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1. Preliminaries: "The establishment of the State of Israel" — "a sign of God"s faithfulness?"

Among the Protestant churches in the Federal Republic of Germany the 1980 synodal statement of the Church of the Rhineland "Towards the Renewal of the Relationship between Christians and Jews" signified a breakthrough. Most of the other regional churches have followed the example. In presbyteries and synods they have dealt more or less intensely with the question of the relationship between the Church and Israel/Judaism and made relevant decisions. In many cases these even led to additions in church constitutions, in which the permanent relationship of church and Israel/Judaism was expressed. The question, how the State of Israel should be seen in this context, proved again and again to be a neuralgic point in the discussions. This had already been the case in the Church of the Rhineland"s Statement, since it had formulated the "insight" that "the continuing existence of the Jewish people, its homecoming into the country of promise and also the establishment of the State of Israel are signs of God"s faithfulness to his people." The State of Israel is not mentioned in isolation here. It stands in the context of the "continuing existence of the Jewish people" and "its homecoming into the country of promise." Whichever way the "also" that appears in the text before "the establishment of the State of Israel," is to be understood, it is clearly "also" included in "a sign of God"s faithfulness to his people." This had been the first theological qualification of the State of Israel in a statement of a governing body of a German church. It was immediately critically questioned: Is hereby not a specific current historical-political event theologically elevated and therefore withdrawn from a more rational consideration? Are we Germans not "burnt children," both with regard to the traditional Protestant elevation of the state in general and also with regard to the positive theological interpretation of the so-called accession to power [of Hitler transl.] in 1933, widely supported by the German Protestant church? Does the same not, at least structurally, happen here with regard to "the establishment of the State of Israel" — which, therefore, should rather not be included in such a statement?

On the other hand, seeing the establishment of the State of Israel as a sign of God"s faithfulness could also be seriously questioned — as it was on the Jewish side. If, for any reason, the State of Israel ceased to exist on the political map, would this then be theologically interpreted as a sign of "God"s unfaithfulness to his people?"

2. The anti-Jewish interpretation of Jerusalem"s destruction in the Christian tradition

For now I will leave these inquiries and point at two examples of another Christian tradition that, in

its theological quarrel with Judaism, thought to profit from the Jews not having their own state. Martin Luther argues exceptionally often that almost 1500 years ago the Jews lost their country, Jerusalem, the temple, the kingdom and priesthood and since then have always lived in misery. This he already does repeatedly in his writing of 1523 "Dass Jesus Christus ein geborner Jude sei," [That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew] where he still recommends humane behavior towards Jews. For instance he interprets the prophesied destruction of "city and sanctuary" in Daniel 9:26 as having occurred through Titus in the year 70 and writes, "Therefore, all this has happened. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed with utmost thoroughness and up to now have never again been in Jewish hands nor have they ever regained their former power in spite of attempts at their restoration, and are still desolate to this day; that this prophecy and what we see with our eyes are the same thing, no one can deny." He draws the conclusion: "Because the scriptures and history are so mightily in agreement with each other, there is nothing the Jews could say against it. Because they feel their destruction deeply which is immeasurably greater than what they have ever suffered before."

Luther expresses himself more sharply in his writing "Against the Jews and Their Lies" of 1542/43: "Do you hear Jew, do you know that Jerusalem and your domination, along with the temple and the priesthood, has now been destroyed for over 1460 years? Because this year, when we Christians count 1542 from the birth of Christ, it has been 1468 years and it is close to the 1500 year mark since Vespasian and Titus destroyed Jerusalem and drove the Jews out of it. Let the Jews crack this little nut and dispute it, as long as they want. Because such cruel anger of God makes abundantly clear that they err and are wrong, even a child will grasp this. Because one need not consider God so cruel, that he should so cruelly, for so long, so mercilessly punish his own people and stay silent, not comforting them with words or works, without appointing time or end. Who would want to believe, hope for or love such a God? Therefore, this angry work testifies that the Jews have surely been rejected by God, are no longer his people, and he is no longer their God."

