On the eve of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation

31/01/2017 | The United Protestant Church of Belgium*

This letter to the President of the Central Israelite Consistory in Belgium, Mr. Philippe Markiewicz LL.M., was read by the President of the United Protestant Church in Belgium, Rev. Steven H. Fuite, on Thursday, December 1st 2016, in the Great Synagogue in Brussels during the 6th annual colloquium of the group "Juifs et chrétiens, engageons-nous!" ("Jews and Christians, let us commit ourselves!"). The colloquium was attended by more than 200 people who discussed recent statements on Jewish-Christian relations.

Brussels, December 1, 2016

Honourable Philippe Markiewicz,

Dear President of the Central Israelite Consistory,

Esteemed brother,

Next year the world will remember the 16th century Church Reformation of which 1517 is considered the beginning as the year in which the Augustine monk Martin Luther nailed his theses to the chapel of the castle of Wittenberg.

Also in our part of the world, the reformation movement, which followed and which would enter history as *the Reformation,* played an important role. People in the seaport of Antwerp, for example, were informed about the new ideas at an early stage and it was no coincidence that the first martyrs of the Reformation were Augustine monks from Antwerp. The movement of Luther marked the beginning of the Reformation, also in the territory which later became known as Belgium.

All traditional protestant churches, like the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) and also the United Protestant Church in Belgium (EPUB/VPKB), are historically linked to Luther. We owe a lot to the Reformation with its return to the original texts of the *Tanakh* and the Gospel, and through new contacts between churches and synagogues.

As United Protestant Church in Belgium, we cannot and do not want to remember the beginning of the Reformation without, at the same time, remembering a very nasty aspect. With this, we refer to certain statements of Luther about Jews, like those found in his satirical tract *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* ("About the Jews and their lies").

As we did in the past, we would like to strongly reject these statements of Luther again, especially on the eve of 2017. Although there is a scientific discussion about the question whether or not

Copyright JCRelations

there is a causal relation between these Lutheran expressions and later manifestations of antisemitism in protestant circles, we wish to clearly distance ourselves from Luther's statements and we want to express this also clearly to you and to our own constituency.

You and me encounter each other regularly, notably in all kinds of consultative bodies in which we, both as Presidents of minority religions, engage ourselves enthusiastically and with an open mind in the struggle against discrimination, racism antisemitism and xenophobia.

Also at local levels, Protestant churches and their Jewish neighbours jointly take up their responsibility. Taking into account the specific character of Jews and Christians, and building on an ever improving understanding of the biblical texts, we, members of the United Protestant Church in Belgium, commit ourselves day after day, together with our Jewish sisters and brothers, to the vision of the prophets and to a more livable world where there is a place for everyone.

On behalf of the United Protestant Church in Belgium,

Please accept our brotherly greetings,

Steven H. Fuite

President of the Synodal Council

* Église Protestante Unie de Belgique, Rue Brogniez 44 B-1070 Bruxelles Tel. 00-32-(0)2-511.44.71; email: president(at)protestant.link; www.epub.de.

English translation (from the French original) revised by Jean Duhaime for Jewish-Christian Relations.

Copyright JCRelations