

## Meeting of the CFEB Board with Fr. Jean Jacques Pérennès:

December 8, 2019 at The Dominican House, Toronto

**Present:** Sandra Demson, Eleanor Clitheroe, Donna Harvey, Ed Jackman, Eileen Schuller, Peter Warrian, Murray Watson

For the first hour, Fr. Pérennès shared information for us about the École Biblique. He brought the powerpoint presentation that he had presented at the École on Nov. 15, the *Dies Academicus* held annually to mark the official start of the academic year at the École Biblique and the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum. This gave an excellent overview of the 2018-2019 year, highlighting key events month-by-month. After lunch, we continued with a more informal discussion.

Faculty renewal: Fr. Pérennès noted that when he began as Director in 2015 six new professors had been brought to the school to renew the faculty. At present, more young Dominicans are being prepared for the École, including Fr. Olivier Catel, who has completed his MA at Hebrew University. At present, the faculty is stronger in Old Testament than in New Testament. Marcel Sigrist has not been replaced. Emile Puech is now retired, though he still continues teaching some courses. Fr. Dominique-Marie Cabaret has completed his doctorate in archaeology and is teaching in the area of archaeology and leading the field trips, but there is a need for a professor to teach in English in archaeology. In January of each year, young Dominicans from around the world who are doing their doctorates are invited to Jerusalem for a session of study and to get to know the school.

The doctoral program has been strengthened by introducing a series of four seminars that all students take in their first year, in both Old Testament and New Testament. This term, Fr. Michel Gourgues is giving one of these seminars “Jésus et Paul : Les premières formulations de la foi chrétienne (de 30 à 50) avant l’émergence du Nouveau Testament.”

Students present a public lecture as they begin their thesis work, and there is an evaluation at the mid-point of their program. There are three new doctoral students this year, and fourteen in total.

Public Events: Fr. Pérennès outlined many recent initiatives. These include: the Thursday lectures that feature visiting scholars in Jerusalem; the annual Lagrange lecture that invites leading scholars from around the world; the Saturday morning visits that are open to the general public to local sites; the major Symposium on Josephus held in the fall 2018 and the volume just recently published; a 10-day session for Qumran specialists held in fall 2019. In the past years, a summer school program has been held in June, with students from Humboldt University (Berlin) and Ireland in 2019, from Boston College in 2018. All of these events give the École a public profile and integration into the scholarly community of Jerusalem and internationally.

Archaeological work: at St. Hilarion monastery in Gaza work is ongoing on the publication of materials from Qumran, with a recent volume on the archaeology and scroll fragments from Cave 11 by Jean-Baptiste Humbert and Marcello Fidanzio. Jean-Baptiste continues to work with a team in the summers in Jordan on preparing the archaeological materials from the Citadel of Amman.

La Bible en ses Traditions: Fr. Pérennès spoke about this project under the direction of Fr. Olivier Venard and his team of collaborators which numbers about 150 people overall.

The Library: The Library is now part of a major library collective for the Near East, Bibliothèque d’Orient. The library space is used to capacity, and often every place at the tables is taken. Major challenges include the development and integration of digital technology and access to digital journals. There is the need to hire skilled personnel; it is very difficult to find local Palestinians with the necessary training, and some new hires may be Israelis.

There was discussion of possible specific projects that CFEB could undertake to support the library: perhaps the completion of certain series, or the funding of online journals. Fr. Pérennès will follow up with further discussion about this. There is a Dominican in Paris now who is receiving training to become the librarian.

Challenges and plans for the future: Fr. Pérennès spoke about a number of challenges and priority issues including: ongoing threats from the municipality to build a road through the property; lack of final settlement between the Vatican and Israel re taxation; the plans to renovate student quarters and to expand the library; and the need for ongoing faculty development and renewal (especially since the current financial situation makes it difficult to pay lay faculty).

This was a wonderful opportunity for the CFEB to learn about the current life of the École and for most people on the board to meet Fr. Pérennès for the first time. We are so grateful for his taking the time to come to Toronto – and for meeting with Jean Duhaime and Sr. Marie de Lovinfosse in Montreal.

