

Exploring God in Judaism and Christianity

3 September 2009

Well over 100 attended an engaging evening organised by the Council of Christians and Jews, in the Anglican Parish of Applecross on 3 September. Guest speakers for the seminar were Rabbi Dovid Freilich and Archbishop Roger Herft, both Honorary Presidents of the Council. In his introduction, CCJWA Chairperson, the Reverend Associate Professor Rowan Strong, explained that while the group's usual focus is the commonality of the two Faiths, it would on this occasion be upon their different perspectives on God.

Rabbi Freilich argued that, for a Jew, knowledge of God is more deed than creed: "The hands fashion the heart's knowledge about God". One only knows God by acting in a godly manner — with compassion, mercy, kindness. Repeatedly, he stressed that God has no form, and no gender, but is sought by deed, prayer and experience.

His address revolved around the comparison: As the soul is to the body, so God is to the world. Each of us is a world in him/herself and God is the soul to each of our worlds.

God is in whatever heart, whatever event, to which people give "him" entry, and "his" concern is not so much that we worship "him" but that we act in godly manner toward each other.

Archbishop Herft grounded his presentation in the earthiness of Australian indigenous people: All people share the common earth, a holy ground, and it is from this ground that thoughts of God first come.

Jesus is grounded in being a Jew during the time of Roman tyrannical occupation. He chose the path of mercy, compassion, of radical inclusiveness, as seen by his choice of companions, those he healed and taught, and his use of the Sabbath. His messianic purpose was to make all the earth holy. This led to the scandal, the foolishness, of the cross.

Archbishop Herft emphasised that the Trinity is not a mathematical formula. God is not three, but one — a communion of self-giving in himself and in his creation.

The path of self-giving leads to suffering, but the resurrection of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, transforms the suffering community into a joyful community. To enter the presence of this God is to enter a life of love. We travel into transformation in fear and trembling, walking this earth as sacred ground.

In the question time after refreshments, our differences were sometimes accentuated, but conversely, the commonality of the two Faiths was affirmed. Rowan Strong captured this in his closing words: "Our God is one and expects us to celebrate life with each other, despite our differences."

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