



Christians and Jews: A Manifesto 50 Years after the Weissensee Declaration

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Evangelical Church in Germany

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Christians and Jews: A Manifesto

50 Years after the Weissensee Declaration

Fifty years ago, at its second session in Berlin-Weissensee, the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany declared:

We believe in the Lord and Savior, whose human origin was as a member of the people of Israel. We confess our belief in the church as one body, composed of Jewish and Gentile Christians, whose peace is Jesus Christ. We believe that God's promise to his people Israel has remained in force also after the crucifixion of Christ.

This was the first time that an Evangelical synod contradicted the view, which is widespread also in the Evangelical Church, that the people of Israel were rejected by God and replaced by the church as the true Israel. Over against this it set its conviction that God's promise to the chosen people has remained in force.

At the same time the synod declared:

We state clearly that through omission and silence, we too have become guilty before the Merciful God of the outrage perpetrated against the Jews by members of our [German] people

The Synod thereby admitted the church's complicity in the persecution and murder of European Jewry. At the same time it added a warning against "any notion of an equivalency between what has befallen us Germans as God's judgment and what we have done to the Jews."

We reject all attempts to close the book on our German history before 1945.

On the basis of the studies on "Christians and Jews" issued by the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (I, 1975; II, 1991; III, 2000) as well as the synodical declarations of many member churches and church-related associations concerning a new approach in the church's relationship to Israel, we extend the declaration of 1950:

It is not only through "omission and silence" that the church has become guilty. It is rather through the disastrous tradition of estrangement from the Jews and enmity towards them that it has been implicated in the systematic destruction of European Jewry. It is this theological tradition that since 1945 has burdened and delayed all endeavors towards a new approach in the church's relations to the Jewish people.

Today we can state explicitly:

1. We believe that God the Creator and Lord of the universe, in Jesus Christ "our Father," has chosen Israel as his people. He has bound himself to Israel forever and remains faithful to it in the continuity from biblical Israel to the Jewish people. Jews are witnesses to us of God's faithfulness.
2. We confess our belief in Israel's Holy Scripture, the Bible of Jesus and primitive Christianity and our Old Testament. The New Testament witness to Christ is the center and source of our Christian faith. The two testaments form a unity of reciprocal interpretation. They are the foundation and guideline for a new approach in our relations to the Jewish people. We are grateful that Jews through their interpretation help us to a deeper understanding of the Bible.
3. We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and member of his people. In him, Israel's God became human and reconciled the world to himself.
4. We give witness to our participation in God's history with his people. Our election in Christ is election through the same God who chose his people Israel.
5. The New Testament testifies to the one church of Jewish and Gentile Christians. We see our Christian sisters and brothers of Jewish descent as witnesses to our indissoluble bond with God's permanently chosen people Israel.
6. Despite all differences, we acknowledge that we have in common:
 - belief in the One God – for us Christians, in the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - the hearing and following of God's commandments - for us Christians, in discipleship to Jesus
 - the expectation of the last judgment and the hope for a new heaven and a new earth – for us Christians, associated with the second coming of Christ.
7. Dialogue about faith includes respect for the identity of the other. The endeavors towards a brotherly and sisterly relationship between Christians and Jews are a basic challenge and a permanent task for the church and for theology.

Braunschweig, November 9, 2000

President of the Synod of the

Evangelical Church in Germany

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