

**The Messianic Movement and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:
Understanding the Evangelical Palestinian Resistance¹**
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I want to thank David Zadok for his keen interpretation of the biblical and historical dimensions of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict.² In my response, I join him in supporting ongoing Messianic dialogue with Palestinian evangelicals. In order for us to dialogue in the absence of peace, we must be willing to grapple honestly with the fact that many Palestinian evangelical activists support the Palestinian Resistance against Israel, the peace process, and the normalization of relations between Palestinians and Israelis. We must recognize that many Christians and Israelis also oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state and normalization with the Palestinians. Despite these realities, we must, in the name of our Messiah, reach out in love to our enemies, keeping in mind that He is even now working to transform us, His body, into an instrument of peace through the very process of reconciliation in the absence of peace. A Messianic Jewish response to the Palestinian Evangelical initiative embodied by the “Christ at the Checkpoint” and “Impact Holy Land” conferences ought to express the indigenization of the ideals of early Christian Zionism by the Jewish people, ideals that promise a redemptive future not only for us, but also for our neighbors. Such a response will shape our ecclesiastical posture towards our non-Jewish neighbors, including the growing movement of Muslim Background Believers who have recently turned to Christ throughout the Middle East in response to the conflicts in the Muslim world over the nature of Islam.

The Political Context of Palestinian Christians of the West Bank and Gaza

As Palestinian theologian Mitri Raheb has rightly pointed out, international conflict between the world’s great powers has made the Promised Land a geopolitical cauldron throughout its history.³ The Bible shows us that Israel has always ever been at the crossroads of the world, making it a natural setting for war. We ought not to be surprised that Israel’s strategic centrality has not changed.

Almost all studies of the Arab-Israel Conflict focus almost entirely upon the history of the region without analyzing it in the context of global politics, making it difficult to see the forces that have shaped the war between the Palestinians and the Israelis today. Therefore, our first level of analysis will briefly survey the history of the conflict from an international perspective, allowing us to understand the context of Palestinian history in the twentieth century.

The international community, in the name of the League of Nations following the Ottoman defeat withdrawal from its Arab provinces during WWI, mandated Great Britain to govern what was then Palestine, from 1922-1948. During this period, the Jewish and Arab inhabitants of Palestine were all “Palestinians.” The establishment of the State of Israel just three short years after the end of WWII was the result of the Jewish people’s war against invading Arab armies allied with their former oppressor, Hitler. Following WWII, the West and the Soviets fought out the Cold War by proxy in Iran, Afghanistan, and the Arab world, which included Israel. The superpower conflict created the arena in which Israel fought for independence. This war left those Palestinians who had supported the British Mandate and the war effort in Palestine without political representation or legal protection of life and property. These Palestinians did not view the Hashemites newcomers of Transjordan as their own, foiling Jewish hopes that the Palestinians would accept Jordanian sovereignty, thus making it the Arab state established in 1947 by the U.N. vote in favor of partition, the vote that legitimized the establishment of the State of Israel and that precipitated the first Arab-Israel war.

The legacy of the international failure to establish a Palestinian state created the conditions for Palestinian irredentism following the establishment of the State of Israel. Unhappily, this was legacy of the Cold War. Soviet interest in fostering anti-Western liberation movements worldwide made the Palestinian Liberation Movement and its ally Cuba the premiere anti-Western resistance movements in the world. Another tragic consequence of the Cold War in our time was the rise of the anti-Soviet Islamist group al-Qa’ida, although its importance would not become clear for decades.

¹I presented an earlier version of this paper at the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation, which invited me to respond to the *Kairos* Document at their annual conference in Washington DC, November 5-6, 2010.

²I would note only one historical fact: that three times Muslim rulers invited Jews to return to Jerusalem—twice after defeating the Christians who forbade them to live there: the Caliph Umar and Salah al-Din, and once after they’d been expelled from Europe (Andalusia) by Christian rulers in 1492—Ottoman Sultan Bayezit II.

³Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes* (MaryKnoll: Orbis, 2014).

Since 1979, we have witnessed the extension of Iranian hegemony into the Arab world, most notably by its proxy Hizbollah in Lebanon, its power in post-Saddam Iraq, and, most recently, by its close alliance with Syria. This, in turn, has fostered the rise of reactionary Sunni Islamist political movements, including al-Qa'ida and offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood, including Hamas in Gaza. Syria represented the last remaining vestige of secular socialist Arab nationalism in the Arab world, but its Alawite regime increasingly turned to Iran for its survival following the fall of its former patron, the USSR in 1989.

