

Recommended Action:

■ Differentiation training! Discussions involving Jews and antisemitism can touch on many different issues: from Israel/Palestine to National Socialism and even Wallstreet. The first rule to follow is: Whenever a sentence begins with “The Jews,” ask which Jews are actually meant, and at what time, at what place, and in what context. Generalizations should be pointed out and avoided.

■ Report on people’s life stories! The best way to familiarize yourself with different Jewish perspectives is to invite Jewish people to speak and tell their stories. Recent biographies, published in books and documented in films, are also helpful. We recommend books with short, well-written texts and photos, such as “So einfach war das. Jüdische Kindheit und Jugend in Deutschland nach 1945,” edited by Cilly Kugelman and Hanno Loewy, Dumont Verlag 2002, 12,90 €.

■ Take advantage of education programs and have arguments ready when engaging in discussions with anti-Semites. Being familiar with the argumentation patterns of the extreme right will give you an advantage and help you articulate your own positions more clearly. The BAGKR can help you find appropriate education programs.

■ Get involved. Discussions about Israel, the U.S., etc., often just distract from what is happening on your own front doorstep. What do we know about Jewish life where we live? What was it like here in the past, how is it today? Have there been antisemitic incidents in our own region, perhaps even in the recent past? Photos, texts, newspaper clippings, etc., can be documented in the community room of your church.

Useful Literature:

- Brähler, Elmar /Decker, Oliver /Kiess, Johannes und Weißmann, Marliese (2010): Die Mitte in der Krise, Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland 2010. Berlin.
- Küppers, Beate und Zick, Andreas (2011): Antisemitische Mentalitäten, Bericht über Ergebnisse des Forschungsprojektes Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit in Deutschland und Europa. Universität Bielefeld, Fakultät für Erziehungswissenschaft, Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung.

through their accomplishments and not because they are Jewish.

Recent publications of the extreme right that criticize globalization contain many positive references to the National Socialist concept of the alleged Jewish “money-grubbing capital” of banks – in contrast to the “hard-working capital” of the laborer and the “honest” German industrial capitalists. The extreme right juxtaposes the proliferation of capitalism with its contrived biological, homogenous, ethnic community. In its view, “good for nothings,” homeless people, “freeloaders” and people designated “unworthy of life” are not productive and therefore have no right to live in this “ethnic community.”

Antisemitism is not only expressed by the extreme right. It manifests itself in all strata of society. Israeli policies are often taken as an opportunity to promote anti-Jewish positions. Naturally, not every criticism of Israel or its government is antisemitic, but a line is overstepped when Israel is held to a double standard, is demonized or when its right to exist as a state is questioned.

Comparative claims such as “They are no better than Hitler” overlook the fact that Israeli policies have never aimed to entirely wipe out the Palestinian people. The Middle East conflict has sadly cost valuable human life on both sides. But in Germany the comparison is used to remove its own national responsibility for the crimes of the Holocaust. Equating Israeli policies with the Holocaust plays down the fact that the National Socialists systematically planned and executed the mass murder of the European Jews.

Antisemitic views are also communicated through the refusal to address the crimes of National Socialism.

According to a 2007 study by the Bertelsmann Founda-

tion, 58 percent of Germans supported “drawing a line” under the past. For decades the extreme right has tried to shift attention to the Germans as victims of the Second World War. It refers to the Allied bombing of Dresden on February 13, 1945, for example, as the “Bomb Holocaust,” in an effort to equate the victims of the Holocaust with the air-raid victims in Dresden.

Denying the crimes of the Wehrmacht and its involvement in antisemitic ethnic cleansing campaigns is just as antisemitic as denying the Holocaust. The extreme right presents the Holocaust as an “historical lie” concocted by the Allies and the Jews in an effort to take the “German people” hostage.



What can I do?

Any expression of antisemitism is incompatible with the Christian faith. This goes back to the very foundations of Christian faith: The Bible tells of God’s love for the Jewish people; the Old Testament is the foundation of Christian faith. By believing in Jesus, Christians share in God’s promise to the people of Israel. The mere fact that Jesus was himself Jewish obligates Christians to stand by Jews and to unambiguously condemn any form of antisemitism.

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KIRCHE & RECHTSEXTREMISMUS

HANDOUT #1

5 QUESTIONS ABOUT

Antisemitism



What is meant by the term “antisemitism”

Antisemitism is more than a “prejudice”. It also has social and political consequences for the people it targets. Hostility towards Jews and discrimination against them has not only been a phenomenon of Western civilization since antiquity. Early manifestations of antisemitism were religiously motivated, but later spread throughout the secular world, often finding expression in conspiracy theories.

