



in cooperation with
University of Manchester Centre for Jewish Studies

**International Conference, Manchester, July 1- July 4,
2012**

**New Neighbours, New Opportunities
The Challenges of Multiculturalism and Social
Responsibility**

Introduction

The International Council of Christians and Jews (www.iccj.org) was founded in 1947 in Seelisberg, Switzerland. 2012 is its 65th anniversary. It serves as the umbrella organisation of 38 national Jewish-Christian dialogue organisations worldwide, including the CCJ UK, which is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. The annual conference of the ICCJ is a gathering of around 150-200 religious leaders and academics from around the world to discuss matters relating to interfaith relations. This year, the keynote speakers and respondents include:

Mon 2 July

Keynote: **Clive Lawton**, educationalist and broadcaster, co-founder and senior consultant of Limmud, and former chair of the development charity Tzedek

Respondent: **Rev. Dr. Helene Egnell**, Director of the Centre for Inter Faith Dialogue (Stockholm Diocese of the Church of Sweden)

Tue 3 July

Keynote: **John Denham, MP**, former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Respondent: **Dr. Ed Kessler, MBE**, Founding Director of the Woolf Institute, Cambridge

Wed 4 July

Keynote: **Prof. Kwok Pui-Lan**, Professor of Christian Theology and Spirituality at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Respondent: **Baroness Rabbi Julia Neuberger**, Senior Rabbi at the West London Synagogue

The Conference Theme

The conference will attempt to bring about a fruitful discussion of the two closely related themes of social responsibility and multiculturalism, in both European and non-European contexts.

The idea of *multiculturalism*, that is, the advocacy of extending equitable status to distinct



ethnic and religious groups without promoting any specific ethnic, religious, and/or cultural community values as central, is highly topical in the UK and Europe with several national leaders (including Angela Merkel and David Cameron) on the record saying that multiculturalism has failed. Several key religious leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi, have contributed to the debate concerning respect for diversity. On the 70th anniversary of the CCJ in the UK, it would also seem fitting to celebrate many of the assumptions behind the multiculturalist project which are shared by those working in interfaith relations, including: respect for the other's identity and integrity; opposition to prejudice, intolerance, discrimination and racism; and a recognition that groups and individuals can remain loyal to their faith commitment while at the same time recognizing in the other person his or her integrity and otherness.¹

The idea of **social responsibility**, that is, the idea that groups and individuals have an obligation to act to benefit society at large, is also relevant at a time when political and religious leaders struggle to align the interests of minorities within wider society. Leaders of the Jewish and Christian religious traditions are convinced that they can contribute to the debate; many official statements emphasise a shared vision of social justice lying at the core of their understanding of Mission.² The prominent Conservative Jewish philosopher and drafter of *Dabru Emet*, David Novak, has argued that Jewish and Christian co-operation in a post-modern world on the ethical issues facing society is where the real potential of dialogue lies.³

While such concerns are especially important in British and European contexts, they resonate in other contexts, too, especially in relation to the gap in comprehension between religious thinkers in the third world and western world regarding Jewish-Christian relations and dialogue. All of us face the challenge of reconciling and/or respecting different worldviews, often generated by very different histories and experiences. One way of building relations and trust between third world and western world religious people might be to explore potential opportunities for common action, such as developing a shared vision of social justice and debating common experiences and ethical dilemmas in society.

Workshops

Five themes have been identified, each of which will be developed in a series of five workshops designed to consider in depth some of the issues raised. In preparing these, we have

¹ The ICCJ's mission statement states, among other things, that it 'promotes understanding and cooperation between Christians and Jews based on respect for each other's identity and integrity; addresses issues of human rights and human dignity deeply enshrined in the traditions of Judaism and Christianity; counters all forms of prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, racism and the misuse of religion for national and political domination; affirms that in honest dialogue each person remains loyal to his or her own essential faith commitment, recognizing in the other person his or her integrity and otherness.'

² See, for example, *Jews and Christians: Perspectives on Mission*, R. Silverman, P. Morrow, D. Langton, eds. (Cambridge: Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths, 2011).

³ In a classic study Novak has argued that 'traditional ethics' (based on the religious conceptions of the family) are more useful than ethics derived from Enlightenment civil rights (based on the individual) for solving modern social problems. See David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).



deliberately drawn upon the strengths of several UK-based academic centres of excellence, including the Parkes Centre for Jewish/Non-Jewish Relations at the University of Southampton, the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Manchester, and the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths at Cambridge University, in addition to the resources of the ICCJ and CCJ.

Mon 2 July am	'Multiculturalism, Past and Present'
Mon 2 July pm	'Israel, Islam and Interfaith Relations'
Tue 3 July am	'Social Responsibility'
Wed 4 July am	'Non-Western Countries and International Interfaith Developments'
Wed 4 July pm	'The Dialogic Interface: Lessons and Principles'