News



(Unsplash/Alla Kemelmakher)



by John Grosso

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 30, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

All was not calm, nor was it bright, on Catholic social media this Christmas.

In fact, hundreds of Catholics erupted on X, Instagram, and Facebook after the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops dared to share well wishes with the Jewish community in celebration of Hanukkah on the evening of Dec. 25.

This year, the first night of Hanukkah began on Christmas Day, a convergence that has occurred only five times since 1900.

As has become a practice since the dawn of social media, Catholic accounts on every digital platform issued Christmas greetings and well wishes throughout the 24th and the 25th to Christians celebrating the holiday. Prominent Catholic social media accounts also shared well wishes to the Jewish community around sundown, including the U.S. bishops' conference.

> The Catholic Bishops of the United States wish our Jewish brothers and sisters a Hanukkah filled with light and joy. May our enduring friendship shine, especially in times of darkness. pic.twitter.com/BcXHFUofn8
>
> — U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (@USCCB) December 25, 2024

Sharing the message on X, Facebook and Instagram, the conference posted an image of a menorah, with the caption reading: "The Catholic Bishops of the United States wish our Jewish brothers and sisters a Hanukkah filled with light and joy. May our enduring friendship shine, especially in times of darkness."

Commenters on all three platforms erupted into what can only be described as an antisemitic rage, accusing the bishops' conference of being drunk, praying for the conference's conversion to the Catholic faith, and calling the conference a joke, the Catholic Church evil, and the post disgusting.

A number of comments referred to the Jewish people as "Christ killers," heretics and "antichrists."

Others commented "Merry Christmas" and "Christ is King" en masse. Still others called for the conversion of the Jewish people, or made accusations that the Jewish

people worship Satan or follow the devil.

Some other commenters (that must lack reading comprehension skills) demanded the bishops' conference post about Christmas, apparently missing the nine Christmas-related tweets the account posted throughout the holiday. Many also referred to Hanukkah as a "fake holiday."

It got so bad that the bishops' conference had to issue a lengthy clarification on Instagram in which they quoted *Nostra Aetate*: a declaration on the relation of the church to non-Christian religions.

The Instagram post said it wanted to clarify Church teaching and the conference's position "with regard to our relationship with those of the Jewish faith."

Advertisement

The post then quoted from *Nostra Aetate*, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in 1965:

"True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

"Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of antisemitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."

While some well-intentioned people affirmed the Hanukkah well wishes on the conference's Facebook, the damage was already done. The volume of negative comments on the post animated more attention and views — making the entire episode trend on the precipice of social media virality.

The Hanukkah post on Instagram had more than 100 comments — more than every Christmas post combined. Similarly, the Hanukkah post on X had more than 100

comments and 35,400 views. A Christmas post of the same style had nine comments and fewer than 5,000 views.

This is just the latest episode in the continuing degradation of Catholic social media discourse. Earlier this year, conservative Catholics helped fuel speculation that the government controls the weather. In October, then-candidate Donald Trump attempted to use Catholic imagery on X to ingratiate himself with Catholics who believe they are "under attack" from secular society.

This story appears in the **Reporter's Inbox** feature series. View the full series.