

איחוד אקומני למחקר תיאולוגי בישראל

Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel

President: Rev Dr Geert Cohen Stuart

Executive Secretary: Rev Petra Heldt

NEWSLETTER NO. 3 - MARCH 1989

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Dear Friends,

As the previous newsletter promised, we have moved to a new home in the beautiful and historic Ratisbonne Monastery, located in the heart of Jerusalem. Our quarters are spacious and inviting with room for office activities, our library and our computer. We may also use adjoining lecture rooms for hosting seminars of up to 150 people.

It would take a full page to name all those who helped in the monumental task of moving into these new quarters. Thanks to them, our library has been reassembled, our office equipment is in place, and everyone is happily and busily working in our handsome new surroundings.

We are most grateful that these quarters were renovated and made available. Special thanks are due to the Holy See for this manifestation of active support for continued Jewish-Christian dialogue in Israel, centred in Jerusalem. We also appreciate the warm welcome from all who work in the Ratisbonne Centre for Christian Studies of Judaism, now occupying most of this historic monastery.

A housewarming reception was held on the evening of February 2 for friends and members of the Fraternity. It was a wonderful evening attended by nearly 200 people from the local Jewish and Christian communities, together with good wishes arriving from abroad.

We were greeted by Mgr Mathes on behalf of Ratisbonne and the Vatican. Mr Teddy Kollek, Mayor of Jerusalem, inspired us with a speech stressing the continued importance of Jewish-Christian dialogue here and throughout the world.

Among other speeches, Rev Dr Geert Cohen Stuart, President of the Fraternity, made an interesting application of Paul's analogy of the olive tree. Just as the Fraternity is in "the basement," literally, at Ratisbonne, the roots of the olive tree must penetrate deeply into the subsoil under the Jerusalem stone in which the Fraternity has its new home. He pledged the Fraternity's continued dedication to exploring the ancient relationship of Jewish root and Christian branch as applied to contemporary understanding of Christian faith.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SERVICE

The Ecumenical Fraternity is most proud of the scholarly work of Lena Skoog and Malcolm Lowe on our "Catalogue Project on the Jewish-Christian Encounter." Under their able administration, the project has advanced tremendously and is now making bibliographies available to scholars, students and all interested persons on request. We also invite libraries and institutions to enter into cooperative agreements with us to build up and further disseminate this store of information.

For many years, the Fraternity has collected bibliographical references regarding all aspects of the Jewish-Christian encounter today and throughout the centuries. This wealth of collected information has now been edited for easy retrieval from our computer and will be updated on a continuous basis.

The project comprises 27 main topics, divided into over 300 sub-categories according to country, historical period, etc. For the 1980s alone, we have over 4000 bibliographic items, together with a similar number from earlier years. Many of them are in French, German and other European languages as well as English.

A bibliography can be easily printed containing all items relevant to a given research topic or interest. We can also search for names or catchwords in the titles of books and articles.

We began the project with the help of a Cardinal Bea prize, but for years it has been financed entirely by the Fraternity. Hopefully, the project will become self-supporting as the value of this work becomes more widely known and appreciated.

Our researchers work on a volunteer basis, but we still have expenses. It costs approximately \$5 to prepare and mail a bibliography. Starting from this sum upwards, we welcome all donations to the project and, indeed, urge our friends to help us continue to enlarge and provide this valuable service.

STUDY PROGRAM

At the last general meeting of the Fraternity, the members decided to renew their study of "The Unity of The Triune God." The topic continues to attract attention with new concepts developing as theologians have begun to contrast trinitarian ideas with the thought of God being in need of man (Heschel).

The opening dialogue took place on October 27, led by Prof Jorg Jeremias from Munich and Prof Moshe Goshen-Gottstein from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Their discourse was entitled "Unity and Oneness of God in the Tanach," presented from a Jewish and a Christian perspective.

On November 17, Rev Vincent Martin, OSB, led a study on the "Filioque" clause in the Nicene Creed. He suggested its significance for the twentieth century as a bridge for possible ecumenical understanding between our brothers and sisters in Eastern and Western churches.

On December 15, Dr Avital Wohlmann and Dr Zeev Harvey conducted a seminar on "The Language of the Unity of God in the Middle Ages," concentrating on the teachings of Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas. Their views were challenged by Prof Marcel Dubois in the subsequent debate.

On January 26, Dr Gedaljahu Stroumsa and Malcolm Lowe presented a program entitled "Between Gnostic Dualism and Jewish Monotheism: The Position of the Early Church Fathers," moderated by Rev Joseph Stiassny, nds, of Ratisbonne in his inimitable and scholarly fashion. The two participants, one a Jew and the other a Christian, are longstanding friends and colleagues. Both the presentation and the discussion touched on Gnostic inclinations also in the present century.

