

Lutherischer Weltbund

**Hope for the Future. A Study Document for Renewing  
Jewish-Christian Relations**

*Diese Arbeitshilfe wurde im Kontext der 13. Versammlung des Lutherischen Weltbundes in Krakau, Polen, veröffentlicht. Das Dokument untersucht die Erneuerung jüdisch-christlicher Beziehungen aus lutherischer Perspektive, reflektiert kritisch die historische Schuld der Kirche, insbesondere den Antijudaismus Martin Luthers, und bekräftigt die theologische Verantwortung zur Umkehr und zum Dialog. Theologisch betont es die bleibende Erwählung Israels und die Unaufhebbarkeit des göttlichen Bundes mit dem jüdischen Volk, wodurch missionarische Bestrebungen zur Bekehrung von Juden zurückgewiesen werden. Gleichzeitig ruft es zu einer gemeinsamen Hoffnung auf Gottes shalom auf, die in Versöhnung, Gerechtigkeit und interreligiösem Engagement Gestalt gewinnt. Schließlich sieht das Dokument in der dialogischen Begegnung zwischen Juden und Christen eine eschatologische Aufgabe, die Ausdruck der vom Geist gewirkten Erneuerung und Hoffnung auf Gottes zukünftiges Heil ist.*

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THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

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THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

A Communion  
of Churches

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# Preface

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is committed to foster constructive contact and meaningful dialogue between Jews and Christians, as well as between neighbors of different faiths all over the world. The discussion about Jewish-Christian relations requires Lutherans to critically review our past, invite others to join into the conversation, and also carve out paths to move forward in new ways of engaging the topic as a global communion of churches. It is important to review how the LWF has engaged in processes to improve Jewish-Christian relations, specifically addressing Luther's 'anti-Semitic' writings. But it is even more important to commit to address new challenges that have emerged in our contemporary setting.

The position that Lutheran churches reject anti-Semitism and affirm the integrity and dignity of the Jewish faith was stated clearly at the LWF Assembly in Budapest, Hungary, in 1984, where the LWF member churches also distanced themselves from Martin Luther's writings and expressions against Jews. It was a significant step for the global communion to reexamine the writings of the pioneering figure of the Reformation. Since then, the LWF has recognized the shifts and the complexities around Jewish-Christian relations in dialogue with our Jewish and ecumenical partners.

In 2021, The Jewish-Christian Relations Study document task force that consisted of representatives from all seven regions of the LWF was formed. Besides regular online meetings, they met in person both in Amman, Jordan, and Kraków, in 2022, and completed the work in 2023, including significant engagement with Jewish partners to inform the final publication which you are now reading.

Throughout this process, the LWF also renewed its relationship with Jewish partners such as the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) with a view to continue strengthening Jewish-Christian relations beyond the Assembly in Kraków. Meaningful encounters often require dialogue partners to wrestle with the complexities of social and political realities that impact theological conversations as well.

*Hope for the Future* is a forward-looking title that resonates with The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Thirteenth Assembly theme "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," in Kraków, Poland, in 2023. I invite LWF member



churches to use this study document as an educational resource and reflective guide in renewing Jewish-Christian relations in their respective contexts. In our world increasingly characterized by polarization, hostility, and even hate toward people who are different from us, may this document inspire member churches to be messengers of hope both locally and globally bringing justice, peace and reconciliation to all.

*Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt*  
*LWF General Secretary*

# Introduction: A Lutheran perspective on Jewish-Christian Relations

## **The LWF Assembly in 2023**

Members of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) meet in Poland in 2023 for the Thirteenth Assembly of our communion under the main theme of “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” We come from places all over the world where this one body takes on different shapes. Our hopes are united in the one vision of the kingdom of God for the whole world, while our contexts make us see this vision under differing perspectives.

We come to be guests of our Polish member church, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, and we meet in Kraków. This historic city has played a prominent role in the history of Europe, of our Lutheran member church, and of the Jewish community for many centuries. In not-too-distant times Poland was home to the largest and most significant Ashkenazi Jewish community in the world, and Kraków served as an important scholarly center during the golden age of Polish Judaism (1500-1648).<sup>1</sup>

Christians and Jews coexisted peacefully in Kraków for many centuries. Until the Second World War, a quarter of the city’s inhabitants were Jewish, and the influence of the city’s Jewish heritage endures—especially in the former Jewish quarter of Kazimierz. Seven synagogue buildings survived the Nazi terror, the annual Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków is world-renowned, and museums and exhibitions are dedicated to the city’s Jewish history. Attesting to a renewal of Jewish life in Kraków there is now a new Jewish Community Center, several synagogues are again active with services, and young Polish musicians are reviving the traditional Jewish style of klezmer. The visitor can even hear some Jewish influence reflected in the music played today in many of the famous Kraków Jazz clubs.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the history of Kraków Jews prepared in English as part of the initiatives of the POLIN Museum of Polish Jews see “Virtual Shtetl”, <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/towns/k/512-Kraków/99-history/137527-history-of-community>.

These things are a memorial to the multifaceted Jewish life that previously characterized the city of Kraków, as well as a sharp reminder that this heritage has been irretrievably annihilated. Kraków is where in 1940 almost 70,000 Jews were expelled and displaced during the Nazi Germany occupation. Those remaining became forced laborers in the ghetto and were later deported to extermination camps and murdered. Near Kraków is Auschwitz-Birkenau, the former Nazi concentration and extermination camp where more than a million Jews and others, considered “not worth living” according to Nazi ideology, were murdered. Today, the name Auschwitz stands worldwide for an unparalleled crime against humanity.

Many Poles today, like many other Europeans, feel that an essential part of their existence and culture was extinguished by the brutal destruction of European Jewish communities during the Nazi terror. The human void caused by this systematic killing of Jews and others can still be felt. The memorial site of Auschwitz-Birkenau reminds us of this horrific event in human history. It is a place where one looks into the abyss of inhumanity.

For member churches in the region, remembering and confronting the effects of the Shoah, the genocide of the Jewish people, remains a reality. The Nazi terror has left deep scars in Poland’s memory, due to the murder in Poland alone of over 5 million victims (3 million of whom were Polish Jews). This bleak reality shapes the identity of the Polish people and of our member church in Poland.

Currently, the brutal war in Ukraine, Poland’s immediate neighbor, is recalling the trauma of Russian aggression in World War II and frightening the Polish people deeply. The war has a devastating and uprooting impact on our member churches in the region.

When coming to Kraków as a Lutheran communion, we take note of this local perspective because church happens in time and space. The place where we meet affects our faith and the understanding of our tradition, both globally and locally, and it will influence the agenda of our meeting here and now.

In this context, we respond as a Lutheran communion gathering here by readdressing Jewish-Lutheran relations in the light of our painful history, which includes the harmful legacy of Martin Luther’s anti-Jewish writings. At the same time, we gather with a perspective of hope for the future. We meet as people of faith who have a long history with our Jewish sisters and brothers and who want to get to know them better. We want to know

more about their history and traditions and to get to know them as unique individuals and communities. We want to build on decades of LWF engagement with Jewish-Christian relations and to amplify the moments of encounter with the Jewish people. We hope for a future where Christian and Jewish communities work together to address the challenges that we and our world are facing today.

Our hope is that where “the Spirit creates, the Spirit reconciles, and the Spirit renews.” We hope for a creative, reconciling, and renewing relationship with the Jewish community and a deeper understanding of the faith that we share in the one God.

## **Why this study document?**

The aim of this study document is to invite Lutheran Christians to renew their reflection on Jewish-Christian relations and to work toward respectful coexistence, mutual understanding, and effective solidarity with our Jewish neighbors. The root of the unique relationship between Jews and Christians is that both communities claim the heritage of biblical Israel: we worship the same God, share scriptures, and hold common values. Christians are coming to appreciate anew that Jesus, the apostle Paul, and all the disciples were Jews.

For centuries, Christian attitudes toward the Jews were marred by prejudice and even enmity. When we gather in Kraków and visit what is now the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, we are dismayed to see evidence of atrocities made possible by hatred of Jews. Together we want to overcome hatred, clichés, and ignorance in order to break new ground.

The perspective of this study document is from a Lutheran viewpoint and the immediate purpose is to promote further reflection within the Lutheran churches. But this guide is also an invitation to the wider Christian community and to our Jewish sisters and brothers. We hope that the Jewish community will hear our honest wrestling with sensitive and painful matters, both historical and contemporary. We hope to foster constructive contact and meaningful dialogue between Jews and Christians, as well as between neighbors of different faiths all over the world. This study document is designed to encourage further thinking, commitment, action, and relationship building to take our member churches wherever the Spirit might lead them.

## **Overview of chapters**

The first chapter reviews past work done by the LWF to address impediments to Jewish-Christian relations and recognizes that Christians still have much work ahead to mend our relationship with the Jewish people.

Chapter 2 invites us to learn about the history of Judaism and its present-day manifestations, in turn opening a path for meaningful understanding and respectful interaction with Jews of the present.

In Chapter 3, the shared theological foundations of Christianity and Judaism are explored. Different interpretive trajectories of our shared texts have contributed to the differentiation of Judaism and Christianity, but recognizing both commonalities and differences in our biblical and theological foundations can guide us toward healthy Jewish-Christian relations.

Chapter 4 addresses significant historical transgressions in Jewish-Christian relations. Awareness and acknowledgement of these obstacles is an essential step toward nourishing the relationship between Christians and Jews.

Chapter 5 explores present-day obstacles within the church and globally, including the challenging issue of the conflict over the land that is home to both Jewish and Palestinian national identities. These obstacles jeopardize meaningful encounters with our Jewish partners and may subvert our sincere efforts to understand and express love for our neighbors.

Chapter 6 explores Christian motivation for pursuing Jewish-Christian relations, proposes methodology for interreligious dialogue, and suggests some ideas for moving forward.

## **Using this study document**

The chapters of this study document have been set in a particular order that the reader is encouraged to follow, recognizing that this study guide has both reflective and proactive aims. It is intended to encourage deeper understanding and reconsideration of individual views and also to deepen a commitment to love our neighbors in the midst of the complexities that surround Jewish-Christian relations. This document can also be used in group discussions and as a tool for leadership of local churches seeking guidance on how to respond to specific challenges. This text is intended to guide readers along a journey of understanding into hopeful action for

reconciliation, healing, justice, and peace. Footnotes and an appendix are provided to encourage further exploration.

## **Beyond the Kraków Assembly**

We recognize that for many in the Lutheran communion, the question of Jewish-Christian relations is not a primary focus since there are regions of the world where there is none or no publicly visible Jewish population. Yet, Jewish-Christian relations remain an important part of every Christian's identity. Jesus and his earliest followers were Jewish, and both communities treasure their shared scriptures. Our intertwined histories have profoundly shaped both religions over the course of 2,000 years.

The lessons and insights from working through this study document can also be informative and inspirational for further reflection and action in our engagement in other interfaith contexts—with Muslims, Buddhists, and people of other faiths and life persuasions.



# 1: LWF's Journey in Jewish-Christian Relations

The Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF in Kraków marks an important milestone toward coexistence and cooperation with our Jewish partners. LWF's journey of involvement in Lutheran-Jewish relations since the 1960s shows a complicated picture of the Lutheran struggle with questions and challenges presented in our relations with Jews. We acknowledge the complex story of significant advances and missed opportunities, of robust intra-Lutheran dialogue, and of deepening dialogue with our Jewish partners. We have brought to Kraków lessons learned from the past to address the challenges before us.

A significant turning point in Lutheran-Jewish relations occurred when Lutherans went from talking *about* Jews and Judaism to talking directly *with* members of the Jewish community. This chapter will first review the intra-Lutheran dialogue about Jewish-Christian relations, followed by a discussion of the impactful opening of Lutheran dialogue with Jewish partners.

## 1.1 Intra-Lutheran consultations in the 1960s to 1980s

Institutionally, the LWF officially began to address Jewish-Christian relations starting in 1963 with the Fourth Assembly held in Helsinki, Finland. Why did the LWF become interested in Jewish-Christian relations? What was communicated during the early period from the 1960s to the 1980s to condemn antisemitism and anti-Judaism and to clarify a Lutheran understanding of the Christian mission toward Jews? This section will review LWF's response to these questions and then conclude with a summary of topics identified at that time for further study, as well as calls for peace in the Middle East.

### 1.1.1 Motivations for Jewish-Christian relations

Lutheran individuals and churches were involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue after the Second World War, but there was no early direct connection to the LWF. The Protestant church in Germany provides an example. Antisemitism was widespread until 1945, and this attitude changed only slowly after World



War II and initially only among a few. Shocked by the genocide perpetrated by the Germans on the Jewish people, individual theologians sought dialogue between Jews and members of church communities, and laypeople questioned how such a murderous catastrophe could have happened. The founding of the State of Israel caused further self-examination by Christians and increased interest in learning more about the Jewish people. Religious pilgrimage and tourism have brought many church groups to Israel over the years to experience Judaism and Jewish life in the country.

A German movement to rediscover Judaism and revise anti-Jewish stereotypes emerged in the 1960s. Events with Jewish interlocutors and theological dialogues met with immense interest. A flood of literature on Judaism appeared and found numerous readers. In 1978, the “Study in Israel” program was established, which invites young German students of theology to study for one year at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the synods of all German evangelical regional churches had dealt intensively with the relationship between the church and the Jewish people. All of them have officially declared their commitment to work for a renewal of the Jewish-Christian relationship and to fight antisemitism.<sup>2</sup>

After the founding of the LWF in 1947, Lutherans had to learn how to collaborate theologically and find common answers to the questions and challenges that individual member churches encountered. Along with intra-Lutheran dialogue, attention was also devoted to ecumenical dialogue in preparation for the Third Assembly in Minneapolis, United States (1957) and the Fourth Assembly in Helsinki, Finland (1963). This intra-Christian engagement contributed to the establishment of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research (1963). Two years later, the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France came into existence.

In Helsinki, the assembly decided to undertake a study of Jewish-Christian relations. During the first consultation at Løgumkloster in 1964, chairperson Bishop Heinrich Meyer, then bishop of what was the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lübeck, Germany, summarized four reasons for LWF involvement in the issue of Jewish-Christian relations:

- The common roots of Judaism and Christianity in what Christians call the Old Testament and in the shared faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Christians can affirm these roots without eliminating the

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 for a discussion of the rise of antisemitism and its role in the genocide of the Jewish people in the Shoah during World War II.

fundamental difference between Jews and Christians regarding the recognition of Jesus Christ as the Messiah

- The Jewish people's self-understanding of peoplehood including its national dimensions
- The continuing manifestation of antisemitism, despite its terrifying and murderous consequences during World War II
- The Christian understanding of mission, which raised questions about whether the mission to Jews differs from mission to other non-Christians

These four reasons still inform the work of the LWF in Jewish-Christian Relations as a focused topic of institutional significance. Yet most of the new developments in Jewish-Christian relations are still driven by the initiatives of member churches, as seen in the example of Germany earlier in this section.

### **1.1.2. Condemnation of antisemitism and anti-Judaism**

The last two reasons Bishop Heinrich Meyer mentioned concerning confronting hostility to Jews and the nature of mission among them dominated the intra-Lutheran discussion that took place during subsequent consultations up until the Seventh Assembly in Budapest, Hungary (1984).

In 1964, the consultation at Løgumkloster formulated the following statement in response to antisemitism:

Antisemitism is an estrangement of man from his fellow men. As such it stems from human prejudice and is a denial of the dignity and equality of men. But antisemitism is primarily a denial of the image of God in the Jew; it represents a demonic form of rebellion against the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and a rejection of Jesus the Jew, directed upon his people. "Christian" antisemitism is spiritual suicide. This phenomenon presents a unique question to the Christian church, especially in light of the long and terrible history of Christian culpability for antisemitism. No Christian can exempt himself from involvement in this guilt. As Lutherans, we confess our own peculiar guilt, and we lament with shame the responsibility which our church and her people bear for this sin. We can only ask God's pardon and that of the Jewish people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Church and the Jewish People Report on a Consultation, in Christians, Jews, and the Mission of the Church*, [Geneva 1964], 147.

The LWF is a global communion, which complicates any assessment of responsibility and guilt for anti-Jewish attitudes. In 1975, the consultation in Oslo noted that when it comes to responsibility and guilt, not all churches should be treated as equally complicit in the history culminating in the Second World War. The consequences of antisemitism unfolded predominantly in Western Christianity. At the consultation at Bossey, Switzerland, in 1982, the churches of Asia and Africa were adequately represented for the first time, and they offered reports of positive attitudes toward Jews in the churches of the Global South. The broader representation of Lutherans reflected the global nature of the LWF and painted a more complex picture of Jewish-Christian relations.

These observations, together with the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's birth, became an incentive in the 1980s to face the legacy of Luther's anti-Jewish statements. The history of Christian anti-Judaism implicated the entire communion of LWF churches. In Oslo, Norway, (1975) there was already a recognition of the need for repentance and for dialogue with Jewish partners as the best way to understand where change was needed:

Our repentance is worthy of the name only if it leads to change, to renewed hope, to prayer and work for a better future. An essential step is to ask our Jewish neighbors what hurts them.<sup>4</sup>

This assertion led to repeated calls for critical reflection on the Lutheran theological tradition to uncover and address its anti-Jewish content. For example, the Lutheran concept of the law, which has been used to justify the inaccurate perception that Judaism is a legalistic religion, was re-examined. Also considered was the Lutheran Christocentric interpretation of the Bible to guard against the erroneous conclusion that the Old Testament has been superseded by the New Testament. These calls for reflection extended to the practical side of church life as well, such as the revision of catechetical and liturgical materials containing anti-Jewish paradigms, whether explicit or implicit.

In the matter of work to be done, the Bossey consultation (1982) recommended the *Ten Points of Seelisberg* (1947)<sup>5</sup> for use in the churches.

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<sup>4</sup> *Report of the Consultation, in Christian Witness and the Jewish People. The Report of a Consultation Held under the Auspices of the Lutheran World Federation, Oslo, Norway, August 1975*, [Geneva] 1977, 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ten points of Seelisberg* <https://www.jcrelations.net/statements/statement/an-address-to-the-churches-seelisberg-switzerland-1947.html>. See chapter 4.3.1 for the list of the *Ten Points*.

The *Ten Points* were adopted by an assembly of 63 Jews and Christians (including Roman Catholics and Protestants) during the International Emergency Conference on Antisemitism, held in Seelisberg, Switzerland from 30 July 30 to 5 August 1947. This text is considered a landmark in Jewish-Christian relations after World War II.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, other important declarations of ecumenical partners such as *Nostra Aetate* adopted at the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1965 were not mentioned in the Bossey communication. The discussion of Jewish-Christian relations during this time remained largely an intrar-Lutheran debate. Today, the importance of *Nostra Aetate* in catalyzing the modern era of Jewish-Christian dialogue is widely recognized, and ecumenical cooperation in these efforts has grown.

### 1.1.3 Christian mission toward Jews

Another point of discussion within the context of Jewish-Christian relations was the topic of Christian mission, specifically the targeted conversion of Jews to the Christian faith. A significant change can be seen in the intra-Lutheran talks leading up to the Assembly in Budapest. The consultation in Løgumkloster, Denmark (1964), began with a clear declaration of intent to continue missionary activity toward Jews, even calling for the establishment of special missionary organizations when the churches themselves are unable to fulfill this task. This stance shows that those gathered in Løgumkloster still sought to convert Jews to Christianity. The position of the next conference in Neuendettelsau, Germany (1973), is more nuanced, indicating the need for Jewish-Christian encounter in which it is possible to talk about the faith of both sides. This trajectory continued in the Oslo consultation (1975) which renounced missionary activity specifically targeting Jews and reminded Christians “that their witness to the Jewish people is but part and parcel of their witness to all people.” The Oslo report asserted that “Christian witness, whether to Judaism or anyone else, is God’s mission and not our own.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Christian M. Rutishauser, “The 1947 Seelisberg Conference: The Foundation of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2, no. 2 (2007), 34-53, <https://doi.org/10.6017/scjr.v2i2.1421>. See Chapter 4.3.1 for a description and list of the Ten Points of Seelisberg.

<sup>7</sup> *Report of the Consultation in Christian Witness and the Jewish People. The Report of a Consultation Held under the Auspices of the Lutheran World Federation, Oslo, Norway, August 1975*, [Geneva] 1977, 5.

A similar shift is also seen in the change in how biblical texts are interpreted. For the consultations focusing on intra-Lutheran matters, Romans 9-11 (chapter 3) was an important text. In Løgumkloster (1964), the consultation report emphasized the unbroken validity of God's promises and hence the healing of the division between "old" and "new" Israel, when the Jews would recognize Jesus as the Messiah. In Bossey (1982), the emphasis was not on the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah by the Jews, but rather on the mystery of Israel with which the church is confronted. It is described as follows:

Gentile Christians believe that through Jesus Christ they are grafted into the root of Israel (Rom 11:17ff). Yet in its self-identification the church is continuously confronted with the mystery of the Jews, who being outside of the church still are God's beloved, because of the irrevocable covenant and election (Rom 11:28-32).<sup>8</sup>

#### 1.1.4 Further studies and call for peace in the Middle East

Recognition of the common roots of Christians and Jews, as noted by Bishop Meyer, led to a call for further studies to uncover these shared roots. For example, the study *Worship among Lutherans* was conducted in light of a new appreciation for common Jewish-Christian roots.<sup>9</sup> In the area of biblical studies, there was explicit recognition of the substantive contributions of Jewish scholars to deeper understanding of Christian scriptures.

Meyer's second reason for engagement, the Jewish people's self-understanding of peoplehood including its national dimensions, focused attention on the State of Israel within the larger context of the Middle East. Lutheran reflection on the conflict in this region first addressed the situation of Lutherans in the Holy Land, and then issued calls for peace and well-being for all parties, as expressed in Oslo (1975):

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<sup>8</sup> *Group Reports, in: The Significance of Judaism for the Life and Mission of the Church. The Report of the Fourth International Consultation held under the Auspices of the Lutheran World Federation, Department of Studies, Bossey, near Geneva, August 1982*, in: Jean Halperin and Arne Sovik, eds., *LWF Studies: Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews*, July 11-13, 1983 (1984), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Tantur Report on Worship* (1981), in Eugene L. Brand, ed., *Worship Among Lutherans*, LWF Studies (November 1983).

We therefore call upon Lutheran churches to make responsible contributions toward the achievement of peace and reconciliation, justice and dignity, among all the peoples of the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

## **1.2 Meetings with Jewish partners since the 1980s**

The beginning of the 1980s brought a fundamental shift in Jewish-Lutheran relations. Until then, a substantially intra-Lutheran process of study included only individual representatives of the Jewish side with particular expertise. Now an official dialogue began between the LWF and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC).<sup>11</sup> The prominence of Lutheran-Jewish dialogue in this period permanently changed the Lutheran perspective on our relationship with Jews. This development allowed the LWF to prepare statements with important new dimensions, including those emerging at the Assembly in Budapest (1984).

### **1.2.1 Confronting Luther's anti-Jewish legacy**

Cooperation with the IJCIC led to meetings of Lutherans and Jews as partners on equal terms in two consultations in Copenhagen, Denmark, (1981) and Stockholm, Sweden, (1983). A significant achievement of this dialogue was the document prepared in Stockholm by both sides in which Lutherans squarely faced the legacy of Martin Luther's anti-Jewish statements. In 1984, the LWF formally renounced the anti-Jewish invective of Martin Luther's writings and repented of its detrimental effects and consequences for the Jewish people. The context for taking up this topic was the celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Reformer. The equal status of both parties was expressed by the very structure of the prepared document, in which both Lutherans and Jews had a voice. In part one, Lutherans declare:

We Lutherans take our name and much of our understanding of Christianity from Martin Luther. But we cannot accept or condone the violent verbal attacks that the Reformer made against the Jews. [...] Lutherans of today refuse to be bound by all of Luther's utterances on the Jews. We hope we have learned from the tragedies of the recent past. We are responsible for seeing that we

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<sup>10</sup> See report from Oslo Consultation, *Christian Witness and the Jewish People*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations see <https://ijcic.net/>

do not now nor in the future leave any doubt about our position on racial and religious prejudice and that we afford to all the human dignity, freedom and friendship that are the right of all the Father's children.<sup>12</sup>

Jewish partners responded to this declaration as follows:

The Jewish participants welcome the commitment of the Lutheran partners in dialogue to respect the living reality of Judaism from the perspective of Jewish self-understanding and their undertaking that Lutheran writings will never again serve as a source for the teaching of hatred for Judaism and the denigration of the Jewish people. This heralds a new chapter in the relationship between Jews and Lutherans which should find practical expression in teaching, preaching and worship as well as joint activities for social justice, human rights and the cause of peace.<sup>13</sup>

The final part of the statement contained the following joint commitments:

We affirm the integrity and dignity of our faith communities and repudiate any organized proselytizing of each other. We pledge to combat all forms of [racial] and religious prejudice and express our solidarity with all who suffer the denial of full religious freedom. Sharing in the common patrimony of the Prophets of Israel and inspired by their vision, we commit ourselves to strive for a world in which the threat of nuclear warfare will be ended, where poverty and hunger will be eradicated, in which violence and terrorism will be overcome, and a just and lasting peace will be established.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of this document as a landmark signaling the Lutherans' repudiation of Martin Luther's anti-Judaism legacy was confirmed by the Seventh Assembly in Budapest. This Assembly, which hosted Dr Gerhart M. Riegner, retired General Secretary of the World Jewish Congress and Co-Chairperson IJCIC, adopted the Stockholm consultation statements, making them the official position of the LWF.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Statements of the meeting* in Jean Halperin and Arne Sovik, eds., *LWF Studies: Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews*, July 11-13, 1983 (1984), 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Carl H. Mau Jr. (ed.), *Budapest 1984: In Christ—Hope for the World. Official Proceedings of the Seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Budapest, Hungary, July 22-August 5, 1984*, LWF Report No. 19/20, February 1985, 144-148 & 255-259.

