



## Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews

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**A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews, 24 June 2001.**

### Church and Israel

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## **Preface by the Editor of the Leuenberg Documents Vol. 6** [To top](#)

The document 'Church and Israel' marks the first joint theological contribution of the Reformation churches in Europe to the relationship between Church and Israel. A draft document, whose genesis is outlined in its introduction stage by stage, was worked out between 1996 and 1999 by a Leuenberg working group pursuant to a resolution of the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (Vienna 1994). In 2000 it underwent a discernment procedure in the signatory churches of the Leuenberg Agreement and some other churches and church families.

It was submitted to the 5<sup>th</sup> Leuenberg General Assembly in Belfast for an in-depth discussion and was adopted unanimously on 24 June 2001 in the present form. Its consequence was elucidated by Wilhelm Hüffmeier – himself actively involved from the onset in the 'Church and Israel' working group as director of the Leuenberg Secretariat – in his introduction to the Leuenberg document 'The Church of Jesus Christ' as follows: 'The General Assembly identifies itself with this text. The text formulates the consensus reached on this issue. Although this consensus does not possess the binding force like the Agreement accepted by each individual church, it does constitute a high degree of commitment for the theological work of the churches affiliated through the Leuenberg Fellowship' (The Church of Jesus Christ. The Contribution of the Reformation towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity, Leuenberg Documents 1, Frankfurt/M. 1995, p.77). Accordingly, the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly requested the churches in its resolution to 'receive the results of the doctrinal conversations and to take them into account in Christian/Jewish dialogue and in their own work on the issue »Church and Israel«.'

The inner-Protestant consensus reached which was continuously acquired afresh as the consultations of the study group proceeded in discussions and reflections – we forewent on principle any votes liable to majority or minority positions – calls for a broader reception in churches and congregations, various dialogue groups and the public. Dealing with this study will be of advantage to synods, church governing bodies, theological committees, seminaries and faculties, pastoral colleges or in the adult education. The three parts of the document with their respective emphasis on historical, dogmatic or practical aspects may be selectively approached depending on the question raised. It should be kept in mind, however, that these dimensions are cross-referenced throughout the paper.

This German-English volume is to facilitate a broader reception of this paper. The French text will be available at the Leuenberg website ([www.leuenberg.net](http://www.leuenberg.net)) in the near future and shall be included in one of the next supplements to the collection volume 'Accords et dialogues oecuméniques' (ed. André Birmelé and Jacques Terme, Les Bergers et les Mages, Paris 1995ff).

The short time span between the adoption and the publication of this paper is due to the help of many whom I have pleasure in thanking: Margaret A. Pater for her reliable translation, Hera Moon and Mark Pockrandt of the Leuenberg Secretariat and Peter Brath of the Evangelical Church of the Union for organisational petty works and the layout, Dr Wolfgang Neumann of the Lembeck Publishing House for his uncomplicated and rapid coordination, and last but not least all the members of the Leuenberg doctrinal working group who have worked together with indefatigability and expertise in the consultations and supplementary editorial sessions under the chairmanship of Dr Ernst Michael Dörrfuß.

The publication was made possible through the general financial support of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, The Evangelical Church in Germany, The Evangelical Church of the Union, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany and the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland. Many warm thanks are due to all those in charge.

*Helmut Schwier*, Berlin, July 2001

## **Church and Israel**

### **A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews**

The 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship resolved unanimously on 24 June 2001:

1. It thanks the Leuenberg Working Group "Church and Israel" for its work and for submitting the results of its doctrinal conversations.
2. It adopts the results of the doctrinal conversations.
3. It requests the churches to receive the results of the doctrinal conversations and to take them into account in Christian/Jewish dialogue and in their own work on the issue "Church and Israel".

#### **Introduction**

The 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship adopted the study "The Church of Jesus Christ. The Contribution of the Reformation towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity" in Vienna on 9 May 1994. At a central point in this study, in which the Reformation churches in Europe for the first time formulated a common understanding of the church, the nature of the church is described as the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ, from which the church derives its description of itself as the 'people of God'. Since the expression 'people of God' reflects the way in which the people of Israel understands itself according to the Old Testament tradition, it is clear from the start that for the Church to describe itself as the 'people of God' raises the question of the proximity and the boundary between the Church and Israel.

Consequently, the Leuenberg Study on the Church states expressly, "The relationship of Jews and Christians, of Israel and the church requires further doctrinal consultations among the churches participating in the Leuenberg church fellowship. The 1994 General Assembly has therefore selected it as one of the three new themes of doctrinal conversations." (p.103, note 3)

The Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship provided the doctrinal working group on 'Church and Israel' which was then formed with project guidelines containing four basic elements.

1. "There is an inseparable connection between the election of the church and that of Israel, between the 'old' and 'new' covenant.
2. Their relationship to Israel is for Christians and the Church inseparably bound up with the foundation of their faith.
3. In their encounter with the witness of the lives of Jews, Christians will discover both similarities and differences in the life of Church and Synagogue.
4. Lively dialogue between Jews and Christians requires that both sides affirm their testimony to the experienced truth of their faith and attend to each other in an effort to reach mutual understanding."

According to these guidelines, the goal of the conversations was "to develop a common understanding among the churches of the Reformation on the theme 'Church and Israel'". It was to be in line with the criteria stated in the Leuenberg Agreement (38), namely to reflect the endeavour to make the "common understanding of the Gospel ... relevant", in this case "against the background of the special challenges of Christian-Jewish dialogue". It was to be "open to dialogue between Christians and Jews as the basis for the promotion of mutual trust" and able to "prove its value in the proclamation, teaching and pastoral care of the churches". And, finally, it was to "contribute towards ecumenical dialogue".

It is important to say something about the terms used in this study document. The term *Israel* refers to the Jewish people and to Judaism as a religious and ethnic entity, including some possibly contradictory self-definitions in the diverse branches of Judaism both in the past and in the present. When what is meant is *Israel* in a political sense, the study refers expressly to the *State of Israel*.

In accordance with the project guidelines mentioned above, the doctrinal working group started from the particular contexts in which Christian/Jewish dialogue is taking place in the various Reformation churches in Europe at the present time.

*Part I* thus begins by making clear to what extent the signatory churches to the Leuenberg Agreement are interested in a dialogue with Israel, the questions on which a consensus can be identified among them and where there are differences on individual points (Part I, Sections 1 and 2). Since reflection on a new definition of the relation between the Church and Israel is not possible without a critical analysis of the biblical foundation and of the contexts in the history of the churches, there is then a description of the historical development of the relationship between the Church and Israel (Part I, Sections 3 and 4).

*Part II* contains the necessary dogmatic reflection. Section 1 begins by discussing the theological attempts already made to clarify the relation between the Church and Israel; then Section 2 spells out its own definition of this relationship in various steps based on theological criteria. In Section 3 the insights gained into the coexistence between the Church and Israel are expressed more concretely.

The study leads up to some practical conclusions in *Part III*. Section 1 begins by indicating some specific fields of action by the churches and spells out some tasks. This part concludes in Section 2 with a statement about the responsibility Christians and Jews share for the world. The concluding remarks express the churches' awareness of their guilt, with a request for forgiveness and the hope that it will be possible to follow new paths.

In order to compile this study, the delegates sent by more than 20 European churches gathered for

seven consultations (Winter 1996 – Basle; Spring 1997 – Preetz; Autumn 1997 – Warsaw; Spring 1998 – Amsterdam; Autumn 1998 – Dresden; Spring 1999 – Prague; Autumn 1999 – Berlin). After a discernment procedure in the churches of the Leuenberg Fellowship, the doctrinal conversation group met again in Rome in November 2000 for its eighth and final consultation in order to discuss over 30 reactions received and to incorporate their concerns.

It was especially significant that Dr. Chana Safrai (Jerusalem), professor for Jewish and Rabbinic Studies, was a regular participant in the meetings; the conference in Warsaw was also attended by Rabbi Dr. Roland Gradwohl (Jerusalem, now deceased) and by Stanislaw Krajewski (Warsaw).

The titles of all the addresses given at the consultations are listed in chronological order in the Appendix.

## Part I

### Israel and the Church

#### 1. *Theological and historical presuppositions* [To top](#)

1.1. There are several reasons for defining the relationship between the Church and Israel. The Church is rooted in Israel. Israel's Holy Scriptures constitute one part of the Christian Bible, the Old Testament. The Church is understood by faith as the community of people who believe in God's saving act in Jesus Christ, namely the 'body of Christ'; but the Church is also understood as the people of God chosen in Christ. Thus the Christian faith makes a statement about the Church which is in tension with Israel's understanding of itself as the people of God. In the course of the history of the relation between the Church and Israel, this tension has had various consequences; periods of coexistence have been succeeded by periods of dis-interest and often also of enmity and hatred.

The churches look back on times of persecution of the Jews and especially on the Shoah, which exceeded all previous persecution in its programmatic brutality and intensity. The churches know that they failed in that situation; a number of churches in the Leuenberg Fellowship have therefore confessed their guilt towards Israel and their share of guilt in the Shoah in different ways and given voice to their failure. The churches failed because of indifference and fear, pride and weakness; but they also failed, above all, as a consequence of wrong interpretations of texts from the Bible and the terrible theological errors to which they led. Sometimes in Christianity there has been an idea that the rejection and devaluation of Judaism, even to the extent of overt anti-Semitism, could be considered an important aspect of how Christians understand themselves.

If, in view of this past, we are able to come to a new, theologically responsible clarification of the relation between the Church and Israel, this will give the Church greater freedom and also constitute a theological enrichment and a deeper insight into its own nature.

1.2. The recommendations adopted by the General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship at Strasbourg in 1987 for conducting the study "The Church of Jesus Christ" state, *inter alia*, that it should take account of "the relationship of the Christian community to the Jewish people within the framework of Reformation ecclesiology and from the perspective of our identity as a church". The study presented in 1994 followed this instruction by including statements on the relation between the Church and Israel at several points.

1.2.1. The nature of the Church, its mission and its task were described in the following way (p.88). It is "God's people chosen in Christ, gathered and nurtured by the Holy Spirit, on its way through time towards its consummation in the Kingdom of God. The church has its origin and lasting foundation in this all-encompassing action of God." The Church which faith thus understands as "God's people chosen in Christ" has its source in Israel, historically regarded. But, despite the Christ event, Israel has not changed its view of itself as the people chosen by God's action. God and his people Israel are linked by an indissoluble bond. This act of God's election is expressed in the divine covenant, especially as described in the biblical account of the events on Sinai (Ex. 19-24). The inseparable link between the election of the Church and the election of Israel as the people of God has been described from a Christian perspective in the study on the Church as follows (p.102). "As his people God has called Israel to faith (Is. 7:9) and has shown it through his guidance the way to life (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 30:15-20) and has in this way made it the light of the nations (Is. 42:6). This promise to Israel has not been rendered invalid by the Christ event because God's faithfulness upholds it (Rom. 11:2, 29)."

1.2.2. In Chapter I of the study on the church ("The Nature of the Church as the Community of Saints"), Section 1.1. begins by speaking about the "justifying action of the triune God". Under the heading "Election as the basis for the mission of the church – the church as the people of God", Section 3.1. deals in greater detail with the conception of the Church in the light of certain biblical statements. God has "chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3-6). Then, referring to Ex. 19:5f, it states expressly that "this election of the Church is inseparably connected with the election of Israel as the people of God". The study speaks about the "church as the people of God (I Peter 2:9f.)" as the "community of believers called by Christ from among Jews and Gentiles alike (Rom. 9:24)" (p.102). And then in this context it includes a note containing the sentence quoted above in the introduction about the necessity of doctrinal conversations on this issue.

1.2.3. Chapter II of the study on the church ("The Community of Saints in Today's Society") begins in Section 3 ("The churches in dialogue") by speaking about the dialogue with Judaism (3.1.) prior to the sub-section on "Dialogue with other religions" (3.2.). One of the statements made there is (p.115), "To be the church means for the churches of the Reformation in biblically rooted priority to examine their relationship to Judaism. Dialogue with Judaism is an indispensable necessity". Then, after recalling the painful history for the Jews of the relationships between the Church and Israel, it goes on to state, "A thorough analysis of the painful and burdening history of the relationship of Jews and Christians has become a central task for all churches. Where the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ is abused to justify the 'reprobation' of Israel or indifference towards the fate of the Jewish people the gospel itself is called into question as the foundation of the existence of the church. *The relationship with Israel is therefore for Christians and for the churches an indispensable part of the foundation of their faith.*" Before going on to speak concretely about dialogue, the study then observes, "The existence of Judaism is for the church a sign of God's faithfulness to his promises on which the church itself also depends in view of its manifold failures, especially in its relationship to the Jews."

1.2.4. The Church Study makes a quite deliberate distinction between dialogue with Judaism and dialogue with other religions. On "dialogue with other religions" it states that faith must "criticize all worship of alien gods and all institution of alien ideologies", also within the church itself. However, faith in the God who is active in Jesus Christ makes it possible, "in spite of the critique of religion, to *perceive* the objective and meaning in the rituals and imagery of *other religions*, even to discern *aspects of truth* in their worship and understanding of the Divine", although "syncretistic harmonizations" in the sense of "a new super-religion" are always excluded for the Christian faith (p.118). Precise theological reflection on the fundamental difference between the dialogue with Judaism and the dialogue with "other religions" or with "other world-views" (3.3.) is lacking from the study on the church. This study on "Church and Israel" has therefore been undertaken because the relation between the church and Israel belongs to ecclesiology and is thus an immediate aspect of

the identity of the church; the question of the relation to other religions must be examined at some other point.

