

Summer in Paris

As the sound of “Death to the Jews!” filled the streets this summer, much of the French elite averted its gaze or blamed the Jews for their own misfortune. Do Jews still have a future in France?



Police officers chase rioters in the Paris suburb of Sarcelles on July 20. Several Jewish-owned stores were burned. Pierre Andrieu/AFP/Getty Images.



ESSAY

ROBERT S. WISTRICH

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About the author

Robert S. Wistrich is professor of Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he heads the Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism. He is the author of *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (2010).

On July 13, the eve of Bastille Day (a national holiday in France), a mob laid siege to the Don Abravanel synagogue in the Eleventh district of Paris. The “protesters,” mainly of North African Arab origin, had broken off from a larger demonstration supported by a small band of left-wing allies—Communists, militant anti-Zionist Trotskyists, a few environmentalists, and trade unionists—waving Palestinian flags and chanting “Death to the Jews” (*Mort aux Juifs*) along with the Islamist battle cry, *Allahu Akbar!*

The synagogue, located in Rue de la Roquette, was filled with about 200 congregants who were forced to barricade themselves within as the rioters, some of them armed with chairs, clubs, and knives, sought to break their way in. They were held off by a small group of policemen, Jewish activists, and members of the Jewish Community Protection Service. But it took three hours for the siege to be lifted, and then only thanks to the very belated arrival of special police reinforcements. For some, the event evoked memories of *Kristallnacht*, “Night of the Broken Glass,” the November 1938 Nazi rampage throughout Germany and adjacent lands—an exaggeration, no doubt, but testimony to the scale of the trauma inflicted.

The surrounding days saw no fewer than eight attempts to invade, damage, or set fire to synagogues in the Paris area. Already on July 11, two days earlier, a synagogue in Aulney-sur-Bois had been firebombed during Friday-night services. A week later, in the northern suburb of Sarcelles (known as “Little Jerusalem”), with its large Sephardi Jewish population, a failed

effort to set the synagogue aflame led the enraged rioters to burn cars and destroy a Jewish-owned pharmacy, pizzeria, and other stores. In a scene reminiscent more of the Middle East than of Western Europe, the police needed recourse to water cannons, tear gas, and rubber bullets to subdue the attackers.

Not that France was alone in the democratic world in witnessing an escalation of anti-Jewish violence during this summer's conflict in Gaza. From London, England to Sydney, Australia, from Boston, Massachusetts to Santiago, Chile, the chorus of anti-Israel protest—often spilling over into anti-Semitism—could be heard world-wide. In Great Britain alone, over 200 anti-Semitic incidents were registered in July, a record for a single month. In Germany the anti-Israel mood was particularly visceral, with a visiting imam in Berlin inciting Muslims to slaughter the Zionist Jews and demonstrators screaming slogans like “Jew, Jew, cowardly pig, come out and fight!” Protesters in Antwerp, Belgium, marched while reportedly chanting threats to “kill the Jews.” In Malmö, Sweden, the synagogue was vandalized for the third time in a year, swastikas were painted on Jewish-owned shops, and Jews were insulted on the streets.

But none of these incidents caused the same devastation as in France, where, according to official statistics, no fewer than 527 anti-Semitic incidents occurred in the months from January through July of this year, double the number for the same period of the previous year. Violent acts were especially common, increasing by 126 percent. And no wonder: a variety of factors, starting with the respective sizes of its Jewish and Muslim populations, combine to make France a special but also an emblematic case for a European Jewry whose overall future now seems to be under a menacing cloud.

I. Jihadism Hits Home

At perhaps 600,000-strong (recent estimates place it lower), the French Jewish community accounts for fully half of the Jews presently living in the European Union. But if France's Jewish population stands out for sheer size, its Muslim population is at least ten times greater, anywhere from six million to perhaps as high as eight million: easily the largest such concentration in the EU, and constituting about 12 percent of the total French population (and a much higher percentage of France's younger generation). Like most of France's Jews since the 1950s, French Muslims immigrated principally from the country's ex-colonies in the Maghreb—Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco—augmented later by Muslims from West Africa as well as from Turkey and Iran.

These immigrants and their progeny have proved particularly receptive to anti-Semitic as well as anti-Israel propaganda and incitement. Things have grown progressively worse in this respect ever since the onset of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000 and the growth of a massive Muslim presence in Europe, but there is a prehistory here that is now largely forgotten. French (and European) Jews first became victims of Arab rage against Israel between 1979 and 1983, when Palestinian groups and their local allies carried out a campaign of terrorist attacks.

For example: on October 3, 1980, a bomb intended to murder the maximum number of worshippers at the Reform synagogue of Rue Copernic in Paris exploded prematurely, killing one Israeli woman and three non-Jewish passers-by. Around the same time, in another portent of things to come, a pro-Palestinian narrative

emerged in France accusing Israel of using disproportionate force, gratuitously killing Palestinian children, and committing war crimes and even genocide. In 1982, left-of-center newspapers like *Le Monde*, the left-wing daily *Libération*, the Communist daily *L'Humanité*, and the Catholic-left *Témoignage Chrétien* shamelessly denounced an imaginary Israeli “genocide” in southern Lebanon.

It is now a truism: to be seen wearing a *kippah* in public is to invite curses, insults, harassment, and physical aggression.

It was during the second intifada (2000-2004) that anti-Jewish violence began soaring to unprecedented heights in France. The slogans behind the violence were by now familiar, mixing classic European anti-Semitic tropes with radical Islam and hatred of Israel. But the form was different. For the most part, the perpetrators were not operatives of terrorist organizations but were drawn from Muslim immigrant families in the *banlieues*, metropolitan “suburbs”—more accurately, urban slums—containing high proportions of foreign-born residents and plagued by unemployment, crime, drugs, family breakdown, and gang terror. Much of the violence took the form of pogrom-style mob attacks, spontaneous harassment, and vandalism. But some of it was carefully planned and orchestrated.

Although the violence abated somewhat after 2004, two years later French Jews received a chilling reminder of their vulnerability with the murder of Ilan Halimi, a twenty-three-year-old Jewish salesman in Paris. Halimi had been gruesomely tortured to death on the outskirts of the city by a gang appropriately called “Les Barbares.” Although the media, the police, and much of the public stubbornly resisted seeing the murder as an anti-Semitic act, it eventually emerged that the gang leader (Youssef Fofana) was a West African Muslim with Salafist connections who had already focused on Jewish targets in previous kidnapping attempts, and gang members had hurled anti-Semitic insults at the boy’s father during abortive ransom negotiations.

Six years later, in Toulouse, home to 20,000 Jews, a thirty-year-old rabbi, his two small children, and an eight-year-old pupil were gunned down at the Ozar Hatorah school, an academy of high repute located in a region relatively free of so-called “inter-community” tensions (the usual euphemism for anti-Semitic disturbances). The twenty-three-year-old killer, Mohammed Merah, a French citizen of Algerian descent, had been born in Toulouse, imbibed Islamist and extreme anti-Semitic attitudes at home, became further radicalized in prison as a juvenile delinquent, and subsequently trained as a jihadist in Afghanistan. His grisly executions, which he recorded on camera, and his own death in a shoot-out with police succeeded in turning him posthumously into a heroic figure to many of the alienated young Muslims in France’s *banlieues*.

