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Chairperson's Editorial

Dear Members

As this letter to you for our annual newsletter was being written, the Israeli military response to the eight years of Hamas rocket attacks on its citizens was being reported on our news bulletins. In many ways it is the familiar story of western media. The reports highlight the deaths of Palestinian children (itself an appalling tragedy) and only later, or in passing, get to the fact that Hamas has been attacking Israel for years now. These rocket attacks included at least one where the rocket landed in the playground of a kindergarten — fortunately no Israeli children were there at the time. The Middle East conflict is complex and convoluted, but no state can allow its citizens to live under rocket attacks without defending them. This may seem to be a matter of politics, but Israel is constantly identified in the media as a Jewish state, an identity precious to Israel itself. So it is also a matter of religion, and in that area of human life the western media are all too often guilty of a bias, not just against Israel, but against Judaism and Christianity also.

Given the predominance of Christianity in the West over the past centuries, it is a new experience for Christianity to experience what Israel and Jews have had to deal with for generations — anti-religious bias. Take for instance our public broadcasting channels on television over this past Christmas. There were few programs devoted to Christianity on Christmas Day, and little in the week leading up to it. Overall, Christianity has been increasingly marginalised in the mainstream public media and has long since disappeared almost from the commercial media. For example, the two long-running shows devoted to Christian music — 'Songs of Praise' on ABC TV and 'For the God who Sings' on ABC radio — are now at times when virtually no one watches or listens, unless you happen to be up at 10:30pm on Sundays or at 4:00am in the morning!

It is a new common experience for Christians and Jews — their marginalisation or distortion on western media. It is clear to me that the public media are not neutral in respect of religion, particularly in relation to Judaism and Christianity, but in fact have an antagonistic or secularist agenda towards these two faiths which needs to be challenged in Australia. Judaism and Christianity have as much claim to the respect and informed interest of Australian society and its media outlets as any other form of religion or non-religious belief.

For this reason, this Christmas season has been for me another wake-up call about the importance of what we do in this Council. With our work and commitment to religious dialogue, respect, and mutual engagement between Christians and Jews, we remind our members and friends that these religions are not just the worldview of the violent, the stupid, or the fanatical. Rather, they have a rich and satisfying way of life and intellectual understanding that flies in the face of the secularist agenda of much of our contemporary western culture.

Your membership enables the Council of Christians and Jews in Western Australia to be one of the numerous voices for the authenticity of a religious way of life in Australia. It is as necessary as it ever was to witness against anti-Semitism, but we also now need to stand against an aggressive anti-religious secularism in the West that is particularly virulent or dismissive of the Judeo-Christian underpinning of western culture. Keep up the good work everyone and let us have an interesting, relevant, and well-supported program of work in 2009.

Associate Professor Rowan Strong
Chairperson

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2008 Kristallnacht Commemoration



Dr Colin Skilkin, Dr Mary J. Marshall, Mr Ken Arkwright OAM, Rabbi Moshe Berstein

Prior to the commencement of the formal program there was a display of projections of scenes from Kristallnacht and its aftermath, accompanied by suitable music.

In an introductory address, the Reverend Ken Williams, Moderator of the Uniting Church in Western Australia, spoke of the strength of interfaith dialogue. He thought that seventy years after the dreadful events of 1938, another generation could keep the candle alight and move to a new understanding.

Choristers from Carmel School gave an emotive rendition of the song “Shema” by Bella (Rotenberg) Levitan and Abie Rotenberg; and students of All Saints’ College provided an introduction to Muriel Rukeyse’s “To be a Jew in the Twentieth Century” before reciting the poem. Against a background of appropriate music, students from Sacred Heart College presented readings from Lamentations and Isaiah, dramatised with graceful liturgical movement.

The principal address was given by Kenneth Arkwright OAM, Vice-Chairperson of the Council of Christians and Jews, Western Australia. Ken emphasised, that during the sorry history which started in 1914 and continued until 1945, there was a conspicuous opportunity presented to the “World Powers” to take firm action which could have obviated the horrors of World War II. This moment was Kristallnacht, 9 November 1938! It was on this night that the world became aware of the extremes to which the Nazi Regime could descend, to further its evil plans and appalling ideology.

Ken, who was then aged ten years, shared his personal memories of that dreadful time, as from the following morning, 10 November 1938. On the way to school he passed the chocolate shop where he had entered many times before, completely shattered. Chocolates, mixed with glass, were strewn on to the road. A policeman, who was standing nearby, invited Ken to help himself to these chocolates, but warned him to be careful of the glass! What a find for a 10 year-old boy to have an unlimited amount of chocolates to eat!

