

Tantur Ecumenical Institute Newsletter

A Tantur Encounter
by
Tony Pohlen

Latest News and Events:

- **A Tantur Encounter** by Tony Pohlen, Program Director at Tantur, originally from Eden Prairie, Minnesota, USA
- **The Icon of Christ Pantocrator, the New Adam and a new addition to the Tantur garden** by Ian Knowles, Director of Bethlehem Icon School, Bethlehem, Palestine.
- **Looking back on my 2012 Sabbatical** by Fr. Godric Timney OSB, Ormskirk, Lancashire, UK.
- **A Reflection for January** by Sr. Veronica Quinn, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.



Tony Pohlen the new Program Director of Tantur with his wife Esther van Stam. No this is not Minnesota, but Tantur, Jerusalem!



My wife, Esther, and I are delighted to be some of the newest members of the Tantur staff. I first came to the Holy Land and to Tantur in 1996 as an undergraduate student. I knew this experience would impact my life's path but did not know it would lead me back here someday. Esther and I had the privilege of participating in the lectures and excursions of the 3-month program that ended in December. This was the best on-the-job training we'll ever experience, and it reminded me of my semester here as a student. The participants of the Tantur programs then and now are amazing people with much to share from their lives and ministries. Each participant's presence adds one more stitch to the ongoing tapestry of Tantur.

I've relearned in the past several months that Tantur is an extraordinary kind of institution as a place of encounter with the other – other religions, another nationality, a differing political perspective or worldview, or even cross-generational encounters. Tantur welcomes all who are willing to engage in respectful dialogue with the other. When we can do that, our experience of God becomes less bounded because no matter what religion, nationality, race, or ideology with which one identifies, the common human identity we all share as beings made in the image of our Creator becomes paramount. God reveals a part of God's self in our courteous encounters with others.

We recently celebrated 40 years of superb Tantur programs. I inherit and get to build upon the incredibly dedicated work of so many rectors, vice-rectors, and program administrators who have come before me, not to mention the incredible dedication of our local staff, several of whom I met 17 years ago and are still here today. Our programs have changed over the years as the original mission of Tantur has responded and adjusted to local political realities, the evolving state of ecumenism, and the increasing importance of interfaith understanding in today's globalized world. This adaptation as a living, breathing institution serves Tantur's ultimate vision, a church and a world of unity in the midst of multiple and shifting layers of diversity.

My hope in the coming years is to bring more of that diversity to Tantur, both denominationally and geographically. In our increasingly interconnected world, we are rubbing shoulders, physically and through cyberspace, with people from around the world and outside our own circles so much more readily. Churches are growing fastest in places such as Asia and Africa, yet we have few participants from those regions. There are challenges to providing people from these areas the opportunity of a Tantur experience, but we can overcome those. I lived in Uganda for over four years, and the mutual exchange of faith and church experiences with my friends and colleagues there from multiple faith traditions was refreshing. Of course, we still want all of you North Americans, Europeans, and those from "Down Under" to continue coming. I just hope we can add even more variety to that already enjoyable mix!

I invite you, friends of Tantur, to contact me at any time with inquiries or ideas. We are very open to developing new programs, especially one custom designed to the interests of a group to which you might belong.

Just as it has always been, Tantur is here to be of service to those wishing to have a deep encounter with their faith, with each other, and with the Holy Land.

May God bless you in this New Year and may 2013 bring you much joy and peace!!

Everyone is delighted to have Tony and Esther here at Tantur. Tony is our new Program Director and if you wish to contact him regarding the Programs he would be more than happy to answer any questions you might have to apohlen@tantur.org

**The Icon of Christ Pantocrator, the New Adam
and a new addition to the Tantur garden.**

*by
Ian Knowles*

The newest addition to Tantur's garden. The beautiful icon designed and painted by Iconographer, Ian Knowles.



"A Shrine Divine" – with spectacular views to Bethlehem



The new icon shrouded in snow..... A real rarity in Jerusalem



I do enjoy a challenge, and working with Fr. Tim on a new icon for Tantur was certainly a challenge and certainly very enjoyable!

The brief began with the rather dead garden space and the empty garden shrine. The brief was to make the area into a reflective environment, an exterior liturgical space. Being at Tantur with its strong ecumenical mission, and the wider context of contemporary Palestinian/Israel, including the native eastern Church culture, its position overlooking Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the international nature of its resident and visiting body... all these considerations came to fruition in the idea of... an icon of Christ Pantocrator, in glory as the Light of the New Jerusalem.

Taking you through the twists and turns of how the final icon emerged would be a little tedious, but perhaps a little sketch of the basic components of the finished piece would be helpful.

Christ appears as in the icon of Christ of the Powers, reigning on his heavenly throne, surrounded by angels, archangels, seraphim and cherubim, in other words it is an icon that speaks about Christ's heavenly nature and his dominion over the cosmos. This points us to the universal reign of Christ, when all shall be in all, a unity of all things around the will of the Father.

It is then an eschatological theme. And thinking eschatologically in the Tantur garden you can't but think about the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth, the time of consummation and the ending of the world of division, hatred, violence, injustice, war and the establishment of a true and enduring peace.

