



5762 SIVAN

MAY 2002

Published by the Council of Christians and Jews, Western Australia Inc.,
 c/- 16 MossPaul Close, Duncraig, Western Australia 6023
 Web Site: <http://www.ccjwa.iinet.net.au/>

In This Issue:

1. Our Program for 2002
2. President's Report - 2001
3. Paul the Prophet

**1. Our Program for 2002**

- **Lecture Series: Religious Observance in Contemporary Society** - 4 week nights in August - Venue to be advised.
- **Annual General Meeting** - 15:00 Sunday 22 September - Temple David, Mount Lawley. Guest Speaker - Rabbi John Levy from Melbourne. Kosher BBQ to follow.
- **Kristallnacht Service** - 15:00 Sunday 10 November - Venue to be advised.

**2. President's Report - 2001**

Revd Dr Rowan Strong

This organisation has existed since 1995. It was formally launched by the then Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency Major General Jeffreys, at the Jewish Centre on 4 September that year. The Chief Justice of Western Australia, the Hon. David Malcolm, gave the keynote address before a large audience, including the five presidents, the Anglican Archbishop of Perth, the Catholic Archbishop of Perth, the Moderator of the Western Australian Synod of the Uniting Church, the Rabbi of Perth Hebrew Congregation, and the Rabbi of Temple David. Since that launch the Council had endeavoured to run four events every year to facilitate its objectives. These remain the same as in 1995.

- To promote the education of Christians and

Jews so as to appreciate each other's distinctive beliefs and practices and their common ground.

- To promote the study of and research into historical, political, economic, social, religious and racial causes of conflicts between Christians and Jews.

- To promote, for the benefit of the community, education in those fundamental ethical teachings common to Christianity and Judaism.

- To provide a forum for the discussion of issues of common interest or concern between Christians and Jews.

- To act, in Western Australia as the spokesperson on all matters that come within the purview and purpose of such a council.

To these ends the Council this year, through the efforts of its hard-working and dedicated Executive, has sponsored a workshop on a recent Jewish document on the significance of Jesus. There has been a launch of the booklet issued by Council of Christians and Jews, Victoria, entitled *Re-reading Paul*, giving guidelines for Christians teachers on the attitudes of Paul towards Judaism and Torah. Dr John Dunnill, Senior Lecturer in New Testament at Murdoch University, launched the booklet in Western Australia with a lecture on 'Paul the prophet; a challenge to Christians and Jews'. Finally, the first of a projected annual memorial service for Kristallnacht was held at the Anglican Christ Church, Claremont. It is anticipated that the venue for this annual service will alternate between Jewish synagogue and Christian church. The council also has its own web site, and a regular newsletter, thanks in great measure to the work of our publicity officer, Graham Nielsen.

However, despite the great optimism of the launch six years ago, and the maintenance of a regular programme of events since then, all is not well with your Council. Membership continues to decline from its peak in 1995 of some eighty members to its present number of just over fifty. That membership continues to be among the older generations of Jews and Christians.

The Council seems to have little attraction for the younger Christians and Jews or to their leaders. Attendance at Council events is also becoming smaller, and it is especially noticeable that events

about Christianity attract few Jews. The Executive has basically remained the same since the Council's inauguration. Speaking for myself, I would not wish to change any of its present members who continue to be deeply committed to its life. However, some extra members to share to work would be most welcome. I, for one, am beginning to question if I have not passed my use-by date as your Chairperson.

Now I am not stating these things to induce guilt in any one of us, despite that being a tried and true method of religious organisations seeking to encourage higher standards among members. All voluntary organisations these days are feeling the same pinch, and it is probably true that they are not as attractive to present generations of people as they were to our parents.

The Council has done some good, if unspectacular work, in promoting its objectives and if it is time for it to dwindle and die over the next couple of years, so be it. But as your Chairperson I consider that you should know these things and let you make the choice about whether we live or die, conscious that, as the apostle Paul said, 'If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord'.

