

'For Fear of The Jews'

Joseph Sobran

The news that I would be addressing the Institute of Historical Review came to some people as, well, news. It was mentioned in the Jewish newspaper *Forward* and on the Zionist *Wall Street Journal* OnLine. The editors of two conservative magazines called and wrote me to express their concern that I might damage my reputation, such as it is, by speaking to "Holocaust deniers."



I'm not sure why this should matter. Even positing that I was speaking to a disreputable audience, I expect to be judged by what I say, not whom I say it to. I note that my enemies have written a great deal about me, yet they rarely quote me directly.

Why not? If I am so disreputable myself, I must at least occasionally say disreputable things. Is it possible that what I say is more cogent than they like to admit?

My enemies are always welcome to quote anything I say, if they dare. I would say the same things to them, and they may consider my remarks to the IHR as addressed to them too. I wasn't just speaking to "Holocaust deniers," but also to Holocaust believers.

Because I've endured smears and ostracism for my criticism of Israel and its American lobby, some people credit me with courage. I'm flattered, of course, but this compliment, whether or not I deserve it, implies that it's professionally dangerous for a journalist to criticize Israel. That tells you a lot.

But if I'm "courageous," what do you call Mark Weber and the Institute for Historical Review? They have been smeared far worse than I have; moreover, they have been seriously threatened with death. Their offices have been firebombed. Do they at least get credit for courage? Not at all. They remain almost universally vilified.

When I met Mark, many years ago, I expected to meet a raving Jew-hating fanatic, such being the generic reputation of "Holocaust deniers." I was immediately and subsequently impressed to find that he was just the opposite: a mild-mannered, good-humored, witty, scholarly man who habitually spoke with restraint and measure, even about enemies who would love to see him dead. The same is true of other members of the Institute. In my many years of acquaintance with them, I have never heard any of them say anything that would strike an unprejudiced listener as unreasonable or bigoted.

It was their enemies who were raving, hate-filled fanatics, unable to discuss "Holocaust deniers" in measured language, without wild hyperbole, loose accusation, and outright lies. I began to wonder: if they can't tell the truth about "Holocaust deniers," how can they tell the truth about the Holocaust itself?

Even if the Holocaust had really happened, as I assumed, maybe it should be studied with a critical rationality most of its believers obviously lacked. After all, even Stalin's crimes might be exaggerated, quite understandably, by his victims. As Milton puts it, "Let truth and falsehood

grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?" Even those in error might have something to say, some marginal clarification to offer. Why stop our ears against them?

Why on earth is it "anti-Jewish" to conclude from the evidence that the standard numbers of Jews murdered are inaccurate, or that the Hitler regime, bad as it was in many ways, was not, in fact, intent on racial extermination? Surely these are controversial conclusions; but if so, let the controversy rage. There is no danger in permitting it to proceed. It might be different if denying the Holocaust could somehow affect the course of events, as the denial of Stalin's crimes by the *New York Times* in the 1930s helped him to continue committing them. Why is the Institute for Historical Review notorious, while the *Times*, despite its active support of Stalin at the height of his power, remains a pillar of respectability?

The Holocaust has never been a consuming interest of mine. But as I read the *Journal of Historical Review* over the years, I found in it the same calm virtue of critical rationality I'd found in Mark himself. And it was applied to many other subjects besides the question of whether Hitler had tried to exterminate the Jews. An article it carried about Abraham Lincoln some years ago caused me to revise my entire view of Lincoln and stimulated me to write a book about him. [Robert Morgan, "[Abraham Lincoln and the Issue of Race](#)".]

The IHR's mission can't be fairly summed up as "Holocaust denial." Its real mission is criticism of the suffocating progressive ideology that has infected and distorted the telling of history in our time. But of course its specific skepticism of the standard Holocaust story is regarded as blasphemy, and has earned it the dreaded epithet of anti-Semitism.

Not long ago the only label more lethal to one's reputation was that of child molester, but, as many men of the cloth are now discovering, there is this difference: a child molester may hope for a second chance.

There is also another difference. We have a pretty clear idea what child molestation is. Nobody really knows what "anti-Semitism" is. My old boss Bill Buckley wrote an entire book called *In Search of Anti-Semitism* without bothering to define anti-Semitism.

