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A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL OREN

THE SEVENTH DAY & COUNTING:
THE ELUSIVE PEACE OF THE SIX-DAY WAR
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A POPE & A PRESIDENT:
JOHN PAUL II, RONALD REAGAN, & THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM
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ALSO: ROBERT KAUFMAN BACKS THOMISTIC OFFENSE • CHRISTOPHER KOLAKOWSKI REMEMBERS BATAAN • C.S. LEWIS CELEBRATES THE 1ST SERVANT • ALAN DOWD INTERROGATES AMERICAN INTERVENTION • MARK TOOLEY ON AMERICAN INTERESTS • GENERAL MACARTHUR CONSTRUCTS A MAN • MARK COPPENGER OFFERS AIDE TO THOSE SNOWED-IN • GEORGE ELIOT LAUDS A SPOT OF NATIVE LAND & ROBERT NICHOLSON PUTS SIX DAYS IN PROPER CONTEXT

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Army Chief Chaplain Rabbi Shlomo Goren, surrounded by Israeli Defense Force soldiers of the Paratroop Brigade, blows the shofar in front of the Kotel ha-Ma'aravi, or Western Wall, during the Six-Day War, June 7, 1967. Built by Herod the Great, the Kotel is a segment of a much longer, ancient, limestone retaining wall that encased the hill known as the Temple Mount. Under the British Mandate of Palestine, the blowing of the shofar at the Kotel was criminalized, and from 1948-1967, when the Old City of Jerusalem was controlled by Jordan, Jews were denied access to the Wall entirely. Today, in accordance to agreements with Muslim authorities, the Kotel is the holiest place on earth where Jews are allowed to pray. Photo Credit: David Rubinger, Government Press Office.

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ROBERT NICHOLSON

JUSTICE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A feature article in a May 2017 issue of *The Economist* opens its discussion of the Six-Day War with a clever play on the Genesis narrative:

In the beginning they destroyed Egypt's air force on the ground and knocked out the planes of Jordan, Iraq and Syria. That was Monday. Then they broke Egypt's massive defences in Sinai. That was Tuesday. Next, they took the old city of Jerusalem and prayed. That was Wednesday.

The author, Anton La Guardia, ends the montage a few lines later: "And on the seventh day the soldiers of Israel rested."

La Guardia's historically-playful opening belies a complete indifference to actual history. Careful readers will note that he begins his story mid-sentence with no mention of the Arab aggression that preceded the war, even though it is only in the context of that aggression that the war could have happened or, in retrospect, can even make sense. To read La Guardia is to encounter Jews resolving *ex nihilo* to bomb other people's planes and take other people's cities for no other reason than to pray in Jerusalem. That the Six-Day War was a response to an abiding and active Arab plan to destroy the young Jewish state goes entirely unstated.

The pattern continues. In regard to Israel's founding, La Guardia writes, "In the war of 1947-48, when Israel was established, Palestinians fled or were pushed out en masse. Hundreds of villages were destroyed." Yet the most important fact about the 1948 Arab-Israeli War—what Israelis call the War of Independence and Arabs call the *Nakba*, or catastrophe—is that *Arab armies attacked Israel* upon Israel's declaration of statehood, not the other way around. It was the Arab invasion, not any policy of Israel, that proximately caused the Palestinian refugee crisis.

Ahistorical analysis of any event tends to be inaccurate and dishonest. But it's not unusual. In a June 2017 edition of *The New Yorker*, Palestinian activist Yousef Munayyer argues that a classic Six-Day War photograph of three Israeli soldiers standing by the Western Wall marks the moment of "the arrival of

Zionist vision...into new territory," a vision that had already "denied equal treatment under the law to non-Jews, denied return to Palestinian refugees, and physically destroyed hundreds of Palestinian villages that dotted the landscape" in the pre-1967 borders of Israel. With the Six-Day War, Munayyer avers, the Zionists simply pushed their colonial enterprise deeper into historic Palestine.

What Munayyer doesn't tell his readers is that Israel had no intention of capturing Jerusalem, much less the West Bank, and begged the king of Jordan to stay out of the fight. For reasons that are still unclear, King Hussein began shelling the civilians of Jerusalem anyway. Israel responded, Israel won, and "the Zionist vision" reluctantly assumed the burden of ruling a local Arab population that had previously been occupied, and abandoned, by Jordan.

A world of difference a little context makes.

THE VIRUS OF AHISTORICISM would be dangerous enough if it were only confined to pundits. But the same disease has gripped the American church, especially those segments that are focused on the promotion of social justice.

