



THE TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

A September New Year

Dan Koski, Tantur Staff



Greetings from Tantur!

On the Jewish calendar, we have just marked the start of 5774, a period marked by a seemingly endless litany of Jewish feasts, each with their own unique practices and delightful disruption of the local routine. For Jews and non-Jews, locals and expatriates alike, September is truly the start of another year. The endless summer heat finally gives way to cooler climates and a touch of clouds, as grapes and pomegranates ripen. The warm-blooded of our staff and residents begin to reach for a light jacket, while everyone enjoys a basket in

the slightly diminished rays of the afternoon sun.

Our academic and program cycle begins as well, starting as always with the Three Month Sabbatical Program, which is currently underway and heading into its second month at the time of this writing. We welcome back those who took their summer vacations and welcome in our new residents. And as grapes and pomegranates give way to olives (and still more olives), let us rejoice in God's many blessings and many renewals in the Holy Land and beyond.

Tantur at a Glance: Welcoming New MESP Neighbors



Tantur is pleased to welcome Dr. Douglas and Patti Magnuson as the new directors of MESP (Middle East Studies Program). Together with Program Assistant Sari Heidenreich (r), this fabulous trio has been busy since the summer settling into their new roles as administrators for this unique multi-institutional educational initiative.



MESP is an independent study-abroad program under the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, designed for undergraduates from affiliated institutions to spend a semester in the region. A secondary building on the grounds of Tantur has served as the home for MESP, with the staff and students being our frequent companions in our cafeteria. Best wishes to all from Tantur!

Thoughts on the Tantur Experience

By Gilles Mongeau, S.J.

I came to Tantur after a very busy five years juggling administration, teaching, spiritual formation ministry, and parish ministry, along with trying to keep up my academic research and writing. I came to Tantur very tired; I was looking for a program that would allow me to transition spiritually and intellectually into my time of sabbatical.

The most important thing for me to highlight, at the end of the program, is the unexpected and truly rich encounter with the historical person of Jesus that I have been given. Though I have been teaching my students about the "Jewish Jesus" for many years, and have been intellectually stimulated by the writings of researchers like Geza Vermes, N.T. Wright, John P. Meier, Ben Meyer, and other proponents of understanding Jesus as a first-century Jew, something about being present at the holy sites, seeing Masada, Qumran, Tell Dan, visiting an example of a first century house in Galilee, pondering the reconstruction of first-century Jerusalem at the Israel Museum has given me new and deeper appreciation of what it means that Jesus was a living breathing first century Jew. He has a texture, an imaginative and intellectual "thickness" and "real presence" to me that he did not have before.

It is not only the holy places and the historical sites that have made this difference: I know now what it means to walk an hour in the hot sun of the



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Gilles Mongeau (left) with
Tantur guide and lecturer Ophir
Yarden.

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Summer Volunteer Clayton Goodgame puts the finishing touches on our Coffee Room.

A Coffee Room, Renewed

Our Coffee Room plays an important part in the life of Tantur. Besides being a vital source of filter coffee and tea for our guests who need just a touch of the comforts of home, it is also a reception room, as well as where our staff, residents, visitors and program participants most often interact in between meals and social functions.

New bulletin boards completed the renovation project. Besides a notice board for our own programs, we also highlight different activities in the region that many local visitors and international expatriates enjoy frequenting.

The project was tackled by a joint team of our maintenance staff and Clayton Goodgame, a participant in our [Tantur Fellowship Initiative](#). We've been enjoying our coffee and tea in resplendent luxury ever since!



The International Flavour of Christianity at the Basilica of the Annunciation

Tantur July 2009 Continuing Education Program participant and Singapore resident, Glenn de Cruz, C.Ss.R, reflects on the significance of the Singaporean depiction of the Virgin Mary in the courtyard of the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth.

Having been to Israel a number of times, I have always marveled at the myriad of pilgrims that come to this holy place. And the many different races and languages that accompany these pilgrimages from many different countries around the world and Singapore is no exception.

Singapore is a tiny city-state at the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It's a nation of five million people from all walks of life. Early Asian immigrants came from China and India to seek a better life. From the sixteenth century European traders arrived especially from Spain and Portugal on their way to the Far East, and intermarried with the locals, made up of the Chinese, Indians and the Malays. Later Britain came to its shores and founded modern day Singapore.

Along with the different races came the different languages and religions, with their customs, cultures and traditional values. Buddhism forms the largest religious denomination, followed by Islam, Christianity and Hinduism, with Taoism, Sikhism and others bringing up the rear. So it's an amalgamation of sorts trying to make a living in a small cosmopolitan state. The government is secular, but the people are not. Mosques, temples and churches are well attended.

