

Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel  
איחוד אקומני למחקר תיאולוגי בישראל

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Dear Friends,

In the past half-year, the contrast between developments in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East has been experienced personally by many of us who are engaged in the Jewish-Christian dialogue in Israel. Last August, shortly after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the International Council of Christians and Jews held its annual conference in Prague, where Jewish-Christian relations in Eastern Europe could now be freely discussed. The participants were welcomed by President Havel's chief of bureau, Prince Schwarzenberg, Duke of Krumau (Krumlov), and by the Mayor of Prague.

A strong team of Jews and Christians from Israel took part. Besides Mrs Sally Klein-Katz and our Executive Secretary, the officially invited representatives from Israel, it included Rabbi David Rosen (ICCJ Executive member), Rabbi Ehud Bandel (ICCJ Youth Conference delegate), Dr Kalman Yaron (Director of the Hebrew University's Martin Buber Institute) and others. We returned to face the growing problems and anxieties of the local situation. Among other things, most Christian students and volunteers in Israel were withdrawn to their home countries before January 15. However, several Christian teaching institutions with strong ties to the Fraternity were at least partial exceptions.

The Fraternity sought to pursue its normal activities as much as possible. It also moved to better appointed rooms in the Ratisbonne monastery, its home since the end of 1988. Some 60 guests came to a "house-warming" on December 27. Speeches were given by Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem, Msgr Dr Richard Mathes, Cultural Attaché of the Holy See in Israel and Administrator of the Ratisbonne Centre, Rev Prof Marcel Dubois, Director of the Ratisbonne Centre, Rabbi Dr David Hartman, Director of the Shalom Hartman Institute, and Rev Dr Geert Cohen Stuart, our President. All emphasized the importance of the occasion as a demonstration of hope for the future.

This was also an opportunity to say a fond farewell to Sr Ibolya Glancz, nds, who has been called to new duties in Britain. She had served the Fraternity devotedly as Assistant Editor of our journal *Immanuel*, among many other functions, for more than a decade.

## Prayers for Peace

As January 15 approached, various prayers for peace were held in Jerusalem. On Sunday, January 13, an ecumenical prayer was organized in the Coenaculum, the generally recognized site of the Last Supper, by the Fraternity and the Ecumenical Circle of Friends. Nearly 70 persons from many churches and Christian groups took part in a mostly silent prayer led by Franciscan Father Baratto and Lutheran Propst Friedrich. Bishop David led fellow Armenians in a hymn, Anglican Dean Peter Crooks read Psalm 121 ("I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills") and the Greek Catholic Archbishop led some of his congregants in a responsive prayer. We concluded with the Lord's Prayer in each one's own language.

The next day some 200 Christians met in the YMCA (West) for prayers led by Rev Charles Kopp, United Christian Council in Israel, Rev Alfred Sawyer and others. Principal themes were "trusting in God, the Creator of the world" and "not succumbing to panic". At about the same time 50,000 Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall were praying for peace and an end to the very serious drought. Participants questioned by the *Jerusalem Post* (January 15) were praying for a solution without war, that Israel not be hurt by war, or just that "God should work things out as He sees fit". Indeed, the first missile attacks were accompanied by the first prolonged rain of the winter and injuries were described as miraculously light.

The Ecumenical Circle of Friends, an informal group of Eastern and Western Christians convened by Father Bargil Pixner, OSB, organizes the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This year's prayers (January 20-27), despite greatly reduced participation, were held almost as usual, although air raid sirens were sounded immediately after an event held at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

## Study Programme

For many reasons, the Fraternity's theme of study for this year - "Praying in Jerusalem" - is an apposite one. Our opening lecture, on Jerusalem in biblical prayer, was given by Prof Moshe Greenberg of the Hebrew University on October 25. On November 22, Prof Gabriel Cohen of Bar-Ilan University led us in a study of midrashic texts on the role and status of Jerusalem in Jewish prayer. Both lecturers more than confirmed their reputations as experts in the respective fields.

An unusual and most interesting perspective was given on December 20 by Dr Joop Meyers, an Orthodox Jew who teaches psychology at the Hebrew University. He showed how various traditional Jewish understandings of the nature and function of prayer have their parallels in known psychological theories. The next lecture, scheduled for January 31, will be given by the Very Rev Peter Crooks on "Jerusalem: 'For those who believe' (John 17:20) - Perspective of a Protestant Pastor". The experiences of Dean Crooks in a previous testing assignment are described in his recent book *Lebanon: The Pain and the Glory* (Eastbourne: MARC, 1990). Among future events planned are a day of study on how Israeli folk music echoes religious understandings of Jerusalem, including participation by such singers.

Like other activities in Israel, participation in our lectures has been affected by the approaching crisis. Fewer scholars came from abroad and many left early, culminating in the departure of most Christian students. However, we can continue to rely on our veteran members. Compared to the record attendances at the Fraternity's lectures last year, numbers are down by one third to an average of about 55.



## Cooperation

Surprisingly many organizations and institutions in Israel have some kind of activity in the interfaith field on one level or another and in one respect or another. All too often, one organization does not know what others are doing. It led to duplication of efforts and to clashes between events. Obviously, some kind of coordination was long overdue.

