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# Acknowledgement and responsibility

**about acknowledging guilt and  
our responsibility for the future**

Declaration by the Protestant Church in The Netherlands

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# Foreword

A 'Declaration of acknowledgement and our responsibility for the future' is finally here. For too long, this declaration on the role of the churches in and immediately after the Second World War in relation to the Jewish community in The Netherlands has been delayed. Now is the time, over 75 years after the liberation, following a period of unimaginable oppression and destruction of living Jewish communities.

In this brochure, you will find the statement of the Protestant Church to the Jewish community in The Netherlands, followed up by an explanation. There's a short article on apologizing and confessing guilt. It is set in a historical context, looking at the role of *the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk*, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland and the *Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, the predecessors of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands, in and immediately after the Second World War with regard to the persecution of the Jews.

This is a moment of reluctance, modesty and an outstretched hand to the living Jewish communities. It is our desire to continue on the path we have already taken together, so that we can get to know each other better, strengthen each other, support each other where necessary and grow in friendly relationships. All this in a deep desire to be meaningful in society and to make a positive difference.

*On behalf of the General Synod of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands,*

*Rev Marco Batenburg, moderator*

*Dr René de Reuver, general secretary*

# Statement of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands - on acknowledging guilt and our responsibility for the future

## Kristallnacht Commemoration, 8 November 2020

Also at the end of this 75th year of our liberation, the Jewish community of The Netherlands will meet in Amsterdam for the November Pogroms Commemoration. On the night of 9 to 10 November, 1938, the unscrupulous mechanical murder campaign, which killed six million Jews in the following years, began with a first pogrom. But as Abel Herzberg wrote in his diary from Bergen Belsen: There were not six million Jews murdered; there was one murder, six million times. Other groups were also excluded, taken away and murdered.

The vastness of the sorrow the Shoah brought to the Jewish community and the depth of the pain felt by its survivors is inconceivable. A pain that will be carried and experienced by next generations. It is in recognition of that sadness and that pain that the Protestant Church in The Netherlands is addressing the Jewish community in our country. Never before has the Protestant Church sought dialogue with our Jewish interlocutors in this way. This taking place only in the 75th year of liberation is late. We hope it won't be too late.

The Protestant Church in The Netherlands wants to acknowledge unreservedly that the Church helped to prepare the breeding ground in which the seeds of antisemitism and hatred were able to grow. For centuries, the gap that later enabled the isolation of the Jews in society in such a way that they could be taken away and murdered, was maintained. Even in the war years themselves, the church authorities often lacked courage to choose a position for the Jewish inhabitants of our country. This was in spite of incredibly courageous individual acts which, thank God, were also carried out by members of the churches. It is with gratitude that we remember those who had the courage to resist during the war.

The Protestant Church also recognises that the reception of the Jews who returned to our society after 1945 led to distressing situations. The problems encountered in returning war foster children to the Jewish community and in the restitution of property are painful examples of this.

In acknowledging all this, the church confesses guilt. Today, in particular, it does so towards the Jewish community. Because antisemitism is sin against God and against people. The Protestant Church is also part of this guilty history. We failed in speech and silence, in actions and omissions, in attitude and thought. May all the victims of the great horror have a memory and a name (Hebrew: Yad vaShem) in the heart of the Eternal One, the God of Israel. May all loved ones who are missed not be forgotten. As it is written:

*Earth, cover not my blood, and let my cry for justice find no resting place. (Job 16:18)*

We take it upon ourselves to do all we can to further develop Judaeo-Christian relations into a deep friendship of two equal partners, among others, linked in the fight against contemporary antisemitism.

*General Synod of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands  
Dr René de Reuver, general secretary*

# Explanation to the Declaration

The 'Declaration on acknowledgement of guilt and our responsibility for the future' is a declaration of the General Synod of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands. Never before has the Protestant Church (or one of its predecessors) confessed guilt and acknowledged the pain and sorrow that the Shoah has caused the Jewish community to this day so wholeheartedly. What had long been overdue is now taking place in the year in which 75 years of liberation are commemorated. A liberation that has had a bitter aftertaste for many Jewish fellow citizens due to the very inadequate reception of those who returned after 1945, as problems arose with the return of war foster children to the Jewish community and with the restitution of property.