At the time I thought this was an oversight. I was wrong. The word would lose its utility if it were defined. As I observed in my own small contribution to the book, an "anti-Semite" used to mean a man who hated Jews. Now it means a man who is hated by Jews.

I doubt, in fact I can't imagine, that anyone associated with the IHR has ever done harm to another human being because he was Jewish. In fact the IHR has never been accused of anything but thought-crimes.

The same is true of me. Nobody has ever accused me of the slightest personal indecency to a Jew. My chief offense, it appears, has been to insist that the state of Israel has been a costly and treacherous "ally" to the United States. As of last September 11, I should think that is undeniable. But I have yet to receive a single apology for having been correct.

If I were to hate Jews en masse, without distinction, I would be guilty of many things. Obviously I'd be guilty of injustice and uncharity to Jews as human beings. I would also be guilty of willful stupidity. More personally, I'd be guilty of ingratitude to my benefactors -- which Dante, in his

Inferno, ranks the worst of all sins -- since many of my benefactors, in large ways and small, have been Jewish.

Moreover, I would be becoming exactly the man my Zionist enemies would like me to be; a man like them, in whom ethnic hostilities take priority over all other values and considerations. I would justify them in treating me as an enemy. In fact I'd go so far as to say that I would be helping to justify the state of Israel. I consider that if I fight these people on their terms, they have already won.

What, exactly, is "anti-Semitism"? One standard dictionary definition is "hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group." How this applies to me has never been explained. My "hostility" toward Israel is a desire not for war, but for neutrality -- out of a sense of betrayal, waste, and shame. Our venal politicians have aligned us with a foreign country that behaves dishonorably. Most alleged "anti-Semites" would wince if Jews anywhere were treated as Israel treats its Arab subjects. Moreover, Israel has repeatedly betrayed its only benefactor, the United States. I have already alluded to the place Dante reserves for those who betray their benefactors.

These are obvious moral facts. Yet it's not only politicians who are afraid to point them out; so are most journalists -- the people who are supposed to be independent enough to say the things politicians can't afford to say. In my thirty years in journalism, nothing has amazed me more than the prevalent fear in the profession of offending Jews, especially Zionist Jews.

The fear of the label anti-Semitic is a fear of the power that is believed to lie behind it: Jewish power. Yet this is still pretty much unmentionable in journalism. It's rather as if sportswriters covering pro basketball were prohibited from mentioning that the Los Angeles Lakers were in first place.

There has been a qualitative change that is downright eerie in American conservatism generally. The "fear of the Jews," to use the phrase so often repeated in the Gospel according to John, seems to have wrought a reorientation of the tone, the very principles, of today's conservatism. The hardy skepticism, critical intelligence, and healthy irony of men like James Burnham, Willmoore Kendall, and the young Buckley have given way to the uncritical philo-Semitism of George Will, Cal Thomas, Rush Limbaugh, and of course the later Buckley -- men who will go to any lengths, even absurd and dishonorable lengths, to avoid the terrorizing label anti-Semite.

It was once considered "anti-Semitic" to impute "dual loyalty" to Jews -- that is, to assert that most American Jews divide their loyalty between the United States and Israel. This is now passé. Today most politicians assume, as a matter of course, that Israel commands the primary loyalty of Jewish voters. Are they accused of "anti-Semitism" for doing so? Does this assumption cost them Jewish votes? Not at all! Dual loyalty nothing! Dual loyalty would be an improvement!

Once again, it's a practical necessity to know what it would be professional suicide to say. No politician in his right mind would accuse Jews of giving their primary loyalty to Israel; but most politicians act as if this were the case. And they succeed.

You can read Jewish publications like *Commentary* for years, and you'll read interminable discussions about what's good for Israel, but you'll never encounter the slightest suggestion that what's good for Israel might not be good for America. The possibility simply never comes up. The only discernible duty of Jews, it seems, is to look out for Israel. They never have to choose between Israel and the United States. So much for the "canard" of dual loyalty.

