

## Report on Annual General Meeting for 2023

The Council's AGM for 2023 was held at the Mary Lockett Hall, Claremont, on 25 February 2024. Some 30 members and guests attended this memorable meeting; first, to hear the order of business (where newly appointed Chair, Trevor Creewel, gave his inaugural address conveying his hope for the new year, and where Dr Mary Marshall, Secretary, was invited to be an Honorary Life Member for her lengthy and devoted service to the Council), and second, to hear an address by invited guest speaker Aviva Freilich, Honorary Fellow UWA Law School and former rabbanit of Perth Hebrew Congregation. Freilich shone with precision and clarity.

### *Freilich's Address*

In her discussion on *Jews – Chosen for What?*, Freilich began with the point that being chosen was not something deserved (by being better than others) but, rather, meant being a recipient of a mission. Indeed, the idea that one people (Jews) are, or view themselves as morally or spiritually superior, is a repellent notion. Such a view, often imposed on Jews by others, would be very bad public relations on God's part!

### *Chosen-ness A Biblical Concept*

Asserting the notion of chosen-ness is drawn from the Bible (including the NT) and the Quran, Freilich cited Deuteronomy and Leviticus to show its true nature. The Jewish people are to be holy to God; they will prosper when they 'own' God as their God. Rather than chosen-ness reflecting a high status, it endowed Jews with a purpose: to be witness to a benevolent God, who values life, and doesn't demand child sacrifice, who rejects greed, envy, and violence, who envisions a Utopic future for Israel (peace instead of fighting), and who asks that the 613 *mitzvot* – given as an ethical system – be observed. In return, they will be rewarded with this God's presence. Our forebears at Sinai responded willingly: "We will do and we will hear."

### *Replacement Theology*

Freilich then traced the course of antisemitism through history to the modern day, noting a pervading myth: the perception that 'chosen-ness was a sign of Jewish arrogance'. This, she said, led to movements seeking to replace the Jews (and their role). Indeed, Christianity and Islam could only be viable if Jews were displaced from their position. They reasoned that worthier people needed to replace Jews – due to the Jews' resistance to conversion or, alternatively, due to their corrupting influence.

### *Antisemitism*

Freilich described a trajectory of antisemitism in an astounding variety of forms following the changing values of different eras. While The Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* came to acknowledge that God spoke firstly to the Jewish people, this was an isolated reprieve. She further noted: ironically, Jews do not view themselves as spiritually superior, and to that end do not proselytise. They see all persons as created in the image of God, and as descended from Adam, equal in the sight of God. Moreover, antisemitism rests on irrational notions: Jews are blamed simultaneously for over- and underreaching; sometimes they are seen as power hungry, as manipulative, at other times as subversive, as disloyal to the country in which they reside, or, insidiously, as genetically flawed.

*Present Day*

Since the October 7 massacre, antisemitism has taken new forms, such as: undiscerning support for the oppressed – without regard to facts, and precipitating anti-Zionism (Israel and Jews must be cancelled).

Observing that cures are the purview of Nobel Laureates, but that no cure for antisemitism has yet been found, Freilich praised CCJWA for engaging in open dialogue toward better understanding of this ill, caused by misinformation and ignorance. Hope for change has the final word.

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*Vice-Chairperson, CCJWA*