

12-2-2012

Dear Mordechai,

You and I never met face to face; that must wait until you will be completely free. In the meantime we have internet as a means of communication and I gladly make use of it. I do hope that you have the time to reply and comment upon this letter. In the following I shall tell you about

a. my own background.; b. my relation to you; c. (the) Jewish people; d. the state of Israel.

My own background. The year of my birth is 1920 so now I am nearly 92 years old. I grew up in a devout Protestant family but for some time religion had no meaning whatsoever for me. During the second world war I participated in the resistance against the German occupation; twice I was in prison, once I was shot down when trying to escape with a Jewish girl. After the battle of Arnheim I helped an English general, Sir John Hackett, to escape to freedom. Sir John published a book about his adventures in the Netherlands, *I was a Stranger*. You can find more about it on website: www.Theirstheglory.com . Most of it is in English, but comments of my sister and me are in Dutch.

At the end of the war I became a dedicated Christian, so much, that in 1948 I decided to study theology in order to become a pastor. In 1953 I completed the studies, married and was appointed as the pastor of a parish. We got in the course of the years five children, three of them born in Israel. In 1958 I was appointed by the Church of Scotland as the pastor of their church and Centre at Tiberias. So my family and myself spent eleven years (1958-1969) at the shores of the lake of Galilee. Our children went to a local (Jewish) school, I learned Hebrew and was invited from time to time by kibbutzin to give a lecture on Friday evening. I also did research in the library of Yad Washem about the attitude of the non-Roman Catholic Churches in Europe and America regarding the persecution of the Jews by Hitler, which resulted in the publication of *The Grey Book*. You can find it in the library or load it down: www.gutenberg.org/etext/14764 The pope kept silent, but most of the non-Roman Catholic Churches in Europe and also the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands publicly protested. An article on the subject I contributed to the Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 8, p. 914-916 (Jerusalem, 1971).

In those days I was a strong supporter of Zionism and the state of Israel. We had seen from nearby the terrible fate of Jewish people during the second world war; I believed the Jewish people remains the people elected (—"Am segulah"), and we had rejoiced about the establishment of the state of Israel. As a consequence I was not interested about what had happened in 1948 to the Palestinian people. I just overlooked them. I did not know and I did not wish to know about their fate.

In 1969 we returned to the Netherlands for one year. I had been appointed as a staff member of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, being responsible for the relation with the Jewish people (1970-1975). In that capacity I traveled, together with a colleague staff member, to the Middle East just after the Yom Kippur war. On the request of the Israeli government we tried and succeeded visiting two Israeli pilots, prisoners of war in Damascus. No one knew about their fate and the Red Cross was not permitted to visit them. Last year the story was brought to life on Israeli television in a program of *Avudim* ("Lost without a trace") with one of these pilots and me.

In those years I also visited a Palestinian refugee camp and was horrified. Slowly it penetrated into my mind that injustice had been done to them and that it was my duty to stand up for them, just as once I had stood up for Jewish people during the second world war at the risk of

my life. Now the most I risked was that some people would try to commit character assassination upon me.

In 1990 I published my memoirs, *Soms moet een mens kleur bekennen – een terugblik op 70 jaar* (“Sometimes one had to show one’s colours”). There is an electronic version of it but it is all in Dutch.

Relation with you.

In “...kleur bekennen” I tell your story (here follows an abbreviated translation from the Dutch) and explain why I feel so deeply concerned about you.

Firstly, because of the issue of nuclear arms in the Middle East which should be a nightmare to all of us. (Israel having the bomb is just as dangerous as Iran having it, and the one is related to the other).

Secondly, because of the person of Vanunu. He describes himself as ‘an ordinary guy’ but as such he was not powerless but acted according to his conviction and was prepared to pay a high price for that. I am quoting from your “I am your spy”, which I have in Hebrew.

Thirdly, because Mordechai became a Christian, those in Israel who are against the bomb do not support him for they consider him a traitor because of his baptism.

“Once a month I am sending him a picture postcard. I intend to do that as long as he is in prison and I am alive. I do not know whether he gets my cards. If he gets them it is for him a token that he is not forgotten; if not, it helps me not to forget him.”

After my retirement I have visited Israel a number of times. In 1989, when I met with the Anglican priest Gilbert Sinden who was permitted to visit you once a month. I asked him to pass on to you the pocket edition of general Hackett’s *I was a Stranger*, which he did. I hoped that you would read it and would figure out that John Snoek in the book was the same as Johan Snoek who was sending you a card monthly.

In 1993 I spent a holiday with relatives in Australia. In Sydney we went to the Sunday service in the church known to you. After the service I met with people who had known you and respected you very much.

In 1995 I again visited Israel. I had written a letter to the then president of Israel general Ezer Weizmann requesting an interview with him. I never got a response, and when in Jerusalem I was treated impolitely by an aide of him, though I had presented him with the book of Hackett.