I've often noticed how eager and desperate mainstream conservatives are to avoid Jewish wrath. Again, they don't just speak favorably of Israel: they refuse to acknowledge any cost to American interests in the U.S.-Israel alliance. They treat the two countries' interests as identical; when they scold either government, it's always -- always -- the U.S. Government for failing to support our "reliable ally. They are in headlong flight from reality. They have none of the realism of James Burnham, whose writings and style of thought would be wholly unwelcome in today's conservative movement.

They are frightened. You can sense this in their bluster, in the vicarious jingoism with which they address Israel. Their fear produces a peculiar intellectual thinness that pervades all their thinking on foreign policy. Individualists have been replaced by apparatchiks. Zionism has infiltrated conservatism in much the same way Communism once infiltrated liberalism.

Here I should lay my own cards on the table. I am not, heaven forbid, a "Holocaust denier." I lack the scholarly competence to be one. I don't read German, so I can't assess the documentary evidence; I don't know chemistry, so I can't discuss Zyklon-B; I don't understand the logistics of exterminating millions of people in small spaces. Besides, "Holocaust denial" is illegal in many countries I may want to visit someday. For me, that's proof enough. One Israeli writer has expressed his amazement at the idea of criminalizing opinions about historical fact., and I find it puzzling too; but the state has spoken.

Of course those who affirm the Holocaust need know nothing about the German language, chemistry, and other pertinent subjects; they need only repeat what they have been told by the authorities. In every controversy, most people care much less for what the truth is than for which side it's safer and more respectable to take. They shy away from taking a position that is likely to get them into trouble. Just as only people on the Axis side were accused of war crimes after World War II, only people critical of Jewish interests are accused of thought-crimes in today's mainstream press.

So, life being as short as it is, I shy away from this controversy. Of course I'm also incompetent to judge whether the Holocaust did happen; so I've become what might be called a "Holocaust stipulator." Like a lawyer who doesn't want to get bogged down debating a secondary point, I stipulate that the standard account of the Holocaust is true. What is undisputed -- the massive violation of human rights in Hitler's Germany -- is bad enough.

What interests me is the growth of what Norman Finkelstein has called "the Holocaust Industry." True or not, the Holocaust story has been put to many uses, some of them mischievous. It is currently being used to extort reparations and to blacken reputations, for example. Daniel Goldhagen is soon to publish a book blaming the Holocaust on the central teachings of the Catholic Church. This is only the most ambitious project of a school of thought, largely but not exclusively Jewish, that sees Christianity as the source of all "anti-Semitism."

So if you want to avoid being called "anti-Semitic," the safest course is to renounce Christianity. Whether this is a safe course for your immortal soul is a question Goldhagen doesn't address. The important thing is to avoid Jewish censure. Obviously this sort of thinking presupposes Christian fear of the Jews. Jews themselves are not unaware of Jewish power; some of them have rather exaggerated confidence in it.

But the chief use of the Holocaust story is to undergird the legitimacy of the state of Israel. According to this view, the Holocaust proves that Jewish existence is always in danger, unless the Jews have their own state in their own homeland. The Holocaust stands as the historical objectification of all the world's gentiles' eternal "anti-Semitism." Jewish life is an endless emergency, requiring endless emergency measures and justifying everything done in the name of "defense." Jews and Israel can't be judged by normal standards, at least until Israel is absolutely safe -- if even then. Their circumstances are forever abnormal.

But the daily news reports suggest that Israel may not really be the safest place for Jews. Theodore Herzl's original dream was of a Jewish state where Jews could at last live the normal lives they were denied in the Diaspora. Yet today it's Diaspora Jews who live relatively normal lives, at least in the West, while they must worry about the very survival of Israel. And far from being the independent state Herzl hoped for, Israel depends heavily on the support not only of Diaspora Jews but of foreign gentiles, especially Americans.

Israel insists that its "right to exist" is nothing more than the right of every nation on earth to be left in peace. This right is allegedly threatened by fanatical Arabs who want to "drive the Jews into the sea," as witness the recent wave of Palestinian terror. But in truth, Israel's claimed "right to exist" is much more than it seems at first sight. It means a right to rule as Jews, enjoying rights denied to native Palestinians.

