

Rabbi Jack Schlacter  
Los Alamos Jewish Center  
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An anti-Semite once declared, without shame, "All our troubles come from the Jews."

A Jew nearby responded, "Absolutely. From the Jews. And the bicycle riders."

"Bicycle riders? Why the bicycle riders?" asked the antisemite.

"Why the Jews?" asked the Jew.

I'm here to speak about antisemitism, or, more accurately, Jew hatred. And I started off my remarks with the joke, because there's not much else in this presentation that's going to be funny.

The whole exercise of preparing for this has been incredibly painful, inflammatory and sad. And I became more and more discouraged as I continued to read about antisemitism. And trust me, there are books and books and books on this topic. But as I prepared, I did find some consolation in the realization that when I look out at this congregation, I know that I see either potential or in most cases, staunch allies already in this millennia long battle against antisemitism.

And I have this opportunity to speak to you because you have a courageous, thoughtful, supportive leader in Reverend Ann Hill. The professionals here at Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church have all been helpful in arranging for this today. And I could not ask for a more welcoming reception. So let me give you a few caveats up front. First of all, I serve as the rabbi of the Los Alamos Jewish Center here in Los Alamos.

I also serve as the rabbi of a small congregation in Santa Fe called Combe. But I am only representing my own opinions. I am not representing any official organization. So that's caveat number one. Caveat number two is that I am not an expert on this topic. I keep buying more books about antisemitism. I read them. I learn a little bit.

I'm actually immersed right now in an intensive program through the Spiritus Institute in Chicago on antisemitism. I hope to learn more there. But I have a lot more to learn. This is not my area of expertise. And Los Alamos has been pretty spared much of the anti-Semitic rise that has taken place in this country. We had the swastika on the rock in white rock not so long ago.

Hopefully that was just a one off event. I have congregants who have told me about anti-Semite stickers on products at Smiths here in Los Alamos, of all places. I've had some

congregants tell me about getting into some arguments with people that seemed quite anti-Semitic to them. But mostly, Los Alamos is spared the worst of it. My congregation in Santa Fe not quite such a pretty picture.

There was a scheduled concert by the American Jewish singer Matisyahu that was supposed to be hosted by Meow Wolf some months ago. That was canceled by anti-Semites. There was a screening of the film *Screams Before Silence*, a documentary about the sexual atrocities committed on October 7th by Hamas. That screening was interrupted by numerous protesters a few months ago in Santa Fe.

There was a talk scheduled in Santa Fe by the Israel consul general from Houston. Her talk was canceled by anti-Semites. And in Albuquerque. The list just continues. If I have one message alone to share with you, it is that the rise in antisemitism in this country is real, and that the fear and anger and sadness that Jewish people feel in this country is tangible.

There was an incident in New York City a few months ago where somebody walked onto a subway car and demanded that all Jews identify themselves. This individual was photographed by somebody on the subway car and subsequently arrested. When I walk around now and I've been doing this since October 7th, I always wear some kind of head covering. And in most settings I'm wearing what we call a kippah or a yarmulke in Yiddish, a Jewish skullcap.

When I do that, I know that I am identifying myself as a Jew. And I wouldn't say I'm a hero. I was on the subway in New York City not long after that incident, and I was incredibly conscious of the fact that I was telegraphing my Jewish status.

There is an organization in this country. It's about eight years old. It's called JewBelong. It was established to try to bring young, alienated Jews back into Judaism and JewBelong pivoted. Six years ago, you may remember, there was a shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Subsequent to that, antisemitism has really been on the rise.

Synagogues around this country pay out of their pockets what we call a Jew hatred tax. Security that is required to make sure that these incidents don't get repeated. JewBelong pivoted. Six years ago. And instead of focusing exclusively on bringing young Jews back into the fold, they now work to combat antisemitism. JewBelong has a pretty edgy approach to their advertising because they really are targeting young people and they have a billboard that says, Here's an idea.

