



**“YES, I AM A JEW”: EDUCATION AND ANTISEMITISM
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In the 1830s, an aspiring member of the British Parliament, Benjamin Disraeli, sought political advantage by attacking his opponents as aligned with a once and future MP named Daniel O’Connell. O’Connell was stung and said so. Referring to Disraeli, O’Connell took the occasion to note:

“His name shows that he is of Jewish origin. I do not use it as a term of reproach; there are many most respectable Jews. But there are, as in every other people, some of the lowest and most disgusting grade of moral turpitude. I look upon Mr. Disraeli as the worst.” One of Disraeli’s ripostes in the exchange is the stuff of *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*: “Yes, I am a Jew,” he declared, “and when the ancestors of the right honourable gentleman were brutal savages on an unknown island, mine were priests in the Temple of Solomon.”

The riposte was more memorable, but the accusation is more revealing. There was nothing wrong with *respectable* Jews. Disraeli just happened to be a disgusting one. The problem is that Disraeli *was*, by any conventional measure of the time, a respectable Jew. He was baptized as an Anglican and married one. He belonged to a church and is buried there. The lesson is this: A respectable Jew may be a compliant, assimilated, or even temporarily useful Jew. But the respectable Jew is, in the end, a Jew.

In that sense, I do not intend to be a respectable Jew in these remarks. Dara Horn, the novelist and scholar of Yiddish literature, notes in her essay collection *People Love Dead Jews* that the world does pay homage to certain Jews. The catch is that they have to be murdered first. “People love dead Jews,” the book opens. “Living ones, not so much.”

Horn recalls having covered the 1993 opening of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for a teen magazine. In her review, she wrote about an exhibit tracing the brief life of a Jewish child from his youth as a typical boy in Berlin—going to school, playing soccer—to his murder in a concentration camp. This exhibit, the teenaged Horn exulted, reminded humanity that Jews were *just like everyone else*. And just as everyone else was exulting in the precocious Horn, an elderly woman with a thick accent and telltale numbers tattooed on her forearm asked: And what if they *weren’t* just like everyone else? Would it then have been acceptable to murder them?

The massacre of October 7 yielded the world around 1,200 murdered Jews, though some of the bodies were so mutilated, some of the bone fragments so scattered, that Israel is still counting its dead. These Jews evidently failed the test of “respectability” when they were alive, partly because they were living normal and diverse Jewish lives—from concert goers to peace activists— but mostly because they were Jews and had not yet done the service much of the

world demands before it gives them any regard: namely, dying. Perhaps someday there will be memorials. But we stand now in the strange interlude between troublemaking Jews and dead, and therefore respectable, Jews.

The defining feature of the interval is that the world is either indifferent to their deaths or felt they had it coming. That brings us to why I am standing here as the Jewish president of a Catholic university giving a talk about antisemitism and education.

Jews and Catholics share a great deal in common. We differ on foundational theological questions. But I believe we also understand each other uniquely. The physical, bodily aspect of ritual is crucial to Catholic and Jewish worship alike. Our intellectual traditions share many premises and methods. But all of this is true precisely because— and I proudly say this about Assumption vis-à-vis other universities too— Jews and Catholics refuse to be “just like everyone else,” including just like one another.

We approach our commonalities in the true spirit of ecumenism. In the vernacular, “ecumenical” conjures images of holding hands and denying difference. Actual ecumenism—in Biblical Greek, the root is derived from “home”—is meaningful only amid honest difference about serious things. It requires perspectives—homes—from which people of goodwill encounter one another.

For Jews around the world, the delusion that we might sneak by with our respectability intact has been demolished since October 7. We have been reminded that even respectable Jews are faceless building blocks of an ontological category that, to anyone familiar with Jewish history, would be comical were it not so tragic. No matter our behavior as individuals or our circumstances as a people, we are oppressors.

This categorization of Jews as oppressors has justified an eruption of Jew hatred globally, including here in Worcester, since October 7. Because this particular outbreak of hate is inextricable from events in Israel, it is necessary for me to state a disclaimer. Other peoples are not usually expected to justify self-defense in this way, but so be it: There is no country on earth in which Israeli policies are debated more fiercely than in Israel itself.

