

Eleventh North American Coordinating Committee Meeting  
of the LCJE  
New York, 11-13 April 1994

# Jewish Evangelism in Post-Holocaust Europe

By Kai Kjær-Hansen

## Introduction

It is not difficult to find negative ~~statements on~~ attitudes to Jewish evangelism – held by Christian theologians: Jewish evangelism is an 'anachronism' because Christians are not the only people of God (cf. Rolf Rendtorff, 1981).<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 (cf. Paul Gerhard Aring, 1980).<sup>2</sup> When Israel and the Church both belong to the one and same people of God, neither of them can missionize to the other (cf. Bertold Klappert, 1979).<sup>3</sup> Jewish evangelism is the "Endlösung der Judendfrage mit anderen Mitteln" – the final solution to the Jewish question with other means (Heinz Kremers, 1979).<sup>4</sup>

To redress the balance we might listen to a few statements by Axel Torm, the grand old man 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>

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 – we shall be making our message 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 is the hard times. This attitude is often seen in connection with Christianity, and I suppose it is the same with Jewish evangelism. Sometimes the myth about the good old days and one's own hard times is used to rouse an amount of 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!

To see Jewish evangelism in Europe in these terms – before and after the Holocaust – is, with an understatement, to simplify the situation. A simplification like this would hardly be true anywhere, nor in North America, I suppose. 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 organised Jewish evangelism. We have that today. 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). This year the Norwegians celebrate the 150-year anniversary of the beginning of their Israel Mission in 1844. In Germany they set up several

Instituta Judaica, the best known of them being Institutum Judaicum in Leipzig, which after the death, in 1890, of its founder, Franz Delitzsch, was named Institutum Delitzschianum. Many countries in western and northern Europe had their own Israel Mission societies. There have been changes over the years: some have been abolished, others have changed their names, replacing, for example, Mission with Ministry. This *may* indicate a turning away from mission, but not necessarily so. But Jewish evangelism is not a thing of the past in Europe. Commitment to it might be much greater, which would mean that the work could be done more effectively. But it is there!

If we ask what the so-called good old days were really like, perhaps the answer is not as positive as we often imagine. I am not going to elaborate any further. But if you leaf through old mission magazines it is easy to find examples of writers who complain over 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 bears no fruit, has little impact, etc.

The main part of this paper will be a demonstration of the negative development of – or at least the very 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. But before I do that, I want to make a little detour.

At LCJE's Fourth International Conference in Zeist, Holland, 1991, Arnulf H. Baumann from the German Zentralverein said: "Since 1980 there are no statements from church bodies in this region [Europe and especially in Germany] that I know of which advocate Jewish Evangelism without reservations."<sup>8</sup>

Baumann is right about the tendency. But he does not take into consideration 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>9</sup>. The Willowbank Declaration (1989)<sup>10</sup> falls outside "this region", which Baumann is referring to. As far as I can see, the response of the German Confessional Church<sup>11</sup> to the Rhineland Declaration (cf. below) – both from 1961 – clearly advocates Jewish evangelism. But Baumann is right about the main tendency of the documents.

However, documents and statements are one thing, reality something else. This is worth a few considerations. And now we have arrived at the question of the importance of mission documents.

### **The importance of mission documents**

If Baumann is right – and in principle he is – one would expect the unclear language used about mission to have had a fatal impact on Jewish evangelism in Europe today. That would only be natural. But it does exist – in spite of the documents. This in itself is a point.

The reason is, in my opinion, that the importance of mission documents and statements is relative. Some statements contain statements of dissent from a minority, others do not. At a conference in 1977 (WCC/CCJP) such disagreement was expressed. Here it is stated that some are convinced of the 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>12</sup> Most documents are the result of compromises, of giving and taking, of a lot of polishing of the wording. The same would be the case if a group like LCJE were to formulate a document. (Not all members of LCJE share the same views, but to be members of LCJE all should share the view that Jews need Jesus for salvation.) In the Manila Manifesto (1989) we managed to have the following passage, which is important for LCJE, inserted:

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>13</sup>

And yet, sad to say, no one dares to claim that we have got all LCWE people on our side.

Most of the documents, drafted since the Holocaust, have retained the concept that Christians have a testimony to be given to the 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 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.

I am not saying 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 – also when all they achieve is to get a minority statement included in documents which speak against or reluctantly about 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>14</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>15</sup> This book has not only documents formulated in Europe. My point is that there is a long way from the draft of a document to its realization. But considering the often obscure attitude to Jewish evangelism, I am inclined to say: Thank God for that! So, 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 on the scholarly debate to speak of, 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.

