

**No to the Mission to the  
Jews - Yes to Dialogue  
between Jews and Christians**

March 9, 2009

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## Preface to the 2nd edition

The declaration of March 9, 2009 "No to the Mission to the Jews - Yes to the Dialogue between Jews and Christians" of the discussion group "Jews and Christians" of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) has been met with many responses and has set off a rather controversial public debate. These discussions illustrate the charged nature of the problem that-decades after the Second Vatican Council-the relations between the Church and Jews remain strained. A no to the mission to the Jews is considered as a test case for the credibility of the Church's rejection of the traditional paths of hostility toward the Jews. Some prominent Catholic critics see this as the unacceptable renunciation of a binding teaching of the Church. However, these objections do not respond to the declaration's approach and argumentation. The discussion group thus feels compelled to clarify the following points.

Our declaration neither claims to be a comprehensive theological treatise, nor is it an official document of the Church. It is also not a declaration in the name of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK). It is, nonetheless, the result of many years of dialogue between Catholics and Jews, in which on both sides the faithfulness to one's own tradition was never a question. This declaration stands on the strength of its arguments:

- Without taking into account the context of the discussion group's earlier statements, it is difficult to appropriately understand and assess our most recent declaration. Both our 2005 declaration "Jews and Christians in Germany" (Juden und Christen in Deutschland), mentioned in our declaration from March 2009 (p. 2) and the 1979 declaration "Important Theological Issues for Jewish-Christian Dialogue" (Theologische Schwerpunkte des jüdisch-christlichen Gesprächs) should be consulted in this context. In these declarations, some critics of our most recent declaration will find more in-depth statements regarding both Jesus Christ's universal message of salvation and a form of dialogue which necessarily includes the attestation to one's own faith.

The Catholic members of our discussion group stand to their earlier statements.

- We must not disregard the catastrophe that the past mission to the Jews was. Over centuries, it caused fear and horror for innumerable Jews, it violated the Jew's religious dignity, and it is responsible for the deaths of Jews. Through the mission to the Jews, the Church lost great credibility. When Jews today, in light of the numeric asymmetry between Judaism and Christianity, see in the mission to the Jews a new danger for their religious existence after Auschwitz-even when this mission is nonviolent-then Christians must not only take this viewpoint seriously, but also theologically reflect upon these concerns.
- We hold the fundamental decision against the organized mission to the Jews on part of the Catholic Church after the Council to be true and just. Accordingly, the problem of the mission to the Jews is for Cardinal Walter Kasper "factually, but not yet theologically resolved" (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 20.03.08). It still must be asked how the Church can theologically justify the renunciation of the mission to the Jews, something which some critics interpret as a betrayal of tradition. To aid in the resolution of this open question, our discussion group formulated its declaration and presented it to the public for debate.
- Our thesis is: Even without believing in Jesus as the Christ and without baptism, the Jews are, as the people of God, on a path to salvation. God will lead them on this path to this end. For us, there is no discrepancy therein to the commitment of the Church that Jesus Christ is the savior of all men and women: "The covenant of the New Testament ... points to the death of Jesus as an act of God toward universal forgiveness of sins" (p.10).
- The decisive argument for our thesis is the "never revoked old covenant" (John Paul II). Otherwise, the faithfulness to God on part of the Church would be in question. That all men and women, when they follow their own convictions of their beliefs, can achieve salvation, only says that there are as many paths to

God as there are human beings. This message, however, avoids the theological question regarding what God's eternal covenant with his people of Israel means for its path to salvation.

