The Church of Norway's relations to **Judaism and Jews**

A critical survey with an emphasis on historical, theological and Human Rights perspectives.

A report from a committee appointed by the Bishop's Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations 2024

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The full report is available online in Norwegian:
www.kirken.no

English translation by Brian McNeil.

Foreword

In 2021, *Bispemøtet* (hereafter: the Bishops' Conference) and *Mellomkirkelig Råd* (hereafter: the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations) of the Church of Norway set up a committee tasked with investigating theological and pastoral perspectives on Church of Norway's relationship to Jews and to Judaism. The present report is the result of the committee's activity.

Our mandate required us to study a variety of thematic fields. In our discussions, we both trace historical trajectories and treat a number of fundamental and theological questions. One aspect highlighted by the report is that Church of Norway's relationship to Jews and to Judaism has been characterized by an onerous anti-Semitism with a European and a religious motivation. This obliges Church of Norway to reflect critically on how it speaks about Jews and Judaism in its preaching and teaching today; to build good and trusting relationships to Norwegian Jews; and to fight against both anti-Semitism and other forms of racism today.

The context in which we have worked changed en route, especially after the terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, the ensuing war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, and the violence in the occupied West Bank. This situation has led to a harsh and polarized debate about Israel and Palestine in the Norwegian public sphere – including church circles. The committee had little opportunity to take this up in the report, since we were already in the closing phase of our work. But we believe that the report, in the form presented here, is a resource that can make a contribution to these exchanges too, and we have offered some reflections on this in a concluding postscript.

It is our shared hope that the analyses and reflections in the report can prompt necessary, critical, and deep-reaching conversations about Church of Norway's relationship to Judaism and to Jews today, both inside the church and in the encounter with Norwegian Jews. We hope that the report will be an important resource for all the parts of Church of Norway.

The committee wishes to express its deep gratitude to all the resource persons who have made important contribution to its work. In particular, we wish to thank Det Mosaiske Trossamfund (DMT, hereafter: "The Jewish Community of Oslo") and the Jewish Community in Trondheim.

Oslo, April 5, 2024

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1 Introduction

Change is needed

The Church of Norway needs a new approach to Jews and to Judaism. This sums up briefly the conclusion of this report. Jews continue to be caricatured or othered in the church's preaching, theology, and praxis. Church of Norway's leadership has not sufficiently confronted the anti-Semitic attitudes that played a central role in the church in the interwar years. The employees and the members of the church know too little about the church's Jewish inheritance – and about its anti-Jewish inheritance. The church's work for peace and for human rights has not mobilized a sufficiently good defense against anti-Semitic linguistic tropes,[1] and the church (like other actors involved in the conflict between Israel and Palestine) needs a greater awareness of how blind spots linked to one-sided depictions of the conflict can help to create enemy images.

The group responsible for this report worked from June 2021 to March 2024. The committee was set up by the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations of the Church of Norway in order to "draw up a report on Church of Norway's relations to Judaism and to Jews." One reason for this was that "Church of Norway needs a renewed theological reflection on its relationship to Judaism and to Jews."[2] The findings and conclusions of the committee confirm the need for changes in how Church of Norway relates to Jews and to Judaism.

Part of a larger new orientation in the church

The last fifty to sixty years have seen the beginnings of a new orientation in the relationships between many European and North American churches to Jews and to Judaism. The most important contributing factor here has been the recognition of the church's failures both before and during the Holocaust,[3] which were a contributory factor to the Holocaust. A number of churches and ecumenical organizations have set up theological commissions that have produced innovations and reports.

1 "Trope" (from the Greek *tropos*): a pattern, theme, or motif.

2 Bishops' Conference and Council on Ecumenical and International Relation, Church of Norway, 2021. "The Church, Judaism and Jews. Theological and practical reflections on the relationship between The Church of Norway, Judaism and Jews today. A mandate for a committee." file:///C:/Users/SI379/OneDrive%20-%20Den%20norske%20kirke/Skrivebord_plattform/UTVALG_Dnk%20og%20j%C3%B8der%20og%20j%C3%B8dedom/Mandate_Committee_ENGLISH.pdf (retrieved 12.03.2024).

3 The word "holocaust" comes from the Greek and means something that is wholly burnt up. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), the related noun *holokaustôma* is used to designate burnt sacrifices: the whole of the sacrificial animal was to be burnt and literally to go up in smoke. In English, this word has been used in the sense of "massacre" since the eighteenth century. It was only in the 1960s that it began to be used about the genocide of the Jews during the Second World War, and this became the customary use of this concept in the following decade. Among many Jews, the Hebrew word *Shoah* ("catastrophe, sudden annihilation") has become the customary designation of the Holocaust. The term "Holocaust" is used consistently in this report, since Norwegian readers are presumably more familiar with it, but *Shoah* occurs in some quotations. When "holocaust" is used of the genocide of Jews during the Second World War, it is customary to capitalize it; the lower case is employed when speaking of other genocides. The committee has chosen this style, which is also used by the HL Center (specializing in studies of the Holocaust) and in the standard Norwegian encyclopedia; however, the Language Council of Norway consistently uses the lower case.

Church of Norway has not until now undertaken an autonomous and holistic reflection on its relationship to Jews and to Judaism.[4]

Although the numerous ecclesial innovations that exist have a variety of profiles and came into being in various contexts, at the same time there are several thematic fields that recur in the different texts. David Marshall, formerly a consultant on Jewish–Christian relations in the World Council of Churches, has identified four such thematic fields:[5]

The first field is theological reflection on how the church is to understand in a new manner the relationship between God, the Jewish people, and the Christian church. This entails *inter alia* a consistent confrontation with what has been called supersessionism (or replacement theology). The second field is the awareness of how anti-Semitism and anti-Judaist attitudes have been a part of the church's history and theology, and an awareness of the churches' obligation to combat anti-Semitism today. The third field concerns the understanding of mission; while some churches support missionary work among Jews, other churches have rejected all forms of mission here. The fourth and last field is more political, and concerns the situation in Israel and Palestine, various understandings of Zionism and human rights, and a clearer involvement by the church in support of the Palestinians' rights in the last twenty to thirty years.

All these thematic fields are reflected in this report too. The committee hopes that this work can contribute to an increased self-examination in Church of Norway. If the church truly grasps how it has contributed to stigmatization, othering, and violence against Jews down through history, this must lead to a critical reflection on theological narratives and intellectual constructs that have left their mark on the church's tradition, and not least on the values on which the church wishes to build for the future.

The committee hopes that the report can bring clarification – not necessarily by answering every question, but by describing some intellectual tools, arguments, and historical overviews that can make it easier for the reader to form one's own opinion and make well-informed choices. The relationship between Judaism and Christianity is marked to a large degree by complexity, while it is at the same time marked by closeness – both historically, theologically, liturgically, and ethically.

Today's starting point

Parallel to the internal ecclesial and theological reorientation in Europe, an institutionalized work of dialogue between Jews and Christians began both in several countries and on an international level. 2022 saw the seventy-fifth anniversary of the epoch-making Seelisberg Conference (1947) and the establishing of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), an international umbrella organization for dialogue work and collaboration between Jews and Christians. ICCJ

4 Both Den Norske Israelsmisjon (DNI, hereafter: "The Norwegian Mission to Israel") and Den Evangelisk Lutherske Frikirke ("The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church") have published statements of theological principles (the former in 1986/2004, the latter in 2009). Church of Norway has also taken part through delegates in ecumenical commissions that have dealt with Jewish–Christian relations, such as the European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People, which is loosely connected to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Norway has been continuously represented by the Norwegian Mission to Israel.

5 Marshall, David. 2020. "The World Council of Churches and the Theology of Christian–Jewish Relations," *Current Dialogue* 72, no. 5 (December 2020), 861–894. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12566 (retrieved 27.02.2021).

has members in thirty-four countries today; in Norway, the Jewish Community of Oslo, the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations of the Church of Norway, and the Catholic diocese of Oslo are all involved in this organization.

In Norway, a formalized bilateral contact group between Church of Norway and the Jewish Community of Oslo has existed since 1998. The dialogue slowed down in 2016, and Rabbi Joav Melchior wrote in the newspaper *Vårt Land* in May 2021 that "after various things that have happened, linked first and foremost to the Church Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, the Kairos Document, BDS Norway ["Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions"], etc., the dialogue is frozen."[6]

The committee hopes that the reflections in this report, as well as the manner of its reception by the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, can help restart the dialogue in the contact group between Church of Norway and the Jewish Community of Oslo.

In the past six months,[7] Hamas' terror attack on October 7, 2023, the ensuing war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, and the increasing violence in the West Bank have fueled a strongly polarized debate, both internationally and in Norway. An increase in the use of anti-Semitic expressions and in hate crimes against Jews in Norway has been documented,[8] and Norwegian Muslims also state that they have experienced increased harassment and racism.[9] The committee hopes that the report can be a resource in debates about the situation in Israel and Palestine. A commitment to the rights of Palestinians ought not to exclude a commitment to the rights of Jews – and vice versa. On the contrary, the commitment to human dignity and to a shared humanity ought to be the basis of *both* the struggle against anti-Semitism *and* the commitment to the rights of Palestinians.