But the indistinct speech about Jewish evangelism expressed by the documents has not had the disastrous impact on Jewish evangelism that might be feared. Not all agencies in Europe have died. Although some have. But all has not been said with this. 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 function. Some missionary societies did not survive the Holocaust, those in Berlin and Cologne, for example. And they were not revived after the War, which the Leipziger mission was (The Zentralverein).

The development in Switzerland and Sweden is noteworthy. 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 it became part of "Svenska kyrkans mission", but abandoned the mission line. From an LCJE point of view it is a sad story. But this is not the end. For 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" was set up in 1971 by some who had formerly been 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 ten persons from seven denominations and organizations in Switzerland – from 1985 with a German branch.<sup>16</sup> In Sweden a small Israel mission was set up in the late 1980's – but there are several groups with a great interest in Israel, and it is clearly a task for LCJE to increase their awareness of the Church's evangelistic obligation towards Israel. And further: when the declaration from the Rhineland Church was published in 1980, with what was understood as a no to mission, it was immediately met with reactions: among them a statement from the Confessional Church in Germany<sup>17</sup> and a number of statements from German professors who objected to the no of the declaration.<sup>18</sup> And after the Zentralverein in 1991 had given up the term "Judenmission", because it was found to be an embarrassment and also open to misconstruction,<sup>19</sup> this no was countered by a number of theologians from the University of Göttingen.<sup>20</sup> Matthias Dahl, chairman of Nordelbischer Verein für Zeugnis und Dienst unter Juden und Christen e.V., 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>21</sup>

In other words: If one focuses 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. If we ask if there is more or less interest in Jewish evangelism today compared to the good old days, I for one do not know the answer. That involvement in evangelism generally speaking – and not just Jewish evangelism – is not as big as one could wish, there is no doubt about. But when I look at the circulation of my own mission society's magazine, I cannot help being somewhat surprised: in 1980 the

circulation was below 3,000, in 1990 it was 5,400. In this period the commitment to evangelism to the Jewish people has not been played down, on the contrary, and the Messianic Jews' situation and conditions have been brought into focus. Never before in the history of the Danish Israel Mission – it was founded in 1885 – has a greater number people received its magazine. Are we doing our job well enough? No! But that is a different matter. My point is that the unclear or inadequate speech of the Church's commitment to evangelism has not liquidated the interest in Jewish evangelism today.

Let us shift the focus to movements which arose in connection with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and allow me once more to take an example from my own country. The movement "Ordet og Israel" [The Bible and Israel], which focuses on the fulfilment of the land promises and sees Israel in an eschatological context, did not in the beginning pay much attention to mission to Israel. In 1960 the editor of their magazine summed up the contemporary Messianic Jews in Israel in the following words: "A lot of things would indicate that the "Messianic Jews" in Israel like Rabinowitz's "Christian synagogue" are too early born babies, not capable of surviving."<sup>22</sup>

Today the movement is involved in the work in a Jewish Messianic congregation in Jerusalem, they write positive things about them, show solidarity with them, and show in many other ways that they want to communicate the gospel to Israel. It is quite a different matter with the Norwegian Karmel movement, which from its beginning and to this very day defer the work for Israel's conversion to her Messiah to the future. A view that is, sadly enough, shared by some other evangelicals.

And then we have seen societies arise in areas where there never were any before. In 1978 one was founded in Iceland – I am not quite aware of its status today – and in 1992 one in The Faroe Islands – in both cases persons from the Danish Israel Mission served as midwives. I am fascinated by the thought that in a group of islands in the North Atlantic, with a population of less than 50,000 but with enormous financial problems, there are people who have energy to become involved in Jewish evangelism and support it. In 1993 the first cheque of more than USD 3,000 was sent to the evangelical student work in Israel.

In other words: I am not as pessimistic on behalf of Jewish evangelism as I would be if I only kept to mission documents.

However, in spite of what I have already said I am not satisfied with the situation. And if people ask me how do we involve still more people, my answer is that we must tenaciously insist upon the fact that the gospel came from Israel and was for Israel – that is the clear testimony of the New Testament. And if it is no longer for Israel, then it is no longer for us. It is not we who maintain that Jews need Jesus for salvation who have problems. It is those who deny it who have problems. With a clear Christological orientation for one's faith and theology, it ought to be possible to interact with fellow evangelicals, those who on all other points have a Christological orientation 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 the framework of Jewish evangelism, but in the general theological discussion.

