

## Four written texts with everyday examples of religious oppression:

### **(#1) Everyday examples of antisemitism (internalized, between people, in social institutions, in the culture and broader society** (Written by Eric Hamako)

Mixed heritage family, both racially and religiously. My mother's a third generation US citizen – and a White Ashkenazi Jew. My father's a third generation US citizen – and a Japanese American who's secular Christian – but who's grandparents were Buddhists. For my father, it's important that we celebrate Christmas – not because of Jesus or even anything particularly religious – but because, I think, he associates Christmas with “What normal people do” – and he's interested in being “normal.” Which makes sense – because the US put his own mother, my grandmother, into a concentration camp along with 110,000 other Japanese Americans. So he's interested in fitting in and assimilating into White culture in a lot of ways – and one way to “Whiten up” is to become Christian.

My Japanese American grandmother was raised Buddhist. But her parents wanted her to maintain her Japanese language and cultural skills. So they sent her to Japanese cultural school – it's like Sunday school, but for culture and language rather than religion. Well, actually it was for religion too. Because, you see, the only Japanese school in her area – and this was Los Angeles, an area with a lot of Japanese Americans – the only school was a Christian school run by Episcopalians. So, my grandmother and some of her friends converted to Christianity. Not because they particularly cared about the religion, but because they were grateful to the Christians who ran the Japanese school – and it seemed important to the Christians that my grandmother and her friends convert. So they did.

On my mother's side, my family came over traditional or perhaps Modern Orthodox. But with each generation, they've become more and more assimilated into White Christian culture. In my mother's generation, only one or two out of maybe a dozen cousins married someone Jewish – all the other cousins married Christians. Which also kinda makes sense, when you consider that they were born just before or just after Christian Europe succeeded in killing off about half of the European Jewish population. A pretty clear message about the value the dominant Christian society places on being religiously “different.” Years later, I ran into a quote by a Russian Czar, who'd said that Russia would deal with the Jews with three strategies -- one-third extermination, one-third expulsion, and one-third assimilation. Death, exile, or conversion to Christianity.

I was raised “California Reform” – celebrating major Jewish holidays with family, rather than by going to synagogue – with the exception of High Holidays.

I identify as Jewish – and as a Jewish atheist – but I also acknowledge that I've been raised with a small amount of Christian Privilege, having had half of my family at least nominally celebrate cultural aspects of Christianity – namely Christmas presents, Christmas trees, and Easter candy. I realized this a bit more when I was talking with a close Jewish friend about what my family does for Christmas. That was a mixed-heritage experience.

## **EXAMPLES OF INTERNALIZED RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION**

- -Growing up with the sense that "It [i.e., the Inquisition, pogroms, the Holocaust] could happen again, here – and OUR neighbors might do nothing to help us – or they might TURN on us."
- -Intellectually defending myself, as a 12-year-old, girding myself against the sense, the chance, that I might wind up in Christian hell -- and resolving that I'd rather GO to Christian hell than convert to Christianity out of fear or doubt.
- -Having to decide, in my EARLY teens, that I'd never "try Christianity" as a way to get a date or acceptance. But knowing that the day would come when someone I wanted to date would ask me to "try Christianity" – and encountering that day when I was seventeen.
- -It's wondering if, in my efforts to resist being converted by Christians and Christian culture, that I might have rejected my own religion's god as well.
- -Feeling "not-Jewish-enough."
- -Being conditioned by Gentiles to believe that anti-Jewishness is somehow less important or wrong than other oppressions.
- -Hearing Jewish professors and students talk about Jewishness and anti-Semitism and thinking "Shut up! The Christians are going to get angry and then BAD things will happen again!"

## **EXAMPLES OF INTERPERSONAL JEWISH OPPRESSION**

- -Being asked by one of my fifth grade classmates, "You're Jewish? So... you're Catholic? ("No.") So then... You're Christian? ("No.") What else is there?"
- -A Boy Scout leader I respected offering to sell me something, telling me that he got a great deal on it – "I really Jewed him down."
- -My high school mentor using my tax dollars to sneak an evangelical Christian "strongman" group onto campus to give a lunchtime performance, tearing phonebooks in half to show "the power of Jesus." And when we discussed the matter among our student government, one of the Christian students says, "But we have an Earth Club." And it takes a Jewish student to say, "There's no separation of Earth Club and State." And further, Earth Club isn't trying to exterminate Judaism; I could join the Earth Club and still be Jewish.
- -A family friend telling my Mom, during the 2004 Presidential campaign, that he doesn't like Bush, but the real problem "son los Judeos" – "it's the Jews." He apologizes when my Mom tells him that she's Jewish – he always thought she was Italian.

