

An Open Letter to SPLC Spokesman Mark Potok

Dear Mr. Potok,

Because your organization has not responded to my previous attempts to interact and because the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is coming under increasing public scrutiny, I am writing this open letter with the hope that you will respond. You should be familiar with my name, since I am on your list of “30 New Activists Heading Up the Radical Right” and since I was profiled in the Spring 2012 Intelligence Report (more on that shortly).

My desire in writing to you is not to be contentious, nor is it to embarrass you. Rather, it is to pursue peace, to expose falsehood, to confront hateful misinformation, and to call on you and the SPLC to do what is right.

To be sure, I am hardly the only one questioning the credibility of the SPLC today. You have, no doubt, read the editorial in the *Washington Post* by columnist Dana Millbank, who stated, “I disagree with the Family Research Council’s (FRC) views on gays and lesbians. But it’s absurd to put the group, as the law center does, in the same category as Aryan Nations, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Stormfront and the Westboro Baptist Church.” And Millbank is just one of an increasing number of Americans from diverse backgrounds who are pointing out the absurdity of your recent “hate group” listings.

Do you realize, Mr. Potok, that by placing mainstream, conservative Christian ministries like the American Family Association and the FRC side by side with legitimate hate groups that you call your whole work into question? Do you realize that millions of Americans, hearing about the SPLC for

the first time in the wake of the FRC shooting, will now question the veracity of all your listings, thereby empowering genuine, dangerous hate groups?

You placed my name, along with that of a number of other conservative Christian leaders, on your list of "30 New Activists Heading Up the Radical Right." This list included men like Malik Zulu Shabazz, leader of the New Black Panther Party. One of their recent radio shows featured this audio clip: "We give them [i.e., whites] 24 hours in South Africa to get out of town by sundown. I say, if they don't get out of town, we kill the men, we kill the women, we kill the children, we kill the babies, we kill the blind, we kill the cripple, we kill the crazy, we kill the fa**ots, we kill the lesbians, I say god da**it we kill them all."

Contrast those words with my statement in May 2006, addressing the gay and lesbian community of Charlotte: "We recognize that we have sometimes failed to reach out to you with grace and compassion, that we have often been insensitive to your struggles, that we have driven some of you away rather than drawn you in, that we have added to your sense of rejection. For these failings of ours, we ask you to forgive us. By God's grace, we intend to be models of His love.

"We understand, of course, that in your eyes, our biblical convictions constitute hate, and it is hurtful to us that you feel that way. The fact is that we really do love you – more than you realize or understand – and because we love you, we will continue to speak the truth, convinced that it is the truth that sets us free. Love does what is right, even when it is scorned and mocked and ridiculed."

Does this constitute hate in your book? Is this comparable to the language of the KKK? Neo-Nazis? New Black Panther Party? Yet it is in this spirit that we have carried out our work for the last 8 years, all to find a place on one of your lists.

The SPLC actually acknowledge in the "30 New Activists" article that, "Unlike many other voices on the religious right, Brown generally has avoided the kind of slashing rhetoric that often devolves into rank defamation. His work is heavily footnoted and avoids the blanket pronouncements that have gotten others in trouble." Yet I am listed side by side with Shabbaz, whom the SPLC cites as saying, "Kill every god**mn Zionist in Israel! God**mn little babies, god**mn old ladies! Blow up Zionist supermarkets!" Surely listing me (and other Christian leaders) alongside of him discredits the SPLC, not me (and the other Christian leaders).

You define a hate group as one which knowingly disseminates false information and demonizing propaganda about other people and groups, yet I have noted where the SPLC is guilty of this very thing. (You will claim that you never do so knowingly; certainly, the Christian groups you are attacking would say the very same thing about themselves.)

Mr. Potok, does it trouble you that your Intelligence Report focusing on NARTH (the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) was so riddled with errors that anyone in possession of a program to the conference would recognize that the report was utterly unreliable, not to mention patently biased? What hope does the average reader have of accurately separating fact from fiction in reports like this?