I will be asking the Executive to consider making promotion and recruitment its major work for the coming year, in the belief that we should give life one more shot before we submit to death as an organisation. Further, I think that one reason for our diminution has been that we have not had a very high profile among our congregations and the wider public of Perth. In that regard, I also want the Executive to consider reducing our programme for 2002 but making what we do rather more public. So I have in mind a series of public lectures, perhaps at lunchtime in a venue in the city. It is possibly time our presidents' collectively did something for us. Perhaps they might agree to be the core of a lecture series that might be entitled 'A Religious Vision for Australian Society'. With just one major public event, plus the AGM, and the Kristallnacht service, your hard-pressed Executive of volunteer workers might just about find themselves coping throughout the year. You owe them much gratitude for the ways in which they all continue to maintain their enthusiasm for the work.

But most of all this year I want to speak about why I believe that this Council, or something like it, is necessary in our society. Indeed, I believe there are reasons to indicate that our work for religious tolerance and the acceptance of our differences may become more important in the years to come. Reading the *Australian* yesterday I came across two things which invigorated my own commitment to the Council. I am not generally known for my sympathies with the conservative side of politics, but I read with interest an article on the principled and courageous stand of the National Party's Senator Ron Boswell against the One Nation Party with its

politics of fear and division. Particularly, I was struck by an incident in Boswell's career that began his principled opposition to the extreme Right in politics. In 1988 Boswell attacked the League of Rights in a senate speech. The speech was a consequence of a meeting he had attended at the Queensland timber town of Ravenswood where the people were angry about the World Heritage listing of the rainforest. While he was in the town Boswell discovered literature being distributed by the League of Rights which claimed the Jews were taking over the world's rainforests. Now to anyone who knows something of the history of anti-Semitism this sounds like the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' all over again. This was a fabricated, scurrilous and long-discredited anti-Semitic tract dreamed up by the imperial regime of Tsarist Russia, a regime infamous for its anti-Semitism. Yet here it is the same old lie all over again about the Jews taking over the world. Only this time it was being spread as part of the politics of contemporary Australia. Re-invented to suit issues of our day, we can see from this example that anti-Semitic hatreds are still seeking influence in Australian society and politics, feeding off the energy of people's anger and attempting to fuel them into flames of hatred. And this was just thirteen years ago.

Neither is that anti-Semitism surprising in the context of Australia today. As a recent Australian citizen I have been mortified of my country recently. I am ashamed by the way in which both sides of politics have given voice to the darker fears of Australians towards people who are different in the recent election campaign. It is all so easy to do, to turn difference from something we celebrate into something we fear. Intolerance has been called 'un-Australian' by a succession of our country's leaders from the Prime Minister on. Yet our history tells us just the opposite. Alongside the mateship and egalitarianism among white Australian men has gone a persistent national tradition of exclusion and division and violence towards different people. The solution to the difference of Aborigines was to exterminate them. The Chinese on the goldfields of the 1850s were run off the digging by violent diggers who saw them as a threat because they were obviously different. This practice of exclusion towards Asian peoples became systemic, formalised government practice in the White Australia policy. Intolerance has as much evidence in our history to be classed as an Australian tradition as does any so-called egalitarianism. Yet Jesus once said, 'And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?'

Equally, Australians have a long tradition of fear of others coming here to invade us. This fear of the foreign hordes stretches back at least to the Russian invasion scare at the end of the nineteenth century. It transformed into a long-term fear of the 'yellow peril' of the Japanese, even before World War One when the Japanese were our allies.

Intolerance of difference, fear of the foreigner, anxieties about invasion are all darker sides of Australian national identity which have more than had an airing in the past months. The oldest form of this in our history is anti-Semitism. It has been a persistent tradition in which western culture and Christianity have demonised the Jews as the feared other. This, and other suspicions and hatreds of those among us who are different seems to have come surfaced again as alive and well in Australia.

But these fears about those people who are different could become even more prominent in Australian society if another article in yesterday's *Australian* is accurate. The paper's international editor, Paul Kelly, suggests that in the near future the encouragement of immigration will become a necessary policy in western countries. That is because in western countries like Australia the birth rate continues to decline to near zero population growth. Already European countries have begun initiating policies to encourage immigrants as they desperately seek people to fill in the labour market shortages and pay the taxes needed to keep their ageing populations going. In such a transformed world the immigrant will be feted rather than feared. But what chance does Australia have of competing for migrants if the present climate of division and fear is maintained and promoted by our political leaders?

