

ICCJ Conference 2018. Budapest

Reflection by Luca Vesztróczy

Towards Reconciliation in a Broken World: Jewish and Christian Contributions to Responsible Citizenship

[English translation edited by Jutta Hausman and Peter A. Pettit.]

First of all, thank you for the conference invitation.

The positive:

It was a very good and logically organized conference. That so many people have come and represented their thoughts and shared their experiences impressed me very much. I liked the combination of the topic proposals, though some of the lectures seemed quite abstract.

Remark:

Is there a future-oriented goal? In my experience interreligious dialogue is difficult in practice.

The number of young participants was small. There is a generational gap which can create differences (e.g., the "victim mentality" is no longer comprehensible for a young person). We gained a good deal of lexical knowledge and the formalities were strong. Closer, more enduring relationships, unfortunately, seem not to be feasible.

Proposal:

The conference could include a pre-committee of young people, a junior conference of sorts. We would benefit from stronger use of social media (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter); a Facebook group could be helpful to build pre-conference connections and to sustain them after the conference. Ideally, there would be more opportunities to meet, twice or three times a year, in smaller, one-day or two-day conferences. This could work better in Europe, but many participants live in the United States. Perhaps the ICCJ conference could be held once in New York, since the largest Jewish community lives there. The theme could be the life of today's Jewish American communities and the relationship

between the small churches and the Jews there. It would enhance the conference, if participants could come not just by invitation, and for free. This would require fund-raising to underwrite young people's participation. Sustaining a consistent group of young people with more frequent meetings would also be desirable.

All the topics of the 3-day conference were excellent. The most appealing lecture was in Kecskemét from Canada's Hector Acero Ferrer. I became acquainted with Peter Pettit and Eva Schulz-Jander; I really liked them and would love to work with them.

I missed the stronger presence of the Association of Jewish Communities in Hungary (Mazsihisz). I felt a little bit that the subject of Jewish victimhood dominated. But really powerful propaganda cannot be ignored. Propagandistic representation of Jews as "cockroaches," as parasites, and thinking that liberating society from the Jewish people would be the best solution, were terrible and sick thoughts long ago; they remain so even now. Unfortunately, antisemitism is still present, since it is almost impossible to free ourselves from, deeply engrained ideas.

However, the Holocaust must be remembered to keep the memory of the past alive. Without living memory, we will cease to remember the darkest period of history and there will be no future. We need to develop better methods for engaging people.

Peace is always emphasized, as if we are still at war with each other until today. I do not think that this concept should be followed. Rather, after a genocide, one starts to practice reconciliation. Finding reconciliation between survivors and perpetrators is indispensable. Unfortunately, the survivors of those days (the Shoa) are already elderly or died and, just as unfortunately, reconciliation often was missed. It must be recognized that it was not handled well and became a taboo subject. It was suppressed both publicly and subconsciously in order to forget everything.

Thus now only the descendants can practice it. Before Christ's cross, I would call on Christians to let their hearts melt and see the "brother" in each "other." There is a lot to be done consciously about community development. The first step is to build small bridges, which the conference helps a lot.

I hope the next conference in Sweden will also be successful.

Further thoughts in a later communication

[Hungarian original available from The Association of the Friends and Sponsors; English summary by Peter A. Pettit]:

1. The conference only goes so far; a permanent working group meeting more regularly and frequently could be more effective in the long run.
2. (Reiterating,) more attention to younger participants, and perhaps a young participants section, would be helpful.
3. ICCJ should have a strong presence in social media.
4. More open, wider participation is needed; everyone should be involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue.
5. More frequent, smaller-scale conferences might be more effective.



Luca with the board of the Association of the Friends and Sponsors of the Martin Buber House:
Peter A. Pettit, Petra Grünewald-Stangl, Luca Vesztróczy, Eva Schulz-Jander and Michael Korn.