

# VLADIMIR SOLOVIEV LISTENS TO ISRAEL: THE CHRISTIAN QUESTION

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One cannot sufficiently emphasize the place of Judaism in the thought and work of Vladimir Soloviev. In his bibliography as a whole, it is a constant theme both visibly and behind the scenes, a *leitmotif* in the true and literal sense of the word.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Except where otherwise indicated, all references to Soloviev's writings refer to the monumental edition of his complete works in Russian, edited in twelve volumes by M. Soloviev and E. L. Radlow, *Sobranie sochinenii V. S. Solovieva* (new ed., Brussels, 1966). References to "Soloviev's works" are to this edition. Several of his writings are particularly relevant to our subject. In vol. 3: *Dukhovnyia osnovy zhizni* ("The Spiritual Foundations of Life," 1882-84). In vol. 4: *Evreistvo i khristianskii vopros* ("Judaism and the Christian Question," 1884), pp. 135-185; *Istoria i budushtnost theokratii* ("The History and Future of Theocracy," 1885-87), pp. 234-642, and in particular Book III, "Natsionalnaia theokratia i zakon Moiseev" ("National Theocracy and the Law of Moses"), pp. 414-488. In vol. 6: *Evrei, ikh verouchenie i nraouchenie* ("The Jews, Their Religious and Moral Teachings," 1891), pp. 374-380; *Talmud i novetsbaia literatura o niem v Avstirii i Germanii* ("The Talmud and the Most Recent Polemical Literature on the Subject in Austria and Germany," 1886), pp. 3-32; *Novozavetnyi Izrail* ("Newtestamental Israel," 1885), pp. 207-221. In vol. 7: *Kogda zhili evreiskie proroki?* ("When Did the Jewish Prophets Live?" 1896; a critical review of Ernest Havet's article, "La Modernité des prophètes," Paris, 1891), pp. 180-200. In vol. 8: *Pravo i nraustvennost* ("Justice and Morality," 1897), pp. 521-658, and particularly pp. 577-578; *Opravdanie dobra* ("The Justification of the Good," 1894-96), pp. 3-516, and especially p. 102 on the relationship between *tzedek* and *tzedakah* (justice and charity). In

Judaism, indeed, is ever-present in his work in one form or another. If it is true that his thinking on major subjects could change or develop, the attention he paid to the teachings of Judaism was completely unvarying. His “listening to Israel” is to be understood in a literal sense; it is not just a manner of speaking. One can say that religiously and philosophically — or, more precisely, existentially — Soloviev took Judaism seriously. In his case it was almost an obsession.

His work as a whole demonstrates his remarkable knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish sources, including the post-biblical ones. Short of giving a complete account, I should like to draw attention to certain remarkable ideas that I believe were integral to Soloviev’s intellectual and spiritual outlook and that have remarkable relevance today.

### **Life and Character**

A few dates can serve us as an illustration and as points of reference. Born in 1853, Soloviev discovered Spinoza in 1869, when he was only sixteen. He studied Kabbalah in the British Museum in 1875-76.

In 1884, at the age of thirty-one, he began enthusiastically to study the Hebrew language under Feivel Goetz, a “young talmudist.”<sup>2</sup> His essay “Judaism and the Christian Question”<sup>3</sup> was published in August-September of that year. In May 1890, he participated actively in a campaign against antisemitism.

Only a few months before his death on July 31, 1900, he decided to make an annotated translation of the Hebrew Bible. It was one of the projects to which he was then most attached, as was also that of making a journey to the Land of Israel. On July 18, lying on his deathbed, he said to those around him: “Don’t let me fall asleep. Let me pray for the Jewish people.... I have to pray for them,” and he began to recite the

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vol. 9: *Poniatie o Boge: v zashchitu filosofii Spinozy* (“The Notion of God: In Defense of the Philosophy of Spinoza,” 1897), pp. 3-29. In vol. 10: *Tri Razgovora* (“Three Discussions,” 1899-1900), pp. 84-221. In vol. 11: *Lettre à Nicholas II sur la liberté religieuse* (“Letter to Nicholas II on Religious Freedom,” 1896-97), pp. 452-456. In vol. 12: the poem “Emmanuel,” p. 33, and *Kabbala, mistisheskaya filosofia evreev* (“The Kabbalah, Mystical Philosophy of the Jews,” 1896), pp. 322-334.