The committee's mandate

The committee's mandate was to draw up a report on Church of Norway's relation to Judaism and to Jews, including:

- the church's self-understanding in the encounter with Judaism,
- understandings of the Jewish people, the land, and Israel,
- missiological questions,
- the church and anti-Semitism, and
- Christian Zionism and Christians' support for Zionism.

6 Melchior, Joav. 2021. "Biskopene heller bensin på hatbålet," *Vårt Land,* published 21.05.2021. https://www.vl.no/meninger/verdidebatt/2021/05/21/biskopen-heller-bensin-pa-hat-balet (retrieved 24.02.2024).

7 The committee had its final working session on January 29, and met on March 12, 2024 to sum up what had been achieved.

8 Ragnhild Aarø Njie, Rushda Syed, Lea Girolami Bråthen, Zhilwan Manbari, Ingrid Uleberg. 2023. "Dobling av anmeldelser om antisemittisme: – Skaper redsel og uro," nrk.no., published 20.12.2023. https://www.nrk.no/stor-oslo/antisemittiske-anmeldelser-i-norge-doblet-etter-hamas-terrorangrep-1.16685930 (retrieved 10.03.2024).

9 See, e.g., Klette, Erlend Tro, 2023. "Norske Ayat blir kalt terrorist på gata: – Jeg har aldri vært så redd." *Fri fagbevegelse,* published 24.10.2023. https://frifagbevegelse.no/magasinet-for-fagorganiserte/norske-ayat-blir-kalt-terrorist-pa-gaga--jeg-har-aldri-vart-sa-redd.6.158.998536.49d047b4a3 (retrieved 01.03.2024).

We were also asked to "discuss the most important contemporary questions linked to each of these thematic fields" and "to propose concrete recommendations, measures, or other further responses to be taken by Church of Norway."[10]

The mandate underlines that this work "will demand a broad theological approach that also includes sociological, ecumenical, and historical perspectives." Accordingly, the committee has emphasized a broad and interdisciplinary approach to the various questions. The fact that its members are drawn from a variety of traditions in professional scholarship and in praxis has made possible a comprehensive access to material, perspectives, and research.

A recurrent challenge has been the relatively small amount of research into Church of Norway's thinking, theology, and attitudes with regard to Judaism and to Norwegian Jews. Our work has thus uncovered a need for greater research-based knowledge of the themes that are discussed in this report.

Some passages in the report speak of individual persons in connection with the accounts given of various opinions, positions, and contemporary debates. The committee has judged this to be appropriate for pedagogical reasons; and we wish to stress that, in this context, it is the positions that matter – not the persons. The committee refers exclusively to material that is already in the public domain, such as published books, media stories, or public debates.

There is a continuous growth in insight and experiences of the role played by society and by the church in the encounter with Jews and with Judaism. The understanding of Jewish–Christian relations keeps on generating new perspectives. The committee has kept to the task defined in its mandate, with the attendant risk that important perspectives have been overlooked or left out. This means that the problems discussed in the report have a "here and now" perspective, and these themes will require continuous fresh attention and new studies on the part of Church of Norway too.

The members of the committee were not always in agreement, nor do they always take the same position on every question. Our goal has been to identify and to comment on various positions and discussions that are significant for Church of Norway's self-understanding in relation to Jews and to Judaism. At the same time, however, the committee as a whole stands behind the report in its entirety and supports all the recommendations. We hope that the discussions can be a contribution to the larger conversation about Christian–Jewish relations in Norway.

10 Bishops' Conference and Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, "A mandate for a committee" (See above).

A contextual approach: Christianity and Judaism in Norway

The report has its origin in a Norwegian context, and its primary orientation is to this context. The main focus lies on Christianity as it is practiced in Church of Norway, and on Judaism as it exists in Norway. This, however, does not mean that international circumstances are neglected. Both Church of Norway and Norwegian Jews are influenced by discourses,[11] relationships, and networks outside Norway. The committee has chosen to relate to international discourses to the extent that these are articulated or are prominent in a Norwegian context. For example, it is not our task to take a position on the conflicts in Israel and Palestine, but we discuss how Church of Norway communicates on these conflicts. Besides this, international discussions of the use of concepts and the definitions of (for example) anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, Christian Zionism, and supersessionist theology are important presuppositions in Norwegian discussions of these concepts. German history often plays a role in the historical chapters, both because of the history of Lutheran theology and because of the history of anti-Semitism. In the chapter on Christian Zionism, we also look at how this phenomenon is manifested in the USA.

With regard to the relation between Jews and Christians, the Norwegian context is marked above all by three factors that make it different from the situation in some other countries.[12]

First, the Jewish minority has a relatively short history in Norway. Jews were not admitted to the realm until the prohibition in the Constitution was abolished in 1851. It was only at the close of the nineteenth century that Norway could be said to have a small Jewish population.

Secondly, the Jewish minority in Norway today is small in comparison with the Jewish minorities in our neighboring countries. The Jewish population amounted to slightly over 2,000 before the Second World War, and the Holocaust made a very grave impact on a Norwegian Jewish minority that was already small. 773 Norwegian Jews were deported to German extermination camps, only 38 of whom survived. The census in 1946 registered 559 Jews in Norway. A minority that was small to begin with had almost been wiped out.

The Norwegian Jewish population today consists of ca. 1,500 persons, less than 800 of whom are registered in a Jewish faith community. Norwegian Jews are primarily organized in two faith communities, the Jewish Community of Oslo and the Jewish Community in Trondheim, each of which has its own synagogue. Each has its own unique history, with particular links to Denmark and to Sweden, respectively.

The Jewish Community in Oslo is the largest group with the widest spectrum of activities and the largest numbers of employees, who include three rabbis[13] and a cantor. The Community is a unified congregation; in other words, the rabbi is Orthodox and the common praxis in the community follows Orthodox Judaism.

11 Discourse (from the Latin *discursus*): the way in which we write or speak about phenomena.

12 For an updated study of Jewish life in Norway, see Døving, Cora Alexa (ed.). 2022. *Jødisk. Identitet, praksis og minnekultur.* Universitetsforlaget.

13 A Chief Rabbi, a rabbi for the community, and a rabbi who works both for the community (35%) and in the action plan against anti-Semitism and in dialogues with outsiders (65%).

However, the individual religious praxis of the members varies greatly. In this way, it is capable of bringing together highly disparate Jews from disparate traditions. In 2022, it had 626 members and was entitled to financial support from the state.

With its 120 members (in 2022), the Jewish Community in Trondheim is much smaller. The synagogue in Trondheim is not Orthodox, nor does it have its own full-time rabbi. The Jewish Community in Trondheim has its premises in the same building as the Jewish Museum, and it is highly active in cultural work.

The Jewish Community in Bergen was founded as an association in 2020. It does not regard itself as a faith community. It works to preserve Jewish culture and Jewish traditions in Bergen, and states that it has ca. 80 members.

Thirdly, while Jews have been one of the smallest religious minorities in Norway, Church of Norway has been the dominant faith community with regard to the number of members, resources, cultural dominance, influence, and links to the state. Until the law about dissenters was passed in 1845, Norway was de facto a country in which only Lutheran Christianity was allowed to be practiced openly. This means that the relationship between Church of Norway and Jews in Norway is a relationship between the largest and the smallest faith communities, and is characterized by various majority–minority asymmetries. Jews are both a national and a religious minority in Norway. As the majority faith community, Church of Norway will always be marked to a greater or lesser extent by a majority blindness, and it risks displaying a lack of sensitivity and responsiveness to minority experiences. This fact must challenge Church of Norway to engage in a continuous reflection on what it means to be a cultural, religious, and historical majority – also in the encounter with other Christians, with adherents of other religions and worldviews, and with the indigenous population in Norway.

A self-critical approach: human dignity and human rights

The minority- and majority-perspective thus also entails a power-critical perspective. In some periods in the past, it was official Norwegian policy to eradicate "un-Norwegian" languages and cultural expressions.[14] One of the aims of the committee has been to investigate how, in very concrete terms, Church of Norway has given expression to attitudes and practices that have harmed and excluded Jews socially, politically, and in the religious domain.

14 Report to Parliament. *Sannhet og forsoning. Grunnlag for et oppgjør med fornorskningspolitikk og urett mot samer, kvener/norskfinner og skogfinner.* 2023. https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/sannhets--og-forsoningskommisjonen/rapport-til-stortinget-fra-sannhets--og-forsoningskommisjonen.pdf (retrieved 12.02.2024). See esp. 188–255.

