



# Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism Today

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**Message of a Consultation of the Lutheran World Federation held at Dobogokö, 9-13 September 2001**

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*This message is a working paper, which comes out of a discussion that is ongoing. Its purpose is to stimulate the continuing Jewish-Christian dialogue. The full context of this document is to be found in the contributions of the participants in the Dobogokö consultation, which will be published in 2002.*

Over a three-day period, we representatives of Lutheran World Federation member churches have met with members of the Jewish community from 15 countries in a consultation on *Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism Today: A Lutheran Contribution to the Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, held September 9-13, 2001, at Dobogokö near Budapest, Hungary. Our encounter has been intensive, mutually respectful and mutually enriching. On the basis of our encounter, and in consultation with our Jewish colleagues and ecumenical observers, we wish to express our gratitude to those who have preceded us in establishing the Jewish-Lutheran dialogue and exploring the issues raised by and in it. We have gathered to assess the status of dialogue in these member churches of the Lutheran World Federation and to explore the directions in which our response to antisemitism and anti-Judaism must move from now on in the light of new and continuing challenges.

We use "anti-Judaism" to name specifically theological formulations that denigrate Jews and their faith. Looking at the roots of anti-Judaism in Christian theology, it can be understood as a phenomenon of the separation of the church from Judaism. Later on, other motives (social, political, economic, racist) became dominant and led to exclusion and persecution of Jews through centuries. In "antisemitism", we refer to a broader reality: the hatred of and hostility toward Jews, in reality and in rhetoric, that denies them legitimacy among the peoples of the world. This hatred and hostility is to be understood within the larger issues of racism and is countered by the affirmation of human rights that has been part of our heritage for more than 50 years.

Today we can see that in many countries Jews and Christians work together for social justice and respect for human rights and engage in dialogue on theological matters. Our consultation has been an example of this. Christians have increasingly started to seek the Jewish roots of Christianity and understand the Jewishness of Jesus and of the apostles. It has become clear that our common heritage, all that unites Jews and Christians, is a fruitful point of departure for our dialogue. In this dialogue antisemitism and anti-Judaism are key issues. The LWF and the WCC have repudiated all forms and expressions of these attitudes.

Antisemitism and anti-Judaism are present in every church and society represented in this consultation. The expressions are many, and the roots are several. Intolerance of difference and the absence of respect for the dignity of others are essential to these expressions and are the soil in which these sins take root. We therefore encourage member churches of the Lutheran World Federation to undertake appropriate action and education to protect the rights of all people, especially minorities, to build appreciation for difference, and to teach and guard respect for the dignity of others.

Such action and education will take different forms and have different goals in the various member churches. The religious, political and social circumstances of each church, together with its own experience, will shape the responses that are possible. Within the communion of the LWF, each member church retains the autonomy for addressing these concerns in accordance with its own discernment of the gospel in its particular context.

Yet all share in the heritage of biblical Israel that establishes the churches' bond to modern Jews and Judaism. In faithfulness to their calling in the gospel, the churches will seek to discern the significance of this bond for the life and mission of the church. What we affirm is the validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people which has never been superseded.

We acknowledge the importance of the land of Israel to the Jewish people and its central place in the promises of God. We therefore affirm that the connection of the Jewish people to the land is not a racist ideology but a central element of Jewish faith. In solidarity with the Jewish people, and in the spirit of the biblical prophets, the church will seek to understand the proper role and calling of the State of Israel among the nations of the world.

We are deeply concerned about the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the sufferings of the Israelis and the Palestinians, including the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan. We urge the State of Israel and the Palestinian leadership to seek all possible ways to end the violence and to resume negotiations seeking a just agreement between these two peoples.

We affirm the legacy of the dialogue that is already ours in research, statements, and insights, and encourage the member churches and the Lutheran World Federation to build on this legacy to produce materials that counter anti-Judaism in the church's theology and liturgy. These materials should be addressed to every arena of the church's life : lay and theological education, worship, mission, service and organization. We call on the individual member churches to inform the LWF of any such materials that they may produce, so that these can be shared with other LWF member churches and other ecumenical partners.

We encourage the member churches to create and support opportunities for their members to learn about Jews and Judaism, and the church's shared heritage with them, from the youngest age and in face-to-face encounter, building trust and common understanding.

We encourage the member churches to advocate for adequate legal proscriptions and remedies against racist and antisemitic activities, deploying the legal tools of human rights in the effort.

We encourage the member churches to raise their voices against antisemitism and anti-Judaism wherever they appear and to actively support Jewish communities in maintaining their traditional observances.

We affirm the cooperation that has grown between Jews and Lutherans in work for peace and justice, social relief and community development, and we encourage all who are engaged in such work to continue and thrive in it.

We encourage the Lutheran World Federation to continue its support of Jewish-Lutheran dialogue

in the member churches. We especially encourage the engagement of younger leadership in the dialogue, to help assure its continuation and its relevance to contemporary culture.

We encourage the Lutheran World Federation and member churches to convene theological consultations to pursue the theological, exegetical, missiological and pastoral issues that have been raised in and by the dialogue and our own plenary sessions.

We express our gratitude to the Lutheran World Federation for its leadership in this consultation and in the promotion of Jewish-Lutheran understanding. We call for patience and perseverance by all who share this goal, until the long-term process of change on which we have embarked is brought to fruition by the one God of Jews and Christians.