

LESSONS OF THE HOLOCAUST AND ANTI-SEMITISM



NEVER FORGET  
NEVER AGAIN



International Fellowship  
of Christians and Jews®

*"I swore never to be silent  
whenever and wherever human  
beings endure suffering and  
humiliation. We must always  
take sides. Neutrality helps  
the oppressor, never the victim.  
Silence encourages the tormentor,  
never the tormented."*

Jewish author and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel,  
from his Nobel Prize acceptance speech

## From the Rabbi



Each year Jews around the world observe *Yom HaShoah* — Holocaust Remembrance Day — commemorating a horrific chapter not only in the history of the Jewish people, but also in the history of the world. Motivated by a fanatical hatred of Jews and a desire to rid society of “undesirable” elements, the Nazi regime that ruled Germany during the mid-20th century engaged in a systematic and brutal campaign to destroy the Jewish people. Harvesting the fruits of seeds sown through centuries of anti-Semitism, they nearly succeeded, murdering six million Jews, or about one third of the world’s Jewish population at the time.

The full name of Holocaust Remembrance Day in Hebrew is actually “*Yom HaShoah Ve-Hagevurah*,” meaning “Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day.” This reminds us that even though many ignored evidence of Nazi crimes, there were those who went to great lengths to save Jews. Many of these heroes are remembered today as “righteous gentiles.” In Holland, Corrie ten Boom sheltered those fleeing Nazi oppression. In France, Pastor André Trocmé helped to make an entire town, Le Chambon, a safe haven for persecuted Jews. Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish Christian, rescued thousands of Jews from the Nazi death machine. And there were, of course, many more who are less well-known, but no less deserving of our gratitude.

Some say the Holocaust is too terrible to remember. But there is a reason why the Jewish people have vowed to “never forget.” They remember so that they may prevent such horrible events from ever occurring again.

Today there seems to be a trend to forget the lessons taught by the Holocaust, or even to rewrite history as if it never occurred. The radical Islamic regime of Iran, which has dedicated itself to Israel’s destruction, held a “Holocaust denial” conference in recent years that attracted not only Islamist fanatics, but Western academics and other public figures as well.

Recent events in America, Europe, and around the world, where Jews of all ages have been targeted for intimidation, vandalism, and even death in terrorist attacks by radical Islamists, are a stark reminder that “those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Indeed, my friends, the threat of anti-Semitism remains very real today.

It is my hope and prayer that as you read the stories that follow of those who survived the horrors of the Holocaust and learn more about the history of anti-Semitism that allowed the unthinkable to occur, you will join *The Fellowship* not only in caring for and helping the survivors of this horrific event, but also in continuing to fight anti-Semitism whenever, and wherever, it occurs.

With prayers for *shalom*, peace,

*Rabbi Eckstein*

Founder & President,  
International Fellowship of Christians and Jews



# NEVER FORGET

*Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp,  
which has turned my life into one long night,  
seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke.  
Never shall I forget the little faces of children,  
whose bodies I saw turned to wreaths of smoke  
beneath a silent blue sky.*

Elie Wiesel, *Night*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1960), 43–44

It has been more than 70 years since the Holocaust — the year 2015 marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp. For some, the events remain real and ever-present. For others, the Holocaust seems like ancient history. But, since those horrific events, the Jewish people have adopted a motto: Never again. Never again will they allow such a catastrophe to occur. From the ashes of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau, Belzek, and other Nazi death camps, the Jewish people have vowed to live. As Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein wrote in his book, *How Firm a Foundation*, “Like the psalmist long ago, Jews today collectively declare,

“I will not die but live,  
and will proclaim what the  
LORD has done.”  
(Psalm 118:17)

Holocaust Remembrance Day, or *Yom HaShoah*, was inaugurated in 1953 as a day set aside to memorialize the six million Jews murdered during the Nazi reign of terror. As befits the event it commemorates, *Yom HaShoah* is a

solemn day. Some Jewish people light six candles to represent the six million Jewish lives lost in the Holocaust. Holocaust survivors are encouraged to share their stories at public events. In Israel all public entertainment venues are closed, and at 10:00 a.m., sirens are sounded throughout Israel, and everyone stops what they are doing for two minutes, even on busy highways, to stand in silent remembrance.

## How should we respond to the Holocaust?

As Rabbi Eckstein has noted, “All Jews alive today regard themselves as Holocaust survivors since Hitler’s plan was genocidal—to eradicate the entire Jewish nation. All bear the awesome responsibility of telling the story of those excruciating years.” But how does one address something so devastating; something that is at once unfathomable, yet real; something unspeakable that we nonetheless must discuss in order to prevent it from ever happening again? Rabbi Eckstein proposes that, “The appropriate way to confront the Holocaust is first through silence and then through well-considered words. Only after mourning the terrible loss dare we speak of that tragedy; only after reverential silence may we risk talking about it.”

