

Anglican Jewish Commission 2007

The first meeting of the Anglican Jewish Commission of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel took place at the seat of the Chief Rabbis in Jerusalem on Sunday 1st and Monday 2nd July 2007.

The Commission had been put in place under the provisions of the joint declaration of the Archbishop and the Chief Rabbis at Lambeth Palace on 6th September 2006. The discussions took place within the framework of the joint declaration made on that occasion which said that: "Our relationship is unique, not only historically and culturally, but also scripturally and for both religions is rooted in the one overarching covenant of God with Abraham to which God remains faithful through all time.....This will be a dialogue of mutual respect in which we seek only to understand each other better and to strengthen our own communities and their affection and respect for each other".

The leaders of the delegations, Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen of Haifa and The Rt Revd Michael Jackson, Bishop of Clogher warmly welcomed the first meeting of the Commission as a most important further step in international Christian Jewish relations and in the contribution of religious communities to the peaceful life of the world.

Chief Rabbi Cohen said: "this dialogue is of the greatest importance both for our bilateral relationship and for promoting our shared values to the benefit of humanity at large".

In response The Rt Revd Michael Jackson emphasised the significance of the personal relationships which were being built up through the work of the Commission.

The focus of the Commission's deliberation was the sanctity of human life.

Papers were presented and considered in depth on the basis of our mutual understandings of Scripture and of our common understanding of human life as a gift from God to be valued from conception to the natural ending of life. Between the beginnings of life and its ending, human life is to be nurtured and enabled to flourish and all violence against other human beings is to be deplored as a defacing of the image of God in humanity.

In his presentation, Chief Rabbi Cohen highlighted the life giving attributes of God as the source of all vitality that demands that everything possible be done to affirm the inalienable sanctity of human life. He defined the idea of divine sanction for suicide and homicide as a "religious" sacrifice as blasphemous.

Bishop Michael said: "Our understandings of the sources of the sanctity of human life lie in our shared Scriptural heritage. For Christians a further supreme source of such understanding lies in the life of Jesus and in his resurrection. For Anglicans, these concepts have been developed in particular ways through the use of tradition and reason applied to the Scriptures".

In further discussion, emphasis was given to God's gift of life in creation, without diminishing the supreme and immeasurable value of human life created in the divine image.

Contemporary challenges and concrete situations were addressed. In light of these presentations and discussions, and in the wake of escalating terrorism in their respective societies and around the world, the delegations issued a call to their communities and to all people of faith and goodwill, to educate and promote the sanctity of human life as a supreme value. In addition the Commission called upon all those in positions of influence and authority to exercise their mandate and responsibility to advance the cause of peaceful, co operative and just living ☞ locally, regionally and internationally.

The Commission expressed the hope that in appreciating commonality and respecting differences, its work would encourage Jews and Anglicans around the world in their mutual explorations and dialogue. The members looked forward to the future meetings of the Archbishop and the Chief Rabbis of Israel later in the year and to future meetings of the Commission. The Commission noted the importance of other dialogues being taken forward regionally and particularly through the Council of Religious Leaders of the Holy Land in which the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem was a leading partner.

The Commission plans to meet regularly and next in Spring 2008.

Delegation of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel
Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa
Rabbi David Brodman, Chief Rabbi of Savyon
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
Mrs Jane Clements, Director of Programmes, Council of Christians and Jews
The Ven Michael Ipgrave, Archdeacon of Southwark
Canon Guy Wilkinson, Archbishop of Canterbury's Inter Faith Relations Secretary