Encounter with History, Learning for the Future. ICCJ International Conference, Vienna, 2-5 July 2006 - a summary and reflection.

31.08.2006 | Weyl, Ruth

A summary and reflection regarding the ICCJ 2006 International Conference at Vienna, Austria

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

Encounter with History - Learning for the Future

2006 International Conference

Vienna, 2-5 July 2006

A summary and reflection by Ruth Weyl

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The last time the ICCJ held a conference in Vienna was 1978. The theme then was “The Rise and Development of Neo-Nazism and Other Forms of Political Extremism”. Considering that a representative from Austria was among the first who six decades ago in the post-World War II era contributed towards what eventually became known as the ICCJ, and the fact that our host, the Austrian Coordinating Committee for Christian-Jewish Cooperation celebrated its 50th anniversary, the choice for the 2006 International Conference of a topic dealing with the encounter with history could not have been more apt.

For centuries Vienna had been an important religious as well as social centre with numerous Christian-Jewish encounters of tragic conflict as well as of creative cooperation. Many, often inconspicuous but not less significant sites in the city give witness of historic and contemporary Jewish life. They point to a once strong and vivid Jewish community – once the third largest in Europe – but they are also a symbol of a vanished life destroyed within a short period in the 20th century, as it had been nearly extinguished in the 12th, the 15th and the 17th century.

Central to the conference programme was the need to evaluate the significance these historic sites and artworks have for Jewish-Christian relations. How could these sites be given greater prominence and their significance be made clear? How could they be used to teach their meaning

to the present and future generations? But also, how do they impact on people of this generation? – either those who wish to create new attitudes or those who wish to perpetuate prejudice and hatred. How can modern works of art and memorial sites improve Christian-Jewish relations? And how do we deal with memory linked also to these places?

Uniquely, the conference centred on many visits. In a sense they replaced the usual series of theme related workshops, but they also allowed for a great deal of personal exchange of impressions and ideas during walks, bus travel and at the sites.

As usual in ICCJ conference programmes, there was also a good mix of emphasis on local concerns as well as on the ICCJ's wider international outreach and ongoing programme. Set in Vienna, forever a centre of intimate contact with its Central European immediate neighbours, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the programme allowed interesting glimpses into a region still endeavouring to break down the political boundaries of the past, as well as the relationship between the three Abrahamic faith communities.

There were some 130 participants including Viennese residents, lecturers and religious leaders. The conference centre, the Kardinal König Haus in one of the suburbs of Vienna offered superb conference facilities as well as accommodation for the majority of non-Austrian participants from twenty of the ICCJ's member countries. We owe much gratitude to the ever helpful management, the staff and not least the chef of the Kardinal König Haus as well as to the representatives of the Coordinating Committee for the excellent arrangements of the many visits.

Opening event

At the opening event, attended by Ambassadors from ICCJ member countries, religious and civic personalities, there were wonderful violin and piano interludes of music by 19th and 20th century Jewish composers in Vienna. Welcoming all present, ICCJ President Fr Prof John Pawlikowski stressed the importance also of the geographical location in Central Europe and the emphasis of the conference theme on memory and how to deal with it in today's post-World War II and post-communist multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural societies.

Special words of greetings were expressed by H.E. the Israeli Ambassador Dan Ashbel who welcomed the programme which promised a clean and honest dealing with the antisemitic ideologies that lead to the horrors of the Shoah. The fact that the conference took place in a seminary named after the late Cardinal König was more than symbolic; it was a commitment to the values of mutual honour, respect for human beings regardless of colour, race or religion for which the late Cardinal stood throughout his life. As Ambassador to Austria, the OSCE and shortly also Slovenia Ambassaor Ashbel saw himself in a position where he could and must play his part in bringing peoples closer. He was delighted to note among the participants his good old friend Irvin Borowsky because in his time as Consul General in Philadelphia he had attended the opening of the Liberty Museum (integral part of the American Interfaith Institute soon to be officially admitted as a member of the ICCJ). At that museum there was a small sculpture made of colourful jelly beans – a symbol of our multi-coloured, multi-religious, multi-ethnic humanity – an understanding to which he was sure the conference would make a fruitful contribution.

Before the keynote address ICCJ Patron, Sir Sigmund Sternberg presented Dr Eugene Fisher with the ICCJ Interfaith Gold Medallion in recognition of his study on the textbooks which help solidify the results of the original textbook studies; in recognition of his long-standing work on Christian-Jewish relations with the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as the organisation of many meetings of the Vatican-IJCIC international dialogue and in particular the many writings on Christian-Jewish relations in books and articles, thereby bringing important church texts on Christian-Jewish relations to the attention

of a wider public.

Eugene Fisher's long-time colleague on the path of milestones and minefields of Christian-Jewish dialogue, Judith Banki, paid a moving personal tribute to her friend who, in her words, seems to have one of the hardest jobs on earth: he interprets (and usually defends) the position of the Jewish community to the leaders of his Church, and he interprets and defends the Church to Jews, sustained throughout by the loving support of his wife Cathy and his daughter Sarah.

Keynote address

All of it an encouraging up-beat to the conference and to the keynote address by former Czech ambassador to Germany and Austria and Director of the Diplomatic Academy of the Republic of Austria and author, Dr Ji?i Gruša who presented a philosophical outlook drawing on his experiences and observations from a Central European point of view. Looking at the conference topic he asked whether 'history' was not in fact something that should never have occurred, and whether 'encounter' was not mostly first a danger and only rarely an experience. As for 'Central Europe' he had once called it the Bermuda triangle of our continent, because so much evil had emanated from Vienna, Munich and Prague which caused havoc to our entire world. Also modern nationalism, a sort of secularized religion had found its roots in the region. What was it, he asked, that enabled people to rid themselves of everything humane and replace it by superman celebrating the worst? Although the concept of 'nation' had its origin in the Judeo-Christian tradition, how come we succeeded in de-humanizing it? It is only some 50 years that democracy has taken deeper roots in this European continent.

