

News from the

Ecumenical Fraternity א'חוד אקומני

P.O.Box 249 • 91002 Jerusalem • Israel • Telephone (02) 224961 טל • ישראל • 91002 • ירושלים • 249 ד.פ.

President: Rev Dr Geert Cohen Stuart

Executive Secretary: Rev Petra Heldt

NEWSLETTER No.2 — JULY 1988

Dear Friends,

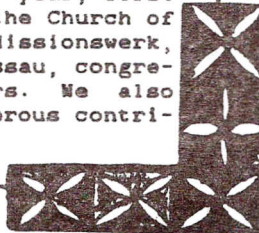
At the end of our programme for 1987-88, which was a lively and fruitful one in our theological research, the current political tensions are in all our minds. They have also increased polarisation in the Christian community here. On the one hand, Christians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, including many who have been sent by churches from abroad, naturally identify with Palestinian aspirations. On the other hand, the Christian Zionists feel that precisely now Israel needs every possible support.

Fortunately, those tensions have not undermined the fraternal spirit among our members, even in a year when our theme was "Theological Reflections on State, Land and People". Most of our members would not wish to identify themselves with either of the two camps mentioned; all of them are sensitive to the claims and sufferings of both sides in the current conflict.

In its founding statutes, the Fraternity expressed its commitment to Jewish-Christian dialogue in the context of the State of Israel. This commitment was reexpressed in our letter to the President of Israel on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Israel's independence. The answer, sent on behalf of the President by his office, reiterated "Israel's desire for good and peaceful relations with all our neighbours" and emphasized the "guarantees for the rights of minorities, freedom of religion and protection for holy places of all religions" in Israel's Declaration of Independence. It also recalled that "He and predecessors of his have met with representatives of the Ecumenical Fraternity over the last twenty years and have been deeply impressed by the Fraternity's unique contribution to life and thought here."

Our lecture programme included both Jewish and Palestinian viewpoints. There was also a small consultation group of the Fraternity which met from time to time to discuss the tensions and exchange experience.

Because we are not clearly identified with either of the two Christian groups mentioned above and which are well known abroad, it is less easy for us to obtain the support needed for our theological research work, which in fact is well received indeed. All the more thanks, therefore, go to those churches and individuals who supported our work financially during the past year, first and foremost the Vier Moderamina of the Dutch Reformed Churches, the Church of Sweden Mission, the Order of the Sisters of Zion, the Berliner Missionswerk, the Evangelischer Arbeitskreis Kirche und Israel in Hessen und Nassau, congregations in Nuremberg, Berlin and elsewhere, and various visitors. We also thank the Mayor of Jerusalem, Mr Teddy Kollek, again for his generous contribution at the beginning of the year.



STUDY PROGRAMME

1. LECTURES

Following the lectures of Prof M. Greenberg and Dr D. Hartman (see previous Newsletter), we continued with Prof B. Viviano ("Personal Reflections on Israel after Forty Years State, Land and People", December 17), Sr K. Pedersen ("Between East and West Jerusalem -- Between the Hebrew University and the Ethiopian Church", January 28), Canon N. Ateek ("An Arab-Israeli's Theological Reflections on the State of Israel after Forty Years", February 25), Fr P. DuBrul ("Passover 1988: Reflections on the Fortieth Anniversary of the State of Israel -- Christian Notes from the Underground", March 24) and Fr Dr M. Dubois ("Christian Self-Discovery in Israel -- Balance Sheet of 25 Years", April 28).

The lectures showed from the Christian side a great readiness to give personal evaluations. The level of a living message was often more emphasized than that of theological foundations, while the Jewish speakers combined both. Given that excellent scholars spoke to the Fraternity, it is obvious that Christians still have less theological resources for handling the historically burdened issues of the State, Land and People of Israel in today's context.

2. CONFERENCE AND RETREAT WEEKEND

In addition to study groups mentioned earlier (cf. previous Newsletter), our research work was deepened in a one-day Conference at the Ratisbonne Centre and in our Retreat Weekend in Kiryat Ye'arim near Abu Ghosh. While the Conference was mostly devoted to traditional Christian theology on Israel and Jerusalem ("Church Fathers", "Thomas Aquinas", "Crusader Period", "The Vatican's Position", "Today's Importance of Jerusalem"), the Weekend concentrated on current theological conceptions of Israel and the Holy Land. It is notable that the term "Holy Land" was not dropped in our theological debate on the State of Israel.

The Conference and the Weekend gave much appreciated opportunities of studying texts (rabbinic sources) under the direction of Sr A.-C. Avril and Br P. Lenhardt. The texts enabled us to reexamine Christian theological presuppositions and realise the living and deeply rooted Jewish tradition concerning the Land of Israel.

3. PUBLIC LECTURE

In cooperation with the Israel Interfaith Association and the American Jewish Committee (Israel Office), we invited the public to a lecture given by Prof J. Pawlikowski on February 1, entitled "The Re-Judaization of Christianity: Its Implications for Judaism". About 150 attended despite one of the worst winter storms. The lecture was reported in the Jerusalem Post four days later under the headline: "Judaism's debt to Christianity", reflecting Pawlikowski's notion of what "Christians who are active in the Jewish-Christian dialogue with Judaism expect from their partner", although "most Jews might well shrug off that question".

An intense discussion followed this learned lecture. While some suggested that Jews should take "a fresh look" at Jesus and his message and express "recognition of his unique contribution", others saw it the other way round: asking Jews to re-examine their own views is a confession by Christians that they have come to an end with their own research.