And so Christ presides over the New Jerusalem as its light and Temple, and is worshipped by the two apostles, Peter & Paul, representing the Jewish and Gentile worlds that find their fulfillment in the Person of Christ. St Peter is a transfigured fisherman, while St Paul is a transfigured scholar, especially important given Tantur's role as a home for itinerant scholars and the importance in the Holy Land of Scriptural studies. St Paul however is no longer writing, but hands back a scroll, symbolic in iconography of all the saint's writings, for in the end only three things endure – faith, hope & love – while everything else, even the Scriptures and the sacraments, will cease. The City itself is a parable of love, an embodiment of the Song of Songs, and filled with Divine Light. At its centre is the new Eden, and in it the Tree of Life, verdant and rich in fruit and medicinal leaves. A deer drinks from within the Garden from the waters of life, reminding us of the search for God is the response of a lover, which is now fulfilled, consummated. In the midst of the Garden is the New Eve, the Theotokos, resplendent in vestments matching her Son, as she, the Bride Unwedded and symbol of the Church, awaits the arrival of the Bridegroom. Just outside the Garden are two resplendent, regal figures and their retinues: Adam and Eve who return to the Garden for their sacramental marriage rather than simply their natural one, and so are crowned (as in the eastern marriage rite) and attended to by minstrels (as was King David before the ark) and virgins (the wise ones of the parable); Eve is herself dressed as a virgin because through Christ all purity and virtue are restored, and it is a new beginning when things are even greater than they were before. The icon was painted in October 2012 using natural pigments and egg tempera, and quite a quantity of gold leaf - so is ecologically friendly! The board was made locally of the finest grade of plywood and in a sealed frame to protect it from the elements. It was a real bonus to get to paint the icon 'in situ' and to make friends with many others staying there, getting a real feel for what Tantur is and the place the icon was to have in its life. It was a push for time, but nevertheless a real joy and my sincere thanks to Fr Tim, Lisa and all the others who made the time working on the icon such a blessing.

For further details of Ian's work please visit his website www.bethlehemiconschool.org

Looking back on my 2012 Sabbatical

by
Fr. Godric Timney

Since my return I have often been asked by my parishioners (and some non-sabbatically-minded priests) if I enjoyed my holiday! Hardly a beach holiday when the weather for at least five weeks required wearing several pullovers and carrying an umbrella; when on one particular day there was less than an hour's break between the 9am lecture and evening prayer at 5.30pm - with another session after supper; and early morning departures for visits to near and distant places of interest! Yet there can be few places in the world more enjoyable and uplifting than Tantar Ecumenical Institute, in the land that we call *The Holy Land*.

Eighteen years ago and after being a member of my monastic community for 32 years I was granted four months in Berkeley, California, on sabbatical. That was a life-giving experience that has lived with me ever since. Now after another 18 years the demands of life in two parishes and work within our archdiocese began to take their toll and when the opportunity arose of going to Tantar 'on sabbatical' I snatched it with both hands.

This was my fifth visit to Jerusalem, the first being in 1978. I am familiar with the main places of pilgrimage around The Galilee and Jerusalem / Bethlehem, but what, one might ask, was the impact of spending eight weeks in this unique place? Some four months on I delve into my memory bank and pull out ...

The old maxim: 'What is received is received according to the mode of the recipient.' In my case, what was my disposition when I embarked on this journey, what was I hoping to gain from a time of sabbatical? Several points: wanting to spend more time immersed in the Scriptures – and what better way than to walk where Jesus walked, to take in the surroundings with which He would have been familiar, to appreciate all the more the biblical imagery; to meet people, Jew and Gentile, living out the paradoxes unique to this land; to share the faith journeys of fellow Christians; and, undeniably, to escape even for a while, the door bells and telephones which ring incessantly in a busy parish.

Politics: coming from the relative stability of the UK, the politics of Israel and Palestine confront one at every step: people queuing to pass through the check points from Bethlehem or Ramallah, segregated buses for Jews and Palestinians, the interrogations at the airport, and even embattled Christians disputing their rights at the places where Jesus was born and rose from the dead.

Ecumenism, the strength of Tantar: while a certain tension pervaded the Masses in the first half of my stay, of lasting impact on me were the dignified and prayerful Eucharistic celebrations I attended at which my Anglican friends presided. And plucking further I am animated to find: engaging lectures, and the warm hospitality of Tim and Lisa and all the Tantar staff, and my contact with the brothers at Bethlehem University, and Sr. Raphaela and her orphanage 'Home of Peace', and Hebron, and trekking up Mt Sinai, and ...

... It's not likely that I shall enjoy another sabbatical but I hope I can make many more visits to Bethlehem and Jerusalem and The Galilee.

Fr. Godric at the Catholic Chapel in the Cave of the Manger in Bethlehem



"One of the lucky few"- Fr. Godric visiting inside the Dome of the Rock, a rarity these days since the 2000 Intifafa.



All work and no play..... Tennis anyone? Fr. Godric playing tennis in Bethlehem



A Reflection for January 2013 by Sr. Veronica Quinn.

In trying to articulate my hopes before spending three months at Tantur at the end of 2012, I was especially mindful of the unique opportunity to explore and depth the history and richness of my Christian tradition in the land in which of it originated. I am exceeding grateful to have had the opportunity to visit numerous sites sacred to the Christian tradition as well as those shared by the other Abrahamic faiths. However, much to my surprise, I have found that on returning home it is not a sense of the sacred that encapsulates memories of my time in Israel. The Holocaust museum of Yad Vashem speaks deafeningly of the momentous persecution of the Jewish people in exile while the Separation Wall and the numerous emerging settlements in the West Bank stridently express the ongoing subjugation of the Palestinian people in Israel. My hope is that there comes a time when we no longer call Israel either the Holy Land or The Promised Land. These everyday terms denote a proprietorship and an exclusivity that has been used since the time of Abraham to signify restricted ownership of the land of Israel. Perhaps, if like the indigenous peoples throughout the world, we come to recognise that all land is Holy we will also recognise that land is not ours to own.

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