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CLERGY

They Hate Us Cuz They Ain't Us

The plague of anti-Semitism is an old and loathsome scourge which unfortunately is still strong after all these years. While the social, political, ethnic and religious affiliations of the perpetrators morph from one generation to the next, they all share the same core of pathological hatred towards Jews.

Note the beginning of that old canard: "The Israelites (Jews) are too powerful, they have too much influence," began when a new Pharaoh arose in Egypt. When he instituted policies to oppress our ancestors, the Israelites continued to flourish and prosper. Enraged, Pharaoh and the Egyptians increased the harshness of their anti-Semitic policies. Thus began the world's first outbreak of virulent anti-Semitism. An entire people enslaved just because of their faith and ethnicity. And once the Egyptians gained a taste for this new kind of bigotry, Pharaoh prompted them to take their hatred to the extreme: the genocide of our people.

Egypt may have been the first, but the shameful story has been repeated throughout history. We have witnessed it in the ancient Middle East, throughout Northern Africa, and from one end of Europe to the other. Eastern, Central and Western Europe have all perpetrated anti-Semitic outbreaks that led to the slaughter

of tens of thousands. Ah, if it was only the murder of thousands that we were talking about. Rather, we know all too well that the modern Europeans, less than 75 years ago, murdered at least

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six-million Jews and terrorized millions of others.

Just about every Jew is familiar with the sneering taunts, derision and threats from anti-Semites. That it is still a thing in the 21st century is a little shocking---but maybe not. I suppose there is a bad news--good news in this hyper-social media crazed age. The bad news is that anti-Semites can now easily spread their venom around the world with a simple click of a button. Twisted folks can quickly find like-minded creeps and form pop-up groups and blogs to egg each

other on.

The good news about social media is that we can just as easily find out who these creeps are and out them for the sociopaths they are.

And because of social media, it has become abundantly clear that anti-Semitism is not confined to those who are dismissed as "deplorables," the uneducated, and backward bigots.

No. Today's anti-Semites are found among the far right and the far left. Some of today's anti-Semites are the obvious characters who march in parades wearing neo-Nazi and KKK regalia. And on the opposite side of the political spectrum, there are some anti-Semites who are considered the darlings of the "intelligentsia," the social and academic elite. Some are bestselling authors, popular actors, athletes and rock stars. And most alarmingly, some are college professors who are teaching our students. They openly broadcast their hatred of Jews and of Israel but are protected because of their tenure.

The Anti-Defamation League reports that "the number of anti-Semitic incidents was nearly 60 percent higher in 2017 than 2016, the largest single-year increase on record and the second highest number reported since ADL started

tracking incident data in the 1970s." And though the 2018 report has not yet been released, we know that it has only gotten worse.

Of course, Jews are not the only people who have suffered from bigotry. Nearly every minority group has been attacked. Indeed, the ADL fights passionately for the rights, justice and protection of people regardless of their faith, race, gender, nationality, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

But the kinds of attacks Jews suffer is unique. We cannot afford to fool ourselves by thinking that the threats come only from the ignorant and backward. No, anti-Semitism is found in nearly every social and ideological circle. Nor is it possible to offer a reasonable explanation for the origin and continued strength of anti-Semitism. How can you "explain" a pathology?

So consider this: in light of the fact that the Bible is the story of the Jewish people, that Christianity and Islam both rely heavily on the Jewish Bible and experience for their own development, Jews have maintained a blessed loyalty to our ancestral traditions and family ties. In addition, consider that though the Jewish people are but a tiny fraction of the world's population, we continue to thrive and achieve beyond all measure despite the bigotry and prejudice of anti-Semites and those who seek to destroy the modern nation of Israel. And once you realize that we are not only the oldest religious and ethnic group, we are also dynamically modern and innovative, then the only explanation for anti-Semitism is---well, to quote Seth Rogan in The

Interview, "They hate us cuz they ain't us!"

As we move through March and April we encounter two beloved Jewish holidays that celebrate our ancestors' survival from anti-Semitism. On Purim we rejoice in the memory of heroic Esther and Mordechai who helped us defeat Haman's evil plot. On Passover, we recall the miraculous exodus from Egyptian bondage. In each generation we are taught to consider how we were once slaves in Egypt---that we too face the sting of the oppressor. And in each generation, we have felt that sting---and often times the slaughter. But we have also experienced the redemption. God has helped us throughout time. Our journey and our destiny is still unfolding. Yes, we'll continue to face anti-Semites and bigots. We know that they'll continue against us from all sides. We'll have to continue to ready ourselves, prepare ourselves and keep our wits about us. And God-willing, we'll continue to make progress, slowly but surely helping the many, many good people of this world unite with bonds of respect, fellowship and peace.

Chag Purim Sameiach v'Chag Pesach Sameiach!

Rick

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