

A background image showing a pair of hands clapping, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The image is partially obscured by a white diagonal shape on the left side of the page.

Creating Brave Spaces

Learnings from a Jewish-Christian
Dialogue on Antisemitism





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Executive Summary

How can we engage in better dialogue about issues that affect us deeply, with people we might profoundly disagree with? This document is intended as a learning resource for groups who would like to tackle high stakes issues in a constructive way. It is the product of an experimental dialogue series delivered by Interfaith Glasgow in partnership with the West of Scotland Branch of the Council of Christians and Jews entitled 'Understanding Antisemitism: Difficult Questions in Jewish Christian Dialogue'.

The series involved a dozen participants – Jews and Christians – coming together repeatedly over two and a half years and then working together to compile their collective learning. Their dialogues explored the nature of antisemitism and how it relates to criticism of the state of Israel. This topic has become one of the thorniest in the public sphere and is often an 'elephant in the room' in interfaith contexts and other settings where there is an emphasis on good relations. Like a number of difficult issues, it is characterised by polarised and often hateful debate on social media and elsewhere.

The steering group hoped to create a 'brave space' for dialogue, a phrase which builds on the more commonly used idea of a 'safe space'. This 'brave space' was one where participants were invited to accept the discomfort and risk involved in asking difficult questions, speaking honestly, and listening attentively, even though this might be painful. In this space, there was no expectation for participants to agree. Instead, the emphasis was on seeking to understand where their dialogue partners were coming from.

In this resource you will find reflections from both the participants and the facilitators about what aided discussion and what pitfalls might be worth

avoiding. There is also a sample dialogue plan (Appendix C). We hope all this will be useful for any group seeking to engage in discussion on some of the more difficult issues of our times, as well as being helpful, more generally, with respect to any kind of dialogue. Also included, by way of a case study, is the document the dialogue participants collaboratively produced, which draws together their key learning points in relation to the topic discussed. There is, moreover, a summary of antisemitic tropes, of which we identified a need for greater awareness and more widespread recognition in contemporary discourse; as well as some suggestions for further reading (Appendix A).

The public-facing product of an experiment in dialogue, this resource is far from the final word on any matter, but we hope it will encourage others concerned with promoting good relations to be brave in relation to difficult issues, and that it will equip them with some useful tools and practical suggestions for facilitating constructive conversations in relation to those issues, as well as evidencing the progress that is possible. Because if those of us who care about fostering good relations don't have these conversations, we leave a vacuum within which disinformation, fear, and hatred of the 'Other' will continue to prosper.

Introduction

We are better connected today than we have ever been. Yet advances in communication methods have not always resulted in greater understanding of each other. Indeed, increasingly it feels as if there are many issues in relation to which different sections of society are talking past each other and where a lack of mutual understanding and empathy is striking.

Online and elsewhere in the public sphere we see increasing polarisation and mutual hostility in relation to various issues that matter to people. Too often there is a tendency to shout entrenched opinions at each other and there is little interest in acknowledging nuance or seeking greater understanding of those whose views seem at odds with our own. Meanwhile, well-intentioned individuals can end up avoiding conversations about things that trouble them for fear of causing offence or triggering a backlash; and groups and organisations invested in promoting positive relations avoid certain 'hot topics', wary of the risk of doing more harm than good.

Working with trained facilitators, and initially guided by a steering group, a group of twelve (subsequently 11) Jews and Christians came together to discuss antisemitism and, particularly, how it relates to criticism of the state of Israel, and, alongside this, to reflect together on the process so as to identify various factors that the group felt contributed to:

- ▲ creating a space for conversations in which participants listen deeply to one another with the intention of understanding the other person's point of view.
- ▲ building relationships such that people feel safe expressing viewpoints that may be deeply challenging to others in the room.

- ▲ developing a spirit of trust such that people can ask questions they are unsure or anxious about, and where participants are gentle in their correction of one another.
- ▲ developing a willingness amongst participants to learn from each other, without feeling pressure for them to change their basic point of view.

By sharing their learning, Interfaith Glasgow, the West of Scotland branch of the Council of Christians and Jews and all participants in the dialogue hope to give confidence and tools to those who would like to be able to engage in respectful and honest conversations on questions about which there are deep disagreements and significant levels of discomfort. Reflections gathered from participant feedback can be found on pages 9-11 of this document, while the Case Study on page 16 features their subject specific learnings related to the topic. The latter section was collaboratively produced by the dialogue participants, who remain anonymous. We are extremely grateful to all of them for the time, energy, and insights they've contributed to this project; and for their willingness to accept the risk of vulnerability in order to try and model a more constructive conversation.

¹ Arao, Brian, and Kristi Clemens. "From safe spaces to brave spaces." The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators 135 (2013): 150.

Background

The question of how antisemitism relates to criticism of the state of Israel is a difficult and underexplored issue, even in the context of meetings of Christians and Jews. It is regarded by many as a topic that brings ‘more heat than light’ when discussed, and so best left alone. And yet, in many instances, it is the elephant in the room.

At one public meeting on antisemitism in Glasgow, a longstanding Christian participant in Jewish-Christian dialogue expressed hesitancy in asking the question - how possible is it to criticise the actions of the Israeli state or express support for Palestinians without it being seen as antisemitic? We reasoned that if someone who had for so long been so involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue had such misgivings, some degree of reticence was likely to be very widespread. Meetings of Christians and Jews have for many years been successful in creating safe spaces, where Jews could be relatively confident that they would not face antisemitic comments or prejudice. Now, however, it seems clear that we also need ‘brave spaces’, where people of good intention feel able to ask the difficult questions of each other, and willing to listen to the answers.

Antisemitism is a growing problem in the UK. While it comes in many guises, incidents tend to spike dramatically at times of increased violence in Israel and the Palestinian Territories (see CST’s “Antisemitic Incidents Report 2021”, p. 4). It is particularly pervasive online but there are also a worrying number of instances of in-person abuse and the targeting of synagogues, and Jewish homes and businesses. While some forms of antisemitism are very obvious and can be unequivocally labelled as such, other forms are subtler and require a look at underlying motivations and assumptions as well as knowledge of the broader context. It’s perhaps unsurprising, then, that there can be considerable confusion, disagreement, and anxiety about when the ‘antisemitism’ label should be applied. This is especially true when it comes to identifying antisemitic sentiments where they appear in the

context of criticism of the state of Israel. When does such criticism slip into a veiled expression of longstanding prejudices that must be challenged? Where we place the line matters because misidentifying its location carries serious risks: in one direction lies the risk of failing to identify – and thereby challenge – antisemitism; in the other, lies the risk of dismissing as bigotry legitimate objections to the policies of the Israeli government. In the first case, antisemitism is permitted to thrive unchecked and Jewish people feel increasingly under threat; in the second case, the charge of antisemitism risks becoming a slur to delegitimise people who speak out against the Israeli government on human rights grounds.

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The stakes are high and the fear of doing more harm than good is not unfounded. People feel so strongly about the issues at play that discovering or exploring any disagreements can derail longstanding relationships. Engaging in these conversations can be extremely difficult for the individuals involved. While the conversation might feel like an intellectual exercise to one participant, another may find talking about these issues emotionally draining. Yet if we avoid altogether the ‘difficult questions’ over which opinions differ, how can we hope to understand each other, let alone find any kind of shared ground? To put the point more provocatively: how can we denounce the quality of the conversation we see around us if we are unprepared to accept the personal risk of attempting to model a different kind of conversation? And so, we need to learn how to create the ‘brave spaces’ where this different kind of conversation can happen.

Purpose, Process, and Outcomes

The purpose of the dialogue was to explore the potential for – and to model – a different kind of engagement on the difficult questions surrounding antisemitism in the context of conversations about Israel and Palestine: one where the primary aim was increased understanding; where the emphasis was on listening; and where space was made for nuance and ambivalence.

Since this was an experimental, participant-led dialogue, we didn't begin with a plan to meet X number of times or with the intention to produce a learning resource – these outcomes are a result of the ideas and energy of the group involved. In the end this group of a dozen Jews and Christians met for nine sessions over the course of 2.5 years (longer than we'd intended partly due to a break for the first 6 months of the pandemic). Meetings were initially in-person (4 meetings) and then online (5 meetings), and finally the participants worked together online on a shared document that would gather up their learnings with a view to sharing them with others (see Case Study).