And now some main lines.

### **Main lines after 1945**

I am not going to discuss the question of how the Holocaust has influenced the concept of God among Jews and Christians. For some, from both sides, it has become meaningless to speak about God after the Holocaust. God and the problem of pain is a theme which the Holocaust has made most urgent, but I am not going to deal with that either. All solutions to this must of necessity be tentative. When as a Christian I meet a person who has been struck by an incomprehensible suffering, I do not know what else to do but to refer the person to the suffering God who in Jesus takes all suffering upon himself – and then let the incomprehensible remain unsolved – while I hold the suffering person's hand.

1. 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 World Council of Churches 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 gospel to the Jewish people and to produce literature suited for such work. Anti-Semitism is condemned as sin against God and men.

2. 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. And the question was asked: What in the churches' preaching and theology could have contributed to the Holocaust? The Dutch Reformed Church issued a study in 1951 – and another in 1961 – which emphasized Israel's continued election. In various contexts there was a production of instructive material about Judaism in order to confront a false picture of it. Already in 1947 there was a gathering in Seelisberg, Switzerland, of Catholics, Protestants and Jews. Jules Isaac had worked out 18 points, and the conference issued a document with 10 points intended as guidelines for pastors and teachers in their preaching and teaching. These points are worth summarizing:

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, 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>23</sup>

The 10 points in the Seelisberg declaration are worth noting and worth further reflection. Anti-Judaism as such is an urgent issue which I cannot deal with in detail here. But I would like to discuss – also self-critically – if the theology of the Israel missions has been anti-Judaistic and if they have promoted anti-Judaistic ideas. In a recently published Norwegian book it is alleged that there have been many examples of anti-Judaism in the magazines of the German and Nordic Israel missions.<sup>24</sup> However, I have no illusions that we who advocate mission to the Jews should be able to avoid accusations of anti-Judaism. If a person says that Jews need Jesus for salvation, some will see this as an anti-Judaistic statement. I for one intend to keep saying it! According to Rosemary Ruether's theology, which has had a considerable influence on European theology, "anti-Judaism is the left hand of Christology",<sup>25</sup> for which reason the New Testament Christology needs to be reformulated. To those who agree in that we must boldly assert the New Testament's Christology – and be prepared to be accused of anti-Judaism.

3. The period from about 1960 and through the 1970's is the period of dialogue. This does not mean that there were not occasional dialogues before or after the Holocaust. At the church meeting in Berlin 1961, which had a Jewish attendance, there was a demand for the abolition of Jewish evangelism. 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.

1961 was also the year when the International Missionary Council (IMC) was incorporated in WCC. IMC had been founded in Edinburgh in 1910, had held world conferences on Jewish evangelism in Budapest and Warsaw in 1927 and in Jerusalem in 1928 and worked from the early 30's under the name The International Missionary Council's Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews (IMCCAJ). In passing it may be noted that its main task was similar to LCJE's. The originator of the setting-up of IMCCAJ was

John Mott, and he hoped to place the Jews at the centre of the Christian churches' mission commitment.<sup>26</sup> In 1961, under the auspices of WCC, The Committee on the Church and the Jewish People (CCJP) was formed – this is the year when WCC holds its third general assembly, in New Delhi – and CCJP is joined with the department for world mission and evangelization. From 1971 CCJP became a sub-unit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies.

The space does not allow me 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 to keep the commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. 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 together can unite their voices and together speak up for more peace and justice in the world. But when dialogue replaces mission, or when dialogue becomes dialogism where pluralism and an openness towards all people with a living faith form the fundamental principle and where the pursuit of peace and justice becomes the main issue, then one has estranged oneself from genuine Christian faith, transformed the New Testament Christology and nullified the salvific work of Jesus – the work which according to the New Testament is important for 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 P. Lapide's book, *Ökumene aus Christen und Juden* (1972).<sup>27</sup> He says, among other things:

- \* Ecumenical meetings are incomplete without the participation of Jews.
- \* 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 common 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 study *Christen und Juden* [Christians and Jews], from 1975, published by the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands, must be placed.<sup>28</sup>

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

- \* Guilt over 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 of the Church as 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 is a matter for gratification. The same themes are on LCJE's agenda. The conclusions, however, are sometimes amiss. The reason is that something is fundamentally wrong about the Christology.

I refer to my paper *The Problem of the Two-Covenant Theology* – which is submitted as an appendix.