Of the many responses to the Holocaust, support for Israel is perhaps the most widely accepted and most deeply felt. “Israel is the symbol of the contemporary Jewish resolve to

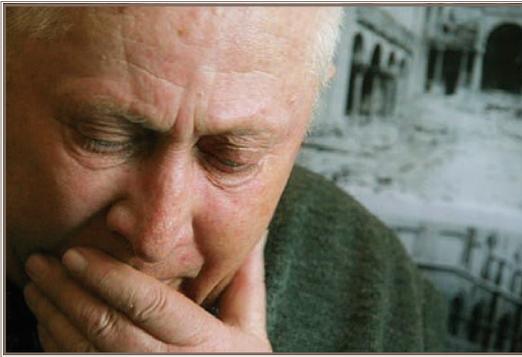
live after having been tormented and persecuted for centuries. She epitomizes the Jewish rebirth as a dynamic, living people ... The existence of Israel goes to the very core of Jewish identity today,” says Rabbi Eckstein.

He concludes that, “The primary imperative Jews have elicited from the Holocaust is to live, and never allow a similar Holocaust to occur again.” And for the Christian, the Rabbi adds this challenge: “The primary imperative to be elicited by Christians from the Holocaust is equally as compelling as is that of the Jews — to expunge any and all traces of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism from their midst ... They, too, are divinely obligated to ensure Jewish survival and to prevent a future Holocaust.”

Will you join with us, Rabbi Eckstein, and millions around the world of all faiths and backgrounds to reflect, to be on guard, and to declare “Never Forget” and “Never Again”?

## TELLING THEIR STORIES

One significant way that we “never forget” is to keep the voices of the Holocaust alive and strong through hearing the stories and experiences of those who lived through this horrific chapter in history. Below are accounts from two such individuals who were courageous enough to share their story.



# JOSEF KATZ

**J**osef, a 75-year-old Ukrainian Jew, is a Holocaust survivor. During World War II he was imprisoned at the notorious Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. For many years, Josef kept his horrific stories of the events during the war to himself.

But recently, after encouragement from a worker at a local *Hesed* center funded by *The Fellowship's Isaiah 58*

program, he began telling his story. The center is a place of hope for Josef, where this impoverished man receives food and medical assistance on a regular basis. And now, it has also given him a means of release, and a sense that his history will not be forgotten.

“I was working in a coal mine when the frontline of the fighting was approaching,” Josef began. “We were

marched away in lines wearing prison clothes. We had wooden soles on our boots. It was cold and people were weak. Those who couldn't go further were killed and stayed where they lay. We were driven forward this way for three days, day and night. When the front was coming too near, we were put into carriages where the coal was usually kept. We were piled one on top of another.

"As we rode in the carriages, somehow people in one of the villages we were passing through learned that prisoners were in the carriage, so they threw us bread and meat. We were weak and hungry. We tried to catch the pieces of food. People were so hungry that the crowd crushed each other trying to get the food. The Nazi guards shouted, 'Halt!' and they shot the prisoners. A lot of people were



guards. It was night, dark. We saw a big barn. Very carefully, we approached the barn, crawled in, and slept there all night. We didn't hear a tank coming

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**"We arrived one night at Auschwitz.** The train cars slowed down. We heard a lot of shouting in German and the dogs were barking. They opened the carriages and there was light everywhere. They arranged us into columns. I was on one side and my mother and two sisters, who were four and twelve, were on the other."

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killed. The guards made us take the bodies and stack them inside the carriage like a bench. Then they made us sit on them. Three more days we lived through that, imagining the day when we could escape.

"Finally they took us from the carriage. Then they put us in columns and we began marching again. Many days passed. We found ourselves in a small forest. Suddenly we stopped and looked around and there were no

near. But then we looked out and saw a five-angled star."

At first, Josef and the others thought they were seeing a Russian tank. "We started whispering, 'It's a Russian tank, it's a Russian tank,'" he said. "Then we understood that they were Americans. We didn't know that the English and Americans had a five-angled star, too.

"When the Americans found us, they were struck dumb at what we looked like. We were kids and there



were middle-aged people there, too. The soldiers handed us chocolates and vitamins and water. I felt the strength

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**“A German soldier drove me to the gate, away from my mother and sisters.** He pushed me with a stick. I fell, and when I turned my head I saw a dead man lying in a pool of blood. I was frightened. That was the last time I saw my mother. I saw my sisters on the other side of the barbed wire fence. I called for my mother, and the soldiers hit me with the stick again.”

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coming into my muscles again. The soldiers told us how to get to the road.

I will remember them all my life. There were about 80 of us at that time. They took us to a town in Germany and settled us there, in former Nazi housing. We took off our prison clothes and they showed us piles of clothes and told us to take what we wanted. We washed, they fed us, and there were doctors there.”

Josef is grateful that he was able to share his story. And we, too, should be grateful to him. It is the testimony of people like Josef, who witnessed firsthand the horrors of the Holocaust, that can help us strengthen our resolve to fight anti-Semitism wherever it occurs. We cannot give back life to those who perished. But we can help ensure that the eternal rallying cry of the Jewish people - “Never again!” - is fulfilled.