The content for discussion was initially planned by the steering group (the two facilitators and four people who were also participants in the dialogue) and then refined by the whole group. Time was set aside at the end of each dialogue session for the group to reflect together on the process, and, using this feedback, a plan for the following meeting was developed by the facilitators.

Participation was by invitation only and there were a roughly equal number of Jews and Christians (we started with 12 participants and ended up with 11), all of whom had an interest in Jewish-Christian relations and all of whom participated as individuals rather than in any representative capacity. While some of the group were meeting for the first time in the context of this dialogue, others had known each other for many years, yet previously had felt unable to explore the subject

for fear of causing offence. Limiting participation to those with an existing interest in Jewish-Christian dialogue no doubt contributed to the progress that the group was able to make together. While there were, and remain, deep disagreements amongst the group, all participants were aware that the full spectrum of opinions on the subject within their communities was not represented.

Similarly, they were very conscious of the fact that Muslims – who also have a crucial voice in discussions relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – were not present in the dialogue. However, the focus for the dialogue had already been identified based on tensions in the context of Jewish-Christian relations and, subsequently, on the needs of the particular group of participants. It was agreed that the possibility of future dialogues including Muslims should be explored where all participants have an equal say regarding the

parameters of the discussion, and where they begin the process together as equal partners.

Facilitation methods included various listening exercises and a mix of whole group and small group discussion, paired work and triads (groups of three). A sample dialogue plan can be found in the appendices. Some of the questions under discussion included:

- ▲ How does Jewish identity differ from Christian identity? How does it relate to belief, race, ethnicity, culture?
- ▲ Why do Christians care about Israel, Palestine and antisemitism?

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- ▲ Is Zionism intrinsic to Jewish identity, and, if so, why?
- ▲ What aspect, if any, of anti-Zionism is antisemitic?
- ▲ How can we make sense of the differing definitions of antisemitism?

The group was not pushed towards consensus on any issue, and facilitators were clear that the goal of the dialogue was building understanding and not agreement. Nevertheless, they did reach some points of agreement, some of which surprised them, and which they believed it would be helpful to share. They also felt it important to include some of the points where disagreement remained, as a demonstration of the honesty that developed during their meetings, and in order to show that

respect and good relations can be fostered where views continue to differ significantly. These points of agreement and disagreement are shared in the Case Study.

This case study is not presented as an attempt to offer the final word on what antisemitism is and is not –indeed none of the people involved in the dialogue would claim to be experts on the topic. Rather we include it here as a demonstration of the kind of learning that is possible when people come together with a commitment to listen to each other. It reveals the perhaps surprising amount of common ground that can be established between dialogue partners who have seemingly opposing viewpoints and very different life experiences, when they spend enough time listening to each other explain exactly what they mean.



Participants' Reflections

The abiding hope of the dialogue participants is that more conversations like this take place, amongst many more people. One participant commented that, in their experience, “the instinct to suppress difficult conversations means that interfaith engagement often doesn’t supply the platform it’s supposed to.”

Another said: “I hope that the fact that we have remained on good terms and benefited from the dialogue will encourage others to have a go”; and another commented: “I now feel much less afraid to discuss this issue. I feel I have a better understanding of a range of perspectives and am better equipped to help others navigate this territory.”

Despite there being familiarity between many of the participants, and friendship between some, this had been a no-go topic. The sensitivity of the issues was such that all participants felt that having a facilitator was very important to the success of the dialogue. As one participant was keen to stress: “it is a difficult thing to do. You don’t know all the people, and you don’t really know what to say. There has to be a lot of trust. It has to be a safe space.”

It takes time

Levels of anxiety at the first meeting were high for some and, reflecting at the end of the first session, one person commented that though we heard a little about some people’s discomfort, “we didn’t get to the heart of it.” There was, at times, a sense of “walking on eggshells.” Nevertheless, the group felt that they had engaged in something important – and unique – and were keen to continue meeting. And with each dialogue session the levels of honesty deepened. This, they felt, was down to the quantity of time spent together, the size and consistency of the group, the opportunity to build relationships – particularly through talking in small groups, and the process of reflecting together on how the dialogue was going and where they would like to take it next.

One participant commented that the experience had increased their sensitivity, helping them to “be aware of the fears, uncertainties, insecurities, prejudices and conditioning that lie beneath the surface” when these issues are discussed; and all agreed that this dialogue provided a space for discussing things we disagree about that many hadn’t found elsewhere, even in interfaith contexts.

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As one participant put it: “I’ve been able to express things in a much more open way than I normally would and still feel respected / listened to.” Participants commented on the benefits of the process and various facilitation tools used, saying, for example “it has been a very good way to hear from people properly and to explore topics that are often emotional and hard to feel heard on.”

Some said that it had been “clarifying” and “helpful” to have the opportunity to share their perspective with others and that the experience had increased their confidence in discussing the topic in other contexts.

It’s not about changing minds

Participants did not report any major change in their basic views on antisemitism and its relationship with criticism of the State of Israel. However, many did report having had their presuppositions about other people’s perspectives challenged and their understanding of their own views as well as the views of others expanded and deepened. For example, one participant commented: “I understand more fully that dialogue in this context is less about dialogue between one ‘community’ and another, but rather individuals in dialogue with other individuals.” While another said: “I realised I’d been making assumptions about what people’s

views would be, many of which were not borne out and there was much greater diversity of opinion than I'd expected. For my part, I hope I now have a much more nuanced understanding of the issues and feel much less inclined towards dogmatism in this area!" Another reflected: "I learned about the Christian perspective of Israel and appreciated how important it was for them ... that was a big revelation for me." One participant explained further that "understanding the context from which Christians are speaking makes it easier to engage. It builds empathy."

Facilitation tools

Participants were asked to reflect on the different facilitation tools used during the nine dialogue sessions, and to consider which ones were helpful in encouraging the development of trust, deep listening, and honest discussion. Facilitation tools used included:

- ▲ Each person given time to speak without interruption by other participants.
- ▲ Developing a "Working Together Agreement" together.
- ▲ Beginning each meeting with time to connect on something "light" - time to get to know each other as people.
- ▲ Reflecting together on comfort levels and confidence in tackling the issues before beginning the discussion of them.
- ▲ Light touch facilitation - with facilitators intervening only if needed.
- ▲ "Elephants in the Room" exercise - where participants anonymously wrote down the issues they wanted to discuss.
- ▲ Hearing about other people's life experiences and how that impacts on their views.
- ▲ Facilitated small group discussion followed by plenary.
- ▲ Mid-point survey to gather feedback on progress and what to do next.
- ▲ Voting on which questions to focus time on.
- ▲ Facilitators sharing their summary reflections on what they have heard from participants.
- ▲ Fishbowl (where one group discussed an issue in the centre while others listened).

- ▲ Paired listening exercise (where participants had to come to an agreed articulation of the other's point of view).
- ▲ Spectrum exercise - standing at different points on an imagined line to indicate feelings on a particular topic.

All tools used were felt to be helpful by at least some of the respondents, but none got the approval of absolutely everyone, highlighting the diversity of preferred styles that will exist within any group. In the list above, those tools which were felt to be effective by the most people are listed first. Participants were almost unanimous in valuing the time given to each participant to speak without interruption. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the least popular methods were the most highly structured ones, which pushed participants out of their comfort zones by asking them to move physically (spectrum); to observe and be observed in dialogue (fishbowl) and to communicate in an unfamiliar and formulaic way (listening pairs).

We don't all learn in the same way

Some participants found all of the above tools helpful and liked the "variety of approaches." But for one or two, some approaches had been unhelpful. For example, one participant explained:

"I wasn't keen on the fishbowl exercise, particularly when used quite early on in the process because it exacerbated the sense of being scrutinised - that I could be in trouble if I didn't express my views really carefully. E.g. someone could misunderstand me and [I would] not be able to clarify as they weren't actually a participant in the dialogue."

By contrast other participants really valued the fishbowl saying, for example: "I thought it best when we were all...together, and yet [the fishbowl] was a good discipline for everyone to be heard, and others to have to listen for at least half the time." The other exercise that was found to be unhelpful by one participant was the paired conversations - for more on the risks of this method and how to mitigate them see the Facilitators' Reflections.