Instead I want to focus more specifically on a document from 1980 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>29</sup> By some it has been seen as the decisive turning-point for the relationship 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. A shared responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust
2. A 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 towards 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 profess], "Wir glauben" [We believe] and "Wir stellen darum fest" [We therefore declare].

Three statements are of particular interest:

§4.3 "We profess 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 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 dealing with Jesus means for the Jewish people now.

§4.6 "We believe that Jews and Christians always in their calling are 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 with 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. In LCJE we heartily agree in that. But that was not the way it was understood and nor was it meant that way.

In summary: the themes are highly relevant and there are many things to be pleased with. Much of what is said about Israel, about the relationship of the Church to Israel and about the Church and Jesus is right. And yet – behind the formulation – there is cause for scepticism towards the overall understanding of the declaration. It is tied up with the unclear speech about the importance of Jesus *for Israel* – and in connection with this the unclear speech about the Church's witness *to Israel*.

I will now 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 and in the 1980 declaration of the Rhineland Church in an attempt to uncover what may be hidden behind relatively cautious and vague formulations in a document.

### **Hans Kremer's *Judenmission heute?* (1979)**

The subtitle 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>30</sup>

A swift glance through Kremers' book corroborates the fact that although a document is formulated ~~rather~~ in rather cautious terms, the persons behind it are often more explicit when they write in their own name.

Heinz Kremers' book from 1979 explains the EKD Study (1975) and paves the way for the Rhineland Declaration (1980). He arrives at the conclusion that the word "Jewish evangelism" 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 societies for 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 societies 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. It is my contention that Kremers distances himself from Jewish evangelism "today" by using arguments about "yesterday's" Jewish evangelism. The point of my criticism is not that he criticizes "yesterday's" Jewish evangelism – there are plenty of things to criticize – but rather that the problem is not given a closely reasoned treatment. Or one might also say that, as far as I can see, he

does not take the problems – and the readers – seriously. Parallel with the summary I am going to give, I shall point out what I think Kremers should have done. In passing it may be mentioned that Kremers himself reveals some knowledge of Messianic Jews in Israel.

First Kremers defines the word Jewish evangelism: 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 agrees with, the American theologian Eva Fleischner: "The goal is baptism and entrance into the Church, with the consequent disappearance of the Jew as Jew."<sup>31</sup>

It would have been relevant if Kremers had discussed the attitude of Jewish Christians and Christian Israel missions today to the question 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 with strong modifications – to define the goal of Jewish evangelism the way he does. If he had had the courage he might 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 circles that the desire for Jesus-believing Jews to disappear as Jews is biggest.

Kremers goes on to enlarge on the situation for Jews who have become Christians (pp. 10–11). From the second century and 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. Now that was 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. 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.

Kremers proceeds to speak about Jews and Christians as brethren. Jews should help Christians to become better Christians, and Christians should help Jews to become better Jews (p. 12). Kremers then examines various documents from the Jewish-Christian dialogue. He objects to the dialogue between Jews and Christians 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 Judenfrage mit anderen Mitteln" [a final solution to the Jewish question with other means] (p. 31). Professional contacts and personal friendship with Jewish scholars – Rabbi Aschkenasy, Professors Safra, Pines, van Praag and Flusser are mentioned – have led him to a new realization: Christian mission to the Jews is a mistake (p. 33).

In this place I cannot resist the temptation to point out that this is excellent example of the success of "mission" on the part of the Jewish participants of the dialogue: A Christian like Kremers is made to change his view.

And now things are beginning to 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):* But that is not good. For you have betrayed your Jewishness with your baptism and you have defected to the Gentiles!

Kremers has this comment: This is a problem that I have met more and more often and I have come 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. But a Christian must not be negative towards Jews. Then it is better to mislead the Christians. 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 for 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 stopping to ask questions, although there are plenty of them, e.g.: the presence of Jewish Christians as a challenge to the Church; the fear of the Gentile Christian church – and of the Israel missions? – of a Jewish Christian church. Nor does Kremers discuss the relevant question that, whether intentional or not, the Jewish Christians are made losers when one's point of departure is 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 if Jewish Christians can be used to serve that purpose, then it is fine with him!

After a chapter of 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 for 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 would like to become Christians it is a condition that they leave their people.
2. For Jews who would like to become Christians it is a condition that they no longer live "after the law of their people".
3. For Jews who would like 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 on 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. "If baptism was the only way I could stop this man from hanging himself, then I would baptize him. For also according to Jewish doctrine it is so that 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 suicidal 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.