At the core of antisemitism is the construct of alleged “races,” in which Jews, on the basis of real or assumed religious conviction or ethnic origins, are presented as “the other,” and portrayed alternately as inferior or extra powerful. This is accompanied by a belief in the existence of a supposed “Jewish world conspiracy.” The eliminationist antisemitism of National Socialism, which led to the Shoah and the murder of six million European Jews, is perpetuated today through the glorification, denial and relativization of the Holocaust. A modern form of antisemitism finds expression in the insistence on the illegitimacy of the State of Israel.

Antisemitism was at the very core of the National Socialist ideology. Today it remains a central feature of rightwing extremist thinking and is a formative ideological element of the extreme right. Many manifestations of antisemitism, however, can also be found within mainstream society. The fiction of a “world Jewry” controlling social processes and financial operations is an integral part of many people’s world view today.



What does antisemitism have to do with Christianity?

Anti-Judaism, and later antisemitism, is a common thread running through the doctrine and practice of Christianity. “The Jews” evasion of the “divine plan of salvation,” which recognizes Jesus Christ as the Messiah and as the world’s savior and redeemer, was understood by the majority of Christians as an attack on their own identity and faith. Because of their rejection of the Messiah and Christian doctrine, “the Jews” are perceived by many as a threat. That the Jews are already with the father, to whom the Christians have access only through Jesus Christ, is experienced as an affront. In the history of Christian antisemitism, all kinds of atrocities were attributed to “the Jews” at the beginning of the second millennium as a way to justify this hatred. These included the alleged poisoning of wells, murdering of children and desecration of the final supper. Although all of these accusations were proven false, they nevertheless led to waves of violence and pogroms against Jews.

Thus, in regard to antisemitism, the churches have no reason to sit back and point the finger at others. Being a member of the Church does not protect anyone from harboring rightwing extremist views, or for that matter, from antisemitism. Recent studies show that antisemitic resentment towards Jews and the State of Israel is more prevalent among people who describe themselves as religious – both Catholic and Protestant – than among the rest of the population (Küppers/Zick 2011: 45). To cite one example: 38.6 percent of the Protestant respondents said that they agree somewhat or fully with the statement that: “Jews today try to draw benefits from the history of the Third Reich” (ibid.: 46).

The extreme right’s typical hatred of Christianity is also charged with antisemitism. The extreme right criticizes Christianity for its Jewish roots – and it values – and blames it for having destroyed an alleged “natural” Germanic tribal society.



Does antisemitism still exist today?

Hostility towards Jews continues to exist in all strata of society. In this respect, the quote from August Bebel that “Antisemitism is the socialism of fools” also belittles the issue in that it attributes antisemitism to poor education and poverty and suggests that it subsides when the anti-Semites achieve financial comfort. This thesis has been repeatedly disproved by opinion polls, which show that respondents from middle class and bourgeois society are also antisemitic. Research on attitudes has shown that agreement with antisemitic statements continues to be widespread. For example, 17.2 percent of all Germans agree mostly or fully with the statement: “Jews still have too much [...] influence today” (Brähler/Decker/Kiess et al. 2010).

Although historically the term antisemitism is still linked to the Shoah, it is by no means a phenomenon of the past. According to an inquiry of the German Bundestag, police statistics recorded 873 criminal and violent acts related to antisemitism in the single year of 2010. Between 1990 and 2000, more than 471 Jewish cemeteries were vandalized in east and west Germany. The number of unreported incidents is believed to be much higher.



How is antisemitism expressed?

Antisemitism has many faces. It appears in antisemitic slogans in football stadiums as well as in insults. The invective “Hey Jew” has become commonplace in today’s schoolyards. Denial of the Holocaust is an integral part of the music, propaganda and events of the extreme rightwing milieu. During rightwing extremist marches, fantasies about annihilating Jews are openly expressed. The Berlin neo-Nazi band “White Aryan Rebels” wrote a song in 2002 with the line: “This bullet is for you, Michael Friedmann.” During the election for the Berlin parliament in 2011, the NPD hung campaign posters across from the Berlin synagogue with the slogan “Give Gas,” a cynical reference to the Holocaust.

Conspiracy theories are a typical outlet for current antisemitism. They often represent a variation on the traditional antisemitic theme of the “Jewish world conspiracy” which claims that “the Jews” are secretly controlling the world’s destiny. These kinds of irrational constructs are intended to provide simple answers to complex correlations, which many have difficulty understanding. This is the case, for example, when the “Jewish lobby” is declared the decisive determinant in American foreign policy. The financial world also draws the attention of anti-Semites. Neo-Nazis are not the only ones to use the term “the power of East Coast capital” to claim that the world’s largest stock market and the banks of New York are secretly controlled by Jews.

Conspiracy theories often do little more than conceal the personal inadequacies of those who spread them. And yet humans generally acquire important positions