

THE PLAIN DEALER

OHIO'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER. SERVING CLEVELAND AND NORTHEAST OHIO SINCE 1842.
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JOHN EHLKE | WEST BEND DAILY NEWS VIA AP

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump concludes his speech at a rally Tuesday in West Bend, Wisconsin.

Rabbis condemn Donald Trump's hateful rhetoric, intolerant policies

IRVING GREENBERG AND DANIEL ROSS GOODMAN

A group of American Orthodox rabbis, speaking as individuals, have come together — in solidarity with other religious leaders — to make this statement on a matter of grave religious import:

We believe that religion should be lived in daily life and applied in the public square and in making policy judgments. We also believe that religion should be invoked with care because its tendency to judge matters in absolute or ultimate terms may interfere with the ability of the political system to work through partial steps, compromises and pragmatic accommodations. We also affirm that it is improper to claim that God or our religion is totally on one side, be it progressive or conservative. We affirm that people of good faith can come to contradictory conclusions on policy matters.

Nevertheless, there are times when the political discourse veers into morally offensive language and policy proposals that violate fundamental religious norms. In such cases, we feel that we must speak up — and as Orthodox rabbis in particular — since we believe that every action in life should be shaped and guided by our religious values.

We issue this statement on the heels of the week of

the 9th of Av. On the Jewish religious calendar, this commemorates the anniversary of the destruction of the Second Holy Temple and the Great Exile — the greatest catastrophe of Jewish history until the Holocaust. The Talmud states that this disaster was a direct consequence of the release of gratuitous and unrestrained hatred into the body politic.

In the current presidential election, we have been deeply troubled to hear proposals that condemn whole groups and which are justified by pointing to evil behaviors by members of that group or religion. Wholesale condemnations — such as the proposal to ban all Muslim immigration into the United States — violate the principle of individual responsibility and violate the fundamental religious principle of “love thy neighbor as thyself,” which is one of the greatest commandments of Judaism (see Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:4). These proposals violate the biblical prohibitions to spread hatred or slander about groups and individuals and violate the oft-repeated biblical command to love the stranger.

We add that we were shocked by the disrespect shown to parents who suffered the greatest pain — losing a son who died in the service of our country. The Torah commands us always to comfort mourners. The

fact that the parents criticized a candidate does not justify harsh and hurtful retaliation.

Similarly, we condemn a candidate's remarks demeaning women, and we denounce his attacks labeling many Mexican immigrants as rapists or criminals. Again, opposition to immigration or to amnesty for illegal aliens cannot justify wholesale denials of the dignity of human beings or threats to round up and deport millions of families. These remarks and proposals are gross violations of the fundamental principle of our religion that every human being is created in the image of God and should be treated as equal, as unique, and as a person of infinite value and dignity.

Finally, we are troubled by candidates who signal authoritarian tendencies and pursue personal vendettas that come across as a dismissal of constitutional rights and legal processes. Protection of the law, equality before the law, and respecting democratic political processes (though they may fall into gridlock or frustrate us from time to time) are the bedrocks of democracy. Democracy is the system most protective of human dignity. Upholding it and protecting its processes is of the highest religious value. The fact that these dangerous tendencies have been cou-

pled with statements of admiration for authoritarian dictators has aroused our conscience.

All these behaviors, taken together, have led us to make this extraordinary statement in the name of our religious principles. Our core religious values and essential theological beliefs require us to condemn Donald Trump's hateful rhetoric and intolerant policy proposals in the strongest possible terms.

Greenberg, a scholar and theologian, is the founding president of the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation and of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership in New York. Goodman, is a doctoral candidate at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. Other lead signatories on this statement were Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, founder and president of Uri L'Tzedek: The Orthodox Social Justice Movement, and president and dean of the Valley Beit Midrash in Scottsdale, Arizona; and Rabbi Aaron Potek, who works with Jewish young adults in Washington, D.C. At least 35 other Orthodox rabbis have also co-signed this statement. The full list of names can be found at utzedek.org/rabbinic-statement/