As a result of the carnage unleashed by expansionist, Shi'ite revolutionary Iran, we are witnessing the final stages of the decimation and the eradication of the ancient Middle Eastern Christian communities in Iraq and Syria. Over this same period of time, a growing number of Muslims are turning to Christ throughout the Muslim world.⁴ The so-called Islamic State and its allies now threaten Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, countries with large Christian minorities and large numbers of Palestinian refugees and their descendants. As we have seen, these countries face opposition from their own citizens, some of whom seek democracy, while others are sympathetic to the Sunni militants. The West Bank is no different. There, the Palestinian Resistance, especially Hamas, which overthrew it in Gaza in 2007, are challenging the failed Palestinian Authority, whose legal mandate has expired. Both the PA and Hamas have received support from Iran via Syria since the Al-Aqsa Intifada. These relationships are affected by the political struggles rocking the Muslim world as a result of Iranian expansionism.

The emergence of the Palestinian resistance (*muqawama*) in the twentieth century thus seemingly continues to represent the only acceptable political option for some evangelical Palestinians to express their political will, to have some sense of participating in their national rejection of the legitimacy of Israel. This is the reason that most Palestinians reject peace on Israel's terms and oppose any kind of "normalization" of relations with their enemy. This explains why even some evangelical Palestinian Christians support Hamas and PLO militants.

The Palestinian Resistance

The Palestinian Resistance shapes the evangelical Palestinian discourse. Without understanding what the Palestinians mean by "resistance," Messianics and Western evangelicals cannot understand evangelical Palestinian activism. The Palestinian Resistance today is constituted primarily by two political parties at the forefront of the battle against Israel's existence: the Islamist Hamas/Muslim Brotherhood and the Marxist Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) founded by the nominal Christian George Habash in 1967. The PFLP sprang out of obscurity with its most recent terror attack in Har Nof. Surprisingly, many Christian Palestinians, including some evangelicals, support both the PFLP and Hamas.

The secular resistance characterizes Israel as "settler-colonial" apartheid state. They reject Zionism as a legitimate national liberation movement. The resistance does not differentiate Israel's policies in the disputed (or, as they describe it, occupied) territories from Israel itself. These resistance parties, along with a number of even smaller and more extreme Islamist groups, rejected the Oslo Agreements and instead continued to call for the creation of a unitary state of Palestine. In the confusing world of Palestinian politics, Fatah, the Movement for the Liberation of Palestine (founded in 1959 by Yasser Arafat), the majority party in the coalition known as the Palestine Liberation Organization (founded in 1964 by the Arab League under the direction of Egyptian President, and Soviet ally Gamal Nasser), has governed in the West Bank (and Gaza) since 1993 as the Palestinian Authority. During the 2000 Al-Aqsa Intifada, Fatah's Tanzim and al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigades collaborated with the resistance in the interest of Palestinian unity, a fact that completely undermined the peace process. Iran was deeply involved with Arafat and Hamas and achieved its goal of preventing Israel and the Palestinians from making peace. Those who had traditionally supported Fatah felt betrayed and view it as a political failure: corrupt and hopelessly compromised by its ambivalent attitude towards peace. In the eyes of most Palestinians, the resistance remains the only political actor fighting for Palestinian rights.

Just as in Israel, Palestinian politics are largely driven by domestic concerns. Neither Israel nor the Palestinians have developed foreign policies to improve their relationships with one another.⁵ Their internal struggles for political capital are fought out in the arena of international public opinion, exploiting the failures of the peace process for political power rather than doing the hard work of diplomacy to negotiate a peace between two sovereign states envisaged by the UN vote for partition in 1947.

⁴ David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam* (Monument, CO: WIGtake Resources, 2014).

⁵ "Israel's Arab Citizens and Foreign Policy: Summary of a workshop conducted by Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, The Abraham Fund Initiatives, and Nazareth Academic Institute," Nazareth, January 28th, 2014 and "The 2014 Israeli Foreign Policy Index: Findings of the Mitvim Institute Poll" Ramat Gan, December 2014, <http://www.mitvim.org.il/> <accessed December 24, 2014>.

Palestinian Evangelicals and the Palestinian Resistance

Like most other Palestinians, some Palestinian evangelicals believe that the Palestinian Authority has capitulated to Israel and its ally, the US and oppose the peace process. Others, who support peace with Israel, are constantly in danger of being accused of being collaborators, which carries a death sentence in the PA. Yet still others, lacking employment opportunities and fearing the increasing power of Hamas, have been emigrating from the West Bank, reducing the number of Christians there to historic lows. These are the political realities facing those few evangelical Christians who are seeking dialogue and reconciliation with Israeli Messianic Jews in the absence of peace. And we must be there for them.