My aim is neither to defend nor to denounce Israeli policies. I very much intend to explain how the terms of many critiques have reawakened antisemitism in its oldest and most detestable forms.

I have already said I do not intend to be a respectable Jew. I also do not intend to be an “Uncle Leo” Jew. Those of you of a certain age will recall the *Seinfeld* episode in which Uncle Leo accuses the line cook in a diner of antisemitism because “they don’t just overcook a hamburger.” I thought it was funny. I still do. But the humor derives from the absurdity, and the absurdity in the late 1990s lay in the conceit that Jews were immune to hate or persecution in America.

The last several months have shattered that conceit for many of us. I do not say this lightly: It is unclear that we have a long-term home in America. It is no sure thing that we will

have a haven in Israel if we need it. And we have too much collective memory of slaughter and persecution to be indifferent to either.

What has shocked us is not simply how endemic antisemitism seems to be to the human experience. That we knew. The jolt was how instantly it was activated after October 7—like a hibernating bear that awakes with all the predatory instincts it possessed just before going to sleep—and how acceptable it has become in the mainstream.

Antisemitism has, over time, been an issue over which the far left and far right mask their consensus through mutual accusation. The left was outraged when former President Trump chose to commemorate Rosh Hashanah last fall by declaring that liberal Jews had voted to destroy America. The right was appalled when a Democratic member of Congress, Rashida Tlaib, endorsed a chant—“from the river to the sea”—that calls unequivocally for the annihilation of Israel.

Even the rhetoric is similar. At universities like NYU and Columbia, students have replicated—not approximated, but replicated—Nazi propaganda while demanding a stop to what they call “Israeli genocide.” At the other end of the spectrum, the gunman who shot 11 Jews dead during a worship service at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh was in thrall to the “Great Replacement” theory that remains a staple of Tucker Carlson diatribes.

When the gunman was arrested, he told a police officer that—stop me if you’ve heard this one before—Jews “were committing a genocide to [my] people.”

But who, in the purported political mainstream, has declared to one of these bigots: I repudiate your support and do not want your vote? Who, among the voting public, has said: If you do not repudiate the support of bigots, you will not have mine? If you take nothing else away from these remarks, please let it be this:

If you think antisemitism is a sin committed only on the other side, please look on your own. Because that left-right consensus has been central to our recent experience of Jew hatred. And it is inextricable from the events of October 7 and their aftermath. When you came in, you were handed a palpable symbol of this hate. It is a picture of Kfir Bibas. There are similar posters for the more than 130 hostages Hamas took on October 7 who remain unaccounted for. Hamas, by the way, disclaims responsibility for some captives because they have been sold—let us pause for a moment on that word: *sold*—to other terrorist groups.

Kfir was 10 months old on October 7. He spent his first birthday as a captive held by terrorists in unknown conditions—we hope. I say we “hope” because Hamas announced the death of Kfir and his four-year-old brother Ariel in December while declining to provide proof.

What we do know from young children who have been released is that the terrorists forced them to watch videos on repeat of their parents and siblings being tortured and murdered. If the children—young children, utterly innocent, wholly untouched by any geopolitical dispute—dared to cry, they were cowed into silence at gunpoint.

The flier for tonight’s lecture shows the same poster, except with an arrow pointing to

Kfir's face and the hand-scrawled comment "head still on." News reports at the time indicated that Hamas had decapitated dozens of Israeli children on October 7. Whether that was the precise method of execution is now in dispute. The number of murdered children is not.

When a CNN interviewer challenged an Israeli military spokesman about reports of decapitation, the spokesman was actually reduced to asking if the method of torturing and slaughtering children was really the issue. "It's a dead baby," he replied. "Does it matter if it's burning or decapitation?"

That poster, along with dozens of similar ones depicting other hostages, was defaced—and the murders of children were mocked—on the campus of the supposed crown jewel of higher learning in America: Harvard University. It was not done in the heat of the moment. It was the day before the current semester began.

