

CCJWA SEMINAR – “ANTISEMITISM – WHAT CAN WE DO?”

The most effective antidote against antisemitism is education.

This view of Ms Anette Adelman MA, Dipl. Theol. was emphatically endorsed by the other four panel speakers at a seminar arranged by the Council of Christians and Jews (Western Australia) held at the Wesley Church in Perth on Monday 12 August 2019.

Ms Adelman has a Dipl. Theol. (Protestant theology), holds a Masters degree in Jewish studies, and is the General Secretary of the International Council of Christians and Jews based in Heppenheim, Germany. The four panel members were Mr Steve Lieblich, Director of Public Affairs, Jewish Community Council of WA; Mr Sol Majteles, President of the Holocaust Institute of WA; Mr Simon Millman MLA, WA Labor member for Mount Lawley; and Fr Michael Moore SM, rector of the Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Morley.

Indicating the importance of the work of the CCJ in WA, there were a number of prominent guests also in attendance, including the Chief Justice of Western Australia, His Honour Justice Peter Quinlan, and former governor of Western Australia the Honourable Malcolm McCusker.

In her keynote address, Ms Adelman said that formal action against antisemitism was well advanced in her native Germany. When she was a child in the aftermath of the Shoah the Jewish population had been decimated and discussion of the issue was unpalatable. However, with the resurgence of the Jewish population of Germany, Jews are once again visible and vocal, stimulating the demand for suppression of antisemitism. Relevant legislation has been passed by governments, churches accept responsibility for eliminating antisemitic interpretations of biblical texts, and governmental and community organisations are committed to minimising antisemitic criticisms of the State of Israel, much of which emanates from refugee groups now living in Germany.

Ms Adelman expressed the view that the government should not hesitate to bring more prosecutions under relevant legislation, that teachers and social workers should be trained in the early recognition and intervention in antisemitic behaviours, and that all organisations and institutions should be alert to press government into further action when necessary. Whilst churches have appropriate programmes under way, with the increasing secularisation of German society, other institutions must be developed for the delivery of appropriate programmes, especially to German youth who do not attend churches.

Ms Adelman also related personal experiences with her nieces, who are three-and-a-half and seven years old, who have no concept of “the other” in a religious context, because they belong to one of the first generations in Germany to have been brought up in the absence of age-old accusations against the Jews of deicide and supersessionism. This, Ms Adelman says, emphasises the need for the early intervention in the education of children so as to ensure the absence of antisemitic tropes.

Mr Lieblich, in his address, focussed on the definition of antisemitism, so as to be able to identify it early and intervene effectively. He drew attention to the current widespread practice of extending objective criticism of Israeli government policies to inflame antisemitic sentiment.

Mr Lieblich cited Natan Sharansky's "3D test of antisemitism," ie:

- demonisation — when comparisons are made between Israelis and Nazis and between Palestinian refugee camps and Auschwitz
- double standards — when criticism of Israel is applied selectively; when Israel is singled out by the United Nations for human rights abuses while the behavior of known and major abusers, such as China, Iran, Cuba, and Syria, is ignored; when Israel's Magen David Adom, alone among the world's ambulance services, is denied admission to the International Red Cross
- delegitimation — when Israel's fundamental right to exist is denied — alone among all the nations of other peoples in the world.

Mr Sol Majteles pointed out that some 2000 schoolchildren visit the WA Holocaust Institute each year, most of them being 9–11 years old, but he agreed that, in the light of Ms Adelman's experiences with her nieces, that earlier intervention should be considered.

Mr Simon Millman urged the general public to participate in the Speak Up and Speak Out campaign, and to publicly express their opposition to all forms of antisemitism. He is a member of the bipartisan Parliamentary Friends of Israel, a group intending to take advantage of their privileged position as parliamentarians to advance Israel's interests. He said the group could best do this when it had vocal support from the electorate.

Fr Moore said that in the 1960s the Catholic Church realised it had to change direction, and since then there have been two high-level meetings between the cardinals of the Church and senior rabbis to discuss the way forward in relationships between the Church and Judaism. He included several quotes from Pope Francis, including statements such as that an attack on the Jews is an attack on humanity, and that the Jews are the chosen people.

The evening ended with a vote of thanks to the speakers by Mr Colin Rockman, who presented them with certificates of the planting of trees in their honour in the State of Israel.

Trevor Creewel, Committee member, CCJWA