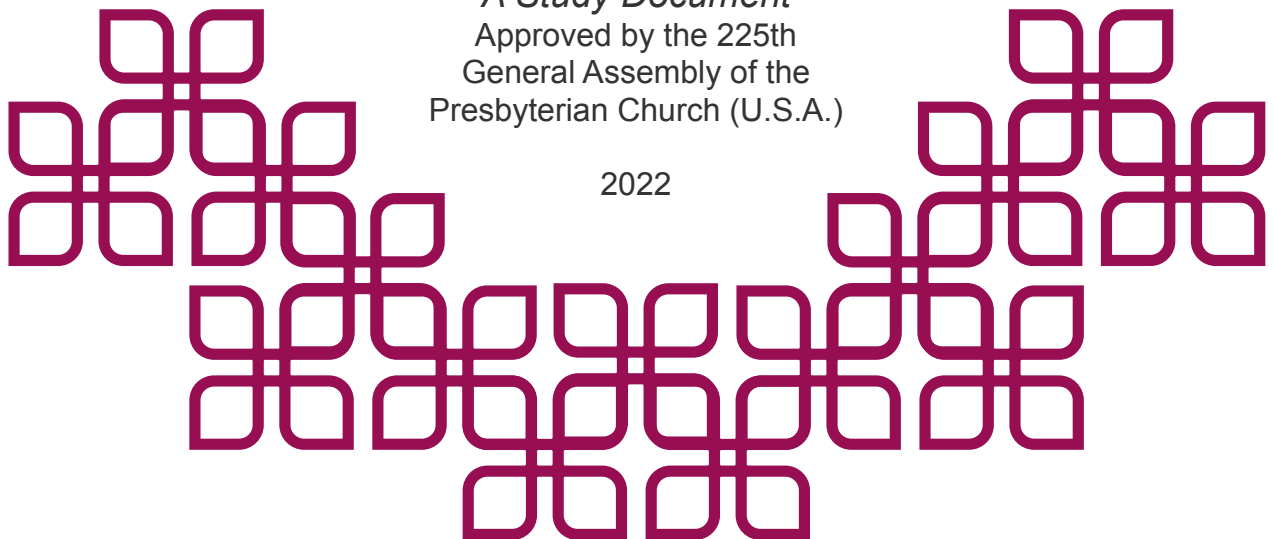




DENOUNCING  
ANTISEMITISM  
AND  
ISLAMOPHOBIA

*A Study Document*  
Approved by the 225th  
General Assembly of the  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

2022





# PREFACE



Rationale for approval submitted by the  
General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations (GACEIR)  
to the 225th General Assembly

During an address at Howard University in 2011, Dr. Cornel West said, “Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” We love because God first loved us. Scripture shares that the greatest gift is the gift of love, and they will know we are Christians by our love. Thus, by design our work is guided by an ethic of love, a love understood not as mere sentimentalism but as a decision to pursue and promote God's justice.

For the past four years, the writing team of the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations (GACEIR) has prayerfully undertaken the task of writing a Presbyterian response to the growing wave of antisemitism and Islamophobia. In particular, the writing team has sought to address the roots of antisemitism and Islamophobia—in our scripture, our confessions, our theology, and our history—in order to understand, to confess, and to repent. To support our churches and mid councils, resources are also submitted to deepen our study and action to fight antisemitism and Islamophobia.

This report is a revision of an earlier version submitted to the 224th General Assembly (2020). We have taken into account comments submitted by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) and input from the Israel Palestine Mission Network (IPMN).

Christian belief that all human beings are divine image-bearers to one another grounds our efforts to combat Islamophobia and antisemitism. Hospitality is the act of recognizing the image of God in others. As Christians, we are taught to welcome the stranger and to be blessed and not threatened by difference. We are called to provide nourishment, care, and protection to all.

In the nearly two decades since the 9/11 attacks, political and religious leaders have used Islamophobia to fan the flames of fear and hatred of Muslims. The FBI has reported that 60.3% of hate crimes based on religious bias in 2018 in the United States were directed against Jews.<sup>1</sup> Presbyterians must show up in public ways to make our support for both communities known.

The fear felt by our Jewish and Muslim siblings in the face of unchecked antisemitism and Islamophobia in our time is real, and both have historical roots in Christianity. When Christians do not know the antisemitism and Islamophobia woven into our history, we are unable to come to our Jewish and Muslim siblings with repentance, and seek repair for this history.

Antisemitic ideas have been embedded in our scriptures and our confessions. We have often, intentionally or unintentionally, promoted ideas of Christian superiority over Jewish people. Presbyterians have also had misconceptions about the Qur'an and the value and the beauty of Muslim ways of faith and life. Contemporary theology, biblical study, and liturgy that affirm our ongoing kinship with Jewish and Muslim peoples will begin to repair and strengthen our interfaith relationships, bring renewed understanding and appreciation for the uniqueness that each community brings.

In preparation for the 225th General Assembly (2022), GACEIR is working to follow the recommendations laid out here, providing ongoing resources that deepen this essential work of the PC(USA) on the ground to fight antisemitism and Islamophobia. We are committed to deepened partnership with our Muslim and Jewish siblings in this process. This is an important step in repairing our relationships with Jewish and Muslim people, and to nurture the conditions of flourishing for all.

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<sup>1</sup> US Dept. of Justice, Hate Crime Statistics, 2019  
<https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/topic-pages/incidents-and-offenses>

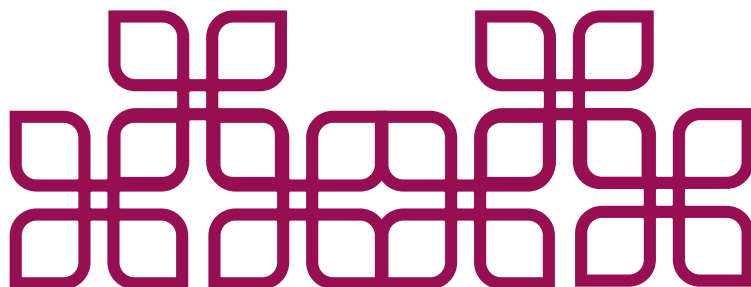
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# PART ONE

## Introduction

**T**he General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations (GACEIR) plans, coordinates, guides, and fosters inter-religious and ecumenical relations and commitments. The committee is also mandated to call the Church to repair the wounds of antisemitism and Islamophobia and any associated racism and white supremacy.

Given this charge, GACEIR asks the Church to study the following denouncement of antisemitism and of Islamophobia. Presbyterians are called to repent of and make repair for harm we have caused both communities. However, these communities are unique and distinct, thus there is a section concerning our Jewish siblings and a section concerning our Muslim siblings. We offer shared resources for repentance, renewal, and relationship-building with both Muslims and Jews.

We are guided in all this work by the “Inter-religious Stance,” adopted by the 221st General Assembly (2014), which states that “many things draw us together in respect for those who have religious commitments different from our own, including the example and person of Jesus Christ, the evident need for religious peace, the necessity of meeting human needs in a world of poverty and want, and the biblical call to solidarity amid our diversity.”<sup>2</sup>

This work of repentance is never complete, but here we commit to begin, by taking action to repair our relationship with our Muslim and Jewish siblings, even as we stand with them against the violence and fear they face today.




