



## Jews and Christians in Germany: Responsibility in Today's Pluralistic Society

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### Jews and Christians in Germany

#### Responsibility in Today's Pluralistic Society

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translated by Prof. Dr. Michael Signer, Notre Dame, Indiana; Claus Jungkunz, Bamberg; Sr. Dr. Katherine Wolff, Jerusalem

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## **Preface by the President of the Central Committee of German Catholics**

The Discussion Group "Jews and Christians" of the Central Committee of German Catholics has already existed for more than thirty years. Its work has had a positive resonance among Jews and Christians, in churches and the general public, and also beyond the borders of Germany. The effects of its publications, its public stances, its conferences, its visits to Jewish communities in other countries, its work at the *Katholikentage* and the *Ecumenical Kirchentag* in 2003 are obvious. Without the discussion group, relations between Jews and Christians in Germany would hardly have developed in such a positive way and the perception of Jewish-Christian issues among the public would be more meager.

Since the Protestant Church is involved in similar Jewish-Christian dialogue, the work of the discussion group also has an ecumenical dimension.

In 1979, the discussion group published its Statement "Important Theological Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue", in which it presented its theological program. Now there is a new theological statement following the former one and further developing its intentions. We hope it will find the same resonance.

The Central Committee of German Catholics owes thanks to the Discussion Group.

*Prof. Dr. Hans Joachim Meyer*

President of the Central Committee of German Catholics

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## **Foreword by the Chairperson of the Discussion Group: "Jews and Christians"**

In 1979 we published our Statement "Important Theological Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue". It was the fruit of passionate discussion for many years until we could promulgate it unanimously. It has remained the foundation of our work until today.

We come together not for humanitarian reasons alone; rather, we are connected to one another by God's desire. It is not enough for us that Christians refer to their Jewish roots in biblical times. We want more. Dialogue demands that contemporary Christians and Jews work together. In the future, we want this rapprochement to focus even more on our common responsibility for our endangered world and society.

After 25 years we renew the same question as it was then: What are the most urgent theological issues for Jewish-Christian dialogue today? The answer cannot just be a reaffirmation of the earlier Statement, because our current religious and social situation is no longer the same as it was 25 years ago. The dialogue partners and the topics have changed. Therefore we seek a new point of view.

The Discussion Group received ideas and encouragement for its work during two conferences in the Bavarian Catholic Academy in Munich (2003 and 2004). We thank all our guests and all those who participated in the meetings for their contributions, which pushed us further in our work.

*Prof. Dr. Hanspeter Heinz*

Chairperson of the Discussion Group "Jews and Christians" in the Central Committee of German Catholics

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## I. JEWS AND CHRISTIANS HAVE CHANGED

### 1. More Jews in the reunited Germany

#### **The period of "packed bags" is over**

Compared to the size of the communities, which number all together about 100,000 members, there is an astonishingly great public awareness of Jews and Jewish institutions in the German Federal Republic. In general, anti-Semitism is noticed and rejected in both the strongest possible way by the political elite and the mainstream media. Occasionally we observe an open interest in and sympathy for the development of Jewish life by our political leaders. Subtle forms of anti-Jewish hostility receive less attention by society and media.

In general, emigrants from countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU), who since the fall of the iron curtain have experienced acceptance, brought about a big change in the Jewish community.

After World War II survivors of the Shoah from Eastern Europe arrived in Germany and remained there. They became the "founding fathers" and "founding mothers" of post-war Jewish communities. They were especially important for German society. In a few years, their witness will disappear. The post-war generation that grew up in Germany and their children are taking over leadership positions in the communities. Many Jews of the second and third generation born in Germany still have a sense of insecurity because of the Nazi persecution. Therefore we must

speak of trauma that spends several generations.

Concerns about possible terror attacks continue to generate fear. Consequently for the foreseeable future all Jewish community buildings must be protected against such attacks. With the change of generation, there is a growing conviction by members of the Jewish community that defence against terrorist attacks is a concern for all Germans.

In spite of all problems the period of the "packed bags", when Jews were not sure they wanted to remain in Germany, is over. Projects for building synagogues and community centers were begun and completed. There is greater public awareness of Jewish culture. The resentment by Jews outside Germany toward those Jews who have lived in Germany since World War II has been reduced. As this acceptance by the worldwide Jewish community has grown the self-assurance of Jews who live in Germany has improved.

In summary Judaism has begun a new life in Germany despite great difficulties – a development which no one would have dared to dream a few decades ago. In many cities where there were no Jews, there are Jewish activities in which young Jews participate. These are signs of hope.