- Our declaration draws not only from Paul's statements in his Epistle to the Romans (9-11), but it also reads afresh the passages in the New Testament which are traditionally utilized as rationale for the mission to the Jews. Similar to prominent exegetes, in our declaration we arrive at the conclusion that a duty on part of the "gentile Christians" to preach the gospel of Jesus the Jew as their Messiah cannot be found. In the New Testament, it is always Jews who advocate to other Jews for the recognition of, and belief in, Jesus the Messiah.
- "What separates us is history." This was one of the central convictions, based on decades of dialogue, of a founding member of our discussion group, Professor Ernst-Ludwig Ehrlich who passed away in 2007. One cannot refer to the New Testament while forgetting history. Paul's and the first Christians' hope for a church "of Jews and gentiles" would be a utopia for the Church and a nightmare for the Jews, because this would mean the end of the latter's religious and cultural identity.
- On 12 March 1979, John Paul II said that the encounters between the Church and the Jewish people should be "at the very level of their respective religious identities." And, Cardinal Karl Lehmann adds: "This does not preclude individual conversions, which occur on the basis of a very personal decision." The discussion group consciously did not address the theological controversy concerning whether God's covenant with Israel and the Church should be understood either through the metaphor of two paths towards salvation or through the metaphor of a common path ("shoulder to shoulder," Zeph 3:9) or, as the declaration states, as one history of the covenant with many iterations. The declaration limits itself to the statement: "Israel and Church are, together and each in its own specific way, instruments of God for the coming of His universal Kingdom" (p.10). Commonality and difference are stressed, just as Israel's and the Church's universal "light to

the Gentiles - lumen gentium" (Isa 49:6; Mt 5:14). Nonetheless, we are with Paul in our conviction that God's plan for salvation is a mystery; for Jews and Christians it will be understood only when our common goal is upon us (Rom 11:33-36).

- That the discussion group decidedly positions itself against the mission to the Jews does not impede its conviction that Jews and Christians alike should witness to one's own faith and enter into dialogue about one's faith. Throughout almost four decades of dialogue, we have learned again and again how enriching this witness and dialogue is and can be.

Bonn, 4 May 2009

For the Discussion Group "Jews and Christians"  
Prof. Dr. Hanspeter Heinz



# I. Introduction

## An Overdue Statement

For the discussion group "Jews and Christians" of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK), the specific reason behind our renewed concern regarding the topic of the mission to the Jews lies in the amendments to the Good Friday Prayer, announced by Pope Benedict XVI on 05 February 2008 and pertaining to the extraordinary form of the Roman Missal. These changes have been understood in some circles to mean that the Catholic Church is open again to a mission to the Jews. On the contrary, we stress with the Church of the Second Vatican Council that God's covenant with the Jewish people presents a way of salvation – even without the acceptance of Jesus Christ and the sacrament of baptism.

One of the fruits of the Jewish-Christian dialogue is that Jews can respect Christians when they attest to God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ as constitutive for their worldview. Christians and Jews hold the common viewpoint that, through acting ethically, all human beings are opened a way to God, one which is found ultimately above and beyond all differences of belief. The line of demarcation between Jews and Christians lies in the question of the incarnation of the Son of God and the doctrine of the Trinity. When, how, and whether Jews and Christians will meet each other along the way to the Kingdom of God remains God's secret.

As a matter of fact, we observe that some Christian groups are still today very active in missions to the Jews, for example in the USA and Israel.

Due to this situation, the discussion group "Jews and Christians" has taken upon itself to address this topic again, i.e. after its declaration of 13 April 2005 (see [www.zdk.de](http://www.zdk.de)). We understand this as our especially important task for two reasons. For decades, our discussion group has been the only representative body in the world in which Jews and Catholics have stood in continuous exchange with one another and together have made statements about fundamental and prevailing

theological issues. Such joint experiences are not possible anywhere else. Moreover, our Christian members, as Catholics from Germany, are especially committed to bear in remembrance the Shoah, and to reflect upon its significance for the whole Church.

In order to better understand our declaration, we first would like to explain how we use the terms dialogue and mission.

## **The Term Dialogue**

Over the course of history, the term dialogue has been defined and understood in various ways.

- In Greek thought, dialogue is understood as dialectic, as a method of ascertaining the truth through discussion, something which can also result in open questions (aporia). In the Middle Ages, the philosophical and theological discourses were also determined by scientific debate aiming at gaining the truth; the discussions in the context of the councils are also representative of this type of dialogue.
- In the philosophical dialogic of the 20th century, influenced not in the least by Jewish thinkers, the term dialogue gained a new meaning. The "new thinking" (Franz Rosenzweig) is based on an ethical commitment to dialogue, something which the partners can pursue only in voluntary consensus. They encounter each other either as coequals (Martin Buber) or with an understanding of the priority of the other. According to Emanuel Levinas, the latter represents the epitome of nonviolent dialogue, from which a specific understanding of the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself can be derived.
- The influence of dialogical thinking on contemporary Christian theology is not to be underestimated. Both the Second Vatican Council and the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* of Pope Paul VI (1964) attach great importance to dialogue. Today, one rightly speaks of ecumenical, Jewish-Christian, and interreligious dialogue. This dialogue begins with the recognition of the plurality of practiced