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<sup>2</sup> The Inter-religious Stance [of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)], p. 1, Introduction.  
<https://www.pcusa.org/resource/interreligious-stance-44700/>



# Denouncing Antisemitism

We live in a moment of sustained and rising violence directed toward Jews. The FBI has reported that 60.3% of hate crimes based on religious bias in 2019 in the United States were directed against Jews.<sup>3</sup> Antisemitic rhetoric and action has been seen in the White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville in 2017, the horrific massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018, in other shootings and assaults upon Jewish people and their property, and at the Capitol Building Insurrection of 2021.

Most of us can also recount such incidents in our own local communities, and many of us have Jewish friends or family who are increasingly afraid. Antisemitism exists on multiple levels, ranging from consistent, low-level aggression and negative stereotyping, to significant acts of violence against Jews, their religious communities, and their property. All of these forms of antisemitism are on the rise.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) condemns this evil, this sin, and the violence and contempt it generates. Further, Presbyterians recognize we are complicit in the roots and rise of antisemitism. This responsibility can be traced from our interpretations of Christian scripture, a history of violence against our Jewish siblings, and assumptions of Christian centrality and supremacy that continue into our present day.

Anti-Jewish sentiment and behavior by Christians is deeply rooted in problematic language in our holy scripture and in our confessions. For example, in the gospel of Matthew, after Pilate says that he is

“innocent of this man’s blood,” Matthew’s crowd responds, “His blood be on us and on our children!”<sup>4</sup> This one verse has been used for centuries to justify violence against Jews and to claim that Jews as a whole people throughout time are responsible for Jesus’ death.

Today, many Presbyterians remain unaware of the ways we have internalized antisemitic attitudes. Our assumptions of Christian superiority have rendered us unable to recognize our own biases and privileges. Even our well-meaning attempt to emphasize unity through an embrace of what we have called the “Judeo-Christian” tradition has subtly nurtured in us the problematic assumption that there is nothing particularly distinct about Jewish identity. An assumption of Christian supremacy is shown when Christians erroneously speak of the God of the New Testament being a God of love, and the God of Hebrew scripture (the Old Testament) being a God of wrath. The same God is represented in both.

Addressing the long history of antisemitism, and our current complicity in it, requires study, confession, and repentance. We desire to heal our broken relationships with our Jewish siblings, to make amends, and to stand with all those who are targeted with antisemitism in any form.



<sup>3</sup> US Dept. of Justice, Hate Crime Statistics, 2019  
<https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/topic-pages/incidents-and-offenses>

<sup>4</sup>Matthew 27:25, NRSV



# Defining Antisemitism

Expressions of antisemitism<sup>5</sup> change over time and any definition can be inflammatory in our political climate. Because of this, we have chosen to lift up two definitions in order to name and explore the complexity of antisemitism.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) defines antisemitism in this way: “The belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews.”<sup>6</sup>

One example of PC(USA) teaching prejudice and stereotypes about Jews is found in the development of Christian ideas of superiority over Jews. By the beginning of the third century, it became orthodox Christian teaching that the church had replaced the Jews as God’s chosen people because Jews had refused to accept Jesus as Messiah. The Second Helvetic Confession states, “But now, since Christ the true Messiah is exhibited unto us, and the abundance of grace is poured forth upon the people of The New Testament, the Sacraments of

the old people are surely abrogated and

have ceased; and in their stead the symbols of the New Testament are placed—Baptism in place of circumcision, the Lord’s Supper in place of the Paschal Lamb and sacrifices.”<sup>7</sup>

This sort of theology reinforces an idea of Christian superiority or Christian supremacy: that Christianity and Christians are right, normal, and good, while Jews are marginalized and stereotyped as misguided and wrong, or even as evil, dangerous, and worthy of being feared.

White supremacy also plays a role in contemporary antisemitism. This link is evident in recent shootings and other attacks on Jews by white supremacists. White supremacists target Jews as their common enemy, and yet, Jews are people of many races living around the world. White supremacist ideology includes antisemitic beliefs taken from medieval Christian antisemitism, claiming that Jews are an inferior race or don’t have “pure blood.” While antisemitism cannot be reduced only to racism, it has been intertwined throughout history with racism and white supremacy.

<sup>5</sup> In this report, we have chosen to use the unhyphenated form of antisemitism, with great care. The prior tradition of hyphenation reflected 19th century pseudoscience that created false racial categories, but the word has been consistently used to denote hostility and prejudice against Jews. This resource explains more. <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/antisemitism/spelling-antisemitism>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.adl.org/antisemitism>

<sup>7</sup> PC(USA) *Book of Confessions*, Second Helvetic Confession, 5.177



To understand antisemitism, we must also acknowledge how Jewish self-understanding is rooted in relationship to the land now called Israel and Palestine. For many Jews, their identity is tied to what we Presbyterians call the Holy Land. Their experience of being a people is shaped by their bonds to each other, to God and Torah (for those who are religious), and to a shared history in the land of Jewish ancestors.

To discuss the relationship of Jews to the land opens up a very complex and nuanced conversation among Jews and non-Jews about whether, or when, anti-Zionism reflects antisemitism. Some believe that criticism of Zionism is never antisemitic because it is criticism of a political system, regardless of Jewish involvement in that system. Others believe that criticism of Zionism implies criticism of the very existence of a Jewish homeland, and carries an embedded lack of concern for the survival and flourishing of the Jewish people (or worse, a desire for their destruction). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines anti-Zionism as “opposition to the establishment or support of the state of Israel.”<sup>8</sup> This is more than criticism of policies and practices, or forms of government. To some people, the definition of anti-Zionism is to be against the existence of Israel.

In March 2021, an international group of scholars in Jewish, Holocaust, Israel,

Palestine, and Middle East studies published the “Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism” (JDA). The declaration gives guidelines and examples for a nuanced and contextual identification of antisemitism that takes into account the speaker, the situation, and intention. One example is that an expression of hostility toward Israel could be antisemitic, could be “a reaction to a human rights violation, or it could be the emotion that a Palestinian person feels on account of their experience at the hands of the State.”<sup>9</sup>

The JDA defines antisemitism in this way:

Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility, or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish).<sup>10</sup>

Specifically in regard to Israel and Palestine, the JDA states that antisemitism includes “applying the symbols, images, and negative stereotypes of classical antisemitism to the State of Israel; holding Jews collectively responsible for Israel’s conduct ...; requiring people, because they are Jewish, publicly to condemn Israel or Zionism (for example at a political meeting); assuming that non-Israeli Jews ... are necessarily more loyal to Israel than to their own countries; denying the right of Jews in the State of Israel to exist and flourish, collectively and individually, as Jews, in accordance with the principle of equality.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anti-Zionism>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Preamble

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid



The JDA also lists five actions that they do not deem to be antisemitic “on the face of it.” Some of these will get widespread agreement among Presbyterians, such as “supporting the Palestinian demand for justice and full grant of their political, national, civil, and human rights” and “evidence-based criticism of Israel as a state.”

Another example of things that are not antisemitic on the face of it is criticizing or opposing Zionism “as a form of nationalism,” or advocating for different forms of government (“two states, a binational state, unitary democratic state, federal state, or in whatever form.”) Boycott, divestment, and sanctions are also acknowledged by the JDA as “commonplace, non-violent forms of political protest against states,” that are not antisemitic on the face of it.