Then you left prison and I stopped sending you a card monthly, which was a token that once a month I was praying for you. However, in fact you remained a prisoner because of restrictions and confinement. So I decided to continue praying for you, not once a month but every day. That is what I intend to continue, as long as I am alive.

(The) Jewish people.

Regarding individual Jews, I feel as follows. Last year an old acquaintance and his wife came from Israel to visit me. In 1943, Yehuda was a child of seven years old when I helped to find a place of hiding for him. He survived and so did his parents. They emigrated to Israel. Now Yehuda is about 76, a father and grandfather, yet the memories of the war had made him mentally wounded. He and his wife were very proud of Israel and I refrained from discussing the subject or even mentioning it.

Mordechai, you are from Morocco if I remember correctly and I believe the situation of Jews over there was relatively good; or am I mistaken? But many Jewish people originating in Europe and their offspring are still being haunted by the memories of the sjoa, the holocaust. Do you know the books of Primo Levi, an Italian Jew? He survived concentration camp but the humiliation he suffered was so bad that on a certain moment he could not bear life any

more. It is an evil thing that, in addition to these terrible memories, these memories are being misused to encourage an implacable policy towards the Palestinian people.

However, I would rejoice if one could rightly see Israel as a source of pride for the Jewish people. Unfortunately for those who are not only willing but also able to see, it has become something to be ashamed of. I regret that and I respect very much those Jews in Israel and outside Israel who have the guts to criticise the unjust policy of the state.

Regarding the Jews as a people, in my opinion they remain, biblically speaking, a special people, not only in Tenach (the Old Testament) but also in the New Testament. Read the epistle of Paul to the Romans, ch. 11, vs. 28-29. Surely this does not mean that they are better than goyim or that they are beyond criticism; see Romans ch. 2, vs. 9-11. By the way I do not have an English bible anymore but I trust you have one.

Jesus was a Jew and he quoted Tenach (**Tenach?**) frequently. We cannot understand what justice and righteousness mean without reading for instance the prophet Isaiah. Recently an (American) Jew publicly told: "Since I see how matters really are, I stand up for the rights of the Palestinians. So my wife said: 'are you becoming a Christian?' My reply was: 'no, I now am becoming a Jew!'".

"Love thy neighbour as thyself" is Jewish. True, the Nazarene whom I am trying to follow gave to that great commandment an explanation that is of vital importance: gospel of Luke ch. 10 vs. 25-37. That is to say: the commandment does not apply to my own group only: the Dutch, or the Christians, or the Jews. Always asking "what is good for the Jews" is wrong and will ultimately lead to disaster. All human beings are created in the image of God, they all are equal. That is Jewish.

The State of Israel.

Here you and I may be of different opinion. I recognise the state of Israel and its right to exist, not because of any religious legitimation but according to international law. I also hope that Israel will survive, for the misery of the Jewish people has been immeasurable; I myself have seen some of it in the Netherlands.

In my view, Israel's policy is unjust as well as shortsighted. Take the issue of the "bomb"- you know much more and much better about it than I do. Even today it would be wise to pursue a nuclear free Middle East. If Israel would be willing to give up its atomic weapons, it would be easy to convince Iran that it should do the same. However, the very fact that Israel has the bomb, provokes Iran, and understandably so for the bomb is a strong means of blackmail if you have one and your opponent has not. In my opinion, nowadays you and your courageous act are already being vindicated by developments and this will be increasingly clear.

I am convinced that in case Israel continues its present policy towards the Palestinians it will not survive but collapse in the not so distant future. Much more dangerous than Hamas are the colonists in the occupied territory. Every Israeli government after 1967 has favoured them, openly or surreptitiously. Now there is a well armed state within the state and Israel is a divided house as it was at the end of the second temple when the Romans besieged Jerusalem. Now there is a process of erosion as happened to the kibbutz: the **façade** is still there but in fact it is an empty cartridge.

Israel cannot survive without the support of the Jewish community all over the world especially in the US, of the US government and of world opinion. If Obama will be re-elected he may decide to exert serious pressure on the Israeli government. World opinion is increasingly taking sides in favour of the Palestinian cause, even in Europe and North America. It happens as in the case of apartheid South Africa, slowly just as a large oil tanker slowly turns into another direction.

Salvation may come from the inside for since the prophets raised their voices the Jewish people had a small but strongminded number of courageous dissidents. You yourself belong

to that group, and also a number of Israeli authors. To me the most respected is David Grossman. I have read his *Ha-Zeman hatzahov* in Hebrew, in 1987, though my knowledge of Hebrew had become rather limited, and it made a strong impact upon me. He and others like him have suffered ostracism because of their conviction, though none of them suffered as much as you did.

I am going to stop. Of course it is unknown how long I will live but as long as I am living I shall daily pray to you, and hold you in high esteem.

Your friend, Johan Snoek.