What was it that caused so much hatred of what was most valuable in Jewish belief? Was it that its tenets had the character of mission rather than of submission? As for himself, Dr Grusa recalled that the influence Jewish ethos has had upon his thinking and action had earned him after 1989 the attribute as one who "judaized" diplomacy. Born at the time of the Kristallnacht and having lived through so many changes of government, he was only too aware of the importance Holocaust teaching ought to have as an integral part of the teaching of history and as a sub-chapter of honest national resistance movements. To his part of the world anyhow, liberation from war had not brought liberty, even though under its guise communism was voted into power, as Nazism had in the early 1930s in Germany. It was a not yet entirely overcome spirit of affinity. There had been hope of a thaw in the years 1960–1968, a period of open courage to evaluate the past as a whole and to try and come to terms with the individual's responsibility, to write and publish openly. It took a further twenty years for genuine liberty and liberation of the mind. And yet 'Jewish' still remained a negative word. In the old bi-polar world it was still possible to change one's enemy; today he feared there was only one interchangeable 'devil', Liberalism and Israelis, particularly post nine-eleven. But he believed that it was our joint task to affirm our Christian and Jewish legacy, its ethics and faith and the readiness to pay the price of our individual investment for the future. That way in the end greater space will be assured for life in freedom.

The sombre reflections following this lecture by an experienced diplomat were soon lifted by a festive buffet dinner.

The conference theme in its local context

The sun was still shining on Monday morning, when Revd Prof. Helmut Nausner, President of the Austrian Coordinating Committee introduced the conference theme setting it in its local context. He mentioned the ICCJ presidency from 1964 to 1968 of the late Kurt Pordes of the then *Aktion gegen den Antisemitismus in Oesterreich*, the Coordinating Committee's long time partner organisation. Though a comparatively small organisation the Austrian Coordinating Committee is active within their given possibilities, with a small part-time staff. There was a well visited website and apart from

organizing small conferences also with neighboring countries, they edit a quarterly magazine, highly supported by a number of interested and competent volunteers. Looking back on their history, Helmut Nausner mentioned two outstanding personalities: the late Sr Hedwig Wahle nds, the spiritual force behind many of their projects, and Professor Kurt Schubert. It was the goal of this conference to share with us how they understand their educational work.

The importance they attach to their history and the meaning of historic sites to a large extent determines their Christian-Jewish dialogue. The many visits were not sightseeing tours, but are intended to help conference participants from around the world to realize the importance of history to the city of Vienna besides Mozart, Beethoven and Johann Strauss. One question was of utmost importance to their work in Austria: What does this past mean for their society as the Jewish community is rather small today. In a country where much money is invested to preserve old castles and palaces though there are no longer any knights and princesses, it is even more important to preserve synagogues and Jewish cemeteries though in so many places there are no Jews anymore. He concluded with these words “Remembering through art, through historic research, remembering through slabs and monuments – these are some of the main points of our conference. But there is also another way of remembering, especially for Christians and Jews: remembering through prayer and in the faithful conviction that the Eternal One heals all pain and gives us together a chance for a new beginning without denying the failures and sins of the a past that should never be forgotten or suppressed from generation to generation”.

History of the Christian-Jewish relationship in Austria

There followed the day’s major address covering the Christian-Jewish Relationship in Austria from the 1848 Revolution to the Rise of National Socialism written by Prof. Kurt Schubert who due to a hospital stay could not present it himself, but had asked his student Dr Bernhard Dolna to do so in his place. The scholarly exposé traced the Christian roots of antisemitism in Austrian religious and political life which prepared the fertile ground into which the seeds of Nazi persecution were cast. It covered the period immediately following the Vienna Congress, the development of Judaism in the liberal era of the second half of the 19th century and its German assimilation, Jewish Diaspora nationalism and proto-Zionism, fin de siecle antisemitism, the period of social reform and the post-World War I period of 1918-1938. In a fascinating tour de force he covered economics, liberal capitalism as well as numerous literary references, the Dollfuss period including legislation on the protection of German Jewish refugees until the murder of Dollfuss in July 1934. Government relations to Jews and Judaism were on the whole influenced by the stance of the church. He recalled that the Hebrew theater, the Habimah, presented a production of the Dybbuk in Hebrew only days before the infamous ‘Anschluss", and he cited from the review in the last issue of *The Jewish* Front of 23 February 1938: “…the most important impression of that performance was that Judaism has a language that is more beautiful, more melodious than anything we have ever heard … a language that was cleansed from the misery and suffering of the Ghetto.” And the German language lecture ended with Prof. Schubert’s words: “And then there followed the darkest time not only for Austria, but for all Jewry”.

There were two further morning sessions:

History of Islam in the region

Myths and Monuments – the Turkish siege of Vienna and its contribution to present-day Austrian identity presented by Dr Susanne Heine, Head of Department for Practical Theology and Psychology of Religion at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Vienna University.

In a colourful presentation of the centuries old dispute between the former Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires we became acquainted with this unique situation, so different from that in other

European states, of a Muslim population. Culminating in the 1912 legal recognition of Islam reinforced through the 1979 acknowledgement of Islam as an accepted religion within the Austrian Republic, attitudes towards Turks and Turkish nationalism differed from those towards Muslim immigrants from former European colonies. Although after the Second World War Egyptians, Syrians, Iraqis and Iranians settled in the country, it is the Turkish face of Islam that to this day persists in the public memory and mind. To demonstrate this 21st century state of affairs the speaker expertly led us through the past 400 years of Muslim existence and influence in the region, particularly also including Hungary and Bosnia with high level theological exchanges with Christianity – mainly Catholic, but also its wars; in the late 16th and 17th century marked by the European religious wars.

