



Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations

A National Reckoning of the Soul: A Call to the Churches of the United States to Confront the Crisis of Antisemitism

December 14, 2022

The United States is facing the greatest crisis of public antisemitism in a century. Prominent figures—entertainers, athletes, media personalities, politicians—are using twenty-first century technologies to spread antisemitic lies and conspiracies to millions of people. So-called “Christian” nationalists openly declare that true Christians hate Jews. Jews are being verbally and physically abused in the streets, vilified in social media, attacked on campuses, and assaulted and shot in their synagogues. “The tragic reality [is] that the Jewish community uniquely ends up on the receiving end of hate-fueled attacks from all sides,” FBI Director Christopher Wray recently said, adding that sixty-three percent of religious hate crimes in the country target Jewish people, who make up only 2.4 percent of the American population.

As centers comprised of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars and educators dedicated to studying the history of Christian-Jewish relations and to promoting interreligious enrichment and solidarity, the Council of Centers on Christian-Jewish Relations (CCJR) is increasingly alarmed that we may be witnessing the normalization of antisemitism in American discourse, which recalls events that happened in Germany when the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s. History also shows that the dehumanization of one minority group is often accompanied by the dehumanization of other minorities, as is happening today as well.

Many people are unaware that since the Second World War, the majority of Christian churches have affirmed that Jews remain beloved of God because “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). In numerous official documents, they have recognized Jews as brothers and sisters in covenant with God and urged dialogue and collaboration (see CCJR’s online library *Dialogika* at www.ccjr.us). We are living in a strange time when there is both a blessed and growing friendship between Christians and Jews alongside a resurgence of antisemitism and neo-Nazism.

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Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin Center for Theology & Ministry
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Illinois

Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Dialogue
Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio

Catholic-Jewish Dialogue Committee
Stonehill College, Easton, Massachusetts

Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies
Saint Leo University, St. Leo, Florida

Center for Christian-Jewish Learning
Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Center for the Study of Values & Violence after Auschwitz
Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Florida

Centre for Catholic-Jewish-Muslim Learning
Kings University College, London, Ontario, Canada

Christian Jewish Relation and Encounter
Sisters of Zion, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Driscoll Professorship in Jewish-Catholic Studies
Iona University, New Rochelle, New York

Foundation to Advance Interfaith Trust and Harmony
Boca Raton, FL

Gratz College - Jewish Christian Studies Program
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Hartford International University for Religion and Peace
Hartford, Connecticut

Center for Holocaust and Genocide Education
Saint Elizabeth, University, Morristown, New Jersey

Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center
Manhattan College, New York City, New York

Institute for Islamic • Christian • Jewish Studies
Baltimore, Maryland

Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations
Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Institute of Judaic-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey

Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning
Saint John's University – Collegeville, Minnesota

Jay Phillips Center for Interreligious Studies
University of St. Thomas - St. Paul, Minnesota

Jewish-Catholic Theological Exchange
Providence College, Providence, RI

Judaic and Catholic Studies Centers
Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut

Kraft-Hiatt Program for Jewish-Christian Understanding
College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts

Kripke Center for the Study of Religion & Society
Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska

Lux Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies
Sacred Heart Seminary & School of Theology in Franklin, Wisconsin

Miller Center for Interreligious Learning and Leadership
Hebrew College, Newton Centre, Massachusetts

Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue
Jewish Theological Seminary, New York City, New York

Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue
Spring Hill College, Mobile, Alabama

National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education
Seton Hill University, Greensburg, Pennsylvania

Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding
New York City, New York

The CCJR unanimously issues this urgent “Call to the Churches” to take concrete actions at this critical moment. While we affirm the religiously plural character of the United States, we also recognize that Christianity is the cultural backdrop for issues of religion in our country.

We implore all churches to redouble their efforts to denounce antisemitism publicly as *antithetical to the very essence of Christianity itself*. We appeal to preachers and teachers to reiterate that hatred of Jews is a sin against God and humanity, violating Jesus’ admonition to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31)—significantly, a command from the Torah (Leviticus 19:18). We urge them to encourage their communities to speak out strongly against antisemitism when they encounter it and provide them with strategies to do so. We plead for the churches and individual Christians to deepen or develop partnerships with Jews and Jewish communities to further interreligious solidarity. We encourage Christian worship that emphasizes the common mission of Jews and Christians to give witness to God in the world.

There is a further profound reason why all this is morally obligatory for Christians. As students of history, we know that the roots of modern antisemitism and associated conspiracy theories grew out of Christian libels perpetuated against Jews in medieval Europe and out of centuries of Christian religious teaching of contempt for Jews. In Nazi Germany, certain theologians went so far as to call for the “de-Judaization of Christianity,” with some even arguing that Jesus himself was not really a Jew, but an “Aryan.” As many recent official church statements have observed, this anti-Jewish legacy weakened resistance to Nazism even among those Christians who discerned the sacrilegious nature of antisemitism.

Since the long habit of denigrating Jews as blind or faithless is not quickly unlearned, the CCJR believes that Christians today need to examine their own consciences, what ancient Jewish tradition calls *cheshbon hanefesh*, a reckoning of the soul. At this crucial time, as in the past, there is a danger that preachers and teachers might inadvertently reinforce an image of Jesus as “outside” Judaism—or worse: as somehow opposed to the spiritual traditions of his own people. This could leave Christian congregations susceptible to the divisive anti-Jewish propaganda echoing all around them. Therefore, we offer these questions for self-reflection in Christian communities:

- Do we think about Jesus as if he were an outsider to Judaism, or as a Jew devoted to the Torah and its proper interpretation?
- Do we contrast the teachings of Jesus with the Old Testament as if his own spirituality was not inspired by those sacred texts?
- Do we conceive of the crucifixion as primarily motivated by Jewish figures or as a Roman execution of one more Jew among the thousands of Jews crucified by Rome?

Contemplating these questions with a focus on historical accuracy highlights the Jewish identity of Jesus. This effectively counteracts the subversion of Christian faith by self-declared “Christian” haters of Jews.

We entreat the churches to look inward by examining their preaching, teaching, and theologies to eliminate any traces of anti-Jewish sentiments and look outward to act and speak against all forms of antisemitism they encounter. We ask Christians to reach out to their Jewish neighbors in solidarity and friendship and so follow the scriptural admonition: “let them shun evil and do good; let them seek amity and pursue it” (Psalm 34:12, 14; 1 Peter 3:10-11).