**The *Einheitsgemeinde* (the unified Jewish community organization) no longer represents all branches of Judaism**

Until the end of the 1980's, the Jewish communities in the former Federal Republic had about 25,000 members. Many Jewish communities had a high number of elderly people. Migration from countries of the FSU put an end to the threat of demographic disappearance. Thus the number of members in the Jewish communities in the German Federal Republic grew to about 100,000. Presumably, there are about another 50,000 Jews living in Germany who do not belong to the organized Jewish community. These immigrants include many young people, and their social, economic, cultural and religious integration has become the main task of the communities. Until the present day, they need the help of the organized community in finding a place to live, for further education, etc. These new tasks are challenges and at the same time opportunities for the future. The communities are willing to use these opportunities and to fulfil their responsibility.

Many of the Jews living in Germany are actively committed to the destiny of the State of Israel. They give intellectual and financial support to Israeli establishments. Others have a more ambivalent relationship to the State of Israel.

Since the 1990's, a new pluralism has developed within Jewish life in Germany. Before the Shoah essentially there were liberal and orthodox Judaism in Germany. At present together with these two and the secular Jews there are also other groups. Among these are, for example, the Lubavitcher Hassidim, who do outreach work within the Jewish community. In the meantime, the "Union for Progressive Judaism", to which a number of communities belong, has obtained legal recognition by the government (1997). The Abraham Geiger College, which was founded at the Potsdam University in 1999, trains Liberal rabbis. The university faculty for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg has existed since 1979.

Christian communities must become more aware of diversity in the Jewish Community. False religious expectations by Christians about Jews who live in Germany must now come to an end. These expectations would include the assumption that all Jews observe the dietary laws and the Sabbath in the same way. This idea is rooted in the erroneous presupposition that only Orthodox Judaism is to be considered "genuine". However, Orthodox Jews constitute only a minority of world Jewry. So that Jews and Judaism are not seen as something "exotic" education is necessary to create a realistic and unbiased relationship between Jews and Christians.

The memory of the Shoah must also be kept alive in the future. For us and for the next generation,

"the abnormal will be normal".

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## **2. Fewer Christians faced with greater tasks**

Since 1979, the situation of Christians and of the Churches in Germany has also changed substantially.

Looking back, the re-establishment of German unity in 1990 also represents a decisive turning point for Christians. Although Protestant Christians in particular played a large part in this change, the Churches have since then continued to lose their support in society. Since 1990, the proportion of people in Germany who are non-believers, agnostics, of esoteric orientation or religiously indifferent has considerably increased. This results in a loss of influence of the Churches on German society, a phenomenon which previously had been caused by pluralism, individualism and secularization.

In spite of all their differences, this new situation should become an occasion for Jews and Christians to work together even more than in the past. These new possibilities may exist in discussions about ecological, bioethical and socio-political issues.

After September 11, 2001, the media have paid greater attention to the monotheist religions as political forces. At present, the threat to Western societies from Islamic terrorism absorbs all the attention. This puts considerable pressure on interfaith dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Since the second Intifada in the year 2000, the conflict in the Middle East places new burdens on Jewish-Christian dialogue. Many times the widespread criticism of the Israeli government's policy goes beyond the boundaries to forms of anti-Semitism. This type of criticism many believed had been overcome. Criticism of Israeli policy by Christian partners in dialogue should always be grounded on a fundamental solidarity with the State of Israel and its people. When this is not the case, Jewish-Christian dialogue enters into a dangerous crisis.

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## **3. Insuring that the fourth post-war generation will remember**

The third post-Shoah generation of the 30 to 45-year old Jews and Christians are becoming a significant factor in the dialogue. Some are very interested in giving a fresh start to historical research on the history of Jews and Christians or in theological exploration of the Shoah. They want dialogue without exaggerated expectations of a future "consensus".

Dialogue between the next generation of Jews and Christians offers an important opportunity to keep the memory of the Shoah alive. Christian and Jewish communities should foster this as much as possible. They should not let it fall behind because of problems within each community (decrease in the number of members and financial difficulties in the Churches, integration and growth in pluralism in the Jewish communities). Part of this effort should be an openness to new questions that are asked about the Shoah by the younger generation. The death of the survivors and witnesses of the Shoah will make a fundamental change in the forms of commemoration and remembrance. New forms of transmission through the media and of public remembrance will play an important part. It will be necessary to evaluate this process critically. At the same time it is clear that there is no substitute for personal encounters with Jewish neighbours and free dialogue

between Jews and Christians about the Shoah. That is the only way to ensure appropriate forms of remembrance.

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## II. STEPS FORWARD – IN SPITE OF OBSTACLES

### 1. The Pope leads the way

The Second Vatican Council courageously gave a new direction defining the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people. By deed and word, John Paul II opened a way into the future for this change. Statements by the Church Magisterium as well as by Protestant Churches have initiated intense theological discussion that can be summarized in a few key sentences.

