



THE TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

Dusty Summer Blessings

Dan Koski, Tantur Staff



This summer, Tantur had dust everywhere. Everywhere. In offices. In hallways. In rooms. On our vehicles. On every bench. On every branch on every tree, on every flower. For a while, the joke was that we were all seeing life through an "Instagram" filter.

The reason for this predicament was not entirely our fault. First, July and August, especially August, is generally dusty in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Second, the highway expansion project that has been edging to the southern edge of Jerusalem finally reached the western perimeter of our property about a year ago. A tremendous mound of sand, visible from the hilltops of Bethlehem, has been created to the immediate west of the center of our campus along the eastern side of the expanded highway, and our famed afternoon hilltop breeze has done its part to share the wealth.

Lastly, to use a Midwestern American proverb, we made hay while the sun shined, and used the break between the end of our July program and the start of our autumn sabbatical to add to the inevitable mess by making a bit of our own by

undertaking several interior renovation projects, painting a good number of rooms and retiling a hallway in one of our residential wings across the facility. We also completed a new exercise facility, and decided to tackle some repairs on one of our rooftops.

It wasn't the easiest return from summer holidays for our staff, especially as we had our first autumn guests set to arrive even before the start of September, but everyone did their part, and we made it through.

We still haven't figured how to wipe off the dust on the flowers and tree branches, but from the looks of it, Mother Nature may bring rain sooner than later this year. We've delayed harvesting our olives in the hope that the first shower of rain does come early. Even construction on the new retaining wall on our western hillside has begun, and much of the noisier, heavier road construction has already moved farther south of us.

The cool evening weather has begun, and even a few light jackets and sweatshirts have been spotted on campus.

All things under heaven pass; even in Jerusalem!

Tantur at a Glance 2016 Summer CEPs



Our 2016 June and July programs were comprised of two diverse, dynamic groups of participants from around the world. Our June group included thirteen participants from five nations representing Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant expressions of Christianity, while our July group, comprised of twelve participants, included Church of England ordinands sponsored through the Tantur British Trust. Our July participants were able to meet both our outgoing and incoming Program staff, while both groups were able to participate in our new "Tuesdays at Tantur" initiative, as well as meet and engage with our scholars and University of Notre Dame undergraduate and post-graduate students.



A Tantur Alumni, Twice Over

Former Tantur Staffer Tony Pohlen reflects on life after Tantur.

When Esther, Oliver, and I departed from Tantur one year ago, we spent two weeks in Europe to re-energize. This was our time to transition from three years of service to Tantur and its guests, and an opportunity to just focus on enjoying each other. It was not quite our dream transition – we had wanted six months of traveling around the world to visit former Tantur guests, our friends. However, we headed to Minnesota refreshed and ready to begin our “next chapter.” I have been learning a lot in my new work with Catholic Relief Services and Esther has been focused on expertly shaping Oliver into the wonderful three-year old boy he now is.

Recently we had a lovely afternoon with an old friend who participated in the 6-week continuing education program at Tantur this year. We were eager to hear about her experience and get an update of that hilltop oasis between Jerusalem and Bethlehem that we called home. Some of the program elements had changed and many were the same. What was exactly as we remembered was the overall Tantur experience she described: something special, complex, messy, but ultimately life-giving – something holy. And it wasn’t because it was in a land more holy than some other geographical location. It was holy because of the people she encountered – the staff at Tantur who cared for her as she nursed an injury in her early days there; the



Tony Pohlen served on the administrative staff of Tantur from the summer of 2012 to the summer of 2015, serving as Interim Rector from the autumn of 2013 to midsummer of 2014. He was also a participant in a summer semester through the University of Notre Dame’s undergraduate program. Joining him for his professional term at Tantur was his wife Esther VanStam, who also joined our administrative staff, and their son Oliver, born in Jerusalem in the autumn of 2013.

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Body and Mind

A new exercise facility on campus allows for students, scholars and residential staff to take a break from their desk and work up a sweat.