Like Messianic believers, Palestinian evangelicals in the Palestinian Authority are a tiny minority. They, too, seek the acceptance of their own people. Under the Palestinian Authority, the only recognized Protestants are members of the Anglican and Lutheran churches. Other evangelical Christians, i.e., the Baptists, Nazarenes, and Assemblies of God, have no legal identity. The recognized Palestinian churches: the Greek Orthodox Roman Catholic (Melkites), Armenian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites), as well as the Assyrian, Coptic, Ethiopian Orthodox, churches which oppose the smaller, legally unrecognized, evangelical Protestant churches. Reportedly, somewhere between 36,000-50,000 Christians live in the West Bank cities of Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus. Most are Greek Orthodox and Catholic; both of these churches own a great deal of property on the West Bank. Greek Orthodox properties date back to the fourth century establishment of the Constantinian Church, while the Catholic properties date back to the Crusades. The Armenian Church was established during the earliest Christian period, as was the Syrian Orthodox Church. Palestinian Christians recognize the fact that they, like Israeli Jews, face the threat from Muslim jihadists who oppose any form of non-Muslim sovereignty or minority rights, and for that reason have been outspoken advocates of secular Arab nationalism. Like their Muslim counterparts, these secularists blame the other Arab regimes for abandoning Palestinian nationalism. The Arab world, especially in view of the ascendancy of Iranian regional hegemony exacerbated now by the realities of the Islamic State, increasingly recognize that peace with Israel will stabilize the region, and for that reason have been promoting the Arab Peace Plan and have supported the Jordanian UN proposal to recognize Palestine during the last week of December 2014.

Thus, Palestinian evangelicals face opposition not only from Islamists, but, even more importantly for them, from secular Palestinian Christians, many of whom support the PFLP, home to many of them. In response, like the many Messianic Jews who stress their identity as Zionists; many Palestinian evangelicals support the Palestinian Resistance to express their political identity. In the Palestinian case this can be a matter of life and death, unlike in Israel, where there have always been vocal anti-Zionist dissenters.

In the 1980s, evangelical Palestinians in the Bethlehem area, led by Mubarak Awad, political activist and currently an American University adjunct, developed a philosophy of non-violent action based upon the work of Gandhi and King in support of the Palestinian resistance. His brother Sami Awad is the head of the Holy Land Trust, which seeks to mobilize Western evangelicals to support the nonviolent Christian resistance against Israel, work that is supported by the Palestinian authority. Bishara Awad, their father, is the founding president of Bethlehem Bible College. Together, the Awads have sought to turn the Palestinian resistance into a non-violent movement. However, in 1987, the first Palestinian uprising, the “Intifada of the Stones” overtook the ongoing non-violent tax rebellion on the West Bank then well underway. With the fall of the USSR in 1989, Latin American liberation theology soon was deployed by the Left in the fight against South Africa’s Apartheid policies. The Palestinian rejectionists soon adapted that discourse in its campaign against Israel, resulting in today’s Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement. Anglican Rev. Naim Ateek, through his ecumenical organization Sabeel, introduced Liberation Theology to Palestinian Christians in 1994. Sabeel, along with the Holy Land Trust, which offers educational tours for evangelicals in Palestine, and most recently, the evangelical Bethlehem Bible College, recruit American evangelical support for the Palestinian cause through their conference series “Christ at the Checkpoint.” This is where the 2009 ecumenical Palestinian *Kairos Document* and Palestinian advocacy for evangelical support against “Christian Zionism” comes in.

A Critique of the Palestinian *Kairos Document*

It is important for Messianic Jews to understand two recent expressions of the Palestinian Evangelical Resistance to Israel: the ecumenical Palestinian Christian *Kairos Document* as well as the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement that is associated with it, and the concept of dual historical narratives: one Israeli, one

Palestinian, that challenges Israeli self-understanding.⁶ The 2009 Palestinian *Kairos Document* characterizes Israel as an apartheid state. This language has taken the world by storm and is at the heart of the increasingly successful BDS campaign isolating Israel in public opinion. Early critics of this position were easily steamrolled by the popular acceptance of the concept, which elides the conditions created in the West Bank and Gaza by the ongoing state of war with the very legitimacy of Israel as a sovereign state. The battle against apartheid is the model for the nonviolent Palestinian BDS movement today. The underlying philosophy of the 2009 Palestinian *Kairos Document* makes it an impossible basis for reconciliation between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians. Like the Hamas Charter, the Palestinian Christian document articulates an eschatological rejection of the Jewish state.