- God is faithful to his covenant with the Church, but equally to his covenant with the Jewish people. Therefore, Christians and Jews are both called to understand themselves as "people of the covenant" and to be a "light to the nations" (Isa 49:6; Mt 5:14).
- No catechesis of the Christian faith without teaching the living tradition of Judaism.
- No reconciliation with God without acknowledging the history of the Church's sin towards the Jewish people.
- No understanding of biblical revelation without reading the Old Testament and seriously considering the Jewish interpretations.

When confronted with their traditional way of understanding their faith these statements may be confusing to Christians. A new orientation of Christian identity is required. The Central Committee of German Catholics has made many contributions to this new orientation through its discussion group "Jews and Christians". The initiatives and teachings of John Paul II and others during his pontificate deepened many of the discussion group's efforts and gave them a stronger foundation.

Where that is concerned a main thesis in our 1979 theological statement is, "Dialogue needs contemporary partnership". This is why the Church seeks dialogue with contemporary Jews and why the Church wants to hear how Jews understand themselves. We are connected with one another "for God's sake". During his first visit to Germany in 1980 the Pope expressed a ground rule for Catholic theology speaking in Mainz with representatives of the Central Council of Jews and the Rabbinic Conference: "The first dimension of this [Christian-Jewish] dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God, and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible." In these words the Pope acknowledges that the Old Testament has theological value, "since this value is not wiped out by the later interpretation of the New Testament." In the same speech he states, "... a second dimension of our dialogue – the true and central one – is the meeting between the present-day Christian Churches and the present-day people of the covenant concluded with Moses. It is important here that Christians ... should ... learn which fundamental lines are essential for the religious reality lived by the Jews, according to their own understanding."

In 1974 and 1985, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews published two statements. The 1985 "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis" criticizes the widespread ignorance of Judaism's traditions and calls upon Christians to take into account these traditions "as they are professed and practiced still today". The discussion group also made a contribution to the area of school education: since 1980, the project initiated and carried out by the discussion group at the University of Freiburg, *Lernprozess Juden Christen* [The Learning Process Jews Christians] has led to a revision of schoolbooks and of annotated editions of the Bible in Germany .

John Paul II's visit to the Great Synagogue in Rome in 1986 was the first visit of a pope to a synagogue. The public perceived and acknowledged it as a historical event in the Catholic Church's rapprochement with Judaism. The Pope wanted to do a symbolic act to "overcome old prejudices and to secure a wider and more complete recognition of that 'bond' and 'common spiritual patrimony' that exists between Jews and Christians." His address culminated in the words: "You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers." The travels of the discussion group to Jewish communities in Israel, the USA, Poland, Hungary, France and the Czech Republic were a response to the Pope's words and actions.

In 1988, 50 years after the Kristallnacht the discussion group published the statement, "After 50 years – how can we talk about guilt, suffering and reconciliation?" It stimulated a greater response and was disseminated more widely than any of our other texts. The Pope gave public expression to the long Christian history of sin through his prayer of confession at St. Peter's Basilica in the Holy Year 2000. One of the prayers for forgiveness focused on the Church's relationship with the Jews who are acknowledged as "the people of the Covenant and of the blessings". This prayer was a witness to the Church's desire for reconciliation. The Pope's pilgrimage to the Holy Land which followed also had great symbolic significance. He visited Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the memorial to the six million Jews who were murdered. At the Western Wall, he left a paper with a prayer, whose text is identical to the one in St. Peter's: "God of our ancestors, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the nations. We are profoundly saddened by the behaviour of those who, throughout history, caused your children to suffer. In asking for your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to a life of authentic brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

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## 2. Obstacles on the path

Unfortunately, there have been a number of events over the past years, which cause us to lament, and do not fit into a completely positive development. We offer three examples.

The discussion group criticized the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1992. It is true that it does not lag behind the Council's statements about the Jews when it speaks directly about Judaism, but it does not fulfil the expectations that must be brought to a Catechism in our time. Certainly, it is not consciously anti-Jewish, but it is a-Jewish, that is, it is a document that does not take the Jews sufficiently into consideration. It is clear that the Catechism has difficulty in acknowledging post-biblical Judaism as an independent entity alongside the Church in salvation history, and in many passages it talks about the Church in such a way as if Judaism did not exist, even though the subject at hand would require that it speak of the Church's bond with Judaism.

The Vatican statement "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah" (1998) speaks of the historical background of anti-Semitism, the Shoah, and newer forms of anti-Semitism. The discussion group did think it was correct to distinguish between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism and to recall Christianity's historical guilt. But it criticized the questionable theological distinction between the guilt of its members and the holiness of the Church, which remains untouched. In summary, the discussion group saw a tendency towards apologetics in the way history was presented, and considered this as a step backwards in comparison with the 1988 statement of the German and Austrian bishops, "Die Last der Geschichte annehmen" (Accepting the Burden of History), and the 1997 statement by French bishops.