Yes, it's true: even scholars sometimes want to exercise!

This August, Tantur began work on a new exercise facility. Saying goodbye to an old garden shed near the courtyard fountain, we built an entirely new structure in its place.

The demand for an exercise facility at Tantur has grown in recent years, with greater numbers of programs and program participants, especially with the increase of undergraduate student programs from the University of Notre Dame through the Jerusalem Global Gateway. Many program participants on medium-length stays, particularly scholars and students on compact schedules, have found it difficult to travel to local gyms in south Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The exercise facility includes several cardio machines. A weight set will soon be added. Those that enjoy some time off the Hill by attending a local off-site gym, or the challenge of a jog up and down our road still can break a sweat the old-fashioned way.



The new exercise facility at Tantur, located near the courtyard fountain, will include both cardio and weight-lifting equipment by the late autumn.



Wadi Qelt Inclining One's Ear to a Parable

Fr. Kevin Grove, C.S.C.

A walk through Wadi Qelt in the Judean Wilderness offers insight to Fr. Kevin Grove, a frequent pilgrimage group leader to the Holy Land.

The desert is harsh and hot, but hardly that which lacks life. It demands intentionality, sunblock, water, and care not to dwell too long. But it is far from devoid of life. Water can flood in an instant. The sounds of distant birds echo off rocky hills and vegetation finds unlikely places from which to spring forth. In sacred geography, this is a privileged place for pilgrimage where the Lord meets the human heart. Ascetics and monks have sought and continue to find wisdom there. This is also why I take my students while at Tantur to hike the Wadi Qelt—a stretch of trail along the riverbed from St. George's monastery to Jericho. In some ways, asking this of students makes me nervous. It is a hike through the hot sun and a lot of work. Yet, time and again it becomes a truly profound experience for my students—not merely in their study of sacred text and geography, but in two insights in their own spiritual lives.

First, silence speaks. For the largest part of the journey, we walk in silence. Rushes of wind. The birds. Silence is pregnant both with God's grandeur and the presence of the Creator to creation on pilgrimage. The wilderness and the desert were places of trial, refinement, prayer, and discovery, not merely because they stripped away but because they added awareness of a God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

Second, though, the desert and wilderness bring about a different encounter with each other. In most moments of human togetherness, there is sound: from laughter to entertainment and from conversation to song. The desert silence opens up a communal space in which individuals become aware they are pilgrims together by walking single file on a slender trail through the rocks. I know not my neighbor's words or thoughts, but for the sound of his or her footfalls on dusty rock. And when we finally read the parable of the Good Samaritan—a profound tale of encounter—silence has prepared us. For all of us are prone at some points to pass along by—and for very good reasons—those who might interrupt our work and our world. But the desert strips all extra constructions away. We hear each other and, as we enter the parable, we start to see each other, too.

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Wadi Qelt: Inclining One's Ear

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Away from the desert, as I walk on university campuses or on city streets, I frequently observe that we rarely see and hear each other in this way. The now necessities of our lives, our phones, earbuds, and constant inputs mean we can walk down the street quite literally without noticing each other...provided we don't run right into one another!

To me it is daily proof that you and I need the desert; we need the Wadi Qelt. For though the desert strips away a great deal, it does so in a way that heals by opening us to a fullness richer than we had in our noise. We open ourselves once again to our God and each other. We become the parable which we ever are drawn to incline our ears.



Fr. Kevin Grove is a member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross. He completed his Ph.D. in Philosophical Theology at the University of Cambridge in 2015, and was Residential Fellow at the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Studies for the 2015-2016 academic year.

A Tantur Alumni, Twice Over

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other program participants with whom she journeyed and grew in relationship; the other pilgrims and visitors to the land that she met as she travelled; and the residents of the land whose reality is a complicated one, but for whom she quickly gained affection.

