



## Tantur: Hill in the Holy Land

### Episode 1: Origin Story

[Sepulcher bells]

[VO]

It's mid-July, and we're in the Old City of Jerusalem. We're here as members of Notre Dame's University Communications team, learning about the University's evolving presence in the Holy Land.

On this day, we're standing outside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site venerated as the place of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and burial. We quite literally landed at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport about 3 hours prior, and that fact is adding to the surreal feeling of what we're seeing.

The bells are signaling a changing of the guard of sorts. The Sepulcher is controlled by five different Christian sects, with varying rules for who oversees specific parts of the Church. The bells signify it's time for one group to take its watch. They're incredibly loud - though that helps somewhat with the jet lag. And frankly, the sound of bells is preferable to some other sounds the Sepulcher has become known for..

[NAT: Fighting inside Sepulcher]

[VO]

This is audio of news footage taken in 2009, during a brawl inside the Church. And it's pretty incredible. You see clergy of different stripes throwing haymakers at each other, some landing square in the face. The cause for the uprising? Apparently a dispute over whether the Greek Orthodox would allow the

Armenians a place inside the shrine of Jesus' tomb, during the Armenians feast day.

Seven years prior, another fight broke out, and the cause of this one is either comical, or sad, depending on your perspective. A monk from the Coptic church of Egypt was sitting on the roof, in a symbolic gesture to stake their claim to that part of the church. You see, it's controlled by the Ethiopian Orthodox. Well, on this particularly hot day, the monk moved his chair a foot or so into the shade...into Ethiopian space. Things unraveled from there. In the end, 11 holy men were sent to the hospital...one of them unconscious.

This is a part of the world where inches are contested, and obviously, not just among Christians. And yet Notre Dame operates 36 acres here. It has for more than 50 years. We'd like to tell you how that happened, and how the University is planning for the next 50.

I'm Andy Fuller, and you're listening to Notre Dame Stories' "Tantur: Hill in the Holy Land."

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[VO]

On February 11, 1991, Fr. Ted Hesburgh sat down for an interview with journalist and C-SPAN founder Brian Lamb. The occasion was the publication of Fr. Ted's autobiography, "God, Country, Notre Dame."

Father Ted was Notre Dame president for 35 years. He's responsible for making Notre Dame what it is today. And among his accomplishments: founding what became Tantur Ecumenical Institute.

Back to the interview. Very early on in the conversation, the subject of conflict in the Holy Land comes up. Now, it's 1991, so it's impossible to know exactly what Lamb is referencing here, or if he's just making a broad statement, but nonetheless...Fr. Ted's answer and the ensuing dialogue are interesting.

[CSPAN Interview]

LAMB: In the rain, right. There have been a lot of conflicts in the world, a lot of problems, and I just have a need to ask you this question: If there is a God, why all the conflict? Why all the war? Why all the violence?

[HESBURGH]

I can give you an even worse one: Why so many of it religious based? This is what in theology we call the problem of evil. God

did a great thing for us, better than any creature we know on earth. He gave us intelligence and freedom, and that's how we mimic or image him, by being intelligent and by being free. The only problem is, the moment he made us free, we're free to be good or free to be evil, and too often we're evil. We have his grace if we ask for it, but the fact is that he can't have loving creatures if he doesn't make us free to love. Or if he makes us free to love, he's got to make us free to hate, and that's fundamentally what it gets down to. You can't have it both ways. Even God can't have it both ways. You can't be free to do one thing and not free to do another. So, if we're free to earn heaven, we're also free to blow it.

[LAMB]

I suppose it depends on which side you're on and how you look at it whether you're evil or good.

[HESBURGH]

Yes, they can say that, too, especially in the religious wars -- they've all got God on their side, and none of them do.

[LAMB]

Have you been to Jerusalem?

