

Anti-Semitism

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

If you've ever been on vacation and had the nightmare that things would be bad when you got back -- I tell you, it's terrible! So, loved ones, today I'd like to talk about anti-semitism.

I haven't read the newspaper reports. I just got back on Friday. But I've heard some of the vague reports of sentiments that were expressed. None of them are mine. So I'd like to make my contribution today.

While I was on vacation, as far as I can gather, six clergymen out of the twenty of us who are involved in ministry among students on the University of Minnesota campus sent in for transcripts of the three sermons that you perhaps remember me preaching about a month ago on the Jewish people. We gave them the transcripts, of course, in good faith that they wanted help of some kind, or wanted to understand things better. But they took the transcripts and distorted some of the phrases, took some others out of context, and generally mutilated the messages so that I appeared as anti-semitic. Then they seemed to have released their doctored version of the sermons not only to our own local newspapers and to our radio people and our television people, but to the Associated Press wire service, so that now as far as New York and Louisiana I am known as anti-semitic.

Now loved ones, especially clergymen, who would do that to a colleague when they know the tremendous vulnerability of any extemporaneous public speaker -- I just don't understand. I'd rather not touch their motives. It's just so sick and so bad that I think it's better for people who care about truth and beauty not even to touch it. The opposition of people like that, I'm glad of. I'm glad to be on the other side to them. Should anybody else align themselves with them, I would be very glad that they were my opposers and not my friends.

But it is different, loved ones, with not only yourselves here who are so loving and so kind, but it's different also with the dear Jewish businessmen and the dear Jewish friends that we have made over the past ten years. It's different with them. They have been, as far as I can see, most dignified and most quiet about the whole thing. But I care about what they think. During the past ten years Campus Church, Christian Corps and Fish Enterprises have made many friends and deal in business with many loved ones who are of Jewish background. It has been embarrassing for them and has put them in a most difficult position to hear one bunch of Gentiles saying to the Jews, "You know -- that Gentile whom you trusted, he hates you." Well, it has just made things very awkward for the loved ones who deal with us in our plaque business, who come to our restaurants, who respect us and trust us. I think of those loved ones in the merchants of St. Anthony that have come to regard us as an open-minded, openhearted group of people. It has done great damage to them and made things very awkward for them.

I care not only about them, but I care for my fourth favorite restaurant, (It's really my first, but because I'm president of our own restaurants, they have to be my first three.) But my fourth favorite one is Lincoln Del {a restaurant in Minneapolis, Minnesota}. These clergymen can mutilate my theology, but they can't touch my French dip corned beef! For about maybe fifteen years I've eaten in Lincoln Del, and I suppose I eat there not only because of the dear food, but because as an Irish immigrant, those dear old European Jews that come in there in the late afternoon bring for me something of the atmosphere of the old country. And I suppose, too, an Irish immigrant feels a lot

in common with a group of people who have been so often oppressed as a minority.

We Irish have all kinds of problems, but one of our problems is not anti-semitism, and I think the Jewish loved ones know that. They know that it's against the whole nature of a man in my position to even feel like that towards another minority. Any of us who lived in Europe as we did during the Second World War have nothing but disgust for things like the Warsaw Ghetto or the cruelty and the hatred of the Holocaust or the gas chambers. We lived closer to those things than you loved ones did here in the States, and we have nothing but disgust for the injustice and the hatred and the blind bigotry that lay behind those things.

So I am concerned about the Jewish loved ones who have heard these lies. And as clearly as I can say on television, I want you to know they are lies -- that in no way do I feel anything but love for you. I love you first of all because our Creator made you and he made me. You're made in his image, and you're my brothers and sisters in humanity. You're my brother human beings and sister human beings. I don't know about all of you here, but in Ireland we were taught to respect other people and to treasure them and value them. That's the first reason why I love the loved ones who are Jews.

I love them secondly because my Savior, who has given me life and given me assurance of living forever, is a Jew. I love them because he is a Jew. I love them thirdly because they are God's chosen people. What we shared in those sermons is that it's because of them that we Gentiles were given the chance of the gospel. So we owe a lot to you loved ones who are Jews.

And, of course, I'd just call the business people of the area and others to witness what kind of people have you seen us to be over the past ten years? Have we shown ourselves a bigoted, hateful group of people, or have we shown ourselves an open-minded, open-hearted group of people that receive others at their face value?

