Protestantse Kerk

Vindplaats van geloof, hoop en liefde

Recognizing faults and taking responsibility

about recognizing faults and our responsibility for the future

Statement by the Protestant Church in The Netherlands

Content

Preface

At long last, here is a "Statement about recognizing faults and our responsibility for the future." For too long, this statement regarding the role of the churches with regard to the Jewish community in the Netherlands during and immediately after World War II has been delayed. Now it has finally materialized, more than 75 years after the liberation which followed a period of unimaginable oppression and destruction of living Jewish communities.

In this brochure, you will find the declaration by the Protestant Church addressed to the Jewish community in the Netherlands, followed by a short explanation. There is a short article on excuses and recognizing faults. All this is set in a historical context, looking at the role of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the predecessors of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in and directly after the Second World War with regard to the persecution of the Jews.

This is a moment of trepidation, modesty and a hand being outstretched to the living Jewish communities. It is our desire to continue the path we have travelled together before, so that we get to know each other better, strengthen each other, support each other where necessary and cultivate friendly relationships. We deeply desire in all this to make a difference in society and to make a positive contribution to it.

On behalf of the General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

Rev. Marco Batenburg, preses
Rev. René de Reuver, scriba

Statement by the Protestant Church in The Netherlands - about recognizing faults and our responsibility for the future

Kristallnacht commemoration, 8 November 2020

At the end of this 75th anniversary of our liberation, the Jewish community of the Netherlands will again gather in Amsterdam for the Kristallnacht commemoration. On the night of November 9-10, 1938, a first pogrom began the unscrupulous, machine-like murder campaign to which six million Jews would fall victim in the following years. But, as Abel Herzberg wrote in his diary from Bergen Belsen, "Not six million Jews were exterminated in the Second World War, but one Jew was murdered six million times." Other groups were also excluded from society, taken away and murdered.

The magnitude of grief the Shoah caused in the Jewish community and the depth of the pain the survivors have felt are unbelievable. The pain will be borne and experienced by generations to come. It is in recognition of that grief and pain that the Protestant Church in the Netherlands addresses the Jewish community in our country. Never before has the Protestant Church sought a dialogue with our Jewish discussion partners in this way. It did not do so until 75 years after the liberation. We hope it is not too late.

The Protestant Church in the Netherlands wants to recognize without hesitation that the church has helped prepare a breeding ground in which the seeds of anti-Semitism and hatred could grow. For centuries, the rift was maintained that could later isolate the Jews in society in such a way that they could be taken away and murdered. Even during the war years themselves, the ecclesiastical authorities often lacked the courage to publicly defend the Jewish inhabitants of our country. This is despite the acts of incredible personal courage that, thank God, were also performed by members of the churches. With gratitude, we remember those who had the courage to resist during the war.

The Protestant Church also recognizes that the reception of Jews who returned to our society after 1945 led to dire situations. The difficulties concerning the return of war foster children to the Jewish community and the restitution of property are painful examples.

In recognition of all this, the church recognizes faults and feels a present responsibility. This is focused towards the Jewish community, because anti-Semitism is a sin against God and against people. The Protestant Church is also part of this sinful history. The church to which we belong fell short in speaking and in silence, in acting and not speaking, in attitude and thought. May all victims of the great horror have a memorial and name (Hebrew: Yad vaShem) in the heart of the Eternal One, the God of Israel. May all loved ones that are missed not be forgotten. As is written:

Earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest! (Job 16:18 N.I.V.)

We undertake to do everything possible to further develop Judeo-Christian relations into a deep friendship of two equal partners, united among others in the fight against contemporary anti-Semitism.

General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands
Dr. René de Reuver, secretary

Some extra words about the statement

The "Statement about recognizing faults and our responsibility for the future " is a statement by the General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Never, until now, has the Protestant Church (or any of its predecessors) confessed so wholeheartedly, and acknowledged the pain and sorrow that the Shoah has inflicted on the Jewish community. What should have happened long ago, now takes place in the year in which 75 years of liberation are commemorated. Liberation has left a bitter aftertaste for many Jewish compatriots due to the very inadequate reception of those who returned after 1945 (problems concerning the return of war foster children to the Jewish community and concerning the restitution of property).