Therefore, it is likely that in twenty-first century Australia cultural, ethnic, and religious differences will broaden as new migrants arrive in greater numbers than recently. Such an increase of social and cultural differences in our society will probably provide a situation in which hatred of those who are different has all the more chance to grow. The future of this nation, therefore, makes it likely that there will be even greater differences and diversity in our society than ever before. In that case the work for mutual understanding and tolerance will become more and not less important.

It is my belief that the work of this Council for sympathy, tolerance, and understanding between people who are different and have been historic enemies is just as important in Australia as it ever was. Possibly more so in our future. After all, the hatreds between Christian and Jew, are the oldest continuing examples of social fear and division in western culture and history. And we all know where that leads. The ovens of Auschwitz were only able to be built because the enlightened culture of Germany contained within it the seeds of hate which produced its own fruit of horror. It is perhaps important to realise that our accepted tradition of religious toleration in the West is historically very recent, being just over a couple of centuries old. The hatreds that built the ovens of Auschwitz and erected the stakes of the Inquisition are far older and more prominent in our history than is the value of religious tolerance and understanding. Alone against the fruits of intolerance, as individuals, we

can do little. But as Christians and Jews together, as an organisation, we are capable of working to ensure the future of this country will be different from the hatreds and divisions of its past. The Council of Christians and Jews, Western Australia, exists to re-echo the hope of the survivors of the Holocaust of Auschwitz about the consequences of hatred of other people - 'Never Again'.



3. Paul the Prophet –

a Challenge to Jews and Christians

An Introduction to *Re-reading Paul: a fresh look at his attitude to Torah and Judaism* (Melbourne: The Council of Christians and Jews (Victoria) Inc., 1999). Reviewed by by Dr John Dunnill, Senior Lecturer in New Testament, Murdoch University

In the long history of mutual misunderstanding and suspicion between Christians and Jews, Paul has often been given a central place. Just two texts (read a certain way) would be enough to establish his culpability as a rejecter of Torah: 'We know that a person is justified, *not by works of law* but by faith in Jesus Christ' (Galatians 2:16) and 'Christ is *the end of the law* for those who believe' (Romans 10:4). The image of Judaism as a religion of perfectionist 'works-righteousness', 'self-salvation', 'legalism', 'slavery', 'Pelagianism in ancient dress' (NT Wright) is largely the shadow side of the Pauline understanding of Christianity as a religion of freedom, divine gift, grace received through faith. If now Christians are coming (slowly!) to a different perception of the faith and practice of Israel, they must also look afresh at what Paul said about Torah. Was Paul wrong about Torah, or have we been misreading him all these centuries?

The research of EP Sanders is central here. In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), he showed that the classic view of first-century Judaism is simply wrong. Torah is not a ladder, a set of laws offering salvation to anyone who is perfectly obedient, and damnation to those who fail; think of it rather as a circle, a fence around the community of those who dwell in covenant-relationship with God. The 'law' is then the God-given means of pursuing this relationship, but the law itself allows for failure and repentance within the circle of God's care. This pattern of religion, which he calls 'covenantal nomism' (ie the *nomos*, law, is a function of the covenantal relationship, not a primary structure) later reproduced itself in the Church. With two communities of flexible belief and obedience loyal to different revelations, how could rivalry not result?

Did Paul then reject Judaism? Krister Stendahl (*Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 1976) has shown how much of the Western Christian picture of Paul's struggles with Judaism reflects the struggles

of Martin Luther in the 16th century with the Catholic Church of his day. Rather than think of Paul as undergoing a 'conversion' on the road to Damascus (for which there is no NT word), he himself speaks of a 'call' (Gal 1: 15-16), modelled on that of Hebrew prophets (Isaiah 49:5-6; Jeremiah 1:4-5), a summons from his God, the God of Israel, 'to proclaim among the Gentiles' the Good News of God's Son. Like most New Testament authors, Paul was a Christian Jew and he affirms this Jewish identity (e.g. Phil 3:6). He also affirms that Torah has been given by God: 'for the Law is holy and just and good' (Rom 7:12). In his encounter with the risen Christ he passed, not from bad to good but from good to better.

