

Book Review

Munther Isaac

The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020, 248 pp.

Someday, a Palestinian Christian living in the West Bank will write about Mahmoud Abbas's failure to negotiate a final settlement in good faith with Ehud Olmert when he had a chance in 2007. This prophet might even condemn Yassir Arafat for declining to accept the Clinton Parameters, which would have created a Palestinian state, in 2001. This hero will speak openly about the corruption of the Palestinian Authority (PA), its theft of foreign aid, and its use of Jew-hatred as a unifying political agenda to distract rank-and-file Palestinians from the misrule they have endured since the mid-1990s.

This Palestinian Christian will condemn the PA's pay-to-slay program, which rewards terrorists for murdering Israeli civilians, and the use of extremist antisemitic rhetoric in Palestinian textbooks. This Palestinian Christian will condemn the hateful anti-Christian rhetoric broadcast by the muezzins of mosques in Bethlehem and elsewhere in the West Bank.

He, she, or they might even call for elections in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, so that the Palestinians can tell their leaders the direction they want their society to go. In doing these things, this Palestinian Christian will point his fellows toward peace and not war.

In sum, this Palestinian Christian will do exactly the opposite of what Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, academic dean of Bethlehem Bible College, has done in his recent book *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and*

Hope. This text should actually be titled *The Other Side of the Street: A Palestinian Christian Polemic of Self-Pity and Blame (Because Nothing is Ever Our Fault and Everything is the Other Guy's Fault)*, because in this text, nothing is the Palestinians' fault and any criticism directed at them is an act of oppression and bullying.

In this text, Isaac tells us that Palestinians can't be antisemitic because they themselves are Semites, and that Western Christians are trying to atone for the Holocaust by forcing Christians in the Middle East to accept the theology of Christian Zionism, "a theology designed to solve a Western problem (anti-Semitism) with the purpose of dealing with the inner guilt." He adds, "it is ironic that the West, which has a long history of anti-Semitism, wants to educate Palestinians on this issue – even rebuke and correct us now, and teach us the right way."

Isaac writes these things as if his readers do not know about the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin Al Hussein's meetings with Hitler during World War II, or the letters he wrote to Nazi officials telling them not to trade Jewish children headed to death camps for German prisoners of war. He writes these things as if his readers do not know about the Grand Mufti's Arabic radio broadcasts from Germany during the war, in which he incited hostility toward Jews throughout the Middle East.

The author also complains that U.S. politician Newt Gingrich once labeled the Palestinians an "invented" people, ignoring the fact that some Arabic intellectuals and even a few Palestinians, including the Grand Mufti himself, have said similar things. He complains – without providing a quote – that Gingrich "stated that Palestinians are all terrorists" and that their school textbooks include instructional content like "If there are thirteen Jews and nine are killed, then how many Jews are left?" Isaac tells us, "This of course is factually wrong."

What Isaac does not want to admit is that while Gingrich mangled the quote, he wasn't too far off. One Palestinian textbook in fact includes the following question: "One of the settlers [Israelis] shoots at [Palestinian] cars that pass on one of the roads. If the probability of his hitting a car in one shot is 0.7, and the settler shot at 10 cars, what will you expect to be the number of cars that were hit?"

One obvious contradiction inherent in Isaac's text is that he affirms the Palestinian demand for self-determination while undermining the Jewish claim to the same right.

Isaac fully admits this when describing how he responds to Christians who ask him whether the Jews are entitled to a “safe homeland.”

In response to this question, Isaac declares that “Jews should feel safe *everywhere!*” and that “they should feel at home in Germany, France, the United States and anywhere they are living.” He adds that “the idea that Jews won’t be safe unless they have a homeland cannot be acceptable, as it ignores the root of the problem of why they are unsafe to begin with! It is lamentable that Jews today continue to find themselves targets of attacks and as a result feel unsafe and the need to relocate to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.”

Apparently, the deal that Isaac is willing to offer Jews is that they will be accorded their safety if they give up their sovereign state. The fact that Isaac is willing to make such an offer, even implicitly, shows just how little he understands about Jewish and Israeli history.

In sum, Isaac’s book is a self-pitying and obtuse text that unintentionally illuminates the problems in Palestinian thought and discourse that hinder the prospects of peace and development in the West Bank. As dishonest and self-pitying as this text is, it will prove a useful read for Israelis, in that it demonstrates how Palestinian Christians living in the West Bank have enlisted in the Palestinian Authority’s propaganda war against the Jewish state.

Dexter Van Zile

Shillman Research Fellow for the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA); dextervanzile@gmail.com