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**“You cannot tell how many people died.** When I was in the camp, they brought us to the coal mine. The people were so thin and weak. When they came out of the mine all black from the coal, their arms were like twigs of a tree and their legs were like matchsticks. Every three or four days, the soldiers would load all those thin dead bodies and take them away like wood, like trees. Only God knows why I stayed alive. There was no strength in me at all. If the Americans hadn’t saved me at that moment, I would be dead, too. It must be a miracle.”



# MAGDA BROWN

*The stench from the chimneys of burning flesh,  
it will live with me as long as I live.*

**Editor's Note:** This story was written by *The Fellowship's* Christina Johns, Creative Director, on her experiences attending a *Fellowship*-sponsored Holocaust awareness event. Although this event occurred several years ago, Christina remains in contact with Magda, who continues to share her story.

Several years ago, I attended a *Fellowship*-sponsored conference on Holocaust awareness at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie. My main task was to interview one of the Holocaust survivors who would serve as our guide through the exhibit.

When we stepped into a replica of a railcar that had been used to deliver Jews to the concentration camps, a wave of panic washed over me. I

met the eyes of Magda, our guide and an 83-year-old Holocaust survivor, and was suddenly overcome with shame, anger, and sadness.

When Magda was 17, not much younger than me, she stood in a railcar just like the one we were standing in. Magda, her mother, and other victims were packed into the train cars, given little information as to their destination, and left to endure yet another phase of the Nazis' "final solution."

## Magda shared her memories:

There wasn't enough room in the cars to sit down. So in order to allow my mother to sit, I stood for three days. There were all kinds of people there. Some just prayed, others yelled, and some didn't know what to do. There was no food, no water, and the only bathroom facility was a bucket in the corner. The smell was terrible, but the thirst was so intense that it was all I could think about. Everything was secondary to the torture of being denied water. It was maddening.

At one point I was pushed into the corner where there was a small window with barbed wire across it. I looked out the window, and my memory is so vivid. I saw a boy close to my age herding a flock of sheep. I thought to myself, *Why is he out there and I'm in here?* You see, I thought the whole world was in train cars. Then, I thought, *What did I do to deserve this? I am good girl.*

Eventually the train stopped, the box car door was opened, and some men motioned for the people to get out and leave their belongings behind. I grabbed my mother's hand as the thousands of people poured out of the train cars. I looked up and saw people that looked like skeletons wearing striped uniforms staring back at us with an empty, detached glare behind a barbed wire fence. I thought to myself, *Why did they bring us to an insane asylum?* I thought we were going to work.



When we got up to the front of the line, there was an SS man pointing people where to go. Some went right, others left. People were screaming and crying as they were pulled from one another. They saw me holding my mother's hand and now I look back and think that was a mistake. You see, my mother looked young and they probably would have let her live if they thought that. Instead, they knew she was my mother, and they pointed her in the opposite direction from where they pointed me.

I kind of waved to her and I said, "Mother, I'll see you later," not realizing that would be the last time I saw my beautiful young mother. And then everything was systematic. You become a zombie. You're no longer a person. You just move. You follow directions or else. After they shaved our heads and gave us our ill-fitting uniforms, people started talking to other Jews who had been at Auschwitz longer and asked if they knew where their relatives had gone. I listened; I wanted to know when I would see my mother again. They pointed to the five chimneys in the distance and very coolly said, "There is your family. There are your relatives." The stench from the chimneys of the burning flesh, it will live with me as long as I live. It is the most horrible thing imaginable.

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Magda's eyes were glassy as she shared this part of her horrific story. I felt my eyes well with tears as pictures of my mother flashed through my mind. The fear Magda must have experienced and the strength she must have had in order to survive I will never be able to comprehend.

Tragically, the war against the

monster of hatred and anti-Semitism has not ended.

The war on hate is being waged all over the world. We need to know the threat and be a voice of reason amongst a chorus of ignorance. It is not just up to those who survived the Holocaust to ensure we remember – it is up to all those who wish to live in a world that is just and moral.



# NEVER AGAIN

## LEARNING ABOUT ANTI-SEMITISM

Another important way to combat anti-Semitism is through education. What is anti-Semitism? How pervasive is it today? How does it impact Jewish-Christian relations? Below are a series of questions and answers from Rabbi Eckstein's book, *Ask the Rabbi*, about the history of anti-Semitism from a biblical and theological perspective, and what Christians can do today in response.

### 1. When and How Did Anti-Semitism Begin?

Anti-Semitism is one of the most ancient and tenacious prejudices ever to afflict humankind. And its beginnings are ancient as well. Already in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., in one of the earliest records of ancient anti-Semitism, the Bible records that Haman sought to wipe out all the Jews of the Persian Empire. Why? Because Mordecai, a Jew, refused to bow down to him.

Haman, long ago, exhibited the classic traits of the virulent disease of anti-Semitism. He made unfair stereotypes, projected negative characteristics from individual Jews onto an entire nation, and called for the liquidation of all the Jewish people because of the perceived misdeeds of one Jew. Let us examine what the Bible says about Haman's hatred for Jews and about the hatred of all other anti-Semites, as well.

