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Dreyer, Nicolas

Israel is Unique: „Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her, rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn for her.“ (Isaiah 66:10)

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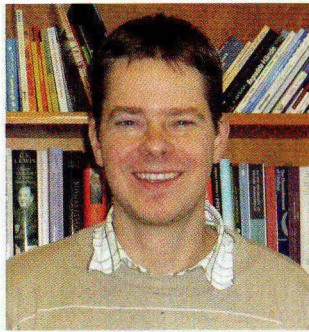
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Nicolas Dreyer is studying for a PhD in Russian Literature. He is an Evangelical Christian from Altdorf (near Nuremberg), Germany

“Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her, rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her.” (Isaiah 66:10)

A few decades ago, the then-mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, described the birth of the modern State of Israel as “perhaps the most significant event of this century.” In 2008, Israel celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of this event.

Yes, there is indeed much reason to celebrate, despite all of Israel’s domestic, national, international problems, and challenges. A land, which for centuries lay largely desolate, is populated and cultivated. Kibbutzim, villages, and cities were rebuilt or built from scratch; swamps were drained, land reclaimed; parts of the desert were made habitable, the land was cultivated; crops increased and multiplied a thousand fold. Israel revived her language, the ancient tongue of the Bible, into a modern spoken language. Several million immigrants from all corners of the earth were absorbed and given new homes. And, Israel has won a number of wars directed at her destruction in which she was numerically weaker, initially without even having her own regular armed forces.

Israel has excelled in agricultural, scientific, medical, and technological innovation as a successful democracy, in which all residents and adherents of all faiths can live and worship freely. Israel is an independent, sovereign Jewish state, in which Jews can determine their own national life, follow their own national aspirations, in freedom, and security from anti-Semitism.

Israel is unique. No other ancient people or empire, Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, or Roman, has ever been dispersed to all ends of the earth, and yet kept their national and religious identity and customs. To have survived more than two and a half millennia of anti-Semitism, persecution, and destruction, with their tragic summits in the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and the Holocaust; and to convene again in their ancient home and rebuild their nationhood is nothing short of remarkable. Indeed, this is unmatched anywhere in human history and was made possible, among other factors, by:

- Israel’s spiritual leaders and rabbis throughout the diaspora, who encouraged their communities not to assimilate, but to observe their traditions.
- The enthusiasm, pioneering spirit, and willingness to sacrifice of the early Zionists who settled in the land and who, at great personal cost, built their communities and reclaimed the land so that it would yield fruit.
- The patriotism and fighting spirit of the generations since then which contributed, again sacrificially, to Israel’s continuous existence and successful development.

The creation of the State of Israel is testimony of our God’s faithfulness. Beginning with His Covenant with Abraham, and confirmed on numerous occasions since, He has last, but not least, through the Old Testament prophets, spelt out His eternal plan and purposes for Israel, including the restoration of Israel. The prophet Jeremiah, at the time of the Babylonian Exile prophesied to God’s chosen people of their return from exile and their national restoration (Jeremiah 3:7-8): “So then, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when people will no longer say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,’ but they will say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.’ Then they will live in their own land.”

The break-up of the Soviet Union led to an influx of over one million Soviet Jews to Israel during the past eighteen years, and several million Jews from countries around the world have joined Israel as citizens during the past seven decades. Ancient biblical prophecies are being fulfilled right before our eyes.

If you visit Israel, you will find that all Israel wants peace, more than anything else. The Israelis are weary of loosing spouses and children in terror attacks on buses, on the way to school, or downtown; their fathers, sons, and husbands in battle; or their own homes, health, and life to rockets and shells. Israel truly desires peace and has been prepared to make very, very difficult concessions to work towards a peaceful solution, concessions which meant among others the mass displacement of thousands of her own citizens from towns in the Gaza strip. To help us understand what this meant for Israel, a similar situation in the UK would have been the forced removal of all British subjects from Northern Ireland by the British government in order to appease the IRA. In Britain, this would be, quite rightly, unthinkable. In Israel, it was done.

Israel clearly has been prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of peace, and she has been incredibly courageous in her decisions to hand over power to the PLO in Judea, Samaria, as well as to unilaterally withdraw from her security zones in both South Lebanon and in the Gaza strip. Israel has no desire to be responsible for most of these territories, but the fragile hope, that accommodating Palestinian and Arab demands would usher in at least some kind of peace and cooperation. These were also done without any sustainable security guarantees.

Alas, none of these have brought peace any closer. Israel’s withdrawal from South Lebanon allowed Iran’s terror proxy Hizbollah to take root. The same can be said about the Gaza strip: for eight years, since 2001, Israel’s population in the vicinity has been hit by rockets and shells from Hamas. Israel tolerated this for a very long time indeed before conducting the recent Operation “Cast Lead”. It is doubtful that the British government would have shown similar patience in a comparable situation, if say, Hastings or Newport, or Dumfries had been hit by more than 8,000 rockets and mortar shells! When looking at this record, one might well be tempted to ask where this principle of handing over land in exchange for even more destruction and war (rather than the peace advertised by so many well-meaning, but naïve individuals) is supposed to end? When the whole land of Israel, including Jerusalem (which, by the way, never was the capital of any other nation except Israel), is completely surrendered to the enemies of Israel?

The real obstacle to peace in the Middle East is not Israel, nor the details of her borders, nor her military actions, but the denial of many in the region to recognise Israel’s right to exist. True peace must be both comprehensive, including the whole region, based on the unconditional recognition of the Jewish state by all parties. Peace would require from Israel’s regional neighbours the cessation of hostilities of every kind: terror, war, anti-Israel rhetoric, anti-Jewish education of the young. It would also demand an engagement in real cooperation.

This seems highly unlikely in the immediate future, because of the widespread pro-Islamist and anti-Jewish sentiment in the region, which has generally not made peace with the idea that there is now a Jewish state in the middle of the Arab and Muslim world.

John de Courcy said half a century ago with great discernment, “But one thing is certain. There will not be another dispersion of the Jews from Israel. It is a supremely important political and physical fact, one of the big facts of history, that these people are here to stay, alive or dead. There is no power on earth that can shift them. No appreciation of the international and political situation comes anywhere near being realistic without recognition of this fact.”

John de Courcy merely re-phrased an ancient promise which God made to His people Israel, “But I will defend my house against the marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch” (Zechariah 9:14).

Israel is unique