The committee has emphasized human rights perspectives in its discussions of theological norms. The commitment to human rights can be justified in an ecclesial context on the basis of all three articles of faith: the dignity of the human being who is created in the image of God; faith in Jesus Christ; and the church's calling and task in the world. Over the years, a theological consensus has grown on the church's commitment "to promote and protect human rights in a world in which there are still innumerable victims of violence, injustice, and offenses."[15]

At the same time, the history of Church of Norway – in particular, with regard to Jews – reminds us that the church itself has not always been a credible ambassador for human rights or human dignity. The construction of "the Jew" as the negative other functioned for centuries as a basis for Christian self-assertion and identity construction. This is why an approach in terms of human rights also entails a self-critical look at one's own theological practices, as well as work to identify the power structures that are at play when one articulates theology. The recognition that Church of Norway has been an actor contributing in various ways to exclude specific groups in society obligates the church to a continuous self-criticism and to a reflection on one's own practices from a perspective of human rights. One goal of the committee, therefore, has been to make a contribution to renewal of the theological language used about Christian–Jewish relations. Our ambition for the report is that it may prompt a wider conversation and a consciousness that goes beyond the church's official organs.

The composition of the committee

No Jewish representatives were appointed to the committee, which is thus not an interreligious committee, although its task is to report on the self-understanding of Church of Norway in the encounter with Judaism and with Jews. This choice is understandable for many reasons, even if it also presents some fundamental challenges. Self-understanding does not become what it is, unless we also relate to others and learn from them.

During the process, therefore, the committee has emphasized the importance of meeting various Jewish persons and milieus and listening to their experiences. Those we have met include the leaders of the Jewish Community of Oslo, the Jewish Community in Trondheim, and other Jews in Norway, all of whom have given us important insights into Christian–Jewish relations in Norway. We have also listened to, and had conversations with, representatives of the Jewish Community of Oslo about why the dialogue in the bilateral contact group between Church of Norway and the Jewish Community is put on ice for the moment. We have heard the expectations of the leaders of the Jewish Community with regard to Church of Norway in a society that is open to various worldviews.

The various conversations have been instructive, stimulating, and diverse. Although the Jewish minority in Norway is small, it is well organized and very vigorous and alive. It is an important voice in Norwegian society and in the Norwegian dialogue about faith and worldviews.

15 The Church of Norway Human Rights Committee. 2014. *Set the Oppressed Free! The Church of Norway and Human Rights.* https://www.kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/global/2014/dokumenter/menneskerettigheter_innmat_eng_korr2c.pdf (retrieved 12.02.2024).

It is customary in a dialogue context to distinguish three levels: to learn about, to learn from, and to learn together with. In view of the composition of the committee, the most important thing we have learnt is how it is possible to take a constructive stance in difficult internal discussions. In the encounter with Norwegian Jews, we have primarily learnt about and learnt from. In Church of Norway's continuing work on these questions, the committee wish to underline that it is important for Church of Norway also to learn *together with* Jews, both in Norway and internationally.

A work that is never finished

In this report, we have discussed within the framework of our mandate what we see as the most important questions today for Church of Norway in the encounter with Judaism and with Jews. We have sought to illustrate important problems and ongoing debates in scholarly literature, in the church, and in society. Jewish–Christian relations continuously generate new experiences, insights, and empirical data, and the church must continuously reflect on these and take a position on them.

The main goal of the committee has been to produce a report that we hope can promote a deeper and a renewed self-understanding of Church of Norway and a strengthening of the relations between Church of Norway and Jews in Norway. For the future, this will require attentiveness, involvement, setting priorities, prudence, and new studies by both Jews and Christians in Norway. The work on these important questions is far from over.

The structure of the report

The report has the following structure:

We begin the report in Ch. 2 with a sketch of anti-Semitism's long history in Europe, where we demonstrate how the anti-Semitic language was a Christian language for many centuries, before it was secularized in the modern period. The chapter then points to some typical fields where anti-Semitism has been openly expressed after the Holocaust, and concludes with a brief discussion of how anti-Semitism is defined today. This survey establishes some central concepts and furnishes an important framework for understanding Ch. 3, where we present what we see as the most important events in Church of Norway's history vis-à-vis Jews from 1814 to 2021.

The historical part is the foundation of Chapters 4 and 5, where we focus on Church of Norway's work in support of human rights. In Ch. 4, we begin by seeing how this work has developed since the Second World War and what it has signified for the relation to Norwegian Jews. We consider *inter alia* how work for human rights, anchored in the dialogue in Norway about faith and worldviews, has played an important role in Church of Norway's endeavors to ensure a place for Jewish tradition and praxis in Norwegian society. We also describe the emergence of Church of Norway's work for human rights in Israel and Palestine, and how this has been communicated in a Norwegian context. We then go on to discuss in Ch. 5 some controversial contributions to Norwegian debates about the situation in Israel and Palestine by actors with connections to the Bishops' Conference or the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations.

In the following chapters, we discuss various theological problems that Church of Norway faces in its encounter with Jews and with Judaism. The aim is to supply intellectual tools that can promote conversation and reflection on theological questions, some of which are complicated. Our starting point in Ch. 6 is the concept of "supersessionism." Here, we discuss how it is possible to think of the relation between Judaism and Christianity as both breach and continuity. The reading and interpretation of the Bible is a fundamental praxis in Church of Norway, and in Ch. 7 we look more closely at some central biblical texts that have helped to form Christians' views of "what is Jewish" in ways that have led to caricaturing and othering. In Ch. 8, we sum up the work of four scholars who were asked by the committee to investigate how Jews and Judaism are presented (or overlooked) in central practices in Church of Norway today: preaching, hymns, religious education material, and liturgies. In Ch. 9, we outline various positions in the controversial question of the Christian mission to Jews, before we discuss this question from historical, exegetical, and systematic-theological perspectives. The discussion of the question of mission concludes with a specific treatment of Jews who believe in Jesus, and of how Church of Norway can think of these persons and relate to them. In Ch. 10, we discuss various understandings of the land that today is Israel and Palestine. We describe how this has been expressed, and is expressed today, in Jewish and Palestine narratives, and then we offer a critical analysis of an apocalyptic Christian Zionism that is focused on the Last Days. The committee concludes this chapter with a reflection on how the church can think in an inclusive and dynamic manner about the so-called "land promises."

In Ch. 11, we present some resources from interreligious dialogue, and reflect on how these can help both to build up good relations between Jews and Christians in Norway, and to develop Church of Norway's self-understanding and self-criticism in the encounter with Jews and Judaism.

After all these chapters, which have taken up various themes and questions that need to have light shed on them and to be discussed in a report such as this, we round off with some considerations in Ch. 11 and with overall recommendations in Ch. 12. Each chapter closes with a summary in which the committee gives a general view of the discoveries and observations that have been made. This forms the basis of the overall recommendations to the Bishops' Conference and to the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. An afterword follows.

The reader will find at the end of the report an overview of the committee's meetings and of the persons whom the committee has met; the mandate of the committee; a presentation of its members; and a bibliography.

2 Antisemitism – A historical sketch leading up to present day attempts of definitions.

Summary: Knowledge of the anti-Semitic language is necessary, in order to recognize this phenomenon

The church has a long and dark history in the encounter with Jews and with Judaism. For many centuries, down to the Holocaust, anti-Semitism was a part of the central forms of expression that create the identity of Christianity. This has meant that othering, prejudices, and hate toward Jews have been allowed to form the church's theology and praxis; it has also contributed to the spread and the legitimation of the European hatred of Jews. This means that the church bears a grave responsibility today to help prevent, identify, and combat anti-Semitic attitudes and actions both in society and in the church's own practices.

In order to combat anti-Semitism in our days, one must be able to identify it precisely and to know what it is. This is why the endeavor to define anti-Semitism is a part of the struggle against the phenomenon. However, all definitions have their limitations. On the one hand, linguistic attempts to define and pin down understandings of anti-Semitism will always to some extent be incomplete. Definitions become problematic when they contribute to excessively static understandings of phenomena; the context will always be very significant for the analysis. The dispute about definitions can also lead to an ideologized trench warfare, thereby diverting attention from the matter itself. On the other hand, definitions are important as intellectual tools, *inter alia* in order to have an orientation to action in preventative work. It is therefore important to have a continuous professional conversation and discussion of what anti-Semitism is, in order to sharpen awareness of the phenomenon. History has shown that anti-Semitism continually takes on new forms.