Previous ecclesiastical statements about the Shoah

There is an earlier statement from the then Dutch Reformed Church, which wrote in a letter to the German churches dated March 9, 1946: "God has given us the strength to fight against National Socialism. We openly confess to God and the world that in this struggle we have not been faithful enough, brave and willing to sacrifice. " This statement, however, was addressed to the German churches (and thus not to the Jewish community) and the persecution of the Jews is not highlighted. This is a response of the Dutch Reformed Church to the declarations signed by (part of) the Landeskirchen EKD in Stuttgart (Stuttgarter Erklärung, 1945) and Darmstadt (Darmstädter Wort, 1947). Neither of these statements concern the Holocaust and they are not addressed to the Jewish community. This was in recognition of faults in that the Church failed in combating the ideology of Nazism.

Only from 1948 anti-Semitism came into focus, for instance in Darmstadt, in 1948, and in Amsterdam with the foundation of the World Council of Churches, also in 1948. This was of course also the case, for instance, in the run-up to, the establishment of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), in 1947 in Seelisberg. Alertness to anti-Semitism was a response to the persecution of the Jews. In those early years, however, official church leadership was hardly aware of this.

Apologies from Prime Minister Rutte

Now and again, over the years, many have asked the church to recognize faults made. The urgency has been felt for so long. There is no excuse for this late recognition of faults and the sinfulness involved. It is precisely in this year commemorating 75 years of liberation that it is important to send a message to the Jewish community about recognizing the sinfulness and about our responsibility for the future. During the National Holocaust Commemoration at the Mirror Memorial "Never again Auschwitz" in the Wertheim Park in Amsterdam on Sunday January 26, 2020, Prime Minister Rutte apologized on behalf of the Dutch government for the actions of the government during the war years. During this commemoration, representatives of the executive committee of the Protestant Church were present. The Prime Minister's impressive words contributed to reconsidering the question within the Protestant Church, but they were certainly not the only reason. Rev. Dick Wigsma, then chairman of the Protestant Council, took the first step towards this statement, for Church and Israel. Contact was sought with a number of Jewish discussion partners, and there was close contact with the board of the Central Jewish Consultation.

This monument in Amsterdam was created by Dutch writer and artist Jan Wolkers, in memory of the many victims of Auschwitz. The monument is made up of broken mirrors and can be found in the Wertheimpark. According to Wolkers, the mirrors represent the thought that "heaven is no longer unbroken since Auschwitz". (Flickr.com / FaceMePLS)

5

Bible Verse Job 16:18 which is mentioned at the end of the Statement, is stated on the monument at the Bikernieki Memorial in Letland. Bikernieki forest is the biggest mass murder site during The Holocaust in Latvia with two memorial territories spanning over 80,000 square metres (860,000 sq ft) with 55 marked burial sites with around 20,000 victims still buried in total. (Jewish Community of Latvia)

Historian Dr. Bart Wallet was asked to provide a historical interpretation to accompany the statement and to put the whole in the context of what the churches did and failed to do with regard to the Jewish community during and immediately after the Second World War. The initial intention was to publish this statement on Yom haSjoa, Monday April 20. Consultation at the outbreak of the corona crisis made it seem more advisable to find another date, the Kristallnacht commemoration on November 8, 2020.

Following the text

After listening carefully to the reactions and comments from the Jewish side, our text was drawn up. This is an ecclesiastical text. In line with previous statements, anti-Semitism and the role that the churches have played in it are frankly spoken of. The text also looks at the present: the fight against contemporary anti-Semitism. Words like "faults and responsibility," ecclesiastical language where others might use "excuses and responsibility." Fault is a loaded word and says something not only about the relationship between people, but also about the relationship between people and God. Faults have to do with sin. "Anti-Semitism is sin against God and people," the statement said. It is a reference to what was said at the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948: "Anti-Semitism is sin against God and man." On January 20, 2020, the World Council of Churches reconfirmed this statement: "Anti-Semitism is irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith."