## Previous ecclesiastical statements on the Shoah

There is an early statement by the then Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, that wrote in a letter to the German churches dated March 9th, 1946: 'God has given us the strength to fight National Socialism. We openly confess before God and the world that we have not been sufficiently faithful, neither sufficiently willing to sacrifice, nor brave enough in this struggle'. However, this statement was addressed to the German churches – and not to the Jewish community – and neither did it include the persecution of the Jews. This is a reaction of the Dutch Reformed Church to the declarations signed in Stuttgart (Stuttgarter Erklärung, 1945) and Darmstadt (Darmstädter Wort, 1947) by (part of) the Landeskirchen EKD. Neither of these declarations are related to the Holocaust and are not addressed to the Jewish community. This is a confession of guilt, because the Church failed in the face of the ideology of Nazism.

It was only in 1948 that antisemitism came in the crosshairs. Again in Darmstadt, in 1948; and in Amsterdam, with the establishment of the World Council of Churches, also in 1948. Earlier, of course, this was also the case in the run-up to, for example, the establishment of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), in 1947 in Seelisberg. The alertness to antisemitism was a reaction to the persecution of the Jews. In those early years, however, this awareness was still miles away from the official church leadership.

## Apologies from Prime Minister Rutte

With fluctuations, many have asked the Church to confess guilt for many years. The urgency has been felt for so long. There is no excuse for this belated acknowledgement of guilt and responsibility. Particularly in this year of 75 years of liberation, it is essential to send a message to the Jewish community about recognition of guilt and about our responsibility for the future. During the National Holocaust Commemoration at the Mirror Memorial 'Never Again Auschwitz' in the Amsterdam Wertheim Park on Sunday January 26th, 2020, Prime Minister Rutte, on behalf of the [Dutch] authorities, apologised for the government's actions during the war years. During this commemoration, a representation from the synodal board of the Protestant Church was present. The Prime Minister's impressive words were among the reasons for reflection within the Protestant Church, but certainly not the only one.

The initial impetus for this statement was given by Rev Dick Pruiksma, then President of the Protestant Council for Church and Israel. Attempts were made to contact a number of Jewish interlocutors, and there was close contact with the board of the Central Jewish Consultation. Historian Dr. Bart Walle



*This monument in Amsterdam was created by Dutch writer and artist Jan Wolkers, in memory of the many victims of Auschwitz. The monument is made up of broken mirrors and can be found in the Wertheimpark. According to Wolkers, the mirrors represent the thought that "heaven is no longer unbroken since Auschwitz". (Flickr.com / FaceMePLS)*



*Bible Verse Job 16:18 which is mentioned at the end of the Statement, is stated on the monument at the Bikernieki Memorial in Letland. Bikernieki forest is the biggest mass murder site during The Holocaust in Latvia with two memorial territories spanning over 80,000 square metres (860,000 sq ft) with 55 marked burial sites with around 20,000 victims still buried in total. (Jewish Community of Latvia)*

was asked to give a historical interpretation of the declaration and to put it all within the context of what the churches had done and had failed to do with regard to the Jewish community, in and immediately after the Second World War. The initial intention was to make this declaration on Yom haShua, Monday April 20th. Due to the corona crisis, it seemed more advisable to look for another date by mutual agreement: the November Pogroms commemoration on November 8th, 2020.

### To the text

After listening carefully to the reactions and comments from the Jewish side, a text of its own was drawn up. This is an ecclesiastical text. In line with earlier statements and statements, it

speaks openly about antisemitism and the role the churches have played in it. It also looks at the present: the fight against contemporary anti-Semitism. Words such as 'guilt and responsibility', ecclesiastical language where others might use 'apology and responsibility' are mentioned. Guilt is a loaded term and says something not only about the relationship between people, but also about the relationship between people and God. Guilt is linked to sin. 'Antisemitism is sin against God and man', the statement says. It is a reference to what was said at the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948: 'Antisemitism is sin against God and man'. On January 20th, 2020, this statement was reaffirmed by the World Council of Churches: 'Antisemitism is irreconcilable with the

profession and practice of the Christian faith'. The statement talks about the fact that, during the war years, the church authorities often lacked the courage to take a stand for the Jewish inhabitants of our country. The word 'often' is not used to weaken the recognition of guilt, but to do justice to the commitment of individuals and institutions. The accompanying article by Dr Bart Wallet gives a further historical interpretation.