He arrived at school to find that it was closed and he was told to go home. A non-Jewish friend of the family suggested to Ken’s parents that they go into the forest and stay there for a day. This they did, although at first Ken’s father was not so keen to do so. On hindsight they were grateful to the friend for his wise counsel.

After spending time in a Labour Camp, Ken was marched some 400 kilometres in a temperature of minus 20 degrees, to the Concentration Camp of Gross-Rosen, where he spent a considerable amount of time. His food consisted of one meal a day, a bowl of insipid-looking liquid and a piece of bread about half the size of the palm of one’s hand. What to do with this small piece of bread? Should it be eaten in one mouthful, or broken in half and saved for the evening? What a decision to make when one is starving for lack of food.

He escaped from Gross-Rosen and lived with a non-Jewish peasant family under a false identity, to conceal that he was Jewish.

Churches and synagogues, he told us, are places where people all too often express their separation from others. A ballroom is a place where people mix, embrace, and face each other, discovering for themselves a fellow human being. Ken remembered that it was in the ballroom in his home town where Jews had to pray together after their synagogues had been destroyed, where they were assembled by the Nazis to be deported to Concentration Camps where their fate was determined, and as Jews they had to learn that any internal differences between them must be put aside. They must remember first and foremost that they had something in common — they were all Jews.

So it was serendipitous, that the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht should be remembered in a ballroom. Ken thanked the Governor for his generosity in opening the ballroom-part of his home for this thought-provoking occasion.

The event gave an opportunity to all present to adopt the mind-set of youth, determined to look to the future and to leave behind, though not to forget, the nightmares of the past.

Following the address, two students of Wanneroo Senior High School recited extracts from the play “I Never Saw Another Butterfly” by Celeste Raspanti.

Prayers were then offered; a Jewish prayer read by Rabbi Moshe Bernstein followed by a Christian prayer read by Judith Schneider. Silence was then observed for two minutes, while images were projected of burning synagogues and destruction of properties, finishing with a crash of broken glass. A confession of remembrance was then spoken by all, after which a short address was given by His Excellency. The Reverend Marie Wilson then gave an expression of thanks.

All then stood and recited this poem, which was found on the wall of a Cologne cellar where Jews had been hiding from the Nazis:

I believe,
I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining.
I believe in love, even when feeling it not.
I believe in God, even when God is silent.

Finally we were invited to greet our neighbours with the words “Shalom, Peace”, seeking out in particular those of the opposite faith.

Images now shown were expressive of hope, and included photographs of synagogues restored after their destruction during Kristallnacht, and of some which had remained unscathed in the pogrom. The initial music played was a recording of “Inscription of Hope”, a setting of the words from the Cologne cellar, composed by Z. Randall Stroepe, and sung by the choir Exordium — St Stephen’s School.

His Excellency remained for some time talking with the principal speakers, and groups of people continued to talk about the Commemoration. All attendees, whatever their background, agreed that this was a profoundly moving occasion.

Ralph Hickling, Committee Member CCJWA

Jewish–Christian Dialogue: All Said and Done?



On Thursday, 16 October Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein addressed a CCJWA gathering of 40 members and visitors at the Temple David, responding to the question, “Jewish–Christian Dialogue: Has it all been said?” Warmly informal, he narrated experiences drawn from the conferences he had attended over the years in his capacity as the representative Jewish theologian to the World Council of Churches (WCC). Dr Goldstein, who was a rabbi of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue from 1970 following his ordination at Leo Baeck College, is Vice Chair of the European Board of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, member of the ICCJ’s executive board, and co-chair of the ICCJ’s Theology Committee.

As the Jewish representative at WCC conferences, Dr Goldstein discovered in these occasions of exchange that humour transcended faith; Christians told Jewish jokes, substituting Christian ‘punch lines’ for Jewish ones. He became aware of divides other than faith, and had the opportunity to observe the nature of these divisions.