You claim that the FRC knowingly disseminates false and defamatory information about LGBT people. Why, then, have you refused to have a public dialog with FRC head Tony Perkins in order to demonstrate your points? What if there is support for the statements the FRC has made, or what if their statements have been taken out of context?

My attempts to engage in public dialog with the SPLC have also been met with deafening silence. What is it, sir, that you fear? Why are you so unwilling to bring the issues to light in

the public square? To this day, it would be my delight to have civil, constructive, public dialog regarding your "anti-gay" hate group listing. Are you willing?

On December 2, 2011, you partnered with Truth Wins Out, running an ad in a local DC paper that asked, "HAS ANYONE TRIED TO 'CURE' YOU OF BEING GAY? SHARE YOUR STORY. Help expose the lies behind the 'conversion therapy and help other LGBT people who have undergone or are considering 'therapy' to 'cure' themselves."

Is this now part of what the SPLC does? And in the interest of fairness and accuracy, have you put out similar ads in other cities asking for the stories of those who have been helped by such therapy? And are you aware of detailed, scientifically sound studies documenting that some are indeed helped and now gladly identify as "ex-gay"? (One of these recent studies has received the highest praise from respected academicians and psychologists.)

And how is it that the SPLC has partnered with Truth Wins Out (TWO), an organization known for vicious, ugly, and mendacious attacks on individuals and groups? In one short article, Wayne Besen, founding executive director of TWO, referred to me as a pathological monster, a slick, sick, cynical, diabolical madman with a messiah complex, also accusing me of trying to incite a bunch of "unstable thugs . . . to engage in a violent physical clash with LGBT people."

Mr. Potok, is not this defamatory hate speech? Do you approve of a close colleague of the SPLC calling fine Christian moms, dads, kids, and grandparents a bunch of "unstable thugs"? Do you approve of his dangerous and utterly false accusation that I am trying to incite these fine people to violence?

And what do you make of the comments of Dan Savage, perhaps America's best-known gay activist, with regard to the FRC? He said, "These people won't be satisfied until they are standing

on top of a pile of dead, gay children.” Perhaps the SPLC has contributed to this inflammatory, toxic environment? And perhaps it is no coincidence that the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force has confirmed that the FRC shooter was also targeting the Traditional Values Coalition, another “anti-gay” Christian organization on your “hate group” list? Would it trouble you if, in fact, you and the SPLC were part of the potential mass-murderer’s inspiration?

I want to say clearly that I am not writing this letter out of concern for my own safety, nor am I afraid to suffer the consequences of my beliefs. Following Jesus is not meant to be easy or popular, and I have friends and colleagues who were tortured for their faith (have you heard of the late Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, celebrated author of *Tortured for Christ?*), stoned for preaching the gospel, and even killed. (Recently a young man close to my organization was murdered by Islamic terrorists while doing Christian, humanitarian work in a Muslim country.)

The purpose of this letter is to expose error and to pursue truth, and I am lovingly challenging you and your colleagues to sit down in a room together with the Christian leaders whose names and organizations you have defamed so each side can present their case. (I would also welcome this in a public forum, if preferable. On a personal level, I reaffirm my commitment to have public dialog on the relevant issues with any qualified representative from the SPLC or approved by the SPLC.)

In powerful and concise language, the apostle Paul wrote, “For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Cor 13:8). And it was Jesus who said that, “whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God” (John 3:21).

The highest and best thing you could do is recognize the error

of your recent listings and remove the leaders and organizations in question, thereby restoring a modicum of credibility. But if you are convinced that your listings are right, then let us have the private convocation of which I speak, and let the truth come forth for all to see.

I ask again: Have you anything to hide or fear? I appeal to you not to respond with a press release but to contact me directly. I am accessible to you and will take your call whenever possible.

Will you move forward and come into the open or will you retrench and retreat? The future of the SPLC could be at stake.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Brown, Ph.D.

Michael Brown is the author of *The Real Kosher Jesus and the host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show The Line of Fire on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of FIRE School of Ministry and director of the Coalition of Conscience.*