

News from the

ECUMENICAL FRATERNITY אחדות אקומני

Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel
אחדות אקומני תיאלולית רישראלי

President: Rev Dr Geert Cohen Stuart

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Dear Friends,

During the height of summer, the Executive Secretary went on a "long trek" through Germany, France and Britain, whose purposes included publicising the Fraternity's work at every opportunity. This was made all the easier, now that our basic publicity material is available in French and German as well as English. Our brochure, incidentally, now exists also in Italian and Welsh (available from our office on request); volunteers to make other translations have also appeared!

The first station was the Protestant Academy in Mülheim for a conference led by Rev Dr Brigitte Engel-Hiddemann on identifying and eliminating possible anti-Judaism in certain trends of feminist theology. The sessions led by your Secretary owed much to insights gained in Jerusalem (with special thanks to Rabbi M. Rubin). Next came West Berlin: valuable meetings with church personalities, the Working Group of Christians and Jews, the parish of Neuwesend and other friends. Then the centres of the Northelbian Church in Lübeck and Breklum; in both places, busy committees made time to enquire about the Fraternity's progress. Many thanks again for the renewed expressions of support from our firm friends in Berlin and Northelbia.

After lectures to Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Wetzlar, Hamelin and Bad Nauheim, we hastened to Cologne. There Prof Paul-Gerhard Aring kindly took us on to Lille for the annual conference of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), also attended by our President, Treasurer and other Fraternity members. Among the many who worked to make this a memorable event, our personal thanks go to Bishop Gerald Mahon and Mme Hélène Secly-Kaufmann.

Finally, in London we had helpful discussions with Mrs Ruth Weyl and Rev Peter Jennings, to both of whom we wish many more years of their devoted work. At a time when some voices call the Jewish-Christian dialogue "passé", it is a blessing to meet so many people in so many places for whom it is no fashion but a lifelong commitment.

Study Programme

The last two lectures on our theme for 1988-89, "The Oneness of the Triune God", were given on March 20 and April 13, respectively by Rev Dr Thomas Hughson, SJ on "The Unity of God: An Interpersonal Approach" and by Prof Shmuel Safrai on "The Unity of God in the Teaching of the Sages". The one presented Heribert Mühlen's conception of the Trinity as "I" (Father), "Thou" (Son) and "We-act in person" (Holy Spirit), which both opened untraditional perspectives and provoked critical reactions among the audience. The other explained that the various rabbinic terms for God's activity ("Indwelling", "Power", "Heavenly Voice", etc.) are just alternate designations of the One God: the difference lies in the ways that God endeavours to become present to human beings.

We shall all greatly miss Rev Hughson, now serving in the U.S., but hope to maintain a continued fruitful contact. Among others departing, we wish a happy retirement to Sr Despina Caradja, a faithful member for many years, and congratulate the Very Rev Hugh Wybrew on the appearance of his new book on Eastern Orthodox spirituality (strongly recommended also for "beginners").

An "extra feature" was a morning (May 19) spent with Prof Rev Paul van Buren discussing his recent book on Christology (*Christ in Context*). Many of the 27 present also subsequently participated in the Shalom Hartman Institute's conference (see under "Cooperation"); Prof van Buren is a co-director of the SHI's Centre for Ethics and Religious Pluralism.

Incidentally, a systematic four-page evaluation of our 1988-89 study programme by the Executive Secretary is available from our office. Please enclose with your request NIS 5 (in Israel) or \$5 (abroad: or equivalent in £ or DM) to cover expenses.

At our annual retreat (May 26-28), stimulating lectures were given by Dr Aaron Singer on "The Holy Spirit in Rabbinic Thinking" and by Rev Dr Jacobus Schoneveld on "Creation Theology". The one rounded off our study programme for 1988-89, the other powerfully launched the programme for 1989-90 on precisely this theme: "Theology of Creation in Judaism and Christianity". We are grateful to "Coos", our Executive Secretary during the 1970s, for this manifestation of his unfailing support amidst the many demands of his current role as Secretary of the ICCJ.

Cooperation

Our standard brochure mentions numerous institutions, both local and abroad, with which we co-operate on a regular basis. Some specific instances can be given from the past year.

Mostly Fraternity members were the Christian participants in a fortnightly seminar organised at the Shalom Hartman Institute by Rabbi Tzvi Marx and Malcolm Lowe (himself a Fraternity member), which culminated in a two-day conference on "Community and Peoplehood: Jewish and Christian Perspectives". The bibliography for the seminar, which in 1989-90 is investigating Jewish and Christian approaches to interpretation, comes largely from the work of Lena Skoog on the Fraternity's long-term catalogue project. In this project, thousands of references have been collected to articles and books on all aspects of the Christian-Jewish encounter, both throughout history and today. (For more details, see our brochure or the account in our third newsletter, or write to our office.)

Together with the Israel Interfaith Association and the American Jewish Committee, whose Israel Office does so much to promote good Jewish-Christian relations, the Fraternity is represented in the

Liaison Committee dealing with practical issues of Christian existence in Israel. Highly valued by all concerned was a perceptive survey of "The Condition of the Christian in Israel" submitted by our member Rev Frans Bouwen, WF. Here too, the Fraternity could supply much bibliographical material.

Now that we are under the same roof as the Ratisbonne Christian Centre for Jewish Studies, co-operation can take place almost daily. Among major examples was a jointly organised lecture by Prof Walter Principe of Montreal on April 17, entitled "Jewish-Christian Encounter in the Middle Ages - and Today". It was attended by a broad cross-section of Jerusalem residents. The advanced seminar of the Ratisbonne Centre, too, has taken advantage of bibliographies supplied by the Fraternity. We are also grateful to Gianpaolo Gotti, studying at the Ratisbonne Centre during 1989-90, for translating our brochure most exactly into Italian.