Nevertheless, it is important for Messianic Jews to deal with the *Kairos Document* on its own terms. The insights of Croatian theologian and ethicist Miroslav Volf, author of the acclaimed book *Exclusion and Embrace*, are helpful here.⁷ Volf rejected the ideology of the South African anti-Apartheid theologians who wrote in their 1985 “*kairos* document”

In our situation in South Africa today it would be totally unchristian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed. Any such plea plays into the hands of the oppressor by trying to persuade those of us who are oppressed to accept our oppression and to become reconciled to the intolerable crimes that are committed against us. That is not Christian reconciliation, it is sin. It is asking us to become accomplices in our own oppression, to become servants of the devil. No reconciliation is possible in South Africa without justice.”⁸

Volf explains that he is “not persuaded that reconciliation should be pursued only *after* the injustices have been removed.” For him, the more worrying issue is that “cheap reconciliation sets ‘justice’ and ‘peace’ against each other as alternatives.” The South Africans believed that to pursue cheap reconciliation would mean giving up “on the struggle for freedom, to renounce the pursuit of justice, to put up with oppression.” Volf responds, “...[If] I am not mistaken, some such usage of the term ‘reconciliation’ predominates in public discourse today. ... Stripped of its moral content, reconciliation is contrasted so starkly with ‘justice’ that one has to weigh the relative values of ‘justice’... in order to assess to what extent the sacrifice of justice can be morally acceptable and politically desirable in order to achieve political unity.

Drawing on Bonhoeffer, Volf states: “[C]heap reconciliation clearly means to betray those who suffer injustice, deception, and violence.” And indeed, Volf recognizes that “the Christian faith has been all too often employed to advocate such reconciliation...” He writes: “indeed, the [South African] *Kairos Document* is a critique of ‘cheap reconciliation’ directed against the theology of the pro-apartheid churches...” However, Volf believes that “such a concept of reconciliation really amounts to a betrayal of the Christian faith.”

It is almost universally recognized by theologians and church leaders today that the prophetic denunciation of injustice has a prominent place in the Christian faith. This prophetic strand cannot be removed without gravely distorting Christianity. The struggle against injustice is inscribed in the very character of the Christian faith. Hence an adequate notion of reconciliation must include justice as its constitutive element. And yet it is precisely here that watchfulness is needed. For the imperative of justice, severed from the overarching framework of grace within which it is properly situated and from the obligation to non-violence, underlies much of the Christian faith’s misuse for religiously legitimizing violence.

Volf’s powerful critique of the South African document applies equally to the Palestinian one. He rejects the idea that the process of reconciliation—peacemaking—can begin “only *after* injustice has been removed.” “First and most fundamentally,” he writes, “the ‘first justice, then reconciliation’ stance is impossible to carry out. ...In any conflict with prolonged history, each party sees itself as the victim and perceives its rival as the perpetrator, and has *good reasons for reading the situation that way.*” He then enters upon a carefully reasoned ethical argument. “No peace is possible within the overarching framework of strict justice for the simple reason that no strict justice is possible, showing that “even if strict justice were possible, it is questionable whether it would be desirable... because “the enforcement of justice would rectify past wrongs but it would not create communion between victims and perpetrators.” He writes, “some form of communion—some form of positive relationship—needs to be established if the victim and perpetrator are to be fully healed.” He thus

⁶ “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering,” Kairos Palestine December 15, 2009, <http://www.kairopalestine.ps/?q=content/document> <accessed December 24, 2014>.

⁷ Miroslav Volf, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice: A Christian Contribution to a More Peaceful Social Environments,” Available at <http://www.livedtheology.org/resources/papers/> <accessed December 30, 2014>, 10-26. See also Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 11.

⁸ *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa.* (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers/Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), Art 3.1.

shows that “the pursuit of justice... would satisfy our sense of what is right, but would not heal us. It would bring us peace only as the absence of war, but not as harmonious ordering of differences.”

He then explores the concept of forgiveness. “...To forgive outside justice is to make no moral demands; to forgive after justice is not to be vindictive. In both cases it is to treat the offender as if he had not committed the offense or as if it were not his.” Finally, he writes, “if justice is impossible, as I have argued, then forgiveness could never take place.” Instead, he proposes a theological solution to these moral and ethical conundrums. He writes,

We need to look for an alternative both to forgiveness and reconciliation outside of justice and to forgiveness and reconciliation after justice. I want to suggest that such notions of forgiveness and reconciliation are to be found at the heart of the Christian faith—in the narrative of the cross of Christ, which reveals the very character of the God. On the cross, God is manifest as the God who, though in no way indifferent toward the distinction between good and evil, nonetheless lets the sun shine on both the good and the evil (cf. Matthew 5:45); as the God of indiscriminate love who died for the ungodly to bring them into the divine communion (cf. Romans 5:8), the God who offers grace—not cheap grace, but grace nonetheless—to the vilest evildoer.

The will to embrace embodied by grace and mercy must supersede the quest for justice and reconciliation. The South African document does not relate to the conflict between two different polities, nor even to Israeli social and political discrimination against the Arabs in Israel, because there is a legal basis for equality in Israel’s Declaration of Independence and its Basic Law, a legal basis for equality that was absent in South Africa’s Apartheid system. Nevertheless, VolF’s conclusions remind us of the prophetic role of the Church as witness to the Jewish and Arab peoples about the nature of Christ and His desire for the nations.