The Bible verse from Job 16:18 mentioned at the end of the statement is on the monument of the Bikernieki memorial site near Riga (Latvia) where the remains of 20,000 victims of the Shoah are buried. It is also on the memorial at the Umschlagplatz in Warsaw, where more than 300 000 people were deported to Treblinka. The text aptly and poignantly expresses the lamentation of sorrow and pain that will never come to silence. In the Jewish explanation of Job 16:18, there is a reference to Genesis 4:11, where the LORD tells Cain to go away from the ground that opened her mouth to receive the shed blood of his brother Abel.

### Responsibility to combat antisemitism

Being alert to antisemitism is a constant point of attention in the Protestant Church in The Netherlands. Awareness of what antisemitism is and combating it is explicitly mentioned in Ordinance 1, Article 2 of the Church Order. In recent years, steps have been taken, certainly in the area of awareness, for example by means of seminars and articles. In 2016, in the run-up to 2017 – the year in which 500 years of Protestantism was thought and celebrated – the Protestant Church renounced Luther's anti-Jewish statements. After attacks [on the Jewish community], the Protestant Church bucked up the Jewish community in The Netherlands and expressed its sympathy. General secretary Dr. René de Reuver wrote in March 2019: Tackle antisemitism at its roots! Together with the Roman Catholic Church in The Netherlands, the Protestant Church sent out a signal against antisemitism on 28 June, 2019. Here is one quote from this:

*'For the churches, the ongoing dialogue with the Jewish community in The Netherlands is of great importance. We also consider it our responsibility to do everything in our power to combat antisemitism in society as a whole and to support initiatives that put a stop to it.'*

In the case of antisemitism, we must focus mainly on education. That is Professor Dineke Houtman's

conviction. She was Extraordinary Professor of Judaica at the Protestant Theological University (PThU), a chair of the Foundation for the Promotion of Scientific Education in Judaica. This chair was and is co-financed by the Protestant Church.

Because of this special chair and also within the regular education and research at the PThU, attention is paid to the themes of antisemitism, Judaism, fundamental languages of the Bible, and Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

Antisemitism can be combated by curbing it, by giving a positive image of living Judaism, by recognising and embracing the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, and by entering into the Judeo-Christian dialogue. As stated on the website of the Protestant Church: 'For the Protestant Church, the relationship with the Jewish people is an essential part of its own identity.'

### Where do we go from here?

The text ends with: 'We take it upon ourselves to do everything possible to further develop Judeo-Christian relations into a deep friendship of two equal partners, among others linked in the fight against contemporary antisemitism'. These words should not be left as words, they should be fulfilled. A propos, friendship does not mean you're always two peas in a pod, but rather examining each other's minds, supporting and encouraging each other, and showing through real actions what this friendship is worth to us. It goes without saying that the Protestant Church will continue to speak out against any form of antisemitism in society, in order to encourage the Jewish community in The Netherlands in its diversity. The message that the Protestant Church wishes to send to the Jewish community in The Netherlands is that a vital Jewish community is an inseparable part of Dutch society. This also means that we are putting our house in order. The text mentions the breeding ground of antisemitism within the church and within the Christian tradition. Much has already been done to turn this tide. In the formation of Protestant pastors (preachers and church workers), attention is paid to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, Judaeo-Christian conversation and antisemitism. In the current curriculum at the PThU, a special chair has been established for this purpose. But is it enough? The Protestant Church and the PThU should do constant updates here. It is crucial that the translation of responsible exegesis and hermeneutics find an effect in local congregations, in which the liturgy also plays an important role.

This can be emphasised in the further training of ministers and church workers.

For the benefit of Judeo-Christian relations, there used to be a study secretary in both the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Although we should never stare back to the past, in a new way we can take valuable things from the past into the present. Within the Protestant Church, we are investigating and considering making more room and funding available to invest in Judeo-Christian relations, to raise awareness of and fight against antisemitism, and to bring the essential importance of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith to the attention of the local congregations.