Indeed, following Merah’s vicious acts, incidents of anti-Semitic aggression by other Muslims—especially against Jewish adolescents—soared. In Toulouse itself, though messages of sympathy were extended to the grieving Jewish community, Jews were also bombarded with threats and insults *after* the killings. As for the French general public, the innocent victims were quickly forgotten as the media, in their haste to change course after having reflexively posited the murders as the work of neo-Nazi or far-right extremists, instead soon developed a perverse fascination with the killer.

Which brings us to the grim reality of the present and to the actions of twenty-nine-year-old Mehdi Nemmouche, who committed the brutal killings at the Brussels Jewish Museum in May of this year. One of Nemmouche's four victims, a retired art publisher, had arrived in the Belgian capital only two months earlier, having left her home in France because of the increasingly pervasive anti-Semitic atmosphere there. Instead of tranquility, she met a cruel death. Her assailant, like Mohammed Merah, was a French-Algerian jihadist, born in the northeastern French industrial city of Roubaix —today a mecca of French Islam—and (as it subsequently emerged) had just recently returned from a stint with Islamic State in the killing fields of Syria.

The growing presence of such jihadist elements has greatly accelerated the sense of eroding confidence among Jews all over Europe. In France, this is particularly the case for less affluent Jews living in places like Sarcelles or other heavily Muslim-populated suburbs of Paris where their situation has been precarious for some time. It has by now become something of a truism, for Jews living in any area largely populated by Muslims, that to be seen wearing a *kippah* in public is to invite curses, insults, harassment, and physical aggression. More than anything else, this one homely fact (amply documented in *Mosaic* by such close observers as Michel Gurfinkiel and Annika Hernroth-Rothstein) sums up the somber truth concerning contemporary Europe and 21st-century anti-Semitism.

II. The Irresistible Uses of Anti-Semitism

Neither the murder of Ilan Halimi nor the Toulouse killings, however, seemed to alert mainstream French society to the gravity of growing anti-Semitism—or, no less significantly, to the exact nature of its 21st-century face. But a wake-up call, of sorts, did come in the form of a mass demonstration on January 26, 2014, known as *Le Jour de Colère* (“The Day of Anger”). That 17,000-strong march (which I personally witnessed) included a vocal and heterogeneous group of militants shouting slogans like “Jew, Jew, France does not belong to you,” “Jews, get out of France,” and “The gas chambers were a bluff.” These merged seamlessly with the demonstrators’ more generalized expression of anti-elitism, hostility to the French state and its confiscatory taxes, fury at the policies (and the personal life) of President François Hollande, and much else besides. As then-Interior Minister (now Prime Minister) Manuel Valls remarked, it was a dangerous cocktail—the symptom of a morbid climate of opinion linking both left and right extremes against the Republic.

In an Orwellian inversion, the mythical “Jewish lobby” in France was accused of seeking a monopoly over public compassion for the victims of genocide.

Valls was at least partly right—but the toxic populist brew he described is itself not without precedent in French political history. Moreover, from the 1930s onward, some French politicians have not failed to exploit or abet this mood of bitter discontent, complete with its strong anti-Semitic admixture, even as they express shock and alarm at its potential for havoc. For our purposes here, it may be worth sorting out the main strands from the most recent past as they affect the Jewish situation in particular.

In 1990, a historic Jewish cemetery was vandalized in the southern French town of Carpentras. No doubt sensing an opportunity, President François Mitterrand—France’s first socialist president, but soon to become the object of embarrassing revelations about his wartime service to the Vichy regime—marched in a huge demonstration against anti-Semitism and “fascism” attended by some 300,000 people. Conveniently, or obediently, the French media at the time blamed the cemetery desecration on the right-wing National Front (FN), which in fact had nothing to do with it. Evidently, anti-Semitism, now defined by the left as a subcategory of racism or “fascism,” was to be pressed into service as a political weapon against the right.

But the uses not only of anti-Semitism, and specifically of the Nazi Holocaust, were to prove both many and irresistible. In short order, French blacks, Arabs, gays, and other minorities were fighting for institutional recognition of their suffering, and journalists, intellectuals, and politicians began equating anti-Muslim xenophobia with anti-Semitism if not with the Holocaust. The turnabout was completed when, in an Orwellian inversion, the mythical “Jewish lobby” in France found itself accused of seeking a “monopoly” over public compassion for the victims of genocide.

Thus, it is no accident that since 2000, both Holocaust memorialization and the “Jewish Lobby” have come under relentless attack by Dieudonné M’bala-M’bala, the French-Cameroonian “ex-humorist” who stands at the extreme ideological forefront of the new anti-Semitism in France. Dieudonné claims that Jews themselves, since the days of Abraham, have been consummate and archetypal racists. He has a bizarre close ally Alain Soral, a former Communist, and ex-National Front activist who today proudly proclaims himself to be a National Socialist *à la française*. The pair’s mix of left and right anti-Semitism is held together by the paranoid theory of a world “Zionist” conspiracy, a theory that has proved viral in several senses of the word. Even as their videos portraying Jewish domination of the economy, politics, culture, and the media reach an audience of millions, their reputation as convinced Holocaust deniers and admirers of Iran has borne fruit in the form of Iranian financing for their campaign to win membership in the European parliament through the frankly named Anti-Zionist party.

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Exploiting their notoriety, Dieudonné and Soral have bridged the gulfs among whites, blacks, and *beurs* (Arabs), between middle-class youth and the impoverished drop-outs of the *banlieues*, between FN supporters and the far left, and between old-school French anti-Semites and younger immigrants. Crucial to their success has been their ability to link their eclectic, hybrid anti-Semitism to their anti-establishment, “screw the system” politics. The link is symbolized in Dieudonné’s *quenelle*—an inverted Nazi salute and a mutual recognition sign for like-minded followers around the world. As at the January 2014 “Day of Anger,” the many Internet images of individuals showing off their *quenelle* salutes in front of Jewish memorial sites—whether in Paris, Berlin, or Auschwitz—encapsulate the process by which Gallic “anti-racism,” ostensibly conceived as a tool to counter and prevent anti-Semitism, has been recomposed as gutter anti-Semitism.

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III. Delusion and Denial

European elites seem powerless to respond to this hybrid anti-Semitism, especially insofar as it is connected with Islam. Denouncing the anti-Semitism of Alain Soral has not been difficult—he is, after all, a white reactionary—but the anti-Semitism of Dieudonné is much harder to grapple with. For most French intellectuals, leftist by inclination, to designate any group of blacks or Muslims as “anti-Semites” is considered highly suspect, if not racist and “Islamophobic.” It can also lead to the accuser’s being stamped as himself an “agent of Israel” seeking to cover up “Zionist crimes.”