The goal and the function of the definitions of anti-Semitism ought to be to make a contribution to, and not to stand in the way of, an increased sensitivity and vigilance with regard both to old and to new variants of prejudices, othering, and hate vis-à-vis what is Jewish – or what is regarded as being Jewish. It is impossible to overlook the fact that anti-Zionism and the criticism of the Israeli occupation are central *discursive fields and arenas* in which anti-Semitism finds expression today. At the same time, one must avoid gagging discussions of human rights and a legitimate criticism of the politics of a state. If criticism of Israel is understood exclusively in the light of the history of anti-Semitism, there is a risk that legitimate criticism may be branded as a scandal. But if one fails to take this into account, there is the opposite risk, namely, that anti-Semitism may be legitimated. It is only an analysis of the individual instance that can determine to what extent aggressive language about Israel is also anti-Semitic. The decisive point is whether the use

of such language activates anti-Jewish stereotypes. Anti-Semitism must therefore be understood within a larger racist framework, and we must fight against it on universal and antiracist presuppositions.

The historical presentation in this chapter demonstrates that anti-Semitism has a tendency to take new forms and expressions in changing cultural, political, and social contexts. Rather than establishing categorical boundaries between what is and what is not anti-Semitic, it is important to contribute to a critical and vigilant conversation about how anti-Semitism is expressed today, and how one can recognize and combat the phenomenon. In order to do this, the church needs to know how anti-Semitism has been manifested historically. In short, it needs knowledge of the anti-Semitic language in order to recognize the phenomenon; and for many centuries, this was a Christian language.

3 The Church of Norway and Jews: 1814 - 2021

Summary: An insufficient confrontation

Church of Norway's attitudes to Jews and to Judaism have largely been interwoven with the attitudes that were dominant in the course of history in social life, in culture, and in politics. At several periods, key theologians and church leaders have actively contributed to anti-Jewish prejudices and to anti-Semitism. Sometimes, individual church leaders have stood up for Jews' human dignity. At other times, ecclesial actors have displayed passivity and indifference in the face of derogatory language, discrimination, and even persecution of Jews. An increasing recognition of the church's historical errors has been registered since the 1980s/1990s, including among ecclesial actors.

The dialogue work between Church of Norway and the Jewish Community of Oslo has been consolidated and put on a more formal footing since 1996, both via the bilateral contact group and through the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities, first in Oslo, and gradually also in Trondheim. In parallel to this development, the church has also intensified the contact with Palestinian Christians and has taken a clearer stance against the Israeli occupation. The bilateral contact group between the Jewish Community of Oslo and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations has held no meetings since 2016, and the Jewish Community in Oslo declared in 2021 that the dialogue in this group "is frozen."

The committee has seen how deeply embedded anti-Jewish attitudes have been in broad sectors of Church of Norway – including in the interwar period – while the persecution of Jews was increasing in Europe. The committee finds it striking that the Bishops' Conference did nothing in connection with the escalating anti-Semitism in the 1930s – neither the anti-Semitism that was mediated from Germany nor the anti-Semitism that was spread via the propaganda of the Nasjonal Samling party, in Norwegian newspapers, or among Norwegian pastors and theologians. The Bishops' Conference appears to have been fairly indifferent to the growing anti-Semitism in the interwar period, and its involvement against the persecution of Jews during the Second World War came too late.

It was only in 2012, with the declaration "Kirkens forhold til jødene under okkupasjonen 1940–1945" ("The church's relation to the Jews under the occupation, from 1940 to 1945," BM sak 37:12 "Kirken og jødene"), and in 2016, with the declaration "Arven fra Luther og det jødiske folk" ("The inheritance from Luther and the Jewish people"), that the Bishops' Conference confronted Luther's anti-Semitism. Although the bishops did recognize here that "some Norwegian theologians ... directly or indirectly supported German anti-Semitism," the committee holds that this declaration fails to give a complete description of how widespread the anti-Jewish attitudes actually were in Church of Norway in the interwar period. Anti-Semitism was not primarily a German concern that influenced some

Norwegian theologians. Anti-Semitism had deep theological, cultural, and political roots in Church of Norway and in Norwegian society. The declaration also fails to mention that a confrontation with church anti-Semitism never took place after the War.

Key theologians who had mediated explicitly anti-Semitic ideas before the War, or who had even displayed sympathy with Hitler, were never called to account after the War. On the contrary, they were allowed to continue in central positions in the church, in academic life, and in Christian organizations. When the declaration confines the anti-Jewish attitudes to "some Norwegian theologians at the end of the 1930s," it shows that a considerable amount of work is still needed with regard to knowledge of Church of Norway's contribution to anti-Semitism and to anti-Jewish attitudes. It is necessary to study this question in depth and to confront it.

One can also ask whether the lack of sensitivity to anti-Jewish stereotypes is a purely historical matter. Is it not rather something that can be seen in parts of church's engagement for Palestinian questions today? The answer depends on how one evaluates this involvement on behalf of human rights, and we shall look further at this in the next chapters.

4 The Church of Norway's Human Rights-work in Norway and the Middle East

Summary: A stronger focus brings an increased responsibility

In this chapter, we have seen how Church of Norway's involvement in human rights has emerged, how it has been expressed in dialogue work on questions of faith and worldview in Norway, and also how the commitment to human rights by the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations has developed over the last seventy years with regard to the Israel–Palestine conflict. We have also looked at the number of declarations about this conflict by the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, and we have compared this with the number of declarations about other conflict regions.

The committee notes that Church of Norway has committed itself to work for equal treatment and religious freedom for minority faiths and worldviews in Norway, especially through the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities and in the bilateral contact group with the Jewish Community of Oslo. The church has worked actively in these forums in matters that were important for the Jewish Community of Oslo and the Jewish Community in Trondheim. The committee wishes to stress that Church of Norway must continue its involvement in this type of issues, such as the possibility for the ritual circumcision of boys, access to kosher food in public institutions, dispensation from the slaughter ban, and a more flexible regulation of public holidays. It is important that Church of Norway should help, via close contact with Norwegian Jews, dialogue work, and lobbying, to make it easier for Jews to live and to practice Jewish culture and religion in Norway in the years to come.

The committee has not undertaken a systematic, qualitative study of the declarations about Israel and Palestine by the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations and the Bishops' Conference, and we recommend that this should be done. But the declarations we have read give no grounds for claiming that they are anti-Semitic or that they mediate underlying anti-Semitic attitudes. The declarations that the committee has read are characterized by a secular and human-rights language, and they offer a clearly political interpretation of the conflict.

With regard to the question of the extent to which Church of Norway in recent years has been more concerned about the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the committee notes that such a development can be observed in the strategies of the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. Initially, the focus was on the human rights of the Christian minorities in several countries in the Middle East, but the subsequent Middle East strategy of Church of Norway has largely

concentrated its focus on the human rights situation in Israel and Palestine, and on the living conditions of Palestinian Christians.

The committee evaluates this in various ways. Some find it problematic, and hold that the concentrated focus on the Palestinians' situation appears somewhat inconsistent in view of the human rights situation for Christian minorities elsewhere in the Middle East. One can also ask whether the strong involvement in the Israel–Palestine conflict does justice to the geographical and substantial spectrum in the total involvement to which the church has committed itself. The form this involvement sometimes takes also appears ill-advised in the light of the church's anti-Jewish inheritance – not least in view of what we know about how anti-Semitism is linked today to blind spots and one-sided discourses about this conflict, and of what this communicates to Norwegian Jews. The involvement itself is not the problem. The concern is that, if the one-sidedness becomes too massive, the risk of triggering anti-Semitic reactions will grow.

Others in the committee see this as an important prioritization and concentration on a conflict in a region that means much for the church. The Christian faith has its historical roots in the region that today is Israel and Palestine. Church of Norway has close bonds to churches and institutions in this area, including Church of Norway's sister churches, and this makes it natural for Church of Norway to have a special involvement here. The human rights and the living situations for Palestinians and Palestinian Christians have deteriorated gravely in recent decades, and in March 2024, the situation in this region is critical. Another argument is that Norway's recent history and involvement vis-à-vis Israel and the Palestinians have increased the commitment of many Norwegians; and this is reflected in Church of Norway too.

Despite varying views in the committee about the attitude taken to the extent of Church of Norway's work for human rights in Israel–Palestine, we all agree that it is worth reflecting on some possible *consequences* of a strong focus: A strong focus on the human rights situation in Israel and Palestine entails obligations. The communication in Norway about this involvement must be based on knowledge. The involvement must convey how complex and composite the conflict is, and it must help to dismantle pictures of the enemy and stereotypical depictions that can fuel anti-Semitic attitudes or hatred of Palestinians and Muslims. One aspect of this picture is the danger that the state of Israel may be delegitimized, or that the rights of Palestinians may be relativized. Studies show that Jews experience a considerable measure of hatred and harassment in Norway too, as a consequence of the polarized debate on the situation in Israel and Palestine. As the presentation above has shown, Church of Norway has taken clear positions in the struggle against anti-Semitism and racism, and has a clear commitment to the rights of the Palestinians. This makes it important for the church to mobilize an effective line of defense against anti-Jewish attitudes, and to be attentive to the boundary between legitimate criticism of Israel's politics and anti-Semitism. As we shall see in the next chapter, this line of defense has not always worked satisfactorily.