beliefs, its partners meet each other as coequals with mutual respect for one another, but it also in no way precludes debate over controversial matters. Thus, dialogue creates a space which allows one to immerse oneself in one's own religious beliefs encouraged through the perspective of the other. Despite continuing – and by no means small – differences, such dialogue also enables the discovery of commonalities that facilitate both living together and the shaping of society in a responsible manner. In the process, a significant potential for peace unfolds.

Since the Second Vatican Council (*Nostra aetate*, 4), the Jewish-Christian dialogue has proven to be extremely fruitful. It has become more and more clear that this dialogue, based on the singular revelation of God, which Judaism and Christianity understand in their own individual ways, provides the basis for all forms of interreligious dialogue. For Christians, therefore, there can be no interreligious dialogue that does not specifically take into consideration the unique relationship between Jews and Christians.

## **The Term Mission**

The term mission has also changed greatly over the course of history.

- The earlier theological understanding of the term is that the Church recognizes in its mission Jesus' command to preach his word to all men and women and to baptize. Through baptism, all are freed from guilt and can thus attain eternal salvation. This command to mission has a dual application: outside of the Church for non-Christians, who should accept Christianity through baptism as belief and way of life, and within the Church for all who are baptized, who must always consider anew their belief and way of life. The Second Vatican Council once again stresses God's universal will to save, and it teaches in agreement with older Church tradition that men and women can
- also attain salvation without being baptized when they follow the calling of their own conscience.



- This understanding of the term mission is not applicable to the Jews because it does not do justice to the unique relationship between Jews and Christians. Christianity lives with Judaism in a special relationship, a kind of relationship that is unique and cannot be found between other peoples and religions. In this declaration, our discussion group wishes to reconsider in theological terms the consequences of this unique relationship for the mission to the Jews, consequences that have not yet been sufficiently thought through in the Church.
- While rejecting the mission to the Jews, our discussion group is aware that this allows and, indeed, calls for Christians to attest to their faith before Jews and for Jews to do the same before Christians. Without this, religious and theological dialogue is impossible. Likewise, Jews and Christians alike are beholden to both the continuous calling for repentance (Hebrew: teshuvah; Greek metanoia) and also to adherence to the commandments, above all the commandment of love which holds central meaning to both the life and teachings of Judaism and the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

## **II. The Jewish No to the Mission to the Jews**

For many centuries, the Christian mission was based on the concept that men and women were born with "original sin" which could only be cleansed through baptism. This understanding seemingly prevented those who are not baptized from reaching salvation, resulting in the phrase "no salvation outside of the Church".

### **I. The Rabbinic Concept of Humanity**

In the Jewish tradition, this concept has always been understood differently. A non-Jewish person did not have to become a Jew in order to alleviate him or herself from an innate flaw preventing salvation and so participation in the coming world.

Right at the beginning of the Torah, humanity is described as the 'crown of God's creation.' The Talmud answers the question on the meaning of the story of the first man (Hebrew: adam harischon): "[t]o teach you that whosoever destroys a single soul, scripture imputes [guilt] to him as if he had destroyed a complete world; and whosoever preserves a single soul, scripture ascribes [merit] to him as if he had preserved a complete world" (Mishnah Sanhedrin IV, 5). It reads further: "[he was created alone] for the sake of peace among men, that one might not say to his fellow, 'my father was greater than yours'" (ibid.). Not only is life itself worthy of protection and respect, but also the fundamental equality of all people as God's creations.

In the Jewish tradition, the often-cited biblical commandment to "[I]ove thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev 19:18) has been interpreted through other translations to be "[I]ove thy neighbor, for he is like you" (Martin Buber/Franz Rosenzweig). But most often, this passage is only partially cited, for it reads in its entirety: "[I]ove thy neighbor, for he is like you. I am the Lord." Rabbis often ask then about the connection between the two parts of the passage. Because humanity was created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7), they mostly choose the interpretation: love thy neighbor, for they are, like you, creations of God. Because God created all people, your neighbor is just as well a creation of the Highest One. Therefore, they have the right to be loved by you as you love God, for it is exactly this image of God in everyone that makes them so worthy of love.