2. Serge M. Soloviev, *Vie de Vladimir Soloviev par son neveu* (Paris: Editions S. O. S., 1982), pp. 257 ff.

3. *Evreistvo i khristianskii vopros*, first published in *Pravoslavnoie obozrenie*, 1884, nos. 8-9, and then in book form (Moscow, 1884); Soloviev’s works, vol. 4, pp. 135-185. This text has recently been published in French with a preface by Alain Besançon (Paris: Desclée, 1992), 189 pages. An earlier translation into German is *Das Judentum und die christliche Frage 1884* (Wuppertal-Barmen: Jugenddienst-Verlag, 1961), 32 pages; in this version, however, parts of the original appear to have been silently omitted.

Psalms very loudly in Hebrew.<sup>4</sup> According to one witness,<sup>5</sup> he died reciting in Hebrew the biblical profession of faith, *Shema Yisrael* ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One").

My mother had a very clear memory of the fervent enthusiasm with which Soloviev participated in the Passover meal (*seder*) in the home of her grandfather, Baron Horace de Gunzburg. During the meal, he followed the text of the account of the redemption from slavery in Egypt (the Haggadah of Passover) in the original Hebrew.

Where Judaism and Jewish thought were concerned, Soloviev was exemplary in the attention he paid to them and in the rigor of his reading of sources. So much was this so, indeed, that N. Bakst said after his death that Soloviev constituted a challenge to the Jews themselves because he knew and understood Judaism infinitely better than many of them did.<sup>6</sup> Of course, it did not prevent him from having, as a man of his time, certain prejudices about the power of the Jews, the role played by their money, and their materialism. Perhaps he also tended to overestimate their importance in Russia and Poland and the part they played in urbanization, industrialization and the construction of railways.

Another interesting testimony is that of Aaron Steinberg. He remarked that Leon Platonovich Karsavin not only bore a physical resemblance to Soloviev (the same hair, the same mannerisms), but also had his passion for severely criticizing his contemporaries and had experienced a similar "encounter" with Judaism. Steinberg recalled something that Karsavin had said to him one day:

I envy you a great deal. I know it isn't right, but I can't conceal it. Just think: it is so easy for you to open the Old Testament and to read it in the original. For you, it's a book to read. Yes, I read Greek easily, although the Gospels are closer to me in their Slavonic form. But, to read the Old Testament in the original! Which of us can do that? But, without this, it is not possible to understand Orthodoxy. I'm too old to begin to learn the alphabet. Vladimir Soloviev learned Hebrew and advised Leon Tolstoy to do the same. I can't follow that advice, but I need that language; I need someone who knows that language. You are my language.<sup>7</sup>

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4. Serge M. Soloviev, op. cit., p. 469.

5. Henri Sliosberg, *Baron Horace de Gunzburg: sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris, 1933), p. 57.

6. Speech made on 12 November 1900 under the auspices of the Society for the Dissemination of Education among the Jews, *Knizhnii voskhd*. Cf. also F. Goetz, *Soloviev i evrei* ("Soloviev and the Jews"; Moscow, 1902); V. Korolenko, *La Lutte de Soloviev contre l'antisémitisme* ("Soloviev's Struggle against Antisemitism"; Moscow, 1909), and P. Berlin, "Soloviev i evrei" ("Soloviev and the Jews"), *Novyi Journal*, 1962, pp. 223-235.

7. Aaron Steinberg, *Druzia moyekh rannikh let (1911-1928)* ("Friends of My

In the same book, one finds Steinberg's recollection of a commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of Soloviev's death.<sup>8</sup> It took the form of an evening with Ernest Radlow, presided over by Alexander Blokh.