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# Apologies and guilt – A brief exploration

During the National Holocaust Remembrance Day in January 2020, Prime Minister Rutte, on behalf of the [Dutch] government, apologised for the government's actions then, in the Second World War, "while the last survivors are still among us". He used the word 'apology' "in the realisation that no word could ever comprise something as great and horrific as the Holocaust". He spoke of the "remembrance mission to honour the dead with their full names, to be accountable, to stand together in the here and now". It is an impressive statement which received many positive reactions from Dutch society, including from the Jewish community. It has led to further reflection within the Protestant Church and other churches. How has the Church spoken about its role in the Second World War? What is now essential to be heard? In church parlance, there is never really any talk of 'apology', but of 'guilt'. Just as making an apology is to have consequences, confessing guilt calls for taking responsibility. In this article, I will elaborate on some aspects of the word 'guilt'.

## Guilt in the Bible

The failure of man, the missing of the goal, the rushing by one's calling as a human being, is dealt with in the Bible in all keys; in stories, legal texts, songs, prophetic texts, gospel stories. The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, has more than fifty words for 'sin'. Three stand out:

- *chata'*: doing something wrong, missing its purpose, violating a commandment; the error may be deliberate or unintentional.
- *pasja'*: deliberately breaking a rule; rebelling, usually against God.
- *'awon*: injustice, unfairness, crime, guilt; this word is almost always used for guilt against God, not against people.

Psalms 32 and 51 play with these words and, among other texts, have had a great influence in Jewish and Christian spirituality. They are penitential psalms.

*'I acknowledged my sin to You,  
And my iniquity I have not hidden.'*  
(Psalm 32:5, New King James Version)

*'For I know my wrongdoings,  
And my sin is constantly before me.'*  
(Psalm 51:3, New American Standard Bible)

Individual guilt and collective guilt are always intertwined. There are no separate words to distinguish them. You are responsible for your own actions, and your actions have consequences for the community to which you belong. The community, in turn, can stand up for your transgressions and bring them to God. In the Old Testament this happens, for example, through the practice of sacrifice in the temple. People's sin is in their hearts, which biblically stands for human will. The One penetrates the heart, and examines the mind.

*The heart is more deceitful than anything else,  
and incurable - who can understand it?*  
(Jeremiah 17:9, Christian Standard Bible)

In the New Testament, the words sin (*hamartia*) and guilt (Greek: *ofeilèma*) are almost synonymous. Yet there is a difference in emphasis. Sin is above all a transgression and an offence against God. Guilt is inextricably linked to obligations that people have towards each other: economic, social, moral. Guilt means that you owe something to someone; a *quid pro quo* is demanded of you. Guilt is the consequence of sin. In the Lord's Prayer this comes together:

*"And forgive us our sins (hamartias),  
for we also forgive every one that is indebted  
(ofeilonti) to us."*  
(Luke 11:4, 21st Century King James Version)

The recently deceased emeritus professor of biblical theology Dr. Rochus Zuurmond says it succinctly:

*Debts are always a burden. They have to be paid  
or compensated. In the Lord's Prayer we pray  
that our debts will be forgiven, that we will be  
freed from the power that debts have over us,  
that we will be free from all binding, oppressive  
obligations. God's forgiveness is there, whether  
we pray for it or not. In the Lord's Prayer we ask  
that we, too, will be part of it.*

Here, the concept of guilt is linked to forgiveness. But certainly not as automatism. Confessing guilt is a painful process with consequences. Acknowledging guilt is a beginning of reversal, a change of mind and behaviour (*teshuvah, metanoia*). Forgiveness has to be granted. On the basis of the Bible you can say that gift and commitment

go hand in hand. You have to do something for it at the same time: on the one hand acknowledge individual and collective failure, and on the other hand be willing and committed to put something in return.

