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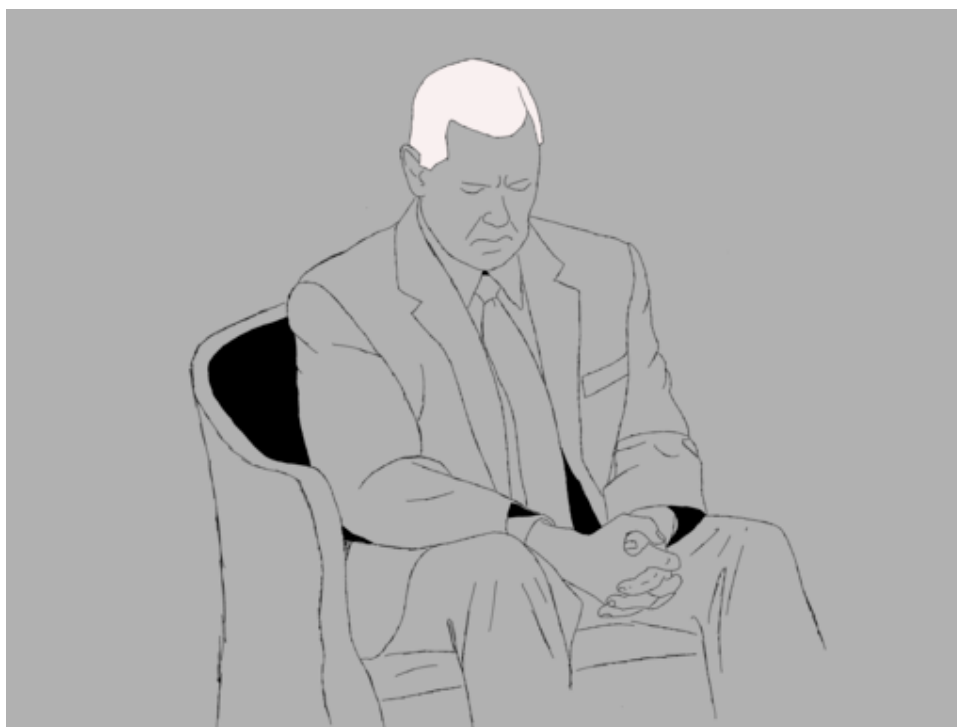
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## *Pence and the Benjamins: An Eternity of Anti-Semitism*



Drawing by Nathaniel St. Clair

There has been much throwing about of brains on the subject of anti-Semitism lately. But in the ceaseless and almost entirely cynical media-political imbroglio that has followed the “Benjamins” tweet of Rep. Ilhan Omar, I’ve seen nothing said about perhaps the most intense and thoroughgoing form of anti-Semitism in America today: an anti-Semitism that is not only prevalent but dominant in the halls of power at the moment.

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This virulent anti-Semitism — which in at least one respect surpasses that of the Nazis themselves — is passionately embraced by millions of Americans. Its most prominent adherent right now — in terms of actual power — is the vice president of the United States, Mike Pence. (See note 1 below.) So we will examine Mike Pence's beliefs as an exemplar of this growing brand of anti-Semitism.

Mike Pence believes, with all his heart, that every single Jewish person on the planet will — and should — burn in the ovens of Hell for all eternity ... unless they stop being Jews and accept his own version of the Christian faith. There is no equivocating here. Pence is a passionate evangelical Christian. He believes that the Bible is the literal word of God, and that his sect's interpretation of that word is true, correct and everlasting. I know his type of Christianity very well, for I was raised in it. There can be no question what Mike Pence, and millions of Americans, believe about Jews and their ultimate fate.

So let's continue. Mike Pence not only believes that every Jew alive today will be tortured and tormented for eternity, but that every single Jew since the time of Jesus Christ is right now burning and writhing in undying flames — unless, again, they had cast off their cursed Jewishness at some point and become Christians.

Thus Mike Pence believes that every Jewish person killed in the Holocaust — with a few exceptions (see note 2 below) — is even now, right this minute, screaming madly with unbearable pain as they feel the fire searing into their flesh: fire that never stops lashing, flesh that never burns away. Mike Pence believes that almost all of the Jews killed in the Holocaust went directly from the torment of the gas chamber or the shooting pit into the fires of Hell, where they are even now undergoing tortures and abominations far worse than the Nazis could ever inflict.

It's worse because there is no relief, not even for a moment. There is no chance even to lie down on a wooden plank for three hours in a bone-cold winter night after a back-breaking day of slave labor. There is not even the hope that your mind will break and you'll lose conscious awareness of your situation, or that the torture will finally end at some point in the relief and oblivion of death.

There is none of that. No relief. No hope. No end. Only the unbearable pain of your entire body burning in flames, while you remain fully conscious, fully aware of every microsecond of agony. Forever. For millions of years, billions of years, trillions of years. This is what Mike Pence believes should happen to every single Jewish person who doesn't renounce their literally God-damned Jewishness. He believes they deserve to

suffer unending torment and pain ... because they didn't believe what he believes about God and Jesus and salvation.

The beliefs of Mike Pence about the eternal torment of Jews are the very embodiment of an extreme anti-Semitism. In its feverish vision of the ultimate fate of the Jewish people — an eternal Final Solution — it is even more brutal and cruel than Nazism itself.

2.

