

Arab-West Report

Interview with Paul-Gordon Chandler

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“Naguib Mahfouz: Art is the language of the entire human personality”

Driven by an interesting childhood in Senegal he strives to build bridges using art. Paul-Gordon Chandler will leave Egypt this summer after leading St. John’s Church in Maadi for over ten years. Where he will go, he is not sure yet. Will this then be the end of the Caravan Festival of the Arts he organizes this year for the 5th time? Like the name implies, the festival can move...

Paul-Gordon Chandler: *“..I am not always so passionate, about interfaith dialogue, but I am passionate about interfaith friendships!”*

Could you first of all elaborate a little on the fact that we are sitting in a historic place involved in interfaith dialogue, St. John’s Church in Maadi. How exactly was the church involved?

Paul-Gordon: “St John’s Church is officially called Church of St John the Baptist. Some see the word “Baptist” and think we are Baptists, but we are Episcopal (Anglican). I am actually an Episcopal priest from the United States. The church has a long history, and it was begun by the Church of England. The church is very interesting because it has been involved with interfaith from the beginning. Until the 1950s Nasser period, it had a little mosque or prayer room on its property here, for the workers, to honour them, as the majority of the workers, such as the gardeners, were Muslim. By that time, to my understanding, that was the only official church property in Egypt that voluntarily chose to put a little kind of mosque on the property. Aside of that, it always had a wonderful history here with the local imams. The priest here, and especially Rev. P.W. Guinness, who was one of the first priests, who was from the Guinness beer family, and they funded him here. He was a very dynamic individual. That was probably the height of the church prior to the present day. He was the first one really building bridges, relationally, with various imams.

The church also has a history in the arts, the architecture of this little building (where his office is situated), was done by a very famous architect named Sir Herbert Baker. He built government buildings and churches including cathedrals from South Africa all the way through Egypt. This was the last property he designed before he retired. The church does a lot with the arts in the sense that it uses the arts, even in worship to seek to focus us the commonalities that exist between ourselves and the local majority faith, Islam. So for example, on my initiative, we wanted to put stained-glass windows in the church. There are two huge round windows in there that were just clear glass. We went to Al Azhar and we asked the Al Azhar stained-glass artist who does the work there and in the surrounding buildings of Al Azhar University, if he would like to do our windows in the Arabesque stained-glass style. He had to ask one of the Imams for permission since we wanted a cross. He was trilled to do it and the Imam gave permission so we had these two Arabesque windows made by that Al Azhar stained-glass artist. Then we had them installed, on 9/11 (in 2004) with one of the Imams of Al Azhar as our special guest showing really how we can work together and enhance each others’ worship.”

Why is it so important for you that they worked together? Why did you come up asking the stained-glass artist from Al Azhar for the window project?

Paul-Gordon: “Because I am not always so passionate, about inter-faith dialogue, but I am passionate about inter-faith friendships! Meaning, I have lived in dialogue all my life and it has become, especially within the last 12 years quite trendy and programmatic. For example I go to very few inter-faith dialogue conferences any more. It is the same people I usually I find and they don’t really get down to the grassroots level. In my personal efforts I tend to focus more on things that actually

involve people. When I say grassroots I do not mean poor necessarily, I mean relational, that actually has an impact in someone's life. You can see quickly the divide here between Copts and our Muslim brothers and sisters, and that the need is to have some kind of a bridge. So for example the stained-glass artist, he was fascinated to be able to work in a church, he had never been in a church before. It opened the door with some of the Al Azhar leadership to think differently and, fundamentally, it helps to change the stereotype that Christians, such as many Western Christians, might have of our Muslim Brothers and sisters.

For the rest of the church we hired a Western artist and asked her to put in windows that reflected the stories of Egypt in the Bible and the Qur'an. So all the stained-glass windows, except for one, relate to the stories of Abraham, Moses and Joseph and the Holy Family and all the things familiar in the Christian and Islamic tradition that relate to Egypt."

What are some examples of dialogue activities you are involved in?