1.3. When Christians speak of the continuing election of Israel, this includes recognising the Jewish people as the people of God. On the other hand, however, one cannot take for granted that the Church can describe itself as the 'people of God'. Even when the emphasis on the continuing election of Israel is maintained, the Jews can still feel it presumptuous of the Church to understand and describe itself as the 'people of God'. In any case, if the Church sees itself as 'people of God', it cannot ignore its special relationship to and link with Judaism.

The inter-relationship between the Church and Israel, which is based on the way each understands itself as 'people of God', is not a marginal question for the Church or for Christian theology. On the contrary, it concerns a central element of Reformation ecclesiology which is derived from the action of God. The foundation of the Church's faith makes it dependent on Israel and therefore its relation to Israel is "an indispensable part of the foundation of [its] faith" (The Church of Jesus Christ, p.115). That is an insight which belongs to the Christian faith. But a Christian theological statement on Israel as the people of God must respect the fact that Israel describes itself as the 'people of God' in its own way. However, these two statements about Israel do not necessarily have to agree with one another.

1.4. The life of Judaism today is still marked by the Shoah, even after more than fifty years. The Shoah constitutes a lasting challenge to the churches and their theology. It is a task for all the churches in Europe, including those whose members did not participate in the Shoah. The Shoah continues to demand permanent theological self-examination and renewal; it compels us to investigate the causes of the hatred of Jews which repeatedly breaks out anew and of the anti-Semitism which is still found even today. This self-examination must demonstrate willingness and readiness for penitence and conversion.

## *2. Encounters between the Church and Israel in the Reformation churches of Europe* [To top](#)

2.1. There is an immediate connection between the responsibility and guilt ensuing from history and the theological necessity residing in the nature of the Church for an appropriate definition of the relation between the Church and Israel. Both aspects must be taken into account, each in their own way. The following considerations are intended to provide a forum for further reflection and for future conversations at the level of the Leuenberg Fellowship. To this end, it is necessary to become aware of the discussions in which the individual churches have been involved to varying degrees of intensity and to start a dialogue within the Reformation churches themselves.

2.2. The General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship meeting in 1994 in Vienna appealed to the Reformation churches in Europe to consider the results of theological reflection on the relationship between the Church and Israel obtained by individual churches, and themselves to seek, promote and intensify the dialogue with Israel. This also implies the challenge to go beyond what has been achieved so far and find a definition of the relation between the Church and Israel which can be jointly supported in common responsibility by all the Reformation churches.

2.3. In the past, reflection on their own encounter with Israel has taken very different forms in the Reformation churches of Europe. In the context of Jewish/Christian dialogue one can observe a wide range of experiences, developments and tendencies. In many European churches, it was only after 1945 that an encounter between Christians and Jews took place on an official level. This was associated with reflection on the causes of Christian alienation from Judaism and even of hostility to the Jews, and also with theological reflection on how individual churches understood themselves over against Israel.



The following paragraphs reflect the reports provided by the churches which responded to our inquiry on this point. The approaches of the individual churches in their own historical contexts show how they describe the encounter between the church and Israel. This brief review attempts to shed light on different emphases and characteristic developments.

2.3.1. In *Poland* in the 20's and 30's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a "Barbican" Mission which aimed to convert Jews to Christianity. After World War II it took the Polish Reformed Church several years to deal with the memories of the occupation period – the period when the parish house and church in Warsaw were surrounded on all sides by the Jewish ghetto. In addition to efforts to rebuild the church, there were endeavours to establish contact with Judaism in a new way. The magazine "Jednota" (Unity) discussed the question whether a religious dialogue between Christians and practising Jews was possible. In 1995 the synod of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland adopted a statement on the anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp at Auschwitz.

2.3.2. In the constitution of *Norway* Jews were excluded from the realm from 1814 to 1851 (with no right of residence), but thereafter they became a lively minority although not always accepted. Interest in the Jews and solidarity with them and the state of Israel have become very strong in the Church of Norway, especially since World War II and the German occupation of Norway. In 1942, although late, the church voiced the first public criticism of the deportation of the Norwegian Jews. Solidarity with the Jews also developed as a result of encounter with Jews through the mission to the Jews. The Jewish congregations in Norway today are small but play a part in the public debates on culture and religion. The Church of Norway has had a permanent dialogue commission with the Jewish congregations in Norway since 1996.

2.3.3. In *Denmark* the attitude of the church authorities to the Jews was consistently anti-Jewish from the establishment of the first synagogues (end of 17<sup>th</sup> century) until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the government was more tolerant; in 1814 the Jews were granted equal civil rights, 35 years before general religious liberty was introduced. When the German occupying power wanted to arrest and deport the Jews in 1943, a pastoral letter was read in services referring to the Bible and to conscience and expressly condemning the persecution of the Jews. With the support of the population about 94% of the 8000 Danish Jews escaped to Sweden. After World War II the relationship between church and synagogue was always harmonious although there was no closer contact. Up to the present the chief rabbis have provided information about Judaism through personal contacts and numerous lectures in church congregations. However, there is no official forum for conversations between the established church and the congregations of the Jewish faith.

2.3.4. In the churches in the Netherlands, where, following the Synod of Dordt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, close direct contacts with Rabbis were already a reality, an autonomous conception of the relation between Christians and Jews evolved. A special interest in the Old Testament and the practice of singing the psalms at Sunday worship had prepared the ground for an interest in the meaning of Israel to develop, and this was clearly expressed by certain theologians at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the forties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a struggle over the subject of "Judaism as a question/challenge to the Church" and of "Edda and Torah" which soon became a burning issue. There was a growing conviction that the relation between the Church and Israel differed from the Christian relationship to other religions and, in particular, that one could not speak about Israel's being "disinherited". The significance of theological reflection on the relationship to Israel in the present was underlined by the study 'Israel, People, Land and State' of the 'Hervormde' synod of 1973. In 1995 further reflection under the same heading was forwarded to the congregations as an interim report.

2.3.5. In *Italy* the relations between Jews and Protestants are marked by the fact that Jews and Waldensians were for centuries the two religious minorities that suffered discrimination and persecution but were never wiped out or assimilated; in 1848 both were emancipated ("parallel

fates"). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was widespread philo-Semitism among Italian Protestants, marked by a literal interpretation of certain biblical promises about the end of the diaspora and Israel's returning to the Promised Land; not least for this reason, the Italian Protestants were impervious to anti-Semitism and provided assistance to persecuted Jews, even though their general assemblies and church authorities never officially condemned the racial legislation. Direct contacts between Protestants and Jews came about mainly after World War II, both in the framework of their common interest in the defence and protection of the rights of minorities and in a pluralist society, and also in the context of dialogue between Jews and Christians.

2.3.6. Protestantism in *France*, which had lived with the historical experience of persecution and exile and had been nourished by concentrated reading of the Bible and especially of the Old Testament, always felt close to Judaism. In 1942, the Reformed Church, under the influence of Karl Barth's theological thinking, took a stand against the racial legislation of the Vichy government; the Protestant population often expressed solidarity with the Jews. After the war, the Protestant Federation in France established a commission with the task of examining and reflecting on the relationship with Judaism; however, none of the French churches has officially taken up the question of how Christians may have shared responsibility for the Shoah. The Reformed Church in Alsace-Lorraine gave a general introduction to the question under the heading "The Jewish roots of the Christian faith" at its synod of 1990 in Saint-Louis.

2.3.7. In *Switzerland* a bitter theological disagreement arose in 1941 in the context of the "Agency to assist the Confessing Church in Germany" over the understanding of John 4:22 ("Salvation comes from the Jews"). One group understood the sentence as a statement about the past: "Salvation *came* ..." to the church from the Jews who have now been rejected; another group read the statement "Salvation *comes* from the Jews" to mean that the church thus has a permanent connection with the people of Israel. A representative gathering of the church finally declared in credal form: "Since scripture says, 'Salvation comes from the Jews' (John 4:22), anti-Semitism cannot be reconciled with membership of the Christian church."

2.3.8. In the Church of the Czech Brethren in the *Czech Republic*, a process of careful reflection and effort has been under way for a long time to obtain theological clarification and a practical improvement of the relationship with the Jews. The Czech Brethren are thus associated with the efforts of the other Reformation churches. Here, they have been able to pursue an intention which is recognisable in the work of the Czech Bible translators and exegetes during the Reformation period as well as in the present.

2.3.9. As a consequence of the extermination of Jews organised by Germans during the period of the National Socialist regime, the Protestant churches in *Germany* feel they have a special duty to Israel. A pointer to the future came from the synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) meeting in Berlin-Weissensee in 1950. For the first time, it referred to the share of guilt which the Evangelical Church had brought upon itself in relation to the Jews under the Nazi regime, stated that the church had done wrong "by silence and omission", and confessed its belief "that God's promise for his chosen people Israel has remained in force, even after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ". Ever since the Kirchentag in Berlin in 1961, conversations with Jews have continued to take place at every Kirchentag. It is not least to such conversations that the three studies "Christians and Jews" of 1975, 1991 and 2000 are indebted. The study "Christians and Jews II" notes a "basic consensus" which has meanwhile been reached and comprises the "rejection of anti-Semitism" and the "admission of a Christian share of responsibility and guilt for the holocaust"; emphasis is given to "the inseparable bond between the Christian faith and Judaism" and to "the lasting election of Israel", and there is reference to the "importance of the state of Israel".

In the individual regional churches in Germany, the results of theological reflection and of dialogue with Israel have been received and implemented in different ways; special mention must be made here of the resolution adopted by the synod of the *Evangelical Church in the Rhineland* in 1980.

Since then, many regional churches have adopted statements on the relationship between Christians and Jews. In some cases, the decision was made to include a reference to the lasting election of Israel in church constitutions. Some German regional churches have voiced a clear repudiation of any kind of mission to the Jews.

2.3.10. In 1998, the General Synod of the Evangelical Church in *Austria* adopted a detailed declaration with the title "Zeit zur Umkehr" (Time for conversion). It states that the churches shared responsibility for the Shoah and that they are aware of their duty "to resist any form of social or individual anti-Semitism". In this connection, it says, "Since out of pure grace God's covenant with his people Israel continues until the end of time, mission among the Jews has no theological justification and should be rejected as a church programme."

2.3.11. The Church of *Scotland* has pointed out that it has not experienced occupation as a consequence of war or totalitarian domination nor has it been confronted with the extremes of anti-Semitism. In Scotland very small Jewish congregations exist in a few parts of the country. In general, relations between the Church of Scotland and its Jewish neighbours are good.

2.4. The churches give differing answers to the question of a theological interpretation of the state of Israel. In some of the statements, the establishment of this state in 1948 is seen expressly as a historical sign of God's faithfulness to his people; other statements say nothing theological about the state of Israel. There is a far reaching consensus that a careful distinction must be made between the biblical promises of the land to Israel and the secular state of Israel. In the Austrian statement of 1998 to which we have referred, the hope is expressed that "this state will establish lasting peace with its neighbours – especially the Palestinian people – in mutual respect for the right to a homeland, so that Jews, Christians and Muslims can live together in peace".

2.5. The question of the significance of Jews who confess Jesus Christ, especially those who, as Christians, still feel committed to their Jewish background and tradition, has rarely been raised. This is also linked with a recognition of the danger of setting at risk the trust that has developed in encounters between Jews and Christians. Many of the theological statements on the relation between the Church and Israel see the Christian Church implicitly or explicitly as the "Church of the nations" without giving any further thought to people of Jewish descent. On the other hand, the synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany stated in November 2000, "The New Testament witnesses to a church of Jewish and Gentile Christians. We see our Christian brothers and sisters of Jewish descent as witnesses to our indissoluble link with God's people, Israel, and its continuing election."

The question whether and in what way witness to God's reconciliation with the world brought about by Christ also relates to Israel, is frequently not mentioned. It is precisely this question which disturbs Jews and endangers the dialogue; hence many church statements avoid referring to this issue; others underline that witness to Christ is intended for the whole world.

2.6. The history of the Reformation churches has often been closely linked in Europe with the history of the individual nation states. The historical responsibility of the churches and of individual Christians has been understood here in different ways. In some countries the churches were so closely related to the state that they supported a state policy directed against the Jews, or at least refrained from any criticism of it. There have also been churches that were sometimes oppressed and persecuted as religious minorities like the Jewish community, but without developing a positive interpretation of Judaism or showing any active solidarity with the Jews.

Both points must be made. Germany and Christians in Germany have a special responsibility because of the National Socialist period; but all the churches share in the special history of European guilt towards Israel, wherever they failed clearly to oppose anti-Semitism or even, on the contrary, directly or indirectly encouraged it.

3. Israel and the Church in the context of the biblical heritage [To top](#)

3.1. The need to reflect on the relationship between the Church and Israel is a consequence of the very beginnings of Christianity. The biblical texts referring to these beginnings do not only speak of the historical origin of the Church and thus of the historical relation with Israel; they also form the starting point and critical point of reference (*fons et iudex*) for all theological reflection.

3.2. Israel's Holy Scriptures, the Tenak (Torah, prophets and 'writings'), witness to the story of God, the Creator, who chose his people Israel and led it through history. This history begins with the election of the fathers and mothers. The Holy Scriptures give an account of the liberating exodus of the people from Egypt and of how God gave them the Torah on Sinai, of the gift of the land and the development of the state. The history to which these Scriptures witness continues through the Babylonian exile and the return to the land with the construction of the second temple. One aspect of this history is that a major part of the people lives in the diaspora. The preaching of the prophets in the context of this history of God with Israel reflects experiences of salvation and judgment, experiences of hope and delivery. At the same time, the texts of the Bible point to the breadth of human life in the world, the experience of life and death.

3.3. According to the witness of the New Testament, one part of this history of God with his people Israel is the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the coming sovereignty of God. Jesus was and remained a Jew. His concern was that the will of God be implemented directly; in this sense, he belonged to the tradition of the biblical prophets. Simultaneously, he claimed to reveal the true intention of the Torah; in this way he represented the tradition of the doctors of the law and wisdom teachers. But, in particular situations, he also claimed to be able to question certain views of the religious tradition and specific statements in the contemporary interpretation of the Torah in the framework of the coming rule of God. Thus Jesus provoked a conflict with the religious and political authorities of his time. Tradition implies this, for example, when referring to how Jesus dealt with the Sabbath commandment (Mk. 2:23-28), his criticism of the distinction between 'pure and impure' (Mk. 7:1-23), his rejection of the practice of divorce (Mk. 10:2-12) and above all his proclamation that God's sovereign rule was near (Lk. 6:20; 10:9). Jesus' death on the cross, however much it may have involved misunderstanding and human error, was a consequence of his preaching and his life.

3.4. Jesus' death did not mean the end of him; the Christian faith confesses and witnesses that the crucified Jesus did not remain in death but God raised him from the dead. The circle of those who had followed Jesus as his disciples in Galilee and Jerusalem soon gave voice to the confession: Jesus is risen from the dead (Lk. 24:34). They proclaimed their faith: God has raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 10:9) and has thus affirmed the way of the crucified one; that was the evidence that the earthly Jesus had an incomparable authority. The risen Jesus was believed in biblical, Jewish titles of power to be the Lord, the Messiah, the Christ. Using biblical "Old Testament" categories, his dying was understood as a vicarious death for the sins of humankind (Rom. 3:25), as a death "according to the scriptures", as stated in the confession of faith quoted by Paul in I Cor. 15:3b. Those who believed in the raising of Jesus took this message to their own people, Israel.

3.4.1. The first "Christians" were Jews; they were convinced that the same God, who had created heaven and earth and had led Israel through history, had now acted in and through Jesus Christ. They expected the risen One to come again soon from heaven. In that connection, they also expected the final judgement and the beginning of the new creation. They thus understood the raising of Jesus as an eschatological event. Believing in Jesus' resurrection and relying on the experience which they had had of the presence of God's spirit (Acts 2), they felt justified in following new ways. This was especially evident in the group around Stephan, which maintained a certain critical distance from the religious tradition connected with the Torah and the temple in

Jerusalem (Acts 6-7).

3.4.2. The Jews who believed God had raised Jesus naturally saw themselves as part of the people of Israel. But at the same time, like, for example, the Jewish community living at that time at Qumran by the Dead Sea, they also felt they were a special community within Israel. What God had done for the crucified Jesus was, in their view, the goal of God's history. That was a statement of faith which constituted a challenge to the way the Jewish majority understood itself.

3.4.3. The Jews who believed in the raising of Jesus saw themselves in a special way as "community, church", as *'ekklesia'* (Acts 8:3).

3.4.3.1. The word *'ekklesia'* can refer to the individual congregation or to the church as a whole and be translated that way. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible, *'ekklesia'* refers to the religious community of Israel. In everyday Greek the word was used for the political assembly of the commune; in order to distinguish this from its particular understanding of itself, the church adopted Old Testament language and emphasized that it was "God's community" (Gal. 1:13 and very often; it is only in Rom. 16:16 that Paul speaks of the "churches of Christ"). By emphasizing the connection with God, the church made clear that it was not the product of its own decision but owed its existence to its divine calling.

3.4.3.2. The image frequently used in classical times of the community as a "body" was applied by Paul to the Christian congregation (I Cor. 12; cf. Rom. 12:4-8). At one point he even describes the Christian community of the body, in which all the members perform different functions but enjoy the same rights, as the "body of Christ" (I Cor. 12:27). The study "The Church of Jesus Christ" states in this connection (p.90), "The biblical image of the body expresses *how the church lives and in what it has its continued existence*. The church is the community of persons whose unity among themselves is based on their unity with Christ (I Cor. 12:12f). The community of the members draws its life from the fact that they all equally contribute to the building of the church in accordance with the diversity of their God-given talents (I Cor. 12:12-31; Rom. 12:4-8)." Talking about the body of Christ indicates that the congregation is to be understood as the community in which the risen and

exalted Christ is present as the Lord who determines the way in which the believers live. In the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians, this image is further developed to describe the church as the body and Christ as the head of this body.

3.5. The fact that the Jews who believed in Christ saw themselves as the 'church of God' did not separate them from the people of Israel. The believers in Christ were and remained Jews. They lived in the expectation that the other Jews would also become convinced of the truth of confessing Christ. This caused conflicts between the Jews who believed God had raised the Crucified One and other Jews who ignored or rejected this message. The latter, who certainly formed the vast majority, tried in various ways to silence the believers in Christ. Paul says of himself that, as a Pharisee, he tried to put a violent end to the Jesus movement, "to destroy the church" (Gal. 1:13-14; cf. I Cor. 15:9). Being converted from this practice of persecution also signified for Paul that he was called to proclaim the gospel.

3.6. The Jews who believed in Jesus' resurrection came to recognise that the message of Christ was to be preached not only within the people of Israel but also beyond it to the nations, the "Gentiles". The account of the conversion and baptism of the centurion Cornelius by the Apostle

Peter (Acts 10) describes vividly how the traditional distinction between 'pure' and 'impure', and thus also the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, lost their central importance in the context of mission. The Apostle Paul, called by God to be the preacher of the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16), bases his right to mission to the Gentiles not only on his special missionary commission (Gal. 1:15-17) but also on the statement that the One God is not only the God of the Jews but also the God of the Gentiles (Rom. 3:29; cf. Rom. 15:8-11). That is how the far from undisputed decision came to be taken that believers in Christ who came from the nations did not need to become Jews, and thus did not have to follow the special requirements of the Torah which determined the identity of the people of Israel, especially circumcision, in order to be able to belong to the 'church of God'. But at the same time it is repeatedly emphasized especially in Acts, that Paul in his missionary preaching first addressed the people in the synagogues. The church became a community in which members of the people of Israel and people from the nations should be and were able to live together. They were united by the faith that God had been at work in Jesus of Nazareth and that God was active in Jesus Christ at present. Thus baptism made it a reality that "Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men, men and women" formed a unity in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

3.7. In the last third of the 1<sup>st</sup> century of the Christian era, at the latest those from the nations who believed in Christ ("Gentile Christians") outnumbered the believers in Christ from the people of Israel; it became increasingly difficult for the "Jew-ish Christians" who still followed the Torah to maintain and practise their Jewish identity, including obedience to the commands of the Torah. A process started in the course of which the Jewish Christians committed to the Torah became more and more marginal in the church. The point which Paul in particular had stressed, that the church was always made up of both Jews and Gentiles, tended to be forgotten. At the same time, the majority in the church no longer saw themselves in continuity with the biblical or the contemporary Israel; they began to view themselves more as the replacement of Israel. Even in the letter to the Hebrews there is the idea that the "First Covenant" with Israel should be seen as something by the Christ event (Heb. 8:6-13). In Matthew's Gospel the historical event of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., is interpreted as God's punishment for the disobedience of the Jews (cf. Matt. 21:43; 22:7).

3.8. Simultaneously, a clear distinction was evolving between Jews and Christians in their use of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Christian church which existed predominantly outside Judaea and Galilee, especially after the first Jewish/Roman war (66-70/73 A.D.), stuck to the wording and scope of the Greek version of the biblical texts ("Septuagint") used in the Jewish diaspora. On the other hand, Rabbinic Judaism, which was becoming normative, opted to recognise as binding only the biblical writings preserved in Hebrew and Aramaic, from which new Greek translations were then made.

3.8.1. Accordingly, books such as Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Solomon and historical works like the books of the Maccabees were recognised by the Christian church as part of the Bible but not by Judaism. In addition, Rabbinic Judaism further developed the conception of the "oral Torah" entrusted to Moses on Sinai together with the written Torah.

3.8.2. The Latin translation of the bible, the Vulgate, included further writings in addition to the Septuagint; so the difference became greater, although the translator of the Vulgate, Jerome, did not base himself on the Greek but, wherever possible, on the Hebrew versions of the scriptures.

3.8.3. Martin Luther in his translation of the Bible adopted the humanist principle that one should go back "to the sources" (*ad fontes*) and took the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament as his basis; he therefore considered the writings that had only been handed down in Greek to be "Apocrypha" and of lesser value, although he kept them in all the editions of the Bible. This then meant the unity of the biblical canon no longer existed on the Christian side, because the Roman Catholic Church stuck to the Vulgate. As in the case of the New Testament, where Luther departed

from tradition and moved three letters (the letter to the Hebrews, and the letters of James and Jude) for theological reasons to the end before the Revelation of John, he also had theological reasons for choosing an order for the books of the Old Testament which differed from the Hebrew Bible. Thus the Old Testament in Luther's version closes with the books of the twelve prophets, and hence the eschatological promises of the book of Malachi (Mal. 3:23f): "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." The clear theological consequence is that the beginning of the New Testament, with Jesus' genealogy in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew and the tradition of understanding John the Baptist to be Elijah, follows straight on from these prophetic promises. By contrast, the collection of Israel's Holy Scriptures ends, also with a clear theological intent, with the Books of the Chronicles which belong to the 'writings' and conclude with the edict of the Persian king, Cyrus, which made it possible for the Israelites to return from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple (II Chron. 36:23): "To every man of his people now among you I say, the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up."

#### *4. The historical development of the dividing line between the Church and Israel*[To top](#)

4.1. The Jews who believed in Jesus' resurrection, as well as those from the nations who believed in Christ, initially saw themselves as fully part of the history of the biblical people of God, Israel. Therefore it was also natural for them to use the Holy Scriptures recognised by the people of Israel as authentic witness to God. They read these scriptures, like other Jewish groups of that time, as applying to their own group and their own faith. The scriptures helped them to understand the experience of Easter. As believers, they saw how the statements of these writings pointed to Christ; and they saw themselves as being in continuity with the history of God with his people to which these writings witnessed.

Hence, the biblical expression 'people of God', that was characteristic of how Israel understood itself, was also understood as applying to the community of those who believed in the raising of Jesus; a corresponding direct use of this formulation is found at two places in the New Testament (I Peter 2:9-10; Titus 2:14; cf. Rom. 9:25). But at the same time this implied that the early Christian church was beginning to see itself as the only true people of God. Nevertheless, the other members of the people of Israel were still invited to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead, because this faith was understood as continuing participation in a history that was unbroken, though believed to have been renewed by God's action.

4.2. Nevertheless, the history of the relation between the Church and the people of Israel very soon became a history of separation. Some statements in the Gospel of John lead us to suspect that Jews who confessed Jesus were excluded from the synagogue (John 9:22; 16:2). But soon this line was drawn on the side of the church too, to the point of contempt and finally even of open hostility and hatred, even though in the first three centuries this did not yet entail a physical threat to the Jews.

Initial signs of this development can already be found in the anti-Jewish statements of a number of New Testament writings (cf. I Thess. 2:14-16; Matt. 21:33-44; 27:25; John 8:44f.). Here it should be recalled that people like the Apostle Paul and the Evangelists Matthew and John were Jews themselves. With their polemical delimitations from the Jews who did not believe in Christ, they claimed their own continuity in the Jewish tradition and tried to deny this continuity to the other Jews; in this sense this was initially an internal Jewish conflict. In fact, it can even be described as historically amazing that anti-Jewish polemics are found to such a limited extent in the New Testament. An extremely polemic document, like the "Letter of Barnabas" written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, which has actually been ascribed to one of Paul's companions, was not included in the New Testament by the church.

4.3. During the first three centuries, Rabbinic Judaism paid little attention to the church and Christianity, whereas on the Christian side, alongside attempts to woo the Jews, there were also extremely sharp polemics against them. On the one hand, numerous Christian writings "against the Jews" were compiled; but, on the other, the church to a large extent lost interest in even taking note of contemporary Judaism as an entity which existed historically and was of theological significance.

4.3.1. When, in the course of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the state persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire came to an end and Christianity was first recognised and then became the state religion from 381 A.D. onwards, the political interests of the Roman emperors combined with the theological judgments of the church to form a generally unholy alliance against the Jews. In the Roman collection of laws, the Codex Theodosianus, of the year 438, special legal requirements for the Jews were laid down for the first time. Their civil rights were restricted and they were excluded from holding public office. However, unlike the "Gentiles" and the Christian heretics, the Jews retained the right to reside in the Roman Empire.

4.3.2. In the following centuries in Europe there were also longer periods of predominantly peaceful coexistence between Christians and Jews. European rulers provided protection for Jews, not least in their own political and economic interest, granted them the freedom to engage in trade and commerce, access to service at court and civil rights. Many Jewish congregations were formed. In Mainz, Troyes and Worms the Talmudic schools became centres of Jewish culture and learning. The first crusade in 1096 formed a profound caesura; in its course Jews were murdered and synagogues destroyed on a scale never known before. At the same time, more emphasis was given to theological views according to which the Jews existed to enable the Christian church to see the meaning of judgment and reprobation. The idea was that it was right on the one hand to humiliate the Jews legally, but to protect their life on the other, so that their wretched existence would demonstrate clearly to the Christians how drastic the consequences of rejection by God really were.

4.3.3. During the period of the crusades, the physical existence of Jews in Europe was increasingly at risk. The legal limitations – exclusion from professions, ghettoisation, prohibition from land tenure, discriminatory clothing regulations – became more and more drastic. The aggressiveness of accusations with a religious motivation increased; Jews were accused of ritual murder and of desecrating the Host. During the Inquisition there were mass executions of forcibly baptised Jews who had continued to practise their customs.

In the late Middle Ages the Jews were expelled from most of the countries and cities of Western and Central Europe. The background to this was economic interests, especially the growing strength of the guilds, and religious hatred, particularly stirred up by the preachers of the mendicant orders.

4.3.4. In general, there was a marked ambivalence in the relation between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages. Phases of toleration and coexistence contrasted with others of enmity, exclusion and persecution. It would, however, be wrong to see the whole of the Christian Middle Ages as an epoch exclusively marked by religious or even "theological" anti-Semitism. The struggle of the official church against the Jews corresponded in part to the struggle against the internal Christian "heretical movements" as well; and there were popes and theological teachers who looked on Judaism with interest and even attempted to have some kind of dialogue. But this did not lead to a theologically considered, positive understanding of Judaism.

4.4. The attitude of the Reformers to Judaism reflects the range of different options that already existed in ecclesiastical and social practice at the end of the Middle Ages.

4.4.1. Martin Luther's sermons and writings contain repeated expressions of the anti-Semitism of



his time. He did deal in a relatively open way with the Jews in the document he wrote in 1523, "That Jesus Christ was born a Jew". Since he considered the papal church totally unsuited to transmitting the Christian faith to Jews, he was filled with hope that they would now be won over to the Gospel which had come to light by virtue of the Reformation. During the initial phase of the Reformation, there were even some beginnings of a Jewish/Christian dialogue among Luther's followers, combined with a mainly literary endeavour of mission to the Jews. There were a few isolated incidents of Jews being converted to Reformation Christianity. At the same time, the strong reference to the Bible in Luther's theology contributed to his being described by his opponents as being very close to Judaism; he was called "father of the Jews".

When it became clear to Luther, however, that his hopes for a widespread "conversion" of Jews to Christ were vain, when chiliastic and anti-trinitarian trends developed and tendencies arose to celebrate the Sabbath instead of Sunday, Luther became afraid of the "wrong way" of a "new Judaism" and changed his attitude. Whereas he had been prepared at the beginning to be patient with the Jews with a view to their possible conversion, he now saw them as a social, political and religious danger (usury, Turkish espionage, proselytism) and advised against tolerating them any longer. In his first anti-Jewish writing "Against the Sabbath followers" (1538), he protested about the supposed blindness, lies and blasphemy of the Jews. The document he wrote in 1543, "About the Jews and their lies", then demonstrated radical anti-Semitism with an apocalyptic bias. He called for synagogues and schools to be set on fire as "places of blasphemy", for Jewish houses to be destroyed, their books to be burned and the Rabbis to be prohibited from teaching; in addition, their free conduct on the streets should be abolished, usury prohibited and the Jews' gold and silver be taken away. By this time Luther dismissed the idea of mission to the Jews as a lost cause.

4.4.1.1. Some of the Reformation theologians found Luther's attitude unacceptable. In a letter to the Jewish scholar Elias Levita the Nuremberg Reformer Andreas Osiander rejected Luther's polemics as inappropriate. Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich, felt that the inquisitorial enthusiasm of the Middle Ages had welled up again in Luther's writings on the Jews. At the same time he used anti-Jewish vocabulary and warned against admitting Jews to Switzerland.

4.4.2. John Calvin also described Jews as braggarts, liars and falsifiers of the Scriptures and called them avaricious. Since he worked mainly in areas in which very few Jews had been resident for many decades, he did not consider the relationship with Judaism an urgent issue. Nevertheless, according to his own words, he often had disputations with Jews and also took account of numerous Jewish commentaries in his exegesis of the Old Testament. Since he rejected the assumption that all Old Testament statements were to be interpreted only in regard to Christ, he was called "Calvinus Judaizans". In a document written around 1555, he engaged in serious debate with the arguments used in disputations by the Jews in the Middle Ages. Calvin often describes the 'Old Covenant' granted to the people of Israel as almost identical to the 'New Covenant' granted to all people in Christ; he saw the differences between the two as differences of degree rather than fundamental. The new covenant did not abolish the old covenant; both are one and the same covenant of grace within two different dispensations (Institutio II, 10.2). Since even the "infidelity of humankind" could not cause the divine covenant to "waver", "the Jews as the first-born in the family of God" took first place, but from the point of view of faith in Christ they could only be seen as "apostates". Thus Calvin also states that the church "has taken the place of the Jews" and Judaism is therefore really a thing of the past. In his later sermons, in particular, Calvin's attitude to Judaism was marked by rejection and polemics. Because the Jews had rejected salvation in Jesus Christ, he considered that they had been punished with blindness and perdition. But at the same time he also stated that there was a chosen remnant in the Jewish people and that for their sake one should not despise or even maltreat the Jews.

4.4.3. Only a few supporters of the Reformation adopted a consistently positive attitude to the Jews. Among these was the Strasbourg Reformer Wolfgang Capito and a professor of theology in

Basle, Martin Borrhaus. They believed in the eschatological conversion of Israel as a whole and called on Christians to be friendly to Jews. A Christian humanist who also lived in Basle, Sebastian Castellio, even at that time expressly advocated religious tolerance.

4.4.4. In general it must be stated that almost everywhere the Reformation affirmed the expulsion of the Jews in the late Middle Ages or even gave rise to new expulsions. In the Protestant territories of Germany very few Jews were still resident, e.g. in Frankfurt on Main and in Fürth. The Catholic authorities were more tolerant in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, even though this was predominantly for economic reasons. The Reformed Netherlands became an important centre of Jewish life and new centres developed in Catholic Prague and Catholic Poland.

4.5. During the period of confessionalisation in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was occasional scholarly interest in Judaism among Protestant theologians. In Lutheran orthodoxy there was a controversial debate on the question whether Christian authorities should tolerate Jews and whether a major eschatological conversion of the Jews was to be expected. The predominant attitude was distanced and reference was also made to Luther's anti-Jewish writings. A few individuals called for Jews to be compelled to attend Protestant preaching services. Baptisms of Jews were rare events and there were no organised missionary efforts.

4.5.1. In contrast to Germany, in the Netherlands and England vigorous philo-Semitic tendencies came to life. One consequence was that under Oliver Cromwell the Jews were again permitted to settle in England. In the Netherlands Christian/Jewish religious conversations took place in a free atmosphere; Reformed federal theology encouraged a new, positive theological view of Israel.

4.5.2. In Pietism there were often calls for friendly relations with the Jews, echoing the ideas of the young Luther. Christians should set the Jews a positive example and thus attract them to conversion. This attitude was rooted in the Pietist eschatology which generally expected a major conversion of the Jews at the end of time. Active mission to the Jews was launched from Halle and Herrnhut. This missionary activity meant that Christians were more interested in Jews than before, learnt their language and studied their religious customs and the conditions in which they lived; this contributed to reducing prejudices.

Despite this newly developed enthusiasm for Christian mission, Jews who wished to become Christians could not automatically expect to be accepted by the territorial churches, receive instruction and be baptised. Many Jewish applicants for baptism were turned away. Baptised Jews were normally not integrated into Christian society, frequently had to go from place to place begging and were marked out for their whole lives by their Jewish origins. At the university of Halle, Pietists and followers of the Enlightenment drew up expert opinions in favour of tolerating Jewish minorities and combated anti-Jewish prejudices. Radical Pietism even demonstrated clear philo-Semitism, a readiness for tolerance and a special interest in Jewish doctrine and life. In the county of Hessen-Darmstadt towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Jews were admitted to university studies in Giessen and the building of synagogues was authorised; in Hessen-Kassel at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Rabbis were appointed as university lecturers.

4.5.3. However, the stimulus for the emancipation of the Jews did not come from church circles but from the anti-ecclesiastical Enlightenment; the French revolution of 1789 led the way. In Germany, Protestant theologians and churches generally opposed Jewish emancipation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even rationalist and liberal theologians rarely supported it, despising the Jewry of their time because its religiosity was supposedly mere outward ceremony. A friendly interest in the Jews was shown by many members of the revival movements, following the tradition of Pietism; however, this was combined with a strong missionary impetus that was soon shared by confessional groups as well. Numerous societies for mission to the Jews were established following the example of London. Individual members of the revival movements became allies of Zionism and prepared the way for the Zionist colonisation of Palestine.

Protestant theology was challenged for the first time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a newly evolving modern Jewish theology. Here and there Jewish/Christian encounters took place and there were even forms of cooperation: Protestant pastors attended Jewish worship, and in 1837 for a short time a "church paper" was published jointly by Protestants, Catholics and Jews.

At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, in confessional and Christian social circles a new form of hostility to Jews developed in association with the racist anti-Semitism that had arisen in the meantime.

4.6. With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new theological interest and mutual awareness developed, both in certain circles of German Judaism, as represented by Franz Rosenzweig and Leo Baeck, and on the Christian side. Joseph Klausner wrote the first major Jewish presentation of the life of Jesus. The religious philosopher, Martin Buber, had conversations with non-Jewish philosophers and with Christian theologians in the years 1928-1933 at the "Lehrhaus" in Stuttgart. In Great Britain the Jewish scholar, Claude Montefiore, undertook detailed study of the New Testament and wrote commentaries on New Testament writings.

4.7. When the National Socialists came to power with their discrimination against and persecution of the Jews – which was of course not based on religion but on race, and was to a large extent tolerated by the Christian churches and to some degree even supported by the "German Christians", – all such initiatives in Germany came to an end. Some theologians even evidenced clear proximity to the National Socialist ideology; they endeavoured to provide a "scientific" basis for hostility to the Jews and anti-Semitism. The question whether the "Arian paragraph", which excluded Jews from all public office, should also apply within the church was a matter for controversial debate in the Summer of 1933 and theological opinions gave varying answers; the Confessing Church came into existence to oppose the "alignment" of the churches desired by the National Socialists. But there was next to no intensive study of the Jewish tradition or of contemporary Judaism.

4.8. After the end of World War II, there were attacks on Jews in individual countries of Europe, and in many countries to this day there have been repeated outbreaks of open or hidden anti-Semitism. When the World Council of Churches was founded in 1948 in Amsterdam, a declaration against racism was adopted which also rejected all forms of anti-Semitism. Since the 60's a gradual readiness has been developing in theology and the church to find ways of having dialogue with Jews. This effort respects the fact that there are major reservations within Judaism or even rejection of such conversations. Christian theology has been increasing its efforts clearly to combat all forms of anti-Semitism and, at the same time, to see reflection on the relation between the Church and the people of Israel as a theological task.

4.9. This review of the history of the church and especially the history of Christian theology shows that there were fundamental deficits in theological reflection on Judaism and on the special relation between the Church and Israel. Shortcomings in the church's teaching – in the realm of the understanding of scripture, the doctrine of God and also in Christology – were also a major contribution to the lack of effective resistance in many Reformation churches to the crimes of National Socialism. In view of this experience, irrespective of the special German responsibility, all the churches need to engage in new dogmatic reflection to re-define their relationship with Israel.

## The Church and Israel

### 1. Theological attempts to clarify the relation between the Church and Israel [To top](#)

In the context of the Christian/Jewish dialogue since 1945, various attempts have been made by Christian theology to find an appropriate definition of the Church's relation to Israel. Some of the most influential theological conceptions will be described below and then, as a second step, each will be examined critically.

We start from the recognition that Israel is an unavoidable and lasting issue for theological self-reflection and the way Christianity understands itself. In addition, we are guided by the insight that it is fundamentally inappropriate to maintain that the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God. This is true not only because Israel continues to see itself as the people of God on the basis of its assurance of faith and truth, but above all because the Christian faith itself understands the Christ event and the election of the Church not as outdating God's promises to Israel but as proof of his faithfulness to it. All the approaches described below therefore rightly assume that the theory of the "disinheritance" of Israel or of the "replacement" of Israel by the Church is false.

#### 1.1. The conception of "two ways"

1.1.1. At a very early stage in the Christian/Jewish dialogue, whose effects can still be felt today, the conception was formulated of two ways of salvation running parallel to each other. These two ways have a common point of reference in the One God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; for Israel, the way to this God is the Torah and for the nations it is Christ.

1.1.2. To speak about "two ways" emphasizes that Israel's way to God is not of less value than the Christian way.

However, the Christian faith cannot simply speak about two parallel ways, side by side but unrelated, when referring to God's revelation and God's saving will. On the contrary, it must bear in mind the significance of Jesus Christ for both, for the Jews and for the people of the 'nations'; but it also has to take into account that this significance already differed in the New Testament and differs in another way in the present, in the sense that the Jews already know the one living God, who had first to be made known to people from the world of the nations (I Thess. 1:9f). The theory of the "two ways" also ignores how Christianity originated within and was a product of Judaism. From the very beginning, there were Jews who confessed Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah/Christ and there are still some today.