Let's ask everyone who's wondering if antisemitism is real to wear a skull cap for a week and then report back. So I'm ready to report back. It's real. My younger brother lives near the border between Washington State and Idaho, rents an apartment, and he always

removes all the signs of his Jewish background from his apartment when somebody comes in to do some work there because he just doesn't want to have some problem.

According to FBI statistics, more than half of all religious hate crimes in this country were targeted at Jews last year. Jews constitute 2% of the population of this country. So that's a little bit out of the norm. There were almost 9000 anti-Semitic incidents reported to the Anti-Defamation League in 2023. That was two and a half times the number in 2022, which was also a record setting year.

Over the past decade, the number has increased by a factor of ten. 60% of Jews in this country, according to a Gallup poll. On July 1st of this year, 60% said they feel uncomfortable sharing their religious affiliation. I find that a disgusting statistic. 25% of American Jews report experiencing an anti-Semitic incident of some kind in 2023. Pro-Palestinian rallies that show signs saying Burn Tel Aviv to the ground bother me personally because my father-in-law lives in Tel Aviv.

I guess I take that personally. So you may ask, why should I care? I mean, if I were speaking to a Jewish crowd, this would be a no brainer. But I'm not speaking to a Jewish crowd. Why should you care about antisemitism in this country? Deborah Lipstadt, who is the United States special envoy for monitoring and combating antisemitism, says, and I quote, antisemitism is not just a threat to Jews.

Even if you don't care about Jews, it's a threat to democracy. The late chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, Lord Jonathan Sacks, said antisemitism is always an early warning sign of a dangerous dysfunction within a culture. Because the hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews and others have likened anti-Semitism to a canary in the coal mine of the health of a society.

And we should all be concerned, both Jew and non-Jew alike, that antisemitism is a serious problem in 21st century United States of America. Jews are 2% of the population of this country. We cannot solve this problem on our own. We need allies. And it's for that reason that I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you because you are our potential or already on-board allies.

This past September, I had my first trip to Poland. I have the luxury as a well-paid and now well retired scientist from the laboratory. I have the luxury to do Rabbi-ing wherever I feel like doing, because I don't make my living from it. And I like to do itinerant rabbi-ing for the Jewish High Holidays. Last fall I was in Warsaw, Poland, and I found myself in a country that experienced antisemitism on steroids.

There's a wonderful museum in Warsaw called the Museum of the Jewish Experience in Poland, and it documents the 1000 year saga of Jews in the country of Poland, a very rich

and rewarding experience which ended. It really ended. This was a country that had 3 million Jews prior to World War Two. If there are a thousand Jews in Poland today, I would be shocked.

My congregation there was at most 70 people for the highest holiday of the year, the day of Atonement. We probably had 70 people present. One of the individuals in the congregation said something to me that's really stuck. He said, We are a remnant of a remnant. It's a horrifying situation to have. antisemitism wipe out that population, and that is the ultimate end of unbridled antisemitism.

That is not the path that we want to go down as Americans. The word antisemitism. I'm going to talk a little bit about definitions here. The word antisemitism was coined in 1879 by William Wilhelm Marr in Germany. Why did he do this? It's because Germany emancipated its citizens. And you could be in Germany in 1879. You could be Jewish and a proud German citizen.

You simply worshiped elsewhere than the majority of the population. But Wilhelm Marr and others like him did not like emancipation. They didn't think that people should be legitimate citizens if they were not, if they were Jewish. And so to delegitimize Jews, he coined this term antisemitism. It's a made-up word. I don't put a hyphen in there because it's not like there's really something called Semitism.

And this means you're against Semitism. It's really Jew hatred. We should be very clear about it. I also don't capitalize it because that gives it more attention than it really deserves. But what exactly is antisemitism? In 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance plenary. That's quite a mouthful, but it's usually referred to as the IHRA plenary, I-H-R-A, they decided to adopt a non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism and it goes like this antisemitic is a certain perception of Jews which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews.

Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. IHRA was initiated in 1998 by the former Swedish prime minister. There are 35 member countries and each of those countries recognizes that international political coordination is imperative to strengthen the moral commitment of societies and to combat several growing issues, which include antisemitism, Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion.

