

# Jewish Evangelism in Post-Holocaust Europe—in light of some mission documents

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It is not difficult to find negative statements on Jewish evangelism—made by Christian theologians:

Jewish evangelism is an anachronism because Christians are not the only people of God.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of its history in the Hitler era, Jewish evangelism has forfeited its credibility and also its right (“exousia”) to missionize.<sup>2</sup>

Since Israel and the Church both belong to the one and same people of God, neither of them can missionize the other.<sup>3</sup>

Jewish evangelism is the “Endlösung der Judenfrage mit anderen Mitteln” — the final solution to the Jewish question by other means.<sup>4</sup>

To redress the balance we might listen to a few statements by the late Axel Torm, former chairman of the Danish Israel Mission. In 1972 he wrote:

*In earlier times the church downgraded Judaism in order to exalt Christ. It was a sin that the church committed. Today people downgrade Christ in order to exalt Judaism. Is that better?*<sup>5</sup>

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This article consistently uses the term “Jewish Christians” in order not to burden the presentation with a terminological problem. “Jewish Christians” is the designation which is mainly used in the theological debate in Europe by those who do not have much contact with Jewish believers in Jesus or Messianic Jews.

<sup>1</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, “The Effect of Holocaust on Christian Mission,” *Sidic* 1981/1, 20-25.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gerhard Aring, *Christliche Judenmission, Ihre Geschichte und Problematik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), 8-13.

<sup>3</sup> Bertold Klappert, *Christlich-jüdisches Forum*, 3979, no. 51, 71-72.

<sup>4</sup> Heinz Kremers, *Judenmission heute? Von der Judenmission zur brüderlichen Solidarität und zum ökumenischen Dialog* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1979), 31. Cf. the discussion below.

<sup>5</sup> Axel Torm, “Kirke og synagoge,” Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Israel, Kirken og Verden* (Oslo: Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1972), 188.

*Are we today ignoring Christ – in happy recognition of people if they will only say God? If Christ is not everything, then he is nothing. If it is possible to belong to God without him, then he is not necessary...<sup>6</sup>*

*If we downgrade Judaism in order to exalt Christianity – and this has happened – our message will become incredible. If we downgrade Christ – and this is happening today in order to meet the synagogue on equal terms in brotherhood – then we have forfeited our message. Friendship and brotherhood alone create nothing new. Together in Christ, in whom we are chosen, we must come before the face of God ...<sup>7</sup>*

## **The Good Old Days and Our Days**

The old days are almost by definition the good old days, and by the same token the present represents hard times. Sometimes the myth about the good old days and one's own hard times is used to rouse self-pity, or it is used as an explanation of why things are not going so well for us and what we stand for. The times are against us – and so are some churches and what they say about the church's relationship to Jews. But in the good old days things were different!

To see Jewish evangelism in Europe in this light – before and after the Holocaust – is, mildly stated, an oversimplification. A good way to deal with this self-pity is to look at things in a historical perspective.

In the Reformation era – i.e. the 16th century – there was no organized Jewish evangelism. In the wake of Pietism this came into being with the setting-up of Institutum Judaicum in Halle, Germany, in 1728, and with J.H. Callenberg's work there.

In the 19th century a number of societies for mission to the Jews were set up, beginning with The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews (1809). Many countries in western and northern Europe followed and established their own Israel Mission societies in the 19th century. There have been changes over the years: some have been abolished; others have changed their names, for example replaced *Mission* with *Ministry*. This *may* indicate a turning away from mission, but not necessarily so. Jewish evangelism is *not* a thing of the past in Europe.

The so-called good old days were not as good as we often imagine. This is also the case with the 19th century, although this was the great century of Jewish evangelism. A cursory examination of old mission magazines provides many examples of writers who complain that there is a lack of interest in the missionary work, who point out that some people think that the Jew should be left in peace, that the work among the Jews is useless anyhow, that the gospel

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-194.

bears no fruit, has little impact, etc. In a report from a conference on Jewish evangelism in Leipzig 1895 it says: "Jewish evangelism has few friends." The report spells out the reason why Jewish evangelism does not have many friends: "The necessity for it is denied, partly for dogmatic reasons and partly for reasons of expediency."<sup>8</sup>

The main part of this article will be a demonstration of the unclear and unsatisfactory attitude to Jewish evangelism which has been expressed through the enormous amount of documents and statements formulated by various churches and Christian organisations after the Holocaust. The themes contained in the various statements *are* relevant. But the formulations are often of a nature that allows a more positive interpretation than intended by those who drew up the documents. The examination of a book by Heinz Kremers shows that an individual may have rather radical views when writing in his own name—although he has been co-author of a document with a much softer formulation.

## The Importance of Mission Documents

Documents and statements are one thing, reality something else. This is worth a few considerations.

