

# AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH STUDIES

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## Israeli Scholar to Head 20th AAJS Conference

**Twentieth Annual Conference of the Australian Association of Jewish Studies (17-18th February 2008) Monash University Theme: *A People that Dwells Apart:-Exploring the Boundaries of Jewishness.***

**Professor Yedidia Stern** who will give the keynote address is former Dean of the Faculty of Law at Bar Ilan University, and a Senior Fellow of the Israel Democracy Institute. He is a well-known public intellectual working on Israel's future constitution and its Jewish and Democratic character.



His books include:

*Judaism: A Dialogue between Culture* (Jerusalem, 1999),

and the essay series:

*State, Law, and Halakhah* (Jerusalem, 2001-6).

and

*The Identity Crises of the Jewish State.*

Over the two packed days of the conference, around sixty presenters have been scheduled to speak.

For more information consult the AAJS website: [www.geocities.com/aajssite/](http://www.geocities.com/aajssite/) and <http://judaica.library.usyd.edu.au/AAJS.html>

Kieran Mitchell

On behalf of the AAJS, I'd like extend our heartfelt congratulations to Marianne Dacy for receiving the Sigmund Sternberg Award for her contribution to the interfaith movement in Australia and overseas.

This is an award of the highest order and is a testament to Marianne's unceasing commitment to dialogue and education.

We wish Marianne continued success in the important work she does.

*Dr Dvir Abramovich*

## Third Successful Mandelbaum Yiddish Conference Concludes

On November 25 and 26, Mandelbaum House was the venue for the Third International Mandelbaum Conference on Yiddish Studies, this year centred on the theme of Communities. The conference was opened by keynote speaker Prof Sol Encel, who spoke on the lives and fates of the Soviet Writers, who suffered during the Stalinist purges. Also on Sunday, Dr Tom Kramer discussed the ethical concerns of the vegetarian community while Hinde Ena Burstin presented a paper on the marginalisation within the publishing community of Yiddish poetesses. The day ended with a screening of the video, *Finf shtetlekh* (Five cities) from the Spielberg Archive.

The second day of the conference was opened by Dr Marianne Dacy who presented the audience with an overview of the works of Melbourne writer Moyshe Ayzend. After breaking for morning tea, the discussion turned to the topic of community and foodways, with Dr Gillian Polack discussing the (re-)identification of an Anglo family with the Yiddish cuisine traditions so prevalent in post-war Melbourne and Dr Felicity Newman describing how the sharing of Yiddishkayt, and specially the sharing of food traditions, has led to the revitalisation of community. Ute Mueller from Frankfurt presented a paper and slide show on the history of the 'Naier idisher teater' of Riga, based on her archival research. Dr Jennifer Dowling closed the conference with a discussion on the difficulties, and successes, of creating a virtual Yiddish community.

Following the conclusion of the conference, the Australian Friends of Yiddish and Mandelbaum House hosted a dinner in celebration of ten years of the Yiddish programme at the University of Sydney. Past and present students, and friends of the programme gathered to reunite and honour those who worked diligently to establish and maintain the Yiddish course. Special thanks were given to Prof Alan Crown and the late Nate Zusman, who together brought Yiddish to the University of Sydney. A prize in Mr Zusman's memory has been established by the Australian Friends Of Yiddish (AFOY), and this year the monies were split between two first year students: Jordan King-Lacroix and Emma Saad.

Next year will see the convening of the Fourth International Mandelbaum Conference on Yiddish Studies, marking one hundred years since the Czernowicz Conference. Calls for Papers will be issued in January.

*Dr Jennifer Dowling*  
*Dan Goodridge Lecturer in Yiddish*  
*University of Sydney*

Back in Sydney fresh from a study trip to Prague I am gathering my thoughts and impressions of this city of unsurpassed beauty. Situated in the European heartland, Prague is also an ancient centre of Jewish history. Its Jewish Quarter is studded with age old synagogues, of which the Altneu Shule is the most famous, and the Pinkas synagogue the most impressive Holocaust memorial to hundreds of thousands of victims to Nazism, and of which other synagogues, the clock tower with a Hebrew clock and the famous Jewish cemetery make this part of Prague the most visited museum complex in the Czech Republic.

Emerging from decades of oppression and neglect, brought about by Nazi and Communist totalitarianism, the Jewish community in Prague was given a new lease of life. A kosher restaurant and a Jewish school are in place, and the promotion of the heritage of Jewish culture has now taken root. Old synagogues throughout the country, for decades neglected, are now being restored and the awareness of Jewish history, as well as cultural landmarks, art and literature are now firmly embedded in the consciousness of the population of this small country. Jewish press has also been established with two important publications: *Rosh Chodesh* – a unique journal of political, historical, cultural and contemporary issues in the Czech Republic and worldwide and the bi-monthly magazine *Hamaskil* of the recently established reform movement in the country. Importantly, the Institute of Terezin Initiative is in the vanguard of cutting edge research and teaching of Holocaust history. In addition, the Prague Jewish Museum is the centre of education, exhibitions of priceless artefacts and Holocaust history. Visiting these sites leaves an indelible mark on any visitor.