Dr Goldstein then turned to the progress made through “Nostra Aetate,” and “Dabru Emet.” The strength of these documents was in their conceding theological differences while pronouncing the necessity for equality, that is, ‘we both use wine, but it symbolizes different things for us’. These signs of progress, however secure they seem, have been threatened by recent events. Not long ago, there was the possibility of an outbreak of anti-Semitism in relation to the depiction of Jews in the “The Passion of the Christ” (averted through the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ statement

that this portrayal was not an accurate representation of the gospel accounts of the Passion). Another problem involved the preparation of material based on a literalist reading of the New Testament, by people who did not appreciate the progress that had been made in Jewish-Christian relations. Consequently, fundamentalist literature was being disseminated to evangelical Christians who might never meet a Jew in their lives. Further, a brochure condemning the formation of the state of Israel (confusing the events of 1948 with those of 1967), caused a setback through misinformation. Moreover, the assumption made by some theologians that all Jewish persons were in favour of the Lebanese War, was asserted to be facile and insensitive.

Openness to criticism, Dr Goldstein suggested, needed to occur *within* our faiths, and interfaith dialogue on neutral ground was often the occasion for developing sensitivity to human sensibilities. It was encouraging that a recent reemergence of Protestant 'supersessionism' was condemned by Catholic Christians.

Dr Goldstein in conclusion quoted Rabbi Melchior: "What is spoken is political, but deep down it is first religious," adding that if we who are religious cannot speak about this, then, who can? He noted there was there a cyclic pattern in interfaith relations, and that we had to be constantly vigilant against anti-Semitism, not just by resolving difficulties, but by learning from each other.

Judith Schneider, Committee Member CCJWA

The Stories Our Parents Found Too Painful To Tell by Rafael Rajzner and Henry R Lew

On 12 October 2008, ABC TV's program, Compass aired the remarkable story of Rafael Rajzner and the rebirth of his original memoirs *The Annihilation of Bialystoker Jewry* published in Yiddish in 1948 – one of the earliest memoirs ever written.

Rafael Rajzner was one of only a handful of Jews who lived in Bialystok, Poland who survived the Nazis. Alive but alone, having lost everything but his mind, which by the end of the war was saturated with terrible memories, Rajzner began to write down the details of everything he had seen. In a notebook, over a period of many months, he compiled precise details of the atrocities he had witnessed – a series of detailed accounts including names and dates. He eventually moved to Melbourne, Australia, and it was here that Rafael Rajzner would fill in the blanks of other people's lives. Jews would gather at the Bialystok Centre, an old Italianate mansion in St Kilda, to listen to him recount the tragic events of that time and to learn about the fate of their families and friends.

Henry Lew was the first child born at the Bialystok Centre and he grew up knowing that 90% of his family had been murdered. It was not until Lew's father died at age 95 that he came across a signed copy of Rajzner's book while cleaning out his father's bookcase. He remembered how his father had extolled Rajzner for having been able to tell him how most of his family had perished and lamenting that the book had never been translated into English. It was then that Lew decided to have the book translated, which was to prove more difficult than imagined. To hire a single translator was too expensive, so Lew set about contacting 50 prominent Yiddish translators around the world asking them if they would perform a good deed and translate a portion of the book without commission. Lew subsequently divided the book into 333310-page sections – 22 translators agreed immediately and some of them subsequently offered to translate several sections. By April 2006, Lew had the entire book in English having relied almost "purely on the goodness of strangers". Once again, Rajzner's words have come to life and Lew has finally been able to read the book his own father found so painfully illuminating. To obtain a copy of *The Stories Our Parents Found Too Painful to Tell*, please email: harlew@blaze.net.au

Shelley Rush, Member CCJWA

(additional material sourced from the article, "Rajzner's List" by Fiona Harari published in The Australian, 8 March 2008)

The Problem of Representing God for 20th Century Christian and Jewish Artists

On 4 May 2008, Mr Simon Blond, Lecturer in Visual Culture and Art History, Curtin University, lectured on 20th Century Christian and Jewish Art. One of the primary aims of art has always been to represent the spiritual dimension of human experience. For Jewish artists faced with the ban on graven images, that

has been possible only by representing nature as a reflection of divine will. For the Christian artist, there has been a wealth of subject matter which is shown in the rich tradition of European painting. Since the late 19th Century however, it has been unfashionable for artists and intellectuals to confess to a belief in God and hence similar problems have been faced by both Jewish and



Christian artists. Artists then turned away from religion to new forms of spirituality, preferring totally abstract art which moved the viewer's feelings like a piece of music: a representation of the unrepresentable. Fresh interpretations of items of Christian faith such as the resurrection were depicted with new media, such as by Bill Viola in "The Crossing".