In the book of Esther we find Haman saying to King Xeres

(Ahasuerus in Hebrew) of Persia: *“There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king’s administrators for the royal treasury”* (Esther 3:8–9).

### Seeds of Hate

Haman despised the Jews because they lived and believed differently from others. He accused them of being clannish, unpatriotic to their nation, and disloyal to the king. He planted doubts in the king’s mind about the safety and wisdom of having Jews living in the Empire. Haman finally succeeded in rallying the king and the masses to his anti-Semitic cause by cleverly appealing to their greed. He assured them that by destroying the Jews they would not only rid themselves of their national problem, they would also reap great financial reward in the process. Isn’t this kind of thinking typical of many anti-Semites? Are not most consumed by greed and hatred?

Anti-Semitism is actually a term of recent vintage. It was coined in 1873 by Wilhelm Marr, a German who believed that Jews as a group were unalterably tainted and “racially determined.” Their goal, in his view, was to overrun society and corrupt the pure Aryan German nation. This new

concept of anti-Semitism reflected a fundamental shift in attitudes. What was once historic anti-Jewish prejudice that flared up in response to offensive Jewish behavior or beliefs, changed to a view that was anti-Jewish on genetic grounds.

## 2. How Did Anti-Semitism Change and Flourish up to World War II?

Though anti-Jewish prejudice has been around for thousands of years, it took a significantly new form in the late 1800s. It shifted from a historic prejudice that was anti-Jewish and flared up as a negative reaction to Jewish behavior or beliefs, to a view that was anti-Jews based on irrational racial hatred.

In previous centuries, Jews could theoretically change their actions or beliefs, and thereby avoid being subjected to anti-Semitism. But with the introduction of the new racial (i.e. genetic) dimension, they could not escape. Even if they converted to Christianity, for example, they could not escape being branded as Jews. The root problem, according to this new kind of anti-Semitism, was not in Jewish behavior or beliefs, but in Jewish flesh and blood.

### Nazi Obsession

As is well known, this theory of Jewish racial impurity was reintroduced in a most monstrous form a few decades later by Adolf Hitler. This hypothesis constituted the ideological backbone of the Nazi onslaught

against the Jews. Thus, modern anti-Semitism involves pathological racial hatred, in contrast with the historic prejudice against Jewish actions and beliefs.

For example, a Jew living during the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, or even the pogroms of the late 1800s, could have been spared from persecution and death by converting to Christianity. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Holocaust, with the new racial (i.e. genetic) understanding of anti-Semitism, such a conversion would have been an entirely futile gesture.

Is anti-Semitism then a rational phenomenon that we can somehow try to comprehend? Many people believe it is not. They declare the very existence of Jews somehow, almost supernaturally, evokes hatred in the hardcore anti-Semite. Such hatred is not based on the Jews' personality, beliefs, actions, or social mores, but the simple fact of being Jews. For anti-Semites, the urge to destroy Jews is a central, irrational, passionate obsession.

History provides many examples of inconsistent accusations against the Jews. In fact, Jews seem to be criticized no matter what alternative they choose. At various points in history, for example, Jews have been accused of being too poor or too wealthy, too politically domineering or too politically uninvolved. Jews have been accused of being too spiritual and too secular; unambitious and overly aggressive; too separated from others and too assimilated; capitalists and communists. The obsessional

hatred of Jews is not prompted by anything the Jews themselves do or don't do, but simply by the reality of who they are — Jews.

### 3. How Do Stereotypes Extend Anti-Semitism?

What are the historical causes and ideological roots of anti-Semitism? Is it a chronic disease? Is it curable? Is it rational? Obviously these are very complex issues that we cannot fully address. We can say, however, that anti-Semitism has been spawned and nurtured by economic, social, political, and even religious forces.

In many respects anti-Semitism entered into the mind and psyche of Western civilization through Christianity, as will be addressed later. At times, anti-Semitism is so enmeshed in Western culture that we fail to even recognize it.

#### Ingrained Stereotypes

Ask yourselves what happens to children when they read in school about Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*? What is the result of viewing church Passion Plays, or movies portraying Jews as evil, hostile, and even murderous toward Jesus?

Such experiences, which are not at all uncommon in our society, reinforce some of the most vicious anti-Jewish stereotypes and canards that have plagued Jews for centuries. Particularly damaging is the notion that Jews were somehow responsible for killing Jesus and are divinely

intended to suffer for that sin for generations.

Sometimes, of course, anti-Semitic stereotypes can take a far more subtle form. Look at how Jesus is portrayed in the artwork found today in most museums and many churches. Usually, he (and the apostles, except for Judas) is depicted with straight light-colored hair, smooth features and benign expressions. Meanwhile, the (other) Jews are pictured with black, unruly, curly hair, large noses, and conniving eyes. These pictures silently deny Jesus was a Jew! We cannot call this overt anti-Semitism, but it certainly reinforces and gives credence to common derogatory perceptions of Jews.

Thus, anti-Semitism is often manifest blatantly and overtly, but it can also assume a more subtle, deceptive guise, as well. We need to be on guard lest it slowly and subtly work upon the minds of unsuspecting people, especially impressionable children. Covert anti-Semitism can insidiously shape strong negative attitudes toward Jews.