We are told incessantly that Israel is a "democracy," and therefore the natural ally of the United States, whose "democratic values" it shares. This is a very dubious claim. To Americans, democracy means majority rule, but with equal rights for minorities. In Israel and the occupied territories, equal rights for the minority are simply out of the question.

Majority rule itself has taken a peculiar form in Israel. The original Arab majority was driven out of their homes and their native land, and kept out. Meanwhile, a Jewish "majority" was artificially imported. Not only the first immigrants from Eastern Europe, but every Jew on earth was granted a "right of return" -- that is, "return" to a "homeland" most have never lived in, and in which none of their ancestors has ever lived. A Jew from Brooklyn (whose grandfather came from Poland) can fly to Israel and immediately claim rights denied to an Arab whose people have always lived in Palestine. In recent years Israel has been augmenting its Jewish majority by vigorously encouraging Jewish immigration, especially from Russia. Ariel Sharon has told a group of American senators that Israel needs a million more Jewish immigrants.

Israel rejects demands for a "right of return" for Palestinians exiled since 1948. Its reason? This would mean "the end of the Jewish state." An Arab majority would surely vote down Jewish ethnic privileges. If Israel remained democratic, it wouldn't long remain Jewish. It must be the only "democracy" whose existence depends on inequality.

American gentiles, bemused by the propaganda claim that a beleaguered little democracy is fighting for its very right to exist, still haven't figured out that Israeli "democracy" is essentially and radically different from -- even repugnant to -- what they understand as democracy. Put otherwise, Zionism is a denial of the "self-evident truths" of the Declaration of Independence. To acknowledge those truths, and to put them into practice, would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state. Again, honest and rigorous Zionists have always seen and said this.

With the verbal sleight-of-hand at which they are masters, the Israelis always appeal to the Holocaust. Maybe they have nuclear weapons, but their existence is threatened -- once more! -- by rock-throwing Arab boys. The Arabs are the new Nazis, repeating and perpetuating the eternal peril of the Jews. Israel is determined to prevent another Holocaust and must crush the Arab threat by any means necessary, including harsh measures.

Israel without the Holocaust is hard to imagine. But let's try to imagine it.

Suppose the Holocaust had never occurred, had never been alleged, had never been called "the Holocaust." Imagine that no great persecution had provided the Jewish state with a special excuse for oppressive emergency measures. In other words, imagine that Israel were forced to justify itself like any other state.

In that case, Israel's treatment of its Arab minorities would appear to the world in a very different light. Its denial of equal or even basic rights to those minorities would lack the excuse of a past or prospective "Holocaust." Civilized people would expect it to treat those it ruled with impartial justice. Special privileges for Jews would appear as outrageous discrimination, no different from insulting legal discrimination against Jews. The sense -- and excuse -- of perpetual crisis would be absent. Israel might be forced or pressured, possibly against its will, to be "normal." If it chose to be democratic, its Jews would have to take their chance of being outnumbered, just like majorities in other democracies. Nobody would suppose that losing elections would mean their annihilation.

In short, the Holocaust has become a device for exempting Jews from normal human obligations. It has authorized them to bully and blackmail, to extort and oppress. This is all quite irrational, because even if six million Jews were murdered during World War II, the survivors are not entitled to commit the slightest injustice. If your father was stabbed in the street, that's a pity, but it's not an excuse for picking someone else's pocket.

In a peculiar way, the Holocaust story has promoted not only pity, but actual fear of the Jews. It has removed them from the universe of normal moral discourse. It has made them victims with nukes. It has made them even more dangerous than their enemies have always charged. It has given the world an Israel ruled by Ariel Sharon.

Benjamin Netanyahu has written that Israel is "an integral part of the West." I think it would be truer to say that Israel has become a deformed limb of the West.

Joseph Sobran (1946-2010) was an author, columnist and lecturer. For 21 years he wrote for *National Review* magazine, including 18 years as a senior editor. For 20 years he was a syndicated columnist.

This article is adapted from his address at the 14th IHR Conference, June 22, 2002, in Irvine, California. It was published in the August 2002 issue of *Sobran's* newsletter, and in the May-August 2002 issue of the IHR's *Journal of Historical Review*.