

*A report on International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) Conference in Istanbul, Turkey (20-23 June 2010) – Dr Marianne Dacy nds.*

This year's International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) Conference was one of the most informative and enjoyable ICCJ conferences I have ever attended.

There were about 100 participants from several countries, including Poland, Canada, Australia, The Netherlands, South America, France, Slovakia, South Africa and Turkey itself. For many, it was their first experience of the shining, multi cultured coastal city of Istanbul with its many minarets piercing the skyline, ancient ruins, street gardens and bustling, colourful bazaars.



The title of the conference - 'That we may know one another' - comes from a verse in the Koran, this being the first time the ICCJ meeting has been held in a predominantly Muslim country.

A Muslim participant summed up his experience by saying that he was taking home personal knowledge, for it is this component that helps us remember we have known each other. He believed a trilateral conversation was better than a dual one as Jews, Christians and Muslims are inextricably united in their origins and shared common values.

One person had remarked that organisationally, Islam and Judaism were close in having no hierarchichal structure and their version of monotheism was closer than the Trinitarian theology of Christianity, and they shared food laws. Christianity and Judaism were closer in their liturgy and biblical values.

A young participant thanked the ICCJ for creating a safe space where expressed opinions could be aired without fear of reprisal. She said she wished to challenge those members of our community, who do not wish to meet the 'other' and wished to remain within the confines of their own safe world. We have need not only of interreligious dialogue but also of intrareligious dialogue to bring people who resist change into the relationship of openness. At the same time we need to create a home for ourselves within the confines of the structure in which we live, and come up with new models to attract people.

On this basis, the ICCJ has resolved to create stronger links with the Young leadership Committee. Next year their meeting will be at the same time as the ICCJ Conference in Cracow. It is being held in Dublin this year in early July.

## **Reviving the Abrahamic forum of dialogue**

Susannah Heschel, quoting her father said 'What I receive I must transform.' Her speech will appear on the ICCJ website as will all the other keynote speeches of the conference.

Having said these things, the ICCJ is not about to become the International Council of Jews, Christians and Muslims. However, it is imperative that we should develop more dialogue with Islam. The three religions are linked and influence each other.

We need to encounter each other on a human level in order to know one another and understand our different and enriching perspectives. It was stressed also that we need to retrieve our sense of community. The call of faith is to interconnectiveness. However, the ICCJ focus will remain on the relations between Jews and Christians. It was expressed that we need to revive the Abrahamic forum of dialogue with Islam that was started some years ago and now needs re-energizing.

In workshops, we learnt about the religious and political situation in Turkey - how it has applied to join the European Union and how religion is strictly controlled by the State and the situation of Orthodox Christians in Turkey. One evening we attended a Sephardi synagogue service and a concert by nine cantors and dinner in a covered courtyard.

Another time, we visited the famous Topkapi Museum, the home of fabulous treasures of sultans, and the Catholic Cathedral where the bishop spoke and we listened to some organ music and soloist who performed the music of Palestrina and other famous melodies. The singer was a Muslim lady from Ankara. Another evening we experienced traditional Turkish dancing and mime on board a dinner cruise on the Bosphorus.

The 100 people who attended, exchanged and learnt about the richness of the culture of the 'other' in the exotic, Istanbul setting went from the conference enriched and enlightened. It was refreshing to be in this environment. We could have breakfast outside by the sea, and experience the wonderful Turkish fruit – enormous cherries and figs, wonderful tasting tomatoes, cucumbers, bread, eggs and cheese, and Turkish coffee, as well as discover a warm hearted people, proud of their ancient culture and handicrafts.