On practical matters, the group was in broad agreement - our first two meetings (3 hrs including refreshments) were felt to be too short and so we lengthened this (4 hrs) for future in-person meetings. But, on moving to Zoom half-way through the

process (because of the pandemic), it was agreed that meetings should be much shorter (2.5 hrs felt long). Everyone agreed (to varying degrees) that in-person meetings were better, but that because the relationships had already been established, Zoom worked well enough. They agreed it would have been better if meetings had been closer together, with dates agreed in advance if possible. On more substantive points about the process, opinions varied more. For example (paraphrased):

- ▲ I would have liked to hear more of the facilitators' reflections.
- ▲ I preferred it when the facilitators took a more background role.
- ▲ I would have liked to spend less time on rapport building and get stuck into the issues more quickly.
- ▲ I would have preferred to spend more time trying out different dialogue exercises.
- ▲ It would have been good to have a broader spectrum of opinion in the group.

- ▲ We were right to limit participation to people already involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue.

It helps to have a clear focus

The suggestion to work together on a learning resource came from the group, and views were gathered after the fourth dialogue via an anonymous midpoint survey. Although a challenging task, and one which has taken a lot longer to produce than any of the participants anticipated, they were agreed that others could potentially gain valuable learning and encouragement from their experience. Subsequently, they felt that the process of producing the learning document together (see Case Study) was beneficial for them as a group, giving a focus for discussions and requiring them to reach a clarity of focus and an attention to detail and nuance that would not have been achieved otherwise.



Facilitators' Reflections

Working as a pair brought significant benefits to the facilitation process, allowing us to share roles and responsibilities, gain insights from each other's experience and reflections, and support each other when things became difficult and the best way forward was unclear.

When choosing facilitators, you might want to consider having someone with experience of each "side" of the debate. While they will aim to approach the dialogue with neutrality, they will each bring an insight into the participants' experiences that may be helpful in building rapport, trust and empathy.

Here are some of the important factors for a successful dialogue, emerging from our experience:

Planning and reflection

Always important in facilitation, planning is even more crucial when bringing people together around a sensitive topic where the stakes are high.

Consider having a diverse planning or steering group who can discuss and agree the fundamental questions regarding the process: Who should we bring to the table and why? What is the purpose? Who is facilitating? To what extent should dialogue participants have a part in shaping the process? The steering group can set the facilitators off on the right course, and be there to offer guidance at key points along the way. Facilitators should meet between each session to reflect on the last session and plan the subsequent one. We began with a script of what we would each say and agreed who would lead on which parts of the process and who would take notes; how we would time the various sections; and how we would communicate with each other during the meeting. As time went on our

Can you create a 'brave space' online?

When it comes to rapport building, it is difficult to replicate the benefits of the in-person experience online. We began by meeting at a neutral venue – a large and pleasant space – and always served food. After four meetings, the pandemic hit and so, after a long hiatus, we moved to online meetings. Most participants in our dialogue felt that it wouldn't have worked if we had started online, but this may not be the case for every group. There are some advantages to working online, but it also poses some challenges:

Advantages

- ▲ Less onerous a commitment – participants can attend more easily, from the comfort of their own home/ place of their choosing
- ▲ A democratising effect – each participant appears in a box of the same size on the screen
- ▲ Break out rooms can be created quickly and easily – they can be used for participants and for facilitators who may need to have a private conversation during a break

Challenges

- ▲ No opportunity for the spontaneous, informal conversations that can occur before and after an in-person meeting. More time for informal, light conversation may then be needed within the meeting itself.
- ▲ 'Zoom fatigue' – meetings should be shorter and breaks are important
- ▲ Less flexibility for using dynamic/ movement-based facilitation tools
- ▲ Easier for participants to become disengaged

plans became less detailed, but the planning and reflection remained crucial throughout.

Beginning well

A good first meeting will make all the difference. Some participants will be eager to get stuck into the issues almost straight away but ask for their patience and consider spending at least the first half of the first session laying the groundwork:

- ▲ Acknowledge discomfort and the difficulty of the undertaking and thank participants warmly for being present.
- ▲ Explain the purpose of the dialogue, invite comments and questions.
- ▲ Think about how you'd like participants to introduce themselves, communicate this clearly and allow ample time.
- ▲ A good starting point for discussions is to ask – what do you find difficult or off-putting about other types of conversation on this topic? What do you want to be different about this space?
- ▲ Address expectations and keep the scope of your session realistic – it can be deeply uncomfortable to hear a lot of issues laid out and not have the time to address them together.
- ▲ Create a “Working together agreement” with the group (see Appendix A for details of a helpful guide). Agreeing confidentiality is crucial, but our group also came up with their own additions to a standard agreement of this kind, such as “give each other the benefit of the doubt” and “correct each other with kindness” which were extremely helpful in setting the tone of the discussions. The conversation about what to include allowed the group to hear the willingness of their co-participants to engage and therefore for a degree of trust to develop. It was also an opportunity to flag up potential problems. For example, to discover whether raised voices would be deemed acceptable by the group (as a natural response to stress) or unacceptable (as for e.g. a sign of disrespect or an assertion of power).
- ▲ Everyone's voice should be heard from the beginning – not everyone will feel equally equipped to share on all the issues, so begin with something where everyone can contribute, and ease into the difficult discussions.

Being open and intentional about the process

This is crucial to building trust:

- ▲ Regularly reiterate the purpose of the dialogue (consider having it written up on the wall during each meeting, repeat in meeting invitations etc).
- ▲ Acknowledge challenges – and mis-steps if they occur.
- ▲ Acknowledge limitations – one source of pain in our group was the lack of a shared historical narrative regarding Israel and Palestine. One or two in the group would have liked to spend time learning together (through a reading list or inviting in speakers), to see if such a shared understanding of the history could have been developed. But most felt this would be an impossible undertaking – particularly with the time and resources available. It remained a source of difficulty throughout the dialogue, but it did help to at least acknowledge it.
- ▲ Gather feedback on the process – take on useful suggestions, explain why others aren't being taken on.

Structuring meetings

In every session we found it helpful to make time to:

- ▲ Begin by connecting over something light.
- ▲ Offer a facilitator's welcome - including some reflections on the stage of the process, reiterating the purpose of the meeting, and perhaps returning to the “working together agreement”.
- ▲ Agree a focus for discussion and stick to it (within reason).
- ▲ Use a mix of small group and whole group formats.
- ▲ Create time for breaks.
- ▲ End with a period for group reflection and feedback on the process and suggestions for subsequent meetings.

Encouraging empathy

Empathy is crucial to developing understanding of another person's perspective. To create the right environment for this to occur we found it made a big difference to:

- ▲ Make time for participants to learn about each other's lives and experiences to the extent that these had shaped their views on the topic.
- ▲ Acknowledge how difficult and draining the process can be, perhaps particularly for some people in the group with personal connections to – or experiences of – the issues.
- ▲ Acknowledge current events that may be impacting on how people are feeling. For significant events, it may be worthwhile to dedicate time to a listening circle – where people simply listen to each other's experiences and reflections without making any comment.

Encouraging honesty

Once other factors are in place such that participants can feel safe to share (agreement on confidentiality, a basic level of trust in the process and the other participants) they may still need some encouragement to express themselves honestly:

- ▲ Invite alternative views.
- ▲ Offer and model ways of expressing contrary views in a non-confrontational manner.
- ▲ Be a non-anxious presence when tempers become heated, treating it as natural. Lean in when emotions are heightened – ensuring that participants feel heard and understood should bring down the temperature without extinguishing the discussion.
- ▲ Acknowledge the discomfort and the desire not to offend or to face accusations.
- ▲ Discuss the need for honesty, allow participants to hear from their dialogue partners that they are ready to listen to an alternative point of view.

Sharing reflections

As facilitators we tried to remain neutral on the content of the discussions, but some participants felt uncomfortable with this and wanted at times to know what we thought. Rather than sharing our personal views, it was helpful to share where we thought the fault lines were amongst the group. Perhaps our most powerful intervention was when we began a meeting by sharing a reflection summarising the different perspectives that we had heard so far from the group, relating their differing perspectives to their different lived experience of the issues (see p16). One participant described it as a "turning point." Participants felt that they had been heard and understood. Giving voice to some of the key points of difference between them offered some clarity and relief in what could at times feel like an overwhelming mass of issues and disputed territory.