#### **4. What Role Has Some Specific Christian Theology Played in Anti-Semitism?**

Jewish rejection of Christian beliefs is widely believed to be a major cause of historical Christian negativism toward Jews and Judaism. Since the time of Jesus, the Christian gospel has been inextricably linked with Jewish denial of that message and its messiah. Christians proclaimed that

the messiah had arrived and that man could attain salvation through him.

Meanwhile, Jews, by their very existence, seemed to be a counter-testimony. Stubbornly, Jews continued to irritate and embarrass Christians by insisting that the true messiah had not yet come, that God's covenants with them remained operative, and that the Hebrew Bible (not the New Testament) was still the complete and definitive Word of God. Jews simply refused to acknowledge the Christian claim that, with Jesus, God had made a major change in salvation history.

Christians maintained that Jesus had come to bring salvation first and foremost to his fellow Jews. But by their overwhelming rejection of Jesus, the Jews severed their covenantal relationship with God and forfeited their rights and position as God's chosen people.

#### **The New Israel?**

Christians proclaimed that they constituted the "New Israel," that the Gospels were God's "New Testament," and that Christianity had become the only true faith and the only means of salvation.

In other words, Christians declared Jews and Judaism were displaced in God's plan by the Church and Christianity. The continued existence of Jews after Jesus' death was, for centuries, a thorn in the Christian side, constantly needing explanation. Christians even maintained that non-Christian Jews had ceased to be true Jews, i.e. the

true descendants of Abraham. The concept of “Jew” was spiritualized and applied to Christians instead of biological Jews.

Paul’s writings were a major source of this “replacement theology.” For example, he wrote in Romans 2 and 9, “*For he is not a Jew, who is one only outwardly . . . but he is a Jew who is inwardly one.*” Later, the term “the Jews” was transformed into a negative symbol describing all who rejected Jesus, not just the real flesh and blood Jews.

It was not a major theological step for Jews of succeeding generations to become collectively viewed as “sons of the devil,” or the incarnation of evil. In Christian eyes, Jews were the people who crucified Jesus out of sheer malice; those who shouted “Crucify him,” as well as their descendants, were all murderers (see John 8:44 and Matthew 27:25).

This theological antipathy toward non-Christian Jews built upon prior negative views of Jews. Paul had warned against undue pride, telling Christians not to take theological hostile positions toward the Jews (e.g. Romans 11:17–24). This theme will be explored further in our next question.

## 5. How Does a Christian’s View of the Jewish Roots of Christianity Affect Anti-Semitism?

We have described briefly the evolution of a hostile attitude toward Jews in the early Church. We also discussed how the continued existence

of the Jews and their refusal to accept Jesus were an ongoing aggravation. Both challenged the Church’s claim that it was the inheritor of God’s covenant and promises and that it was the new “True Israel.”

In the book of Romans, Paul admonished the Gentiles regarding such attitudes, warning them not to be haughty nor to forget who supports whom. It is the root that supports the branch, not the reverse, said Paul. (See Romans 11:18.)

### Divine Ordination

Paul goes further and suggests that the Jewish rejection of Jesus was somehow divinely ordained. When Paul says that a temporary blindness has come over the Jews, he means it is not their doing but God’s. Moreover, Paul insists, the Jewish rejection of Jesus was for the Gentiles’ benefit, so that they could be grafted onto the rich (Jewish) olive tree and share in a covenantal relationship with God (Romans 11:11).

Unfortunately, however, as the Church became increasingly Gentile, its Jewish roots were increasingly denied. All that was remembered from Paul’s admonition was that the Jews rejected Jesus. The second half of his statement, that the rejection was “*divinely ordained and for the Gentile’s sake,*” was tragically forgotten. (See Romans 11:28–29).

This replacement theology was not, however, an isolated or unique phenomenon. The early church, in its formative centuries, tended to

shape a distinctive Christian identity by denying its Jewish roots and origin. Consistently, the Church defined itself over and against Jews and Judaism. The Jewishness of Jesus, for example, was virtually forgotten. The Jewish origins of rituals and concepts such as the Passover meal, baptism, circumcision, and salvation were either denied, spiritualized, or radically transformed in meaning.

Christianity has been much like the teenager who rebels against his parents in order to define his own separate identity. The Church broke with its Jewish origins and parentage, and tried to shape a distinctive identity by claiming it displaced Judaism and superseded the Old Covenant.

Yet, the encouraging news is that among some Christians there has been a renewed interest in exploring the Jewish roots of their faith and in rediscovering the Jewishness of Jesus. Our ministry's vision at *The Fellowship* is that Jews and Christians will reverse their 2,000-year history of discord and replace it with a relationship marked by dialogue, respect, and cooperation.

## 6. Has Blaming Jews for Killing Jesus Stirred Anti-Semitism?

By the end of the third century, the primary motifs of theological anti-Semitism were firmly implanted in the Church. Indeed, the arguments and ideas posited by early church leaders and apologists in the first few centuries formed the

Christian view of Jews and Judaism for centuries to come.