The discussion group criticized the simultaneous beatification of the two popes Pius IX (1846-1878) and John XXIII (1958-1963), who were so different in their Church policies. The difference seems to serve two opposing tendencies within Church. Whereas John XXIII convened



the Second Vatican Council and worked personally for a renewed relationship of the Church with the Jews, Pius IX, the pope of the First Vatican Council, engaged in overt anti-Jewish statements and actions. The discussion group was not alone in its praise for John XXIII and its criticism of Pius IX.

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### 3. Christians and Jews read the same Bible in different ways

Since the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution "Dei Verbum", there has been a new awakening in Catholic biblical theology. Official statements by the Pontifical Biblical Commission took the new exegetical insights into account. Above all, *The Jewish People and its Sacred Scripture in the Christian Bible* (2001) is to be mentioned. Based on earlier statements, it says: "Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible."

Israel's refusal to say "Yes" to Jesus of Nazareth can also be acknowledged by Christians as fidelity to Jewish tradition. In the same way, Jewish fidelity to their own Sacred Scriptures and the Jewish hope of redemption can be acknowledged as theologically valuable for Christians. The document correctly emphasizes that the Christian understanding of the Old Testament is based on the insight that human speech has multiple dimensions; therefore the plurality of textual interpretation is at the foundation of biblical interpretation.

Jewish scholars have helped Christian theologians and religious educators to come to a better understanding of Judaism in its living diversity. For many years commentaries on the Hebrew Bible have been published, in which Jewish experts have collaborated. For Christian readers, rabbinic ways of understanding have shed new light on the books of the Bible. Since 1973 *"Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit"* [Jewish Writings of the Hellenistic-Roman Period] has been published. The writings of the Septuagint are given a very important place in the series, because all the authors of the New Testament knew these texts and their theological ideas. Many misunderstandings in Christian-Jewish dialogue happen because Jews and Christians read their scriptures in different versions. For Jews only the Hebrew has authority. Since antiquity Christians read the Old and New Testament in Greek. Many of the ideas in the Greek version were transmitted by Hellenistic Judaism. The study of Greek-speaking Judaism facilitates understanding between Jews and Christians. In interpreting the New Testament, there is more care in avoiding anti-Jewish clichés and to understand the Jesus movement as a movement of Reform within the Judaism of its time. In this way the problems that arise from reading the Bible while ignoring Judaism can be avoided.

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### 4. "Dabru Emet" – Jewish scholars enter new territory

Over the past decades, in spite of several steps backward, Jews have played a substantial part in bringing about a surprisingly positive development in the relationship between Christians and Jews.

- In the Jewish-Christian discussion group of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK), Jews and Christians discuss current religious, theological, historical and political



issues.

- For many years in English-speaking countries and beyond there has been cooperation between Christians and Jews with respect to social and political tasks.
- On various occasions, national and international Jewish organizations have positively acknowledged the statements and actions of the Christian Churches .

The statement "Dabru Emet – Speak Truth" (September 10, 2000), goes one step further. The four authors and more that 300 co-signers representing a broad spectrum of approaches to Judaism did not claim to possess any binding authority within the Jewish world. It is clear to many Jews that "Dabru Emet" has not provoked much positive response, and has been strongly criticized.

Dabru Emet enters new territory. It expresses the hope that more Jews will engage with Christians in theological dialogue.

Dabru Emet suggests:

- There are points of convergence and of agreement between Jews and Christians. It states very clearly that both worship the same God, draw authority from same book, the Bible, acknowledge the moral principles of the Torah, and have a common responsibility for the world.
- Dabru Emet does not avoid difficult issues. There are some differences between Jews and Christians which will remain until the end of time, e.g. the meaning of God, the Bible and salvation. The document also clearly presents the difficult relationship of the Churches to National Socialism.
- The text clearly states that Jews expect Christians to stop a specific mission to the Jews and to acknowledge their religious autonomy.
- Dabru Emet concludes with the hope that Christians and Jews will work together for justice and peace.

For these reasons Dabru Emet can provide an important impetus to the development of the Jewish-Christian relationship.

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### III. ISSUES OF CONTINUING CONTROVERSY

#### 1. God's Covenant with Israel was never revoked

Whereas in the past the Church taught indiscriminately that there was no salvation outside of the Church and without Christ ("*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*"), in "*Nostra Aetate*" the Second Vatican Council adopted the biblical belief that God wants the salvation of all (1 Tim 2:4), even of the whole world (Jn 3:17). Therefore, verses of Scripture like "No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6; similarly: Acts 4:12 ; differently: Mt 7:21 ) should be re-assessed. This changed attitude of the Church led to a new approach to all world religions. After Vatican II the unique status of Judaism was not recognized in a sufficient way and it was put on the same level as the world religions.

