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Chairman's Editorial – We are different, thank God

On New Year's Day Christians in my tradition celebrated the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus. You could say, that day we Anglicans celebrated the naming of a boy Jew. Or, to make my point more clearly, we could turn that statement around slightly and say we celebrated the naming of a Jew boy. The word 'Jew' can still carry with it overtones of insult in our culture. I can still remember that as a child at school being told you were 'being Jewish' or 'don't be a Jew' meant that you were being mean or ungenerous. The same stereotypical negative images have been unpleasantly prominent in Western culture from the Gospels, through Shakespeare's character Shylock in the Merchant of Venice hell-bent on getting his pound of flesh, to the former Prime Minister of Malaysia blaming his country's financial troubles on international Jewish financiers. Much of this negative stereotyping has been the responsibility of the Church and Christian culture. Why else would Russian Jews for generations have been particularly apprehensive in their village each year at Easter? Villages throughout that vast land where there were Jews were frequently visited by marauding Christian gangs, wreaking violence and even death on their Jewish neighbours for being 'Christ-killers'.

But something has changed, thank God. Or rather, something is changing slowly. There is still Christian and non-Christian antisemitism, so that even here in Perth and in Adelaide just last decade Jewish graves got broken up and daubed with swastikas. But among some Christians and some Christian Churches there has dawned the realisation that centuries of Christian antagonism to Jews has brought truly horrible consequences. Why is it that we can hear the description of Jesus' birth as that of a Jewish boy without batting an eyelid, but cringe at the description

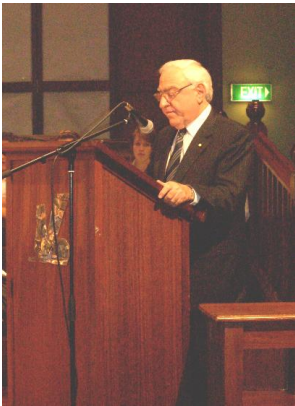
of him as a 'Jew-boy'. It is because Christians have begun, after centuries, to reassess positively the Jewish antecedents of our faith. In some ways this has gone, perhaps, too far; now some Christians appropriate the Seder meal, a sacred ritual of Judaism, into their own liturgies and in HolyWeek. It is ironic, that Jews who have suffered so brutally and ideologically from Christianity for centuries should now find Christians being imperialistic in another way, but this time from looking on Judaism more positively.

Thankfully the recent experiences and history of Jewish-Christian relations are not only about such culturally and religiously insensitive appropriations of each other's holy rituals. Christians have certainly rediscovered much of the meaning and history and treasures of their own faith by becoming awakened to the Jewishness of Jesus, his first disciples, and the earliest generations of the Church. However, the Council of Christians and Jews is not just about one-way traffic in bringing Christians and Jews together to appreciate and understand one another and each other's faith more. It is my hope that Jews will learn as much from Christians as about them, in the same way that Christians in these last decades have discovered Jews and Judaism are not only there to be understood; it is a dialogue that has much to teach us about our own religious faith and practice.

So this year the Council Executive will be seeking to help members and friends not just understand each other more, but to experience as well the differences that also make us who we are – the Council of Christians and Jews. To encounter such differences, over beliefs that really matter to each other can be awkward and painful, but it is necessary if we are to be our true Jewish and Christian selves with one another. We are grown from the same stock of the faith of ancient Israel. We became in our history different and hostile. We have seen the tragic consequences of our own hatreds. We seek this year to realise that we are both different and, at the same time, uphold that difference. We will do so in the knowledge that the One God we seek to serve delights in his people, both those of the older and those of the newer covenants.

*Associate Professor Rowan Strong FRHistS
Rowan Strong, Chairperson*

2007 Kristallnacht Memorial Service



In the past having organised, attended and participated in many events within the Perth Jewish community commemorating Yom Hashoah, I did not know quite what to expect attending my first Kristallnacht Commemoration organised by the Council of Christians and Jews WA (CCJWA), to the Executive of which I had been recently appointed.

The event was held at Perth Modern School on Thursday 8 November 2007, which had graciously offered the use of their superb auditorium and premises. Special guest of honour was His Excellency Dr Ken Michael AC, Governor of Western Australia. Prior to the start of the commemoration, participating High School students, CCJWA Executive members and distinguished clerical guests were given the opportunity to mingle with the Governor and Mrs Michael in the Perth Modern staff room.