Luther is so certain of these things and a return of the Jews to the country of Israel appears so unreal to him that he — in the "Letter against the Sabbatarians" — thinks he can mock them: "Or if such (certain commandments that can only be observed in the land) have been neglected and not been observed, so let them still go to their land and to Jerusalem, build the temple, establish priesthood, principality and Moses with his law, so that they themselves again fully become Jews and possess the land. If that ever comes about, they should soon see us [Christians transl.] follow on their heels and also become Jews."

The other example, about 400 years later, shows the same concept. It comes from a most respectable event, the conversation in the Jewish Lehrhaus in Stuttgart on January 14, 1933, between Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Martin Buber. The Christian interlocutor considered it "the only really important question, whether the Jewish people . . . had hardened itself against the Messiah sent by God, after that lost the center of its widespread diaspora through the destruction of Jerusalem and since then . . . lives in the diaspora without a spiritual center. . . . Jesus, who was rejected by his people as the Messiah, prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is destroyed, never again to become a Jewish possession."

The establishment of the State of Israel clearly proves how useless the destruction of Jerusalem is as an argument in Christian theology. However, does that not also strengthen the skepticism against using the establishment of the State as a positive theological argument? On the other hand one must also ask, is it possible to understand the founding of the State without using appropriate theological categories?

3. On the theological dimension of the State of Israel

The State of Israel is, of course, within the international community of states, a state like all others and is not to be assessed by different standards than other states. However, at the same time it is also correct to say that the State of Israel is obviously not a state like any other. This is already shown in the numerous events that were held outside of Israel on the occasion of its 50th anniversary in 1998 which will probably be no less numerous on the occasion of its 60th anniversary in 2008. The special feature of the State of Israel is, in my view, that it has a theological dimension as well. Even secular considerations can not escape this. That this State exists with these people in this part of the world cannot be understood without reference to the Jewish Bible and therefore without its reference to God, which is theology. I want to show this in three points.

1. There is first of all the name of this State: "Israel". Shortly after the founding of the State, Karl Barth is astonished to see that this name "so surprisingly found its way from the language of the Bible and the church, from the "language of Canaan," suddenly again into the newspaper" (*Church Dogmatics* III 3). In view of large parts of contemporary society"s obliviousness to the Bible, the astonishment would go in the opposite direction, that is to say, the discovery that the name "Israel" is indeed already anchored in the Bible and according to its representation was first given to the tribal father Jacob after his mysterious struggle at the Jabbok (Genesis 32:29). In looking back at the founding of the State, Rolf Rendtorff writes, ""Israel" was a word which I constantly read, pronounced and wrote as a professor of Old Testament. But for me, it had no relation to the present." This changed for him after the State of Israel had entered his consciousness and he had experienced it. After that he could not read, write or pronounce the name "Israel" any longer without simultaneously relating the name to the present time. The name of the State of Israel links into the history of the Jewish people in biblical times — and this history is theologically interpreted history.

2. The State"s symbol is the Menorah, the seven-arm Lamp — a cult object from the time of the temple, explicitly described in the Bible, archeologically preserved in a few images from antiquity. The most famous one is the relief in the Arch of Titus in Rome, where the Menorah is shown as a booty piece in Titus"s march of triumph, symbolizing the victory of Rome, the defeat of the Jewish people and the end of what had remained of its sovereign existence. The Menorah as the coat of arms of the new State links to this antithetically — as a symbol of overcoming destruction and dispersion.

