



European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People | 31.05.2004

European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People (LEKKJ)

Statement on Antisemitism

We view with deep concern various expressions of animosity towards Jews in our countries. Jewish dialogue partners describe an increase in antisemitism, which has taken many forms: graffiti on synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, verbal abuse, telephone threats, and even physical violence.

Reports such as the study of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia ("Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002-2003") confirm this increase of antisemitism and call for measures to combat it: "Europe's political leaders must make it very clear that they do not accept antisemitism and racism by taking a strong leadership position on the issue." (EUMC media release, 31-3-04).

We expect an equally strong attitude from church leaders and from all church members, since from a theological point of view, "antisemitism is sin against God and humanity" (First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam, 1948, "The Christian Approach to the Jews"). Likewise the "Charta Oecumenica - Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe" (Conference of European Churches and Council of European Bishops' Conferences) states: "We commit ourselves: to oppose all forms of antisemitism and anti-Judaism in the church and in society; to seek and intensify dialogue with our Jewish sisters and brothers at all levels."

As Lutherans we bear a special responsibility in light of anti-Jewish elements in the Lutheran tradition. This has been an issue at LEKKJ Conferences for years, indeed decades. For example, the LEKKJ Declaration of Driebergen, The Netherlands (1990) states: "We strongly urge that, within the Lutheran Churches, the anti-Jewish attacks in Luther's later words and their disastrous consequences be worked on as has been done in the Stockholm statement of 1983. We also urge that the fundamental patterns of Lutheran theology and teaching . . . be reconsidered in view of their effects on the relationship between Christians and Jews." We regret that these commitments are not yet shared by all church members. This challenge is still an acute problem.

Today we see antisemitism showing itself in the form of anti-Zionism. As churches we have close and lasting ties with the Jewish people and with the state of Israel. Our faith also gives us an inherent relationship with Palestinian Christians. Despite efforts to achieve a balanced position, we often see an unbalance favoring the Palestinian point of view within our churches.

In the public debate about these issues, we often note antisemitic allusions, as expressed, for example, in the intolerable equation of the Israeli government's present policies with the National Socialist policy of annihilation. To criticize the policies of the State of Israel is not per se antisemitic. But it becomes so when the very existence of the State of Israel is called into question. In public discussions, anti-Jewish clichés such as "retribution" and "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" occur repeatedly. We must state emphatically that political disagreements do not justify attacks on Jews. We further assert: The state of Israel has the right and the obligation to protect itself and its citizens from terror.

Cluj, Romania, May 9th, 2004

Editorial remarks

This statement was adopted by the European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People (LEKKJ), in which 25 Lutheran church bodies in Europe are represented, at its annual meeting in Cluj-Klausenberg, Romania, on May 9, 2004.