Any of their examples of things that are not antisemitic “on the face of it” can become antisemitic if they include language or images or actions that are antisemitic. Looking at context, patterns, the intention of the speaker, and the general guidelines about antisemitism can help identify when a line is crossed. The general guidelines include making sweeping generalizations and stereotypes about Jews, which could be presented through words (wealthy, stingy, unpatriotic, source of evil or disease) or through images. These antisemitic ideas and images can be explicit or suggestive of stereotypes. For example, “portraying Israel as the ultimate evil or grossly exaggerating its actual influence can be a coded way of racializing and stigmatizing Jews.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

“The Zionists” then take the place of “the Jews” in the stereotyped images.

Presbyterians have repeatedly affirmed our conviction that the State of Israel has a right to exist as a homeland for Jews, providing a safe haven for all Jewish people, as we also advocate for national self-determination and safety of the Palestinian people, including Palestinian refugees. Presbyterians have spoken out repeatedly to condemn the actions of the government of Israel in the occupation of Palestinian land and the consistent abuse of the fundamental human rights of Palestinians. Palestinians have lost their land and their homes, the land and homes of their parents, their grandparents, and their ancestors. The Occupation and Israeli Settlement expansion into Palestinian territory increases Palestinian suffering. It is urgent to critique human rights abuses that are happening through the policies and practices of the government of Israel and it is possible to do so without questioning Israel’s right to exist, and without using antisemitic language and stereotypes.

It is right that Presbyterians call the government of Israel to live up to its democratic ideals. It is right that Presbyterians denounce antisemitism whenever and wherever we see it. We can do both. We make a commitment to study, confess, repent, and repair wounds we have caused.





# Denouncing Islamophobia

We live in a moment of sustained and rising violence directed toward Muslims. From the Crusades in the Middle Ages to the transatlantic slave trade to European colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries, Western Christians have a long history of targeting Muslim populations with hostility and violence in the name of empire. Much of the violence and instability in the Middle East arising from U.S. foreign policy and militarism since the end of World War II, including the war on terror, can be viewed as the continuation of Western imperialism and the anti-Muslim prejudice upon which it historically has been predicated.

The PC(USA) condemns Islamophobia as evil, as sin, and denounces the violence and contempt it generates. Further, Presbyterians recognize that we are complicit in the rise of Islamophobia, and in its ongoing presence. We are called by God to confess we are part of a history of Islamophobia that has contributed to pain experienced by our Muslim siblings. We desire to heal our broken relationships with them, to make amends, and to stand with all those who are targeted with intolerance and hatred because of their identity as Muslims.

Islamophobia in the United States cannot be divorced from the events of 9/11 and the violent reactions to it, leading to wars throughout the Middle East and the refugee crisis. The roots of Islamophobia are, however, much older: beginning with the expansion of Islam throughout the Middle East and the reaction it provoked

in Europe, most notably in the violence of the Crusades during 1095–1291. These wars against Islam in the Holy Land were started by the Church and fought by Christians against Muslims. They, too, are part of our faith history as Christians. While in many countries, Muslims and Christians are no longer at war, overt and ongoing conflict continues between them in Northern Nigeria, parts of East Africa, Indonesia, and beyond. Elsewhere, the uneasy competition between these two Abrahamic siblings continues in many subtle and obvious ways. Whether conflict is fresh or historic, the memories of violence and mistrust remain and show up in various stereotypes about Islam that circulate prominently in American Christian circles, even today, claiming that Islam is uniquely and inherently violent, intolerant, monolithic, or misogynistic.

Many would suggest that Islamophobia is rooted primarily in ignorance. While ignorance of Islam is widespread, understanding Islamophobia mainly through a lens of ignorance has limitations. We too often assume Islamophobia can be fixed through education of well-meaning individuals. However, the root of the problem is actually far deeper and systemic, and hardwired into the political and legal systems of this country that are woven through with prejudice. Much of Islamophobia in the United States today is manufactured intentionally for political and financial gain. Since 9/11, these include detentions, deportations,



extraordinary extraditions, torture, registration systems (NSEERS), profiling, law enforcement surveillance, counter-terrorism programs, the Muslim ban, and anti-Sharia legislation. All of these actions are fueled by Islamophobia and result in systemic discrimination against Muslims.

Anti-Muslim attitudes and actions among Christians have deep theological roots. Where Christians understand Jesus to be the Child of God and therefore indistinguishable from God's very being, Muslims understand Jesus as a Holy Prophet, just as they do Abraham and Moses before him. Further, Mary the mother of Jesus is revered among many Muslims as an example of piety and faith. But the belief among Muslims that God's truest revelation came in the Qur'an, through the Prophet Muhammad some 600 years after the death of Jesus, is deeply problematic for Christians. For Muslims, it is the Holy Qur'an—not Jesus—that is the final, definitive revelation of God. Christians and Muslims have not always been able to appreciate the contrasts of our beliefs as a shared opportunity to explore our different understandings of God's revelation. On the contrary, throughout our history our theological differences have deepened the divides between us, and, in part, provided the basis for the centuries of violence between us.

Another source of tension between Christians and Muslims is competition with one another. Both Christian and Muslim leaders have, at times, proclaimed their respective traditions to be the only legitimate path to God. This competition has often been tragically violent. Misconceptions about one another, especially those by Christians that stereotype all Muslims as violent pursuers of a militarized jihad, has deepened the divide between us. It will take committed action to understand this history and heal the wounds we have created.

Many North American Christians have not chosen to learn about Islamic beliefs and history. Islam emerged in the Arabian peninsula six centuries after the birth of Christianity. Islam has sometimes been interpreted as irrelevant to Christian beliefs and practices, or even hostile to Christianity. And yet, Muslims see Christians and Jews as fellow "People of the Book," recognizing a bond between these three religions that we, too, can claim and learn from. Our ignorance about Islam and our history with Muslims has led some Christians to see all Muslims as a threat. This has led to both widespread acts of violence and to individual acts of hatred.



# Defining Islamophobia

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) defines Islamophobia as:

a fear, hatred, or prejudice toward Islam and Muslims that results in a pattern of discrimination and oppression. Islamophobia creates a distorted understanding of Islam and Muslims by transforming the global and historical faith tradition of Islam, along with the rich history of cultural and ethnic diversity of its adherents, into a set of stereotyped characteristics most often reducible to themes of violence, civilizational subversion, and fundamental otherness. Islamophobia must also be understood as a system of both religious and racial animosity that is perpetrated by private citizens as well as cultural and political structures.<sup>13</sup>

CAIR names the ways Islamophobia in our time is shaped by both popular culture and the media, and finds its power in state policies of discrimination and prejudice. Islamophobia occurs on both an individual and internalized level and on a widespread level. This includes attacks upon mosques and Muslim people and anti-Muslim legislation that limits civil rights. They note four ways in which Islamophobia can be identified in organizations or individuals:

1. If they allege that Islam and Muslims are inherently or uniquely violent, misogynistic, inferior, intolerant, primitive, static, authoritarian, homophobic, manipulative, self-righteous, devious, or that Islam is the antithesis of civilization;
2. If they allege that Islam is an existential threat to the U.S. and/or the 'West' and that Muslims, or their representative institutions, are part of a plot to overthrow the 'West' or America;
3. If they support unequal treatment under the law for Islam or Muslims; and
4. If they allege that violent groups which falsely and perversely claim a religious cover possess the correct understanding of Islam.<sup>14</sup>

A recent survey of a cross section of U.S. Muslims, conducted by the Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of 9/11, reveals how Islamophobia is experienced today. The survey can be found [here](#)<sup>15</sup> and is recommended for further study. In particular, we note that three-quarters of total respondents reported experiences of Islamophobia, with Muslim women particularly affected.

