

Creation of Jewish People as “The Other”¹

Largely adapted from Facing History and Ourselves seminar “Pedagogical Approach to Teaching Roots of Anti-Semitism,” St. Mary's (Ontario), April 18th, 2013

The Deicide Charge

- Comes from the belief that Jewish People committed the great sin of putting Jesus of Nazareth to death.
- However, from the beginning of the CE (Common Era) to 30 CE history records the life of **Jesus of Nazareth as a First Century Jewish Person** steeped in Jewish teachings.
- Jesus of Nazareth begins his ministry around 13 CE and early followers saw themselves as **Jewish reformers**.



The destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, Francesco Hayez

¹ This lesson is NOT meant to:

- Attack Christianity or challenge it on a faith basis
- Make generalizations concerning Christians experiences or understanding of Anti-Semitism
- Draw a straight line, or imply that, Christianity led to the Holocaust

- The Second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed in the Roman-Jewish War in 70 CE.² Millions of Jewish People are killed, and many “Jesus-followers” move away from nationalistic Jewish People (the first sign of a “family split”).



The Wailing Wall is in the Old City of Jerusalem at the foot of the western side of the Temple Mount. It is a remnant of the ancient wall that surrounded the Jewish Temple's courtyard and is arguably the most sacred site recognized by the Jewish faith outside of the Temple Mount itself.

- Jewish People flee Palestine and disperse throughout the Roman Empire.



² The Hebrew Bible says that the First Temple was built in 957 BCE by King Solomon. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, when he conquered Jerusalem in 586 BCE.
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- As Jesus-followers searched for a separate identity they made the following claims:

1. Jesus fulfilled the teachings and was the promised Messiah.
2. “Christianity” starts to supersede traditional Jewish teachings.
3. Book of Acts 7:51-53 (New Testament):



51 “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! **52** Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— **53** you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

- Around 300 CE there were approximately 60 million people in the European world: 6 million Christians and 3 million Jewish People (the remainder were Indigenous faiths). Jewish People were tolerated as an established minority at this point, while the “Jesus Movement” was highly persecuted.
- 312 CE – Future Roman Emperor Constantine embraces Christianity.
 - Constantine paints a cross on his armor and wins the day – his army adopts the cross as their badge. This act may have been done for political reasons rather than faith.
 - Constantine becomes emperor of Rome – *Pontifex Maximus*
 - Issues the Edict of Milan in 313, which proclaiming tolerance of all religions throughout the Empire.
 - In 324 CE the capital of the Roman Empire is moved to “New Rome,” renamed Constantinople in 330 CE.
 - Emperor Constantine calls for the **Council of Nicaea** in 325 CE.
- 354 CE – St. Augustine revisits the Deicide Charge and codifies (formalizes) the charges:

- Jewish People are declared as:
 - Killers of Jesus of Nazareth
 - Have been superseded by Christianity
 - Have lost their land & been dispersed as a punishment
 - Witness to Judgement
 - Must be preached to in love

- BUT, Jewish People:

- Remain the people of God
- Are not cast off
- Carry Christian “Books”
- Must be converted to Christianity

“Othering”

- In 380 CE **Christianity (as defined at the Council of Nicaea) is proclaimed by Emperor Theodosius as the state religion of the Roman Empire.**

The United States Memorial Holocaust Museum explains:

In the first millennium of the Christian era, leaders in the European Christian (Catholic) hierarchy developed or solidified as doctrine ideas that: all Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Christ; the destruction of the Temple by the Romans and the scattering of the Jewish people was punishment both for past transgressions and for continued failure to abandon their faith and accept Christianity.

Seeking to retain their beliefs and culture, Jews became bearers of the only minority religion on a now Christian continent of Europe. In some countries, Jews were welcomed from time to time, but, at a time in which faith was perceived as the principal form of self-identity and intensely influenced both public and private life, Jews found themselves increasingly isolated as outsiders. Jews do not share the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and many Christians considered this refusal to accept Jesus' divinity as arrogant. For centuries the Church taught that Jews were responsible for Jesus' death, not recognizing, as most historians do today, that Jesus was executed by the Roman government because officials viewed him as a political threat to their rule.

