

## THE BERLIN DECLARATION ON THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST AND JEWISH EVANGELISM IN EUROPE TODAY

An international task force of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance met on the issue of the uniqueness of Christ and Jewish evangelism in Berlin, Germany, from August 18-22, 2008. We met to consider how our community might express genuine love for the Jewish people, especially in Europe. Participants included Christians from Germany and Messianic Jews.

### **1. Love is not Silent: the Need for Repentance**

We deeply regret the all too frequent persecution of Jewish people in Jesus' name. We do not for a second deny the evil it represents. During the genocide of the Holocaust, when the Jewish people were in their greatest peril, most Christian believers were silent. Many, such as The Stuttgart Confession of Guilt right after World War II, have apologized for the failure to speak out and for not doing more to demonstrate genuine Christian love to the Jewish people. Some of our brothers and sisters in the European Christian community suffered as well for resisting the anti-Semites and perpetrators of the atrocities. Many more today feel embarrassment and shame for the general failure to protest. As a result, there is an evident insecurity about relations with Jewish people. Also, there is a tendency to replace direct gospel outreach with Jewish-Christian dialogue.

We believe that genuine love cannot be passive. Jesus taught that authentic love could not be unfeeling when other human beings are in misery and need. Honest love must include an expression of Christ's good news in word and deed. Therefore, Christians everywhere must not look away when Jewish people have the same deep need for forgiveness of sin and true *shalom*, as do people of all nations. Love in action compels all Christians to share the gospel with people everywhere, including the Jewish people of Europe.

### **2. Beyond Genocide: the Problem of Sin**

We acknowledge within the sad record of European Christian history the "teaching of contempt," intolerance toward Jewish people and Judaism, abhorrent acts of coercion, anti-Semitism in attitude, word and deed. The historical events of the Holocaust developed within a climate of anti-Semitism. The German Evangelical Alliance out of concern for that history has expressed shame and responsibility for Christian silence and too few attempts to stop the horror.

Jewish people interpret Christian failure to speak out as complicity in their genocide during World War II. However, there were some valiant Christians who did speak up, risking and sometimes losing their own lives to save Jews.

In light of rising European anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism vigilance is necessary now. Jewish people are not the only victims of genocide as evidenced today. The Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi, warned, "It has happened. Therefore, it can happen again." The source of all genocide is sin. This sin affects all humanity, both the persecutor and the sufferer. God's response to sin is the gospel. Therefore, this grace must be proclaimed to every human being.

### **3. The Solution for Sin: the Uniqueness of Christ**

We recognize that genocide illustrates the enormity of sin. God is not responsible for genocide; we humans are. God has provided the solution.

It is often seen as unacceptable to challenge another's religious views. Nevertheless, we regard failure to share the gospel as ignoring the problem of sin. No one should ignore Jesus' assessment of human sin. Everyone needs what God offers by his grace: forgiveness of sin and a transforming divine presence in those who respond. Jesus did not seek to dominate, but gave himself on the cross as sacrifice for sin. His death cleanses from the guilt of sin and provides a new relationship with God. This benefit is neither earned nor entered into by birth. It is received through acknowledging our deep need for God to supply what we lack.

Confessing Jesus as Messiah affirms Jesus' uniqueness as a person, especially to Jews, because Messiah (or Christ) is a Jewish concept. He is sent as the Word, anointed as Messiah and vindicated by God to sit at his right hand. Through resurrection Jesus shares in the divine glory, task, and authority. Jesus of Nazareth is more than a prophet or a religious teacher. Rather, he is the unique Son of God, mediating and administering God's promise. By his divine authority, Jesus extends his offer to all. He exercises the divine prerogatives of forgiving sin and receiving worship. This is why we confess Jesus as both human and divine.

God calls believers to take the gospel to the world. Everyone needs to hear this message including the Jewish people. Proclamation to Israel was Jesus' priority. It also reflects the apostles' practice of going to the Jew first. Nothing has occurred since Jesus came that changes the need for Israel and the nations.

#### **4. The Call to Action: Jewish Evangelism**

Christians are called to share this good news, with sensitivity and humility. Witness to the gospel should be motivated by heart-felt love and expressed in practical ways. So, we stand in solidarity with the Jewish people, opposing anti-Semitism, prejudice and discrimination. This sinful behavior is irreconcilable with the calling of Christ's disciples.

Most of all, we invite Jewish people and all others to consider the claims of Jesus. We share this gospel with Israel and all nations, not as an attack on the integrity of others. We uphold everyone's right to freedom of speech, freedom of religion and an open forum for all. While respecting the views of others, we still challenge them to consider the message of the Messiah.

Christians have much to learn from the Jewish people. We recognise our need to hear Jewish concerns. We affirm the importance of dialogue in promoting mutual understanding and sympathy. Dialogue provides an opportunity to share deeply held beliefs in a context of mutual respect. Dialogue and evangelism are not mutually exclusive. We reject the notion that evangelism is deceptive in claiming that Jews can believe in Jesus. We also reject the accusation that evangelism is the equivalent of spiritual genocide. We affirm the right of Jewish believers in Jesus to practice those traditions that affirm their identity, reflect God's faithfulness to his people and uphold the Messiahship of Jesus.

We recognise the important role of Messianic Jews in the work and witness of the Church. Their special contribution gives testimony to the Jewish origins of Christianity and brings understanding of our Jewish roots. They remind us of the Jewishness of Jesus and of the first Christians. They also point to the fulfillment of God's promises to save his people. We encourage them to stand firm in their identification with and faithful witness to their people. The Lord is also glorified in the visible demonstration of reconciliation of Jew and German in the body of Christ.

#### **The Next Step**

Therefore, as Christians concerned for the well being and salvation of the Jewish people, we call for:

- Respect for religious conviction and liberty that allows frank discussion of religious claims
- Repentance from all expressions of anti-Semitism and all other forms of genocide, prejudice and discrimination
- Recognition of the uniqueness of Christ as the crucified, resurrected and divine Messiah who alone can save from death and bring eternal life
- Reconciliation and unity amongst believers in Jesus
- Renewed commitment to the task of Jewish evangelism