5 A discussion on contested examples from the Church of Norway's engagement in Israel/Palestine.

Summary: Build stronger defenses against anti-Semitic tropes

As we have seen in ch. 2, discourses that criticize Israel's politics are a field in which anti-Semitic attitudes and expressions are openly expressed today. We have also seen that scholars disagree about where the boundary lies between anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel's politics.

The presentation of the examples in this chapter challenges everyone in the church who is involved in the conflict between Israel and Palestine to reflect continually on where the boundaries lie between legitimate and illegitimate criticism. In the case of the church, a special challenge will be the use of religious symbols and biblical motifs that can easily activate old anti-Jewish ideas from the church's history. The committee therefore recommends that criticism of the occupation and of breaches of human rights in this conflict should primarily be articulated in human-rights vocabulary.

The Swedish historian of ideas Henrik Bachner (born 1959) discusses in his book *The Return. Antisemitism in Sweden after 1945* (1999) how one can distinguish legitimate criticism of Israel from criticism that is anti-Jewish. Bachner holds that one-sided negative evaluations of Israel can indicate anti-Jewish attitudes; but at the same time, he points out that it is problematic to use this as the only criterion of anti-Semitism. He concludes that every statement that is critical of Israel needs analysis before one can say whether or not it is anti-Jewish: "In order to isolate and identify anti-Semitic motifs behind or in the criticism, we must look at *what* is said. The only method that makes possible an identification of anti-Semitic motifs in the criticism of Israel is thus an analysis of the ideas, arguments, and attitudes that occur."[16]

This presupposes knowledge of the history of anti-Semitism and of how anti-Semitism today continually takes on new forms of expression. We also need good questions, a self-critical attitude, time, reflection, and fellowship in order to elaborate good instruments for our own day that can uncover and confront new forms of old anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic tropes, as well as the reproduction of these tropes. We know that committed involvement, not least when it is based on powerful experiences of injustice, can also create blind spots where important perspectives

16 Bachner, Henrik. 1999/2020. Återkomsten. Antisemitism i Sverige efter 1945, Natur & Kultur. 45–48. [Our translation of title into English in text above].

and critical evaluations are missing. Some of the examples discussed in this chapter indicate that both church leaders and parishes have failed to mobilize a sufficiently good line of defense, and that they lack an adequate knowledge of how anti-Semitic tropes are recycled and keep on turning up in new ways.

There is evidence that many Norwegian Jews experience harassment and feel unsafe against the background of what is happening in the Middle East. Norwegian Muslims have also stated that they experience insecurity and harassment as a consequence of the polarized debate. No one in Norway – even one who has strong opinions about the conflict – ought to be made responsible for what is happening in Israel and Palestine. Church of Norway must be aware of the public and strongly polarized debate about the Israel–Palestine conflict, and must promote a public exchange of views that is based on knowledge and anchored in human rights. The church must continually confront expressions that contribute to the stigmatization of Jews or to prejudices against them.

Last but not least, Church of Norway must help prevent the struggle for the Palestinians' rights and the struggle against anti-Semitism from being understood as antithetical: on the contrary, they must be understood as two aspects of the same commitment. There is no contradiction in getting involved on behalf of the human dignity of both Israelis and Palestinians. When groups from Church of Norway travel to Israel and Palestine, they should be encouraged to visit a variety of actors and milieus on both the Israeli and the Palestinian side, in order to get a picture of the situation that is as complex as possible. Afterwards, the communication of their knowledge and experience of Israel and Palestine must take account of the impact that their narratives and impressions will have on those who hear them in Norway.

6 Continuity and breach: Replacement, extension, fulfillment or confirmation?

Summary: Investigate models of confirmation and of expansion

The relationship between Judaism and Christianity is defined by both breach and continuity. For large parts of the church's history, it was the breach that was marked most clearly. This has provided a breeding ground for motifs that present contrasts, for supersessionist theologies, and for prejudices about Jewish faith, culture, and life. A considerable amount of work still remains to be done in Church of Norway to map, analyze, and confront practices that are based on motifs and intellectual constructs from supersessionist theology.

The church's continual challenge and task is to articulate its "good news" in a manner consistent with integrity, without making Jewish traditions superfluous, belittling them, or offering a caricature of them. It is decisively important for the church to ask when emphases on the breach become caricatures, reductionist, or destructive, and when they can function to bring clarification.

In recent decades, churches and theologies have investigated, to a greater degree than in the past, what is entailed by the fact that the Christian and Jewish tradition has a common origin, and that the church stands in a fundamental continuity with ancient Judaism, both historically and theologically. Both Christianity and rabbinic Judaism developed with an eye to each other and in relation to each other. This relational point of departure calls for a deeper dialogue between Jews and Christians with regard to the self-understanding of both groups. The committee encourages Church of Norway to continue working on its self-understanding in the encounter with Jewish faith and traditions – and also to do so in dialogue with Jews. The International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) is one of several suitable contexts for this work.

The church ought, to a greater extent than in the past, to investigate models of confirmation and of expansion linked to the relationship between Jewish and Christian tradition, while maintaining respect for what is specifically Jewish. A general challenge for all theological work today is to seek forms of acknowledgment that entail an openness to positive elements in traditions other than one's own.

7 Bibel and ethical reading of the Bible: task and challenges.

Summary: Enhancing competence in order to avoid an anti-Jewish use of biblical texts

In this chapter, we have looked at some typical examples of how Jews and Judaism have been understood and presented in Christian interpretation of the Bible and in biblical scholarship, and at how this has contributed to stereotypical and negative presentations. Texts that initially were Jewish texts, with discussions, polemic, and internal positioning among Jews, gradually came to be read and interpreted in the (Gentile) Christian church as eternally valid descriptions of what Jews "are."

As a communicator of biblical narratives, the church has a grave responsibility to contribute to a biblical interpretation that is historically, exegetically, and ethically defensible – an interpretation that does not reproduce and consolidate caricatures, triumphalism, and (ultimately) anti-Jewish ideas.

The problems linked to the translation of *hoi Ioudaioi* both in the Gospel of John and in other New Testament texts ought to be thematized more strongly than is done today in the church's preaching and instruction in faith, and in other contexts in which biblical texts are employed in culture.

In the encounter with texts about Pharisees, preachers must above all be conscious that the New Testament texts do not give a complete historical picture of who the Pharisees were. Instead, they attribute to them roles and functions that are partly one-sided, *inter alia* as opponents of Jesus.

Biblical scholarship, like other research, reflects the cultural and academic trends in its own day. This is why European biblical scholarship too has offered pictures of Judaism and of Jewish tradition that are caricatures. At the same time, however, biblical scholarship continuously generates fresh knowledge and insights that can correct the ways in which biblical texts were understood and used in earlier times. The committee holds that Church of Norway must make it possible for pastors and those employed in church teaching positions to receive greater knowledge and a higher competence with regard to the Jewish context of the New Testament; to the historical relationship between the church and rabbinical Judaism (which has been both relational and polemical); to the problematic potential of biblical texts; and to an ethical use of the Bible.

8 A critical look at faith-education materials, preaching, hymns and liturgies in the Church of Norway

Summary: A great deal of work remains to be done

In this chapter, we have inquired whether there are aspects of the liturgical practices and the instruction in faith in Church of Norway *today* that reproduce anti-Semitic tropes, supersessionist theological motifs, or other negative stereotypes of Jews and of Judaism. The presentation of the material shows that greater and smaller problems are attached to a number of practices, material, and theological intellectual constructs linked to preaching, instruction in faith, and the celebration of worship in Church of Norway.

The presentation shows that there has been a positive development in the case of Church of Norway's liturgies. Here, elements that in the past presented Jews and Judaism as a contrast or contradiction to the Christian faith and confession have largely been replaced by formulations that help to underline continuity and the shared inheritance. The presentation of children's Bibles and of Sunday school material in use in Church of Norway displays a tendency to depict the relationship between Jesus and the disciples and their Jewish contemporaries as marked by conflicts and contrasts. The sermons and the homiletic commentaries that we have evaluated contain motifs both of contrast and of punishment, and there is very little reflection on the anti-Jewish potential of the biblical texts. Although many hymns have been given new and better translations that play down earlier caricatures of Jewish tradition, we also see that this tradition is often rendered invisible in the hymn texts. For example, large parts of the historical material from the Old Testament receive little mention in the hymns, or in other Christian proclamation.

This presentation leads the committee to conclude that a great deal of work remains to be done in order to identify and confront supersessionist theological motifs, descriptions of Jewish tradition that are caricatures, and the way in which this tradition is rendered invisible in various practices in Church of Norway – especially in connection with preaching, teaching, and the communication of the Bible.

