

PREFACE

"To bring about a reconciliation with Israel, with Israel and with all Jews everywhere in the world – that was my prime concern, which I pursued because deep inside me there was a profound feeling of obligation, because I felt that humanity owes Judaism a great debt of gratitude in all spheres of the human intellect as well as in the field of religion." This goal played a crucial role in Konrad Adenauer's policy. As early as 1949, he emphasised that *"in the spirit of tolerance, we regard our Jewish compatriots as fully entitled fellow citizens. Endowed with equal rights and duties, we wish them to participate in the intellectual, political, and social reconstruction of our country. We cannot and will not do without their assistance."*

Proud to bear the name of Konrad Adenauer, our foundation remains permanently committed to the aim of promoting reconciliation and understanding by exchanging views on the intellectual and spiritual heritage we share. Conducting a national and international dialogue with the Jewish world is one of the core missions of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Ever since we began our work, we have been supporting the Jewish-Christian dialogue and helping to resolve misunderstandings and irritations.

The need for dialogue is as urgent as ever. Relevant examples include the theological debate about the Jewish mission, the reformulation of the traditional prayer on Good Friday in the extraordinary rite of the Catholic Church, and the cancellation of the excommunication of four bishops belonging to the Pius Brotherhood. In this situation, while an occasionally heated debate is raging, it is good to see positive signals and motivations for a discussion that is factual and based on scientific insights. After several years of debate, the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) has presented twelve propositions regarding the reassessment of the Christian-Jewish dialogue. The intention is to provide a new foundation for the exchange between Christians and Jews.

This call for renewed commitment will be published in Berlin, the city in which preparations for the Holocaust of the European Jewry were made in the era of National Socialism.

After some initial encounters in the twenties, the foundation stone for theological dialogue was laid in Seelisberg, Switzerland. There, members of Christian and Jewish organisations met in 1947 at an “emergency conference against anti-Semitism” to promulgate ten propositions on the reorientation of Christian teaching and preaching. The theological demands that were made at the time, i.e. that Jesus’ Jewish identity should be recognised and any anti-Jewish interpretation of the reports of his passion should be rejected, have by now become almost commonplace. At the time, they formed the programmatic starting point of the Christian-Jewish dialogue.

Sixty years later, the new publication shows that Christian-Jewish relations, though often turbulent, have come a long way since then. In retrospect, we see what obstacles barred the way, and how important it is to listen to one another and be attentive to each other’s injuries. In the dialogue, new questions have been asked which open up new perspectives for theological research as well as new fields of investigation where we can discover commonalities and conflicts and analyse how much these are tied to their times. Next to the fundamental question of religious pluralism, further essential aspects include the theology of the covenant and understanding the deeply-rooted ties which attach the Jews to the land of Israel, the rationale for the right of the state of Israel to exist. We regard all encounters and talks as part of an ongoing process of learning.

In addition to updating the theological dispute, the Berlin declaration follows a novel approach in terms of its addressees. Unlike the ten propositions of Seelisberg which, formulated immediately after the war when the impression of the Shoah was still fresh, addressed exclusively Christians and Christian communities, the new undertaking also targets Jews and Jewish communities as well as Muslims and all people of good will.

In view of the challenges confronting all humankind, the twelve Berlin propositions go beyond the confines of theology, calling upon all people who live in their faith to work together. They presume that people are motivated by their religious convictions to work for others and for the good of the whole. This rationale for social commitment deserves to be highlighted because socio-ethical maxims will have to be accorded

greater importance in the future so that they may reach large segments of society. For this reason, we welcome the wider scope which the new declaration implies.

Based on the precept that every human being is created in God’s own image, the appeal aims at strengthening the dialogue with political and economic institutions. Key issues include social justice in a globalised society, ecological accountability, and questions relating to comprehensive education through interreligious and intercultural schooling. The authors face difficult problems, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where interreligious dialogue might help, in their opinion, to do away with distorted perceptions and promote mutual understanding. Once again, the point is to remain wakeful, particularly because of the experience of the Holocaust, and to see to it that no group is marginalised in the common search for solutions.

