

***News from the***

**ECUMENICAL FRATERNITY**

**NEWSLETTER NO. 11**

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Dear Friends,

A most important event for our work was the signing of the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the Vatican in Jerusalem on December 30 last. Formally, of course, it is an agreement between two states. Unlike an ordinary political treaty, however, it refers to relations between Jews and Christians everywhere and alludes to the unique relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

Thus the preamble opens by noting that the two signatories are "MINDFUL of the singular character and universal significance of the Holy Land". It then recalls that they are "AWARE of the unique nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and of the historic process of reconciliation and growth in mutual understanding and friendship between Catholics and Jews".

Also Article 2 commits both sides to co-operate "in combating all forms of antisemitism and all kinds of racism and of religious intoler-

ance". Further: "The Holy See takes this occasion to reiterate its condemnation of hatred, persecution and all other manifestations of antisemitism directed against the Jewish people and individual Jews anywhere, at any time and by anyone."

All the aims and aspirations quoted were among the motivations that led to the creation of our Fraternity of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians over twenty-five years ago. Some of our Catholic members, and especially our former President, Rev Prof Marcel Dubois, participated for years in the informal discussions between Jews and Catholics that paved the way for formal understandings.

There are other signs of reconciliation after centuries-long estrangement. Notable are the Great Synod currently planned by the different Orthodox churches, as well as the recent important conference of Orthodox Christians and Jews in Athens. Here too, our Fraternity will be making a contribution to be announced shortly.

## Study Programme

The theme of our studies in 1993 -94 is "Jewish Tradition and Christian Traditions: The Exemplarity of Jewish Tradition for Christian Theology". A particularly large audience came to hear **Rabbi Dr Tzvi Marx** of the Shalom Hartman Institute speak on "The Beauty and Burden of Living with a Tradition" on October 28.

While Dr Marx spoke from a Jewish perspective, the discussion revealed how Christians face the same issue in their own traditions. He commented that only living in the State of Israel made such a free and open discussion possible. The evening also included warmly applauded singing by the cantorial school of the Hebrew Union College.

On November 18, **Prof Justin Taylor** of the Ecole Biblique gave a lecture entitled "To Constitute Unity: The Acts of the Apostles and the Origin of Catholic Tradition". The theme was drawn from his eagerly expected commentary on Acts.

The Fraternity organised a "pre-Christmas dinner" on December 16. It was preceded by a talk with slides by **Mr Bob Mullins** on "Traditions of Worship at Beit Shean", the archaeological site about which he is writing his doctoral dissertation. We were honoured to have the Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church and his assistant, Father Simon, among our guests.

Special thanks are due to the students of our Student Christian Forum, who helped to prepare the dinner, and to the various groups and individuals who provided entertainment. Some of the students noted that this would be their only "family" celebration of Christmas.

Our lecturer on January 27 was **Dr Rafael Jospe** of Israel's Open University, who gave a masterful survey of "Tradition and Reason in Jewish Bible Exegesis: The Case of Abraham Ibn Ezra". On February 24 we

heard about the role of "Tradition (*Paradosis*) in the Understanding of the Greek Orthodox Church" from **Abbot Dionysios** of the ancient Holy Cross Monastery in Jerusalem.

To the regular lecture programme was added an extensive auxiliary programme. Even before the first lecture, thirty of us made a one-day field trip to Sepphoris (Tzippori) on October 15. Recent excavations have shown how Jews and Christians were living there side-by-side in the Byzantine period.

Addressing us in the Roman theatre, our President introduced us to the "theology of the theatre" and the history of the excavations, in which he has been closely involved. Our member **Br Pierre Lenhardt**, NDS later lectured on the importance of Tzippori for the formation of the Mishnah and Talmud. The information and maps compiled by our President and Mrs Jill Groves provided everyone with material for more detailed study.

Further study in **small groups** was led by two of our lecturers. Rabbi Tzvi Marx presented his recent doctoral dissertation entitled *Halakha and Handicap: Jewish Law and Ethics on Disability* on November 5. (His British friends commented that Rabbi Marx is always good for fireworks.) On December 3, Prof Justin Taylor continued his approach to the Acts of the Apostles.

A large audience from numerous churches came to hear **Bishop Dr Heinz Joachim Held** on February 8. Besides his leadership in the overseas relations of the German Protestant Churches (EKD), Bishop Held is a former Moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC). He surveyed the "Debate on Syncretism in the WCC from Jerusalem in 1928 to Canberra in 1991", noting that syncretism could have good as well as negative senses.

Our Student Christian Forum held its own programme under the leadership of Dr Kirsten Pedersen and Rev Rien van der Vegt,

assisted by the famous hospitality of our President. A highlight was Dr Pedersen's talk on the fiftieth anniversary of the rescue of the Jews of Denmark in October 1943.

## Co-Operation

Working together with other institutions, locally and internationally, is an essential part of both our ends and our means. We are particularly grateful to the Northelbian Lutheran Church, which for some years has sent future ministers who visit us as part of their training. This year it was Andrea Hardekopf and Götz-Volkmar Neitzel, to be followed by Frank Engelbrecht.

