

What initiated the recent flurry of CAPE COD TIMES letters to the editor was an editorial accusing my religion of the Holocaust. That had about as much truth-content as accusing Jews' religion of the Crucifixion. I blamed the paper for not helping Christians & Jews get beyond the blame game.

1 In his National Religious Freedom Day '94 speech, Al Gore rued that "killing in the name of religion" persists "all over the world." The 24 Jan 94 TIMES lead editorial commented "it's impossible to imagine a world at peace until the potential for religious warfare is erased." Gore stated a world-historical fact: the editorial preached the American dogma of "the primacy of individual conscience" (Jefferson's religion "lies solely between man and his God").

2 From the dogma, two dubious inferences have been drawn: (1) Religion ought to stay out of politics (either because it's too important or because it's politically insignificant); (2) To point out religious differences is politically incorrect. Numerous responses to my Jan.5 TIMES letter spanked me for even mentioning Christian/Jewish differences: I sinned against "political correctness." But under an omerta-like code of silence, the costs to truth & amity are too high. The God of truth & love calls us to honest dialog beyond mutual blaming.

3 Who profits when we Jews & Christians blame each other? Those who are happy to see us at each other & to hear bad news about either of us. The infidels (ie, devotees of religions other than ours). The antireligious (ie, militant secularists). For Christians' blaming Jews/Judaism adds to the cesspool of antisemitism, Jews' blaming Christians/Christianity adds to the cesspool of antichristianism. And our enemies delight to draw poisons from both cesspools.

4 The body of good materials for Jewish/Christian dialog is increasing. Honest discussion of, eg, "Shoah" & "Shindler's List" can help us get beyond thin-skinned hurt & blaming--a matter of maturity, for thin is the only skin we come naturally equipped with....The resistances to mature dialog? (1) **Defensiveness** vis-a-vis awkward realities on our side. Civility, justice, tolerance are not served when one group's awkward facts are remarked but not the other group's. Only mutual repentance can move us beyond mutual blaming. (2) **Compassionism**, the reverse of defensiveness. To underdogs (minorities), topdogs (majorities) say, with feelings of guilt & shame, "Bite me again." Some masochism, more masked self-righteousness. Beware! (3) **Extremism**, the emotional preference for inauthentic simplicity over against realistic complexity & ambiguity. (4) **Fear**, as detailed in my letter (above). And of course (5), **indifference**.

Fear clouds Jewish-Christian dialogue

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The orthodox, conservative, and reform rabbis who studied with me, an old teacher in* Hebrew, would be surprised at the recent Times letters accusing me of anti-Semitism. The reason for the low reality-and-fairness content in current Jewish-Christian dialogue is fear, the fear of being called anti-Semitic if you plead for more reality and fairness.

And of course the fear of being misunderstood. On hot-button topics, most people have a diminished capacity to reason: The heat blows their minds. As I often address hot-button topics, I'm often misunderstood. It's part of the price of democratic discourse, and I'm willing to pay it.

Then there's the fear of being understood. That can be worse for one's reputation than being misunderstood. For being understood when one is taking an unpopular stand may lead to confrontation, which most people fear.

All in all, it's easy to see why some people, and even nations, prefer silence to speech, even though the silence may lead to violence, the only alternative to reasoned discourse, the life-blood of diplomacy and democracy.

None of the published letters against my Jan. 5 letter recognizes my letter's context as a response to a Times editorial that brought up the economic factor

in the persecution of Jews and overrated Christian theology as a factor. And none of them mentioned any of the following data in my letter -- data often suppressed in the interest of politeness, but necessary if Christian-Jewish dialogue is to be real, balanced, and fair:

1. Hostility between Jews and Christians was a Jewish invention. Indeed, Jews tried to wipe out the earliest Christians.

2. The persecution of Jews was not a Christian invention. For example, the Jews were expelled from Rome in the year 40, long before Christians had any influence there.

3. Jews were involved, however tangentially, in Jesus' execution by the Romans.

4. The fact that Jews are disproportionately successful in any society is a factor in the persecution of them.

5. The mystery of Jewish suffering, on which Elie Wiesel dwells, includes the death of Jesus.

Of course these data do not justify the persecution of Jews. For that there can be no justification, only reprobation.

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