Some statements include dissent from a minority; others do not. At a conference in 1977, arranged by The World Council of Churches (WCC), such disagreement was expressed. Here it is stated that some are convinced of the Church's obligation to witness to the Jews, while others believe that the Jews are faithful and obedient to God, even though they do not accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.<sup>9</sup> Most documents are the result of compromise, of giving and taking, of a lot of polishing of the wording.

This is also the case when Evangelicals formulate their documents. At a conference held by The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) in Manila in 1989, a manifesto was issued in which members of The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) requested that the following passage be inserted, a passage which is important for Jewish evangelism:

*It is sometimes held that in virtue of God's covenant with Abraham, Jewish people do not need to acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah. We affirm that they need him as much as anyone else, that it would be a form of anti-Semitism, as well as being disloyal to Christ, to depart from the New Testament pattern of taking the gospel to "the Jew first ..." We therefore reject the thesis that Jews have their own covenant, which renders faith in Jesus unnecessary.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Rich. Bieling, *Nathanael* 1895, 102; cf. Kai Kjær-Hansen, *LCJE Zeist* 1991, Sabro, Denmark, 154-156.

<sup>9</sup> CCJP *Contribution to DFI Guidelines* (adopted by the Jerusalem Conference of CCJP, June 1977), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Manila Manifesto, cf. *Mishkan*, 11/1989, 85.

And yet, sad to say, no one dares to claim that all participants in the Manila meeting were in agreement with this or subsequently implemented the message of this passage.

Most of the documents, drafted after the Holocaust, have retained the concept that Christians have a testimony to be given to Jewish people. The problem is that it is not made clear what is the content of this testimony.

When the formulation of a document has been polished and finally agreed upon, the result is not that people go home and act accordingly. On the contrary, they continue where they left off. Only a minority change their views. Those who advocated mission to Israel continue to do so, although the document in question is more ambiguous about this point than they would have preferred. And those who opposed mission to Jews continue to do so, although they would have preferred the document to express a clearer *no* to mission than is the case. And then of course there are exceptions to this rule.

This is not to say that documents are void of importance. On the contrary, I am convinced that it is important that advocates of mission to Israel assume the often tiresome and hard task of drafting documents—even when all they achieve is to get a minority statement included in documents which express opposition or reluctance to mission. To my mind it is important that, for example, the document “Christian Witness to the Jewish People” from LCWE’s consultation in Pattaya, Thailand, 1980,<sup>11</sup> is included in a German book with almost 200 statements and documents on the Church and Judaism in the period of 1945-1985.<sup>12</sup> Whether one likes it or not, in order to be part of the theological and missiological debate, it is necessary from time to time to draft documents. They may never get any influence to speak of on the scholarly debate, and they may be dismissed as fundamentalist declarations—and therefore uninteresting—but they may be of help to others who want the best for Israel. There is a name for that: Yeshua.

The vague language used about Jewish evangelism in the documents has not had the disastrous impact on Jewish evangelism that might be feared. Not all agencies in Europe have died. A few examples will show this.

## **Jewish Evangelism Does Exist**

Under Hitler some Israel mission societies and their publications were banned in Germany and in the occupied countries, while others were allowed to

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<sup>11</sup> *Christian Witness to the Jewish People, Report of the Consultation on World Evangelization Mini-Consultation on Reaching Jewish People* (Pattaya, 16-27 June 1989), (Wheaton: LCWE 1980).

<sup>12</sup> Rolf Rendtorff & Hans Hermann Henrix (eds.), *Die Kirchen und das Judentum* (Paderborn 1988, 2nd printing 1989: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei Paderborn & Chr. Kaiser Verlag München).

function. Some missionary societies did not survive the Holocaust—those in Berlin and Cologne, for example. Neither did they revive after the War, which the Leipziger mission did (the Zentralverein).

A few more examples can be mentioned: The Swiss mission embarked on a development which resulted in mission being replaced by dialogue. Since 1981 the society has called itself "Stiftung für Kirche und Israel" (Society for Church and Israel). In 1970 the Swedish mission changed its name to "Kyrkan och judendomen" (Church and Judaism). Later, as part of "Svenska kyrkans mission" (The Swedish Church's Mission), it abandoned the mission line. However, when a society is closed down or when it changes its views, there will often be a reaction. In Württemberg, southern Germany, "Evangeliumsdienst für Israel" (EDI) was set up in 1972 by people who were formerly active in the Swiss mission. In 1968 "Arbeitsgemeinschaft für das messianische Zeugnis an Israel" (AMZI, Association for the Messianic Witness to Israel) was founded by 10 persons from seven denominations and organizations in Switzerland – since 1985 with a Germany branch.<sup>13</sup> In Sweden a small Israel mission was set up in the late 1980's. In 1978 one was founded in Iceland and in 1992 one in the Faroe Islands in the North Atlantic.