What we tend to do is increasingly more public events, like a series of lectures and seminars: The Abraham Forum is an example, which exists to focus on issues that bring Christians and Muslims together. We bring speakers in, and the church here is the venue. We have an annual program called The Cairo lecture, which is focussing more on Egypt and the issues here. It used to be only about Christian and Muslim interaction, but have broadened it, to focus on challenges that both face. For example, David Kirkpatrick, the New York Times Cairo bureau chief is coming for that this coming week. It was supposed to be Reza Aslan, a well-know Muslim in the United States. He is a writer from a Shia background, an Iranian-American, and he wrote the most beautiful and profound book on the story of Islam: "No god but God". He was going to address religious fundamentalism in an age of globalization. We also used to have an initiative, called The Tent, which we haven't done for a while now. The Tent would be bring Christians and Muslims together around a theme, so for example "what does prayer mean to you?". It will be around food. And one was not allowed to debate, but were free to ask questions. It focused on the experimental. It was for a select invitation, and not just open to the public, and generally focused on laity. We learned that many do not feel comfortable when a cleric is there. There is too much pressure. So it is like a forum to publicly discuss common spiritual issues. And we would try to push the boundaries a little bit in there."

I would like to talk to you about the festival coming up, the Caravan Festival of the Arts. The title this year is "In Peace and with Compassion, the Way Forward." Why was this title chosen this year?

Paul-Gordon: "The title was chosen because of two reasons. We decided to do something with public art this 5th year of the festival. Normally we focus on visual art, film, literature and music. The visual art is the main event and normally it has been related to painting and sculpture, and we take the church and convert it into a gallery. We invite premier artists, half Western or Christian and half Muslim, both Egyptian and Western. It has an intercultural and an inter-religious focus...East-West, Christian-Muslim. But within the East, we also have the Christian-Muslim aspect, we have Muslim Egyptian artists and Christian Egyptian artists. We thought of the idea of something that first was done in Zurich with the painted/decorated cows and then was done in Chicago, Amsterdam, and then further globally. We tried to think of something indigenous to Egypt and we came up with the subject of the donkey. The donkey largely because, unlike the camel, the donkey is indigenous to Egypt. Where the camel has been brought in from Arabia. Even though people think of Egypt and camels. Also, in the Christian tradition, when Jesus came to Jerusalem, he rides a donkey, which represents peace. In the Islamic tradition, there are a lot of legends, like that of Salah El Din coming into Jerusalem on a donkey. I was talking to a group of young Imams the other day, and one of them reminded me that Omar Ibn El Khattab rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The donkey represents peace and it also represents compassion, especially here in Egypt, where it is a beast of burden. One thinks of the Zabbaleen (in Garbage City).

The second reason is that if we look at Egypt's future, internally (look at what happened in Khusus recently), we are saying that the way forward has to be in peace and with compassion for "the other".

Also in Egypt's relation with the rest of the world, we want to be an example for all, and during the revolution Egypt was for a short period of time and the world stood in awe of how the two, Muslims and Christians, came together. Some of this has been eradicated now in the global worldview, because of things that have happened. So we are trying to make a statement like that."

So you mentioned the festival was founded five years ago, with the objective building bridges using arts. How did you envision this, in what way could art build a bridge? Why is it an exceptional tool?

Paul-Gordon: "I think it is, especially in visual cultures like Egypt. And that is why this year we wanted to do public art, to get it out there a little bit more. A visual element as opposed to a literary element or a print element is important here. The second thing I would say is that art addresses issues in an indirect way, that cannot be addressed as easily straight on. It is the medium where the impact is slow and long in its digestion. When the former Grand Mufti, Ali Gomaa opened the festival two years ago, he made this incredible statement that art is helpful to our faith. This is unusual for Muslim leader to say. All the Muslim artists present were most encouraged about what the Grand Mufti said. Creativity and beauty bring humanity together, in whatever form, as those are common themes. We do not say that the art is the end all of addressing the critical issues, but we are saying it is a component that typically is not used very often, specially within this context of building bridges. So we are trying to play a kind of a special role in that."

What are your personal motivations to work on this festival?