The discussion group rejects the tendency to diminish the unique nature of Judaism. It affirms Christianity's distinctive and non-negotiable relationship with the "Israel of God", with pre-Christian and post-biblical Judaism. Support for this argument may be found in Chapters 9-11 of the Letter to the Romans, where the apostle Paul says that God does not revoke his promises. (Rom 9:4). Paul is convinced that his proclamation is identical to that of the prophets (Rom 1:2). Jews and non-Jews are saved by faith alone (Rom 1:16f.). In the end, God will have mercy on all (Rom 11:32 ).

That is valid both for Israel and for the nations.

Although Paul sees the bridge to the salvation of the nations in God's covenant with Noah and Abraham, he does not ignore the significance of the covenant at Sinai (Ex 19-20) or of the new covenant for Israel announced by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). God promises to be faithful to all these covenants and bring them to fulfilment. Paul emphasizes that Israel continues to possess the covenants, the Torah and the worship (Rom 9:4). Thus God's promises remain valid, regardless of whether Israel comes to faith in Jesus or not.

These words provide a foundation for Pope John Paul II's teaching about the "covenant never revoked". They are appropriate for the emphasizing of God's fidelity to the chosen people, which extends to contemporary Judaism.

However, Paul did not think that this reflection solved all the problems in the relationship between the early Christian communities and the "Israel of God". At the end of his reflections, he referred to God's inscrutable wisdom and ways of salvation (Rom 11:33-36).

For this reason contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue should not attempt a universal resolution to theological problems. The dialogue contributes to the kinship between Jews and Christians who know and praise God's fidelity. This bond is unique among religions.

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## **2. No more missionizing of Jews!**

Today we must gratefully acknowledge that neither Jews nor Christians are excluded from salvation. Paul states that God includes Jews and non-Jews in his mercy, each in a different way. It is God who opens up the way and the understanding of the gospel. That is why the discussion group emphatically expresses the conviction that there should be no specific mission of the Jews. Along with important biblical reasons, there are also historical grounds. Throughout history, missionary work among the Jews was linked to oppression and violence. Missionary activity frightened large parts of the Jewish people. This terrible history alone sufficiently explains and justifies the contemporary rejection of the missionizing of Jews. It should have become clear to Christians that Jews resisted Christian missionizing. This opposition meant many disadvantages for the, for the Jews. It was the firm conviction of the Jews that the life of the Torah provided their own way to God. A firm rejection of a specific mission to the Jews does not imply that Jews and Christians should isolate themselves from one another. On the contrary, the absence of missionizing allows both communities to speak freely about their beliefs. Paul says that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26f.) when the redeemer comes out of Zion. Christians can rejoice that Jews have their own way to salvation, and not feel compelled to offer their hope for redemption to Israel.

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## **3. What separates Jews and Christians must also be part of the dialogue: Jesus Christ**

Belief in Jesus as the Messiah is alien to Judaism or is even considered erroneous. Is it possible to build new bridges between us based on Jesus? The discussion group believes this to be possible on two conditions:

- According to Christian faith, Jesus Christ is "the Yes and the Amen" (2 Cor 1:20 ) of God's irrevocable fidelity to Israel and to the whole world.

- Nevertheless, there is salvation for Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus as the Christ because of God's covenant with them.

The apparent contradiction in the two statements can be resolved only by the infinite wisdom of God (cf. Rom 11:25-36). According to Franz Rosenzweig, this aporia can only be determined when the first word (of creation) has become the final word (of redemption).

For Christians, Jesus is the center of faith. For Jews, the question of Jesus is not part of their understanding of God. Nevertheless, our discussion group asserts that Jesus must have a place in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Because of its Christology the Christian side must be aware of misunderstandings. This means that the Christian interpretation of Jesus as savior must include more than just a consideration of the historical Jesus. On the other hand, it must not only develop a dogmatic Christology that speaks of the incarnation of God as if Jesus replaced the Creator God of the Old Testament. The face-to-face relationship of Jesus with the God of Israel and, at the same time, Jesus' union with the Father (cf. Jn 17:11) are the basis of Christian teaching on the Trinity. According to Christian faith these concepts do not contradict belief in the one God.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) plays a decisive role in defining the concept of the incarnation. The council states that Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human ("vere Deus" and "vere homo"). Accordingly, the Word of God ("Logos") can really be heard in the human being Jesus, in his life, his person. Therefore the humanity of Jesus may not be diminished. But on the other hand, this self-emptying of God does not mean that God has not communicated himself in Jesus. Therefore divinity and humanity maintain their specific nature and may not be melted into one. In order to avoid misunderstandings in the dialogue with Jews Christians must maintain the clear formula of their early profession of faith.

