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# Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism

— “I have not come to abolish the  
law, but to fulfill it.” —

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## Quick overview of terms:

◆ **Anti-Semitism:** term emerging from 19th century racist, sociological, nationalist, and colonialist understandings. Efforts to portray Judaism not as a religion, but Jews as a distinct “race”.

In a sense **anachronistic** to use anti-Semitism prior to 19th century

◆ **Anti-Judaism:** Historically a term used to describe particularly Christian (but also pagan and Muslim) pejorative, negative, and discriminatory attitudes and actions towards the Jewish people up through the modern period.

## So why are we talking about this?

Anti-Defamation League: **Anti-semitic incidents in the United States have increased every single year for the past 7 years.**

The **single largest massacre of Jewish people** in the past 5 years took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at Tree of Life Jewish Center.

Kanye West, one of best known musicians in the United States, with millions of social media followers, spewed anti-Semitic hatred so vile it gave actual Nazis pause.

# But why are we talking about this today?

We are called to denounce anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism as contrary to who we are as Christians, Episcopalians, and followers of Jesus Christ

We are called to stand in support and solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters.

And we are also called to look how to put our own house in order, and be careful of other, more subtle, forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in Christianity and even in our Anglican tradition.

# 4 “Do”s and 4 “Don’t”s for Christians

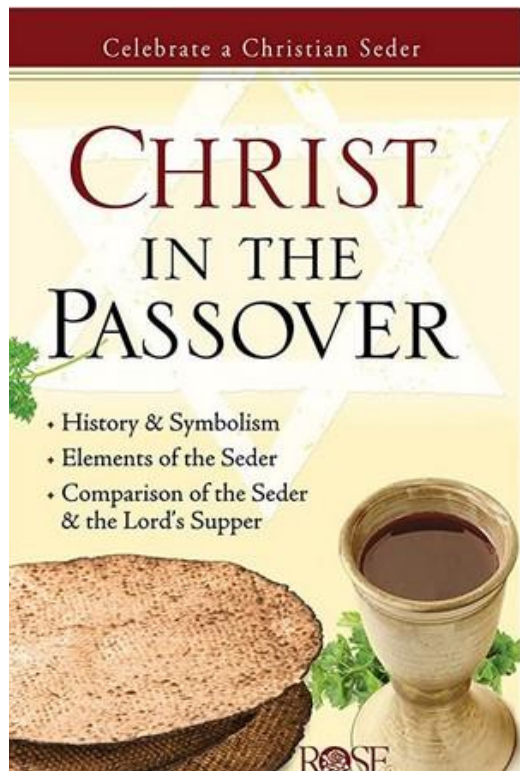
## Four “Don’t”s

1. Don't Hold “Christian Seders”
2. Don't Call People Pharisees, or Use Pharisee as Synonym for “Hypocrite”
3. Don't Do anti-Jewish Marcionism / Gnosticism
4. Don't Diss the Torah

## Four “Do”s

5. Do Watch Out For anti-Judaism in Holy Week Liturgies and readings
6. Do Be Aware of Authorized Liturgies and Biblical Translations
7. Do Be Careful When Speaking of Issues Connected to Israel / Palestine
8. Do Make Efforts To Connect with Local Rabbi and/or Interreligious Organizations.

# Don't Hold or Attend Christian Seders



## **'O Taste and See': prayer at home on the evening of Maundy Thursday**

*This short form of prayer is intended to be used at home by those who at this time of pandemic are unable to gather with others to celebrate the Holy Communion on the evening of Maundy Thursday. The words recall the scene of Christ's Last Supper, and express our longing for the time when we can again gather in church to celebrate the Eucharist. While the prayers and actions echo motifs from the Jewish Seder, this is not such a meal. Jewish people will understand the resonance of the symbols and practices in very different ways from Christians.*

# Don't Hold or Attend Christian Seders

**They're not historically accurate.** The Last Supper was not necessarily a Passover meal, and even if it was, it wasn't a seder meal the way it is practiced now.

**These events run the risk of falling into supersessionism,** though mostly unintentionally.

**Supersessionism:** belief (often implicit) that Christianity has superseded and replaced Judaism. With seders Christians appropriate a central ritual of Jewish identity then symbolically cast that identity off-or "supersede" that identity-with the celebration of Christ's resurrection on Easter.

**TRUST the voices of our Jewish siblings** when they tell us that the practice feels uncomfortable.

**Does that mean I can't go to a seder at all?** You can definitely go to a seder! You'll get to eat really good food, and participate in a meaningful ritual.

But there's a difference between a Christian seder, hosted by Christians for Christians as a way of celebrating Christianity during Holy Week, and a seder hosted by members of Jewish community as part of the observance of Passover.

# Don't Call People Pharisees

↓

MATT 23 "ARE YOU BEING A PHARISEE?" TEST

Does it harm or burden someone who may be more vulnerable than you?

