

CCJ - COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

The enormity and horror of the Holocaust shocked the civilized world. Christians were taken aback and repelled by its barbarity and inhumanity, and some felt compelled to recognize and confront the limitations and inaccuracies of Christian teaching. In the UK, during the inter-war years, James Parkes was a lone Christian voice warning about the dangers of the centuries-old Christian tradition of anti-Judaism and the anti-Semitism, persecution, injustice, hatred and violence it had spawned. In 1934 he published "*The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*". During the war, news began to emerge of the incomprehensible, inhumane horrors perpetrated by the Nazis against entire Jewish communities in occupied Europe; this was a terrible and tragic vindication of Parkes' earlier warnings.

These events, together with James Parkes' insights, sparked an historic and slowly growing recognition of the need for Christians to reject forever "the teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism" (Jules Isaac), and to establish in its stead a new foundation for Christian-Jewish relations based on mutual tolerance, respect and trust. In 1942, Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple and Chief Rabbi Hertz met, and together they founded the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ); thus, for the first time in history, the foundations were laid for a new and beneficial relationship between a major Christian denomination and the Jewish community in the UK. In Manchester in 1942 the CCJ began with a cup of tea in the Midland Hotel!

After the war, and as the enormity and awful reality of the Shoah was exposed, other countries followed and established their own national versions of CCJ; there are now 38 countries that have done so. These national bodies are affiliated to the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ). Since the end of the Second World War, Christians and Jews have continued to meet and develop a shared understanding of issues and concerns common to both our communities of faith. Essential to these constructive conversations is the absolute prohibition of proselytism within CCJ, and the willingness of all to acknowledge and respect their differences. In 1947, Christian and Jewish scholars and theologians working together published the Ten Points of Seeligsburg to formalize their shared understanding; this was the forerunner of a number of similar documents that have been published since, and which are emblematic of the respect and trust of the authors.

NOSTRA AETATE – A RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION IN OUR TIME

This revolutionary approach to Christian-Jewish relations received a vital new impulse with the 1965 document "*Nostra Aetate*" - "*In Our Time*" which was published by the Vatican from the Second Vatican Council. For the first time in its history, the Catholic Church began to redefine its relationship *with* the Jewish community instead of *over and against it*. Catholic theologians began to explore and reject the limitations and inaccuracies of some Church teaching which had led to anti-Semitism, persecution of Jews, and a distorted Christian theology. This new beginning was actively encouraged by the papacy that followed, and continues to this day. These seismic changes in church teaching were initiated by Pope John XXIII. In 1986, Pope John Paul II visited the Chief Rabbi of Rome, a thirty minute walk that was almost 2,000 years in the making! In 1993, full diplomatic ties were established between the Vatican and Israel, and, in 2000, the Pope visited Israel.

Pope Francis has continued deepening this relationship when he made what he described as "a journey of friendship, a genuine gift of God" by also visiting Israel together with his friend Rabbi Skorka of Argentina.

Welcome as these events and trends are, it must be recognized that while they are well-known to those who are actively engaged with this work. The majority of members of our communities, including many clergy and lay leaders, have little or no experience of the progress that has been made during the last fifty years. Within the Catholic Church, "Nostra Aetate" has led to a growth in understanding, sensitivity, and respect both for its Jewish roots, and for the Jewish community today. **In order to give further impetus to these welcome trends, Pope Francis has determined that the 50th anniversary of Nostra Aetate should be actively celebrated in 2015.**

We are especially fortunate that on Tuesday 12 May **Rabbi David Rosen CBE KSG** will be visiting Manchester in order to speak to our communities. Rabbi Rosen is internationally known for his interfaith work, and his work with the Vatican was officially acknowledged when he was created a Knight of St Gregory. His subject will be "**Nostra Aetate – A Religious Revolution in Our Times**". His keynote address will be followed by a Discussion Panel that will include **Bishop John Arnold – Catholic Bishop of Salford**, and **Bishop David Walker – Anglican Bishop of Manchester**.