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**The Commitment of the Church to the Quest of a Just Peace
A European Perspective**

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If you look at the European Union and its politics, you will quickly realize that Europe is extremely diverse. I therefore ask your permission to talk primarily about Germany and, as a Protestant pastor, to focus mainly on the Protestant churches.

Understanding the German context

As a German born in 1960, I am personally not responsible for what happened during the time of the Nazis to Jews and to others—even my father was luckily too young to have been a soldier in the second world war. But still I inherited the German history.

I studied theology at a time when theologians had begun to understand that our anti-Jewish Christian and Protestant theology had in the past provided the perfect nourishing ground for a constant anti-Semitism in our society, even though in the 19th and the early 20th century Jews had been well integrated in German society and contributed greatly to German culture and science. So we re-read the Bible and found it says that God is faithful to his promises. As Paul points out in Romans 9-11, God is faithful to his promises to the Jewish people.

In his presentation, Michael Volkmann notes that the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland drew the conclusion that the foundation of the state of Israel is also an indication of that faithfulness. Most churches in Germany did not go along with that, for if you see one event in history as an indication of the faithfulness of God, you should also be able to interpret other events in that light. So what then would you call the murder of six million Jews and many others?

Because of such dilemmas other churches did not include statements concerning the state of Israel in what they said about their new understanding of their relation to Judaism. Some churches in those declarations also equally reflected their relations to Palestinian Christians when they reformulated their relation to Judaism (e.g., the Evangelical Church of Westphalia).

The question that is now often discussed within our churches is: What consequences are we to draw from all that we learned since then?

And here the struggle begins. It took us a long time to understand that there is something wrong with Israeli politics towards the Palestinians. And many still do want to see that the way the state of Israel treats its neighbours is not really promoting peace, to say the least.

But even if we get that far, the next question is: Does this mean that we as Germans are allowed to openly criticize Israeli politics? The good news is that more and more Germans acknowledge that criticism of Israeli politics is not as such anti-Semitic. But there still is a certain threat that you will be accused of anti-Semitism if you dare to voice such criticism. Others fear that if they criticize Israel they will foster the still existing latent anti-Semitism of many Germans. This for example was the position taken by a responsible person at the EKD offices during the Lebanon war in 2006.

The second conclusion that many Germans draw from the past is: What happened to the Jews during the time of the Nazis shall never again happen to Jews. Others draw a different conclusion: Never again shall people be discriminated against due to their ethnicity, religion or any other characteristic that distinguishes them from others. This principle can not be limited to a certain people only. It has to apply always and everywhere. Even many Israelis from the peace and human rights movement challenge us Germans to draw the second conclusion and to speak out.

Relations of the Protestant churches in Germany to Christians in Israel/Palestine

For more than 150 years, German Protestantism has been strongly linked to Palestinian Christians, especially to the Lutherans and Anglicans, through several mission organizations and institutions such as the Syrian Orphanage, Talita Kumi and others. Alongside many groups that are in contact with Jews from Germany and Israel, there are partnerships with the Lutheran and Episcopal churches at both church and congregational levels. German churches and church-related agencies support those churches and some of their institutions financially.

Activities of the Protestant churches and church-related agencies

The Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (church development service, EED—www.eed.de) supports church institutions and NGOs in the region. In the framework of Aprodev (the association of WCC-related development organizations in Europe—www.aprodev.net), it is also active in advocacy, asking, for example, for the full implementation of the Association Agreement of the EU with the state of Israel. Full implementation means that either Israel complies with the human rights standards set in the agreement or the agreement is frozen. Unfortunately, up to this point, neither is the case. Another issue is that Israel exports products from illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories to the EU, declaring them “made in Israel”—a breach of international law that so far is not being stopped by the EU in a consistent way.

An ecumenical network of various missions, as well as EED, Bread for the World and Pax Christi Germany, is involved in sending volunteers to the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI—www.eappi.org). Other European churches, for example from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK, are also involved in this programme. In Germany, unfortunately, this programme is so far not supported openly and directly by the churches. It would be a great help if our network received additional financial support and publicity from the churches in Germany.

In 2008, activities took place for the first time in some German churches in the framework of the International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel (ICAPPI—see www.oikoumene.org). Mostly these activities came from certain groups at the congregational level. Although the lack of action from officials of our churches frustrated me in the beginning, I am now convinced that a big

opportunity lies in this fact. Churches in several other European countries are also actively involved in ICAPPI on different levels.

The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) adopted the Amman Call, although the EKD council voiced two concerns. Applying economic pressure rings a warning bell in the ears of many Germans, as this immediately recalls the boycott of Jewish shops and enterprises enforced by the Nazis already in 1933. Requesting the right of return is also seen by the council as an obstacle to a peaceful solution. (Personally, I can't see a just solution without acknowledgement of that right.)

The EKD forward the Amman Call to its member churches, and since the summer of 2008, it is being discussed by many of them.

Outlook

I hope that eventually our Protestant churches in Germany, and in all of Europe, will become more open to the suffering of the people in Israel/Palestine, as well in the whole region. I hope that church leaders, officers in charge, and individual Christians in our congregations will open themselves up to the suffering caused for more than 60 years by the lack of a just peace and commit themselves to this quest, rather than continue fighting over their own perceptions and theological concepts. The concept of *shalom* is there: we need not invent it anew, we need to help implement it.

I sincerely hope that all of us Christians in Europe will eventually understand the final words of the Amman Call: "We have allowed too much time to pass. Time has not served the cause of peace but has served the cause of extremism."