- -Christian White Supremacists murdering Jewish children at daycare centers' playgrounds.
- -Fearing violence at my place of worship – having to have ID checks, metal detectors, and security guards during high holidays.

#### **EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTIONAL ANTISEMITISM:**

- -Being forced to learn and sing Christian songs for the "Winter Pageant," AND being forced to sing Chanukah songs, so that the Christians could pretend it wasn't a Christmas pageant.
- -Being pressured by Boy Scout leaders to go to "nondenominational" services, which were ALWAYS Protestant Christian.
- -My high school using my tax dollars to bring hometown-hero-turned-NFL-quarterback to give a lunchtime assembly, where he told students, "You can't be a winner without Jesus."
- -Limiting my college and grad school search to schools that don't require Christian study or worship.
- -Knowing that if ever there's one day a week when I don't have to pay for parking, it's the day when Christians go to Church.
- -Businesses who leave the menorah up for two weeks after Chanukah, because that's when Christmas is, and they want to feel they're “being inclusive.”
- -Having to choose between High Holidays and going to school or going to work – even at UMass. And knowing that schools NEVER schedule classes for December 25 or January 1.
- -Learning that the US knew about the Holocaust, but delayed acting – AND learning that the US turned away refugee ships full of Jews at US ports. AND learning that the US refused to approve bombing runs against Nazi factories that were owned by the Ford Motor Company – even if that would have ended the war sooner. After all, Ford was an American corporation.
- -Government devolving social services from government agencies onto religious organizations, the re-creation and government-funding of “faith-based social services” – which are overwhelmingly Christian.
- -The US government using my tax dollars to pay for Christian programs to convert prison inmates to Christianity.

- -US ambassadors to Southwest Asia and North Africa placating rulers by saying they wish they could do something about Israel, but "the Jews," they rule the US.
- -Learning that the Christian Right is the biggest funder of Israel's illegal settlements, because Christian Zionists want to get all the Jews back to Israel, to hasten the Second Coming of Christ, when all the Jews either convert or go to Christian hell.

### **EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL ANTISEMITISM – including language**

- -Inheriting two generations of assimilation, instead of two generations of traditions.
- -Not knowing or learning Hebrew or Yiddish. Imagine not understanding the language that you're praying in.
- -Knowing I was "the only" or "one of the only" of my religion in my class, my school, my town, my county.
- -Having to "come out" as Jewish (or keep it hidden) in every interaction.
- -Having a choice of dozens of Christian churches in our county, but driving an hour and a half to go to services because the one synagogue that was finally built in our county wasn't our denomination.
- -Practicing ritual at home, in private spaces, in (virtually) all-Jewish temporary spaces, rather than in public spaces. For example, for years, I went to High Holidays services in a Protestant church – because none of the Jewish congregations could afford their own synagogue.
- -It's feeling physically unsafe at the thought of practicing my religion in public – even to pray before or after a meal at a restaurant.
- -The belief and social reality that day begins either at midnight or when the sun rises, not when it sets.
- -Living in a world structured against observing Shabbat. If the weekend were structured for Shabbat, we'd get Friday and Saturday off, not Saturday and Sunday.
- -The belief that it's 2009. It's the millennial panic about the world ending when the Christian calendar turned 2000. For Jews, Y2K was about 3700 years ago.
- -Seeing and hearing "God" in the US, in class, on money, from elected officials, and knowing they don't mean the Jewish G-d, or the Muslim god or anybody else's god -- they mean Jesus.
- -Using the word "Bible" to refer to "the authoritative book" on something (e.g., "the cooking bible," "the carpenter's bible," "the dieter's bible.")