A philosopher, like Socrates, a publicist, a poet and a theologian, Soloviev expressed himself above all as a believer, and it was as such that he demanded the "conversion" of Christianity to its Hebraic sources. Radlow gave an eloquent description of his qualities: "Purity of soul, disinterestedness, a desire to help those around him and the persecuted (for example, the Jews), delicacy, a capacity to comprehend the souls of others, courtesy."

One might add to this list the rigorous firmness with which he upheld his convictions and the demanding intensity of his sense of responsibility, anchored at one and the same time in his patriotism and his humanity. He wished to restore to patriotism its true significance, which was not a hatred of foreigners and of other faiths but an active benevolence on behalf of one's people. He saw human dignity as the primary value, and the only one capable of combating evil. In Soloviev's view it was the prophets of Israel who had best understood that an authentic patriotism leads on into universalism.

### **The Christian Question**

First of all, we must look at his essay, "Judaism and the Christian Question" — a work that in certain respects is disconcerting.<sup>9</sup> In this essay, Soloviev based himself on two assumptions. One is:

The mutual relations of Judaism and Christianity for many centuries of their life together have had a remarkable character. Everywhere and always, the Jews have viewed Christianity and acted toward it according to the precepts of their religion, their faith, their law. In their behavior toward us, the Jews have always adopted a Jewish attitude, whereas we Christians, on the contrary, have never learned to behave toward Judaism in a Christian manner. With regard to us, they have never infringed their religious law, but, where they are concerned, we have infringed and constantly continue to infringe the commandments of the Christian religion.<sup>10</sup>

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Early Years"; Paris: Syntaxis, 1992), p. 199. Cf. his selected essays and studies, *History as Experience: Aspects of Historical Thought — Universal and Jewish* (New York: Ktav, 1983), p. 385; and in this volume, Uriel Tal, "Introduction: On the Thought of Aaron Steinberg," pp. 7-31, esp. pp. 15 and 30.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

9. See note 3 above. For the following quotations, references will be given to Soloviev's works, to the recent French translation and (where available) to the earlier German one.

10. Russian, p. 136; French, pp. 55-56; German, p. 5.

The other assumption:

If the influence of Christian principles had been stronger in the private lives of Christians, in the social life of Christian nations and in political relations among Christians, then also the Jewish view of Christianity would have more clearly been given the lie and the conversion of the Jews would have been more of a possibility and would have come much closer. Thus, *the Jewish question is a Christian question.*<sup>11</sup>

In between these two postulates, Soloviev concealed neither his admiration for what he called “the best forces of Judaism”<sup>12</sup> and its genuine faith, nor his profound longing as an Orthodox Christian for a “unity of Judaism and Christianity, not on a basis of indifference or of a few abstract principles, but on the true basis of a natural and spiritual affinity and positive religious interests.”<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, in his quest Soloviev acknowledged that:

The true God, who elected Israel and was chosen by it, was the strong God, the living God, the holy God. The strong God chooses a strong man who can struggle with Him. The living God reveals Himself only to a person who is conscious of himself. The holy God joins Himself only to the man who seeks holiness and seeks *active* moral responsibility.... It is thus clear that the true religion that we find in the Jewish people does not preclude, but on the contrary demands the development of a free human personality, demands self-awareness and personal activity. Israel was great in its faith, but in order to have a great faith one must possess within oneself great spiritual forces.... The believer does not passively wait for external objects to manifest themselves, but goes out courageously to meet them. He does not react to phenomena, like a slave, but anticipates them. He is free and autonomous in his actions.<sup>14</sup>

Soloviev was concerned about the propensity of the Jews for materialism, which could render them “unattractive,” although it could not justify hatred or persecution. At the same time, he discerned in Judaism a sound appreciation of material reality, from which others could learn.