Moreover, one must ask who is meant by neighbor. Does it refer only to one's own people, to the members of one's own religious creed, or even only to those closest, to one's own family? The sages answer that this is not so, for one reads in the parallel sentence: "[b]ut the stranger who dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev 19:34). Just as you should love your neighbor, who was created in the image of God, for this reason you should love and respect the other, the foreign one, i.e. those who do not belong to your group or to your closest friends.

According to rabbinic teachings, this means that human beings are born without flaw. At the same time, every human being is provided with good and evil inclinations, but also with the ability to resist the latter. And, in the case that sin is committed, one also has the possibility to return to God through repentance (Hebrew: teshuvah, i.e. without needing a redeemer).

## **2. Adhering to God's Will without Promoting Judaism**

14 From the Jewish perspective, there is no reason to convert others to Judaism. In order to be counted among the "righteous among the peoples" and to be able to have a share in the coming world, it is enough that people hold themselves true to the covenant which God made after the flood with Noah and his sons, the ancestors of all of the remaining peoples (Gen 9:8-17). In the rabbinic literature, (Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 64b; Sanhedrin 56b), this covenant is understood as the seven laws that God gave to humankind: the requirement to have just laws and the prohibition of idolatry, murder, theft, promiscuity, blasphemy, and brutality against animals. To these Seven Laws of Noah the Jews should give witness before the entire world. For they know that they are commanded by God to be a "light to the Gentiles" (Hebrew: Or laGoyim; Isa 49:6). This includes attesting to the hope that all people recognize the eternal One as God, as it is formulated in the Aleinu prayer, a main prayer in the synagogue.

## **3. Positive Assessment of the Second Vatican Council**

It is inarguable and recognized from the Jewish perspective that the Catholic Church has fundamentally changed its position regarding the Jews since the Second Vatican Council. The conviction – self-evident for Jews – that the covenant of God with His people of Israel has not been, and never will be, broken was accepted without reservation in *Nostra aetate* and through the papal teachings of John Paul II. Thus, in the mid-20th century, the Church broke with a centuries-old tradition, whose terrible consequences are known. Since then, there is no organized mission to the Jews, and it shall never take place again.

#### 4. New Concerns

However, this situation has changed with the expanded re-admittance of the extraordinary form of the Roman missal with the Good Friday Prayer as revised by Pope Benedict XVI. If one could previously assume that, in accordance with the Council, the Jews were recognized in their special relationship to salvation, this assumption appears after the Pope's revision of the prayer no longer as clear-cut.

From the Jewish perspective, there are two ways of interpreting this new Good Friday Prayer:

- If the prayer is to be interpreted that we Jews here and today should recognize Jesus as the Messiah, then the basis for the Catholic-Jewish dialogue is destroyed. This would throw us back decades into the time before the Second Vatican Council.
- If the Church defers this hope to the end of times and combines it with a clear rejection of the mission to the Jews, as the Cardinal of the Roman Curia responsible for Church relations to Judaism, Walter Kasper, interprets the revised prayer (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 March 2008), then this would be a significant release of tension. Nonetheless, the impression remains that Judaism in the eyes of the Church may not be a fully valid way of salvation. If this impression persists, the prerequisites for dialogue and unselfconscious dialogue are in danger of no longer being met.

From the Jewish perspective, the only acceptable form of the Good Friday Prayer is thus the version from 1970, in which the decision regarding how and when God saves the whole of Israel rests with God alone. Here, the prayer reads: "[l]et us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the Word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant that they may reach the destination set by God's providence."

