

This Year's Passover Exposes the Enemy's Agenda Against God's People

Growing up in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s, my most profound memories are of Jewish collective identity. The Holocaust remembrance events and rallies on behalf of Soviet Jewry that my brothers and I attended with my parents and community instilled in us the most basic axiom of our identity as Jews when facing anti-Semitism. An attack on one Jew is an attack on all Jews. As I write this statement I am struck by how trite it seems. That the discriminatory targeting of any individual based on religious or ethnic group is an attack on the entire group is obvious. Negative as it may be, there is scarcely a better indication of identification with a group than feeling the sting when another member is attacked.

The logic behind this sentiment is simple. When any Jew is attacked for being Jewish every one of us knows full well that "If I was there it could have been—would have been—me." It would have been me because the victim was attacked not as an individual but as a representative of all Jews. The Jewish people were attacked.

Of course, this is not unique to Jews. Whenever someone else who shares my identity or beliefs is attacked and I can honestly say that had I been there it would have been me, I am the victim as well. This is the litmus test of collective victim-hood.

Which brings us to the horrific events of this past year. A few weeks ago, it was widely reported that, as per the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 2016 was the bloodiest year for Christians on record. An estimated 90,000 Christians worldwide were murdered this past year because of their faith.

In fact, recent history shows that while the numbers were somewhat higher than in the past, 2016 was not a significant outlier. The CSGC report approximates the same number of deaths for each year of the past decade. As Pope Francis has noted, in terms of numbers of martyrs, Christians are by far the most persecuted religious group in the world.

While most of the deaths occurred in the war zones of Africa and the Middle East, Christian martyrdom is not confined to those regions. The recent ISIS terrorist attack in Istanbul intended to target Christians celebrating “their pagan feast,” the slitting of the throat of an elderly French priest and the Easter bombing in Pakistan are only a few examples of attacks on Christians going global.

While the scope of Christian martyrdom is shocking, the overall suffering of Christians worldwide is not confined to the mounting number of deaths. Discriminatory anti-Christian policies as well as outright or unofficial yet sanctioned persecution are commonplace in too many countries to name.

And this is a Jewish problem.

If the measure of collective victimhood in the face of attack is, “Had I been there, it would have been me,” then the conclusion is inescapable. In today’s world, an attack on Christians is an attack on Jews. Is there any doubt that those who have murdered Christians for their faith in Iraq, France or Pakistan would kill any Jew they could get their hands on? In the 21st century, are there any enemies of Christianity who are not at least as passionately enemies of the Jews?

I do not mean merely that we as Jews who know the meaning of suffering and discrimination must stand up for others who are under attack. While this is correct regarding the issue of persecution of Christians, it does not go far enough. According to the collective victimhood test, attacks on Christians are—quite literally—attacks on Jews. This may be

difficult for many Jews to accept considering the history of Christian treatment of our people.

We dare not allow the dark past of the Church's treatment of Jews to cloud our vision in the present. Christians no longer persecute Jews anywhere in the world. Christian doctrines regarding the Jews and Judaism have been inching—and in some cases charging—forward toward greater acceptance and reconciliation in most denominations of Christianity. Closer to home, our greatest hope for peaceful coexistence with any non-Jewish population in Israel is to be found in the Christian community. Israel has rapidly become the only country in the Middle East in which Christians have no reason to fear for being Christian. History, it turns out, makes strange bedfellows.

The Tanakh—the Jewish Bible—is sacred Scripture for both Christians and Jews. The basic values contained therein—the biblical definitions of good and evil, of sacred and profane, of life and death—are the shared underlying principles on which our worlds are built.

It must be clearly stated: Neither these Scriptures nor the values contained in them are sacred to those who attack and persecute Christians. If those who murder Christians would kill Jews too, it is because they hate all that we share; all that Jews and Christians together represent.

We are currently in the Passover season, when Jews the world over will engage in the millennia-old rituals of remembrance and identification with the slavery and Exodus from Egypt. As they were about to enter the Promised Land over 3,000 years ago, the people of Israel were commanded to “love the foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” (Deut. 10:19). In our times, as well, the people of Israel are once again a free and strong nation that has returned to its homeland. And once again the historical memory of Jewish suffering is meant to instill within us the emphatic concern

for those who are not of our own nation—the others among us who are in need of support and rescue from oppression. This is the lesson of the suffering of Egypt in biblical times, and it is the message of modern anti-Semitism—and anti-Judeo-Christianism—in our times as well.

So yes, in the 21st century, an attack on one Christian is an attack on all Jews. {eoa}

Rabbi Pesach Wolicki *is the associate director for the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation (CJCUC) and the co-founder for Blessing Bethlehem, a nonprofit organization that provides humanitarian aid to the beleaguered Christian Arab community in Bethlehem.*