### Guilt in the Protestant tradition

The Bible and the Christian faith tradition have always put a great deal of work of human guilt,' professors Dr. Gijsbert van den Brink and Dr. Kees van der Kooi say in their *Christian Dogmatics*. They point to the important impetus Calvin has given: he makes the awareness of one's own failure an integral part of the relationship of faith. It is not a 'spiritual gateway to it'. What they mean is this: with Calvin, guilt and repentance (*poenitentia*) do not precede the Christian life. Like: first you confess your guilt and then you live a Christian life. Pronouncing failure is a permanent and integral part of your faith relationship with God. Luther also puts this accent. He states that the whole life of believers should be penance.

In the classical Protestant liturgy, this is reflected in the section confession of guilt and proclamation of grace. In the Protestant ecumenical liturgy this is mainly found in the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*. The need of the world (and, thus, also the failure of people) is proclaimed, and it is sung that God does not let the world sigh in forlornness.

It is rightly said in *Christian Dogmatics* that it is not so easy to let these notions land in our time, stamped by individualism. Guilt and sin aren't popular words, and outside the church a word like 'sin' is only used in the sense of 'pity'.

However, that's not the whole story. Nowadays, there is a widely supported awareness of individual and collective human action that has catastrophic consequences. There seems to be a growing awareness that things are interrelated and people are interconnected through the generations.

This provides leads to connect ecclesiastical notions of guilt (and forgiveness) and social notions of economic, ecological and social failure. In various words, you describe how people continue to fail to take the bend regionally and globally, and you try to find a way out of it. Ecclesiastically and spiritually, you end up with God, with Moses, with the prophets, with Jesus and Paul.



*National Holocaust Remembrance Day 2020 in the Wertheimpark at the Mirror Memorial. Prime minister Rutte embraces Jacques Grishaver, the chair of the Dutch Auschwitz Committee. (Sabine Joosten/ Hollandse Hoogte)*

### Part of a greater whole

The emeritus professor of philosophical ethics Dr Paul van Tongeren, as a reaction to Rutte's apology, describes that 'apology' literally means 'excluding guilt' or 'acquitting', and thus 'justifying'. That's why, he says, one can't actually 'offer' an apology, at least not if one is not guilty of anything. On the contrary: one asks for an apology, because one is to blame for something, and asks the person to whom one owes something, to be acquitted of it. Now starting asking all kinds of questions can be initiated, such as 'what do excuses mean when the perpetrators and victims are virtually gone?' But in his view, this reasoning is too individual. As a matter of fact, one is always a member of a community, one was born somewhere, one is part of something, one didn't choose so, but is in it. Whatever way you look at it, you're part of larger entities, 'communities whose history touches us and in which the actions of others affect us as well'.

This touches on an important biblical notion. As a human being, you are connected with people around you, you are part of communities. What you do has consequences for the community,

and the community appeals to you and to your responsibility. Biblically, it all comes together in God. At the beginning of the Bible, the One asks man the resonating question throughout the Bible: 'Where are you?' (Genesis 3:9) What is your place, your choice of position? What do you do if you are to blame, how do you relate to others, and to the generations before you and after you?

In this year of commemorating 75 years of liberation, it is appropriate to acknowledge guilt towards the Jewish community in order to stand firm together in the here and now.

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# The forerunners of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands and the persecution of the Jews

What positions did the forerunners of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands occupy with regard to the persecution of the Jews? This question has been the lead of several studies, both immediately after the war and more recently. On the basis of these studies, and supplemented by new research, an outline is presented here.

Firstly, it is good to define the forerunners of the current Protestant Church in The Netherlands. These were the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* and the resulting *Gereformeerde Kerken in Hersteld Verband*, the *Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk* and the *Hersteld-Evangelisch Lutherse Kerk*. Together, the members of these churches made up about 42% of the Dutch population at the beginning of the Second World War.

For a good understanding of the position of these churches during the war, it is important to know that their church structures varied from the centrally governed Dutch Reformed Church (top-down) to the more bottom-up organized Reformed Churches. Moreover, the theological views on the relationship between church and government differed: the Lutherans used Lutheran dualism, with a clear separation between the ecclesiastical and political domains, while the Calvinists could invoke, among other things, a public theology that legitimized resistance. Moreover, the Hervormde Kerk had embraced the nineteenth-century model of the 'people's church', in which nation and church were strongly involved with each other. The different structures and theological beliefs largely determined the churches' leeway during the Second World War.