Choosing facilitation tools

Without a doubt, our group was most comfortable working in a mixture of two small groups and plenary sessions. This format allowed the building of rapport in smaller groups with one facilitator present with each group, but also for participants to benefit from hearing from everyone in the plenary sessions, so that they moved forward together. Nevertheless, sometimes it is helpful to challenge participants to leave their comfort zone and we used a range of tools intended to encourage participants to share more thoughtfully and honestly and listen more attentively, particularly in the early dialogue sessions (see p10 for a list).

Spotlight on “Listening Pairs”

“Listening Pairs” is a great tool for practising the skills needed for successful dialogue. People naturally tend to flit between the different roles of dialogue – of speaking and listening – without much thought, and often we are not truly listening, but thinking about what to say next. This exercise is about slowing down the process and giving participants the chance to inhabit each of these roles in turn. The ‘speaker’ is given a set amount of time to share their perspective on a topic as clearly and concisely as they can – not easy. The ‘listener’ must set aside the urge to respond – also not easy! Instead, they must listen attentively so that they can summarise back what they’ve heard. They should then check in with their partner asking – “Have I understood you properly?”, before they switch roles and begin again. If used early in the process this exercise can lay a strong foundation for the way in which participants engage with each other. It makes clear that the ultimate purpose of the dialogue is understanding, and builds a sense of trust that each participant is working towards that goal. However, this exercise is also risky as the facilitators can’t always be present to help if things go wrong. Where a sensitive topic is being discussed, this tool is best used in the second or third meeting, rather than the first. And, compared to exercises where the facilitator is present, additional time and care will be needed both for preparation and follow-up:

Prepare participants

As well as describing the task, it will be helpful to prepare participants to feel challenged. For

example, you might say: “As you listen to your partner’s summary, please be mindful that they may not get it right first time.” Encourage participants to resist the natural reactions which might include frustration or even anger at being misunderstood, instead giving their dialogue partner the benefit of the doubt and explaining calmly where they have got it wrong.

Check in afterwards

As well as observing the room and checking if each group might need support during their paired conversation, factor in some time for feedback on the exercise. In a plenary you can ask – “how did that feel? Do you think your view was well summarised by your partner in the end? Did it take a few goes?” For many people it is very illuminating in showing how difficult effective communication can be, and just how much effort is required. If anyone feels their conversation didn’t reach a satisfactory point, they could be invited to raise that in the group – or include it in a feedback form at the end. Facilitators can then consider how the issue can best be addressed – perhaps through an individual follow up conversation with each person involved and/or a decision made to bring the two together in future conversation, this time with a facilitator (and perhaps other participants) present. Once you’ve established this skill with the group (of summarising the other person’s point and checking you’ve got it right), it is something you can ask people to do at points where understanding isn’t coming easily.

Case Study:

Understanding antisemitism in the context of the Israel Palestine debate

Facilitators' reflection

(Adapted from a reflection shared at the start of our 5th meeting)

It became clear over the course of the meetings that there are not only different views about the issues we discussed but also very different experiences of the general public discourse.

Christians in the group discussed their anxieties around expressing criticisms of the actions of the Israeli government for fear of being seen as antisemitic. This, we heard, comes from a place of real concern and, for some, a deeply felt moral anguish. They feel an absolute repugnance towards, and repudiation of antisemitism; and we heard expressions of dismay and regret regarding antisemitism's roots in Christian history and teachings. At the same time, Christians in the group expressed a strong connection with the place they know as the Holy Land, with the Palestinian people and their suffering and, we heard, they hold a general belief that injustices must be challenged and called out and people's human rights protected. To feel unable to do so out of fear of causing pain and being misunderstood or accused of antisemitism is deeply troubling for them.

Most Jewish people in the group, on the other hand, experience not a lack of criticism of the State of Israel but a deluge of it. We heard the point raised a number of times that Israel receives more criticism than any other country. When Israel is criticised, people often don't distinguish between the State of Israel, the current (or past) government of Israel, the people of Israel and Jews in general (especially those outside Israel). We heard about how Jewish people are sometimes afraid to identify themselves as Jewish for fear of being blamed for the actions of the Israeli government.

We know that antisemitic expressions are rife on social media and present in political discourse and are more often than not linked not only with

criticism of the Israeli government but also with the view that the Israeli state should not exist at all. This view is often hatefully expressed, directed towards Jews as though they are personally responsible, and littered with antisemitic tropes. For some it may feel, then, that the key problem is not one of some people feeling unable to express their criticisms of the Israeli government but of the multitude of attacks that Jewish people face every day – most commonly online but also in person – from people who feel very free indeed to express their anger and hate.

Participant Learnings

The following points of learning have been offered by the dialogue participants. This case study is included as an illustration of the group's learning: the kind of learning that is possible when people come together with a commitment to listen to each other. It does not represent the views of either Interfaith Glasgow or of the Council of Christians and Jews. Rather, it offers a snapshot in time of one dialogue group's views at the point of wrapping up their discussions together. It is entirely possible that their views have shifted since. It should also be acknowledged that there is a bias towards common ground here. There remained a great many points of disagreement, some of which are alluded to, but it would have been impossible to capture them all.

This process of agreeing a set of written statements was a powerful discipline in itself, as it gave a focus for discussions and the group continued to

learn about the crucial role of language and how terms can have different connotations and evoke different reactions depending on who is hearing them, and who is speaking them.

Differences of opinion expressed here were not split along Jewish and Christian lines. Instead, as is usually the case, there were differences of opinion amongst both the Christians and the Jews themselves.

Diversity and complexity

- ▲ Dialogue reveals a wide variety of perspectives within both Jewish and Christian communities about Israel and how we should define antisemitism. We should avoid rigid ideas about what any group of people thinks on these issues.
- ▲ Many of the words people use in association with Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (e.g. 'Zionist') are loaded and can mean very different things when used by different people and in different contexts. We should therefore be very wary of assuming that we know what someone means – and reacting in accordance with our preconceived perceptions. We need to make a concerted effort to listen closely to each other and to ask questions to really understand each other on this issue.
- ▲ People use different terms to talk about the geography of the region including: State of Israel and (the Biblical) Land of Israel, The Holy Land, Historic Palestine, Judea & Samaria, West Bank, Occupied Territories. Terms can sometimes seem to be used interchangeably, but for many they refer to different geographical areas, and are loaded with additional meanings. For example, the use of the phrase 'The Holy Land' by Christians can sound proprietary or like a negation of Israel to Jewish ears. It is also not clear what geographical area this phrase refers to. Again, the plea is to ask questions, and to not assume that we know just what the other means by such phrases. For more on geographical and other terms see Useful Resources (Appendix A), in particular the International Press Institute's Guide.
- ▲ The issues are extremely complicated, and many problems arise from people not understanding them, or oversimplifying them. For example, when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it is unhelpful to cast the 'sides' in rigid roles of 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. Similarly, when people speak of Israel and Palestine as being the 'two sides' of the conflict, this can obscure the fact that they are very different entities and are certainly not the only parties involved in the conflict. Palestine is not a state. Palestinians are split across two fragmented territories (Gaza and the West Bank), each under a different leadership, with very limited autonomy, infrastructure, or resources, and no organised military. Many Palestinians also live as Israeli citizens in Israel and as refugees in the countries on Israel's borders. Israel is a recognised state with a sophisticated military and powerful allies. Yet it is a very small nation surrounded by much larger countries that have historically been hostile to its existence, and which waged war on the new nation as soon as it was founded in 1948. Access to high quality educational material, such as that produced by Solutions Not Sides, is therefore vital – for Israelis, Palestinians, and for those who feel an investment in the issues in the UK and elsewhere (See Useful Resources).
- ▲ There is also a danger that the complexity of the questions results in people avoiding discussion of them. As one participant said in frustration "there is a tendency for people to just keep repeating over and over again how complex it is and never really say what they think."
- ▲ There are different and often competing historical narratives that underpin people's views about the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It helps to acknowledge this in a dialogue context, and to do the hard work of listening to each other's explanations and personal stories, before offering any correction or a different view.
- ▲ The presence of different historical narratives amongst participants sometimes made reaching a common understanding difficult within the group. There were times when facilitators moved the conversation on from an area of dispute because it was not part of the agreed focus of discussions. Some would have liked to spend more time focusing on these disputed histories, but, on the whole the group agreed that, given the time constraints, this would render progress in other areas impossible. It helped to acknowledge the

existence of these differing historical narratives, but it remained an area of tension particularly because dialogue participants could be left with the feeling that some of their dialogue partners were simply mistaken about certain historical facts. Some groups may benefit from spending time exploring differing historical narratives together, but should be aware that significant time is needed, and boundaries would need to be agreed for the conversation so that some progress in achieving mutual understanding could be made.

