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Interfaith Dialogue and Transcendence: being face-to-face

My favourite philosopher is Emmanuel Levinas. He was born in Kaunas, Lithuania in 1906 and died, Christmas day in 1995. His philosophical and Talmudic scholarship and writings especially during the past thirty years have had a defining influence upon the direction of Western thought. His influence has also flowed over to Christian theology. Indeed, he was very happy for Christian theologians to develop their writings using his ideas.

Particularly, what makes me so enamoured by his thought is the way that he opens meaning into life itself. Our experience is often characterised by the way we think about and see the world. Our senses provide a lens to understand and process our existence and reality. Even the mention now of 'existence' and 'reality' can provide some level of vertigo! Levinas' philosophy, however, is more than a mere guide to life. He speaks as a modern day biblical prophet, challenging the way we interpret our reality of life in the world with the wisdom and insight that often lies hidden from our everyday existence, freedom, choices and responsibility. If we listen to his call to care for the stranger, the orphan and the widow, we are not far from having a sense of peace and savouring God's promise of healing for those who are near and far (Isa. 57:19).

Levinas speaks to us as a prophet. The presentiment and memory of the Shoah are never far from his writings. Living through the horror of Hitlerism and the near extinction of European Jewry, Levinas encountered a grave insight about evil itself. Evil is always an excess that aims at us and seeks us out. It devours personhood and mutates life into a depersonalised and anonymous existence. Evil contaminates the human soul mocking all that is good. However, experiencing evil, Levinas knew that suffering is not useless and for nothing. Facing evil and the encounter of death, he began to hear the word of God and envisage a future world of what no ear has heard or eye has seen (Isa. 64:4). He found the word of God in the other's face, the poor one who hungers for a little good, a piece of bread and food from the other's mouth.

Listening to the outrage of the other, encountering the pain and tragedy of fear, loss and desolation, our philosopher Levinas encountered a moment so shocking and overwhelming: the nakedness of the human face. For the most part, we cannot see the other's face in all its mystery and truth. However, there are moments where the word of God comes to mind revealing feelings and emotions that lie hidden and repressed in our language and thoughts. And it is here that we can learn so much from Levinas' philosophy and Talmudic writings about the challenge of interfaith dialogue, and the necessity to move beyond our self-interested and competitive concerns to the world and feelings of the other.

Interfaith dialogue demands transcendence towards the sacred reality of the other's face. The other is always sacred. In the other's face we hear the word of God ordering us to journey into ways of peace, healing and compassion. These are the ways of loving our neighbour with all our heart, mind, strength and hope.

The other's face is an enigma. Given that our identity contains levels of mystery, the face becomes an entry point to begin to enter into the enigma of the other. Yet, we are indeed strange beings. We become strangers to ourselves and to others. However, facing reality and discerning its contours and colours evokes the hope to partake of wisdom and maturity. The other's face offers the gift of God's word to lead us to learn ways of gentleness, hospitality, intimacy and prayer.

Moreover, the other's face opens a world of interpersonal relations and bodiliness. Encountering the other's outrage and pain, we give meaning to suffering as compassion: to suffer through the suffering of the other. Being exposed to the other's wounds, to be wounded through the woundedness of the other, we learn that sacrifice is an integral part of compassion. And partaking of joy, being joyful through the joy of the other, we discover the truth of bodiliness: the transcendence of love. The art of bodiliness, of developing a life of compassion, sacrifice and love, becomes a response to God's word living and breathing in the other's face. Where interfaith dialogue unveils moments of the heart and gentleness, friendships may well begin to sprout, and this can lead to a whole manner of transcendent encounters that ultimately lead us beyond dialogue towards a messianic era and a future world of partaking of an ancient and Edenic vintage of being a gift of self for the other.