Chronologically, we will look at the churches' attitude to the persecution of the Jews in the 1930s, during the Second World War, and in the period immediately after the war.

## The 1930s

Persecution of the Jews became a political theme in Dutch society in the 1930s. Through the power seize by the Nazis in neighbouring Germany in 1933, followed by the immediate discrimination, boycott and exclusion of Jews, a flow of Jewish refugees

to The Netherlands was created. Dutch policy was restraining: due to the economic crisis in their own country there was little political room for help and shelter. In addition, The Netherlands wanted to maintain a good relationship with Germany in order to maintain its own neutral position. In principle, only refugees who could yield economic advantages to The Netherlands were welcome. In addition, The Netherlands agreed to act as a transit country for a limited group of German, Austrian, and Sudeten-German Jews in order to facilitate further migration elsewhere.

The refugees' reception broadly followed the model of the 'compartmentalised', philosophically segmented society. To a large extent, the government left this reception to the religious communities. This meant that the reception of Jewish refugees was for the account of the Dutch Jewish community. Churches and Christians were mainly concerned with their 'own' refugees, the Protestant or Catholic Jews. Against this backdrop, the 'Committee for so-called non-Aryan Christians' was established in 1935, with its own reception locations for Christian Jews and their family members.

Some theologians, such as Klaas Schilder and Jan Buskes, already began to hold guard at an early stage against the rise of National Socialism and political antisemitism in Germany and, in their own country, in the form of the National Socialist Movement (NSB). As early as 1933, the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church unanimously rejected a proposal for a special Sunday for the mission of the Jews with the remark that such a Sunday would be particularly inappropriate in these times and that mission against antisemitism, in their own Lutheran circle among the 'neighbouring Christian people' (read: Germany) had to be carried out earlier. In 1936, the Reformed Churches decided that membership of the NSB was incompatible with church membership.

However, the Dutch Reformed Church didn't want to take that step and, as a 'people's church', didn't want to make political choices. Some Reformed ministers were active in the NSB and they condoned the German persecution of the Jews or even blamed it to the Jews themselves. Other reformed ministers were active in helping the Christian Jews who had fled.

## Conclusion

An official protest against the persecution of the Jews from the Dutch churches during this period lacked. They largely followed the Dutch government line in guarding their own neutrality. Assistance to Jewish refugees was concentrated on the 'own' baptised Jews.

## During the Second World War

The attitude the churches adopted after the beginning of the occupation was, to a large extent, characterized by continuity with the already existing policy of concentrating on the fate of the 'own' baptised Jews. Primary responsibility was felt for them, and isolation and possible deportation of Christian Jews was seen as an attack on the unity of the Christian community, of which these Jews were an integral part.

The beginning of the occupation led to a remarkable initiative: the otherwise so divided Dutch churches managed to find each other in a joint Convent of Churches, called Interkerkelijk Overleg (IKO) from 1942 onwards. All the forerunners of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands were represented, along with other Protestant churches and, from 1941, also the Roman Catholic Church. Initially, the self-organisation was intended to defend church interests, such as Sunday rest and restitution of war damage to church buildings. With difficulty, also antisemitism appeared on the agenda.

Coordinated by the Convent/IKO, several protests against the persecution of the Jews were organised between 1940 and 1944. The scope of these protests varied, as did the address. In some cases, protests were lodged with the Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart, in other cases with the secretaries general, and several times a pastoral letter was also sent to their own supporters. It concerned the following interventions:

Coordinated by the Convent/IKO, several objections against the persecution of the Jews were organised between 1940 and 1944. The extent of these protests varied, as did the speech. In some cases, protests were made to the Reichskommissar Arthur Seyss-Inquart, in other cases to the Secretaries General, and a pastoral letter was also sent several

times to their own rank and file. These were the following interventions:

- 24 October 1940: letter to Seyss-Inquart in protest against the ban on Jews in the civil service;
- 5 March 1941: letter of protest to the Secretaries-General in the context of the February strike;
- 17 February 1942: delegation on audience with Seyss-Inquart, also discussing the fate of the Jews;
- 19 April 1942: reading of a 'Testimony' in the church services, including a passage rejecting the persecution of the Jews;
- 11 July 1942: telegram to Seyss-Inquart in objection to the deportation of Jews from The Netherlands, including special attention to the fate of the Christian Jews;
- 21 February 1943: pulpit message in protest against the persecution of the Jews;
- 19 May 1943, 14 October 1943, 17 March 1944 and 1 April 1944: letters and telegram to Seyss-Inquart about the fate of the mixed-married.