Not separating spirit from its material expression, Jewish thought, owing to that very fact, did not separate matter from its spiritual, divine principle. It did not recognize matter in itself, it attached no significance to the existence of matter *as such*. The Israelites were neither the servants nor the worshipers of matter. On the other hand, being far from an abstract spirituality, the Israelites could not behave

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11. Russian, p. 159, French, pp. 104-105; German, p. 26. Emphasis by the author.

12. Russian, p. 142; French, p. 62.

13. Russian, p. 139; French, p. 66; German, p. 8.

14. Russian, p. 145; French, pp. 76-77; German, p. 15.

toward matter with indifference or remoteness, and still less with the hatred that oriental dualism displayed toward it. They saw in material nature neither the devil nor the Godhead, but only *the uncompleted habitation of the divine-human spirit*. While practical and theoretical materialisms submit to matter as to a law, while dualists turn away from matter as though from evil, the religious materialism of the Israelites caused them to pay the greatest attention to material nature, not in order to serve it, but in order in it and through it to serve the Most High God. They had to separate the pure that was in it from the impure, the sacred from the profane, in order to make matter worthy to become the temple of the Supreme Being. The concept of *holy corporality*, and the desire to realize that concept, are much more important in the life of Israel than in that of any other nation. To this attaches a significant part of the Mosaic legislation, which deals with the distinction between the pure and the impure and with the laws of purification. The whole religious history of the Jews may be said to have been directed toward the preparation, for the God of Israel, not only of holy souls but also of holy bodies.<sup>15</sup>

Such a materialism, he argued, posed no danger as long as it operated within the framework of two other basic qualities of Judaism: a firm consciousness of the existence of God and a strong sense of personal identity. It brought him to the conclusion:

It is now clear that this religious materialism of the Israelites by no means contradicted, but on the contrary complemented the two chief qualities of this people: its powerful religiosity and its highly energetic human consciousness and activity. The believing Israelite wants the object of his faith to possess all the plenitude of efficacy and to reach the point of accomplishment. And the energy and activity of the human spirit, for their part, cannot be satisfied with the abstract nature of ideas and ideals; they require their incarnation in reality and demand that the spiritual principle should dominate the material circumstances until the accomplishment takes place. But this assumes that matter itself is capable of such a spiritualization, this presupposes a spiritual and holy body. The religious materialism of the Israelites does not derive from unbelief but from an abundance of faith eager to find its accomplishment; it does not derive from the weakness of the human spirit but from the force of its energy, which does not fear to soil itself with matter but which purifies it and uses it to achieve its aims.

Thus, the reciprocal action of the three main qualities of the Israelite people corresponded directly to the lofty significance of this people and facilitated the accomplishment of the work of God in its

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15. Russian, p. 149; French, pp. 82-83; German, pp. 18-19. On the "religious materialism" of the Jews, cf. also some important reflections in *Istoria i budushtnost teokratii* ("The History and Future of Theocracy," 1885-87), Soloviev's works, vol. 4, p. 440.

midst. Believing strongly in the living God, Israel attracted to itself the manifestation of God and His revelation; believing equally in itself, Israel was able to enter into a *personal* relationship with YHWH, to confront Him face to face, make a pact with Him and serve Him, not passively as an instrument, but actively as an ally. Finally, by the very strength of this active faith, aiming at the final realization of its spiritual principle through the purification of material nature, Israel prepared within itself a pure and holy habitation for the incarnation of the God-Word.<sup>16</sup>

After taking a disapproving look at the history of Russia, Orthodoxy and Byzantium, Soloviev also showed himself severe — at least in this book — toward Protestantism, particularly with regard to its attitude toward the Bible:

The starting-point of teaching, for both Judaism and Protestantism, was exactly the same: the Bible. Both were doctors of the law, but they approached their book in an entirely different manner. The Jewish rabbis saw in the book above all the law — that is to say, the *rule of life* — and concentrated all their efforts on consolidating this law of life by erecting an impenetrable barrier of traditions and commentaries. Such an attitude to the sacred book derived from the Israelite national character, but the national genius of the Germans related to the Bible quite differently. In the German Protestant conception, the Bible quickly became not so much a rule of life as a *matter of theoretical instruction*. Paying the practical barrier of tradition as little attention as possible, it immediately attempted, on the contrary, to exclude all traditional elements from the understanding of the Word of God. The Protestant study of the Bible turned into a criticism, and the criticism turned into a refutation. The Bible, in our time, for the prominent teachers of Protestantism, is no longer the support of faith but only the object of a negative criticism; and if they continue to grant it an exceptional significance and occupy themselves with it more than with other things, it is only out of habit. The commandment, in the Protestant world, passed first from the prophets to the doctors, and now religious teaching, in turn, is giving way to a scholastic science, preferably anti-Christian in character. Nothing remains of the original, although false, theocratic idea that inspired the first leaders of Protestantism. The present destroyers of the biblical texts no longer

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16. Russian, pp. 149-150; French, pp. 84-85; German, p. 19. In this matter as in others, there is a striking resemblance between Soloviev's ideas and the thought of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hachohen Kook (1865-1935), one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of our time, who became the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel under the British mandate. See also Mikhail Agursky, "Universalist Trends in Jewish Religious Thought," *Immanuel* 18 (Fall 1984), pp. 43-53; Rabbi Shmuel Aleksandrov, *Mikhtavei mehkar u-vikoret* ("Dispatches of Research and Criticism"; Jerusalem, 1932), pp. 3, 6 and 21, who refers to Soloviev as a "sage" and a "righteous man."

have *anything* to say to the world and they have *no goal* toward which to lead it.<sup>17</sup>

Soloviev also called upon Christianity, if it had not abandoned itself to inaction, to demonstrate its moral strength to the world at large and justify its pretensions to be a religion of peace and love.<sup>18</sup> After citing the role of the Jews in the urban commercial classes of the “Russian West” (that is, the “Pale of Settlement” and Poland), he explained:

The trouble is not the Jews or money, but the domination, the supremacy of money, and this is not the doing of the Jews. It was not the Jews who made profit and enrichment the aim of all economic activity; it was not the Jews who separated the economic domain from that of morality and religion. It was enlightened Europe that introduced atheistic and inhuman principles into the social economy and then reproached the Jews for following those principles.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Soloviev dreamed of a new society where the aim of economic activity would be “the *humanization* of material life and nature, their subjection to human reason, so as to animate them through human sentiment.” He concluded: “And what people would be better suited and more predestined for this guidance of material nature than the Jews who, from the beginning, granted it the right to exist but did not submit to its blind force, seeing its purified form as the immaculate and holy envelope of the divine existence?” Thus, “the future Israel can serve as an active intermediary for the humanization of nature and material life, for the creation of a new earth in which truth may dwell.”<sup>20</sup>

This idea was forcefully restated in *The Justification of the Good* (1894-96), p. 383. Here he also pointed out, among other things, that “the majority of the Pharisees had no part in the accusations against Jesus” (*ibid.*, p. 315).

### **Dominant Themes in Soloviev’s Thought**

Several dominant themes appear in Soloviev’s writings. To begin with, he constantly told Christians that one could not expect the Jews to look at the Christian world as if it were already truly Christian. One could not ask them to forgive and forget all the harm that they had suffered in the Christian world. For the majority of Jews, he held, it was morally and psychologically impossible to do so as long as the unworthy attitude of the Christian world toward them continued to exist.

Still more explicitly, he said that the Jews were only able to see in the Christian world what those who called themselves Christians showed

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17. Russian, pp. 170-171; French, pp. 128-129.

18. Russian, p. 182; French, p. 150.

19. Russian, p. 184; French, p. 152; German, p. 30.

20. Russian, p. 185; French, pp. 155-156; German, p. 32.



them, and it was ridiculous to expect the Jews, en masse and out of religious conviction, to convert to Christianity as a religion of love amid the clamor of anti-Jewish pogroms and "Christian" cries of "Death to the Jews! Down with the Jews!"

