

ADL Should Switch Focus From Israel to U.S. Jewry



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Last month, The International Affairs Committee of the Anti-Defamation League's New York Regional Office, along with Cardozo's Jewish Law Student Association, held its sixth annual Conference on the Middle East. This year, the conference specifically focused on "The De-Legitimatization of Israel," featuring as the keynote speaker the former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton.

I could not make it due to my crippling fear of mustaches.

However, the Anti-Defamation League's single-minded focus on Israel as the lynchpin of Jewish existence is somewhat misplaced.

Certainly, Israel, the Jewish state, is important. And after years of war and struggle, Israel seems to have earned its place in the world. With an impressive economy, powerful military, and U.N. recognition, Israel is not going anywhere any time soon. The U.S. Jewish population, on the other hand, is.

The Jewish population in the United States is on the decline, dropping from 5.7 million in 2000 to an expected 5.6 million in 2020, and is predicted to decrease to 4.7 million in 2050 and to 3.8 million in 2080. These numbers, published by the American Jewish Community, are 10 years old. One would think that these demographics would have called Jewish organizations to a red alert about the declining American Jewry, making the past decade one of conferences about family rearing, charities to help new parents, and an overall mission to keep Jews Jewish. But it is 10 years later, and the focus is still on the Middle East.

The fear for Israel's existence was once well founded, but after the War of Independence, the Yom Kippur War, and all sorts of defeated militarist thugs, Israel stands strong. Jews have survived greater threats in the past and will continue to do so. Today's enemies have made their mission clear, their rhetoric loud, and their tactics obvious.

But there are other threats to American Jewry, real threats that lie in wait. They exist under a facade of allegiance, biding time and working slowly to hasten the elimination of American Jews. Their goal: convert Jews to Christianity.

It was only a few years ago when Ann Coulter revealed in a CNBC interview an attitude towards Judaism that one does not often hear out loud: Jews need to be "perfected" into Christians. It is easy to dismiss Ann Coulter as a washed-up pundit begging for attention, but Coulter's rhetoric is echoed throughout the nation. Entire organizations, from bible studies to evangelical churches, explicitly state their goal of converting people, including Jews, to Christianity. While organizations like StandWishUs.com worry about the attention-grabbing political pro-Palestinian groups on college campuses, they ignore the threat of on-campus Christian clubs standing in college quads, seeking to bible beat students into religious submission. Ahmadinejad may have his rants, but Iranians don't confront young Jews on the cusp of adulthood and convince them to sever their religious and cultural heritage, and then pretend to be allies because they "support Israel." At least Hamas is honest about its anti-Semitic intentions.

Indeed, I have never heard of Muslim groups trying to convert Jews on college campuses. I have heard, and regularly experienced, the problem of Christian groups trying to convert Jews. The Jewish community should not tolerate these fork-tongued fair-weather allies who seek to steal away bubbie and zadie's collegiate scholars.

This phenomenon is not just in the Red States. Last month, The Jewish Week reported about "Hebrew-Christians" setting up shop in Flatbush with the intent of proselytizing to the Orthodox community. The Jewish Week is kind enough to frame it as proselytizing, but let's call it what it really is: a sick goal of making Jews no longer Jewish. Christian groups may not call for the death of Israel, but in their conversion attempts they call for an end to the Jewish people as we know it.

The Anti-Defamation League and other Jewish groups need to expand their perspective of what constitutes a threat to Judaism. If settlers cannot live on a hilltop on the West Bank, Israel will still exist. If East Jerusalem becomes part of a Palestinian state, Jews will live on. But if evangelical Christian groups have their wish, Jews will not live on — at least not as Jews. We have stood strong against threats to Judaism abroad; now it is time to confront the threat at home.