



EUR/D: International Conference on the State of Relations between Christians and Jews

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Ten years ago the Conference of Protestant Churches in Europe's (CPCE) study "Church and Israel" marked a milestone in Christian-Jewish relations. On this jubilee 40 specialists from Europe met in Arnoldshain and called for its renewed putting into practice. The text of the closing Communiqué follows

1. The study "Church and Israel" of 2001 is so far the broadest based worked-out protestant contribution in the decades of efforts to renew the Christian-Jewish relationship: There belong to CPCE 95 protestant churches in Europe and South America as well as four further participating churches in Scandinavia.
2. The study "Church and Israel" is a part of this process of renewal in the relations between Christians and Jews: in the history of its emergence it received many impulses from this process, which it has also further encouraged. The study is a weighty protestant voice in the churches' discussion of their relationship to the Jewish people.
3. The renewal of the relations between the churches and the Jewish people is based at its core on the following insights, which also mark the study "Church and Israel":
 - the recognition of the abiding election of the Jewish people
 - the recognition of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith
 - the recognition of the indissoluble bond between the Church and Israel
 - renunciation of mission to the Jews
 - recognition of the central role of the state of Israel for Judaism, along with efforts at the same time for a just and peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict
 - admission of Christian co-responsibility and guilt for the Shoa
 - the irreconcilability of Christian faith with anti-Semitism and all forms of hatred for Jews.
4. In many European countries the relations between the churches and the Jewish communities could be improved in recent years. Here we have experienced that the themes and contents of the meetings and the remembering of the Shoa develop in varying ways. We hold the insight into the Christian history of guilt and the remembering of the victims of National Socialism, for example by making their names visible, for both necessary and healing. At the same time we ask our churches to facilitate more meetings in which Christians can come to know the Jewish religion and contemporary Jewish life. In work on biblical texts, in relating to the tradition of Jewish and Christian feasts, in spiritual exchange and in engagement for peace and justice insights could and can be deepened through which the things we share and also our differences can be named with mutual respect. In many places there are trilateral conversations between Christians, Jews and Muslims. While we hold this to be an important development we would emphasise the continuing particular significance of the Christian- Jewish dialogue.
5. The study makes clear that central theological questions in the Christian-Jewish relationship demand further work. To these belong the concepts, critically discussed in the study, of "two ways", "extended covenant", "pilgrimage of the nations to Zion" and the understanding of "people of God" in relation to Judaism and the Church. The consultation showed that the New Testament supplies no undisputed conceptuality for ecclesiological self-definition. We encourage reflection on whether

instead of subsuming Israel and the Church under one common concept such as “people of God” it might be biblically better founded to speak of Israel as the “people of God” and the Church as the “congregation of God” (cf. inter alia Acts 20, 28; I Cor 1, 2; 10, 32; 15, 9). Admittedly such concepts as “people” and “congregation” taken over from the biblical texts also remain in need of explanation. It further needs to be clarified what the vision of the “Church of Jews and Heathens” has to signify today. In further work the procedure of the study should be observed, which excludes unacceptable positions (as e.g. the idea of substitution) but then gives space to a possible multiplicity of positions.

6. The unresolved problems of the Middle East conflict affect the Christian-Jewish dialogue and also lead to polarisations within our churches. Our churches are challenged in this difficult situation to maintain their newwon relationship to Judaism and their solidarity with the Christians in the Middle East. It is necessary to combine solidarity with the state of Israel with engagement for an autonomous and peaceful future for the Palestinian community. The Bible contains a wealth of pointers opening perspectives full of blessing for the land and all who live in it. At the same time it is necessary to object to the instrumentalisation of biblical texts in the Middle East conflict. We ask our churches to support Jews, Muslims and Christians in their undertakings for a democratic and peaceful future for Israelis, Palestinians and their neighbours.

7. The perspectives signaled in the study “Church and Israel” touch all dimensions of the Church’s existence. The “Church’s inseparable bond with Israel...must continue to be an issue in Christian doctrine” (p. 126) and play its part in the shaping of our church community. We recommend the CPCE member churches to bring the insights of “The Church of Jesus Christ” and “Church and Israel” into their discussion with each other, to reflect further on them and to introduce them into the world-wide ecclesiological debate.

8. We ask the churches to put the recommendations of the study “Church and Israel” into action in parish work and church leadership, church proclamation and teaching, divine worship and training and further education (see Part III). On this we recommend a collection of Best Practice Examples from the churches in Europe by the CPCE.

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