

## REL 223 Module 6 AVP Script Jewish–Christian Relations

### Slide 1

Welcome to our presentation on Jewish–Christian Relations

### Slide 2

#### Slide title:

Christianity as a Jewish Sect

#### Slide content:

No text

Image: Jesus

#### Narrator:

Beginning as a movement with first-century Judaism, Christianity owes a great debt to Judaism. At the same time, the relations between Judaism and Christianity historically, have been riddled with ambiguities and animosities.

In the mid-first century, Christianity was a sect within the broader Jewish religion. Judaism was itself diverse, but unified by core beliefs and practices. Jewish Christians believed that Jesus was the promised messiah. Their numbers were few, and they were tolerated as a sect within Judaism, similar to other Messianic movements at the time. The first Christians were Jews who kept the Law (Torah) of Moses. They practiced Jewish rituals and customs, lived in Jewish communities, and they participated in the synagogue life and worship.

### Slide 3

#### Slide title:

Jewish Rejection of Christian Claims

#### Slide content:

No text

Image: close-up image of Jesus on stained glass

#### Narrator:

Why did most Jews not accept the Christian claim that Jesus was the messiah? Although specific expectations concerning the messiah differed among Jews in the first century, none envisioned the messiah as dying at the hands of pagan Gentile Romans. Most Jews expected the messiah to defeat their enemies and re-establish the kingdom of Israel, like the glorious kingdom of David long ago. Capital punishment by shameful crucifixion was nowhere in the spectrum of Jewish views about the messiah. In fact, according to the Law of Moses, death on a tree signified God's curse. Later Jewish traditions preserved in the Talmud probably reflect the mainstream Jewish belief that Jesus was a bad Jew who practiced sorcery and was in league with the devil. One such Talmudic passage says:

“It is taught: On the eve of Passover they hung Yeshu and the crier went forth for forty days beforehand declaring that ‘[Yeshu] is going to be stoned for practicing witchcraft, for enticing and leading Israel astray. Anyone who knows something to clear him should come forth and exonerate him.’ But no one had anything exonerating for him and they hung him on the eve of Passover.” (Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 43a)

Jews at the time of Jesus and throughout history have also claimed that Jesus did not fulfill all of the Messianic promises in the Jewish Scriptures. They include universal peace and prosperity, worldwide, in the age of the messiah.

#### **Slide 4**

##### **Slide title:**

The Separation of Judaism and Christianity

##### **Slide content:**

No text

Image: painting of a rabbi

##### **Narrator:**

Despite a small Jewish constituency, Christianity quickly became a Gentile (non-Jewish) movement. By the end of the first century, there were more non-Jewish Christians than Jewish Christians. During the reorganization of Judaism after the failed Jewish revolt against Rome and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, the Pharisees assumed leadership. They expelled Jewish Christians from their synagogues and communities. The gospels, written after this time, forever enshrine the bitterness that this entailed.

#### **Slide 5**

##### **Slide title:**

Christian Dominance and Misunderstandings

##### **Slide content:**

No text

Images: Roman ruins and St. Augustine

##### **Narrator:**

When Christianity became the official religion of the Empire in the late 300s AD, Jews were tolerated but viewed as miscreants who rejected the messiah, Jesus Christ. From then on and throughout the Middle Ages, Jews continued to live in tight-knit communities but were a persecuted, oppressed, and marginalized minority within Christian Europe.

Christians blamed later Jews collectively, far removed from Jesus' time, as responsible for Jesus' death. This was misguided. It is wrong to blame people for the actions of their distant ancestors. Also, largely due to the theology of St. Augustine, the Church viewed Jews as trying to "earn their salvation" by keeping the Law of Moses, apart from God's grace. This was based on a misunderstanding of the apostle Paul. Modern scholarship has demonstrated that Paul did not condemn the Law of Moses and Jews for "works righteousness" and trying to earn salvation through the Law. Rather, Paul's contrast between "works of the Law" and "faith" addressed the issue of by what criteria one could join the Messianic community: circumcision and law observance, or merely faith.

#### **Slide 6**

##### **Slide title:**

The Middle Ages

##### **Slide content:**

No text

Image: an Italian city built during the Middle Ages

##### **Narrator:**

Throughout the Middle Ages, Jews lived alongside Christians as a minority. Jewish separation on account of Halakah (keeping the Law of Moses) made Jews a tolerated but countercultural and looked-down-upon group. Anti-Semitism developed. In its worst forms it accused Jews of vile actions and religious atrocities, like defiling the Eucharist, or being in league with the devil. There were periodic attacks on Jewish

communities. The Church's Inquisition targeted, in part, Jewish Communities. "Ghetto" is an Italian word originally referring to a separate part of a city, sometimes by walls, to which Jews were confined and lived as second-class citizens.

### **Slide 7**

#### **Slide title:**

Martin Luther on the Jews and Judaism

#### **Slide content:**

No text

Image: bronze statue of Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer

#### **Narrator:**

In 1543, Martin Luther, the famous Protestant Reformer, was only echoing the sentiments of countless European Christians when he wrote his treatise, *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Luther said that Jews were a "base, whoring people, that is, no people of God, and their boast of lineage, circumcision, and law must be accounted as filth," are "full of the devil's feces ... which they wallow in like swine," and he claimed that Jewish synagogue was an "incorrigible whore and an evil slut."<sup>1</sup> In his treatise, Luther urged violence against the Jews, including destroying their homes and synagogues. He argued that practicing Judaism should be outlawed, Jews should be denied legal rights and privileges, and that Jews should be reduced to slave labor. Besides these written attacks, Luther's theology polarized "Law" and "Gospel," denigrating the Law. This fueled centuries of misunderstanding Judaism as legalistic, trying to earn salvation apart from God's grace. This is not what Judaism taught or teaches.