[HESBURGH]

I have an institute in Jerusalem which I built 25 years ago called the Tantur. Paul VI asked me to build a place where Protestants, Catholics, Anglicans and Orthodox Christians could live together, pray together, work together, tour together, if you will, and that place has been going for 25 years. We've had over 2,500 people there, mostly Protestants but next would probably be Catholics and then Anglican and Orthodox. We try to do, in a way, what Paul VI wanted. He wanted us to reproduce what happened during the Vatican Council II. About 200 theologians got together from all over the world in Rome and spent the whole council there advising us on what we were doing. I have to say that Jerusalem is a place that really catches you in the heart -- all the popes. It really catches you because it's a place that belongs to everybody. It belongs to Jews, it belongs to Christians, it belongs to Muslims. To all three it's a holy city. And it belongs to history and it belongs to Scripture. There's no place on earth like Jerusalem.

[LAMB]

When you walk in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, it's all divided up.

[HESBURGH]

That's right. They're fighting over it -- the Armenians and the Copts and the Catholics and the Orthodox. Everybody's got a

piece of the action, if you will. I hate to see it. I feel very uneasy with that, Brian. I really do.

[LAMB]

How does that happen in the name of religion?

[HESBURGH]

It shouldn't. It's just that people think they own God or something. That's why we built this building called Tantur. It's right between Jerusalem and Bethlehem -- actually a little closer to Bethlehem but within the confines of Jerusalem. We try to show there that Christians of all stripes can really spend time studying, living, playing, praying together and do it in a way that transcends the differences, if you will, because of their loyalty to the Lord. But there's been all too little of that.

[VO]

There's something very Hesburgh-like about that exchange, namely, a sort of understated relaying of the facts. Obviously the line of questioning in that particular interview was tangential: they weren't there to talk about the founding of Tantur itself. Nevertheless, it's a fascinating story to tell. It involves religion, politics, war, and just a little bit of good fortune.

First, a little backstory. Before Pope Paul the 6<sup>th</sup>, Pope John the 23<sup>rd</sup> set in motion the wheels of Vatican 2. It's difficult to overstate just how novel this decree was. Inviting scholars and clergy from other Christian denominations in to watch what the Catholic Church was doing was a gesture on an unprecedented scale, and of unprecedented warmth. The lines of communication between Christians were not just closed, and they were frozen over.

Pope John the 23<sup>rd</sup> began the thawing process, and the Vatican began to establish an office to oversee these efforts. The Secretariat for Christian Unity. It remained nascent for quite a while, but nevertheless, it was moving. Pope John the 23<sup>rd</sup> died before seeing the council through, but his successor, Pope Paul the 6<sup>th</sup>, took up the mission.

As the council drew to a close, there was an increasing interest to have something that memorialized the bridges that had been built, a place where people from all different traditions could continue the work of Christian dialogue and encounter and study. The word for this sort of thing is ecumenism.

The pope liked the idea, but the ideal location for such a center wasn't immediately clear, until another landmark event:

the Pope's trip to Jerusalem in January 1964. Here he met, and embraced Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople. It was the first encounter between East and West in centuries. It would lead not only to the lifting of mutual excommunication, but would also cause Jerusalem to emerge as the ideal location for the proposed center.

One more bit of backstory you should know: Before he became Pope Paul the 6<sup>th</sup>, the man known as Cardinal Montini spoke at Notre Dame's baccalaureate Mass in 1960, at the invitation of Fr. Hesburgh.

Ok, backstory over. Now you're up to speed.

Over the course of 1964, correspondence between the Pope and Fr. Hesburgh discussed how the center could come together. To put the timing in context, the Civil Rights Act was signed in July of that year. Fr. Ted is said to be the architect of that piece of legislation, famously bringing together the various factions over bourbon and fishing to forge a landmark victory for equality.

In January of 1965, Pope Paul the 6<sup>th</sup> asked he take on another bridge-building endeavor. In a letter, he formally requested that Fr. Ted take up what was known as "the Jerusalem project" at the time. Interestingly, he made this request to Fr. Ted in his capacity as head of the International Federation of Catholic Universities.

Here's Angie Appleby Purcell, the senior director of internationalization at Notre Dame International. She was interim director of Tantur for about a year.

[Purcell]

If you look at the founding documents, it became clear, multiple times, that this was to be a University effort, not an ecclesial one as we would understand it. While supported by the Vatican, obviously, this should be an academic, research-based institute. I bring this up because it seems to be something of a pre-occupation,

[VO]

She's reading from the actual documents here

[Purcell]

"That this should be a research-based institute. The institute will be established on a university level of research. It will be founded on the agreement of the Church, but not necessarily by them." At the lead of that identity, from the beginning, was

fording the academic efforts and initiatives of scholars, of people in the field of ecumenism.