I would just point out to all of you here that probably no gathering is as ecumenical as our own. Probably no gathering has as many loved ones from Jewish background in it as we have, as many from Arabic background as we have, as many from Protestant, from Catholic background as we have, as many from Christian Science, or Jehovah's Witness background. And I would simply call the loved ones in the Jewish community to look at the facts. Could a bigot, pastor and lead and guide a congregation that is so universal and so broadly based? Well, I think the facts are pretty clear and pretty obvious.

How did the miserable mess come about? How did they misinterpret? Because, of course, misinterpret they did, loved ones. If you ask, "Is this the spirit that was in those sermons?" Oh, yes; here is part of the actual words of the third sermon I preached on Romans 11:12. "It is amazing, isn't it, that the Jewish nation itself seems so different in all our eyes to all other nations. It's interesting that even Japan, which is the only nation that has been devastated by a nuclear bomb, or Germany that has been twice defeated in world wars and is now divided, does not excite in us the same pity and sympathy as those little groups of shuffling people with the armbands and yellow stars as they trail down those roads into the gas chambers. No nation excites our sympathy and pity as this Israel nation. Maybe it is because they have been trailing down the world's roads since eternity. It seems they have been a bundle of refugees trailing down one road or another since the world began. Abraham trailed from Haran to Canaan with his family. Jacob trailed with his family down to Egypt to join Joseph."

Is that the spirit of anti-Semitism? Is that the spirit of invective and hatred? You know it's the spirit of the love and tenderness and sympathy of Jehovah God.

How did these dear clergymen misinterpret these sermons? Well, I'll try to explain it, though it's hard for me to understand. We for ten years, and I for thirteen years, have been studying the book of Romans in the New Testament. About a month ago we came to some verses that spoke about Israel.

Those verses, loved ones, if you like to look at them, are in Romans 11 beginning at verse 7. "What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened." And if you remember, I shared that that was one verse that indicated that Paul was not saying that every Jew had failed to obtain it, but certainly that Israel as a nation had failed to obtain it. But that obviously some Jews were obtaining it, because that's why he says the elect obtained it but the rest were hardened. "As it is written, (and then he quotes Isaiah who is, of course, a well-known Jewish prophet)'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear, down to this very day.' And David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs for ever.'"

Now those are words that are in the Jewish Scriptures -- that this is what God said about Israel, and this is what we had to interpret. Then in verse 11: "So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall?" (that is, the Jews.) "By no means! But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!"

We as people who cannot simply ignore God's word and say it isn't true, as some can, we were faced with the task of interpreting those words. Strong words! It's Paul that says: it's their failure. It's Paul that says: their backs are bent forever. It's Paul that says in the next verse (that I hope to deal with if things calm down in a couple of weeks time), verse 15, "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?"

And we were faced with the task of interpreting in what sense God was saying that the Jewish nation had been rejected or had failed. We were faced with the kind of verse that you get over there in verse 28 of this chapter -- and maybe I'm quite glad we won't come to it for a number of months -- but still! -- verse 28: "As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers."

Now I'd say to you and to the loved ones among the Jewish community: my calling is to interpret God's Word. That's my calling. Whether it brings about my death, my success or my failure, that's my calling. Whatever I do, I have to interpret faithfully this dear Word which is the only sure authority we have in our world. That's what we were faced with.

Loved ones, another verse, the last verse of Romans 10, verse 21. A dear reporter asked me yesterday, "Oh, then you're not saying these things. You mean Paul says them." And I thought, "Yes, that's good. That's right." Loved ones, honestly, it is unbelievable. The dear reporters, they are dear souls you know, but they are only as good as their information or their understanding. So verse 21: "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" And the Greek word, of course, can be interpreted as "reprobate". But some dear souls didn't even know what reprobate means, you know. I think that's part of the problem. They think that by reprobate I mean lost and destroyed forever. Reprobate is from two English words, *probo* in Latin

which means "to prove," and re; "reprove". It means a reprovved people, a reprimanded people. Or to use somebody else's phrase, a "censured" people. But that's what it means. It can be interpreted, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and a reprimanded or a censured people." We were faced with interpreting those words.