### **Slide 8**

#### **Slide title:**

Modern Persecution of Jews

#### **Slide content:**

No text

Image: Jews being attacked by an angry mob

#### **Narrator:**

In retrospect, Christians today have realized that this was a manifestation of the human tendency to oppress minorities and demonize those who are different.

Equal rights for all people, acceptance of religious pluralism, tolerance of different belief systems, and freedom of conscience in religion have been hallmarks of the last several centuries of western history. Yet, persecution of Jews continued into the early 1900s. In the late 1800s Russia reinstated violent attacks, or pogroms, on Jewish communities.

### **Slide 9**

#### **Slide title:**

The Holocaust

#### **Slide content:**

No text

Image: Photo of Jews being treated like prisoners during the Holocaust

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 111–13.

**Narrator:**

The horrors of the Holocaust attest to the failure of modern values to attain the lofty goals they envisioned. During the Second World War, Hitler and the Nazis systematically exterminated six million European Jews, including one million children. Jews refer to this as the *Shoah*. Numerous scholars argue for a direct line from Luther's anti-Semitism in sixteenth-century Germany to the Holocaust.

In the wake of the Holocaust, many Christians have seriously reckoned with historical Christian anti-Semitism. They have changed longstanding attitudes toward Jews. Some have even issued formal apologies. For centuries, the Good Friday liturgy in the Catholic Church included a prayer for the "perfidious" and "faithless" Jews. Since 1955, the Church has revised that prayer multiple times, focusing on what Christians and Jews have in common.

**Slide 10****Slide title:**

The Roman Catholic Church on Judaism

**Slide content:**

No text

Image: The Vatican

**Narrator:**

At the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the Catholic Church highlighted numerous ways Christians are indebted to Judaism. It denied that Jesus' death is attributable to all Jews alive at the time of Jesus. It rejected attributing Jesus' death to later generations of Jews and it rejected the belief that Jews are cursed by God, and condemned anti-Semitism and violence against Jews.<sup>2</sup> In 1998 Pope John Paul II issued a formal apology for Pope Pius XII's and the Catholic Church's failure to publically oppose the Nazis and the Holocaust during World War II.

**Slide 11****Slide title:**

Recent Protestant Statements on Judaism

**Slide content:**

No text

Image: a rural Protestant Church

**Narrator:**

In 1981, the World Council of Churches, the world's largest cooperative of Protestant denominations, published a statement rejecting the tradition Christian teaching of "supercessionism." This claims that the Church replaced Israel as God's chosen people. They also stated that they would no longer seek to convert Jews to Christianity. In 1991, the European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People condemned Luther's anti-Semitic writings, rejected historical Christian contempt toward Judaism, and urged Christians to reform their teaching and practices regarding Jews and Judaism.

**Slide 12****Slide title:**

*Dabru Emet*

**Slide content:**

Text:

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<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" (*Nostra Aetate*), (1965), paragraph 4.

- Jews and Christians worship the same God.
- Jews and Christians seek authority from the same.
- Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.
- Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.
- Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.
- Differences not settled until God's future Kingdom.
- New Jewish–Christian relationship will not weaken Jewish practice.
- Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.

No image

**Narrator:**

Jewish responses to these Christian apologies and overtures have been mixed. In the year 2000, 220 Jewish scholars, leaders, and rabbis published in the *New York Times*, a statement called *Dabru Emet*, "Speak the Truth", affirming the following eight theses:

- Jews and Christians worship the same God.
- Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book -- the Bible (what Jews call "Tanakh" and Christians call the "Old Testament").
- Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.
- Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.
- Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.
- The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture.
- A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice.
- Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.

**Slide 13**

**Slide title:**

Some Jewish Perceptions of *Dabru Emet*

**Slide content:**

Text:

- Jews and Christians **do not** share the same scriptures.
- Real and irreconcilable differences are being glossed over.
- Religious relativism is being promoted.
- Jews believe Christians commit idolatry.
- Christians do not accept and practice the moral principles of the Torah.
- Nazism and the Holocaust are Christian phenomena.
- *Dabru Emet* poses hazards to Jewish identity and practice.

**Narrator:**

Many Jews, however, are skeptical of such a positive view of past and present relations between Jews and Christians. There have been numerous Jewish criticisms of *Dabru Emet*. In 2001, Jon Levenson, an internationally renowned Jewish scholar at Harvard University, published a point-by-point refutation of *Dabru Emet*. Jewish criticisms of that article include:

- Jews and Christians do not share the same scriptures. This is because Jews and Christians read the Hebrew scriptures through different and incompatible lenses, and they have different books in their canons of scripture.
- In the name of a superficial and illusory agreement, *Dabru Emet* glosses over real differences, some irreconcilable and contradictory, between Jewish and Christian beliefs.
- *Dabru Emet* proposes religious relativism, wrongly claiming that neither Jews nor Christians can be certain that their beliefs are correct.

- *Dabru Emet* overlooks the Jewish claim that Christians commit idolatry by worshipping Jesus.
- Christians do not accept and practice the moral principles of the Torah.
- Nazism and the Holocaust are in fact Christian phenomena.
- *Dabru Emet* poses hazards to Jewish identity and practice.

**Slide 14**

**Slide title:**

The Road Ahead

**Slide content:**

No text

Image: an open road

**Narrator:**

Thus, despite recent promises of improvement in Jewish–Christian relations, as in centuries past, the road ahead seems rocky and fraught with difficulties.