On the international level, too, we received Jonathan Lawrence and Sebastian Honcourt, two participants in the Raul Wallenberg programme of the Hebrew University. All students in the programme both study at the university and volunteer in a local institution of their choice.

Our two students read the journals coming into our office and found items to add to our bibliographic data base on all aspects of the encounter between Jews and Christians, both in history and in the present. Thanks also especially to our research assistant, Mrs Jill Groves, the total of recorded books and articles now surpasses 10,600.

Locally, together with the American Jewish Committee and Bridges for Peace, we sponsored the Eighth Meeting of the Liaison Group that surveys issues concerning Christians in Israel. The theme of the meeting was "The Israeli Media and the Christian Community".

**Rabbi Emmanuel Quint**, Dean of the Jerusalem Institute of Jewish Law, explained the status of the non-Jew in the Jewish legal tradition. **Mr Moshe Kohn**, a veteran journalist whose weekly column in the *Jerusalem Post* draws many avid readers, surveyed the coverage of Christian affairs in

his newspaper during a whole year. **Mr Malcolm Lowe**, the editor of our series *Immanuel*, discussed the somewhat philosophical issue: What makes Christian affairs interesting to a newspaper — here or anywhere?

Finally, **Dr Yossi Olmert**, former Director of the Government Press Office (and brother of the new Mayor of Jerusalem), gave practical hints on how to attract the interest of the press. The proceedings have been printed as a booklet by the three sponsoring organisations.

Among other instances of co-operation, the Fraternity arranged lectures at an old people's home where the co-ordinator of cultural affairs is about to celebrate her one hundredth birthday. We wish her "till 120"!

## Visitors

As usual, only a selection of many visitors can be mentioned. Last May, Rev Spier of Berlin brought a study group and the Middle East Commission of the German Protestant Churches came for a consultation.

In June Rev Schwegler came with a Swiss study group and Dr Klaus Geyer of Aktion Sühnezeichen brought students. The Fraternity also co-operated with the American Jewish Committee in introducing an interfaith group from Boston to Jewish-Christian relations in Israel.

Many friends of **Sr Lucy Thorson**, nds, our former President, came to a reception in her honour on July 5. She recently completed an M. A. in Jewish Studies and took over the leadership of SIDIC in Rome. Besides the homage of various speakers, our President secured the services of the famous tenor Mr Damon Ploumis of the New York Opera. His beautiful and intimate arias will stay unforgotten with the Fraternity and especially with Sr Lucy.

August brought a seminar with the lively Korean congregation in Jerusalem and an

introduction to our work for students from Italy. In September, besides another group led by Rev Spier, came students from Loccum and a student group from Berlin with Rev Kluge.

A group of British students visited in November, as well as groups led by Mrs Eva Föhringer of Mannheim and Rev Dr Müller from Neumünster. Curates from the Northelbian Church were brought by Rev Ingrid Homann.

In November, three groups from the USA came for joint studies with us and the Hebrew University. Mr Udo Lauer enlisted our help for the third stage of his exhibition of photographs on Jewish communities in "Potsdam-Berlin-Jerusalem". A session on "religious responsibility for the stranger in our midst" was conducted for an association of committed German female jurists.

Psychologists from the USA studied ethical questions in December. Prof Anna-Marie Aagard, a President of the WCC, participated in an exchange with our members in January.

The Fraternity was consulted in February by a delegation from the MECC, brought by Rev Assaly, director of its liaison office in Jerusalem. Teachers of religion from East Germany came for further studies and pastors from Switzerland came for an intensive seminar organised by the Fraternity with leading local scholars.

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February saw the biggest joint gathering of Jews and Christians ever to take place in Jerusalem — and maybe anywhere. Besides such figures as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Ratzinger (Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, the keynote speakers included new and old friends of the Fraternity: Metropolitan Damaskinos, Prof Irving Greenberg, Rabbi David Rosen and Prof Marvin Wilson.

The theme was "Religious Leadership in Secular Society: Modern Social and Scientific Challenges". Leading theologians and Israeli scientists worked together in workshops on genetic engineering, life's beginnings, ethnicity, religious education in pluralistic societies, spirituality, the quality of life and more.

Thanks to Prof Stransky of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, which helped to organise the conference, a large number of our members and other local Christians could attend. We were especially impressed by the great variety of countries represented.

Thus Bishop L. V. Azariah exemplified the strong delegation from India that was prominent in the discussions, only a short while since Israel and India established diplomatic relations. Rev Everson Sieunarine of Trinidad exemplified the interest in Jewish prayer and spirituality that has sprung up at the grass roots in Caribbean countries. The conference also brought new faces to Jerusalem from familiar places, like Prof P. Beyerhaus from Tübingen and Prof D. Bierlein from Regensburg.

In many parts of the world today, the forces seeking to create hostility between religious groups, including resurgent antisemitism, are only too evident. The enthusiastic response to the conference — many participants saw it as a chance in a lifetime — shows that the forces for understanding between Jews and Christians are just as strong; they only wait to be mobilised.

Yours Fraternally,

Rev Petra Heldt (Executive Secretary)