9 Mission and Jesus-believing Jews.

Summary: More contact and dialogue with Jews who believe in Jesus

There are various points of view in the committee about the fundamental question of mission among Jews, and about how the various theologies of the covenant are envisaged. The committee also believes that there must be room in Church of Norway for differing views on this subject. Theologically speaking, the decisive point must be that Church of Norway holds fast to two principles: Jesus' universal work of salvation, and the trust that God is faithful to his promises. Church of Norway must continue to work on what these two principles mean for its ministry of mission and dialogue today. The point of departure for the church in this work must lie in historical experiences and in biblical texts, and their varying interpretations and the contexts in which they are used. The church must also have a dialogue with Jews, including Jews who believe in Jesus, about these questions.

With regard to the activity of the Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel, this can be understood as an ecumenical work of solidarity and friendship with Jewish Christians who share our faith. The committee finds it desirable that there be collaboration in solidarity, in freedom of religion, and in ecumenical friendship with Messianic Jews, on the same lines as with other Christians. As in all other ecumenical collaborative relationships, the question whether parishes in Church of Norway ought to collaborate with, or support the work of, Messianic communities (for example, via the Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel) must be evaluated in the light of the content and character of the work.

Given the weight of the church's negative history vis-à-vis Jews, the committee holds that the most appropriate way to be witnesses to Jesus the Messiah is the testimony that comes from Jews who themselves believe in Jesus.

The committee stresses that it is important that Church of Norway's relation to Jews must be based on a dialogue between two equal religious traditions. As far as the church is concerned, the recognition that, on the deepest level, Jews and Christians believe in the same God must lead the church to continue investigating what this means for Christian theology and praxis.

10 About the Land – Zionism, Christian Zionism and land promises.

Summary: An approach on the basis of international law to the question of the land

In this chapter, we have seen how political Zionism emerges within a Jewish context, and how various Jewish and Palestinian narratives linked to understandings of the land and of history find expression in today's political situation. We have also seen how Christian Zionism emerged as a special Christian theological and ideological tradition, with the primary emphasis on what can be called today an apocalyptic Christian Zionism. This type of Christian Zionism probably has little influence among members of Church of Norway, but this ideology is very much alive among influential Christian actors, and it is also found in an ecumenical and international context. The committee finds this kind of Christian Zionism problematic for various reasons, including:

The use of the Bible:

The committee holds that a literal and programmatic use of the Bible with regard *inter alia* to the land promises is both speculative and problematic. Such a way of reading the Bible is largely blind to the exegetical tensions in the biblical material.[17] Much more serious is its failure to take seriously the ethical consequences of reading the Bible in this way. Biblical interpretations that are open to understanding the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and the expulsion of Palestinians as a part of God's plan, and that likewise encourage war and catastrophes as a part of this plan, are not in accord with the ethical thinking that has its basis in the Old and the New Testaments.

We have also noted that references to the land promises are important in this thinking, and it is not uncommon to insist that the boundaries of the modern state of Israel ought to be identical with the boundaries mentioned in the Bible – something that is in itself a problematic point of departure, since the boundaries in the biblical material vary considerably. It is also striking that adherents of this thinking often automatically regard the maximalist boundaries as the most authentic and authoritative (the idea of "Greater Israel"). Accordingly, many will interpret illegal settlements on occupied territory as a sign that Israel is gradually taking control over "the whole of the Promised Land." The committee holds that a use of the Bible that helps to legitimate breaches of international law is ethically and theologically untenable. The Bible cannot be employed to argue that Israel has theological privileges that elevate this state over obligations in international law that are binding on other states, or to legitimate the Palestinians' loss of their property.

17 Skarsaune, Oskar. 1999. *Tusenårshåpet. Endetidsforventninger gjennom 2000 år.* Verbum. 104–106.

Enemy images:

Some Christian Zionist rhetoric operates with strong enemy images: either one understands God's plan with Israel "correctly" and fits in with it, or else one is rebelling against God's plans by being critical of Israeli policy – thereby risking coming under God's judgment. A well-known Norwegian example is Per Haakonsen's address in Sarpsborg in January 2012, in which he interprets the terror on Utøya as a warning from God not to criticize Israeli policy: "The massacre on Utøya can be seen in the light of the ever more inflamed relationship between Israel and Norway and the diplomatic controversies that have occurred in recent times ... It is food for thought that the two greatest disasters in Norway after the War (the *Alexander Kielland* disaster and the terror on Utøya) can both be linked to Norway's relationship to Israel. We must instinctively ask: Could these disasters have been avoided if we had had a more positive relation to Israel?"[18] This dualistic division of reality between evil and good forces affects most of all Palestinians and Arabs, who are reduced to extra players in a specific ideological universe. These ideas also make dialogue between Jews, Muslims, and Christians, as well as interreligious work for peace, reconciliation, and coexistence extremely difficult. The committee holds that theologically motivated enemy images are incompatible with a Christian view of the human being.

Anti-Jewish tropes:

When the first impulses for a new view of Jews came into being in Reformed theology in the seventeenth century, this contributed to the emergence of a greater sympathy with the Jews' situation. More people became aware of the suffering and oppression to which Jews were exposed, and they worked to defend Jews at a time when many other persons in the churches failed to do so. This involvement on behalf of Jews' human dignity has also been clear in modern Christian Zionist milieus. One example is Per Faye-Hansen, who helped to bring Norwegian Jews to safety in Sweden during the War.[19]

Nevertheless, the committee is deeply concerned to see that a part of these ideas reproduce persistent anti-Jewish notions from the church's history. The punishment motif (God punished the Jews with exile because they killed or did not believe in Jesus) and instrumentalization (the Jews as extras in a Christian theology of the last days) are found in many Christian Zionist discourses, also in Norway.[20] Moreover, the theological explanation – and in the worst, case, the legitimation – of the Holocaust and of anti-Semitism is completely unacceptable. It is an extra paradox when such ideas occur in theologies that profess to be the foremost defenders of Israel and of Jews.

18 Haakonsen, Per, 2012. "Antisemittiske holdninger i Norge og blant kristne: 1814-d.d. ". Text published in the newspaper *Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad 23.01.2012. https://www.sa.no/lokale-nyheter/antisemittiske-holdninger-i-norge-og-blant-kristne-1814-d-d/s/1-101-5895250 (retrieved 12.02.2024).*

19 Brurås, Svein. 1987. *Arthur Berg.* Nye Luther Forlag. 45–47.

20 Jan Hanvold made the following statement on November 12, 2023, on the television channel "Visjon Norge": "The Jews have always been against their leaders. They were against Moses – good Lord, he had one and a half million Jews against him, in addition to Pharaoh and all his army. But he won the victory. And if you look, [you will see that] the Jews have always been against their leaders. That is how things are today, as well. And if you look at Norwegian state television, you will see that they present us with Jews, Judas-Jews who are against Israel and who are against Israel's defense of their land. But it is not the Jews' land, Israel is God's land. So no matter what the Jews hold, believe, or think, it is God's land. And God has determined that the land is to extend from the Brook of Egypt to the Euphrates. Amen."

Christian Zionists?:

With regard to "support of Zionism by Christians," which our mandate asks us to discuss, the committee wishes to emphasize that most of the church members in Norway who support Israel cannot be called Christian Zionists in the sense of the apocalyptic variant we have presented here. It is probable that far more Christians are led by considerations of international law to give their support to the basic idea in Jewish Zionism that Jews are entitled to govern themselves in a state of their own, in accord with boundaries recognized in international law. This is why they will also identify as Zionists. These persons fall outside the definition of Christian Zionism that we have emphasized here. Other Christians will support Jews' right to self-determination and will legitimize the right of the state of Israel to exist, without however calling themselves Zionists.

The committee finds it important for Church of Norway to continue to be clear in its acknowledgement of Jews' link to the land, whether this is justified on religious, historical, cultural, political, existential, or emotional terms – and this includes the right to national self-determination. The committee does not find it problematic that Christians identify with forms of Zionism that are based on, and that respect, international law and human rights; and if Zionism is understood in this way, it is something the church ought to endorse. At the same time, we wish to underline that the struggle against anti-Semitism must include vigilance over against the forms of anti-Semitism that we have discussed in greater detail in ch. 2.

This does not contradict acknowledging the Palestinians' link to the land. Nor does it contradict seeking to promote a political solution that enables them to get equal treatment in Israel and to see their right to self-determination realized within a two-state solution. The Council for Ecumenical and International Relations therefore encourages dialogue with Jews, Muslims, and Christians – both in Norway and internationally – about various ways of understanding Zionism, and in order to learn more about how different groups understand this concept.

The committee believes that questions about the land, boundaries, and political solutions in today's conflict between Israel and Palestine cannot be based on theological arguments, but must be resolved on the basis of international law.

