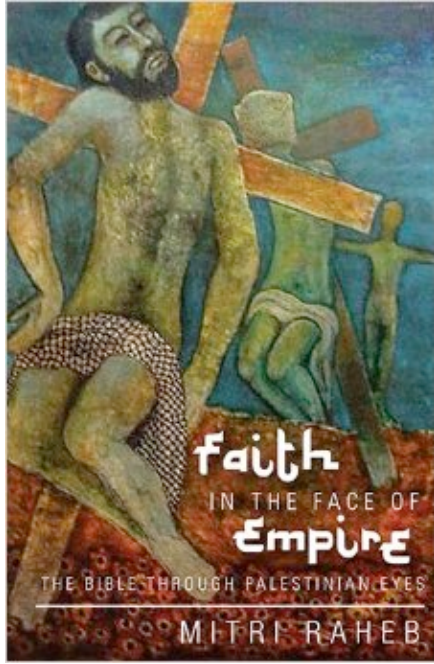


Faith in the Face of Empire

The Bible through Palestinian Eyes

Mitri Raheb



In *Faith in the Face of Empire* Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Christian pastor, presents a new reading of the Bible from the perspective of the “people of Palestine.” He shows how the history of Palestine, ancient and modern, is one of diverse and unique contexts and yet recurring patterns. Using biblical narrative he introduces a wide lens for viewing that history.

This "sacred" story is a response to the "secular" history of occupation by various empires, from the Babylonians to the British to the state of Israel. Throughout this history the question of God remains crucial, Christian understanding remains relevant, and the spiritual dimension of utmost importance.

Raheb spells out Jesus’ gospel in relation to the Roman empire of his time, and the biblical values relevant for the Middle East—then and now. This approach sheds a new light on the biblical texts within the context of imperial domination, and it introduces a new perspective and culture for a “New Middle East.”

Faith in the Face of Empire is an essential read for anyone who desires new insight into scripture, seeks a re-orientation of geopolitical perspective, and maintains hope for justice for Palestinians.

—**Dr. Peter Makari**, Executive for the Middle East and Europe in Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and author of *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*

Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes

Mitri Raheb

Publisher: Orbis Books

Specs: 160 pages, paperback

ISBN-13: 978-1626980655

ISBN-10: 1626980659

Price: USD20.00

Publication Date: February 10, 2014

For review copies (for media), exam copies (for potential classroom use) or to interview the author please e-mail Bob Todd at bt@bobtoddpublicity.com or call (612) 910-1468

About the Author

Born in Bethlehem, the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb is a powerful advocate for peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict. He is the President of Dar al-Kalima University College in Bethlehem (www.daralkalima.edu.ps), as well as the president of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. He serves as the Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, Palestine.

The most widely published Palestinian theologian to date, Dr. Raheb is the author of several books translated into more than 10 languages. On a Regional Middle Eastern level Dr. Raheb, as the President of Diyar Consortium (www.diyar.ps), has been leading several civil society research initiatives on Religion & State and the contribution of Palestinian Christians to society. He co-founded several organizations and serves on a number of national, regional and international boards.

The work of Dr. Raheb has received wide media attention, including major international media outlets and networks including CBS, HBO, CNN, ABC, BBC, ARD, ZDF, DW, BR, ORF, *Premiere*, *Raiuno*, *Stern*, *The Economist*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and *Newsweek*. There is a strong presence on the Web, Facebook and YouTube.

An internationally-acclaimed multi-lingual author, Dr. Raheb is a keynote speaker at international conventions, conferences and large events from Australia to Canada, and from South Africa to Scandinavia. His writings and work have received several international awards, including the German Media Award that is usually given to heads of states (including President Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela, King Hussein of Jordan, and other special celebrities); the Aachener Peace Prize; the International Mohammad Nafi Tschleibi Award; the Wittenberg Award; and several others.

Mitri Raheb and his wife Najwa have two daughters, Dana and Tala

Organizations co-founded by Mitri Raheb

Diyar	www.diyar.ps
Dar al-Kalima College	www.daralkalima.edu.ps
Bright stars of Bethlehem	www.brightstarsbethlehem.org
Foerdderverein Dar al-Kalima	www.foerdderverein-bethlehem.de
Bethlehems Venner	www.bethlehem-venner.dk
DINO	www.dino-muenster.de

Previous Books

Bethlehem Besieged (Fortress Press, 2004) received the Spirituality and Health Award for being one of the 50 best spiritual books published in 2004 in the USA. *I Am a Palestinian Christian* (Fortress Press, 1995) is a landmark work in interfaith and intercultural communication.

Q & A with the Author

Tell us something about the origins of *Faith in the Face of Empire*. How did you come to write it? