



Fifty Years After Seelisberg

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A reflection by Prof. Dr. Martin Stöhr, former President of the International Council of Christians and Jews on the 'Ten Points of Seelisberg,' the 1946 statement by a group of Christians and Jews after the Holocaust.

Fifty years after Seelisberg –

an uncompleted international task

by Martin Stöhr

The Jews and Christians, who 50 years ago gathered in the Swiss village of Seelisberg, represented differing traditions from their own faith communities, yet were unified by two experiences: on the one hand the genocide initiated by Nazi Germany which destroyed Europe, and on the other their humanity which had motivated their actions to help refugees and save human lives. The General Secretary of the International Council of Christians and Jews established in 1946 was Rev W. W. (Bill) Simpson, who since 1941 had led the British CCJ. The "elder sibling", the NCCJ, came from the USA. They had begun the fight for human rights and against antisemitism and racism way back in the twenties.

In 1947 Europe and the world at large had not yet been torn by the Cold War. Delegates had come from countries as far apart as Britain and Bulgaria, Poland and the USA, Germany, Luxembourg and Australia. They were joined by representatives from UNESCO and the World Council of Churches in Geneva which had been brought into existence in 1938. The President of the Synagogue Council of America and of the Institute for Democratic Education, Rabbi William F. Rosenblum, like so many of the delegates, represented the double aim: to establish human rights in a democratic society and to counter racist antisemitism. It is noteworthy that the historic "Churches of Peace" (Friedenskirchen), which as minority churches had rendered much practical help during and immediately after the war, were as well represented as other peace organisations. The working commissions discussed:

- Jewish-Christian cooperation in relation to the combating of antisemitism
- Educational opportunity in schools and universities
- The task of the Churches
- Work in the field of civic and social service
- Relations with governments

The last mentioned group raised concrete demands, which have retained actuality to this day: the effective enactment of laws making discrimination against minorities and offences of human rights a criminal offence; the restitution of confiscated or stolen Jewish property;

effective opposition to developments and manifestations of antisemitism in the Occupied Territories; and an early solution to the problems of displaced persons and refugees. It was commission 3 that set out the well known theses of Seelisberg, which in many countries resulted in a revision of textbooks and curricula as well as revision and correction of traditional expressions of contempt of the Jewish people in Christian teachings. Fifty years after this epochal step in Christian Jewish cooperation a great deal of intensive work still needs to be done not least in the battle for human rights, in assuring mutual respect and in countering the continuing practice of using, or abusing, religion as a weapon. Now as then, these aims can only be achieved by way of international exchange and cooperation.

[An Address to the Churches: The Ten Points of Seelisberg](#)