Kremers' (ab)use of Jewish Christians makes me ask the question how Jewish Christians more generally enter documents and discussions about the relationship between Jews and Christians.

### **The 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 the Christians when they discuss the relationship between Jews and Christians.

I substantiate this assertion on 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 and a couple of statements from Israel, also included in the book. In a common 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>32</sup> The Baptists in Israel pronounce against anti-Semitism in 1972 – without mentioning the Jewish Christians,<sup>33</sup> and in 1977 the UCCI pronounce against the so-called anti-mission law.<sup>34</sup>

If one turns to the index for the term Jewish Christians, the tendency is the following:

Jewish Christians or similar designations are used about the first Jesus-believing Jews, i.e. about a phenomenon of the past.<sup>35</sup> But the existence of Jewish Christians is often used to argue for the Church's positive relationship to Judaism – which is correct, but not as an argument for a positive relationship to Jewish Christians today – which is misleading.

Jewish Christians or similar designations are used in documents which confess guilt because Christians failed them under Nazism; it is sometimes said explicitly that they are authentic members of the Church.<sup>36</sup>

Some documents mention that there are Jewish Christians today and that they may serve to remind the Church of its Jewish roots.<sup>37</sup> And – to include an example from Los Angeles from 1982: the Catholics distance themselves strongly from members of the Jesus movement and mention as an example Jews for Jesus.<sup>38</sup> A yes to the Jewish Christians comes from the Confessional Church in Germany: they encourage them not to abandon their solidarity with the people of Israel.<sup>39</sup> There are good tendencies in documents and writings which individuals from for example the German Zentralverein and the Norwegian Israel Mission have helped to draw up,<sup>40</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: with a few exceptions Jewish Christians do not take part in this debate.

Lastly, two examples from documents drawn up by Lutherans, who naturally have their/our special problem to struggle with, namely Martin Luther and his attitude to the Jews – a theme which I cannot treat here, although it is very relevant.

In 1964 The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) held a consultation in Løgumkloster, Denmark. From here it was said:

Those who have received Jesus Christ in faith and baptism – even though they are descended from the people of the Old Covenant or belong to the heathens – are all Christians and nothing else than Christians. With the designation of 'Jewish Christian' or something similar, is created a non-biblical division within the congregation.<sup>41</sup>

A misleading statement like this is very much to be regretted. However, the same document expresses solidarity with Christians of Jewish descent in Israel.<sup>42</sup>

In 1976 a European Lutheran committee for Church and Israel was set up (LEKKJ), it was to work independently of but in contact with LWF. Their latest statement is in Die Driebergener 'Erklärung' zur Gegegnung zwischen Christen und Juden (1990). Having mentioned that the Christian Church arose in Israel and that the subsequent Church comprised people from the Jewish people as well as from other peoples, it continues to say: "Jewish Christians can contribute to ensure that the Church becomes and remains conscious of its Jewish roots. They can make a special contribution to the dialogue between Jews and Christians."<sup>43</sup>

At a meeting, held by LEKKJ in Dianalund, Denmark, 1992, which I attended as an observer for LCJE, this was not the dominant tune, on the contrary. And then we are back to where we began: documents do not fully express the viewpoints of all members of a committee.

How do we get on? I do not think there is only one answer to this question. There are, however, two things which I am pretty much sure about: One: people are not saved by documents. Two: Jewish Christians and Israel missions must intensify their work with the preaching of the gospel, so that Israel may be saved through faith in Jesus Messiah.

I am not saying an absolute no to all dialogue and efforts to formulate the Christian Church's view of Israel in contexts where there is a lack of clarity concerning mission to Israel. But I have relativized such efforts.

And then we must ask: 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 presume to 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.