3. The State"s name and symbol are clear indications of the consciously intended and accomplished relationship of the modern State with the history narrated and interpreted in the Jewish Bible — to whatever extent this State has understood and still understands itself as secular. But by far the most important point here is the biblical context of a chosen people and a promised land. This context resulted in the fact that the State was finally founded not in Madagascar, Uganda or anywhere else, as had been considered during the early times of Zionism, but that it occurred in the former British mandate of Palestine, in the land of Israel. It is its history as told in the Jewish Bible that formed the Jewish people and gives it its identity; and this identity is inextricably linked to this land. In an introduction to a booklet about "Solidarity with the State of Israel" it is stated, "It is a truism that the relationship to the land of Israel is constitutive for Jewish identity. It applies to Jews in Israel and to those in the Diaspora." This relationship is grounded in biblical theology. A Jew of the Diaspora who died only recently, Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, wrote, "The Hebrew Bible, with which I live, constantly points me back to this land, and it is more than a historical memory." Religious observance also keeps this relationship alive. Only one point shall be mentioned here: Jews, dispersed all over the world, have for centuries on Pesach year after year said again and again "Next year in Jerusalem!" and they continue to say it.

If, however, it is true that the constitutive relationship between the Jewish people and the land of

Israel can only be understood on account of how the Jewish Bible speaks of God in relationship to this people and its land, why then should one not see a "sign of God"s faithfulness" in the fact that this people continues to exist, lives in the land in substantial numbers and there has the power through its own state organization to regulate its life?

However, should such a statement not be reserved for the Jews only? Can and may Christians make such a statement?

4. Why Christians are positioned in a special relationship with the State of Israel

As I have stated at the beginning, we were able to learn in the last somewhat less than five decades that the Church not only grew out of Judaism but is also permanently directed to it. This relationship is part of Christian identity because the God of whom the Bible speaks and in whom the Church believes is not — to quote Blaise Pascal — "the God of the philosophers" but "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", who is, of course, as the Creator also the God of all the world, though not an "all-purpose" God, but Israel"s God, who has had and still has his special history with this people. Rainer Kampling, a Catholic theologian, states "that the bond that ties the Church to Israel in the past, presence and future should become the signum ecclesiae" (Kampling/Weinrich, *Dabru emet*, P. 47).

The Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity with the title "Dabru emet" (speak truth) of the year 2000 formulated in its third thesis: "Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel." Compared to the first two theses of the statement there is here, in the third, no clear determination. It says here, "they can" — apparently however, they may not want to. It appears to me that the position on the Jewish people"s claim on the land of Israel, and therefore also the attitude toward the State of Israel, is something like a litmus test with regard to the actual behavior of Christians toward Jews, though land and State are not identical, but for the time being, also inseparable.

The history of God with his people Israel has a specific place. According to Jewish tradition, God is also enslaved with the people in every one of its exiles; however, the reference to the land of Israel is an elementary concept in the Bible and in Jewish tradition. In the Christian tradition, there is the contention of a relationship to the "Holy Land" which ignores the Jewish people and attaches itself to it only in reference to Jesus Christ. But such a relationship would be an abstraction that pulls Jesus out of his people and isolates him, because it does not want to see him as the one who worked as a Jew among Jews. Paul stated, "from them [the Israelites] according to the flesh, comes Christ," the earthly Jesus, belonging to the Jews (Romans 9:5).

This abstraction has again and again been carried out and has produced most concrete results due to the Church"s power. Where places were identified that, according to the gospel narratives, had a connection to Jesus"s life and work, the Church raised claims to "holy places." To highlight this I quote what Theodor Herzl reported from a private audience he had with Pope Pius X on January 25, 1904. The Pope said: "We will not be able to prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem, but we could never support them. The soil of Jerusalem has not always been holy; it is sanctified by the life of Jesus Christ. As the head of the Church I cannot speak otherwise. The Jews did not recognize our Lord, therefore we cannot recognize the Jewish people. . . . I know it is not pleasant that the Turks now own our holy places. We have to bear with that. But to favour the Jews in attaining the holy places, that we cannot do. . . . And so, when you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we will have churches and priests ready to baptize all of them."

Once again: The relationship of Christians to the land and State of Israel is the result of their relationship to Judaism. In this regard the statement of 1970 of the Reformed Church of the

Netherlands says, "However, it is not only a question about the return but also about the State. The promise of God concerns the permanent bond between people and land but not in the same way as that of people and State. . . . However, as things appear at the present time, we see a free state as the only possibility to guarantee the continuation of the people and to provide the Jewish people with the possibility of living according to its character. . . . Therefore, we are convinced that a person who, because of faith, accepts the reunion of people and land, must also, under the given circumstances, accept the formation of their own State. . . . Because this affirmation rests on the permanent bond with the land which is grounded in the promise and therefore based on reasons of faith, this cannot remain open for debate in the Christian Church."