Dr Pnina Nave-Levinson, a scholar equally active in Europe and Israel, gave the lecture on February 23, entitled "Multiple Aspects of the One God in Jewish Mysticism: Beliefs and Conflicts." She emphasized that Kabbalah mysticism is not anti-intellectual, but presupposes a strong grounding in Torah study.

This year's one-day conference was held on March 17 in Ratisbonne and concerned "How to Pray to the Triune God." Speakers were Rev Joseph Stiassny, Rev Vincent Martin, Sr Abraham and Rev Petra Heldt. The lectures focused on prayer in the Second Temple period and the oneness of God and how this idea challenged the thinking of churches during later periods.

Although difficulties of the situation in Israel may be involved in a slight fall in attendance at our lectures, we still have an average of 70 people. We are grateful to the Abbot of the Dormition Abbey, which continues to host our monthly meetings.

Just a few days before the December meeting, the whole world was shocked by the devastating earthquake in Armenia. As a gesture of sympathy and support to our Armenian sisters and brothers, and friendship with the Armenian Church in Jerusalem, the members, guests and friends of the Ecumenical Fraternity collected NIS 525 at the meeting to aid the earthquake victims, to whom go our prayers and heartfelt sympathies.

VISITORS

We were pleased to welcome ministers, students, pilgrims and other distinguished visitors from many parts of the world. We hope their visits meant as much to them as they did to us.

From Germany, there came Rev Paul Hoffman of the Berliner Missionswerk, Prof Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt of the Free University of Berlin, Rev Ingrid Homann, Chairperson of the Middle East desk in the Nordelbische Missionszentrum, and Dr Josef Foschepoth, General Secretary of the Coordinating Committee of Jewish-Christian Societies in Germany, besides groups interested to learn more about our work. Vikarin Kerstin Peters was sent by the (Lutheran) Northelbian Church to work with us for six months, in order to become acquainted with ecumenism and Jewish-Christian dialogue in Israel. Her assistance in our office was warmly appreciated and provides a good precedent for others to follow.

We are also grateful for contributions from the Northelbian Church, the Berliner Missionswerk, the Arbeitskreis Hessen und Nassau, and the nascent "Friends Association" of the Ecumenical Fraternity in Germany.

From Sweden, there came Rev Dr Hans Ucko, as Head of the Department of Interfaith Relations of the Church of Sweden Mission. We are grateful for the substantial contribution from his church to the work of the Fraternity and congratulate him on his new appointment with the World Council of Churches.

Among American guests were Prof James Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary, Rev Daniel Burke of Rhode Island, Director of the Abrahamic Accord, and Prof Philip Culbertson and Rev and Mrs McFarlane, members of the new Episcopal-Jewish project in America founded by scholars of both traditions - Prof Paul van Buren and Rabbi Dr Neil Gilman. In the course of their various teaching engagements and study tours, the resources of the Fraternity assisted them in making contact with the manifold world of Jews and Christians in Israel.

Old members of the Ecumenical Fraternity, members of the Abrahamic Accord and a minister of the American Methodist Church are preparing to develop a "Friends Association" of the Ecumenical Fraternity in the United States. All interested in helping are invited to contact us.

In the meantime, contributions can always be sent to our office or direct to our bank account in Israel: Account number 10638/62, Union Bank of Israel (Main Branch), 34 Rehov Yafo, P.O.Box 873, 91008 Jerusalem, Israel.

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All our members will surely join me in thanking our one and true God for His guidance and blessing in recent months. Although our resources are slender, constantly the very person we needed came to our help. Also, this year as last, we can be thankful that our theological work was not impaired by difficulties of the political situation. Unfortunately, this cannot be said for some circles abroad, where differences of opinion between supporters and opponents of Israeli policy have invaded the area of Christian-Jewish dialogue. Through our nearness to the actual events, and even more due to the maturity of the Fraternity's members (whatever their personal sympathies), we were spared this danger.

Two recent signs of hope should be mentioned. Our neighbour in Har-El Synagogue, Rabbi Prof Schalom Ben-Chorin, recently received distinguished awards for his many contributions to increasing understanding between Christians and Jews. To him go our congratulations and renewed thanks. The other was a new Jesuspassion, which stresses links between Jesus and the Jewish people. Through the efforts of the composer, O.G. Blarr, and the FRG Foreign Ministry, it could be performed in Jerusalem's Redeemer Church at Easter, gaining a most enthusiastic review in the Jerusalem Post. The German singers and musicians were joined by an Israeli children's choir and youth ensemble. Certainly, the composer gave a challenge, for his colleagues to pick up, to show how our difficulties with traditional musical depictions of the Passion can also be expressed by composing alternatives.

Fraternally yours,
Rev Petra Heldt (Executive Secretary)

This newsletter was prepared by Mari Kuhnley and Malcolm Lowe. We are especially thankful to Mari for the wide range of voluntary help she provided during her current stay in Jerusalem and look forward to her prospective return in October. Thanks go also to all the "regulars" in our office and to the whole army of people who came to our assistance at one time or another in recent months.