[VO]

There's someone else I want you to meet. Fr. Patrick Gaffney, who's an emeritus anthropology professor at Notre Dame, and is currently working at Notre Dame University Bangladesh, which is also founded by the Congregation of Holy Cross, but has no other formal tie to the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. All of which is to say, we interviewed him via Zoom teleconference.

Fr. Gaffney has arguably researched Tantur more than any other person. Much of the historical information for this series and the accompanying stories on the web, is rooted in Fr. Gaffney's work. We asked him to provide some context for the original charge of the project.

[Gaffney]

In the mid sixties when this idea came up, the theological world, especially with the scholarly side of the schools of the theological world, was quite segregated. There were virtually no serious joint programs between Catholics and Protestants except in Germany. And so what they were starting, what Hesburgh envisioned was radical and new and putting it together was not going to be easy. Although the dream was pretty easy to conjure up. And so at these meetings in northern Italy, that conference, they had to hammer out how they were going to do this and they tried to put together a structure and administrative organization. They tried to put together a plan and these were scholars, they weren't for the most part administrators. And you can see that when you read this. So they thought, well, we'll have, you know, Lutherans and Congregationalists and Baptist and Orthodox and we'll all work together.

Catholics, of course, they hadn't done this before and it wasn't clear exactly how they're going to do this. And what Hesburgh envisioned, hence the word scientific in it, was, well, we're going to do scientific theology like they do study chemistry at the Planck Institute, we're going to do something like, you know, at the Center for Advanced Studies at Princeton where we're going to do with as theologians. And so there were several, I'd say just visions and how that was going to work.

Here's what I think Hesburgh really thought. Well he thought, well, we will get world class theologians and these guys are magnets. Everybody wants to study with them. He did that, he had about a half dozen people who are maximum movers and shakers at the beginning, now unfortunately it didn't last and there's a story about that too, but if we get, you know, one of the three or four people who are really pacesetters, they will attract

people at another level, maybe even a couple of people at that same level. And we'll get a dozen people together and we'll put together a study agenda for a year. Okay. We're going to study devotion to the saints and there are different aspects of this history. The councils, popular piety. Okay. And people will be given different aspects that are located by the leader of the project. They'll work on these papers, four or five months, we'll have ongoing reports and then we'll put this together at the end and we'll solve this problem. Then we'll move on to the next purgatory.

[VO]

Forging the academic and programmatic course of the institute was no small task. It required a lot of travel, for one thing. In his autobiography, Fr. Ted estimated he traveled more than 250,000 miles for the "Jerusalem project."

But the "what" wasn't the only issue. There were equally urgent issues of the "where" and the "how." The institute didn't have a location yet, much less a building. And it needed money. A considerable amount for the time.

These factors piled up and eventually it became clear the Federation for Catholic Universities wasn't up to the challenge as a body. They ceded control of the project to Fr. Ted. It was now, for all intents and purposes, a Notre Dame project.

Fr. Ted secured an initial gift from I.A. O'Shaughnessy, for whom O'Shaughnessy Hall on campus is named, to help get the institute off the ground. But a weird misunderstanding led all involved in the project to believe the Vatican had secured one property, but that was for another project in the region.

[Gaffney]

Now it was decided then they were going to build this Institute shortly after that Hesburgh got the money or the serious money from O'Shaughnessy so that it was going to happen. And at that time of course Jerusalem was still divided between Jordan and Israel and they weren't sure where they were going to build it. So there's a whole process of finding a site and again, there's several suggestions that a little bit of skullduggery. There were a couple people who had their eye on property that their brother owned and stuff like that. Yeah. But they finally isolated the right place for themselves about halfway between Jerusalem, and that's where the place is now. And they proceeded to purchase that, which was again a bit tricky. That was owned by the Knights of Malta and they no longer had a presence there, but they still owned the property that was still building there. It was occupied at that time about the Silesian just using part of the building. Part of it was not capable of being used, it

was structurally condemned. The Knights of Malta had used that as something like a hospital during the first world war and then it was sort of used opportunely by people who needed shelter.