By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, John Chrysostom, for example, declared, “the martyrs especially hate the Jews, for the reason that they love so deeply the one who, by them, was crucified.” He explained that Jewish suffering came as a divine punishment “because you [the Jews] killed Christ. It is because you stretched out your hand against the Lord. It is because you shed the precious blood that there is now no restoration, no mercy anymore and no defense ... this is why you are being punished worse now than in the past ... if this were not the case, God would not have turned His back on you so completely ... thus, you who sinned against Him are in a state of dishonor and disgrace.”

### The Deicide Charge

The average Christian today is, in all likelihood, totally unaware of such statements by outstanding leaders in the early Church. Unfortunately, such ideas were promulgated and widely accepted during the important formative centuries of the Church's development.

At the very heart of Christian anti-Semitism was the deicide charge that, as a people, Jews killed Jesus and were doomed to suffer divine wrath and rejection eternally for that act. “If someone killed your son,” wrote John Chrysostom, “could you stand the sight of him or the sound of his greeting? Wouldn't you try to

get away from him as if he were an evil demon, as if he were the devil himself? The Jews killed the Son of your Master ... Will you so dishonor Him as to respect and cultivate His murderers — the men who crucified Him?”

Hippolytus and other church fathers expressed similar sentiments, explaining that the Temple was destroyed “because they [the Jews] killed the son of the Benefactor, for he is coeternal with the Father.” Prudentius, a fourth century Christian poet, said the Temple was destroyed as, “the penalty for murder and for having stained their hands with the blood of Christ.”

For centuries thereafter, Christians believed that “the Jews” as a nation rejected and crucified Jesus and assumed collective responsibility for his death when they vowed, “*His blood is on us and our children*” (Matthew 27:25).

## 7. How Does Christian Anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages Still Reverberate Today?

As we have seen, for many centuries some Christians have maintained that the Jews brought upon themselves and their descendants the divine retribution of eternal wandering and suffering. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and exile of the Jewish nation were seen as proof that God had rejected His ancient people as punishment for the crime of rejecting and crucifying His only

begotten Son. Through such theological filters, Christians interpreted and accepted Jewish suffering. From such theories of deserved punishment, Christians went on to derive approval for administering unto the Jews that very suffering.

### Society’s Scapegoats

During the Middle Ages, Christian contempt for Jews and Judaism brought about devastating consequences throughout Christian-dominated Europe. Jews remained the only unconverted minority, and their very presence was a source of discomfort to Christians who regarded the church as the “New Israel.” Jews suffered terrible persecution and often mass slaughter from frenzied Christian mobs during the Crusades. During the Inquisition, they were expelled or forced to convert or die.

Jews were compelled to engage in theological disputes with church leaders, which usually resulted in the persecution or forced conversion of entire Jewish communities. There were mass expulsions from European lands. The Jews were falsely accused of libels — the charge that Jews killed Christian children and used their blood for the Passover *seder*. When the drinking water was contaminated, the Jews were blamed for poisoning the well. When there was an epidemic of typhoid or black plague it was presumably the Jews’ fault. Jews became handy scapegoats for all the ills of society in Medieval Christian Europe.

The history of Jewish persecution at the hands of Christians is a significant factor influencing how Jews even today perceive Christians and the prospects for dialogue with them. Defensive mistrust is the starting point for most Jews in their relations with Christians. Christians, on the other hand, are generally not aware of these tragic pages of their history and tend to have different starting points in their relations with Jews.

### **8. How Have Jews in the U.S. Fared on the Matter Of Anti-Semitism?**

Jews encountered anti-Semitism and discrimination in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, too, though certainly not to the degree of outright persecution they had experienced in Europe. American Jews were excluded or restricted from participating in many areas of society. They were often discriminated against in jobs, housing, education, and business. There was a proliferation of anti-Jewish propaganda disseminated by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, and acts of violence against the Jews were not uncommon.

American Jews countered these challenges by organizing into groups like the Anti-Defamation League. They fought against all threats to the democratic fabric of American life from the right and the left, viewing these as threats to Jewish life itself and believing that Jewish life thrives best in a strong democracy. Jews have

thoroughly believed in American ideals and have trusted this country's legacy of tolerance toward religious minorities. They have felt secure and hopeful in the conviction expressed by George Washington that America would "give to bigotry no sanction."

### **Horror of the Holocaust**

The Holocaust, however, shattered much of the optimism and security that pervaded American Jewry. Our shared worldview has been radically altered toward the negative by that cataclysmic event. The Holocaust brought into sharp focus the entire question of Christian-Jewish relations. The stereotypes promoting contempt toward Jews, from which the Nazis drew, were rooted in those held by the Church for centuries.

The Holocaust took place in the very heartland of enlightened Christian Europe. Pro-Nazi leadership was often in the hands of baptized Christians. With some exceptions, the Christian church was essentially silent and demonstrated passive acquiescence. The monstrous crime of genocide was committed by baptized Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians.