When the declaration from the Rhineland Church was published in 1980, with what was understood as a *no* to mission, reactions were immediate. These include a statement from the Confessional Church in Germany<sup>14</sup> and a number of statements from German professors who objected to the *no* of the declaration.<sup>15</sup> After the Zentralverein in 1991 had given up the term "Judenmission" (Jewish mission or Jewish evangelism) because it was found to be an embarrassment and also open to misconstruction,<sup>16</sup> this *no* was countered by a number of theologians from the University of Göttingen.<sup>17</sup> Matthias Dahl, chairman of "The Nordelbischer Verein für Zeugnis und Dienst unter Juden und Christen e.V." (The Nordelbisher Association for Witness and Ministry among Jews and Christians), did not intend to follow this line and invited, for example, Stan Telchin as main speaker to the 1993 annual meeting of the Nordelbischer association.<sup>18</sup> And after The International Missionary Council's Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews (IMCCAJ) had been silenced when in the 1960's it was made part of The World Council of Churches (WCC), The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) was established in

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. pamphlet from AMZI: *25 Years*, 1993, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Die Kirchen und das Judentum* (cf. note 12), 596-598.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Wolfgang Schrage, "Ja und Nein - Bemerkungen eines Neutestamentlers zur Diskussion von Christen und Juden," *Evangelische Theologie*, 1981/42, 126-151.

<sup>16</sup> "120 Jahre Zentralverein," *Friede über Israel*, 4/1991, 168.

<sup>17</sup> See Arnold H. Baumann, "Aneinander vorbei: Der Göttinger Streit," in *Friede über Israel*, 3/1992, 97-98. For other reactions, see *Friede über Israel*, 1/1992, 32-34.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Fokus Israel*, no. 3, 1993, 2.

1980 with a program which almost might have been copied from IMCCAJ—a matter which will be dealt with below.

Attention should also be drawn to the statement issued by the Norwegian Israel Mission in 1986, entitled *To the Jew first*, which is an affirmation of continued Jewish evangelism without any reservations.<sup>19</sup> The same is true of The Willowbank Declaration (1989) a document to which European theologians also contributed.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, if the focus is exclusively on the churches' *official* mission documents, one is often led to a pessimistic view of the position of Jewish evangelism. But if one looks at the actual situation, it is a different picture. There is, however, no doubt that involvement in evangelism as such—and not just Jewish evangelism—is not as broad as one could wish.

### **Main Lines After 1945**

The question of how the Holocaust has influenced the concept of God among Jews and Christians will not be dealt with here. For some from both sides it has become meaningless to speak about God after the Holocaust. But from a New Testament perspective—and in spite of the Holocaust—it has to be said: The gospel came from Israel and was for Israel. If it is no longer for Israel, then it is no longer for us. It is not those who maintain that Jews need Jesus for salvation who have the problem. It is those who deny it. It ought to be possible for those with a clear Christology and theology to interact with fellow evangelicals who have a clear Christology when it comes to evangelism of non-Jews. As to those who have abandoned the New Testament's Christology it is a different matter. Here the theological confrontation must continue, not only in regard to Jewish evangelism, but in general.

The phase immediately after the Holocaust is characterized by the Church's shame and guilt towards the Jewish people, but also towards the Jewish Christian members of the Church whom it had betrayed. In several documents the Church confesses its guilt. But this confession does not fundamentally affect the fact that the Church has an obligation to evangelize the Jewish people. Prominent spokesmen for mission *before* the Holocaust are also spokesmen for mission *after* the Holocaust. The Israel mission societies continue their activity. When the WCC was founded in Amsterdam, Holland in 1948, the Jews were included in the churches' mission. The WCC warns against unworthy mission and manipulation and recommends that pastors are trained to expound the

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<sup>19</sup> *To the Jew first. Statement About Christian Ministry to the Jewish People.* From the National Board of directors, the Norwegian Mission to Israel (Oslo: 1986); printed in *Mishkan* 4/1986, 53-63. For reactions to this, see *Mishkan* 5/1986, 12-33.