A second definition of Islamophobia comes from the Haas Institute at UC Berkeley:

Islamophobia is the belief that: Islam is a monolithic religion whose followers, called Muslims, do not share common values with other major faiths; is inferior to Judaism and Christianity; is archaic, barbaric, and irrational; is a religion of violence that supports terrorism; and is a violent political ideology. Islamophobia forms the basis of an ideology that views Muslims as a threat to 'Western' civilization. Further, Islamophobia is

<sup>13</sup> Islamophobia 101, <https://islamophobia.org/research/islamophobia-101/>

<sup>14</sup> Cair's 2019 Islamophobia report, *Hijacked by Hate*. <https://ca.cair.com/losangeles/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2019/05/CAIR-Islamophobia-Report.pdf>, pp. 10–13.

<sup>15</sup> Islamophobia through the Eyes of Muslims, Assessing Perceptions, Experiences, and Impact, 2021, The Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, formerly the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2021-10/Islamophobia%20Through%20the%20Eyes%20of%20Muslims.pdf>



contingent upon the construction and reification of a homogenized Muslim 'other' who should be viewed suspiciously, scrutinized, dehumanized, and excluded from Western or Judeo-Christian societies. Islamophobia has been expressed in prejudicial views, discriminatory language, and acts of verbal and physical violence inflicted upon Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim. Islamophobia has manifested in a policing regime that engages in the profiling, surveillance, torture, and detention of people along racial/ethnic and religious lines, and has justified the militarization of foreign policy ...

This definition is accompanied by [a study](#)<sup>16</sup> of recent examples of Muslim views being seen as a threat to Western civilization, leading to the rise of anti-Sharia law in state legislatures.

Presbyterians recognize that incidents of Islamophobia often depend upon institutionalized racism and systems of white supremacy that have thrived in our society. The link between the two is clearly evident in racist attacks on mosques and Muslim community centers by white supremacists. Like other forms of racism, Islamophobia is often driven by misuse of Christian symbols and Christian scripture.

We invite all in our Presbyterian family into a path of self-examination, repentance, and renewal in our relationships with Muslim people. We confront our assumptions of Christian superiority and our prejudice against Muslims and Islam. In this time, in which Islamophobia continues to threaten our Muslim siblings, we confess the harm we have done and offer genuine repentance through actions that begin to repair this relationship. We are determined to work with our Muslim siblings for a world in which they are not at risk or afraid.




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<sup>16</sup> *Legalizing Othering, The United States of Islamophobia*, Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, 2017





# Working to Repair Our Relationships with Jewish and Muslim People



## *A Practical Guide*

We as Presbyterians recognize that our willingness to confess our complicity in antisemitism and Islamophobia must be matched by our active and intentional efforts to stand with—and in defense of—our Jewish and Muslim siblings. We do this every day, and especially in this time when both antisemitism and Islamophobia are on the rise globally and in our own country. The time for Christians to speak out boldly and act decisively on behalf of our Jewish and Muslim siblings is now.

Congregations and councils are invited to participate in a time of study and reflection by taking the following actions:

### **1. Establish honest, respectful, and healthy relationships with our Jewish and Muslim neighbors and friends.**

*Churches are encouraged to:*

- Develop (deeper) relationships with Muslim and Jewish people through dialogues, dinners, youth encounters, food banks, refugee resettlement, and so on, in partnership with mosques, temples, and other organizations.
- Learn to appreciate Muslim daily piety in dress, prayer, and food, and consider how it anchors and shapes their daily life. Learn to appreciate the unique practices and rituals of our Jewish siblings and how this anchors and shapes their daily life.
- Listen closely to Jewish and Muslim friends and leaders, especially when they carefully name assumptions, attitudes, or behavior of ours that they find thoughtless, hurtful, or destructive of our common commitment to mutuality and friendship.
- Learn about the love of and respect for Jesus, Mary, and the prophets that is prominent in the Qur'an. Learn to respect the uniqueness of the Hebrew scriptures and their interpretation by rabbis, and denounce theologies of replacement

that Christians have taken from the New Testament.

### **2. Stand publicly with Muslims when they are targeted because of their Muslim identity. Stand publicly with Jews when they are targeted because of their Jewish identity.**

*Churches are encouraged to:*

- Participate in and/or initiate public inter-religious expressions of unity, mourning, and thanksgiving, as demonstrations of solidarity.
- Speak out immediately and boldly against words and behavior that are anti-Muslim or anti-Jewish. It is important to act both in private and public solidarity with our Muslim and Jewish neighbors, especially when they are the victims of Islamophobia and antisemitism.
- Refuse to participate in the condemnations of all Muslims for the extreme actions of a few. Refuse to participate in the condemnations of all Jews, particularly when connected to a critique of the State of Israel. Renounce violence against Jews that is done in reaction to Israeli actions.
- Show up prepared to offer a litany, prayer, or other public statements when requested, but do so with the purpose of supporting others rather than calling attention to ourselves.



**3. Learn about the history of Christian antisemitism and Islamophobia, and the historic relationship between Presbyterians, Muslims and Jews, and teach about this in our churches.**

*Churches are encouraged to:*

- Learn from historical sources, mission co-workers, ecumenical partners and interfaith friends, and, most important, from Muslims and Jews themselves about the many complex histories with Christians over the centuries, around the world, and in the United States.
- Learn and teach about the violence that Christians have perpetrated against Jews since the beginning of Christianity itself, and against Muslims from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, continuing on through the Crusades and the Inquisition, through pogroms and forced conversions, through the holocaust and into contemporary times.
- Take responsibility when someone misuses Christian scripture or teachings to justify violent actions. Confront the misuse and publicly offer corrections to such teachings.
- Study the connections between antisemitism and Islamophobia and white supremacy in our country, both historically and in the present.

**4. Learn about Christian scriptural and Presbyterian theological foundations of antisemitism and Islamophobia.**

*Churches are encouraged to:*

- Learn about, confess, and repent of the theologies that have been used to justify violence and hatred against Jews and Muslims.
- Explore occasions for open exchange and dialogue with Jews about our shared scriptural texts, Rabbinic and Christian interpretations, as well as practices and traditions of faith.
- Explore occasions for open exchange and dialogue with Muslims about the Qur'an, and learn about the Prophet Muhammad who received that scripture from God.
- Look with honesty at ourselves, and understand how part of the enmity between Christians and Muslims and Jews in North America is due to Christian arrogance about our own understanding of God and scripture, and our ignorance about Muslim and Jewish theologies and practices.