That Israel lives and shall live, includes last but not least, that it has permanence in its form as a State. When I first traveled in Israel, it was my strongest experience to be in a country in which Jews are in the majority and in which they live quite naturally as residents of their own country. For me, it is presently one of the most depressing realizations, that this self-evident and natural life in their own country has been shaken for many Israelis, that some have serious worries about the permanence of the State of Israel. The statement that we are not obliged to approve every measure of an Israeli government is certainly correct, but in my opinion it far too often tends to legitimize a quick judgment and condemnation. It would be better to be reminded of Paul"s demand to probe ("test everything; hold fast to what is good!" in 1 Thessalonians 5:21) that has its frame of reference in the Bible, which testifies to an indissoluble relationship between God and his people. The Jewish tradition has succinctly stated, "Everyone who hates Israel, hates, as it were, Him who spoke and the world came into being." And positively, "Everyone who helps Israel, helps, as it were, Him who spoke and the world came into being." Therefore, this frame of reference should oblige us to empathize with Israel and also to at least attempt a perception from the inside. As Hillel the Elder said a generation before Jesus, "Do not judge your fellow man until you have entered into his situation!"

As a teacher of the New Testament I may be permitted to speak a bit more extensively about the problem from a New Testament context. In regard to the New Testament statements about Jesus as Messiah there exists a Christian cliché which says, the Jews had a national-political messianic hope, which was rejected by the New Testament and given an entirely new direction. However, if one reads the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke in a fairly unbiased way, for instance, one discovers the formidable conceptualization of a national-political hope for Israel through John the Baptist and Jesus.

In the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist his promised function is exclusively related to Israel according to Luke 1:16f. When it is said that he will "turn many . . . to the Eternal One, to their God," reference is made to the people"s restitution to the covenant which on God"s side is never in question. Israel — and only Israel — is in view here. At the end of his announcement of the birth of Jesus to Miriam, the angel Gabriel says in Luke 1:32f.: "Who will become a great one and be called son of the Highest One. The Eternal One, God, will give him the throne of his father David. He will rule over the house of Jacob forever; his rule will have no end." This is national, political messianology. Here the allusion is to Isaiah 9:5f., where the prophet speaks about the never-ending rule on the throne of David. The explicit rendering "the house of Jacob" makes it obvious that it is a reference to Israel only. In the following narrative about the meeting of the two pregnant women, Miriam renders praise to God. The second part of her praise makes political statements and at the end puts it clearly into the context of Israel. In Luke 1:51-55 she says about God: "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." The birth of the messianic king from the lowly slave girl (Luke 1:48), who is thereby raised up, also alludes to the lifting up of the oppressed in the end time and the downfall of the rich and mighty. These statements are not made in some generalized way but are related to

Israel.

After the story of the birth and circumcision of John, Zecharias, who had been made dumb, can talk again. What he says is praise to God. In the first half of his speech he says in Luke 1:68-75: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear." Again the relation to Israel is evident; the political-theological goal is presented clearly. The liberation or rescue from the hand of the enemies and from those who hate Israel is mentioned clearly twice; and the purpose of it is, to enable them to serve God without fear. This serving is more closely characterized by "integrity" and "justice." It concerns a religious and social life in the community of the people of Israel that responds to God and complies with God"s commandments.

Within the story of the birth and circumcision of Jesus the angel says to the shepherds according to Luke 2:10f.: "Have no fear! For see, I am bringing you good news of great joy which is for the whole people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Rescuer [Savior], who is the Annointed, the Lord." The circumscription of Bethlehem as "the City of David" and the terms "Rescuer" [Savior] and "the Annointed One" [Christ] are messianic motifs used here, as before, and related to Jesus. Also, the relation to Israel is unambiguous when it is said about the announced joy that it "is to the whole people" — the whole people of Israel.