#### 1.2. The concept of the "uncancelled covenant" and the idea of inclusion in the One Covenant

1.2.1. The reference to the "uncancelled covenant" associated with Martin Buber was the subject of the working group "Jews and Christians" established at the German Protestant Kirchentag in 1961. Numerous synodal statements by German regional churches and now a number of church constitutions speak in different ways about the uncancelled covenant. In the guiding principles adopted by the Reformed Alliance in 1990, "We and the Jews – Israel and the Church", guideline II states, "God has not cancelled his covenant with Israel. We are beginning to recognise that, in Jesus Christ, we people from the world of the nations, who in origin were far from the God of Israel and from his people, have been honoured and called to participate in the election and communion in God's covenant which was first promised to Israel". This is intended to express the idea that the "New Covenant" based on the revelation in Christ (I Cor. 11:25; Heb. 9:15; 12:24) is not a second covenant but the covenant renewed as promised in Jeremiah 31, and thus a confirmation and a further development of the covenant God made with Israel that goes beyond the covenant with Israel.

1.2.2. The conception of the one, uncanceled covenant emphasizes that the community of those who believe in Christ exists by virtue of God's act of election which began with the election of Israel. God grants the people from the world of the nations who believe in him a share in his salvation; the Church can express this only in gratitude and praise to God.

But the theory of the uncanceled covenant leaves open what is the appropriate theological way of conceiving the relation between Israel as the people of God and the Church as the people of God. On the one hand, it is insufficient to see the Church exclusively as the "Church from the world of the nations". On the other, the nature of the renewal of the covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 and believed to have happened in Christ remains undefined. The conceptual approach of understanding the term "new" when speaking of the 'New Covenant' as only meaning "renewed" also fails to do justice to the acceptance and interpretation of Jer. 31 in the New Testament (cf. the Words of Institution in Paul and in Luke's Gospel and also Hebrews 8). This is not an adequate answer to the question of the relation between the 'new covenant' and the 'old covenant'.

### *1.3. The adoption of the concept of the "pilgrimage of the nations to Zion"*

1.3.1. Following on from Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 with the expectation that the nations will undertake a pilgrimage to Zion at the end of time, it can be stated that Jews and Christians share the same tradition of promise and hope. On this basis, an attempt has been made to define the relation between Israel and the nations more precisely and thus also the relation between Israel as the people of God and the Church as the people of God. The Church has entered into Israel's history of the promise and this is understood as the beginning of the fulfilment of that prophetic expectation.

1.3.2. This conceptual approach links up with a fundamental expression of Israel's hope. The priority of Israel mentioned in the New Testament (Rom. 9:4f) continues to be recognised; the nations are understood as "fellow heirs of the promise".

Here too, then, there is the idea that the Church is the product of God's act of election; it sees itself alongside the people of Israel on the way to a common goal. But the danger of this approach is also that the Church may be defined as an exclusively "Gentile Christian" church. Moreover, it remains unclear how the relation between the "church of the nations" chosen in Christ and the provisions of the Torah should be defined. The prophetic expectation of the nations' pilgrimage to Zion expressly includes the idea that, at the end of time, the Torah will be recognised by all the nations as God's valid commands (Micah 4:2; Is. 2:3f); and this raises questions, not least about how to understand the Pauline statements about the validity of the Torah for those who believe in Christ (cf. Rom. 10:4).

### *1.4. The conception of the One People of God comprising Israel and the Church*

1.4.1. An attempt has been made, starting from the specific singular 'people of God', to speak about an inner distinction within the understanding of the people of God. The intention is to keep two things together: the sovereignty of the God who chooses and has mercy, who brings everything to his goal and will be "all in all" at the end (I Cor. 15:28), and the experience of the separation between the original people of God, Israel, and the Church which came into existence in its midst and also sees itself as the people of God because it is rooted in the same election.

1.4.2. This conception is based mainly on Rom. 9-11. It takes up the pain felt and expressed by Paul about the rejection of the gospel of Christ by the 'Israelites' (9:1-5; 10:1-4), and it includes Paul's certainty that the present "hardness of heart" of those who do not believe in Christ does not imply their final rejection (Rom. 11:23).

There is, however, a danger here that the significance of the Christ event may be diminished:

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Christ's relationship with Israel is left open and this suggests the idea that the Christ event might be of saving importance only for the people of the nations and not for Israel. A similar critical question must be raised about speaking of a "divided people of God" comprising both Israel and the Church. Neither of these conceptions does full justice to the statements made by Paul in Rom. 9-11 as a whole.

### 1.5. Conclusion

These various endeavours to clarify the relation between the Church and Israel, especially in connection with the issue of the 'covenant' and with regard to speaking about the 'people of God', are stages in an unfinished process of theological reasoning. They have enriched the Church, its theology and its spirituality. They have provided stimuli for the internal dialogue between the churches; and they have encouraged people to reflect together on a positive view of Israel.

Therefore the Church must continue this process and seek further possibilities for defining and understanding its identity in relation to Israel. Every answer found in this process must be judged by whether, on the one hand, it does justice to the statements made in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments about Israel's election by God and the election of the Church in Jesus Christ, and, on the other, whether it takes seriously the special way in which God relates to his people Israel.

## 2. Israel and the Church in Christian doctrine [To top](#)

The self-revelation of the God of Israel in Jesus Christ and the assurance given by the Holy Spirit is the basis for and subject of the Christian confession of faith. Hence it is necessary for the Church to define its relationship to Israel theologically.

Christian teaching spells out the content of the revelation in Christ. The latter itself enables us to see the origins of faith and the church in God's act of election which began with the election of Israel. Since this action of God is the foundation of the Church's inseparable bond with Israel, this bond must continue to be an issue in Christian doctrine.

The next section of this study will attempt to demonstrate that. In accordance with the nature of the Christian faith, we first examine the conception of the revelation of the God of Israel in Jesus Christ (2.1.). Confessing the truth of this revelation leads on to the question of the Christian exegesis of Israel's Holy Scriptures (2.2.) and to the question of the Christian understanding of God (2.3.). That is followed by considerations of the Christian understanding of God's action of election (2.4.) and how Christians understand the church as the "people of God" (2.5.).

### 2.1. The revelation of the God of Israel in Jesus Christ

2.1.1. The Christian faith understands the revelation in Christ as the decisive act of God's election (Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:1-4). Christians believe and witness that the Christ event constitutes the final valid act of God's revelation; they therefore see it as the "eschatological event" (cf. II Cor. 6:2). They confess that God, the Creator, is present and powerfully at work in the world in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings about the salvation of the community with Christ and thus with the Creator and all creation through preaching and the celebration of the sacraments. Christians look forward to the parousia as the second coming of Christ as judge of the world to complete the whole of history.

2.1.2. Faith in the revelation of God in Christ is related to a historical event. The experience of Easter reveals the Crucified as the Risen One (I Cor. 15:5-8; Lk. 24:34), the One who has been exalted to God (Phil. 2:9). The believers are seized by the truth that God's rule already affects the

present in this Christ Jesus (I Cor. 15:25-28; cf. II Cor. 4:6).

In the light of the Easter events, faith recognises that the witness of the life of Christ perfected on the cross is the fulfilment of Israel's central expectation. God establishes his reign. Thus, the revelation of God in Christ presupposes the earlier events of election and revelation, confirms, deepens and broadens them.

2.1.3. The 'New Covenant' (I Cor. 11:25) established by God in the Christ event is seen in the context of the covenants witnessed to by Israel's Holy Scriptures; Christians believe it to be the final, unsurpassable act of God for the people of Israel and for people from the world of the nations. Thus faith in God's self-revelation in the Christ event implies the confirmation and reinforcement of the preceding revelations of God. God's commitment to the creatures in the covenant with Noah (Gen. 8f) remains valid and unaltered. Equally valid and unaltered is God's action of election by which the people of Israel was constituted and is preserved, and by which it has been assigned its role in and for the nations, of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:7-18; 17:1-16) and the covenant made with Israel at Sinai (Ex. 24:1-11; 34:1-28).

In the Christian view, this confirmation of the covenant at the same time implies the renewal which deepens and broadens it. Referring to the old Testament insight that God himself brings about justice (cf. Gen. 15:6), the covenant is deepened in the sense that God brings about the justice which is acceptable to him by reconciling sinners with himself in Christ (II Cor. 5:19-21). The renewal of the covenant broadens it in the sense that God's renewed covenant is open "to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

2.1.4. The confession "God was in Christ reconciling the world with himself" comprises the confession of the person of Jesus as the "Christ" and the "Son of God" and as the incarnation of God's creative word (John 1:14).

This content of the faith in Jesus Christ is expressed in the confession that Jesus is "truly God and truly man" (vere Deus – vere homo). This confession maintains the content of faith in the incarnation only when "became truly man" immediately and inseparably includes "truly a Jew". It was not just any man but precisely this man – a Jew by birth, a member of the people of Israel, descended from the family of David – who was revealed at Easter as the Christ, the Son of God. When God reveals Jesus the Jew as the true witness to the coming of God's reign, that testifies that this bond with Israel is final.

2.1.5. The incarnation of the pre-existent Son of God in a member of the people of Israel expresses God's bond with Israel. Therefore the Christian faith cannot view it as a mere historical coincidence. Indeed, the history which leads to God's self-revelation in Christ is the history of God with Israel and with no other people.

2.1.6. Therefore it is true that the special relation between the Church and Israel resulting from the Christ event is indissoluble because the election of Israel is part of the history of the One God who revealed himself in Christ.

But then it is also true that, from the viewpoint of faith in Christ, the election of Israel as the people of God is not a thing of the past and can therefore not be understood as invalid or outdated. One can state with Paul that the promises to Israel have been confirmed by the Christ event (II Cor. 1:20) and at the same time deepened and broadened (Gal. 3:6-18).

2.1.6.1. Does this imply that God's act of election for his people Israel continues to be valid although Israel does not accept the witness to God's revelation in Christ? And how should this continued validity then be understood? For the Christian way of speaking about God an answer to this question is of decisive importance, because here it is a matter of whether God remains faithful

to himself.

2.1.6.2. The prophetic promise hopes that God "will create new heavens and a new earth" (Is. 65:17). This prophetic promise is taken up and confirmed in II Peter 3:13, "We have his promise, and look forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells". The Seer of the Revelation of John, like the prophet in Is. 65:17-25, links this view of a new world with the vision of the New Jerusalem; however, he adds that in this city of God there will be no temple, "For its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22). So Christians look forward like the Jews to the fulfilment of the prophetic promise of God's future and to his future world. But they understand this fulfilment as comprising the perfection of the salvation which began in the revelation of Christ.

2.1.7. Thus it is clear that the revelation of God in Christ gives the Christian faith grounds to cling to the witness to the revelation and truth found in the Holy Scriptures of Judaism, and to read, understand and interpret these Scriptures in the light of the revelation in Christ. So it is the revelation in Christ which itself forms the basis for the specifically Christian understanding of the Israel's Holy Scriptures (2.2.) and for the Christian conception of God which follows from it (2.3.).

## *2.2. The Christian understanding of Israel's Holy Scriptures*

2.2.1. The Church reads and understands Israel's Holy Scriptures, the Christian Old Testament, in the light of the revelation in Christ. At the same time, the Church reads and understands the New Testament witness to Christ in the light of its Old Testament.

2.2.2. The Church is repeatedly reminded of its link with Israel by the fact that Israel's Holy Scriptures, as "Old Testament", are part of the two part canon of the Christian Bible. The Old Testament writings are of great importance in worship and also in the personal spirituality of individual Christians. But every Christian use of the Old Testament texts, and every sermon in particular, must also take account of the fact that these same scriptures also have authority for Judaism.

2.2.3. The consequence of the tension in the continuity of God's one action for Israel and for the Church is that the Church has a particular way of dealing with the Old and New Testament biblical tradition. According to the Christian understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, the promise which it contains points to the Christ event, namely to the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, and to his coming as eschatological judge and saviour. Alongside and prior to this Christian understanding of Israel's Holy Scriptures, however, there is the Jewish way of reading them which does not see the Tenak (Torah, prophets and 'writings') as an "Old" (or "First") Testament but as the one, complete Holy Scripture. The question to be asked is not which of the two ways of reading Israel's Holy Scriptures is "right". It is more important to recognise that both Israel and the Church must accept their own responsibility for their interpretation of the particular texts entrusted to them.

2.2.3.1. The canon of the Christian Bible, in which the Holy Scriptures of Israel form only one part, is different from the Jewish canon which only comprises the Tenak. However, it would be inappropriate to state that the Christian canon also includes the Jewish canon, and thus the Jewish canon is simply a part of the Christian one. On the contrary, we are dealing with two different canons of two different communities. Although to some extent both canons contain the same texts, each is read and interpreted in its own particular context.