Defining antisemitism and calling it out

Disagreements about how antisemitism is to be defined, particularly in relation to criticism of the state of Israel, added to people's confusion and anxiety. Therefore, for their last dialogue session, the group decided to focus their attention on two definitions of antisemitism: The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism which was adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in 2016 and has since been adopted by numerous governments and institutions around the world; and The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism which was developed by a large group of scholars and launched in March 2021 as an alternative to the IHRA Working Definition (see Useful Resources for links to both).

The IHRA Working Definition consists in a short definition followed by 11 "contemporary examples", which it says, "could, taking into account the overall context" be antisemitic. The Jerusalem Declaration, which was developed in response to perceived problems with the IHRA Working Definition, presents a different short definition of antisemitism followed by 15 guidelines which include examples of types of statements that it says are – or are not – antisemitic "on the face of it". The following points of learning were offered by the group:

- ▲ It is important to seek an understanding of both definitions, but neither definition should be seen as definitive or beyond challenge.
- ▲ The IHRA Working Definition of antisemitism is problematic if the examples included are regarded as a prescriptive list of antisemitic statements – doing so can lead to people being wrongly labelled as antisemitic. Many people do not realise that this "working definition" seeks to provide a list of statements that "could" be antisemitic, depending on the context. Confusion arises because while most of the statements are clearly antisemitic, some of the examples are not antisemitic in and of themselves. Instead, they are best regarded as potential 'warning signs' and more must be known about the context before someone making statements such as these could be legitimately accused of antisemitism.
- ▲ The Jerusalem Declaration is helpful in that it includes two lists of example statements - distinguishing between those statements that are antisemitic in and of themselves, and those that are not. For example, it states that "criticising Zionism as a form of nationalism" isn't antisemitic "on the face of it." It also makes it clear that "the line between antisemitic and non-antisemitic speech is different from the line between unreasonable and reasonable speech."
- ▲ The IHRA Working Definition has been adopted by many governments and institutions and this is unlikely to change. The Jerusalem Declaration can be used as a tool for interpreting the IHRA Working Definition – a suggestion that is made within the preamble of the Jerusalem Declaration.
- ▲ When calling out antisemitism it is important to try and name what is objectionable, so as to assist learning, and help avoid misunderstanding and misrepresentation of one's objections. This is particularly important in light of the confusion over how antisemitism should be defined.
- ▲ People can be described as 'antisemitic' when they display negative attitudes towards Jews because they are Jews. Such attitudes are worryingly prevalent, particularly online.
- ▲ However, antisemitic stereotypes and tropes are widespread and engrained in various cultures and as a result antisemitic remarks or images can also be uttered or shared thoughtlessly, without any intended ill will towards Jews. Nevertheless, they must be challenged and challenges should, ideally, be accompanied with a clear explanation of what is objectionable and of its likely impact.

- ▲ We should use the term 'antisemitism' rather than 'anti-Semitism'. The term 'Semitic' used in reference to people comes from a constructed 19th century 'science' of racial difference. Placing the hyphen there suggests there is a 'Semitism' that people can be against, which there isn't. 'Antisemitism' with no hyphen indicates the dislike or hatred of – or discrimination against – Jews because they are Jews.
- ▲ There were differences of opinion in the group as to how useful the IHRA Working Definition was, given the potential for misinterpretation and misapplication. Some felt that the IHRA Working Definition had been counterproductive, and had in practice censored legitimate debate. Some appreciated the Jerusalem declaration as making it clear, for example, that forms of protest like boycott, divestment and sanctions and use of the term 'apartheid' in reference to Israel, are not antisemitic in and of themselves. Others felt that these examples, though not antisemitic in and of themselves, so often co-exist with antisemitic sentiment they should be regarded as a cause of concern.
- ▲ While some might have been inclined to abandon the IHRA Working Definition in favour of the Jerusalem Declaration, others felt that the two statements are complementary. Further, because the Jerusalem Declaration was written in response to the IHRA Working Definition, it was suggested by some that it may not make full sense without also reading the IHRA Working Definition.
- ▲ Some preferred the short definition of antisemitism provided by the Jerusalem Declaration which states that "Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)". They considered it clear and concise in contrast to the more vague IHRA short definition. Others felt that the Jerusalem Declaration's short definition would be unable to identify anything other than the most overt statements of antisemitism. This, they felt, is a serious problem given that much antisemitism is subtle. The IHRA Working Definition is useful, they argued, in highlighting statements of concern alongside statements that are clearly antisemitic.

Understanding Zionism and Anti-Zionism

- ▲ At the heart of the question of where the line can be drawn between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism, is the complex question of Zionism and its relation to Judaism and Jewish people. People often say "I'm not anti-Jewish (or antisemitic), I'm just anti-Zionist." But it is not possible to easily separate Jewish and Zionist identities in this way. Although there are some Jews who are anti-Zionist, most Jews in Britain would say that Zionism is an intrinsic part of their Jewish identity. In the Jewish Policy Research Institute's 2010 "Israel Survey" 72% of respondents identified themselves as Zionist (see: <https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=94>).
- ▲ There is no common definition of Zionism. This group used a broad definition: "the desire of Jews to have a homeland in Israel." However, Jews espouse different forms of Zionism which vary from individual to individual. They employ different reasonings for their Zionism, including secular, political, cultural, and religious forms – with many differences within each of these. Christian Zionism (a view held by some Christians - see below) is different again and also comes in numerous forms.
- ▲ People criticising "Zionism" should therefore be careful to articulate precisely what they mean.
- ▲ Some in the group were inclined to see any rejection of Zionism or denial of the right of the State of Israel to exist as a Jewish state as antisemitic. This view is understandable given the belief amongst most Jews in the UK that Zionism is intrinsic to their identity, the history of antisemitism, and the Holocaust; and the very real physical threat which Israel faces from multiple quarters. Certainly, when people deny the right of Israel to exist in the sense that they wish for the death or exclusion of Jews from the area, this is antisemitic.
- ▲ However, most agreed that it is possible to be critical of Zionism without being antisemitic, but this depends on what is meant by Zionism. If Zionism is taken to mean something like: "The right of Jews to have a state of their own in the land of Israel" then someone could be an anti-Zionist e.g. because they believe this right has been claimed at the expense of Palestinian rights or because they think that

religious or ethnic nationalism is always wrong. Someone might also argue for one equal state for all as a response to the demise of the two-state solution. All of these positions could be regarded as a denial of the right of the State of Israel to exist, but it is not clear that any of these positions are antisemitic.

- ▲ Christian Zionism is a minority view within Christian denominations in the UK, though it is very prevalent in the United States, particularly amongst evangelical churches. Christian Zionism as an idea is the belief that the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 is in accordance with biblical prophecy. The term 'Christian Zionism' was used from the mid-20th century, but the idea is much older and begins to emerge in Christian movements which interpret Genesis 12 literally and see the creation of Israel as a strong country as something they should and must support politically and economically:

I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:2-3)

For some Christian Zionists the presence of Jews in Israel is key for the end times to come about, so they often support charities that encourage Jews to migrate to Israel. Christian Zionists often do not acknowledge Palestinian Christian presence in the land or understand their identity as Palestinian. The tone of a lot of Christian Zionist literature is that 'Christians have a duty to support Israel no matter what'. None of our Christian participants espoused a Christian Zionism. Some expressed a concern that Christian Zionism had the effect of denying Judaism its own unique identity and so could in that way be regarded as anti-Jewish.