And so, when anti-Jewish violence by Muslims occurs in France, or anti-Jewish hate speech fills the air, the media, intellectuals, and many politicians simply deny its existence—or blame it on the actions of Israel and/or the Jewish community itself. In stark contrast, Muslim youths from *les quartiers difficiles* (a euphemism for violent inner-city neighborhoods) are never held responsible for their criminal actions, any more than are the Palestinians in the Middle East. Perhaps needless to say, their solidarity with Hamas, complete with its rabidly anti-Semitic “Sacred Covenant” of 1988 and its death-cult call to Islamize Palestine “from the river to the sea,” raises remarkably few eyebrows.

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Is the French right any better? The answer is at best a qualified yes. Opposition to so-called creeping “Islamicization” in France has traditionally been led by the National Front (FN), which carries significant historical baggage of its own. Under its current leader, Marine Le Pen, the movement has sought to distance itself from the more openly anti-Arab legacy of her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, and its spectacular success in the European parliament elections of May 2014 (it polled first among French parties, with 25 percent of the vote) has made it, for the first time, a possible contender for power. Unlike the far left and some socialists, the FN took no part in the pro-Palestine marches of July 2014, and Marine Le Pen has even made some overtures to the Jews of France.

The resistance of the FN to the threat posed by radical Islamists, along with its new emphasis on republican secularism (*laïcité*), has indeed been welcomed by some Jews. But suspicions remain: in light of the party’s trivialization of the Vichy past, its current links with far-right populist movements in Europe, and its vehement rejection of Jewish communal representation (about which more below), most Jews have trouble seeing it as an ally. Moreover, when public display of the *quenelle* and Dieudonné’s anti-Semitic performances fell under a government ban, the FN voiced criticism in the name of free speech. (In the past, Le Pen *père* went so far as to express appreciation for the “provocations” of Dieudonné, and a 2005 rapprochement between the two former opponents was well publicized.)

But to return to the mainstream elites: in addition to the reluctance to identify Islamic anti-Semitism as such, there is an almost reflexive hostility to Jewish expressions of sympathy with Israel. One of the most common reproaches against Jews who defend the Jewish state has been that of “*communitarisme*,” which in English means not communitarianism but “communalism.” However inoffensive the term may sound, it is anything but. In French political discourse, communalists are

tribal, selfish, and particularist, concerned only with their own community and not with the general interest. This, in some circles, is tantamount to a violation of the “republican contract” of 1791 when France became the first European nation to emancipate its Jews, granting them full civic and political rights on condition that they renounce their former communal autonomy except in the restricted sphere of religious practice.

By and large, French Jews adhered meticulously to this unofficial pact until it was brutally sundered by the French state itself in 1940. The race laws instituted by the Vichy regime in that year abolished Jewish emancipation and paved the way for the deportation by French police of 76,000 Jews and their murder in the Nazi death camps.

That was almost 75 years ago, and much happened in the decades following the war to restore the old status quo and contribute to Jewish flourishing. But today, and indeed ever since the second intifada, Jews who defend Israel have found themselves consistently branded as tribal communalists. In addition, any rise in anti-Semitism is immediately identified as the product of so-called “inter-communal tensions,” thus creating the appearance that it is the outcome of unresolved issues between French Jews and Muslims for which both parties may be equally to blame. Yet there has never been a single case of French Jews assaulting mosques, Muslim community centers, schools, or individuals because of their being Arab or Muslim, while there have been countless incidents of this kind perpetrated by Muslims against Jews.

In other words, the aggression has been in one direction only, something the official mantra covers up and may be intended to cover up. It certainly helps to explain the marked apathy on the part of successive French governments toward attacks on Jews. Between 2000 and 2003, during the high point of the second intifada and of anti-Jewish violence on French soil, ordinary Jews felt increasingly abandoned by the state. And with reason: not only were there official insinuations that Israel’s “aggression” against the Palestinians was the prime or perhaps even the sole cause of anti-Jewish incidents, but leading French officials, from President Jacques Chirac on down, denied that there was any anti-Semitism in France or invented grossly false symmetries between Jewish and Muslim behavior.

In Paris this August, I confronted a stark example of this entrenched attitude and the loaded vocabulary in which it is couched. The center-left magazine *L’Express* had just published a special report criticizing the response of French Jews to the riots of July, riots that included the three-hour siege of the Don Abravanel synagogue and its congregants described at the beginning of this essay. Accompanying the report was an editorial by the magazine’s publisher Christophe Barbier, a prominent journalist and pundit, entitled *Les Nouveaux Baal-Zebub* (“The New Beelzebubs”). Barbier’s allusion to a medieval name for the devil went unexplained, but I assumed he was warning French Jews not to surrender to the demons of fear.

One journalist hinted darkly that, by placing their Jewish identity first, Jews risked playing into the hands of those who had always warned there was a “Jewish problem” in France.

I was mistaken. Barbier’s screed began by vigorously attacking the Jewish Self-Defense League, a voluntary organization that had helped resist the rioters and that he contemptuously

dismissed as a “communalist [sic] gang” that should be dissolved. Assuming a more solicitous tone, he then assured his readers that such efforts to “defend the tribe” were in any case counterproductive, bound to backfire and to lead only to more violence.

But if self-defense was bad, emigration (*aliyah*) to Israel was worse: in Barbier’s judgment, such a vote of no-confidence in the Republican order represented a virtual desertion of the colors, a “betrayal” (his word) of France. What’s more, it would be a flight to “nowhere,” an “imposture,” reprehensible and cowardly in itself and a disgraceful abandonment of those Jews who chose to remain in France. For good measure, Barbier accused French Jewry as a whole of self-asphyxiation, of “bunkerizing” Judaism and retreating into a self-imposed ghetto: in short, of communalism run amok.

And he still wasn’t through. If the Jews abandoned ship, Barbier now insinuated, almost pleadingly, the wound to French institutions would be so great as to leave other communities prey to “barbarism.” Therefore, Jews must stay, resolving to fight anti-Semitism as a point of honor and in the clear interest both of themselves and of Israel (!). In doing so, however, they would have to abjure any support for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—a “war-mongering” nationalist—or for Marine Le Pen, lest they encourage a “civil war” in France that would only redound to their harm. Finally, Barbier hinted darkly that, by placing their Jewish identity first, Jews risked playing into the hands of those who had always warned there was a “Jewish problem” in France.

These admonitions, at once hysterical and almost breathtakingly candid, were no less representative for that—representative not only in their contortions, which effectively turn the victims of aggression into culprits, but in what they so conspicuously omit. They completely fail to grapple with the central issue of Islamism: a danger to the French Republic and to Europe that is threatening enough, one would think, to dwarf the putative danger posed by 5,000 French Jews arriving in Israel by the end of 2014. Put that modest figure next to the shouting mobs on the Paris streets, and the very real prospect of nearly 1,000 native-born jihadists returning soon from Iraq and Syria after having trained with IS or similar groups, and one begins to grasp the accumulating layers of delusion and denial that paralyze the educated European mind.