During the second half of 1990, representatives of several of those organizations met regularly in the Fraternity's offices with the purpose of solving this problem. Some broader public meetings were also convened. Finally, on January 16, 1991, the Founding Meeting of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI) was held.

Nearly 30 organizations have already expressed their intention to join the ICCI and as many more are expected to join it later. For both them and visitors from abroad, the ICCI will provide a central address for information about interfaith activities in Israel. Its primary role will be to facilitate cooperation between the member organizations. But it will occasionally promote initiatives of general interest to its members. It thus also continues the work of the Liaison Committee dealing with practical issues of Christian existence in Israel, which was created earlier by some of the same organizations (see our Newsletter No. 4 of November 1989).

At the Founding Meeting, the following Executive was elected: Rev Dr Geert Cohen Stuart (Theological Advisor in Jerusalem to the Netherlands Reformed Church), Rev Petra Heldt (Ecumenical Fraternity), Rabbi Dr Ronald Kronish (Israel Bureau, American Jewish Committee), Mr Malcolm Lowe (Shalom Hartman Institute, Ratisbonne Christian Centre for Jewish Studies), Rabbi David Rosen (Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith), Mr Clarence Wagner (Bridges for Peace) and Dr Kalman Yaron (Martin Buber Institute). Subsequently, a discussion was held on education towards religious pluralism in the context of Israel - truly a matter of general interest. The speakers were Rabbi Rosen, Prof Dubois and Dr Subhi Abu Ghosh, Shari'a Courts Director in Israel's Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The idea of the ICCI was originally proposed by Rev Dr Jacobus Schoneveld, General Secretary of the ICCJ, among others. A message of greeting was also received from the Chairman of the ICCJ Executive Committee, Sir Sigmund Sternberg. Initially, the ICCI will operate from the offices of some founder members until a more permanent solution is found. For further information, please contact our office.

## Publicity

Our standard brochure describing the Fraternity's origins and activities will shortly be available in Spanish and Scottish Gaelic. The Spanish translation is by Sr Vicky Vargas, nds, who with Rev Rien van der Vegt organizes the Fraternity's Student Christian Forum in Jerusalem. For the Gaelic version we are grateful to Ragnall Mac'ille dhuibh (Mr Ronald Black) of the Department of Celtic at Edinburgh University and to Rev J. McL. Ritchie for providing this contact. Rev Ritchie previously served the Church of Scotland in Nazareth and Tiberias.

The brochure is already available in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Welsh: please apply to our office for copies. This newsletter will continue to appear in English, French and German.

## Visitors

The crisis in the Gulf has reduced the number of visitors of all kinds to Israel. Many groups of pilgrims cancelled trips. At the same time, both individuals and representatives of various organizations were prompted to come precisely at this time in order to show their concern. Although we did not see (except in the streets of Jerusalem) the 400 students of Yeshiva University who flew to Israel on the eve of hostilities, we were honoured by the following visitors among others.

In August a pilgrim group from Wales, led by Rev Ioan W. Gruffydd, was given a lecture in Welsh on the Fraternity and Jewish-Christian dialogue in Israel. In September we were visited by Prof Dr Magdalene Schutz of the Evangelische Fachhochschule in Hanover and by Prof Lauer of the University of Lausanne. Rev Erich Spier and his wife came from Berlin in October.

Our member Sr Kay McDonald, nds, brought a group of Christians and Jews sponsored by the Canadian Council of Churches in November. There was also an ecumenical group of 45 from the United States and a mostly Jewish group of 120 sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, but accompanied by Rev Dr Ben Cowles and other Christians.

At the end of November we were happy to greet our old member the Very Rev Prof Robert Craig, D.D., who highly commended the recent issue of our journal *Immanuel* (No. 22/23 on the theme "People, Land and State of Israel: Jewish and Christian Perspectives"). This issue was also warmly reviewed in the French journal *Sens*, ending with the question: "How soon can we have a French translation?"

In December came the new General Secretary of the Coordinating Committee of the Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Germany, Dr Ansgar Koschel. Rev Ingelore Ehricht from Greifswald in the former East German spent Christmas in Jerusalem. On December 26 an ecumenical group from the United States studying at the Hebrew University received a lecture. In January came Rev Hans Schwegler of Zurich, a member of the Council of Christians and Jews in Switzerland. A brave group of mostly American Methodists engaged in Christian-Jewish dialogue came to Jerusalem shortly before January 15.

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Especially in these times, we are very grateful for all the expressions of support received. They include letters, telephone calls, telegrams and collections by parishes. Regarding the latter, we thank in particular the Parish Council of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem for deciding to make regular collections for the Fraternity's work, most recently on Christmas morning. The Redeemer Church also collects for the programme "Study Year in Israel" for German theology students, among other worthy causes.

The Fraternity also thanks its members Rev Bruno Hussar and Prof Dubois for enabling its library to receive some of the books left by the late Rev Gabriel Grossman. Father Gabriel will long be remembered for his gentle disposition and his exemplary courage in the face of recurrent illness.

Yours fraternally,  
Rev Petra Heldt (Executive Secretary)