

Like you, I'm disturbed by the recent surge in religiously motivated violence. The mass murders at a mosque in New Zealand, bombings at churches in Sri Lanka, church burnings in Louisiana, and now the killings in Chabad Poway Synagogue, follow the earlier killings in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh by white nationalists. I do not have adequate words when all humanity is under assault, often in the name of religion. (Yes, White Nationalism is a religion.) I do pray that God will deliver me from cruelty and lead me in the way of life everlasting. (Psalm 139:24)

Recently while walking with my friend, Rabbi Adam Raskin of Har Shalom, we were discussing our common concern of protecting our people from violence and ensuring that our congregations remain places of worship and service. It was an important conversation, particularly in the light of the news that the killer at the Poway Synagogue was a Christian and a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a small ultra-conservative denomination within the Presbyterian tradition. His faith was formed through Sunday School and attendance of regular worship over many years. Unfortunately, this formation somehow led him to believe that Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus and therefore worthy of condemnation and annihilation. This system of beliefs reflects supersessionism, or *replacement* theology. Replacement theology is used to justify retributive violence against the Jewish people, who are erroneously considered no longer God's chosen people, as the Christian church has replaced Israel in the covenant with God. It gains traction from a particular reading of the New Testament that says God has replaced the Jews with the act of salvation through Jesus Christ. Yet this retrograde interpretation has been rejected by the Presbyterian Church USA and all other mainline traditions along with the Roman Catholic Church. Again and again, at Saint Mark I have repeated what Saint Paul declares: that God has not rejected the eternal covenant with the Jewish people. (Romans 9-12). Yet, the doctrine of supersessionism persists among a small number of Christians as was acknowledged with contrition by the Poway killer's pastors, who expressed deep sorrow to the Jewish community. See their comments here:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/05/01/alleged-synagogue-shooter-was-churchgoer-who-articulated-christian-theology-prompting-tough-questions-evangelical-pastors/?utm_term=.4436f7d87f92

It's important that Christians understand God's covenant with the Jewish people is eternal. Jews and Christians share in this eternal covenant into which Christians have been grafted. (Romans 11) As our PCUSA Brief Statement of Faith declares, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.

Finally, Christians must stand in solidarity with the Jewish people against all attacks against them, just as we stand with Muslims and all other religious groups

when they are attacked. Christians must denounce all speech and acts violence leveled against people of faith or no faith, whenever and wherever they occur.

This is paramount and must never be neglected.

Pastor Roy W. Howard
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