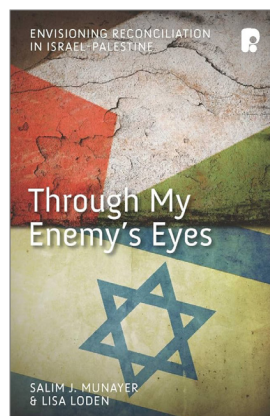


Through My Enemy's Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine

By Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden.
Pasternoster, 2013.

Reviewed by S.T. Antonio

S.T. Antonio (pseudonym), editor-in-chief of Seedbed, serves as a church planter and theological catalyst with Pioneers for the Middle East alongside his wife. He is a graduate of Biola University and a perpetual member of its Torrey Honors College, and he holds MDiv and ThM degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Antonio is author of Insider Church: Eklesia and the Insider Paradigm (2020, William Carey Publishers). He is an American with a Hispanic mother and an Asian wife.



The Israel-Gaza war has set the world on fire. The overwhelming violence and devastation on and subsequent to the October 7 Hamas attack has detonated an atomic bomb of hatred, terror, and bloodshed in the Holy Land, with radioactive fallout impacting all Jews, Muslims, and the watching world.

How should apostolic workers, whether serving in Israel-Palestine, in the greater Middle East, among Muslims, or anywhere in the world, think, talk, and pray about the unfolding war? Amidst conflicting narratives, algorithmically-filtered videos and news, and diverse theologies and cultures, it can be challenging to get a handle on reality, let alone discern the mind of Christ in the eye of this tornado of a conflict.

A decade before the Hamas attack, a Palestinian Christian and an Israeli Messianic Jew co-wrote a book which may illumine the current crisis and how Christ followers ought navigate it. [Dr. Salim Munayer](#), former academic dean of Bethlehem Bible College and current professor at several institutions, is a regional coordinator of the WEA's Peace and Reconciliation Network. He founded [Musalaha](#) (Arabic for "reconciliation"), a ministry aiming to bridge divides between Israelis and Palestinians inside and outside the church. [Lisa Loden](#) is a Messianic Jewish believer who emigrated to Israel in 1974, where she cofounded a Messianic Jewish congregation. She serves as co-chair of the Lausanne Initiative for Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine and co-founder of "In His Image—Women for Change," a group of 9 Israeli and Palestinian women serving in different ministries in Israel-Palestine.

In this remarkable collaborative project, Munayer and Loden, from the well of their personal friendship and partnership, share jewels of knowledge and incisive wisdom on the roots of the conflict and a vision for how the church in the Holy Land—and the broader body of Christ—should move forward.

Summary & Evaluation

Through My Enemy's Eyes focuses on reconciliation, not of Israel and Palestine generally, but of Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians specifically. Much light is shed, however, on the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its theological implications. The book is very helpfully structured around four key issues, each which naturally leads to the next: history, identity, biblical interpretation, and theology.

The genius behind the book, however, is the way the chapters alternate—in each of the above categories—between a Palestinian Christian and an Israeli Messianic Jewish perspective in turn (though both vetted each other's chapters). This provides a kind of stereo experience for the reader, offering a well-rounded and reliable picture of many of the central issues dividing these two believing communities.

The first section begins naturally with history, as the root of the conflict often boils down to conflicting historical narratives. After an exceedingly fair and refreshingly balanced summary of the key facts about the historical origins of the conflict (ch.1), the authors delve into the divergent histories found in Israeli and Palestinian historiography. In one of the most important insights of the book, the authors show how these contrasting historical narratives construct Israeli and Palestinian identities in a way that entrenches the two sides, with each excluding and marginalizing the other (ch.2-3).

This naturally leads to next topic of identity, fleshed out through informative chapters on the wonderfully complex identities of Palestinian Christians (ch.4) and Israeli Messianic Jews (ch.5). Much helpful context and nuance is provided for both, which is critical in a day where many are ignorant of even a basic understanding of who our brothers and sisters in Christ actually are. Each community comprises a minority within Israel-Palestine, and significantly, each see themselves as a community with theological significance and connection to their land. Palestinian Christians identify as heirs of the multi-ethnic church at Pentecost and the millennia-long custodians—in service to the global church—of the holy sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth. Israeli Messianic Jews view themselves as those who have returned both to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as to the land of their forefathers, in fulfillment of God's eschatological promises to his covenant people.