The next scene tells about the introduction of the six-week-old Jesus in the temple. Here the old Simeon appears first, of whom it is said in Luke 2:25f.: "This man was . . . looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord"s Annointed." Simeon sees this promise fulfilled when he holds the baby Jesus in his arms. He sees in him "the Anointed One of the eternal God," who will bring about "the comfort of Israel". So he says in Luke 2:29: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word.", I will withhold, for the time being, the continuation of what he says in verses 30-32 about the saving action of God through this child, because here an aspect comes into focus that leads further than everything said previously. For now I refer only to Luke 2:38, where it is said of the prophetess Hannah that at the same hour she talked about Jesus to all "who waited for Jerusalem"s liberation." Jerusalem here stands pars pro toto for Israel.

After this overview it is clear what kinds of expectations Luke awakens right from the beginning in those who read his gospel, namely, that Jesus will appear as the royal Anointed One in the tradition of David to liberate his people from the hands of its enemies and make it possible for them to live a life pleasing to God without the fear of enemies. However, it is equally clear in this gospel that Jesus never fulfilled these expectations. Why does Luke then bring them up? In order to discount them? However, the ones who cause this expectation through their messages are heavenly messengers and inspired people. How does Luke handle this in the continuation of the composition of his gospel? To answer this, I will only deal with two places in this gospel and one at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke 19:11 is a prominent place in the total outline of the gospel. On his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus is in Jericho, the last stop before reaching his destination. The story of the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, into whose house Jesus had invited himself, has just been told. Before he continues his journey to Jerusalem it is said: "As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately." In his story, Luke lets the people around Jesus have the expectation that with Jesus"s journey to Jerusalem the kingdom of God might come. On the level of those who read his

gospel the expectation for Israel that had been aroused in them at the beginning, is now formed into the concept of "kingdom of God" and in Luke"s story ascribed to the people around Jesus. Now follows the parable of the entrusted monies which does not deny the expectation, but dampens it: The time to fulfill it has not yet come.

The second place appears within the Emmaus narrative. Two disciples of Jesus, resigned to having to accept his death, are on the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the third day after his execution. Jesus joins them, unrecognized, as the third traveler. He acts ignorant while they talk sadly about him. One of them expresses their dashed hope: "And we had expected that he would be the one to liberate Israel" (Luke 24:21). Here the initially awakened expectation of Israel"s liberation is clearly stated again. Luke makes it evident that Jesus" disciples persevered in this expectation. Now, however, it is expressed as a disappointed expectation because the disciples must now see it as a failure on account of the execution of Jesus. Is this hope now completely denied, crossed out for good, so to speak, by the cross of Jesus? By no means! This is already shown by the circumstance that, according to this story, the unfulfilled hope is expressed to the one who did not remain in death but is with them as the living one. In the continuation of the story Jesus does not deny this hope, but rather denies the basis on which the disciples accept this hope as unfulfilled, when he shows them through the scriptures that "the Anointed One had to suffer this and enter into his glory (Luke 24:26).

At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, it is clearly expressed that the awakened hope for Israel at the beginning of the gospel is not denied. The people who came with Jesus shortly before his ascension asked him according to Acts 1:6: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Now that they no longer think that Jesus is dead once and for all, they no longer see their hope as disappointed but raise the question again. Now that he is risen from the dead, will he fulfill this hope? Again, Jesus does not deny their expectation. However, he also does not promise its immediate fulfillment: "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). The "now" of fulfillment of this expectation is denied, but at the same time the expectation itself is confirmed as one that God himself will bring about. Jesus tells his disciples what is now important to them: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). How do the two statements, the one about the "restoration of the kingdom to Israel" and the one about a mission in the strength of the Holy Spirit that goes beyond Israel, "to the end of the earth," relate to each other? Do they stand unconnected side by side or is there an objective connection?