Anti-Jewish hate is also explicit and sustained on many other campuses where Jewish students have been beaten, menaced, and physically threatened. I do not know a single Jewish parent with college-aged children whose break before the spring semester did not include serious conversations about whether it was safe—by which I mean physically safe from physical attack—to return.

One professor from Northwestern University—the Director for the Study of Diversity and Democracy, no less—recently suggested to the *New York Times* that such concerns were much ado about nothing. As you hear his words, ask whether you can imagine them being uttered about anyone other than Jews: "No Jewish students," this scholar declared, "have really been subjected to violence on most of these campuses." Not "really." Not on "most" campuses.

So here, it would appear, is the standard where Jews are concerned: Menacing mobs: no big deal. Explicit threats: lighten up. Violent assaults: acceptable as long as the number is small.

Since October 7, this eruption of hate has also occurred on the right. Figures like Nick Fuentes, a Holocaust denier who has received open support from Republicans who hold prominent office as we gather tonight, have been emboldened too. In December, Fuentes raised concerns about occult activities among Jews who were cavorting with, and I quote, "demons." "When we take power," he declared, "they need to be given the death penalty."

Here is how this looks to me as one Jew who declines to be respectable as conventionally understood: On October 7, Hamas—which doubles as an Iranian terror proxy and the elected government of Gaza, a territory from which Israel unilaterally withdrew nearly two decades ago, ordering its soldiers to drag Jews bodily from their homes—invaded Israel and unleashed a murderous rampage.

They went door-to-door shooting, hacking, and burning people to death. These deaths were not tragic civilian casualties of a legitimate military action: They were the entire point. They opened fire on a music festival connected with a Jewish holiday. They set shelters filled with Israelis on fire. They committed coordinated acts of sexual violence, torture, and mutilation too grotesque to describe.

Three short weeks later, after these gruesome details were well established, Ghazi Hamad, a political leader of Hamas, openly stated the group's intention to repeat the attack again and again, murdering, maiming, and raping as many Israelis as possible. "We must teach Israel a lesson," he said in a televised interview, "and we will do it twice and three times. [October 7] is just the first time, and there will be a second, a third, a fourth. Will we have to pay a price? Yes, and we are ready to pay it. We are called a nation of martyrs, and we are proud to sacrifice martyrs." Asked whether the aim was Israel's annihilation, Hamad, who, having fled Gaza weeks before the attack, was at minimal risk of martyrdom himself, responded, "Yes, of course."

The most moderate claim critics of Israel have made is that the October 7 attacks might have been regrettable but they must be placed in "context." For the Jews, there is always a "context" that justifies it. We had it coming. We were usurers and bloodsuckers in medieval Europe. We were capitalist war profiteers exploiting the suffering of post-World War I Germany. We defended one sliver of resource-poor land on which we and our ancestors have dwelled for millennia.

This weighing of "context" is taken to be an evenhanded position. So, Jews are left to wonder: What, precisely, is the "context" that explains burning babies to death, raping and sexually mutilating women, or dragging Holocaust survivors into Gaza as hostages?

Yet where Jews are concerned, standards differ. Let me specify before proceeding that I was born without the gene that inclines people to easy offense. I grew up in the only Jewish family in a small Texas town where I learned to interpret friends' concerns about my eternal damnation as what they were—an expression of genuine caring.

Having said that, we have had speakers on this campus since October 7 who were invited to lecture on a variety of topics despite having publicly called for the murder of Jews to be placed in "context," if not worse.

I will not name them tonight. I did not and do not object. I have personally found some to be engaging and interesting on the unrelated topics on which they spoke. I prefer that an academic community err on the side of allowing controversial views to be heard.

What I cannot help but notice is that no member of our community has, to my knowledge, uttered a syllable of concern about any of these speakers. Perhaps the search-and-destroy Google queries that condemn controversial speakers are reserved only for those thought to espouse unacceptable views. I would prefer that, in a spirit of charity and inquiry, we assume we can learn something from everyone, especially those with whom we disagree. But if there is an exception to outrage for those who practice bigotry against Jews, the least those who tacitly espouse it can do is say so out loud.

