

Annual General Meeting 8 February 2015

CCJWA's AGM for 2014 was held at St David's Church Hall, the Anglican Parish of Applecross, with The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB, Archbishop of Perth, giving the keynote address. About 30 members and guests attended, undeterred by the severe heat, to hear Archbishop Costelloe reflect on *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, on the 50th anniversary of its promulgation by the Vatican Council.

The business meeting began with the chairperson Associate Professor Glenn Morrison giving the annual report, followed by Dr Ralph Hickling reading the treasurer's report, and the election of the executive committee, then concluded with the announcement of the events planned for 2015.

Archbishop Costelloe began his address by thanking the CCJWA for their invitation, stating he hoped his presence could be a sign of the growing friendship between the Council and the Western Australian Catholic community he represents. He apologised ahead for preparing something that might resemble a lecture, due to habit (formerly lecturing at The University of Notre Dame Australia and the Catholic Theological College in Melbourne), when his aim was simply to share ideas. He also apologised for any lack of sensitivity he might show with respect to dialogue-friendly phrases and language, due to inexperience in this area – and happily invited corrections.

Archbishop Costelloe then drew to our attention the Catholic Church's 50th anniversary of Vatican Council II, and recalled how *Nostra Aetate* was fostered by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI in visiting the Holy Land and the Chief Synagogue in Rome during their pontificates. He also pointed to the history of friendship between Pope Francis and Rabbi Abraham Skorka of Buenos Aires. In one step of progress in 1986, Pope John Paul II described persons of Jewish faith as "our elder brother in the faith of Abraham". Later, Benedict XVI replaced "elder brother" with "our fathers in the faith of Abraham" to avoid any allusion to Jacob the younger brother being favoured over Esau the rejected older brother. Sadly, over the course of history, Catholics and Christians in general haven't always treated our older brother as we should have. As younger brother, or son, we've behaved with arrogance, anger, suspicion and resentment – characteristic of an immature younger person. This, just like in any family, led to terrible consequences in history. *Nostra Aetate*, with the full authority of the Catholic Church, called for a change, reminding us that "We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any [person], created ... in the image of God."

Archbishop Costelloe then shared something of his own understanding of Genesis – the first book of the Torah, or the 'First Testament' – about being "created in the image of God." He conceded that his knowledge fell short of the long history of Jewish reflection on this text, and was conscious that his ideas were forged in a Western philosophical context. Nevertheless, he would try to convey something from his own theological tradition to revisit, stimulate, challenge, and rejoice in our shared inheritance. Reading Genesis 1:26–28, where God said "... 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' ... and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it ...'," Archbishop Costelloe remarked that in spite of the Church's long reflection and interpretation on this phrase, it was good to revisit it with fresh eyes. He observed, as this verse is numbered 26, we know 25 verses precede it. If a child were asked what the preceding verses were about, they might answer: about a God who makes things. However, only in verse 26 do we read that something is created in God's image and likeness. Because this verse culminates a long presentation about "God as a creating, a life-giving God," it is possible to suggest that humans fulfil their calling and destiny as the "image of God" when they give life, when they nurture it, when they are at its service. This is the most God-like we can do. To do the opposite is to repudiate God's created purpose in the most fundamental way.

In Genesis 2, the second and earthier Creation presentation, God states that “it is not good that man should be alone.” Archbishop Costelloe noted that the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib leads to why a man leaves his father and mother – to be fruitful, to be life-giving. This results in the birth of Cain, which mirrors God’s creativity. Only by the man and woman encountering each other and entering into relationship, do they begin to be the images of God that they were created to be. There is a profound truth here about how to be truly human. It tells us that we’re made for communion, for inter-relation – not to be alone or to live independently and for ourselves. This is why marriage, family, and community, matters, and why we should be responsive to other faith groups. We are inextricably woven together as a human family. “The good of one is the good of all.” To be in the image and likeness of God, the archbishop concluded, is to be faithful to all that God presents to us, to “give expression to God’s creative, life-giving presence in the world through our own life-giving and creative lives.”

A question time was then introduced by Associate Professor Glenn Morrison, who brought to mind the mystery of God. The first question related to the accessibility of the document *Nostra Aetate*. This short and straightforward document, the archbishop informed, was readily accessible on the internet. Responding to Assoc. Professor Morrison, he observed that it was helpful to reflect on God’s mystery by considering how little we know of the universe and how much greater God is than this; and how we cannot narrow God down to Catholic Christian ideas. We need to be more open to new things God wants to do for us.

A second question was initiated with the comment that when speaking of Genesis, it was hard not to think of a place where the lion lies down with the lamb. However, how do we get up from lying down together? All persons are blessed with the divine image; how do we as Christians and Jews manifest the divine image? The archbishop concurred, turning to Isaiah 2:3–4, where a common dream is to “beat our swords into ploughshares,” however, we don’t seem to be getting there. He pointed to the Pelagian heresy which believes we can reach this on our own, forgetting our need to call on, and depend on, God. Both Jews and Christians have a sense of the nearness of God – we should open ourselves to God who walks with us.

A question arose about what our response to ISIS should be. Confessing he didn’t know much about this topic, Archbishop Costelloe nevertheless saw that we need to return to the deep truths of our faith traditions, to be faithful to the path that God has set before us. He asserted that there is no room in our own communities for us to harbour such feelings in our every day frictions; here we should operate by the “turn the other cheek” principle.

Another question asked how to deal with a neighbour’s aggression towards us. What might a specifically Christian-Jewish relationship model look like? The archbishop responded with the Zacchaeus story from the New Testament (Lk 19:1–10). Jesus sets an example for responding to anyone who is marginalised. Zacchaeus, a small man, could be seen as being ‘small’ in more than one sense. ‘Small’ connotes that we are less than magnanimous or thoughtful of others. Jesus’ response “I am coming to your house for dinner” portrayed a quality of relationship that led to a change in Zacchaeus’ immediate relationships, resulting in a chain-reaction of good responses righting previous wrongs.

At the conclusion of questions, the Reverend Marie Wilson gave a vote of thanks, and presented the Archbishop with a gift. The meeting celebrated with refreshments and fellowship.

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