3. REREADING THE NEW TESTAMENT WITH AN ORTHODOX RABBI

R. Menachem, who teaches and writes on the New Testament from a Jewish viewpoint, led members of the Fraternity in a study of "Children in the New Testament and Rabbinic Literature". His hermeneutical approach was the traditional one of the Sages, that is, the New Testament was treated as one more Midrash to the Tenach. Although some Christians would reject this approach,

4. EVALUATION

As we evaluate our studies in this academic year, we would recommend continuing this year's theme as research projects at universities and institutions. More detailed suggestions and a (nearly) complete dossier of our study material is available on request.

C A T A L O G U E P R O J E C T

For several years, the Fraternity has been compiling bibliographical references on the various aspects of the Christian-Jewish encounter. The compilation, begun by Barbara Chilton and Sr Gemma del Duca, continues under Lena Skoog. Some 7000 items have been entered into the Fraternity's computer, where they have been edited and processed for easy retrieval by Malcolm Lowe.

We have a classification under some three hundred headings. Further details for bibliographical researchers, as well as for scholars working in the area of Jewish-Christian encounter, are available from our office.

A service for research workers, clergy and students is offered in the following comprehensive dossiers, compiled by Lena Skoog:

- Dossier 1: Christian Views on the State of Israel 1957-87: Part I
- Dossier 2: Christian Views on the State of Israel 1957-87: Part II
- Dossier 3: Jewish Analysis of Jewish Christian Relations 1957-87
- Dossier 4: Jerusalem: Christian Views 1967-87
- Dossier 5: Aqedah (Binding of Isaac)
- Dossier 6: Fish or Fowl: Some Recent Studies of the Book of Jonah
- Dossier 7: The Shoah: Some Documents for Reflection

All the dossiers are available in our office on modest terms.

I M M A N U E L

In April 1988, the Steering Committee asked Malcolm Lowe to become Editor of Immanuel, while Marcel Dubois stays as President of the Editorial Board. The next issue of Immanuel (nos.22/23) will be a Festschrift for David Flusser, to appear later in the year.

C H A N G E S

At the General Meeting on May 29, 1988, Rev Dr Geert Cohen Stuart was elected 11th President of the Fraternity. He replaces Sr Lucy Thorson NDS, who served in this office with much wisdom and charm for three years. Rev. Cohen Stuart is the counsellor to the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk concerning Israel and Jewish-Christian relations. He finished his doctorate on "The Struggle in Man Between Good and Evil: The Inquiry into the Origin of the Rabbinic Concept of Yetzer Ha-Ra" in Jerusalem. Since 1983, he is a full member of the Fraternity, of which he became in 1984 its Treasurer and in 1985 elected advisor to the Student Christian Forum. We wish him and his family health and joy for his new post.

Sr Carmen Farrugia NDS was elected Treasurer. Having lived in Israel for nearly twenty years, she has mastered both Hebrew and Arabic to such a degree that she teaches girls at an Arab school. She lives currently in the Old City and is completing her degrees in Judaic Studies at the Hebrew University.

Rev Vincent Martin OSB was elected a new member of the Steering Committee. As one of the earliest members of the Fraternity, he left Israel in 1969 for China. On his recent return to become Spiritual Director at Tantur, he went straight back into the middle of the Jewish-Christian discussion.

NEW PREMISES

In September 1988, the Fraternity will move to the Ratisbonne Christian Centre for Jewish Studies, where we were offered premises in this reorganised large compound. Besides c. 100 sq. m. for our headquarters, we shall have access to further rooms for groups and to the library. We are very much obliged to Ratisbonne and especially to its Director, Rev Etienne Nodet OP. Ratisbonne and the Fraternity mutually agreed to promote each other's purpose without amalgamating or diminishing either's independence. Our postal address (POB 249, 91002 Jerusalem) remains the same. The address of the Office will be: Rh. Shmuel Hanagid 24, Jerusalem (Tel. 24 68 16).

ANNUAL THEME FOR 1988 - 1989

At the General Meeting, the following subject of study was decided: "The Oneness of God". How can Christians discuss the "Unity of the Triune God" in such a way that it is comprehensible for Jews? Over centuries of hostile separation of Jews and Christians, language about the one God developed in different directions. Even so, overcoming obstacles does not seem to be impossible, as the following two examples indicate. Prof. J. Moltmann admits that "the doctrine of the Trinity remains unfinished... it is an unending process of learning and suffering" (from "The Unity of the Triune God", St Vladimir's Th. Q. 28 (3), 1984), while Rabbi Dr P. Peli in his lecture on "One God" to the Fraternity in 1982 says: God "is a 'one-ness' that is incomplete in this world ... God is perfect in his own Being, perhaps, but in his Revelation to us he is open like a Midrash" (quoted from SIDIC XVI (2), 1983).

Is there a common starting point to which both Judaism and Christianity can refer in order to make each other understandable as speaking about the same one God? Is it to be found in Abraham, in whom all people were blessed by this one God? Is it Moses, to whom the one God gave the Torah of which not one jot will be taken away, as Jesus says? Or is it after all Ezra, with whom there started a new orientation to the revelation of this one God?

Perhaps Buber summarises our problem when he says: "'God' is the most heavily-laden of all human words. None has become so soiled, so mutilated, but for this reason I may not abandon it. Generations of men have laid the burden of their anxious lives upon this word and have weighed it to the ground, it lies in the dust and bears their whole burden" ("The Eclipse of God").

But we may not give it up, we can raise it from the ground - as it is written by Ezra suffering from the aftermath of exile:

With praise and thanksgiving they sang
to the Lord: "He is good, his love for
Israel endures forever." And all the
people gave a great shout of praise to
the Lord. (Ezra 3:11)

Fraternally yours
Rev Petra Heldt, Exec. Sec.

With thanks to the fellow workers and to
Malcolm Lowe for editorial assistance.