

THE TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

Stars over Bethlehem

Dan Koski, Tantar Staff



"Dan, come quickly!"

Going on five years of marriage, I have since learned that those three words uttered from my wife rarely bode well for my evening plans. On this particular December night, however, I had nothing to fear: stars were falling in the winter night sky.

I doubt there are too many places in the world where watching stars fall on a night sky is anything but enjoyable, but on the rooftop of my apartment that overlooks Bethlehem and the Jordan Valley, it borders on nothing short of magic.

Quickly, my wife and I grabbed our coats and scarves, and took the elevator to the apartment roof. Even with light pollution from Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the night sky seemed to be as clear and bright with stars as any I could remember.

It only took a moment before we counted our first falling star; soon to be followed by another, then another. They fell at a delightfully measured pace, enough to keep our interest for a considerable amount of time as we tried to make out constellations and

noted one particularly bright star - as I live and breathe - over Nativity Church in Bethlehem.

"Is that the Christmas star?" my wife asked.

"I'm not sure, but I'd like it to be." was all I could say.

To the north, Tantar is part of the view. I can just make out the lights of our buildings on the south of the campus, and, if I look hard enough, our Tower and its own flashing Christmas star. Falling (or flashing) stars or not, I always take a look at Tantar before I head back in and think of how uniquely placed we are in the middle of this Biblical landscape.

Are we at Tantar doing our part to keep Christmas alive, within sight of where it all began? Have we done so this year, now that our programs have all run their course, and our scholars and program participants have left the Holy Land? Will we do so next year?

I am not sure, but I'd like it to be so.

Tantar at a Glance

A Year's End and Nostra Aetate



On 4 December, our 3-Month Sabbatical Program came to an end, and with it, another calendar year of continuing education programs concludes. While a few of our research fellows continue on, we are happy to report that all Tantar programs were successfully completed, despite the heightened conflict in the Holy Land. Meanwhile, December saw the first of a two-part conference, co-organized by Tantar, on the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the document that clarified Catholic theological stances towards the Jewish faith. The second day will be held in early 2016.



Top photo: A 3-Month Sabbatical Program Participant departs for home. Lower photo: a snapshot from the 50th Anniversary *Nostra Aetate* conference co-organized by Tantar.

An Open Letter to the Fall 1995 Tantur Three Month Program

Jared Price

Thank you.

It has been twenty years since we were together, and it seems both only yesterday and so very long ago. For many years, I lost touch with all of you. Only within the past few have I been fortunate enough to reconnect with Nancy Bowen, Sandy Olewine, Martin Bailey and Kevin Codd. There are so many more of you out there, and I hope that if anyone I've mentioned has the means to get this letter to you, that they will do so. Thank you, Gordon Brubacher for helping make my experience possible.

I cannot say what the rest of you expected when you left your homes to travel to Tantur. I cannot even say for certain what I expected. I somehow doubt that you expected to have a 21-year-old college student in your midst. The gift you gave that young man, however, is beyond anything you can possibly imagine.

You gave me the gift of your company. You gave me the gift of your wisdom and your continuing search for what God has in store for you. You gave me an opportunity to find myself surrounded by clergy from such different backgrounds, all of whom shared a common humanity. You resisted allowing the charge of your positions to create distance between us. You allowed me to experience your genuine selves without walling yourselves behind the image you might have thought a young layperson



"God used Tantur, and each of you, to shape me, and though we have been apart for so very long, you continue to do so."

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Tantur Staff Heads to Nazareth and the Galilee

Even Tantur people need retreats! This past December, the administrative and facilities staff took a day off from our year-end responsibilities and tasks to travel north to Nazareth and the Galilee for fellowship, relaxation and reflection on a year's job well done. The day began in Nazareth with a local guide explaining some of the sights with a visit to the impressive hilltop Salesian church, then a walk through the Old City down to the churches of the Annunciation. In the afternoon, a visit to the Magdala Center near Tiberias, where local excavations have unearthed revolutionary archaeological findings, was followed by a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee and a delicious fish dinner where it was the turn of our dining and kitchen hall staff to sit and enjoy being served upon! By decree of the rector, it was determined that an annual staff trip will be held each December from hereafter. Until next time...



Tantur staff on board a Sea of Galilee tour boat. Almost all of our staff were able to attend our inaugural year-end day retreat.



A New Normal?

Fr. Russ McDougall, C.S.C.

Here is a photo of the Jacir Palace Hotel in Bethlehem, just across the separation wall from Tantur. This is where I have a gym membership.

The photo provides some hints of the "new normal" that we have entered into in this corner of the world.

One is that the street in front of the hotel is scorched. That is because, almost daily for the last few months, there have been afternoon protests that involve rock throwing at Israeli security forces, the burning of tires and dumpsters, and the return fire of tear gas, and at times bullets, from Israeli soldiers. The local joke is that kids go to school in the morning, and then in the afternoon go to the wall in order to have a "conversation" with the IDF.

You might also notice that the street actually looks quite clean. That is because, early in the morning after these daily afternoon events, city workers as well as the owners of the businesses along this portion of Hebron Road come out to clean up the mess from the day before. Not too long ago a parking spot in front of the Jacir Palace was hard to find, but there are plenty of spaces there now.

I took this photo in the early morning after I had gone to the gym to work out. We are all learning, sadly, to adjust to the "new normal." I used to go to the gym in the afternoon; when I can manage it now, I go in the early morning. Otherwise I stay away.