Paul-Gordon: "My personal motivations come from my growing up in Senegal, West Africa, where my father was a minister. Senegal is from a percentage standpoint more Muslim than Egypt, as they do not have that large of an indigenous church as here in Egypt. Most of the Muslims in Senegal are members of one of five Sufi brotherhoods. There is a sense of openness and tolerance and the importance of the experiential in faith. I grew up around that and many of my best friends were Muslim. I found it as a young man very difficult to see that when some of these young friends converted to Christianity they would pretty much lose everything: sometimes their families and definitely their opportunities to have a good future, such as education, opportunities for a good wife, all those things which are very important in that culture. And they would often be ostracized socially. Some of them even, until this day, face an identity crisis. This launched me on a journey. Though it was not so much a conscious one as a young man, but became much more defined over time, of seeking to focus on how we build on the commonalities that we have between the two of us, and basing the relationship on that. Then one can naturally address some of the differences, but always based on that foundation on what we have in common. Typically we often focus on the differences first. I like to use the example of the crescent, the Islamic symbol of faith. The crescent is that little part, the sliver, of the moon that we can see because of the light's reflection. But the majority of the moon is dark, black. And for the sake of the illustration I would say that the dark side of the moon, that huge section represents what we have in common, and the crescent, that little sliver, is what is different. And the challenge for us is to build our relationships with the other on "the dark side of the moon". And then this naturally allow for the privilege of looking at each others "crescent", that which we have different from each other. We have this amazing amount in common....socially, culturally, religiously, theologically. And that sliver is all that we have different. And then I have a personal passion for the arts. I have been involved in the arts for a long time as a patron, so for me it is a bringing together of those two things. And I find also, and I might be wrong here, that religious figures do not involve themselves very much in the artistic scene. They often have this dichotomy in the way they see the world around them."

Why do you think that is so?

Paul-Gordon: "I think there is a kind of separatism, that certainly conservative religion breeds, whether it is Christianity or Islam. There is a little bit of an "us and them" worldview, and of what is holy and sacred and what is not. And they often consider the arts as in the "non-sacred" category. Art is often seen as unimportant, as it is so practical, and they prefer approaches that are more functional. This is not functional; this is more philosophical, metaphysical, and mystical."

What will happen when you leave in July? Who will coordinate the festival?

Paul-Gordon: "It will be interesting to see what happens here; I do not know who will take over. The church and the bishop will soon be interviewing for the new Rector of St. John's Church. So it will depend on the personal vision of the next person. One of the beauties of a Caravan is that caravan's move, so it could move somewhere else."

The highlight of the festival this year is the public art with painted donkey sculptures. Could you tell me a bit more about that, like how are these artists selected?

Paul-Gordon: "This year it is a higher level of artists in Egypt that were selected, and some of the artists that sell through Christies and Sotheby's, and exhibit internationally. Secondly, in the selection, it was critical that they are passionate about the theme of interfaith. They have to embody that. Thirdly, we made sure that a sixth of the artists are young recognized artists, to give them a unique opportunity and raise their profile. 35 Egyptians artists, of which the majority are Muslim, with a few are Copts. 10 Western. In the past it has been more 50-50 Arab and Western artists, but this year we decided to focus more on Egyptians."

What do you think the impact will be? What are you hoping for?

Paul-Gordon: "In terms of impact, you could stop the project now and see that some of the impact has already been accomplished. And what I mean is that relationships have been established between Eastern and Western artists, and between Egyptians of different religious background that would normally not be exhibit jointly together. That may seem like a relatively small thing, but it is a big thing in terms of the life journey of each artist. Locally, I would love it to be an example of how art can be seen increasingly by people of faith as having a role in building bridges and playing a part in conflict resolution. So the greater publicity and visibility we receive the better toward that end. On the opening night it is always fascinating here to see a "motley crew" attending...a concoction of imams to oil executives from the West. It is a very interesting dynamic and there are very few contexts here where they all mingle together. If I go to an art opening downtown, it is a certain kind of clientele. That is part of the goal as well."

On a larger scale, since it is a public art initiative, one of the challenges we had is that there isn't a respect for public art here. One I cannot just put it in a public park, for it will be ruined. So that will take time in terms of the greater populace learning to value art. So we are putting them in "safe" areas. The life-size and ¼ size painted donkeys will be at the church the opening night. Next day the life-size donkey artworks will be exhibited in hotel lobbies, all the major galleries, some international schools, AUC, cultural centres, etc.

Aren't you afraid that the critiques will be that they will be exposed to the upper-class only?

Paul-Gordon: "Very possibly that will be the case. To me it is not a criticism, because one can only do so much and it is all part of the bigger picture."

Will there be one in Al Azhar Park?

Paul-Gordon: "We thought about Al Azhar Park, but the problem is that have to guarantee the safety of the art piece. We have also agreed that the artists sign off on where their work will go. We brought Al Azhar Park up, but no one felt comfortable, other than the restaurant high up above, but then again that is also certain clientele as well. This is part of the challenge, as you can see."