In the political sphere, he maintained that one could not accept a tyrannical russification of the Poles and deny the civic rights of the Jews. On this matter, Soloviev's position may be said to have resembled that of other Russian writers such as Leon Tolstoy, M. Stassulevich, Maxim Gorky, Leonid Andreev, Fedor Sologub, Paul Miliukov, F. Rodichev and Vladimir Korolenko.

A second theme was his refutation of misrepresentations of Judaism. An example is his review of "La Modernité des prophètes" ("The Modernity of the Prophets"), an article by Ernest Havet (author of *Le Christianisme et ses origines*) which had appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in Paris in 1891. Soloviev insisted on the writer's ignorance of Hebrew, and the superficiality and ingenuousness that led him to say that Hebrew was already a dead language in the period of the Hasmoneans, and that the prophets were publicists who lived in the first centuries of the Christian era. As Soloviev put it:

It is as though one claimed that there had never been an ancient Latin literature, and what we know of it (Horace's Odes and Vergil's poems, Cicero's speeches or the Annals of Tacitus) had been written by unknown monks in the period of Charlemagne's successors or during the Crusades, and one made this assertion without knowing any Latin and having access to these works only in a French translation.

This clarification well illustrates the absurdities and distortions to which a revisionist or negationist reinterpretation of history can lead. Soloviev again expressed himself with the same abrasive irony in an article entitled "The Talmud and the Most Recent Polemical Literature on the Subject in Austria and Germany":

It is not unusual to read or to hear it said: "The Jewish question could easily be settled, one could accept the Jews completely and grant them equal civic and social rights if only they would give up the Talmud that encourages their fanaticism and their singularity, and if they returned to the pure religion of the law of Moses as the Karaites practice it, for example."

It is as if in a country in which the Orthodox were not well thought of — in Austria, for instance — one had said or written: "We are ready to accept the Orthodox and not restrict their rights if they categorically renounce their rules and liturgical customs, their old scholastic nonsense called the 'teaching of the Church Fathers,' and, finally, monuments of superstition and fanaticism such as 'The Lives of the Saints'; and if they return to the pure teaching of the Gospels as

practiced, for instance, by the Mozav Brethren or the Molokan sect.”<sup>21</sup>

In this context, Soloviev recalled the “fundamental rule of Judeo-Christian morality: Do to others what you would have them do to you.” He further observed, once again, that “Judaism represents the very axis of universal history.”

Not only did Soloviev constantly insist on the ethical value of the teachings of the Talmud and of the assertion of the responsibility of the individual, which it made into the guiding principle of life in society. He also condemned the defamatory antisemitic maneuvers to which a distorted presentation of rabbinic literature can give rise. It was with an intense indignation that he condemned, for instance, the tissue of nonsense and falsification put forward by S. Diminsky in a pseudo-scientific report prepared for a Minsk commission on the Jewish question. Soloviev wrote that this pamphlet deserved attention only insofar as the spiteful arrogance of its author was indicative of the cultural level of the public to which he addressed himself.<sup>22</sup>

A third theme was his appreciation of the Kabbalah. He revealed it in an article on the Kabbalah which appeared in the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary, and which was originally written as a preface to David de Gunzburg's essay, “The Kabbalah, Mystical Philosophy of the Jews.”<sup>23</sup> In this article, Soloviev described the Kabbalah as a huge tree, spread out over more than a thousand years and going back to the beginnings of Jewish and Judeo-Chaldean thought. Its teachings displayed certain similarities to Gnostic and Neoplatonic concepts.

The Kabbalah, he said, was the product neither of medieval nor of Alexandrine thought. It was the negation of dualism. For the Kabbalah, the material world was only the final and ultimate stage of the realization of what is truly existent, the accomplishment of the truth to the point where it attains finality and fullness of being, on the model of Jacob's ladder, on which heavenly powers ascended and descended.

Soloviev regarded this as a fundamentally different conception from that of Greek philosophy because of its emphasis on the idea of man as an absolute and universal form, which Soloviev saw as an authentic biblical truth transmitted to Christianity by the apostle Paul. He saw the mystical lore of numbers, letters and names as a subsidiary element inseparable from the leading anthropomorphic ideas.

