

Ed. Condon in **THE PILLAR**

Like everyone else, I have been watching the horror of what is happening in Israel. And like some, I can be upfront about my lack of any worthwhile opinion on what, if anything, can be done to effect peace in a region, and between peoples, who have known nothing but violence for so long.

I can also admit to a total lack of objectivity here.

Some years ago, I lived in Israel for a brief time. I ate in the homes of Arab Christians, and I danced with Jewish men at the Western Wall on the Sabbath. I spent hours in lines at roadblocks and checkpoints with hundreds of people trying to get between home and work, and I sat in cafes where young women in t-shirts and shorts drank lattes with their national service rifles across their laps.



Sabbath dancing at the Western Wall. Image not mine, iPhones didn't exist when I lived there.

When a riot broke out on the Temple Mount, I was there, caught in the crowds. I remember the roiling smells of fear and anger as they spread over the city like an aerosol of violence.

This morning, the building where I lived in Israel, a seminary and retreat house, has tanks in the parking lot.

I can't credibly claim "friends on both sides" like a cable news talking head, but I do have people I know and love living in Israel, traumatized by what has happened and reasonably fearing even worse to come.

I also lived, for many years, in a largely Jewish neighborhood of London. Our last apartment overlooked a Jewish school, necessarily patrolled by security at all times — consider what that says about standards of "normal life" — the school gate is now reinforced by police at pick up time. In the last week, kosher restaurants there have had their windows smashed in, and the local railway bridge was daubed with celebratory slogans following the violence in Israel.

My views is undoubtedly colored by all of this, but there are still some things I think can be seen clearly enough.

You can have your own opinions on the proportionality and even morality of Israeli policies and actions in Gaza over the decades.

And you can pray, like me, that somehow the Israeli government and military might be dissuaded, even now, from visiting total and indiscriminate revenge on the people of Gaza.

But no one celebrates the deaths of civilians in Gaza. When a bomb claims the life of a Palestinian mother or child, crowds do not gather in the streets of Paris and Vienna to revel in their deaths. After the attacks last weekend, in which murder and rape and carnage were livestreamed on social media, no one demanded a worldwide "day of rage" to legitimize and support the violence.

They do gather and celebrate and seek to legitimize it all, though, when Jews are killed. Not Israelis, Jews.

People who celebrate such things are not motivated by grievance, or a frustrated sense of justice, but by hatred — hatred not of a system, or a circumstance, or a government, or even a nation. It is hatred of a people.

It is a hatred so deep and fierce and bitter that it moves them to shout victory slogans at the violent desecration of women and the literal slaughter of actual infants.

And yet this goes largely excused among us - however much we might bluster about some things being supposedly “unacceptable.”

In the UK,, where freedom of speech is so heavily policed that for the crime of giving offense, you can be arrested for silently praying within two football fields of an abortion clinic, thousands gathered to chant and jeer and celebrate the killing of women and children on the doorstep of the Israeli embassy.

Outside the Sydney Opera House, a crowd gathered and chanted “Gas the Jews.”

Let that sink in.

“Gas the Jews.”

Such scenes should provoke, would justly merit, all the fury and contempt any society worthy of the name could muster, but they do not.

All of this is at once normal, and though still unique.

When Nigerian Christians are slaughtered in their homes by Islamic militants, people do not throw bricks through the windows of Nigerian restaurants in London, nor do [crowds form on American college campuses](#) chanting “Glory to the murders!”

But for the Jewish people, this is standard.

There is a special malignancy to antisemitism, and a special malice towards the Jewish people which is ever ready to erupt, given the chance. And, perhaps worst of all, a special kind of equivocation about it in our society, with excuses being made in the media for attacks on Jews which would never, for an instant, be tolerated with any other kind of racism, and a willingness to elide details of atrocities carried out when the victims carry Israeli passports.

I have long believed that antisemitism is a kind of canary in the coalmine of Western society. When it rises, and when its rise is tolerated and excused and “what-about’d,” epochal change is usually in tow.

On the podcast last week, JD and I talked a bit about what we called “last chapter syndrome” and the tendency of every generation to believe it is living through the end of history.

I don’t think we’re living the last chapter right now. But I do think we are in a time of historical trauma, of hatred, and that we are only reading its prologue.

The only answer to hate I know is love. Not cloying sentimentality or ephemeral romance, but the bloodied, gasping, searing love of the Cross. A love that is an act of the whole will and whole person. The love of the Lord, who loves us thus, and of our neighbor — even and especially when they are consumed by hate.

Cardinal Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, has called for a day of prayer and fasting for peace. I will fast, and I will continue to pray.

I will pray especially for love, because when I contemplate those who celebrate the murder of babies and chant for genocide, I confess I have no heart for it.