

OPINION

# Know antisemitism when you see it

Campus protests have crossed into the 3 D's: demonization, delegitimization and double standard

By JOEL SCHWITZER

Jewish student leaders at the University of North Texas recently planned a walk on campus to amplify the plight of the 133 Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Hindu hostages — including six Americans — still being held captive by Hamas terrorists.

While there, I didn't see any signs for Israel Week programming (of which the walk was the kickoff event). I was told they had been snatched almost as soon as they had been placed.

What I did see were many anti-Israel and antisemitic messages written in chalk on the sidewalks. Perhaps the most shocking of these read "No Zionists at UNT," with an asterisk. Below the asterisk, it read "this is not Anti-Semitic (sic)." It's similar to a drunken relative at a family dinner proclaiming, "I'm not a racist, but ..."

Listen to those affected by vile words and deeds. Just as we pay heed to the Black or LGBTQ+ communities about the bias or racism they experience, it is incumbent that we are guided by the Jewish community when defining antisemitism.

Zionism is the aspiration or support for the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. For me personally, and many Jews, it is exemplified by Israel's national anthem, Hatikvah (the hope), based on an 1877 poem by Naftali Herz Imber. The anthem ends with the stirring



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A student wrapped in an Israeli flag listens to Pro-Palestinian protesters gathered on campus at the University of Texas at Austin on April 30. When pro-Palestinian protesters effectively hold all Jews responsible for the actions or policies of Israel and oppose the existence of a Jewish state, that is antisemitic, writes Joel Schwitzer.

words: "Our hope is not yet lost, the hope of two thousand years. To be a free nation in our own land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem."

Shockingly, this term is increasingly being weaponized as a slur.

A recent American Jewish Committee report found that 80% of American Jews believe that caring about Israel is central to their Jewish identity. In other words, Zionism is part and parcel of what makes them Jewish. So, when pro-Palestinian protesters effectively hold all Jews responsible for the actions or policies of Israel and oppose the existence of

a Jewish state, that is antisemitic.

Former Soviet dissident, human rights activist and Jewish leader Natan Sharansky once delineated what he called his "3-D test of antisemitism" to better understand the distinction between being anti-Israel and being outright antisemitic. These include demonization, delegitimization and double standard.

Demonization is exemplified by comparisons of Israel to Nazis. The Dallas Mavericks acknowledged their Jewish fans by wishing all who celebrate a Happy Passover on their social media channels. Among the

many comments was a meme of Adolf Hitler in a relay race handing a baton off to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This is what antisemitism looks like.

Statements that Israel has no right to exist, including the labeling of Israel as a settler colonialist endeavor, or calls of "from the river to the sea" fall into the category of delegitimization. I recently had the honor of assisting a delegation of family members of hostages with a community visit. One of these families has lived in Israel continuously for 2,000 years. They are as legiti-

mate as you can get.

This, too, is what antisemitism looks like.

A double standard occurs when Israel is singled out to the exclusion of significant human rights abuses elsewhere. Where is the anguish over the slaughter in Darfur under the Sudanese government, in Syria under the Assad regime or the abuse of Uyghur Muslims in China? When only Israel is held to account, that is also antisemitism.

At American Jewish Committee, we've identified a fourth D to Sharansky's list: dis-inclusion, which is perhaps the most insidious. It includes requiring Jews to disavow their real or perceived connection to Israel or shunning them because of that connection. That is what happened to Jewish (not Israeli) musician Matisyahu, who had several shows canceled when staff refused to work at a venue or venues had security concerns. Even more troubling, in 2022, the co-founder of a student group at State University of New York at New Paltz was booted out of the group she started for survivors of sexual assault because of her Zionist views.

This is most certainly what antisemitism looks like.

You can certainly disagree or protest Israel's policies without lapsing into antisemitic tropes. You know who criticizes Israel the most? Israelis. But they don't question the Jewish people's right to self-determination and call for the elimination of the only Jewish state.

Nor should you.

Learn what is hateful. Commit to disagreeing in an agreeable way. We all benefit when we know how to turn down the heat and shed more light.

*Joel Schwitzer is regional director for the American Jewish Committee Dallas.*

## United Methodist Church adapts as Paul taught

Decision on same-sex marriage, LGBTQ clergy celebrates global unity and lets congregations reflect local diversity

By RUBEN SAENZ JR.

With 11 million members in 60 countries representing our unity and diversity, the mission of the United Methodist Church transcends borders, resonates across cultures, promotes unity and addresses global concerns. At the same time, our local mission nurtures the spiritual life of congregations by addressing social, economic and cultural realities of our unique communities. This is what makes our church vibrant and inclusive.

After more than 50 years of intense and prayerful debate, the General Conference delegates decided to remove language in the Book of Discipline that prohibited same-gender marriage and ordination of partnered LGBTQ+ individuals. This change now allows clergy to perform, or refrain from performing, a same-sex marriage without penalty, while not requiring that all local churches hold same-sex weddings.

Each church — traditional, centrist and progressive — can adapt to its unique local mission field context, ensuring its message and ministry align with the spiritual and temporal needs of the people it serves. These recent decisions empower our local churches in North Texas, the United States and around the world to exercise their freedom and responsibility in shaping their ministry. We trust in the wisdom and discernment of our local churches to carry out their mission in a way that best serves their communities.

The recent actions regarding regionalization mark a



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An attendee at the United Methodist Church General Conference last week made her support of LGBTQ clergy known.

significant shift away from the U.S.-centric focus of our denomination. This move establishes regional conferences that grant equal responsibilities and powers to churches across the United States, Africa, Europe, the Philippines and around the world. The proposed constitutional change, approved by the General Conference, will now undergo ratification by our annual conferences within the next 12 to 18 months. In our increasingly interconnected worldwide community, it is imperative that we preserve the ability to make local and contextual ministry decisions.

Contextual ministry dates back to the early church and continues to guide us today. In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul exemplifies adaptiveness by becoming all things to all people, that he might, by all means, save some. Just as Paul engaged in ways that resonated with diverse people groups, the church today must also adapt its message to connect with diverse

people groups within the Dallas-Fort Worth area and in communities across the world.

Over the past two weeks, the teachings, policies and structures of the United Methodist Church have changed to reinforce God's overarching message of love, acceptance and equality. They also affirm the inherent dignity of the LGBTQ+ community and express support for them, their families and their friends.

Our mission remains steadfast: "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Our focus can now be directed toward our shared worldwide and local mission. We invite you not just to join us, but to be inspired and motivated by the vision of a loving, just and free world that God imagines for all people. Together, we can make this vision a reality.

*Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. is the resident bishop of the Central and North Texas Conferences of the United Methodist Church.*

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