Filling in for the absence of CCJWA Chairperson Reverend Dr Rowan Strong was Ken Arkwright, who, apart from his poignant personal history in the tragic events of those time, masterfully articulated the various elements of the presentation. He first introduced two students from Presbyterian Ladies College, who provided a short synopsis of the background events that led to the horrors of Kristallnacht on the night of 9 November 1939. Thousands of Jewish businesses were destroyed and hundreds of synagogues burned and demolished; seventy-two Jews were murdered and 30,000 more interned at Buchenwald. This was the first incidence of an organised Nazi policy aimed at dehumanising Jews; the world's passive reaction only emboldened Hitler to pursue this policy to its demonic end.

Following these readings the Junior String Quartet of Perth Modern School performed *Concerto Grosso in D Minor* by Vivaldi. To me, it seemed as if the violins were weeping those tears that the rest of the world failed to shed those many years ago. His Excellency Dr Ken Michael then read the opening passages in English from The Book of Lamentations, linking in the Divine tragedy of the Temple's destruction.



A choral rendition of John Rutter's *The Beauty of the Earth* by students of Perth College again stirred the emotions of all who were present. A paradoxical counterpoint to the ghastly horrors that began on Kristallnacht, the song was a poignant reminder that hope can arise from the ashes of the past. This same theme reverberated in the moving arrangement of Psalm 36 (verses 7-9)



מה יקר חסדך אלהים performed by Ken and Judith Arkwright, accompanied by PMS student, Christine Yeong on piano. A dramatic excerpt from Elie Wiesel's *Night* describing a gruesome public hanging of a young Jewish boy in the concentration camp was delivered by a PLC student.

The main address was eloquently conveyed by Rabbi Dovid Freilich. Rabbi Freilich offered an innovative interpretation of the name Kristallnacht, providing a deeper insight into the causes of the calamity. Although a crystal is valued for its polished sparkle, unlike real jewels, it easily shatters. He brought anecdotes and quotes to show how many German Jews viewed German culture as the paragon of civilisation and Germany a country that protected them with its laws and morals. What was lacking, however, was what he termed the "Divine Conscience", which is accompanied by attributes like justice, mercy, compassion and pity. Because of that fatal flaw, the sparkle and attraction of that culture was illusory, and, like the crystal, it shattered.

Rabbi Freilich also took issue with the renowned quote of the German nationalist Pastor Martin Niemöller, who was interned in a concentration camp late in the war. (“First, they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then, they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then, they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew... Finally, they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out.”). One should not act because the end result might be the effect on oneself but rather out of that same Divine Conscience that impels us to defend the sanctity of life everywhere regardless of the personal repercussions.

Although this was certainly one of Rabbi Freilich’s many outstanding oratory gems, even more impressive to me was watching the faces of the non-Jewish students seated on the dais, all of whom were rapt in his words.

Following the rabbi’s address the program concluded with a contemporary and yet comforting arrangement of *The Lord is My Shepherd* performed by students of Aranmore College with piano and guitar accompaniment. Finally, students from PLC again recited the poem *The Butterfly*, written in Theresienstadt by 11 year-old Pavel Friedman, and *The Chimneys*, by Nobel Prize Laureate Nelly Sachs. Ken Arkwright then led all the assembled in a moment of silence.

The CCJWA Kristallnacht Commemoration concluded with Carmel School students Gali Blacher, Jonny Eintracht, Jarod Rhine-Davis and Ernest Shultheis singing *The Partisan Song* in Yiddish and English accompanied on piano by Shirley Atlas.

Personally, I was profoundly moved by this event. The CCJWA, and in particular, through the efforts of its Secretary Dr Mary Marshall, put a great deal of time and dedication into a rich presentation that succeeded in evoking the necessary emotions to jostle us from our habitual slumber. Moreover, the mutual participation of the Jewish and Christian communities in such an occasion ensures a result that transcends the more insular concerns of Jewish life and is therefore educative in the truest sense of the word. I would highly recommend this event to the entire Jewish and Christian communities, but particularly to the younger generation, as a different, but very meaningful way, to remember and to learn from the catastrophe of Kristallnacht.

