



North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church: Christians and Jews

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Declaration of the Synod of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church. 2002

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With this declaration on the renewal of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism, we join the growing consensus of Protestant Christians in Germany and in many other countries. This consensus has already been documented in numerous synodical decisions and in three studies of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

Nevertheless, the process of clarification of historical, theological and spiritual questions must be continued.

Today we, the Synod of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, set forth the insights that move and guide us:

1. **We acknowledge** that we have erred.

For centuries, false and defamatory views of Jews and Judaism have been expressed among us Christians and in our churches, and this is still happening today.

It has been and is still denied that Jesus was a believing Jew.

Jews have been and still are accused of deicide.

It has been taught and is still being taught wrongly that God has rejected Israel as his people.

As Christians we recognize:

Anti-Judaism has not been rooted out, either among us nor worldwide, and we share in the responsibility for this.

Having understood this more deeply, we declare that the time is at hand to redefine our

relationship to the Jewish community. We want to orient our thinking and our action to the fact that the very roots of our Christian proclamation are bound up with Judaism. We want to speak about our faith without denigrating Jews.

2. **We confess** that through anti-Jewish interpretations of the Bible and through preaching and teaching based on such interpretations, the church shares in the responsibility and the guilt for the centuries-long history of animosity against Jews in the West, their deprivation of rights and persecution that culminated in the almost complete annihilation of European Jewry, the Shoah.

We Christians in the 21st century bear responsibility for working through this guilt in a way that is open to the future. Therefore, we must repent. We want to turn around and search for a new way. We want to overcome inherited schemes of thought that distorted Judaism, and revise wrong interpretations of biblical texts. Christian preaching and teaching must not encourage antisemitism. We want to do everything possible to strengthen within our congregations an attitude of solidarity with Jews.

3. **We thank** the Jewish conversation partners who, in spite of the Shoah, were and are ready to meet with us. We appreciate the patience with which they correct our prejudices and we prize the enrichment of our faith through common learning from scripture and through the experience of the living Jewish tradition.

4. **We affirm** the insights we have gained in meeting with Jews and in reexamining our theological language:

1. We witness to the One God, Creator of heaven and earth, the God of Israel, whom we Christians confess as the Father of Jesus Christ.
2. This God, we believe, remains forever faithful to the covenant with his people.
3. The Old Testament is not abrogated by the New. As part of the biblical canon, it is a basis and source of our faith.
4. Christian prayers, liturgy and holidays are rooted, more than is generally recognized, in Jewish tradition, and, conversely, have influenced the latter.
5. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and lived, in spite of all arguments about the truth, as a pious Jew. He worked on the basis of Jewish tradition and at the same time strongly contradicted it in certain respects. Without this background of solidarity with Judaism and contradiction of it, the message of Jesus and the Christian faith cannot be understood.
6. Both Christians and Jews live from the grace of the One God.
7. Both Christians and Jews are called to live and work with justice and love among all nations in the whole creation.
8. Both Christians and Jews are journeying toward the goal of history, when God will be all in all. It is then that we hope for a final understanding of God's way with his chosen people Israel and with us Christians.

5. **We reject** all undertakings that aim to alienate Jews from their religion.

We support the meeting of Christians and Jews in the mode of listening to each other's faith witness with respect for the otherness of the other.

6. **We are learning** to honor the difference between the two religious traditions as much as we rejoice in the rediscovered similarity. We understand that central terms like "election," "law/Torah," "justification" or "Messiah" have different meanings in the two traditions.

For a proper relation between Christians and Jews, it is equally necessary for bear with what is strange or different and to seek for commonalities.

7. **We conclude** that the renewal of our faith and our theology attained in the encounter with Judaism remains a central task of the church. This insight must be implemented in the church's life.

1. The Synod of the North Elbe Evangelical-Lutheran Church intends to add the following to the preamble of its Constitution:
"The North Elbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church testifies to the faithfulness of God, who remains true to the covenant with his people Israel. In listening to God's instruction and in hope for the fulfillment of God's rule, the church is linked with the people of Israel."
2. We ask our congregations, service agencies and other institutions to take care to nurture their relation to the Jewish community in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein and to develop it in neighborly harmony.
3. We ask all those engaged in congregational work, education and proclamation to make sure that church texts do not express or foster anti-Judaism.
4. We ask the theological faculties and the church training institutes as well as the governing bodies of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church to take care that teaching about Judaism and questions of the Christian-Jewish dialogue be given sufficient attention in theological education and examinations. We ask also that more adequate support be made available for related scholarships and grants for practical training in Israel.
5. We ask the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) to continue the fruitful theological studies of the last decades.
6. We urge that topics concerning Judaism and the Christian-Jewish dialogue be intensely studied in all congregations and groups as well as institutions of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church that are devoted to Christian formation and continuing education, and that this be considered an ongoing responsibility.
7. In order to accomplish this, a full-time staff member for Christian-Jewish dialogue is needed.

Thankful for the deepening of our faith, we praise God in the words of the 36th Psalm: *Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.*

This declaration is a result of the intense Jewish-Christian dialogue in the second half of the 20th century and is part of a new process of reflection also within the worldwide Christian oecumene. The Synod of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church is conscious of the fact that this declaration is being adopted in a situation in which violence is escalating in the Middle East and terrorism has reached shattering proportions. The Synod calls for prayer for all those directly affected by war and terrorism as well as for a just solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The declaration concerns itself in particular with the biblically based relationship between Christians and Jews. It is linked with the hope that it may promote respect for the faith and dignity of all human beings and contribute to a peaceful coexistence of all peoples.

Rendsburg, 22 September 2001

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