

## France and Antisemitism

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Thank you for your invitation to speak on behalf of the difficult position in which the Jewish people in France find themselves and how we can be effective ministers of the gospel in an atmosphere that is unfriendly to the Jews. Let me begin by an illustration. There was an announcement in a grocery store in Moscow during the period of the iron curtain. The announcement? Fresh fish and meat would be delivered in the local grocery store. 3 days before the delivery, locals formed a line and camped out waiting for the happy day. After a day, an official from the politburo arrived and retracted: « No Jews allowed ! » So all the Jews left the line and the line got a little shorter. The next day, the same party official came and said, « All the non-Russians, must leave! » So all the Georgians, KavKazis, Ukranians left and the line shortened even more. The following day...the day of the delivery, the same apparatchik appeared and said, « all non party members must leave ! ». He then continued: « All of you are pure Russian and loyal members of the party » He continued: « To you I can tell the truth. There is no delivery of meat or poultry here. It was all a propaganda campaign to raise morale and confidence in the Soviet Union. » The frustration was understandable and the tension was palpable. Then someone in the line said: « The Jews are always favored !»

The delightful malevolence of this joke reveals the somewhat ironic and always malevolent nature of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is illogical, fallacious and evil. Jewish people have often used humor to not only relieve the stress put upon us

by anti-Jewish hate, but also in a humanistic attempt to understand it. Many great thinkers taking a more serious position have found themselves frustrated or even caught into anti-Semitic stereotypes when they've tried to survey, or philologize and philosophize anti-Semitism. Why have some of the greatest minds of the Jewish people from Hanna Arendt to Theodor Adorno been befuddled when it comes to resolving this issue? There are at least two reasons for this befuddlement. One of them is because Anti-Semitism or Judeo-Phobic attitudes just don't make sense or as the joke goes: "The Jews and the cyclists are the source of the world's problems!" The reply follows "Why the cyclists?" The answer, "Why the Jews?" In other words, it just doesn't make sense. Another reason for the quandry many thinkers find themselves in is because they are ignorant of the spiritual world. There is a spiritual reason, climate and motivation that calls for the destruction of the Jewish people wherever Jewish people are to be found. The biblical revelation of a spiritual war for the souls of humanity and the calling of the Jewish people is lost on many of our people.

One more quote and we'll get on with our subject. I have always wanted to meet Henri Bergson. He was one of the finest mathematical and philosophical minds of the turn of the century (the 19<sup>th</sup> century). He was Jewish and wanted to "convert to Christianity" in the parlance of his times during the war, but he didn't want his zeal for Christ to be misconstrued as fear of persecution. He died in 1946 in Paris, but asked that a Priest and not a rabbi perform the funeral. In December 1914, he said the following in a discourse called, **LIFE AND MATTER AT WAR**

"Comprendre et ne pas s'indigner": this has been said to be the last word of philosophy. I believe none of it; and, had I to choose, I should much prefer, when in presence of crime, to give my indignation rein and not to understand. Happily, the choice has not to be made. On the contrary, there are forms of anger which, by a thorough comprehension of their objects, derive the force to sustain and renew their vigour. Our anger is of that kind. We have only to detach the inner meaning of this war, and our horror for those who made it will be increased."

So let's put Bergson's theory to the test and allow ourselves a little space to try to understand what we do not want to understand: Anti-Semitism. If we seek to better comprehend, we will better our chances to overcome. Hopefully, this will, as he says, increase our determination and conviction to defeat it, but also (hopefully) succeed where many others have failed in understanding its spiritual context. Of course, we have limited time and the title of this paper is Anti-Semitism and France. We are under the practical track following the question "How do we deal with opposition/persecution today? What lessons we can learn?" So we will touch on a few things lightly and then give some applications on how to bring the gospel and the light of Christ into this arena that is so important to the Jewish people and should concern all people...especially Christians.