The plenary was not satisfied with this definition, but it went on to bulletize a list of examples of antisemitism. And the first bullet in the list says calling for aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of

religion. And as I was preparing these remarks, I read the Hamas charter of 1988 and the 2017 revision to the Hamas charter.

And I think it is patently obvious to any reader of the Hamas charter that it epitomizes antisemitism by, quote, calling for aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of radical ideology or an extremist view of religion. There are other bullets in that list in the IHRA definition, denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination.

And the next definition that I will go onto is Zionism. And anti-Zionism, in very clear terms, denies the Jewish people their right to self-determination. There are other things in that bulletized list comparing contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the State of Israel, applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.

So this is all in the IHRA definition and the bulletized list that follows. I am proud to say that not only did the United States government adopt the IHRA definition, but our governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham, signed an executive order in August of 2022, two years ago, adopting the IHRA definition for New Mexico as well. So I already alluded to Zionism and anti-Zionism as an example of the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

What is Zionism? In some sense to me? Zionism is a done deal. Zionism was modern. Zionism was a late 19th century political movement to reestablish a Jewish state in Israel, which was the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. There were many net nation states being formed around that period and Zionism was simply one of those many movements. But the state of Israel was established in 1948.

Anti-Zionism, to me, tries to change history and pretend that the country doesn't exist. It exists. I tell people, Get over it. anti-Zionism is opposition to Jews having a state. They already have a state now. And Rabbi David Zaslow, who provided a lot of the information that I've used here today, says Zionism asserts the rights of the Jewish people to resettle in their ancient homeland.

It's not a liberal or conservative movement. It doesn't identify with a particular political party. It simply asserts Israel's right to self-determination while granting equal rights to all its citizens Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Druze and secular. It does not preclude the claim of Palestinians to their own nation. Judaism is the state religion of Israel, just like Islam is the state religion.

In about 25 countries. Christianity is the state religion in 15 countries. Buddhism is the state religion in four countries. Hinduism is the state religion in three countries. So when somebody says they are anti-Zionist, they are often unaware that the term implies that Israel is not a legitimate nation. And I think it's time to get past that. What about genocide?

Genocide is, quote, another coined word, by the way, coined, I believe, in about 1947. It's the definition is a crime where acts are committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. There is no attempt by Israel to destroy the Palestinian people. The war is between Israel and the terrorist organization of Hamas, not the citizens of Gaza.

The Arab population in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza has quadrupled since the end of World War Two. If Israel is committing genocide against Arabs, it's doing a pretty bad job of it. To imply that this is a genocide is a distortion of the word genocide. Think of genocide as Armenia. The Holocaust. Rwanda or Darfur. And what about apartheid?

Apartheid is any system or practice that separates people according to color, ethnicity, caste, etc.. And if you look in Israel proper today, 25% of the citizens of the state of Israel are not Jewish. More than half of the Jews, by the way, in Israel are of Middle Eastern extraction. It's not white Jews. So it is not an apartheid state.

When you go to Israel today, you see diversity, you see inclusivity, you see toleration. This is a democracy. And all citizens have the right to vote, assemble, protest and redress grievances in the courts. That's not apartheid. What about colonization? This one really gets to me because here we are in northern New Mexico. We should understand what colonization is all about.

Colonization is an act of political and economic domination involving the control of a country and its people by settlers from a foreign power. Jews are not a foreign power in the Middle East. There was an ill fated war against the Roman occupation 2000 years ago. In fact, I will tell you that Monday night, tomorrow night marks the anniversary of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

And Jews have had a presence in that land for over 3000 years. The descendants of the Jews who fled that war 2000 years ago have been slowly returning to their ancient homeland. Whether that homeland was under Roman occupation, Christian occupation. Muslim occupation. The return accelerated after World War Two. Would you call these returnees colonizers? Are Jews who survived the pogroms, the Holocaust and expulsion from Arab countries, people you would call colonizers?