In our continuing conversation with Jews the humanity of Jesus is remains particularly significant. This is because it is Jesus who offers himself unto death both to the God of Israel and to the human being in need of salvation. He is savior because he teaches us to walk on the path of salvation. But he is more because as fully divine he lowered himself unto death. It is he who was in the form of God and who humbled himself unto death (Phil 2:6-8). In him, the "goodness and loving kindness" of God appeared (Tit 3:4). Jesus Christ, therefore, is a sign of God's faithful promise. This goodness and loving kindness of God is illuminated in his life and in his death. In his resurrection God's fidelity is confirmed.

There are ideas in Judaism that resemble these notions of Christology. In early Rabbinic texts there are numerous examples revealing God's drawing near to humanity and the created world. However, none of these texts identifies this relationship with a human being who lived on earth.

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#### **4. The scandal of a world unredeemed**

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians see the foundation of their salvation that was established by God (2 Cor 5:18f.). This faith, which Jews do not share, has been harshly tested through the unredeemed condition of the post Holocaust world in the 21st century. There is still sin, suffering and death although Christians expect that God's Messiah should have brought an end to them. But neither Israel nor the world currently live in peace.

We turn again to Paul who first refers to this difficult problem. According to him, "all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now" (Rom 8:22). According to St. Paul salvation in its universal fulfilment is only realized by means of hope.

Jews also have a hope for the redemption of the world. Based on God's promises they work for the repair of the world (*tikkun ha olam*). Therefore in the light of a world unredeemed Christians and Jews find a common hope and impetus for collaboration.

This cooperation is demonstrated in the way Jews and Christians give concrete help, love, and care to those who are suffering. This common action is more important than all theological reflection on suffering and redemption. That is what the biblical commandment "to love" means. That is the message of the prophets, who became defenders of orphans and widows and publicly denounced injustice in the name of God. The Gospels continuously show how Jesus fought against suffering and injustice. On the day of judgment, the only valid measure for him is: "Just as you did it to one of the least of my brothers or sisters, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Jesus stands in unity with the prophets of Israel (Isa 58:1-14) and his statement represents a continuity with Jewish ethics. From these biblical statements the task that is central to Jews and Christians emerges: to perceive and alleviate the suffering of others. As both communities engage in these tasks they create signs of redemption in an unredeemed world.

In the Gospel according to Matthew it says: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Mt 7:21) This statement indicates that Matthew's community acknowledged that there is redemption in fidelity to Torah without referring to Jesus. For this reason then, Christians and Jews are more united by their hope in the fulfilment of redemption than they are separated by the Christian interpretation of Jesus.

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## IV. BIBLICAL ETHICS OBLIGE US TO CONTRIBUTE TO WORLD-SOCIETY

### 1. Human dignity must be defended

Today Jews and Christians are faced with new tasks they have in common. Biblical ethics are an absolute criterion for the inspiration of contemporary society.

Therefore, Jews and Christians are required to oppose the use of human beings as instruments of a society that makes economic power into idolatry. The obligation for Jews and Christians to honour a day of rest, Shabbat or Sunday, points the way toward restoring human beings in the image of God. This becomes credible only when Jews and Christians cultivate a culture for this day corresponding to their faith and as a model for society.

In addition, we currently face social reforms in Germany and, as religious communities; we make it our common task to be a voice that speaks for the weak and the helpless and to insist that they live with dignity.

We will collaborate to promote the protection of human life from birth to death and oppose medical assisted suicide. However, significant differences about the issues of human life require further discussion between our communities. According to Catholic teaching, the dignity of the human person begins with conception. This belief is not shared by all Jews. Therefore, Jewish thinkers can draw different conclusions from the common biblical tradition than those of Catholic theologians with respect to the protection of the embryo. Catholic and Jewish ethics would differ with respect to pre-natal and pre-implantation diagnosis and procedure. Yet, Jews and Christians agree that the dignity of the human being may not be violated. This dignity is based on the biblical idea that the human being is created in the image of God. It is supported by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. Therefore Jews and Christians are convinced that where human dignity is not respected the constitutional state may also be threatened at its very foundation.

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## **2. Hostility towards Jews – an old scandal in a new garb**

In many countries hostility towards Jews has aggressively reappeared recently. The discussion group reminds Christians that their solidarity with Jews should be self-evident. This means that actions and public statements that express hostility to the Jewish people obliges a vigorous response from Christians who should not leave the response only to the Jews.

It is necessary to analyze the causes that had led to this new hostility towards Jews. The discussion group would point to the following list: the increase in militant Islamic groups, the success of radical Rightist parties, the growth of xenophobia, the alienation of many young people and, finally, the insufficient integration of foreigners, migrants and marginal groups.