2.2.3.2. When Israel's Holy Scriptures in the Christian canon are described as the "Old Testament", this does not mean "old" in the sense of "out of date"; on the contrary, "old" implies original and fundamental. This is what is also intended by the occasional use of the expression "First Testament"; however, this can be misunderstood to mean the first in a series which could



continue indefinitely. But by setting the "First Testament" alongside the "New Testament", the Christian idea of the unity of the two parts of the Bible is also more endangered than preserved. And the use of the terms "Jewish Bible" or "Hebrew Bible" is also problematic when they are supposed to designate the first part of the Christian canon; they could give rise to the error of seeing the Jewish canon as part of the Christian one. Nevertheless, the justification for all these terms is that they are intended as a reminder that the first part of the canon of the Christian Bible contains texts which are identical with the whole Jewish canon.

2.2.4. The early Christian church, and this is surprising from a historical point of view, maintained the traditional wording of Israel's Holy Scriptures as it had received them. The texts were not changed by later insertions, deletions or "improvements", nor were these writings "edited" in a Christian way. Thus the Christian congregations received the pre-Easter witness of scripture consciously in the way characteristic of this witness, namely its openness to different possibilities of interpretation; then in its double biblical canon the Church declared this witness binding for its own proclamation. However, the changes in the structure of the Old Testament canon, especially as a result of the decisions of the Reformation, have meant that more emphasis was given to how the Old Testament writings were related to the event of Christ's revelation.

2.2.5. The way Christians use the Old Testament must include the awareness that its writings comprise the wording and content of the Holy Scriptures of Israel, even if they do not constitute the Jewish canon. The revelation of God in Christ confirms the history of election which began with Israel; it therefore directs attention to Israel's witness to revelation and faith before the Church came into being. It leads us to recognise the truth contained in that witness. However, the Church must not forget its own task in the process, namely of reading the texts of Israel's Holy Scriptures from the point of view of its faith in Christ, and allowing the statements of the Old Testament also to give content to its own faith. Every encounter of the Church with the Jewish reading and interpretation of the Tenak will always be marked by the way in which the Church's own approach to the Old Testament is influenced by the Christian faith.

2.2.6. In the matter of the relation between Jewish and Christian interpretations, it is not initially a question of whether – e.g. thanks to the possibility of historical-critical research on the texts – we recognise the necessity of distinguishing between the "original" (historical) meaning of the text, on the one hand, and an interpretation from a Christian perspective derived from the faith of Easter, on the other. The perspective which matters here is rather that of preaching, i.e. it is a question of how the Church proclaims the message of Israel's Holy Scriptures as the message of the Christian Old Testament.

This certainly does not rule out a historical-critical interpretation; on the contrary it points to its necessity. But even then it is necessary to remember that what seems to be only a historical-critical reading is affected by a "preliminary understanding". It is based on a fundamental hermeneutical option which precedes all exegesis. This basic hermeneutical decision takes a fundamentally different form in Judaism compared with Christianity. The fact that there can be no interpretation of a text without a preliminary understanding was already recognised as legitimate both by ancient Judaism and in Christianity as it evolved.

2.2.7. The Jewish exegesis of the Holy Scriptures of Israel, namely that which is not influenced by faith in the Christ event, contains a perspective which is also not only legitimate but even necessary for the Christian interpretation. This is the only possibility for recognising the inherent meaning of the words of Israel's Holy Scriptures; otherwise, there would be the danger that the Christian interpretation would always only discover itself in the texts of the Old Testament. The church's theology is enriched by reading the Jewish exegesis of the Old Testament and by dialogue with Jews.

2.2.8. For the reasons mentioned, the Christian understanding of scripture quite rightly has the

possibility, not only of being aware of the Jewish interpretation of Israel's Holy Scriptures and of respecting it, but also of taking account of it in its own exegesis. This is normal procedure in the context of historical research in theological science. But it is also of benefit for the Church's preaching and teaching if the witness of faith in Israel's Holy Scriptures is not only appreciated in a Christian understanding looking back from the New Testament, but also in the way proper to these writings, namely open for the Jewish and thus non-Christian understanding and hence also open for the hermeneutical tradition resulting from it.

2.2.9. The Easter gospel states that the Christ event not only confirms the biblical promises but simultaneously interprets them anew. But the Jewish way of reading the same biblical texts also makes two things clear. Firstly, we recognise that they contain promises, the fulfilment of which is obviously still to come. Secondly, it becomes clearer that, and how, in the biblical tradition, "this-worldly", human existence in all its diversity is related to God.

2.2.10. For Christian preaching, the witness of Israel's Holy Scriptures is a constitutive part of its own revelation history. Marcion's doctrine of two gods, developed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, demonstrated the consequences of a theology which tried to sever the link between the witness of Israel's Holy Scriptures and the Christ event. The Christ event itself compels the Church to remain conscious of the fact that the ("Old Testament") revelation to which Israel's Holy Scriptures witness was not only originally but is also permanently directed to Israel, although it is not possible to construe a discrepancy between the "God for Israel" and the "God for the world".

### 2.3. *The Christian understanding of God* [To top](#)

2.3.1. The church confesses the one God of Israel. It does so on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and on the basis of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It therefore understands this God differently from Israel and also speaks about this God differently from Israel. The church confesses the triune God. In this very way it wishes to remain true to the confession of the one God of Israel. The doctrine of God in its Christian form as the doctrine of the triune God (trinity) cannot be understood adequately without its origin in the revelation of Christ, nor therefore without reference to the history and present reality of Israel.

2.3.2. The trinitarian dogma states that God with Jesus Christ in union with the Holy Spirit has always been the triune God even "before the foundation of the world". The basis for this conception of God had already been laid in the writings of the New Testament. The New Testament writings may not contain a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity in such terms, but they do speak about the pre-existence of Christ, namely that Christ was with God before all times (John 1:1-14; Phil. 2:6; cf. John 8:58). This establishes a link with certain Jewish statements already to be found in the Old Testament, especially about the pre-existence of wisdom (cf. Prov. 8:22-36). According to the Christian faith, God is at work in the present in the Church and in the world through the Holy Spirit, who both witnesses to and brings about the continuing presence of the risen and exalted Christ in the Church and the world. So, for Christians, the doctrine of the Trinity is the theologically appropriate attempt to speak of the mystery of God's revelation. The doctrine of the Trinity is misunderstood if it is interpreted as a human attempt to define God in this way. On the contrary, it is intended to help in combining what is stated about the One God (cf. Deut. 6:4) with the New Testament witness to the raising and exaltation of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:9-11).

2.3.3. The triune God, of whom the Christian creed speaks, is none other than the God to whom Israel prays. He is the Creator who entered freely into a covenant with Israel and graciously made himself present for Israel in the Torah. According to the Christian view, God reconciled the world with himself in Christ; through the Holy Spirit this reconciling work of God becomes a certainty of faith and in proclamation it is promised to and made real for all people.

2.3.4. The Christian faith witnesses that God acts in history and that he thus makes himself

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present in history – from the beginning of creation to the eschatological consummation. On the basis of the biblical tradition, Christian theology does not see God as a "supreme being" reposing in himself; it speaks of a living, active God who reveals himself to human beings by his free, sovereign resolve; this event of revelation is related to history. In this sense, Christian theology does not speak of God being "unchangeable" – and it cannot do so because trinitarian theology sees God as being self-related.

2.3.5. The Christian faith confesses God to be the gracious and merciful one (Ps. 103:8) who began the revelation of his covenant with his creation in and with Israel. He also renewed this covenant in Israel. He made himself a present reality in the Jew, Jesus, and revealed his grace and truth in their whole depth and breadth in him through the Holy Spirit (John 1:14).

2.3.6. The Christian conception of God includes the insight that the living understanding of the Creator and of his grace and truth in Israel, apart from the revelation of Christ, is also based on God and he is its object. Indeed, this reminds Christians that God has the freedom to make his Spirit blow where he wills. Therefore the Christian faith is also aware that God's care for his people Israel, which does not see God in a trinitarian way, has not been abolished by the election of the Church.

2.3.7. Where the Christian understanding of God is expressed, it refers to the same God as the one of whom Israel speaks. The Christian faith sees the Christian and Jewish ways of speaking of God not only as two ways of speaking about the same God but also as expressions of two different understandings of the same God. The One God is understood differently in the light of Christ's revelation or without this revelation, namely as the one who entered into a new relationship with the world in Jesus Christ.

The fact that Israel and the Church mean the same God when they speak of God, and that they nevertheless speak in fundamentally different ways about this One God, has to be conscientiously examined by the doctrine of God.

Our question is, what does it mean that God is concerned both for the people of Israel and for the Church? We certainly cannot say that the Church and Israel form some kind of unity over against the One God. The Christian faith hopes that there is a unity in the One God which embraces Israel and the Church and will finally be made visible at the end of time.

#### 2.4. *God's act of election*

2.4.1. In agreement with the witness of Israel's Holy Scriptures, the Christian faith speaks of the election of the people of Israel in Abraham and of election through the gift of the Torah on Sinai. At the same time – in analogy to the Jewish view that God created the world so that Israel could be chosen – the Christian faith speaks of the election of the Church in Jesus Christ as an election "Before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). The two statements exist side by side but in such a way that neither can claim superiority over the other. Indeed, the belief in election relates to an event which comes from God himself and not to God's reacting to human action. The motif of election directs attention to God's action and thus questions all claims by means of which human beings may try to demonstrate their importance in the world. So neither Israel nor the Church can lay claim to election; on the contrary, both speak rather of God's act of election in which the chosen are always the object and never the subject. In the Christian view, the election of the Church "before the foundation of the world" includes God's free decision to elect the people of Israel, and this makes any idea of Israel's repudiation impossible. The identity of the Church in its history – not only in its history with God but also in "world" history – depends on its not forgetting or denying the origin of its own historical development in the people of Israel, but maintaining it, which simultaneously implies recognition and acceptance of the lasting position of Israel in the history of revelation and thus the continuing relation between the Church and Israel.

2.4.2. The revelation of the crucified and risen Jesus as the Christ confirms God's action of revelation and election which began with Israel. God's free act of election is the foundation of creation and salvation history; it is the basis of the divine decrees even before the creation of the world. God is the one who loves in freedom. His chosen goal of creation is the historical expression of his pre-existent saving will made visible in the Christ event and which will be fully complete in the future perfection of creation (cf. Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:3-12). The Creator's free redeeming will is the basis for the election of Israel as the people of God, for the election of the Church as God's people of Jews and Gentiles and for its inseparable link with the permanently chosen people of Israel.

2.4.3. God chose Israel to be his people in sovereign freedom and love and established the covenant with Israel. This act of election is based alone on the merciful love of God and on the promise to the fathers. As an example we can quote Deut. 7:6-8: "You are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God chose you out of all nations on earth to be his special possession. It was not because you were more numerous than any other nation that the Lord cared for you and chose you, for you were the smallest of all nations; it was because the Lord loved you and stood by his oath to your forefathers, that he brought you out with his strong hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

The basic provisions of this covenant understanding apply to both testaments in the Christian bible.

2.4.4. According to the testimony of the biblical accounts of creation, God creates human beings, not nations. But he creates people not only as individuals but also as social beings who organise life together and are linked across generations. Thus, the origins of the people of Israel can be presented as the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will multiply (Gen. 12:2) and in this sense as a "family history".

2.4.5. So Israel's being chosen means it is God who really makes Israel into a people, namely his people. God devotes himself out of pure compassion to a small group of people in Egypt in order to lead them out of oppression. In this connection, the name Israel is applied to the people in Ex. 1:9 for the first time in the biblical writings; when God speaks in Ex. 3:7-10, Israel is then expressly called "my people". There is no other reason for election apart from God's love.

2.4.5.1. In the scriptures of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word 'am' is mainly used to refer to the people chosen by God, whereas other terms are used for the 'nations' surrounding Israel which are usually called 'goyim'. But, according to the Bible, even 'my people' ('ammi') Israel is in danger of becoming a 'not my people' ('lo ammi'; Hos. 1:9). The term "people of God" therefore does not only refer to a sociological or biological entity; rather, it is mainly and primarily based on a relationship with God.

2.4.5.2. Israel's being led out of slavery in Egypt is the confirmation of the promise to Abraham for Israel as a people. The gifts of the making of the covenant and of the Torah are rooted in this saving action of God, as is the land given to the people, and it is these which then essentially determine and mark Israel's life.

2.4.6. As soon as faith in election becomes associated with a claim to power, the truth of the confession, which speaks of God's special saving action from a situation of human impotence, is lost.

2.4.6.1. So, when Israel describes itself as "the chosen people of God", this statement is not the basis for some claim to power.

The same can be said of the Church. When Christians view themselves as "the people of God chosen in Christ", they are also not making a claim to power. According to the witness of the New

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Testament, they are the community of those who have to carry the cross of Christ. So they are chosen to give their lives as a service to God's rule (Mk. 8:35; 10:43-45).

2.4.6.2. The election of Israel creates a dividing line which is seen as a special call to service. Through the covenant between God and the people, the latter's whole existence belongs within the service of the God who chooses. The consequence is practical non-conformity; that is part of how the people of God understands itself (Robert Raphael Geis) and is based on the response of faithfulness to God's remaining true to that choice.

The same applies to the Church. Precisely as 'people of God' it has a special position in the secular world like Israel. The title 'people of God' includes the "practical non-conformity" guided by God's instructions.

2.4.7. According to the biblical view, the election of the people comprises a duty. Because of God's uniqueness, all that human beings do is seen within the context of the first commandment. The instruction of the people of God about the will of this God culminates in excluding the veneration of alien gods; by this means, the people of God is to be distinguished in a particular way from the nations around it.

