

Report from the ICCJ Salzburg Conference 2024 “Holiness: A Religious Imperative and Moral Obligation?” by Samantha Lin

I was incredibly fortunate that this was the first ICCJ that I have attended in person; I presented a workshop last year in Boston but was unable to attend in person. Because I have been involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue since I completed my Sacred Theology License in Judaic Studies at the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, I knew a few of the participants who would be there but I was still anxious to meet new people. I didn't know what the environment would be like.

This year I arrived late on the first evening in the quiet retreat above Salzburg, the St. Virgil and nervously went down to breakfast the next morning. I was immediately greeted and welcomed by Petra Grünewald-Stangl and Michael Korn, to whom I am particularly grateful for inviting me to join him and his wife for breakfast. Michael took great pains to welcome me and introduce me to leadership of both the Friends & Sponsors and the ICCJ and I am grateful for his welcome when I was still very jet-lagged and a little lost!

The first morning started with a beautiful meditative 15 minutes as we all sat in surprised silence as students from a nearby conservatory played a Mozart for us. The theme of the conference, “Holiness,” was introduced and the conference began.

For this report, I would like to highlight two major learnings that I took away from the conference; these come directly from some of the excellent workshops but also from the environment of meeting and talking with my fellow conference attendees.

I was reminded of the “wideness” of Jewish-Christian dialogue

I have been very fortunate to be deeply involved in Jewish-Catholic dialogue beginning from when I moved to Rome in 2016 as a member of the Russell Berrie Fellowship. Last June (2023) I was fortunate to be a delegate to the Emerging Leaders Conference in Oxford that was organized by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations. While the Jewish delegates at the conference came from all over the Jewish spectrum, all of the Christian delegates were Catholic.

This conference was a reminder of how wide Jewish-*Christian* dialogue is and of the opportunities that dialogues with different Christian churches have to learn from one another. I was fortunate to get to know many of the young scholars of the Network of Young Scholars in Jewish-Christian Dialogue like Julia Feldbauer at the University of Salzburg who focuses on Catholic theology and Paula Kautzmann, who focuses on Protestant theology. In conversation over lunch and tea breaks with them, I was inspired by the work of young lay Christian women as the future of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

I additionally attended the panel Orthodox Christian – Jewish Relations: Updates on a Different Dialogue /Panel Presentation and Discussion that was facilitated by Shoshana Gelfand and featured Prof. Michael Azar, Prof. Geoffrey Ready and Rabbi David Fox Sandmel. I am fortunate to know Shoshana and Rabbi David from the Emerging Leaders Conference but was not familiar with their work with the Orthodox Christian church and I was fascinated to learn about the different needs and sensitivities involved in that dialogue as compared to Jewish-Roman Catholic dialogue. I was particularly inspired by the willingness of each panelist to confront the fundamental challenges to Jewish-Orthodox Dialogue with a generous predisposition toward their dialogue partners, a model that is so crucial to dialogue, assuming the good in your dialogue partner, but that unfortunately can sometimes be lost. It was powerful to see it being played out in front of me by four respected leaders in the field.

I was inspired for the road ahead

On the bus ride to Bad Ischl I sat next to Dr. Gertrud Rapp, the president of the Association of Friends and Sponsors of the Martin Buber House and we talked about her long history of Jewish-Christian dialogue, how the work she has done for years has culminated in a tapestry of rich friendships across Europe and Israel. I reflected that most of the dialogue I have done up until this point has been focused on student-to-student dialogue or “young people” who will be the next generation of leaders. Attending the ICCJ I met many people in all stages of life, including many who have spent years dedicated to dialogue and even after retirement they to live out the spirit of Jewish-Christian dialogue in their personal lives.

On the bus, in small group discussions and over a glass of beer in the evenings I was reminded that the work of Jewish-Christian dialogue is more than just an academic pursuit but rather a life-long *orientation*. The way we live our lives can (and should!) be oriented in a way that considers, makes space for, and honors the dignity of “the other.” It is a life-long pursuit, not just a week in Salzburg.

Being able to attend the ICCJ was a privilege. These spaces always remind me that I am a student, never the expert, and I always can learn things from others. Whether I was learning from the academic workshops or from the example of others, the ICCJ was a rich experience that I would not have been able to be part of without the generous funding of the Friends & Sponsors of the Martin Buber House. I am profoundly grateful for their support and now feel it my responsibility to model the life-long dedication to dialogue that I was so inspired by at the ICCJ.