Rabbi Moshe Y Bernstein, Committee Member CCJWA

International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) – Sydney Conference 2007

It was a great privilege to be able to attend the majority of the annual conference of the ICCJ, held in Sydney, 8-11 July. The theme was “Healing a Broken Earth — The Faiths Working Together”, with the focus being on the three monotheistic faiths and on indigenous people and their culture. There had been strong encouragement to young people to attend the conference, and this was highly successful. Out of 165 delegates overall, there were 30–40 youth, including Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Our local council was holding an event on the afternoon of Sun 8 July — Rabbi Jonathan Magonet’s excellent lecture on the topic “Who Owns Abraham?” — and consequently I could not be in Sydney until early afternoon on Monday 9th. However I was in time to join other delegates at lunch before we boarded buses for visits to three institutions. The first was Sydney Jewish Museum, where we were given an introductory presentation

concerning the Shoah, before being divided into smaller groups for guided tours. The entire visit was a most sobering experience. The next venue was The Great Synagogue, where Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence led us through a brilliant PowerPoint presentation, and answered our questions, and we had a brief opportunity to look around. The final venue was the magnificent St Mary’s Cathedral.

The activity for the evening was focused on “Spirituality and land in Aboriginal culture”. Delegates were split into two groups, and for the first part of the session, ours was given a tutorial on indigenous plants and their uses. After swapping over with the other group, we were invited to paint small, smooth stones with bright colours, having first been offered some insights on motifs used in indigenous art.

Since I had missed the morning session this was a light day for me. However, the program over the following two days was very dense, and it would be impossible to encapsulate the experience in a brief report. I will therefore confine my reflections to sessions or activities I regarded as highlights.

The first of these was the plenary session on Tuesday morning, for which the theme was “What can religion contribute to healing in the Middle East context?” What made this session particularly remarkable was that in the absence of the Muslim member of the panel, his place was filled at short notice by Rehanna Ali, who spoke very competently on the topic.

After two plenary sessions on Tuesday morning there was a choice of workshops, and I attended Rev Dr Franklin Sherman’s, which was titled “Repentance and Reconciliation — How one denomination has come to terms with its anti-Judaic heritage; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its repudiation of Luther’s anti-Jewish views”. The background to Dr Sherman’s involvement is that as editor of Vol. IV of *Christian in Society*, published in 1971, he was able to insist that an appropriate statement was included, emphasising that the Lutheran Church totally rejects the anti-Judaic attitudes and violent recommendations voiced in Vol. 47 of Luther’s works. Continuing work on this issue led to the publication by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) of some important documents: “Declaration to the Jewish Community” in 1994, and “Guidelines for Lutheran–Jewish Relations” in 1998. As well as speaking to these documents, Dr Sherman introduced workshop participants to “Talking Points” — material for group study and discussion on this topic and on others relevant to Christian–Jewish relations.

[To view all the relevant materials see:
www.elca.org/ecumenical/interreligious/jewish/talkingpoints/index]

At the end of the workshop the moderator, Bishop Louis del Castillo, commented on the need for equivalent revisions of anti-Judaic statements made by Christians dating back to St John Chrysostom, to separate ourselves from “questionable assertions of our predecessors”. One of the participants suggested this also needed to be done in reverse, mentioning her dismay about items displayed at the Sydney Jewish Museum, depicting Christian antisemitic behaviour. She felt there should be indications that things had *changed* in the church. A rabbi in attendance at the workshop assured the group that elsewhere in the Museum there *are* displays showing that things have changed.

My favourite time-slot on Tuesday afternoon was a presentation entitled, “The Interfaith Voice of Women”, with Josie Lacey as the main speaker. The session was an inspiring exposition on the

Women’s Interfaith Network, launched in 2001. The principles of the group, in summary form, are:

- Respect for other religions;
- Encouragement of mutual understanding;
- Rejection of all proselytizing;
- Working to eliminate religious prejudice and discrimination;
- Encouragement of joint advocacy to address common social concerns;
- Spreading the ideal of harmony between religions.