As outsiders, Jews were objects of violent stereotyping and subject to violence against their persons and property.

Among the myths about Jews that took hold in this period was the "blood libel," a myth that Jews used the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes. Other myths included the idea that Jewish failure to convert to Christianity was a sign both of service to the anti-Christ as well as of innate disloyalty to European (read Christian) civilization. Conversely, the conversion of individual Jews was perceived as insincere and as having materialistic motives.³

Under the "protection" of early modern rulers and landholding aristocrats, Jews were permitted and encouraged to perform managerial and commercial tasks that the ruling classes had neither the skills nor inclination to perform themselves. Since the Catholic and Orthodox Churches banned usury (lending money at interest) and generally looked down upon business practices as immoral, Jews came to fill the vital (but unpopular) role of moneylenders for the Christian majority.

. . . . Central and east European rulers forbade the Jewish settlers from owning land, from serving as officers in the military, and from holding positions in state service unless they converted to Christianity (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, or, after the Reformation in the sixteenth century, one of the Protestant denominations). Absolutist rulers consolidated modern states in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries and loyalty to a nation increasingly competed with religious confession as a central human identifying marker in the nineteenth century. Jews, who still endured the above restrictions, hence did not become associated in the popular mind with the most "noble" professions of early modern central and eastern Europe (where the majority of Jews lived): landed aristocracy, military service, and state service.⁴

Things to consider:

- The Gospels are written (from oral stories) between 68-100 CE (around the time of the Temple's destruction)

³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Antisemitism in History: The Early Church to 1400." Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism-in-history-from-the-early-church-to-1400?series=30>. Accessed on 27 May 2024.

⁴ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Antisemitism in History: The Early Modern Era, 1300-1800." Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism-in-history-the-early-modern-era-1300-1800?series=30>. Accessed on 27 May 2024.

- Remember: Blaming Pontius Pilate is blaming Rome (Jewish People did not have the power in the Roman Empire to order the death of Jesus).
- Christianity is trying to define itself vis a vis Judaism, vying for survival as a separate faith, and vying for survival from persecution from the Romans.
 - **The words Christ and Christian derive from the Koine Greek title Christós (Χριστός),** a translation of the Biblical Hebrew term *mashiach* (מָשִׁיחַ) (usually rendered as *messiah* in English).
 - Some of the Jewish leaders may have seen Jesus of Nazareth as a political threat to their power in the community.
 - “Crucifixion” was a common Roman form of execution with a historic use against Jewish rebels.
- 16th Century – the Reformation Period sees dramatic change in expressions of Christianity as Protestant Churches emerge, as well as a reformed Roman Catholic Church. Ideas of Anti-Semitism are carried into these new expressions of Christianity.

4. For the Conversion of the Jews.

O GOD, who didst choose Israel to be thine inheritance: Look, we beseech thee, upon thine ancient people; open their hearts that they may see and confess the Lord Jesus to be thy Son and their true Messiah, and, believing, they may have life through his Name. Take away all pride and prejudice in us that may hinder their understanding of the Gospel, and hasten the time when all Israel shall be saved; through the merits of the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

1962 Book of Common Prayer, Anglican Church of Canada

- 1965, Vatican II council under Pope John XXIII reforms the modern Roman Catholic Church
 - Reformed the Catholic Church’s position on Judaism
 - Declared that Jewish People are not guilty of the Deicide Charge
 - Jewish People have not been rejected by God

- A positive relationship is established between the Roman Catholic Church and Judaism
- Pope John Paul II makes a formal apology to Judaism and the Jewish People on March 12th, 2000, during a public Mass of Pardons.
- In 1998 John Paul II also apologized for the inactivity and silence of many Catholics during the Holocaust