The statement refers to the fact that, during the war years, the church authorities often lacked the courage to defend the Jewish inhabitants of our country. The word "often" is not used to water down the recognition of faults, but also to do justice to the efforts of persons and authorities. The accompanying article by Dr. Bart Wallet provides further historical interpretation.
The Bible text from Job 16:18 mentioned at the end of the statement is on the monument of the Bikernieki memorial site near Riga, Latvia, where the remains of 20,000 victims of the Shoah are buried. The text is also on the monument at Umschlagplatz in Warsaw, where more than 300,000 people were deported to Treblinka. The text aptly and poignantly expresses the lamentation of sorrow and pain that will never be silenced. In Jewish interpretation of Job 16:18, reference is made to Genesis 4:11, where the LORD tells Cain to go from the face of the earth that opened her mouth to receive the shed blood of his brother Abel.

Responsibility to counter anti-Semitism

Being alert to anti-Semitism is a constant focal point in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Awareness of what anti-Semitism is and fighting it is explicitly mentioned in Ordinance 1, article 2 of the Church Order. Steps have been taken in recent years, certainly in the field of awareness, including seminars and publications. In the run-up to 2017, the year in which 500 years of Protestantism was commemorated and celebrated, the Protestant Church renounced Luther's anti-Jewish statements in 2016. When they were attacked, the Protestant Church comforted the Jewish community in the Netherlands and showed its sympathy. Scriba Dr. René de Reuver wrote in May 2019: "Tackle anti-Semitism at the root!" Together with the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands, the Protestant Church spoke against anti-Semitism on June 28, 2019. One quote from that:

> *"The ongoing dialogue with the Jewish community in the Netherlands is of great importance to the churches. We also consider it our responsibility to do everything we can to combat anti-Semitism across society and to support initiatives that impede it."*

In the case of anti-Semitism, we must mainly focus on education. That is the conviction of Prof. Dineke Houtman. She was an endowed professor of Judaica at the Protestant Theological University (PThU), a chair on behalf of the Foundation for the Promotion of Higher Education in Judaism. This chair was and is partly funded by the Protestant Church. Because of this special chair and also within the regular education and research at the PThU, attention is paid to the themes of anti-Semitism, Judaism, the basic languages of the Bible, and Jewish roots of the Christian faith.
You can combat anti-Semitism by creating barriers against it, by promoting a positive image of living Judaism, by recognizing and embracing the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, and by entering into Judeo-Christian discussions. As stated on the website of the Protestant Church: "For the Protestant Church, the relationship with the Jewish people is an essential part of its own identity."

What next?

The text ends with: "We undertake to do everything possible to further develop Judeo-Christian relations into a deep friendship of two equal partners, united in, among other things, the struggle against contemporary anti-Semitism. "These words must not remain just words, they have to be fulfilled. Friendship does not always mean agreeing with each other, but rather "tasting each other's kidneys", supporting and encouraging each other, and showing through concrete actions what this friendship is worth to us. Naturally, the Protestant Church will continue to speak out against any form of anti-Semitism in society, in order to support the Jewish community in its diversity in the Netherlands. The message that the Protestant Church wants to convey to the Jewish community in the Netherlands is that a vital Jewish community is an inseparable part of Dutch society.
That also means that we must check with our own conscience whether we are blameless. The text speaks about a breeding ground of anti-Semitism in the ecclesiastical and Christian tradition. Much has already taken place to turn this tide. In the formation of Protestant pastors, (ministers and church workers) attention is paid to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, the Judeo-Christian discussions and anti-Semitism. In the current curriculum at the PThU, the aforementioned special chair has been established for this purpose. But is it enough? The Protestant Church and the PThU must continuously work on updating this. It is very important that responsible exegesis and hermeneutics is also found in local congregations, in which the liturgy also plays an important role. An emphasis can be placed on this in the in-service training of ministers and church workers.