[VO]

The land in question was in Jordan, just about 10 kilometers south of Jerusalem's Old City. It was a hill known as Tantur, which means "peak" or "hilltop" in Arabic. And when Fr. Gaffney says the Knights of Malta owned the property, it's not like it was a recent purchase. The Knights were given the property way back during the first crusade.

But maybe the fact the land was owned by a Catholic order was fortuitous. Here's Fr. Ted from an interview in 2009:

[Fr. Ted WNDU Interview]

"They'd had it for ten centuries. It was right at the gate of Jerusalem. You could see the mountains of Mohab and the roads going down to the Dead Sea, you could see Bethlehem like it's next door."

"He said, 'it won't be easy' and I said, 'Holy Father may I remind you that you are the Pope.'

"He said, 'I'll give it a try' and I said, 'don't just give it a try, tell them you want the land.'"

[VO]

Turns out, being the Pope has advantages. An agreement was struck: the knights would keep about 17 acres, the Vatican would purchase the remaining 36, and lease the land to Notre Dame at the symbolic cost of a dollar a year.

Next, Fr. Ted asked Frank Montana, head of the department of architecture at Notre Dame, to design the building. Permits, easements, all the particulars were squared away with the nation of Jordan.

It was starting to come together. Two years of planning and negotiating and fundraising had borne fruit. Finally, it was time for groundbreaking.

It was June 4, 1967.

History buffs may recall what took place on June 5<sup>th</sup>.

[Nat news clips: Six Day War]

[VO]



Whatever you think about war, it rarely answers all the questions it portends. And in the case of the Six Day War, it multiplies them.

There's a gripping account of an Israeli soldier who describes their march into the Old City of Jerusalem as, "writing another chapter of the Bible."

The legacy of the Six-Day War defines so much of the region today, most notably in the area around Jerusalem. As in, the hill called Tantur.

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, the ecumenical institute broke ground in Jordan. By June 10<sup>th</sup>, the land was under Israeli control.

If it were me, or if it were a lot of people, this kind of thing would cause us to throw up our hands. The massive amount of legal red tape the project waded through to gain Jordanian approval was now essentially for naught.

Fortunately, Fr. Hesburgh was not like most of us. In the hours after the shooting stopped, Fr. Ted moved to contact someone who, it just so happens, he had invited to speak on campus a few years prior.

[Gaffney]

I think the interesting thing that for a historian or for person tried to summarize a lot of the detail is the Father Hesburgh right after the war ended, contacted Abba Eban, who was then the ambassador to the United States and the ambassador to the United Nations in the U S, so he was moving between Washington, DC and New York, [inaudible 00:07:40] and Abba Eban very early, I mean, before a lot of investigation, before it was all settled, it wasn't clear what the future of the West Bank was. I mean, now we look back and it looks like Israel was always going to hang onto it, but that wasn't clear. Right after 67 Abba Eban gave Hesburgh guarantees, that Tantur would go forward.

So that was very critical because it was to have the legal foundations with Israel. So once that was known, they moved forward. They started building. There were many other details, but it could now happen because largely at the highest level, Israel agreed to let it happen and there's a whole correspondence between Abba Eban and Hesburgh about who he had to work with to make that happen. In those days, I mean, Israel was less, I'd say consolidated as a country. There were several founding figures, Abba Eban one of them, who just had big elbows and they could make things happen in Israel because they knew everybody and they knew this was best and didn't have to go through the normal bureaucracy.

[VO]

Whether it was big elbows or divine intervention, or both, Tantur was moving forward. By December 1967, the lease was signed and construction was starting.

The next few years were typified by construction delays and other administrative fits and starts. Success, as they say, is seldom a straight line.

But there was one episode that caused Fr. Hesburgh to write a letter that, according to Fr. Gaffney, is the second most important piece of literature relating to Tantur, after the pope's letter of instruction to Fr. Ted.

You see, as the project gained momentum, it gained attention from people all over the world. The New York Times and France's Le Monde each wrote front-page stories about Tantur and its aims.

