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MY VIEW ALEX MCDONOUGH

Another way to fight antisemitism

By Alex McDonough

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I am writing in reply to the commentary (“Fight intolerance in the City Different,” My View, Feb. 17), by Rabbi Neil Amswych.

Life is precious, which means Jewish life is precious. This is nonnegotiable. On this, I believe Rabbi Amswych, whose synagogue I grew up in, and I agree with him. I’m sure we also agree we want safety and that antisemitism is dangerous and must be opposed. Fundamentally, we have similar values. We’re both activists who have stepped up to fight antisemitism. There are differences, too. He has given presentations defending Zionism, while I worked with a coalition of local activists to deny Matisyahu a platform because of what we see as his Islamophobic, transphobic and pro-genocide rhetoric and actions.

This is a microcosm of a debate happening around the world; thousands of Jewish activists put our freedom, safety and sometimes lives on the line, protesting the Zionist colonial project in Palestine. Meanwhile, Jewish soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces risk their lives to fight threats to the Zionist state, a state they associate so strongly with Judaism that, to them, the two are inseparable. They believe Israel is the political representation of Jews on the world stage.

The state, to Zionists, is so important to Jewish safety that they’re willing to kill Jews to protect it. From Yitzhak Rabin, to Rachel Corrie, to the Jewish Israelis killed by the Israeli military on Oct. 7. The state is so important to Zionists that they signed the Haavara Agreement with the Nazis and welcome far-right antisemites including John Hagee, Glenn Beck, Donald Trump and Steve Bannon to their side. Jewish Zionists align themselves with the evangelical Christian Zionist movement, which seeks a return of Jews to Palestine to bring about their faith’s “end times,” which from their perspective also would send Jews to their religion’s hell.

Zionists accuse pro-Palestinian protesters of sympathizing with Hamas — the organization that five months ago carried out the second-largest killing (for the largest killing, look up the Argentine juntas) of Jewish people since the Holocaust. And that's complicated. All life, including Palestinian life, is precious. Devaluing any life devalues everyone's life. I'm not scared to admit that the world is complicated and sometimes violence is the least-worst option. Still, on a fundamental level, everyone's life is precious in the same way that Jewish life is precious.

People under occupation — whether they be Irish, Jews forced into the Warsaw Ghetto, or Palestinians living under intense and brutal occupation in Gaza — have the internationally recognized right to resist. Knowing the history of the ethnic cleansing, displacement and subjugation Palestinians have experienced in their own country long before Israel funded the creation of Hamas, I don't think the foundations of the violence in occupied Palestine can be blamed on Palestinians or Hamas. If they were Jews, and they are descendants of Jews, they would be fighting back as Jews. That's what humans do.

Our safety as Jews or even just humans will not and cannot come through building alliances with hate. It will not come without honest analysis of history and power. All hate that is based on people's identities should be deplatformed. Matisyahu is responsible for and can change his intolerant beliefs or at least his expression of them. Palestinians cannot change that they were born Palestinian.

We can only end antisemitism through continuity of values and solidarity with all oppressed peoples in principled opposition to hate.

Alex McDonough lives in Santa Fe.