### III. The Christian No to the Mission to the Jews

#### I. Reasons for the Earlier Mission to the Jews

Since the Second Vatican Council, the formula 'dialogue without mission' has characterized the new Jewish-Christian relationship. This formula stands in contrast to a centuries-long history, in which Christians practiced 'mission without dialogue' to the Jews, and it also stands in contrast to 'mission with dialogue.' Prior to deeper theological reflection on this changed circumstance, it is important to first analyze the arguments used to justify the mission to the Jews. Along with ecclesiastical interests to increase the number of Christians, the Church in its early centuries primarily supported the mission to the Jews with the theological teaching of the necessity of baptism for salvation. Today's defenders of the mission to the Jews mainly cite certain passages in the New Testament. Their most important reasons are:

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- Jesus himself preached and spoke (almost) exclusively to Jews. For this reason, the proclamation of his message to Jews is thus indispensable.
- The so-called command to mission (Mt 28:19-20) also applies to the mission to the Jews. Jesus calls on his followers to go to "all nations" and baptize them.
- According to Acts, Paul went in his travels first to the synagogue to proclaim Jesus Christ's message of salvation. What was right for Paul cannot be wrong for the later Church.
- Addressing his circle of Jewish disciples, Jesus called for them to believe in him and referred to himself as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Joh 14:6). To his Jewish listeners, he said that he who rejects his words is lost and shall be judged accordingly (Joh 12:37-50, esp. 12:48).
- The teachings of the Church that Jesus Christ is the redeemer of the whole world stand in contrast to renouncing the mission



to the Jews, for with this, one could no longer speak of universal salvation.

- Because there is no salvation outside of the Church, Jews must be evangelized and baptized.

These arguments are neither historically nor theologically persuasive.

## **2. Historical Reasons against the Mission to the Jews**

- The mission to the Jews has caused Jews terrible and painful injustice. In opposition to the Gospel and to the biblical commandment to love one's neighbor, the mission to the Jews was far too frequently accompanied with physical, psychological, and cultural coercion. Forced sermons in the Papal States, the surreptitious baptism of Jewish children by Christian wet nurses, and the separation of Jewish children from their parents and their upbringing in cloisters have left their mark. Understandably, Jews cannot forget these wounds and have a traumatic fear of a return to unconscionable acts such as those that occurred in post-war France when members of the Church did not return two Jewish children who had been hidden during the war to their parents until 1953. In the wake of the Nazi genocide, the mission to the Jews is more than ever unconscionable, for it was for centuries an expression of disdain of Judaism and thus responsible for preparing the foundation for the antisemitism of the Nazis.
- With the mission to the Jews, the Church was not only unsuccessful, but it also caused itself great damage. Forced conversions and baptisms brought the Church's theology into disrepute. The sacrament of baptism was abused, and the image of the Church darkened. It lost great credibility in the eyes of Christians and non-Christians alike.

### 3. Theological Reasons against the Mission to the Jews

As insightful and irrefutable as these historical reasons are, they must be supported and complemented by theological reasons, for historical reasons alone cannot be determinative for Christian theology.

- The Second Vatican Council proclaims in *Nostra aetate* that the Church has a spiritual bond to Abraham's stock. This is a clear indication of the Church's spiritual relationship with Judaism that endures till today. Although Jews reject the Christian Gospel, the Council asserts: "Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues – such is the witness of the Apostle (Cf. Rom 11:28)."
- This new appreciation of Judaism on part of the Church theologically ties Judaism to the Church in a unique manner. Therefore the relationship between the Church and Judaism must be different than that with other religions. With the formation of the Church, this divine bond did not lapse, but instead retains its own lasting meaning for salvation.
- With the Council, the Church has begun to read chapters 9-11 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans in a new light. Briefly, the beginning passages read: the Jews "are Israelites and to them belong the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the worship of God and the promises; of whom are the fathers" (9:4-5a). The no on part of "some" Jews (3:3) does not revoke God's yes to the Jews: "[i]t is not as though the Word of God has taken no effect" (9:6). Paul answers the question "has God cast away His people? With a clear "God forbid!" (11:1). The gentiles are like new branches grafted into an old olive tree, in order to retain the power of its Jewish roots. They, thus, should not elevate themselves above the Jews (11:13-24). The future of Israel remains in the hand of God alone (11:25.33-36). Paul speaks of the fullness of the peoples who will come into the kingdom of God and that "all Israel shall be saved" (11:25-27).