## 1.2.2 Missed opportunities and positive developments

The LWF did not immediately pursue ongoing bi-lateral Jewish-Lutheran dialogue at the international level after Budapest. The LWF Study Secretary for Theology and the Church Dr Wolfgang Greive attributed this to “a failure to find mutually acceptable topics.”<sup>16</sup> However, Greive positively highlighted the importance of Jewish-Christian relations among the member churches:

In the 1990s some Lutheran synods underlined the continued election of Israel and rejected mission to the Jews, and a new, constructive attitude developed in the individual churches. The documents and recommendations from Budapest did not play a special part in this. They were simply a part of the overall dynamics in the Jewish-Christian dialogue which progressed in small steps from “contempt to respect for Israel in the church and in theology.”<sup>17</sup>

Around this time in Europe, the umbrella group known as the Lutheran European Commission on the Church and the Jewish People (LEKKJ) advanced Lutheran-Christian relations<sup>18</sup> through preparation and publication of a number of important documents including the “Driebergen Declaration on the Encounter between Lutheran Christians and Jews.”<sup>19</sup>

Lutherans from member churches and their Jewish dialogue partners next came together under the auspices of the LWF in 2001 at the consultation at Dobogókő, near Budapest, Hungary, devoted to the topic of “Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism Today.”<sup>20</sup> After 2001, Jewish-Christian dialogue was incorporated into the LWF focus on interreligious dialogue, as was the case in 2014 at the LWF Jewish-Christian-Muslim consultation

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<sup>16</sup> See W. Greive, “A Long Road: Turning Points” in Wolfgang Greive and Peter N. Prove, eds., *A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations? A Lutheran Contribution to Christian-Jewish Dialogue with a Focus on Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism Today*, Documentation No. 48 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> LEKKJ, <https://www.lekkj.eu/>

<sup>19</sup> *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*, <https://www.lekkj.eu/damfiles/default/lekkj/lekkj/dokumente/LuthEuropKommission1990ErklaerungDriebergen-b9d3abccebbe22e7e-789a24b87f07679.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> The materials and the consultation report were published in W. Greive, “A Long Road: Turning Points” in Wolfgang Greive and Peter N. Prove, eds., *A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations? A Lutheran Contribution to Christian-Jewish Dialogue with a Focus on Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism Today*, Documentation No. 48 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003).



in Seattle, United States.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, a reader published in 2020 on inter-religious dialogue treated Jewish-Christian relations within this broader context.<sup>22</sup> A consultation on the Gospel of Matthew sponsored by the LWF incorporated principles learned from Jewish-Christian dialogue into contemporary Lutheran interpretations of scripture.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.2.3 Critical topics for Lutheran-Jewish dialogue

Lutheran-Jewish dialogue prompted Lutherans to take responsibility for their own legacy and sparked further reflection on topics current in the intra-Lutheran debate. Three critical topics received further attention in the consultation at Dobogókő (2001):

First, a clear Lutheran condemnation of anti-Judaism and antisemitism was upheld:

- Antisemitism and anti-Judaism are present in every church and society represented in this consultation. The expressions are many, and the roots are several. Intolerance of difference and the absence of respect for the dignity of others are essential to these expressions and are the soil in which these sins take root. We therefore encourage member churches of the LWF to undertake appropriate action and education to protect the rights of all people, especially minorities, to build appreciation for difference, and to teach and guard respect for the dignity of others.<sup>24</sup>

Second, clear calls for peace in the Middle East were made:

- We urge the State of Israel and the Palestinian leadership to seek all possible ways to end the violence and to resume negotiations seeking a just agreement between these two peoples.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Simone Sinn and Michael Reid Trice, eds., *Religious Identity and Renewal in the Twenty-first Century: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Explorations*, LWF-Documentation 60 (2015).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Loving your neighbor: Encouraging constructive interfaith engagement—A Reader*, Geneva 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Mtata and Craig Koester, eds., *To All the Nations: Lutheran Hermeneutics and the Gospel of Matthew*, LWF-Studies 2 (2015).

<sup>24</sup> See *Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism Today. A Contribution to the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Consultation of the Lutheran World Federation, Dobogókő, Hungary, 2001* in Wolfgang Greive and Peter N. Prove, eds., *A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations?*, 202.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Decades of dialogue with Jews had sensitized Lutherans to Jewish ties with the land of Israel, as expressed at the earlier conference in Copenhagen (1981):

- The Lutheran and Jewish representatives affirmed their support of the right to existence of the State of Israel and agreed to seek to find opportunities to advance dialogue leading to reconciliation, mutual respect and peace among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Middle East.

The consultation in Dobogokö confirmed and expanded this recognition of Jewish connections with the land:

- We acknowledge the importance of the land of Israel to the Jewish people and its central place in the promises of God. We therefore affirm that the connection of the Jewish people to the land is not a racist ideology, but a central element of the Jewish faith. In solidarity with the Jewish people, and in the spirit of the biblical prophets, the church will seek to understand the proper role and calling of the State of Israel among the nations of the world.<sup>26</sup>

Third, dialogue with Jewish partners at Dobogokö sharpened the Lutheran position on the mission among Jews. The Stockholm report, approved by the Assembly in Budapest as cited above, already stated unequivocally that targeted conversion was unacceptable:

- We affirm the integrity and dignity of our faith communities and repudiate any organized proselytizing of each other.<sup>27</sup>

Dialogue with Jewish partners at Dobogokö helped identify a theological basis for Christian restraint from attempts to convert Jews to Christianity. Recognizing our common heritage as the source of the church's continuing connection with Jews and Judaism, Christians have an obligation to take this unique bond seriously in our life and mission. The consultation in Dobogokö made it clear that God's covenant with the Jewish people was never superseded, and they stand within that enduring relationship:

- Yet all share in the heritage of biblical Israel that establishes the church's bond to modern Jews and Judaism. In faithfulness to their

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid..

<sup>27</sup> *Statements of the meeting* in Jean Halperin and Arne Sovik, eds., *LWF Studies: Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews*, July 11-13, 1983 (1984), 11.

calling in the gospel, churches will seek to discern the significance of this bond for the life and mission of the church. What we affirm is the validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people, which has never been superseded.<sup>28</sup>

### 1.3 Opportunities for stepping forward

The journey of the LWF toward positive Lutheran-Jewish relations begins with a critical self-awareness of Christianity's long history with the Jewish people characterized too often by marginalization and abuse of unequal power dynamics. The current global perspective and our recent initiatives in dialogue open new opportunities to reframe our collective and individual efforts. LWF's history of engagement with Jewish-Christian relations has celebrated important moments and bold statements. Still, we struggle in some respects regarding the Lutheran approach to our Jewish partners. An encouraging example of progress has been the clear rejection of antisemitism and anti-Judaism, especially in connection with Luther's harmful legacy. Examples of remaining challenges include ongoing disagreements within Lutheran churches about Christian mission to the Jews and the practical implications of acknowledging Jewish perspectives on the land of Israel.

Perhaps the most important lesson that Lutherans can take away from this mixed story is that the best way to conduct Jewish-Christian relations is to engage in dialogue with Jewish partners. Direct encounters have taught Lutherans many things, including how to be sensitive to the perspectives of the Jewish community. We did not manage to maintain an ongoing Jewish-Lutheran dialogue at the global level since our initial attempts in the 1980s, but we have begun work on new initiatives through the renewal of our interrupted conversation. In the next chapter, this study document invites us to start by informing ourselves with basic knowledge about Jews and Judaism. *The aim is to encourage meaningful conversations and to prepare for fruitful interfaith encounter.*

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<sup>28</sup> See Dobogókő Consultation in Wolfgang Greive and Peter N. Prove, eds., *A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations?*, 202.

## Questions for reflection, discussion, and action

1. Dialogue with people who are different from us can lead to new insights and changes in behavior. Where in this description of the LWF's history of engagement in Jewish-Christian relations do we see most clearly the impact of dialogue?
2. Are there examples from your own life, or from the history of your church, where direct interactions and deep conversation with others have changed your mind and influenced the way that you act?
3. How does your church practice evangelism or Christian mission to share the good news of Jesus Christ with non-Christians?
4. How do you understand LWF's stance against attempts to target Jews for conversion because the Jewish people are already in a covenantal relationship with God?
5. Critical examination of our Lutheran history and taking responsibility for the hateful words of our founder Martin Luther have been important steps in Lutheran-Jewish relations. How does this critical reflection and reorientation impact your church, whether or not you have Jewish neighbors in your local context?
6. It is not always easy to live with a critical self-awareness of how our church has fallen short and to take on the responsibility to change in order to live in light of the gospel. In what areas, including interreligious relations, has your local church fallen short and so needs to change to give hope for the future?



## 2: Understanding the Jewish People

In meeting Jewish people, Christians may have a sense of encounter with the roots of our own tradition. We may hear vocabulary that is similar—but often the meaning is quite different. Some fundamental knowledge is needed to clarify misconceptions and help us relate better to the Jews we meet, whether in person or in our sacred scriptures. Understanding our Jewish partners and their traditions involves recognizing that Judaism is not only a faith, but also a people and a culture.

The following chapter provides basic information on the Jewish people and their faith, tradition, and history from biblical times to the present day with the aim of promoting respect for the integrity of our two communities.

### 2.1 Belief in One God

The Bible tells the story of the people of Israel in rich and vivid pictures. These are narratives of faith and not always exact historical accounts. Nevertheless, our Christian faith is shaped by these narratives. They tell of God's faithfulness to his people and the faithfulness of the people of Israel to their God.

According to the Bible, the story begins when Abram is called by God to leave his country and place of birth in the town of Ur in Chaldea (present-day Iraq). Abram, his wife Sarai, and their family came to the land west of the Jordan river called Canaan where God renamed them Abraham and Sarah, promised them a son, and made an everlasting covenant with them and their descendants. In Genesis 17 we read:

...the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty (El Shad-dai); walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous. . . As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. . . I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to

be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God (excerpts from Gen 17:1-8).<sup>29</sup>

Sarah and Abraham did indeed have a son, Isaac, who later with his wife Rebekah had twins, Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25). Following Abraham and Isaac, Jacob became the third patriarch or “father” of the people of Israel. Jacob wrestled with a “man” who seems to be a messenger of God on the Jabbok River. The man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but **Israel**, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed” (Gen 32:28, emphasis added).

Because of a famine, the sons of Jacob and their families fled to Egypt, where much later their numerous descendants were enslaved when a new king, or pharaoh, came to power. Guided by their leader Moses, they escaped and traveled through the desert until they reached Mount Sinai. There God made a covenant with the people of Israel: “Then God spoke all these words: ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me’” (Ex 20:1-3). The covenant offered a way of life through the Torah, or revealed teaching, from Sinai, including the Ten Commandments, to which the Israelites committed themselves. “Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, ‘All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord.” (Ex 24:3-4a).

The twelve tribes of Israel appear as descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, also known as Israel (Num 1:1-16). Initially upon entering the land and throughout the time of the Judges, they had no common political leaders and institutions. Their belief in the God of their ancestors united them into a community. They later asked for a king as other nations, and God raised up Saul as the first king of Israel, followed by the shepherd boy David. David founded the city of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital; his son Solomon built the First Temple in Jerusalem (1Kings 6 ff.). The Temple became the center of Jewish belief and practice with a priesthood, sacrifices, and pilgrimages.

After Solomon’s reign, Israel was divided into a northern and a southern kingdom. The larger and stronger northern kingdom with its capital in Sa-

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<sup>29</sup> All Bible passages in this document are from the New Revised Standard Version, <https://biblia.com/bible/nrsv/genesis/17/1-8>.

maria was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. The southern kingdom known as Judah survived this invasion, but in 586 BCE the Babylonians conquered Judah, Jerusalem fell, Solomon's Temple was destroyed, and the Judean leadership was deported to Babylon.

Having lost the center of their ritual and liturgical life, the deported Jews modified their practice in order to keep their identity in the Babylonian exile. Early writings from before the exile (2 Kings 22:8) were collected and edited, and oral traditions were written down by Jewish scribes. Thus, the written Torah came into being, and scripture served as a mobile sanctuary in place of the Temple. The observance of Shabbat, the weekly day of rest from Friday evening to Saturday evening, also became an important hallmark of Jewish identity at this time.

## 2.2 From Old Testament to rabbinic Judaism

Following the return from Babylonian exile during Persian rule, and later during occupations by Greeks and Romans, many varieties of Jewish practice emerged. Among these groups were the Pharisees, a non-priestly scriptural movement that sought holiness in everyday life. Their creative ways of interpreting the Torah contributed to the eventual emergence of the rabbis or teachers who further transformed Jewish practice after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE.

Rabbinic Judaism arose during a time of crisis, when Jewish civilization faced an existential threat following the destruction of the Second Temple and the inability to continue its rites. Under the rabbis, the synagogue, which was already a place of communal gathering and Torah study, became the central Jewish institution.

## 2.3 Written Torah, Oral Torah, and the “way of walking”

Rabbinic Judaism is grounded in the revelation of the Torah, which is both written and oral. The Written Torah is the five books of Moses (often known by Christians as the Law of Moses or the Pentateuch), read consecutively every year in the synagogue. By extension, the Written Torah includes the entire **TaNaKh**, which is an acronym standing for the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible: Torah (Law or revealed teaching), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). The **Oral Torah** includes the traditions in the **Talmud** and other classical rabbinic texts, as well as their ongoing interpretation.



According to rabbinic tradition, the Oral Torah was passed down in an unbroken chain from Moses on Sinai (*Mishna Avot* 1) until its contents were committed to writing in the Mishna, Talmud, and other rabbinic texts. The emergence of these texts reflects Judaism's ongoing evolution as a distinctive national community beyond biblical times.

The holistic code of conduct derived from the Written and the Oral Torah is called **Halakha**. It encompasses rituals, worship practices, and standards for God–human and interpersonal relationships. It deals with everything from dietary laws to Shabbat and festival observances, marital relations, agricultural practices, civil claims, and damages. A translation of the Hebrew word “Halakha” might be the “way to behave” or even more literally the “way of walking,” which indicates that the Halakha has always shaped and characterized everyday Jewish life. While open to ongoing interpretation through the process of interaction between community life and rabbinic authority, the Halakha is considered foundational to Jewish life in all its variety.

For many Jews today, life would be unrecognizable without the traditions of the Oral Torah, although denominations differ significantly in their views of how the Oral Torah and the Halakha shape everyday Jewish life. **Reform Judaism**, for example, reflects on the Oral Torah as the product of human beings operating within a specific historical moment and does not uncritically accept the binding nature of the Halakha for modern life. Conservative Judaism officially accepts the binding nature of the oral tradition but claims greater authority for modern rabbis to modify rabbinic rulings made centuries ago and finds more flexibility within its structures than **Orthodox Judaism**. **Secular Jews** who identify as culturally Jewish, but non-religious, may still follow certain practices and customs as part of their ethnic identity.

## 2.4 Jewish diaspora

Since at least the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Jewish population has been scattered all over the world in what is known as the Jewish diaspora. A people in diaspora have spread beyond the borders of their original homeland. After the Roman defeat of the Jewish people following the Bar Kokhba revolt in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, a vibrant Jewish presence remained in the land with Galilee as its religious and academic center. But until the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 there has been no Jewish sovereignty in the biblical land of Israel. Instead, Jews lived as a minority among other people

in many lands and countries, contributing to the wider culture, including science, philosophy, and communal life, and developing Judaism further.

During the Roman period Jews were found throughout the Roman empire. Jewish people followed the expansion of the Roman empire throughout the Mediterranean and northward, entering central European regions including France and Germany.

Even before the Roman period there were significant Jewish diaspora communities. One of the most historic of these originated during the Babylonian captivity in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE and flourished for centuries in Babylon (current Iraq). This community produced the prestigious Babylonian Talmud dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, still studied by Jews around the world. The Talmudic scholars were responding to the loss of the Temple and to existence in diaspora outside the traditional homeland of the Jews, which was the new reality for the Jewish people.

Prior to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, between 800,000 and 1 million Jews lived in lands that make up the Arab world and were known collectively as Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews. Anti-Jewish persecution, confiscation of property, and expulsions followed the Arab governments' rejection of the decision by the United Nations to partition Palestine and create a Jewish state. The rich 2,600-year history of the Mizrahi Jews in Arab countries largely came to an end, and the majority relocated to the State of Israel.

Another diaspora population worth special note is the ancient Jewish community in Ethiopia, the largest known as Beta Israel (House of Israel). Jews in Ethiopia today number less than 25,000, but a robust Jewish community once thrived there prior to the rise of Christianity as the imperial religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. This community shaped its distinctive life apart from rabbinic tradition. While Ethiopian Jews have the Written Torah (the five books of Moses), the Oral Torah (the Talmud) is not part of their authoritative tradition. Their language is not Hebrew, and their leaders are priests rather than rabbis. During the 1980s, famine and civil war made the Ethiopian Jewish population vulnerable. Thousands of Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel through humanitarian operations in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Turning westward, Jews have been in the New World since its earliest exploration and settlement by Europeans. They have experienced opportunities for participation and flourishing as well as limits on immigration, restrictions on voting and holding office, and other antisemitic barriers. Jewish communities have built strong religious, educational, and cultural institutions,

and have contributed significantly to the larger societies in which they are found, especially in the big cities of the United States and Canada.

Today, the number of Jews worldwide is approximately 15.2 million.<sup>30</sup> Israel is home to 6.9 million Jews, while about 8.3 million live outside Israel including around 6 million in the United States of America.

### 2.4.1 Poland, land of promise

By 1100 CE, Jewish communities had spread and increased throughout western Europe. Persecution and expulsion of Jews from Germany, France, England, Spain, and other countries in the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries led to rapid flight and mass migrations to the east.<sup>31</sup> At that time the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were sparsely settled. Rulers from this region extended an invitation to Jewish immigrants, granting them a relatively secure legal position. Jews were welcomed because of the economic resources and commercial expertise they brought. The area of contemporary Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine as well as surrounding lands thus supported centers of flourishing Jewish life. The great rabbinic academies (*yeshivot*) of Eastern Europe were established during this period, laying the foundation for contemporary Orthodox Judaism. Poland and its environs became home to a vibrant Jewish presence for over five hundred years.

Within this context, and in part in reaction to the intellectual focus of the yeshiva world, the teachings of Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760), became popular among the Jews of Eastern Europe and Poland in particular. The Baal Shem Tov's disciples encouraged a new kind of Judaism known as **Hasidism** based on the mystical teachings of the **Kabbalah** and attuned to the spiritual realm, healing, prayer, and joyful devotion to God in daily life. Hasidic Judaism spread worldwide. Many Hasidic dynasties, each venerating the teachings of a revered, founding rabbi, continue to have a large following, including the Chabad-Lubavitch movement identified with Rabbi Menachem Schneerson.

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<sup>30</sup> The Jewish Agency for Israel, “World Jewish population rises to 15 Million,” The Jewish Agency, September 5, 2021, accessed May 26, 2023 <https://www.jewishagency.org/jewish-population-5782/>.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 4.1.3 for a description of the Crusades as a turning point in the Jewish-Christian relationship in Western Europe and the massacres and expulsions that drove Jews eastward.

Today, most affiliates of Hasidism reside in Israel and the United States. The connection with Poland and Ukraine remains as Hasidic Jews make pilgrimages every year to visit the graves of their teachers. One of the most venerated rabbis is Moses Ben Israel Isserles (c.1525-1572) from Kraków. His synagogue and tomb remain an important pilgrimage destination for Jews from all over the world.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a more rationalist strand of Judaism known as the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment emerged in Western Europe and then spread eastward. This movement supported educational and cultural reforms within Jewish communities that contributed to the modernization of Eastern European Jews. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the Nazis almost completely destroyed Europe's largest Jewish community of three million Jews, as well as the vibrant culture of Eastern European Jews.

## **2.5 Diversity of Jewish identity**

Jewish culture is rich and diverse since Jewish communities throughout the world developed their unique character and practices within a variety of contexts. According to the Halakha, a Jew is a person who was born of a Jewish mother or who converted to Judaism. Within the more progressive North American Reform and United Kingdom Liberal movements, a person is Jewish if either parent was Jewish and the person claims their Jewish identity. The right to Israeli citizenship extends to the children and grandchildren of any Jewish person. There are various streams and schools within religious Judaism, as well as Jews who do not consider themselves religious at all. It is often asserted that for practicing Jews “orthopraxy” or right practice is more important than “orthodoxy” or right theology. Judaism has no central religious institution that makes decisions for the Jewish collective.

This short summary makes clear that Judaism is not only a religion, but also a people and a culture. Although there are different ways to articulate what “Judaism” is, many Jews—perhaps the majority—would identify with the following explanation:

“For me, the phenomenon of Judaism is built on three pillars: the first, religion—with its system of commandments—collective and individual—which presuppose a holy legitimacy as emanating from God; the second—belonging to a distinct people, with shared values and feelings of solidarity; and the third—sharing a common culture and tradition based on the contributions

of our great minds and hearts dating back to the Bible and stretching up to the present.

The unique characteristic aspect of this phenomenon lies in the dynamic between these three pillars as well as with the outside world: the constant arguments, rivalries, conflicts, problems as well as solutions and resolutions, all in an unending process.”<sup>32</sup>

There are a number of distinctive Jewish ethnic and cultural communities which emerged in particular contexts over the centuries. For example, the Sephardic Jewish community developed over centuries in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal). When Christian monarchs expelled the Jews in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Sephardim took their traditions with them when they settled in areas where Mizrahi Jewish communities already existed, predominantly in the Arab world.<sup>33</sup> The traditional language of the Sephardic community was Judaeo-Spanish known as Ladino.

Mizrahi Jews are of Middle-Eastern, North African, and Central Asian origin. They are often confused with Sephardic Jews because they follow similar Sephardic customs and traditions. Many Mizrahi Jews were driven out of their countries after 1948 when the State of Israel was founded. Today most Mizrahi Jews live either in Israel or the United States.

Ashkenazi Jews originally came from Germany and France, with the majority settling in Poland and its environs after the expulsions from Western Europe in the 13<sup>th</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. They commonly spoke Yiddish, a language based on German with Hebrew and Slavic elements and written with Hebrew letters. A rich Yiddish literary tradition flourished, with its creative pinnacle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

These are just a few prominent examples of the variety of Jewish identities. Christians must be cautious of imposing our own definitions on our Jewish neighbors and take seriously their self-understanding. This respect is an important first step of a meaningful encounter.

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<sup>32</sup> Quotation from David Witzthum, from private archives of H. Lehming.

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 4.1.3 for a description of the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492.

## 2.6 Zionism and the State of Israel

After a long history of oppression in Europe, Jews were finally given civil rights and achieved integration in many European countries in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Jewish emancipation was part of a larger progressive movement to grant freedom and rights to minority populations. The ideas of emancipation that positively affected Jewish life circulated at the same time as the rise and spread of antisemitism in Western Europe.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile to the east in Russia and Ukraine violent attacks intended to destroy or expel Jewish communities known as **pogroms** massacred tens of thousands of Jews between 1881 and 1920. During this period, more than two million Russian Jews emigrated, most of them to the USA. Around 200,000 went to Palestine.

Within this context of extreme violence against Jewish communities, ideas of Jewish self-determination and return to the biblical land of Israel gained traction. Jewish messianic expectation had long viewed return to the land and the reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom in Jerusalem as events that God would bring about at the end of days. Many Jews were attracted to the secular messianisms of communism and socialism that promised to bring about improvements in society. The Zionism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the Jewish form of the nationalism being expressed by many peoples at that time.

In 1890 the term “**Zionism**” was coined by the Austrian-Jewish publicist Nathan Birnbaum in his journal *Self-Emancipation* and was defined as the national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the biblical Land of Israel. Responding to the pogroms in the Russian empire, the Jewish doctor Leo Pinsker (1821–1891) wrote in his book *Autoemanzipation (Self-Liberation)* that “Being plundered as a Jew or having to be protected as a Jew are equally shameful, equally embarrassing for the human feelings of the Jews.” According to Pinsker, only Jews themselves could find a solution to the so-called “Jewish question” concerning the status and treatment of Jews in secular nation-states. The solution that he advocated was Zionism.

Six years later, the influential Austrian-Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl published his book *Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution to the Jewish Question, 1896)*. This book further developed the

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<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 4.1 through 4.2 for a survey of early and recent ruptures in Jewish-Christian relations, including 4.2.1 about the rise of antisemitism in the age of European Enlightenment.

foundations of political Zionism as a secular project. The Dreyfus affair (1894-1906), in which a French military officer of Jewish origin named Alfred Dreyfus was wrongfully convicted of espionage and humiliated amid cries of “Death to the Jews,” convinced Herzl that Jews would never be safe in European countries and needed their own sovereign nation.