My hope is that the global attention that this exhibition gets will focus on both the general idea of how Christians and Muslims work together and the need for peace and compassion, highlighting Egypt. 25 of the painted donkeys will be selected to travel...first to Geneva, Switzerland, where the plan is for them to be exhibited at the UN headquarters there, and then they will go onto London. And we are looking at the possibility of St. Pauls Cathedral there as the exhibition venue, perhaps during the season of advent and Christmas later this year."

This year the festival focuses on ending sectarian strife and encouraging a society here in Egypt that inherently respects and honours religious diversity. Don't you sometimes have the feeling that with projects as these, we go one step forward here in Egypt, but then after an attack on a church in Khusus and the aftermath at the funeral, we go again two steps back? Could you elaborate a bit on what happened in Khusus?

Paul-Gordon: "I am not an expert on what happened in Khusus, nor have I been there. I actually spoke with someone yesterday who was surprised of how many churches there are there. I think, this is an example of a lot of tragic things that have happened. My experience in Egypt is that nothing is all black and white, but regardless it is all tragic. As to the reasons behind these incidents I would say they are very complex. Perhaps so complex that they are actually very simple. That is perhaps the paradox."

What do you mean by that?

Paul-Gordon: "Meaning that, often it has to do with local issues, the global media doesn't necessarily pick up on right away. It could be even down to just bad relationships between neighbours or family feuds, and then all of the sudden that explodes and gets picked up by the media and given global attention and labelled quite simply as just a "Muslim-Christian" conflict. And I am not sure it is not always that. I am not a pessimist in any way, as for every negative thing one can find two positive things. And this is not to negate the negative, for ideally you do not want the negative at all. But the way forward has to be to not "demonize" the other; it has to show an alternative. How this alternative is then perceived depends on the local context."

Do you think dialogue initiatives could prevent or avoid clashes or sectarian violence, strife?

Paul-Gordon: "I think you need ambassadors for peace in every community, who call people above and beyond these small ways of seeing things. I think in Egypt the visual is very critical here, meaning the role of what is seen in public. I remember that Amr Khaled went to the mosque in Qena, after the revolution when there was a lot of conflict down there. He preached an amazing sermon, saying "the problem is not out there, the problem is right in our hearts." And that is what we need more of. In that sense I would say, I am not sure religious leaders have been so articulate on this; while a lot of them have been bold, there is also the criticism that this Imam is not saying this or that priest is not saying that. I think a lot are saying some really good things, but I am not sure they are really always so effective from a communication standpoint, as often their message is not really getting out to the broader audience. By a "broader audience" I mean, everybody within their respective community. You are always going to have conflict. Any time you have a minority, you are going to have conflict or tensions from time to time. And also the minority may overreact because they are a minority, there are all kinds of sociological aspects to these issues."

Do you see a certain role for the media in Egypt?

Paul-Gordon: "The media is critical here, especially because people believe the media here. In the West we tend to criticize it, but of course sadly there are those in the United States that believe all they see and hear in the news, so we are at fault as well. Generally speaking, the visual and I mean the media, is very important here. That is where interfaith dialogue, or interfaith friendships I would say are critical, at the public visible level. To see the Grand Imam for example, not just meeting with the Coptic pope but having tea together...and not just official "business" when crises surface. With

the Caravan Festival two years ago, we had a delegation of 30 imams coming from Alexandria. They were young imams who wanted to hang out with me and talk to me afterwards. The reason they wanted to talk was because they had never met a priest before. I asked them if they were serious, and they told me they all met Christians, but never a priest. This is because the priests are often only among those of their own faith, and not mingling too often in non-Christian settings. Culturally here, you will never see a bishop eating in restaurant, bishops do not do that here. It will call for more public displays on friendship, to show that this can be normal. And we have to stop thinking what what Christians (or Muslims) do and don't do."

What do you see should be the role of the ruling regime towards these clashes?