I would like to encourage us to describe the nature of anti-Jewish attitudes and violence, as specifically as possible, without always defaulting to the word "anti-Semitism". This word originated in a very specific historical and geographical

context and cannot be applied to most of today's instances of anti-Jewish hate that have sprung up all over the world and especially in the middle east and especially when those who are vociferating anti-Jewish invective are of Semitic origin themselves. "Hitler has dishonored Anti-Semitism!" said one repentant Catholic anti-semite (Georges Bernanos) during the war after he discovered the camps. So Anti-Semitism in that European context, in which it has its origin, is mostly over and the use of the word takes us further away from Bergson's admonition to understand more fully in order to more fully vanquish.

In the UK, the CST or *Community Security Trust* works closely with British Police and publishes reports on anti-Semitic incidents. 1,168 anti-Semitic incidents were registered in 2014 more than double the 535 incidents recorded the year previously and the highest annual ever recorded. A similar organization, in France, the SPCJ, or *Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive* has published similar statistics in conjunction with the Prefecture de Police (Police department). In 2014, from 423 incidents in 2013, it has jumped to 851 incidents last year. France has not yet published reports for this year, but the half-year report for 2015 in the UK has just been published finding that anti-Semitic incidents have again doubled in comparison to the same period last year. 100% increases from year to year should give us all cause for alarm.

It must be said nonetheless, that neither France nor the UK are anti-Semitic countries. When the fascist group known as *The New Dawn* called for a rally to fight against the "Jewification" of Great Britain and planned for the demonstration to take place in Golders Green, a symbolic Jewish suburb, all of Britain was incensed. The prime minister spoke out publically against and was

strenuously applauded by both his party and the opposition. The Home Secretary used all of her power and influence to put pressure on the police and finally secured the change of location for the rally. I went to see the rally organized by these Neo-Nazi admirers and was happy to see that there were less than 30 of them and were greatly outnumbered by the opposition to almost 3000! They were toting many flags, but not a single Union Jack was to be found.

Similarly in France, after the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in January, the Prime Minister was interviewed on national television and said, "France is not France without the Jews." Most recently, the minister of the Interior Bernard Cazeneuve has said, "Nous ne devons jamais relâcher notre vigilance ni tolérer la moindre expression de haine vis-à-vis de nos concitoyens juifs. (We must never drop our guard nor tolerate the least expression of hatred vis à vis our Jewish citizenry." Millions marched in France toting signs: "Je suis Charlie" and "Je suis Juif". France is a country that has not only attracted the Jewish people throughout history since Roman times, but has become foundational to the country since the revolution and remains today the largest Jewish community of Europe.

What is interesting about the statistics in France is the more general statistic of racism.

Last year there were 1662 total racist acts or incidents in France. 851 (51%) of those are anti-Jewish acts, 678 (41%) of those incidents were acted out against other people groups and 133 (8%) of them were anti-Muslim. So half of all racist crimes in France were committed against Jews and yet Jews barely make up 1% of the total population of France!

If most racism or xenophobia against other people groups or religions is motivated by fear, racism against Jews is motivated by hate. This is where it becomes difficult to understand due to the lack of studies done in this area. Most anti-Semitic acts or slurs are committed by Muslims in France. Many of the anti-Semitic acts also are linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Last year incidents against Jews and Jewish establishments soared over the summer months, specifically during the Incursion into Gaza. Our own Jews for Jesus office in Paris was graffitied during the anti-Israel demonstrations with the saying: "Stop the massacre of the Palestinians and end the occupation of Gaza" Again was heard the cry "Death to the Jews!"