Underlying their identities are the diverse ways each community reads Scripture, the focus of the next two chapters. The most helpful theme of these chapters is the impact of each community's social context and concerns on biblical interpretation. The Arab Christian experience, the Islamic milieu, diverse responses to Zionism, and denominational diversity all shape Palestinian Christian hermeneutics (ch.6). Israeli Messianic Jewish interpretation is likewise shaped by their minority status within Judaism, the history of Christian anti-Semitism, and fundamentalist religious and secular Zionism (ch.7). Neither community reads Scripture monolithically, and the book's focus on this diversity is sometimes encyclopedic and lacking in synthetic analysis. However, the

authors highlight some unifying elements as well, such as the remarkably ecumenical Palestinian [Kairos Document](#), and the common Messianic Jewish desire to recover the Jewish heritage of Scripture as the promised eschatological remnant of Jews who return to their God and their land.

These different biblical perspectives prepare the reader for a chapter summarizing the theological differences between Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews (ch.8), which while redundant at times, helps flesh out further some important sticking points. Several of the differences boil down to a fundamental divide over the new-covenant relevance of old covenant promises to Israel regarding the land and their national “chosenness.” Also, of note is the difference in emphasis (or lack thereof) on a biblical theology of justice for Christ’s church. The chapter powerfully highlights, and explicitly emphasizes, the way that each community’s theology is thoroughly shaped by their social and ethnic concerns, neglects the concerns of the other community, and results in a theology which is often experienced by the other as marginalizing or rejecting its legitimacy and theological significance as a people.

After clearly describing, not solving, these seemingly irreconcilable theological perspectives, the authors conclude the book by outlining a “theology of reconciliation” (ch.9). Readers hoping for a tidy resolution of all the tensions of history, identity, hermeneutics, and theology in the book will be disappointed. What the reader receives, however, is a biblical and practical theology of reconciliation for Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians as members of the one people of God, whose barriers have been broken down at the cross in Christ (Eph. 2:14–17), and who are called to the imperative of seeking justice and reconciliation in face-to-face, vulnerable, and forgiving community. While most of the book alternates between different perspectives, this final chapter offers a unified, prophetic voice, not of armchair theologians but of two battle-scarred reconciler-practitioners—calling Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, and the rest of the global church, to the hard, essential work of reconciliation and justice.

Personal Reflections & Implications

Before moving to the Middle East, I studied at a seminary in a majority-Jewish town. To make ends meet, I coached 6th-grade Jewish boys in basketball, and my wife tutored a Jewish teen. Meanwhile, my seminary studies taught me the profound role Israel plays in God's redemptive plan, the Jewish background of Jesus and the apostles, and the missional importance of Jews coming to know their Messiah. Our hearts longed for Jews to come into the kingdom, and we rejoiced when several of our friends entered into Jewish ministry both inside and outside of Israel.

Simultaneously, God was also knitting in my heart his love for Arab peoples. My own calling and love for Arabs began soon after our own national trauma on September 11, 2001. As our nation was preparing for legitimate military retaliation, I remember a conviction settling in my heart that the ultimate Christian response to Islamic terrorism is not through the sword. It is through the cross, for our ultimate battle is not against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12). Jesus teaches us to overcome evil with good—to pray for, serve, and love Arab peoples that they might be transformed into children of the light. To that end, we began a journey of “becoming like Arabs to the Arabs that we might win Arabs” to Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20).

Our first Arab church in the Middle East—where we learned to speak, fellowship, and worship in Arabic—was led by Christians of Palestinian heritage. It was these precious believers who served, welcomed, and mentored us, in language, culture, and ministry in the Arab Middle East. As we began to incarnationally identify with our Arab friends, we learned to grieve at the generational loss and trauma of our Palestinian brothers and sisters.

Since the October 7 war erupted, we have faced multiple waves of grief at the tens of thousands of Palestinian and Jewish children, women, men, and elderly who have lost lives, limbs, and innocence in the brutal, senseless violence in Israel-Palestine. Our grief has been compounded

by insensitive and inhumane policies and statements—including by those in my American evangelical circles—which have tended to acknowledge only one part of the evil and tragedy and coldly dismiss, justify, or even dehumanize the other.