<sup>20</sup> Printed in *Mishkan* 11/1989, 76-84; see also Henri Blocher's article in this issue.

gospel to the Jewish people and to produce literature suited for such work. Anti-Semitism is condemned as a sin against God and men.<sup>21</sup>

Concurrently with the confession of guilt there is a process of reflection on the peculiarity of the Jewish people, its special importance for the Christian faith, the State of Israel as a theological phenomenon, and above all, a reflection on the question of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. The question was asked: What in the churches' preaching and theology could have contributed to the Holocaust? In various contexts instructional material about Judaism was produced in order to fight a false representation of it. Already in 1947 there was a gathering in Seelisberg, Switzerland, of Catholics, Protestants and Jews. The meeting was arranged by IMCCAJ. Jules Isaac had worked out 18 points, and the conference issued a document with ten points intended as guidelines for pastors and teachers in their preaching and teaching. These points are worth mentioning:

1. It is the same God who speaks in the Old Testament and the New Testament.
2. Jesus was born of a Jewish mother, he was of David's lineage, and his love encompasses his own people and the whole world.
3. The first disciples and martyrs were Jews.
4. The commandment to love God and one's neighbour is found in the Old Testament, it is affirmed by Jesus, and it is binding for Jews as well as Christians.
5. Biblical Judaism as well as post-biblical Judaism must not be denigrated in order to extol Christianity.
6. The word Jew should not be used exclusively about the enemies of Jesus. One should avoid calling the whole Jewish people his enemies.
7. The Passion should not be described as if all Jews—or as if the Jews alone—were responsible for the circumstances which led to the death of Jesus.
8. The crowd's shout: "His blood be on us and on our children!" should not be isolated from - and cannot nullify - Jesus' words: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Jesus' words have the greater weight.
9. The godless idea that the Jewish people has been rejected, cursed and damned to interminable suffering must not be supported.
10. The fact that the first members of the Church were Jews must not be suppressed.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Göte Hedenquist (ed.), *25 Years of the International Missionary Council's Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1957), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Axel Torm, *Israelsmission og Israels Mission* (Århus: Forlaget OKAY-BOG, 1990), 60-61.

The ten points in the Seelisberg declaration are worth noting and worth further reflection. Anti-Judaism as such is still an urgent issue. In 1994, the Norwegian theologian Øyvind Foss maintained that there are many examples of anti-Judaism in earlier issues of the magazines of the German and Nordic Israel missions.<sup>23</sup> This may be so, but those who advocate mission to the Jews should not be surprised that some people accuse them of anti-Judaism. If a person says that Jews need Jesus for salvation, some will see this as an anti-Judaistic statement. According to Rosemary Ruether's theology, which has had a considerable influence on European theology, "anti-Judaism is the left hand of Christology,"<sup>24</sup> for which reason she claims that the New Testament Christology needs to be reformulated. To those who agree we must boldly assert the New Testament's Christology – and be prepared to be accused of anti-Judaism.

It is noteworthy that in the 1950's there is still in IMCCAJ a clear commitment to Jewish evangelism. The International Missionary Council (IMC) had been founded in Edinburgh in 1910, had held world conferences on Jewish evangelism in Budapest and Warsaw in 1927, in Jerusalem in 1928, and had worked since 1932 under the name The International Missionary Council's Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews. In passing it may be noted that its main task was similar to LCJE's today. The founder of IMCCAJ was John Mott who hoped to place the Jews at the center of the Christian churches' mission commitment.<sup>25</sup>

In connection with the celebration of IMCCAJ's 25-year anniversary, a small booklet was published. This booklet is indeed edifying reading for those who today advocate Jewish evangelism! After an enumeration of various objections to Jewish evangelism, it is said:

*If it were held that the Jews did not need Jesus Christ, or were an exception as regard Christian missions, it has to be conceded that there may also be other people who would not need Christ. This would imply that the Christian mission was deprived of the basis for its claim of the absoluteness and necessity of salvation for the individual man and for mankind. It is true, however, that Christianity, as well as Mohammedanism, has its roots in Judaism but it is only one of these three religions that recognizes Jesus of Nazareth as Christ. Judaism is as much without Christ as Mohammedanism and Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Either all people need Christ or none.*<sup>26</sup>

In 1961 IMCCAJ was incorporated in the WCC and the Committee on the Church and the Jewish People (CCJP) was formed. This was the year when WCC held its third general assembly, in New Delhi, and CCJP was joined with

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<sup>23</sup> Øyvind Foss, *Antijudaisme, kirke og misjon* (Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rosemary Ruether, "Anti-Semitism Is the Left Hand of Christology," R. Heyer, *Jewish-Christian Relations*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 1-9.

<sup>25</sup> Göte Hedenquist (cf. note 21), 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.



the department for world mission and evangelization. In 1971 CCJP became a sub-unit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies. There is quite a gap between what IMCCAJ stood for—with its commitment to Jewish evangelism—and its replacement, CCJP, with its vague if not negative attitude to Jewish evangelism. In CCJP the orientation is in a different direction, which is shown in the following words from a conference in 1977:

*We want to consider in more depth how Jews and Christians are jointly, yet distinctly, participating in God's mission to his creation toward the "Hallowed be Thy Name." (missio dei/qiddush ha-Shem)*<sup>27</sup>

The period from about 1960 through the 1970's is the period in which dialogue between Jews and Christians becomes the dominant feature while the church's commitment to evangelize Jews is played down. Naturally, this does not mean that there were not occasional dialogues before or after the Holocaust. But now even Christians demand that Jewish evangelism be abolished. The acknowledgement of God's ongoing covenant with Israel is used theologically to speak about one covenant people which has been divided. On Calvary God did not annul his covenant with Israel, but it is now expanded to include gentiles.

