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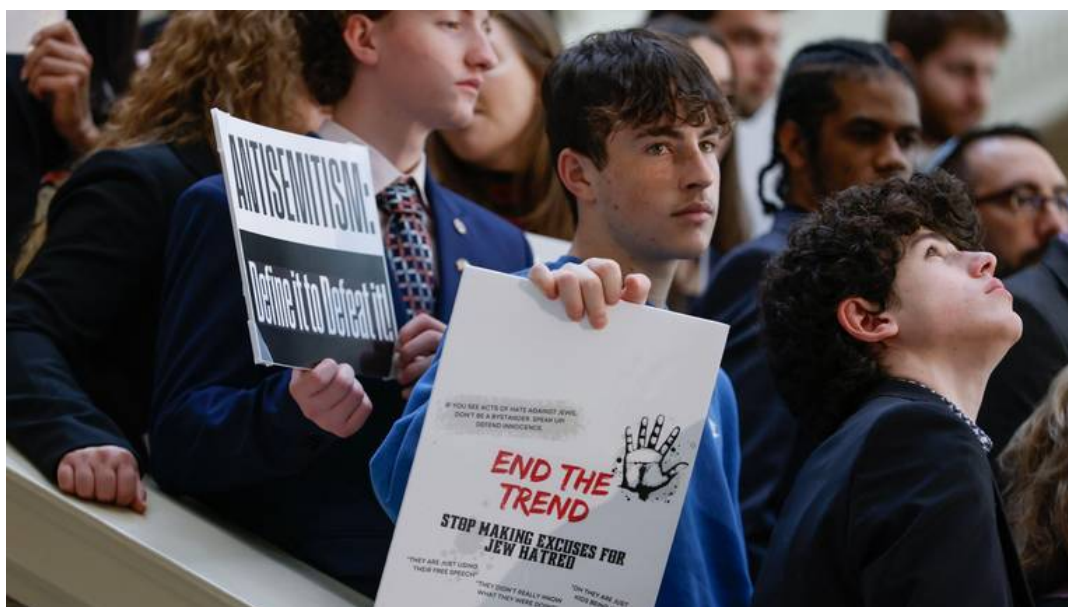
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Critical theory driving antisemitism at colleges. We must stand for moral truths / Opinion

BY BISHOP MICHAEL F. OLSON
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Members of the Jewish community and supporters hold signs during an antisemitism press conference at the Georgia State Capitol on Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023. (Natrice Miller/The Atlanta Journal-Constitution/TNS) NATRICE MILLER TNS

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The kidnappings, acts of torture and murders perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli civilians, including the elderly and children, should horrify people everywhere. Adding to the horror is that these evil actions were often [livestreamed on the Facebook accounts of the victims](#) to be traumatically viewed by their unsuspecting families.

These actions by Hamas, an organization that exists not to promote justice for Palestinians but to kill all Jews, have been accompanied by public and unabashed acts of antisemitism. It included the unashamed display of [young men dressed as Nazis in a local restaurant](#) who apparently were in Fort Worth to recruit members for their cause. Yet perhaps most terrifying is the blatant antisemitism espoused and displayed without shame by too many students, faculty and administrators of what are purported to be our nation's finer institutions of higher education.

What has happened to our society that what was recently thought to be unthinkable is attempting again to become acceptable in the mainstream?

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The embracing of [critical theory in classrooms and administrations](#) has become a chokehold upon our academic institutions. Critical theory places its focus upon the will and not upon reason's capacity to grasp the truth. It eschews facts in favor of compelling narrative — regardless of the facts. And it relativizes the truth required for exceptionless moral norms and replaces it with “context” as “culture” positing a false equivalence between the murderers and their victims.

With its threatening cries of “no justice, no peace,” critical theory has become a cudgel wielded against the tranquility of order that is the peace of human society and the constitutive rights of all people, especially members of minority groups.

No plan to protect the vulnerable or vindicate the aggrieved can be based on a program stemming from the primacy of the will. No one who says, “I may kill because I hate” can be a champion of anything truly humane. Justice, peace and other goods must be rooted in reason and supported by faith, or they will not be had at all.

Sadly, as a people, we are fast becoming ill-equipped for making and justifying such

basic moral claims as “the killing of innocent people is wrong.” While we have seen this in our society in the last 50 years regarding the unborn and the terminally ill, we now see, less than 70 years after the Holocaust, the hateful espousing of antisemitism in our streets and on social media, not by thugs but by the educated, with such [hateful cries of “gas all Jews!”](#)

We have now clear evidence of the deconstruction of American morality by activists who indoctrinate the young instead of educating them so that they are unable or unwilling to recognize that terrorism is based on contempt for human life and not the promotion of legitimate justice.

This fresh return of brash antisemitism in public discourse is both an ancient sickness and a symptom of a new one. The remedy for each involves the recognition of the real history of the persecution of the Jewish people and, more fundamentally, the acceptance of a morality that is based on the basic dignity of our shared human nature and the religious awareness of an all-loving God instead of cultural equivalence and equitable inclusion through violent will to power.

As a Catholic bishop and a citizen in Tarrant County, I urge others to stand together in solidarity with the Jewish people, who have been too easily threatened throughout history. For this to be more than sentiment and good will, we must return in our schools and houses of worship to the principles of sound reason, human nature and religious belief in God to inform our moral judgment for loving our neighbor.

This is the only path for us to defend human life, including the Palestinians oppressed by Hamas, and to witness confidently to those who irrationally but willfully advocate for the killing of others simply because they hate them. Casting a blind eye and fearing to stand up for the vulnerable is not an option.

Michael F. Olson is bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth.



Bishop Michael F. Olson

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