NO →

YES

|

## 7 Signs the Pharisees Are Running Your Church

By ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~





# Don't Call People Pharisees

Unless you are living in first century Palestine, and have met up with a literal member of the sect committed to spreading adherence to Jewish law among people living far from the Temple, then do not call people Pharisees.

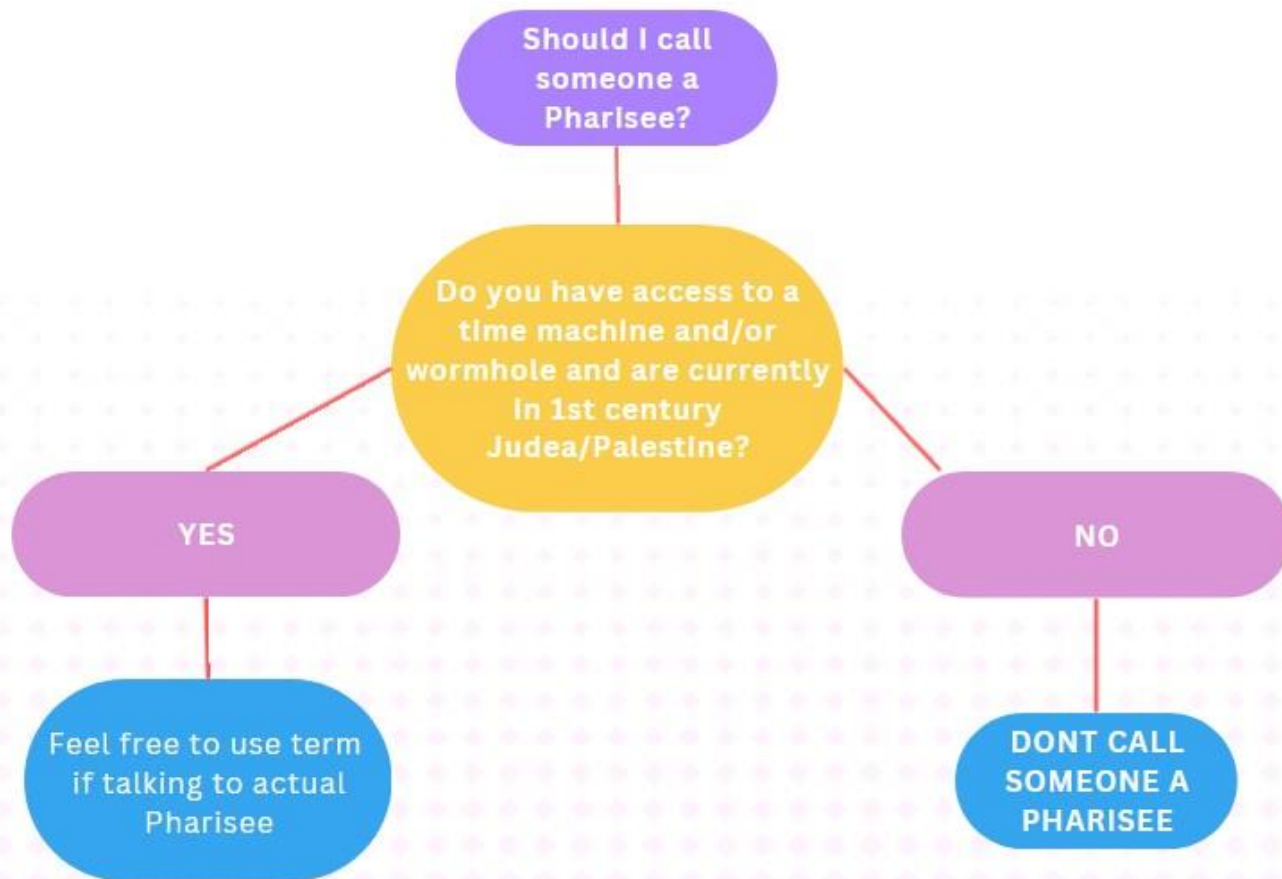
**Point one:** There's nothing necessarily wrong with being a Pharisee! They were a group within the big tent of Second Temple Judaism that believed that a relationship with God through the Torah was within everyone's reach, not just the people who had enough time and money to go to the Temple and make sacrifices.

**Also: We wouldn't have Judaism without them!** After the Temple fell, it was the Pharisees who regrouped, established the Jewish canon of texts and their interpretations through the Talmud and Mishnah, and literally saved Judaism. What we know today as Judaism is literally—the Pharisees.

**And imagery** associated with Pharisees is sometimes stereotypical “Jewish” often used in anti-Semitic propaganda: people with long beards and noses in flowing robes.

**So:** **When you mean hypocrite, just say hypocrite.** Keep the Pharisees out of it. This is a matter of impact over intention; it doesn't matter how you mean it. For many Jewish people, hearing the term used that way is experienced as hearing “all Jews are hypocrites” and it is hurtful. Please don't do it.

# Fixed It



# Don't Do a Marcionism / Gnosticism

⇒“The God of the Old Testament is mean, nasty, judgmental; the God revealed by Jesus is forgiving and loving.”

