

*The Address delivered by the Chairman, the Lord Bishop of Manchester,
at the 2011 Annual General Meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews*

Ladies and gentleman, it is my privilege and pleasure to welcome you to the Annual General Meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews; and to express appreciation to you all, whether you are from Central London or far distant places, for taking the trouble to be here to support the well-being and good governance of CCJ. On behalf of us all, may I express gratitude to the President of The Board of Deputies of British Jews and to the Chief Executive for most kindly allowing us to use their excellent premises today. Earlier this year I had the honour of being invited as a chief guest to the banquet that concluded the celebrations of their 250th anniversary. Warm, gracious and generous words were said publicly on behalf of the Board about the contribution CCJ has made in building up good relations between the communities. May I respond publicly on this occasion by acknowledging with thankfulness the strong support we receive from The Board of Deputies, and congratulating them on their 250 years of distinguished service that has so enhanced the culture and public life of these isles.

After such a history, the 70th anniversary of CCJ seems modest – though its founding was ground-breaking. Ours was the first national inter-faith organisation and it has become the template for others. The idea was conceived at a lunch in Manchester in November 1941, and the inaugural meeting took place, without publicity, under the auspices of Chief Rabbi Hertz and Archbishop William Temple – the Council's co-founders – in March 1942. The public announcement of the by now firmly established CCJ was made during the News on the BBC's Home Service in that October. There will be various celebrations, for CCJ members and also for fund-raising, throughout the twelve month period between November this year and next October. We want to use this opportunity to further our significant bilateral aims, nationally and locally, to enlist new supporters from here and overseas, and if possible, set new targets for financial resources that will ensure a sustainable future.

People outside CCJ, and sometimes within it, ask: what does CCJ do? There are clear answers to that – so never let us hide our light under a bushel. We need to emphasise, far more than we do, that this is a unique organisation doing things no-one else is achieving. Let me give you some examples.

Higher Education. We know there are often problems on the campuses, with Jewish students facing anti-semitism particularly from certain Muslims. So we put resources into providing materials and advice to university chaplains, not only to inform them of these issues, but to enable them to deal with them firmly and wisely. This is achieved through the work of David Gifford, our excellent Chief Executive, through frequent and valued input from the visits and addresses of CCJ Trustee Malcolm Weisman, and through the unique electronic networking of chaplains through e-zine. And similarly we resource and engage with theological colleges training future Christian clergy. No-one else is doing this.

The Jewish and Christian “denominations”. I use that umbrella term to cover the different nuances of belief and practice that each of our faiths contain. CCJ, as I reported last year, has uniquely drawn together the leaders of the United Hebrew Congregations, the Reform Movement, the Liberal Jews, the Masorti and the Spanish-Portuguese. This year CCJ has engaged closely with other Christian denominations – such as the Methodists, who caused us all some problems. I took the new President of the Methodist Conference on my CCJ Study Tour to Israel and Palestine last January (co-sponsored by the Anglo-Israel Association and the Greenwood Trust), and at the 2011 Methodist Conference CCJ helped with what turned out to be a very successful Seder. We remain concerned about the Quakers and their Ecumenical Accompaniers to Israel and Palestine and what, in our view, is the unbalanced message they often convey. The Roman Catholics have been giving strong support led not only by the Archbishop of Westminster himself but also by the very positive views being put forward, for example, by Professor John McDaid from Heythrop College. CCJ is the only organisation in the field with such access to leaders of denominations. Next year we need to include the Black Churches. But of course, in all these connections, the art is to use the access gained to further our aims.

The CCJ Branches. CCJ is the only inter-faith body in the UK with a cross-country branch base - from Scotland to Cardiff, Belfast to Bournemouth. It would be invidious for me to highlight some of the excellent programmes that many branches have put on this last year. But it is the branches that are our life-blood; and whilst some are declining others are growing. It is those growing ones whose good ideas, tried and tested, need to be shared to encourage others. In the coming year we hope to facilitate more sharing of what branches are achieving - through the Bridging Branches newsletter, a what-works consultation for branch representatives, and through the increasingly important networking that new media offers.

The London Breakfast Seminars are organised by Trustee Zaki Cooper and are a great success. I had the privilege of chairing an excellent one last month at the BBC when our speakers were the Chief Rabbi and the Archbishop of Westminster. These seminars are ways in which CCJ uniquely gives a public platform for exploring the ethics and ways of our Judaeo-Christian culture and its potential for the good of 21st century society. Incidentally, to further that agenda we re-launched this autumn CCJ's All-Party Parliamentary Group (that had been in abeyance for several years) at a splendid occasion in the Lord Speaker's Rooms at Westminster

The health of an organisation like CCJ depends, in addition to local activities and special projects, on *good governance* at the centre. We are currently blessed with Trustees who are supportive, committed, and enthusiastic. As always, our Presidents give firm backing and involvement; and among our Vice-Presidents we very much benefit from the energy, experience and wisdom of Dr Lionel Kopelowitz. CCJ is also fortunate in its Vice-Chairmen of Trustees – Maurice Ostro whose huge commitment and creativity has been of untold value, enabling us, through the various projects and ventures he encourages and supports, to punch above our weight. That we are able to do so, on what is an extraordinarily small financial base, is in no small measure thanks to Christopher Moran

whose great dedication, rigorous oversight, and gifting of Michael Cutting to sort out the accounts, has enabled CCJ to be in such good health as it nears its 70th birthday.