Historiography and the Concept of Dual Narratives

The second dimension of the *Kairos Document* is its conception of the role of history in the conflict and its bearing on reconciliation. Increasingly, the contradictory historical narratives that the combatants tell about the history of the conflict have attracted the attention of those seeking to win the Arab-Israel conflict through non-violence. In 2006, the United Nations published an important report entitled “Alliance of Civilizations,” focusing attention on the role of religion, particularly Islam, in world affairs.⁹ The authors’ main concern was to contest Huntington’s famous “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, which asserts that Islam is at the root of most current conflict worldwide. In this report, the Palestine-Israel conflict looms large. It focuses upon the role of historical narratives in shaping of political identities, and, in particular, upon the need for “mutual recognition of the competing narratives that emerged since the establishment of the state of Israel ... competing narratives ... mirrored in divergent interpretations of recent history: different ways of describing conflicts, occupation, and peace negotiation efforts.”¹⁰

“The competing narratives of Palestinians and Israelis cannot be fully reconciled,” the report from the United Nations goes on to say, “but they must be mutually acknowledged in order to establish the foundations of a durable settlement.” The authors call for a White Paper “analyzing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dispassionately and objectively, giving voice to the competing narratives on both sides, reviewing and diagnosing the successes and failures of past peace initiatives, and establishing clearly the conditions that must be met to find a way out of this crisis.” This effort, according to the report, “would strengthen the hand of those who seek a just solution to this conflict while weakening extremists on all sides, as they would no longer be the champions of a cause they have been able to appropriate because its story had been left untold or deliberately ignored by the community of nations.”¹¹ The mutual recognition of the competing Palestinian and Israeli narratives, framed in a “level-headed and rational analysis,” it is hoped, will strengthen those who seek peace and weaken those who oppose it. The Alliance “seeks to address the widening rifts between societies by reaffirming a paradigm of mutual respect among people of different cultural and religious traditions and by helping to mobilize concerted action toward this end.”¹²

Elazar Barkan, Columbia Professor of International and Public Affairs, co-director of the Human Rights Concentration at the School of International and Public Affairs and of the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation at the Hague, commented on the way these historical narratives are shaped: “while empathy and collaboration may eventually become the norm for historical writing, in the short run the aim is to delegitimize the nationalist (and often hateful) historical myths that feed ethnic and national xenophobia and

⁹“Alliance of Civilizations: Report of the High-Level Group,” November 13, 2006, <http://www.unaoc.org/content/view/lang.english> <November 5, 2009>.

¹⁰Ibid., 18.

¹¹Ibid., 52-4.

¹²Ibid., 4.

conflict.”¹³ He warned that the subjectivity of history must “not [be] in the service of controlling or reversing the past, but rather to the delicate task of narrating the past in a way that enriches the present.”¹⁴ The admonition that memory ought not to be romanticized as “the repository of alternative histories and subaltern truths” is important in this connection.¹⁵ The editors of *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, Lila Abu-Lughod of Columbia University and Ahmad H. Sa’di at Ben Gurion University, explained that for them “... the Palestinian national metanarrative ought to be used to contradict the “powerful imagery of redemption” of the Jewish people, Israel, after the Holocaust (i.e., the Jewish metanarrative).¹⁶ Their method is thus not only historical, but political: to dismantle “the mythic Israeli narrative.” Such a stance destroys the important work of preserving memory: by politicizing their project, they undermine their own credibility, thereby defeating the legitimate goals of historiography to analyze the complexity of the conflict by recognizing the many perspectives on each event and then judging them on the merits of their case.

“It has become increasingly clear that how Israelis and Palestinians understand—and misunderstand—their own and the “other’s” history has had a profound influence on their ability—and inability—to make peace.” Motivated by their belief that “history is ignored at one’s peril” Paul Scham, Walid Salem, and Benjamin Pogrund, editors of *Shared Histories: A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue*, warn: “Without some understanding of the historical experience of the other side, and how that other side views its own history, Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking is doomed to further rounds of violent and pointless failure. What is worse, peacemaking failures can significantly aggravate the situation rather than ameliorating it” Indeed, failures “add a new element to the narrative of both sides, and a new hurdle which those who still think peace is possible must clear.”¹⁷ To address the need to explore the different historical narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Scham, Salem, and Pogrund convened a conference to explore the historical dimension missing from the Oslo Process. In his forward to the resulting book, Burkhard Michael Blanke wrote that “‘Shared history’ is also ‘common history’ endured together, which can simultaneously be the basis and point of departure in dialogue, respect, and understanding for the other side, in each case.”¹⁸

As theologian and ethicist Volf so brilliantly showed us, memory must be truthful, therapeutic, and didactic, framed from a posture of humility in a paradigm of mercy, and forgiveness, for it to serve the purposes of reconciliation and redemption.¹⁹ Without a paradigm of mutual acknowledgement of sin, memory too often is wielded as a weapon in the perpetuation of fear, hatred, and conflict, rather than mutual truth-telling, reconciliation, and redemption. Through truthful history, written objectively, we can better understand the full complexity of the historical forces that have shaped our world.