Who has not encountered these zealous "ambassadors of reconciliation" who leap from issue to issue, injustice to injustice, driven by a Christ-like concern for the downtrodden but afflicted by a raging case of presentism? These peacemakers have little interest in how a given injustice came to be because the task of acquiring such knowledge would be so arduous as to impair their ability to parachute in and out of conflict zones with one-size-fits-all solutions. What matters is *today*: what I see, what I feel, what God is telling me. History is supplanted by sentiment, or—to hear them tell it—the urging of the Holy Spirit.

This approach was affirmed in a recent Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking seminar held at a popular US megachurch in Chicago. Teaching a rapt audience how to facilitate reconciliation between Jews and Arabs, the speaker said, "Both sides have their own experiences of the same events. At some point it really doesn't matter who started it if we want to play the role of the peacemaker."

That Christians would approach the world this way is bizarre. Many writers over the centuries have pointed out that Christians, like their Jewish forebears, are perhaps the most historically-minded of all people. "Christianity...is essentially a historical religion," wrote Marc Bloch in his seminal *The Historian's Craft*, "that is, whose prime dogmas are based on events." The journey of Abraham out of Ur, the covenantal ceremony between God and Israel at Sinai, the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah—these are moments that took place in real time as witnessed by real people.

For the Christian, transcendent meaning can only be found in an appreciation of history. "In contrast to ahistorical cultures," Reinhold Niebuhr wrote in his book *Faith and History*, "Biblical faith affirms the potential meaning of life in history. It is in history, and not in a flight from history, that the divine power which bears and completes history is revealed." God chose to embed us in time and gave us memory to make sense of it. Freedom, choice, causality, consequences—these are lessons endlessly reiterated throughout special and general revelation. "Don't be deceived," Paul told the believers in Galatia, "God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows he will also reap." It is this principle of sowing and reaping—human choice subjugated to the judgment of God—that supplies meaning both within and beyond the framework of history.

In supplying meaning, history also supplies truth; for meaning and truth are one. Here we find the wisdom, or *chokmah*, that was so eloquently praised by Solomon as the greatest treasure of all—so valuable that it even surpasses justice in the kingdom of God. "Justice is of a lower order than truth," wrote John Lukacs in *At the End of an Age*, "and untruth is lower than injustice." He continued:

At the same time there hangs over the world an enormous and spreading dark cloud cover of untruths... And amid this often suffocating discrepancy, which is replete with the gravest of potential dangers, few are aware that the indiscriminate pursuit of justice may turn to insane lengths—indeed, that it may lay the world to waste.

The pursuit of justice is commanded by Scripture, but it cannot be based on a subjective approach to suffering. If it could, every case would be decided in favor of the one who weeps the loudest. True justice begins with an objective analysis of the facts. No court can award judgment before hearing what actually happened.

Love of justice presumes a love of truth, for justice without truth is a contradiction in terms. And love, to the extent it matters in the procurement of justice, is only effective when purified by truth.

LA GUARDIA ENDS HIS PIECE with reference to the ambiguous legal and political status of the West

Bank and Gaza. "Fifty years after 1967, it has become too easy for Israel to forget that, just a short drive away, the grinding occupation of Palestinians has become all but permanent." Here *La Guardia* touches on one of the most vexing issues of the conflict, subtly implying that Israel is to blame for the situation and therefore bears the burden for fixing it.

Following the logic of his article, that seems right. Following the logic of history, that seems wrong. Following the logic of the peacemaking seminar, it doesn't really matter: whoever seems to be suffering the most right now deserves compensation from the other.

Pursuing justice is noble, but this kind of indiscriminate pursuit may indeed lay the world to waste. Christians wading into the emotionally-complex world of Middle Eastern culture and conflict cannot afford to be so unmoored from the past. They must maintain a firm grip on history or otherwise be swept away.

Knowing the past doesn't mean wielding it like a weapon. Israel should work with Arab states and the Palestinian people to reach a settlement regardless of who started the Six-Day War—and Israel does. But mediation of that settlement

will be far more effective when mediators understand whom the parties are, how they got here, who has made offers for peace, and who has rejected them. Here that means recognizing the enormous lengths to which Israel has gone and the less-than-equal response from the other side.

CAUSALITY MATTERS. CONTEXT MATTERS. Geography, culture, history—they all matter. The greatest flaw of US engagement in the Middle East is the lack of cultural and historical context. Our love of the universal blinds us in a region built on the particular.

Only when our policymakers—and, in the case of the church, our peacemakers—are informed by a deep understanding of history and causality will our policies, and our ministries, truly begin to bear the fruit of justice. **P**

Robert Nicholson is the executive director of the Philos Project, and co-publisher of *Providence*.



The mouths of the guns of eight Arab countries: Sudan, Algeria, United Arab Republic, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. *Al Jarida*, Beirut, May 31, 1967.