Esther, Oliver, and I are now physically far from Tantur, but it has never really been far from us. While we are living the next chapter in our lives, no previous chapter is ever forgotten or truly ends. It is part and parcel of who we are, intertwined with the rest of our story.

I consider myself a two-time alumnus of Tantur, once as an undergraduate student spending a semester abroad there in 1996, and then sixteen years later being on staff for three wonderful years. And, so, it is doubly a part of who I am. I still cherish my times there and it will always flow through me in my interactions with others. Hardly a week goes by that I'm not telling someone about Tantur, encouraging them to consider spending time there.

With this brief article, we greet all of you we had the good fortune of meeting during our time at Tantur. And to all Tantur alumni, we hope your Tantur experience still courses through your veins as it does ours. You are welcome at our home in Minnesota. We love visitors and reminiscing about Tantur with others!

Tony Pohlen can be reached through email at tonypohlen@gmail.com.

Staff Shot

Program Director Frederic Masson



This August, Tantur Ecumenical Institute was pleased to formally welcome Mr. Frederic Masson as our new Program Director. Frederic is from the Alpine region of France, but has lived much of his life in Syria and the Holy Land. Frederic has extensive professional and personal experience in the field of independent, experiential pilgrimage and tourism.

As Program Director, Frederic oversees both Tantur's Continuing Education Programs and our visiting programs. For the programmatic year of 2016-2017, he is joined by Hayley Cohen, a Presbyterian seminarian from the United States serving as Program Assistant.

Along with his native French and proficiency in English, Frederic is fluent in Arabic, and is learning liturgical Aramaic as part of his preparations for entering the diaconate of the Syriac Catholic Church, under His Eminence Archbishop Grégoire Pierre Melki.

Frederic and his wife Stephanie Saldana, an accomplished writer, and their three children Joseph, Sebastian and Carmel have joined the Tantur residential community.

Frederic Masson can be reached for all concerns related to Tantur programs at fmasson1@tantur.org.



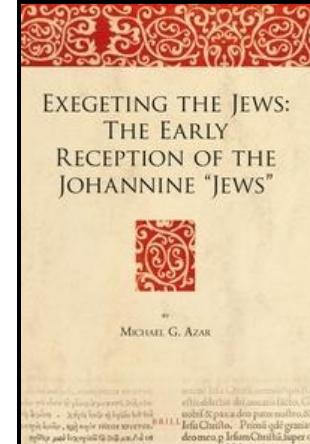
TANTUR SCHOLAR REV. DEACON MICHAEL AZAR PUBLISHES WORK ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Exegeting the Jews: The Early Reception of the Johannine "Jews" was released through Brill Publications in the summer of 2016.

We at Tantur often observe that our scholars are generally best known for what they accomplish in the years following their time with us, and Rev. Deacon Michael Azar, Ph.D, is certainly no exception to this normal. This past summer, Deacon Michael published *Exegeting the Jews: The Early Reception of the Johannine "Jews"* through Brill Publications. His work "analyzes the rhetorical function of the Gospel of John's "Jews" in the earliest surviving full-length expositions of John in Greek: Origen's Commentary on John (3rd cent.), John Chrysostom's Homilies on John (4th cent.), and Cyril of Alexandria's Commentary on John (5th cent.)."

Deacon Michael was a scholar in residence at Tantur during the 2010-2011 academic year. He recently joined the faculty of Scranton University as assistant professor of theology/religious studies. He is Orthodox Christian deacon presently under the jurisdiction of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese of the United States, and frequently writes and lectures on contemporary Christian communities of the Middle East.

Tantur congratulates Deacon Michael on this significant publication, which we greatly look forward to adding to our theological library.



Exegeting the Jews: The Early Reception of the Johannine "Jews" is available through [Brill Publications](#).

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.

TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

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Tantur has begun the process of transitioning its e-list for events and the newsletter to an automated email system. Our local event announcements will now be distributed through the e-service "Mailchimp," with the possibility of the newsletter list also being delivered as such in the near future.

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