A step in the right direction has been taken by Israeli believers Lisa Loden, a Messianic Jew, and Palestinian evangelical Salim Munayer by co-authoring the incalculably helpful book, entitled *Through My Enemy’s Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine*. Their example of reconciliation in the absence of peace is a model for us today and provides us with a sound basis for dialogue. They begin their book with a helpful up-close history of the conflict by weaving together what they can both agree to include in the story of “what really happened.” They then provide a brief excursus on the subject of the differences between history and narrative, followed by an excellent overview and critique of current historiography focusing in on the Israeli “new” historians and Palestinian historians. The rest of the book introduces readers to the varieties of Palestinian Christianity and Israeli Messianic Judaism and their biblical hermeneutics, zeroing in on the theological disagreements and the theological imperative of reconciliation. Loden and Munayer recommend three practical steps that will aid Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation in the absence of peace. As a first step, they urge believers to “learn one another’s narrative and history” asserting that “[s]imply being open to hearing the other side’s account of what happened will bring the sides toward one another.” Tacitly, they challenge both sides to accept the presence of the other and to “bridge” the two narratives “as much as possible.” They write, “While there are many impasses in our accounts of what happened and what caused these events, we can focus on shared social and cultural history and be open to challenging our own narrative.” This means that for reconciliation among believers to take root, rejectionists on both sides of the conflict must be challenged. We

¹³Elazar Barkan, “Introduction: Historians and Historical Reconciliation,” *American Historical Review* 114 (October 2009): 900.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 913.

¹⁵ Ann Stoler and Karen Strassler, “Castings for the Colonial: Memory Work in ‘New Order’ Java,” *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 42, no.1 (2000): 4-48.

¹⁶ Ahmad H. Sa’di and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 3, 12, 23. See my review of this book: “The Historian and the Claims of Memory: A Review Essay,” *Fides et Historia* 42 (Summer/Fall 2010):55-65.

¹⁷ Paul Scham, Walid Salem, and Benjamin Pogrund, *Shared Histories: A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2005) vii.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹ Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

cannot accept and respect a narrative of exclusion; we must counter those extremists who seek the annihilation of the other's presence. Loden and Munayer admit that listening to one another "does not mean we will completely agree on the past, but it does mean we will develop empathy for one another, and respect the importance each narrative has for the other side." Respecting the importance of a narrative of exclusion that aims at the expulsion of the other means not allowing extremism to set the terms of the conflict. In obedience to our Lord, Loden and Munayer have responded to His call for us to love our enemy. Together, they have written a message of hope: a message of good will that encourages us to seek "to recognize the other's pain, affirm the other's identity and help bring us closer to the goal of reconciliation gained at the foot of the cross."²⁰

A circumspect, self-critical Palestinian Christian historical narrative dealing with the legacy of Palestinian rejectionism has yet to be written. Munayer's appraisal of the *Kairos Document* fails to acknowledge the consequences of the Palestinian "resistance." We as a movement must commit to dialogue honestly with those who believe, as we do, in the power of the gospel to transform us, formerly His enemies, into those who love God and neighbor as He loved us. Just in the days of the Second Temple, zealotry will only lead our peoples to death. As the followers of Yeshua, we must embrace our enemies with grace and forgiveness in order to glorify Him above all else, and in that way redeem our identities in Him. May we commit to following His teaching boldly, studying His work in history so that we may enjoy fellowship with our closest neighbors and spiritual kin, the Palestinians, who, like us, love the Land because it is where the God of love dwelled among us.

Epilogue

With the publication of my book on the history of Jerusalem in the late Ottoman period in 2004, I turned my full attention to the politics of the Arab-Israel conflict. I visited Israel and the West Bank for the first time since 1987 in 1999, twelve years since had I completed my dissertation research in Jerusalem, and found an entirely new political reality. During that time the promise of peace had risen and fallen; although expectations concerning the Papal visit to Bethlehem the next year were high, there seemed to be a dimming sense of hope about the future. Orthodox Christians were vocal about their fears about what Palestinian self-government on the West Bank would mean for their future.