This question can be answered by the continuation of the story I first passed over. After Simeon says that he can now die in peace, he continues: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the nations and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32). Here, for the first time, we encounter in Luke"s gospel the peoples [the nations, gentiles] outside of Israel. They are not only the background of God"s action with Israel (comp. Psalm 98:2f.) but also themselves the object of God"s aid and rescue. Here, Luke takes up the basic biblical distinction between Israel and the nations. He adheres to it, yet brings both entities into a context with each other. He says about the child that Simeon holds in his arms: "A light for revelation to the nations [gentiles]." Luke speaks in line with his Bible. In Isaiah 42:6f. God speaks to the figure in God"s service: "I have called you in solidarity, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people (= Israel), a light to the nations." The same constellation can be found in Isaiah 49:6: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." What Simeon says here is nourished by these biblical texts. For Luke the use of the term "revelation" in relation to Jesus is exceptional. Through Jesus the nations of the world shall receive the revelation that Israel"s God, the one and only God, is also the God of the whole world and therefore also their God, who in this child, turns to them in aid and salvation. Here, where for the first time, Luke brings the nations into a positive relationship to Jesus as God"s

means to aid and rescue them, he immediately puts Israel right beside them in a positive way. Accordingly, Jesus is not only "a light for revelation to the nations" but also, and just in this way, a light "to the glory of your people Israel." How does that match? How can Jesus "as light for revelation to the nations" at the same time and through it become the glory of the people of Israel? I believe that Luke had the following vision: If through Jesus the nations recognize Israel"s God as the God of the whole world and therefore also their God, then they will no longer oppress God"s people Israel and act in a hostile manner against it. Then it would come to pass what Zecharias had said: ". . . to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days" (Luke 1:73-75). If this was Luke"s hope, then it was bitterly disappointed as the process of history has shown.

Daunted as I am by the horrors of the past century and as a consequence of the passages I have dealt with, I have to perceive Israel in a theological and practical-political sense as God"s people, which carries with it the duty to do whatever possible that this people can live its own identity, freed from the hands of its enemies and without fear.

What we find here in Luke had already been concisely formulated by Paul in Romans 15:8: "For I tell you that the Annointed One has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God"s faithfulness in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors." He sets up a relationship of the Anointed One — speaking of Jesus, of course — with the people of Israel. In relation to Israel Jesus is a "servant." He has a diaconal function which he carries out "to prove God"s faithfulness." What Paul had elaborated upon in Romans 9-11 he brings into its briefest possible formulation here: God keeps the faith with his people — independent of its behavior, most of all: independent of its position towards the Messiah, Jesus. As the Anointed One Jesus confirms God"s faithfulness by confirming the promises given to the ancestors. What are the promises given to the ancestors? Naturally those that Paul knows from his Bible, indeed particularly the ones about descendants and land and about a secure and secured life in the land as for instance in the already mentioned benedictus of Zechariah: ". . . the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in integrity and justice [NRSV: holiness and righteousness] before him all our days." As the Anointed One Jesus is a servant of Israel in such a way that he does not cancel or abrogate such promises but that he confirms them; they remain absolutely valid. I consider it exceptionally important to observe that Paul here does not combine the category of fulfillment with the category of promises, only that of their confirmation. If it was maintained that Jesus had fulfilled the promises related to Israel, it would be possible only by spiritualizing them, while simultaneously removing the designation "Israel" from the actually existing Judaism. Paul very obviously never intended to do this. Jesus as the Anointed One did not fulfill the promises related to Israel but he also never canceled or removed them; he confirmed them. What, however, does this mean for Christians when the community is called the "body of Christ," "body of the Anointed One," the messianic embodiment, if the Anointed One represents himself in his community? Should his community then not also take up his serving function towards Israel and accept and act on it as its very own and vouch for the validity and realization of these promises? Therefore, according to this scripture, there can be no mission to Judaism other than solidarity with Jews as Jews, and I would add here: solidarity also with the State of Israel.

5. "Sign of God"s faithfulness"? "Sign of God"s faithfulness"!