Time was when Martin Luther saw the Turkish danger as God's punishment for Christian inadequacy. The eventual victory over the Turks could be viewed as the peak of Austrian history in the population's historic memory helping to strengthen national pride and self-confidence, particularly as Roman-Catholics. Dr. Heine spoke of the school text books, in her experience still the most influential literature for information and education, which to this day mirror and reinforce problematic public self-understanding as a foremost Roman-Catholic country. On the other hand the language contains numerous Turkish expressions, and this also applies in particular to the cuisine, not to mention that Lessing's 'Nathan the Wise' and Mozart's 'Abduction from the Seraglio' are practically Austrian folklore. It was the collapse of the Old European Order after World War 1 – which incidentally also destroyed the Ottoman Empire – that provoked a new symbiosis of nationalism and religious intolerance. The recent debate about Turkey's admission to the EU has revealed political slogans that have their origin in religious ignorance and historical eclecticism. And despite immigration also by Egyptian, Syrian or even Pakistani Muslims, to the population as a whole it boils down to the Turkish Islam which they are most familiar with and which they are most suspicious of. A hindrance to the better development of an authentic Austrian Islam is the influx of imams with their message of a Turkish national Islam. She concluded that Vienna and Istanbul, Ankara and Vienna are a chapter of European history that must not be overlooked if new concepts of living together are to overcome latent as well as real fear of the impact of past history.

Her lecture was followed by Dr Air Radian, Director of the Islamic Pedagogical Institute in Vienna who spoke of Islam in Austria and the growing desire, as Muslims, to play a full part in all aspects of Austrian society.

Visit to St Stephen's Cathedral

And so continuing the theme of myths and monuments, we moved in the afternoon to visit St Stephen's Cathedral where a general introduction in the beautiful St Barbara's Chapel was given by Dr Annemarie Fenzl, archivist and long-time assistant of Cardinal Franz König who pointed out that the Cathedral actually contained numerous signs of hatred and rejection of Jews, among them the portal of the west entrance depicting animals and other creatures that would desecrate the Cathedral, among them also a Jew. Other examples were seen in the relic chamber. But there were also the 12th century stained glass windows depicting Viennese Jews of the period.

We descended into the catacombs and visited the grave of Cardinal König who had contributed so much to the Declaration Nostra Aetate and the Christian-Jewish encounter. Rabbi Ehud Bandel and Fr Norbert Hofmann offered short prayers, while our backs were turned to the grave of Cardinal Theodor Innitzer who set his 'Heil Hitler' signature to the April 1938 plebiscite voting in favour of the 'Anschluss'. Referring to this discrepancy, Dr Fenzl said that it was important not to forget this ugly chapter of Austrian history. Yet Cardinal Innitzer had also established in his home a service and haven for non-Aryan Catholics and in a later sermon entitled "Christ is our Leader" called for resistance to the Nazis.

Markus Himmelbauer gave an illuminating guided tour of the Cathedral's outside with ancient frescos depicting Jesus with a Jew's hat. From there, Markus pointing out on the way a number of plaques and memorials to former Jewish life guided us to the Judenplatz, for nearly 500 years the main square of the Jewish community where we were welcomed by Dr Ariel Muzicant, President of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde in Wien. As we stood between the memorial created by British artist Rachel Witered remembering the places where 65,000 Jews were murdered by the Nazis and the statue of Lessing he gave us a marvelous overview of the square's and the community's history, which had its renaissance in Vienna in 1848 with the grant of civil rights and full citizenship in 1867. He stayed with us throughout the visit answering questions and also speaking of his hope of the continuing renewal of Jewish life. We visited an exhibition entitled 'Art Against Oblivion' of the haunting work of the survivor Adolf Frankl and met his son Thomas who told the story of the pictures. We visited the Jewish Museum which forms an integral part of the entire Judenplatz complex. It contains a room where archeologists had discovered the remains of a synagogue destroyed some 500 years ago. We then made our way to the splendid main synagogue for evening service led by Chief Rabbi Chaim Eisenberg and cantor Shmuel Barzilai before returning to the conference centre.

24 hours after the start of the conference old friendships were renewed and new ones forged over a delicious supper, followed by the Slovak television film 'Visions of the Inferno' about the paintings of Adolf Frankl.

Tuesday's plenary sessions started with the challenging enquiry into How the State of Israel Affects Today's Jewish-Christian Dialogue.

Effect of the State of Israel on today's Jewish-Christian dialogue

Prof. Simon Schoon of the Theological University Kampen and Pastor of the Reformed Church in Gouda, Netherlands, showed up various aspects of the Christian approach and attitude including the ambivalence about passionate relationship, from church documents stating that in the relationship the very heart of Christianity is at stake and the feeling of a strong bond even gratitude towards the Jewish people because Jesus was born of this people, to what has become the most sensitive issue: The State of Israel. There was a generation gap in the different Christian reactions towards the State of Israel. His students showed little interest in the classical themes of the official Jewish-Christian dialogue. They are much more interested in the role of religion in society, with Islam being a hot issue. The generation gap also applies to reactions about the State of Israel, and there is little or no knowledge or remembrance of Shoah. Reactions range from The Greater Israel Movement to the conviction that the State is racist. Events in Israel and the Palestinian territories can very quickly change from love to hatred and vice versa. Past patterns and thoughts still determine ideas and attitudes.

Models of approach must be distinguished: In the old replacement model the State of Israel has in theory no special theological or religious significance for Christians. In practice this still means however anti-Judaism and sermons and religious teaching and anti-Zionist reactions. Following old typology, the present People of Israel is still viewed as living in the shadows resulting in a new triumphalist theology that only mass conversion to Christ could bring about a solution to the Middle East conflict. For some Christians the self-identification of the Jewish People and the Jewish State with the name 'Israel' is objectionable. In this view Biblical Israel is not a nation but a notion. Questions debated in Christian circles are: is the State of Israel a normal state like all other states with good and bad policies, with success and failure, or does the State of Israel have a special theological significance for Christians? Should it be regarded as God's own miracle in our time? Should the State be measured by the standards laid down in the Bible or just as any other state, by the standards of international law?