IV. A Thin Ray of Light

If one were looking for a ray of light in this depressing picture, it could be located—unexpectedly—in the embattled Hollande administration, which has been quite robust in its response to the increasingly violent manifestations of anti-Semitism in France. On July 16, 2014, at a ceremony marking the 72nd anniversary of the French roundup of Jews in Paris, many of whom were later transferred to Auschwitz and other death camps, Prime Minister Valls publicly defended his decision to forbid any provocative pro-Palestinian demonstrations and unequivocally condemned any “anti-Semite who hides his hatred of the Jew behind an appearance of anti-Zionism and the hatred of Israel.” This was sharper language than any adopted by previous French leaders, including former President Nicolas Sarkozy.

A few months earlier, President François Hollande had been equally firm at a dinner organized by CRIF (the Representative

Council of French Jewish Institutions) in Paris. Far from denying what was happening in French society, he spoke forthrightly:

Jews are being attacked on the streets because they are wearing a *kippah*. Children in French schools are being insulted because they are Jewish. Synagogues are being desecrated with swastikas. This is the reality of anti-Semitism.

On the same occasion, Hollande stressed that the rage manifested at January's "Day of Anger" was not owing to unemployment, poverty, or hard times. It was, he averred, the old hatred of Jews "searching for someone to take the blame." If once the anti-Semites were more cautious, now they had come out into the open—marching in the streets, using the Internet to spread their lies and false rumors, performing in theaters, publishing books.

Hollande genuinely regards anti-Semitic acts as an attack on France. But even the best intentions will not suffice to overcome three decades of official apathy.

I do not doubt that Hollande genuinely regards anti-Semitic acts as an attack on France and the fundamental "values of the Republic." But even the best intentions will not suffice to overcome three decades of official apathy toward (or passive complicity with) intolerance, indoctrination, insults, and hatred. It seems doubtful, moreover, especially when the president's own popularity is at such an all-time low, that his views will find much resonance among an increasingly morose and indifferent French public. For a population increasingly battered by social malaise, economic stagnation, and fragmenting politics, the specific ailments afflicting the Jews would appear to be a very low priority.

And so, despite the current government's welcome attitude toward anti-Semitism and the radical Islamist danger, many Jews in France feel themselves trapped. For years they have heard declarations by government ministers to the effect that an assault on the Jewish community is an "attack on France" and "the values of the Republic," but the violent incidents have continued unabated. Legislation penalizing anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial remains severe on paper, yet seems to have little effect in practice. Despite the efforts of government to maintain a more balanced position on the Middle East, at home there remains a great reluctance to name the main perpetrators of anti-Semitic acts for who they are.

V. Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Less than ten years ago, an officially commissioned report to the French Interior Ministry made bold to connect the rise in anti-Semitic violence with the rise of radical Islam. French schools, those time-tested incubators of solidarity with the values of the Republic, were instead, the report noted, becoming the "lost territories of the Republic"—to borrow the title of a book edited by Emmanuel Brenner in 2002. All of the trends manifested across Europe today were already then present in French schools, where Jewish children, adolescents, and teachers were being harassed, insulted, mocked, and abused by Muslim pupils originating from North Africa—young people whom the French state was egregiously failing to integrate into French society or to bring into conformity with the "values of the Republic."

Where did those young Muslims acquire their virulent anti-Semitism? In large measure, it was an integral component of a militant ethno-religious identity, based on hatred of the West, France, and the Jews, that they or their parents brought with them from the Maghreb. This Islamist identity blended a Qu'ran-oriented hostility to infidels with traditionalist contempt for non-Muslims (both Christians and Jews) and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories derived from European sources like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. What we see today, in other words, is ground that was well seeded early on, fertilized by the global jihad, the rise of Salafism, and the cult of Osama bin-Laden—and then, once transplanted to France, copiously watered by urban anomie, juvenile delinquency, economic depression, and cultural nihilism, not to mention the ongoing crisis of French national identity itself.

What we are witnessing is the slow death of the sanctified French model of integration, and with it the beginning of the end of French Jewry.

In the 1960s, General Charles de Gaulle could still project a powerful sense of Gallic pride, rooted in the continuities of French history, the global reach of France's influence, and the country's successful modernization. But much of this national self-confidence has been eroded in the past 45 years, not least by the failure to control immigration from the Third World or to adapt more creatively to the challenges of globalization. One symptom of these and other failures has been the refusal of French elites to acknowledge, let alone to address, the issue of anti-Semitism or their own conspiracy of silence and acquiescence in the face of radical Islam. Today's awakening has come 30 years too late.

What we are witnessing, in sum, is the gradual fragmentation of the much-vaunted and sanctified French “republican synthesis,” and perhaps even the collapse of de Gaulle's Fifth Republic. It is as a possible harbinger of this slow death that we can already identify the beginning of the end of French Jewry—hitherto considered one of the great Jewish success stories of the postwar era. That latter event may take decades fully to come about, but its likelihood can no longer be excluded.

From my own research and many discussions with French Jews who have just arrived in Israel or are currently contemplating such a move, I have reached a number of conclusions. On the whole, those leaving France believe that Jews have no future there. Though still fond of the country, its beauty, its culture, and its past greatness, they are convinced that something has definitively snapped in the republican model of integration. The French system simply does not work any longer—not for Jews, not for Muslims, and not, critically, for the nominally Christian majority. Jews, however, have experienced a unique period of personal insecurity, a feeling that they are no longer protected by a state that has somehow lost its grip. Even in an Israel at war, the new immigrants tell me that they feel far more secure in the Holy Land, where they are protected by the Israeli army and free to give expression to their Judaism in the public sphere.

I have visited France countless times during recent decades; never before did I hear French Jews say so often that they consider Israel to be their homeland. This is new. Something has indeed radically changed. A process that began its incubation after 2000 and gestated slowly thereafter is now finally arriving at its maturity.

To be sure, some French Jews would categorically reject these impressions, attributing them to panic, fear, or alarmism. But I think they deceive themselves. The resurgent tide of anti-Semitism is very real in France, and it will not disappear any time soon. This is certainly not the sole reason for emigration to Israel or elsewhere, but it is a major trigger.

In that respect, the disgust expressed by many Jews at the consistent disinformation about Israel in the French media, and their genuine anxiety about the frightening levels of Muslim, far-left, and populist hostility to both Israel and themselves strike me as an entirely healthy and normal reaction. In France, as in much of Europe, the freedom to live one's identity as a Jew has become not only much more limited but also much more perilous. If an image of the European Jewish community is wanted, the emblematic picture today is that of the synagogue in Rue de la Roquette, its congregants huddled within, marauders screaming "*Mort aux Juifs*" at the doors, the intellectual elites averting their gaze or blaming the Jews for their own misfortune, an apathetic civil society, and authorities seemingly powerless to stem the tide.

For some this may be a sad, perhaps even a tragic conclusion. These are feelings I can understand. But I also remind myself that what France loses, Israel will gain.