In the past, there was a study secretary in both the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands on behalf of Judeo-Christian relations. Although we should never glorify the past, we can bring valuable things from the past into the present in new ways. We are investigating and considering making more time and money available within the Protestant Church to invest in Judeo-Christian relationships, to raise awareness of and to fight against anti-Semitism, and to highlight the vital importance of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and translate this to local congregations.

Dr. Eeuwout Klootwijk is a scholarly policy officer for Church and Israel / Jewish-Christian relations at the ministry organization of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

Excuses and faults recognized. A brief exploration

During the National Holocaust Commemoration in January 2020, Prime Minister Rutte apologized on behalf of the government for the government actions of that time during World War II, "... now that the last survivors are still among us." He used the word "apologies" in the realization that "...no word can ever encompass something as enormous and horrific as the Holocaust. " He spoke of the "...command to keep commemorating, honoring the dead with their full names, giving account again and again, standing firm together here and now." It is an impressive statement that has received many positive reactions from Dutch society, including the Jewish community. It has led to further reflection within the Protestant Church and other churches. How has the church spoken of its role in World War II? What is important to be heard now? Church parlance never actually speaks of "excuses", but of "faults". Just as making excuses must have consequences, confessing a fault calls for taking responsibility in the present. In this article, I explore some aspects of the word "fault."

Fault in the Bible

Human failure - missing the mark, overshooting your calling as a human being - is addressed in all sorts of ways in the Bible, in stories, legal texts, songs, prophetic texts, gospel stories. The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, has more than fifty words for "sin". Three stand out:

- *chata':* do something wrong, miss his mark, break a commandment; the error can be intentional or unintentional.
- *pasja':* deliberately violating a rule; rebel, usually against God.
- *'awon:* injustice, iniquity, crime, guilt; this word is almost always used for faults to God, not to people.

Psalms 32 and 51 play with these words and, among other texts, have had a great influence in Jewish and Christian spirituality. They are penitential palms.

> *"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."*
> (Psalm 32:5, King James Version)

> *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."*
> (Psalm 51:5, New International Version)

Individual guilt and collective guilt are always related. There are no separate words to distinguish these. You are responsible for your own actions, and your actions affect the community to which you belong. The community, in turn, can advocate for your mistakes and bring them before God. In the Old Testament this is done, for instance, through the sacrificial practice in the temple. The sin of men resides in their hearts, which biblically stands for the human will. The Holy One "searches the heart, tests the kidneys."

> *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"*
> (Jeremia 17:9, King James Version)

In the New Testament, the words sin (hamartia) and debt (Greek: ofeilema) are almost synonymous. Yet there is a difference in emphasis. Sin is above all a mistake and offense against God. Debt is inseparable from obligations that people have among themselves: economic, social, moral. Debt means that you owe something to someone; compensation is required from you. Debt is the consequence of sin. In the Lord's Prayer this comes together:

> *"And forgive us our sins, (hamartias)*
> *For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. (ofeilonti) is."*
> (Lucas 11:4, King James Version)

The recently deceased professor emeritus of Biblical theology Dr. Rochus Zuurmond puts it succinctly:

> *"Debt is always a burden. Debts must be paid or reimbursed. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray that our debts will be forgiven, that we will be released from the power that has debts over us, that we will be free from all binding, oppressing obligations. God's forgiveness is there whether we pray for it or not. In the Lord's Prayer we ask that we too will partake of it."*

Here the concept of "debt" is linked to forgiveness, but certainly not automatically. Admitting indebtedness is a painful process with consequences. Acknowledging faults is the

beginning of reversal, change of disposition and behavior (teshuvah, metanoia). Forgiveness must be given. On the basis of the Bible you can say that gift and commitment go together. At the same time, you have to do something for it: on the one hand, recognize individual and collective faults, and on the other, be willing and committed to doing something in return.