The United Nations has carved out a comparable exception for Jews. The UN Agency for Women—one of whose slogans, which I endorse, is "believe women"—apparently does not mean "believe Jewish women." Perhaps better put, they may believe but they do not care. This agency refused comment on the Hamas campaign of rape for nearly two months, and then spoke only under international pressure and only in heavily qualified terms. The membership of the UN

Human Rights Council has included notorious abusers like Iran, which hangs gay people from cranes in public squares, tortures political prisoners, and is the largest state sponsor of terror in the world, including of Hamas.

The Council's agenda at any given meeting includes timely causes of concern, and then a standing item—at every meeting, permanently and preemptively—about Israel, which can apparently always be assumed to have violated somebody's human rights somewhere or somehow. It has a name. You can look it up. It is called Item 7.

Here in Worcester, billboards declaring Hamas to be everyone's problem were recently defaced to say "Hamas is liberating Palestine." That would be news to the innocent Palestinian people whom Hamas has terrorized, oppressed, and used as civilian shields for years—stashing rocket launchers in hospitals and mortars in kindergartens, exposing them to exactly what they now face if Israel commits the sin of self-defense.

In news outlets, Israel's response in Gaza is routinely, and seemingly objectively, depicted as "retaliation," "collective punishment," and "disproportionate." I do not know a single Jew who does not weep for the innocent Palestinians of Gaza—not one. It is precisely for these innocents, who have lost their lives and loved ones and homes by the thousands, as well as for the 1,200 Israelis slaughtered on October 7, that I say this: I cannot imagine any more despicable or dehumanizing calculus than these accusations of retaliation or disproportionality. The standard is numerical, not humane: Hamas killed 1,200, Israel is therefore allowed to kill a comparable number, and we can all cancel the butcher's bill out and call it even.

"Calling it even," by the way, means allowing Hamas to continue to terrorize Palestinians in Gaza and to place them deliberately in harm's way by using them as civilian shields. The impossible position in which Israel is placed is this: Defend yourself, your nation, your children, your families, and be condemned internationally, or skip the criticism and submit to the slaughter. Israel finds that choice morally wrenching. Hamas, using Palestinian people in Gaza as pawns on the chessboard, does not.

I am not aware of any philosophical or theological theory of just war, including in the Catholic or Jewish traditions, in which the standard of proportionality means a response must be proportional to a provocation. The standard is that the conduct of war must be proportionate to a war's legitimate ends. In this case, the legitimate end is preventing Hamas from doing exactly what Ghazi Hamad said they plan to do again: murder, torture, rape, and kidnap Jews.

This twisting of proportionality—and the concomitant claim that Israel is engaging in retaliation rather than self-defense—assumes two premises dripping with antisemitism. One is that Jews are bloodthirsty, that we somehow enjoy killing people for fun or from rage or for making matzah or whatever other motive. The second is that Jews should be "respectable" by accepting that murder, sexual torture, and kidnaping babies and the elderly are just the way it is for Israel and, according to Hamad, the way it will be until Israel disappears. Tough world, tough luck. Just don't cause trouble.

There are those who say apologists for Hamas are proof of failed education. The protesters do not know the history of Israel or the criminality of Hamas or some other fact that, if

learned, would cause the scales to fall from their eyes. Perhaps that is true in some cases. I hope it is. But before I discuss how liberal education *does* matter, I confess I have concluded in recent weeks that there are limits to education as an antidote to hate. For if Jews are ontological oppressors—standing permanently on a presorted side of a civilizational divide between the oppressed and the oppressors—what difference can any education or information make?

There is a theory of intersectionality that studies how people’s many different identities—racial, religious, gender, and so forth—overlap and affect their social experiences, including the experience of oppression. The corrupt intersectionality I am describing does away with such complexities. Everyone has a meta-identity—persecutor or persecuted—and is either denounced or esteemed alongside all the identities everyone else in that category possesses.

This often descends to the absurd. The dominant culture in Israel is North African and Southern European. For those who are really, in their heart of hearts, actually concerned about skin tones, most Israelis’ complexions are indistinguishable from those of Palestinians. Yet because olive-complected Israelis belong permanently to the category of oppressors, they are also “white supremacists.” In turn because they are white supremacists, these Jews, whose rebellion deprived the British empire of a colony in the Holy Land, are *de facto* colonialists too. Fact and fiction are not part of this dialect, only persecutors and persecuted who have been predetermined according to their identities.