Now, Mike Pence might argue that he and his fellow sectarians are not anti-Semites, because they don't hate Jews just for being Jewish, as the Nazis did. In fact, Mike Pence and his religious compatriots will tell you they actually love Jews, deeply and fiercely, which is why they support the Israeli government far more blindly and fervently than, say, most Jewish Americans do. They love Jews so much they want to spend eternity with them — millions and billions and trillions of years! They love Jews so much that many of them pray nightly that every Jew in the world will be saved from the Jewishness they were unfortunately inflicted with at birth. They don't want a single Jew to writhe and scream forever in the fires of Hell. Let us grant them that.

Nevertheless, Mike Pence and his fellow sectarians are cheerfully resigned to the fact that this writhing and screaming will be the fate of any stiff-necked Jew who fails to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. They believe it is part of God's perfect plan that such Jews burn in unrelenting agony for billions and trillions of years. They believe the eternal torture of the Jews is not only justified; it is righteous, holy, even glorious. Because it is in accordance with the divinely ordained structure of the universe.

Here, Mike Pence might object again. The fate of eternal hellfire awaits all those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, he might say. We're not just singling out the Jews for "special measures." And that's true. But it was also true of the Nazis. They didn't just persecute and torture and murder Jews. There were many different kinds of people whom the Nazis felt violated their idea of the divinely ordered structure of the universe and deserved punishment, torment and elimination. But the fact that condemnation is spread around various groups doesn't mitigate the suffering of any specific group being targeted.

And with both Mike Pence and the Nazis, it is the Jewishness of the Jews that condemn them. For the Nazis, a Jew could be an exemplary person with a record of long and faithful service to the German nation; it didn't matter. They were Jewish and thus were condemned. For Mike Pence, a Jew could be an extraordinarily loving and giving individual, someone who has sacrificed for others, helped the poor and sick — indeed,

lived a blameless, Christ-like life in every respect; it doesn't matter. If that person does not renounce their Jewishness, then it is their very Jewishness — their adherence to their own faith rather than the faith of Mike Pence — that will condemn them to eternal damnation.

I suppose one might say that non-religious Jews will be lumped in with all the other non-believers on the transport trains to Mike Pence's eternal Auschwitz, and therefore it's not their Jewishness per se that condemns them. Whether that will be any comfort to them as they screech in agony alongside religious Jews is unlikely. But let us concede that on this point, Mike Pence and his fellow sectarians are not as anti-Semitic as the Nazis: they only condemn religious Jews for being Jewish; non-religious Jews will go to Hell for other reasons.

And in fact, I'm not here to equate evangelical Christianity with Nazism. Do Mike Pence and his fellow sectarians advocate the persecution of living Jews in any way, much less along Nazi lines? No, of course not. (Although it has to be said that Mike Pence — and Donald Trump — and millions of their followers seem happy to persecute Muslims in ways very similar to the Nazis' early treatment of Jews. Whether their anti-Islamism will lead them into emulating the Nazis even further in their persecution of a demonized minority remains to be seen. But they are not there yet.)

My point is simply this: any belief-system that says Jews deserve to be tortured and tormented, forever, simply for being Jews, is anti-Semitic. Any belief-system that says this eternal punishment of Jews is an absolute requirement of a just and moral universe is anti-Semitic. Anyone who holds this belief is, ultimately and essentially, an anti-Semite, whatever else they might feel about Jewish individuals they know, or Jewish people in general, or the state of Israel.

Therefore, Mike Pence — and so many others who have been loudly and showily condemning Omar — are in fact anti-Semites of the highest order. They are the eternal anti-Semites, envisioning an unspeakable punishment for all Jews who remain Jews, for all time ... yea, even beyond the end of all time. And that, to me, is utterly despicable.

NOTES.

1. Donald Trump is, of course, more powerful than Pence; but he can't be used as a representative in this case, because it's obvious Trump has no religious belief at all. He is certainly not an evangelical Christian in even the remotest sense, although the political hucksters of Pence's sect like to claim him as an adherent. His only object of worship — his only "ultimate concern," to use the Tillichian terminology — is his own bloated, blustering self.

2. As noted, Mike Pence doesn't believe that every Jew who was murdered in the Holocaust is now in Hell. There are exceptions. First, of course, are the many Jewish converts to Christianity killed by the Nazis, who were less concerned with belief than biology. (Or rather, with their bogus view of biology and "race science," which they took largely from American "thinkers" and lawmakers of the early 20th century.)

The second exception would be children who had not yet reached the "age of accountability." This is the point (in the evangelical conception) at which a child comes to the conscious knowledge that he or she must accept Jesus as their Saviour and be baptized — or else burn eternally in Hell. This means that that little children who have not yet formed such an awareness are in a state of innocence, and would be taken up to heaven in the event of an untimely death. So while Mike Pence believes that Anne Frank, for example, went straight to the fiery pits of Hell as soon as she was murdered by the Nazis, many younger Jewish children would have been spared eternal damnation after their deaths.

(The "age of accountability" is a very murky milestone, however. I remember hearing a sermon on the subject when I was seven years old, and becoming aware that I was aware, that I understood the deal: I'm a sinner who will burn in hell if I don't get baptized. At the same time, I was mortified by the idea of going down in front of the whole church at the altar call and confessing my "conviction," which was the standard practice. But even though the preacher had offhandedly mentioned a vague age range — "10, 11 years old" — I figured God would know that I knew, and that I couldn't risk dying at some point in the next few years then trying to weasel out of things when I stood before the Great White Throne of Judgment: "Hey, I'm not even 11 years old yet, so I haven't technically reached the age of accountability, right?" Thus I spent a few anxious weeks running the risk of eternal damnation before I worked up the courage to overcome the embarrassment of making a public confession.)