

Happy Hanukkah

2020

Dear Jewish friends,

This year as Hanukkah menorahs and advent candles are lit, may it be for us a symbolic act, a reminder of our joint calling as people of the book. Both Jews and Christians are destined to be a light bearing witness to the one true light which is the G-d of the Bible, the G-d of Israel. Carol services often include those words of Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2 NKJV). At a time when a long dark shadow has fallen across the earth, the words resonate strongly.

As families now struggle to come to terms with smaller gatherings in the festive season because of Covid-19 restrictions, the lights remind us of G-d's light, which no darkness can overcome, not even the darkness of isolation and loneliness.

In the forced inactivity can we hear G-d speaking to us? "Be still, and know that I am G-d." (Psalm 46:10 KJV) Knowing G-d is key to survival. It is the people who "know their G-d" who will be strong and firmly resist an ungodly ruler who will speak against the Most High, oppress His people, and try to change the set times and the laws (Daniel 7 and 11).

Changing G-d's laws is dangerous. Trying to make G-d's Word fit contemporary culture doesn't work. Just because everyone is doing something doesn't make it right. Since when has majority rule been right or morally superior? The Hebrew scriptures exhort us not to "follow the crowd to do evil" (Exodus 23:2 KJV). "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20 KJV).

Christian scriptures similarly urge believers not to let the world squeeze it into its mould but to be transformed from within, so as to know and fulfil G-d's good and perfect will. As Jews and Christians we have a responsibility to uphold Holy Scripture, in which the living G-d reveals His will through His commandments.

Ideologies promising peace and prosperity to the nations may sound attractive but are deceptive if they do not originate with G-d.

To quote our late founder Mother Basilea Schlink: *"When G-d made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, when He chose Israel to be a priestly kingdom for the world, He determined what would be valid for all times: salvation comes from the Jews – and Jesus confirmed it. Thus, this is the only way that renewal of the world, salvation and prosperity for the nations come: through those whom G-d has chosen."*

"Knowing this, we pray every Friday at the beginning of the Sabbath: 'Israel, you are a people holy to the LORD your G-d. The LORD your G-d has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession' (Deuteronomy 7:6 NIV). And we continue to pray: 'Lord, our G-d, You have chosen among all peoples Israel to be Your people. She is the apple of Your eye, the people of Your special love. You have chosen her to proclaim Your glory to the world. For G-d's gifts and His call are Irrevocable.' Jews and Christians: A Common Responsibility in Our Times Today, from talks by M. Basilea Schlink to Jewish congregations in North America."

She went on to say that with every calling comes the burden of responsibility. So the challenge for us, as both Jews and Christians, is to accept the burden G-d has given us.

Again, what is G-d asking of us as Jews and Christians? We believe He is asking us to embrace our joint calling to be a light to the world, though it costs to go against the tide. We also believe He wants to meet with us afresh, to give us the strength to stand up and be counted for the G-d of the Bible, the G-d of Israel.

Even now "the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chronicles 16:9 NIV).

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The Evangelical Sisters of Mary