

## **PLENARY LECTURE “BIBLE, CHRISTIANITY AND ANTISEMITISM”**

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Title: “**Jews and Judaism between Bedevilment and Source of Salvation: Christianity as a Cause of and a Cure against Anti-Semitism**”

Anti-Semitic hatred and prejudice are notable for their irrational fervor: anti-Semitic views seem immune to rational arguments and indeed have an apparently infinite capacity to absorb conflicting data in support of their unshatterable convictions with regard to the Jewish people. An approach to anti-Semitism that treats it as “a religion” highlights several important insights: that anti-Semites think with the passionate fervor of believers, rather than as rational actors in a world of intellectual exchange, and that rational arguments, in turn, will never fully convince an anti-Semite to undertake a change of views. This presentation will argue that anti-Semitism is best understood as a religious symbolic system, albeit a negative one, that has been transmitted since antiquity through religious and cultural memories variously expressed in the Holy Scriptures of Christianity and Islam as well as in other literatures that are canonical to the anti-Semitic believer. Such memory spaces as Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” and the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” present articulations of this symbolic system and provide bases for ongoing expressions of diverse anti-Semitisms around the globe.

Responses to this anti-Semitic religion may begin with rational efforts at education and exposure to contradictory evidence, but such efforts will only rarely lead anti-Semites to a “conversion” from their beliefs, as rational arguments have only a limited effect on the irrational. Therefore, along with education, responses to anti-Semitism must engage anti-Semitic believers more deeply, at both communal and individual levels. Scholars have the dual responsibility to critique anti-Semitism at the collective level and to offer a meaningful alternative in response to individual articulations of anti-Semitic belief. At the same time, religious communities have an obligation to offer meaningful religious alternatives to anti-Semitic believers. On the educational level, these alternatives should include translations of the New Testament, the Quran, and classical anti-Semitic canonical texts such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or *Mein Kampf*, annotated in ways that identify and correct anti-Semitic statements such as the deicide slander. On the communal and personal level, religious communities should direct anti-Semitic believers to alternate heritages that embody respect for and tolerance of Judaism. In Islam, examples for such traditions could include Mohammed’s constitution of Medina; in Christianity they could include the Jewish origins of Jesus as well as modern Christianity’s appreciation of the literal meaning of the Hebrew Bible. By challenging the totalizing perspective of anti-Semitism from both intellectual and religious perspectives this approach provides the best way forward to confronting anti-Semitism on a global scale.