Recently editing a book on the Messianic expectations of Jews and Christians Prof. Schoon had himself written an article trying to describe the ideas of different groups: The religious colonists in the West Bank, the militant Islamists and the concepts of Christian Zionists: they all seem to hear in their particular way the footsteps of the approaching Messiah or the approach of the Final Judgment Day. Drowned by all these questions, it often seemed that there was a dialogue of the deaf. His final question was whether the entire Middle East will suicide-bomb itself or – quoting Bernard Lewis – will Jews and Palestinians be able to abandon grievances and victimhood and settle for differences, join their talents, energies and resources in common creative endeavour. Or was that also an unrealistic messianic dream?

The People of Israel in the State of Israel

And then followed a totally different approach to the subject: Dr Racelle Weiman, Executive Director of the Institute for Interreligious, Intercultural Dialogue of Temple University, Pennsylvania, an Israeli of US origin in a lecture entitled Encountering the State of Israel Today in the Christian-Jewish Dialogue introduced us to an alternate to encountering Jews - the Jews in their State in an effort to explore the infinite possibilities of the Christian-Jewish dialogue in the 21st century. That unique and oft talked about nation-state called Israel – when "Israel" actually refers to the people – today six million individuals gathered in a small corner of this globe from the ends of the earth, all identifying themselves as members of the Jewish people. It is not primarily about sacred space, nor about fulfilling anyone's messianic wishes or aspirations. It is about doing what all living creatures do, which is to find an environment that they feel comfortable in, where they feel at home. Christian-Jewish dialogue will only enter into a constructive and healthy stage when Jews, and certainly those gathered in the State of Israel are not treated as theological objects or God's mystery or mythologized, or as vessels needed for Christian repentance or guilt. "Do not make us a god-like people, we are only trying to work it out like everyone else on this globe." She was not asking to abandon dialogue but to deepen the dialogue without too much prior upfront expectations and demands on the Jewish people to be some sort of 'Uebermensch' because we once were sufferers. Rather than have understanding for an always suffering minority, meet Jews as *Am B'Israel* (a people in Israel) enjoying their newfound voice, yelling in Hebrew. They are real, not abstract. They are not empty synagogues and cemeteries and concentration camps. "Just getting over being called the devil's children – don't make us all into angels."

Dr. Weiman referred to one of the initiators of modern dialogue, James Parkes, who actually *liked* Jews, enjoyed their company and felt comfortable with them. It was James Parkes who from his earliest journeys to Israel stated that "there had always been a continued and significant Jewish presence and that there have always been as many Jews as the land could economically bear and the authorities would allow". Whether Christians embrace the idea of *Am B'Israel* as an experiment or compensation for Christian antisemitism and the resulting Shoah or as an aborted messianic dream does not matter. Sixty years and six million Jews are by all definitions a State, a reality, a truth. How does any human being debate that right! This 21st century has extraordinary challenges for an evolving Christian-Jewish dialogue whose building blocks include awareness of the influences of the external world in this age of globalization; openness to dialogue with communities of living Jews; exploration of a level playing field such as with *Am Israel B'Israel* (the People of Israel in Israel).

Dr Weiman referred to the Durban, South Africa, World Conference Against Racism which was overshadowed by the events of 9/11 so that the world to its peril disregarded that what had been meant to be a conference supposed to be against racism, had turned into a racist conference against Jews. A new lexicon was needed to define and combat this newest form of antisemitism which five years on has turned into what has been termed genocidal antisemitism. But in today's Israel with its population from Ethiopia, the Gulf, the former Soviet bloc and the multi-generational Israelis Sabras (the native born there) there was living encounter with a wide range of dialogue

partners, including Arabs whether Christian or Muslims, and Israelis being well travelled and even well versed in Eastern religions. It is a luxury for Jews to function as a majority culture and to learn for the first time in 2000 years what it means to have sovereignty and uniquely express a communal identity. It also means that the Christian-Jewish encounter in Israel takes a completely different form from contacts between Jews and Christians elsewhere in the world, and here she quoted John Pawlikowski's outline of four crucial points which he perceives as critical for Jewish disinterest or reticence:

Whereas Christianity needs Judaism to speak about its own identity, Jews do not need Christians for self-definition; the bitter history of Christian antisemitism; the Jewish claim that they are less theologically focused than Christians; fear of Christian mission. None of these considerations apply to dialogue with *Am B'Israel*. Psychological and numeric security allows *Am B'Israel* where joint study of Bible and language, investigating ecology, anthropology and the archaeology of the place, even in secular terms is a creative encounter, as is their respective interest in that early century that brought forth both the Jesus movement and rabbinic Judaism. Those committed to this Christian-Jewish dialogue must interpret and apply new lessons within each age, not in reaction to the world's affairs, but to navigate through it and be empowered. By not paying attention, by not adapting and inventing this new global age, the dialogue will be threatened with erosion, be eclipsed and marginalized.

Dr Weiman concluded by quoting Rabbi David Hartman: "Our return was not only to provide a haven against antisemitism but a new way in which the other, the different one, might enter into our consciousness … the presence of the dignified other, be it a Christian or a Muslim brings home to Jewish spiritual consciousness the important empirical fact that not one person or community exhausts all spiritual possibilities."

