

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Israel: Academic Bigotry in the American Academy

Speaking of the detached nature of higher education, we often hear of the “ivory tower” or of the “absent-minded professor.” Both metaphors communicate a separation from the real world, even an intentional detachment from reality. Usually, we use such figures of speech with humor or even mild criticism. But, the American Studies Association (ASA) and its recent actions concerning Israel reflect a deep-seated academic bigotry, not a detached pursuit of academic freedom. Why would a group of American scholars bitterly attack Israel? Israel is the only functioning democracy in the Middle East. Further, as columnist Charles Krauthammer observes, Israel has “the freest press in the Middle East, a fiercely independent judiciary and astonishing religious and racial diversity within its universities, including affirmative action for Arab students.” Furthermore, a mere cursory survey of Israel’s neighbors evidences brutality, torture, murder and the use of chemical weapons. Just consider Syria, Iran and even Egypt—let alone other nations such as Russia, China and North Korea. The bottom line is that the ASA actions have nothing at all to do with human rights. Krauthammer: “It’s an exercise in radical chic, giving marginalized academics a frisson of pretend anti-colonialism, seasoned with a dose of edgy anti-Semitism.”

The ASA action centered on a resolution to boycott Israel. In mid-December, the ASA announced that 66% of its members voted in favor of this boycott. With fewer than 5,000 members, the ASA is hardly a prominent academic organization. [The resolution bars official collaboration with Israeli institutions, not with individual Israeli scholars. As an aside, no American university has signed on in support of this resolution and the much larger American Association of University Professors has rejected the ASA resolution as stifling academic freedom.] But it is a milestone for one reason: The Palestinian movement known as B.D.S., for Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel, has gotten little traction in the US. But the ASA is the second academic organization to join this B.D.S. movement, with the Asian American Studies the first in April 2013. As Richard Perez-Pena and Jodi Rudoren of the *New York Times* recently observed, the B.D.S. campaign has won greater support in Europe. For example, the Dutch company, Vivens, announced recently that it would do no business with Israel’s national water company because of Israeli policies in the West Bank. A European Union program produced guidelines that prohibited investment in any institutions operating in territory Israel seized in the 1967 war. In April, the Teachers’ Union of Ireland endorsed an academic boycott of Israel.

ASA leaders betray a bitterness and hatred for Israel. As Jonathan Marks of Ursinus College has shown, four of the six members of the ASA executive committee signed a 2009 letter to President Obama that characterized Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians as “one of the most massive ethnocidal atrocities of modern times” and declared that a one-state solution, which would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state, is “almost certainly” the only road to peace.

Furthermore, the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel calls for boycotting “Palestinian/Arab-Israeli collaborative research projects or events.” As Marks argues, such a campaign actively discourages “opportunities for cooperation and mutual understanding.” It also warns that “all academic exchanges with Israeli academics do have the effect of normalizing Israel and its politics of occupation and apartheid.” Such language does not evidence scholarship or academic freedom; it is blatant ideological propaganda. In addition, as Krauthammer boldly declares, “To apply to the state of the Jews a double standard that you apply to none other, to judge one people in a way you judge no other, to single out that one people for condemnation and isolation—is to engage in a gross act of discrimination. And discrimination against Jews has a name. It’s called anti-Semitism.”

In addition to the ludicrous actions of the ASA, there are other disturbing developments aimed at Israel. Anti-Israeli actions and speech are now fashionable among musicians, actors, writers and performers in the US and Western Europe. One of the most outrageous is the growing popularity of the “quenelle,” a reverse Nazi salute, popularized by the anti-Semite French entertainer, Dieudonne M’Bala M’Bala. Another more subtle enemy today when it comes to Israel is not only blatant anti-Semitism, but the attempt to blame Israel singularly for all that is dysfunctional in that sliver of land called Palestine. Columnist Andree Seu Peterson cites an “Impact: Holy Land” conference held in Philadelphia this past December. Palestinians, Messianic Jews and Christians mingled, but did so around the agreed-upon assumption that “the unconscionable oppression of Israel was the *starting point* of the ‘conversation,’ not a proposition for debate.” The friendships and bonding this conference sought among the various religious groups was through “dismantling checkpoints; boycotting, divesting, and sanctioning Israeli companies; tearing down the West Bank wall; and returning occupied lands.” One also thinks of former president Jimmy Carter, one of Israel’s most vehement critics, who, in a book of several years ago, used the incendiary term “apartheid” to describe what Israel is doing in the West Bank as it relates to the Palestinians. Using such a term and then interspersing that charge with quotations from Jesus is difficult to accept. As Proverbs 18:17 states, “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him” (ESV). At such conferences, a review of the events of the 20th century and the Jewish people in that century brings balance. The pogroms, the butchery and of course the Holocaust must be a part of the story and the “conversation.” That the Jewish people now have a homeland in which they can defend themselves against such butchery must also be a part of that same “conversation.” That Israel’s neighbors (e.g., Hamas, Hezbollah and the nefarious Iran) refuse to even recognize the existence of the state of Israel, let alone its nature as a homeland for the Jewish people, must also be a part of the “conversation.”

Krauthammer concludes his penetrating essay (which I cited above) with this statement: “The persistence of anti-Semitism, that most ancient of poisons, is one of history’s great mysteries. Even the shame of the Holocaust proved no antidote. It provided but a temporary respite. Anti-Semitism is back.” The “mystery” of anti-Semitism is solved by a close reading of Scripture. The evil one (Satan) has been trying to destroy the Jewish people for over 4,000 years (since Abraham, the father of the Jewish people). Two examples: You see it in ancient Egypt during the time of their slavery. You see it in the book of Esther, where Haman almost achieved his goal of the total annihilation of the Jewish people. The Bible clearly teaches an unconditional and unilateral covenant that God made with the Jewish people (the Abrahamic Covenant). That

Covenant forms the structure of what God is doing in His world; it reached its apex with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Christ's return will place the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Israel back on center stage. Hatred for the Jewish people is a part of the systemic sin of humanity, because Satan hates what God loves—and He loves the Jewish people.

See Charles Krauthammer in www.washingtonpost.com (13 January 2014); Andree Seu Peterson in *World* (25 January 2014), p. 71; Jonathan Marks in the *Wall Street Journal* (17 December 2013); Richard Perez-Pena and Jodi Rudoren in www.newyorktimes.com (19 December 2013).