[For more information see:
<http://www.fecca.org.au/Interfaith/index.html>]

On Wednesday the theme for the first plenary session was “The Australian Story”, covering early settlement, the White Australia policy, post war immigration, and treatment of Aborigines. The first speaker of the panel was the Hon. Linda Burney MP, a high-profile indigenous leader, and former Director General of the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Linda is the first Aboriginal to be elected to the State parliament. She gave a most moving address, commencing with some advice about

nomenclature — that the appropriate term for Aborigines is “the first people of the land”. She went on to state that the greatest achievement of her people was their survival. Her own kin group, from the southwest of Sydney, had borne the brunt of colonisation, with three-quarters having been killed as a result of poisoned waterholes. She spoke about the significance of Aboriginal stories, asserting that they are not myths, but legends, and that they are as real as Bible stories. She concluded by emphasising that Aboriginality entails responsibility to country, family and kin, and is about connectedness to each other and to the land.

The first workshop I selected on Wednesday morning was on the topic “Islamophobia: Its Problems and Solutions”. Rehanna Ali was one of the speakers, and as previously, I found her most engaging. She is of Fijian, Indian and Dutch extraction, has a law degree, and specialises in British common law and Sharia law. Her presentation was based on an acrostic which she titled “The Infidel Syndrome”.

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Rehanna spoke about the word in each of the columns, one by one; e.g. in regard to NEWS, she observed that our information comes primarily from the media, and concerning FOREIGN, that there is a presumption that we care more about white people than brown. She concluded by saying that for Muslims, Islam is not a “problem”; it is a “solution”; and suggested that our situation represents not a *clash* of civilisations, but rather a *melding*.

The topic of the second workshop I attended that morning was “Minority/majority relations — how does mainstream religion talk to others?” Of the three speakers, the one I found most engaging was Jim Mein, Moderator of the Uniting Church Synod in NSW. In his introductory remarks, he described how despite being in a potentially influential position, he had not achieved much in the field of interfaith dialogue during the early part of his term of office. The turning point came in December 2005, when, at the time of the Cronulla riot, the Uniting Church hall at Auburn had burnt down. (For the benefit of overseas visitors, he explained the Cronulla situation as a “turf war” between Lebanese and white Anglo-Saxons over the beach.) Following the fire, a media conference was held outside the burnt hall. The inclination of the gathered journalists was to assume a connection between this event and the Cronulla situation, despite the fact that the cause of the blaze had not been determined (and in July 2007 remained unknown). However, the Islamic and Uniting Church leaders resisted making any such link. As a testimony to the media, in a gesture of solidarity and peace, they placed their hands one on top of the other to build a symbolic pillar, and then together held a march. Jim went on to speak of the activities of the Abrahamic Faiths Conference, mentioning in particular their encouragement for Christians to visit mosques, especially the Auburn Mosque, and for Muslims to visit local churches. Working together they have become community leaders.

In the afternoon, delegates were able to visit either the La Perouse Aboriginal Catholic Centre or the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque. I was in the latter group, and this tour was a major highlight. Our guide was a beautiful young Muslim woman who with the utmost graciousness described for the group the functions of the various areas of the Mosque, patiently answering delegates’ questions. After removing our footwear, we were invited into the mosque, and sat on the carpeted floor while she provided further insights on Muslim faith and practices. We were also permitted to walk freely

about the interior and to take photographs as we wished. This visit was a wonderful experience, which appeared to be as enriching and enlightening for others as it was for me.

The closing event of the conference was a gala dinner held at Le Montage Function Centre, Leichhardt. During the evening, representatives of the group of young delegates announced the establishment of YALCA — Young Abrahamic Leadership Council of Australasia [<http://yalca.org>]. Other high points were Prof. John Pawlikowski’s reflection on the Conference, and a fine address by Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy. This was a most enjoyable gathering, and a fitting conclusion to a superb conference.

Dr Mary J. Marshall, Secretary CCJWA

News – Home and Abroad

[News articles by courtesy of Bridges for Peace, Jerusalem and Israel Today and have been condensed.]

...13 June 2007, World Jewish Congress...

Indonesia’s former president Abdurrahman Wahid has denounced Iran’s leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for calling the Holocaust a myth. Wahid chaired a conference held on the resort island of Bali which was attended by rabbis, Holocaust survivors and Muslim leaders to promote tolerance and reaffirm the horror of the Jewish Holocaust. Wahid is a moderate Islamic leader known to take courageous positions in Indonesia. He has been a member of the Shimon Peres Peace Institute in Tel Aviv since 1984 and has drawn fire for his support for direct trade relations between Indonesia and Israel.

...26 February 2007, Ynetnews.com...