Between 1881 and 1939 five waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine brought around 400,000 Jews from Europe to Palestine. This population increase set the stage for the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948.<sup>35</sup>

The idea of Zionism was strongly rejected by many Orthodox Jews, who argued that the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty was a messianic mission reserved for God alone and should not be the work of human beings. The deep gap between religious and secular Jews about the Zionist nationalist movement was addressed by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine (1921-1935). Although not a Zionist himself, Rav Kook (as he was known) applauded the return of secular Jews to the land as a tool used by God to inaugurate divine redemption. Rav Kook contributed to the concept of religious Zionism, a concept that remains controversial today even as it has become increasingly influential.

## 2.7 Life in Israel

Today Israel is home to over 9 million people,<sup>36</sup> the majority Jewish (almost 75 percent). Most Jewish Israelis are descendants of refugees or immigrants from more than 100 countries of origin. Almost 21 percent of all Israeli citizens are Arab Palestinians, and of these Israeli Arab Palestinians almost 90 percent are Muslim and the other 10 percent are Christian. There are many other distinctive ethnic and religious groups in Israel, including Druze, Samaritans, Christian Arameans, Armenians, Circassians, Bahá'ís, Ahmadiyya, and others.

In its Basic Laws, the State of Israel defines itself as “a Jewish and democratic state” (1985, 1992, 1994) and as “the nation-state of the Jewish

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<sup>35</sup> Chapter 5 describes in more detail how the establishment of the State of Israel and the Arab rejection of it resulted in war and is considered a disaster by Arab Palestinians.

<sup>36</sup> Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, “Mortality in Israel, 2019-2021,” December 30, 2021, accessed July 27, 2023 [https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/doclib/2021/447/11\\_21\\_447e.pdf](https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/doclib/2021/447/11_21_447e.pdf).

people” (2018).<sup>37</sup> Israel has a parliamentary system known as the Knesset, which allows for a representative government. Tension between the ideals of a democracy and a Jewish state nevertheless remains. The official language of Israel is Hebrew, with Arabic granted a special status. The weekly holiday is Shabbat, which begins on Friday evening and ends on Saturday evening. Official holidays in Israel are the Jewish holidays; additionally, in the Arabic community and school system, Muslim and Christian holidays are observed as appropriate.

In matters related to personal status such as marriage and divorce, Jewish Israelis are technically under the jurisdiction of the state rabbinate, which is Orthodox. In fact, however, religious orientation among Israeli Jews varies immensely from Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) to atheism. Around 40-50 percent of the Jewish population classify themselves as secular (Hiloni), 30-40 percent as traditional (Masorti), 10 percent as religious (Dati), and another 10 percent as Haredi (ultra-orthodox).

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv provide examples of contrasting lifestyles. In Jerusalem, public life comes to a standstill on Shabbat evening. One hardly sees any cars on the streets, instead festively dressed families walk to the synagogues to pray. In Tel Aviv at the same time, young people meet in discos, families stroll along the beach, joggers dart along the promenade, and some shops remain open. Israeli culture is characterized by a willingness to engage in controversial discussions; nevertheless, these extremely different lifestyles can cause tensions in society.

## 2.8 Next steps

Understanding our Jewish partners begins with a respectful learning posture toward their long turbulent history, changing religious understanding and practices, and cultural diversity of the Jewish population worldwide. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the face of Judaism and the perception of Jews in the world has changed. After almost 2,000 years of living as an often-oppressed minority among Christians or Muslims, Jews in the State of Israel live as free, independent, and self-determined citizens. For the first time since biblical times, they have responsibilities toward others as a nation with political sovereignty. Chapter 5 describes in more detail some of the problems that still exist in this respect. The State of Israel is still young, having celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023, and

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<sup>37</sup> For the Israeli nation-state law of July 2018 see chapter 5.



its development is ongoing and open. What is certain is that the State of Israel is an integral part of modern Jewish identity today.

In the next chapter, we will review areas where Jews and Christians share a unique relationship. We also recognize that there are certain areas that invite us to correct misunderstandings that may hinder further conversations.

### *Questions for reflection, discussion, and action*

1. What parts of this brief introduction to Judaism as a religion and way of life were most familiar to you? What parts were new? What sources of information about Jews and Judaism do you have available?
2. What main impressions and insights remain with you after reading this overview?
3. Do you know much about the history of the Jewish people in the country or region of the world where you live? What can you discover by doing a bit of research?
4. How do you think knowing more about Jewish history, religion, and contemporary realities may contribute to positive Jewish-Christian relations?
5. Many Christians do not realize that a person can be Jewish without being religious, since being Jewish includes belonging to a people and a culture. Was this a new insight for you? How does this insight impact your understanding of Lutheran-Jewish relations?

### 3: A Unique Relationship

Jews and Christians have a unique relationship among the religions of the world. They believe in the same God, have common historical origins within Second Temple Judaism, and share holy scriptures. Christians view Jewish-Christian relations as distinctive from other interreligious relationships. Some even maintain that the connections are akin to ecumenical relationships between faith communities within a common tradition since both lay claim to the heritage of biblical Israel.

Yet these two religions over time have continued to define themselves in contrast to each other. They have retained their distinctive identities through the course of centuries as they developed the biblical heritage in different ways. Jews are our sisters and brothers in worshiping the same God, and yet the question of our togetherness remains a mystery. From a Christian perspective, what remains most striking is that Jews do not agree with the central Christian claim that Jesus Christ is God's messiah and the second person of the Triune God.

Although Paul knew other Jews were not persuaded by his gospel, he energetically maintained that God's gifts and calling to the Jewish people nevertheless remain irrevocable (Rom 11:29). He regarded his Jewish kinsmen's refusal as a mystery intended by God to facilitate the merciful inclusion of non-Jewish nations into the divine narrative of salvation (Rom 11:25) before the immanent return of Jesus. Paul is confident that all Israel will be saved because of God's faithfulness. Reflecting on this mystery, the Apostle Paul exclaims:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ...For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:33, 36)

How this insight and conviction can be realized through Christian theology is a work still very much in progress in our own day.

### 3.1 Shared scriptures

Jews and Christians share common scriptures central to faith, study, and worship. The books of the Hebrew Bible are called by Christians the Old Testament, and by Jews the TaNaKh.<sup>38</sup> Our common scriptures provide a source of deep memory, shared values, and overlapping religious identity. They also provide one rich point of entry for interreligious dialogue between Jews and Christians.

At the same time, Jews and Christians read and interpret their common scriptures quite differently. The different order of the books found in the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish TaNaKh suggests the distinctive orientations of the two communities. The Christian ordering ends with the Prophets, in anticipation of the New Testament claims that their prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus. The overall impression is that the biblical story from Genesis to Malachi is unfinished, and something new is yet to come. By contrast, the Jewish ordering of Torah, Prophets, and Writings suggests that Writings such as the Psalms, the wisdom literature, or the book of Esther are useful for the ongoing religious life of the Jewish community and faithful practice. The conclusion of the TaNaKh with the Persian King Cyrus releasing the exiles, granting permission to rebuild the Temple, and inviting all who are willing to return (2 Chr 36:23) orients Jewish communities toward Jerusalem, wherever they may reside.

Christians understand the ancient Jewish scriptures as part of a double canon including the Old and New Testaments. This decision was made in opposition to those like Marcion in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, who argued that the Jewish scriptures should not be used in the church because they depict a different God from the one worshiped by Christians.<sup>39</sup> The position that prevailed, however, was that the one true God is revealed in both the ancient scriptures of the Hebrew Bible (and its translations the Septuagint and Vulgate) and in the writings of the early church. For Christians both the Old and the New Testaments are essential for faith.

Our shared scriptures bear witness to the one God (section 2.1) who is acknowledged and worshiped by Jews and Christians. Today many Jews daily recite the *Shema* that proclaims, “Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (Deut 6:4), and this unity of God is also the first article of Christian faith. Jews understand themselves to be the people of God

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 2.3 for an explanation of the acronym TaNaKh.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 4.1.1 for more about Marcion’s impact on the early church.

(Ex 19:5-6), which Christian self-understanding echoes in similar terms, viewing themselves as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet 2:9).

The Ten Commandments found in the books of Exodus (Ex 20:2-17) and Deuteronomy (Deut 5:6-21) are cited by Jesus in response to a question about what must be done to inherit eternal life: Jesus answered, “You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother’” (Mk 10:19). Jesus similarly drew from the Hebrew scriptures when he articulated the Great Commandment in Mark 12:30: you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your might” (Deut 6:5). In Mark 12: 31, he added “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18).

Jews and Christians believe in the one God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob, Rachel, and Leah, and look to the same ancestors of faith, including Abraham and Sarah among others. As Isaiah 51:1-2 urges, “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you.” The journeys and faith of the ancestors, the creation and flood narratives, the exodus from Egypt under Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, the wilderness sojourn and period of the judges, the kings of Israel and Judah, the Temple in Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile and return—the ancient biblical narrative contributes to our respective religious identities. This deep scriptural legacy asserts that God works in human lives and in the history of Israel and the other nations of the world.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2 Common roots

In the early centuries it was difficult to distinguish between Jews and Christians; rabbinic Judaism and the early church share roots as the two forms of Judaism that survived the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE and then came to thrive within the new realities of the Roman empire. The New Testament may be considered a collection of early Jewish literature from the time of the Second Temple and soon after its destruction. As such, the New Testament provides a window to Judaism

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 2.1 for a summary of the narrative recounted in the Hebrew scriptures.

within that historical context and documents how the Jesus movement originally developed within Judaism, not as a separate religion.

The vibrant religious and cultural matrix from which rabbinic Judaism and Christianity emerged has been highlighted in the study of the so-called “intertestamental” literature. Better referred to as “Second Temple literature,” this rich corpus displays a wide range of literary types, or genres, and includes the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran. These written sources from the Greek and Roman periods can shed much light on the diversity of Jewish life and practice at that time. They can illuminate much about the context of Jesus’ life and teachings and the beginnings of the church.

Jesus was Jewish and remained Jewish for his whole life. His family, disciples, and community were all likewise Jewish, and followed the “Way”—a movement within Judaism that followed Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 9:1-2; 24:14). Jesus articulated his mission as being sent to his own people, “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Mt 15:24). Jesus’ name is a Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua, meaning “God delivers,” which is the name also of the Israelite deliverer who followed Moses and entered the promised land. The New Testament asserts that Jesus was circumcised, observed the Sabbath, attended synagogue services, wore traditional Jewish clothing (the “fringes” on his garment in Mt 9:20-22), taught seated as a Jewish teacher (Mt 5:1), quoted scripture extensively, debated important matters of the day with religious leaders, and made pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem during major Jewish festivals. Jesus denied that he came to abolish the law, but rather that he came to fulfill the law, meaning to interpret it, teach it, embody it, and live it out in its fullness (Mt 5:17).

The Apostle Paul is another example of a biblical figure who was Jewish and remained Jewish for his entire life. His call experience on the road to Damascus was to stop persecuting the followers of Jesus and to tell the good news of the Christ to Gentiles (non-Jews). It was not a “conversion” from Judaism to Christianity, as these were not two separate religions at that time. Nor did Paul’s message call on Jews to give up their Judaism or their faithful, Torah-based lifestyle. His pleas were against imposition of that lifestyle obligation on non-Jews, who had already received their own, sufficient guidance for faithful life through the gift of the Spirit of Christ.<sup>41</sup>

The closest communities often have the most heated arguments as part of the ongoing definition of what is essential for religious identity. Debates con-

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<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 6.2.1 for a discussion of Paul engaged in respectful interfaith dialogue in Athens.

cerning what is permissible on the Sabbath, observance of fast days, table fellowship, purity practices, and capital punishment, among many others, were current in the Judaism of Jesus' time. Jesus is portrayed in numerous controversies with Jewish leaders and members of different groups, including scribes, priests, Sadducees, tax-collectors, and Zealots, as well as with the Pharisees, with whom he was perhaps closest. The **Pharisees** were a group of leaders seeking a way of sanctifying ordinary life, a concern that Jesus shared, although the means to live a life connected with God were contested. There are instances when Pharisees befriend Jesus and warn him to be careful of political opponents (Lk 13:31-35). In general, Pharisees who are named in the New Testament are presented sympathetically (Jn 3:1; Acts 5:34; Phil 3:5; Acts 23:6). Jesus explicitly acknowledges the authority of the Pharisees to interpret Mosaic law since they "sit on Moses' seat" (Mt 23:2-3), although he charges their leadership with hypocrisy, of teaching one thing while doing another, which is a charge to which all leaders, teachers, and idealists are vulnerable, whether Christian or Jewish or of other faiths. Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees are not a wholesale repudiation of Judaism, but rather may be seen as an inter-Jewish debate about important matters. In some cases, Jesus' interpretations of the Torah are stricter than those of his interlocutors (e.g., Mk 10:2-12).

### 3.2.1 Festivals with common origins

There are numerous parallels in the annual calendar between festivals of the synagogue and the church, and many Christian festivals have their origins in the Jewish tradition even if this is often no longer obvious in the way they are celebrated today. Like Christianity, Jewish life on a yearly cycle is structured by a rich calendar of holidays that commemorate events primarily connected with the biblical story. First and foremost is the observance of Shabbat, the weekly day of rest. Similar to Sunday for Christians, Shabbat is a day of remembrance of God's rest following the creation of the world. Shabbat also recalls the exodus from slavery to freedom and according to rabbinic tradition offers a foretaste of the world to come (Ex 31:13; 23:10-12; 34:21; Deut 5; Gen 2:1-3). Many Jews gather in the synagogue every Friday evening to welcome the arrival of Shabbat. Customary in Jewish homes is the lighting of two candles and blessings over a cup of wine and two loaves of bread at the beginning of the Shabbat dinner.

The major Jewish holiday of Pesach or Passover celebrates the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. In all four Gospels the festival of Passover provides the context for Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem in the company

of other Jewish pilgrims to the Temple. In the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Jesus instructs his disciples to prepare the Passover meal for him and his followers. This Jewish holiday with its themes of liberation and freedom provides a rich backdrop for the institution of the sacrament of Communion, Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion, and his resurrection and first appearances to his followers. Holy Week and Passover continue to be observed in the spring of each year, more or less in tandem although now with different calculations as to the observed date. Today, Passover is celebrated within the family around a special meal known as the Passover Seder featuring matzah or unleavened bread, wine, and various other symbolic foods. It also involves a special liturgy, the Passover Haggadah. The reading of the Haggadah retells the Exodus story of the liberation from slavery and reflects on its meaning throughout Jewish history and for the present generation. The Jewish festival of Passover therefore remains an essential part of Christian memory and has shaped the central Christian holiday of Easter and the observances leading up to Easter in Holy Week.

Fifty days or seven weeks after Passover, the festival of Weeks or Shavuot, celebrates the giving of the Torah to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Some Jews stay up all night on Shavuot to study the Torah. Shavuot, like Passover, is one of the three pilgrimage festivals described in the Bible (Ex 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Deut 16:1-17). It marks the wheat harvest in the land of Israel and is also known as the festival of First Fruits. Shavuot provided a template for the Christian holiday of Pentecost, which is a festival occurring fifty days after Easter. Like Passover and Easter, the meanings of the festivals of Shavuot and Pentecost remain distinctive within Jewish and Christian communities: Jews celebrate the gift of the Torah during Shavuot, while Christians celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit that enlivens their community at Pentecost (Acts 1).

### **3.3 Core values**

Jews and Christians share many scriptural values, such as an emphasis on justice and shalom (peace or wholeness), individual and communal responsibility, and an imperative to live according to God's will. This potentiates grounds of cooperation and joint witness and service to our societies, especially in places where Christians and Jews live together in the same neighborhoods and cities.

Human worth and dignity are fundamental for Judaism and Christianity. From the beginning of Genesis, the creation of all humankind from com-

mon ancestors made “in the image of God” asserts the value of each person (Gen 1:26). Shared religious values of truth, mercy, and justice are expressed in the writings of the biblical prophets including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah, among others. The prophet Micah reminds us, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic 6:8). Forgiveness of sins, deliverance and hope for comprehensive reconciliation and renewal are also found in Jewish concepts of faith and life.

Along with the Prophets, the beloved liturgical poetry of the Psalms lifts up the vision of God’s reign of peace, restoration, and flourishing intended for Israel, the nations of the world, and all of creation. Psalm 46 looks forward to that time when God makes wars to cease and proclaims, “Be still and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth!” (Ps 46:10) Psalm 117 encourages all nations and peoples to extol God’s powerful loving kindness and everlasting truth (Ps 117:1-2). And Psalm 145 declares that the same Creator of heaven, earth, sea, and all that is in them also takes care to execute justice for the oppressed, feed the hungry, set prisoners free, heal those with infirmities, and watch over immigrants, widows, and orphans.

Hospitality and care for others are additional values expressed in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The ancestors Abraham and Sarah eagerly welcome three unexpected guests at the Oaks of Mamre in Genesis 18, modeling hospitality toward strangers. The story of Jesus’ feeding of the multitude is found in all four Gospels and emphasizes the abundance of food remaining after everyone was satisfied (Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:31-44; Lk 9:12-17; Jn 6:1-14; cf. Mt 15:32-39; Mk 8:1-9). Stories of healings also abound in the scriptures. Elijah gave instructions for the healing of the Syrian military officer Naaman (2 Kings 5), Moses prayed for the healing of his sister Miriam (Num 12:13), and Elisha revived the Shunammite woman’s son (2 Kings 4:32-37). Jesus’ frequent healings, such as the healing of the ten men with leprosy (Lk 17:11-19), of the man born blind (Jn 9), and of the woman with a hemorrhage (Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48) offer additional examples of responding to the needs of others. With models of hospitality and compassion such as these, our shared scriptural heritage can spur us to action for the common good.



### 3.4 Different interpretations

The shared scriptural foundation of Jewish-Christian relations provides an access point for dialogue and the construction of an identity that is sometimes in the West referred to as the “Judeo-Christian” tradition. This tradition is indeed rich; yet the term “Judeo-Christian” sometimes obscures important differences. Jews and Christians have different interpretations and liturgical uses for our shared scriptures. For example, in Jewish liturgical practice the first five books of Moses, the Torah, is read in the synagogue every year in its entirety, whereas Christians tend to read selections from the Prophets and Psalms as part of a lectionary cycle that each year grants pride of place to readings from a different Gospel.

The prominence of the New Testament in the Christian canon means that for the church the ancient and venerated scriptures of the Old Testament are understood within a broader context that centers on the saving work of Jesus Christ. For Judaism the **TaNaKh**<sup>42</sup> has a different broader textual context that includes the Mishnah, Talmud, and other rabbinic writings that have sustained the Jewish people as a distinctive community for centuries. Most Christians are not familiar with this later Jewish literature that collectively is regarded as “Oral Torah” in distinction from the “Written Torah” of the TaNaKh.

The same words of biblical text make distinctive associations and identify particular meanings within Christian or Jewish contexts but may not be shared. Our common scripture paradoxically highlights differences that have emerged over time rather than the common roots of our origins. Jewish interpretations can provide eye-opening instances of how scripture may offer different meanings depending on the context. For example, the *lex talionis* principle, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” for some Christians has suggested the retributive character of Old Testament law. In rabbinic Jewish sources the same principle is understood as compassionate, limiting retribution, and shifting the focus to monetary compensation for physical injury that corresponds to the severity of the injury.

Another example is the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) which for Christians illustrates that service to a neighbor in need defines who is the “neighbor” in the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Jews may not hear the same message and rather take offense at the stereotypes of the Levite and the priest that have been overlaid on the parable. Both interpretations may overlook the likelihood that Luke

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 2.3 for an explanation of the acronym TaNaKh.

presented Jesus as using a familiar intra-Jewish rivalry to make a point. This parable, while beloved in Christian circles, has often been used to denigrate Judaism by showing the Samaritan as compassionate in contrast to the Jewish leaders who are supposedly obsessed with purity.

### **3.5 Difficult texts**

The Gospels and other New Testament writings that trace Christianity's growth were written by Jewish authors when Christianity was still closely connected with its Jewish roots. Reports of controversies and accusations found in those texts usually reflect internal Jewish controversies. In the following centuries, however, Christianity differentiated itself more and more from its Jewish roots, and this original Jewish context was obscured.

The differentiation over time between Christian identity and Jewish traditions and practices is evidenced, for example, in the interpretation of the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus and his disciples' attitude toward God's Torah or Law. Originally, controversy about such things as the observance of Sabbath, permitted foods, purity, and circumcision reflected ongoing debates within the larger Jewish community. The question was how the commandments should be observed, not whether they should be observed. As Gentile Christianity became more dominant, these intra-Jewish disputes came to be interpreted as points of division between two separate religions. Jesus' statements about matters of Jewish Law came to be viewed as an outside criticism of Judaism, erroneously pitting Christianity against Judaism. Competition and antagonism emerged between early Christianity and nascent rabbinic Judaism on the understanding of the Law, the covenant, and the identity of God's people. The separation between emerging Christianity and the Jewish community was expressed in language with dangerous potential.

The harsh language in John, in which Jesus accuses his opponents of being in league with the devil as their father ("You are from your father the devil," Jn 8:44) is an example. The exaggerated language in this passage has led to demonizing Jews and portraying them as opponents of God, with disastrous consequences. Today's Christian perspective challenges this interpretation and the views found in much of Christian literature over the course of history. Neither Jesus nor Paul intended to harm Jewish people. They were both Jews themselves and cared deeply for the Jewish people.

One of the most pernicious and distorted accusations against Jews in Christian thought has been the blood guilt charge, the idea that Jews

everywhere, and for all times, are responsible for the death of Jesus. The scriptural basis for this accusation has been the words attributed to the crowd at Jesus' trial, when they cry, "Crucify him!" (Mt 27:22, 23), and exclaim, "His blood be upon us and our children" (Mt 27:25). The writer of Matthew used these words to show those present at Jesus' trial demanding and taking responsibility for the decision to convict Jesus. The early church mistakenly interpreted the Christian scriptures to mean that the Jewish people as a collective, wherever they may be found, may be blamed for Jesus' crucifixion. Execution by crucifixion, however, was a form of capital punishment extensively used by the Romans, including the Roman Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, whose reputation for cruelty was widespread. And yet the Gospels go to great lengths to downplay Roman responsibility and to portray instead Jewish authorities and crowds as culpable. This tactic makes sense within the context of the Roman empire, where tribes and nations were free to observe their ancestral practices as long as they caused no offence to the Roman people or their gods. Presenting Pilate as innocent and deflecting responsibility to the subjugated Jewish population was an attempt by the early church to remain inoffensive to Roman authorities.

John's version of the Passion narrative (Jn 18:28-19:22), traditionally read every year during Holy Week, presents additional challenges. John's reference to "the Jews" as Jesus' opponents is jarring given that Jesus and his disciples were also Jews. These negative references to "the Jews" again contributed to the sense that the Jewish people as a collective were conspiring and responsible for Jesus' death. In fact, "the Jews" in the Gospel of John may refer to those Jews who in this largely Jewish context did not follow Jesus. One purpose of the gospel may have been to encourage belief in by Jesus by the larger Jewish community.

With the re-examination of Christian attitudes toward Jews in the wake of the Holocaust, there has been a recognition, repentance, and repudiation of anti-Jewish interpretations of New Testament texts that contributed to the marginalization and demonization of Jews. The Christian Scholars Group work on the Passion narratives is a recent project by a group of well-respected scholars to address harmful traditions that persist even at an unconscious level.<sup>43</sup> While some of the most serious harms have been addressed in academic and well-informed circles, there is still a

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<sup>43</sup> For the CSG/ICCJ video series, see "Presenting the Passion . . . without blaming 'the Jews'," ICCJ, April 1, 2022, accessed July 14, 2023 <https://www.iccj.org/article/presenting-the-passion-without-blaming-the-jews.html>.

pressing need for intentional education and real changes in preaching, hymns, liturgy, art, and other Christian ways of communicating the faith in Jesus Christ, so that we may live out our gospel witness in love for our Jewish neighbors.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.6 Exclusivist claims

There are passages in the New Testament that have been interpreted as claiming that salvation is only through Jesus and those who do not recognize him do not enter eternal life. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). Within the context of 1<sup>st</sup> century sectarianism as well as throughout much of Christian history, this statement has sometimes been understood to mean that only through faith in Christ is a relationship with God possible.

This narrow understanding does not have to be determinative for our time, however. These words are offered by Jesus as a reassurance to his troubled disciples who fear that they are losing their teacher, not as a general principle restricting access to God for those outside the faith. Jesus counters that he will not leave his disciples comfortless by asserting his continued presence as they seek God. Within the Gospel of John, which identifies Jesus as the Word of God present in all creation (Jn 1), Jesus’ claim to be “the way, the truth, and the life” has an expansive, inclusive resonance. Jesus gestures to the diversity of those included when he speaks of the “many dwelling places” in his Father’s house” (Jn 14:2) and of the “other sheep, that are not of this fold” (Jn 10:16).