Remaining at the heart of interfaith dialogue is the challenge to develop our emotional sensibility of the other's life and world. Consequently, encountering the other's face in dialogue demands a difficult freedom to take courage and confidence to be gentle and sensitive to the other's world and emotions. Naturally in dialogue, we are led by one another's ideas and thoughts. Yet emotions have equal weight. The other's face contains something so overwhelming and wonderful, namely God's word that is full of emotional weight and value. And by listening attentively to the other's way of expression, we will begin naturally to take on an emotive way of life that is on the near side of the soul.

If interfaith dialogue leads us to the sacred space of encountering the other's soul, here we will find a place to encounter meaning, wisdom, healing and the promise of peace. Interfaith dialogue evokes spirituality and transcendence. Where God's word becomes an integral part of the face-to-face relation in interfaith dialogue, nurturing a spirituality of openness and gentleness will facilitate horizons of creativity, friendship and beauty. Levinas' thought has much to offer, and his thinking has led me to realise how emotions and the life of the soul are deeply connected to our everyday thoughts and actions. In a practical way, this means that the success of essential interfaith dialogue demands the sense and sensibility that everything good, true and beautiful begins and ends in love and gentleness.

Associate Professor Glenn Morrison, Chairperson

Newsletter 2014 Review of Events in 2013

Annual General Meeting for 2012

The Council's first gathering for the year was the AGM, held on the evening of Tuesday 5 February in the Parish Hall of the Applecross Anglican Church, in Ardross. Mr Ken Arkwright, as Vice-Chairperson, presided in place of Chairperson Fr Charles Waddell, who was unwell. In his Annual Report, Ken foreshadowed that 2013 would be his last year of service as a Committee Member, and emphasised the Council's need for new members and new ideas, if it is to continue to thrive and succeed. He remained in the chair to declare Dr Glenn Morrison as the new Chairperson, and Glenn then presided for the election of the other eight Committee Members, and for the remainder of the meeting. The guest speaker, Committee Member Ms Judith Schneider, was introduced by Glenn as one of his colleagues at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle Campus, and as having recently completed her doctoral dissertation in Theology. Judith's topic, "Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Chosen-ness," was equally relevant to Jews and Christians in the audience, and her erudite paper evoked an animated discussion on various aspects of her findings.

The Annual Report may be accessed at:

http://www.cciwa.org/Documents/Articles/2012_Annual_Report_for_AGM_050213_final.pdf

A copy of Dr Schneider's address is available at

http://www.cciwa.org/Documents/Articles/Jewish_and_Christian_Perspectives_amended_final.pdf



Film Night

CCJWA members and guests gathered at the beautifully refurbished Temple David Social Hall on 30 April for a private screening of the 2004 film, *As it is in Heaven*, directed by Kay Pollack. The film focuses on life in a small town in Sweden, and particularly on conflicts and tensions in its local Lutheran church community, especially among those involved in its music ministry. However, it also serves as a study of institutionalised religion and of human nature, and hence was of relevance to Jewish as well as Christian members of the audience. The lively discussion afterwards indicated that the film had stimulated profound thoughts about music, love, and God, and highlighted some of the similarities in our different faith communities. The success of this event encouraged the Committee to schedule a film afternoon in August 2014. A more detailed account of the event is available on the CCJWA website, Past Events 2013.

Evening at St George's College

CCJWA members and friends were invited to join with students at St George's College Chapel, Crawley, on Thursday 16 May at 6:00pm, for Evening Worship with the Winthrop Singers. The gathering was a joint venture arranged by: Dr Nicholas Bannan, director of the Winthrop Singers; Dr Michael Champion, Lay Chaplain of St George's College; Mr Ian Hardy, College Warden; and CCJWA Executive Members. The liturgy for the service, while based on traditional Anglican Evensong, was designed specifically for the occasion to ensure its suitability for Jewish and Christian attendees. All of the works sung by the choir were Jewish: "Hine Ma Tov" (Psalm 133:1); Salamone Rossi, "Haleluyah, Haleli nafshi" (Psalm 146); Louis Lewandowski, "Enosh Kechotzir Yomov" (Psalm 103:15–17); and as an anthem, the second movement of Leonard Bernstein, *Chichester Psalms*, containing verses from Psalms 23 and 2. Organist Alessandro Pittorini offered a lovely rendition of Mendelssohn's "G Major Prelude" before the service, and afterwards completed the performance of the work by playing the "G Major Fugue" as the organ voluntary.

