

Communiqué: The Anglican Jewish Commission third meeting, Jerusalem 24th-25th March 2009

The third meeting of the Anglican Jewish Commission of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel^[1] took place at the offices of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel on 24th and 25th March 2009/ 28th and 29th Adar 5769. The Commission's mandate is taken from the provisions of the joint declaration of the Archbishop and the Chief Rabbis at Lambeth Palace on 6th September 2006 and confirmed at their second meeting in Jerusalem on 31st October 2007.

The leaders of the Commission delegations, Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen of Haifa and the Rt Revd Michael Jackson, Bishop of Clogher, recalled with pleasure the previous meeting of the Commission and welcomed the confirmation and renewal of friendship which this third meeting of the Commission represents for Jewish Christian relationships. The Anglican delegation regretted the unavoidable absence of Rabbi David Brodman and wished him a speedy and full recovery

The Commission's meeting in Jerusalem took place in the context of a number of significant events including the tensions created as a result of recent suffering in Gaza and southern Israel; the increase in anti semitic incidents in Europe and elsewhere; and the forthcoming visit of Pope Benedict to Israel. The Commission also coincided with the meeting of the Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land and the members of the Commission were glad to be able to exchange greetings and discuss matters of mutual interest in the context of a joint luncheon with Council members.

The Commission members also appreciated the hospitality of the Director of the Department for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Bahig Mansour, who briefed the delegations on the proposed arrangements for the visit of Pope Benedict and other matters of interest including the continued detention of Gilad Shalit beyond the conventions on the treatment of prisoners.

The Anglican delegation enjoyed a tour of the Jewish Quarter led by Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber, including a visit to his home and library in the heart of the old city

At the opening session Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen welcomed the Anglican delegation to Jerusalem, a city of holy places for Jews, Christians and Muslims. The Rt Revd Michael Jackson brought greetings from the Archbishop of Canterbury and from the Rt Revd Suheil Dawani, Bishop in Jerusalem and thanked the Chief Rabbinate for their hospitality

The theme of the Commission's meeting was 'Jerusalem' and papers were presented by Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber on behalf of the Jewish delegation and by Mrs Clare Amos on behalf of the Anglican delegation. Extensive discussions took place in a friendly and constructive atmosphere on the many issues raised by the papers

Both papers noted the conjoined terrestrial and celestial understandings of the significance of the city and the creative tensions between them and both appreciated the implications of the theological and scriptural perspectives for the present and future life of Jerusalem. In discussion it was noted that Jerusalem is at the centre of

historical and contemporary Jewish identity and also the importance of understanding Jerusalem as a city to be shared between the religions, a house of prayer for all nations and a city which should make all people friends beyond possessiveness. The peace of Jerusalem for which Jews, Muslims and Christians pray should be such as to be a light to all nations

In his paper, Rabbi Sperber spoke of the traditional understanding of the degrees of sanctity emanating outwards from the heart of the temple, the Holy of Holies extending outwards and represented in the mediaeval view of Jerusalem as the navel of the world. The terrestrial Jerusalem is mystically connected to the celestial Jerusalem and is the point from which all creation expanded. The physical Jerusalem is thus a glimpse of the celestial and is the place to which all prayer is oriented and through which all prayers pass. He cited Nathan Sharansky's understanding of Jerusalem as being the spiritual centre of gravity for all Jews and of the spark of Jerusalem's sanctity in every Jewish soul.

Clare Amos in her paper took the vision of Jerusalem in the New Testament book of Revelation as her starting point, and explored four key themes with which Christians have engaged: The renewed or heavenly Jerusalem; Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God; Jerusalem as the centre of the world; Jerusalem as the rejecting and suffering one. She drew on material from the Old and New Testaments, and well as Christian history and poetry. Her presentation made it clear that cherishing Jerusalem was deeply embedded in the faith of many Christians, and that linked to that, Christians from other parts of the world needed to have a special care for their Christian brothers and sisters who lived in the region. She suggested that reflecting on Jerusalem as a 'sacrament' allowed us both to hold an ideal vision before our eyes, but also acknowledged that, for Christians, the present reality was less than perfect.

The Commission members looked forward to the next meeting of the Archbishop and the Chief Rabbis of Israel in Jerusalem and to the next meeting of the Commission in London in 2010.

Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen

The Rt Revd Michael Jackson

[1] Delegation of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel

Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa

Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber, Bar Ilan University

Rabbi David Rosen, President IJCIC

Mr Oded Wiener, Director General of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel

Delegation of the Archbishop of Canterbury

The Rt Revd Michael Jackson, Bishop of Clogher

Mrs Clare Amos, Director of Theological Studies, Anglican Communion

Dr Jane Clements, Consultant to the Council of Christians and Jews

The Ven Michael Igrave, Archdeacon of Southwark

Canon Guy Wilkinson, Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for Inter Religious Affairs