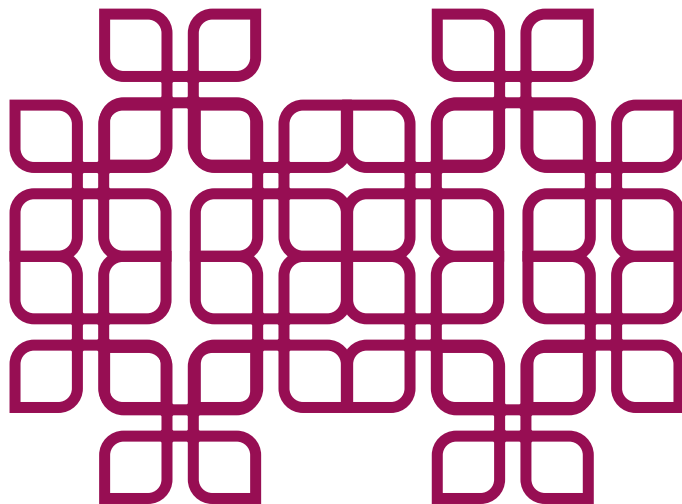


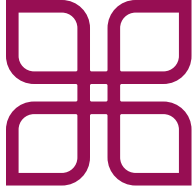
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## Part 2

### **Additional Resources**

1. A Public Litany
2. Biblical and Confessional Grounding
3. Foundations of Christian Antisemitism
4. Foundations of Christian Islamophobia





## A Public Litany

(for moments when we stand with others against acts of antisemitism or Islamophobia)

A public litany to be offered by Christians in moments of shared mourning, witness and protest when violence is perpetrated against Jews, Muslims, or any children of God – by which we mean all people – when they are targeted because of their religious identity or their perceived religious identity.

In addition to offering to bring a litany, consider co-creating a public litany with our neighbors of other faiths, so that we do not place Christian experience as the focus in a multi-faith event.

### **As Christians, we confess our complicity:**

O God, as Christian believers we confess to you that we have long tilled the soil of mistrust and fear of those who come to you by a different path, that we ourselves have too often sown the seeds of hatred, and carried out unspeakable violence against those of other religious traditions. We recognize and confess our responsibility for the violence that is on the rise around the world and here in our own community. We have sinned against you in our assumption that only we can fully know you. In the face of acts designed to sow mistrust and fear among us, we turn to you in humility and prayer.

### **As Christians, we ask for forgiveness:**

O God, we turn to you in shame for the times when we have been silent when you desired us to speak out, and when we have instead averted our eyes from the pain and sorrow and the tremendous risk experienced by your people who come to you through other religious traditions. We depend on your steadfast love and mercy to sustain us as we open our own souls to examine the violence that we carry within us. As broken people who desire to be better, we ask for your forgiveness, O God.

### **And to our siblings of other traditions, we say to you that we repent...**

We repent for the harm we have caused you who are made in God's image and who are a part of God's family. We commit to you that our repentance will be an ongoing act of self-examination. We pledge to stand with you in this moment, and in the times to come, when you are targeted because of who you are or what you believe as God's beloved family.

### **And having confessed our sin, asked for forgiveness from God and taken the first steps of repentance before the people of God, we invite all present to pray with us:**

God who mourns with us...

### **We come to you in different ways, but we pray to you with one voice**

God who comforts us...

### **We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

God who gives us the strength to endure...





**We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

God who gives voice to our outrage...

**We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

God who desires to see all people flourish and be made whole...

**We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

God who stirs us to reach out to one another...

**We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

God who calls us out when we hide our eyes from violence...

**We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

God whose anger against injustice cannot be pacified...

**We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

God who desires that we draw near to one another in times of sorrow...

**We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

God whose mercy endures forever...

**We pray to you as one people, with one voice**

Together, with one voice, we come to you:

**Help us find strength together to build a beloved community in which we share beautiful visions with one another.**

Let us read together from Hebrew Scripture:

***“All people may take refuge in the shadow of God’s wings. They shall again live beneath God’s shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.” (Hosea 14:7)***

Let us read together from the Qur’an:

***“Had God willed, He would have made you a single community, but He wanted to test you regarding what has come to you. So compete with each other in doing good. Every one of you will return to God and He will inform you regarding the things about which you differed.” (Qur’an 5, 48)***

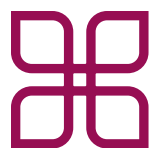
Let us read together from the New Testament:

***“Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.” (1 Peter 3:8)***

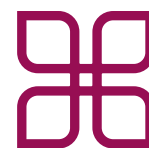
Together, with one voice, as God’s family made in God’s image, we say:

**Amen.**





## Biblical and Confessional Grounding for Our Commitment to Combat Antisemitism and Islamophobia



### ***An Explanatory Preface: Why A Combined Study Document***

The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations offers the Study Document on Denouncing Antisemitism and Islamophobia with two unique and yet interrelated parts: a denouncement of Antisemitism, and a denouncement of Islamophobia. We have, through helpful consultation with our interfaith and ecumenical partners, carefully and thoughtfully considered whether to present a single study document, or two distinct documents. Presenting two distinct documents would have protected against conflating the particular identities of Jewish and Muslim persons and our unique relationship with each. We also recognize that the harm experienced by each community is not the same. Yet presenting a single document recognizes our common complicity as Presbyterians with both Antisemitism and Islamophobia, and protects against repenting of only one, to the exclusion of the other. Holding together these two concerns, we have presented a single document with two distinct parts. The document, in its singular nature, voices our shared commitment to repentance for the sins of Antisemitism and Islamophobia. We as Presbyterians have a singular call to repent of and make repair for the harm we have caused both communities.

### ***Image of God***

All people are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). God's image is reflected in those of all faiths, and those who claim no religious connections. The Confession of 1967 states that "God has created the peoples of the

earth to be one universal family" (9.44a) and that God is always working to break down barriers of oppression. Our belief that we are divine image-bearers to one another grounds our efforts to combat antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Hospitality is the act of recognizing the image of God in others. As Christians, we welcome the stranger. We are blessed and not threatened by difference. We are called to provide nourishment, care, and protection to all. We seek to love and serve as Jesus loved and served, to all people in all places.

Genesis 18:1-13 tells the story of Sarah and Abraham being visited by strangers, and names that in the act of providing hospitality they were welcoming God. Hospitality is a theme throughout Hebrew scripture, which Christians call the Old Testament, most clearly expressed in Leviticus 19:33: "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love [them] as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This refrain echoes throughout the rest of Christian scripture. Throughout the history of God's people, refusal of hospitality to those who traveled through the land was a matter of life and death.

### ***Repentance of Sin***

Sin takes many forms. Our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) constitution defines sin as what is contrary to the nature and law of God (Westminster 6.082), the enforced separation of people

on a racial basis (Belhar 10.5), the violation of the image of God in others and ourselves (A Brief Statement of Faith 11.3), and the



human habits of idolatry and tyranny (F-2.05, W-3.0205), among many others.

In the parable of the Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 25: 31-46, we hear about Jesus' remarkable vision of hospitality, as he encourages his followers to do all they can in welcoming the stranger. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me..." Jesus insisted. And when his listeners asked him "when, Lord, did we see you a stranger and welcome you?" he responded "truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

As Presbyterians in the United States, we have often failed to see the unique lives of our Jewish siblings, just as we have often not recognized the rich and nuanced lives of our Muslim siblings. We have accepted stereotypes and generalizations as truth. Our historical confessions have too often caused pain to those who are Jewish or Muslim, and limited what we are capable of imagining about God and our neighbor (Second Helvetic Confession 5.014, 5.019, 5.176, 5.225). We recognize in ourselves the sins of antisemitism, Islamophobia, nationalism, racism, and Christian dominance that we ourselves have perpetuated.