The service was led by Dr Champion, and at its conclusion, Mr Hardy invited CCJWA members and their guests to the College dining room for dinner. Following an excellent meal with staff and students from the university community, members of our group were invited to the Junior Common Room for the third segment of the evening — a so-called "Fireside Chat" between Michael Champion and CCJWA Vice-Chairperson, Ken Arkwright OAM. The audience, with many students augmenting our group, filled this large room to capacity, with many standing. All present were spellbound as they listened to Ken's reminiscences of his experiences during WWII, and of the Holocaust. Following the interview, there was a time for questions, with the majority coming from keenly interested students. Discussion continued over light refreshments. The entire gathering, featuring shared worship, table fellowship, and discussion, was considered highly successful, and UWA and CCJ representatives unanimously agreed to plan a similar event this year.

A more detailed description of the evening is available on the CCJWA website, Past Events 2013.

Seminar on Paul



On the evening of Thursday 1 August, members and friends again assembled at Temple David Social Hall. On this occasion it was to hear visiting New Testament scholars speak on "The Image of Paul and Jewish-Christian Relations." Dr William S. Campbell and Dr Kathy Ehrensperger, both of the University of Wales, Trinity St. David, Lampeter Campus, presented complementary papers on the theme. Dr Campbell spoke first, on "Paul's positive evaluation of his Jewish identity and its relevance for Jewish-Christian relations," and his wife Dr Ehrensperger then gave an address on "Paul's vision of the unity of Israel and the nations." Both speakers have a longstanding association with CCJ and interfaith relations, and the sensitivity of their approaches to the topic was appreciated by those present. The question time was vigorous, and energetic

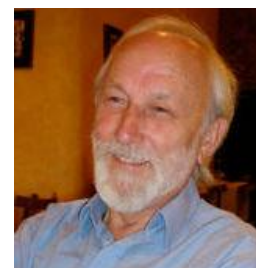
discussion continued for a further hour over refreshments. An article on the seminar is available at:

<http://www.cciwa.org/Documents/Articles/Seminar%201%20August%202013%20report%20final.pdf> and the

speakers' papers may be accessed at:

http://www.cciwa.org/Documents/Articles/Seminar%201%20August%202013_Bill%20Campbell%20paper.pdf and

http://www.cciwa.org/Documents/Articles/Seminar%201%20August%202013_Kathy%20Ehrensperger%20paper.pdf



Commemoration of Kristallnacht



His Excellency Malcolm McCusker AC CVO QC*

The occasion to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the so-called “Night of Broken Glass” was held at Government House Ballroom on Sunday 10 November. Prior to the formal commencement, music was played while guests were entering, to set the solemn tone of the gathering. Violinist Ronniel Orlando played the haunting Yiddish song “Eli Eli” (Sandler), which was frequently sung by concentration camp inmates during the Shoah; and Caroline Badnall then offered three works on the Fazioli Grand Piano: Felix Mendelssohn: *Andante and Rondo Capriccioso* Op 14; Frédéric Chopin: *Nocturne No. 20 in C-sharp minor* Op Posth. (*Reminiscence*); and Louis Lewandowski: *Andante espressivo*. At 5:30pm, Dr Glenn Morrison, as MC, announced the arrival of the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency Malcolm McCusker AC CVO QC, who was accompanied by the Reverend Ken Williams, Acting Moderator of the Uniting Church in WA. The Governor, Patron of CCJWA, was then invited to the podium to give the Welcome speech. In his heartfelt address, His Excellency urged all to work together to try to ensure that atrocities such as were perpetrated on 9 November 1938, in the subsequent Shoah, and in other genocides, will be avoided in future.