I want to express appreciation also to *our staff* at our new headquarters in Godliman Street for all their work; and, among them of course, and most especially, our Chief Executive David Gifford. Somehow he manages to be the fund raiser whom we can not afford and the inspirer and deliverer we can not do without. His intellectual grasp of the issues that underlie the complex relations between our faiths, his sensitivity over dealing with them and his astute ambassadorial skills in representing our bilateral purposes beyond our own boundaries, have gained him widespread and well-deserved respect. This summer he was ordained in the Church of England. For that, and much else David, we congratulate you.

Those present at last year's AGM may remember my mention of the newly restored *Advisory Board*. At that time it had met only briefly. So I am pleased to report significant progress. Its purpose is to operate as a think-tank and, as appropriate and with the agreement of the Trustees, set up such bodies as may be deemed suitable for the proper furtherance of CCJ's aims. First, a *Theological Group* has been formed, led by Rabbi Tony Bayfield and including a range of Jewish and Christian members. It seeks to re-engage with the theological dialogue that was part of CCJ's remit some time ago, but which appears to have slipped off the agenda. Considerable wisdom and sensitivity will need to be exercised if this group, now meeting, is to be worthwhile. Theology is not an easy matter for us to engage in together, but it is an important one. My hope is that the group will also note some of the other interesting conversations taking place – such as Professor Irene Lancaster's excellent non-academic group that aims to promote intelligent understanding between our faiths, and Rabbi Reuvin Silverman's work with Oxford University and the Archbishop of Canterbury on the sometimes vexed issue of the Church's approach to mission.

Second, the Advisory Group, is giving imminent birth to a *Communications Group*, aided by Michael Wakelin, formerly Head of Religion and Ethics at the BBC, who has been with us on the staff and whom, sadly we are losing (though hopefully not entirely from this group to which he brings obvious expertise). The redesigned website and a whole host of ideas to keep CCJ at the forefront of technological advance within the communications sphere will promote not only our programmes but also hopefully our fundraising.

There are just two more things I wish to mention. One is about *our bilateral being*. Christians in CCJ are concerned about the rise of anti-semitism in Europe and its continuing appearance in this country – and we want to do all we can on behalf of, and with, our Jewish friends to quench that evil. But I ask our Jewish friends to see support for us Christians as also part of the authentic CCJ agenda. There is a Christian diaspora spread across the world. The persecution of Christians over the past 100 years has grown so much that during that time more Christians have been martyred for faith than in all the previous centuries of Christianity put together. We are of course very conscious of the grave situation facing our brother and sister Christians in the Middle East. This led the

Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster to call a conference in the summer to which representatives of CCJ were invited. We had worries that Israel might unfairly be represented. That seems not to have been so. The truth is that we are terribly anxious about the future of Christianity in Iraq, Iran, Egypt and so on. What also saddens us is the prospect of sites that mark key moments in the Christian story becoming bereft of local worshippers. Being a bilateral organisation means giving each other the time and space to learn from one another, about what things deep down really matter and why; and about what things threaten both of our faiths, giving us common concerns – be they about countering new atheism or facing another missionary faith. In the next 70 years, for several reasons, Jews and Christians will need to come together side by side even more.

The other, and brighter, matter is that during our 70th anniversary celebrations, *the International Conference of Christians and Jews* will hold its next meeting in July in this country. It will take place in Manchester and is being hosted by the local CCJ under the auspices of David Arnold and Canon Steve Williams. This will be a prestigious occasion, addressing multi-culture and social responsibility. We wish Manchester CCJ well as they prepare for that important event.

Ladies and gentleman, we have a memorable year ahead. Much is happening, but in these difficult economic times our finances are under much pressure. So it is important that we pray hard, and do all we can to keep up our encouraging momentum.

When I was a young boy I was given an autograph book for my birthday. One of my teachers wrote in it some words by an American Christian from an earlier generation. Ever since, these words have inspired me. They are by Oliver Wendell Holmes:

“I find the great thing in this life is not so much where we are but in what direction we are moving. To reach the port of heaven we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it. But we must sail and not drift nor lie at anchor.”

Let us make sure we keep CCJ strongly sailing.

The Right Reverend Nigel McCulloch
London *11 October 2011*