The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 was an “almost barbaric” act, Spain’s Consul General, Francisco Jose Viqueira said during an event held in the city of Chicago, marking 21 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Spain. Viqueira described at length the expulsion of the Jews from the country in the 15th century and echoed King Juan Carlos’s apology to the Jewish people for the suffering they had endured. According to the consul, the expulsion was Spain’s greatest political and historical mistake, since the Jews and their culture were an integral part of the country. The special event entitled, ‘Shephardic Flamenco’, included a dance show by renowned Israeli flamenco dancers, Ella Weich and Shoshi Yisraeli and was held at the Museum of Modern Art. The show was the culmination of the sixth Flamenco Festival in the city, sponsored by the Cervantes Institute.

...March 2007, Israel Today, from an article by Sara Fischer...

With the observance of international Holocaust Memorial Day came a timely nomination for the title of "Righteous Gentile" – the first Arab candidate ever. Robert Satloff, director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, requested that the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem consider Khaled Abd al-Wahab of Tunis for the honor. When Abd al-Wahab overheard a German officer say he planned to rape a Jewish woman in his village one night, he hid the Jewish family on his farm for six weeks until the end of the German occupation in Tunisia. A 73-year-old Jewish woman who settled in Los Angeles confirmed the story. Anny Boukris described how Abd al-Wahab rescued her and 24 relatives and hid them on his farm until the end of the war. The Yad Vashem commission, which grants the honor of Righteous Gentile is considering approval of Abd al-Wahab, who died 10 years ago.

...15 April 2007, Ynetnews.com, from an article by Vered Luvatch...

The number of antisemitic acts around the world, especially in Europe, registered a large increase during 2006. According to a report compiled by the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism in Tel Aviv University together with the World Jewish Congress, 590 acts of vandalism and violence were committed during 2006 against Jewish people, property, and institutes such as synagogues and cemeteries. The number of physical attacks against Jews, including children and adolescents, doubled compared to 2005. A total of 324 violent incidents was registered in Europe, higher than in other regions of the world. The highest number of anti-Semitic acts committed in the United Kingdom in the last 20 years was registered. Germany remained steady but high, holding the record for desecrating cemeteries and Holocaust-memorial monuments.

...7 May 2007, World Jewish Congress...

The French Jewish umbrella organisation CRIF has hailed the election of Nicolas Sarkozy as the new president of France as a positive sign. The former interior minister is seen by the Jewish organisation as a friend to Israel and an important figure in the fight against anti-Semitism. CRIF president, Roger Cukierman said in a letter of congratulations to Sarkozy: "Your position statements during the electoral campaign carry much hope for a France that needs to be reconciled with itself. I was touched by what you said, and I understand that you intend to be a standard bearer of the French values

we so cherish, those of a republic that allows each of its citizens to find his and her place in a framework of values that respect every individual and leave no room for intolerance, racism, and anti-Semitism."

...19 June 2007, Ynetnews.com, from an article by Tama Sela...

Jewish and Christian students in Israel will study texts from the Bible and the New Testament together, visit synagogues and churches, and get to know each other through a variety of joint activities, according to a new curriculum plan of five Israeli Jewish schools and five Christian educational institutions. The pilot program is expected to embrace Muslim schools in the future. The program in question, called Dialog, is the joint initiative of Tali and the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations. The Tali teachers understand that an encounter with the other causes you to sharpen your identity, and this is the foundation of dialog.

...27 June 2007, World Jewish Congress...

At a cost of \$65 million, a landmark museum in Warsaw is to be erected in a central Warsaw square next to a monument of Jews who resisted the Nazis during the 1943 ghetto uprising. The monument is to celebrate the history of Jewish life in Poland that flourished for 1,000 years before it was destroyed in the Holocaust. President Lech Kaczynski was reported as saying that, "the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is a great chance to...break the lack of knowledge about one another and forge deeper reconciliation between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles as they remember their common history." The Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Meir Lau, whose parents hail from Poland, stressed the museum's importance in conveying the rich contribution of Poland's Jews for those too young to remember. Officials hope that the museum will become a cultural landmark to match Jerusalem's Yad Vashem, Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Berlin's Jewish Museum.

The CCJWA newsletter is produced by the Executive Committee and is principally distributed to CCJWA members. Copies are also made available to congregations of the five faith communities who directly support our work. We welcome submissions, feedback and subscription requests. Contact details are provided below.

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