2.4.7.1. Through Jesus Christ, the Church comes to understand the meaning and significance of the first commandment. In its encounter with God's people Israel, the Church is repeatedly reminded of the supreme importance of the first commandment for faith and action. As a result of God's act of election, the life of the community chosen by God is subject to certain duties: Israel, as the people chosen by God, must follow God's instructions, the Torah, and is bound to God by the commandment of love. The Christian Church understands its confession of Jesus Christ as the response to God's self-revelation and thus also as the answer to the first commandment. Election in Christ entails the commitment to the commandment to love the One God and one's neighbour (Mk. 12:28-32; Rom. 13:8f), and to the instruction "to bear one another's burdens" and thus to "fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

2.4.7.2. For the Church, the discipleship of Jesus Christ means that forgiveness of sins, righteousness and eternal life are gifts received alone by faith in God's saving act in Christ (Confessio Augustana, Art. IV). The consequence is that faith "should bring forth good fruit and good works"; but the believers should not rely on works; they know that "forgiveness of sins and righteousness" are received "through faith in Christ" (Confessio Augustana, Art. VI). The Church confesses that "Jesus Christ, as he is testified to us in the Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, whom we are to hear, whom we are to trust and obey in life and in death"; since Christ "is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins," so he is also "God's mighty claim upon our whole life" (Theological Declaration of the Confessional Synod in Barmen, Theses I and II).

2.4.8. It is part of the realism of Israel's Scriptures that they also express and bewail the shortcomings of the people of God in all clarity and sobriety. This is seen especially in the harshness of the prophets' criticism. But in grace God remains faithful to his people. That is reflected in the idea that this people is God's property; God struggles to keep his people and does not abandon it (cf. Hos. 2:19-25).

The same applies correspondingly to the Church. In all clarity and sobriety its theology must also express and bewail its shortcomings; this is already a reality in the New Testament writings and it happens in self-criticism of the church's teaching. But at the same time the Church can hope for and rely on the grace of God, the faithfulness and perseverance of God's support for his people. How else could the Church hope to survive in view of its history?

2.4.9. All theological attempts to make divine election plausible and to explain it completely come up against limits. God's faithfulness to the promise given in election includes the possibility of

judgement. Prophetic preaching in Israel has repeatedly emphasized this link between election and judgement. The New Testament states the same for the Church and for Christians (II Cor. 5:10).

## 2.5. *The Church as "people of God" – Israel as "people of God"*

2.5.1. The origin of the Church lies in the Easter experience of Jesus' followers. Since the Church remains bound to this origin, it remains bound to Israel. This must be clearly stated in the doctrine of the Church, ecclesiology.

2.5.2. In line with Paul's thinking, the Church can be understood as the community called in Christ; the justification by faith revealed in the Christ event and promised to humankind proves to be the confirmation of what God had already done for Abraham (Rom. 4). Similarly, the Apostle sees an announcement of the nations' acceptance by God in the promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:6-8).

2.5.3. As a result of its certainty based on faith in the truth of the Bible, Israel has not ceased to see itself as the people of God. Since it does not share the Christian belief that the biblical ("Old Testament") writings point ahead to the election of the Church, the question must be raised of the parallel exist-ence of Israel's election and the election of the Church by the same God.

Both statements are true: God chose the people of Israel, and God chose the Church from Jews and the nations and thus made it his own possession. God granted the covenant to Israel by the gift of the Torah; and: in renewing, deepening and broadening this covenant with Israel by grace alone, God has promised his righteousness to all who believe in his action in Christ.

2.5.3.1. According to the image of the olive tree used by Paul in Romans 11, God's act of election forms a whole at its original source ("the root"), and initially this action initially relates only to the "olive tree" Israel. But God has now cut off some of the branches of this olive tree "because of their unbelief" and implanted others (Rom. 11:17ff). For Paul, the olive tree comprehensively includes all the bearers of the promise to Abraham chosen by God's pre-existent decision; so the olive tree is not identical with the empirical people of Israel. But Paul is certain both that God's promise of salvation for Israel remains unchanged, and that hence Israel's election remains in force and unchanged, although the majority of the people of God does not recognise God's acts in Christ. Paul sees this as "unbelief" (11:23); but he also speaks of how God can and will "engraft" the "cut off" branches again at the end of time (11:24); he sees God's promise in the Bible that "the Deliverer will come from Zion" and that "so all Israel will be saved" (11:26f), beyond the historical entities "Israel" and "Church".

2.5.3.2. Paul understands the inclusion of the Gentiles in the one original election, the "engrafting" of the "wild branches" into the trunk of the olive tree, precisely as a sign that God, at the end of time, will not treat the "cut off" branches any differently either. For Paul, there is no question of "the Gentiles" having taken the place of "the Jews"; God is the one who acts sovereignly towards both (Rom. 11:21-24).

2.5.4. There are two places in the New Testament where the Church is described directly as the 'people of God'. In both cases, in the First Letter of Peter (2:9f) and in the letter of Titus (2:14), statements have been taken from the biblical, "Old Testament" tradition and applied to the Christian congregation. In these statements, there is no reference to the disinheriting or replacement of Israel as the people of God, nor is there any other indication of Israel's being demoted; it must however be stated that at these points there is no thought for the contemporary Israel which does not believe in Christ. Nowhere does the New Testament speak about a "new people of God" in contrast to an "old people of God".

2.5.5. This has consequences for the appropriate use of the term people of God for the Church.

2.5.5.1. It is misuse of the title 'people of God' to apply it to the Church in a way which denies it to Israel.

2.5.5.2. The term 'people of God' is rightly applied to the Church when it is seen as a community created by God's election and subject to the promise of eschatological fulfilment. This promise of salvation applies to creation as a whole. Hence, the right understanding of the Church as 'people of God' will always also express the relativisation of the Church in relation to the fulfilment still to come; it expresses that the Church is sent to witness and serve and does not claim any privileges for it.

2.5.6. The Reformation churches long attached little significance to the self-designation 'people of God'. Over a long period, even in theological reflection and the churches' understanding of themselves, the focus was on 'people' as a natural community.

Only after catastrophic experiences had caused this understanding to lose its dominant position was it possible in the ecumenical movement for the term 'people of God' to be applied to the Church. Since the founding assembly of the WCC in 1948, this term has referred to the Church as a community transcending all natural peoples, created by God's election, looking to fulfilment at the end of time and committed to witness and service with a view to this fulfilment. This witness includes testifying to the inseparable bond between the Church as people of God by divine election and Israel as people of God by divine election. This idea has been spelled out further in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship study of 1994, "The Church of Jesus Christ".

In the Roman Catholic Church, thanks to the Second Vatican Council, the term 'people' has become important for understanding the nature of the Church in the overall context of God's acts of election.

2.5.7. The Church is not just a "historical" entity but also an object of faith. This is shown by the ecclesiological emphasis in the third article of the early church creed which speaks of the Holy Spirit. The Church is both a visible community of persons and the hidden work of God.

2.5.8. Terms which can only apply to the Church are not sufficient to express the full ecumenicity of the Church – not least because it is impossible for the Church as it understands itself to see itself only and fundamentally as the "Church of the nations" or as a merely "Gentile Christian" Church.

2.5.9. The title 'people of God' is a healthy relativisation by setting the Church in a broader overall framework which points to the how God's saving will concerns humankind. In addition to the reasons connected with election and covenant theology, the eschatological perspective is the main characteristic of a theologically correct understanding of the 'people of God'. The Church as 'people of God' is also not the place of fulfilment; on the contrary, the Church is on the way to the promised kingdom of the glory of God. So the theological content of reference to the Church as 'people of God' is not a "self-description"; it is a title of honour promised to the Church *sola gratia* which in view of its actual appearance should make it ashamed rather than confirming it. Of itself the Church cannot claim to be 'people of God' and consequently it can derive nothing for itself from this title to impress the world. It can only repeatedly discover and praise the granting and promise of this title of honour in the deeds of the living Christ.

2.5.10. Only when the final goal of all of God's history with the world has been reached, will the 'people of God' appear visibly in the way God has predetermined for it. Until that time theology will not be able to solve the mystery of the relation between the Church and Israel. The Church confesses that is created by God's work of election and that it is thus 'people of God' – with Israel. To speak of 'people of God' is confession and praise of God.

3. *The coexistence of the Church with Israel* [To top](#)

3.1. What has been said above has consequences for defining the relation between the Church and Israel. The Church understands itself to have been chosen freely by the God of Israel. It believes itself to be the community founded through faith in the revelation of the God of Israel in Jesus Christ; it sees Israel as the people which knows and honours God in the framework of the revelation to which its Holy Scriptures witness but without confessing Christ. Precisely on the basis of the revelation in Christ, it cannot be said that Israel should merely be seen as the past historical context of the Christ event and as "outdated" now. On the contrary, Israel continues to be the unchanging constitutive and far from outdated point of reference for God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. Faith knows that in God's history with his creation, from the beginning to the end of time, the people of Israel continues to have its lasting place.

3.1.1. From the point of view of the Christian faith, it must be said that the continuing place which belongs to Israel is the result of the divine act of election. Israel itself defines itself as the context of the life of a people. Christians are aware that the community of the people of Israel is based on God's act of election which relates to a life context with both social and religious dimensions.

3.1.2. Judaism has various definitions of its own of what "Israel" is. Apart from the Orthodox definition, according to which a Jew is a person born of a Jewish mother, there is also the idea of descent from the father.

However, it must not be ignored that there are also non-religious Jews for whom belonging to the people of Israel is far from identical with belonging to the 'people of God'. The diversity of Jewish understandings must be respected.

3.1.3. All these statements of Judaism about itself have in common that the people of Israel also sees itself as a people in the social sense, as a community reproducing and maintaining itself through family relationships in the continuity of history since biblical times. However, the emphasis on God's act of election makes clear that the term 'people of God' does not refer primarily to a sociological or biological entity, but has a basis which is initially and above all theological. This theological basis also implies its own sociology; it places the community before the individual without thereby despising the individual, and in this way it opens up a perspective for shaping the life of this people which has many consequences. One of these consequences is that Israel is bound by the commandments of the Torah.

3.2. Christian preaching is public and is addressed to all people. It takes place in the context of dialogue with the religions of the world and in conversation with non-religious ideologies. To all of these Christians witness naturally to their faith in their words and actions.

The same applies to the encounter with Jews. The common features of witnessing to the God of Israel and confessing the sovereign act of election by this One God are a strong argument for the churches to refrain from any activity directed specifically to converting Jews to Christianity.

3.2.1. The Church is aware that its beginnings were in Israel, and this means that in early Christianity preaching of the gospel took place also and initially to Israel. The theological debate was not about the right to preach the event of Easter among Jews; on the contrary, special theological justification was needed for mission to the Gentiles. The Apostle Paul hoped that in his work as "apostle to the Gentiles" he would also be able to win members of the people of Israel to faith in the revelation of God in Christ (Rom. 11:13f). In Rom. 11:26-32 he expresses the certainty that God, at the end of time, will have mercy on Israel, even if the majority of the Israelites do not come to believe in Christ during history.



3.2.2. The credibility of Christian witness is necessarily affected by the practical experience which Jews have of Christians. We cannot deny that the experiences Jews have had of Christians have very often fundamentally shaken the credibility of the Christian witness. Christians must be prepared to be reminded of this whenever and wherever they witness to their faith.

## Part III

### The Church in Israel's presence

The experiences described in Part I and the insights gained in Part II for a theological definition of the relationship between the Church and Israel have consequences for the Church's practice. The recognition that the Christian faith came into existence in Israel, and that the Church has been related to Israel from its historical beginnings down to today, leads one to grasp that the concern for Israel in the life of the Church must be deepened. The churches exist in the world alongside the forms of Jewish life which can be observed empirically. This has consequences, in particular, for reflection on the practice of Christian worship and for witness to the Christian faith beside and over against Israel. The Church has the permanent task of reflecting afresh on its position in the world with particular regard to its relation to Israel. Understanding its situation in history will mean that the Church in all its fields of action will also examine the ethical challenges of our time in the light of the biblical tradition. In this connection, the insight emphasized in Part I must be recalled that, when the churches of the Leuvenberg Fellowship define their relationship to Israel, they must take account of how they are caught up in their own particular national contexts and pay attention to the resulting different forms of approach in the churches.

#### 1. Consequences for the practice of the churches [To top](#)

The consequences for the practice of the churches relate particularly to (1.1.) Parish work and church leadership, (1.2.) The church's preaching and teaching, (1.3.) Worship and the festival calendar, and (1.4.) Church education and further training. Under each heading, in conclusion, practical recommendations have been included which should be discussed in the churches and implemented as the local possibilities allow.

##### 1.1. Parish work and church leadership

1.1.1. The churches are responsible for the Gospel of Jesus Christ keeping its radiance and clarity; they must therefore make sure that Christian identity is not strengthened by devaluing or distorting the Jewish faith. It is necessary to combine one's own identity and certainty of faith with a comprehending ear for Israel's witness and statements of its identity. Reflection on a relationship between the Church and Israel which corresponds to scripture and is theologically correct is a permanent task for the churches.