The scope of this article does not allow a proper confrontation with the dialogue attitude. I am *not* opposed to the idea that people of different faiths meet and discuss their faiths so that misconceptions can be avoided and people can help each other keep the commandment: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Nor do I deny that through dialogue I can learn something—indeed much—from Jews about my own faith. I am not against cooperation in the field of scholarly research. And I am not blind to the fact that the religions can make a combined effort and together speak up for more peace and justice in the world. But when dialogue replaces mission, when dialogue becomes dialogism with pluralism and an openness towards all people with a living faith as the fundamental principle, and when the pursuit of peace and justice becomes the main issue, then one has alienated oneself from genuine Christian faith, transformed New Testament Christology and nullified the salvific work of Jesus. According to the New Testament this work is to the Jews first! If the Church does not proclaim that the world needs Christ, no one in the world will do it.

The Christian professor M. Stöhr sums up this phase very accurately in the preface to Pinchas Lapide's book, *Ökumene aus Christen und Juden* (1972).<sup>28</sup> He says that (1) ecumenical meetings are incomplete without the participation of

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<sup>27</sup> *Dialogue in Community. Statement and Reports of a Theological Consultation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 18-27 April 1977*, (Geneva: WCC, 1977), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Pinchas E. Lapide, *Ökumene aus Christen und Juden* (Neukirchen-Vluyn,:Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), 6.

Jews and that (2) a Christian witness expresses itself through the practical cooperation of Jews and Christians for more justice and human worth in the struggle against oppression and exploitation. Jewish evangelism is a contradiction of this biblical task.

These words are taken from a statement, issued in 1971 after a joint Jewish-Christian service in Augsburg.

In documents from this phase there is constant mention of Christian witness, but it is never specified what the witness implies. For some the dialogue becomes a new way to proclaim the gospel. It is in this context the 1975 study *Christen und Juden*, published by EKD, Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands, (The German Evangelical Church) must be placed.<sup>29</sup>

A glance at the themes dealt with in the churches' mission documents shows that these are indeed key questions. To mention but a few:

- \* Guilt owing to shared responsibility for the Holocaust
- \* The struggle against anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism
- \* Israel's God – Jesus Christ's Father and our Father
- \* The Jewish roots of the Church
- \* The continued election of Israel and the denouncement of the view that the Church is the new Israel
- \* The State of Israel in a theological perspective.

The so-called renewed reflection on the Israel question, on behalf of the churches and other church bodies, must be welcomed. The conclusions, however, often leave much to be desired, the reason often being a distorted Christology.

We will now focus more specifically on a 1980 document which has received much publicity.

### **The Synodal Resolution of the German Rhineland Church 1980**

Not many documents have attracted so much attention as the one formulated by the Rhineland Church in 1980.<sup>30</sup> Some have seen it as the decisive turning-point in the relations between Judaism and Christianity. The document itself sees the Holocaust as a turning-point—not in God's revelation but in the relationship between Jews and Christians.

Four reasons for this turning-point are cited:

1. Co-responsibility for and guilt because of the Holocaust

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<sup>29</sup> Printed in *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, (see note 12 above), 558-578. The EKD study of 1975 was later succeeded by another study, *Christen und Juden II, Zur theologischen Neuorientierung im Verhältnis zum Judentum* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Printed in *Die Kirchen und das Judentum* (see note 12), 593-596. See also Helgo Lindner's article in this issue of *Mishkan*.

2. New biblical insight into Israel's continued importance for salvation history (Rom 9-11)

3. Israel's continued existence, its return to the Promised Land and the creation of the State of Israel are tokens of God's faithfulness to his people

4. Willingness on the part of Jews to dialogue and cooperation with Christians in spite of the Holocaust.

These four points are given a more specific explanation in paragraphs beginning with "Wir bekennen" (We confess), "Wir glauben" (We believe) and "Wir stellen darum fest" (We therefore declare).

Three statements are of particular interest:

§ 4.3 "We confess faith in Jesus Christ, the Jew, who as Israel's Messiah is the saviour of the world and who unites the peoples of the world with the people of God."

(It is positive that Jesus is called "the Jew" and "Israel's Messiah," *but* it is not said explicitly that the Jew Jesus is Messiah to Israel's people *now*.)

§ 4.4 "We believe in the continued election of the Jewish people as God's people and acknowledge that the Church through Jesus Christ has entered the covenant of God with his people."

(Again, *nothing* about what God's acts through Jesus mean for Jewish people *now*.)

