



## EVANGELISCHE MARIENSCHWESTERSCHAFT E.V.

Darmstadt, July 2016

### Dear friends and prayer partners,

As some of you know, in January 2014 Sister Joela wrote a personal letter to key people in view of the upcoming Reformation Jubilee 2017. Her request was that in view of the close historical links to Martin Luther, the defamatory "Judensau" (Jewish sow) sculpture on the Parish Church of Wittenberg should be removed before the Jubilee commences. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judensau>

She received a number of positive, thoughtful replies, although the response from the Parish Church of Wittenberg, who are legally responsible, was more reserved.

Meanwhile we have learnt that the past two years have seen the completion of the sculpture's restoration and the close of the discussion concerning its future. This is what prompted the attached article.

In June a few of us were able to visit Wittenberg for the first time. There we took part in the "Wittenberg 2017" initiative, an international cross-denominational movement of prayer and repentance.

At the beginning of our stay in Wittenberg the pastor of the Parish Church received another letter from us, informing him of our plans to publish the article and letting him know that we were in Wittenberg.

A chance encounter with Bishop Munib Younan provided the opportunity to pass on the article to him in person. Bishop Younan is President of the Lutheran World Federation, which happened to be in session in Wittenberg.

On June 22 we received a reply from the pastor of the Parish Church, consistent with the views so far expressed by the EKD (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland). In his closing paragraph he writes:

*To date, the Church Council stands by the decision to maintain a culture of remembrance which includes a visible defamatory sculpture in its original position. In our experience, direct exposure [to the sculpture] helps people to face up to and concern themselves with the past. It is our desire that this form of remembrance should have a formative effect on historical awareness and should be respected.*  
(Translated from the German)

Professor Dr Margot Käßmann, EKD Council Ambassador for the Reformation Jubilee 2017, commented on the subject as follows:

*It is not enough to plant a cedar next to the "Judensau" and place a memorial plaque next to the devil. But removing such signs of anti-Judaism will not take us a single step forward! We need to continue the learning process of the Reformation. What counts is the emphatic rejection, in word and deed, of every form of anti-Judaism today. (Chrismon magazine, 1/2015, translated from the German)*

We continue in faith and prayer that our Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches will together recognize our historical responsibility and consider the removal of the obscene sculpture. That would be a sign of true Reformation in our times: a unique opportunity, after so many centuries, to honour our Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with an appropriate act of repentance.

We would like to express our thanks to all who support us in prayer, especially for wisdom and the right channels for disseminating the article. Please also pray for God's protection and that this objective may be achieved in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

The Evangelical Sisters of Mary and Canaan Franciscan Brothers

## 500 YEARS SINCE THE REFORMATION:

### Removal of the defamatory sculpture from Luther's Wittenberg parish church long overdue

On the exterior of Wittenberg's historic Parish Church, where Martin Luther preached, is a much-debated anti-Semitic sculpture. The *Judensau* (Jewish sow) epitomizes a shameful aspect of German church history. In 1988 a memorial plaque was embedded in the paving below the sculpture, pointing to the dire consequences of the church's blindness from early medieval times to the Holocaust with its atrocities. The full significance of this plaque, however, may not be obvious at first glance.

In 1933 the National Synod of the German Evangelical Church deliberately chose to convene in Wittenberg. Here Ludwig Müller, Hitler's nominee, was unanimously elected *Reichsbischof* (Reich Bishop). In Luther's parish church he received a Guard of Honor from Germany's "first SA theological storm troops" (*erster SA-Theologen-Sturm Deutschlands*).

Most visitors will be unaware of the history of the sculpture: a history with direct links to Martin Luther. The sculpture itself dates from before his time, but some years after his death an inscription was added in golden letters: *Rabini Schem HaMphoras*. It is based on Luther's virulently anti-Semitic tract of 1543, *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi* (On Shem Hamphoras and on the Lineage of Christ), widely distributed at that time with six reprints.

Excerpts from the inflammatory pamphlet translate as follows: "Here on our parish church in Wittenberg is a sow sculpted in stone ... Behind the sow is a rabbi lifting up her right leg and peering intensely ... under her tail at the Talmud ... No doubt this is where they get their Shem Hamphoras from [in rabbinic Hebrew the ineffably holy name of God]." Derived from the title of Luther's anti-Semitic tract, the words carved in stone above the sculpture were a public

affirmation of his hatred and sacrilege. And so they stand to this day.

Not only is the above quotation deeply wounding to Jewish people; it is also a severe affront to our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, honored and loved by Jews and Christians alike – the God to whom we owe our salvation.

Roman Catholics and Protestants of all denominations share the pre-Reformation history and heritage in which this anti-Semitic sculpture is rooted. A fitting prelude to the *Christusfest* planned for 2017 would be a collective act of repentance, in which we ask forgiveness of God and His covenant people Israel. "Where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation", to quote from Luther's *Small Catechism*. Repentance in word and deed is crucial to the integrity of any such celebration of the Reformation. The removal of a centuries-old obstacle would be a concrete expression of grief over past sin. Wittenberg 2017 could be a turning-point in church history with far-reaching implications. Its effect could be more widespread than official theological statements.

Luther ministered in great blessing from the parish church of Wittenberg. That is reason enough to remove this relic of a bygone era.

The Jubilee year of 2017 is a unique opportunity to part once and for all with both the sculpture and its inscription. By replacing the defamatory sculpture with a new symbol, this time one in honor of our Lord and His chosen people, the church would send out a clear signal to the world, in keeping with the true spirit of the Reformation. Wittenberg 2017 could become a landmark in history.

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International Council of the Ecumenical Prayer and Repentance Movement "Wittenberg 2017"  
Thomas and Amy Cogdell

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