The problem with what I just said is the accusation being bandied about more and more by humanists, politicians and djihadists alike: Islamophobia. There are very few studies and therefore very little known statistically and sociologically about these sensitive and project-like suburbs surrounding Paris filled with young disenfranchised malcontents from muslim background that very easily cry "dirty Jew" next to "Bin Laden was a wise man" and who identify emotionally and violently with the Palestinian cause. According to French sociologist Pierre André Taguieff, "the youth, of these project like suburbs of muslim culture, often fail at school, are unemployed and suffer from social discrimination causing them to become delinquent and is particularly sensitive to anti-Sionist propaganda, and Islamic indoctrination within which hatred of Jews plays a major role."\*

This recurrent cycle of failure, marginalization and delinquency contributes to anti-Jewish attitudes, but also has another effect. It nourishes and increases anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the country with the demagoguery that is

heard a little bit everywhere in Europe of “Muslim invasion” or “taking over the country by birth and Sharia law”. I find this unacceptable, especially on behalf of Christians. The gospel is tailor made to transform and radically save this situation and these souls. These Muslim populations in European countries should not be seen as an invasion, but as an opportunity. Friend and Jewish believer Pascale Jones was expelled from Morocco where she served as a missionary with WEC (World Evangelization for Christ) International. She returned to her native France and moved into one of these “banlieues sensibles” the neighborhood we have mentioned previously. She has had more open contact and opportunities of gospel witness in these suburbs than she ever had in Morocco where there were government spies trying to catch missionaries “red-handed”. This experience has been shared with many others that have given up home and health to live and witness in Muslim countries where the spread of Christianity is outlawed.

“What lessons can we learn?” for the furtherance of the gospel. I would like to charge you to charge others in return. Sound the call for people to work in the mission field among these European Muslim populations in our western cities. Let the gospel turn these suburbs rife with Jewish hatred upside down and to “overcome evil with good” as the apostle admonishes us.

When neo-Nazi admirers planned the gathering in Golders Green, we were in the middle of a Jews for Jesus campaign that had Golders Green as one of our main venues for regular evangelistic outreaches. That demonstration caused us to diverge on our strategy for evangelism. Should we go? What should be done?” Among the many questions we asked of ourselves, one of them I asked was, “Who are we ministering to?” The answer should be obvious to a Jewish mission

committed to sharing the good news of the Messiah with the Jewish people.

However, do anti-Semites or Jew haters need to hear the gospel? Yes. Do they deserve to hear the gospel?

I was confronted with the situation at the beginning of the year, because as a result of the Charlie Hebdo attacks we planned an impromptu outreach, a leading public figure contacted me. I will not mention his name, but suffice it to say that he has become a central figure for what people call the “New Anti-semitism” (which is by the way not so new anymore, the first time it was used was in the 70s and again I would call for us to leave this outdated terminology and use more specific language). Many of my colleagues didn’t feel it was my role as a missionary to Jews to spend much of my time with a gentile, especially one viewed by the Jewish community as public enemy number one. A dear friend of mine François Blum whose aunt died in Theresienstadt and whose mother survived Auschwitz told me in no uncertain terms, “Joshua, he deserves to hear the gospel and you are called to deliver it.”

In the 70s and 80s, testimony books of Jewish believers like Stan Telchin’s betrayed flourished and were best sellers. Today it is more testimonies of Muslims that have come to faith that fill Christian bookshop shelves. Some of these, “like son of Hamas” are even more attractive especially when it speaks of past terrorist links and how Christ has transformed them. Just so if my contact comes to Christ and overcomes the evil of anti-Jewish hatred with the love of the Jewish Messiah, maybe, just maybe, one might hear in the Jewish community what was once said of the apostle Paul, “the man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching...” or loving the people “...he once tried to destroy.”



The gospel is tailor made to minister to both Jews and gentiles with hate for the Jewish people in their hearts. Please pray for us as we seek to discover new ways to confront and defeat the demon of Jew hatred in France and bring the love of the Messiah to those who live in hate.

August 17, 2015

\*Full quote: "Quant à la population des banlieues ou des "cités" de culture musulmane dont la jeunesse est souvent touchée par l'échec scolaire, le chômage et la marginalisation sociale, ce qui la fait basculer parfois dans la délinquance (qui aliment elle-même les passions anti-immigrés), elle est particulièrement sensible à la propagande antisioniste et à l'endoctrinement islamiste, où la haine des Juifs joue un rôle majeur."

## Bibliography

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