What is unusual about the twelve propositions is that they are not confined to the perception and propagation of values. They expressly include the question of God as a basis for conscious decision-making and place their trust in spiritual strength. In a society that is obviously growing more receptive towards religious issues, all those must be supported who again and again feel called upon by the strength of God to set out for new shores and join in building a better society on the basis of the writings they consider sacred. Given these foundations, the new propositions may throw open gateways to Jewish culture, help keep a productive memory of the Shoah alive, and create opportunities to view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a constructive and factual way.

To provide a background for the twelve propositions of Berlin, this publication includes the presentations given at the last preparatory meeting held at Fribourg in the autumn of 2008 as well as the Seelisberg propositions of 1947. Martin Klöckener’s article on the beginnings of the ICCJ shows how astonishingly up to date some of the points were that the first members focused on, and how deep the reservations were they had to struggle with.

Rabbi Marc Saperstein warns against an overdose of metaphorical rhetoric instead of rational analysis. This, he says, is particularly hazardous whenever metaphors fail to describe reality, appeal to emotions, and resort to exaggeration in order to avoid a rational discourse. Despite these reservations, however, he proposes to describe interreligious dialogue

as an orchestra incorporating various large groups of instruments. In translation, this means trying to understand the intrinsic logic of the self-interpretation of another religion in order to identify what is common and what is different. He demands honesty in dealing with one's own tradition in the Alenu prayer which asks that every human being should recognise the one true God, a universal appeal which resembles that of the Good Friday prayer. Instead of blaming others, people had better turn to the urgent problems of mankind.

From the Catholic point of view, Bishop Sklba names three characteristics of a fruitful dialogue: distinguishing between positions without excluding any of the disputing partners, undertaking to implement the results of the dialogue, and recognising consciously that any statements are temporary in nature. In his opinion, any dialogue essentially depends on cultivating a collective memory, being able to see oneself through the eyes of the other, and striving for truth. He goes on to say that the theology of the covenant and its impact on Jews and Christians is of key importance in this context.

Regarding the prerequisites of the interreligious dialogue, the president of the ICCJ, Deborah Weissman, believes that people should be open with regard to results so that views can be exchanged without surrendering one's position. The classical texts of Jewish tradition described a culture of debate in which alternative truths were admissible. Though pluralism had its limits, we should strive not to "reproduce uniformity" but to "organise diversity", a peaceful, vibrant coexistence of different elements. Yet there were crucial items that were not negotiable; for Jews, these included the recognition of the right of the state of Israel to exist.

Many of the ideas contained in the new appeal can be summarised in one sentence: "*We do not intend to forget anything, but we do intend to build a better future together.*" This clearly amalgamates remembering and turning towards the future. We will not forget that it was the Jewish-Christian culture of the occident which left its mark on our continent and which, through its strength, will shape the future of our polity.

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PREFACE

It is my honor and pleasure to introduce this document, published in conjunction with the July 2009 annual conference of the International Council of Christians and Jews. We are meeting in Berlin, as it is the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. I believe that since the War many of the German people have provided us with a model of what Christians call *metanoia*, of transformation, that can surely serve as a beacon to other nations, as well. They have assumed responsibility for the past and are among the most outspoken opponents, for example, of Holocaust denial. Many German leaders in the recent past and present have been true friends of the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and I would like to acknowledge our gratitude for that.

It is for those reasons that there can be perhaps no more fitting venue than Berlin for the proclamation and publication of our statement, "A Time for Recommitment." This I believe is a groundbreaking statement in that to the best of my knowledge, never before has a large group of Christians and Jews worked together on such a declaration that calls for parallel action on the part of Christians and the Churches and Jews and the Jewish communities, as well as joint action of Christians and Jews together. Most of the previous statements in the history of the dialogue were either unilateral or were primarily theological documents. I do not wish to minimize their importance. Each one of them moved us along in the right direction, on our long and bumpy road towards reconciliation and cooperation. But I believe that our document is different, in that it also translates theology into practical liturgical, educational, social and other realms.

I anticipate that there will be criticism of the document. I hope that it is constructive criticism from which we can all learn. If the document engenders fruitful discussions between Christians and Jews and within each of those communities, I would say, echoing the Jewish Passover liturgy, *Dayeinu!* It will suffice!