We confess before God and our neighbor the sins of antisemitism and Islamophobia. In the spirit of the Westminster Confession of Faith, we speak of our sin very specifically: "[People] ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every [person]'s duty to endeavor to repent of [their] particular sins, particularly" (6.085). We have expressed a well-intentioned desire for the followers of the faiths that claim Hagar, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Leah, and Rachel as founding ancestors to

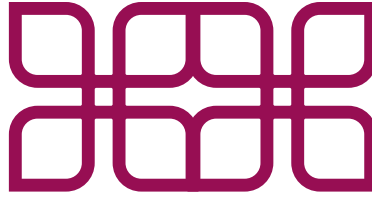
find common ground, but have failed to acknowledge histories and theologies of harm that have led to the wounding divisions between us. We have been silent in the face of white supremacy and Christian dominance, Christian supremacy, even as they continue to cause so much harm to our Jewish and Muslim siblings. We have relied upon the power of our nation (Barmen 8:23-24) rather than the power of our Creator to shape our imagination of other people. Our sin injures not only our Jewish and Muslim siblings, but we ourselves, and God as well (Westminster 6.096).

### ***Well-Being for All***

It is with hope for the forgiveness and repair possible with God that we confess the damage our belief in Christian superiority has created. As Presbyterian Christians, we are an Easter people. When Jesus arose from the dead, Thomas needed to touch his wounds to believe new life was possible (John 20:24-28). Jesus responded not with rebuke, but instead with hospitality. The peace Jesus spoke to his disciples was no superficial greeting; it was wrought through the touching of his resurrected body's wounds. So, too, does peace with our Jewish and Muslim siblings require attention to wounds -- especially those we have caused -- even as we bear witness to the promise of new life.

Stanley Samartha, a Christian theologian from India, names an important gifting of the Spirit needed for this repentant, hospitable work, writing, "As we live together with our neighbours, what we need today is a theology that refuses to be impregnable, but which, in the Spirit of Christ, is both ready and willing to be vulnerable."





# The Foundations of Christian Antisemitism

## Anti-Jewishness and Christian Supremacy in our Sacred Text and Confessions of Faith

Anti-Jewish feelings and behaviors by Christians are deeply rooted in problematic language in our most sacred text. We raise our children on stories recited during our own highest of Holy Days each Good Friday and Easter that, when read simplistically and without an awareness of the context in which these stories were written, sow suspicion, prejudice, and dangerous acts against our Jewish siblings. These scriptures have been used to create an idea of Christian superiority or Christian supremacy-- the idea that Christianity and Christians are always right, true, normal and good, while Jews are marginalized and stereotyped as evil and dangerous, and worthy of being feared.

For example, the gospel according to Matthew is understood to be written to a largely Jewish community within which Jewish followers of Jesus were in conflict with those who did not follow Jesus. The bond between the community of Jews and those who came to be called Christians was broken. Given this conflict, the gospel paints a picture of Jews and Jewish leaders as hypocrites, liars, and murderers. In Matthew, Jesus refers to the synagogues as “their” synagogues, which creates greater distance between his own Jewish followers and Jews who did not follow him. When the Pharisees and Sadducees test Jesus by asking for a sign, Jesus calls them “an evil and adulterous generation” (Matt 16: 1-4). In Matthew 3:7, Jesus specifically calls the Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of vipers,

and in 12:34 he calls them evil. “You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil?” In Matthew 23, after a long list of accusations and renunciations of Pharisees and Sadducees (seven “woes”), Jesus asks them, “How will you escape being condemned to hell?” (23:33b)

Matthew is the only gospel in which the crowds calling for Jesus’s crucifixion claim responsibility for his death. After Pilate says that he is “innocent of this man’s blood,” Matthew’s crowd responds, “His blood be on us and on our children!” (Matthew 27:25) This one verse, referred to as the “blood curse,” has been used for centuries to claim that Jews as a whole people throughout time are responsible for Jesus’s death. This idea is lodged in the Scots Confession, part of our *Book of Confessions*, where it states, “[Satan] has incited cruel murderers to persecute, trouble, and molest the true Kirk [church] and its members, as Cain did to Abel, Ishmael to Isaac, Esau to Jacob, and the whole priesthood of the Jews to Christ Jesus himself and his apostles after him.” (Chapter XVIII,3.18) Even today, for too many Christians, this ideology provides a rationale for violence and genocide against Jewish people.

Such problematic language in our sacred text has laid the foundation for Christian bias and violence against Jews. By the beginning of the third century, it became standard Christian teaching that the Christian church



had replaced the Jews as God's chosen people, because Jews had refused to accept Jesus as Messiah. This includes the idea that Jews are cursed by God and are no longer in covenant with God. Such thinking lies behind the Second Helvetic Confession's claim that the sacraments of communion and baptism replace earlier Jewish rituals: "But now, since Christ the true Messiah is exhibited unto us, and the abundance of grace is poured forth upon the people of The New Testament, the Sacraments of the old people are surely abrogated and have ceased; and in their stead the symbols of the New Testament are placed--Baptism in place of circumcision, the Lord's Supper in place of the Paschal Lamb and sacrifices" (5.177).

Presbyterians have since repeatedly rejected the idea of Christian replacement of Jews, looking instead to our connections with the Jewish people. We reaffirm with Presbyterians in the Confession of 1967 that "Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys and sorrows." (C67 9:08) Our Reformed theological tradition emphasizes the steadfast nature of God's love and promises. We see this affirmed in Romans 11, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew,"... "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:2, 29) In *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews*, adopted for study by the PC(USA) in 1987, we stated that, "We affirm that the church, elected in Jesus Christ, has been engrafted into the people of God established by the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, Christians have not replaced Jews."

Recognizing that antisemitic ideas are embedded in our scriptures and our confessions, Presbyterians have a responsibility to understand and to teach the histories of such texts. Christian supremacy also leads to Christian symbols, prayers, beliefs, traditions, and holidays being assumed to be the norm for everyone. It is important that we offer contemporary theology, biblical studies, and liturgy to affirm

the ongoing covenant between the Jewish people and God, as well as our spiritual kinship with, and respect for, Jewish faith and life.

### ***A History of Violence Against Our Jewish Siblings***

Many Christians are ignorant about the truth that Christians have brought unspeakable violence upon Jews for over 2000 years, since the beginning of Christianity itself. Early echoes of that violence appear in the writings of Justin Martyr in the second century and continue through the angry sermons of John Chrysostom in the wake of Constantine's decision to make Christianity a religion of the State. (See *Fordham University Ancient Wisdom Sourcebook*). Then, there was the murder of Jews during the Crusades and the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290 and from France in 1306. In 1391, in the midst of mass killings of Jews in the Spanish cities of Seville, Cordoba, Valencia, and Barcelona, many Jews were forced to convert to Christianity to save their lives.

The Spanish Inquisition began in 1478, and in 1492 all Jews who had not converted were expelled from Spain by the *Alhambra Decree* from the Christian monarch. The property and wealth stolen from Jews who fled financed much of the conquest of the Americas. This directly linked antisemitism to the genocide of indigenous peoples across North, Central, and South America, and the advent of the transatlantic slave trade. The Spanish Inquisition later targeted those Jews who had earlier converted to Christianity, accusing them of heresy, or of secretly practicing Judaism, and subjecting them to torture and death. Blood purity (*Limpieza de sangre*) statutes made discrimination legal against the descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity.

