

Vladimir Solovyov: Israel, axis of world history

Decades before the Balfour Declaration, the 19th century Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov referred to the Jews as the chosen people, the theocratic people par excellence... the axis of universal history. Such a conviction reflects Solovyov's recognition of the indissolubility of Jewish identity and their necessary centrality to world history. Even before the British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour's letter of support, in 1917, for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people, Solovyov was acutely attuned to the seismic shift in world history as the fulcrum upon which it rested. Indeed, even after the 14 May 1948 establishment of the State of Israel, the Jewish people continue to embody the enduring contradiction: how can a people who have contributed so much to civilization remain so maligned as the object of the hatred of so many.

Referencing Solovyov, renowned polymath Yuri Okunev highlighted that it is no accident that Jews and Zionists are their chief enemies of the terrorism and neofascism that rises everywhere in the world today. Solovyov regarded the Torah as the constitution of theocracy for a people set apart for a unique religious-historical vocation, a covenant with the creator of the universe. Such a unique calling confers an inevitable exposure and proclivity to conflict in the same way a prophet can only speak to the culture from outside it. The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen understood this when he said that the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.

And why is there such raw hatred directed towards Israel, and by inference towards the historic birthright of the Jewish people? For unless the existence of a personally-relatable God (as revealed to Abraham and confirmed through Moses) is acknowledged, the historic witness of the people of such a 'God' and the otherwise inexplicability of a superior cultural foundation – as demonstrated through their enduring resoluteness – can only be attributed to a nefarious human enterprise. Indeed, such an acknowledgement, and ensuing resoluteness, stands throughout time as a continued witness destined to confound all those who cannot endure it.

The very presence of Israel torments the surrounding nations who cannot understand how it has survived and flourished insofar as it stands as a sign of contradiction unto them. As long as Israel is allowed to endure, the surrounding nations stand vexed by the riddle of their own birth: one son and future nation state overlooked at the expense of another. It is necessary here to acknowledge the inevitability of conflict with great sobriety lest one, zealous to take a side and rush into battle, falls prey to the self-same seed of enmity that sustains such an impasse. The plight of perpetual reciprocating violence and resultant enmity with the nations marks the final end from which the awaited Messiah is destined to deliver the chosen people of God.

As zeal invariably corrupts, and is corrupted by, the cause to which it aligns, so each cause is undermined by the inherent evil from birth to which all people are invariably predisposed.

The struggle, then, is to transcend the natural tendency to repay evil with evil, or enact vengeance on human terms. The challenge presented is to accept the divine calling of Israel as unique among the nations yet not be drawn into the cycle of violence that has accompanied such a destiny. Yet, even here, there is hope that such provision has been made for the fall of human nature in the plan of God to reconcile the world to himself at the end of the age, when every eye shall be opened, and the hidden thoughts of every heart exposed.

For this reason, the fate of the world rises and falls on Israel. The course of history, and national and cultural destinies therein, is indelibly bound to Israel and the Jewish people, in the words of Solovyov, the theocratic people par excellence, the axis of world history.