

# Christians and Jews

Declaration of the Synod  
September 22nd, 2001



Northelbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church

# theological declaration

*This declaration calls for a renewal of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. With it we join the growing consensus among Protestant Christian men and women in Germany and in many other countries. This consensus has already been well documented in many Synod resolutions and in three studies commissioned by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).*

*Nevertheless this process of clarification must continue with respect to historical, theological and spiritual questions.*

*Today, we the Synod of the Northelbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church, set out clearly the vision which moves and guides us.*

## one

**We recognise:** we have made mistakes.

Throughout the centuries we Christians have spoken many falsehoods and said many disparaging things about Jewish people and the Jewish faith, both among ourselves and in our churches, and we continue to do so. We have denied that Jesus was a devout Jew, and continue to do so. We have accused the Jews of murdering God, and continue to do so.

We have falsely taught that God had rejected Israel as His people, and continue to do so.

As Christians we recognise:

Anti-Judaism has been banned neither here nor world-wide and we are a causal factor in this.

With deeper insight, we affirm: the time is ripe to redefine our relationship to Judaism.

We wish our thinking and actions to be guided by the fact that we have been linked together since the Christian faith was first proclaimed. We wish to speak about our faith without using terms of abuse towards the Jewish people.

## two

**We confess:** because of its anti-Jewish interpretation of the Bible, and anti-Jewish proclamation and teaching, the Church shares the responsibility and blame for the centuries-long history of enmity towards the Jews in the western world, for their being deprived of their rights and for the persecution that culminated in the almost complete extermination of the European Jews, the Shoah.

We Christians in the 21st Century must take responsibility for critically reappraising our guilt in a way that looks to the future. We must therefore demonstrate that we are penitent. We wish to change our ways and look for a new way forward. We wish to eradicate traditional thought patterns that present a distorted picture of the Jewish faith,

and revise false interpretations of Biblical texts. Christian proclamation and teachings should under no circumstances encourage Anti-Semitism. We intend to do everything in our power to strengthen within our congregations a feeling of solidarity with Jewish people.

## three

**We thank** our Jewish partners, who, in spite of the Shoah, have been and still are willing to meet with us. We recognise the patience with which they correct our prejudices and we value the enrichment of our faith gained through learning together from Scripture and through our experience of living Jewish traditions.

## four

**We reaffirm** the insights we have gained through our encounters with Jewish people and through re-examining our theological language:

1. We testify to the One God, creator of heaven and earth, the God of Israel, whom we Christians confess as the Father of Jesus Christ.

2. We believe that this God remains faithful for all time to the covenant he made with his people.

3. The New Testament does not do away with the Old Testament, which remains a part of the Biblical Canon, the basis and source of our faith.

4. Christian prayers, worship and festivals are rooted far more in the Jewish tradition than is generally recognised, and have in their turn influenced those traditions.

5. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and in spite of all the conflicts in his search for truth, he lived as a devout Jew. Jewish tradition was the basis for his work even if at times he strongly challenged parts of it. Jesus' message and the Christian faith can not be understood without this background of close links and conflicts.

6. Christians and Jews live through the grace of the One God.

7. Both Christians and Jews are commissioned to live and work in justice and love with all peoples and the whole of creation.

8. Both Christians and Jews have as their ultimate goal the fulfilment

of history, when God will be All in All. It is our hope that we will then gain the final vision of God's plan for his chosen people Israel and for us Christians.

For a right relationship between Christians and Jews it is just as important to tolerate what is alien as to discover what we have in common.

## seven

**We conclude:** the renewal of our faith and our theology to be gained in an active dialogue with the Jewish faith, remains a central task for the Church. This vision must be realised in the life of the Church.

1. The Synod of the Northelbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church intends to amend the preamble of its constitution as follows:

"The Northelbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church bears witness to God's faithfulness to his people Israel. The church is linked to the people of Israel in listening to God's commands and in hoping for the realisation of God's kingdom."

2. We ask our congregations, departments and institutions to nurture relations with the Jewish congregations in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein and so develop a good neighbourly relationship with the Jewish community.

3. We ask all those actively involved in parish work, and in teaching and preaching to see that Church pronouncements neither imply nor favour anti-Judaism.

## five

**We oppose** all attempts to persuade Jewish people away from their religion.

**We support** encounters between Christians and Jews, sharing their faith with each other but fully respecting each other's right to be different.

## six

**We learn** to respect the differences between the two religious traditions, while rejoicing equally in our newly discovered closeness. We understand that central expressions, such as "Election", "Law/Thora", "Justification" or "Messiah" have different meanings in the two traditions.

4. We ask the theological faculties and church training centres as well as the Church Council of the NEC to ensure that knowledge of Judaism and issues relating to Christian-Jewish dialogue are adequately represented in theological training and examinations. Furthermore we demand that sufficient funds be made available for scholarships and work experience in Israel.

5. We ask the ECD and the UELCD (United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany) to continue with their fruitful theological work of the past decades.

6. We encourage all congregations and church groups as well as institutions of the NEC concerned with education and further training, to study in depth topics dealing with Judaism and Christian-Jewish dialogue and to look on this as an ongoing process.

7. In order to achieve this, we see a need for the appointment of an official representative for Christian-Jewish relations.

This declaration is the result of intensive Jewish-Christian dialogue in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and also part of the new process of reflection within the world-wide Christian ecumenical movement. The synod of the NEC is aware that this declaration is being made at a time when violence is escalating in the Middle East and terrorism has reached a terrifying scale. The synod calls on people to pray for all those directly affected by war and terrorism and also calls for a just solution in the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The declaration refers particularly to the relationship between Christians and Jews, as based in the Bible. We hope that the declaration will encourage respect for the faith and dignity of all human beings and will contribute towards peaceful co-operation between all peoples.

*In gratitude for the deepening of  
our faith we praise God with the  
words from Psalm 36:*

*"Your mercy, O Lord, is in the  
heavens, and your faithfulness  
reaches unto the clouds."*

Translated by Cynthia C. Lies

Published by the Northelbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church.  
Presiding Bishop Maria Jepsen for the Church Council,  
President of the Synod, Elisabeth Lingner.

Contact: Northelbian Church Office, Department for mission,  
ecumenical relations and development service,  
Tel: +49-431-9797-801/-802