

# Ecumenical Institute For Advanced Theological Study At Jerusalem

J. R. CHANDRAN

Though one of the youngest, the Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Study at Jerusalem is of great significance. Its formal inauguration took place in September, 1972. It is located at the beautiful hillock of Tantur on the main road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The towers of Bethlehem as well as the walls of the city of Jerusalem are visible from Tantur. The Institute itself is housed in a complex of newly built modern buildings.

The decision to locate an Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem was one of the consequences of the historic meeting in Jerusalem between Pope Paul VI and the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964. The desire to commemorate this important event by some ecumenical project in Jerusalem was linked with a suggestion by the Danish Lutheran Theologian, Professor Skydsgaard during the second session of the Second Vatican Council for undertaking theological research on an ecumenical basis on the theme of Salvation History. The result of this was the proposal to set up an Ecumenical Institute at Jerusalem. In April 1964, Pope Paul asked the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, President of Notre Dame University and President of the International Federation of Catholic Universities to take the necessary steps towards the setting up of such an Institute. After suitable negotiations a group of Theologians from different parts of the world representing the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican traditions was constituted as the Academic Council for the Ecumenical Institute. This Council had its first meeting in 1965 at the Rockefeller Foundation Villa Serbelloni, at Bellagio near Milan and several other meetings since then to plan the programme as well as resources for the Institute.

The main theme for study and research at the Institute is *Mysterium Salutis*, the mystery of Salvation, which is certainly the central theme of all great religions. The Academic Council felt that this would be the most appropriate theme for a common quest on an ecumenical basis. The Institute is conceived as an inter-university inter-confessional and international community for advanced study and research. Scholars from all over the world will come to the Institute to pursue their research on different aspects or dimensions of the mystery of salvation. Through their sharing of scholarly insights as well as common worship and social life, they will promote ecumenical understanding and the realisation of Christian oneness. Even though the Institute is rooted in the Christian faith, the confession of salvation through Jesus Christ, and will continue as a Christian Institute taking the

Christian Scriptures and their interpretation through the centuries, as the basic sources for study and research, the academic and scientific character of the research will necessarily extend the enquiry into historical, philosophical, sociological as well as theological dimensions of other religions also. Therefore in addition to Christian theologians and scholars, the Institute will also welcome the presence of scholars of other faiths with similar aims.

Apart from the historic connection with the origins of Christianity we may also note other reasons for the significance of locating the Institute in Jerusalem. It is a place of many religions particularly Islam, Judaism and Christianity. It is also a place where many of the major branches of Christianity are represented. Even more important than these is the fact that it is a centre of social and political crisis and international conflict, symbolising man's tragic failure to live in harmony. The quest for the understanding of the mystery of salvation undertaken in such a situation will not be a purely academic quest. No one studying the mystery of Salvation in Jerusalem can miss the bitterness of alienation and estrangement in the inter-religious, inter-racial and international relations in the region. Therefore the study and research undertaken at the Institute is likely to take seriously the context of man's involvement in injustice and oppression as well as his struggle for justice, peace and salvation.

At the Institute at present there is accommodation for about 50 scholars. It has also a number of comfortable family apartments. The Institute has a very modern Library with space for 100,000 books. Already it has a good collection of books. Scholars working at the Institute will also have access to several libraries in Jerusalem, well equipped with research tools in the Biblical, historical and theological fields of study.

The work of the Institute is planned and guided by an Academic Council consisting of well known Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Theologians from different continents.

At present Monsignor Charles Moeller, an outstanding Roman Catholic Theologian is the Rector of the Institute. He is assisted by two Vice-Rectors, Professor Jean-Jacques von Allmen, a Swiss Reformed New Testament scholar from Neuchatel and Professor Gerasimos Zaphiris, a Greek Orthodox theologian from USA. Besides these men the Institute also has many reputed visiting professors staying for one or more semesters. Professor W. Kuppers of Bonn, Professor N. Gottwald of Berkeley, California, Prof. J. Murphy O'Connor of USA, Professor E. Ruckstuhl of Lucerne and Professor K. Skydsgaard of Copenhagen are some of the visiting professors expected in 1973-74.

The students coming to the Institute for advanced research are encouraged to devote most of their time for the pursuit of their own project. But as an ecumenical community, they are also committed to collaborate with one another and share the findings of their study and research with one another. Therefore the pattern of studies includes a weekly colloquium led by one of the resident scholars, seminars directed by a visiting Fellow and occasional field trips to sites of common interest.

As a result of recent negotiations, the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches has arranged for theological teachers in Asia, Africa and Latin America to use the facilities of the Institute to prepare for their doctoral studies. Three New Testament teachers from India will be spending two years in Jerusalem starting in October 1973. But in order to plan a period of study at the Ecumenical Institute such a formal doctoral programme is not essential. Scholars of all age groups are welcome to spend periods of different lengths, usually not less than one semester, to pursue their own research projects provided the subject of research is recognised as related to the study of the Mystery of Salvation. The Academic year runs from October to May and is divided into two semesters, October to January and February to May. A limited number of scholarships are also available for helping deserving candidates, particularly those from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. More information about the Institute can be obtained by writing to the Academic Secretary, P.O. Box 19556, Jerusalem, Israel.