The online magazine *Tablet* recently published an essay about a Jewish professor at City University of New York who was preparing to start an 8 a.m. English composition class last fall when a student confronted him with this accusation, “Wow, I can’t believe you bombed that hospital last night and killed all those people.”

Never mind that the professor’s presence in a classroom in New York City at 8 a.m. constituted a pretty good alibi for what had just allegedly been done in Israel on the other side of the world. You might even call the student’s assumption that all Jews are responsible for the conduct of all other Jews “collective guilt.” When used against Jews, it is permissible rather than criminal.

The terms of this accusation reek of the most disgusting and dangerous antisemitic tropes. The speed with which this particular accusation was widely assumed to be true—the fact that many people were so *eager* for it to be true—is the medieval blood libel repackaged for the Internet age: Jews are thirsty for the blood of innocents, especially children.

The accusation itself, even leveled against the Israeli military, was demonstrably false. And here we arrive at the effectual truth of corrupt intersectionality. The professor patiently explained that terrorists had been recorded saying they had caused the explosion accidentally. To that, the student replied: “I will never believe that. Even if they came to my face and say, ‘ Hamas, we did it,’ I will never believe it.”

To say the student was *ignorant* of the facts on the ground misses the point. The student was *indifferent* to facts on the ground. The foundational premise was that Jews are guilty by definition. Intrinsic guilt is to the Jew what the speed of light was to Einstein: an absolute to which other variables must accommodate themselves.

But I am an educator, and I cannot believe that education does not matter. Specifically, I am an educator at an institution where few students are ideologues, and most are curious. Liberal education *can* form people capable of thinking with more clarity and with more respect for the human person than corrupt intersectionality permits. This kind of education is largely being offered at places like Assumption, institutions of Catholic liberal education that express their Catholic identities in a particular approach to inquiry.

These institutions engage in what Pope Saint John Paul II, in his encyclical on faith and reason, called “contemplation” of a specific kind. You may recognize his words from Assumption’s mission statement:

These fundamental elements of knowledge spring from the *wonder* awakened in [humanity] by the contemplation of creation: human beings are astonished to discover themselves as part of the world, in a relationship with others like them, all sharing a common destiny. Here begins, then, the journey which will lead them to discover ever new frontiers of knowledge.

Middle schoolers are famous the world over for saying they will never use algebra. Yet no shrugs off the Mona Lisa or the Sistine ceiling because they can only be appreciated rather than put to some practical use. Appreciation and contemplation are the soul of study as Jews and Catholics have traditionally understood it. Learning is a means of receiving the gift of a created order.

Liberal education does have ancillary benefits, including professional ones. But these are most bountiful precisely when they are byproducts of the desire to know for its own sake. That is why any endeavor to understand the created order—whether the study of the cosmos or of the neuron, philosophy or politics, nursing or theology—is an essential contribution to the mission of a Catholic university. A “university” implies not a proliferation of disciplines as an end unto itself but rather a common endeavor to seek the universal through multiple lines of inquiry and argument. That is deeply compatible with the Jewish tradition of learning. The rabbis of the Talmud debated topics ranging from botany to astronomy. Maimonides was a scientist in addition to a rabbi.

There is no exact Jewish equivalent, at least in the United States, of Catholic liberal education. But Catholic liberal arts universities that express their Catholicity in educational terms provide a natural home for us. For Jews, the barrier to considering Catholic institutions is often the fear that students will be forced to conform to religious dogmas. That is not the goal, and I might submit that, if it were, it seems not to be working, neither at this podium nor among our many students who are Muslim or who come from other faiths. Catholic liberal education, like the Jewish tradition of learning, is liberating rather than stifling. Moreover, what is often taught on elite campuses is vastly more dogmatic politically than any class I have ever known at Assumption to have been dogmatic religiously.