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21. *Russkoye obozrenie*, 1886, pp. 3-32; Soloviev's works, vol. 6, pp. 3-32.

22. *Evrei, ikh verouchenie i nravouchenie: issledovanie S. Ya. Diminskago* (“The Jews, Their Religious and Moral Teachings: A Study by S. Y. Diminsky,” 1891), Soloviev's works, vol. 6, pp. 374-380.

23. This essay, which was published on Soloviev's initiative, appeared in *Voprosy filosofii i psichologii*, May-June 1986, pp. 277-300.

Fourth, the closeness of Soloviev's analysis of prayer, charity and fasting to fundamental Jewish piety is very striking. In a study of "the spiritual foundations of life,"<sup>24</sup> Soloviev wrote in a manner that echoed the Jewish liturgy for Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, according to which "repentance, prayer and charity" can avert a harsh divine judgment.

Prayer, charity and fasting are the three fundamental acts of inner religious life, the three bases of inner religion. The man who does not pray to God cannot help men and cannot correct his nature by making an effort with regard to himself; he remains alien to religion, although he may think, speak and write about religious subjects all his life. These three fundamental religious activities are so interwoven that one has no significance without the other.

Fifth is the importance Soloviev ascribed to "national theocracy and the law of Moses" in his work *The History and Future of Theocracy* (1885-87).<sup>25</sup> To this end, he quoted extensively from the Hebrew sources (pp. 414-635). The same applies to his work *The Justification of the Good* (1894-96).<sup>26</sup>

Here one has an extension of ideas that had already been expressed by Soloviev in his *Lectures on Godmanhood* (1877-78),<sup>27</sup> written when he was only twenty-five. This is what he said about the *Living God*:

When Moses, in the Bible, asked God what His name was, he was told *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, which means, literally, "I shall be who I shall be." ... If, in Indian Buddhism, the divine principle was defined negatively as a nirvana or nothingness, and if in Greek idealism it was defined objectively as any universal idea or essence, in Jewish monotheism it was given an inner subjective definition as *pure I* or absolute personality. This was the first personal and individual manifestation of the divine principle.<sup>28</sup>

After pointing out that the essential principle of Judaism — the revelation of God in His unconditional unity as an absolute "I" — was confirmed by the prophets, he went on:

The Jewish prophets were at the same time great patriots, wholly steeped in the national idea of Judaism. But it was precisely because they were steeped in this idea that they had to realize that it was universal and intended for everyone, that it was sufficiently vast and

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24. *Dukhovnyia osnovy zhizni* ("Foundations of Religious Life"), published in *Pravoslavnoie obozrenie*, 1884; Soloviev's works, vol. 3.

25. *Istoria i budushtnost theokratii*, Soloviev's works, vol. 4, pp. 234-642.

26. *Opravdanie dobra*, Soloviev's works, vol. 8, pp. 3-516 (English translation, 1918); see especially pp. 101-102, 138, 215, 315, 383-384 and 406.

27. English translation, 1948. See now the translation by Bernard Marchadier (Paris: Cerf, 1991).

28. Russian, p. 71; Marchadier, p. 77. Cf. also pp. 74-78; Marchadier, pp. 78-83.

huge to embrace humanity and the entire world. From this point of view, the example of the Jewish prophets — who were great patriots at the same time as being great representatives of universalism — is especially instructive, as it shows us that if true patriotism must necessarily be free of all national egoism and exclusivity, the pan-human conception or genuine universalism, in order to amount to something and have real strength and positive value, must at the same time by its very nature be an enlargement or a universalization of a positive national idea and not an empty and indifferent cosmopolitanism.<sup>29</sup>

Soloviev brought out very clearly the specific character of the Hebrew prophets: “As the prophets were inspired *men of action* endowed with a practical spirit in the highest sense of the term, and not speculative thinkers, the synthetic idea of a Divine Being was more perceived by their spiritual sense and rather awakened their moral will than being an object of an intellectual process.”<sup>30</sup> It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Soloviev was claiming that the example of the prophets of Israel showed that the universal is reached via the particular.