It is true that many factors contributed to the outbreak of the Nazi Holocaust. But certainly one contributing factor was the long tradition of Christian contempt for, and persecution of, the Jews, which by the 20<sup>th</sup> century was deeply ingrained in the minds of European Christians. The Holocaust did not

erupt in a vacuum; it built upon the past. Centuries of Christian antipathy toward Jews implanted the seedbed within which the germ of Nazi anti-Semitism grew and drew its ideological nourishment. In their evil design, the Nazis were able to gain moral and theological support from traditional Christian views of Jews and Judaism. A Holocaust of Jews would have been unlikely, if not unthinkable, without an almost 2,000-year history of Christian hatred and hostility.

## 9. How Shall Christians Respond to Anti-Semitism? — Part I

In recent years, Jews have made tremendous strides in fostering better relations with Christians and in fighting anti-Semitism here in America. Nonetheless, the problem continues to plague us today, at times overtly. Anti-Semitism is a force constantly lurking beneath the surface of Western culture, vulnerable to violent eruption if given the right political, social, and economic conditions.

Of concern to us now is the question of how Christians, particularly Evangelical Christians, should respond to the challenge of anti-Semitism. A few years ago, the prominent evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, devoted almost an entire issue to the subject of Jews and Evangelicals. Let me quote briefly from a column by Dr. Vernon Grounds, president emeritus of Den-

ver Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary in Colorado.

He wrote: “Evangelicals are rightly exhorted to ponder the heart-breaking pages of Israel’s tragic saga: realize that it is Christianity which at bottom has been either primarily, or at any rate largely, responsible for the centuries-long persecution that reached its nadir in the Nazis’ ghastly final solution of the Jewish problem!” These are very strong, compelling remarks.

### Confessing and Repenting

The editorial in this same issue of *Christianity Today* noted that, “On the whole, Evangelicals tend to slough off suggestions that they are anti-Semitic. They admit that nominal Christians, particularly medieval Catholics and some members of the liberal church in modern Germany, were anti-Semitic; but Evangelicals stand opposed to this.

“Beyond that, however, we must confess that Luther and the Reformers and many evangelical Protestants since then have made statements that Jews certainly have a right to consider anti-Semitic. We regret these anti-Semiteisms of the past and present.”

Clearly, a spirit of recognition and penance are essential for Christians. The *Christianity Today* editors also pointed out that though they detected “a spirit of repentance among Evangelicals ... repentance without restitution, like faith without works, is useless!”

## 10. How Shall Christians Respond to Anti-Semitism? — Part II

That editorial, which appeared in the 1979 issue of *Christianity Today*, in the estimation of many, marked a major turning point in Evangelical-Jewish relations. Citing from that same editorial are six ways that the editors urged born-again Christians to respond to anti-Semitism. These are listed below:

1. It is important that, where guilty, Christians publicly acknowledge past anti-Semitism and declare it to be sin. If Evangelicals are unwilling to set the record straight on this matter, any mouthing of repentance is rightly suspect.
2. Evangelical leaders must avoid any direct or indirect support for anti-Semitic causes. We believe Evangelicals pass this test fairly well.
3. It is not enough just to condemn anti-Semitism in the past and remain aloof from anti-Semitic causes. Evangelical leaders and pastors must also use their teaching ministries to present solid instruction as to the anti-Biblical and anti-Christian nature of all anti-Semitic attitudes or actions.
4. Further, Evangelical leaders must ferret out, expose, and actively oppose incipient and overt anti-Semitism that creeps into a society structured for centuries along anti-Semitic lines. Hitler did not arise

in a cultural vacuum. His persecution of the Jews was the end product of a long history of anti-Semitism in which, alas, Evangelicals, too, played an ignoble part. Incipient anti-Semitism leads to gross anti-Semitism, which may terminate in genocide. So Evangelicals must root out even the incipient forms we often think are harmless.

5. Evangelicals must guard against the unconscious anti-Semitism in themselves and others that lies concealed in the structures of society. Jews, naturally more sensitive to this, can help Evangelicals here by forthrightly pointing out such attitudes. A public school English teacher, for example, can instill prejudice for life by his treatment of Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

6. As Evangelicals demonstrate in tangible ways their abhorrence of anti-Semitic actions, they will declare a crucial truth to the Gentile world at large: to attack Jews is to attack Evangelicals, and such attacks will be resisted by Evangelicals as attacks against themselves.

At *The Fellowship*, we strongly believe that Christians today must help stem the tide of anti-Semitism and show restitution, if you will, by educating themselves about the Jewish roots of Christianity, extending love and compassion to their needy or persecuted Jewish brothers and sisters, and supporting Israel and her struggle to survive.



# HELPING HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS TODAY

**Below are just a few of the thousands of stories we could share about how *The Fellowship* with the generous support of its Christian friends is today helping the needy and often forgotten elderly survivors of the Holocaust by providing them with lifesaving food and medicine and much-needed friendship and compassion.**

## Masha from Belarus

Masha lives alone in crushing poverty in Belarus. She is nearly 90, but most of her long life has been marked by hardship. As a child, Masha was forced to run from her home and hide in Kazakhstan to escape the advancing Nazi army. While Masha and her mother were in Kazakhstan, her father was killed in the war.