- ▲ Critique of Zionism is often used as a cover for antisemitic attack. Such attacks may be recognised by the use of antisemitic tropes (see Appendix A). However, it is also possible to use antisemitic tropes without awareness of their significance – and so education is needed on this topic (about which, more below).

Understanding identity and historical and religious connections to the land – Jewish and Christian

- ▲ Understanding the context from which Christians are speaking makes it easier for Jewish dialogue partners to engage – and vice versa. It builds empathy.
- ▲ Judaism and being Jewish are two different things – you can be Jewish without any adherence to the religion of Judaism (i.e. a secular Jew). There is a spectrum of Jewish identities that map on to various understandings of Zionism, yet there is very little understanding of this complexity. (See the Jewish Policy Research Institute's "What makes a Jewish identity?")
- ▲ Most Jewish people in the UK have friends and family living in Israel and feel a strong connection to the country. But this does not make them accountable for the actions of the Israeli government. Holding Jewish people, no matter where they live (including in Israel), accountable for what happens in Israel and for the actions of the Israeli government is completely wrong.
- ▲ Many Jews are concerned about the plight of Palestinians although this is rarely reported.
- ▲ The State of Israel tends to receive more criticism within public discourse in the UK than other nations. For example, the Scottish Council for Jewish Communities have reported that Israel, over the course of the Session 2016 – 2021, was the subject of more than 3 times as many motions in the Scottish Parliament as any other country.²
- ▲ This disproportionate attention might at times be motivated by antisemitism. However, there are also factors other than antisemitism that might explain some of this attention. European interest in the State of Israel is partly a legacy of the Holocaust, WWII, and the geopolitics of the end of the colonial era and the Cold War. Christianity has deep religious and historical connections with the Land of Israel / The Holy Land. For bitesize introductions to Christian and Jewish connections to the land see the resource by the Council of Christians and Jews: "Listening and Learning..." (See: Useful Resources).

² See: https://www.scojec.org/consultations/2021/21x_sg_international_work.pdf

- ▲ Many Christians have current connections with Palestinian Christian communities and are deeply concerned about the suffering of Palestinian people. Many believe that it is their moral duty to call out injustice when they see it, and they may be more familiar with the experiences of Palestinians than with other situations which may be comparable. This can all play an important role in people's particular concern about the modern State of Israel and its government's policies.
- ▲ Some within the group felt that Christians should do more to challenge the treatment of Christians in other middle eastern countries, and at times, within the Palestinian Territories.

Unintended offence

- ▲ Some words and statements can elicit a reaction that may be unanticipated or not understood by the speaker, because of the complex and often painful history – and current reality – of this issue. For example, a boycott of Israeli products may be seen by one person as a peaceful protest against current Israeli policy, but be felt by another as a painful targeting of Jews that evokes the Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany (which began with a boycott of Jewish businesses). Listening to each other and seeking to understand each other's motivations and reactions in these instances is crucial.
- ▲ It is possible to make an antisemitic statement or share antisemitic content unintentionally. Many people are unaware of the antisemitic tropes that are pervasive in popular culture, and therefore they can repeat them without any ill intent. An antisemitic trope is a phrase or image that evokes classic antisemitic ideas (for more on this see the Appendices). We should all seek to familiarise ourselves with antisemitic tropes so that we become more capable of recognising them, calling them out, and educating others. Where something is labelled antisemitic because it exhibits a trope, it is important to name and explain the trope, to promote understanding.

Language matters

- ▲ It is important to speak about 'Jewish people' rather than 'the Jews.' This is because reducing any group to a homogenised entity is potentially dehumanising, and historically talk of 'the Jews' has been used to dehumanise Jewish people with devastating consequences in Nazi Germany and beyond.
- ▲ Talking about 'the Jewish people' as if all Jewish people hold the same opinions is also problematic and misleading.
- ▲ When speaking about Jewish people who are citizens of Israel they should be referred to as 'Israelis who are Jewish' or 'Jewish Israelis'.
- ▲ It's important to remember that there are secular Jewish people. References to 'people of Jewish faith' is an inappropriate label, if one intends to refer to all Jewish people.



Conclusion

This experiment in dialogue began with the question: how can we engage in better dialogue about issues that affect us deeply, with people we might profoundly disagree with?

Working with Jews and Christians to tackle the subject of antisemitism and how it relates to criticism of the State of Israel, we have reflected on this question throughout, and this resource presents the tools and strategies that we found effective, and which we hope will offer encouragement and support to any group wanting to broach any divisive issue in a constructive way.

It seems right to conclude with the thoughts of our dialogue participants, without whose commitment and willingness to be challenged – and to sit together in discomfort – this whole endeavour would not have been possible. Their conclusions regarding what makes dialogue on difficult issues possible suggest, perhaps unsurprisingly, a way or engaging with each other that is diametrically opposed to the kind of debate so often encountered on social media.

For, rather than hiding behind relative anonymity, we need to get to know each other, find out what motivates others, and hear about the experiences that have helped shape their views. Rather than firing off quick, barbed responses in the heat of the moment, we need to slow down and accept that – if we’re going to do it well – discussion of difficult issues takes time and energy. Rather than assuming that we know what others mean because of their identity, we must recognise that there is diversity of opinion within every group. Rather than seeing matters as black and white, we must work to attune ourselves to the complexities that lie beneath the surface, and to acknowledge the simple – but often obscured – fact that there

are people of good will on various sides of the argument.

But we shouldn’t stop there. As participants warned, there is a tendency or instinct amongst well-meaning people when confronted by a difficult issue to avoid saying what we really think, perhaps merely emphasising how complicated it all is, and even to avoid listening to people with whom we disagree because it is so uncomfortable or upsetting to do so.

What makes a ‘brave’ conversation different is the risk involved – both in speaking up and in listening. These ‘brave’ conversations can be draining and when we make ourselves vulnerable, we can get hurt. Such conversations will rarely result in unanimous agreement, moreover, and they may put relationships at risk. But our participants insist they are both worthwhile and necessary. And, if broached with care and commitment, they are likely to establish common ground

we wouldn’t have predicted we’d find.

At the very least, having these difficult conversations will help us to be clearer on where precisely our disagreements lie and why, leaving us better equipped to navigate tricky territory and to help others to do the same. And, crucially, these conversations will help us to see those who hold opposing views as fellow, flawed, complicated human beings just like ourselves – and this may be the ultimate antidote to prejudice, fear, and hatred.

“
I feel I have a better understanding of a range of perspectives and I am better equipped to help others navigate this territory.”



Appendices

Appendix A

Useful Resources

Anti-Defamation League (2020), "Antisemitism Uncovered: A Guide to Old Myths in a New Era", <https://antisemitism.adl.org/>

Arao, Brian, and Kristi Clemens (2013), "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice" in: *The Art of Effective Facilitation* 135, <https://tinyurl.com/bravespaces2013>

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the Council of Christians and Jews (2021), "Connected Communities: Churches Responding to Prejudice Against Jews and Judaism", <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Connected-Communities.pdf>

Community Security Trust (CST), *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2021*, <https://cst.org.uk/research/cst-publications>

Hope Not Hate, "Left Wing Antisemitism: An Explainer", <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2020/10/27/left-wingantisemitism-an-explainer/>

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (2021), "Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism", <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d3006107-519b-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

International Press Institute (2013), "Use with Care: A Reporter's Glossary of Loaded Language in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", http://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/UseWithCare_ebook.pdf

Jewish Policy Research Institute (February 2022), "What Makes a Jewish Identity?" <https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=17983>

Office of the Chief Rabbi and the Church of Scotland (2023), "A Jewish Christian Glossary", <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/connect/interfaith-relations>

Solutions Not Sides, "Educational Resources for Teachers and their Students," <https://solutionsnotsides.co.uk/learning-resources>

"The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism" (2021), <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>

The Council of Christians and Jews (2020) "Listening and Learning: Dialogue between Christians and Jews on issues relating to Israel Palestine", <https://ccj.org.uk/resources/israel-palestine-dialogue>

Appendix B

Antisemitic Tropes and Christian Anti-Judaism

An Incomplete Guide to Historical Antisemitic Tropes³

Although violent antisemitism is not as common as it was several generations ago, the tropes (significant or recurrent themes) that fuel antisemitic prejudice still exist in discourse today. The tropes below fall into several categories of the IHRA's Working Definition of Antisemitism, including the spread of stereotypical allegations, such as "the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, [or] government."