Just decades later, in his treatise *On The Jews and Their Lies* (1543), Martin Luther encouraged people to burn Jewish schools and synagogues, destroy their prayer books, prevent their rabbis from teaching, and to



take their homes and their money, only to be given back if they converted to Christianity. Anti-Jewish thinking continued among many Protestant theologians over the following centuries in Europe and North America. In 1799, Friedrich Schleiermacher, the Prussian Reformed theologian and a founder of Protestant liberal theology, wrote that “Judaism is long since a dead religion, and those who at present still bear its colors are actually sitting and mourning beside the undecaying mummy and weeping over its demise and sad legacy.”

Anti-Jewish pogroms (mass killings of Jews), already happening in Western Russia and Eastern Europe, increased dramatically in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as did the growth of deep Christian antisemitism in the churches, towns, and cities of France and Germany. As racially- based antisemitism reared its head, it laid the groundwork for the murder of two out of three European Jews during the Holocaust.

During the unspeakable horrors carried out in the name of white purity and supremacy by the Nazis in the Holocaust, some Christians stood up for their Jewish neighbors. Most people, however, ignored what was taking place, cowered in fear, or even embraced the ideology that led to the murder of six million Jews and five million others not deemed “pure” enough for the supremacist Aryan Nation. Following the Holocaust, many Presbyterian seminaries and their faculties responded, attempting to shape a new generation of pastors who would help the wider church to repent and make amends for our guilt in that history of anti-Jewishness.

The fear felt by our Jewish siblings in our time in the face of unchecked antisemitism is rational in light of our deeply problematic history. We would do well to listen to their righteous anger. Christians have either ignored or perpetuated the marginalizing, targeting and killing of Jews for our entire history. When Christians do not even know the antisemitism woven into our history, we are unable to come to our Jewish siblings with repentance, and seek repair for that history.

### ***White Supremacy: A Weapon of Antisemitism***

In the United States, Jews were historically seen as non-white. Among other injustices, they were prevented from purchasing homes in neighborhoods controlled by white covenants, excluded from membership in white clubs, and excluded from admittance into colleges. As the stereotypes and mythology about Jews shifted in the United States, conspiracy theories arose, suggesting that Jews were the secret organizers of the Civil Rights movement, for example, or that they controlled the media and manipulated social or political outcomes by financial means. These conspiracy theories and stereotypes have been used against Jews throughout history, especially in times of political instability and economic anxiety. Jews have been used as social scapegoats and it has led to repeated antisemitic violence.

The link between antisemitism and white supremacy is still clear today in recent shootings and other attacks on Jews by white supremacists. White supremacist ideology includes antisemitic beliefs that Jews are an inferior race or don’t have “pure blood.” Christian churches, including Presbyterians, share guilt in this because white supremacist organizations often co-opt Christian symbols and ideas as a foundation for their supremacist beliefs.

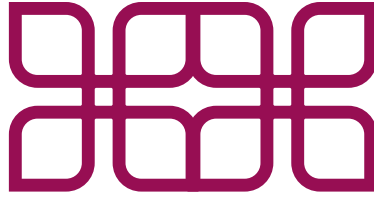
While white supremacists target Jews as their common enemy, Jews are people of many races. Ashkenazi Jews descend from Eastern and Central European ancestors, Sephardi Jews descend from Spanish speaking Jews who fled or were expelled from Spain and Portugal in 1492, while Mizrahi Jews descend from Jews of North Africa and the Middle East. Jews are people of many races living around the world. While antisemitism is not the same as racism, white supremacist ideas are nevertheless used as weapons of antisemitism, supporting hatred and violence.



White supremacy, as well as Christian supremacy, exists not just in the actions and ideas of individuals or particular groups. It operates at the level of basic social systems. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been guilty in viewing white experiences, world views, well-being, and theologies as normal, or as the standard, or as superior. Similarly, Christian supremacy is expressed when Christians speak of the God of the New Testament being a God of love, and the God of Hebrew Scripture (the Old Testament) being a God of wrath. The same God is represented in both.

This lifting up of Christian identity and white identity as superior leads to the unique lives of all people outside of those categories being oversimplified, misunderstood, stereotyped, marginalized, and even feared. Such action has a direct impact on our relationship with our Jewish siblings of all racial identities. Rather than seeing the image of God in others, our deep roots in these systems of white and Christian supremacy limit our vision until we see others only as a stereotype. We believe that, through repentance, honesty, and openness, we can begin to repair the ways white supremacy has wounded us, and others.





## The Foundations of Christian Islamophobia

### ***The Theological Roots of Christian Islamophobia***

Anti-Muslim attitudes and actions among Christians have deep theological roots. While Christians understand Jesus to be the Child of God and therefore indistinguishable from God's very being, Muslims understand Jesus as a Holy Prophet, just as they do Abraham and Moses before him. Mary the mother of Jesus is revered among many Muslims as an example of piety and faith, a respect shared by Christians. But the belief among Muslims that God's truest revelation came in the Qur'an, through the Prophet Mohammad some six hundred years after the death of Jesus, is deeply problematic for Christians. For Muslims, it is the Holy Qur'an - not Jesus - that is the final, definitive revelation of God. Christians and Muslims have rarely been able to recognize the sharp contrasts in our beliefs as an opportunity to explore our different understandings of God's revelation with one another. On the contrary, throughout our history our theological differences have created a sharp line of division and provided the basis for the centuries of violence between us. Ironically, perhaps, Muslims view Christians' inability to recognize the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad in much the same way that Christians' have historically viewed Jewish resistance to the understanding that Jesus is the Son of God.

Another source of tension between Christians and Muslims is that each of our traditions is in some sense both expansionist

and exclusivist. That is, both Christian and Muslim leaders have proclaimed their respective traditions to be the only legitimate path to God. Over the centuries, each has engaged in active, aggressive evangelization and sometimes even forced conversion. The effectiveness of the commitment to evangelism that they share is attested to in the reality that there are billions of Christians and billions of Muslims in the world today. In this way Christians and Muslims have often competed with one another, and this competition has often been tragically violent. A belief in Christian supremacy has contributed to this violence. We are called to remember our responsibility for that history, and to confess and take responsibility for growing violence against Muslims in our communities today.

### ***A History of Violence against Our Muslim Siblings***

While the 9/11 attacks inaugurated a new era of anti-Muslim discrimination and violence in and beyond the United States, such actions have roots dating back to the Middle Ages. The Crusades marked the beginning of extensive Christian violence targeting Muslims. The Christian armies that took control of Jerusalem in 1099 slaughtered almost all of the Muslims and Jews in the city. Ongoing conflict in the Holy Land persisted into the thirteenth century as Christians relied on theological justifications to carry out wars against Muslim kingdoms.





The Iberian Peninsula served as the stage for the Reconquista, or the conquering of Muslim states by Christian forces, which culminated in the fall of Granada to Isabella and Ferdinand in 1492. Remaining Muslim populations were subject to the persecution of the Spanish Inquisition, an effort by the Church starting in the late fifteenth century to root out heresy among Muslims and Jews who had been pressured to convert to Christianity. Like Jews, many Muslims were eventually expelled from Spain, while others were tortured and in some instances executed for failing to conform to the Christian orthodoxy set out by the Inquisition.

The Reformation did not counter Christian reliance on anti-Muslim theologies to justify violence against Muslims. A notable instance of this can be found in the writings of Martin Luther. In his treatise *On War against the Turk* (1528), Luther argued for a war against the Ottoman Empire by insisting that Islam is a religion that stems from the devil and that inherently promotes a doctrine of works and of violence.