In contemporary public discussions hostility to Jews is often linked with criticism of the state of Israel's policies. Jews properly expect people to make a distinction between the policies of the Israeli government and the Jews who are living in Germany. However, it also should be clear that criticizing the state of Israel does not mean supporting Anti-Semitism.

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## **3. An open conversation with Islam**

Without intense dialogue between the "monotheistic religions" it is impossible to imagine that people in the Middle East or in Germany will live together peacefully. That is why the discussion group welcomes all initiatives in what is often called an "Abrahamic" or also a "trialogical" dialogue between representatives of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

However, it must be remembered that relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims are of a different nature. Judaism and Christianity have a special relationship with one another because they share the Hebrew Bible, which Christians call the "Old Testament". The Qu'ran, however, does not acknowledge the Old and the New Testaments as revelation, even though it refers to persons and events in them. Moreover, along with positive statements about Judaism and Christianity in the Qu'ran, there are also passages which Jews and Christians understand as distorted descriptions of their faith.

Our discussion group "Jews and Christians" desires an open dialogue with Muslims. This dialogue should not avoid theological discussion for the sake of future consent. At the outset we want to promote a dialogue that rejects discrimination against others, and that affirms religious freedom and the protection of human rights.

The Central Committee of German Catholics currently sponsors a discussion group "Christians and Muslims". At the present time our discussion group and the Christian Muslim group have emphasized different areas of interest. We believe that collaboration should be encouraged in the future. The contents of religious traditions are often used to support the interests of small groups within the larger community. Our discussion group rejects this instrumental use of any religious tradition. In the future we want to avoid any instrumentalizing within our own communities and we support the efforts of many Muslims towards working together and living in peace.

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#### 4. Working among the German public and in the schools

Bringing the new perspectives and insights from its work into the public arena remains a continuing task for our discussion group. It shall support academic conference centers working in this field and promote the ideas of Christian-Jewish dialogue in adult education, parish work and the media. We want to give special emphasis to a more profound understanding of Judaism and relations between Judaism and Christianity in the areas of preaching and catechesis. These activities are in conformity with numerous statements of the Magisterium.

Religious education has the task of introducing our youth to the results of Jewish-Christian dialogue. It is clear that initiatives of the discussion group have had a positive impact over the last decades. Curricula and schoolbooks, didactic material and the development of projects, specialized literature, media and conferences offer teachers help that can lead to presenting the subject of "Judaism" in a responsible way. However, a lack of knowledge and understanding of Christian-Jewish topics can still be recognized among pupils and occasionally also among teachers.

At the present time in contrast to the early days of the discussion group, about one third of all pupils do not attend religious education classes. Most of them take part in other subjects such as philosophy or *Lebens kunde/Ethik/Religion* (life/ethics/religion). Therefore a question arises which is even more urgent: how can our schools transmit an understanding of Judaism and Christianity in classes that do not focus on religion? Teachers in all subjects will bear greater responsibility in transmitting corresponding insights and knowledge. We believe that it is impossible to understand our European culture and history without studying Jewish-Christian relations.

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#### 5. Judaism and Christianity: a critical voice in public discussions

The biblical commandment to love God and neighbour (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18 ; Mk 12:28 -31 par.) is obligatory for both Jews and Christians. Our two communities proclaim faith in One God, whom we love with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength. This belief unites us above and beyond all theological differences. The human person created in the image of God ("*betselem elohim*": Gen 1:26.) is called to responsibility before God. According to rabbinic tradition, this responsibility is demonstrated in what the person does in the fulfilment of God's commandments. Our actions are directed toward recognizing the image of God in those with whom we live.

Today, Catholic social teaching speaks of "faith's responsibility for the world". Judaism emphasizes that being chosen by God brings with it a responsibility to foster justice and peace in the world. Therefore Jews and Christians are required to work towards a world that reflects the image of the Creator. We are convinced that reflection and action by our communities based on our religious traditions will benefit the political and social issues that constitute the fabric of civil society.

Currently monotheism is often criticized as promoting an absolutism that engenders violence. Just the opposite is the case. As Jews and Christians we remember that our common ethical task flows from the human bond with the Creator. This link prevents us from making anything absolute that is not God. Therefore our faith in one God obliges us to engage in criticism of idolatry and totalitarianism. In secularized societies this religious voice seems more necessary than ever.

Because ties to religious traditions have become visibly weaker in our society, it is necessary for Jews and Christians to communicate their biblical traditions to public discussions about our future. Our discussion group asserts that this task is increasingly more difficult. We must seek new partners in dialogue among people who do not belong to any religious institution or tradition but



who are seriously concerned about justice and peace on earth and about the future of the world.

Therefore Jews and Christians are both responsible for developing ways of effectively acting and speaking in an environment that is secular.