Though published long before the current war, *Through My Enemy's Eyes* proved to be a refreshing contrast. It gives permission to grieve the loss on all sides, to acknowledge the legitimacy of seemingly irreconcilable narratives and identities, and to remember that we have brothers and sisters in Christ on both sides of this war. As opposed to some Christian voices which quickly rushed to military solutions that sought to overcome evil with evil, *Through My Enemy's Eyes* encouraged my heart with its thoughtful, biblical, and costly focus on the way of Jesus and its implications for reconciling Jews and Palestinians in the body of Christ.

The book excels at sympathetically describing differences, and less so in bridging those into a coherent story that integrates the valid concerns of both sides. Subtle suggestions are sprinkled throughout, and the theology of reconciliation is a critical starting point. However, these deserve greater fleshing out, both in practical terms, and in terms of implications for all the issues discussed previously (history, identity, and theology). With that said, creative new frameworks cannot emerge in toxic, polarized environments, and thus the book provides the necessary groundwork to clear layers of ignorance and create safe spaces within which the global church can write a shared story together. To that end, I believe this book remains urgently relevant today, with at least three implications for the work of the gospel in Israel-Palestine, in the Middle East more broadly, and I would argue, among Muslims anywhere.

First, we must submit all national and cultural narratives and identities—Israeli, Palestinian, American, or other—to critical evaluation and correction in light of the narrative of the gospel. While it is possible to authentically follow Jesus as an Israeli, as a Palestinian—and yes, even as an American—we must be sensitive to the ways in which our cultural and national narratives, and therefore our own identities, are prone to

exclude and marginalize other communities. Whether we are engaging with our own cultural narrative or that of the people group we are serving, we must find ways in our discipleship to critically reevaluate every history and heritage in light of the gospel, which creates the new story and new people within which all nations and cultures find a home.¹

Second, for those seeking to make sense of the dizzying array of biblical and theological questions surrounding Israel, eschatology, and justice, we must allow diverse cultural and theological perspectives to push us back to the Scriptures with fresh eyes in search of new treasures we may be missing. It is important both for us and for those we are discipling to read Scripture in dialogue with believers from other cultural contexts, which helps illumine our blind spots, expand our understanding, and enrich our practice.

Finally, the way forward for real reconciliation is the hard work of friendship, listening, understanding, forgiveness, and justice. The current Gaza war has produced fresh wounds that require healing and reconciliation, not only between Israeli Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, but between Western Christians and Muslims. We may have little control over the broader decisions made by nation-states and political groups. However, by our words and actions, we can bear witness to a different kingdom and a different story, one which acknowledges that all nations have sinned are invited to be reconciled to God and to one another through the suffering & resurrected body of Jesus, thereby becoming his ambassadors of reconciliation to the world.

In the wake of the current crisis, *Through My Enemy's Eyes* is needed now more than ever, not as a comprehensive solution, but as a catalyst for kingdom imagination, a reset button for how we think, pray, and speak about Israel-Palestine.

But more than just read it, we need to live it.

1 Andrew Walls' "indigenizing" and "pilgrim" principles remain one of the best frameworks for making sense of the way diverse cultures are both affirmed and transformed in the people of God (1996, 7-9).

From the Editors: *Want to discuss Through My Enemy's Eyes with others? Join our first ever Seedbed Book Symposium this July. Stay tuned for a future email with details on this special Seedbed event. Purchase your copy and [start reading today](#).*

Table of Contents

1. A Brief History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
2. History and Narrative
3. Israeli-Palestinian Historiography
4. An Introduction to Palestinian Christianity
5. An Introduction to Israeli Messianic Jewish Identity
6. Reading Scripture as a Palestinian Christian
7. Reading Scripture as an Israeli Messianic Jew
8. Theological Disagreements
9. Towards a Theology of Reconciliation

Appendix: Stages of Reconciliation

Bibliography

Walls, Andrew. 1996. "The Gospel and Prisoner and Liberator of Culture." In *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith*, 3–15. New York: Orbis.