In many Christian circles, there has been an explicit rejection of the claim that God has replaced Israel and the Jewish people with the church. The Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants with biblical Israel were not superseded by the coming of Christ, but were affirmed and emphasized by God’s self-identification in Jesus the Jew. Some Christians consider Jewish-Christian relations as distinctive and incomparable with other interfaith or interreligious dialogues because Jews already have a covenantal relationship with

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<sup>44</sup> A new guide for *Preaching and Teaching with Love and Respect for Our Jewish Neighbors* has been issued recently by the ELCA Consultative Panel on Jewish Lutheran Relations. The guide is available under: [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Preaching\\_And\\_Teaching\\_With\\_Love\\_And\\_Respect\\_For\\_The\\_Jewish\\_People.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Preaching_And_Teaching_With_Love_And_Respect_For_The_Jewish_People.pdf).

For another resource see *Reading from the Roots*, <https://readingsfromtheroots.bard.edu/>.

the one God whom Christians also worship. Christians are still growing in our understanding of what recent insights from Jewish-Christian dialogue mean for Christian theology.

Judaism has a positive framework for viewing other people of the world as being included in the covenant that God made with Noah after the flood (Gen 9:1-17). There is no need for conversion to Judaism, since all the nations of the world are already affirmed as partners in the Noahide covenant and are held to basic standards of morality. The Talmud and the writings of Maimonides (1138-1204), the great Sephardic philosopher and Torah scholar, acknowledge with appreciation the “righteous among the nations” who keep the seven Noahide commandments, including the prohibition of bloodshed.

### **3.7 Hope in God’s shalom**

Many liturgical elements of Lutheran worship—the reading of the Psalms, fixed forms of prayer, and the liturgical sequence of the services—originated in Judaism. Within the Bible itself there are passages that support the Christian change of heart about Jews and Judaism today and a turn to greater understanding and mutual respect. In Romans 9-11, Paul reminds followers of Jesus that his fellow Jews have much to commend themselves. “They are the Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever” (Rom 9:4-5). Paul insists that “God has not rejected his people” (Rom 11:2), the Jews, something that the church has ignored for too much of its history.

Romans 9-11 is an important reminder to the church to foster a positive appreciation of Jews and Judaism. Paul walks a fine line in affirming God’s continuing love for the Jews as God’s people and proclaiming God’s love for non-Jews as also part of God’s people. From God’s side, so to speak, election and redemption are the same for all people. From humanity’s side, there have been different experiences: the calling of Israel’s ancestors and the Exodus, on one hand, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, on the other. Paul insists that these must be viewed as complementary, born of the same spirit of God that seeks abundant life for all God’s people and all God’s creation. At the same time, he allows for, and even celebrates, the distinctiveness of the Torah community and the Christian community that gather around the stories and memories of their respective redemp-

tive experiences. In the end, Paul is convinced, “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26) by the one God of all.

Our common scriptures encourage Jews and Christians to cooperate along with other people of good will in projects that advance the common good. The vision of justice, peace, and renewal of the prophets, the pragmatic insights of the wisdom literature, and the fundamental understanding of the world as God’s good creation are all examples of how scripture contributes to the shared values that motivate Jews and Christians to work together to promote the flourishing of life, healing, and an improved society. The Jewish concept of “tikkun ‘olam,” or mending of the world, is an important and inspiring watchword that appeals to Christians as well as Jews.

The prophets present an eschatological vision of shalom (peace) between Israel and the nations when God’s will is done. According to the prophet Micah, God will serve as a righteous judge between the nations and put an end to war, so that all may live unafraid:

He shall judge between many peoples,  
And shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;  
They shall beat their swords into plowshares  
And their spears into pruning hooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war any more;  
But they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,  
And no one shall make them afraid;  
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.  
For all the peoples walk  
Each in the name of its god,  
And we will walk in the name of the LORD our God  
Forever and ever. (Micah 4:3-5)

Both Jews and Christians live in the hope of God’s shalom, envisioned as a blessing of wholeness and peace on our lives now and as a promise for the anticipated future age.

## **Questions for reflection, discussion, and action**

1. As Lutherans, or as Christians from any denomination today, what steps can we take to ensure our interpretations of shared texts reflect Jews in an accurate and respectful way?
2. Some of the texts that Jews and Christians share (as well as some New Testament texts) can be understood as “difficult” texts with claims of exclusivism, justification of violence, and suppression of religious difference in the name of God. How do we relate to these texts and interpret them today in our traditions?
3. How do we address exclusivist claims in our tradition, and how do we talk about such claims in dialogue with Jewish partners and friends?
4. How can we uphold our own religious traditions while affirming the validity of diverse traditions from other religions/convictions?
5. In thinking about shalom, what are some ideas for ways you could co-operate with other people of good will in projects for the common good?

## 4: Wounds Affecting Jewish-Christian Relations

Engaging in meaningful encounter and dialogue with Jewish people is essential work, yet personal engagement is never detached from historical conditions and experiences that might complicate or disrupt our efforts. This chapter provides a historical overview of the church's relationship with Judaism, marred by a long history of hostile Christian attitudes and behaviors toward Jews. Anti-Jewish writings and legal measures, social and economic exclusion, persecution, and ultimately the devastation of the Shoah have left gaping wounds and deep scars which still hurt today.

According to the New Testament, prominent followers of Jesus such as the Deacon Stephen were targeted by leaders within the Jewish community (Acts 6-7). The Apostle Paul himself recalls a time when he had zealously tried to destroy the church (Gal 1:13-14). There was also sporadic Roman persecution of Christianity regarded as a corrosive superstition once the church began to be distinguished from the venerable and ancient Jewish people.

Within this context, the early Christian theologians known as the church fathers began to set the Christian community apart from Judaism through strong and sometimes aggressive arguments. Anti-Jewish theology, known as supersessionism, claimed that the Jews had been rejected by God because of their disbelief and that the church had replaced them as the people of God and the true Israel. These arguments reflect a general spirit of anger and hostility, probably out of frustration with the failure to convince Jews of their understanding of the gospel. Another purpose of these early polemical writings was to prevent people from adopting Jewish faith and practices, which indicates that Judaism continued to be an attractive option.

Once Christianity became the dominant religion in the Roman empire in the fourth century CE, the power dynamics between Jews and Christians changed. Periods of co-existence alternated with episodes of Christian persecution of Jews. False justifications for Christian hostility and violence against Jews shifted beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from primarily theological grounds to increasingly secular ideologies, including some



based on pseudo-scientific theories of racial inferiority. This shift marks a transition from anti-Judaism to antisemitism, although the distinction between the two is not absolute.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of contrasting developments. On the one hand, Christian churches began to meet in fraternal dialogue. The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh advanced the common pursuit of world peace with great optimism. On the other hand, while ecumenism was advancing the cause of peace, World War I and then World War II destroyed all plans to improve relations among the nations of the world. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed both a continuation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century emancipation of the Jews in European society and a reaction against that emancipation with new depths of hatred and violence against the Jewish population in Europe. The horrors of murder and community extermination were unleashed on an unprecedented scale during the World War II.

Despite, and perhaps in response to, the atrocities committed during the Nazi regime, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became a time of positive change in interreligious relations between Jews and Christians. This chapter assesses the deep wounds that Christians have inflicted on Jews through their intertwined history and also chronicles the first attempts at respectful dialogue and subsequent movement toward a renewed relationship.

## 4.1 Early ruptures

### 4.1.1 From polemics to conflict: Christian scriptures and early theological claims

The early church wrestled internally with competing voices and movements. Christian anti-Judaism intensified through the teachings of the Christian theologian Marcion of Sinope (ca.110-160 CE). **Marcion** sought to eliminate all Jewish influence on Christianity and declared an irreconcilable gulf between the “loving God” revealed through Jesus and the “wrathful God” of the Jewish scriptures. Marcion developed the first known Christian canon or list of scriptures, which included ten letters of Paul and a short version of the Gospel of Luke. Ultimately in 144 CE the church of Rome excommunicated Marcion. The early church broadly rejected Marcion’s arguments when it identified the Jewish scriptures as the first part of the Christian canon, ever to consist of both the Old and New Testaments.

In accepting the Old Testament as part of the Christian Bible, the church's leadership recognized an ongoing theological continuity with Christianity's Jewish heritage. They asserted, however, that the new covenant through Christ replaced or superseded the ancient covenant that God made with the Jewish people on Sinai. Already in the Gospel of Luke, a Christological reading of the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms pointed to their fulfillment in Jesus (Lk 24:44). The Letter to the Hebrews explicitly states that "In speaking of a 'new covenant' (Jer. 31:31-32) [God] has made the first one obsolete" (Heb. 8:13). The 2<sup>nd</sup>-century Epistle of Barnabas goes even a step further when it claims that the covenants with Abraham and Moses were never made with the Jewish people. **Supersessionism**, the belief that Christians have replaced the Jewish people as God's covenant people, remained a mainstream tenet of Christian theology until its recent reconsideration.

The Christian assertion that the Jewish religion was obsolete was linked to the charge that the Jews as a collective had rejected and killed Jesus; therefore, they had been rejected by God. A starting point for the charge that Jews were "Christ-killers" is Matthew's portrayal of the crowd at Jesus' trial accepting responsibility for his death (Mt 27:25). This New Testament passage has caused immense suffering over the centuries.<sup>45</sup> In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, well over a century after Jesus' crucifixion, the Christian apologist Justin Martyr chided his Jewish conversation partner by saying "tribulations were justly imposed on you, for you have murdered the Just One" (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 16). At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Melito of Sardis expanded the accusation from killing Jesus to killing God, a charge that later came to be known known as **deicide**. Melito stated that "an extraordinary murder has taken place in the center of Jerusalem... God has been murdered; the King of Israel has been destroyed by the right hand of Israel"<sup>46</sup> (*Homily on the Passion* 94 and 96). Only in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have Christians begun to repudiate this false accusation against the Jewish people and to repent its deadly effects.

Many early church writers wrote documents or treatises "against the Jews" (*adversus judaeos*) to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity and to argue that the ancient biblical heritage found its fulfillment exclusively in

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 3.5 which describes the blood guilt charge based on a misinterpretation of Matt. 27:25.

<sup>46</sup> Melito of Sardis, "On Pascha," trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (New York, St. Valdimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 63f. Also available online: <https://sachurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/On-Pascha-Melito-of-Sardis.pdf> accessed July 22, 2023.

Christ, not in the ongoing Jewish tradition. The struggle to attract gentile converts to Christianity and to prevent followers from converting to Judaism also led to strategies that disparaged Judaism. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Jerome of Stridon warned that interactions with Jews might have unintended consequences, as Jews might “not become Christians” through contact, but rather they might “make us [Christians] Jews” (Epistle 112.13). The organic connection between the two communities that existed in the early centuries had been decisively severed.

#### **4.1.2 Coexistence and marginalization in Antiquity and the Middle Ages**

Christianity thrived in the Roman empire. Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313) began a movement toward legitimizing Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire which culminated under Theodosius I (380). The power of Christian churches grew, and several cities developed into theological centers with influential bishops who strengthened Christianity’s dominance. Among them, two prominent figures from the 4<sup>th</sup> century deserve attention here, because they contributed negative stereotypes about the Jewish people to the Christian tradition which have only been rejected in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first is the great theologian of Western Christianity, Augustine of Hippo, who described the Jews in chilling terms as the “witness people.” Just as God marked Cain and caused him to wander the earth after killing his brother Abel, so were the Jews marked and forced to wander continually as punishment for their murder of Christ their brother. The Jews’ long history and preservation as a distinct people proved the veracity of the ancient scriptures that they treasured but could not understand, which now found fulfillment in the church as the “new Israel.” According to Augustine, the Jews’ presence as a scattered and dispossessed minority revealed God’s judgement against them and the truth of Christianity. For this reason, Jews should be permitted to remain as a separate community within Christian society. “Kill them not” (Ps 59:11) was Augustine’s instruction to Christians concerning the Jews living in a degraded state among them.

The second is John Chrysostom, who was the Archbishop of Constantinople at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. “Chrysostom” or “Golden Mouth” was the name given to him because of his fame as the greatest preacher of the Eastern Church. Before becoming Archbishop of Constantinople, Chrysostom lived in Antioch where Christians continued to be attracted to the

Sabbath observances and festivals of that city's vibrant Jewish community. In this context, Chrysostom preached eight *Sermons against the Jews* to discourage Christians from visiting synagogues and adopting Judaizing practices.<sup>47</sup> In these scathing sermons, Chrysostom characterized the Jews as the “perfidious murderers of Christ,” accused them of worshipping the devil, and labeled their religion a sickness. Because there was no possible pardon for deicide, or killing God, the Jews were condemned to live in perpetual servitude. Chrysostom claimed that God hated the Jews, and that Christians were also called to hate them. Chrysostom's harsh rhetoric denigrated and scapegoated the Jewish people, contributing to a deterioration of Christian attitudes and ultimately to social and legal actions against the Jews.

Theological disputes surfacing after the Edict of Milan were soon followed by legal discrimination on the part of a Christian majority against the Jewish minority. The *Theodosian Code* (438 CE) was a codification of Roman Law during the late empire that limited the civil, economic, and religious rights of Jews. Later, the *Justinian Code* (529 CE) further limited the rights of Jews, prohibiting them from holding public office, building synagogues, studying the Mishna, and celebrating Passover before Easter, among other measures.

And yet, during the first millennium, there were also long periods of peaceful coexistence between Jews and Christians. The Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula and the establishment of an Arab empire, Al-Andalus (711-1492), for example, provided a context for the coexistence of Jews and Christians under Muslim rule. Without idealizing this turbulent period, it shaped the common history of the religions in various ways (e.g., philosophically, culturally, and culinarily) and was considered a cultural zenith.

#### **4.1.3. Crusades and other developments in the Middle Ages**

The period from the 10<sup>th</sup> to early 15<sup>th</sup> century was a dynamic and formative time for the European church and society, but it also brought an intensification of Christian intolerance toward the Jewish population. The Crusades in particular marked a turning point in the Jewish-Christian relationship in Europe. In 1095, Pope Urban II called for a Crusade to liberate the tomb of

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<sup>47</sup> Roger Pearse, “John Chrysostom: Against the Jews,” Tertullian Project, last modified September 6, 2008, accessed July 22, 2023, [https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Chrysostom\\_Against\\_the\\_Jews](https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Chrysostom_Against_the_Jews).

Jesus Christ in the city of Jerusalem from the Muslim Seljuks. In addition to religious motives, a further reason for the Pope's call was to expand his political power. For the thousands of Christians who answered the call of the Crusades, the rapidly increasing population in Europe provided another strong motivation: they hoped not only for complete forgiveness of sins, but also for new lands to settle.

In the spring of 1096, after a hard winter which stalled progress toward the Holy Land, armed mobs stirred up by fanatical preachers turned on the so-called “infidels” in Germany. They brutally attacked numerous Jewish communities on the Rhine River, completely destroying them. During the Second (1147-49) and Third (1189-92) Crusades Jews were also persecuted severely. The Crusades caused a deep rupture between Christians and Jews in Europe and left an enduring wound in the Jewish memory.

During this period of anti-Jewish animosity, Christians began falsely accusing Jews of murdering innocent Christian children to reenact the crucifixion and use their blood in wicked religious rituals. Blood libel (also known as blood accusation) against Jews started in England in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the case of William of Norwich. These accusations were traditionally made during Holy Week—the week before Easter—or near Passover. In the Middle Ages blood libel charges almost always ended with the torture and death of the falsely accused Jews. Christians spread blood libel accusations to the Arab World, as in the Damascus Affair of 1840. Although leaders in the Ottoman empire censured these accusations, they remain widespread today. Other spurious charges against Jews during the Middle Ages included Host desecration and well poisoning.

During the Middle Ages, Jewish books also came under suspicion. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century Jewish life in Europe had come to be centered around study of the Talmud and the practice of the Halakha that emerged from it.<sup>48</sup> When Christians discovered the importance of post-biblical writings for the Jewish community, some wrongly charged that the Talmud was nothing more than anti-Christian literature that could not be tolerated by the church. One famous instance, the Trial of the Talmud in Paris in 1240, resulted in the burning of 24 cartloads of Talmuds and other Jewish texts.

Legal action against Jews also continued during this time. The Third and Fourth Lateran Councils in 1179 and 1215 legislated against the civil rights of Jews and dictated their dress code, including imposing the

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2.3 for a description of the Talmud and Halakha.

requirement of an identity badge. Across Europe throughout the Middle Ages, Jews were treated as outcasts of Christian society. In addition to recurring waves of violence, there were multiple expulsions of Jews over the course of 300 years, for example in England (1290), France (1306, 1322, 1394), Germany after the Black Death (1348-1351), Spain (1492), Portugal (1496), and the Papal States (1596).

An illustrative example is connected to the Christian “Reconquista,” which for centuries had aimed to retake the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors. The conquest of Granada in 1492 shifted the power dynamics between Christians and Jews in Spain. Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile forced Jews whose families had lived in Spain for centuries to convert to Christianity or be expelled (1492). The institution known as the Spanish Inquisition forced Jewish converts to Christianity to prove that their conversion was sincere and that they no longer practiced Jewish rites and customs.

The medieval period in Christian history with its anti-Jewish policies, persecution, marginalization, and violence toward the Jewish minority in Europe has ongoing implications for Jewish-Christian relations today.

#### **4.1.4 Lutheran Reformation**

In considering Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reformation, Lutherans should recall that Luther barely knew Jews. He publicly recognized that Jesus was Jewish, but his interest lay in converting Jews to Christianity. Judaism itself was of no value to him. Luther expected that Jews would hear the gospel as he presented it and be moved to accept Christ as their Messiah because of their shared lineage with Christ. In his writing *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* (*Das Jesus Christus ein geborner Jude sey*, 1523),<sup>49</sup> Luther condemned the inhumane treatment of Jews and exhorted Christians to treat them with kindness in order more effectively to convert them.

Luther’s hope to convert the Jews was disappointed, and already by the late 1520s his attitude toward them shifted. Instead of addressing them directly as active subjects, Jews became the objects of Luther’s later writings, which campaigned against Jews as paradigms of the powers and persons who resisted and contradicted the gospel. Appropriating a prophetic role, he detailed how his Christian audience should punish those who resisted conversion by quoting biblical passages from the prophets denouncing

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. WA 11, 314-336; LW 45, 199-229.

heathen practices. These writings, such as *On the Jews and their lies* (*Von den Juden und Ihren Lügen*. Wittenberg, 1543),<sup>50</sup> were full of harshness and cruelty. Luther depicted the Jews as the devil incarnate (as he would later depict the Pope and other church representatives). He advised that Jews should be expelled if they did not convert to Christianity. He urged rulers to prohibit rabbis from teaching Judaism and recommended that synagogues be burned and that prayerbooks and Talmudic writings be confiscated. He furthermore urged that safe passage on the roads cease for Jews, that their money and other property be taken from them, that their homes be destroyed, and that they be forced to perform heavy manual labor. Luther's expectations regarding the role of rulers reflected the rules of Christendom, and his rejection of Jewish teaching was in line with attitudes of other Christians at that time, yet his recommendations were among the most extreme. There were theologians even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who objected to Luther's proposals (e.g., Andreas Osiander). Ultimately, Luther's legacy poisoned the soil in which any Lutheran Christian relationship with the Jewish people might grow.

## 4.2 Recent ruptures

Anti-Judaism up until the European Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was framed primarily in religious terms. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, anti-Jewish sentiment gained additional traction with the rise of secular nationalism and pseudo-scientific theories concerning superior and inferior races. Almost 2,000 years of Christian stereotypes, discrimination, and violence against Jewish people had prepared the way for the virulent racial antisemitism that emerged at this time.

### 4.2.1 Antisemitism in the age of European Enlightenment

Jews remained a sometimes tolerated but severely disadvantaged minority in the centuries following the Reformation. As the power of the church declined, concepts of freedom and human equality gained prominence in Western Europe. Civil rights for minorities and the emancipation of the Jews were part of this development. These ideas spread further with the French Revolution in 1789-1799 and the popularity of the European Enlightenment. Many Jews were drawn to the Enlightenment's promise of inclusion and opportunity. The Enlightenment's critique of revealed religion and the desire to fit into society led some Jews to rethink aspects

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. WA 53, 417-552; LW 47, 137-306.

of Jewish tradition and practice. A migration of European Jews to urban areas furthered assimilation into an increasingly secular society, although a contingent remained in isolated communities where they continued to follow traditional Jewish ways of life.

Secular nationalism also emerged at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly as the French Revolution advanced the ideal of popular sovereignty—the idea that “the people” should rule. Nationalism held that the nation or ethnic group should exercise sovereignty over its native land to create the nation-state. Nationalism emphasized the common identity of the people based on such things as shared culture, language, history, and homeland. Jews as a distinctive people were regarded as strangers in the European nations states where they resided. They were considered “a foreign nation” or “a state within a state,” and in this way they continued to suffer civil disenfranchisement.

The rise in popularity of nationalism coincided with a new and aggressive form of hostility against Jews called antisemitism, based no longer on religious differences but on supposed racial grounds. Racial antisemitism supported prejudice and discrimination against Jews based on a pseudo-scientific view that Jews formed a distinctive and inferior ethnic group with negative traits that were dangerous for the larger society. The term **“antisemitism”** was coined in 1879 by German journalist Wilhelm Marr, whose programmatic antisemitic writings popularized the term broadly. He maintained that Germans and Jews were locked in a longstanding and irresolvable conflict in which Jews were seeking to take control of German finance and industry. Marr rejected the assumption that Jews could become Germans through assimilation because, according to him, the roots of the conflict were based on inherent racial differences. Marr founded the League of Antisemites (*Antisemitenliga*) to promote his antisemitic ideology.

In 1893, the French antisemitic newspaper *La libre parole* (*The Free Word*), founded by Édouard Drumont, included an explicit antisemitic caricature of a Jew embracing the world on its front page with the following caption: “Leur Patrie” (“Their Homeland”). In antisemitic ideology, rejection of Jews is mixed with envy, resentment, suspicion of modernity, feelings of competition and inferiority among the middle class, and fear of economic decline.

#### **4.2.2 World War II and the Shoah**

Severe poverty and political tension in Europe, as well as pogroms or violent attacks against Jewish communities in Russia and Ukraine in the



late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, led to a sharp deterioration in Jewish-Christian relations. Two years before the first Russian revolution in 1905, starting with Bloody Sunday, an anti-Jewish publication titled *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* appeared in the Russian empire.

This document purported to be the record of a Jewish conspiracy to control the world, and it fueled antisemitism around the globe as it still does to this day. The false idea of a Jewish conspiracy was promoted by powerful leaders, including the American industrialist Henry Ford and many rulers of Muslim regimes. These protocols regrettably remain popular, particularly in Arab countries, in Russia, among Christian nationalists, and in conspiracy milieux globally, including online forums.

What was at first a conspiracy theory reached a critical turning point with the emergence of National Socialism and Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933. Hitler had earlier published his political program in his book *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*, 1925), in which he advocated a racist anti-Jewish ideology. He based his conspiracy theories on, among other things, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Hitler's antisemitic ideology became integral to the official political program of the German Reich and led to the genocide against the Jewish people during World War II.

In Christian churches there were those who visibly supported Hitler and his antisemitic political and social program, and many more who were complicit in their silence in the wake of his rising power. Even the Confessing Church within the German Evangelical Churches, which opposed the Nazi movement and stressed the independence of the churches, did not challenge antisemitic policies, or protect Jews as part of its mission. There were individuals who took actions to protect individual Jews, family groups, and communities, but these were a small minority.

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, triggering World War II. Nazi soldiers conducted mass executions of Jews in Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and other parts of Eastern Europe. Starting in 1942, the German government began to deport the entire Jewish population of conquered European countries to concentration camps in Eastern Europe to murder them. Around 6 million Jewish men, women, children, and elderly people were killed in the most horrific and inhumane way.

After World War II, the term “**Holocaust**” surfaced to describe the genocide of European Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1941 and 1945. The term comes from the Greek “holócaustos,” which means

“whole burnt offering.”<sup>51</sup> The ancient Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures known as the Septuagint used this word to translate the Hebrew word “olah,” one of the sacrifices offered in the Temple. Critics see this imagery as inappropriate for genocide because of its religious implications, suggesting that an unspeakable atrocity was somehow a sacrifice desired by God. The Hebrew word **“Shoah”** meaning “catastrophe” is often preferred.

The Jewish population of Europe was devastated by the genocide carried out by Nazi Germany. It was reduced from 9.5 million in 1933 to less than 3.5 million in 1950.<sup>52</sup> The 6 million Jews killed during World War II represented around one third of the global Jewish population, and about two-thirds of the European population. In 1933, 60 percent of all Jews lived in Europe. By 1950, most Jews (51 percent) lived in the Americas (North and South combined), while only a third of the world’s Jewish population lived in Europe. Today, the vast majority of Jews live in Israel or the United States.

## 4.3 Attempts at coexistence

In response to the horror of war and the Shoah that resulted in the broad destruction of lives and cities, many recognized it was time to change the paradigm in interreligious relations and begin to walk a path of healing. Key commitments and principles were developed by Jewish and Christian partners with the aim of cultivating positive attitudes toward Jewish-Christian relations.