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## **Conclusion: Jointly "called to be a blessing for the world"**

Forty years after "*Nostra Aetate*" the discussion group acknowledges with gratitude that the Second Vatican Council's declaration has born fruit within the Christian community. Similar statements and initiatives in the Churches of the Reformation have made substantial contributions. It seems that the main obstacles, which separated the Christians from the Jews and which caused the Jewish people in the "Western Europe" terrible suffering and bloody persecutions, have been removed. The Churches have condemned the accusation of Deicide, the claim that the chosen Jewish people have been rejected by God, as well as the legitimization of hatred of the Jews. We Christians have become aware of the fact that we are related to Judaism from the root and that we cannot understand ourselves correctly without Judaism.

This historical turning point of the council can never be reversed. The spiritual bond, which ties together Jews and Christians, may not be torn asunder again! Thanks be to God, the message of *Nostra Aetate* is understood in Germany, the land of the Shoah. Nevertheless, the danger of Anti-Semitism remains. It still appears in Germany and other parts of the world in new forms.

For this reason the task of the discussion group "Jews and Christians" in the Central Committee of German Catholics is not yet finished. What has been accomplished so far is not enough. We reject the accusation occasionally made that we are pursuing a hobby or that we are a lobby. Christian-Jewish dialogue is not peripheral but at the center of Christian identity. We know that our society is changing. Therefore we must reach out to a new generation of men and women who will engage the dialogue we have begun and bring their own ideas and passion.

In considering our work since 1979 we believe that our first task is to keep the memory of the Shoah alive in the fourth generation born after the Second World War. We must recall the causes, including the anti-Judaism within the Church that led to the Shoah. The second ongoing task is to direct the rapprochement in the dialogue of Christians and Jews toward their common responsibility for our endangered society and world. The challenging invitation offered twenty-five years ago by Pope John Paul II in Mainz remains our task today: "Jews and Christians, as children of Abraham, are called to be a blessing for the world." We look forward to the day when Muslims who are also children of Abraham will join us in this task. May the Lord of history bless our work!

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## **Members of the Discussion Group "Jews and Christians" in the ZdK (Central Committee of German Catholics)**

### Chairperson:

Prof. Dr. Hanspeter Heinz, Augsburg

### Manager:

Rektor Dr. Detlef Stäps, Bonn

### Jewish Members:

Daniel Alter, Berlin

Rabbi Dr. Henry G. Brandt, Augsburg

Dr. Edna Brocke, Essen

Prof. Dr. Micha Brumlik, Frankfurt

Prof. Dr. Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, Riehen/Basel

Rabbi Dr. Walter Homolka, Berlin

Ruth Kahana-Geyer, Lisbon

Dr. Uri Kaufmann, Dossenheim

Petra Kunik, Frankfurt

Ellen Presser, Munich

Prof. Dr. Michael Signer, University of Notre Dame, USA

Dr. Hermann Simon, Berlin

Christian Members:

Prof. Dr. Reinhold Bohlen, Wittlich

Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Breuning, Bonn

Prof. Dr. Christoph Dohmen, Osnabrück

Prof. Dr. Hubert Frankemölle, Paderborn

Dr. Wilfried Hagemann, Münster

Dr. Hans Hermann Henrix, Aachen

Prof. Dr. Herbert Immenkötter, Augsburg

Prof. Dr. Klaus Kienzler, Augsburg

Dr. Ansgar Koschel, Frankfurt

Prof. Dr. Verena Lenzen, Lucerne

Dagmar Mensink, Berlin

Werner Trutwin, Bonn

Rita Waschbüsch, Lebach-Landsweiler

Prof. Dr. Josef Wohlmuth, Bonn

Prof. Dr. Erich Zenger, Münster

### **Guests at the Munich Academy Conferences in 2003 and 2004:**

PD Dr. Regina Ammicht-Quinn, Frankfurt

Father Patrick Desbois, Paris

Prof. Dr. Erwin Dirscherl, Regensburg

Brother Elias Füllenbach OP, Düsseldorf

Prof. Dr. Gregor Maria Hoff, Salzburg

Dr. Lydia Koelle, Bonn

Dr. Stanislaw Krajewski, Warsaw

Pastor Katja Kriener, Düsseldorf

Dr. Maria Neubrand, Eichstätt

Dr. Norbert Reck, Munich

Father Dr. Christian M. Rutishauser SJ, Edlibach/Zug

Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Sander, Salzburg

Prof. Dr. Susanne Sandherr, Munich

Prof. Dr. Heinz-Günther Schöttler, Bamberg

Prof. Joseph Sievers, Rome

Prof. Dr. Clemens Thoma, Lucerne

Prof. Dr. Hans G. Ulrich, Erlangen

PD Dr. Joachim Valentin, Freiburg

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Translation from German