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the trope of the Jewish global conspiracy

- ▲ **Definition/Origin:** The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is a completely fabricated antisemitic text, initially distributed in Russia in 1903. Its first publishers claimed that the book contains the minutes of a meeting where Jewish leaders discussed their goal of global domination by subverting Christian morals and by controlling the press and economy.
- ▲ **Legacy:** This text was instrumental in the fervour of pogroms that swept across Eastern Europe and Russia. This book is still circulated today. Perhaps the most common antisemitic trope heard to this day is that Jews are wealthy swindlers who attempt to control politics and the economy world-wide.

The Blood Libel & the trope of Jews as morally vile

- ▲ **Definition:** Starting in the Middle Ages, an accusation spread that Jews murder Christian children in order to use their blood as part of religious rituals. In some cases, Jews were thought to use children to re-enact the crucifixion, but a more well-known claim is the use of Christian blood to make matzo during Passover.
- ▲ **Origin:** 1144, Norwich, England. A young man named William of Norwich was found dead in a nearby forest. Shortly after, Thomas of Monmouth, a monk, wrote a treatise about William's death, blaming the Jews for killing him during Passover.

- ▲ **Legacy:** This rumour spread quickly throughout Western and Eastern Europe, and was instrumental in the rise of grotesque caricatures of Jews. It denigrated Jews as a people by spreading the message that they were morally vile.

Well Poisoning during the Black Death & the trope of Jews as malicious toward others

- ▲ **Definition/Origin:** With the devastation of the Black Death across Western Europe, Jews were less affected due to their isolation and religious laws that promoted cleanliness. However, they were accused of deliberately and maliciously poisoning the wells of Christian towns. This caused a series of pogroms against Jewish communities.
- ▲ **Legacy:** This was one of many instances in which Jews were scapegoated for an occurrence that could not otherwise be explained, and continued the trend of accusing Jews of having malice toward the "other."

Dreyfus Affair & the trope of Jews as subversive or treasonous

- ▲ **Origin:** December 1894, France. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, an assimilated French artillery officer of Jewish descent, was convicted of treason against France after military secrets were leaked to German nationals. He was publicly humiliated by the French army and antisemitic publications were instrumental to his conviction after very little evidence. In 1906, Dreyfus was finally exonerated and reinstated as a major in the French Army. He served during the whole of World War I, ending his service with the rank of lieutenant-colonel.
- ▲ **Legacy:** The widespread nature of press coverage of the affair spread antisemitism from within the French political elite to the masses. On a wider note, it began the conversation regarding the relationship between Jews and their countries of residence, affirming that their nationality can be easily undermined.

³ An early draft of this section was prepared by Rebecca Stekol, an Interfaith Glasgow student placement, and was shared with - and edited by - the group during one of our early dialogues. Although historical details are accurate to the best of our knowledge, readers may wish to further consult a reference work such as Richard S Levy's *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopaedia of Prejudice and Persecution* (2008).

Expulsions of Jews & the trope of “The Wandering Jew” (or a lack of nationality)

- ▲ There have been numerous expulsions of Jews by monarchs or by nation-states, the most well-known being the Spanish Inquisition, the expulsion of Jews from the Papal States, and the English expulsion. These expulsions created both a sense of insecurity across the Jewish diaspora and the conception of the “wandering Jew.” A harsh manifestation of antisemitism is the notion that Jews do not have a right to be equal or full citizens in their country of residence, which was played out in the policies of Czarist Russia and Nazi Germany.

Eugenics & the trope of Jews as an inferior race

- ▲ **Definition:** a set of beliefs and practices that aims to exclude certain groups considered to be “inferior” from the gene pool to promote the procreation of other “superior” groups. Under Nazi Germany, eugenics was used to justify the killing of Jews, Roma, the disabled, homosexuals, etc.
- ▲ **Legacy:** Alt-right white nationalist groups today justify their antisemitism by saying that Jews are a separate and inferior race.

Christian Anti-Jewish Tropes

The trope of Jews as God-killers / killers of Christ

- ▲ **Definition:** as Christians developed a theological understanding of Jesus, they came to see him as the Son of God and indeed ‘the image of the invisible God’. Jews who were blamed for his death were accused of deicide.
- ▲ **Legacy:** this led to hatred of the Jews who, being called God-killers, were often attacked during the three days before Easter when the Christian community were remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jews were advised to stay off the streets during that time.

The trope of Jews as blind and rejected by God

- ▲ **Definition:** because Jews did not accept Jesus as the promised Messiah they had been rejected by God and their status as God’s Chosen People transferred to the Christian community. This is why Jews are destined to wander the earth.

- ▲ **Legacy:** Jews were seen as wilfully ignorant and blind, now living in the past and should be converted to the new People of God, i.e. the Christians. This led in some cases to forced sermons and forced baptisms and a rejection of Judaism as a legitimate religion.

The trope of Judaism as a dead and legalistic religion

- ▲ **Definition:** Judaism was seen as a legalistic religion which did not enjoy the freedom of salvation in Christ.
- ▲ **Legacy:** a rejection of Judaism as a life-giving religion and the God of the Old Testament being seen as a judging and censorious God. Jews were living in bondage to a Law while Christians lived in the freedom of the spirit with the assurance of eternal salvation which was to be found in Jesus and not in keeping to an out-dated law.

The trope of Jews as of the devil

- ▲ **Definition:** Jews are said to have the devil as their “father” (rather than Abraham as they claimed) because they have refused to believe the claims of Jesus. This trope comes from a strictly literal reading of John’s Gospel (8.44) and a misunderstanding of the context of the debate in which this saying occurred (and also ignores the difficulty in which many scholars from across the theological spectrum question the authorship of sections of John 8).
- ▲ **Legacy:** This misunderstanding and subsequent trope contributed to Christian antisemitism in the form of the devil being seen in artistic depictions of the Crucifixion and even the Nativity. A more robust understanding of the context is still needed within the world of scriptural exegesis in order for this trope to be successfully challenged and rejected within broader Christianity.

Reflections on the origins of Christian anti-Judaism

We know of course that Christianity has its origins in Judaism; indeed, the split with Judaism happened gradually over a significant period of time during the second century CE. Although there were many reasons for why this split occurred, one of the main reasons was the need for Christianity to establish a separate identity from that of the Judaism of that time.

In its effort to define itself, early Christianity needed to systematise its distinctive beliefs and establish a definitive understanding of Jesus. As various arguments and defences of the Christian faith were developed by the early Church fathers, Jews were increasingly regarded as being replaced as God's chosen people and therefore no longer the 'true' Israel by virtue of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah.

One of the more insidious claims which emerged out of these early defences was the claim that the Jews were responsible – as a people – for the death of Jesus. Some early fathers, such as Justin Martyr, harboured an intense personal dislike towards Jews, suggesting that they were responsible not only for the death of Jesus but also for leading people away from the true path of salvation. Others, such as Origen of Alexandria, were steeped in learning from Judaism and defended Jews as being chosen by God. However, he also put forward the argument that Christians are now the "true Israel" and blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus. One of the most influential Christian theologians in Christian history, Saint Augustine, argued that Jews should be left to suffer as a perpetual reminder of their murder of Christ.

Although Christian theology since the time of the early fathers (Martin Luther being a notable exception) has maintained that naming those "responsible" for Jesus' death is irrelevant (quite aside from the fact that it was Pilate who condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion), the myth that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus persists to this day. Christians regularly confess that it was "our sins" which led to the sacrifice of Jesus' life as an act of atonement. It remains vital for Christians to continue to emphasise this point as well as condemn any suggestion of Jewish responsibility as a myth which has its roots in the antisemitism of the early Church Fathers.