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**POPULAR
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The Silent Partnership
OBSERVATION
MICHAEL DORAN

The Ferment that Feeds Anti-Semitism in France

A mix of the far-left, the far-right, radical Islam, and a dysfunctional political class.



Rioters, some of whom burned several Jewish-owned stores, face police in a Paris suburb on July 20, 2014. AP Photo/Thibault Camus

RESPONSE

MICHEL GURFINKIEL

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About the author

Michel Gurfinkiel is the founder and president of the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, a conservative think tank in France, and a Shillman/Ginsburg fellow at the Middle East Forum.

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A recent survey conducted by a British firm, ICM Research, and published on August 14 by the Russian press agency Rossiya Segodnia, tested European opinion toward the jihadist Sunni organization now known as Islamic State (IS). Reassuringly, the poll showed solid majorities in France, Germany, and the UK opposed to IS and what it stands for. Presumably, this would have satisfied Rossiya Segodnya's primary interest in the exercise, since IS is a foe both of the Assad regime in Syria (a Russian ally) and of Iran (a Russian partner).

But what did the survey reveal about the minority of Europeans who are *favorably* disposed to IS? That is the more interesting terrain. In Britain, the figure for those holding "positive" views of IS stood at a moderately low but still disquieting 7 percent, which included the 2 percent whose views were "very positive." In Germany, the comparable figures were significantly lower: 2 percent and zero percent. But in France, by contrast to both countries, they rose to an impressive 16 percent and 3 percent. Buried in the survey report, moreover, was an even more unsettling contrast: of those under the age of twenty-four, fully 27 percent in France declared themselves supporters or admirers of IS, versus only 4 percent and 3 percent in the UK and Germany.

ICM Research is a highly respected pollster, and its findings—which strikingly confirm Robert Wistrich's sober analysis of the French situation in his *Mosaic* essay, "Summer in Paris"—cannot be easily dismissed. Indeed, for the past many weeks they have formed the subject of ongoing discussion among French political scientists and others.

One explanation is demographic: support for IS seems to correlate with the relative size of a country's Muslim population, and there are twice as many Muslims in France as in either Britain or Germany. Percentage-wise, according to a 2011 Pew Report on the Future of the Global Muslim Population, Muslims account for 4.6 percent of the British population, 5 percent of the German, and 7.5 percent of the French—but French statistics are known to be inaccurate when it comes to reporting ethnicity and religion. Last year, the Ministry of the Interior and the National Institute for Demographic Studies settled on a higher figure for the proportion of Muslims in the country: 9 percent, or almost twice the proportion in the UK and Germany.

And those are just the overall figures. In younger cohorts, thanks to greater fertility or the inflow of immigrants, the proportion of Muslims in all three countries is higher than any of these figures suggest, and very much higher in France. Fully a fifth of French citizens or residents under twenty-four are thought to be Muslims, and in some places the numbers are much greater than that. Thus, 30 percent of the overall population in the *département* (county) of Seine Saint-Denis in the northern suburbs of Paris is estimated to be Muslim, and in some of its towns the figure reaches or exceeds 50 percent.

French Muslims, and especially young French Muslims, may support IS just as they support Palestinian extremists like Hamas: out of ethnic pride and/or in order to assert themselves within French society at large. As Wistrich points out, a striking feature of this past summer's pro-Hamas demonstrations in Paris and other French locales was the display of flags. Alongside that of the Palestinian Authority, there were the green Hamas flag, the black IS flag, and the national flags of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Turkey: the countries from which most first-, second-, or third-generation Muslim immigrants derive.

Since the summer, support for radical Islamic organizations has hardly slackened. On September 24, Hervé Gourdel, a fifty-five-year-old French hiker, was abducted and beheaded in Algeria by a North African offshoot of IS known as Jund al-Khalifa (the "caliph's army"). The outrage in France was enormous, with backing for French military intervention against IS soaring to almost 70 percent. In the Muslim community, too, a few leaders, including Dalil Boubakeur, the rector of Paris's Great Mosque, and Hassan Chalghoumi, the head of the progressive Conference of French Imams, denounced jihadist barbarity and attempted to stage "patriotic Muslim" public demonstrations. But these, in marked contrast with the summer's pro-Hamas rallies, failed to attract more than a few hundred participants, and were bluntly condemned by other Muslim leaders and intellectuals as an unseemly form of "apologetics."

Still and all, the public-opinion findings of ICM Research cannot be explained solely on the basis of demographic pressure. Even if most French supporters of IS are Muslim, and even if most French Muslims support IS, many other supporters are to be found outside the Muslim community. A deeper political explanation is needed.

And here Robert Wistrich is right to point to the much wider crisis that Europe in general is undergoing and to its ironic byproduct: the cross-breeding of far-left with far-right and Islamic ideas and ideologies, including anti-Semitism. Indeed, one wonders whether it still makes sense to speak of the age-old divide in Europe between left and right, between liberal and conservative. For France, at least, according to the geographer Christophe Guilluy, the answer is, flatly, that it makes no sense at all.

Guilluy became an instant celebrity in 2010 with his claim in *Fractures françaises* ("French Ruptures") that the nation is now split between a wealthy and thriving but smaller "Elite France" that lives and works in the gentrified big cities and a "Peripheral France" that comprises "60 percent of the French population and 80 percent of the working class" and is relegated to the outer suburbs and the post-agricultural countryside.

Elite France, in Guilluy's telling, is well adjusted to globalization

—in fact, it is one of globalization's big winners; Peripheral France sees globalization as its downfall. Elite France is in love with the free market, multiculturalism, and the European Union; Peripheral France wants to get back to a semi-statist economy, the welfare state, and the nation-state. Elite France supports either the classic conservative parties or François Hollande's mainstream Socialists; Peripheral France is increasingly turning to Marine Le Pen's National Front or to the far-left sects from the Trotskyites to the neo-Communists, from the Greens to the left wing of the Socialist party.

Unsurprisingly, globalization is frequently associated in France with the United States, the West—and the Jews. By the same token, many of the groups that oppose globalization also oppose the U.S., the West, and the Jews, and tend to see any anti-American or anti-Western or anti-Jewish initiative as a positive development. Whereas French Muslims may support IS or Hamas as expressions of Muslim power, many non-Muslim French may support these organizations as allies in a global anti-American and anti-Western insurrection—a “global intifada,” as they sometimes like to call it.

In today's cross-breeding mode of politics, this attitude holds both on the far left and among many subgroups within the far right. For the time being, Marine Le Pen's National Front would seem to be the main beneficiary of the disillusionment of Peripheral France with President François Hollande (elected in 2012 as its champion, only to devote himself willy-nilly to the care and maintenance of Elite France). But last summer, as both the Gaza war and the IS war in Syria and Iraq unfolded, Le Pen's party was rocked by a bitter feud between its primarily anti-Muslim electoral base and a radical pro-Muslim minority. So far, the party leadership has placed greater emphasis on the anti-Muslim line.

