



60 years - the Ten Points of Seelisberg

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President of the International Council of Christians and Jews

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There may be various reasons why contrary to the 1970's and 1980's so little is heard nowadays about the contents of the Seelisberg Theses. One being that their appeal regarding changes in theological approaches and concepts of revelation have on the whole become common ground. On the other hand it may have to do with the fact that other contemporary concerns have taken priority also in dialogue.

Perhaps one reason might be that it is also difficult to admit 60 years after Seelisberg and 42 years after Nostra Aetate that in all likelihood insufficient steps were taken to end the exclusion of Judaism from the Churches. It is after all easier in church statements to denounce antisemitism in general terms as is common nowadays. In principle that is after all welcome. And how we would have welcomed such denunciation after 1938!

But one cannot escape the impression that such determined rejection of antisemitism rather appears to serve as distraction from our own homework. Even though it is generally understood that the Pharisees are not just the evil ones, even though it is clearly understood that calling God "Father" is not the exclusive prerogative of Christianity, this stereotyping remains part of sermons and religious curricula. On the one hand it remains important to emphasize the need to rectify

firmly and once and for all whatever falsehood or denigration of Jews and Judaism is taught or proclaimed from the pulpit.

On the other hand the Church's' relationship to Judaism has by no means yet become part of its self-image. It is not an aspect it actually explores when thinking about itself. The permission at present under discussion to allow the Tridentine Rite of the Roman Catholic Church aims at reviving a self-understanding that believes to manage without the Old/ First Testament even though this erroneous Marcion perception had already been denounced in the 2nd century. Without that word of God that we share with Judaism, without acknowledging this source Christians cannot find their way to the One God.

It is incumbent upon Christians to find their identity side by side with Judaism and this means side by side with Judaism as it defines itself. Leaving behind the folkloristic approach to Jews and Judaism so popular with Christians, we need to pay serious attention to our partners' questioning of Christian understanding of monotheism, we need a positive approach to the value of Torah, and we need to recognize the importance of the State of Israel.

When looking at Judaism, let us try not to do so through Christian eyes. And this certainly does not mean that Christians have to set aside their specific approach to the revelations given to Israel and to through the person of Jesus. But we must rid our self-understanding from any form of anti-Judaism – in the same way in which Jesus would never have considered damning Judaism as such.

In accord with their concern to give impact above all to Christian education allow me to enlarge the Theses of Seelisberg by three additions arising from current discussion. In that way the model of the Ten Commandments is being replaced by the Thirteen Principles laid down by Maimonides – not such a bad example after all.

- It has to be emphasized that the Torah is God's present love and it and it cannot therefore be seen as standing in contrast to the gospel Jesus has preached;
- It has to be emphasized that Christians partake in God's promises to the People of Israel through Jesus. If the People of Israel are not to be understood as simply displaced by or transformed into Christians, then and that therefore the conversion of Jews can never be part of a Christian program;
- It has to be emphasized that the State of Israel is of basic importance to Jewish identity and that this relevance must be acknowledged from Christian side.

The International Council of Christians and Jews and the World Council of Churches have set out on a joint program exploring the impact of the Christian-Jewish dialogue on the self-understanding of the Churches. Jewish observers participate in this exploration. For today the question arises whether Judaism can remain unaffected by Christianity's efforts at renewal. Genuine dialogue after all is based on a reciprocal approach. This is the new challenge we are facing today.

It is precisely the requirement of mutuality to which Dabru Emet has drawn attention – the so far most prominent and most elaborated answer to Christian endeavour to get a new relationship to Judaism. The main focus of the current ICCJ's program is the stock-taking of Christian-Jewish dialogue. Based on the Seelisberg Theses we challenge both the Churches and Judaism. It is our hope that our explorations will eventually provide a new direction, as did those 1947 Theses of Seelisberg.