When I am asked whether I feel safe, I respond that I worry more about the safety of family and friends in the U.S., where shooting sprees seem to take place on a daily basis, than I do about safety here. Anything can happen anytime, anywhere, of course, but the where and when of the incidents of political violence here are fairly predictable.

Many Israelis react to the current round of violence with great surprise, as if the attacks by Palestinians are without context. Violence *ex nihilo*. Or if they do attempt to contextualize, it's to compare the Palestinians, on the one hand, to the Germans in the Second World War, who sought a "Final Solution of the Jewish problem"; or, on the other hand, to compare them to the Canaanites, destined, in a Final Solution of the Palestinian problem, for expulsion or destruction.

If more than a few Israelis see Palestinians either as Germans or as Canaanites, many Palestinians see Israelis as Crusaders, bringing devastation on the land and its peoples (who, today, are Muslims and Christians, instead of the Crusaders' historical victims, who were Muslims and Jews).

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A New Normal?

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Would that we were better able to see the "other" as a person instead of as a "type", whether "German," or "Canaanite," or "Crusader"! With Mercutio, I want to say, and sometimes do say: "A plague on both your houses!" But, aware that, in the distant and not-so-distant past, Christians have committed great atrocities against both Jews and Muslims, I believe that Christians have a responsibility to work for healing in this part of the world.

As I watch Americans and Europeans continuing to drop their bombs across this region, I do not think we are doing a particularly good job of that. But it is what our mission at Tantur is all about.

As we celebrate the birth of the One who took on our flesh in order to bring healing and peace to the world, may all of us who are part of the Tantur ecumenical family do what we can, wherever we are, to be agents of healing and builders of peace.

Rev. Russ McDougall, C.S.C., has been a member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross since 1991. He has been rector of Tantur since July of 2014. He can be reached at rkmcdougall@tantur.org

An Open Letter

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like myself would expect. Whether it was ecumenical showdowns at table tennis, hikes into the Old City, or conversations about world news and events over fresh baklava, you were yourselves.

You welcomed me at your table, and at Christ's table. You profoundly expanded my ideas about the Church in the world. You taught me. You laughed with me. You were my family, so very far from home.

In those few short months, we experienced the election of a Palestinian president, the loss of Rabin's voice for peace to an extremist, and celebrated Christmas Eve in Manger Square under autonomous rule. We witnessed how hard peace can be, and how worthwhile the pursuit of it is.

God used Tantur, and each of you to shape me, and though we have been apart for so very long, you continue to do so.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Sincerely,

Jared Price
with Nancy Bowen and 4 others.

Jared Price was a participant in the 1995 3-Month program. He can be reached at jared.price@gmail.com.

Staff Shot Janelle Neubauer



2015 was a year of many changes at Tantur, with arrivals and departures throughout. This late summer, Janelle Neubauer has joined the Tantur community for the academic year of 2015-2016 as a seminarian intern. She is serving in the newly created position of Program Assistant.

From the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area in the United States, Janelle is at present a student at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Her internship at Tantur is part of the formation and preparation for a vocation to pastoral work and ministry.

This academic year is Janelle's second stretch of time in the Holy Land, having previously served in the Lutheran parish of Beit Sahour in Bethlehem district through the Young Adults in Global Mission program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Janelle was a welcome figure this past autumn, engaging in both administrative work in the office and accompaniment with the Three-Month Sabbatical program.

Welcome Janelle!

ARCHBISHOP ANBA ABRAHAM FALLS ASLEEP IN THE LORD

Coptic Pope Tawadros II was in Jerusalem to officiate the funeral service of the Archbishop, as the Christian community of Jerusalem recall the humility, openness towards other Christian faiths, and forward vision of the long-serving hierarch.

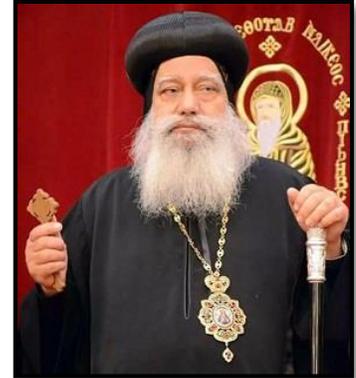
With fewer than fifty families in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah, the Coptic Church in the Holy Land is numerically one of the smallest of the Christian communities recognized by the Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian civil authorities. In addition, a self-imposed ban on organized Coptic pilgrimages due to the Arab-Israeli conflict has meant that the community is comparatively isolated.

Despite these adverse conditions, the Archbishop was known for his tremendous love of his flock and his efforts, both spiritual and

administrative, to prepare for the return of Coptic pilgrims to the Holy Land.

At present, the archiepiscopal seat remains vacant. By Coptic tradition, the Archbishop of Jerusalem is the senior hierarch after the Pope (Patriarch) – a significant enough post for the present Pope Tawadros to lift the ban to officiate the service of the departed Archbishop in Jerusalem on November 28th.

(Tantur staff, including our Coptic faithful, were also in attendance for this occasion.)



Archbishop Anba Abraham, who fell asleep in the Lord on November 25th, 2015, had held his post since 1991, being appointed by the late Pope Shenouda III.

Tantur is an institute for ecumenical 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.

TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

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Christmas and a Happy New Year from all at Tantur!

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