*Altneu Synagogue*

Anybody who was familiar with antisemitic tendencies prevalent in the country throughout centuries, and in living memory during Communist rule, would say that the Czech Republic is one of the most tolerant countries towards Jews and Israel on the European continent – a far cry from the cynical and hateful approach to Jews and the Jewish past in the recent past.

It's not that the present situation is without problems. The emergence of ultra right nationalists throughout Europe has affected this country as well. As recently as last month during the commemoration of the Kristallnacht pogrom, hundreds of young neo-nazis from the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia staged a demonstration which marched through the Jewish Quarter of Prague. With controversy surrounding the decision of the Prague magistrate to allow the demonstration raging in the media, it was met with stiff resistance from the police force and wide condemnation by the public of the Czech Republic.

The overwhelming majority of the Jewish population, who remained in the country after Nazi occupation, perished during the Second World War. Many of those who survived left the country shortly after liberation; thousands of those who stayed were persecuted during the Communist era and many were those who intermarried and for security reasons denied their Jewish origins. In many cases, young people grew up unaware that they were Jewish. It is therefore remarkable to witness Judaism being brought back to life in this beautiful city.

*Anna Rosenbaum*

## **A New Era for Christian Jewish Relations?**

Only a few days ago, I returned from a three day consultation called by the International Council of Christians and Jews at the Evangelische Akademie, Arnoldshain, some thirty kilometres or so out of Frankfurt. The aim of the three year consultation project is to write a document that will be readable, clear and to the point, that will outline meaningful guidelines for Christian Jewish Relations in the next decade of the twenty first century. Most of the work will be done by email in a moderated list, but there will be three 'face to face meetings', the first which was at Arnoldshain, the second, at the end of October 2008 in Fribourg University, Switzerland and the last, where the document will be presented, chosen for its symbolic value, will be in Berlin. The core consultative group is composed of some thirty Jewish and Christian scholars, considered to be experts in the field of Christian Jewish relations, who include John Pawlikowski, Deborah Weissman and Edward Kessler. Sixteen were present at this initial consultation.

As a starting point, we had examined the Ten Points of Seelisberg, formulated sixty years ago, by a group of Jews and Christians who had met in Switzerland. Before we met, several of us had submitted and circulated three pages of points we thought should be included in the new document.

The existence of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) is rooted in this Seelisberg theses. The men and women who joined in the initial debate in 1947, afterwards created the ICCJ as basic platform for a continuing exchange and for Christian-Jewish cooperation.

The ICCJ now has branches in 37 countries. The document was formulated before the establishment of the State of Israel and just after the destruction of the Shoah, and was an attempt to meet the crisis 'head on', and build for the future. .



*Arnoldshain Group*

Fr John Pawlikowski recently postulated that, unlike the case in the 1970's and 1980's, there may be various reasons that so little is heard nowadays about the contents of the Seelisberg theses. One reason is their appeal regarding changes in theological approaches and concepts of revelation have on the whole become common ground. On the other hand, it may have to do with the fact that other contemporary concerns have taken priority in dialogue.

The Executive Board of the ICCJ agreed on the ICCJ agenda for the years 2007-2009. with five themes dominating the list of future activities:

1. **Re-assessment of the Jewish-Christian dialogue.** A stock-taking of what has been done and achieved since the end of World War II. How were the results received by Christians and Jews, what are the burning issues and how to deal with them?
2. **The impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Jewish-Christian relations.** This multi-layered topic should be explored under theological as well as political aspects and will be the topic of the next ICCJ conference in Jerusalem in June 2008..
3. **Jewish-Christian relations and third world theology.** With the help of global institutions as the World Council of Churches contact will be sought with scholars in Africa and Asia to intensify and extend existing dialogue projects and to find new perspectives.
4. **The Central and Eastern European countries.** A questionnaire has gone out to the ICCJ member organizations in six countries in the region and to a few dozen individuals in several more countries to convene an expert conference in November this year.
5. **Trilateral dialogue.** In the near future the ICCJ will establish a pilot group to investigate what the long standing Jewish-Christian dialogue can contribute to the growing contacts between the three so called Abrahamic religions.

When the final document is completed in 2009, it will be presented formally in Berlin, and it is hoped it will provide sound guidelines for many years to come.

*Marianne Dacy*

<p><b>Office Bearers</b>  President: Dr Dvir Abramovich                      Secretary/ Treasurer Dr Marianne Dacy  Vice-presidents: A/Prof Danny Ben-Moshe (VIC);  Dr Michael Abrahams-Sprod (NSW)  Journal Editors: A/Prof Ziva Shavitsky &amp; Dr Dvir Abramovich</p>
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**REMINDER**

Have you paid your membership subscription for 2007 or even 2006? Now it is time to pay for 2008. Our Association depends on members' support, and some have not paid for a very long time!

- \$50 AU regular membership
- \$60 AU institutional and overseas
- \$15 AU full-time student/pensioner

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*Newsletter edited by Anna Rosenbaum and Marianne Dacy*