§ 4.6 "We believe that Jews and Christians in their calling are always witnesses of God to the world and to one another. We are therefore convinced that the Church cannot witness to the Jewish people in the same way as it does in its mission to the nations of the world."

(This might be construed as an explicit formulation of the view that mission to Israel is *different* from Christian mission to non-Jews. But that was not the way it was understood nor was it meant that way.)

In summary, the themes are highly relevant and there is much to rejoice in. Much of what is said about Israel, about the relationship of the Church to Israel, and about the Church and Jesus is valuable and relevant. And yet behind the formulation there is cause for scepticism towards the overall understanding of the declaration. It is tied up with vagueness about the importance of Jesus *for Israel* and related ambiguity regarding the Church's witness *to Israel*.

We will leave this document and turn to a book written by one of those who had a hand in both the 1975 study of the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (The German Evangelical Church) and in the 1980 declaration of the Rhineland Church in an attempt to uncover what may be hidden behind consequent cautious and vague formulations.

### **Hans Kremers' "Judenmission heute?"**

The subtitle of the book *Judenmission heute?* (Jewish Mission Today – published 1979) reveals in what direction Kremers is taking his readers: Von der

Judenmission zur brüderlichen Solidarität und zum ökumenischen Dialog (From Jewish evangelism to Brotherly Solidarity and to Ecumenical Dialogue).<sup>31</sup> A cursory glance through Kremers' book corroborates the fact that although a document is formulated in rather cautious terms, the persons behind it are often more explicit when they write in their own name.

Kremers arrives at the conclusion that the word "Judenmission" can no longer be used as a term for the Christian witness to the Jewish people. Indeed he goes as far as to say that all agencies involved in mission to the Jews must be abolished, even those which no longer use such names, and be replaced by others whose programme is to help Israel and teach Christians what Judaism is. Instead of agencies for mission to the Jews, the Church should have working groups under the name "Church and Israel" (p. 80).

There is no mistaking what he has in mind, but for those who do not share his view, the really interesting thing is the way he argues. Kremers seems to be distancing himself from Jewish evangelism "today" ("today" in quotation marks will be used below in the meaning "the end of the 1970's") by using arguments about "yesterday's" Jewish evangelism. The problem is not that he criticizes "yesterday's" Jewish evangelism—there are plenty of things to criticize—but that the problem is not dealt with in depth. In passing it may be mentioned that Kremers himself reveals some knowledge of Messianic Jews in Israel.

First Kremers defines the word "Judenmission": It comprises all church activities which aim at "making Jews Christians," which means that they are taken out of their people and made members of a gentile Christian church (p. 10). He quotes, and concurs with, the American theologian Eva Fleischner's words: "The goal is baptism and entrance into the Church, with the consequent disappearance of the Jew as Jew."<sup>32</sup>

It would have been relevant if Kremers had discussed what Jewish Christians and Christian Israel missions "today" have to say regarding whether a Jew who comes to faith in Jesus has to give up his Jewish identity. He might also have mentioned how at least some Jewish Christians of the last century tackled the problem. If he had done that, it would not have been possible for him—at least not without strong modifications—to define the goal of Jewish evangelism the way he does. He might instead have asked some Jews what they think of the question, and he might have come up with examples showing that "today" it is in Jewish non-Messianic circles that the desire for Jesus-believing Jews to disappear as Jews is strongest.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. note 4 above.

<sup>32</sup> Eva Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945* (Metuchen, N.J., USA: ATLA Monograph Series, No. 8, Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1975), 139.

Kremers goes on to enlarge on the situation for Jews who have become Christians (pp. 10-11). From the second century onwards Jews have only been able to become members of a Christian church if they renounced their Jewishness:

1. In order to become Christians, they had to segregate themselves from their people, which is still the one God's covenant people (*Bundesgemeinde*).

2. In order to become Christians, they were no longer allowed to live in a Jewish manner (after the Law).

3. In order to become Christians, they were no longer allowed, like the Jewish Christians before them, to understand Messiah Jesus and the entire Christ event in a Jewish way. That had now become synonymous with heresy. On the contrary, they had to bring a *sacrificium intellectus*, i.e. they had to sacrifice their Jewish intellect, and understand Messiah Jesus and the entire Christ event in a Hellenistic and western way.

Not one word hints that Jewish Christians as well as people involved in Jewish evangelism have exactly these themes on their agenda today – which was also the case in the 1970's. Who says "today" that a Jewish Christian must segregate himself from his people? Not the Jewish Christians! It is true that the Jewish Christians' relationship to the Law is a subject for discussion and disagreement "today," but there is more to it than Kremers implies. Who says "today" that the Christ event must not be seen in a Jewish light? It is not the Jewish Christians and it is not the non-Jewish Israel missions. Kremers elegantly ignores what is actually on the agenda of Jewish evangelism "today." Kremers claims that for 1800 years the Church was convinced that it had a commission from its Lord to evangelize Jews. By this he implies that it is different "today."

