



The *No* to Jewish Mission from Cologne

By Kai Kjær-Hansen

The theme of the last issue of *Mishkan* was Mark Kinzer's book *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (2005). Kinzer's main point – a “bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel that affirms Israel's covenant, Torah, and religious tradition” – was carefully examined by a number of people. Even after reading Kinzer's response to these articles, it is still not clear to me how Christians – for whom the book is mainly intended – will discover “God and Messiah in the midst of Israel,” nor what practical implications this has for our witness to the Jewish people today.

The responses to Kinzer's book were very different, but none of them questioned “Israel's enduring covenant and election.” Neither was that questioned in the evangelical Trinitatiskirche in Cologne during their Pentecost celebration on June 4th of this year.

What were the implications of this for the Protestant Christians gathered there?

My source is the journal *Begegnungen – Zeitschrift für Kirche und Judentum* (no. 3, 2006, pp. 1-13). In a short editorial, the editor of the magazine, Wolfgang Raupach-Rudnick, underscores the theme of the issue by quoting a declaration made in 1998 by the General Synod of the evangelical church in Austria: “Since God's covenant with his people Israel remains to the end of time because of his mercy, mission to the Jews cannot theologically be justified and must be rejected as a program for the Church.”

At the opening of the service in Cologne, participants were welcomed with these words: “What we do today is nothing new, rather it is a confirmation of the decision which has been valid in the Evangelical Church of Reinland since 1980.” This refers to the Declaration of the Reinland Synod from 1980. While that declaration kept the door open for Jewish mission (see *Mishkan*, no. 36, 2002, pp. 5-32), this door has now been closed. New or not new, the Pentecost service in Cologne and its *no* to Jewish mission is a diametrical contrast to the Jewish mission organization established in 1842 – in Cologne. At that time there was a clear yes to Jewish mission.

The theme of the service was inspired by the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20: “Go into all the world: Learn together with Israel – teach the world – our biblical *no* to Jewish mission.” Biblically inspired yes, but in my opinion also biblically twisted.

After the service a small delegation visited two Jewish congregations in Cologne and presented a short statement to the rabbis. The statement says that God's covenant with and promises to Israel are still valid. This is followed by a *yes* to mission, which concerns all people – and then just as strong a *no* to Jewish mission: "We understand and underline our commitment to go against any form of organized Jewish mission and hereby recognize God's special relation to his people Israel." The conclusion of the statement speaks against "our previous Jewish mission tradition," and the statement asks all evangelical churches to do the same.

It is no surprise that the Christian delegation was well received by the two synagogues in Cologne. Nor is it surprising that there were reactions to this from other Christians.

In a letter to the editor in *Idea Spektrum* (23/2006), Professor Dr. Günter R. Schmidt, Erlangen, reacts in five short points. Point 1 is, "A *no* to Jewish mission implies a new form of anti-Semitic discrimination: All should be called to Christ, only not the Jews!" In point 2, Acts 4:12 – salvation is to be found in the name of Jesus alone – is quoted, underscoring that these words were addressed not to Gentiles, but to representatives of the Jewish council. In point 3 it is said that the "*no* to Jewish mission" is the beginning of a *no* to all other mission. If Jews do not need Jesus, then why should Muslims or Buddhists? In point 4 it is maintained that this *no* to Jewish mission undermines the Christian principle of "Solus Christus" (Christ alone). Point 5 emphasizes that Jews should be met in an open and friendly way, but without diminishing the Christian gospel.

Martin Bock and Marten Marquardt, who are the main authors of the statement from June 4, 2006, responded shortly afterward with a 21-point explanation. Point 1 says: "The question of Jewish mission is linked to the question of whether rabbinic Judaism is a continuation of biblical Judaism or not." Point 2 maintains that if such a continuation is questioned, then Israel is equal to all other people and the great commission includes them – but this, according to the authors, is against Scripture. The biblical viewpoint, as the authors see it, is expressed in point 3: "Whoever accepts the continuity of biblical Israel with rabbinic Judaism must, together with Paul (Romans 9-11), admit that the Torah and the promises to Israel are still valid – also after Christ."

Of course it can happen, the authors admit, that some Jews receive the gospel or that some Christians convert to Judaism. But neither side should engage in a "systematic" mission toward the other.

In my opinion, the declaration from Cologne is an example of how, even with a biblically correct starting point – that is, Israel's enduring covenant and election – one can still end up with a theology concerning Israel which does not include God's salvation through Christ.

Regardless of how close present-day rabbinic Judaism is to "biblical Judaism," the Gospels show that Jesus came with good news for Jews. This is true also for Jews today. When the biblical texts read as they do, it is a puzzle to me that anyone dares introduce a *biblical no* to Jewish mission.