Here's what I said. I said: in what sense are the backs of the Israel nation bent today? In what sense are their backs bent? And then I said: one obvious way is that at the moment they face the contempt and hatred of thousands and thousands of people, and they have down through the centuries. I didn't use the word "anti-Semitism" because it is a dangerous word, as I'll share a little later. But that's what I said. Their backs are bent in the sense that they face contempt and hatred and have faced it for generations.

Then I said: Why? What is behind anti-semitism? And any of you who ask anyone who knows anything about anti-Semitism, whether it's anti-Semitism in Hitler's Germany or anti-Semitism in Stalin's Russia, they'll all answer the same. "Oh yeah! We were told to hate the Jews because they take all the money and they are arrogantly exclusive." That's it.

I'm not saying that, I'm not saying that! Please, reporters, I'm not saying that! But if you ask people who are anti-semitic, that's what they'll say. They'll say, "We hate the Jews, because they take all our money and they're arrogantly exclusive." I don't think that.

We're going into business importing Victorian fireplaces from England with Ken, a dear Jewish Christian, and he's not arrogant and he's not exclusive and he's not grabbing money, and there are thousands of loved ones who are not doing those things. But if you ask anti-semitic people why they hate Jews, they'll say that.

Then I went on to say: is there any explanation for that?" And then I pointed out that no nation, no nation in the world, has produced so many Rothschilds, so many Rubensteins, so many Einsteins -- in proportion to its population as the Israel nation has. And then I said: is it not true that God has given to his chosen people special abilities, special talents, so that Abraham himself became a very rich man, a very prosperous man. Is it not so, that God has given to his own chosen people special abilities that enabled them to do things well, and that those gifts that were given to be a blessing to Israel -- have ended up as the target and the goal of the envy of the people that hate Israel? And that these gifts that were meant to be a blessing to Israel have ended up bending the backs of Israel.

Now the loved ones that read these sermons either deliberately, or by mistake, attributed all those things that I said about anti-Semitism to me. They quoted all those attitudes as mine, and then they got into the act themselves and weighed in with ideas that they must come up with --that the Holocaust is God's punishment of the Jews, or that I agree with what Hitler did, or that human beings should take it upon themselves to exercise God's justice upon his own people. Loved ones, that is so ridiculous, so untrue, so cruel, so unkind, so ungrateful to the Jewish nation that I don't think it even deserves mentioning. But I think that that's what happened.

Now, loved ones, what can we learn from the whole thing, from the miserable episode? Well, first of all, I would say to these dear clergymen, "Would you have some kind of professional ethics? If you find a colleague like me saying something that you don't think is right, why not come to me? Why not come and share, 'Brother, I think that's not the interpretation of Scripture that is right. Do you not think that you should change it?'"

Loved ones, would you believe it? No clergyman has yet approached me. No one has phoned me. No clergyman has spoken to me. No clergyman has even written me. None of the loved ones who read the sermons, none of the loved ones who are now involved in some kind of censure movement -- nobody has spoken to me at all. The only people who have spoken to me is the representative of the Associated Press Wire Service, the representative of WCCO {a local TV station}, and other reporters.

Now could I say to the clergyman: Let's have some kind of professional ethics. Let's not stir trouble up. Let's come to each other. There is honor even among thieves. There ought to be honor among people like ourselves. We ought to be able to express our views honorably to each other.

So I would plead first of all that the loved ones in the clergy would realize that they have followed an unethical procedure in this whole mess. They have caused tremendous embarrassment to us with our Jewish friends. They have seemed to be a group of Gentiles saying to the Jews, "This Gentile you think loves you, but he hates you." The whole thing has been unethical. I would hope that the Council of Churches would have the sense not to align itself with that kind of rabble-rousing. I would hope they would have. If they don't, I'll receive the censure as an Oscar, for a man who believes the Bible. But I think when they hear this they'll think about it.

Secondly, it might be good for all of us to see that even our balanced, stable society in Minnesota has, running just under the thin veneer of civilization, blind passions of hatred and prejudice and anger. And that any public figure or any group of public figures can arouse those passions in a moment by the use of certain label phrases. They think that somehow they'll protect themselves by doing it. The tragedy is they won't.

