EDITORIAL

Three subjects provide a focus for this edition. The centenary of the birth of Abraham Joshua Heschel was commemorated in London with a symposium at University College in November 2007 and we reproduce most of the papers delivered on that occasion. The current state of Jewish–Muslim relations is explored through a programme of mapping areas of cooperation in Europe conducted by CEJI – a Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe. We also include a selection of papers delivered at the annual Jewish Christian Muslim Student Conference (JCM). In our Documentation section we publish the ‘Open Letter’ to the Jewish community by Muslim scholars, launched in Cambridge in February 2008. Thirdly we publish two significant papers given at the opening of a travelling exhibition of the Memorial Scroll Trust, charged with caring for Torah Scrolls formerly in the State Jewish Museum in Prague.

At the Heschel Symposium a small leaflet was distributed that included the two iconic pictures that represent his special significance to many Jews who came of age in the 1960s. In one he is walking with the Rev. Martin Luther King on the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, 1965. In the other he is also with Rev. King during the anti-Vietnam protest at Arlington Cemetery, 1968. They show Heschel not only as a scholar, writer and teacher, but as an activist for social justice, representing the very best of practical Jewish values. These two aspects of his life emerge very clearly in the papers exploring his legacy delivered at the symposium. Norman Solomon, Jeremy Gordon and Diana Lipton deal respectively with his scholarly work in the fields of Jewish Thought, Rabbinic tradition and the Hebrew Bible. Michael Chester addresses Heschel’s contribution to Jewish–Christian relations. Edie Friedman focuses on the challenge posed to the Jewish community by his social activism, a theme touched on indirectly by Diana Lipton in discussing how often prophetic texts are used as the basis of preaching by rabbis. What emerges from the papers is that the range and diversity of his interests and activities make it difficult to assess his legacy. Sadly, his contribution in a variety of scholarly spheres is sometimes overlooked by those working within more conventional academic specializations and boundaries.

The ‘open letter’ calling for ‘peace, dialogue and understanding between Muslims and Jews’ arises from the work of the Centre for the Study of Muslim–Jewish Relations within the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths in Cambridge, founded by Dr Edward Kessler. In a brief couple of years it has established a programme of academic research, on-line learning and new dialogue projects. The ‘open letter’ is one product of this initiative, led by the Centre’s Muslim staff. The letter’s positive attitude to dialogue is unlikely to

convince those who have fears about 'Muslims', nor those who gain from propagating such fears. A frequent response, apart from 'I've made up my mind don't convince me with facts', is that the signatories of the letter, however many and significant they may be, are quickly dismissed as 'moderate' (strangely now become a dirty word) and therefore the exceptions and 'not representative'. Nevertheless, for those who have an open mind, and who recognize the multiplicity of voices and viewpoints within any religious tradition, it can only be reassuring to find Muslims openly advocating such a dialogue. At the time of writing the letter continues to gain signatories from international scholars and figures representing both 'liberal' and 'conservative' positions within Islam, as well as cautiously positive Jewish responses. We are pleased to publish an early reaction from Dr Judea Pearl and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC).

The 'open letter' is just one more step in the struggle against the 'culture of fear' that was the subject of one of the annual Jewish Christian Muslim Student Conferences (JCM) in Wuppertal. Reading the papers from that year, 2005, the Conference's thirty-second year, one is struck by the different approaches to the topic. Whereas the Jewish and Christian papers at the time could afford more detached and thoughtful analyses, the former represented by Jeffrey Newman, the Muslim paper by Sarah Joseph throws us into the daily reality of threat and assault *upon* (please note the emphasis 'upon', not 'by') Muslims in European countries. The analogies with Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda against Jews have to be taken seriously as reflecting a process that is conditioning us to view Muslims collectively as 'a threat' and as 'the enemy', and thus labelling them as legitimate targets for violence and worse. If we cannot change the general climate that seems so deeply entrenched, we can at least protest the misrepresentations and demonising of Muslims, particularly since they echo Jewish experience.

The JCM conference in 2006 focused on the role of religion in the public arena and we reproduce the Jewish paper by David Meyer and the Christian one by Annette Mehlhorn, both experienced figures in interfaith dialogue. The more positive quest for models of coexistence was explored in 2007, and we include the Jewish and Muslim papers, respectively, by Judith Rosen-Berry and Inam Hüsseyin. Ruth Friedman, the Dialogue Co-ordinator at CEJI summarizes the history of the organization and the results of mapping Jewish-Muslim Dialogue in five European countries. The sheer extent of this cooperation is heartening and she draws conclusions about the importance of extending it further.

While the 'open letter' points to a more positive relationship with Muslims, the Good Friday prayer 'For the Jews' recently promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI seems set to reverse the positive gains in Jewish-Catholic relations set in motion

by the last two Popes. We document a significant response from the Discussion Group 'Jews and Christians' of the Central Committee of German Catholics.

An intriguing contrast to the direct engagement with social and political activism that conventionally characterize Jewish self-understanding can be found in the account by Norman Davies of his daily life as a Jewish contemplative. He explores the implications of his own decision to adopt a life of spiritual contemplation as a possible route for others in the Jewish world. He argues the case, which has roots in Jewish tradition, that prayer itself also affects external human realities.

The third topic is intimately linked to the history of this journal. In 1964 scrolls from the State Jewish Museum in Prague were brought to the UK to the Westminster Synagogue with the support of its rabbi, Dr Harold Reinhart. Those that could be repaired took on a second life, going out on permanent loan to Jewish communities around the world, while some of those beyond repair have served as memorials to lost Jewish communities. As Rabbi Reinhart's successor at Westminster Synagogue, our late former editor Rabbi Dr Albert Friedlander, and his wife Evelyn, played a leading role in the Memorial Scrolls Trust, which has responsibility for the fate of these precious items. Evelyn continues this work, and the papers by Magda Veselská and Leo Pavlát were given at the opening of an exhibition at the Trust which had travelled from the Jewish Museum in Prague. The latter paper contains new information about the history of the Museum itself and the fate of its contents. It corrects the commonly held view that the museum was developed by the Nazis as a 'museum of an extinct race', and gives a moving account of the struggles of those who sought, through the Museum and its exhibitions, to preserve the memory of Jewish life in Bohemia and Moravia in the short time available before they were deported and killed.

Book reviews and poems complete this issue.

Jonathan Magonet