Bethlehem had been beautified despite the lasting effects of the long first intifada, the Intifada of the Stones, which officially lasted from 1987 to 2000. This popular uprising against the Israeli occupation had begun while I was doing my research in the Islamic court in Jerusalem with the tax revolt in Bethlehem—an intentionally non-violent movement led by West Bank Christians refusing to pay Israeli taxes that began in 1985. It turned violent in 1986, when Hamas emerged as the new face of the Muslim Brotherhood, followed by the official Intifada of the Stones in 1987. During the Gulf War Saddam showed his solidarity with the Palestinians by giving grieving families \$26,000 for each "martyr" of the uprising who died fighting Israel and by lobbing SCUDs with warheads loaded with concrete: symbolic "stones" raining into downtown Tel Aviv terrifying a civilian population scared by the Iraqi dictator's brutal chemical warfare against Iraqi Kurds in 1982. Yasser Arafat, who supported Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, also adopted orphans who'd lost their parents in the fight. Most Palestinians became even more resolutely anti-American as a result of the Iraq War.

I returned in 2003 to see the controversial Wall/Security Fence for myself; Bethlehem's main commercial streets and Arafat's compound in Ramallah by then had been destroyed. The destruction of local Palestinian civil society between the anvil of the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli hammer was complete as militias organized by the PLO and Hamas took over the streets. The growing rivalry between the PLO and Hamas eventually led to the latter's takeover of Gaza in 2007. In 2010 I again toured the Bethlehem and Jerusalem areas to study the impact of the growing Israeli settlements on the landscape and to attend the second Christ at the Checkpoint Conference. I wanted to hear what evangelicals who supported the Palestinians were talking about in light of these difficult events.

I was surprised by what I heard. The evangelicals attending the conference said nothing about Palestinian politics; they said nothing about the state of war between Israel and the Palestinians. Instead they attacked Christian Zionism and the theology known as Premillennial Dispensationalism, which they claimed was the justification of Israel's occupation of the West Bank. Hamas was saying the same thing using Islamic rhetoric. I was distressed by the flurry of theological books by evangelicals criticizing Christian support of Israel's right to exist on theological grounds. I had detected this shift evangelical thinking about the conflict

²⁰ Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden, *Through My Enemy's Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine* (Milton-Keynes: Paternoster, 2014), 52.

when I went on a speaking tour of evangelical colleges and universities about Islam following 9/11. Social justice has long been a familiar concern of many Jews, both Israeli and non-Israeli. However, now evangelicals had begun using theological arguments against the right of the Jewish people to a homeland based upon Israeli injustice towards the Palestinians. The anti-Israel sentiment that I heard struck me as shameful in light of what I knew about the Holocaust and Christian anti-Semitism.

Arriving at the conference as a member of the audience, I was graciously invited by the organizers at the kind suggestion of my friend Salim Munayer, to help serve communion at the mid-week prayer service. It was an unforgettable experience. I found some reason for hope in Bethlehem in 2010, when I attended the BBC Christ at the Checkpoint Conference. Rather than presenting his paper on "Arab Christians in the Shadow of Christian Zionism," as planned at the conference, on March 11, 2010, Palestinian evangelical activist Sami Awad instead spoke about personal transformation in the midst of conflict. He told a story: A number of years ago, a Palestinian Christian involved in reconciliation ministry participated in a trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He and two others, a Muslim and a Jew, decided to spend the night together in the children's bunk at the camp. They brought their warm clothes and sleeping bags, but found that they could not sleep. Images of the sick and starving children, without clothes and blankets, sleeping there night after night sickened them. They looked at the drawings these children had left behind, pictures of children playing drawn by children who would never play again. After this experience, this Palestinian Christian found that he had changed. He realized that the trauma of the Holocaust had created a Jewish psychology of fear and a resolute determination never to be ruled by non-Jews again. After a lifetime of hearing about the Holocaust as a justification for the establishment of the State of Israel, this Palestinian found that he had accepted the Jewish need not only for a state, but for acceptance and affirmation in their homeland. As a Christian Palestinian, his heart was softened towards the Jewish people, and his theology of the land was tempered by a new sense of mercy towards them.

Addressing the participants of the conference, Sami stated that he was that Palestinian. "When we understand deeply the causes, not the outcomes, of Israeli actions," explained Sami Awad, the one who went to Auschwitz, "we understand that hatred, fear, mistrust, resignation, and violence are all the products, not the goals, of the Israeli Jewish community in Israel which came from Europe." Sami sought to understand the tragedy of the Jewish people. For this reason, he participated in the "Bearing Witness Retreat" at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which brought activists from all over the world on personal pilgrimages to Polish concentration camps. During that visit, he saw groups of Israeli children sitting in circles after touring the death camps. Most of these children were aged 13-16 and many had relatives who had died in the Holocaust. For them, the visit was traumatic, and many were in shock over what they had learned. "This is not just history," Sami continued, "but our own present and future—Palestinians, they are told, will do this to us, just like the Nazis. Arabs and Muslims will do to you what the Nazis did to your grandparents." These same kids then graduate from high school and go into the army. They are told that force and violence are the only remedy for the threat posed to them by non-Jews. They are then stationed at checkpoints and are told to deal with the Palestinians as threats who seek their destruction.