Problem of Bible translations

At the end of that session John Pawlikowski invited Mr Irvin Borowsky, whose general scholarly overview on a number of contemporary issues that also have historical relevance had been included in the participants" folders made a special plea regarding anti-Jewish passages in John, Matthew and Luke and general bias in traditional Bible translations. He explained that he founded the American Interfaith Institute for the purpose of assisting in the removal of anti-Judaism from Christianity. This included in particular an ethical obligation to edit and remove offensive passages, particularly from Bibles used for the teaching of children. The Institute is supportive of revised language in the Contemporary English Version, having for instance gifted the Salvation Army with 25,000 volumes for their centres. At present the American Interfaith Institute is financing the first hate-free Bible in Spanish. He urged members of ICCJ to work with Bible publishers in their countries to produce translations and commentaries that are in keeping with the new constructive understanding of Christian-Jewish relations.

Site visits and Bible studies

In the afternoon we set out for visits to selected sights of special interest, and short Bible study sessions at each site:

- To the ***Jewish Community of Baden*** with its 2005 reconstructed synagogue destroyed in 1938, warmly welcomed by Dr Thomas Schärf, the Community's President – Bible Study of Numbers 20:1-13, and 22-29 introduced by Dr Debbie Weissman from Jerusalem and the ICCI, and Prof. Dr Joseph Sievers from the Gregorian University and the Focolare Movement in Rome.
- To the ***Vienna Central Cemetery*** which has Christian graves in the Jewish Section of the cemetery. Under the sensitive guidance of Dr Ruth Steiner, board member of the Austrian

Coordinating Committee we had a heart-rending experience to see so many memorials to people who were only partially Jews, be it by birth or by choice, all destined for deportation and death. Where we offered the reading of a Psalm. Warmly welcomed by Dr Ingolf Friedrich of the beautiful small Roman-Catholic Church 'Namen Jesu', the Bible Study Mark 5:21-43, was presented by Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Anglican Priest from the UK and Ehud Bandel, Senior Rabbi of the Masorti congregation in Melbourne, Australia.

- To ***Leopoldstadt***, the traditional Jewish quarter of Vienna, led by Dr Markus Himmelbauer – Bible study: Psalm 112, presented by Rabbi Irit Shillor of the Or Chadash synagogue, and Pastor Dr Roland Werneck, Director of Interreligious Studies, Evangelische Akademie, Vienna.

All three groups then met up at the beautiful early 12th century ***Klosterneuburg Abbey***, still with its outward Romanesque appearance and the overpowering baroque of its church. But the highlight was of course the 12th century Verdun Altar which took its creator 10 years to complete. Its intricate panels depict Bible stories from the time before Moses, with parallel scenes of the stories between Moses and Christ, and in the middle layer scenes from the New Testament. It was in that chapel that we attended superbly sung evensong in the monastic tradition. We were then treated to a reception with excellent wine by the Abbot of the Canon-Monastery.

And so into Wednesday:

Session at the Austrian Parliament

After an early breakfast we departed for a visit to the Palais Epstein, integral part today of the Austrian Parliament. Built for the 9th century industrialist and banker Knight Gustav von Epstein, a beautiful building situated among the House of Parliament, the Opera and other major buildings. Today it is used for international conferences and important meetings, including Jewish international bodies. Greeted on behalf of the Parliament's President, Prof. Dr Andreas Khol whose duties prevented him from attending in person, his welcome address was read by his parliamentary secretary Dr Christoph Konrath. Referring to the conference theme the President's speech included reference to the difficult task of speaking of encounter with history and learning for the future which really challenges a moral attitude to history. It was highly disputed whether we can learn or even ought to answer, especially in today's liberal and pluralist democracies as there will sometimes be no coherent view of the past – at least of the more recent past that is still part of the living memory or on the brink of ceasing to be part of living memory, such as the living memory of Jewish life in Austria as it was before 1938 which for today's school children is a past long gone and far away.

Dr. Khol also said that it has to be kept in mind that when addressing questions of history and memory we are confronted with the accusation that this endeavour may be a disguised form of religion – and truly words like *memory, forgiving, the healing power of knowing the truth, catharsis* etc. build up the vocabulary of religions. As communities of memory, religious communities and hence their efforts to face history and themselves, have a lasting impact and an important role to fulfill in our societies. Unlike many others, they foster bonds of memory and rituals of commemoration. To create, foster and enrich such relationship with the religious communities, he said, was of special importance to the Austrian Parliament. Since 1998 the Austrian Parliament held a day of commemoration and manifestation against violence, hatred and racism on 5 May, the day of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp Mauthausen in Upper Austria. Other initiatives were also mentioned by him and he concluded by wishing the conference the success its topic promised.

Award to Prof. Dr Kurt Schubert

Central to the visit was to honour Prof. Dr Kurt Schubert with the 2006 ICCJ International Sir Sigmund Sternberg Award in recognition of this courageous scholar's lifelong engagement as a believing Catholic Christian in the Christian-Jewish encounter and dialogue, for having personally been instrumental in ensuring that the concepts of Nostra Aetate are applied throughout the Austrian Catholic Church in the teaching of catechism and Bible study; in recognition of his courageous stand against the Nazi regime as well as in recognition of his foundation of the exemplary Institute for Jewish Studies at the University of Vienna inaugurating in post-war Europe the academic study of Judaism, Jewish history and culture, thereby giving Judaism its rightful place and recognition in public awareness.

The laudatio was given by Prof. Dr Stefan Schreiner, a member of the ICCJ Executive Board and chair of its Abrahamic Forum. In his introductory sentence Stefan Schreiner cited from a discussion which Prof Schubert had early in February 2003 with Cardinal König "Between my Christianity and Judaism there exists a somehow metaphysical connection. In theological words: The Jews are part of us, we are of the one and same Covenant entered with God". Dr Schreiner's wide-ranging laudatio covered what over the past sixty years has time and again motivated Prof. Schubert to engage in the search for the causes of antisemitism and to find theological answers. Immediately after the end of war he initiated Hebrew and Jewish studies at the Vienna University up to the just ended 122nd semester. Among his teaching was the endeavour to make it clear to Christians that with regard to Judaism every analogy to other communities does not apply, but that engagement in Judaism means sui generis engagement with a community, its religion and culture. While in discussion with Jews Kurt Schubert endeavoured to explain that and why it is exactly this incomparability and uniqueness of Judaism that creates problems for those who are not acquainted with Judaism from within. Yet he was not only a researcher and academic teacher, he has throughout his life been actively engaged in politics that could not be seen as separate from a religious and social engagement. To congratulate Prof. Schubert today on receiving this award was for Stefan Schreiner not only an honour but also an act of personal gratitude for invaluable guidance.

