The first Council of Christians and Jews was founded in London in 1942 during World War II and the Nazi persecution of Jews by Chief Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz and the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple. The council evolved with the goal of establishing healthier and greater understanding between the two faiths.

The council grew out of Jewish-Christian dialogue between diverse groups during the 1930s and Temple's support for Jewish refugees. One result of this activity was a proposal to form an organization built on a national network. Temple, then Archbishop of York, invited leaders of various communities to discuss these proposals in 1941 and outlined the mission of what would become the first Council of Christians and Jews. The new Council would work against all forms of discrimination and promote the 'fundamental ethical teachings which are common to Judaism and Christianity'.

Dr. Hertz agreed with this approach and highlighted the central point as being 'the danger to civilisation involved in antisemitism, as well as the steps that might be taken by Christians, working in consultation with Jews, to prevent its spread in this country'. He noted that Pope Pius XI had recently affirmed that: 'Antisemitism is a movement in which we Christians can have no part whatsoever. Spiritually we are Semites'. Hertz made it clear that the Jews and Christians of the Council would be responsible for their own religious teaching without mutual interference.

The formation of the first Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) was agreed at a meeting chaired by William Temple, now the nominated Archbishop of Canterbury, on 20 March 1942.

 The aims of the council were:

(a) To check and combat religious and racial intolerance.

(b) To promote mutual understanding and goodwill between Christians and Jews in all sections of the community, especially in connection with problems arising from conditions created by the war.

(c) To promote fellowship between Christian and Jewish youth organisations in educational and cultural activities.

(d) To foster co-operation of Christians and Jews in study and service directed to post-war reconstruction.

The initial membership of the CCJ was composed of leaders of Christian and Jewish organisations. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, and the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, Cardinal Arthur Hinsley, agreed to be a Joint President subject to the condition that any statements be approved by him prior to publication. The formation of the CCJ was announced on radio and in the press on 1 October 1942. Today the Queen is the patron of CCJ UK.

Council of Christians and Jews in Australia

At the same time as the first UK CCJ was forming, there were personal communications between some Jewish rabbis and Christian clergy in Australia. In Melbourne, Rabbi Herman Sanger, the German-born, Cambridge-educated senior rabbi of Temple Beth Israel, was a prominent proponent of interfaith dialogue, while in Sydney Rabbi Israel Porush of the Great Synagogue was involved in discussions with Christian bishops and archbishops.

In 1943 Rabbi Porush and the Anglican Bishop Coadjutor of Sydney, C V Pilcher, a supporter of Zionism, formed the first Council of Christians and Jews in Australia, based on the English model. The Council acted as a pressure group, along with Melbourne Catholic Archbishop Daniel Mannix and Rabbi Sanger, to plead with the Australian Government to allow Jewish refugees into Australia from Europe,. During WWII, the possibility of a state of Israel became such an issue for some senior Christian clergy, particularly in Sydney, that Father N. Hehir, an advisor to then Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, resigned in 1944 over the Palestinian question. Amid the Australian government's post-war acceptance of Jewish refugees from Europe, in-fighting and a lack of resources caused the Sydney CCJ's collapse in 1948. Unfortunately, real dialogue between Christians and Jews in Sydney was not re-established until after the visit of Pope John Paul 11 in 1986 and the Sydney CCJ was formally revived in 1988.

Although the Executive Council of Australian Jewry had wanted to encourage CCJs to form in Australia, many Orthodox Rabbis were opposed to lay leaders and Progressive or Reformed rabbis involving themselves in religious matters. Some Orthodox rabbis were very wary of working with Christians and senior Orthodox rabbis such as Rabbis Porush, Lubovsky and Apple, initially spoke out against an interfaith group. However, Rabbi Lubovsky and Rabbi Apple later swung around to become keen CCJ supporters.

Much work went on for many years to try to establish a CCJ in Australia, but the work was thwarted by Christian/ Jewish rivalry and intra-religious divisions, especially between Catholics and Protestants and of course Orthodox and Progressive rabbis. Certain religious leaders wanted to be defined as the initial creators of the Council in Australia and there was undoubted rivalry between senior lay and religious figures in Melbourne and Sydney.

However, in Melbourne, the picture was much more encouraging. A Council of Christians and Jews in Victoria held its inaugural gathering on 28 February 1985 after a process of study and reflection by a small group made up of members of a range of Christian denominations and Jewish faith traditions. Much of the success in establishing the Victorian CCJ was due to the hard and persistent work of Sister Shirley Sedawie. A Sister of Sion, she had been commissioned by the Pope Paul VI to seek an improvement of relationships between Jews and Catholics, after the Second Vatican Council accepted the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. Sister Shirley began her work in Rome but soon after Vatican II she returned to Australia and appeared in her black habit on the doorstep of Melbourne's Temple Beth Israel rabbi, Dr John Levi. Rabbi

Levi and Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky were among those responsible for getting the CCJ Victoria off the ground.

For its first six years, the Victorian CCJ was directed by Rev Professor Robert A. Anderson, a minister of the Uniting Church of Australia, who laid the groundwork for a firm contribution to our multicultural society. The first meetings of the group were held at Raheen, the then slightly dilapidated mansion now owned by the Pratt family. The Victorian CCJ has continued to grow and has been the catalyst for forming similar Councils in most States, as well as the peak national body, the Australian Council of Christians and Jews.

The Australian Council of Christians and Jews (ACCJ) was founded on 17 December 1991 by the New South Wales Council of Christians and Jews and the Victorian Council of Christians and Jews to meet the requirement of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), based in Martin Buber House, Heppenheim, Germany, for bodies affiliated with ICCJ to be national organisations. The ACCJ has been a force for tolerance and respect in our community, encouraging the involvement of Christian-Jewish and multi-faith dialogue in Australia through the Councils of Christians and Jews in Australia and New Zealand. All mainstream churches and Jewish religious groupings have been actively and publicly associated with the Council.

Since 1985, every Governor-General has proudly agreed to be Patron of the ACCJ. The present Patrons of the ACCJ are Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple AO, Rev Dr Peter Carnley AO, Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy AC[1], Rabbi Dr John Levi AM, and Jeanne Pratt AC.

Philip Bliss

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[1] President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. He headed the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews.