

# Foreword

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THIS IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF essays is situated amid the most vexatious, dangerous geo-political crisis in the world. The seemingly intractable conflict in the Holy Land that concerns the State of Israel as well as the status and future of the Palestinians turns out to be the pivot point for much of the violent anger that leads to destabilization and threatens all parties to the dispute. The focal point of the many different angles in this collection is insistently justice as a precondition of peace in the Holy Land. Thus all “peace negotiations” are futile if a way is not found to assure justice of a political and economic variety. Such justice requires, perforce, a radical rethinking of practices and policies that continue to sustain and to legitimate political injustice and economic inequity. The writers in this collection are agreed that Zionism, in its intransigent politics and its military aggressiveness, is at the center of the crisis. Readers who have followed this long-standing issue closely will be further informed with important historical perspective. Readers who come to the issue with some lack of orientation will find this collection to be a reliable benchmark in the discussion concerning justice and equity in the Holy Land and an urgent summons to new thought and new policy formation.

Benedict Anderson, in his important but not-much-noticed book *Imagined Communities*, has shown the way in which nation-states are

fundamentally practices of sustained imagination.<sup>1</sup> That imagination is an angle of vision prior to the facts that shapes and positions the facts to serve an interest that requires obedience and resists criticism. Thus “nationalism” in all of its variety is not primarily a matter of hardware or even of paper agreements. Rather, it is an outcome of rhetoric that characteristically reflects passion, eloquence, and courage along with some historical requirement. It is clear that the State of Israel is an act of compelling imagination that appeals to the biblical tradition and to the data of historical crisis. Insofar as Palestinian nationalism is given voice, it also is an act of imagination. So we deal with competing acts of imagination. Of course, the imagination that constitutes the State of Israel is much informed and legitimated in our eyes by an imagined U.S. constituted by Christian foundations that suggest a ready affinity with the State of Israel.

The historical lessons offered in this volume are an invitation to rework such acts of imagination. Thus the chapter on Orthodoxy focuses on the ways in which contemporary Orthodoxy has given courageous voice to human rights. The tracing of Catholic and especially Vatican sensibility evidences the ways in which the Vatican has moved, ever so slowly, to an awareness that is beyond a singular acknowledgment to the State of Israel. The Protestant analysis, in two chapters, deals with evangelical viewpoints and explores the ways in which mainline theologians Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Krister Stendahl gave important support to the State of Israel when the post-war crisis of Jews after the German Holocaust was front and center in our awareness; they did not, however, voice any critique of or restraint about the State of Israel in its subsequent development. Another stimulating feature of this book is its inclusion of a Jewish and a Muslim perspective, each in a chapter of its own.

The volume is a powerful witness to the fact that 2015 cannot be a replay of 1940 or 1948 or 1950. While national imagination always takes some liberties with facts, such imagination must be to some extent informed by geopolitical realities. At the founding of the State of Israel, the danger to Jewish identity and existence was a defining preoccupation, but to continue to imagine the State of Israel in 2015 as we imagined it in the post-war period is an act of irresponsibility. Now the shoe of vulnerability is on the other foot, the foot of the Palestinians, and critical attention must be paid to that decisive alteration of political, economic, and military reality. Many of us—including a roster of leading Christians—are summoned by this volume to update national and international imagination to have some

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 2006).

informed contact with the facts on the ground. And the facts on the ground include the enormous economic and military power of the State of Israel, its control of institutions and finance, and a seemingly unrestrained practice of abuse, exploitation, and ruthless assaults on the vulnerable, so that a viable social life for Palestinians is placed in acute jeopardy.

While this matter is of great importance to Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant communities, as is made clear in these essays, the matter is especially urgent for evangelicals. With too much airtime given to “Pastor Hagee” (he being such an easy target), it is clear that all the talk about “dispensationalism” and pre- and post-millennial faith needs to be demystified and exposed, as it is a gross misrepresentation of the gospel. My friend Bart Campolo, in our conversations on this matter, has reduced it to a simple calculus:

- Presently the State of Israel operates with a free pass in the international community.
- That free pass is made possible by U.S. policy, and Israel will not be restrained in its oppressive, aggressive policies and practices toward the Palestinians until U.S. policy is altered.
- U.S. policy cannot and will not be altered as long as evangelical Christians in the U.S. are singularly and without reserve committed to whatever policy Israel chooses to adopt.

For that reason, a reconsideration of such a policy is most urgent among evangelicals, so that what passes for theological thought of a simplistic kind can be tempered by historical reality as well as by a more sober reading of the theological tradition.

There is now an extensive literature, including the work of Mark Braverman, that shows how Christians are held in hock by accusations of anti-Semitism if they criticize Israel, or by a fear of such accusations that might come. It is clear now, as it could not have been clear in the 40s and 50s, that a critical stance toward the State of Israel is now an important matter, not only for the sake of the Palestinians, but for the sake of justice and security in the region. It will not do to re-perform the courage of Niebuhr and Tillich or any of the others who had such courage in support of Israel in those bygone days. There is, of course, great pressure simply to repeat that old stance. But such support only endorses and legitimates violent state policy that produces injustice and therefore precludes and prevents peace. Of course the matter is complex, but for a beginning, imagination must catch up with the realities on the ground.

The pressure against any new imagination is immense. I know only a little of it but enough of it. When I urged in print that Braverman's book merits positive attention, I received a thirty-minute scolding and reprimand from a friend, a highly respected professional advocate for Jewish-Christian relations. This little experience is not important. It is enough, however, to permit me to sense how important this reconsideration is, and how much is now required to bring our imagination into critical contact with new historical reality.

We may be grateful to the editors and the contributors to this volume for their clear, disciplined thought that summons to fresh work. New occasions do teach new duties! This volume makes clear that one such "new duty" is to recognize that issues of justice and peace pertain in powerful ways to the Holy Land (just as Deuteronomy insists). This is a summons to those of us who cherish Jewish tradition and Jewish friends and who are zealously committed to the security of the State of Israel to recognize that, in the long run, security depends on justice. (The same is true for the U.S., a truth we have yet to take seriously in our own national imagination.) In the short run, easy mantras and self-congratulatory shibboleths prevail. But we know better. This volume is one place from which to begin afresh.

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