If France has become more thoroughly polarized than Britain and Germany, the reason may lie in its governmental arrangements. Those two countries enjoy both functional constitutions (“unwritten” in the British case) and functional parliaments, the latter of which, especially, allow for debates to take place, for strong personalities to emerge, and for straightforward policies to be enacted. Britain was rejuvenated by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, was kept going by Tony Blair, and is now efficiently led by David Cameron. Germany, reshaped by Gerhard Schröder in the early 2000s, is now well managed by Angela Merkel.

Things are very different in France, where Charles de Gaulle's constitution for the Fifth Republic, for all its alleged perfections, has in practice substituted a state bureaucracy for normal democratic institutions. For decades, most French leaders have pathetically postponed much-needed reforms on the mistaken assumption (to borrow Guilluy's terminology once more) that the growth of Elite France would forever compensate for the squalor of Peripheral France. In similar fashion, they have been notably unwilling to address issues related to the growth of radical Islam, issues that powerfully affect France both at home and abroad.

There are some exceptions, to be sure. One of them, cited by Wistrich, is Manuel Valls, the current Socialist prime minister. On September 18, Valls visited Paris's Great Synagogue to deliver Rosh Hashanah greetings. Speaking from the pulpit, he not only acknowledged the increase of anti-Semitic violence in France—up by over 90 percent just in the past year!—but declared that

“denying Israel’s right to exist and questioning its future” was “a first step toward anti-Semitism.” He went on to say that the involvement of about a thousand French citizens or residents of France in jihadist activities in the Middle East, and the prospect that many of them would eventually return to France, constituted “a major threat” to the nation’s security—“much more so than any similar challenge in the past.”

Mind you: unlike most other prime ministers, presidents, or government officials in recent French history, Valls is not a product of the state bureaucracy and never belonged to it.

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Defensible Borders in the Age of IS
OBSERVATION DORE GOLD



Post-Liberal Europe and its Jewish Problem
OBSERVATION
NATAN SHARANSKY

How Anti-Semitism Became a Social Movement

Anyone can join—even Jews.



A protester displays a burning Israeli flag during a demonstration in Paris on July 26, 2014. AP Photo/Benjamin Girette.

RESPONSE
BEN COHEN
OCT. 20 2014

“**A**nti-Semitism was born in modern societies because the Jew did not assimilate himself,” wrote the French-Jewish thinker Bernard Lazare in 1894, a few months

About the author

Ben Cohen is a New-York-based writer on Jewish and international affairs. A contributing editor at the *Tower*, he writes a weekly column for JNS.org. His work has appeared in *Commentary*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Haaretz*, *Tablet*, *Fathom*, and elsewhere.

after the arrest of Captain Alfred Dreyfus on charges of treason. “But,” Lazare continued, “when anti-Semitism ascertained that the Jew was not assimilated,” it reacted in two conflicting directions, simultaneously “reproach[ing] him for it and . . . [taking] all necessary measures to prevent his assimilation in the future.”

This pattern, which Lazare presciently identified as the “fundamental and everlasting contradiction” of anti-Semitism, and which we would call a “Catch-22,” seems to me to lie at the root of the existential dilemma of contemporary French Jews. And not of them alone. At stake here, as Robert Wistrich observes in his masterly essay in *Mosaic*, is much more than the fate of a single minority community. In the “beginning of the end of French Jewry,” Wistrich writes, we may also be witnessing the “slow death” of the French republican ideal—the collapse, as he put it in his 2010 magnum opus *A Lethal Obsession*, “of any consensual national project or unifying social bond, let alone commonly shared ideals.”

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And France is hardly the only nation affected. This past summer, raw hatred of Jews rose to dramatic heights in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany (where mobs urged “gassing the Jews”), and elsewhere. When it comes to anti-Semitism, a post-war, post-Holocaust consensus is breaking down all over Western Europe—right alongside the concurrent breakdown of the EU’s promised ideal of a transcontinental, inter-communal political identity. Such an identity might indeed have permitted European Jews to escape Lazare’s “everlasting contradiction”: rejected for *being* Jewish, lambasted for *remaining* Jewish. But it may be too late.

Still, however consistent with the past may be the motifs of modern anti-Semitism, it has not been easy to pinpoint the motive force behind its present resurgence. It is not enough to say, as many do, that the main culprit, in France or elsewhere, is “the left,” or “nationalist extremism,” or “the Muslims,” or “the Internet,” or some combination of these. That is to confuse the multiple, overlapping expressions of a problem with the problem itself. I would suggest a different point of departure, one that appreciates the radically new situation of Western Jews themselves at this moment in their history. To see this, it would help to take a preliminary step backward.

In the 19th century and well into the 20th, the Jewish experience of modern anti-Semitism in Europe was defined by three factors: first, discriminatory legislation; second, a marked tendency toward mass violence, either sanctioned or colluded in by the state and local authorities; and third, the fact that Jewish communities were dependent for their security on the states in which they lived.

The last time a set of grand European ideals—the ideals encapsulated in Enlightenment rationalism and the emancipation of Europe’s Jews—broke down, all three of these factors came into play: anti-Semitic legislation, violence, the withdrawal of civic rights and protection. Worse, by the 20th century, anti-Semitism became intimately bound up with the ideological imperatives of totalitarian and revolutionary regimes. Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the two states that did more to advance anti-Semitism than any of their European peers, converted mob vilification of the Jews into government policy, shaped on a grand scale and implemented from on high.

Things are very different today. To begin with, the vast majority of European Jews enjoy full civil and political rights and are not subject to anti-Semitic legislation. True, this status is not universal. There are smaller Jewish communities—in Hungary, Turkey, and elsewhere—where anti-Semitic sentiments are stoked or encouraged by governments and political leaders. And there are regimes that manipulate the *charge* of anti-Semitism for their own political ends, the most pertinent example being Russia under Vladimir Putin. But these are exceptions.

As for mass violence, except for sporadic outbursts (like this past summer in France), it, too, is no longer a fixture of contemporary Jewish existence—which is precisely why it is so traumatizing when it occurs. It is certainly not condoned or encouraged by the authorities.

Most significantly of all, there is a Jewish state that not only is reassuringly capable of protecting the Jews who live there but also provides sanctuary to Jews elsewhere who face threats to their security.

As a result, European Jews today are more protected than perhaps at any time since the French Revolution. Though some of the symbols and slogans of the past have come back to haunt the contemporary scene—witness the revival of both the Nazi image of the Jew as alien predator and the Soviet image of the Jew as conniving tribalist—in no European society today does government initiate or engineer the persecution of its Jewish communities. Many governments, in fact, have designed and strengthened legislation with precisely the opposite goal, pursuing it with a zeal that Americans, accustomed to strong constitutional protections for free speech, might well find disquieting.

Thus, in several countries, denial or even distortion of the Holocaust is illegal. (Among the eight convictions of Dieudonné M'bala M'bala handed down so far by French courts is a hefty 2008 fine for having referred to Holocaust commemorations as “memorial pornography.”) General hate speech about Jews can likewise place an offender on the wrong side of the law; British police are currently investigating a flurry of anti-Semitic messages on Twitter in response to a soccer team’s Rosh Hashanah greeting to its Jewish supporters.