He proceeds to speak about Jews and Christians as brethren. Jews should help Christians become better Christians, and Christians should help Jews become better Jews (p. 12). Kremers then examines various documents from the Jewish-Christian dialogue. He objects to this dialogue being used as a new form of Jewish evangelism (p. 26). The Jewish people and the Christian church have both been called by the same God to be his witnesses in the world. He says: "The sustained call of Israel forbids the Church to understand its witness to Israel in the same way as its sending (mission) to all other nations."

According to Kremers, the Church ought to be able to understand when Jews "today" (after the Holocaust) claim that Christian mission to the Jews is an expression of an "Endlösung der Judendfrage mit anderen Mitteln" (a final solution to the Jewish question by other means) (p. 31). Professional contact and personal friendship with Jewish scholars<sup>17</sup>—Rabbi Aschkenasy, Professors Safra, Pines, van Praag and Flusser—have led him to a new realization: Christian mission to the Jews is a mistake (p. 33).

Here things become really interesting, for Kremers goes on to speak about some Jewish Christians in Israel whom he met during a six-month stay in Jerusalem in 1968 (p. 34). First Kremers mentions a conversation between a Jew and a Jewish Christian (p. 34) – which I render slightly paraphrased:

*The Jew to the Jewish Christian:* So, as a Jew you are a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth and believe that he is the Messiah?

*The Jewish Christian:* Yes!

*The Jew:* That is good! But tell me also, have you been baptized?

*The Jewish Christian:* Yes!

*The Jew (disappointed):* That is not good. For you have betrayed your Jewishness with your baptism and you have defected to the gentiles!

Kremers comments that this is a problem he often encountered, and came to understand the Jewish aversion to baptism better.

It would have been appropriate for Kremers to discuss whether this Jew's positive attitude to the Jew who professes Jesus as the Messiah is characteristic of the general Jewish attitude, which the unsuspecting reader is led to assume. If this question had been asked, there would be negative things to say about at least some Jews' continued very negative view of Jesus and not least their dissociation from fellow Jews believing in Jesus as Israel's Messiah. As to the question of baptism, there are also important matters to discuss. It is possible to be baptized without "defecting to the gentiles" – according to some Jewish Christians. In addition there is the very basic question to discuss, namely that baptism is not a gentile Christian invention; it is Jewish, practised by the first Jewish Christians. How can a man who wants to be taken seriously as a theologian tell a story like this and not deal with such a fundamental question? Baptism in Jesus' name did not turn the first Jesus-believing Jews into ex-Jews.

Kremers then describes his contacts with Jewish Christians in Israel in 1968. Most of them were critical of him because of his *no* to Jewish evangelism. When he asks them why they live in Israel, they answer that they are Jews. When he asks them why they still belong to a gentile Christian church, most of them answer that the other Christians in Israel will not allow them to form a pure Jewish Christian church. And if this is attempted, financial pressure is brought to bear on them. Slowly it dawns on Kremers that the Christian mission to the Jews has gone astray when they will not tolerate an independent Jewish Christian church in Israel.

Unfortunately Kremers moves on instead of pursuing relevant questions, although there are plenty of them: the presence of Jewish Christians as a challenge to the Church; gentile Christian churches' fear of a Jewish Christian church; and the Israel missions' fear of the same. Nor does Kremers discuss the relevant question that the Jewish Christians are made losers, whether intentionally or not, when it is argued that the Jew as Jew – without faith in Jesus – and the non-Jew through faith in Jesus are both called to be God's

witnesses in the world (p. 26). From Kremers' point of view there is no reason to become a Jesus-believing Jew. If this had been the case, he might have entered a meaningful discussion of what to expect from gentile Christian churches and missionary societies concerning a Jewish Christian church. But Kremers is not in the least interested in a Jewish Christian church. He is interested in the abolition of the Christian mission to the Jews—and uses Jewish Christians to serve that purpose.

After a chapter on Biblical theology (ch. 5) Kremers returns to the mistake of Christian mission to the Jews (ch. 6). He goes back to the first centuries, speaks about a first-century "Kirche aus Juden und Heiden" (Church of Jews and gentiles), about their differences and their oneness in faith (p. 71), and quotes Markus Barth as saying that nowhere in the New Testament are *gentile* Christians told to missionize Jews. "Mission to Jews is here [in the New Testament] an *internal Jewish matter*" (p. 72). Towards the end of this chapter he recapitulates three conditions which *all* Christian missions to the Jews have imposed upon those Jews who would like to become Christians—from the third century and to this very day:

1. For Jews who want to become Christians it is a condition that they leave their people.
2. For Jews who want to become Christians it is a condition that they no longer live "after the law of their people."
3. For Jews who want to become Christians it is a condition that they no longer understand the Christ event in Jewish terms.