What Jews and Catholics share with respect to education—a yearning to understand situated within a context of faith—is what matters most. Some curious locutions in the Torah

confirm that. In the Book of Exodus, a seemingly illogical sequence occurs. In Chapter 19, the Jewish People are offered a covenant with God. We reply: “All that God has said, we will do.” In Chapter 24, Moses specifies the rules involved. Again: “All of the things that God has said, we will do.” Then Moses recites the entire Torah and the response differs in a crucial way: *Kol asher daber hashem na'aseh v'nishma*: “Everything that God has spoken, we will do and we will hear.”

The order is bizarre: How can one fulfill a commandment first and listen to it later? Some translations, in fact, reverse the order to make it sensible. But in one of the best known rabbinic commentaries, we are taught that the sequence is deliberate. On this interpretation, the verb *nishma*—we will hear—connotes an effort to understand. In other words, we will obey and we will seek to understand, *in that order*. That is not exactly the same as the Catholic teaching that faith and reason are reconcilable. But there is a meaningful compatibility. Both accept that human knowledge has limits (thus faith) and that we should use our rational natures to seek understanding.

St. Augustine’s dictum that “unless you believe, you will not understand” establishes that more than a duality is involved. Faith is a substantive prerequisite to understanding. There must be a core of faith from which understanding proceeds.

There is a related peculiarity. The opening words of John’s Gospel reframe the creation story of Genesis: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In Greek, “the Word” is *logos*. We recognize it as the root of logic, but it is more than that. It is reason embodied in speech. The idea of embodiment is central to Catholic theology. That is the teaching of the Incarnation. Revelation occurs in history. “The Word” is not an abstraction. It is concretized in language. There is no Jewish equivalent to the Incarnation, of course. But the way the Torah repeatedly describes God talking to Moses, among others, suggests a similar concern with concretizing words in the physical world.

These verses usually begin “*va’y’daber hashem el Moshe leimor*”: “And God spoke to Moses, saying.” We are taught that not a single word in the Torah is superfluous. But here, “speak” and “saying” seem to be. In English, they sound interchangeable and duplicative. My students can attest that I would put a red pen on that paper and tell them to remove the extra words: Why not simply “God spoke to Moses”? *Of course* speaking entails “saying.” But in Hebrew, the verbs differ. When God “speaks” to Moses, the verb is *l’daber*. When he “says” at the end of the verse, it is *leimor*. The Torah’s insistence on both speaking *and* saying indicates something about speech through words is central to God’s communication with us.

The root of *y’daber* is similar to the root of another word we we just encountered above: When Israel responds to the offer of the covenant, the response is: “All the things that God has said, we will do.” The word “things”—*devarim*—comes from the identical root as the verb “to speak.” In other words, there is a close relation between speech and tangible things—at least a cousin to the Catholic insistence on situating the abstract within the embodied world.

There is much that connects these traditions of learning. For the last 75 years or so, American Jews have had a companion interest in education: elite degrees as a gateway to acceptance in American society. Before then, elite institutions admitted students solely on

objective academic criteria like grades and admissions exams. I should emphasize my belief that those criteria as we know them today have limited utility for admissions. But at the time, the Ivy League had a problem: Jews kept passing the tests.

The College Board was formed to administer standardized tests. They included Greek and Latin—common topics in Protestant prep schools but not in the urban public schools Jewish immigrants attended. But the Jewish students, forgetting their obligation to be “respectable” and know their places, passed those tests too. Thus the introduction of the admissions essay and factors like extracurricular interests that enabled institutions to assess the whole person. Again, I believe those are indispensable tools today, but make no mistake: In the early 20th century, seeing the whole person was a transparent device for detecting the whole Jew.

Catholics faced similar barriers to entry to elite institutions and to the higher reaches of American society; thus the proliferation of Catholic universities in the United States. It is now time for common cause rooted in the value our mutual traditions place on contemplation. The Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper called the time we reserve for this contemplation “active leisure.” He did not mean relaxation.

By leisure, he meant the luxury of retreating from daily concerns to study for its own sake rather than for its utility. That is similar to the concept of the Jewish Sabbath. Genesis 2, the first three verses of which precede our blessing of wine on Sabbath eve, explains that God finished the work of creation and rested—*vayishbot*.