What then was wrong with Torah, in Paul's view? He has two main arguments. In Rom 7:12 – 8:4 he dramatises the human condition as wrestling with the powers of 'Sin' and 'Death', which he depicts rather like mythological monsters that have invaded God's creation, undermining human happiness and well-being. Torah too has been undermined and is powerless to help – we know what we ought to do but we can't do it (Romans 7: 15-24) – but Christ is given to enable humanity (the whole of humanity) to make a fresh start and live by God's Spirit. Through Christ, God can do what the Law could not (Romans 8:3). This is about Torah's *weakness*; but in Galatians 3 (vv.19, 24-26) he argues, secondly, that Law had a *definite but limited purpose*, now expired. Humanity before Christ was like a child in need of a custodian (a *paidagogos*- part teacher, part disciplinarian, part bodyguard, 3:24), but now has come of age in Christ. The law, which was good but temporary, functional and restricted to Israel, has given way to the eternal, the complete and the universal. It follows that human beings, who in Paul's understanding need to be 'justified', set right with God, can no longer rely for this on 'works of law' but only on 'faith in Jesus Christ' (Galatians 2:16). However, the Law remains, and retains its 'disciplinary' value for Jewish Christians, and there is evidence that Paul himself continued to practise those parts of the Law which did not exclude Gentiles (e.g. circumcision and the food laws).

The sense of urgency and crisis which runs through Paul's letters, the weight of sinfulness and the need of salvation, are typical of some strands of Judaism in the first century. The gospel he proclaimed among the Gentiles was a very Jewish gospel, rooted in prophetic eschatology. Denigration of Israel's faith and practice was no part of his mission. Only when he saw others setting up Law as a salvific principle in rivalry with Christ, or when Christ was subordinated to Torah, then he found a need to drive a wedge between the two, demanding a choice. This choice is the main thrust of Galatians and Romans (but really only those two letters), presented with his characteristic sharpness (Gal 2:21).

Did he believe God had rejected Israel? The

Christian habit of reading Romans 1-8 as Paul's classic statement of personal salvation makes it hard to see the relevance of chapters 9-11. They are a passionate, scripturally rooted defence of an unshakeable belief that God means to save all Israel along with those gentiles who respond to Christ – or even 'to have mercy on all'. How this might happen is far from clear, but that is his dazzling, unifying vision: the 'mystery of God' (11: 25-36). There is no room here for vilification by either side (though he saw his purpose as challenging Israel to repentance, and like Israel's prophets his language in debate was seldom polite). Nor is there room for the view advanced in recent years that he envisaged two parallel covenants continuing indefinitely (Torah for Israel, Christ for the gentiles), a view which would rule out any attempt at 'mission'.

In his own day Paul was an uncomfortable presence for his friends as well as his foes, and today he remains a challenge for both Jews and Christians. As a Jewish prophet he points both Jews and gentile Christians to the 'rich root' of Israel's history and scripture which both share and need. He reminds us that if Christian culture fights against God's people, God's law, God's scripture, it fights against God. Compare George Steiner's claim that anti-Semitism is the world's revenge on those who by their very being set before us the intolerable demands of the God of Sinai.

But Paul also points both Jews and Christians to the action of the living God in history. Twenty centuries have passed, life goes on and evil flourishes, but these are still the 'end-times' in which God's justice comes to pass. Though Christians identify God's justice / righteousness with Christ we have to accept that we have not yet seen the fulness of what God is doing, which will transcend any image of 'Christ' we carry in our mind. Does Judaism encourage merely routine obedience? I don't know, but I know that

Christianity has often encouraged a 'faith' which is static and self-absorbed and detached from faithfulness in action. Paul the prophet calls us beyond all such limitations, to look for the revealing of the mystery of God in the world.



Newsletter Submissions, Feedback, and Subscriptions

The CCJWA Newsletter is produced quarterly by the executive committee

Please contact:

The Editor

CCJWA Newsletter

5 Ryland Road

KELMSCOTT WA 6111

E-mail: nielseng@iinet.net.au