Contemporary Christian-Jewish Relations

Since the Second Vatican Council and the publication of *Nostra Aetate* in 1965 there has been a significant change in Jewish – Catholic relations which have affected other Christian denominations. Rabbi David Rosen has said that he knows of nothing that has so changed a relationship between two peoples as has *Nostra Aetate*. That document and subsequent documents decry the anti-Jewish tropes and state quite explicitly that the Christian Church has its roots in biblical Judaism. Jesus, his mother, and disciples were all Jewish and the Christian church retains a spiritual bond to "Abraham's stock" and continues to draw sustenance from the roots of Judaism, "that well-cultivated olive tree". God does not repent of God's choices or promises, and Jews cannot be presented as rejected or accursed by God or accused of deicide. Hatred, persecutions, displays of antisemitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone is wrong and sinful. A recognition of the history of antisemitism and its contribution to the Shoah has led to a humbler approach and appreciation of Judaism as a living religion. There is a growing interest in the Jewishness of Jesus both within the Christian and Jewish communities and organisations like the Council of Christians and Jews offer hope for the future.

Appendix C

Sample dialogue plan

The following plan was created for the first meeting of our dialogue series. It is offered here as a sample in the hope it might be useful but it should in no way be regarded as prescriptive or foolproof. Every plan should be developed to suit the needs of the group and the purpose of the dialogue. In this case, all 12 participants knew at least one other person in the room fairly well, and had a relationship of trust with one or both of the organisations leading the dialogue. Had this not been the case, more time would have been required in building rapport and a minimum level of trust – first of all in the purpose of the dialogue and the manner in which the process would be held, and second with the individuals participating in the dialogue.

Although the meeting as a whole was successful, the feedback we received on the format was mixed – some highly valued the ‘fishbowl’ while others found it very uncomfortable to be observed in this way. On balance, the facilitators agreed it would have been better to introduce this format in the 2nd or 3rd meeting rather than the first. We also needed more time for introductions than anticipated.

Purpose: To model a different kind of engagement on the difficult questions surrounding antisemitism and Israel/Palestine.

Venue: Large, welcoming, neutral space with adaptable seating.

Room set up: Board room at one end (large table around which everyone can sit) and fishbowl at the other (two concentric circles of chairs).

Timings: 3 hours, evening. Begin with food and some time for people to connect informally.

1. Beginning

1.1 Welcome

- ▲ Set the scene, describe purpose
- ▲ Thank participants
- ▲ Facilitators introduce selves

1.2 Introductions

1.3 Describe process of the meeting

2. Opening up

2.1 Spectrum – Ice breaker questions (5 mins)

- ▲ Participants asked to stand up and move to either end of the room reflecting their responses to a fairly trivial statement. Strongly agree at one end of the room, strongly disagree at the other.
- ▲ E.g. “Spring is the best time of year”.
- ▲ Participants have a chat with those gathered around them about why they think spring is/ is not the best time of year.
- ▲ Repeat with a second trivial question.

2.2 Spectrum – addressing feelings (10 mins)

- ▲ Participants asked to move to either end of the room reflecting how they feel about the discussion that we plan to have this evening – very comfortable at one end and very uncomfortable at the other.
- ▲ **Paired conversation 1:** Participants pair with one person close to them and take it in turns to share something about their discomfort/ comfort.
- ▲ **Paired conversation 2:** With the same partner, take it in turns to ask each other what they think could help alleviate their discomfort and/ or the discomfort of others. (e.g. What do you need from others? What can you undertake in your behaviour towards others?)

2.3 Group Agreement

- ▲ Participants are invited to sit down at the table again.
- ▲ Facilitators invite all to share their suggestions.
- ▲ What do you need from each other in order to make this a conversation that you want to be part of?
- ▲ Flip chart their suggestions and raise any that are missing (confidentiality; one voice at a time; listening to understand etc).
- ▲ Describe next step in process (spectrum and fishbowl).

3. Discussion

(1.5 hours. 45 mins on each question)

3.1 Spectrum on Question 1

What is antisemitism and how does it relate to criticism of the State of Israel?

- ▲ Participants are asked – how confident do you feel about discussing this question? If you feel you have a good degree of knowledge and strong opinions move to one side of the room and less knowledgeable or unsure at the other end.
- ▲ If there are at least 4 feeling confident or fairly confident and they are a mix of Jewish and Christian, they are invited to sit inside the fishbowl (on the inner circle of chairs).
- ▲ If all those feeling confident are from the same tradition this is noted by the facilitator, but they are still invited to sit in the fishbowl.
- ▲ If no-one is feeling confident – seek suggestions on adjusting the question or starting with a different question.

3.2 Fishbowl – Question 1

- ▲ Describe purpose of the fishbowl – to give an opportunity for taking it in turns to speak and to listen and reflect.
- ▲ Those feeling confident are seated in centre and will engage in discussion while those less so are seated in the outer circle and will listen.
- ▲ Both facilitators will sit within the fishbowl and remind participants of the group agreement (one voice at a time, listen to understand – this requires a slower pace. Reassure participants that they will get an opportunity to speak, and encourage them to try to let go of that sense of responsibility that all “wrong” views expressed must be immediately challenged. Try to hold on to your responses at least until the person has finished making their point. Try to be succinct and make one point at a time.)
- ▲ Active facilitation as required: intervening, summarising, reframing, redirecting etc.
- ▲ Those outside the fishbowl are invited to keep in mind or note down any questions or responses that occur during the discussion.

- ▲ After 20 minutes participants are asked to switch places. Those now inside the fishbowl discuss what they have heard. Was there anything new or surprising and what yet remains to be answered or addressed?

Comfort Break

3.1 Spectrum on Question 2

What is needed to improve our understanding of this issue (antisemitism and criticism of the State of Israel)?

- ▲ Participants are asked – how confident do you feel about discussing this question? If you feel you have strong opinions move to one side of the room and if you feel less knowledgeable or unsure move to the other end.
- ▲ If there are at least 4 feeling confident or fairly confident and they are a mix of Jewish and Christian, they are invited to sit inside the fishbowl (on the inner circle of chairs).
- ▲ If all/ most are feeling confident, then randomly select 6 people (equal numbers Jewish and Christian).

3.2 Fishbowl – Question 2

- ▲ Those feeling confident are seated in centre and will engage in discussion while those less so are seated in the outer circle and will listen.
- ▲ Both facilitators will sit within the fish bowl and facilitate as above.
- ▲ Those outside the fishbowl are invited to keep in mind or note down any questions or responses that occur during the discussion.
- ▲ After 20 minutes participants are asked to switch places. Those now inside the fishbowl discuss what they have heard. Was there anything new or surprising and what yet remains to be answered or addressed?

4. Closing

Participants are invited to return to the table and asked

- ▲ How did you find the discussions today?
- ▲ Next steps: What needs to be discussed further?
- ▲ Thanks and departure

Appendix D

About the Organisers



Interfaith Glasgow

Interfaith Glasgow (IG) is a multi-award-winning charity tackling prejudice and discrimination and building positive interfaith relationships in Scotland's most religiously and culturally diverse city, through projects fostering mutual understanding and respect; and equipping people with the skills to engage fruitfully with diversity. Beginning operations in 2012 and becoming a charity in 2016, we bring together people of all ages to meet their neighbours from diverse backgrounds, so that, through familiarity and shared experience, bonds of friendship are built that help to overcome fear and suspicion. We seek to create spaces for people to be open with each other about values they cherish and to share their deepest held beliefs and practices, allowing mutual understanding and trust to deepen. And we create opportunities for people from different faith and belief traditions to connect with those from other communities in relation to issues of common concern, such as poverty, refugee isolation, and climate change; and to work together towards the common good.



The Council of Christians and Jews (West of Scotland Branch)

The Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) is the leading nationwide forum for Christian-Jewish engagement. It was founded in 1942, at the height of the Second World War and the Holocaust, by Archbishop William Temple and Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz. Our aim is for Jews and Christians to meet, to understand each other better and to create meaningful engagement between the communities. We have grown into a nationwide network of 30 active branches around the UK, complemented by a professional team that run national programmes in education, dialogue and social action - for Rabbis and clergy, community leaders, students, policy makers, CCJ members and those of all faiths and none. The message of CCJ is as relevant today as ever. We call on people of faith to use their diversity to challenge prejudice and persecution together so that we can build strong communities that live in dignity, understanding and fellowship. The West of Scotland Branch is the only branch of CCJ in Scotland and organises a programme of activities to develop good interfaith relations in partnership with CCJ UK.

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