A sixth theme has been touched on above: Soloviev readily used his ability to read Jewish sources, post-biblical as well as biblical, in the original Hebrew. An example is his explanation of the nature of altruism, based on those sources. He cited both the doubly negative formulation of altruism — “Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you” — and the positive formulation: “Do to others what you would have them do to you.”

The first of these formulations, he claimed, was the commandment of justice, and the second was that of mercy.<sup>31</sup> One cannot exist without the other, as we see from the Hebrew terminology of *tzedek* and *tzedakah*, which mean justice and charity simultaneously. This inseparable association of the two rules of altruism is of essential importance, since it is the foundation of the inner unity of jurisprudence, ethics, politics and the spiritual life of society.<sup>32</sup>

Speaking of the responsibility of humankind toward creation and nature according to Scripture, Soloviev quotes the Hebrew phrase in Genesis 3:23: *la'avod et ha-adamah*. He adds in a footnote: “This means literally ‘to serve the earth’ — to serve obviously not in the sense

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29. Russian, pp. 79-80; Marchadier, pp. 85-86.

30. Russian, pp. 80-81; Marchadier, p. 86.

31. It is the post-biblical Jewish sources that contain numerous discussions of God's twin attributes of justice and mercy. See E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), pp. 448-461.

32. *Opravdanie dobra* (“The Justification of the Good,” 1894-96), Soloviev's works, vol. 8, pp. 101-102.

of a religious cult (even though the verb *avod* can also convey that meaning) but in the same sense as angels serve humankind or as an educator is at the service of the children he or she teaches.”<sup>33</sup> I am struck by the closeness, here as well, of his way of thinking to that of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook.<sup>34</sup>

Basing himself on biblical sources, Soloviev also correctly analyzed the implications of the commandment of loving one’s neighbor and the meaning that the Jewish faith gives to the idea of sanctity as separation. He explained the latter by means of an original metaphor. Sanctity signifies separation only in the sense that the head is separate from the body, that is: “as the principal part that cannot exist — itself and as such — separate from the body as a whole, just as the body as a whole, at a certain stage of its development, cannot exist without its principal part.”<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, Soloviev often returned to the theme of the significance of God’s election of the Jewish people and the Jewish people’s election of God.<sup>36</sup> It is another way of saying that he took seriously God’s message to Abraham: “In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

In any event, Soloviev’s constant and attentive “listening to Israel” was not only moving, nor was it merely academic. It possesses a singular topicality. In a certain way, I am tempted to say that Vladimir Soloviev speaks to us *today*, as well as to the Russian people and the Christian people, facing them with their responsibilities.<sup>37</sup>

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33. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

34. See note 16 above.

35. *Istoria i budushtnost teokratii* (“The History and Future of Theocracy,” 1885-87), Soloviev’s works, vol. 4, p. 470.

36. As *ibid.*, pp. 550-551.

37. Additional useful information and material will be found in the following studies. Paul Berline, *Russian Religious Philosophers and the Jews* (New York: Jewish Social Studies, 1947), pp. 271-318. Emanuel Glouberman, *Fedor Dostoievsky, Vladimir Soloviev, Vassili Rozanov and Lev Shestov on Jewish and Old Testament Themes* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974). David Flusser, “Vladimir Soloviev und unsere Lage,” *Freiburger Rundbrief* 21 (1969), pp. 8-11. Ludwig Wenzler, *Die Freiheit und das Böse nach Vladimir Soloviev* (Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 1978). Bernard Dupuy, “Les Juifs, l’histoire et la fin des temps selon Vladimir Soloviev,” *ISTINA* 37 (1992), pp. 253-283; reprinted in the Société Vladimir Soloviev’s book *Œcuménisme et eschatologie selon Soloviev* (Paris: F.-X. de Guibert, 1994), pp. 108-141.