The solemn atmosphere was accentuated by the series of four laments in Louis Lewandowski’s *Echa*, sung by the Winthrop Consort, directed by Dr Nicholas Bannan, and accompanied by Caroline Badnall. The MC then provided an introduction to the dramatic piece which was to follow: *Jeremias*, written by Stefan Zweig (1917), and translated from the German original by Mr Kenneth Arkwright OAM. This poignant drama, presented by Paul Montague and Maja Hanna Liwszyc, depicted alternating voices of Chaldaeans, and of Jews departing their homeland. It began with the Chaldaeans’ puzzled question concerning the Jews, singing and seemingly triumphant, despite their suffering: “What *gives* with this people?” and it ended with the Chaldaeans’ profound observation, as they marvelled at the inner strength of the Jews: “You cannot conquer the invisible! You can kill people, but not the God who lives within them. You can subjugate a people, but never their spirit ...”



Winthrop Consort singing the Lamentation*



Justice James Edelman*

The MC then introduced the guest speaker, Justice James Edelman BA, LLB (UWA) BComm (Murdoch) DPhil (Oxon), Supreme Court of Western Australia. In his address, Justice Edelman approached the “unfathomable horror” of Kristallnacht and the Shoah, from a philosophical perspective, suggesting that “we should reject the dominant philosophical theory that all morals are relative.” He argued that “We can reflect on the killing, the destruction, and the inhumanity, and say with confidence that it violates basic moral principle.” In his conclusion, His Honour observed that “it will always be important for us to question our own moral codes and ... always essential to assess critically the views of others,” emphasising that there *does* exist “a notion of natural, or intrinsic moral truth, existing independently of everything that makes us who we are.”

Following the address, the focus shifted to commemoration of Shoah victims, with the MC speaking of the six million Jews and also millions of non-Jews, who perished as a result of the Nazis’ “Final Solution”. In solemn remembrance of them, Moses Schulstein’s poem “I Saw a Mountain,” was read by the Reverend Vivien Larkin. The Righteous Gentiles who risked their lives for their Jewish brothers and sisters were also remembered specifically as Gwyneth Lewis’s poem “For the Rescuers” was read by Dr Judith Schneider. The names of concentration camps were then spoken by Ken and Judith Arkwright, before two minutes of silence.



Reverend Vivien Larkin



Archbishop Roger Herft

The sound of shattering glass broke the silence, and all joined in a statement recollecting the horror, death and destruction that occurred on Kristallnacht. A prayer, read by the Very Reverend Peter Whitely, followed, marking the transition to a focus on future hope and peace. The change of mood began with a reading of Judy Chicago’s “Merger Poem” by Archbishop Roger Herft, and was underlined by the singing of S. S. Wesley’s, “The Lord hath been mindful of us” (Psalm 115:12–15), by the Winthrop Consort, directed by Dr Nicholas Bannan, and accompanied by Caroline Badnall.

All then stood to recite together the “Inscription of Hope” written on the wall of a cellar in Cologne, where Jews hid from Nazis: “I believe. I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining. I believe in love, even when feeling it not. I believe in God, even when God is silent.” Attendees were invited to offer a sign of reconciliation to those nearby, wishing each other “Shalom” — “Peace”. Rabbi Dovid Freilich then led the closing prayer, for Peace. The MC expressed thanks to all presenters and helpers, who were warmly acknowledged with applause. All stood for the departure of the official party, while Ronniel Orlando first played the original “Eli Eli” folk tune (after David Zehavi), and then brought the Commemoration to a close with the popular song “Oseh Shalom” (“The One Who Makes Peace”).



