

Orthodox Jew: Too Much Jesus, Too Little Jesus

In June, I was privileged to attend the Faith and Freedom Coalition's largely Christian "Road to Majority Conference" (RTM). As best as I could tell, among the ethnically diverse group, I was one of only three Orthodox Jews present.

As a speaker, I was warmly welcomed by everyone I met, without exception.

Everyone knew I was an Orthodox Jew. Everyone was welcoming. In fact, many were excited and pleased to see me, an Orthodox Jew from Israel, some inviting me to come visit and speak in their communities too.

Nobody questioned my being conservative enough, or religious beliefs. Not that I expected it, but the fact that it didn't happen is noteworthy due to recent news of Christian conservatives articulating that non-Christians are not, and cannot be, conservative.

The truth is, I heard many messages there that would resonate with many Jews. Because it is a largely Christian event I understood the Christian messages throughout, not preaching or even any air of exclusion to others, but just as an expression of their faith and world view. I honor that.

But I left feeling that the "Faith" in "Faith and Freedom" could be widened and made deliberately more inclusive, broadening coalitions and understanding. While I wasn't bothered personally, I felt there was a little too much talk about Jesus for an average Jew to feel comfortable or included. I know this was not to exclude anyone, but that doing anything to be more inclusive to other faiths was not really considered.

It's hard to quantify for most Jews what's "too much" talk about Jesus and another's faith. Personally, I'd hope that there would be a vision for widening the tent and language that's more inclusive. It's not too hard. I spoke about it with a pastor friend who agreed that there is a lot of coalition building to do between Jews and Christians, and that without sacrificing or compromising on their faith, Christians can be more aware to be more inclusive. He understood that speaking of Jesus and certain theological issues, at best does not resonate with most Jews and can even push many away.

While I'm very comfortable being at a place like RTM as is, last month there were troubling news reports that would prevent any sense of dialogue and understanding, much less building coalitions among conservatives that would include Jews. This is certainly not representative of the Republican party, and perhaps is only "news" if we make it so, but needs to be addressed in the context of the imperative to build bridges and coalitions.

In one instance, self-described Christian conservative, Andrew Torba, ranted that Jews and other non-Christians are not conservative because it's "an explicitly Christian movement," and because the US "is an explicitly Christian country." Torba is CEO of Gab, described as a "far-right social media network." He could be excused as just another nutcase, were he not reportedly a consultant for State Senator Doug Mastriano, the Republican candidate for governor of Pennsylvania.

In video remarks, Torba said, "This is the most important election of the 2022 midterms because Doug is an outspoken are going to build a coalition of Christian nationalists, of Christians, of Christian candidates, at the state, local and federal levels and we're going to take this country back for the glory of God."

Honestly, if it were just his representing his theological opinion, I could live with that comfortably. However, Torba

doubled down in a continued rant that then became anti-Semitic.

"My policy is not to conduct interviews with reporters who aren't Christian or with outlets who aren't Christian, and Doug (Mastriano) ... does not do interviews with these people. He does not talk to these people. He does not give press access to these people. ... These people are dishonest. They're liars. They're a den of vipers and they want to destroy you." And it got worse.

Speaking of people like Ben Shapiro, David Horowitz and others, Torba said that Jews are not welcome in the conservative movement unless "they repent and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior ... They're trying to subvert Christian nationalism. Turn off Ben Shapiro. This is not a Judeo-Christian movement. Those two terms are actually contradictory."

Torba continued, "These people aren't conservative. They're not Christian. They don't share our values. They have inverted values from us as Christians. So don't fall for the bait of Populism Inc., don't fall for the bait of this pseudo-conservatism, big tent nonsense. This is a Christian movement. This movement needs to be centered on the gospel and truth of God's word and of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior and King. That is the only way that this is going to work. ... This is an explicitly Christian movement, because this is an explicitly Christian country. From its founding throughout its entire history, it has been an explicitly Christian country."

Speaking of Jews, atheists, agnostic and any "non-believer," Torba graciously offered, "We're not saying we're going to deport all these people or whatever. You're free to stay here. You're not going to be forced to convert or anything like this because that's not biblical whatsoever. But you're going to enjoy the fruits of living in a Christian society under Christian laws and under a Christian culture and you can thank

us later.”

As much as I felt there was a little “too much Jesus” for most Jews at RTM, Torba is guilty of having “too little Jesus.” By saying Jews and other non-Christians can be a tolerated minority in a Christian society and cannot be considered conservative, shows just how ignorant he is. According to his “theology,” if Jesus came back, because he’s Jewish he’d not be welcome as a conservative, or get an interview with Mastriano. Neither would any of the apostles. Let that sink in for a minute.

I have countless Christian friends who will bristle at Torba’s words, twisted theology and anti-Semitic and anti-Israel ideology. Many understand you cannot really be a Christian if you don’t support Israel. I pray that many will respond and reaffirm this now.

What Torba has done, in Mastriano’s name, is to undo the work of those who want to widen the tent, and elect more conservatives. If Mastriano loses, Torba can look at himself at himself and ask “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the most divisive conservative of them all?”

Thank God, Torba is not the candidate. However, Doug Mastriano, needs to rebuke Torba unconditionally and cut all ties. It may be too late in a swing state that has a significant Jewish vote to sway them back, but if I lived and voted in Pennsylvania, there’s no way I’d vote for Mastriano if he didn’t. Either way, doing so, or not, will show his character or lack thereof. In my capacity as a writer, and host of the “Inspiration from Zion” podcast to build bridges between Jews and Christians, and as an Orthodox Jew, I invite Senator Mastriano to join me as a guest.

Does Torba think that the many federal buildings and institutions adorned with biblical images and references are not Jewish? When something as “mundane” as displaying the Ten

Commandments (in Hebrew) in public is fought, does he not realize that these were given by God to Moses (a Jew) and brought to the Jewish people who received and embraced them?

If ever anyone needed a come to Jesus moment, Torba and Mastriano do. Ignorance can be forgiven. Unrepentant arrogance cannot.

In related "news," and another swing state, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) said the Republican party's primary focus should be on making the political party one of Christian nationalism, "We need to be the party of nationalism and I'm a Christian, and I say it proudly, we should be Christian nationalists." She added that Republicans should conform to Christianity to make it easier to identify with and sway Christian voters.

Despite her history of brash, ignorant and offensive comments, she's yet to be called to task, and people still support her. Bless her heart.

Though many Republican voters identify as Christian, the Bill of Rights guarantees keeping religion and state separate as a means to prevent government officials from promoting any particular faith. I'm good with that on many levels. Torba, Greene and others who believe what they do overlook that in a democracy, and certain districts where the demographics are such, it's not impossible that a largely Muslim electorate would vote to follow Sharia law, relegating Jews and Christians to second class *dhimmi* status, and all others as infidels. Maybe Torba actually likes that model because that's the second-class status to which he ascribes all non-Christians.

Caustic attitudes like these need to be isolated and called what they are: offensive, wrong, anti-Semitic and outside the pale.

While I honor and respect the right of everyone to their

faith, and to express it even in ways that might be off-putting or not embracing to others, specifically stating that conservatism in general and the Republican party (or the US for that matter) are Christian and exclusive of others, is wrong and damaging on every level. {eo}

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