The root for “rest” (as for “sit”) is also the root of “yeshiva.” In the old country, there was a yeshiva in most every shtetl, and I doubt a single student at such a place thought of it as a day spa. The activity of learning is intense, enriching, and exhausting. But at the yeshiva, as at the Catholic university, it also occurs at a step of remove from the cares and controversies of the moment. That is the sense in which it is a form of leisure or rest.

Many of our elite universities have abandoned their similar roots. Rather than questioning and conversing, they affirm and inflame. Their obsession with admitting only the purportedly best of the best of the best applicants has had a perverse effect. Students enroll not to learn what they do not know but rather to express, perhaps with better punctuation and bigger words, that of which they are already certain.

Moreover, given that admission to these schools rather than what is taught at them is the pertinent indication of erudition, one of the defining features of many— not all, but many— students at elite institutions is being entitled rather than teachable. Is it any wonder that so many of these students, who along with their faculty are steeped in a milieu of moral certainty, are certain of their political opinions too?

There are gifted teachers and curious students at these institutions. I have known many of them. But might there be some connection between a culture of moral certainty and the cocksure assignment of wholesale groups into categories like oppressors and oppressed? Moral certainty is antithetical to education but indispensable to indoctrination.

By contrast, if you ask the students present tonight, nine out of 10 will say they value Assumption for our sense of community. You will know they mean it because this event ends at 7 and our new pub opens at the same hour. The cohesion of Assumption's community arises from its purpose. Our students may not know what they are curious about when they walk onto this campus. They may not yet be consciously curious at all. They may—parents, close your ears—even change their minds about their interests. But they are unentitled. The fact that they are so teachable, so open to discovery, is what makes our work as educators at Assumption so joyful.

Do our students spend every waking hour contemplating the Platonic forms? Parents, close your ears again: Probably not. They also have fun. But the pursuit of truth is the ultimate context for friendship. At Assumption, we call this “civic friendship.” It is the friendship of citizens of a community for whom disagreement is both natural and essential to a shared goal of seeking truth. The free exchange of ideas is a prerequisite for civic friendship. But friendship shapes that conversation by situating it in a purpose: the pursuit of truth. By and large, Catholic institutions have been free of the antisemitism seen on other campuses. Jewish families should take note and ask why.

There is no replacing the cachet of an Ivy League degree. But given the Jewish and Catholic traditions of learning—not just the *fact* of learning, but the *nature* of it—we must ask: Where do our children belong? Did our forebears value the sheepskin or the studying?

The whole structure of Talmudic study is debate, not dictation. The most famous of these debates is a series of disputes between two rabbis—Hillel and Shammai—and their followers. The house of Hillel almost always prevails because, we are taught, his students took their opponents' arguments seriously—not just listening tolerantly or respectfully, but genuinely valuing the contrary view because they were open to the possibility that they were themselves wrong. The structure of the dialogues of Plato, or of St. Thomas More, or of the medieval practice of *disputatio*—disputation—is similar.

By way of conclusion, we might put the question this way. To my fellow Jewish parents, to the educators and students who hold the mission of this Catholic University in trust—and I have the privilege of being both—where would you prefer your child be right now: in a great books seminar at Assumption, in a psychology course at Assumption, in a nursing course at Assumption—or in a current events class in the Ivy League?

At this moment, for Jewish students, that is a question of physical safety. That moment will pass, and during the interval between its momentary passing and its inevitable return, we will be left with the question of whether our tradition of learning is actually a tradition of pursuing truth or seeking prestige. Recent events strongly suggest we must choose.

If the priority is learning, an institution like Assumption is your home. If it is prestige, it will share the fate of all ephemeral things. The pursuit of truth in the company of friends will stand long after.

And Jews and Catholics—and people of other faiths that value what is true, good and beautiful—belong engaged in it together. This is the place where we can declare, “Yes, I am a

Catholic.” “Yes, I am a Jew.” “No, I am not *just like everyone else.*” We differ on a great deal. But on this campus—a university unapologetic about our Catholicity *and therefore* welcoming to all who share our mission—we are bound by the tie that matters most: the love of truth. Thank you.