Fault in the Protestant Tradition

"The Bible and the Christian faith tradition have always worked hard on human faults," say the professors Dr. Gijsbert van den Brink and Dr. Kees van der Kooi in their "Christian Dogmatics". They point to the important impetus given by Calvin: he allows the awareness of his own faults to be an integral part of the religious relationship. It is not a "spiritual antechamber." What they mean is this: with Calvin, faults and repentance (poenitentia) do not precede the Christian life. It is not: first you confess your faults and then you live a Christian life. Declaring failure is a permanent and integral part of your relationship of faith with God. Luther emphasizes this. He states that the whole life of the believers should be penance.

In the classical Protestant liturgy this is reflected in the section confession of sin and proclamation of grace. In the Protestant ecumenical liturgy this is mainly found in the Kyrie and Gloria. The need of the world (and therefore also the failure of people) is proclaimed, and it is sung that God does not let the world remain sighing in being lost.

It is rightly said in Christian Dogmatics that it is not yet that easy to translate these notions to modern individualist times. Fault and sin are not popular words, and outside the church a word like "sin" is only used in the sense of "shameful, deplorable, or utterly wrong."

However, that is not the whole story. Today, there is a broad awareness of individual and collective human actions that have catastrophic consequences. There seems to be a growing realization that things are interrelated and that people are interconnected through the generations.

This provides a starting point for connecting ecclesiastical notions of fault and sin (and forgiveness) and social notions of economic, ecological and social failure. In other words, you describe how people keep derailing both in their own surroundings and globally, and try to find a way out of it. Speaking ecclesiastically and spiritually, you end up with God, with Moses, with the prophets, with Jesus and Paul.

National Holocaust Remembrance Day 2020 in the Wertheimpark at the Mirror Memorial. Prime minister Rutte embraces Jacques Grishaver, the chair of the Dutch Auschwitz Committee.
(Sabine Joosten/ Hollandse Hoogte)

Part of a greater whole

In response to Rutte's apologies, emeritus professor of philosophical ethics Dr. Paul van Tongeren writes that "apologies" literally means "exclude from blame" or "acquit", and thus "justify." That's why, he says, you can't really "apologize," at least not if you cannot be blamed for anything. On the contrary, you ask for an apology because you can be blamed for something, and you ask the person to whom you owe something to be acquitted of it. Now you can ask all kinds of questions, such as "What do apologies mean when the perpetrators and victims are almost gone?" But he thinks that is reasoning too individually. Actually, you are always a member of a community, you were born somewhere, you are part of something, you have not chosen that, but you are in it. Whichever way you look at it, you are part of a larger whole, of "... communities whose history touches us and in which the actions of others also affect us."

This touches on an important Biblical notion. As a human being you are connected with people around you, you are part of communities. What you do has consequences for the community, and the community appeals to you and your responsibility. Biblically, it all comes together in God. The One at the beginning of the Bible asks man a question that resonates throughout the Bible: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3: 9) What is your position, your choice of position? What do you do when you are in debt, how do you relate to others, and to generations before and after you?

In this year when we commemorate 75 years of liberation, recognizing faults towards the Jewish community is in order to stand firm together in the here and now.

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The predecessors of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and the persecution of the Jews

What stance did the predecessors of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands take with regard to the persecution of the Jews? This question has been the starting point for several studies, both immediately after the war and more recently. Based on this, supplemented with new research, an outline is presented.
First, it is good to define who the predecessors of the current Protestant Church in the Netherlands were. They were the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the resulting Reformed Churches in Restored Connexion, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church and the Restored-Evangelical Lutheran Church. Together, the members of these churches made up about 42% of the Dutch population at the start of the Second World War.

For a good understanding of the position of these churches during the war, it is important to know that their ecclesiastical structures varied from the centrally administered Dutch Reformed Church (top-down) to the Reformed Churches organized from below (bottom-up). Moreover, theological views on the relationship between church and government differed: the Lutherans used Luther's two-kingdoms doctrine, with a clear separation between the ecclesiastical and political domain, while the Calvinists could, among other things, appeal to a public theology that legitimized resistance. Reforms had also embraced the nineteenth-century model of a "people's church", in which nation and church were closely linked. The different structures and theological beliefs largely determined the leeway of the churches during World War II.