I don't think so. Let's go back to antisemitism. When Jews are verbally or physically harassed or Jewish institutions and houses of worship are vandalized in response to actions of the state of Israel. That is antisemitism. And I'm really trying to focus on what's going on in our country, because that's what we can change by our own actions. We have relatively little influence on what happens in other countries, but we should take our own responsibilities about what's happening in this country, what to do about antisemitism.

That organization, Jew Belong, that I mentioned, has some pretty edgy response to that question. Number one, call it out when you sense that someone is being antisemitic, they probably are. And remember I said they're edgy. They're literature says call it the F out. Do not let people get away with it. Yes, that can be scary. And you should not do things that are jeopardizing your own well-being.

But don't pretend you didn't hear something antisemitic. And don't let people get away with their terrible stuff. And educating yourself is another excellent tool for combating antisemitism. Hence my appreciation to all of you and to Reverend Hill for giving me this opportunity today. We should be clear about October 7th that was the most egregious manifestation of antisemitism ever directed at the Jewish state.

What Hamas perpetrated had nothing to do with one's views on the morality or wisdom of Israeli policies. It had to do with anti-Semitic fantasies that have historically targeted the Jewish people that led to the Holocaust. Fantasies like Jews are evil. Jews are conspiratorial. Jews are subhuman. All of that, by the way, built into the Hamas charter. So let me close these remarks by coming back to Deborah Lipstadt, who said antisemitism is an equal opportunity scourge.

What's so frightening is that is coming from everywhere. Right, left, center. It's the most ubiquitous form of hatred, not just the oldest. And it's like a virus that cannot be cured. Lipstadt was asked how to combat anti-Semitic myths, and she said that the accuser, who is subjecting Israel to a standard no other country must meet. That is the essence of antisemitism.

During our history in the United States, during the history of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, all those countries displaced indigenous people. And no one says that these countries are illegitimate or demands that we evacuate. So why is Israel different? She asks rhetorically. A little over a year ago, President Biden rolled out the first ever United States national strategy to counter antisemitism, and he made mention of the fact that neo-Nazis six years ago marched from the shadows through Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting, Jews will not replace us.

They had torches in hand. They spewed the same anti-Semitic, vile and hate that were heard across Europe in the 1930s. And as President Biden said, what happened in Charlottesville and the threat it represented for American democracy caused the very soul of our nation to hang in the balance. And it is still hanging in the balance today. He went on to say that loud voices are normalizing this venom, but we must never allow it to become normal.

antisemitism threatens not only the Jewish community, but all Americans, people who peddle these anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and fuel racial, ethnic and religious hatred against Jews. Also target other communities. Those communities include black and brown Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, LGBTQ plus individuals, Muslim Americans, women and girls, and so many others. Biden closed by saying, The power lies within each of us to transform this story, to rise together against hate, to show the world who we are, and to restore the soul of America together.

And as I said, Jews cannot restore that soul on our own. We need your help. Not content with lofty words. The United States National Strategy to Counter antisemitism lays out strategic goals, and strategic goal 4.2 is to expand and mobilize multi-faith partnerships. The goal says that people of different faiths often come together to serve those in need, to exchange ideas, to stand in solidarity with one another, and to partner on public issues of shared concern.

The goal states that throughout American history, Baptists and Buddhists, Jews and Jains, Mormons and Muslims, Sikhs and Seventh Day Adventists. And the best I could come up with this, give this a try here. Episcopal aliens and apprehensive Jews. That's the best I could add to his list. Have stood together countless times to advance principles of justice, civil rights for all, and a Hebrew phrase that I hope you embrace.

Tikkun olam repairing the world. This kind of multi-faith cooperation is essential to countering the scourge of antisemitism and other forms of hate, discrimination and bias. It must be expanded and strengthened at this critical time in America's history. And Biden says through that strategy, document religious leaders and faith groups can and should lead the way. And I want to thank you and thank your leadership for helping lead the way and for being my allies as we speak out and fight antisemitism.

Thank you very much.