

Submission to the Holocaust Memorial Inquiry

Friday October 23rd, 9.30am

Archbishop Justin Welby

In the autumn of 1942, my predecessor Archbishop William Temple met with the then Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz and established the Council for Christians and Jews: "CCJ". This was an unprecedented meeting that marked the beginning of a growing collaboration and friendship after centuries of disdain from the Church towards British Jews. This disdain was often thinly veiled, but was sometimes more explicitly manifest in infamous moments of historic persecution. The twelfth-century Jewish pogroms in York and Norwich, for example, happened with the full support and encouragement of the Church hierarchy.

The point of mentioning this shameful history is to overlay into these deliberations a sense of the establishment context to our thinking in the UK about the Shoah or Holocaust. Contrary to the views of some, the history of antisemitism and anti-Judaism that culminated in the atrocities of the Holocaust was enabled by cultural and religious attitudes that were widespread right across Europe, and not unique to Germany. The United Kingdom can only be proud of its stance against the Nazi regime when it also recognises its deep failings towards Jewish people.

The Council of Christians and Jews was founded "to check and combat religious and racial intolerance," as well as "to promote mutual understanding and goodwill between Christians and Jews in all sections of the community". Archbishop William Temple recognised the failings of the Church, and did something practical to make a positive difference. He pressed public opinion in letters to *The Times*, and in representations to government for an awareness of the persecution being inflicted upon Jewish communities across Europe. But Archbishop Temple did not always get a hearing.

In March 1943, Temple's persistent advocacy came to a head when he stood up in the House of Lords, stating that "We at this moment have upon us a tremendous responsibility. We stand at the bar of history, of humanity and of God." That responsibility was a call to receive Jewish refugees from persecution. Again, it was a call that was only partially heard. Like the *kindertransports* of 1938 and 1939, the government did something; but not enough. In celebrating the 80th anniversary of those *kindertransports* as we did at Lambeth Palace in 2018, I recall survivors and historians sharing the pain of loss: of separated families, of a piecemeal, limited offer of safety. Across the Church, as across the government, the story of our response to the Holocaust is fragmentary, mixed, and coloured by an anti-Judaism that is difficult to shake off.

History matters. Yes, it has its fair share of heroes, but more often it is littered with very human frailties. When we see history for what it is, then the lessons of our past can more

readily teach us in the vivid realities of today. And today we witness, alarmingly, a rise in antisemitism; incidents of hate crimes against Jews and Jewish establishments. Disturbingly, a survey last year revealed that 5% of UK adults believe that the Holocaust is a myth.¹ Much as the government and Church responses to the Nazi persecution in the 1930's and 1940's were partial and incomplete, so today's tasks of education about the Holocaust, and the evils of antisemitism, remain partial and incomplete.

The proposal for a Holocaust Memorial with a Learning Centre by the Houses of Parliament and across the river from Lambeth Palace provides a symbolic opportunity to present the full story to new generations. It is a story that will not, and cannot be a comfortable piece of public self-congratulation by the establishment. Rather, it offers an opportunity to learn what we did wrong, as well as celebrating what we did right. Its position by the seat of UK government is a necessary challenge to our national life: that the seeds of such cultural and religious hatred would never be allowed to take root here again. Make no mistake: those seeds were here in the UK too.

I had the privilege of being at the national Holocaust Memorial Day event in Westminster Central Hall in January of this year and was deeply moved hearing from survivors, meeting some of them, and marvelling at their courage as they continued to tell their story. Archbishop Temple described his intervention in the House of Lords in 1943 as being "at the bar of history". As Holocaust survivors dwindle in number, *this* is the time to ensure that a very public memorial to their story, and the millions that were murdered, the millions that we did not save, is told at the heart of our establishment.

I note the efforts that have been made to ensure that the designs guard as much of the scarce green space available in Victoria Park Gardens. I am very conscious of the pleasure that this park brings to workers and residents in Westminster and would encourage practical proposals that can make this project happen responsively with the surrounding communities. As a neighbour across the river, as a friend of British Jews, and as a Christian leader enjoying the privileges and ambiguities of a role in the established structures of the nation, I want to voice my support for the siting of the Holocaust Memorial in Victoria Palace Gardens.

¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/holocaust-memorial-day-poll-uk-jews-murdered-nazi-germany-hope-not-hate-a8746741.html>