



## "... he keeps faith forever." (Psalm 146:6)

A Declaration concerning Christians and Jews as Witnesses of God's Faithfulness

Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany | 30.11.2016

Declaration of the 12th Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany in its 3rd Session.

In the autumn of 2015, in the run-up to the Reformation Anniversary of 2017, the Synod of the EKD discussed Martin Luther's relations with the Jews. It distanced itself from Luther's vilifications of Jewish people and stated that his views concerning Judaism were not compatible with today's understanding of God's faithfulness to his people as presented in the Bible. In its declaration of 11th November 2015, the Synod identified the necessity to take further steps of repentance and renewal. As part of this journey of repentance and renewal, we will discuss the question of the so-called 'Mission to the Jews' at this year's conference. In so doing, we are aware that this topic affects the identity of both Jews and Christians, albeit in different ways. For the Christian Church, this topic relates to its understanding of itself as the Church of Jesus Christ. For Jews, this topic is associated with a long and painful history of forced conversion and the disputation of their enduring identity as God's chosen people.

**1.** In 1950, in Berlin-Weißensee, the Synod of the EKD declared that: "We believe God's promise to be valid for his Chosen People even after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ."<sup>[1]</sup>

Since this time, the insight that Israel is still chosen by God has been debated within theology and within the Church. The consequences of the debate have been examined and appropriated into church doctrine. We confirm that the Church has not superseded the people of Israel as God's chosen people. God is faithful to his people. If we, as Christians, abide by the new covenant which God made in Jesus Christ, then we simultaneously declare that God's covenant with his people Israel is valid without qualification. Since 1945, the Church has increasingly acknowledged the sins which it has committed against Jews in the past, as well as recognising the Christians' share of responsibility for the Shoah, thereby establishing a new way of thinking which has consequences for the possibility of a Christian witness to Jewish people.

**2.** In 2000, the study "Christen und Juden III" (Christians and Jews III), undertaken by the Evangelical Church in Germany, stated that: "The term 'covenant' points to God as the active party, to his faithfulness and support, on which both Jews and Christians alike depend" (46). From this, we conclude that: Irrespective of their mission in the world, Christians are not called to show Israel the way to God and his salvation. All efforts to induce Jews to change their religion contradict the confession of God's faithfulness and the continuing status of Israel as God's chosen people.

**3.** Through Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew, Christians have a permanent link with the people of Israel. For Christians, their relationship with Israel is part of their identity and the history of their faith. They confess "Jesus Christ, the Jew, who, as the Messiah of Israel, is the saviour of the world" (EKIR, Statement of the Synod of 1980). The fact that Jews do not share this confession, we commend to God. On our journey of repentance and renewal, we learn from Paul that God himself will let his people Israel see the perfection of his salvation (cf. Rom 11:25 ff). For us, the trust in God's promise to Israel and the confession of Jesus Christ belong together. The mystery of God's revelation encompasses both: the expectation of Jesus Christ's return in glory and the confidence that God will save the people whom he called first.

**4.** With gratitude, we experience manifold kinds of encounters between Christians and Jews, and we also tread the multiple learning paths opened up by such encounters. These enrich us. They help us

to respect the religious autonomy of Judaism and to better understand our own faith. We re-affirm our desire to continue to embrace such encounters and, wherever possible, to intensify them with a view to our common responsibility, both before God and in the world.

**5.** In our encounters with Jewish partners, we have learnt to perceive each other as equal, to listen to one another in dialogue and to bring our respective experiences of faith and ways of life into the conversation. In such a way, we gently witness to our understanding of God and his truth, which always supports life.

**6.** It is from the perspective of our bond with the people of Israel that we need to theologially and spiritually understand and live out our relationship with God and our responsibility in the world.

In preaching and teaching, in counselling and diaconal ministry, wherever Judaism is misrepresented or distorted, whether consciously or unconsciously, we will confront the falsehoods. We affirm our opposition and resistance to old and new forms of hostility towards the Jews and anti-semitism. Rather, the co-operation between Christians and Jews is a way of embarking upon a journey together, taking joint responsibility for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

The Synod requests the Council of the EKD and the EKD Church Conference to ensure that the insights put forward are made accessible to the churches and are presented, for instance, through accompanying materials, in ways which affirm that encounters with various forms of the Jewish practice of faith lead to a deeper understanding of one's own Christian faith.

In three years' time, the Synod will review the results of the continuation of the work which it initiated.

*Magdeburg, 9th November 2016*

The Praeses of the Synod  
of the Evangelical Church in Germany  
**Dr Irmgard Schwaetzer**

#### Footnotes

[1] *Die Kirchen und das Judentum. Dokumente von 1945 bis 1985*, ed. by. Rolf Rendtorff/Hans Hermann Henrix, Paderborn und München 1989, 2.ed, 549.