They always do it by slogans. It's either, "Jews, Jews." Or it's "Anti-semitic, anti-semitic." Or it's, "Blacks, Blacks." Or it's, "Whites, Whites." Anybody who is involved in public speaking is aware that those are dangerous phrases. Once you label a man "anti-semitic" nobody hears what he says after that. Nobody listens for a moment. Nobody examines what he says. And we need to see, loved ones, that our society is no different from the rest. Our society has deep blind passions of hatred and prejudice and anger that can be released in a moment.

People who take advantage of the fear and insecurity that we all feel at times to rouse those passions, are rousing a lion that they will not be able to control. I would plead directly with the clergymen and with the church people and others who have jumped into this with all kinds of excessive, extreme expressions. I would plead with them, "Do you see that you're playing with something that you will not be able to control? You think you'll control it. You think you can hold it back. You think you can set this lion loose on some of us unfairly, and it won't turn on the rest." But loved ones, the strident cry of "anti-Semitic" today becomes the strident cry of "Jews" tomorrow. That's always the way it has been.

Loved ones, let's stop the witch hunt. That's what I'd say. Stop the witch hunt. There's no witch. If you're head hunting, you've got my head. There it is. But let's stop it now. Stop it before it causes pain and harm.

I don't think the Bookshop windows {The Campus Church Bookshop} were broken by anybody but drunks. I really don't believe the rumor that people are boycotting our businesses. But I point out that any of us who have read the history books always tremble when that kind of thing appears, because we remember where it led last time. So I would ask those of you who have been involved -- probably none

here, but those of you who are outside in television land who have been involved in this mess -- I would ask you for God's sake, for Jesus' sake, for the sake of the Jews, for the sake of all of us who are friends and who love each other, stop the witch hunt. Stop the worrying. Stop the trying to destroy.

And, of course, I would ask all of you to pray for our businesses, because we're hoping to send two of us out to Australia and two of us out to Mexico in the fall, and we depend on the money that we earn through our businesses to do that. So of course, everybody knows that now is a bad time for any business {There was a worldwide recession at the time.} But it's a drastic tragic time if you get a group of people who are supposed to be encouraging young people on the campus to love God -- destroying an operation that has in fact sent hundreds of loved ones out loving God.

I suppose, loved ones, the last thing I would say is for ourselves to get our eyes back on Jesus. And perhaps to see that part of the reason this thing got such a hold is that we are media addicts. If CBS {A National TV station} says it, if WCCO says it -- then we believe it. Now you would not believe how easy it is for a group of six men to get hold of the media people and to spill all kinds of untruth and lies into those media forces.

So loved ones, what I'd say to you is, would you believe our lives? Do you see that there'll come a tragic day when an anti-Christ figure will get control of the media? I don't want to be extreme about it, but let me put it this way. He will tell us that our mothers are spies and we should betray them. That's the method. Media becomes so powerful. The media isn't to blame. It's only a medium for communicating information. It's only as good as its information. But the media will be grabbed by the anti-Christ. Then if we believe everything that comes through the media, even contradicting the evidence of our own eyes and our own ears, we will be lost and will be among that group who will miss Jesus when he comes.

So I would say to us here and to all who are watching on television: for Jesus' sake, would you look at our lives? Has my life over the past ten years been the life of the bigot and the hater and a warmonger? Has the witness of Campus Church been that of a narrow, hateful group of people? Has it produced intolerance and bigotry among young people -- or has it produced love and tolerance? I would ask all of you who have any doubts about what I believe about anti-semitism -- just look at our lives. Believe what you see in our lives. Don't believe what others say about us. Because as this is a dear and sinful world, they'll always say stuff that is bad.

So loved ones, maybe that's what it comes back to. What are we as a people? Are we people who respect and love others for Jesus' sake, or are we people who hate and try to destroy? Well, I think I know what the answer is. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we would thank you for all that has happened because of the blessings that have come to our own hearts through it. We would pray for the dear Jewish brothers and sisters who are our friends. Pray that you will sooth their dear hearts, and give them a sense of our love and our appreciation for them.

Then we would pray for the dear souls that misinterpreted the sermons. Pray our Father that you would still the bitterness and the criticism, and that you would give them delight and joy in their ministry, and enable them to enjoy as much as we do what you have given us to do.

Then our Father, we would pray for this dear society in the Twin Cities. We pray that you would draw

us together even because of this, and that you'll give us a new love and a new tenderness for each other, and a new understanding. We ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.