### 4.3.1 Early steps: Ten Points of Seelisberg

After World War II when the Jewish people were devastated by the catastrophe of genocide, a number of Jews and Christians decided to enter into a dialogue seeking to cleanse Christianity of its anti-Jewish virus and to effect a fundamental transformation of the relationship between the two religions. At the 1947 summer conference, 65 prominent Jews and Christians from 19 countries (including Jews from Europe and North America, Roman Catholics, and Protestants) met in Seelisberg, Switzerland. The goals were to condemn

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<sup>51</sup> The first recorded use of the term *holocaust* in its modern sense was in 1895 by The New York Times to describe the massacre of Armenian Christians by Ottoman forces.

<sup>52</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Remaining Jewish Population of Europe in 1945,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed August 18, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/remaining-jewish-population-of-europe-in-1945>.

the genocide, fight antisemitism, and foster stronger relations between Jews and Christians. They made a ten-point appeal to the Christian churches with the intention of reforming and renewing their ideas about Judaism and their relationship with the Jewish people. These points emphasize—among other things—that the same one God speaks through the Old and New Testaments, and that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother and loved the Jewish people. The ultimate purpose of these points was to challenge Christian superstitions and prejudices against Jews so that they could be avoided in the future. The *Ten Points of Seelisberg* remain instructive for Christians today:

1. Remember that One God speaks to us all through the Old and the New Testaments.
2. Remember that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the seed of David and the people of Israel, and that his everlasting love and forgiveness embraces His own people and the whole world.
3. Remember that the first disciples, the apostles and the first martyrs were Jews.
4. Remember that the fundamental commandment of Christianity, to love God and one's neighbour, proclaimed already in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus, is binding upon both Christians and Jews in all human relationships, without any exception.
5. Avoid distorting or misrepresenting biblical or post-biblical Judaism with the object of extolling Christianity.
6. Avoid using the word Jews in the exclusive sense of the enemies of Jesus, and the words "the enemies of Jesus" to designate the whole Jewish people.
7. Avoid presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon all Jews or upon Jews alone. It was only a section of the Jews in Jerusalem who demanded the death of Jesus, and the Christian message has always been that it was the sins of mankind which were exemplified by those Jews and the sins in which all men share that brought Christ to the Cross.
8. Avoid referring to the scriptural curses, or the cry of a raging mob: "His blood be upon us and our children," without remembering that this cry should not count against the infinitely more weighty words of our Lord: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."
9. Avoid promoting the superstitious notion that the Jewish people are reprobate, accursed, reserved for a destiny of suffering.

10. Avoid speaking of the Jews as if the first members of the Church had not been Jews.<sup>53</sup>

The International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) was established in 1947 in Seelisberg, to provide an ongoing platform for Jewish-Christian dialogue and cooperation. Today, the ICCJ serves as the umbrella group for 34 national Jewish-Christian dialogue organizations world-wide. The international headquarters of the ICCJ are in the house where the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber lived in Heppenheim, Germany until Nazi persecution forced him to flee. The ICCJ's efforts to promote Jewish-Christian dialogue provide models for wider interfaith relations, particularly dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For the Lutheran World Federation, Jewish-Christian relations remains a dedicated programmatic focus of the Department for Theology, Mission and Justice.

### **4.3.2 Recommitment: Twelve Points of Berlin**

In 2009, reflecting on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Ten Points of Seelisberg*, the ICCJ made a new appeal to Christian and Jewish communities around the world to renew and strengthen the commitment to Jewish-Christian dialogue in pursuit of continued healing. The current call reflected the need to deepen the *Ten Points of Seelisberg* in accordance with the progress made in interreligious dialogue.

This appeal, *A Time for Recommitment: The Twelve Points of Berlin*, opened with an exhortation first to Christians and then to Jews, followed by an appeal to both communities and a wider public. Specific tasks were set out for each group, expanding the scope of the 1947 document which focused mainly on Christianity attitudes, teachings, and actions. The recommitment to joint action in the *Twelve Points of Berlin* is listed in three parts:

#### **A Call to Christians and Christian Communities**

- To combat religious, racial and all other forms of antisemitism
- To promote interreligious dialogue with Jews

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<sup>53</sup> See statement produced by Christian participants at an "Emergency Conference on Anti-Semitism," held in Seelisberg, Switzerland from July 30 - August 5, 1947 in International Council of Christians and Jews, "The Ten Points of Seelisberg," CCJR, accessed August 18, 2023, <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/ecumenical-christian/seelisberg>.

- To develop theological understandings of Judaism that affirm its distinctive integrity
- To pray for the peace of Jerusalem

### **A Call to Jews and Jewish Communities**

- To acknowledge the efforts of many Christian communities in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to reform their attitudes toward Jews
- To re-examine Jewish texts and liturgy in the light of these Christian reforms
- To differentiate between fair-minded criticism of Israel and antisemitism
- To offer encouragement to the State of Israel as it works to fulfill the ideals stated in its founding documents, a task Israel shares with many nations of the world

### **A Call to Both Christian and Jewish Communities and Others**

- To enhance interreligious and intercultural education
- To promote interreligious friendship and cooperation as well as social justice in the global society
- To enhance dialogue with political and economic bodies
- To network with all those whose work responds to the demands of environmental stewardship<sup>54</sup>

Stimulated by the Seelisberg initiative, the *Twelve Points of Berlin* address the shameful heritage of prejudice, hatred, and mutual mistrust through a serious commitment to dialogue, self-critical analysis of texts and traditions, and common actions for justice, among other initiatives. In many parts of the world and in many churches, however, the measures for peaceful coexistence proposed in the *Ten Points of Seelisberg* and the *Twelve Points of Berlin* remain unknown or are ignored. The implementation of these proposals for dialogue and interreligious engagement remains a challenge.

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<sup>54</sup> For more details on each point and the broader background to the points, see International Council of Christians and Jews, *A Time for Recommitment: Building the New Relationship between Jews and Christians* (2009), accessed August 18, 2023, [https://www.iccj.org/fileadmin/ICCJ/pdf-Dateien/A\\_Time\\_for\\_Recommitment\\_engl.pdf](https://www.iccj.org/fileadmin/ICCJ/pdf-Dateien/A_Time_for_Recommitment_engl.pdf).

### 4.3.3 Collaboration between Jewish and Christian partners

#### Examples from Latin America

In Latin America, a response to the creation of the ICCJ was a sincere rapprochement between Jews and Christians. This happened mainly in metropolitan areas of countries where large numbers of Jews settled, namely Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, and Chile. The creation of several Jewish-Christian confraternities strengthened ties at the community level.

The dialogue was especially centered in Buenos Aires, where the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary was created. In partnership, the Protestant theological faculty ISEDET (Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos) and the Catholic University of Argentina created the Instituto Superior de Estudios Religiosos (ISER). This higher institute of religious studies facilitated profound dialogue and knowledge exchange at the theological level. The Lutheran churches of the Southern Cone region of South America joined in all these processes.

Today, these paradigms originated by the Jewish-Christian confraternities and ISER are employed by several institutions of interreligious dialogue. The basis of dialogue has been broadened to include Muslims and many other religions, with a clear aim of getting to know each other and breaking down prejudices through sincere dialogue.

#### Examples from the USA

While there are other Lutheran churches that consistently included the conversion of Jews to the Christian faith within their evangelism programs, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its predecessor bodies have built a long record of respect, dialogue, and education for positive Lutheran-Jewish relations. Initially the Lutheran Council in the USA led these efforts, publishing studies and dialogue materials. Since 1989, the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations has guided churchwide efforts on Lutheran-Jewish relations within the office of the ELCA's presiding bishop.<sup>55</sup> *A Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church In America to the Jewish Community* published in 1994 repudiated Martin Luther's anti-Jewish invective and affirmed the church's "urgent desire

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. ELCA. (2023). *Jewish-Relations*. <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Jewish-Relations>

to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people.”<sup>56</sup> The consultative panel has since produced study materials, guidelines for dialogue,<sup>57</sup> insights related to liturgical practices (i.e. Good Friday liturgies), and a guide developed in consultation with Jewish leaders for preaching and teaching in that spirit of love and respect.<sup>58</sup>

Direct dialogue with the Union for Reform Judaism has shaped the ELCA's engagement, as has participation in the dialogue work of national ecumenical organizations and the LWF. Alongside several dozen centers for Jewish-Christian engagement established by the Roman Catholic Church in response to the Vatican II declaration, “*Nostra Aetate*,” Muhlenberg College and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago created interreligious programs that include a focus on Jewish-Christian relations.

At the ELCA's church-wide assembly in 2017 to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, Lutheran-Jewish relations were highlighted through a litany of confession followed by a response by Jewish leadership. This engagement led to a renewal in bilateral leadership meetings with the Union for Reform Judaism and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. In recent years, the national dialogue has made further strides to address antisemitism and nationalism (both Christian and Jewish) and at times enters into related discussion about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In relation to the State of Israel and its ongoing conflict with neighboring Arab countries and the Palestinian people, the ELCA holds its commitment to the Jewish people in a dynamic balance with its commitment to the Palestinian people. Since 2005, a churchwide strategy for engagement in Israel and Palestine has worked to build awareness, undertake advocacy, and ensure the church's constructive accompaniment in relation to the Palestinian people. Partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land is a strong, central focus of the strategy.

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-jewish relation. (1994). *Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community*. [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration\\_Of\\_The\\_ELCA\\_To\\_The\\_Jewish\\_Community.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration_Of_The_ELCA_To_The_Jewish_Community.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Cf. ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-jewish relations. (1998). *Guidelines for Lutheran-Jewish Relations*. [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Guidelines\\_For\\_Lutheran\\_Jewish\\_Relations\\_1998.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Guidelines_For_Lutheran_Jewish_Relations_1998.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Cf. ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations (2022), *Preaching and Teaching “With Love and Respect for the Jewish People”*, accessed July 14, 2023, [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Preaching\\_And\\_Teaching\\_With\\_Love\\_And\\_Respect\\_For\\_The\\_Jewish\\_People.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Preaching_And_Teaching_With_Love_And_Respect_For_The_Jewish_People.pdf).

Too many to mention are the local initiatives by congregations, colleges, seminaries, clergy, and other leaders in building lasting relationships with the Jewish community. In sharing facilities, observing significant annual commemorations such as *Yom haShoah*, undertaking pulpit exchange by clergy and living-room dialogues among lay people, developing shared education programs, and responding to crisis moments of antisemitic violence, Lutherans in the United States are frequently among the Christian leaders in partnership with the Jewish community.

## Examples from the LWF

In 2022, the LWF cooperated with IJCIC to begin a process of renewing Jewish-Christian conversations. This included a webinar where young people talked about “A brave space for courageous peace”, as well as a webinar entitled “Gathering around the tree of Life”, which marked a renewing of cooperation but also brought this discussion to a broader audience.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, the LWF together with HIAS (originally the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and Islamic Relief Worldwide co-organized an international conference on “Welcoming the Stranger, Shaping the Future, and Living as Neighbors.” This cooperation brought together Jewish, Muslim, Christian and other partners involved in refugee response, and addressed xenophobia and nurturing inclusive societies.<sup>60</sup> These steps collectively contribute to the ongoing process of improving Jewish-Christian relations through both dialogue and working together for the common good. One rich example of this work is LWF’s Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem, which coordinates Israeli and Palestinian medical resources to serve the Palestinian population.

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<sup>59</sup> “Interfaith Relations: Gathering around the Tree of Life,” Lutheran World Federation, May 18, 2021, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/interfaith-relations-gathering-around-tree>–“Interfaith Relations: Gathering around the Tree of Life,” Lutheran World Federation, May 18, 2021, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/interfaith-relations-gathering-around-tree-life>. “Brave Space for Courageous Peace,” Lutheran World Federation, June 16, 2021, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/brave-space-courageous-peace>.

<sup>60</sup> For more see “Standing Together to Strengthen Refugee Response,” Lutheran World Federation, June 21, 2021, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/standing-together-strengthen-refugee-response>.



## 4.4 Closing comments

Reviewing historical events that impacted Jewish-Christian relations highlights the negative role that Christians have often played in contributing to these wounds. Too often in the past, Christians have preached and taught with hostile messages against the Jewish people, but there have also been instances when the Jewish heritage within Christianity was affirmed. The Shoah challenged Christians to examine their role in history. Lutherans more specifically had to reconsider their theology and the degree of their complicity in wider anti-Jewish developments that fueled 20<sup>th</sup> century antisemitism and ultimately led to genocide. After World War II, Lutheran churches and the Lutheran World Federation have continued to take significant steps to address the serious mistakes of the past.

In the next chapter, we will investigate obstacles that could hinder further progress toward dialogue, encounter, and healing. Politically, a very important development was the establishment of the State of Israel. Jews took their destiny into their own hands with the founding of the State of Israel. This event produced a hermeneutical shock for Christians (as well as for some Jews) and changed the image of Jews in the eyes of the church. Suddenly, Israel became a real entity instead of a visionary biblical ideal. Advances in many forms of communication have changed the world and turned it into a global village. Christians today find themselves one religion among many others, rather than the dominant religion in colonial Western culture. These realities have opened new opportunities for interreligious dialogue.

## Questions for reflection, discussion, and action

1. What events from history do you feel still need to be addressed with regard to Jewish-Christian relations? How do we take concrete steps to repair historical mistakes and promote healing?
2. What steps can we take to ensure we are being sensitive with dialogue partners about enduring traumas?
3. How do we talk about the past, and especially the Shoah, without letting the past be the one thing that defines both us and our Jewish dialogue partners and our relationship today?
4. Looking at the *Ten Points of Seelisberg* (1947) and the *Twelve Points of Berlin* (2009) discussed above: Are they still relevant, and if so, how do we respond to challenges they pose today?
5. What is antisemitism to you? Is it possible to study the many different expressions of antisemitism and racism as part of work in congregations and in dialogue groups?
6. What might we learn from the history of silence in response to conspiracy theories as new conspiracy theories emerge today?



# 5: Obstacles to Dialogue and Encounter

This chapter will highlight some major obstacles to fruitful dialogue and encounter with Jewish partners, including internal challenges within the Lutheran communion and worldwide Christianity. Extremist movements within Christianity will be explored, as will the practice of uncritically appropriating Jewish holidays and other controversial religious practices. External forces such as the global rise of antisemitism, conspiracy theories, and violence directed against Jewish communities worldwide are also identified in this chapter.

Another major challenge to be addressed is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which puts unique pressures on Jewish-Christian relationships. Some Jewish and Christian dialogue partners might feel uneasy that deliberations around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict threaten to overshadow recent gains in Jewish-Christian relations, particularly in contexts beyond the Middle East. Yet the political dimensions of this conflict have existential and real-life implications for all parties concerned and demand a strong commitment to listen to differing and contested views with care, sensitivity, and discernment. For Christians, Jesus' call to be peacemakers makes this a particularly challenging dynamic.

## 5.1 Internal and external obstacles for Jewish-Christian relations

Although there is overlap among internal and external obstacles to Jewish-Christian dialogue today, it is useful here to distinguish them as those arising within Christianity and those established by larger contextual and political dynamics. While we are making a distinction between them for educational purposes, the reality often is more nuanced.

Internal to the Christian community, for many Christians, discovering their shared roots with Jewish traditions, both religious and cultural, gives them a greater appreciation for the richness of the Jewish heritage.<sup>61</sup> This is a

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<sup>61</sup> Chapters 2 and 3 indicate some of the Jewish roots of Christianity.

point of contact for dialogue, yet instances of Christian appropriation of Jewish elements hinder respectful encounter. For example, some Christian communities today invite people to celebrate a Passover meal in their church as a way of sharing in Jesus's practices. Such religious appropriation is historically inaccurate, as Jesus celebrated the Passover meal differently than Jews do today. It is also disrespectful and offensive to Jews when Christians adopt their customs and traditions as if they were their own, especially when it leads to a blurring of the boundaries of communal identity. The appropriation of Jewish festivals decontextualizes those religious events by forcing them into a Christian framework.

The ethics of proselytization continues to incite debate within Christianity, especially with regard to the explicit missionary approach targeting Jews as objects in certain Christian understanding of the end times. Similarly, interfaith marriages where conversion from Judaism to another religion occurs is a polarizing topic of discussion. The number of Jews worldwide is so small that conversion and assimilation for whatever reason are seen as a threat to Jewish continuity, as community members are absorbed into the general culture.

In contexts where there is no longer a significant Jewish presence (the Middle East and Mediterranean region outside of the State of Israel) or in places which were never home to Jewish communities (much of Asia and Africa), the topic of Jewish-Christian relations surfaces only at an abstract level. Without the presence of synagogues and opportunities for social interaction, many in these communities have no lived encounters with people of the Jewish faith and only meet Jews through the scriptures and global media.

The influence of Christian ideologies with religious-political agendas, such as Christian Zionism, is a growing concern within worldwide Christianity. Some forms of Christian Zionism are problematic in their fundamentalist interpretation of the place of Jews and the State of Israel in the end times. This interpretation continues the long Christian tradition of seeing Jews as objects—in this case as a means to usher in the kingdom of God and to fulfill a triumphant Christian interpretation of the end of time. The ramification of this interpretation has consequences not only for Jewish-Christian encounters but also for the Palestinian Christian presence in what Christians consider the Holy Land.

Moreover, political extremists remain a global problem. There are some left wing political movements, such as in Latin America, which express themselves in a politically negative or even hostile way toward Jews and

Israel. In the USA and parts of Europe and Latin America, some fundamentalist and evangelical revivalist movements have been closely linked to right wing populist political movements giving rise to what has been termed “Christian nationalism.” These political movements often employ incendiary political rhetoric and support anti-immigrant policies. In what appears at times to be an internal contradiction, these movements express uncritical support for the State of Israel while advocating for a nationalistic identity that is hostile to so-called “foreign” influences of religion, culture, and ethnicity—including Jews.

Christianity’s relationship with Judaism is also complicated due to external forces, as exemplified by recent instances of hostilities and attacks on Christian minorities in some regions of the world. In places with a Muslim majority such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria, Christians may be associated with Jews or with the State of Israel in public discourse fueled by religious nationalistic polemics. For example, in the 2022 general election of Malaysia, ethno-religious politicians accused their Christian political opponents of conspiring with Jews to colonize the country. Such accusations of guilt by association with the State of Israel inflame antisemitism and anti-Jewish attitudes in other religious communities as well, illustrating how political actors have the potential to further obstruct opportunities for openness in Jewish-Christian encounters.

In the current global climate, however, the collective awareness that humans live in a world of religious vitality and diversity is increasing. With the interconnectedness of digital media and the Internet, even the most remote communities in the world have opportunities to engage with people of Jewish faith.

Yet at the same time, new technologies also spread false information and conspiracy theories such as Holocaust denial or allegations that prominent Jewish agents are manipulating global economic and political processes, feeding into a dangerous narrative of Jews as untrustworthy. Some have argued that since Napoleon’s military campaign against Egypt at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the spread of conspiracy theories in the Arab world has increased enormously. Anti-Jewish attitudes and antisemitism were fanned by the founding of the State of Israel, and they persist within the framework of the Middle East conflict. Christians and Muslims in the Arab world, and in predominantly Muslim countries, are equally influenced by this.

In today’s polarizing and conflict-ridden geo-political climate, there has been alarming escalation in virulent anti-Jewish rhetoric and violence around

the globe. Many Jews see violence against civilians in Israel as a form of antisemitism. Although the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnesses ongoing reconciliation efforts between Christianity and Judaism, targeted attacks against Jews continue to appear in nearly every country where they live, showing the global prevalence of antisemitic attitudes today.

Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two attacks emblematic of the Jewish population's ongoing insecurity occurred outside of Europe. In 1992 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, car bombs were detonated in front of the Embassy of Israel and the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA), destroying both buildings to their foundations and causing more than a hundred deaths as well as hundreds of injuries. In 2018 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (USA), a gunman entered the Tree of Life Synagogue on Shabbat shouting his desire to kill Jews. Eleven people were shot and killed in the deadliest attack on Jews in American history.

The troubling resurgence of attacks on Jews, their synagogues, Jewish institutions, and embassies in recent decades are perpetrated by a range of groups including right wing extremists, left wing extremists, religious fanatics (including Christians), and state agents, including Iran-sponsored Hezbollah. Jewish-Christian relations are further damaged when Jews as individuals or as a collective are equated with the State of Israel or are held responsible for the policies of the government of Israel. Any attack targeting Jews or their places of worship throughout the world must be condemned as antisemitism.

Internationally, debate continues on the politicization of the definition of antisemitism within the United Nations. This has immediate implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically, but also potentially closes down the possibility for criticism of the policies of the State of Israel. Critics voice concern that charges of antisemitism may prevent open debate and protest, thereby emboldening extremist Jewish nationalism. This dynamic is harmful to efforts that support Israel's founding aspiration of coexistence among its religiously and ethnically diverse populations.

This non-exhaustive list has many complex elements beyond the scope of this study document. However, Lutherans are committed to challenge any form of politicization of religion and the religious instrumentalization of politics which contradict the call of Jesus to love one's neighbor.<sup>62</sup> In the

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<sup>62</sup> *The Church in the Public Space: A Study Document of The Lutheran World Federation* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2021), <https://www.lutheranworld.org/resources/>

context of Jewish-Christian dialogue and encounter, a basic awareness of these obstacles can alert us to be sensitive in our engagement with Jewish friends and partners.

## 5.2 Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict elicits polarizing perspectives and as such must be addressed with care and deliberateness in Jewish-Christian relations. This study guide is not the place to try to propose a resolution of the conflict, nor is it the role of the LWF to do so. The challenging task of resolution can only be achieved by those who are directly engaged in the conflict: the State of Israel and the Palestinian people through their political leadership. One constructive role the LWF and the international community can play is to press for adherence to international law and UN resolutions including the defense and protection of human rights. As noted previously, the LWF has always encouraged Palestinians and Israelis in the quest for peace and has affirmed the vision of two states living in peaceful coexistence with independent sovereignty and security.<sup>63</sup>

In encouraging its member churches to deepen their engagement in Jewish-Christian relations, the LWF seeks to promote awareness through education that supports encounter and dialogue. It does so on the basis of its commitment to the integrity and dignity of every people, including both the Jewish and the Palestinian people, and of its desire to promote the twin values of peace and justice throughout the world. Aiding in this effort are the insights and experiences of an LWF member church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), which is part of the Palestinian Christian community and situated in East Jerusalem, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Amman, Jordan. We have also engaged an LWF dialogue partner, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), and have valued their perspectives while writing this study document.

This section offers three foundational perspectives for dialogue regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It then takes up several dynamics within the conflict that are especially pertinent currently, without any claim to be

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<sup>63</sup> LWF Council. (2011, June 14). *statement on the situation in the Middle East*. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Council%20Middle%20East%20June%202011.pdf> . See Chapter 1 for a summary of the LWF position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



exhaustive. Finally, it concludes by framing Jewish-Christian encounter in a way that affirms and advances equal rights, peaceful coexistence, and security for all people living in the land with full human rights and dignity.

We offer this brief overview to provide encouragement to Lutherans and other Christians wanting to persist in Jewish-Christian dialogue through conversations about this difficult and weighty topic. These conversations are made particularly difficult in churches that have no direct experience with the Palestinian community or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The perspectives of our member church, the ELCJHL, which ministers under conditions impacted by Israeli occupation, help us to understand their experience in ways similar to how local Jewish communities may help us to understand Jewish and Israeli perspectives. We encourage all who use this document to join the LWF in seeking to understand clearly, and as fully as possible, the experiences of all those who are engaged in the conflict. This guide cannot present all the information and perspectives needed for every situation in which it will be used. We therefore point to the urgent need for more conversation, greater understanding, and growth in commitment from all parties who seek a just and enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and who remain committed to fostering positive Jewish-Christian relations.

### 5.2.1 Two peoples in one land

After centuries of oppression and persecution against Jews in Europe, Zionism emerged as a Jewish national movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In keeping with the ideals of other 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist movements, the vision was that the Jewish people would exercise sovereignty in their ancient homeland, identified in this case as the land of Israel. The connection to the land is central to Jewish history and identity. It plays a prominent role in Jewish liturgy and ritual, and there has been a Jewish presence there throughout the centuries. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, in response to a Jewish revolt, the Romans renamed the province of Judea “Syria Palaestina,” a name carried into the modern era as **“Palestine.”** Particularly in light of the history of Christian and Nazi antisemitism in Europe, for proponents of Zionism there was no other land the Jews could call their national home.<sup>64</sup>

However, Palestine was not empty. Most inhabitants during the four centuries of Ottoman rule were Palestinian Muslim. There were also Palestinian

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<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 2.6 for a discussion of Zionism.

Christians and Jews, as well as Druze, Samaritans, and other diverse communities of very long residency.<sup>65</sup> Palestine was their homeland, even though they had not been able to exercise sovereignty under the Ottomans. The fall of the Ottoman empire in World War I and the establishment of British Mandate for Palestine renewed nationalist hopes, particularly among the Palestinian Arab Christians and Muslims, hopes that had already begun to emerge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To them, large-scale Jewish immigration with a nationalist goal was seen as a threat to these hopes.

Significant Jewish immigration to Palestine began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was driven by many factors, including antisemitic threats and violence in Europe and the aspirations of the Zionist movement. This immigration came to be seen by many Palestinians as an expression of Western colonialism. The established Palestinian population and the immigrant Jewish population encountered one another with predictably diverse reactions. There were instances of co-existence and cooperation, as well as escalating episodes of conflict, over time growing increasingly violent.