Rabbi Dovid Freilich*

Pilgrimage to Israel

In October 2013 a group of some thirty members of the Anglican Diocese of Perth went on a Pilgrimage to Israel led by the Reverend Gillian Rookyard, Rector of Kingsley Parish.

As she told us, a pilgrim is someone who travels through the landscape, leaving behind all that is familiar on a journey to discover new territory, both physical and spiritual. For some pilgrims, the very journey itself is an offering. In each of us there dwells a pilgrim soul waiting for the call to set out on its journey. It is the inner journey that makes a pilgrimage what it really is.

We arrived at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv and were immediately introduced to our guide Gadi and our driver Prosper, whose skill at manoeuvring the bus was a remarkable feature. Gadi had just retired after serving in the Israeli Police Force for thirty years, so we were in the hands of a very good team.

We had a day in Tel Aviv, which is a modern city, in contrast with the capital Jerusalem, which is of course very ancient. In Tel Aviv is the village of Jaffa, which was the home of a large Jewish community in the days when the region was part of the Ottoman Empire.



We then travelled North to Tiberias, where we stayed three days, then South to Jerusalem, where we stayed the remaining seven, before the two hour drive to Tel Aviv and the flight home.

We saw many things from each of our places of stay, and also on the journeys between them. I will describe three settings which we found particularly meaningful.

On our travel from Tel Aviv to Tiberias we stayed some hours at the hill fortress of Megiddo. This remarkable fort has been occupied and fought over since the Stone Age, and had been conquered and reconquered many times. It is situated at an important strategic location at the junction of several trade routes where camel trains frequently passed at different points of history from the kingdoms of Persia and Mesopotamia to those of Syria and Egypt. Excavations have revealed several layers of occupation at different times, from the Canaanite period in the Bronze Age in the fourth millennium BCE through King Solomon ruling the Israelites, then the Assyrian and the Egyptian occupation, before the Romans, then the Saracens, Crusaders, the Ottoman Empire, and it featured in a battle in the First World War. According to Christian tradition, it will be a battlefield in the future: the site of Armageddon between the forces of Good and Evil at the end of time as foretold in the Revelation.

The water supply is particularly interesting, with a tunnel leading from the top of the fort to a well in the rocks beneath it, which can be accessed by visitors. A sense of history certainly exuded from this remarkable place, where civilisation and Imperial Power had been so manifest. We felt the presence and the works of an Eternal God.

From Tiberias we spent a day visiting the Sea of Galilee. We went out in a boat on this magnificent stretch of water, and we all felt a sense of peace and awe: this was a principal site of Jesus' ministry. We conducted readings on our boat and held a Church service on the bank. We explored the history, including that of a synagogue in Capernaum, where we recalled Gospel accounts of Jesus surprising people with his learning.

We finished our Pilgrimage in the Old City of Jerusalem. Here, we saw history condensed, where the God of Israel has been worshipped for three thousand years: Temple Mount, built up over the site of Solomon's Temple; and the Western Wall — all that now remains of the Second Temple. Behind it is an amazing system of engineering, in particular the water supply, which we explored. It is still not clear how the massive stones which form the foundations of the Temple were moved into place.

Nearby is the system of narrow streets where all sorts of merchandise is sold, where a big variety of refreshment can be bought. It is through these streets that Jesus was marched, carrying His Cross on His way to His Crucifixion. Many groups of Pilgrims re-enact this event as we did, carrying their Cross and holding readings and prayers.

We saw Golgotha, the place of the Crucifixion, and the tomb where Jesus was said to have been laid, and held a Service at a nearby open air Chapel.



The Israel we saw is full of ancient history, and with many variations of the Jewish and Christian, and probably also Islamic, religious traditions. It gave the inescapable feeling that ancient history and religion cannot be separated; the structure of the human mind binds them together. We felt taken right back in time to when God saw everything that He had made, and it was very good.

Ralph Hickling, Committee Member

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