Prof. Schubert had specially come from hospital to receive the award and from his wheelchair he gave moving thanks to Stefan Schreiner personally and to the ICCJ for its long-time engagement in dialogue and genuine encounter.

John Pawlikowski thanked the Parliamentary President Dr Khol for his gracious welcome and important speech. He explained that the ICCJ emerged from the ashes of the Shoah as a result of the commitment of people such as Prof. Schubert to forge a new political order in which basic respect for human dignity and interreligious understanding prevail. He referred to his own participation in the October 2005 Vienna commemoration of the Second Vatican Council's declaration on the Catholic Church's relationship with the Jewish People which has given a new impetus to its continuing implementation in educational programmes and in concrete social relations among our religious communities and he expressed the hope that the Austrian Parliament and Government will continue to support that process in every way possible, especially the ongoing work of the Austrian Coordinating Committee. And he thanked him for allowing the ICCJ in this Parliamentary setting to honour a great citizen of Austria, a champion of human dignity, moral integrity and Christian-Jewish understanding.

National Fund

In 1995 as a gesture of reparation and reconciliation at the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Austria a proposal was submitted to enact a bill establishing a National Fund with the aim of remembering that Austria took part in the crimes that led to the immeasurable agony millions of people had to suffer. This bill initiated a number of laws on restitution and reconciliation which Austria in 1997 agreed to donate into a Nazi Persecution Relief Fund. Ever since the National

Fund has been closely associated with the Austrian Parliament which also provided for its office space.

It was therefore a unique experience to meet with Dr Hannah Lessing, the Fund's General Secretary who presented a moving overview of her work, as an Austrian Jew, implementing what technically is termed compensation, aware that no payment can ever make up for the losses people sustained. A legal and an ethical interpretation could be given to this concept. For a long time Austria had only given legal answers about her role in World War II. And it took a long time for official Austria to move from an assumed role as the first victim of the aggression politics of Hitler's Germany to declare that it had a responsibility which she could no longer evade for participation in the war on the side of Nazi Germany. In the wake of this new political era of confrontation with the past Austria assumed a new moral as well as financial responsibility.

It was Hanna Lessing's report of what can best be termed the human face behind the financial regulations and payments that left all of us with a new understanding of a country's difficult path of building bridges between today's Austria to those who suffered under its persecution. Her tales of individuals with whom she and her colleagues were dealing with sensitivity and compassion, of some 15,000 victims who came in person to tell their story – the fate of their family and friends – often for the first time, and of journeys made to all the ends of the world to victims who could not come to Austria, made us realize that there were other ways of encounter and dialogue, of overcoming fear from facing past history and experiences, and relieved some of us of long-cherished doubt and cynicism in the country's genuine effort at making good.

And so back to the conference centre for more sessions.

Christian-Jewish dialogue in Central Europe

It was evident that in Vienna at the centre of Central Europe, we would also need to explore aspect of the situation of Christian Jewish dialogue in Central Europe. Under the expert chairmanship of Stefan Schreiner three young scholars – Alzbeta Dvorakova from the Czech Republic, Lucia Hidveghyova from Slovakia and Maria Seri from Bosnia Herzegovina – joined by Dr Maros Borsky also from Slovakia and Dr Anton Leisen from Hungary in a panel discussion exploring issues focusing on the socio-cultural and historical context of interfaith (inter-religious) dialogue in their respective countries:

- who are the partners in dialogue and what is their respective contribution?
- how does the burden of the past impact on the present situation?
- 15 years after the 'changes' what has changed?
- the implications of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina – the role of religious leaders during the war
- the implications of the awakening of a new national identity or identities
- antisemitism in a new guise or its old stereotypes
- with revitalization of religion - is there a threat of religious fundamentalism?
  - information about religious communities/organizations/ and their respective ideologies - what is their role in and contribution to interfaith/interreligious dialogue?
- the relationship between interfaith/interreligious dialogue and politics
  - does the political situation in the Middle East in general and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular affect dialogue in their country?
- the dialogue with Muslims (Islam) and its political dimensions

It was a tall order and the replies of the panelists ranged from the experiences in the Czech Republic considered one of the most atheist countries in the world, where theological discussion is still dormant and self-identification is still sought, with a huge grey mass of ignorance about

Christianity as well as about other religions, to the still pervading war trauma in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

All except the Hungarian experience still showed much misunderstanding of history, and all regretted the lack of translated material so readily available and used in Western countries. And how difficult it was, in particular in Hungary, to deal with the Shoah and even some complicity in it when the country also had so many World War victims. The issue at times was that in countries which experienced communism and further wars, rather than prove that one was a victim, one had to prove that one was not a victim.

It was evident that it was by a younger generation in Central Europe that new approaches were being sought and where new development was happening. It was a task which needed support from the ICCJ and its wider membership. There was need to find a vehicle to address the different religious as well as socio-political approaches and to reinforce the different identities. One suggestion was to establish specific partnerships with these new groups from within the ICCJ. And this not least because the young people showed not only commitment, but also scholarly insight. The conference organizers were thanked for making it possible for these young people to participate, to learn but also to tell of their own experiences.