But sometimes, big projects draw the wrong kind of attention. There was a force of nature in the Vatican at the time called Msgr Benelli. Many people referred to him as second in command to the Pope, though it may be this was an idea he himself began to circulate.

As Tantur started to emerge as a major endeavor, Msgr Benelli sought to bring it under his purview. There are nearly 2 years worth of letters between he and Fr. Ted, in which Benelli inquires of this and that, makes demands...stuff that very clearly had the intent of claiming territory.

Eventually, Fr. Ted had enough. He decided to clear the air. Here's a portion of the letter he wrote to Benelli, with the clear intent of having it shared far and wide in Rome..

"Just so I am not party to any misunderstandings, I think I should declare once for all what I have understood to be the nature and organization of the project. If there is any fundamental disagreement in this, then I believe the only honest thing I can do is to disassociate myself completely from the project because I have assured so many people, our Academic Council, our past and potential benefactors, that the following are the conditions under which the institute is organized and plans to operate."

It gets better...

"I am sure you will understand my position of having to keep faith with those to whom I have given my word regarding this

project, and the complete impossibility of my continuing to be associated with the project if it is understood any differently, particularly as we embark upon this search for external support approximating 6 million dollars."

In other words...keep it up, Msgr, and then explain to the Holy Father why I'm not a part of this anymore.

Benelli relented. Fr. Ted would see it through to the end, and the Tantur Ecumenical Institute would hold its opening celebration in September 1972.

Today it's called the University of Notre Dame at Tantur, a title that encompasses the Ecumenical Institute and the Jerusalem Global Gateway, opened by Notre Dame International in 2014. Names change, but original charter is still alive and well.

Father Gerry Olinger is Notre Dame's vice president for Mission Engagement and Church Affairs.

[Fr. Gerry]

Tantur is one of the most significant ways that we partner with the Vatican. I think both ecumenical conversation, so conversation among Christians, but also interfaith conversations are very important to Pope Francis and to the Vatican, as well as to ND, so I think it's important and a natural connection.

10.10 Because of the proximity of Tantur to so many holy sites for Christians, Jews, and Muslims, there's something very unique about the work that we're able to do there.

[Purcell]

I take encouragement and inspiration from that early mandate. In 2019 when we are renewing for another 50 years who we are, what's our identity. So when we talk about who we are and how name ourselves, yes we are the Tantur Ec In, but we are a University engaging and fording scholarship, research, inquiry on all levels. Ecumenism is one, theology is one, but also across all disciplines of what a university offers.

Fr. Ted said, this is a place where the Church can do its thinking. And this is a prime example of how that's playing itself out, and still does.

I've been there enough now that...you walk up a big road, you know it's a hill...Tantur means hill or peak. So you wind up or walk up the windy road to the top, and you come into the courtyard through this castle-like archway. And then you can't help but look out and you have 500 olive trees representing the days of

Jesus and before, these hearty trees in the middle of the desert that produce beautiful fruit.

But you walk through and you can't but feel you're in this sacred but historic place. That's why the Holy Land, and having our students there is different than where they are in other gateways. Because, you immediately feel, but also are humbled by, also inspired, also feel a deep responsibility that you are in this space that you are pretty confident that prophets, our lord and savior, the mother of god...walked on. And...it gives you chills.

[VO]

Tantur is indeed located amid a number of significant pilgrimage sites. Which begs the question...what was at Tantur before?

[NAT: Archaeology sounds]

[VO]

Next time, on "Tantur: Hill in the Holy Land."

[Winitzer]

Iron Age, Second Temple, Hellenistic, Byzantine: All of that we found. So if we were to do an excavation, that would pay off. Big time.

[VO]

We join Notre Dame students as they search for clues about Tantur's ancient past.

[Nat: More dig]

[VO]

And as they dig at the sites of one of the greatest battles of the Bible...

[Winitzer]

Biblically we have a few attestations in the Old Testament, the most famous one when David meets Goliath

[VO]

And we find the story lives on...in sometimes very odd ways

[NAT: David]

Would you allow me to take 5 rocks...and I'll just slingshot my big ugly friend over there what do you think?

[VO]

That's next time on Tantur: Hill in the Holy Land