



# A statement of the ELCIC to the Jewish Community in Canada

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**The document includes the 1984 statement of the Lutheran World Federation**

## Statement by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

5th Biannual Convention of the ELCIC, July 12 - 16, 1995.

That the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada adopt the following statement to the Jewish Communities in Canada:

## To the Jewish Community in Canada

A Statement by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

The treatment which Christian believers have accorded Jews on many occasions over the centuries is a tragedy and a cause for shame. Very few Christian communities have escaped the contagion of anti-Judaism and its modern successor, anti-Semitism. Lutherans belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada carry a special burden in this matter because of the anti-Semitic statements made by Martin Luther and because of the suffering inflicted on Jews during the Holocaust in countries and places where the Lutheran Church is strongly represented.

The Lutheran communion of faith is linked by name and heritage to the memory of Martin Luther, teacher and reformer. Honoring his name in our own, we recall his bold stand for truth, his earthy and sublime words of wisdom, and above all his witness to God's saving Word. Luther proclaimed a gospel for people as they really are, as we ourselves are, bidding us to trust a grace sufficient to reach our deepest shame and address the most tragic truths of our time.

In that spirit of truth-telling, we who bear his name and heritage must acknowledge with pain the anti-Judaic diatribes contained in Luther's later writings. We reject this violent invective as did many of his companions in the sixteenth century, and we are moved to deep and abiding sorrow at its tragic effects on later generations of Jews. In concert with other Lutherans represented in the Lutheran World Federation, we particularly deplore the appropriation of Luther's words by anti-Semites as part of their teaching of hatred toward the Jews and Judaism in our own day.

Grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred, we affirm our fervent wish to live our faith in Jesus Christ in love and full respect for the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism is an affront to the Gospel, a contradiction of its central teaching, and a violation of our hope and calling. We pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry in our own circles and in the society around us. Finally, we pray that greater understanding and cooperation may continually grow between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish Community in Canada.

## Background Information

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other Nazi death camps. This year also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the execution of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who courageously opposed the Nazi regime. In adopting this statement we honour the memory of those people who have been victims of a racist regime.

Events in Canada today remind us that the sentiments that gave rise to the Holocaust are present in our own society. Groups such as the Aryan Nations which calls itself the *Church of Jesus Christ - Christian* as well as individuals who have invoked Luther's anti-semitic writings in their own defense, are a cold and chilling reminder of the bigotry that confronts us even today. The rise in racist and anti-semitic incidents in recent years troubles members of our community deeply.

In 1984, the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation commended to its member churches the following statement:

We Lutherans take our name and much of our understanding of Christianity from Martin Luther. But we cannot accept or condone the violent verbal attacks that the reformer made against the Jews. Lutherans and Jews interpret the Hebrew Bible differently. But we believe that a Christological reading of the Scriptures does not lead to anti-Judaism, let alone anti-Semitism.

We hold that an honest, historical treatment of Luther's attacks on the Jews takes away from modern anti-Semites the assumption that they may legitimately call on the authority of Luther's name to bless their anti-Semitism. We insist that Luther does not support racial anti-Semitism, nationalistic anti-Semitism, or political anti-Semitism. Even the deplorable religious anti-Semitism of the 16th century, to which Luther's attacks made an important contribution, is a horrible anachronism when translated to the conditions of the modern world. We recognize with deep regret however, that Luther has been used to justify such anti-Semitism in the period of national socialism and that his writings lent themselves to such abuse.

Although there remain conflicting assumptions, built into the beliefs of Judaism and Christianity, they need not and should not lead to the animosity and the violence of Luther's treatment of the Jews. Martin Luther opened up our eyes to a deeper understanding of the Old Testament and showed us the depth of our common inheritance and the roots of our faith. Many of the anti-Jewish utterances of Luther have to be explained in the light of his polemic against what he regarded as misinterpretations of the Scriptures. He attacked these interpretations, since for him everything now depended on a right understanding of the Word of God.

The sins of Luther's anti-Jewish remarks, the violence of his attacks on the Jews, must be acknowledged with deep distress. And all occasions for similar sin in the present or the future must be removed from our churches.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is a member church of the Lutheran World Federation.

As members of this world wide family of faith, The ELCIC wants to state publicly and unequivocally its rejection of theological justification or support for anti-semitism in all its abhorrent forms.

See also [A rabbi's response](#)