"The shock of the present and future [seen from this perspective] transformed my life," he told the conference audience. "I'd always thought of non-violence as a means of resistance to the other. ... Now it's not just about resisting oppression but to help those who fear." He went on to say, "Fear is real. Manipulating fear for political and ideological reasons" is another matter. "How do I deal with someone who is really afraid? And how do I deal with someone who is manipulating fear?"

"The Palestinian Christian community needs to take responsibility for this fear. The world has only used power to deal with fear," he said, challenging everyone in the room. He then went on, asking, "What do we do to provide lasting healing to this land and all who love it? First of all, we have to change the language of the Palestinian political discourse. Language is a pretense used to create more fear through belligerent rhetoric, like saying that the Israelis 'are doing to us what happened to them, that they are the new Nazis.' Next, victimization as a method of argumentation has to end. By ignoring or neglecting the facts creates only bitterness and anger. They are treating us in a manner that was borne out of their historical experience," and so we must not blame the victims or the perpetrators (that is, the Europeans). We must speak truth as truth. We can't engage in falsehood. We must be a voice of truth in suffering, on behalf of all people, including the Jewish people who have not had the opportunity to heal."

As his words were being broadcast live in Arabic, he said, "My call to our local Palestinian Christian community is that it is time for us to take the lead in this work. This is not undermining the Palestinians' legitimate aspiration for self-government, but it is the Palestinian theology to heal and create [new] possibilities." It is time for the Christian world to break the barrier of fear, he said, to be a critical and reasoned voice for peace. Palestinians have to take a strong, critical stand opposing outside forces who seek to appropriate the conflict for their own purposes, and urged Palestinians to engage with Iran, repudiating their

involvement and interference in Palestinian politics.

Sami's statements riveted the international audience. He said that the Palestinian Christian community's longstanding commitment to non-violence was the only option for dealing with the Israeli occupation. He then said, "We must not let anyone distract us or plant bitterness—we must get rid of bitterness through kindness and compassion. We must seek the justice of God for the Palestinian and the Jewish peoples, and be fully aligned in what we seek as justice." He urged the audience to "engage in continuous acts of love with your oppressor—it is a commandment that we must abide in. Expressing love does not undermine our claims, only in strength can we express it." Sadly, Sami has distanced himself from these remarks, and has not been willing to discuss the reasons why. I believe it is because the Resistance will brook no dissent. Yet Sami was on to something. I experienced great joy as I served communion on the Wednesday of the conference in the Shepherds' Fields. The humility of Christ and the simplicity of His love embraced our little congregation that day, filling us with faith that ultimately Christ's love will encompass all, redeem all, and bless all.

In his book *Once Upon a Country*, Muslim Palestinian intellectual and president of Al-Quds University, Sari Nusseibeh, writes:

One day, while reading about two extraordinary philosophers with Jewish Viennese backgrounds, I ran across passages about the anti-Semitic scourge of the 1930s. As I read on, I felt the men's suffocating sense of doom and terror due to their problems with citizenship, residency papers, travel documents, venial bureaucracies, the threat of property confiscation, and other humiliations. All at once I was reminded of my own home and my own people's fate since 1947.

That night, during a visit with Mother, I posed a question. Just suppose, I began, that in the early years of the century an elderly and learned Jewish gentleman from Europe had come to your father to consult with him about an urgent matter. And suppose this gentleman had told Grandfather that a looming human catastrophe of unimaginable proportions was about to befall the Jews of Europe. And suppose this gentleman added that as an Abrahamic cousin with historic ties to Palestine, he would like to prevent the genocide to come by seeking permission for his people to return to the shared homeland, to provide them with safety and refuge. What do you think Grandfather would have said? I asked her.

Nusseibeh writes, "Her answer surprised me. I was prepared for a long conversation full of conditions and clauses and caveats, but instead she replied straight away with a wave of her hand, "What do you think? How could anyone have refused?"

But that is exactly what happened. The Palestinian leadership of that period rejected the creation of a Palestinian state, and for decades the Palestinian rejectionists—Christian and Muslim— have supported the resistance to Israel. Now, after the horrors brought about by the failure of the Oslo process, the Palestinians have become more circumspect. Nusseibeh, a Muslim, relates that he told an astonished journalist, "The Palestinians have to resurrect the spirit of Christ to absorb the sense of pain and insult they feel and control it, and not let it determine the way they act toward Israel. They have to realize that an act of violence does not serve their interest."²¹

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²¹ Sari Nusseibeh (with Anthony David), *Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life* (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 461-2.

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