11 Interreligious dialogue and interreligious solidarity: Challenges and resources in the Church of Norway's self-understanding in the face of Jews and Judaism in Norway

Summary: Build dialogical relationships

Interreligious dialogue and dialogue about faith and worldviews are resources in a number of ways for the relationship between Church of Norway and Jewish milieus in Norway: by facilitating the construction of trust and friendship; by allowing Church of Norway to become familiar with Jewish praxis and tradition, as these are lived in Norway; and by making Church of Norway aware of where and how its own practices can be a problem or a pain point for Norwegian Jews. The starting point for such a dialogue must lie in dialogical values, and it must reflect critically on the asymmetry between Church of Norway and Jewish milieus in Norway. It can take place in several ways, and both bilateral and multilateral dialogue are desirable. Both the face-to-face dialogue, where the relation *per se* is a primary concern, and the shoulder-to-shoulder dialogue, where we work together for a common goal that lies outside the dialogue, are important.

The committee believes that the resources that dialogue represents are very significant for the relationship between Church of Norway and Norwegian Jews. Both dialogue based on human rights and theologically oriented dialogue play an important role in the construction of Church of Norway's necessary knowledge and self-critical reflection vis-à-vis Jews and Judaism. If the dialogue encounters great challenges and is put on ice, Church of Norway must look more closely at the causes and investigate them. Such "pauses" in established dialogues do not, however, prevent the practice of interreligious solidarity, which can also be done unilaterally. The committee is aware that the number of Jews and of Jewish milieus in Norway is very small. This means that Church of Norway's dioceses and parishes often cannot count on establishing face-to-face meetings with Jews in their own local areas. It is important that the Church og Norway see to it that knowledge of Judaism and of Jewish history in Norway – including local history – is actively included in the Church's general basic knowledge. This will also be important to avoid putting too much pressure on Norwegian Jews to set up dialogues all over the country, as well as complementing existing dialogues with Jewish partners.

12

Report: Conclusions and Recommendations

Concluding reflections

The focus in this report lies primarily on areas in which the church has erred in its relationship to Jews and to Judaism. The church's somber historical and theological inheritance makes this focus natural. But this focus is also an important contribution to Church of Norway's self-critical reflection and to its confrontation with its own mistakes. This then forms the basis for a new orientation, and makes it possible to look ahead. It is now up to the Bishops' Conference, the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, and other actors in Church of Norway to take a stance on the knowledge and the arguments we have presented here, and to consider how this work is to be followed up.

It is important for the committee to underline that the relationship between Jews and Christians in Norway is not a "problem" that must be "solved." It is first and foremost an ongoing process that is meant to make a contribution to Church of Norway's work of learning, self-knowledge, and understanding. An important goal for the committee has therefore been to contribute to an increased awareness of the profound relationship that the church has to Jewish tradition. As we have seen in this report, this is realized on various levels:

Historically, because Christianity and today's Judaism have common roots in the Judaism of classical antiquity that existed in the Second Temple period. The original Jewish context played a decisive role in the first Christians' understanding of God, of the world, and of the church's task. Since that time, Judaism and Christianity have developed with an eye to each other over much of their history. Accordingly, the experience of many Christians who encounter Jews and Judaism in our own days will be that we are relating to a shared inheritance and roots. Many concepts and ideas are identical, even if the substantial meaning and the interpretations often differ. After centuries in which the church (and rabbis too, for that matter) often emphasized the differences between Jews and Christians, it is important for the church in our time to investigate how impulses from Jewish traditions and theologies can contribute afresh to the enrichment of the church's theology and self-understanding. This must take place without adapting Jewish traditions and ideas to a Christian world of ideas. It must be done in deep respect for Judaism as a living, vital religion that is alive today.

Theologically, because Christians and Jews relate to some of the same sacred scriptures, and have a monotheistic understanding of God. The fact that Judaism and Christianity have an overlapping canon makes the church's relation to Jews different from that to other religious groups and movements.[21] Although these shared sacred scriptures have their place in different historical contexts, they nevertheless constitute a shared frame of reference that offers a potential for

21 The two religions share the collection of scriptures that the Jews call the *Tanakh,* and the Christians call the Old Testament. *Tanakh* is an artificial word formed from the first letters in the names of the three parts into which the synagogue divides the Hebrew Bible: *Torah* (the Law), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (the Writings). The extent of the Old Testament varies from one Christian confession to another. The Oriental, Orthodox, and Catholic Churches have a larger Old Testament canon than the Protestant Churches. The latter, including Church of Norway, operate with an Old Testament canon that corresponds in its extent exactly to the *Tanakh,* but the sequence of the individual books is different.

collaboration and a common understanding – not least because Christians believe in the God whom Jesus the Jew proclaimed to his Jewish contemporaries. From a Christian standpoint, Christians and Jews believe in the same God.

As we have seen, the New Testament writers are completely familiar with the ways in which the texts of the Hebrew Bible bear witness to God, and with how they express human beings' response in the form of confession, prayer, and lamentation. These were the linguistic and theological resources they made use of, when they wished to interpret God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The New Testament is permeated by a language that is carried over from the Old Testament. The continuity becomes particularly clear in the numerous New Testament quotations from, and references to, texts in the Old Testament. These passages clearly show that the New Testament writers understood their message as rooted in the Hebrew Bible's testimony to God. This means that the church faces a continuous challenge with regard to the use of the texts, the narratives, and the perspectives from what is now the Old Testament in preaching and in the communication of the biblical material. Here, Jewish biblical interpretation and impulses from Jewish scholars who study Jesus and the New Testament can also contribute perspectives and impulses that can enrich Christian theology.

Liturgically, because the closeness to Judaism is clear in the church's liturgies and in the celebration of worship, which are obviously influenced by the synagogue liturgy both in form and in content. For example, the *Sanctus,* which is a central element in Church of Norway's liturgy of the Lord's Supper, probably has roots going back to an early version of the *Qedusha* in the synagogue liturgy.[22] The *Sanctus/Qedusha* is sung with reverence in both church and synagogue, and expresses the sharing of God's people on earth in the angels' adoration of the God who is holy.

Moreover, central Christian feasts such as Easter and Pentecost have their roots in Jewish feasts, and Jewish liturgies have also developed against the background of Christian liturgies. Although Jesus celebrated the Jewish feasts, the content in Jewish and Christian celebration of the feasts today is different. Nevertheless, a greater awareness of the Jewish roots of the Christian feasts can contribute to a greater depth and understanding of these feasts. However, the committee wishes to warn that this should not happen in ways that can be perceived as a theological appropriation ("identity theft"). One relevant example today is the celebration of the Jewish Passover meal by Christian communities, who give it a Christological interpretation. While this can be one way to mark the Jewish origin and context of the Christian Easter, one risks thereby "Christianizing" the Jewish *seder* meal, which is a central identification mark for many Jews today.

Ethically, because Christianity and Judaism share a basic view of the human person, an understanding of the creation, and a common call to live in accordance with God's will. The belief that every human being is created in God's image is central in both Jewish and Christian theology. Jews and Christians likewise share fundamental values such as truth, justice, and forgiveness, as these are expressed (for example) by the prophets. The Book of Psalms mediates a shared vision of peace (*shalom*), the restoration of the creation, and life in abundance for all human

22 The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England. 2019. *God's Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations.* Church House Publishing. 8.

beings and for the entire creation. Hospitality and care for the poor, the lonely, and those who grieve are foundational ideals in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament writings. This common task forms the basis of an even stronger collaboration between Jews and Christians in order to realize God's vision for the creation by protecting human dignity, caring for the creation, fighting for justice, and working for peace and reconciliation.

13 A summary of our recommendations

The mandate asks the committee to propose concrete recommendations, measures, or other follow-ups for Church of Norway. In the summaries at the end of each chapter, we have included recommendations that touch on the topics discussed there. Here, we conclude by summarizing the recommendations again and presenting them. We have decided to concentrate the recommendations on a few broad key priorities.

The committee recommends that the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations follow up the report by concentrating in breadth on the following areas:

More knowledge:

- Church of Norway's leaders, employees, representatives, and members need a greater knowledge of Judaism, Jewish life and culture, the history of Norwegian Jews, and Jewish–Christian relations. Church of Norway should take the initiative to make these perspectives an integral part of further education programs for church employees and of the training of those who work for the church.
- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations ought to encourage dioceses and local churches to seek information about Jewish history and life in their own local or regional contexts.
- The leaders and employees of Church of Norway need more knowledge about Church of Norway's anti-Jewish history and about how this poses a challenge to Jewish–Christian relations today too. The Bishops' Conference has not sufficiently confronted the fact that anti-Jewish attitudes marked large parts of the church in the interwar period. The committee calls on Church of Norway, in collaboration with relevant academic milieus, to engage in further research into the history of its relations to Jews.
- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations should undertake a qualitative investigation of all their declarations and media statements about Israel and Palestine, in order to know more about how they communicate about this conflict.

The struggle against anti-Semitism and stereotyping:

- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations should strengthen the dialogue with Jews in and outside Norway – and with members of other minority faiths and worldviews – and work together with milieus possessing the relevant competence to establish how the church can best contribute to identifying and fighting against anti-Semitic attitudes and expressions. This is a part of a larger anti-racist work.

- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations must take the responsibility for building a better line of defense against anti-Semitic tropes and attitudes in Church of Norway. There must be a greater awareness in Church of Norway of how anti-Jewish ideas find expression in the language that is employed to speak of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.
- In what they say about the Israel–Palestine conflict, actors in Church of Norway ought to avoid using religious symbols and biblical metaphors that can easily activate anti-Jewish ideas from church history. The committee recommends that church criticism of the occupation and of breaches of human rights in this conflict should be articulated first and foremost in a general language from the perspective of human rights.
- The Bishops' Conference, the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, and other actors in Church of Norway should strengthen awareness of how a strong commitment in the Israel–Palestine conflict can create blind spots related to one-sided ideas and enemy images.
- The working recommends that Church of Norway declares November 26, the date of the deportation, as a special day in the church's year with liturgical elements, series of biblical texts, and resources. Church of Norway's parishes should be encouraged to mark this day in worship and to take the initiative to start local events marking this day, or to share in such events in collaboration with local government authorities, groups interested in local history, and other actors.

Confronting supersessionist theology, caricaturing Jews, and making them invisible:

- There remains much work to done in the church to map, analyze, and confront practices that build on and develop motifs and intellectual figures from supersessionist theology. The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations should draw up an action plan for how preaching, instruction in faith, and church music in Church of Norway can avoid contributing to stereotyping Jews and Jewish tradition, caricaturing them, and making them invisible.
- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations should ensure that homiletical resource material is produced that promotes a greater awareness of problematical biblical texts and interpretations of the Bible with regard to theology about Jews, material that can prompt good ways of interpreting such biblical texts today.
- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations should contribute to an increased understanding of the importance of the Old Testament for Christian theology today, and enable the Old Testament to be used more regularly in worship, preaching, and the communication of the Bible. This ought to become an integral part in Church of Norway's program of further study for church employees and in the training of persons who work for the church.

Theological innovation:

- There is a need for more theological work on what the church's Jewish roots, the Old Testament, and the Jewish context of the New Testament mean for the church today. The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations should call for, or should themselves initiate, more work on Christian self-understanding in the encounter with Judaism and with Jews. To a greater extent than in the past, the church ought to investigate models of confirmation and expansion linked to the relationship between Jewish and Christian tradition, while at the same time preserving respect for what is distinctively Jewish.
- The Bishops' Conference ought to promote the development of resources that give pastors and those who work in teaching for the church the boldness (*parrhêsia*) and the confidence to communicate a healthy eschatology as a counterweight to apocalyptic and dispensationalist approaches.
- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations should strengthen the contact with Jews who believe in Jesus. The encounter with these persons and with their theological thinking can both enrich and challenge traditional theological ideas.

More dialogue:

- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations are encouraged to strengthen the dialogue with the Jewish faith communities in Norway. Priority should be given to building good relations. The church must continue its human-rights work on behalf of religious freedom for Jews in Norway, both under their own auspices and via the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities.
- The Council on Ecumenical and International Relations should initiate an evaluation of the dialogue work that has already taken place between Jewish milieus and Church of Norway in Oslo and Trondheim, in order to have a better knowledge base for future work.
- The Council on Ecumenical and International Relations is encouraged to include more theologically oriented conversations and dialogues with Jewish milieus, including conversations about biblical texts.
- The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations ought to strengthen the relation to the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) and to continue the dialogue on Jewish self-understanding and Christian self-understanding, both in Norway and internationally.
- The Council on Ecumenical and International Relations is encouraged to dialogue with Jews, Muslims, and Christians – both in Norway and internationally – about various ways of understanding Zionism. The Council is also encouraged to dialogue with Norwegian Jews and Muslims about the best way to talk about, and get involved in, the Israel–Palestine conflict without contributing to racism, stereotyping, and hate.

A mandate for a committee

Background

Its relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people is important for the church. It is a matter of the church's self-image, its interpretation of the Word of God, its mission, its historical inheritance and some of the greatest and darkest mistakes in the course of its history.

This is also an important context for the Church of Norway's self-critical, theological reflections on the role and task of the church in society today. The church wants to learn from its mistakes, be an observant participant in society and work for a more just society with reconciliation, trust and good relations between people.

The Church of Norway needs to renew its theological reflections on its relations with Judaism and Jews. This will also implement recommendations from the General Synod (KM 15/16) *Religious encounters and Dialogue* (*Religionsmøte og dialog*), where the Synod asks the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations to increase their work on the Church of Norway's relationship to Judaism. The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations want therefore to appoint a committee which can contribute to fulfilling this request. A number of European churches and ecumenical organisations have already done a considerable amount of work on the topic, which has also been the subject of a great deal of new research. The increasing polarisation of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and increasing antisemitism in the West underline the importance of the issue.

In the Church of Norway, the Bishops' Conference has considered questions concerning the church's relationship to Jews and Judaism. The Council on Ecumenical and International Relations has participated in dialogue with Jews in Norway and internationally, in efforts to combat antisemitism and in political and human rights issues connected with the conflict between Israel and Palestine, often based on ecumenical cooperation and relations with the Church of Norway's sister church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. Church of Norway Ministry to Israel has also devoted a considerable amount of effort on Christian theological issues concerning Judaism and the Jewish people.

Renewed consideration of the Church of Norway's relations with Judaism and Jews will require a broad theological approach that also includes insights from social sciences and ecumenical and historical studies. With their differing mandates, the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations will be able to cooperate on forming a committee to study the issue.

Task

With this background, the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations will appoint an expert committee to prepare a report on the Church of Norway's relations to Judaism and Jews, including

- the church's perception of itself in its encounter with Judaism,
- the church's perception of the Jewish people, the country and the state of Israel,
- missiological questions,
- the church and antisemitism,
- Christian Zionism and Christians' support for Zionism.

The committee will discuss important contemporary issues connected to each of these themes. The committee will propose concrete recommendations, actions or other responses for the Church of Norway to consider.

Membership

The committee shall have a broad professional and theological structure.
Its members should have competence in

- biblical theology,
- systematic theology,
- church history,
- political history,
- practical theology,
- interreligious studies,
- human rights,
- research on antisemitism,
- ecumenical questions,
- missiology.

The committee should be put together on the basis of relevant competence, not institutional representation. In addition, it shall include a bishop and a member of the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations' Theological Board.

The executive committee of the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations have the task of assembling the committee and appointing its leader and deputy leader.

The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations provide the committee with secretaries and with finance.

Process and schedule

The committee is to be appointed in the spring of 2021 and should deliver its report in the autumn of 2023.

The Committee should arrange meetings and consultations as the work continues, among others with the Norwegian Centre for Holocaust and Minority Studies, The Jewish Community in Norway, Church of Norway Ministry to Israel and other persons and milieus that the committee finds necessary.

The committee shall organise a public consultation halfway through the process.

The committee or its working parties can make relevant study trips.

The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations will receive the committee's report and consider it in their respective organs.

Members of the committee

The Church of Norway's relations to Judaism and Jews.

A critical survey with an emphasis on historical, theological and Human Rights perspectives.

Members of the committee/ committee

1. **Endre Fyllingsnes**. Vicar in Fredrikstad Cathedral. Chair of the Committee.
2. **Anne Hege Grung**. Professor in Interreligious Studies at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. Deputy chair of the Committee.

The rest of the committee members presented alphabetically by first name:

3. **Claudia Lenz**. Professor in Social Studies at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society.
4. **Hans Morten Haugen**. Professor in International Diaconal Studies at VID Specialized University.
5. **Herborg Oline Finnset**. Bishop of Nidaros.
6. **Håkon Harket**. Managing Director at Forente Forlag.
7. **Jan-Olav Henriksen**. Professor in Systematic Theology at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society.
8. **Jostein Ådna**. Professor emeritus in the New Testament at VID Specialized University.
9. **Kristin Joachimsen**. Professor in the Old Testament at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society.
10. **Merete Thomassen**. Associate professor in Liturgy at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo.
11. **Oskar Skarsaune**. Professor emeritus in Church History at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society.
12. **Øivind Kopperud**. Special Adviser and Researcher at The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies.

Secretaries for the Committee:

- **Steinar Ims**. Senior Adviser at the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, Church of Norway.
- **Sven Thore Kloster**. Head of Research at KIFO, Institute for Church, Religion, and Worldview Research (formerly Senior Adviser at the Bishops Conference, Church of Norway).

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The Church of Norway's relations to **Judaism and Jews**

A critical survey with an emphasis on historical, theological and Human Rights perspectives.

A report from a committee appointed by the Bishop's Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations 2024

English translation of
- Foreword
- Introduction
- Chapter Summaries
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Mandate for the committee and list of committee members

The full report is available online in Norwegian:
www.kirken.no

English translation by Brian McNeil