But this, of course, also highlights something truly disturbing: however zealously European governments may seek to legislate and educate *against* anti-Semitism, they have conspicuously failed to eliminate it. And the reason they cannot do so gets us closer to the heart of the matter. In its actual manifestation, today’s “post-modern” form of anti-Semitism not only thrives but wins approval within the very same democratic spaces that the reactionaries and totalitarians of yesteryear set out to eradicate.

In our century, anti-Semitism is no longer the preserve of a specific political party or state. Rather, it has broadened its appeal, in the process becoming less a political phenomenon than a social one—a social *movement*. In essence, what was vertical in the last century has become horizontal in this one.

The term “social movement” is a creature of the post-1968, New Left-dominated theoretical landscape. Very simply: although social movements may assume organizational form—think of Greenpeace, a product of concerns about the environment, or

PETA, a product of concerns about the treatment of animals—their aim is less to create enduring political vehicles than to change popular sensibilities in the name of a greater social good. Thus, to identify oneself with a social movement is to adapt one's beliefs and behavior in accordance with its vision. A core belief—that, say, we are ruining the environment for which we are all responsible—will then lead an individual to adopt certain behaviors, like shunning some foods in favor of others, or recycling renewable materials, or owning a Prius. Once the sum of these individual behaviors reaches a critical mass, attitudes that originally may have seemed counterintuitive or peculiar become established as wholly positive moral and social norms. In some cases, such norms may become a litmus test of candidacy for office, or be enshrined in court decisions or embodied in regulation.

What is the core belief of anti-Semitism as a social movement? In my view, it has two integrally related parts: opposition to Jewish national power abroad (i.e., Israel) and suspicion of Jewish loyalties at home (the sin of "*communitarisme*," or "communalism," cited by Wistrich in the French context, and essentially a fancier term for "clannishness"). Out of this core belief, and the social movement that has gathered around it, there has emerged a standardized vocabulary and set of rhetorical tools.

Most familiar is the move to elevate the Palestinian cause—in reality, a local struggle between two peoples, not dissimilar from other national conflicts in the world today—into what might be called the ideology of "Palestinianism." From this vantage point, the Palestinian Arabs have assumed the status of iconic, transcendental victims, rather as the Jews did for a brief period after World War II, and as Israel did until 1967. Moreover, the substitution of the one group for the other is hardly accidental. Those who kneel fervently before the altar of Palestinian victimhood can be relied on to traffic in the correlative themes of Israeli racism and brutality, casting the state of the Jews as a carbon copy of South Africa's old apartheid regime, or as a legatee of the Nazis, or even (in the perverse Twitter hashtag #JSIL) as a Jewish version of the Islamic State gang raping, murdering, enslaving, and decapitating thousands of innocents in its rampage across Syria and northern Iraq.

In another, crucial inversion, those who detest the Jewish state, or the alleged "communalism" of European Jews, also go out of their way to repudiate the very term "anti-Semitism." This they have re-defined as a device invented and exploited by the Jews themselves in order to censor frank discussion of the Zionist and Jewish present by invoking the sufferings of the Jewish past. "The word 'anti-Semitic,'" write the French leftists Alain Badiou, Eric Hazan, and Ivan Segré, "is not only the most violent choice but also the one with the least bearing on the present reality."

This makes a kind of perverted sense. What these left-wing intellectuals are struggling with is both the murderous history of anti-Semitism itself and the inescapable associations of the very word with a certified social evil. No wonder, then, that they must declare the term bears no relation to "present reality" and is altogether to be dissociated from, for instance, their own denunciations of Jews, which must instead be seen as serving the interests only of a certified social *good*.

Such contortions, however absurd they may (rightly) appear, perform a signal service in helping to define and justify anti-Semitism as a broad-based and idealistic social movement yoking together, in a common cause, the otherwise

heterogeneous interests of leftists, neo-fascists, Islamists, and large numbers of liberals. Precisely because we are dealing with a social movement, moreover, there are no qualifications for membership in terms of education, social class, political affiliation, or ethnicity. (Anti-Israel Jews are welcome.) Nor is one required to pay membership dues, or hawk pamphlets, or participate in any of the taxing initiatives promoted by earlier generations of political activists.

Instead, the emphasis is on spectacle. Supporters of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement are prone to raiding supermarkets and forcibly removing Israeli goods from the shelves, filming themselves in the act and broadcasting their exploits on blogs, websites, and social-media platforms. Young people, especially, can make a statement by photographing themselves performing the *quenelle*, the inverted Nazi salute popularized by Dieudonné, and posting the image online.

It is through these and other practices, slowly but surely, that the once-taboo becomes normalized. And “normalization”—ironically, a word once associated with the aspirations of early Zionists to repair the defective condition of European Jewry—is precisely what anti-Semitism as a social movement seeks to achieve. The aim is to persuade the mass of Europeans to shun Israel reflexively, as they would once have shunned South Africa’s ruling white minority, and more generally, through the transvaluation of values promoted by intellectuals like Badiou, to upend and overturn the comparatively *philo-Semitic* vision that settled over Europe in the postwar decades.

What then? Can it really be that Bernard Lazare’s 1894 diagnosis of the European Jewish condition—rejected for *being* Jewish, lambasted for *remaining* Jewish—has lost none of its validity even in the radically changed and democratic circumstances of 2014?

There’s certainly no blinking the seriousness of the moment. Because anti-Semitism as a social movement is so loose and “horizontal,” so politically promiscuous, so much more a matter of attitude than of argument, of fashion than of ideology, it is arguably even less susceptible of being contained than a party or a government subject to defeat or recall. In addition, insofar as it can persuade people to see themselves as reacting to illegitimate manifestations of Jewish “power,” the movement can channel the much greater countervailing power of any number of disparate and pre-existing popular discontents with contemporary European life that have nothing to do with the Jews.

Still, although the threat is real enough, its ultimate course is unclear. As I have argued, today’s Jews are not living through a rebirth of the year 1933, nervously awaiting the rise of an anti-Semitic political party armed with an anti-Semitic manifesto and the will to implement it (though, again, parties like Jobbik in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece are menacing phenomena). Instead, in resisting anti-Semitism, European Jews and sympathetic outsiders alike are compelled to focus on more intangible factors, like the prevailing political atmosphere in a country, or what they see in the media or hear from friends and relatives in cities like Stockholm and Antwerp. It is assuredly wise to be fearful, but hard to know what to be fearful *of*. More violence? Legalized discrimination? Expulsion? Worse?

It may be none of these; like other fashions, social movements

can be fickle, and anti-Semitism is no exception. For the period ahead, European Jews may be fated to live at the mercy of the news cycle, prepared for intermittent outrages that then die down but leave the nagging sense that Jews would be better off elsewhere. At the very least, there is comfort to be taken in Robert Wistrich's closing statement that what France—and by extension, many other European countries—stand to lose, “Israel will gain.” It is undeniable that the very real empowerment of the Jews in the post-1945 era—in itself, an unqualified blessing—has had profoundly negative implications in Europe. But to have the great good fortune of living in an age of Jewish empowerment also means, when all is said and done, that there are options.