For years, Masha worked as a math teacher, and her students and coworkers provided all the social interaction she needed. Masha never married, and today she can no longer work, so she is all alone. As a teacher, she never made much money, and now she struggles to live on a tiny government pension. Masha's apartment is nearly empty – she never had much money to spend on furniture. And every year it seems like one of the few items she owns breaks.

Despite everything she has gone through, Masha is in relatively good health. As she lives out her final years,

*The Fellowship* is helping to maintain her tiny home so she can live with dignity. Most recently, *The Fellowship* replaced Masha's toilet and sink, which were broken and unusable. Masha also receives a food card from *The Fellowship*, which allows her to choose the nutritious food she needs to stay healthy. She is so thankful for this loving support!

## Natalya from Minsk

As a child, Natalya experienced the horrors of war firsthand. During World War II, when the Soviets and the Nazis were battling for control of Minsk, her home was hit by a firebomb. Natalya and her siblings barely escaped in time, and they were traumatized by the experience.

A few years later, Minsk was liberated from the Nazis, and Natalya and her brother went out to celebrate. The young children found a box of bullets and picked it up – tragically, one of the

bullets exploded in Natalya's hand, causing her to lose three fingers and disfiguring her face. Natalya required intensive surgery and was hospitalized for a year. Although she recovered, she was left with physical scars she still has today. Throughout her life, children and adults have tormented her and laughed at her disfigured face.

As an adult, Natalya studied economics and then went on to work for the government. But despite her 42 years of work, today Natalya's pension is less than \$300 a month, which is far too little to live on.

Natalya, now 77, is a widow, and is living alone in a small apartment in Minsk. She suffers from heart disease, hypertension, and back pain. In the past, Natalya reached out to *The Fellowship* and the local Jewish community mostly for companionship and emotional support, but today, because of her poor health, she is in need of material assistance as well.

Thanks to *The Fellowship*, Natalya receives food packages, personal and home products, and, most importantly, homecare. Natalya's homecare worker helps her with all the household chores she can no longer do on her own and serves as her main source of social contact. Natalya is so grateful to *The Fellowship* for looking out for her when nobody else is!

### Sophia from Belarus

Born on the eve of World War II, Sophia, now 75, spent her childhood in evacuation in Tatarstan, as the Nazis had invaded her hometown of Vitebsk. The Nazis bombed the railway taking them there and the family had to walk

many miles on foot. While Sophia's father fought on the frontlines, Sophia and her siblings starved. Often, they only had potato peels to eat.

The family returned to Vitebsk after the war, only to find that their house had been destroyed in the fighting. With no money to rebuild, the family lived in a rotting shack. Sophia's father had lost his eyesight during the war, and could no longer support the family.

Sophia's school provided her with food and clothing, necessities which her family simply could not afford. When her mother had her fifth child, Sophia, then 16, dropped out of school to go to work. Determined to finish her education, Sophia worked all day and went to school at night, earning a high-school equivalency degree.

When Sophia met her husband, her life seemed to improve. She married and had three children. But then her husband fell ill and medical malpractice made his condition worse. Sophia spent years caring for him before he passed away.

Now Sophia is herself in poor health. A bad case of the flu left her with rheumatism and heart complications. Sophia also suffers from severe arthritis. The vast majority of Sophia's \$165 monthly pension is spent on medicines to treat her various conditions.

Sophia's main source of assistance is *The Fellowship*, which provides her with desperately needed medical supplies, as well as food boxes during the Jewish holidays. "Thank you so much for this help," says Sophia, "I am exhausted from my disease and your help is invaluable to me."



International Fellowship  
of Christians and Jews®

## HOW WE NEVER FORGET. HOW WE SAY "NEVER AGAIN."

The *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews* was founded in 1983 by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein to promote understanding between Jews and Christians and build broad support for Israel and other shared concerns. Resting on this foundation, *The Fellowship* has been instrumental, with the generous help of our Christian friends, in providing lifesaving care to needy Holocaust survivors in Israel and the former Soviet Union. *The Fellowship* also offers these programs:



**ON WINGS OF EAGLES** — Helping bring hundreds of thousands of needy or persecuted Jews to the Holy Land and helping them build new lives in Israel.



*Guardians  
of Israel.*

**GUARDIANS OF ISRAEL** — Assisting needy elderly, children, and families in Israel to cope with poverty and helping provide much-needed security against Hamas, Hezbollah, and other terrorists.

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## Isaiah 58.

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**ISAIAH 58** — Delivering food, clothing, medicines, and other lifesaving care to elderly Jews, orphans, and impoverished families in the former Soviet Union and other countries where Jews are in distress.



**STAND  
for ISRAEL.**

**STAND FOR ISRAEL** — Mobilizing churches, Christian leaders, and grass-root support in the United States and around the world to stand with Israel through prayer and public advocacy.

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## TO SUPPORT OUR LIFESAVING PROGRAMS

Visit *The Fellowship's* website to find out how you can donate, get involved, and stay involved. Go to:

[www.ifcj.org](http://www.ifcj.org)

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