- -“Cross your fingers” – a derivation of the historical practice of making the sign of the Cross to ward off evil.
- -Realizing that many people say "gypped" because they sense that they shouldn't say "Jewed" anymore.
- -People using "Nazi" as a euphemism for someone who's rigid or judgemental, erasing the reality of genocide (e.g., "soup Nazi," "grammar Nazi," "fashion Nazi"). A real “fashion Nazi” would round up everyone who was poorly dressed – and their families – steal their possessions, enslave them, and then murder them.
- -“Crusade” used as a term for “holy war” or “noble war.” This is the Christian perspective on the word. To Jews and Muslims, the crusades were catastrophes in which Christians invaded, stole, killed, and occupied.
- -Christians seeming to exempt Jesus from all their feelings about Jews. Jesus was a Jew – when he was born, when he died, every day in between – and when he came back, if you believe in that. And so was Mary.
- -The overemphasis of Chanukah, a minor secular holiday, given its proximity to Christmas.
- -The commodification of non-Christian religions and cultures – turning other people’s religions and cultures into fad kitch – White dreadlocks, Buddhist prayer beads, bindhis, Om tatoos, yoga, and Madonna and Britney Spears declaring their "deep interest" in Kabbalah.
- -Secular Christians declaring that "they're not Christian anymore" or that "they had a secular wedding, God wasn't mentioned once!" or that they're “not into organized religion.” Which God are you rejecting? They're not a JEWISH atheist, they’re not a MUSLIM atheist, they’re not a HINDU, BUDDHIST, or TAOIST atheist – they’re a CHRISTIAN atheist.
- -White Gentile liberals' double-standards about Israel/Palestine, pointing out Israel's human rights violations and history of oppression without acknowledging the human rights violations and history of oppression that founded and maintains the US, their own nation, where they live and benefit.
- -People confusing “Israeli” with “Jewish.” Some Israelis aren’t Jewish – it’s a nationality, a matter of citizenship or location. Most Jews aren’t Israeli. And no one blames all Protestants when England or Germany does something oppressive.
- -Christians, secular and religious, telling me that they'd have an easier time listening to me say these things if I didn't seem “so angry.” And have I considered changing my tone? And some of those same people, in the same breath, quote the Bible at me – perhaps trying to “encourage” me?

- -“Take it as gospel,” meaning that someone should accept something as indisputable truth.
- -“I swear on a stack of Bibles,” to signify that one is telling the truth or risking the wrath of the deity to whom the Bible is relevant.
- -“Walking on water.”
- -“Hell” (the concept, as referenced, is Christian)
- -Many restaurants and cafeterias still serve fish or a fish option on Fridays. This is a holdover from the until-recent Catholic policy of not eating “meat” (meaning non-fish animals) on Fridays. That’s why Friday is clam chowder day.
- -“Easter eggs” in DVDs, meaning “hidden goodies.”
- -“You’ll get your pound of flesh,” a reference to Shakespeare’s Shylock the Jew, who demanded a pound of flesh as compensation.
- -“Poisoned the well,” a still common phrase meaning “to turn something good into something bad” – historically, a literal accusation against Jews.
- -“(Playing) the Devil’s advocate,” a Catholic concept, in which a Church functionary plays the role of the Devil, advocating against the confirmation of a nominated Pope or other nominated official.
- -“The Devil’s in the details,” again, a reference to the Christian notion of Satan.
- -“Give the Devil his due.”
- -“A cross to bear.”
- -“Judas,” meaning “betrayed.”
- -“Jesus/Christ!” as an exclamation of surprise or dismay.
- -“(God)dammit!” calling on the Christian deity/deities to curse someone.
- -“Bless you,” as a response to sneezing (vs. secular responses, such as “salud,” “gesundheit,” or “zei geshundht.”)
- -“Sin/ sinful” widely used to mean something bad or something indulgent, as in foods.
- -“Being crucified” as a term for being unreasonably, unfairly, or excessively punished.

- -“Scion” as a name for a car – literally meaning “heir or descendant of,” but also understood to have Christian connotations, as in “the last scion of Christ.”
- -“Saw the light,” meaning to have a revelation or conversion experience related to a way of thinking, with “the light” meaning Jesus.

**(#2) Reclaiming My Roots, And My Name, by Sonny Singh**  
[http://www.racewire.org/archives/2009/04/singh\\_reclaiming\\_my\\_name.html](http://www.racewire.org/archives/2009/04/singh_reclaiming_my_name.html)

**(#3) First Writing Since (Poem on Crisis of Terror) by Suheir Hammad**  
<http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/ac/shammad.html>

**(#4) Nankani, S., & Muslim Youth in NYC Public Schools Study. (2009). *This is where I need to be: Curriculum Guide and A Resource for Teachers* New York Student Press Initiative, Teachers College Columbia University. See**  
<http://www.thisiswhereineedtobe.com/about.html>