Many of these protests were difficult to get off the ground, and often there was no joint implementation. In 1940, for example, the Lutheran churches did not take part in the protest because it would go against the Lutheran doctrine of Two Kingdoms; a pastoral letter in response to the protest letter of March 5th, 1941, was read out in *Gereformeerde Kerken*, but not in many *Hervormde Kerken*, while the pulpit message of February 21st, 1943, was again not proclaimed by the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, because 'for reasons of principle, a public testimony should only be given in very special cases'.

In March 1941, the Dutch Reformed Church had prepared an outspoken brochure against antisemitism, Israel as a sign, but ultimately did not dare to publish it. On October 25th, 1943, however, the pastoral letter 'Christian Faith and National Socialism' was sent to the local Hervormde congregations with a negative passage on antisemitism. However, this letter was not read in church services and therefore received little publicity.

Designer Victor Levie.  
Year of manufacture 1991



An important motivation of the forerunners of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands to refrain from protest when the occasion arose was the fear for the fate of their own baptised Jews. The Roman Catholic Church province made a different choice in this matter, resulting in the deportation of the Catholic Jews. The Protestant Jews remained in the special barracks in Westerbork. Attempts by Jews to obtain false baptismal papers in order to qualify as Protestant baptised Jews were supported by some pastors and church councils. The official churches' policy, however, was that rush baptisms weren't allowed.

Particularly at a local level, church parts were very active in the resistance and in providing hiding places. But there were also many who remained silent about the Jews' position for fear of their own fate or from the idea that public authority should be respected.

### Conclusion

The churches in The Netherlands objected more often and more loudly against the persecution of the Jews than the Dutch government in London and the mayors and government services in the occupied Netherlands did. However, this protest was difficult to get off the ground and was, in many cases, marred by the fact that not all churches cooperated. Moreover, care for the baptised Jews, and by extension the mixed-married Jews, was the main concern. Fear of the consequences for one's own ecclesiastical life, for rounding up preachers and Christian Jews, ensured the ecclesiastical voice to be surrounded by ambivalence. Silence, turning a blind eye, or objecting formed a constant field of tension, in which all too often the first two prevailed.

### After the war

After the war, the churches saw themselves as the beating, spiritual heart of the Dutch 'resistance nation'. There was enormous gratitude for the liberation and there were ambitious plans for a re-Christianisation of Dutch society. Self-criticism about possible negligence was largely lacking, and there was no contact with the Jewish community over the past war years.

The Dutch Reformed Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church both joined the World Council of Churches, which clearly spoke out against antisemitism in 1948. The fact that both churches joined was seen as a logical consequence of their own resistance identity, thus avoiding a self-critical view of their own actions during wartime and possible traces of Christian anti-Jewish thinking. Partly against this backdrop, pre-war missionary activities among the Jewish community was *business as usual*. This was experienced as particularly painful in Jewish circles.

There was a painful debate in society about the fate of more than two thousand children in hiding, neither of whose parents survived the war. The former resistance, which included many prominent church members, wanted to keep these children in Christian foster homes in order to save not only their bodies but also their souls. The Jewish community fought with heart and soul to get these children back. In this endeavour, only a few from the churches supported them.

Meanwhile, the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel raised profound theological questions that gradually surfaced and laid the foundations for the emerging Judeo-Christian dialogue.

### Conclusion

Again, in the immediate post-war period, as in the pre-war period, the churches took up a position in which they highly identified themselves with the national self-image: in the 1930s it was the image of a neutral nation, after the war it was the myth of a resistance nation. Specific attention to the fate of the Jewish community was lacking, although in general terms antisemitism was clearly rejected. The mission of Jews and the attempt to keep Jewish war foster children in Christian families enjoyed broad support within the churches.

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