1.1.2. In the struggle against all forms of discrimination, racism and anti-Semitism, the Church knows it stands side by side with Israel. Christian congregations are more convincing if they are prepared to accept social responsibility even beyond their own realm. They will promote the understanding of humanity and human rights on the basis of the Christian view of human beings. They must make an effort to present history correctly and to reflect critically on the contemporary situation with regard to xenophobia and racism and the attitude to other cultures, religions and ethnic minorities. As a framework for reflection which Christian congregations have already received from their own theological roots, 'Church and Israel' can be an important basis for this.

In their everyday life, congregations will be faced with different situations and thus look for different forms of involvement and communication. The endeavour to make people aware again of the history of Jewish communities which existed in their own setting in the past has awakened a new

sensitivity for history and for the present in many Christian congregations.

1.1.3. The Church is united in solidarity with Israel for historical and theological reasons. This still applies when churches adopt a critical stand on the Arab-Israeli conflict and on contemporary political decisions by the government of the state of Israel. The churches must counteract all tendencies to denigrate the Zionist movement, which led to the founding of the state of Israel, or describe it as racist. The churches will support all efforts of the state of Israel and its neighbours, especially the Palestinian people, to establish and maintain an established, lasting and just peace in mutual respect.

The question whether the founding and existence of the state of Israel also has theological significance for Christians is viewed differently by the churches and remains a challenge for them. In this connection, any direct political justification based on the biblical promises of the land must be refuted. Similarly, all interpretations which consider these promises to be outdated in the light of the Christian faith must be rejected. The way in which Christians see the election of Israel as the people of God must under no circumstances result in religious justification for the oppression of political, ethnic or religious minorities.

1.1.4. In conversation with other religions and, in many European countries, particularly with Islam, Christian congregations and their members are challenged more than ever before to witness to and reflect on their faith in dialogue and debate. In this connection as well, it is important to convey the special relationship which links Christians with Jews, while taking each specific context into account: in religious education, preparation for confirmation, Christian education, adult education and in study and project groups.

#### 1.1.5. Recommendations

- The churches should encourage continuing work in groups with the task of reflecting on the theological and social consequences of the encounter between the Church and Israel for the benefit of all areas of the church's action. Wherever possible, Jewish partners should also participate in these conversations.
- The churches should engage in a lively exchange about their own specific work on clarifying the relation between the Church and Israel. They should share the insights gained from this work with one another. Therefore the churches must endeavour to establish and maintain contacts at all levels with Jewish communities in their neighbourhood. Not least in view of the recent developments within the Jewish communities in Europe caused by migration movements, they should try to show practical solidarity wherever this is welcome.
- The churches should maintain active contacts and membership in organisations which bring together representatives of the Church and Israel or which devote their efforts to understanding, peace and development in the Near East.

### 1.2. *The church's preaching and teaching*

1.2.1. Christian faith comes about by the witness which tells others about this faith, and also lives from that witness. Christians pass on the message of the One God whom they confess as the Creator and Saviour. Christians recognise that Jews also witness to this One God. Hence, the church's proclamation in preaching and teaching can find room for what Jews and Christians have in common and what unites them. Here, it should particularly be remembered that Christians read the Tenak as their Old Testament, and that they are linked with Jews by hopes, which each expects to be fulfilled in their own way.

1.2.2. Christian preaching is the proclamation of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Christian proclamation takes place in accordance with the first commandment; it witnesses to the oneness

and uniqueness of the God of Israel. It confesses the One God in the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus it exists in the tension between what unites and what divides. By witnessing to the unity of God, it makes clear that preaching Christ also takes place "in the presence of Israel".

1.2.3. Christians and Jews witness to their faith before one another. In this process, the articulation of the Christian certainty of faith must take account of the disastrous history of Christian attempts to win Jews to faith in Jesus Christ. An appropriate Christian witness to Israel will therefore particularly avoid all forms which could cause it to be suspected of wanting to exploit existing predicaments.

1.2.4. The preaching of the Church must resist any kind of "forgetfulness of Israel". It must take seriously the Jews' special emphasis on the importance of the uniqueness and incomparability of God. The call to return to the One God links the Church and Israel. This is expressed especially when the Church's proclamation passes on the message of God's compassion as witnessed to in the Torah and in other parts of the Holy Scriptures of Israel, the Christian Old Testament. The Church and Israel witness in the same way that this compassion includes the entitlement of all human beings to justice and creation's right to integrity.

#### 1.2.5. Recommendations

- Christian proclamation must express the link between the Christian faith and Judaism. In particular, it must resist all attempts to contrast a supposedly merciless, vengeful God of the Old Testament with a merciful, gracious God of the New Testament. It must contribute to surmounting the accusation whose influence can still be felt today that the Jews "killed God".
- Christian proclamation must endeavour to make balanced statements about Judaism and its faith. It must, for example, avoid passing on clichés about Jewish devotion to the law and must respect the Jews' understanding of themselves.
- The hesitation still found in some churches today about preaching on Old Testament texts must be examined critically and surmounted. To this end, a greater effort by Old Testament scholarship and by homiletics to provide hermeneutics to assist Christian preaching is just as necessary as a re-examination of lectionaries and encouragement to use Old Testament passages as readings and choose them for sermon texts.

### 1.3. *Worship and the festival calendar*

1.3.1. In worship and celebration the Church witnesses to its link with Israel through faith in the One God who created the one humankind.

1.3.2. Many liturgical elements of Christian worship – the reading of the Psalms, fixed forms of prayer and also the liturgical sequence of the services – originated in Judaism. There are numerous parallels in the annual calendar of festivals of the Synagogue and the Church. The origin of many Christian festivals in the Jewish tradition is normally no longer obvious in the way in which they are celebrated today. People who prepare, lead and celebrate worship should, however, be aware of these connections and stimulate an awareness of the historical background of faith and the Church in Israel among those who share in shaping worship and festival days.

1.3.3. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the Church proclaims the death of Christ through whom God has reconciled the world to himself. It confesses the presence of the risen Lord and awaits his return in glory. Holy Communion is of fundamental importance for the identity of the Christian Church; but the evidence shows that even the celebration and liturgy of Holy Communion is deeply rooted in Jewish worship practice. When the celebration of Communion conveys forgiveness of sins, imparts liberation and witnesses to the hope for comprehensive reconciliation and renewal, these are signs of how the content corresponds to Jewish conceptions, such as those

expressed in the Passover celebration.

1.3.4. It is, however, appropriate to exercise restraint about unthinking adoption of Jewish prayers or other parts of the Jewish (worship) tradition. Inclusions of this kind are in danger of giving the impression that statements of faith are interchangeable. In addition, such adoption can be understood as a lack of respect for the Jews' own understanding and as an attempt to appropriate the traditions of Israel by substitution.

#### 1.3.5. Recommendations

- In celebrations of worship, there are many opportunities for drawing attention to the similarity between Christian and Jewish worship and to the tradition of Israel as the source of many elements of worship.
- The Church and Israel witness to the blessings of Sunday or the Sabbath for humankind and for the whole creation; therefore it is important to make clear the many different dimensions and implications of a break in everyday working life and its healing power. The celebration of Sunday will take the form of hearing the message of God's grace and commands; it will praise the raising of Jesus and at the same time praise God's good creation which knows the limits to which humankind is subject. It will recall the liberation from bondage which repudiates situations of injustice and it will also express the dawning of the kingdom of God, in whose Spirit we are already acting now.

#### 1.4. Church education and further training

1.4.1. Reflection on the link faith and the Church have with Israel has consequences for the curricula of Church education and further training. Here, the question of dealing with the history and traditions of Israel is just as important as being aware of Judaism today.

1.4.2. In the context of Church education and further training, what divides Christians and Jews must be discussed in a way which does not use Israel or the Jews as a foil against which the specifics of the Christian faith can then be presented as a positive contrast.

1.4.3. The special bond between the Church and Israel will have its place in Church education, wherever possible in a direct interchange with representatives of the Jewish community and their tradition. Not least: the theological openness which can be achieved by this kind of interchange with Israel's traditions makes it possible, to engage in self-critical reflection on one's own exegetical, dogmatic and practical/theological tradition and terminology.

1.4.4. In Church education, especially in practical training for the ministry and in schools, but also in education work in general, the churches must sharpen the awareness of the need for reflection on the relationship between the Church and Israel. This will enable Christians to witness to their own identity and at the same time to speak in an appropriate way about Israel.

#### 1.4.5. Recommendations

- Knowledge of the Jewish interpretation of scripture and the practice of the Jewish faith, together with explicit reflection on how the Church and Israel are related, are components of theological teaching in church education courses. It is therefore recommended that, wherever possible, Jewish lecturers should have a share in such teaching – where appropriate in cooperation with Christian theologians.
- Study and exchange programmes at and with Jewish educational institutions at university and other levels should be actively supported by the churches. This includes the encouragement of theological specialisation in the field of Jewish/Christian dialogue and, especially, knowledge of the Jewish tradition and history.

- Ministers of the church and teachers should be encouraged and supported when they wish to become familiar with the reality of life in Israel, e.g. in the context of study on the spot; the churches should create the conditions for this and expand the possibilities already available.

## *2. The common responsibility of Christians and Jews*

In dealing with discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia in recent years, Christians and Jews in many places have taken a stand together and know that this cause unites them. "Justice, peace and the integrity of creation", the issues which became particularly important for many Christian churches in the conciliar process, are concerns and hopes which speak to both Christians and Jews on the basis of their own specific traditions. Jews and Christians can stand shoulder to shoulder in the struggle for the growing implementation of individual and social human rights. In recent years in Europe many people have experienced such joint commitment. These are encouraging signs that sin and injury must not always have the last word, and that – without forgetting or suppressing the past – common steps can carefully be taken together.

### **Concluding remarks**

The churches of the Leuenberg Fellowship recognise and regret their share of responsibility and guilt in relation to the people of Israel in view of the centuries old history of hostility to the Jews. The churches recognise their false interpretations of biblical statements and traditions; they confess their guilt before God and humanity and ask God for forgiveness. They hold fast to the hope that God's Spirit will lead and accompany them on new paths.

The churches of the Leuenberg Fellowship still face the call of seeking dialogue with Jews in their own contexts and particular situations wherever possible. By listening together to the Holy Scriptures of Israel, the Christian Old Testament, ways to mutual understanding can be sought.

The parallel existence of the Church and Israel will not be replaced in history by their joining together (Rom. 11:25-32). The witness of the New Testament teaches that there are limits to theological knowledge and expression which human beings cannot transcend. In the words of the Apostle Paul (Rom. 11:33-36), the Church confesses,

O the depths of the riches and wisdom and know-ledge of God!

How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!

For 'who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?'

Or 'who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?'

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory for ever. Amen. [To top](#)

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**Subjects of the addresses given during the doctrinal conversations\***

Die Israel-Dokumente der deutschen Kirchen seit 1945. Ergebnisse und offene Fragen

[The German churches' Israel documents since 1945. Results and open questions]

Dr. Ralf Hoburg, 5.12.1996 (Basle)

Der jüdisch-christliche Dialog in Deutschland seit der rheinischen Synodalerklärung von 1980

[The Jewish-Christian dialogue in Germany since the Synodal Declaration of the Rhineland of 1980]

Prof. Dr. Heinrich Leipold, 5.12.1996 (Basle)

Entwicklung und Fragestellungen im Zusammenhang mit der niederländischen Studie: "Israel, Volk, Land und Staat" [Development and posing of questions in context of the Dutch study, "Israel, People, Land and State"]

Dr. Andreas Wöhle, 6.12.1996 (Basle)

Die Bedeutung Israels im jüdisch-christlichen Dialog aus der Sicht der Evang. Kirche im Rheinland

[Israel's significance in the Jewish-Christian dialogue as seen by the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland]

Prof. Dr. Johann-Michael Schmidt, 17.4.1997 (Preetz)

Exegetische Untersuchungen zum Israel-Begriff im Alten Testament

[Exegetical investigations of the Israel concept in the Old Testament]

Prof. M. Prudký, Prague, 18.4.1997 (Preetz)

Die Israel-Sicht des Neuen Testaments\*\*

[The understanding of Israel in the New Testament]

Prof. Dr. Andreas Lindemann, 18.4.1997 (Preetz)

Volk Gottes und das jüdisch-christliche Verhältnis

[People of God and the Jewish-Christian relationship]

Prof. Dr. Simon Schoon, Netherlands, 18.4.1997 (Preetz)|

Wodurch sehen sich Juden in ihrer Existenz und Identität heute infragegestellt?

[What is it that Jews see as questioning their existence and identity today?]

Stanislav Krajewski, Warsaw, 18.9.1997 (Warsaw)

Schrift und Tradition im Judentum. Hermeneutische Grundsätze

[Scripture and tradition in Judaism. Hermeneutical principles]

Prof. Dr. Chana Safrai, Jerusalem, 19.9.1997 (Warsaw)

Volk Gottes in geschichtlicher Pluralität

[People of God in historical plurality]

Rabbi Dr. Roland Gradwohl, Jerusalem, 19.9.1997 (Warsaw)

Kirche als Volk Gottes an der Seite Israels\*\*\*

[Church as People of God at Israel's side]

Prof. Dr. Michael Weinrich, 20.9.1997 (Warsaw)

Das Potential des Begriffes 'Bund' für eine Neubestimmung des Verhältnisses zwischen Christen und Juden [The potential of the 'covenant' concept for a new designation of the relationship between Christians and Jews]

Prof. Dr. Jürgen Roloff, 26.3.1998 (Amsterdam)

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\* Most of the addresses are available in writing at the Berlin Secretariat.

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