

COMMENTARY

JOAN-ANDREU ROCHA/Theologian and historian

Anti-semitism is on the rise in Europe

Berlin has hosted the 55-member Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to reflect on the struggle against the worrying rise of antisemitism in Europe. The desecration of cemeteries and attacks on synagogues are constant, proving that antisemitism is far from dead and buried but remains a threat. Both European and International Jewish institutions denounced the constant antisemitic attacks.

According to the dictionary, antisemitism is any doctrine or systematic attitude hostile to Jews. One of the most recent examples of this took place in Alsace, where 127 graves in the Jewish cemetery of Herrlisheim were desecrated and covered with antisemitic inscriptions. From New York, the Antidefamation League keeps track of acts like these, as well as any other event, article or movement suspected of being hostile to Jews. This can tend to make their position seem exaggerated, as any joke against Ariel Sharon is automatically an antisemitic act for the Antidefamation League.

To my understanding, it isn't possible to lump all Jewish concerns together like this: being critical of a particular Jewish leader is not antisemitism. However, burning down a synagogue in Istanbul or spreading Nazi slogans on Jewish graves most certainly is. The difference is obvious to those outside looking in but not to the Jews who, since the Nazi extermination, have had to live with the constant fear of attack and discrimination.

Israel and the United States accuse Europe of being condescending with this phenomenon. A recent European Commission survey showed that Israel was considered "a threat to world peace". Admittedly the question was



badly-phrased, provoking an automatic "yes". But it is no secret that Israel is not the land of milk and honey described in the bible. It's nearer to hell than heaven, and that is a fact not an accusation: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict breeds European antisemitism.

Still, even if this conflict is resolved, antisemitism will not be eradicated because the stigma against Jews is extremely complex and difficult to stamp out. The World and European Jewish Congress brands the European Commission with the double sin of being "antisemitic, actively and passively". Romano

Prodi explained to the French newspaper *La Croix* that he doesn't believe that today's Europe contains strains of antisemitism comparable with the 30s and 40s, as some Brussels diplomats maintain. The OSCE conference in Berlin closed its German summit in favour of prevention.

Meanwhile, the European Observatory for Racist and Xenophobic Phenomena reveals that antisemitism has grown in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Britain. In these cases, antisemitism means acts of vandalism, insulting graffiti and hate speech

circulated on the Web. Greece, Italy, Austria and Spain also show growing signs of acts against the Jewish community.

Who are the European antisemites? In Berlin their profile was described: young, discontented white Europeans, which sadly includes a huge chunk of the population. The diagnosis excludes young European Muslims, which according to other reports are the authors of many of these antisemitic acts.

The Berlin summit concluded with measures to prevent and suppress criminal antisemitic acts. This is not enough. What is needed is a change of attitude towards the Jewish world, and on behalf of the Jews a less defensive attitude.

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It is just about impossible to reason with someone who feels perpetually threatened. Concerns of security and defence cannot be the only criteria that decides the position of the Jewish community. Antisemitism can be reduced if the Jews are willing to do their bit. They could begin by considering the old proverb of the sage Solomon, who could hardly be suspected of antisemitism: "As you sow, so shall you reap".

PLATFORM

MIQUEL PAIROLÍ

Peter Sellers, the provocative genius

At the time of the Olympics, in a world without the internet or mobile phones, the theatre director Peter Sellers presented his version of *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Liceu, provoking a storm of protest from the conservatives who then frequented that theatre. Sellers had removed the action of Mozart's

work to contemporary New York and it all had the air of a Jerry Lewis or Peter Sellers comedy. It was as if Sellers was commemorating Sellers. At the end of the production there was a mix of hissing and applause, of rebukes and bravos.

Nowadays' indifference must be because of the pounding the conservative Liceu public have received in recent years. They've seen it all, even *Don Giovanni* directed by Beito, which was the last straw. Now Sellers has returned to Barcelona to direct, at the Lliure, a work about immigration and multi-culturalism in the

form of a Greek classic, *The Children of Herakles*. Part of the Barcelona Forum 2004, naturally.

Sellers is lively and talented, one of those who lives on the edge. He knows what's needed at any one moment and how to get the most out of it. In a newspaper advert for the show a phrase by the North American director is worth mentioning: "In Parliament you can say anything. In the theatre, if you lie, people notice." It is a phrase that shows Sellers' high moral concept of the theatre and a low opinion of parliamentary politics.

Despite that, the work he has directed is subsidised by Barcelona's city council, the Catalan autonomous government, the Spanish government and UNESCO, all bodies that are based one way or another on parliaments but that also have a need to subsidise various forms of culture, with names such as Sellers and themes such as immigration. Thus we arrive at a happy marriage of interests. Some are generous to the artist and the artist is allowed to be the provocative genius. Everyone has their role to play in the great comedy of the theatre world.

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SUBSCRIPTION: +34 932 276 620. subscription@cataloniatoday.info

Managing Editor: Carles Puigdemont. Editor: Stephen Burgen. Sub Editor: Rebecca Warden.

Editorial Staff: Alex Leff, Richard McCrann, Robert Kimpleton, Marcela Topor.

Editorial Consultant: Miquel Berga.

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