This brings me back to the initial question, whether Christians can call the establishment of the State of Israel a "sign of God"s faithfulness" as stated in the 1980 decision of the synod of the Church of the Rhineland. I will approach this question by formulating conditions under which it can be accepted — conditions not addressed by Christians to the State of Israel but imposed on themselves.

1. The question can be answered in the affirmative if this affirmative answer is not used to gloss over or repress the history of German guilt toward Jews and Judaism. There is undoubtedly a connection between the attempted, almost successful, annihilation of the European Jews and the establishment of the State of Israel. This has been brought most impressively to my attention through the four big sculptures which were originally placed in the entrance hall of the memorial Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and are now, after its renovation, located elsewhere. The first of these symbolizes the death camps, the last the construction in the country. For Christians and Germans, this positive conclusion should never relativize the preceding terrors or let us forget what led to them, which especially includes Christian enmity against Jews. "As Christians and Germans in our relationship with Israel we can never free ourselves from the burdens of our history. Therefore, for us Israel can never be "a state like any other"" (Rolf Rendtorff). That leads to the next point.

2. The question, whether the establishment of the State of Israel may be taken as a "sign of God"s faithfulness" can be answered by Christians in the affirmative if this affirmative answer has consequences in a behavior toward this State that is marked by solidarity. Because if for Christians Israel cannot be "a state like any other," then a so-called "critical solidarity," which causes only irritations for those to whom it is declared, is out of place. Only special solidarity is stipulated. Is it not strange that even in solidarity addresses sent to Jewish communities and Israel — as happened in 2006 during the second Lebanon war — there appear again and again some dissociations, expressions of certain disagreements and questioning of actions taken? In an address of solidarity, why on earth can one not leave everything else out and just simply express one"s solidarity?

   It is irrelevant to pronounce the right of Israel to exist. The statement: "I am for the right of Sweden to exist" would not only ring strange in Swedish ears. The State of Israel exists and that with good right and reason, even though there are people — also in Germany — who regret the existence of this State and think that without it there might be peace in the Middle East and no Islamic terror anywhere in the world. A statement about Israel"s right to exist would have relevance only if it speaks clearly to those who want to eliminate Israel"s existence. Those are, above all, states like Syria and Iran and violent organizations that are armed by these states. They, at least, do what they say. A diffuse anti-war indignation, as was spread during the fighting of Israel against the Hesbollah in Lebanon, only fogs up and prevents the realization that the State of Israel is real and in practical ways threatened in its existence and must defend itself. It is of course appropriate and necessary to pray in peace vigils for the preservation of the civilian population and those who are the victims of war. But would one not also have to pray for those civilians who are abused by their own people as human shields? And would one not especially pray that God would thwart the attempts of those who want to obliterate Israel that their hearts may be turned to affirm a coexistence with Israel, so that at last there may be peace? If the Psalms had not to a great extent been "cleansed" of their statements about enemies for church use, there might be less of a perception deficit.

3. That the establishment of the State of Israel is a "sign of God"s faithfulness" may be accepted by Christians, if they, beside and after the statement that Israel is not a state like any other, also accept the other, that it is a state like any other and they therefore not assert claims on it. A Jewish voice comments about this: "It seems to me that the whole world consciously or unconsciously expects more from Israel, better behavior, than from every other state on earth. Even though it seems legitimate to me that the Jewish consciousness of Israel expects and hopes for an exemplary behavior, the same expectation of Israel on the part of the outside world (and on the part of the churches) is immoderate and in the final analysis suspicious or even offensive. What right, what claim do other states and communities have on Israel and under which pretext are they allowed to demand of Israel more and better than of themselves?" (Jean Halpérin)

Finally — in spite of all obstacles and difficulties of current politics — I want to express my shared joy over the fact that the State of Israel has already existed for 60 years, my shared joy over the fact that with it Jewish existence once again has a political, self-determined center and also a place of refuge, my shared joy over the fact that Jews are able to say what Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, whom I quoted before, said: "The State of Israel has essentially contributed to the ability of Jews today to again be a people with a straight back and an upright head."

Translation from the German by Fritz Voll with editing by Astrid Foster and Franklin Sherman