With the withdrawal of the British Mandatory Authority in 1948, the political situation shifted. The General Assembly of the United Nations on 29 November 1947 approved a partition plan for Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. The Jewish state came into existence when the Jewish National Council proclaimed the State of Israel on 14 May 1948, followed by war against Israel by the armies of Transjordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria, in which members of the Palestinian Arab population participated. The armistice of 1949 set the functional geographical boundaries of the State of Israel for the ensuing decades. With Israel's founding, life for Jews across the Arab and Muslim Middle East and North Africa became more difficult. Over the next two decades, the new state absorbed roughly three-quarters of a million Jewish immigrants and refugees from Muslim countries, drawn by Zionist hopes and driven by anti-Jewish antagonism.

Palestinians speak of the events that led to the founding of the State of Israel using the word “Nakba,” which means catastrophe. During the 1948 war, more than 700,000 Palestinians fled, were forced from the land, or were expelled. More than 470 Palestinian towns and villages were completely destroyed. Some Palestinians maintain that it was above all European antisemitism that led to the founding of the State of Israel. They argue that still today they are paying the price for European racism.

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<sup>65</sup> See Chapter 2.7 for a description of life in Israel, including the diversity of the population of that country.

After the foundation of the State of Israel, the Palestinian people were divided geo-politically between those in Israel and those on the other side of the armistice lines, including those in the Gaza strip then occupied by Egypt, those in the West Bank that was annexed by Jordan, and those in other Arab states. As stateless persons, Palestinian refugees in Arab states are denied the right of return by Israel, usually have no civil rights in their countries of residence, and often experience systematic discrimination as a minority group.

The War of 1967 brought another geo-political division for Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, which came under Israeli military administration. The Palestinian Authority became the first representative government of the Palestinian people in the mid-1990s, although the Oslo Accords limited its control over the Palestinian territories. Israel undertook a withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 with the expressed intent to facilitate Palestinian sovereignty. The 2007 election of a Hamas majority to the Palestinian National Council led to the Hamas leadership in Gaza seizing control by expelling all Fatah (non-Hamas) officials from the region.

Throughout the period from 1948 to the present, Israel has seen significant shifts in the postures and policies of its government, as different political coalitions have gained and lost power. Since 1994, actions taken unilaterally due to political ideology, practical or strategic necessity, or in response to conflict have encroached on territory that has been designated as Palestinian by the Oslo Accords. Israeli military and civilian measures have exerted powerful influence on daily Palestinian life. The route of the separation barrier, the construction of settlements and dedicated infrastructure to support them, the operation of checkpoints, the destruction of homes and agricultural operations, and the allocation of key resources such as water and electricity, all reflect this influence and the impact of military and political strategies. Israel also maintains control over travel into, and out of, the Palestinian territories, limiting mobility for residents and precluding return for many in the Palestinian diaspora.

The circumstances of Palestinian life vary greatly in the Palestinian territories, in the portion of Jerusalem that Israel annexed after 1967, and in Israel itself, yet all reflect the reality of Israeli domination and an Israeli Jewish majority. Nevertheless, Palestinians broadly continue to share a common sense of identity as they seek the dignity of an autonomous national self-expression.

Some Jewish and Palestinian people consider the whole of the land “from the river to the sea” (the Jordan to the Mediterranean) to be their home-

land, notwithstanding the differences in history and in the dynamics by which their attachments to it have grown. Within both communities, strong voices argue for exclusive control of the land for ideological or religious reasons or as protection against the kind of oppression they have known. Both communities also have strong advocates for peace and co-existence within the land in one arrangement or another.

The ELCJHL and some other Palestinian Christians reject any exclusive claim to the land. The land belongs to God, and as such it is a land for all. They call for a theology of a “shared land,” where inhabitants share the land and its resources equally and have the same rights—regardless of their ethnicity or religion. A shared-land theology emphasizes that there are no “second-class” citizens in this land. No one is marginalized in God’s vision of the land.

The changed circumstances of the past decade have shifted discussions regarding the viability and desirability of two national states. Yet the LWF continues to hold this vision, affirming Israel as the national home of the Jewish people and encouraging Israeli and Palestinian leaders to negotiate a political reality that guarantees the rights of Palestinians, including the right of self-determination and the right to live in peace and dignity in their homeland without any discrimination. The LWF views the resolution of the present impasse as a geo-political task. The religious convictions of parties to that task are certainly of relevance to the pursuit of their goals, but no one’s religious convictions can exclusively determine the outcome.

### **5.2.2 Realities on the ground**

The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is a major stumbling block in the unresolved quest for peace in the Middle East and has religious and political implications globally. Bishop Azar of the ELCJHL recently wrote of “the occupation, persecution, and oppression of the Palestinian people that is so often suppressed by Western media and perceptions.” Some people both within and outside Israel assert that the occupation is a response to Palestinian intransigence in peace negotiations and serves to protect Israel from violent attack. Others claim that there are deeper motives of expansionism and point to the ongoing building of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, and the violation of widely held understandings of human rights and international law.

Violence continues to be a factor in the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis. Hamas, the ruling party in Gaza since 2007, remains committed

to an armed struggle to dismantle the State of Israel. Hezbollah, operating across Israel's northern border in Lebanon, similarly uses violent attacks to disrupt Israeli life and exert pressure on the State. Both act with political and material support from Iran, which has demonized Israel and Jews in its political rhetoric. Jewish Israeli citizens remain vulnerable in everyday life to violent attacks with knives, suicide bombings, the use of vehicles as weapons, explosive rockets, and other threats.

Palestinians insist that certain actions of the State of Israel constitute “state violence,” pointing to confiscation of land, control of natural resources, demolition of homes, the practice of family separation, administrative detentions including detention of children without trial, fatal raids on Palestinian lands and homes, targeted assassinations, and air bombardments among other actions. Attacks on persons and property by civilian settlers in the West Bank add to the violence experienced by the Palestinian community. Most people in both Israeli and Palestinian societies know those in the other community only as combatants, adversaries, and a deadly threat.

In the joint statement by Palestinian Christians entitled, “*A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*,” there is a call for a shared future together:

Through our love, we will overcome injustices and establish foundations for a new society both for us and for our opponents. Our future and their future are one. Either the cycle of violence that destroys both of us or peace that will benefit both.<sup>66</sup>

The LWF joins its member church, the ELCJHL, in deploring violence by either party as a way to solve the conflict. Violent attacks on civilians can under no circumstances be seen as a means to achieve peace and coexistence. It stands with the ELCJHL in its efforts to pray, preach, and work toward ending the occupation and establishing a lasting and just peace between Palestine and Israel. In its schools, from its pulpits, and in its families, the ELCJHL teaches its children and communities to value life, understanding, and coexistence. The ELCJHL believes that the best possible future is one in which Palestine and Israel live side by side as neighbors, friends, and partners, with Jerusalem as a city shared by two peoples and three religions (Islam, Judaism, and Christianity).

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<sup>66</sup> Kairos Palestine (2018). *Kairos Document: A moment of truth – A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*, accessed July 27 <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document>.

The LWF also supports those in the wider Palestinian society who work to build positive relationships with Israeli Jews and to make common cause with Israeli organizations and advocates for a just peace and coexistence. It also appreciates those in Israel and the Jewish world who undertake such initiatives and who respond to Palestinian overtures.

### **5.2.3 Covenantal relationship, social justice, and ecclesial communion**

The LWF affirms that the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people continues today, and that this relationship has never been superseded.<sup>67</sup> This affirmation of the **covenant** includes by implication the “promised land,” since the land is part of the biblical covenant. Some Lutherans interpret this affirmation of the covenant to mean that modern-day Israel is a renewal of biblical Israel and that the land belongs to the Jews by divine covenant. Other Lutherans affirm the legitimacy of the State of Israel without grounding their affirmation in a biblical promise, but rather in the human right to life with safety, peace, and dignity. Jews, too, debate the role of the covenant in their understanding of the State of Israel.

For many Palestinians, tying the State of Israel’s existence to the biblical covenant becomes problematic when it overrides their human right to life with safety, peace, and dignity, which they understand to be secured by international law as well as by biblical witness. The silence of church institutions about oppressive acts on the part of the State of Israel is often experienced as disregard for the presence and suffering of Palestinians. Christians understand that the authority to govern is a gift of God to be exercised on behalf of the well-being of all the governed. This principle aligns well both with the Jewish value of care for everyone in the community and with the Palestinian value of generous hospitality. It asserts that the human and civil rights of every individual must be preserved and protected by all those who exercise power. Social justice is the hallmark of a healthy society even when conflict is present.

It can be both easy and counterproductive to view Israelis and Palestinians through two different lenses. Seeing Israeli Jews through a theological lens can confer on them power and privilege because of their covenantal relationship with God, while seeing Palestinians through a humanitarian or

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<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 1.2.3 for the affirmation of the covenant between God and the Jewish people at the consultation at Dobogókő (2001).

sociological lens can reduce them to manipulated and powerless objects worthy only of compassion. This contrast dismisses important dimensions of both communities. The church is called to use both lenses, integrating its theological understandings of the gospel with the humanitarian and sociological realities of worldly existence. It, therefore, must speak out whenever anyone misuses power—be they Israeli or Palestinian and whether that power is authorized by the state or lies outside of governmental structures—in ways that harm human dignity or undermine human well-being.

The experiences and voice of Palestinian Christians remind the church of the ecclesial consequences of all Christians belonging together as one body in Christ. The ecclesial communion, as understood by the LWF, lives from the gift of God and is committed to one another.<sup>68</sup> No member of the communion can be regarded only as an object of compassion and not also as an agent and partner in our journey together as the LWF.

## **5.2.4 Contemporary issues of concern**

The historical emergence of two peoples in one land, the ongoing realities of power and violence manifested in different ways by both communities on the ground, and the intertwined issues of covenantal identity and social justice, shape the fundamental dynamics of any consideration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Layered onto these fundamental and persisting dynamics are issues that emerge from the circumstances of the moment and from the ways in which the parties to the conflict frame them. This section will take up several such issues that seem especially pressing now: Christian Zionism; polarized debate, including use of biblical prooftexts and disagreements about definitions of antisemitism and the appropriateness of apartheid language; and Israel's Basic Law concerning the Jewish nation-state.

### **5.2.4.1 Christian Zionism**

Zionism has recently been described by the LWF member church, the ELCA as “the movement for national self-expression by the Jewish people... In its broadest sense, Zionism embraces any effort to build up and enhance the authentic expression of Jewish life in the world. For nearly all those who embrace Zionism, the existence of a sovereign nation-state identified with

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion: A Study Document of the Lutheran World Federation* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2015), <https://www.lutheranworld.org/resources/publication-self-understanding-lutheran-communion-study-document>.

the Jewish people is an essential foundation for Jewish self-expression anywhere. The State of Israel has been that foundation since 1948.”<sup>69</sup>

Many non-Jews support the core concept of Zionism—the right of Jewish self-determination within their homeland. Christian Zionism focuses on the aspiration for a Jewish nation-state from within a Christian worldview and theology. There are a variety of such theologies.<sup>70</sup>

One form of Christian Zionism that has gained ascendancy in conservative Christian circles exerts a strong impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This theology and ideology, according to Lutheran theologian Robert Smith, can be understood as: “political action, informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now comprising Israel and Palestine.”<sup>71</sup> Smith argues that its roots can be traced back nearly three centuries and that it has played a role in both British and American foreign policy. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many influential Christians promoted the settlement of Jews in Ottoman Palestine, portraying it as “a land without a people for a people without a land.”<sup>72</sup> The long-settled Arab population in the land at the time was not seen as “a people,” in the tragically typical Western imperial attitude of Orientalism.

In its extreme expressions, the political action of Christian Zionism draws energy from a vision of the end times that includes a global war of Armageddon, in which the Jewish people and the State of Israel have roles in hastening the second coming of Christ. This perspective results in virtually unconditional political support of Israel and substantial material contributions for efforts by the Israeli government, international allies, and private actors to sustain and expand Israel’s control over the biblical “land of Israel.” Many Lutheran churches and Jewish groups have rejected this form of theological extremism. To the Palestinian community, when this powerful religious movement is joined to geo-political interests in having a Western-aligned democracy in the Middle East, Israel can appear to be a colonialist projection of Euro-American power.

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<sup>69</sup> ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations, *Preaching and Teaching “With Love and Respect for the Jewish People”*, 31.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Gerald R. McDermott, ed., *Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land* (U.S.A: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

<sup>71</sup> See “Conclusion: Christian Zionism from the Cartwright Petition to American Empire” in Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 185-196.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander Keith, *The Land of Israel According to the Covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob* (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1843), 43.



Constructive Jewish-Christian dialogue and encounter will recognize the variety of Christian understandings of the State of Israel and will be sensitive to their impact on the lives of Palestinians, including members of the ELCJHL. Drawing direct lines from covenantal language in the Bible to political realities in today's Middle East is incompatible with the way that most Lutherans interpret scripture. National identities, political power, and church-based advocacy need to be approached within a larger context than land promises or end times visions from the Bible. Shalom, or peace, is a fundamental biblical concept shared by the Jewish and Christian traditions. The challenge is to translate that peace into political and social reality. Hope lights up where Christian and Jewish commitments to peace go hand in hand.

### **5.2.4.2 Polarized debate**

Combative political discussions over Palestine and Israel impede the road to peace in the Middle East today. There are those who strongly and unconditionally support the State of Israel, while others call for sanctions on Israel until it abides by international law or even is dismantled. Many view security as a legitimate concern justifying Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, while many others regard this issue as a smokescreen justifying the violence of occupation. The language of the discussion often disrupts initiatives in Jewish-Christian engagement, with debate too often descending into emotional conflict that mirrors the intransigence of the actual conflict.

One area of polarization involves the use of biblical passages to define present-day realities, as noted above regarding the biblical covenant and a Jewish right to the land. Palestinian Christians are particularly outraged when the Bible, which is also their scripture, is used by radical Jewish and Christian Zionists to justify their oppression. Equally polarizing are arguments based on the assertion that there is no continuity whatsoever between biblical Israel and the Jewish people today or, conversely, that there is no legitimacy to Palestinian peoplehood. History and heritage are more complicated than such claims acknowledge. Constructive dialogue requires moving beyond charged rhetoric to careful, critical understanding of the situation.

Another contemporary polarization involves the relationship between criticism of the policies and actions of Israel and charges of antisemitism. A definition of antisemitism along with examples of it was promulgated in 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).<sup>73</sup> In

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<sup>73</sup> Remembrance Alliance. (2020). What is antisemitism?. Accessed October 5, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>.

2021, this definition prompted a response from 210 scholars of Holocaust history, Jewish studies, and Middle East studies in the form of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, which emphasizes that “evidence-based criticism of Israel as a state” is not antisemitic.<sup>74</sup> Both documents recognize that antisemitism is unacceptable and that legitimate political and moral criticism of Israel cannot be categorically branded as antisemitic; nevertheless, the documents have become competing battle flags around which defenders and critics of Israel have rallied, respectively.

The question of what makes something antisemitic requires thoughtful consideration. Is it the intent behind a statement or action that makes something antisemitic? Is it the perceived, or anticipated, goal of a statement or action? Here, too, careful listening and mutual understanding are essential to moving the dialogue forward when interpretations differ. A helpful distinction in this debate regards the difference between supporting the State of Israel and supporting particular policies of the state. A suspicion of antisemitism is understandable if a person believes that a criticism of Israel may imply the illegitimacy of the state’s existence. At the same time, charges of antisemitism ought not automatically invalidate critiques of the policies and actions of the state.

Another polarizing dynamic involves applying the terminology of “apartheid” to the Israeli-Palestinian discussion. This divisiveness is described in the statement from the World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany in 2022:

Recently, numerous international, Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations and legal bodies have published studies and reports describing the policies and actions of Israel as amounting to “apartheid” under international law. Within this Assembly, some churches and delegates strongly support the utilization of this term as accurately describing the reality of the people in Palestine/Israel and the position under international law, while others find it inappropriate, unhelpful and painful.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The Jerusalem Declaration of Antisemitism. (2015, March 25). Definition and Guidelines. <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/JDA-1.pdf>, 2. Current news show that the debate is still ongoing

<sup>75</sup> “*Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East*”, statement of the WCC 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seeking-justice-and-peace-for-all-in-the-middle-east>

Those who protest the use of the term “apartheid” will point out that the terminology serves polemically to charge the conflict to the disadvantage of Israel and that circumstances of White rule in South Africa do not apply accurately to any of the relationships between the State of Israel and Palestinians. Those relationships themselves vary among Palestinian Israelis, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, Palestinians in the West Bank, and Palestinians in Gaza. Each of those circumstances has its unique challenges and conflicts that properly deserve examination, debate, and resolution. The model of resolution achieved in South Africa is not applicable to all of these circumstances, if to any of them, opponents of the use of the term “apartheid” argue. Some Christians find that in Jewish-Christian encounters using the term “apartheid” often serves more to polarize and derail engagement with serious issues than it does to explore, understand, and address them.

Yet for some Palestinian activists and theologians, to call Israel an apartheid regime is not a political epithet, nor does it require comparisons with South Africa. They claim that the facts on the ground themselves fulfill the legal elements of the definition of apartheid as established by official international bodies, including the International Criminal Court.<sup>76</sup> To them, these elements are clearly present, as shown in detailed legal studies by respected Palestinian, Israeli, and international human rights organizations, including Al-Haq, B’Tselem, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International.

This polarization surrounding the term “apartheid” continues within the ecumenical Christian community and more broadly in international political and legal debates today, with serious implications for Jewish-Christian encounters.

#### **5.2.4.3 The Israeli Nation-State law and other recent developments**

Since its founding in 1948, Israel has defined itself as a Jewish state. In 2018, the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) enacted a Basic Law clarifying the state’s understanding of that definition, asserting that “the realization of the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is exclusive

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<sup>76</sup> Three main international treaties prohibit and explicitly criminalize apartheid: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1965); the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (Apartheid Convention, 1973); and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute, 1998).

to the Jewish People.”<sup>77</sup> Within the political environment in which it was adopted, this provision raised serious questions both within and beyond Israel regarding its impact on the rights of Palestinian citizens, the future of Israeli democracy, and the issue of exclusive Jewish ownership of the land. Palestinians in Israel find themselves in a country that defines itself as a Jewish state and feel like second-class citizens in their own homeland. Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories interpret the law as a direct threat to their existence.

In response to these concerns, supporters of Israel affirm that “national self-determination” only addresses the character of the state as a whole and does not exclude participation by non-Jews as individuals in the political processes of the state, nor does it infringe on their human and civil rights. Moreover, all people living in a pluralist democracy, and especially those in the majority, bear the responsibility to lovingly and prophetically challenge laws and actions that discriminate against minorities.

Since the formation of Israel’s 37<sup>th</sup> government in December 2022, further questions have been raised about the democratic character of Israel and the state’s treatment of Palestinians. Today, nationalist attitudes are more prominent, and Jewish supremacy is being expressed in the political discourse. Many Israeli and diaspora Jewish voices have named this moment as a “crisis of democracy.” Recent massive protests by Jewish Israelis show dissent to these developments, and yet anti-democratic forces are not relenting, and the situation remains volatile.

Episodes of violence by extremist Jewish groups against Palestinians both in the West Bank and in the Old City of Jerusalem have increased, leading to a call from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, warning that radical groups in Jerusalem are attempting to drive Christians out of the Old City. Alarm and concern among Palestinians in these circumstances have been heightened, even as alarm and concern among Israelis and diaspora Jews regarding the future character of the state have been expressed in unprecedented ways.

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<sup>77</sup> See Sheila Hattis Rolef (trans.) (May 1, 2022). Basic Law: Israel - The Nation State of the Jewish people. <https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/documents/BasicLawsPDF/BasicLawNationState.pdf>, Sec. 1 (c); Original: [https://fs.knesset.gov.il/20/law/20\\_Isr\\_504220.pdf](https://fs.knesset.gov.il/20/law/20_Isr_504220.pdf); cf. “Lutherans concerned about Jewish nation-state law,” Lutheran World Federation, July 24, 2018, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/lutherans-concerned-about-jewish-nation-state-law>.

Engaging in Jewish-Christian encounter at a time of such heightened tension and uncertainty is especially challenging. Humanitarian concerns in the midst of violence can easily push aside interest in historical and geopolitical matters. But achieving lasting peace is important for the sake of relieving suffering, as the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs emphasizes:

The Occupied Palestinian Territories remain a protracted political crisis characterized by 55 years of Israeli military occupation. This crisis is exacerbated by a lack of adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, internal Palestinian divisions and the recurrent escalation of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups. The results are chronic protection concerns and humanitarian needs which will continue in the absence of a sustainable political solution and opportunities for further development.<sup>78</sup>

We encourage member churches of the LWF and individual Lutherans to be well-informed regarding the circumstances of this time, sensitive to their impact on Palestinians and Jews, and responsive to the distinctive challenges faced by the LWF member church in the region, the ELCJHL.

### **5.2.5 Called to be peacemakers with unwavering commitment**

Christians are called to be peacemakers, to challenge injustice, to work for reconciliation and equality, and to stand with the oppressed. In 2011, the LWF Council resolution on the Middle East called for a two-state solution, the end of the occupation, and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. The resolution called for peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. It also called for the immediate lifting of the economic blockade of the Gaza strip, for urgent international action to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, and for all parties to refrain from violent or provocative actions. The LWF Council furthermore called for Jerusalem to be a city shared between the two peoples and among three religions.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> OCHA. (2023). *Humanitarian Response Plan 2023*. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-response-plan-2023>, 7.

<sup>79</sup> LWF Council. (2011, June 14). statement on the situation in the Middle East. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Council%20Middle%20East%20June%202011.pdf> to cf. comment. See Chapter 1 for a summary of the LWF position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In 2012, the LWF Council called upon its member churches to educate members of LWF churches using the 2011 statement as a basis for awareness, advocacy, and accompaniment. The Council urged Lutherans to strengthen their contacts with Israelis and Palestinians for the purpose of encouraging dialogue and reconciliation.<sup>80</sup> These calls for action remain the position of the LWF and take on greater urgency more than a decade after they were first issued.

A Christian commitment toward justice and peace involves joining forces with the many non-violent, civil society organizations and grassroots movements in Israel and Palestine. People of different beliefs—secular, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian, among others—are joining together under the “anti-occupation” message, supporting Palestinian human rights, advocating against the rapid expansion of settlements, and promoting bi-national encounters to create a trusting atmosphere for peace and reconciliation.

LWF member churches can embody the commitment to peacemaking, justice, and reconciliation in Jewish-Christian relations through sustained, careful listening and truth-telling. This commitment includes acknowledging the limited impact that interfaith dialogue has had on geopolitical conflicts, particularly when it takes place far from the fray. It also includes recognizing an emotional and experiential weight to the use of any word or terminology from within the conflict that demands respect, whether or not it accords with one’s own analysis and assessment. Such commitment includes admitting that a complex situation such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be known from any one perspective exclusively, but requires honest dialogue, empathy, and the development of shared understandings.<sup>81</sup>

To this end, the LWF encourages its member churches and individual Lutherans to draw on the resources of the ELCJHL for understanding Palestinian experiences, perspectives, and needs, and to seek out resources from Israeli and diaspora Jewish communities for understanding their experiences, perspectives, and needs. Critical, informed analysis of the conflict by experts in the field should also inform Lutherans as they engage this issue with their local Jewish communities. In any engagement with this issue, the aims of pursuing peace, reconciliation and co-existence between Israel and the Palestinian community should be held up as paramount.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. cf. comment.

<sup>81</sup> A resource for shaping productive encounters is the set of essays and the workshop process outline in Philip A. Cunningham, Ruth Langer, and Jesper Svartvik, eds., *Enabling Dialogue about the Land: A Resource Book for Jews and Christians* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press 2020).

The church's commitment to peace, justice, and reconciliation are undermined when the lines of conflict in the Middle East are drawn in local communities elsewhere. Proxy battles fought verbally in distant places have little, or no, impact on the actual conflict. Listening carefully to the testimony of those directly engaged in the conflict best serves to develop deeper understanding of the conflict and concern for those affected by it. This deep listening will reveal a variety of perspectives and approaches within every involved community. In the complexity and the urgency of the situation, the church will show particular concern for those who stand for peace and justice in defiance of their own communities' dominant voices, as did the biblical prophets.

In the next chapter, we ground our commitment firmly in the God of hope who empowers us to take necessary steps with long-term implications. This hope for a future of justice, peace, and reconciliation needs practical steps that can be realized in the present. This study document so far has laid out lessons from the LWF journey, and from the history of Jewish-Christian relations more generally, that have led to the present moment. In order to move forward into the future, this history-making effort to repair Jewish-Christian relations will involve specific actions for peace at every level of the church and society.

## **Questions for reflection, discussion, and action**

1. What possible obstacles to dialogue can you foresee? What are some ways you might combat those challenges?
2. How do we combat antisemitism and racism in our context? How can we do it together with dialogue partners?
3. How do we understand religious extremism in our own tradition? What marks political extremism from the left and what marks fundamentalist extremism from the right?
4. How does the history of the Middle East and the current situation in Israel/Palestine affect our own work and our own conversations with members of other religious traditions, especially with Jewish dialogue partners?
5. Where do we start conversations—both in our congregations and with dialogue partners, including Jewish dialogue partners—about Israel/

Palestine? Can we imagine starting with hearing and respecting the felt pain and needs of each community?

