

# ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH FRATERNITY IN ISRAEL

## איחוד אקומני למחקר תיאולוגי בישראל

pob 249 \* 91002 JERUSALEM \*TEL 02-625-4941\*FAX 02-672-4237\*EMAIL:ECU FRAT@NETVISION.NET.IL

**President: Prof. Fr. Marcel Dubois, OP    Executive Secretary: Rev. Petra Heldt**

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**Dear Friends,**

What a combination of events we have witnessed over the past months! First of all a sincere 'thank you' on behalf of all those who have received assistance from friends of the Fraternity! Our gratitude extends far and wide, to: Walter Harrelson (United States); Kirsten Stoffregen-Pedersen (Israel); Sr Carmen Farrugia (Israel); Michael Wirtz (Germany); Matthias Kraft (Germany). In particular, the Ethiopian Orthodox community of Jerusalem has a special place in your hearts for which we are grateful.

### **The Fraternity's Research Project**

**Prof. Shlomo Einstein** gave a lecture on January 20 entitled "Substance Abuse: Facts, Myths, Options, Ethical Considerations". Prof Einstein is a widely-read author as well as the creator of The Middle Eastern Summer Institute here in Israel. Prof Einstein stressed the fact that in order for a change process to begin, the identity of the patient needs to be correctly defined: "Drug-users cannot be treated but people can". We thank Prof Einstein for his practical look at the ethics of substance abuse today.

February 24 was the date of a lecture given by the **Prof Jacques Michel**, Director of Hadassah Mount Scopus. We remain indebted to Prof Michel for sharing his expertise on the subject

"Ethical Problems of Experiments on Humans". A member of the Helsinki Committee, he has extensive experience in the field of policy-making in medicine. His 'bottom line' was a quote from the Declaration of Helsinki (Article 5): "Concern for the interests of the subject must always prevail over the interest of science and society".

**Prof. Zvi Bentwich** of The Kaplan Hospital inspired us on the 30th of March with his talk on "AIDS as a Challenge for Faith and Medicine in our Time". Among numerous other roles, Prof Bentwich has headed The Kaplan Hospital's AIDS Centre and its Unit of Clinical Immunology since 1985.

Several articles on subjects of previous research projects undertaken by the Fraternity have recently been published by various members, including the three-part brochure for *The Israel Information Centre* by **Prof Marcel Dubois** entitled "Jerusalem, in Time and Eternity"; "Bethlehem: The Star of David"; Nazareth: The Flower of the Galilee". **Mr Malcolm Lowe's** treatise on "Religion and Democracy" is soon to be published for a Welsh audience. Readers of Greek will certainly appreciate **Bishop Aristarchos'** "Gregory of Nyssa on the Understanding of Baptism", published in Athens. The number 6 June 1999 issue of the Cahiers Ratisbonne features an article in French, by **Sr Anne Avril** and **Br Elio Passeto**

entitled "Parashat Be-Har (lev 25-26,2) avec le Commentaire de Rashi".

As the result of years of research and teaching Christian history in the Holy Land, Mr Malcolm Lowe and Rev Petra Heldt were the advisors for the successful 3-series film on the "History of Christianity in the Holy Land", published as *The Miracle of Faith* by Willy Lindwer, co-authored by Mr Alfred Muller. The premiere was shown in the Israeli Museum. To date, the film has been shown in the United States and Holland as well as Israel, adapted by the Ministry of Education for the teaching of Christianity. Copies are available at the Israeli Museum. Requests can be made via our office for a charge of \$40 USD including postage.

### **The Visit of Germany's President**

From February 16-19 Israel had the joy of hosting German President Rau and his wife. Welcomed at the Knesset, President Weizmann was the first ever to address the Israeli government in German. President Rau is German Patron for the Coventry International Centre for Reconciliation which is involved in building the Syrian Orthodox school together with The Fraternity. The President deemed this project to be worthy of support by his offices.

### **The Syrian School Project**

The school-building committee of the Syrian Orthodox Christians is supported in prayer by the whole community as well as Christians abroad. We had the honour of visiting St Mary's on the 17th of February, together with a German benefactor interested in their project. In addition to the *Coventry Community of the Cross of Nails* in England, it is possible that support for the school will be coming from Germany as well!

### **Land Issues**

There are three important land issues that concern the Christian community. Two are in the process of being solved amicably and one is still unsolved.

One of these issues brought to our attention recently is that of the German Hospice in the Old City. According to the *Yediot Aharonot*, the premises have been leased to a haredi yeshiva. The dispute continues with both sides investigating the legal status of the property. There are very good prospects of solving this amicably in the near future.

Another land dispute in the Old City, one between the *Armenian Patriarchate* and the *Anglican Church*, has fortunately been resolved. Thanks to the wise counsel of the judge involved in the matter, the area at the foot of David's Tower will continue to be used by the Anglicans with a concession accepted by their Armenian neighbours to occupy only a 700 metre portion of the over 3-dunam property. Although it has been used as a continuation of the Anglican School grounds as well as a parking area, the land has long since received rights for housing construction. As such, we will soon see the rise of approximately 40 housing units in this area familiar to many of us.

The Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia has suffered from severe violation of its status quo rights, in regard to its property in Hebron two years ago and most recently in Jericho. The Archbishop Mark (Dr Arndt) of the R.O.C. outside Russia in Germany and Representative of the Synod of the R.O.C. for the Holy Land gave a special lecture on the history and current situation of his church, at the Fraternity on February 4. We gained greater understanding of the relationship between Church and State in

Russia as well as an update on the problems faced specifically by the R.O.C. in the Holy Land, including the unsolved land issue of the monastery in Jericho. Copies of his talk are available for 10 NIS by contacting our office.

### **Our Volunteers**

Our premises at Shmuel haNagid 26 have been graced with the appearance of a volunteer from Germany, Mr. Simon Kunz. Simon is a student of theology specializing in Arabic and Aramaic and as such he has willingly undertaken the translation of the daily prayer service of the Syrian Orthodox from Arabic into German. His efforts will certainly be appreciated by the many pilgrims visiting the Syrian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem.

### **Visa Issues.....Again**

It was recently brought to our attention that new restrictions for volunteers have been discussed by an interministerial committee headed by the Ministry of the Interior. Because of the ever-present dilemma of illegal foreign workers arriving in the country in the guise of 'volunteers', it is certainly advisable to take action in this regard. However, to ensure that these regulations be applied only to the problematic areas (discovered to be particularly the agricultural and hi-tech industries), a meeting of Christian leaders was convened for March 9 at the offices of The Fraternity. Upon mutual agreement, a committee was established with the assignment of writing a letter outlining our concerns to Minister Natan Sharansky. This was composed the following Tuesday and sent to him on March 16 in both English and Hebrew. As a result we have been invited to submit a dossier of recommendations for developing standards for Christian visas in Israel, to the newly-founded Interministerial

Committee for Relations with the Churches, chaired by MK Haim Ramon.

### **Happy Birthday to YOU!!**

Our President, **Prof Dubois**, has led us this year into the realization of the urgency to respond to the ethical challenges in modernity. Here we have a concrete example of 'eternal youth': Prof. Dubois celebrated his 80th on the March 23.

**Sr Abraham**, Director of the Student Christian Forum, celebrated her birthday at the end of February, with a spirit of joy and seems to be growing younger every year!

As for our Vice-President, **Canon Broughton**, beloved inspirer of the SCF, he gracefully turned 70 just before the change of the Millenium.

### **The Pope's Visit**

**Prelate Msgr Dr Richard Mathes** celebrated his birthday with the whole of the Fraternity, by giving an inspiring lecture on "The Implications of the Papal Visit on Ecumenical Life in the Holy Land." As you all know, Fraternity member Dr Mathes was promoted to the most distinguished position of Rector of Santa Maria Dell'Anima, The Pontifical German Institute in Rome.

He stated his assessment of the Pope's visit by asking the very virulent question: "Is the dialogue sacrificed on the altar of the 'trialogue'?" The unequivocal answer resounded as simply "no". The intention of the papal visit was a pilgrimage through the history of salvation as a road of liberation of the human being.

Dr Mathes confirmed the Pope's vivid interest in the churches of Jerusalem. In this sense it was

also an ecumenical journey at the very beginning of the third millenium, thereby leading the way to the joy of an ecumenical movement renaissance. He stressed that the universality of the churches fully respects the legitimate diversity. Therefore the work of The Fraternity is strongly supported by the Pope.

As for interfaith dialogue: it remains a rocky road with many uncertainties which need to be handled delicately. The structure for this encounter has not yet been found and it was suggested to be developed, from the Christian point of view, from within the system of the Cappadocian Trinity.

Msgr Mathes is in Rome certainly in the right place to be working on developing this interesting phenomenon.

#### **A Word from the Ecumenical Fraternity**

For the first time in history, the Pope of Rome came to pay a visit to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, at his See. This has reconciled questions which have arisen as to what nature the relations are between the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The visit generated that the Pope respects the historical authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch as a representative of Christians in the Holy Land. Therefore speculations that local Christian forces might compromise the status quo have been brought to an end.

Both the Pope and the Patriarch jointly stressed the task to reconcile the Christians in the Holy Land. Therefore, the dread that divisions are fostered by political or other considerations is known but shown to be overcome. Both leaders paid respect and friendship to each other, in spite of a world claiming old rivalries to be alive.

The Pope's speech given at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate is available at The Fraternity.

The Pope has set those new dimensions for the ecumenical work bridging old gaps. Now it is important to strengthen these ties in renewed efforts in order to live up to the new sensitivity for the biblical ecumenism which includes all churches and the Jewish people. This is work which needs to be done by the religious and spiritual leaders of both communities with the skills they have respectively developed.

These religious efforts will serve the peace of the larger community in the Middle East. This is decisively different from another important contribution which comes from the interreligious field. Here the sponsors derive from political parties or foundations which follow a political line. Interreligious affairs have become a business with a sizeable market. As the papal visit showed, interreligious meetings, in which the agenda is determined by politicians can turn into an explosive mix -reliability for reconciliation and peace comes from the spiritual and religious aim of the ecumenical work.

With warm fraternal greetings!

#### **Rev Petra Heldt, Executive Secretary**

*ps. Our sincere apologies to Sr Gemma Del Duca for not having verified information contained in an article and referred to in our January newsletter. Please note that Sr Gemma has not in fact taught at a Jewish school.*