## Notes

- \* This paper consistently uses the term "Jewish Christians" in order not to load 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 "Messianic Jews".
1. Rolf Rendtorff, The Effect of Holocaust on Christian Mission, in *Sidic* 1981/1 pp. 20–25.
  2. Paul Gerhard Aring, *Christliche Judenmission, Ihre Geschichte und Problematik*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1980, pp. 8–13.
  3. Bertold Klappert, in *Christlich-jüdisches Forum*, 1979, no. 51, pp. 71–72.
  4. Heinz Kremers, *Judenmission heute? Von der Judenmission zur brüderlichen Solidarität und zum ökumenischen Dialog*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1979, p. 31. Cf. the discussion below.
  5. Axel Torm, Kirke og synagoge, in Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Israel, Kirken og Verden*, Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1972, p. 188.
  6. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
  7. *Ibid.*, p. 193–194.
  8. Arnulf H. Baumann, Recent statements on Jewish evangelism, in *LCJE Zeist 91*, Sabro, Denmark, p. 224.
  9. *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. For reactions to this, see *Mishkan* II/1986, no. 5, pp. 12–33).
  10. Printed in *Mishkan* II/1989, no. 11, pp.76–84.
  11. Printed in Rolf Rendtorff & Hans Hermann Henrix (eds.), *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei Paderborn & Chr. Kaiser Verlag München, Paderborn 1988, 2nd printing 1989, pp. 596–598.
  12. *CCJP Contribution to DFI Guidelines* (adopted by the Jerusalem Conference of CCJP, June 1977), p. 4.
  13. Manila Manifesto, Cf. *Mishkan*, no. 11, II/1989, p. 85.
  14. *Christian Witness to the Jewish People*, Report of the Consultation on World Evangelization Mini-Consultation on Reaching Jewish People (Pattaya 16–27 June 1989), LCWE, Wheaton 1980.
  15. *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, cf. note 11 above.
  16. Cf. pamphlet from AMZI: *25 Years*, 1993, p. 1.
  17. Cf. note 11.
  18. E.g. Wolfgang Schrage, Ja und Nein – Bemerkungen eines Neutestamentlers zur Diskussion von Christen und Juden, in *Evangelische Theologie*, 1981/42, pp. 126–151.
  19. 120 Jahre Zentralverein, in *Friede über Israel*, 4/1991, p. 168.
  20. See Arnold H. Baumann, Aneinander vorbei: Der Göttinger Streit, in *Friede über Israel*, 3/1992, pp. 97–98. For other reactions, see *Friede über Israel*, 1/1992, pp. 32–34.
  21. Cf. *Fokus Israel*, no. 3, 1993, p. 2.
  22. *Ordet og Israel*, 1960, p. 63.
  23. Cf. Axel Torm, *Israelsmission og Israels Mission*, Forlaget OKAY-BOG, Århus 1990, pp. 60–61.
  24. Øyvind Foss, *Antijudaisme, kirke og misjon*, Ad Notam Gyldendal, Oslo 1994.
  25. Cf. Rosemary Ruether, "Anti-Semitism Is the Left Hand of Christology" in R. Heyer, *Jewish-Christian Relations*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1974), pp. 1–9.
  26. See Göte Hedenquist (ed.): *25 Years of the International Missionary Council's Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews*, Uppsala 1957.
  27. Pinchas E. Lapide, *Ökumene aus Christen und Juden*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1972, p. 6.
  28. Printed in *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, (see note 11 above), pp. 558–578. The EKD study of 1975 was later succeeded by another study, *Christen und Juden II, Zur theologischen Neuorientierung im Verhältnis zum Judentum*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh 1991.
  29. Printed in *Die Kirchen und das Judentum* (see note 11), pp. 593–596).
  30. Cf. note 4 above.
  31. Eva Fleschner, in: *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945*, ATLA Monograph Series, No. 8,

Scarecrow Press, Inc, Metuchen, N.J. USA 1975.

32. In *Die Kirchen und das Judentum* (see note 11), p. 341.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 483–484.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 392–395.

35. *Ibid.*, e.g. p. 324, 326 and in many other places where the roots of the Christian faith are emphasized, which is a recurrent sign in the documents and a sign of the renewed attitude in the Church.

36. *Ibid.*, e.g. p. 531, 537–538, 539, 546, 589.

37. *Ibid.*, e.g. pp. 292–294, 426, 432 et. al.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

39. In *Die Kirchen und das Judentum* (see note 11), p. 597.

40. E.g. Arnulf H. Baumann & Käte Mahn & Magne Sæbø (eds.), *Luthers Erben und die Juden. Das Verhältnis lutherischer Kirchen Europas zu den juden*, Lutherisches Verlagshaus, Hannover, 1984, pp. 98–101 and 121–124.

41. In *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, (see note 11) p. 343. See also Jakob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ after Auschwitz*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1981, pp. 143–144.

42. In *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, p. 346.

43. *Erklärung zur Begegnung zwischen lutherischen Christen und Juden – verabschiedet auf der Jahrestagung der Lutherischen Europäischen Kommission Kirche und Judentum (LEKKJ), Driebergen, Niederlande, am 8. Mai 1990*, Ev.-luth. Zentralverein für Zeugnis und Dienst unter Juden..., Hannover 1991, p. 5.