

75 YEARS AFTER SEELISBERG - REFLECTION

BY

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FROM THE TEN POINTS OF SEELISBERG TO THE TWELVE POINTS OF BERLIN

In recent decades, many activists and scholars (both Jewish and Christian) involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue gradually came to the conclusion, that the primary goal of The Ten Points of Seelisberg has been (partially or completely) achieved, i.e. that in Jewish-Christian relations over the last seven decades “swords have been refashioned into plowshares” (Is 2, 4) and therefore, that The Ten Points of Seelisberg need substantial up-dating. The world is not the same as it was more than seventy years ago. For example, at the time of signing The Ten Points of Seelisberg, the modern State of Israel did not exist. Moreover, since 1947, when the Seelisberg document was signed, the religious, cultural, social and political conditions changed significantly due to globalizing trends, demographic, economic and political developments, migration, etc.

This is why more than 30 Jewish and Christian scholars prepared a new document, eventually accepted and signed at the annual meeting of ICCJ in Berlin in July 2009 (by representatives of all the national member organisations). The title of that document is A Time for Recommitment: The Twelve Points of Berlin.

Let us look briefly at the most important differences between The Ten Points of Seelisberg and The Twelve Points of Berlin. Unlike The Ten Points of Seelisberg, the 2009 ICCJ document is addressing not just Christians, but Christians (the first four points,) Jews (points 5-8) and all people of good will (points 9-12). Unlike the Seelisberg document, The Twelve Points of Berlin deal not just with theology and religion, but focus on broader cultural, social, political, and environmental issues and challenges of the contemporary world and encourage cooperation of Jews, Christians, Muslims and all people of good will (including political, economic and social institutions) in these areas. The Berlin Document also seeks balance between remembering the past and envisioning the future (more so than some of the predominantly past-oriented previous documents).

The Twelve Points of Berlin have offered a new or revised set of priorities and strategies for common action by Jews and Christians (and Muslims and all people of good will): they propose new ways, opportunities and possibilities for Jewish-Christian cooperation and joint effort in a wide spectrum of areas. The Berlin Document intentionally moves beyond the past-orientation of previous declarations and it also attempts to broaden the perspective of Jewish-Christian cooperation by offering a platform for positive future-oriented common activities instead of focusing primarily or even exclusively on (Christian and other) antisemitism and ways of fighting against it.

Nevertheless, antisemitism has remained an important concern also in The Twelve Points of Berlin. The sections dealing particularly with the issue of antisemitism are especially the first four points, addressed to Christians and also – in the section addressed to Jews – the part dealing with the State of Israel and different types of criticism of its political actions.

More specifically, point one of the Berlin Document (the longest and most elaborated one) deals explicitly and extensively with the continuing challenge of antisemitism, point 3 encourages a Christian understanding of Jews and Judaism that would not lead to anti-Jewish stereotypes and point 4 encourages a balanced and positive attitude to the State of Israel.

Points 7 and 8 addressed primarily to Jews deal with the sensitive and controversial issue of a fair and balanced attitude to the State of Israel and its political decisions. Points 5 and 6 (also addressed to Jews) encourage Jewish participants in Jewish-Christian dialogue to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of Christian churches (over the last seven decades) to distance themselves from antisemitism, to repent of the Christian antisemitic attitudes and actions in the past and to fight against all contemporary forms and expressions of antisemitism.

It is obvious, if we compare The Ten Points of Seelisberg (1947) – a horrified response to the tragedy of Shoah – and The Twelve Points of Berlin (2009), that, as friendly relations and cooperation among Jews and Christians develop and grow in recent decades, combating antisemitism has not been (and obviously should not be) the only priority on the agenda of the ICCJ. But at the same time, it remains a major continuing concern of all people involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue. And besides facing old forms of antisemitism it is necessary to be aware of newly emerging and developing forms of anti-Jewish attitudes and sentiments, such as those related to the complex political situation in the Middle East.

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