

ISRAEL -- UP TO ESSENTIALS

All the illusions are vanishing.

Once we thought the world would accept Israel as deserving of nationhood no less than any other people, because of guilt over the Holocaust. Now we see that it is no longer true. The emergence of the Third World, uninvolved in the Holocaust, makes the guilt issue irrelevant for them. And the new generation in the West refuses to be held accountable for the sins of its fathers. Even Germans feel no more responsible for Nazi atrocities than Spaniards today feel for the Inquisition 500 years ago. Guilt may last forever, but guilt feelings are evanescent. Age erodes them.

Israelis and American Jews projected the image of Israel as an "outpost" of the Western world in the Middle East. We meant well, and ^{we} were proud of our technological achievements, whether in making the deserts of Israel bloom or offering much needed assistance to underdeveloped countries in Asia and Africa. Now this very fact is used as a stick to beat us. Israel is now viewed as a bridgehead of Western imperialism, as an alien, aggressive interloper which disinherited the indigenous population.

The State was righteously declared "socialist," with all the idealism and ideology the term is meant to convey. Now Israel has become the target of all Leftist groups throughout most of the world.

We piously proclaimed that Israel was "the only democracy in the Near East," and all but convinced ourselves that this is what Destiny

preserved us for. Now we are dismayed to learn the bitter truth: So what? Who cares? Not even other democracies do!

We read G-d out of the equation, and told ourselves and others that Israel was the "creation of the U.N.," and waxed rhapsodic about Israel making a reality of "the parliament of man," and effecting a reconciliation within "the family of man." Now...

All attempts to justify our existence in the eyes of the world, by appealing to the canons of the world's ^{VALUES} principles and ethos, have come to grief.

What now?

Now we must, perforce, come down (or "up") to essentials. Not guilt, not Westernization, not Socialism, not democracy, not secular nationalism, not internationalism are the source of our strength and the warrant for our existence. Our authenticity and our authority derive from a transcendent Source which surpasses all those illusions with which we have indulged ourselves heretofore. Only G-d, the promise to Abraham, the Covenant have any enduring meaning and worth for us. All else is technique. Or illusion.

Now Jews throughout the world must draw together more closely than ever before. Now we must have new confidence in the inner strength and resolve of the people of Israel themselves. But above all else, if we are radically honest and realistic, we must eschew all illusions, old or new, and affirm our faith in the G-d of Israel and the Covenant in which He promised us this Land. All else is idolatry.

To reaffirm our belief in Him -- not only belief in Him, but also to believe Him -- means not to believe that this institutionalized remnant of the Holocaust will be allowed to disappear. G-d is not cruel. Had He wanted to get rid of us, He would have done so during those terrible years of World War II. He does not play sadistic games with His children.

We shall survive -- and flourish.¹ We shall do so as "the people of the Lord" and with full faith in the Lord of Israel. And we shall do so without bitterness. Israel will become "a light unto the nations" despite the nations. It will incorporate the most humane contributions of civilization, even if the methods of its enemies are far less than humane. It will strive for fraternity and friendship among peoples, even though they treat it as a parish.

On Israel's Independence Day, Jews throughout the world hail it in love and esteem -- and solidarity.

We stand with faith and confidence -- and without illusions. Because "this is the day that the Lord hath made; we shall be happy and joyous in it."

NORMAN LAMM