**Why people gotta bring up old stuff?** Christianity settled this issue over 1, 850 years ago: the God of the Old Testament is the same God Jesus calls “Father.” **Marcion** (active in mid-100s) threw out the Old Testament, most of Paul, and claimed the God of the OT and the God of Jesus were not the same. **Gnostics** believed that the God of the OT was a lower, inferior being and Jesus came to give us “true” knowledge of the “real” God.

**This isn't biblical.** This falls apart with one look at the Bible. There are hundreds of verses in the OT which speak of God as kind, loving, merciful, forgiving. There are plenty of verses in the New Testament which speak of God's judgment, straight from Jesus through Revelation.

**This is literally what Nazis did:** Nazis tore Jesus from his Jewish context and proclaimed an “Aryan” Christ, freed from the stain of Judaism. Nazis “purified” Christianity from Jewish elements, even eliminating the word “Hallelujah” in Biblical translations and prayers because it was too “Jewish”.

**It implies (again, intent vs. reception) that Judaism is wrong, flawed, and imperfect.** Don't Do This.

# Don't Diss the Torah

→“Judaism is a religion all about rules and laws, Christianity is about relationship with God.”

→“Wow, some of those laws laid down in the OT are weird / silly / stupid, I mean, c'mon, no shellfish? Bacon tastes good.”

**It misrepresents Judaism:** Judaism has literally spent thousands of years interpreting the Torah in various ways; sometimes literal, sometimes metaphysical, sometimes allegorical. Even mystical: acknowledging we can never know what God might mean by some of these commandments.

**It's insulting to faithful Jews.** Judaism sees the Law as part of a mutual covenant with God, each Jew freely submits to follow the Torah at Bat Mitzvah / Bar Mitzvah (literally = son / daughter of the commandment).

**This is literally what Christians did:** From 1100-1500 Jews would be forced at sword-point into their synagogues where Christian preachers would tell them how foolish, superstitious, and wrong the Torah was, and literally burn copies in front of them.

**It's not biblical.** Jesus literally tells us “Don't diss the Torah.” (Matthew 5:18)

# DO Be Aware of anti-Judaism in our Liturgies

Yes, be aware of them. Read them. Use them. (Or don't.)

But whether you do or do not use them, be prepared to preach and talk about the years of anti-Jewish persecution the Passion narratives have inspired. This isn't just something we can let sit there and ignore.

So while we may deem it **appropriate** to use these translations and resources we should also remember that new translations and new resources **do not solve anti-Semitism**.

It's important to remember the Jewish context of the New Testament. It's also important to do what we can to tamp down on anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in our liturgies and our texts.

We should **preach** about it, **teach** about it, **talk** about it.

This is **especially true as we are in Year A**, which includes Matthew 27:25: "And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be upon us and our children!'"

# DO Be Aware of Liturgical and Biblical Resources

**Alternative Good Friday Liturgy Commissioned by General Convention** and authorized by Bishop DeDe:

<https://cnyepiscopal.org/resources/liturgy-worship/>

- Includes revisions to the Solemn Collects concerning how we pray for other faiths
- Has alternative translation of Passion Gospel

**Background Resources on Holy Week and anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish violence:**

**Beliefnet** article by Amy-Jill Levine:

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/holy-week-and-the-hatred-of-the-jews/11029900>

**America Magazine** reprint of article by Catholic Biblical scholar Raymond Brown:

<https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2018/03/30/passion-jesus-and-anti-judaism>

**Biblical Translations:** Common English Bible, Contemporary English Version, New International Version use “Jewish authorities” or “Jewish leaders” instead of “The Jews” (all authorized by Title II, Canon 2)

# DO Be Careful in Language Used Re: Israel and Palestine

“You avoid antisemitism in activism around the Occupation by not being antisemitic.”

R. Brian Walt, Rabbis for Human Rights

To **critique Israel is not inherently anti-Semitic**. But collective blaming of Jews is one of oldest elements.

We cannot hold **all Jews responsible** for any actions of Israel; we **cannot hold all Israelis responsible** ; nor can we expect American Jews answer for actions a nation they do not hold citizenship in.

We need to be wary of intent vs. reception, and how our language used in Israel/Palestine discussions can reflect anti-Semitic elements (for example: blood libel).

We must acknowledge that Zionism, the movement which established Israel, **is itself in response to Christian antisemitism** and persecution in Europe. As Christians, if we are concerned about events in Israel/Palestine, it is **our essential responsibility** to address the roots of what led to this: Christian antisemitism.

# DO Make Efforts to Connect, Be Involved!

Sometimes we wonder how people acted as they did in the past: where were the people of good will in Germany?

Turn it around: what are we doing now?

If there is a local synagogue, reach out to local rabbi. Go have lunch. The relationships we build can be important in times of crisis.

Attend meetings of local interfaith or interreligious organizations.

Many of our Jewish siblings deal with threats on a routine basis; show up, show support, hear their stories.

Also acknowledge the intersectionality here: while focusing on anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, hate crimes and incidents against Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and others have also increased.