- Above all, the Church's renewed understanding of its relationship to Judaism is supported by these statements by Paul. For his whole life, he was proud of being a Jew and a Pharisee, but he also made disrespectful and polemical remarks, including about Jews who opposed his proclamation of the Gospel (1 Thess 2:15), about his earlier fervor for the Sinai Torah (Phil 3:7-8), or about strict Pharisaic Judaism as a religion of bondage (Gal 4:21-26). However these statements are not to be understood as a universally-valid judgment of Jews who did not believe in Jesus, but instead as according with the circumstances of the time, i.e. disappointment in Jews who did not accept the Gospel and fear of persecution by other Jews. Nonetheless, in Romans – and this is unique to the New Testament – Paul changes his perspective toward fundamental questions: who would God be, if He would revoke the covenant with His chosen people of Israel because most of them do not believe in the Gospel? Due to the radical nature of his question, which requires an answer before God, Romans 9-11 must be the principal witness for the calling of the Jews. Through this, opposing biblical judgments are deemed as relative, such as those found in Hebrews, where the new covenant through the death of Jesus (Jer 31:31-34) stands in contrast to the older, lapsing covenant (Heb 8:1-13; 8:7.13). These stem from the period after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and so from a different linguistic and philosophical context.
- Regarding Paul's Letter to the Romans, theological consensus has been largely reached: "[f]or the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (11:29). Pope John Paul II's emphasis on the "never revoked old covenant" has been established firmly into the language of the Church, and in the *Mea Culpa* of the year 2000, he referred to the Jews as the "people of the covenant." If this were not the case, then we Christians could no longer believe in God's faithfulness, for it would mean that He thus no longer stands true to His earlier promises. An insurmountable contradiction would arise with the biblical belief in God, at whose center is the message of God's love and faithfulness (Ex 34:6-7). Men and women can transgress and break their covenant, but not destroy it, for the covenant is founded upon God Himself.

- The biblical word covenant denotes an unconditional commitment of God, through which He endows an enduring covenantal relationship. God gives and promises in His laws of the covenant for His people of Israel the covenant gifts of the land, continuing descendants and the Torah (Gen 15; 17; Ex 19-34). This often stated and renewed covenant, which calls Israel to a special closeness to God and which, according to Jer 31:31-34, will find perfection at the end of time, is more precisely characterized as an "everlasting covenant" (Gen 17:7.13 and others). The covenant of the New Testament (cf. especially in the tradition of the Last Supper (Mk 14:24 par Mt 26:28 and Lk 22:20 par I Cor 11:25) points to the death of Jesus as an act of God toward universal forgiveness of sins. This covenant does not replace the covenant with Israel, rather it opens anew and strengthens the salvation history of God with all peoples. Israel and Church are, together and each in its own specific way, instruments of God for the coming of His universal Kingdom.

## **20 IV. A Renewed Understanding of the Messages of the New Testament**

### **I. Binding Statements of Belief and Situational Statements**

In the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, the Second Vatican Council stipulates that the Bible must be read from the perspective of the Biblical authors and the conditions of their time. Through this, a new light has been shone on the passages of the New Testament that in the previous tradition of the Church were read in an antisemitic manner and used to justify the mission to the Jews.

Most of these statements were made out of the disappointment on part of Jewish followers of Christ toward the varied forms of Judaism that, for different reasons, did not believe in God's work through Jesus Christ. With their no to Jesus, these Jews retained their Jewish identity by holding fast to their Jewish way of salvation according to God's commandments. This disappointment was frequently expressed

by means of vehement polemics, but it must be understood that these polemics did not come as anti-Jewish statements from the outside, but rather from Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. They were aimed toward other Jewish, primarily Pharisaic groups.

It was a fateful development that these originally inner-Jewish polemics were transformed in the tradition of the Church to be Christian allegations against "the Jews," later even leading to a coercive mission to the Jews. It can no longer be that the situational polemical expressions found in the New Testament are given the authority of permanent binding statements of belief. According to the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council, "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation" (Dei Verbum 11). Hearing God's word in the Scriptures does not demand blind obedience, but rather reasoned distinction between God's binding message of salvation and situational expressions that are only the words of human beings at a particular time.