A brief look at the attitude of the churches towards the persecution of the Jews in the 1930s, during the Second World War and in the period immediately after the war.

The Thirties

The persecution of the Jews became a political theme in Dutch society in the 1930s. The seizure of power by the Nazis in neighboring Germany in 1933 and the immediate subsequent start of discrimination, boycott and exclusion of Jews created a flow of Jewish refugees to the Netherlands. Dutch policy was cautious: due to the economic crisis in the Netherlands, there was little political room for help and relief. Moreover, the Netherlands wanted to maintain good relations with Germany in order to maintain its own neutral position. In principle, only refugees were welcome who could bring economic benefits to the Netherlands. In addition, the Netherlands agreed to act as a transit country for a limited group of German, Austrian and Sudeten German Jews, in order to facilitate further migration elsewhere. The reception of refugees was broadly based on the model of the "compartmentalized", ideologically segmented society. The government left giving shelter largely to the religious communities. This meant that the reception of the Jewish refugees was the responsibility of the Dutch Jewish community. Churches and Christians were especially concerned with their "own" refugees, the Protestant or Catholic Jews. In 1935 it was against this background that the "Committee for so-called non-Aryan Christians" was founded, with its own reception centers for Christian Jews and their families.

Some theologians, such as Klaas Schilder and Jan Buskes, warned from the beginning against the rise of National Socialism and political anti-Semitism in Germany and in their own country in the form of the National Socialist Movement (NSB). As early as 1933, the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church unanimously rejected a proposal for a special Sunday for the Jewish mission, saying that such a Sunday would be particularly inappropriate in these times and rather a mission should be started among neighbouring Christians'(read: Germany) against anti-Semitism. The Reformed Churches decided in 1936 that membership of the NSB was incompatible with church membership.

However, the Dutch Reformed Church did not want to take that step and, as a "people's church", it did not want to make political choices. Some reformed pastors were active in the NSB and they condoned the German persecution of the Jews or even blamed it on the Jews themselves. Other reformed pastors were actively involved in helping the fleeing Christian Jews.

Conclusion

There was no official protest against the persecution of Jews from the Dutch churches during this period. They largely followed the line of the Dutch government in safeguarding their own neutrality. Aid to Jewish refugees focused on their "own" baptized Jews.

During the Second World War

The attitude adopted by the churches after the start of the occupation was to a great extent characterized by continuity with the existing policy, which focused on the fate of "their own" baptized Jews. Primary responsibility was felt for them, and isolation and possible deportation of Christian Jews was seen as an attack on the unity of the Christian community, of which these Jews were an integral part.
The beginning of the occupation led to a remarkable initiative: the otherwise divided Dutch churches managed to find each other in a joint Convent of Churches, called Interkerkelijk Overleg (IKO) from 1942 onwards. It represented all the predecessors of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in addition to other Protestant churches and from 1941 also the Roman Catholic Church. The self-organization was initially intended to defend ecclesiastical interests, such as Sunday rest and restitution of war damage to church buildings. With difficulty, anti-Semitism also entered the agenda.
Coordinated by the Convent / IKO, several protests were organized against the persecution of the Jews between 1940 and 1944. The range thereof varied, as did the address. In some cases, protests were made to Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart, in other cases to the secretaries-general and several times a pastoral letter was also chosen for their own ranks. It concerned the following interventions:

- October 24, 1940: letter to Seyss-Inquart in protest against the ban on Jews in the civil service;
- March 5, 1941: letter of protest to the secretaries-general in the context of the February strike;
- 17 February 1942: delegation for an audience with Seyss-Inquart, also discussing the fate of the Jews;
- April 19, 1942: reading of a "Testimony" in church services, including a passage in which the persecution of the Jews is rejected;
- 11 July 1942: a telegram to Seyss-Inquart in protest against the commenced deportations of Jews from the Netherlands, with special attention for the fate of the Christian Jews;
- 21 February 1943: a pulpit message containing a sentence in protest against the persecution of the Jews;
- May 19, 1943, October 14, 1943, March 17, 1944 and April 1, 1944: letters and a telegram to Seyss-Inquart about the fate of the mixed-marriages.