Austrian Lutheranism and Christian-Jewish relations

A further plenary session dealt with The Lutheran Church in Austria 1938-2006: its conversion from antisemitism to Christian-Jewish relations. Backed up by data and documental evidence Prof. Dr Michael Bünker, member of the executive committee of the Evangelische Kirche in Austria led the listeners through four generations of members of the Dantine family along the path of the Protestant Church from 1938 to the present. At the time of the first generation the lawyer, curator and chairman of the parish council of the presbytery of Leoben in Styria, Wilhelm Dantine senor, was able to say that “it was appalling in what intense way ‘Jewry’ – an unpleasant word for the representation of Jewish culture – has entered our congregations” and clearly expressed his antisemitic views to his son in letters of January and June 1938 as well as supporting the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria to Germany – though saddened about the events of Kristallnacht of 11 November 1938. His son, William Dantine jr. had studied Protestant theology also in Bonn where Karl Barth was his teacher. Earlier than 1938 the young William already showed a different attitude towards the political development and instrumentation of the Protestant Church, which led to some conflict with his father. He was among those who opposed a pamphlet adapted to the general euphoria of the Protestant Church concerning the Anschluss. Later in the fifties he became head of the theologian dormitory, student chaplain and professor for dogmatics rendering him a formative figure in the Protestant Church.

Through the ‘Arbeitsgemeinschaft Dienst an Israel’ (Working Group for Service to Israel) William Dantine jr. exerted some influence on church statements regarding the relationship of Christians and Jews and especially Christian antisemitism, including a 1950 declaration affirming the incompatibility of Christian belief with antisemitism. An important step in that direction was the participation of the Protestant Academy in the Coordinating Committee for Christian-Jewish Collaboration, then under the leadership of Prof. Kurt Schubert. In this way the Protestant Church also took part in the series of November 1965 lectures “Hatred against Jews (antisemitism) – the fault of Christians”, resulting after long preparatory work in a ‘counselling message to the congregations concerning Christian and Jews, defining antisemitism as an incomprehensible aberration. In 1970 Wilhelm Dantine jr. published an article about the proselysation of Jews in which he described this phenomenon as a ‘fundamental misunderstanding’.

And so to the third Dantine generation, Johannes the eldest son of Wilhelm jr. As an educationalist, ecumenism was one of his main objectives. He is considered the theological father of the synod’s

1998 declaration 'Time to Turn'. That declaration contains the first new synodal message asking the theological board to work on a declaration 'Church and Israel' which was to contain reference to the 1998 50th anniversary of the State of Israel and the 60th year commemoration of the 9th November Kristallnacht. Two people who graduated in Israel, among them Pastor Roland Werneck worked on the history of the Protestant Church and Israel. Finalized in October 1998 the statement opens with the admission that Christians and the Church had become accessory to the Shoah and the realization with shame that "our churches showed themselves inured to the fate of the Jews and countless other victims of persecution".

And now there is the fourth generation of Dantines – Olivier born in 1973 who studied in Jerusalem under the 'Studium in Israel' programme. He is part of a generation that is beginning to adopt the recognition of the relationship; between Christians and Jews into their church practice taking action also against anti-Judaism in school text books. He is today the Church's official delegate in the Burgenland for the Christian-Jewish dialogue. Since the year 2000 annually on 17th January, one day before the Day of Christian Unity, Christians in Austria commemorate the suffering of the Jewish people. The character of the sermons on the Day of Judaism is tinted with discernment of the church's guilt and avowal of this guilt makes up the liturgy. Critics have asked whether a 'Day of Judaism' without any Jewish involvement does not in effect mean a step backwards from the new standards of the Christian-Jewish dialogue, because so the Day of Judaism remains a day of and for Christians.

The lecture was proof of the steep path still ahead towards normalization of relations, but it also showed how painful and slow is the path of overcoming history.

Christian, Muslim and Jewish women in the new Europe

There was only one workshop at this conference: Christian, Muslim and Jewish Women in the New Europe: A New Faith? chaired by Mrs Gunnel Borgegård, an ICCJ Vice-President and chair of the Women's Council. The presenters were Dr Gülmihri Aytac, an educator from Vienna, Dr Gabriele Kienesberger of the Austrian Catholic Social Academy, Vienna and Prof Judith Narrowe, anthropologist from Stockholm.

In her introduction Gunnel Borgegård explained that the theme was specifically formulated to concentrate on Europe, but in a changing world she had no doubt that participants from other parts of the world would draw their conclusions in their own context. What does a *new Europe* really mean? It has 25 members. The European Union has given the framework – a *New Europe* – but countries not belonging to the Union are also affected by the changes, by the new context. There had been an intense discussion about a possible constitution for the EU to lay down its value basis. The discussion centered on the question whether God was to be mentioned in the constitution or not, whether religion would be mentioned or not. Though formally the discussion is over, it is still going on. And what about the admission of Turkey? What about the fear of Muslim influence?

And what does a *new faith* actually mean? Was there a difference between faith and religion? In dialogue there is a difference in the use of faith and of religion. The concept *interfaith* stresses the subjective, personal exchange, and *interreligious* the official dialogue between representatives of different religions.

Dialogue is often understood at different levels: it ranges from the everyday dialogue that you might have when you meet any person of another faith – and there are different levels of that – the interfaith dialogue, to the dialogue of experts, of specialists, of theologians – the interreligious dialogue. Where do we find most of the women? In interfaith dialogue or in the interreligious dialogue?

Recently, a doctoral thesis was presented at Uppsala University. The author dealt with all the levels of dialogue and talked about “the contribution of the small tradition and the contribution of the big tradition.” The small tradition is related to day to day life issues, and the big tradition to dogmatics and philosophical systems and theories. In the Church and in the ecumenical movement, the ecumenical key phrase has been and remains *unity in reconciled diversity*. For many years the emphasis has been on unity, while today the emphasis is increasingly on diversity.