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## **2. The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles**

When, according to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul the Jew goes first to the synagogues in order to spread the word of the Gospel to the Jews in the Diaspora, these acts cannot be linked to the notion that Jews are unable to reach salvation without believing in Jesus Christ. As in Romans 9:4-5, in Luke the passage reads in the present tense: "[y]ou are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers" (Acts 3:25). Furthermore, in accordance with Luke, the Jews have precedence in the history of salvation; for them, God acted 'first' and then through Jesus. A contextual biblical concept is found behind the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, whereupon "God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out from them a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). Luke sees the word of the prophets (Am 9:11-12 Septuagint; Jer 12:15; Isa 45:20-21) as coming true: according to him, it is God's will to "build again the tabernacle of David [...] that the rest of humanity might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles" (Acts 15:16-17). This means that, next to the

covenant people of Israel, the people of God are of the gentiles. Luke thus explains here how the Church of Jews and gentiles came to be.

Conflicts still remain which mark the story of Jesus in the Gospel (4:29; 6:22; 12:11; 23:1) and the story of his apostles in Acts (4:3; 5:18.40; 7:58; 9:23; 13:45.50; 14:2.5.19; 17:6-7; 18:12-13). As there are intra-Christian conflicts between Aramaic and Greek-speaking followers of Jesus in Jerusalem (Acts 6-8), there are also conflicts between these followers and Jews who did not believe that God works through Jesus. This is still an intra-Jewish argument. It pertains to the concept of the people of God in the Bible, i.e. whether this concept is particular or universal.

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In spite of his disappointment over the non-acceptance of the Gospel, the Paul of Acts nowhere says that the covenant of God with His people has come to an end. Moreover, at the end of the Acts of the Apostles the so-called "stubbornness" passage from Isa 6:9-10 does not state that Israel has lost its path to salvation. According to biblical understanding, it is never a question of rescinding the covenant, but rather of finding insight and changing course. According to Acts 28:24, "some believed" in Paul's teaching of the Gospel "and some did not believe."

The work of Luke in its entirety is a history of the path of salvation with an open ending. The non-Jewish followers of Christ who were won through the teaching of the Gospel are declared a people of God (15:14-19). They stand next to (and not in supersession of) Israel. Israel remains "a light to lighten the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32). No author of the texts of the New Testament signals the persisting theological necessity of Israel as strongly as Luke does.

### **3. The Gospel of Matthew**

The call for a mission to the Jews stands in contrast to important sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew on the achievement of salvation at the end of times, one which is not bound to a yes to Jesus and mission. For example, the Gospel reads: "[n]ot every one that says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,

but the one that does the will of My Father who is in Heaven" (7:21). In his sermon on the mount, Jesus preaches that he has not come to "destroy the Law or the Prophets," for these shall be fulfilled in the "Kingdom of Heaven" without anything else superseding them (5:17-20). To the rich young man who wishes to know how he could have eternal life, Jesus advises that he keep the commandments of the Torah (19:16-20) without requiring the man to adhere to him and his followers as the path to salvation. This becomes even clearer in his teachings on the final judgment, in which eternal salvation is to be judged on the acts of charity alone (25:31-46).

At the end of the Gospel, these teachings are not revoked, but rather Jesus, raised from the dead, extends them with the so-called mission command to "all nations." (28:19-20). Like the majority of exegetes, we understand this statement regarding "all nations" to mean all non-Jewish peoples. In this sense, Jesus calls upon the (Jewish) apostles to turn toward the non-Jewish peoples so that they can summon them to follow, to baptize them, and to teach them the Torah as renewed by Jesus. Here, the Evangelists are referring to the founding of the mission to the Gentiles through Jesus. Jesus' and the apostles' mission has differing goals regarding the Gentiles and the Jews. Jews are called upon to act in accordance with Jesus' reading of the Torah (Mt 5:17-19). The Gentiles should be led to embrace the God of Israel and to fulfill his will. The command to mission and baptize thus cannot be understood as legitimating the mission of non-Jews to Jews.

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The Gospel on the whole teaches that acting according to God's will and acts of charity are alone determinative for salvation (7:21-23; 25:31-46). This also applies to Israel. Israel is not saved because it is Israel, but because it does God's will. The Jews who do not believe in God's work through Jesus must not be "converted," but must act in continuous repentance to God's will – just as the community of Matthew must act (22:11-14). At the end of the Gospel, Jesus commands all to whom he preaches to commit to an ethic rooted in Judaism (28:20a). At the same time, God's specific revelation in Jesus as "Emmanuel" (1:23; cf. 28:20b) or as "son" (28:19) is the message of "this Gospel of the Kingdom [that] shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations" (24:14; 26:13). Christians are bound to

the work and teachings of the Jewish Jesus. As followers of Jesus, they have to convince people through their acts that they are on "the way which leads to life" (7:14). Actions are judged, not the specific commitment to Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel of Matthew, a mandate for a mission to the Jews cannot be deduced; however, a mandate to personify the work and teachings of Jesus before all human beings, also before Jews, can be.

