

THE Israeli ambassador to Britain, Moshe Raviv, has cabled his bosses back home lamenting modern Israel's "talent for unnecessarily provoking anti-Semitism."

Raviv believes that a Knesset private members' Bill which seeks to outlaw missionary activity is asking for trouble.

Christian groups and other concerned parties have noted that were the proposed measure to pass, and be applied to the letter, it might in effect make the New Testament illegal in Israel.

The Jewish state would thus join the list of countries in which freedom of worship is punishable under the law. It would turn Israel into exactly the kind of repressive state that Jews have, for centuries, been trying to leave.

It is true that most Jews are extremely sensitive about missionary activity and consider apostates the greatest traitors.

My method of shutting up the various Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons who regularly come to the door asking me if I have heard the good news about how Jesus died for my sins, is to say: "Hitler got rid of six million Jews; I'm not going to make it one more." This always does the trick.

Other Jews are not so robust in their responses. Some non-Jewish friends regularly go out carol singing at Christmas. One year, they were amazed to find the elderly residents of a block of flats cowering, apparently in terror, behind their front doors, absolutely resistant to the charms of "Away in a Manger" and "We Three Kings of Orient Are."

The singers later discovered the building was a Jewish home for elderly Holocaust survivors.

Yet how can the dissemination of information about a major religion or voluntary conversion be considered criminal? Just because Jews do not encourage conversion (though we have in the past), it doesn't mean others don't have that right.

This is a disgraceful Bill, but is Mr Raviv right to accuse Jews of actively courting anti-Semitism?

It has, after all, always been the racists' line that the Jews bring it on themselves. "They're asking for trouble," they say. "They attract too much attention; they are too ostentatious; they won't toe the line; if your head sticks out, you can't blame anyone but yourself if it gets cut off."

For some, the proposal to erect an eruv in North-West London was another example of Jews courting controversy. It drew attention to the substantial Jewish

Acute angle



Linda Grant

Not quite as others see us

population in certain areas and assumed these areas could be marked off as Jewish enclaves, a subtle annexation of territory.

I have not made up my mind about the eruv, mainly because I regard it as an act of hypocrisy on the part of those who want it.

Clearly, the area five streets away is not your own home. On the other hand, if we acknowledge the crazy ways of other religions, why not those of Judaism?

But crazy is not the same as unpleasant. For example, when I consider the Chasidim, although I am perfectly comfortable with their black hats and *peyot*, I am not so comfortable with some of their attitudes towards non-Jews.

Strictly Orthodox Jews often seem to regard *goyim* as uncouth and even unclean. This is indeed an attitude I was brought up to hold myself, albeit in a watered-down form. Non-Jews were the alien "other," people you don't invite into your home and whose homes you would certainly never visit.

Jewish strictures on intermar-

riage sometimes give the impression that we regard gentiles as a force of contamination, *treif*. *Shiksahs* are okay for sex but not for marriage — this still-common attitude views non-Jewish women as little better than prostitutes. And almost every word I can think of in Yiddish to describe non-Jews is pejorative.

Even more problematic has been the huge resurgence in anti-Semitism provoked by Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

To some extent, this is irresolvable. The anti-Zionism of Muslim extremists is only a politically correct face on what is in reality anti-Semitism. It is totally uninterested in negotiation or peace treaties, only in the destruction of Israel and its people.

But there are others — former Israel supporters — who have moved towards, or adopted, anti-Zionism because modern Israel is characterised as a belligerent, arrogant, militaristic state, uninterested in human rights.

The liberal outsider will also be troubled by the apparent racism of the Law of Return and by internal, Ashkenazi Israeli attitudes towards Sephardi Jews in Israel, particularly those from North Africa.

Even those with a personal stake in supporting Israel have been repelled by the famous rudeness of the natives. As the half-Jewish novelist, Will Self, recently related in a newspaper article, a holiday in Israel can be a disturbing experience in this regard. The underlying attitude to outsiders seems to be: "We went through the Holocaust. Why should we give a damn about you?"

Philip Roth says the Jews can't win. Either we went like sheep to the gas chambers or we are murderous thugs who don't respect the rights of the Palestinians, whose land we stole.

But perhaps we *have* brought this upon ourselves. We have emphasised our learning, our moralism, our important contributions to science and medicine.

Our deeper insight into what it is to suffer, we like to say, leads us to take action in defence of others who are suffering.

We like to think all Jews have the brains of Isaiah Berlin, the humanity of Primo Levi, the humour of Woody Allen and the looks of Harrison Ford. Then we cry anti-Semitism when we are accused of being no better than anyone else.

You cannot say, "Judge us differently, we are special," and then behave as badly as you like.