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**POPULAR
ON MOSAIC**



You Only Live Twice
ESSAY MICHEL GURFINKIEL



Evangelicals and Israel
ESSAY ROBERT W. NICHOLSON

Who Can Save Europe's Jews? Only Its Christians.

To fight anti-Semitism, Europe needs to rebuild its cultural foundations. That project starts with the Church.



From The Delivery of the Keys, a 1482 fresco by the Italian Renaissance painter Pietro Perugino. Wikimedia.

RESPONSE
GEORGE WEIGEL
OCT. 23 2014

About the author

George Weigel is Distinguished Senior Fellow of Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center, where he holds the William E. Simon Chair in Catholic Studies. He is the author of, among other books, the two-volume biography of Pope John-Paul II, *Witness to Hope* (1999) and *The End and the Beginning* (2011).

The deracination of Europe—which Robert Wistrich accurately limns as the “accumulating layers of delusion and denial that paralyze the educated European mind”—is one of the hard facts of early-21st-century world affairs that can no longer be ignored. It is evident in the ugliness (and worse) that Wistrich describes in France. It is evident in Europe’s policy paralysis (and worse) in the face of Vladimir Putin’s aggressions, which may result in the de-facto dissolution of NATO. It is evident in the inability of individual European Union member states to address the growing gap between their social-welfare aspirations and fiscal reality. It is evident in the plunging birthrates and demographic winter that has set in throughout Europe: for the first time in human history, an entire continent is systematically and willfully depopulating itself.

The effects of this deracination have been obvious to clear-minded observers, European and American, for years, even decades. But causal analysis of Europe’s “delusion and denial” rarely digs deeply enough into the cultural subsoil from which these maladies spring. Until that excavation is done, any chance of a European recovery of decency, will, and nerve is unlikely in the extreme.

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A good place to start the digging is in the 19th century, with the phenomenon that the French Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac would dub “atheistic humanism.” Here, Father de Lubac argued, was something new. Of course, there had been atheists forever. What was new was an atheism that posited the God of the Bible—the God who first made Himself known to the people of Israel—as the enemy of human freedom. This was a great reversal, for, as de Lubac reminded his mid-20th-century readers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had come into the world as a liberator: a God who did not, like the gods of Canaan, demand appeasement through the sacrifice of children; a God who did not, like the gods of Greece, play games with even Achilles, the strongest and wildest of men; a God who did not want his liberated people to fall back into the bad habits of the slaves they had been in Egypt, but Who gave them a moral law by which they could live their freedom nobly.

All of this, de Lubac argued, was thrown over the side of history by atheistic humanism: by Auguste Comte’s positivism, with its promise of endless progress through the scientific method; by Ludwig Feuerbach’s dismissal of the God of the Bible as the mere projection of human aspirations; by Karl Marx’s materialism and its attendant vision of a ultramundane utopia; and by Friedrich Nietzsche’s will-to-power. Atheistic humanism hollowed out the European mind; and in so doing, it set in motion the delusions and denials that Robert Wistrich deplores.

How?

What we know as “Europe,” or, more broadly, the West, is a civilizational enterprise built on three pillars: Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome or, if you like, biblical religion, Greek rationality, and Roman law. Jerusalem taught the West that life is journey, pilgrimage, adventure, not just one damn thing after another. Athens taught the West that there are truths built into the world and into us; we can know those truths by the exercise of reason; and in knowing them, we can know our obligations. Rome taught the West the superiority of the rule of law over the rule of brute force. Those pillars have now, serially, collapsed, and the result is the deracination that finds its enemy where deracination too often does: in “the Jews.”

Why so comprehensive a collapse? Because, it turns out, those three pillars of the Western civilizational enterprise are mutually dependent. When atheistic humanism tossed the God of the Bible over the side of European history—when it tore down the Jerusalem pillar—the Athenian pillar began to wobble. For it seems that, absent the conviction that God the Creator encoded a certain rationality into His creation, reason by itself loses confidence in its own capacity to get at the truth of things—and the result is the vast confusion of post-modernism, displayed in France by the serial idiocies of a Jacques Derrida.

And that's not the end of the story. For when the Jerusalem and Athenian pillars crumble, the Roman pillar in turn begins to wobble, and the rule of law itself comes under attack in the name of either political correctness (like the bogus "hate speech" crimes now prosecuted throughout Europe while the real haters run wild) or ancient toxins (like the anti-Semitism described by Wistrich). The net result is what an aging Bavarian theologian by the name of Ratzinger called, the day before his election as pope in 2005, the "dictatorship of relativism." One public sign of this new and sinister form of authoritarianism is official paralysis in the face of the Islamist-threat-that-cannot-be-named.

If what Henri de Lubac called the "drama of atheistic humanism" is the proximate root of Europe's 21st century deracination, the cure for the pathology has to lie in the rebuilding of Europe's cultural foundations. And that means a new European encounter with the God of the Bible. For there will be no rebuilding of the Athenian and Roman pillars of the Western civilizational project, no recovery of reason and no recommitment to the rule of rationally-ordered law, absent a rebuilding of the Jerusalem pillar. The prime responsibility for that recovery is going to lie with the Christian churches, and the only serious candidate for leading the recovery is the Catholic Church.

No doubt, this will strike some as a proposal in which irony veers into absurdity, given the Christian responsibility for Jewish suffering at far too many moments in European history. But anti-Semitic Christians are not, in the main, threats to Jewish security in Europe (that security, as Herzl knew and as Wistrich has written, being itself a bellwether of Europe's cultural health in general). The real threats come from post-modern and virulently anti-Semitic secularists, who give cover to virulently anti-Semitic Islamists. Moreover, thanks to a cloud of witnesses that runs from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth and the martyrs of the White Rose to John Paul II in our own day, confessionally serious Christians in Europe (and America) have come to grips with the legacy of Christian anti-Semitism and may now be in a position to attempt the rebuilding of a Europe safe for Europe's Jews and restorative of Europe's cultural foundations.

Whether that can happen, given the sclerotic state of European Christianity, is another question. There are signs of vitality in new Christian communities and renewal movements throughout the continent, but the clock is running on Europe's implosion, and there is not much time left. Still, if there is anything that John Paul II, who did more to set Jewish-Christian relations on a new path than any pope in modern history, should have taught us by the example of his own life, it's this: never surrender to the tyranny of the possible. What seems a limited range of possibilities can be expanded by the power of moral truth tied to biblical faith.

This is what Communist hacks like East Germany's Erich Honecker found out in 1989. May those responsible, directly and indirectly, for the peril of European Jewry find it out in turn-sooner rather than later.

More about: Atheism, Catholic Church, European Jewry, Humanism, Jewish-Christian relations

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