6. How can an overemphasis on either theology or geopolitics skew our faithful engagement with the Israeli/Palestinian situation? In questions regarding the “Holy Land,” where do we draw the lines among theological interpretations, political realities, justice and human rights, and other dimensions of the current conflict?





# 6: Hope for the Future

The LWF assembly in Kraków meets under the theme of “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” with the intention to strengthen the communion through discussions on themes of diversity, common spirit, and hopes for the future. In accordance with these themes and in the same spirit of hope, this document on Jewish-Christian dialogue aims to be both an introduction and an invitation.

This final chapter will consider how to lay foundations for meaningful engagement and explore ideas for further steps in approaching an open dialogue and a renewal in Jewish-Christian relations with the goal of making engagement more accessible in the broader communion of the LWF.

## **6.1 Ground conditions for Jewish-Christian encounter**

Every religious community has interpretative sovereignty to define and understand itself according to its tradition. As such, a basic prerequisite for encounters between two religions is respect for the “otherness” of the religious other. This respect can guide dialogue partners through difficult topics and promote learning about the partner as well as mutual growth in insight and understanding. Respectful recognition of “otherness,” a commitment to listening, and acknowledgement of traumas are all essential conditions for fruitful engagement with people of different faiths.

Unfortunately, the faith of “the others” has often been portrayed in oversimplified and negative stereotypes, creating a “negative mirror” where our own tradition comes out in a positive light in contrast to the traditions to which we compare ourselves. In our churches, we must honor other religions by representing them in their self-understanding, thus affirming them as well as our own Christian faith. We have reasons to be confident in the gospel and in our own tradition on their own terms.

Intentionally listening and learning through dialogue creates room for friendly curiosity, which can unveil valuable insights into one’s own—in this case, Lutheran—tradition. Through respect and curiosity, through patience and a willingness to listen, we can establish trusting relationships that create a safe space where we can address even difficult issues. In

this way, dialogue can help temper compulsive antithetic structures of theological thinking and social conventions.

The listening that creates a safe space for dialogue in relationships will recognize and be attentive to power dynamics. “Listening in” to the context of dialogue allows others to define themselves before we assume anything about them. It also allows dialogue partners to define the parameters of conversation together. As Christians we know that God listens to us and our prayers; to the cries and the joys of the world.<sup>82</sup> Listening to the stories of others can go against our need to share what we believe in and to be heard by others. It requires openness to the stories of others, and to the possibility that their stories may influence our own perceptions and convictions. When people reflect theologically together with the mutual awareness that none of us holds all the answers, there is an opportunity to expand our perspectives and insights through dialogical theology.

Engaging with the life story of others is an important theological activity which allows us to draw parallels between experience and underlying theological thought patterns. By listening to another’s story, our own faith and religious practice is expanded and enriched—not in the sense of syncretism or conversion, but in the sense of letting others influence our way of believing. Interpreted through such a theological framework, listening sessions give meaning to the work of dialogue with Jews (and others) in the community.

Judaism and Christianity, like all religions, are influenced by culture, society, and other religious traditions, so context matters. Context can be understood as contributing to the “theological borderland,” an area with blurred boundaries where sensitivity and awareness of history meet current challenges. We are all contributors to theological thinking, development, and renewal within our own Lutheran tradition. According to the theologian Kathryn Tanner, “the distinctiveness of a Christian way of life is not so much formed *by* the boundary as *at* it; Christian distinctiveness is something that emerges in the very cultural processes occurring at the boundary...”<sup>83</sup>

Through encounters with people from within the Lutheran tradition, with Christians from other denominations, and with people from other faiths or convictions, we expand our own perspective. We learn more about

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<sup>82</sup> See Jay McDaniel chapter “In the Beginning Is the Listening” in Darby Kathleen Ray, ed., *Theology That Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 28-29.

<sup>83</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 115.

the other, and about ourselves, and are challenged to be open to change through participation in the stories of the other.

### **6.1.1 Acknowledging anti-Jewish attitudes and actions in Christianity**

Our engagement as Christians and Lutherans with our Jewish partners, indeed with all people around us, stems from our common humanity. It is our Christian mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves, to appreciate the shared values we hold as people of faith, and to affirm our commitment to witness and model the self-giving service of Christ to all peoples. A critical review of Christianity's history reveals shameful instances when Christians have justified horrible acts of violence, past and present, against Jews. Lutheranism has been associated with the negative legacy of Martin Luther's anti-Jewish writings that were exploited to commit historic atrocities against Jews during World War II. Recognizing past harm done and rejecting dangerous perspectives that feed into hostility against Jews and other religious communities can help overcome our history of rejection, stereotyping, and violence, and guide us toward mutual understanding and respect.

Today, Lutherans have a growing awareness of God's presence and engagement in different religions and convictions. Yet even so, we sometimes reproduce old prejudices and hostilities—often unconsciously—toward people of other faiths or convictions than our own.

The way of portraying “others” in negative stereotypes is influenced by our relationship to Jews and Judaism throughout history. Anti-Jewish attitudes and actions by Christians developed over time to distance Christianity from Judaism, gradually becoming a specific Christian form of rejection and even contempt toward Jews and Judaism. They also became a paradigm for Christian engagement with other traditions.

Anti-Judaism is centered around some main themes, as identified by theologian Katharina von Kellenbach below. Familiarizing ourselves with these themes can help us be critical of our history and tendency to automatically contrast ourselves and our theology against Judaism and other traditions. As part of our self-critical work as Christians, we must emphatically reject these ways of thinking:<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> For more see Katharina von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

## 1. Judaism as antithesis of Christianity

- Judaism is portrayed as the negative opposite of all that is good in Christianity. Positive statements by Jesus or Paul are compared to negative statements in the Old Testament understood as representative for Judaism. In this way the Old Testament also becomes the “negative” prelude to the new covenant in the New Testament. Christianity is portrayed as founded on God’s grace, while Judaism is portrayed as a dogmatic and rigid Law-tradition. Other examples of opposite pairs that are being used are: judgment (Judaism) – promise (Christianity); false – true; dogmatic – liberating; dead faith – living faith; patriarchy – equality; etc.

## 2. Jews as the scapegoats

- The Jews are blamed for killing Jesus. They are understood as still being responsible for this, and the statement from Matthew 27:25 is still valid (“His blood be on us and on our children!”). According to this understanding of scriptures and tradition it is therefore in the nature of Jews to be deceitful, misogynist and unable to understand the truth about Jesus Christ and Christianity.

## 3. Judaism as prelude to Christianity

- Judaism is understood as solely laying the foundation for Christianity through the Old Testament. Judaism is understood as a pre-Christian religion stuck in its old understanding of God and the covenant. When Jews and the Jewish traditions rejected Jesus as the Messiah, it became an obsolete tradition. Judaism was understood only on the basis of the biblical descriptions and not placed in a contemporary world as a living, diverse and developing faith of believers.

The three tropes mentioned above contribute to supersessionism and were rejected by the LWF statement from Dobogókő in 2001.<sup>85</sup>

When we, as individuals, recognize anti-Judaic tropes, we can interrupt their force by explicitly addressing them and repudiating them. We can

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<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 1.2 which highlights main points from the 2001 LWF statement from Dobogókő. LWF member church the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has prepared a guide, *Preaching and Teaching with “Love and Respect for the Jewish People”* (See Footnote 58) for identifying and counteracting unintentional anti-Jewish ways of thinking.

commit ourselves to gaining more accurate portrayals of Jews through studying the biblical texts in their original contexts, by learning more about Jewish history, and by getting to know our contemporary Jewish neighbors and faith communities. We are challenged to ensure that our sermons, liturgies, and teachings in the church portray Jews in a way that a Jewish listener would acknowledge as accurate and respectful.

Encounters and dialogue with our Jewish partners can help correct many prejudices when we discover a living, diverse and developing faith that resonates with our own faith. For many, this also entails a deep feeling of connectedness and honest curiosity, not only in how we perceive a shared heritage, but also in the development and current expressions of Jewish life and tradition. This is a good starting-point for further contact and for invitations to engage in dialogue with Jews in our local communities. We might grasp and understand more of God's presence in the world as it is manifested through the different beliefs and convictions that we encounter.

## **6.2 Approach from a Lutheran perspective**

Our Lutheran heritage can inform how to approach renewing this relationship and help us sensitively recognize persistent and enduring traumas from a Lutheran perspective. Outmoded and distorted paradigms can be corrected through willingness to faithfully re-examine the self-understanding of Lutheran churches, church life, and doctrine.

### **6.2.1 Our common humanity and the call to love our neighbors as ourselves**

A deeper motivation and inspiration for engagement with those different from us comes from the theological understanding that our common humanity is rooted in the image of God. The biblical concept of *Imago Dei* means that we acknowledge and see the image of God in every person we encounter and recognize their worth. We are all created by God, equal in dignity and value. As such, there is no place in Christian faith for teachings that devalue the worth of others. The Christian community must state unequivocally that antisemitism is a sin and must be rejected in our churches and theological language.

Antisemitism negates the image of God in our Jewish neighbors. Luther taught that the meaning of the first commandment "to have no other

gods” is to, “fear, love and trust in God above all things.”<sup>86</sup> Disobedience to the first commandment valuing something other than God is a sign of sin. This disobedience is unbelief that separates us from God and - from our neighbors. Based on this understanding, we should state clearly that antisemitism is a sin.

Our Christian commitment takes us a step beyond acknowledging what we need *not* do, toward what we *must* do. As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves in the words of Jesus that are emphasized in Luther’s Small Catechism. In a conversation with a student of the Torah, Jesus, citing Deuteronomy and Leviticus, identified the greatest commandment of all:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Deut 6:5). This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Mt 22:37-40).

Love is the supreme virtue; Jesus equates loving God with loving our neighbor as ourselves. The concept of loving our neighbors as ourselves follows the golden rule in the Sermon on the Mount: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” (Mt 7:12) In this principle, Jesus summarizes what is most essential in the Torah and what continues to be emphasized in subsequent Jewish sources.

The call to love and serve our neighbors applies regardless of the differences we have with them. Therefore, the heritage we claim is not only freedom from servitude, but more so, it is freedom to live out our authentic call. As Luther famously wrote: “A Christian is the freest lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”<sup>87</sup> Included in this call to loving service are our Jewish neighbors. Yet reflecting on our Christian calling as followers of Christ, as Christians and as Lutherans, we must admit that we have often failed to live up to the call to love our Jewish neighbor as ourselves.

The Apostle Paul models respectful engagement in a missionary encounter in the city of Athens and in his dialogue with his audience in the public

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<sup>86</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord (New Translation): The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 351.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, LW 31 (I): 344; WA 7: 21.

space at the. Although not specifically about Jewish-Christian relations, Paul's approach to people of other faiths is a valuable example of constructive interfaith engagement.

Paul's sermon in Athens (as Luke presents it in Acts 17) praises the Greeks for being devoutly religious and demonstrates his knowledge of their religion and their culture, even quoting one of their poets. Paul exemplifies good interaction with "the other," not just in terms of knowing the other, but also in recognizing their truth and beauty. Moreover, Paul stressed that the "unknown god" they worship in Athens is the same God he is preaching about. God in this understanding is one. He is the creator of heaven and earth and all human beings. He is the one who "gives life and breath to everyone and everything," and he who "made of one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and the whole of the world." (Acts 17:25-26).

In this sermon, there is not one God for the Greeks, another for the Jews, and another for Christians. God is one! And God gave us a thirst and the tenacity to search for him: "since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth. He allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps find him—indeed, he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'" (Acts 17:28)

### **6.2.2 Christian witness without pre-judgement**

Christians are called by Christ to witness to all peoples (Mt 28), although Christians today hold a range of perspectives on how to bear witness toward Jews. Some hold to the traditional belief that it is through Christ that all peoples gain access to the Abrahamic covenant (Gal 2:28), some reject any form of witness toward the Jews from a theological position, while others are involved in aggressive and targeted efforts to convert Jews to the Christian faith.<sup>88</sup> Most Jews do not receive Christian mission as an expression of love. Since the ultimate goal is to convert all Jews, some have described evangelism as a kinder, gentler form of genocide. Lutherans around the world continue to grapple with articulating an understanding of evangelism that takes seriously religious vitality and diversity

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<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 1.1.3 and 5.1 for Christian mission to the Jewish people.



in contemporary societies. The LWF presents a holistic understanding of mission that includes proclamation, diakonia, and advocacy.<sup>89</sup>

Paul again offers a model of engagement for sharing the message of the gospel that affirms the good in the other and defers judgment to God. Paul may desire to see all people including even his own Jewish people come to faith in Christ (Rom 10), but he begins his sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17 by identifying commonalities and acknowledging the goodness and elements of truth among them. Paul then shares his own message of faith in the resurrected Christ, by whom God will judge the world in righteousness. Paul insisted on the power and legitimacy of the gospel message—the message of the resurrection. He was faithful to his belief, at the same time showing respect for the beliefs of others.

Some Lutherans continue to emphasize the need to proclaim the gospel to all people. It also remains true for them that no credible witness to the gospel demotes, dehumanizes, or condemns another community or faith tradition. We must recognize the danger of assuming God's place on earth and claiming to hold the keys of heaven and controlling the fate of peoples. God is the ultimate judge; we are not. Since we are liberated from the need to judge others, we are free to engage in authentic dialogue with others as a genuine expression of God's love through us for the neighbor.

### 6.3: Ideas for next steps/possible actions

Throughout this study document, we have discussed many aspects of approaching the renewal of Jewish-Christian relations appropriately. These include:

- The need to reconsider how Lutheran theological concepts are used in light of the commandment to love
- The need to honor the fact that the books of the Old Testament are a shared textual source of faith for the Jewish people and for Christians. Lutherans value Holy Scripture (*sola scriptura*) as the basis of their the-

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<sup>89</sup> See Jack Messenger, ed., *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004). <https://www.lutheranworld.org/resources/publication-mission-context-transformation-reconciliation-empowerment>.

ology: these scriptures and the Jewish interpretations and traditions of his time nourished Jesus's faith and message of the kingdom of God.

- Acknowledgment that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and preached to Jews
- Interpreting the New Testament in a way that avoids portraying central faith elements in false and demeaning contrast to Judaism, and erroneously separating the one God into two personas: the “merciless, vengeful God” of the Old Testament, and the “merciful, gracious God” of the New Testament

These considerations help establish a respectful foundation for engaging with our Jewish partners, and can contribute to a better self-understanding of the Christian roots of faith. In the first centuries, Christians and Jews defined themselves in relation to and at times against each other in their religious development. Even today, our different identities as Christians and as Jews shape the way we share our values and faith to one another.

This study guide has addressed many past and present wounds in Jewish-Christian relations and acknowledged the guilt on the Christian side. Now, in renewed hope and with a prayer for God's guiding Spirit, we consider concrete proposals. This list does not claim to be exhaustive, but these suggested steps toward a new path in Jewish-Christian relations are necessary measures for a lively dialogue among equals.

### **6.3.1 Dialogue in everyday life**

Dialogue does not have to be on an academic level, or even in the context of a congregation, to be of value. Christians and Jews can interact through various activities in everyday life. Cooking, music, celebrations, or other vibrant approaches can be good initial encounters to establish a foundation of trusting relations. Moreover, addressing social and justice issues, like addressing a community concern or promoting peace together, can be a unifying activity that strengthens the dynamics in the relationship.

Ultimately, strengthening relationships is about reaching out and making contact. When in-person encounters are not possible because there are no, or few, Jews in the region, or when there are other impediments, social media can provide a platform for contact and dialogue. As they can be helpful tools when it comes to building up and sustain a network. Supporting

and protecting Jewish heritage is another way to improve Jewish-Christian relations, as for example in Europe where the regeneration of Jewish communities and the preservation of historical sites are very important parts of Jewish-Christian relations, encounter, and cooperation.

Within faith communities, dialogue contributes to building a safe and trusting community at large. Expressing a willingness to engage is the first step toward establishing dialogue within the local community around a parish. Inviting special guests to the church, offering lectures, having theme-based mini-seminars and services, holding special staff meetings, and identifying targeted diaconal projects are a few jumping off points for establishing dialogue groups and interfaith collaborations. Such initiatives may help members identify similarities and/or differences between the traditions, common interests that benefit the larger community, and social issues in the community that need unified attention. Examples include a united stand against racism and antisemitism, addressing hate speech on the streets and in social media, securing safety on the streets for all, addressing environmental issues in the community, etc.

To overcome reticence, insecurity, distrust, and skepticism, interfaith dialogue needs to be an interaction between equal partners. Dialogue should happen in such a way as to give people a chance to be open, moved, and touched. For this reason, the encounter must not harm those involved in the dialogue process. It is only for the benefit of all parties involved.

A commitment to dialogue is an important dimension of loving those who are different from us. Dialogue is not debate. Whereas debate is an attempt to sway the opinions of others, dialogue provides space for a *common* effort between participants to share insights and reflections and come to a new understanding. For successful dialogue, participants must hold a common understanding of the premises for dialogue and the methodology being used. Under these conditions, dialogue can be understood not only as a means to achieve something, but as the goal in itself.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The best way to grasp the meaning and method of dialogue is for any dialogue initiative or group to define dialogue together in their context. A way to do this is to use examples from each participant's own life of their experiences of a good and meaningful conversation. Each person can use words to describe these stories or examples, and through a collection of words generated together they can create a definition of ideal dialogue, one or two sentences in length.

There are many definitions of dialogue and resources for dialogue activity that can be used as inspiration. An extensive example is from the work of philosopher Helge Søre and the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (Norway) with a common dialogue platform: <https://sti.no/sok/>

Interfaith dialogue in its ideal form can be understood as:

A mutual encounter between equal parties, without hidden agendas, not aiming at transforming the other but at taking part in a mutual transformation that may happen through the encounter.<sup>91</sup>

How can we live up to such a definition in our meetings with Jewish dialogue partners? Can we expect our Jewish dialogue partners to think of our meeting with them in this sense—to trust us? Our church's history of suppressing, persecuting and, at times, trying to eradicate Jewish people and identity—as well as proselytizing Jews throughout history—does not allow us to impose trust today. Trust must be built and earned over time.

### **6.3.2 Worship and liturgy**

Liturgy and proclamation can provide space to consider common beliefs without using the Jewish tradition as a “dark background” to make the Christian gospel shine brighter. Parish members and leaders can raise awareness and try to sensitize their community to the connections with Judaism through prayer, worship, and especially preaching. By preaching with respect for the Jewish faith as we witness to the Christian faith, we can discover anew our close connection to Judaism. This means, for example, being respectful of the context of origin when reading biblical texts and sometimes referring to Jewish interpretations. This applies to New Testament texts, but above all, to the preaching of passages from the Old Testament or TaNaKh. Preachers must be encouraged to preach these texts more often and to discover anew the significance of the Old Testament texts as testimonies of faith.

### **6.3.3 Christian education**

Jewish-Christian relations should be a major topic in the regular curricula of seminaries and theological education to facilitate an explicit reflection on how the People of God in Christ and the People of God who are Israel—the Christian and Jewish communities—are interrelated. Historically, Christian education has contributed significantly to the denigration

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<sup>91</sup> Anne Hege Grung, *Gender Justice in Muslim-Christian Readings: Christian and Muslim Women in Norway Making Meaning of Texts from the Bible, the Koran, and the Hadith* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 68.

of Jewish people and a distorted view of Judaism. Today, many Christian theologians have come to recognize that knowledge of Jewish scriptural interpretation and the practice of Jewish faith are important components of the theological method. This knowledge facilitates reflection on Christian faith, and one's own theology, and contributes to its development.

This applies equally to popular education in congregations. To implement education about Jewish-Christian relations, Lutheran congregations, wherever possible, should include Jewish lecturers or representatives of the Jewish community in courses on Judaism and Jewish faith; where appropriate, this could also be done in cooperation with Christian theologians.

Further, those who preach to Christian audiences are called to support Lutheran preaching on Old Testament texts with careful hermeneutics. Through a re-examination of the lectionaries, the use of Old Testament texts as readings and sermon texts is increasingly encouraged, which in turn is also useful in the context of “Jewish-sensitive” preaching.

This study document offers questions for facilitating constructive discussions and presents summaries of some patterns to notice, such as Kellenbach's identifying characteristics of anti-Jewish perception. For more in-depth study, there are many books on the topic of Jewish-Christian relations that make good individual reading or would be perfect for a book discussion group.<sup>92</sup>

Another educational approach is to strengthen the connection between the two religions by encouraging broader exchanges among leaders (pastors, deacons, rabbis, and cantors), students, and congregations. In addition to seminars that are jointly organized and conducted, the following are some suggestions to achieve a far-reaching change in attitudes toward each other through education:

- Study programs—such as a study year in Jerusalem for young Christian theologians
- Theme trips and travels with groups in the congregation—for all age ranges from youth to senior
- Joint celebrations or mutual invitations to special services

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<sup>92</sup> An example of such a book is Philip Cunningham, Ruth Langer, and Jesper Svartvik, eds., *Enabling Dialogue about the Land: A Resource Book for Jews and Christians* (Paulist Press, 2020).

## 6.4 Hope

“Hope is like an anchor that one throws out of his/her reality, [...] into a reality that does not yet exist. This anchoring into the future, the very ability to do so, creates a place of freedom in the heart of the person who has the courage to hope.”<sup>93</sup>

The authors of this document would like to encourage its readers to hope: hope to free themselves from prejudice, slander, and any entrenched (‘negative’) beliefs, and to courageously take the next step in Jewish-Christian relations. This may inspire others to join us on the path toward meaningful interreligious dialogue and engagement.

### 6.4.1 Hope for fruitful relations

Jewish-Christian dialogue offers a rich source of experiences that opens new doors. This is evident when Christian teachings are reformulated based on information gained about Jewish faith and traditions. Reading and interpreting the New Testament from this perspective is a reappraisal to counter elements of anti-Judaism or antisemitism that have found their way into Christian tradition and were justified with biblical texts.

Hope in this context is about learning from Jewish-Christian dialogue. This means re-examining and reformulating polemical and disrespectful aspects of Lutheran theology, including those that may be familiar and almost reflexive. For example, traditional Lutheran contrasts between the Law that kills and the Gospel that gives life need to be heard with new ears. Jewish-Christian dialogue can help us hear this contrast as disparaging the life-giving Torah that has been a “tree of life” for the Jewish people. Christians also need to commit themselves to refuse being by-standers when anti-Jewish statements are made. For example, whenever polemical and false accusations such as that “the Jews killed’ God” are expressed or implied, Christians need to offer their strong objection to this historically untrue and inflammatory charge.

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<sup>93</sup> “*Hoffnung schafft im Herzen einen Ort der Freiheit*“. David Grossmanns Rede zum 75. Geburtstag von Bundespräsident Joachim Gauck. (2015, January 15). KAS Veranstaltungsberichte. <https://www.kas.de/de/veranstaltungsberichte/detail/-/content/-hoffnung-schafft-im-herzen-einen-ort-der-freiheit-1>.

The experiences from Jewish-Christian dialogue can be applied to other interfaith and interreligious dialogues, such as those between Christians and Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, or others. The courageous step to include Islam in a three-way dialogue among Christians, Muslims, and Jews is necessary because the Muslim community is a main dialogue partner in many interfaith contexts worldwide. Moreover, a three-way conversation among these monotheistic religions is a way for us to anchor ourselves in facing together an uncertain future, and to build peace in the world through strong and fruitful relations based on shared Abrahamic roots.

While embracing broader interreligious dialogues as a valuable and necessary endeavor, Christians also need to remain aware that Jewish-Christian relations are their longest and deepest connection to another faith community. A shared foundation in the heritage of biblical Israel makes the Jewish-Christian relationship unique. It deserves on-going special attention and care.

#### **6.4.2 Hope for joint action**

Jews and Christians have different ways of conceiving the end time, the coming of the kingdom of God, and hope. Yet both groups share the value of hope and expect redemption in the end. It is precisely this hope that this study document aims to emphasize as a basis for encounter.

In light of this hope, Lutheran and Jewish communities have a common goal to address the many current challenges emerging from global migration movements, climate change, and systemic economic and political injustices. Lutheran communities and pastors have a special role in being advocates for Jewish people against any harmful texts, actions, or oral statements. Together Jews and Christians can stand firmly in the struggle against all forms of discrimination, racism, and antisemitism. Together we can reflect critically on the contemporary situation with regard to xenophobia and negative attitudes toward other cultures, religions, and ethnic minorities. And Jews and Christians can join forces with others across the globe in asserting our common humanity and advocating for human rights and dignity for all people.

This common cause also applies to the Middle East where the focus of work lies in maintaining active contacts within the region, supporting organizations that build shared strategies across dividing lines, and prioritizing interreligious understanding and peace development.

In conclusion, dialogue and interfaith relationships become anchors of hope for the joint vision of shalom for all peoples as the promised fulfillment of God's covenant.

## **Questions for reflection, discussion, and action**

1. What is motivating you to better understand and engage in Jewish-Christian relations? What have you learned from this document that has influenced your perspective on Jewish-Christian relations?

2. Are we able today to meet Jews in trusting dialogue and let history and the current situation change us?

3. How do we prepare for, and engage in, dialogue with Jews about our perceptions of shared, or not-shared, heritage, our history of transgressions toward Jews (especially in Europe), questions relating to the understanding of the State of Israel, the question of Israel and Palestine, Biblical interpretation and replacement theology, antisemitism, etc.?