#### 4. The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John, written at the end of the first century, is marked by a conflict between the community as a small minority and a larger Pharisaic-rabbinical synagogue, in which the followers of Jesus are banned from the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). They felt theologically and societally stigmatized. Belief stands against belief. In the polemics of the day, true belief and salvation are denied to the adversary (8:44: "[y]ou are of your father the devil"), and this belief is formulated with a high Christology whereby in accordance with Hellenic-Jewish tradition the everlasting word of God was made "flesh" (1:1-14). Therefore, Jesus as the incarnated word of God is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (14:6). These are the convictions of the community of John.

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The Evangelist John does not suggest the rejection of Judaism as a whole, as shown by the positively-depicted Jews, both followers of Jesus and non-followers, in his Gospel (3:1-10; 7:1-12.50-52; 12:42; 19:38-42). As Jews, they look positively upon Jesus and his claim that he is the savior of the world. The temple in Jerusalem is "my Father's house" (2:16), and "salvation is of the Jews" (4:22). Jesus, the "Jew" (4:9), is the "Messiah" (4:25) and the "Savior of the world" (4:42).

The Gospel of John documents the intra-Jewish conflict, but a mission to the Jews on part of the Church can no more be founded upon this Gospel than upon the other works of the New Testament.

In contrast to the times of Paul and the Evangelists, the Christian Church of John's time is no longer composed of comparable portions of Jews and Gentiles. The works of the New Testament concern an



intra-Jewish theological conflict. After the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, dissociation from the followers of Jesus on part of the Pharisaic-influenced synagogues led to their exclusion from the synagogues in the 90s. Through the numeric increase of non-Jews as followers of Jesus' teachings – according to Acts 11:26, they are referred to as "Christians" for the first time in Antioch by outsiders – Jewish-Christian groups were marginalized in the Church. The Church became more and more a church of gentiles, which often strove to clearly set itself apart from Judaism. Over time, Judaism and Christianity became two separate religions. Nonetheless, there have always been phases of intensive interaction, through which both learned from, and corrected, one another. Notwithstanding initial efforts over the centuries and especially in the 1920s, reflection on the part of the Church on its Jewish roots and intensive research of the original Judeo-Christianity only began after the Shoah.

## V. Final Arguments

- Our discussion group collectively says yes to dialogue between Jews and Christians and no to the mission to the Jews. Mutual trust in God's words and deeds and his kingdom of salvation allow Jews and Christians to speak with each other, from belief to belief, the center of their existence. It is our experience that this exchange leads to reciprocal correction, new discoveries, to the intensification and enrichment of our own individual beliefs, and to advocacy for one another. In today's world, the mutual adherence to God is becoming more and more important. Like the ecumenical dialogue, the Jewish-Christian dialogue has been very fruitful.
- The limits of this dialogue are clear in that Christians and Jews cannot grasp the relationship of their dialogue partners to God from an internal perspective, but rather through their empathy and understanding from an outside perspective.
- Because the covenant of God with Israel already makes salvation attainable, the Church has neither to be concerned with

the salvation of Israel, nor to convert the Jews to the Christian belief nor to induce Jews to baptism for the sake of their own salvation. When the Second Vatican Council finds even hope for the salvation of all human beings, then our convictions are such that this is especially valid for the Jews, even though they are not baptized. Ultimately, God creates salvation in ways only known to him (Ad gentes 7.1; Gaudium et spes 22,5). The old pessimism about salvation that is found in the common phrase "no salvation outside of the Church" has been superseded. The hope for salvation connects Jews and Christians in a special way to one another.

- When, how, and whether Jews and Christians meet each other along the way to the Kingdom of God remains one of God's secrets, hidden from human beings. Paul knew this, for he does not bind the salvation of all of Israel to the belief in Jesus. He finishes his trailblazing Epistle to the Romans with the prayer: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Or, who has first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (11:33-36)

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