Many of these protests got off to a slow start, and moreover, there was often no joint implementation. For example, in 1940 the Lutheran churches did not participate in the protest because it would go against the Lutheran two-kingdom doctrine; a pastoral letter in response to the protest letter of March 5, 1941 was read in Reformed churches, but not in many reformed churches, while the pulpit message of February 21, 1943 was again not proclaimed by the Reformed, because "a public testimony serves for reasons of principle to be delivered only in very special cases."
In March 1941, the Dutch Reformed Church had prepared an explicit brochure against anti-Semitism, Israel as a sign, but in the end, it did not dare to publish it. However, on October 25, 1943, the pastoral letter "Christian faith and National Socialism" was sent to the local reformed congregations containing a negative passage about anti-Semitism. However, that letter was not read in church services and therefore received little publicity.

An important motivation of the predecessors of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands to refrain from protest when the situation demanded it was fear for consequences for their own baptized Jews. The Roman Catholic ecclesiastical province made a different choice in this regard, resulting in the deportation of the Catholic Jews. The Protestant Jews stayed in special barracks in Westerbork. Efforts by Jews to obtain (false) baptismal certificates

Designer Victor Levie.
Year of manufacture 1991

in order to qualify as Protestant-baptized Jews, were supported by some pastors and consistory. However, it was the official policy of the churches that baptism in haste was not permitted. Particularly at a local level, parts of the churches were very active in the resistance and in providing hiding places. But there were also many who kept silent about the lot of the Jews for fear of their own fate or from the idea that government authority should be respected.

Conclusion

The churches in the Netherlands protested more often and more clearly against the persecution of the Jews than the Dutch government in London and the mayors and government services in the occupied Netherlands. However, that protest got off to a slow start, and in many cases was marred by the fact that not all churches cooperated. Moreover, the concern for the baptized Jews, and by extension the mixed-married Jews, was paramount. Fear of the consequences for their own ecclesiastical life, of the arrest of ministers and Christian Jews, ensured that the ecclesiastical voice was surrounded by ambivalence. Being silent, looking away or protesting was a constant field of tension, with the first two all too often prevailing.

After the war

After the war, the churches saw themselves as the beating, spiritual heart of the Dutch "resistance nation." There was great gratitude for the liberation and there were ambitious plans for a re-Christianization of Dutch society. Self-criticism about possible negligence was largely lacking, and there was no contact with the Jewish community about the recent war years.
The Dutch Reformed Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church both joined the World Council of Churches, which spoke out clearly against anti-Semitism in 1948. The fact that both churches joined in was seen as a logical consequence of their own resistance identity, avoiding a self-critical view of their own actions during wartime and possible traces of Christian anti-Jewish thinking. Partly against this background, the pre-war missionary activities among the Jewish community continued as usual. This was experienced as particularly painful in Jewish circles.
There was a painful debate in society about the fate of more than two thousand children in hiding, none of whose parents had survived the war. The former resistance, including many prominent church members, wanted to keep these children in their Christian foster homes, in order to save not only their bodies but also their souls. The Jewish community fought with heart and soul to get these children back. Only a few of the churches supported them in this endeavor.
The Holocaust and, a little later the foundation of the State of Israel, meanwhile raised profound theological questions that gradually came to the surface and helped lay the foundation for the emerging Judeo-Christian dialogue.

Conclusion

In the immediate post-war period, as in the pre-war period, the churches again assumed a position of a high degree of identification with the national self-image; if it was the image of a neutral nation in the 1930s, after the war, it was the myth of a resistance nation. There was no specific attention to the fate of the Jewish community, although anti-Semitism was clearly rejected in general terms. Jewish missions and the attempt to keep Jewish war foster children in Christian families had broad support within the churches.

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