Paul-Gordon: "I would say that for the current administration, fundamentally as the overseers of the country, in the role they were elected for, this is a critical issue for them under their watch. President Mursi made a good statement the other day during the conflict, and statements are good. But I think they should find ways to open up doors, that haven't been previously opened, that Christians cannot deny happen. Because human nature tends to often want an enemy and if we don't have an enemy we will create an enemy. So the country's leadership should find ways in which it makes it hard for them to be the enemy. Such as increased freedom, or more permissions granted for the building of churches, etc. Very visible things that people can say that they didn't have that before. Obviously we now do have freedom of speech in new ways that we do not have it before. And we have imams who come and sit in the church here, that was not allowed before the revolution. I would absolutely say that the freedom of religious speech dramatically increased after the revolution. We still have a ways to go. I had a young man who tried to get into our church to attend one of our services five years ago and the police stopped him; this was back in the days when didn't think often of Salafists much then, but he looked like them. So he went home and shaved his beard and came back and was allowed in. He became a friend afterwards, Mohammed, he studied architecture and did his Master's Thesis on the structure of our church building. But now any bearded person can come through, so it is a different era. I applaud that. The downside is that there is less security.

You wrote a book about Mazhar Mallouhi in 2006, an Arab Syrian novelist known as a Muslim follower of Christ. How was Mallouhi an inspiration for you?

Paul-Gordon: "I met him in Tunis. I lived in Tunis at that time. He won the writer of the year award at the Tunisian Writers Union, and he openly called himself a Muslim follower of Christ, sometimes as a Sufi Muslim follower of Christ. I was intrigued, so I got to know him and we became friends. He became for me a model of what I did not see when I was growing up; someone not having to leave his birth faith to follow the teachings of Christ, of Isa. Fundamentally, Jesus was about teaching us how to live. And modelling that and demonstrating that in what he called the kingdom of God. Loving God is loving your neighbour and this is how you do it, and showed us with his life. Mazhar would focus on that aspect, he would call Isa his master, "how I love my master" he would say. It is in some ways like the Sufi tradition, where you have a master. He is this interesting bridge himself between the two faiths. "Islam is my heritage, and Christ is my inheritance," is what he says.

So for me to get an idea, he did not convert?

Paul-Gordon: "No he did. He initially converted, while he was a young poet and writer doing his military service for Syria. He comes from a very interesting family line, that has both conservative Muslim and quite progressive thinkers in it. Writing for the Syrian military literary magazine, and stationed at the Golan heights, which belonged to Syria then, he found himself totally disillusioned by religion. His parents had send him to a Qur'anic school which was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, and he did not like the transcendent view of God given him there....a distant and impersonal God as the world suffers. He said he saw God as up there in heaven, lying down and smoking a shisha, having thrown to the world a book, the Qur'an, and letting humanity suffer on its own. So he explored various faiths, such as the Eastern religions, and he ended up in French existentialism actually, and very disillusioned with life. He was really interested for a time by Jean

Paul Sartre. And then at a very difficult part of his life, there on the Golan Heights someone gives him a copy of Ghandi's spiritual biography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. And of course Ghandi was taken with this person of Christ. And as a result Mazhar found himself interested in this Christ figure. He never thought of looking at the Christian religion, because he was so unimpressed by what he saw of the Christians in his little village of Salameya; one ran the liquor store and the other the prostitution house. He became captivated by Christ, not even thinking about Christianity, and yet he had what you might call in the Christian tradition, a "Damascus road experience," meaning that he in one day went from almost being suicidal to a profound joy he never experienced. At this point he did not have contact with the church; he was just following Christ as his master. So he began to talk to others in the military camp about Christ (Isa) and the few Syrian Christians there who heard him thought, "ahah...convert" and they came close to him. And he would say now, years later, that they became to Christianize him into the Christian religion. And eventually by his affiliation with them he became a "Christian,". And he was encouraged to change his name, to eat pork in public and to not use Muslim Arabic phraseology, but Christian phraseology; do not say "Asalamu Aleikum", but say "Salaam lakum", things like this that Christians say differently...even though they mean the same thing. They tried to rid him of his Islamic culture. However, eventually he met a British man from Cambridge who moved to Beirut, who was an Arabist, who loved the Middle East. And it was through this man that that he was reintroduced to his own Arab and Islamic culture. And the rest of his life has been a journey of finding ways to stay an insider within Islam but following this figure named Christ."

And he would pray to Christ?

Paul-Gordon: "In his Shahadah he would put the Christ figure. But he does see a place for Mohammed. Because he sees the important role for Mohammed played and he has great respect for him."

How would he pray?

Paul-Gordon: "He is not so much a traditionalist, so he would be much more experiential in his approach to faith. In this sense he is more Sufi-like. He would say "prayer is walking around talking to his Master."

So he would not use a praying-rug?