The argumentation comes close to sophistry. One could, by the same token, say the following: The great commission in Matthew 28 was given to Jews, hence it does not apply to non-Jewish believers! And again, with so strong an emphasis on the oneness of Jews and Christians and the insistence that both parties are witnesses about God in the world, it seems strange that a barrier is erected between Jewish Christians and Christians, particularly since the New Testament accentuates their oneness. But then the Jewish Christians do not constitute an integrated part of Kremers' theological overall view. He reflects on unity and differences in the first century between Jesus-believing Jews and non-Jews, but he does not apply it to a similarly serious discussion of the situation "today."

In conclusion Kremers speaks about the ecumenical dialogue between Jews and Christians and about their faith identities. With an example he makes his own position clear. If a Jew comes to him and says, "Baptize me or I will go and hang myself," then Kremers will baptize him.

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*If baptism was the only way I could stop this man from hanging himself, then I would baptize him. For according to Jewish doctrine mortal danger supersedes the commitment to keep the commandments. And here it supersedes what I see as the commandment imposed upon me by God, namely not to baptize any Jew. But if I should succeed in calming down the suicide candidate, then I would entreat him heartily and earnestly not to be baptized, because he*

would thereby give the other Jews the impression that he had betrayed his people – and so give them offence. But above all I would show him that also as an unbaptized Jew he could, thanks to ‘the freedom of the gospel,’ be a complete disciple of Jesus Christ who does not lack anything for his Messianic salvation. And I would ask him to take upon him the cross of Jesus and walk this more difficult way than the one of the Christian baptism into a Christian church (pp. 78-79).

Kremers’ (ab)use of Jewish Christians leads me to question how Jewish Christians figure generally in documents and discussions about the relationship between Jews and Christians.

### **Jewish Christians in the Jewish-Christian dialogue**

The main tendency is clear. Jewish Christians hardly have a place in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The relatively few exceptions confirm the rule, and when Jewish Christians are mentioned they are seldom integrated in the theological overall view of Christians when they discuss the relationship between Jews and Christians.

This assertion can be substantiated by an examination of the 700-page book with almost 200 statements from the period 1945-1985 about the Church and Judaism which I referred to above. Exceptions are the Pattaya document from LCWE 1980 and a couple of statements from Israel which are also included in the book. In a joint statement in 1963 from the majority of the churches in Israel it is made clear that a Jew who becomes a Christian remains a member of his people.<sup>33</sup> The Baptists in Israel denounced anti-Semitism in 1972 without mentioning the Jewish Christians,<sup>34</sup> and in 1977 the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI) declared against the so-called anti-mission law.<sup>35</sup>

Jewish Christians or similar designations are used about the *first* Jesus-believing Jews, i.e. about a phenomenon of the past.<sup>36</sup> It is also used in documents which confess guilt because Christians failed them under the Nazi regime; it is often said explicitly that they are authentic members of the Church.<sup>37</sup>

Some documents mention that there are Jewish Christians today and that they may serve to remind the Church of its Jewish roots.<sup>38</sup> An example from Los Angeles from 1982 indicates that Catholics strongly dissociate themselves from members of the Jesus movement and mention as an example the organization Jews for Jesus.<sup>39</sup> A *yes* to the Jewish Christians comes from the Confessional

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<sup>33</sup> In *Die Kirchen und das Judentum* (see note 12), 341.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 483-484.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 392-395.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g. 531, 537-538, 539, 546, 589.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g. 531, 537-538, 539, 546, 589.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g. 292-294, 426, 432 et. al.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g. 292-294, 426, 432 et. al.



Church in Germany; they encourage them not to abandon their solidarity with the people of Israel.<sup>40</sup>

There are positive tendencies in documents and writings which individuals from for example the German Zentralverein and the Norwegian Israel Mission have helped to draw up,<sup>41</sup> but the overall impression is clear: Jewish Christians are not really integrated in the debate about the relationship between Jews and Christians. And one might add that, with a few exceptions, Jewish Christians do not take part in this debate.

In conclusion we note the following: If it is true that Jewish Christians are not on the agenda in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, and if it is true that Jewish Christians do not take part in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, then we can hardly complain about this *if* the truth is that Jewish Christians and those who support them *do not want to* make their contribution in such contexts.

This is one side of the matter. The other is that Jesus-believing Jews have sometimes been ostracized by the Jewish partner in a planned Jewish-Christian dialogue, as mentioned by Mitch Glaser in his article in this issue of *Mishkan*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 597.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Arnulf H. Baumann & Käte Mahn & Magne Sæbø (eds.), *Luthers Erben und die Juden. Das Verhältnis lutherischer Kirchen Europas zu den Juden* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1984), 98-101, 121-124.