Gülmihri Aytac spoke of European Muslims – some 15 to 20 million living in Europe. Common to all were the concepts of Din = a way of life, and Aman = faith that does not change. Both concepts were the joint responsibility of all Muslims. But while men, dressed in normally accepted clothes were invisible, women, visible because of the way they dressed were in the forefront of attack, but also of misunderstanding of their cherished traditions, voluntarily preserved, not under duress. But there was great need to be allowed to be Austrian even with a different religion, or names that differ from the usual ones. She and others like her know no other country in which they feel at home, as most of them know no other language than that spoken in Austria. Different perhaps yes, but outsiders definitely not.

Gabriele Kienesberger, involved in Austrian social issues, read a paper containing the mission statement, an initiative of 14 Christian churches in Austria that dealt with issues from within society, which prompted her to use the changed concept of New “Faces” rather than New Faith. Where does violence against women come from? Violence which was not only physical. There was need to create also economic justice, equal access to social and political rights, to abolish discrimination and above all to fight racism.

Judith Narrowe also asked what the title “New Europe” or “New Faith” actually meant. And if there is a New Faith, then what kind of faith is it? And where can it be found? And how is the New Faith connected to the old? Born and bred in the US Judith Narrowe moved to Sweden many decades ago as a rabbi’s wife. She did a doctorate in anthropology in Sweden and is a grandmother. As an American she had been quite used to all sorts of pluralism. In Sweden, an old nation state in the so-called New Europe pluralism is a problem. During her life in Sweden she had experienced huge changes in demography and accompanying changes in the ideology and political issues. Today, Sweden can no longer point at a cultural homogeneity. Old myths no longer apply, Swedes are no longer rich and no longer only Christian, even though Christian culture is clearly most vocal and evident in the public sphere. Pluralism is a new challenge. They battle with issues of multi-culturalism and with what Swedish culture really is, whether it is changing, or not changing and what the many ethnic minorities do or should do or should not do in the context of Swedish society. To name but a few.

Returning to the focus on Europe: the proposed constitution spoke of promoting Europe’s cultural, religious and humanist heritage. But what is that heritage? She asked what is needed in the “New Europe”? New women, a new faith, a new religion? In the ICCJ the focus more often is on religion rather than on faith. There is talk about two thousand or more years that we carry on our shoulders and try to make sense of it all. In all this clamour she pleaded for the ‘small still quiet voice’ that she defined as faith. She asked what women could or should do in the context of religion and institutions and faith and individuals. Women today are less marginal than at any time in history. They should push for issues as: a concern with the environment as climate change is a fact. That they push for a better sharing of experiences – in other words talk in their own different voices but shared concerns.

And so to the concluding parts of the conference: chaired by Ambassador Dr Alexander Christiani who was encouraged by all he had heard during the past three days.

Concluding presentations

Helmut Nausner, the Austrian Coordinating Committee's President said that the ICCJ conference here in Vienna was the best birthday present the Committee could have wished for its 50th anniversary. This was even made better by the delightful rendering of Jewish songs of the Jewish Choir of Vienna under their conductor Roman Grinberg who had even composed music of a traditional well loved song in the style of a Negro spiritual.

Then followed a most moving presentation by Carolyn Manosevitz, an artist from the USA and visiting lecturer at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and at Wesley Theological Seminary, entitled "Teitelbaum Doesn't Live Here Any More." Her discourse accompanied a slide showing of her amazing paintings, her way to keep the memory of the Shoah alive. In 1938 she said there were sixteen listings of the name Teitelbaum in the Vienna telephone book, today there are none. It was crucial to honour the memory of those sixteen Teitelbaums and millions more whom we must continue to remember lest their deaths will remain without meaning. Her father was the youngest and only survivor of a very large Ukrainian Jewish family. Because he had emigrated to Canada in the early part of the twentieth century she had never considered him as a survivor, nor their family as a survivor family. It was only when her eldest son went to Berlin to live with his girlfriend, the daughter of a Nazi, that the pain hit her. She found children of survivors and started painting their stories, which actually were their parents' stories. That led to involvement in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, eventually focusing on her art, her writing and teaching that have become her contribution to reconciliation between Christians and Jews in the shadow of the Shoah. Keeping alive the memory of the once thriving European community, recognizing the eternal presence of the absence of that community may be the only way to remember and, here she quoted John Pawlikowski, strive to live together in human solidarity.

From preserving the memories of the human being we moved to a slide presentation "Witness of the Past: Synagogues and Cemeteries" by Dr Maros Borsky, historian and Director of the Slovak Jewish Heritage Center in Bratislava. Here, too, we witnessed the efforts of preserving synagogues and once flourishing community centers, only a very few now again in use, to overcome the danger of crumbling and disintegration. To retain a sense of once living centres, of candles and candelabras lit to celebrate life cycle events and festivals. It is a labour of love and of painstaking putting together, at times even re-kindling a sense of a living past.

With thanks to the hosts, the organizers and in particular the conference participants John Pawlikowski rounded off the ICCJ 2006 conference. Indicating its main conclusions:

- The Vienna conference reaffirmed the importance both of memory and honesty as integral to the dialogue. Authentic dialogue, if it is to touch people"s souls, demands remembering the past and expressing its details. As to honesty, regrettably this has not always been the case in inter-institutional dialogue and is sometimes not even the case presently.

- We must begin to incorporate younger people into the dialogue. What we did in Vienna was a good start. But that must continue and expand. Within ICCJ it means increased collaboration with the Young Leadership Council.

- The women"s panel was an excellent contribution to Jewish-Christian-Muslim understanding. Women"s perspectives must be made ever more central to ICCJ programming.

- Our Middle East panel raised some good questions. But it also confirmed the need to include Israel more and more within the dialogue. We must establish a candid conversation in which all participants feel they have the ability to articulate their views completely and honestly. The 1974 Vatican Guidelines is famous for its statement that Christians must come to understand Jews as they understand themselves. But the reverse is also true. Jews must come to understand better why Christians might react as they do to political realities in light of the Christian theological and moral traditions.