

Envisioning Reconciliation: Signs of Hope for the Middle East, Zeina M. Barakat, WBG Academic, 2022 (ISBN 978-3-534-40690-6), 163 pp., hb €38

This is the inaugural volume in an innovative series on 'Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution'. The author is the Executive Director and Academic Coordinator at the European Wasatia Graduate School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at the Europa-Universität, Flensburg, Germany.

The central focus of the volume is the need for all participants in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to recognize their own responsibility in either promoting peace or for fermenting continued unrest and suffering. The volume contains fourteen short, poignant chapters and has four points of departure. The early chapters describe the author's journey in coming to terms with the need to adopt a personal stance toward reconciliation before recommending action for others. Her testimony is vivid and includes a reevaluation of her own upbringing as a young Arab woman in Jerusalem, the impact which foreign travel and studying abroad has had on transforming her views and perspective, the kindness expressed to her family by Jewish acquaintances and her scholarly immersion and development in the field of post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. These reflections not only offer insights into her own path toward reconciliation but infuse so many of the wise and constructive recommendations which abound in this interpretation.

The second element is her discussion of the ethics of political reconciliation and the various dimensions which have to be fully understood before the outlines of a process of forgiveness and trust can be initiated, for as she argues reconciliation is a costly concept and needs courage if it is to be engaged fully.

The third element is a trenchant re-evaluation of the notion of reconciliation as it might operate at a number of levels from the international to the personal. Significantly the author cites grounds for our common yearning for hope in desperate situations as stemming from scriptural reasoning and reveals a number of strands which Jewish, Christian and Islamic believers have emphasized, and which derive from a recognition of the Divine at work in our world and individual conscience. This leads to a memorable formula that 'hope lies in championing the values of reconciliation, justice, moderation, human rights, gender equality, diversity and pluralism' (p. 144).

The fourth element discusses the qualities of leadership needed if hope is ever to be turned into realizable policy proposals for long-term co-existence and a semblance of democratic accountability both between and within opposing factions on all sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

This is a deeply engaging and thought-provoking interpretation which combines a personal narrative with a searching analysis of the

contemporary situation. Lucid and persuasive arguments are deployed citing the pivotal role of education, transitional justice and mutual respect for the 'other(s)' in any process of constructing a road map for peace-building for the future. How this is to be done is outlined by reference to key concepts and perspectives which turn on adopting a radical stance to engage with others rather than repeating conventional tropes which merely serve to boost one's credentials with one side of the dispute only. If there is a genuine desire to end violence so as to bring about a sustainable peace, then acceptance of co-existence as a permanent reality is a prerequisite. But here it is acknowledged that the foundation of reconciliation is the exercise and active strengthening of empathy, and for its most precious commodity of hope. This is a risky and radical stance because for the author 'reconciliation is an open process whose outcome is not foreseeable'. (p. 32). Empathy can only be enabled to flourish if the structural and social psychological processes of demonisation, delegitimization and dehumanization are recognized for what they are as destructive and ultimately self-defeating human impulses.

Lest one imagine that these critical injunctions are aimed at one side only, namely that of the oppressors, there is more than enough in the analysis involving hard-hitting judgments to alert sections within Palestinian society of the need to be fully trained and engaged in the principles and practices of transitional justice. One of the great virtues of this interpretation is the placing of the central conflict within wider international experiences, particularly post-apartheid South Africa and the national unification process in Germany. The lessons to be learned from such comparative analysis are many, but the principal axiom is the determination to engage in a conscious search for truth telling before any semblance of trust can be nurtured. The clashing narratives must search for a middle ground if strategies which seek to map a reconciliation pathway are to be implemented. The ultimate aim must be the normalization of relations between the opposing identities. Yet so many voices crowd into this space that anti-normalization proponents appear emotionally and strategically, if not morally, superior. For hardliners any cooperation with Israeli agencies and civil society is deemed to be a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. This 'negative engagement' with a shared reality renders reconciliation that much more difficult and stalls well intentioned outreach and attempts at creating a culture of peaceful coexistence.

Difficult though it may be given the memories of victimhood on both sides the author encourages the ongoing search for mutual respect and dignity in the pursuit of the need to celebrate a common humanity. Faced by a range of barriers such as the imposition of higher taxes in Jerusalem, the ever-present flash points which are triggered by attacks on churches, mosques and synagogues, let alone marketplaces and residential districts,

and above all the regular use of organized violence which is a pernicious ready reminder that this troubled, sacred space is a powder keg whose fortunes matter far beyond the confines of the territorial and symbolic contours which animate daily life for the suffering, if not wholly innocent, victims of this near-permanent conflict.

The key question is whether a political settlement is required before reconciliation is achieved (p. 81). The building blocks of a different approach are considered and evaluated in the light of international precedents and include, *inter alia*, peace education, mutual recognition, empathy, apology, forgiveness to deal with painful memories together with respect for Holocaust and *Nakba* remembrances, before any lasting process of the rehumanising of parties to the conflict can be imagined. Yet this is precisely what the volume seeks, namely, the suppression of fear and the creation of a non-violent dialogue to lay the foundations of trust. A significant contribution to this process are the prescient recommendations offered in the conclusion which range from the acknowledgement of legitimate concerns, the shouldering of responsibility by leaders for the construction of a shared future and the encouragement of active participation by women, youth and religious leaders in the search for reconciliation.

This manifesto for human dignity is elegantly written, providing a moving testimony and astute observations which may be translated into practical proposals regarding the suppression of violence and the forging of trust as the *leitmotif* for envisioning reconciliation.

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Thomas Goodwin on Union with Christ: The Indwelling of the Spirit, Participation in Christ and the Defence of Reformed Soteriology, Jonathan M. Carter, T&T Clark, 2022 (ISBN 978-0-5677-0489-4), x + 278 pp., hb £85

Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) was an important Puritan theologian whose works have been much studied. But Carter's book is the first to examine the 'soteriological scheme' found in Goodwin's perspectives as a 'coherent project' (p. 1). Carter says his is 'the first such theological account', which demonstrates that 'Goodwin's scheme holds union with Christ as occupying a fundamental role in the application of salvation' (p. 2).