The violent treatment of Muslims in the United States began with the transatlantic slave trade. Some historians estimate that approximately 30 percent of enslaved Africans were Muslims. White American slaveholders' hostility towards Islam was in no way transformed by the fact that many of their slaves were Muslim. In fact, colonial Americans often did not even recognize the presence of Islam amongst those whom they enslaved. Moreover, they punished the practice of Islam while promulgating a version of Christianity that taught subservience to the white "master" as obedience to God. As the Puritan minister Cotton Mather once noted: "We are afar off, in a Land, which never had (that I ever heard of) one Mahometan breathing in it."

On both sides of the Atlantic, violence against Muslim populations in the nineteenth and twentieth century often coincided with Western colonial expansion. The British and French empires, among others, justified the

imposition of imperial rule in Muslim-majority regions across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia by claiming that Christians were "civilizing" those they were dominating. The process of so-called civilizing routinely involved torture and violent suppression of those colonized.

After the end of the Second World War, the United States defended its own political and military involvement in the Middle East -- including its alliances with some authoritarian regimes -- within a Cold War framework that pitted a "God-fearing" America against "Godless" communism. Such alliances resulted in an increase in U.S. influence in the region along with financial benefits due to greater Western control over vital energy resources. Often, these policies came at the expense of Muslim populations seeking greater self-determination and freedoms in the face of oppressive regimes. The most prominent instance involved U.S. efforts to overthrow the democratically elected prime minister of Iran in 1953 in response to the Iranian government's decision to nationalize its oil resources. The United States subsequently gave its full support to the Shah, whose repressive rule resulted in torture, executions, and restrictions on freedom of religion and speech.

The ongoing War on Terror is a continuation of America's military and political interventionism in the Middle East. The war has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and in practices that have inflicted harm on Muslims in violation of human rights norms, including indefinite detentions, extraordinary renditions, and torture. In the midst of this violence, all too many American Christians have either remained silent or have actively advocated for policies that encourage fear, discrimination, and violence toward Muslims at home and abroad in the name of national security.



## ***Christian Complicity in Islamophobia Since 2001***

Islamophobia in the United States cannot be divorced from the events of 9/11 and the violent reactions to it, leading to ongoing wars throughout the Middle East and the refugee crisis. In the United States, the correlation between being anti-Muslim and not personally knowing a person who is Muslim is high. In the nearly two decades since the 9/11 attacks, political and religious leaders have used Islamophobia to fan the flames of fear and hatred of Muslims. As Christians with our own deeply rooted anti-Muslim attitudes and feelings, we have largely been silent as Islamophobia has become a tool overtly used to increase political power. We have too often been limited by our own prejudices and stereotypes, and have often silently stood by while those who wish to incite fear and hatred play up racist stereotypes of Muslims in order to maintain white power and Christian supremacy. Perhaps most significantly, we have failed to see the ways that this intentionally manufactured fear of Muslims fuels a larger narrative designed to protect and perpetuate white power and privilege in an ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse United States.

Many would suggest that Islamophobia is rooted primarily in ignorance, and too often assume that Islamophobia can be fixed through education of well-meaning individuals. However, the root of the problem is actually far deeper -- hardwired into the political and legal systems of this country that are woven through with prejudice. Much of Islamophobia in the United States today is manufactured intentionally for political and financial gain. A recent CAIR report noted that Islamophobia is a \$1.5 billion industry. It consists of organizations that purposefully push anti-Muslim narratives in order to shape both foreign and domestic policies and a war economy. These organizations, once on the fringes of the political right, are now directly or indirectly advising and

influencing the current political climate of the United States.

This gets to the heart of the structural challenges that undergird the reality of violence directed against Muslims in the United States today. Since 9/11, these policies and practices include detentions, deportations, extraordinary extraditions, torture, registration systems (NSEERS), profiling, law enforcement surveillance, counter-terrorism programs, the Muslim ban, and anti-sharia legislation. All of these actions result in systemic discrimination against Muslims that economically benefits some individuals and sectors of U.S. society.

### ***White Supremacy: A Weapon of Islamophobia***

In the United States, Muslims have been seen as foreigners and as a threat in our communities, even when they are U. S. citizens or their families have lived here for generations. They have been attacked for wearing culturally distinctive and religiously significant garments. White supremacist ideology sees them as not-white and lumps them together as all Arab people, not recognizing the richness of their diversity. The link between racism and Islamophobia is clearly evident in violent attacks on mosques and Muslim community centers by white supremacists. Christian churches, including Presbyterians, share guilt in this because white supremacist organizations often co-opt Christian symbols and ideas as a foundation for their supremacist beliefs.

Some people believe that Islamophobia cannot be understood as racism since Islam is not a race. While it is true that Muslims are people of many races and ethnicities, Muslims in the United States are often treated as a racial group and conceived of as a monolithic entity collectively presumed guilty of harboring violent and hostile tendencies. Because of this erasure of Muslim diversity, many Christians in the U.S. are shocked to learn that only thirty percent of Muslims worldwide are Arab or have roots in the Middle East.

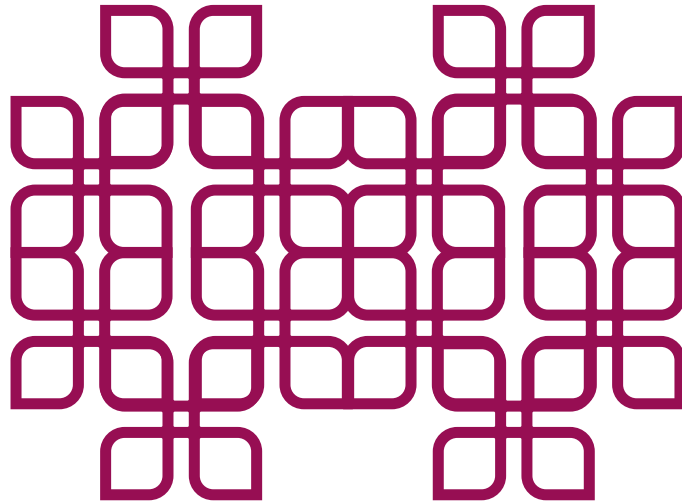


Stereotyping of Muslims is based on categories such as skin color and ethnicity, but is also a product of what some scholars call cultural racism, by which Muslims are assumed to possess inherent and unchangeable cultural or religious attributes that render them dangerous to majority populations. This racialization results in systemic discrimination, including surveillance, profiling, anti-sharia legislation, immigration bans, and registration systems, as mentioned above.

Many in our society believe that white supremacy is limited to fringe groups and individuals who openly promote ideas of white supremacy or nationalist identity. We imagine people who wear white robes, burn crosses, paint swastikas on buildings, post ugly memes on the internet, or target

Muslims in violent attacks or shootings. However, white supremacy is also embedded in conscious or subconscious beliefs that white experiences, world views, and theologies are the norm, the standard, or are superior. This has a direct impact on our relationship with our Muslim siblings when they are seen as non-white. When racism becomes a tool of Islamophobia in this way, the varied and diverse lives of Muslims are erased, misunderstood, and marginalized. Rather than seeing the image of God in our Muslim siblings, white supremacy and Christian supremacy places blinders on us that limit our field of vision so that all we can see in others is a stereotype, or a threat to be feared. We repent of this limited vision, and commit ourselves to the ongoing work of repentance and repair.





## **DENOUNCING ANTISEMITISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA**

A Study Document Approved by the  
225th General Assembly  
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*Produced by*  
The Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations  
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