4. "Which of these measures might you adopt in your community to nurture the Jewish-Christian relationship?"

- pursue ongoing education in Jewish-Christian relations
- commit to continued conversation with Jewish dialogue partners, individually and institutionally
- provide materials—music, art, narrative, etc.—that offer positive images of Jews and Judaism for use in preaching, teaching, newsletter, and other communications media, and in church property décor.
- Engage together (through lectures, readings, and other events) with virtues and values that Jews and Christians have in common and value.
- deepen understanding of Judaism as a reality for Jesus, the early church, and ourselves
- offer regular continuing education for clergy and teachers, as well as adult education, on the church's anti-Jewish heritage and newer theological formulations that counteract it



- examine systematically hymns, prayers, lectionary, and other worship and learning resources, to eliminate anti-Jewish content and implications
- edit consistently educational materials for schools, Sunday schools, confirmation programs, and youth groups to eliminate anti-Jewish content and implications

5. What are possible ways you can attend the Christian call to be peace-makers?

6. What are your hopes for the future of Jewish-Christian relations?

# Appendix 1: Timeline of important LWF consultations and documents

Year	Significant LWF moment or document	Remark
1963	Fifth LWF Assembly Helsinki, 30 July-11 August	<p>First worldwide Lutheran discussion on Jewish Christian relations.</p> <p>Decided that a further consultation on the “problem” of God’s revelation in Christ for Christian Jewish relations is needed.</p> <p>Discussions about revelation, mission and Jewish-Christian relations.</p>
1964	Consultation on “ <b>The Church and the Jewish People</b> ”, Logumkloster (Denmark), April 26 - May 2, 1964	<p>Consultation of the Department of World Mission.</p> <p>First discussion specifically on Lutheran-Jewish relations on a global level.</p> <p>First of inner Lutheran consultation initiated in 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.</p>
1963-1964	Lutheran World (LWF Publication): <b><i>Christians, Jews and the Mission of the Church</i></b>	Documentation of the “Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People” in Logumkloster.
1973	Consultation on “ <b>The Church and the Jewish People</b> ”, Neuendettelsau, Germany, 24-28 April 1973	<p>Consultation of the Commission on Studies.</p> <p>Second of inner Lutheran consultation initiated in 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.</p>

1974	<b><i>Kirche und Judentum</i></b> <b>- <i>Lutherische Beiträge</i></b> — Sonderheft der Hand- reichung des Evangeli- umsdienstes unter Israel durch die evang.-luth. Kirche e.V.	This special issue provides docu- mentation of the consultation on <b>“The Church and the Jewish People”</b> in Neuendettelsau (see above).
1975	Consultation on <b>“The Christian Witness and Jewish People”</b> , Oslo, Norway, August 25-30. 1975	Consultation of the Department of Studies, the third of inner Lutheran consultation initiated in the 4 <sup>th</sup> General Assembly.
1977	LWF Publication: <b><i>Chris- tian Witness and the Jewish People</i></b>	The documentation of the consul- tation on <b>“The Christian Witness and Jewish People”</b> in Oslo (see above).
1981	Consultation on “Luther- an-Jewish Relations”, under the theme <b>“The Concept of the Human Being in the Lutheran and Jewish traditions”</b> , Copenhagen, Denmark, 6-8 July 1981	First official international Luther- an-Jewish consultation.  First cooperation and collabora- tion with IJCIC.  The results are recorded in: Christian Jewish Relations. A documentary survey, Volume 15, Number 2 (79), June 1982, London, Institute of Jewish Affairs, 64 pp.
1981	Seminary on <b>“The importance of Jewish heritage for the contex- tualization of worship”</b> at the Tantur Ecumeni- cal Institute, Israel	Lutheran theologians from Asia and Africa participated.  Seminar report available in: <i>Worship Among Lutherans</i> , LWF Studies, November 1983.
1982	Vancouver, LWF Execu- tive Committee	It was voted: that following the promising meeting held in 1981, a second meeting of Lutherans and Jews be authorised for 1983 under the joint sponsorship of LWF Department of Studies and IJCIC. The adequate funding was also guaranteed.

1982	Consultation on <b>“The Significance of Judaism for the Life and Mission of the Church”</b> in Bossey, Switzerland,	<p>Consultation of the Department of Studies.</p> <p>Fourth and last of inner Lutheran consultation initiated in 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.</p> <p>Adopting the “Ten points of Seelisberg” (from 1947).</p>
1982	LWF Publication: <i>LWF Studies. <b>The Significance of Judaism for the Life and Mission of the church</b></i>	The documentation of the consultation <i>“The Significance of Judaism for the Life and Mission of the Church”</i> in Bossey (see above).
1983	Consultation on <b>“Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews”</b> in Stockholm, Sweden, 11-13 July	<p>LWF and IJCIC representatives participated.</p> <p>In the consultation statement, Lutherans faced and rejected Luther’s anti-Jewish legacy.</p> <p>The consultation in a joint statement by both sides also outlined the prospects for future cooperation.</p> <p>Preparation for the Budapest Assembly</p>
1984	Publication: <i>LWF Studies. <b>Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews</b></i>	The documentation of the consultation <i>“Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews”</i> in Stockholm (see above)

1984	Seventh LWF Assembly in Budapest, Hungary, 22 July-5 August	<p>A major breakthrough in Jewish-Lutheran relations.</p> <p>In the Report of the Assembly Committee on the Church and the Jewish People, the LWF formally accepted the results of the Stockholm consultations, thus rejecting Luther's anti-Jewish legacy, and declared its readiness to continue cooperation with Jewish partners in the future.</p> <p>One of the speakers at the assembly with the theme "Church and the Jewish People" was Dr. Gerhard Riegner (former general secretary of the World Jewish Congress and co-chair of IJCIC).</p>
1984	Publication: <i>People of God, Peoples of God: A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Asia</i>	<p>WCC publication with LWF participation. It gives an interesting non-European perspective on the ongoing global dialogue.</p> <p>(Not available online)</p>

2001	<p>International consultation of the LWF on <b>“Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism Today”</b> in Dobogókő (near Budapest), Hungary, 9-13 September</p>	<p>Return to Jewish-Lutheran dialogue on a global level.</p> <p>The consultation not only addressed the topic of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism on a general level as it has been so far, but also looked at country-specific experiences from representatives of LWF member churches and their Jewish partners.</p> <p>The consultation also reflected on changes in Jewish-Christian relations.</p> <p>Commitment of LWF representatives to contribute to the global Jewish-Christian dialogue.</p>
2003	<p>LWF Documentation No. 48: <b><i>A Shift in Jewish-Lutheran Relations?</i></b></p>	<p>This Volume includes a documentation of the consultation in Dobogókő. In the appendix attached are also earlier documents approved in Budapest as an evidence of change in Jewish-Lutheran relations.</p> <p>It is a new contribution on this scale from the LWF with focus on antisemitism and anti-Judaism today, although the topic was part of the discussion from the beginning.</p>
2011	<p>LWF council <b>Statement on the Situation in the Middle East</b></p>	<p>The statement was a follow-up of the Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart 2010.</p>

2015	LWF Documentation No 60: <b><i>Religious Identity and Renewal in the Twenty-First Century.</i></b> Jewish, Christian and Muslim Explorations	First time that LWF opened the discussion for a triologue: Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars to analyze and reflect on the meaning and dynamics of religious renewal and explore the meaning of religious renewal across religious traditions.
2016	LWF Council <b>Resolution on Israel-Palestine</b>	This resolution came from a LWF council meeting in Wittenberg (Germany) 2016
2022	Webinar: <b>“A brave space for courageous peace”</b>	The LWF and its partners encouraged young leaders to engage in interfaith dialogue. Participants from around the world and different religions (Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims) shared experiences and discussed how to promote peace processes in interfaith contexts.
2022	Webinar: <b>“Gathering around the tree of life”</b>	Lutheran and Jewish experts discussed the urgency of renewing and strengthening relationships in times of polarization.
2023	<b><i>Hope for the Future:</i></b> A Study Document for Renewing Jewish-Christian Relations	The study document is published in the context of the Thirteenth LWF assembly in Kraków, Poland, is an invitation to Lutheran Christians around the world to renew their reflection and practical approach on Jewish-Christian relations.

### General links to access the archives:

- <https://archive.org/details/lutheranworldfederation>
- <https://archive.org/details/lwfassemblies>
- <https://archive.org/details/lwftheology>
- <https://www.lutheranworld.org/resources>

# Appendix 2: Glossary for Jewish-Christian Relations

The glossary below is a selection from *Jewish-Christian Glossary: A glossary of terms used in the Jewish-Christian dialogue*, prepared by Fritz Voll, <https://www.jcrelations.net/article/jewish-christian-glossary> (Used with permission).

## A

### **antisemitism**

Literally means opposed to Semites (which would include Arabic and other semitic peoples as well), but usually applied specifically to opposition to Jews—theological anti-Judaism or hatred of Jews. The term was invented in Germany in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to give Jew-hatred a scientific ring in the context of a pseudo-scientific study of the human races.

### **Auschwitz**

The German name of the Polish town where one of the largest Nazi Concentration Camps was situated. More than 1.5 million Jews were killed here. Auschwitz came to be used as synonymous to the words Holocaust and Shoah.

## B

### **Bar/Bat Mitzvah**

Hebrew for Son/Daughter of the Commandment. The ritual in which a Jewish boy takes up religious responsibilities in the community when he is thirteen years of age. In Reform and Conservative congregations a similar ritual is observed for girls. As part of the ritual the young person is for the first time called to the *bema* or podium (called an *aliyah*) to read from the Torah scroll.



## C

### **CE = common era BCE = before common era**

An attempt to use a neutral term for the period traditionally labeled “AD” (Latin: anno domini or “year of the Lord”) by Christians. CE and BCE is now used in respect of other traditions, especially Judaism, for which the Christian Lord has no significance.

### **Conservative Judaism**

A modern development in Judaism, reacting to early Jewish Reform movements in an attempt to retain clearer links to classical Jewish law while at the same time adapting it to modern situations. Its scholarly center in the US is the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. See Orthodox Judaism, Reform Judaism.

### **covenant (Hebrew brit, Greek diatheke)**

A pact between two parties. The major covenants in Jewish scriptures are God’s covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17), Abraham (Genesis 15), and the Sinai/Moses covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 19-24). In Judaism covenant refers to the eternal bond between God and the people of Israel grounded in God’s gracious and steadfast concern (Hebrew, *hesed*) that calls for the nation’s obedience to the divine commandments (*mitzvot*) and instruction (*torah*). For Christianity God has made a new covenant, better: newer or renewed covenant (rendered as “new testament” in older English) with the followers of Jesus. For centuries Christianity believed that the “new” had superseded the “old covenant” with Moses at Sinai by applying Jeremiah 31:31-34 to itself (see “supersession” supersessionism, replacement). This anti-Judaic view should be rejected. Many Christians now use the terms “First” and “Second Testament” instead of Old and New Testament.

## E

### **election**

A term used theologically in Judaism to indicate God’s choice of Israel to receive the covenant—a choice not based on the superiority or previous accomplishments of the people, but on God’s graciousness (see covenant).

In Christianity, the concept of election is applied to the church and even to individual Christians.

**eschatology adj. eschatological**

From Greek *eschaton*, study of the “last” or the “end-time”. Refers in general to what is expected to take place in the last times (from the inquirer’s perspective); thus the study of the ultimate destiny or purpose of humankind and the world, how and when the end will occur, what the end or last period of history or existence will be like. See also apocalypse, messiah.

**F**

**festivals (Jewish)**

The three festivals that correspond to the three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem during the times of the Temple are Pesach (Passover) Shavuot (Pentecost or Weeks) and Sukkot (Tabernacles). Minor festivals are Chanukah and Purim. See also Passover, Seder, Yom Kippur.

**H**

**Halakah/Halakha (halacha)**

Derived from the Hebrew verb *halakh*, “to go,” thus “the way to go”. The collective body of Jewish religious law that observant Jews follow. It is derived from both, the 613 precepts (*mitzvot*) set forth in the Torah (248 laws are positive commandments and 365 are prohibitions), many of which can only be observed in the land of Israel or while the Jerusalem Temple exists, and the Oral Torah, which includes all the laws decreed by the sages throughout the ages. See Orthodox Judaism, Oral Torah, Talmud.

**hasidim, hasidism**

Hebrew “pious one”. The term may refer to Jews in various periods: (1) a group that resisted the policies of Antiochus Epiphanes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE at the start of the Maccabean revolt; (2) Jewish pietists in the 13<sup>th</sup> century; (3) followers of the movement of Hasidism founded in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Israel Ba’al Shem Tov.

## **hermeneutics**

Greek to interpret, translate. The principles by which one interprets the scriptures. The term is often used with reference to the study of Jewish and Christian scriptures.

## **Holocaust**

From Greek, “entire burnt offering”. A term used in recent times to refer to the Nazi German extermination of the Jewish people. See Shoah, Auschwitz.

## **I**

### **intertestamental period Second Temple period**

A Christian theological term. A formative period in the development of Judaism, between about 400 BCE, the traditional end date for the Jewish and the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Christian canon. The Jewish intertestamental literature includes the Apocrypha (mostly preserved in Greek) and the Pseudepigrapha (works from this period ascribed to ancient authors like Enoch, the patriarchs, and Moses). This literature provides important background for understanding the period of Christian origins. For Second Temple period see Temple.

## **Israel**

A name given to the Jewish patriarch Jacob according to Genesis 32:38. In Jewish biblical times, this name refers to the northern tribes, but also to the entire nation. Historically, Jews have continued to regard themselves as the true continuation of the ancient Israelite national-religious community. The term thus has a strong cultural sense and refers to the Jews as a people. In modern times, it also refers to the political State of Israel. Christians came to consider themselves to be the “true” Israel and to be in continuation of the ancient traditions, which became one of the sources of Christian anti-Judaism throughout history.

## **J**

### **Judaism Jew**

From the Hebrew name of the patriarch Judah, whose name also came to designate the tribe and tribal district in which Jerusalem was located.

Thus the inhabitants of Judah and members of the tribe of Judah come to be called “Judahites” or, in short form, “Jews”. In scholarship the term Judaism is used after about the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE as a designation with varying characteristics at different times and places: especially ancient or early Judaism, rabbinic or normative Judaism. Prior to modern times, the term was never used by Jews themselves in their own writings; they referred to themselves almost invariably as “Israel.” Different expressions of today’s Judaism are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform/Liberal, Hasidism, Reconstructionist etc.

## **M**

### **Marcion(ites)**

A 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian (and his followers) who was considered the first heretic by his opponents because of certain dualistic and gnostic ideas and his call for a severing of Christianity from its Jewish and First Testament roots.

### **messiah**

Literally “anointed one”, Greek christos. Ancient priests and kings (and sometimes prophets) of Israel were anointed with oil. In early Judaism, the term came sometimes to mean a royal descendant of the dynasty of David, who would restore the united kingdom of Israel and Judah and usher in an age of peace and justice. The concept developed in many directions over the centuries. The messianic age was believed by some Jews to be a time of perfection of human institutions; others believed it to be a time of radical new beginnings, a new heaven and earth after divine judgment and destruction. Followers of Jesus applied the name to Jesus of Nazareth. They were soon called “Christians” in Greek and Latin usage. Jesus is also Messiah in Islam. See eschatology.

### **midrash pl. midrashim**

From Hebrew darash, to inquire. It means exposition (of scripture) and refers to the “commentary” or homiletical literature developed in classical Judaism that attempts to interpret Jewish scriptures in a thorough (scholarly) manner or expound it in sermons preached in the synagogue. Literary midrash may focus either on halakah, directing the Jew to specific patterns of religious practice, or on aggada, dealing with theological ideas,

ethical teachings, popular philosophy, imaginative exposition, legend, allegory, animal fables, etc.—that is, whatever is not halakah.

## **Mishnah**

Hebrew teaching or oral recitation. An important digest of the recommended Jewish oral halakah as it existed at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE and was collated, edited, and revised (orally) by Rabbi Judah the Prince. The code is divided into six major units (“orders”) and sixty minor ones (“tractates”). The work is considered the most authoritative legal tradition of the early sages and is the basis of the legal discussions of the Talmud.

## **O**

### **Oral Torah**

In traditional Jewish pharisaic/rabbinic thought, God reveals instructions for living through both the written scriptures and through a parallel process of orally transmitted traditions. Critics of this approach within Judaism include Sadducees and Karaites See Mishnah, Talmud.

### **orthodox**

From the Greek for “correct opinion/outlook”, as opposed to heterodox or heretical. The judgment that a position is “orthodox” depends on what are accepted as the operative or normative “rules” or authorities at the time. Over the course of history, the term “orthodox” has come to denote the dominant surviving forms that have proved themselves to be “traditional” or “classical” or “mainstream” (e.g. rabbinic Judaism; the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian churches; Sunni Islam), although new, relative “orthodoxies” constantly emerge (and often disappear).

### **Orthodox Judaism**

Refers to the movement that arose in reaction to Reform and Liberal Judaism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The name was initially given (by their opponents) to Jews who wanted to remain faithful to Torah against the modernizing trends of the time. Orthodoxy is very much based on the religious laws codified in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Shulchan Aruch. The Pentateuch in its present form is believed to have been revealed by God. Together with this written Torah the oral Torah was revealed, which was eventually

compiled in rabbinic literature. While there is conformity in matters of faith and observance, there are different streams of opinion. In Israel orthodoxy is the only recognized religious authority. A number of famous orthodox personalities have warned against participation in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, while they encouraged cooperation in the social area.

## **P**

### **Palestine**

From Greek for the Philistines, the seacoast population encountered by early geographers. An ancient designation for the area between Syria (to the north) and Egypt (to the south), between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan; roughly, modern Israel. Apparently the name was adopted by the Romans as a way of denying the Jews' connection to their homeland.

### **Passover**

Hebrew pesach, is one of the three pilgrimage festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot). It celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the tyranny and slavery of the Egyptians. See festivals (Jewish), Seder.

### **Pentateuch**

From Greek for "five books/scrolls". The five books attributed to Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; known in Jewish tradition as Torat Mosheh (the teaching of Moses), or simply the Torah.

### **Pharisees adj. pharisaic**

Hebrew perushim, "separatists" (?). The name given to a group or movement in early Judaism, the origin and nature of which is unclear. The designation probably resulted from their special stringencies in matters of diet and purity, which limited their social interactions with people outside their movement. Many scholars identify them with the later sages and rabbis who taught the oral and written law; some scholars see them as a complex of pietistic and zealous separatists, distinct from the proto-rabbis. According to Josephus and the New Testament, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, in a balance between predestination and free will, in angels as active divine agents, and in authoritative oral law. In the early Christian materials, Pharisees are often depicted as leading

opponents of Jesus and his followers, and are often linked with “scribes” but distinguished from the Sadducees. Trying to understand Pharisees by a reading of the New Testament is about as senseless as trying to gain an understanding of Jesus from a reading of the Talmud.

### **pogrom**

From the Russian word for devastation; an unprovoked attack or series of attacks upon a Jewish community.

## **R**

### **Reform Judaism**

Modern movement originating in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe which attempts to see Judaism as a rational religion adaptable to modern needs and sensitivities. The ancient traditions and laws are seen as historical relics that need have no binding power over modern Jews. The central academic institution of American Reform Judaism is the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and it is represented also by the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Compare Conservative and Orthodox Judaism.

## **S**

### **Sabbath**

Hebrew shabbat. The seventh day of the week recalling the completion of the creation and the Exodus from Egypt. It is a day symbolic of new beginnings and one dedicated to God, a most holy day of rest. The commandment of rest is found in the Bible and has been elaborated by the rabbis. It is a special duty to study Torah on the Sabbath and to be joyful.

### **Sadducees**

An early Jewish sub-group whose origins and ideas are uncertain. It probably arose early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and ceased to exist when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE. Sadducees supported priestly authority and rejected traditions not directly grounded in the Pentateuch, such as the concept of personal, individual life after death. They are often depicted as in conflict with the Pharisees.

## **Shema**

Hebrew 'hear', the first word of Israel's ages-long primal confession of faith from Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one." The Jew recites the Shema as an expression of exclusive fidelity to God and God's unity. No system of value, no ideology, art, success, or personal happiness is allowed to replace God as the ultimate ground of meaning.

## **Shoah**

Hebrew for destruction. See Holocaust, Auschwitz.

## **supersession, replacement**

The Christian teaching throughout almost two millennia that the church has replaced or superseded Israel in God's plan of salvation, and that after the destruction of the Temple Judaism has no theological or religious significance other than demonstrating God's wrath, while the church was seen as a demonstration of God's grace.

## **synagogue**

Greek for gathering. The central institution of Jewish communal worship and Bible teaching since antiquity (Hebrew bet keneset), and by extension, a term used for the place of gathering. The structure of such buildings has changed depending on the surrounding culture, though in all cases the ark containing the Torah scrolls faces the ancient Temple site in Jerusalem

# **T**

## **Talmud**

Hebrew for study or learning. Rabbinic Judaism produced two Talmuds: the one known as Babylonian Talmud is the most famous in the western world, and was completed sometime after the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE; the other, known as the Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud, was edited perhaps in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Both consist of commentaries and debates about the interpretation and application of the Mishnah collection of the Tana'im (the early sages) and the Amora'im (the later sages). The Talmud is also known by its Babylonian Aramaic equivalent "Gemara.". See Mishnah, Oral Torah.



## **Tanakh**

A relatively modern acronym for the Jewish Bible, made up of the names of the three parts: Torah (Pentateuch or Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings)—thus TNK pronounced TaNaKh.

## **Temple**

In traditional Judaism, the only legitimate Temple was the one in Jerusalem. The first Temple was built by king Solomon around 950 BCE, destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar around 587/6 BCE, and rebuilt about 70 years later under Zerubabel and dedicated 515 BCE. It was enlarged and improved considerably by king Herod the Great. This second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. The site of the ancient Jewish Temple is now occupied, in part, by the golden domed “Dome of the Rock” Mosque. In recent times, “temple” has come to be used synonymously with synagogue in some Liberal or Reform Jewish usage.

## **Torah**

Hebrew teaching, instruction. In general, torah refers to study of the whole gamut of Jewish tradition or to some aspect thereof. In its special sense, “the Torah” refers to the five books of Moses in the Hebrew scriptures (see Pentateuch). (In the Qur’an, Torah is the main term by which Jewish scripture is identified).

## **Y**

## **YHWH**

The sacred name of God which was revealed to Moses together with its meaning, which contains a “program” (Exodus 3:14). It is also known as the tetragrammaton. Since Hebrew was written without vowels in ancient times, the four consonants YHWH contain no clue to their original pronunciation. In ancient Israel the name was only spoken in the Temple, and only on certain occasions (e.g. on Yom Kippur). Today most Jews do not speak the name, instead, other names for God are substituted, e.g. Lord (Hebrew *Adonai*). In most English versions of the Bible the tetragrammaton is properly represented by LORD. This is most acceptable to Jews. However, in contemporary scholarship and even in some Christian translations of the Bible (Jerusalem Bible) the tetragrammaton is often rendered “Yahweh”. In some new translations even the tetragrammaton

itself is used. Both these renderings are offensive to many Jews. They hear Christians (often even in their presence in the dialogue) pronounce this special divine name, which they themselves would never dare to speak. It signifies for them the “program” of Israel’s special calling and relationship with God, which Christians should learn to respect. See also Jehovah.

## **Yom Kippur**

Hebrew the day of atonement, also called the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar devoted to fasting, prayer and confession. It is the culmination of the High Holidays which begin with Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish New Year. They are also called the Days of Awe.

## **Z**

## **Zionism**

From Mount Zion, a hill in the city of Jerusalem. In biblical times already (Isaiah 1:27) and later in rabbinic Judaism it is used to describe the whole of Jerusalem as symbol of a reconstructed Jewish homeland which gathers its exiles around a rebuilt Temple. The “Return to Zion” was expected as God’s work. The Zionism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century used some of the earlier rabbinic motifs, but its definition of peoplehood (Jews are a people like the French or the English etc.) was taken from a contemporary European context rather than from the traditional understanding of the covenantal relationship between God and the people Israel. Many of the early Zionist leaders were atheists or agnostics. Growing antisemitism and, finally, the mass-murders of the Nazis led to more acceptance among religious Jews of human action (rather than waiting for God) to create a Jewish homeland. Zionism has had and still has a variety of meanings, but apart from some Reform and Orthodox fringes, Jews of all persuasions support the State of Israel founded in 1948. A “Christian Zionism” has arisen in evangelical and fundamentalist churches which sees the founding of the State of Israel and the gathering of the Jewish exiles as the first stage of fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, expected to be followed by the second stage, the return of Christ and the conversion of all Israel to him.

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This study document is designed to serve as an educational resource as well as a reflective guide in the renewal of Jewish-Christian relations in the various member churches and their respective contexts.

*“In our world, which is increasingly characterized by polarization, hostility and even hatred towards people who are different from us, may this document inspire member churches to be messengers of hope to bring justice, peace and reconciliation to all, both locally and globally.”*

*(Rev. Dr. Anne Burghardt,  
General Secretary LWF)*

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