

From: **Daniel Ari Baker** <d.baker2@ugrad.unimelb.edu.au>
Date: 2009/11/17
Subject: Meeting with JCCV
To: michael@aleph.org.au

Hi Michael,

Thanks for your facebook message re the upcoming Aleph meeting with the JCCV. Unfortunately I will be overseas until the end of January 2010, and so won't be able to attend, but I do have a few comments which you might bring up at the meeting; but there a number of issues raised by such a meeting which I feel I must address.

The JCCV has for many years now discriminated against GLBTQ people in the Jewish community, most obviously by its exclusion of Aleph from membership, but also by its failure to censure Rabbis and other community organizations which preach hate. Further, it has done nothing to counteract the ideology put forward by even the most forward thinking mainstream Victorian Rabbis, viz. that heterosexual marriage and the bearing of children is the only way to achieve full participation in our Jewish community and the Jewish people at large. Indeed, the very fact that this meeting is being organized now, that the JCCV is only now beginning to take an interest in 'Gay Jews' Concerns' (not, incidentally, in gay Jews themselves, but in their concerns - that is, the factors which will influence their next vote for the JCCV executive) is, in my opinion, appalling. I have been studying in Philadelphia since July of this year, and can tell you that the involvement of the mainstream Jewish leadership with gay Jews puts the JCCV to shame. For example, at the University of Pennsylvania, where I am studying, Hillel, the national Jewish student union, has a subsidiary body called J-Bagel, which caters to the many gay Jewish students across America. Rabbis and community leaders attend Shabbat dinners organized by this group, and gay Jews are treated as valuable assets to the community at large. One can hardly imagine any executive member of the JCCV coming out so openly and positively for the cause of GLBTQ Jews.

Honestly, I am outraged by Mr Zygier's statement that 'the details of what form [inclusion] might take have to be worked out; we're still at the information-gathering stage'. Mr Zygier's suggestion that there is some uncertainty about what form the enfranchisement of gay Jews should take undermines the earnestness of the JCCV's ostensibly friendly approach. There are no 'different forms' of inclusion: either a community is enfranchised, or it is not. Either gay Jews are full and equal members of the Victorian Jewish community, or they are not. Mr Zygier suggests that the JCCV is trying to be 'as inclusive as possible'. The remark seems, with respect, disingenuous at best and mendacious at worst. Inclusion is the easiest task in the world; all that it requires is the renouncing of one's own antihuman prejudices. Until Jews of all kinds, including queers, are welcomed, the JCCV cannot claim to be committed to tolerance. It is possible, even preferable, for an organization which claims to represent an ethnic community to include all quarters of that community; if it does not, it can legitimately claim neither a desire for inclusiveness nor, indeed, to be a fairly representative body.

Further, Mr Zygier's reference to the 'information-gathering' stage is offensive in the extreme. Gay Jews are not specimens to be examined and theorized: we are human beings, and his suggestion that some kind of study must be performed on gays before enfranchisement can be considered is degrading and disrespectful. What information could possibly be required? We are Jews. We are gay. We are unwilling to renounce our Jewishness, and are equally unwilling to renounce our queerness. That is all there is to it: the matter is extremely simple.

Kind regards,

Daniel Ari Baker