On one of our trips during the Tantur program of 2009, we went to the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth. The Upper Church serves as the parish church for the Latin Rite Catholics of Nazareth. A unique feature of this church is the images or portraits of Mary and the child Jesus. I was surprised to see that tiny Singapore donated a mosaic portrait of the Madonna and Child. I was surprised because Christians represent a small percentage of the population in Singapore and that Singapore is one of only about twenty-five countries represented at this church. The photograph that I took of the Singaporean Madonna and Child needs some explanation (see above picture).

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International Flavour at the Basilica of Nazareth (Continued from Page 3)

First of all, the Madonna and Child have a mixture of Western and Eastern features. The Madonna's outfit is the traditional 'peranakan' dress, called the 'Sarong Kubaya'. Loosely translated, 'peranakan' means a blend of the Straits-born Chinese and the Malay cultures and customs. The children around the Madonna and Child represent the four main races in Singapore, the Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian/European, noticeable by their outfits. The Flowers in the foreground is the Hibiscus, a species that's common in both Singapore and Malaysia and I believe in the Holy Land as well.

Christianity, which began here, has moved beyond these shores to the 'ends of the world' where it continues to grow, even as far east as Singapore.

Editor's note: the present-day Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth was built in 1969 over the structure believed to be the dwelling of the Holy Family, making it the fourth church erected on the spot since the Byzantine Era. It is known for its towering spire, distinctive 20th century architecture and the Marian depictions bequeathed by pilgrims from various nationalities from across the world. For more information about the basilica, visit basilicanazareth.org.

Thoughts on the Tantur Experience (Continued from Page 2)

Dead Sea area, to need water constantly, even in the humidity of Galilee. The many lectures on biblical times and places give order and meaning to all these experiences, but the land is the first and the most important teacher. As Saint Jerome said and many contemporary commentators emphasize, the land is itself "the fifth gospel."

The time spent visiting Christians, Jews and Muslims was just as important. Beyond the much greater and very frustrating understanding I have been given of the present situation in the Holy Land ("It's complicated....."); beyond feelings of anger and bewilderment; beyond the great admiration I have developed for so many proponents of a genuinely peaceful and nonviolent solution to the present struggles; beyond the growing desire to be in ongoing solidarity and collaboration with all those (Jew, Christian, Muslim) who seek a just and peaceful solution for all, I come away with a great gift: I have touched and tasted the fact that God is at work here. I don't mean this lightly, and I certainly can't (after this experience) have any romantic notions of what this statement means. But I have seen God at work: the fruits are often hidden, humble, and very fragile; they may not come to harvest. But God labours mightily here.

Gilles Mongeau is director of the Master of Divinity Program at Regis College of The Jesuit School of Theology at the University of Toronto. He participated in our July 2013 One-Month Continuing Education Program.

Staff Shot



Tony Pohlen & Esther van Stam

Introducing Oliver, the newest member of the Tantur community

We're used to early arrivals at Tantur, but even this one took us all by surprise. Oliver Francis Pohlen, born to Programs Director Tony Pohlen and Guest Services Coordinator Esther van Stam, decided that his projected September birth-date was just too long to wait, and so his arrival on August 17th was the talk of the Hill!

Oliver Francis was born at Hadassah Hospital of Ein Karem, Jerusalem, weighing 2.78 kg/6.12 lbs. His first name was chosen from its Latin root meaning of "olive tree" (of which we have many at Tantur), while Saint Francis of Assisi lays claim as inspiration to the second.

Both names reflect his parents' hope that he be a person of peace. Congrats to the happy family!

Fr. David B. Burrell, past Tantur rector, publishes new book, *Questing for Understanding*.

Keeping up with the many different people who have been a part of the international staff of Tantur is never an easy task, but one always made easier with the publication of a paper or book. Such is the case with Rev. Dr. David B. Burrell, C.S.C. Fr. Burrell was rector of Tantur from 1980 to 1981 following a nine-year tenure as chair of the theology department at Notre Dame. His year at Tantur was a period of growth in the vision and mission of interfaith matters between Christians, Muslims and Jews. In the fifth and sixth chapters of *Questing*,

Fr. Burrell gives a delightful description of the places visited and the people that were part of his time in the Holy Land. Referring to *Questing*, Father David states "my story is not mine but that of the times our generation has inhabited." Anyone interested in learning more about this story told through a remarkable storyteller would do well to pick up a copy of *Questing for Understanding*.

Questing for Understanding is available through [Cascade Books](#) and other book retailers.



First arriving to Tantur in 1980, Fr. David B. Burrell was our rector from 1980-1981. He currently resides in Bangladesh, where he continues his "quest."

Tantur is an institute for ecumenical and theological studies, situated on a beautiful hill in Jerusalem near Bethlehem. It serves as a welcoming place in The Holy Land for visitors who come from all over the world seeking an oasis of learning, community, and hospitality.

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