In cooperation with the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, the Fraternity assisted in a six-week study seminar for students of theology from Germany, in what is hoped will become a regular programme. Likewise, study programmes were organised for visiting mixed groups of pastors and lay people from the Northelbian Church, led successively by Rev Ingrid Homann and Propst Jürgen Sontag. Please apply to our office if you would like our help in organising such a seminar (or a single lecture).

Visitors

Among the many visitors since our last newsletter, we can mention a selection. Visitors from West Germany included Dr Joseph Foschepoth, General Secretary of the Coordinating Committee of the Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Germany, who paid us a return visit and gained on-the-spot acquaintance with parallel work here. One result was an Israeli contribution for next year's "Week of Brotherhood" organised by the Coordinating Committee.

We were happy to receive Prof Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt of Berlin and congratulate him on his important new book, *Von Elend und Heimsuchung der Theologies Prolegomena zur Dogmatik*. A translation into English would be most desirable. Also Prof Helmut Gollwitzer kindly sent us a collected edition of his writings, delivered personally by Rev Anneli Loerbroks.

For the first time, the Director of the Middle East Desk of the EKID (the roof organisation of the German Protestant Churches), Oberkirchenrat Dr Michael Trensky, came and spent a morning learning about the Fraternity. Also Herr Hans-Uwe Stephan, Director of the Northelbian Centre for World Outreach, came together with Rev Ingrid Homann. We also received Rev Hans-Joachim Curth and Herr Walter Sylten, respectively Directors of Adult Education and of Ecumenical World Outreach in the Protestant Church of West Berlin, Rev Dr Stephan Reimers, Director of the Protestant Academy of Hamburg, Msgr Michael Töpel, Ecumenical Advisor of the Catholic Church in Berlin, and Dr Harald Uhl of the Permanent Advisory Group of Jews and Christians of the biennial assemblies of the the EKID.

Oberkirchenrat Trensky subsequently reported favorably about his impressions. We are likewise grateful to our member Propst Dr Johannes Friedrich for his strong recommendation of our work in the latest edition (November 1989) of the journal (*Gemeindebrief*) of Jerusalem's Redeemer Church, which also has a wide circulation in Germany.

As if in anticipation of subsequent events, a stream of visitors came this year from East Germany: Prof Dr Heinrich Fink, Rev Dr Cristoph Schuppan, Prof Dr Stephan Schreiner and Rev Johannes

Hildebrand. With the disappearance of former barriers, we trust that other participants in Jewish-Christian dialogue in Eastern Europe will also soon put Jerusalem on their itinerary.

From the United Kingdom, we had the honour to receive Sir Sigmund Sternberg and his wife, Lady Hazel, as well as our former member Dr Elizabeth Miller, who now holds an important teaching post in the Church of Scotland. As President of the ICCJ, Sir Sigmund was accompanied by Rabbi Prof Dr Peter Levinson as Vice-President and Prof Dr Pnina Navé-Levinson, member of the Advisory Panel of the Executive Committee. Your Executive Secretary is also grateful to Sir Sigmund for personally making it possible for her to attend the last two ICCJ conferences.

The Superior General of the Sisters of Sion, Sr Patricia Watson, visited our office, where various members of her order have contributed devoted service. Another Sister of Sion who came, Sr Isabel Sampaio Wilken, is the Secretary of the Council of Christians and Jews in San Paulo, Brazil. Passing through on his way to sabbatical leave in Britain was Rev Dr Peter Cross, who teaches at the Diocesan Seminary and works with the ICCJ in Melbourne, Australia.

Last but not least, we were happy to greet Mr Jan Henningsson, the new Middle East Secretary of the Church of Sweden Mission, and the Israel Board of the Netherlands Reformed Church. Both come from among our oldest and most faithful supporters; both also enjoyed the opportunity to participate in sessions of the SHI seminar (see above, "Cooperation").

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The end of this decade, especially following the dramatic events in Europe in recent months, is an opportune moment for setting out lines for the future. During this decade, Christian theologians in many fields, such as biblical studies, dogmatics, Church history and practical theology, have been influenced more than ever before by the growing results of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. It is excellent proof that the dialogue is not a short-lived trend but an influence that can shape Christian theology as lastingly as did the scholastic mode in the Middle Ages.

On Jewish thinkers, too, the dialogue has had its impact, but above all in Israel, where various Jewish organisations perceive a special responsibility to develop sound Jewish-Christian relations in a situation where Jews are the majority and have sovereignty. This is how the ADL and AJC see their role in Israel and this also motivates the SHI's Centre for Ethics and Religious Pluralism (mentioned above).

This much, then, is clear for the future: that "the word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem" ever more strongly also in respect of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. It is no accident that the path of so many, exemplified by our visitors, passes through Jerusalem.

Yours fraternally,
Rev Petra Heldt (Executive Secretary)

Please note: our supporters in North America now have available our new Account No. 615-670-2, Franklin County Bank, Sewanee TN 37375, U.S.A. In the United Kingdom, we have: Account No. 30351059, Barclays Bank, Cavendish Square Branch, 4 Vere Street, London W1A 4LT. In Israel: Account No. 10638/62, Union Bank of Israel, 34 Rehov Yafa, P.O.Box 873, 91008 Jerusalem.