



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The medal of the Holy Sepulchre to Macarena Cotelo

Acts of solidarity in the spirit of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre



Macarena Cotelo while receiving the Gold Medal of the Holy Sepulchre in recognition of the help offered to the Latin Patriarchate by the Foundation which she directs.

Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre are called to inspire acts of solidarity towards the Holy Land in the heart of society. So for example **Pilar Lara, Dame of the Order, has initiated a partnership between the Foundation for the Promotion of Social Culture (FPSC), of which she is president, and the Holy Land represented by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.** The FPSC supports a network of the Patriarchate schools in Palestine and Jordan through the restoration and expansion of facilities, as well as the construction of new buildings, as is the case in Gaza, and a training program for teachers. Other areas of focus are housing and job creation projects. In recognition of twenty years of this fruitful partnership (which has resulted in thirty cooperation projects costing over 10 million euro), **Macarena Cotelo, director of projects of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture, received the Gold Medal of the Holy Sepulchre** from the hands of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Granting us an interview, Macarena Cotelo describes the beginnings of the Foundation that she heads in the Holy Land. “We started our business in the Middle East, in Lebanon, in 1993 after a journey that our former president, Pilar Lara, Dame of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, made to the Holy Land.” **“Pilar was deeply struck by the reality of the problems which Christians in this part of the world face that we started to work in Lebanon”.** The following year, “through an acquaintance in Jerusalem, we were proposed for a project of the Latin Patriarchate. We made our presentation and it was approved by the Spanish government”, she says.

In December 1995, Macarena Cotelo and Pilar Lara arrived in the **Holy Land**, fell in love with these places and “we discovered that there was much to do,” she says. For several years the Latin

Patriarchate was their only on-site partner. Macarena Cotelo speaks of the delicate situation of Christians during all these years, “when we went to Palestine, we learned that there were fewer and fewer Christians and that they were living in very precarious conditions. This reality drove them to remain “to become involved in those places, to fight and to continue to help where we could”. Talking about the current situation of Christian communities in the Holy Land, she tells us that today it is “more dramatic than ever”.

FROM LEBANON TO PALESTINE TO THE COMMUNITIES OF IRAQ AND SYRIA

“Since the outbreak of conflict in Syria, the existing Christian communities across the region are struggling to stay on their land,” she adds. “I am always surprised when I meet Christians from the Middle East. **I realize the effort they make to stay, knowing that they must ensure a Christian presence.** Many of them have the opportunity to leave, some have family in other countries and could have far better lives than in the biblical lands where they were born, yet they remain because they know that that is their mission. Unfortunately, we in the West don’t really understand this”. “The war is forcing people to leave” she reminds us, and communities who leave Iraq “unfortunately will not be able to return home. The same thing will happen to those communities that have been forced to leave Syria and who in all likelihood will never return”.

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the Foundation for the Promotion of Social Culture has set up an important humanitarian operation. The main objectives are to save lives, alleviate suffering and safeguard people’s dignity. “Because of the crisis in Syria, we have developed a series of humanitarian projects that we are trying to carry out in both Lebanon and Jordan.” In particular, “we run a clinic for disabled refugees in Jordan”. As for Lebanon, Macarena Cotelo says the Foundation is working in partnership with the Ministry of Health, in a clinic for refugees suffering from mental illness.

“THERE IS A POPULATION OF ARAB CULTURE, BUT OF CHRISTIAN PROFESSION”

“People are discovering that there is a population of Arab culture, but of Christian profession,” says Macarena. The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which hosts thousands of pilgrims every year, tries to put these communities in contact with local Christian Arabs. “It is critical to realize that they are living communities, where people feel at home.” These communities “participate very actively in the life of the parishes, which they view as a second home,” emphasizes the FPSC director of projects. She adds: “I think those Christians in the Middle East probably felt very alone, ignored by all, even before the war had broken out. Then news about the suffering of Christians started to spread....” Today, the awareness is global.

Macarena says that over the past year she has resumed concrete collaboration with the Latin Patriarchate to plan together, and that the Foundation is very “happy to help the Patriarchate in these new projects”, especially for the renovation of the Gaza parish and school. Macarena Cotelo ends with **words of thanks for the Latin Patriarchate for the award of the Medal of the Holy Sepulchre**: “I am touched, honored ... it really is an award for the whole institution, the Foundation, and a team that has always worked and served with dedication”.

She also stresses the importance of the mission of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre as an institution of very interesting origins and evolution, and one that “is still fully inserted into the reality of our time”.

Interview by Mireia Bonilla

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