Paul-Gordon: "Sometimes he would. But he is not so much a five times a day traditionalist; he would be more of a liberal in that sense. A liberal Christian for example would be someone who does not necessarily believe all the historical tenants of Christianity. And what a liberal often does, they assimilate other faith traditions into their own to enhance their spiritual life. In the west we hear a lot about Buddhism being brought into aspects of Christianity. In that sense he would be a liberal Muslim that follows Christ....but culturally and sociologically he is a Muslim. It is very interesting."

What was the response from out of the Muslim community to the book?

Paul-Gordon: "Well most of his close friends are Muslim. And I have met a few religious leaders whom I interviewed for the book about him. When Mazhar moved into a place to live he went to seek out the local Imam and give him a copy of the Gospels, Injil. He would give the Gospels to the Imam and he would say: "I am a follower of Jesus, Isa, and I am asking you, since you are the spiritual leader here, to please read these Gospels and if you see anything in my life while I live in your community that does not live up to the standards of Isa and his teachings, please call me on it, because I am putting myself under your authority. Fascinating. Mazhar himself has published some fascinating books like: "An Eastern reading of the Gospel of Luke" and "A Sufi Reading of the Gospel of John." There was Imam here who used to order the Eastern Reading of the Gospel of Luke by carton. These publications include the text of the Gospels and also commentary that addresses all of these stereotypes as to what Christians believe that are difficult for Muslims to accept. So for example the Son of God terminology. In the commentary it says about this: "One matter which is

often interpreted incorrectly is the title of our Lord Jesus Christ as Son of God. It must be stated emphatically that the term the Son of God has no physical connotation at all... the term son is not to be understood in the literal sense. This should not be difficult to understand as in our Arabic language we use the term son in a non-literal sense for many reasons, like son of the desert, a son of Baghdad, etc.” For example, he will say, if you are a Bedouin and you come to Cairo even, you are still a “son of the desert” it is part of who you are, it is what you represent. It is interesting because when Christians read this it actually helps them. Because Son of God is a Semitic term not a western term and comes out of this region. If you ask a Christian to describe what does Son of God means, they may try to describe it to you but at the end of the day it will be very difficult, and so they just decide believe it.”

Did you receive reactions from conservative Muslims?

Paul-Gordon: “I haven’t had any criticism from Muslims on this book; all the criticism came from conservative Christians. Saying that I am liberal, I am heretical. The book is mostly about Mazhar, what we can learn from Mazhar. Some would say that he does not believe in the essentials of the Christian faith.”

To what extent could you be a pilgrim of Islam?

Paul-Gordon: “Could I be a pilgrim of Islam? I would prefer to call myself a pilgrim journeying toward God. There is a great verse in the psalms: “Blessed are those who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.” A pilgrim is someone to me who is always on the move, always on a journey, and therefore willing to ask directions from other people, whoever they are, to get help for the journey. A pilgrim is not someone who is settled, they are “on the way”. I think it is a much more accurate to say it we are all pilgrims journeying together towards God, and we need each other.”

Last question, would you consider yourself biased towards the Western view on the East, as you have lived and worked in the Muslim world for such a long time (Senegal, Tunis and Egypt)?

Paul-Gordon: “I think the greatest need is for all we have been talking about to also happen now in the West. I lived in the West when 9/11 took place, even though I was on a trip in Malaysia when it actually happened. I saw a whole worldview shift. I believe the West is coming into more of a balance. But it was hard for me to see that shift in peoples’ worldviews; so easily absorbing every negative thing told them about the Islamic world. Do I have a bias against that? I have a bias against anything, against anyone, who is unnecessarily and inaccurately portraying the other. Yes I do in that sense. But I also find some of the best examples of coexistence and tolerance in the West. I think people are tired of having enemies, thankfully. To me the critical thing for the future is waging peace on each other. The West has waged a lot from a military standpoint, sadly. But I think we need to be very pro-active in waging peace. Not just being peaceful. But actively promoting peace....as well as focusing on building on the commonalities between the two. One other thing that is important to me is that the West has lost the sense of the origin of their Christian faith...for it all comes originally out of the Middle-East, just as Islam does. Therefore we are all beholden to the Middle-Easternness of our faith. Coptic Christianity, Islam, it all comes out this region, and therefore one of our main challenges is returning our faith, Christianity, to more of its Middle Eastern origins. And doing that will show us what we have in common with the majority faith today in the Middle East.”