

REVIEW

Leonard Grob and John K. Roth, Eds.
*Anguished Hope: Holocaust Scholars
Confront the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*

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This book is a collection of thirteen essays presented over a number of years at a biennial meeting of Holocaust scholars in Oxfordshire, England, at the Wroxton College campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University. This group, composed of 36 members, “is devoted to international, inter-faith / intergenerational, and interdisciplinary dialogue” (p. 6). In this work, their purpose is to provide a moral response to the human tragedy of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a conflict in which both sides see themselves as victims. They situate their work in the post-Holocaust context and are aware of how this conflict fills many with despair. For this reason, the Jewish and Christian “contributors acknowledge (explicitly or tacitly) that traditional paradigms of moral conduct or of theological understandings cannot provide reliable lenses through which to view the Middle East conflict” (p. 4). The editors admit that the contributors are not Middle East specialists. Rather, they draw on their training in religion, literature, and philosophy and “share a focus on the Holocaust as a common point of departure” (p. 5).

The work, edited by a Jew (Grob) and a Christian (Roth), is divided into three sections: in Part I contributors identify “Challenges,” in Part II they note “Risks,” and in Part III, entitled “Possibilities,” they work “toward *tikkun olam*, the ‘repair of the world,’ in the course of setting forth possibilities” (p. 5). Each essay is followed by challenging questions from other participants and then a response by the author. The structure of the book is a model of the dialogical process that engages Jews and Christians.

There are five essays in Part I. In the first, “Moral Visions in Conflict: Israeli and Palestinian Ethics,” Peter J. Haas, a Reform rabbi, reflects upon “the monolithic narrative constructed by the Nazis during the 1930s and 1940s,” in which Aryans were the only true humans and Jews were sub-humans (p. 9). That type of demonizing rhetoric often characterizes grand narratives about “the Israelis” (or “the Jews” or “the West”) and about “the Palestinians” (or “the Arabs” or “the Muslims”). Until each side’s narrative makes room for “the other,” there will be no peace. John K. Roth, a Presbyterian, in “Duped by Morality? Defusing Minefields in the Israeli-Palestinian Struggle,” discusses the divestment and boycott proposals made by the Presbyterian Church (USA). He argues that proponents forget the Jewish memory of boycotts preceding the Holocaust. Instead of divestment and boycotts, he proposes a prophetic action of investment in Israeli and Palestinian projects that contribute to peace. David Blumenthal, in “Beware of Your Beliefs,” encourages fellow Jews to question some common Western beliefs, such as widespread “faith in reason” and openness to self-criticism, in light of implacable Muslim opposition to Israel. He concludes “that almost all Palestinians are not partners for real peace. . .” (p. 66). One of the most challenging essays is Leonard Grob’s “‘Forgetting’ the Holocaust: Ethical Dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” He says that an exclusive focus on ensuring that “Never again will

Jewish blood...be shed with impunity,” while a vital lesson, has promoted a Jewish culture of victimhood that prevents Israel from taking the risks necessary for peace (p. 75). Britta Frede-Wenger, a German Catholic, in “Dimensions of Responsibility: A German Voice on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in the Post-Shoah Era,” argues that Germans must move from feelings of guilt to those of responsibility for the prosecution of the remaining war criminals, take particular responsibility for the safety and well-being of the Jewish people, and keep alive the memory of the Shoah.

Part II contains four essays on the risks to be taken in response to the types of challenges posed in Part I. Margaret Brearley, an Anglican, in her essay “National Socialism, Israel, and Jewish / Arab Palestinian History: Myths and Realities,” challenges the assertion that Zionism equals Nazism while stressing that Israel must take risks for peacemaking. David Patterson, in “Toward a Post-Holocaust Jewish Understanding of the Jewish State and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” states that the land of Israel and covenant are inseparable in Judaism. As the locus of divine revelation, for Jews that land is holier than all other lands. Didier Pollefeyt, a Belgian Catholic theologian, contributed “Between a Dangerous Memory and a Memory in Danger: The Israeli-Palestinian Struggle from a Christian Post-Holocaust Perspective.” Although he acknowledges “the *historical* and *theological* legitimacy of the claims of the Jewish people on the *Land* of Israel,” he argues not for a two-state solution but a bi-national, one-state solution (p. 136; emphasis in original). However, he does not consider the implications of this approach, and the possibility that a Jewish state would be voted out of existence and “Israel” would become another Arab Muslim state in the Middle East. Myrna Goldenberg, in “The Middle East Conflict, the Responsibility of History and Memory, and the American Jew,” considers whether there should be limits on American Jews’ criticisms of Israel and also encourages them to actively support efforts to reach a two-state solution.

Part III contains four essays on “Possibilities” and invites the reader to consider creative approaches to the conflict. Christian theologian and Methodist minister Henry F. Knight, in “Beyond Conquest: Post-Shoah Christian Anguish and the Israeli-Palestinian Dilemma,” cautions against the dangers of supersessionism and exclusivist claims of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. He argues that the hospitality shown even by the rival siblings of Genesis offers a possible model to Israelis and Palestinians for sharing blessings and land. In the essay, “The Holocaust, Israel, and the Future of Jewish-Christian Relations in the United States,” the African-American Christian Hubert Locke recognizes that for Jews antisemitism is “the most basic” issue in the conflict (p. 198). However, he argues that it is not “a special case in the interminable list of racial hatreds that have marked and marred Western societies virtually since their inception” (p. 202). Locke’s views largely reflect his African American identity, with less attention to the centrality of antisemitism in 2,000 years of Christian history. He also does not believe Jewish existence is dependent on the survival of Israel since Jews have survived 2,000 years without a state. The Jewish philosopher, Amy H. Shapiro, in “Critical Thinking and Self-Identity: Educating for Peace between Israelis and Palestinians,” proposes a new model for developing critical thinking among Israelis and Palestinians, instead of education geared toward conflict resolution or peaceful co-existence. The last essay by Rachel N. Baum, “After the Peace: The Moral Responsibility of Survival,” is the most challenging and creative in this entire collection. Baum, reviewing Jewish history, and in particular the Exodus / Passover and the establishment of Israel after the Shoah, writes that “we [Jews] were victims, we were victimizers...*but we are no longer*” (p. 228). This, she says, holds true for Arabs as well. At the center of suffering need not be victimization but rather redemption. The emotional response to these experiences should not be sympathy but compassion, since both peoples were in some sense “*slaves and because we are not now, we must pursue justice*” (p. 226). She imagines a time in the future when there is peace between Israelis and Palestinians. This is a fitting conclusion and climax to this collection.

This valuable collection of essays needs to be part of the on-going dialogue of the future between Jews and Christians in a post-Holocaust world. Not every essay is equally useful in the dialogue, but all will elicit a vigorous response from the reader. Summaries of each essay at the beginning of each section will help the reader. This book should be required reading for those engaged in Holocaust studies as well as those interested in Middle East peace.