

CCJWA Seminar, Tuesday, 31 July 2018, St David's Parish Hall Applecross

Religious communities often experience difficulties. A recent example of this was in a town in USA:

The Presbyterian church there called a meeting to discuss what to do about their squirrel infestation. After much prayer and consideration, they concluded the squirrels were predestined to be there, and the church shouldn't interfere with God's will.

At the Baptist church the squirrels had taken an interest in the baptistery. The deacons met and decided to put a water-slide on the baptistery and let the squirrels drown themselves. The squirrels liked the slide and unfortunately knew instinctively how to swim, so that the following week, twice as many squirrels showed up.

The Lutheran church decided that they were not in a position to harm any of God's creatures, so they humanely trapped their squirrels and set them free near the Baptist church. Two weeks later the squirrels were back when the Baptists took down the water-slide.

But the Catholic church came up with a very creative strategy! They baptized all the squirrels and made them members of the church. Now they only see them at Christmas and Easter.

Not much was heard from the Jewish synagogue; they took the first squirrel and circumcised him. They haven't seen a squirrel since.

1 A brief answer

My take on the topic "**Why a Council of Christians and Jews?**" begins 3800 years ago with the birth of Abraham or perhaps more specifically 3700 years ago with the birth of Isaac. Judaism and Christianity are heirs to the heritage

of Monotheism that began with Abraham and Isaac. Dialogue between Jews and Christians on matters of faith, in a world where acceptance of faith is increasingly in question, should make good sense. And that could be my first answer.

2 A more recent perspective

Why a Council of Christians and Jews here in WA? The tradition of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews in Western Australia goes back a long way. The first Rabbi of the Perth Hebrew Congregation, David Freedman, took up his post at the age of 25 in 1897. For the next 40 years he was heavily involved in the religious, cultural, sporting and civic aspects of Perth. He forged close personal links with Perth's Anglican Bishop Riley and with Catholic Bishop Clune. This tradition of interfaith cooperation has been carried on by Freedman's successors.

The recent history of the current Council of Christians and Jews of WA began in 1993. It was then that the Rev Dr Rowan Strong took the initiative to setup a working party to explore the possibility of forming such a council. At this stage it is appropriate that I pass on to this meeting apologies from Rowan, whose other responsibilities prevent him from being here.

It is a tribute to Dr Strong's vision and commitment that the council was launched in September, 1995 by the then Governor, Major-General Michael Jeffery. As we can see, it is still going "strong" 25 years later.

In 1993 Dr Strong invited Rabbi Freilich, the then Chief Rabbi of the Perth Hebrew Congregation to nominate a person to represent the orthodox Jews of Perth. Rabbi Freilich asked me to fill that role.

3 My more current answer

As a Jew I recognise the importance of interfaith dialogue. Jews have always been a tiny but significant portion of the world's population. In a similar way, Israel is now a tiny but significant nation among the many nations of the world. But it is always source of controversy. This brings me to my second answer, Antisemitism.

I was born and grew up in Perth. My education and subsequent vocation in the Education Department of Western Australia had given me a broad but somewhat superficial understanding of the religious communities of Perth. Even though my education was almost entirely in secular institutions, and I was very small as a schoolboy, I can't recall being the recipient of any anti-Semitic action. But antisemitism is an active scourge in this world.

I don't understand antisemitism. I don't understand how otherwise rational and sensible people can have such anti-Semitic attitudes. What I can understand is that support for Jews from non-Jews is a powerful weapon in the fight against antisemitism. And that's my main reason for supporting CCJWA.

Nathan (Norm) Hoffman
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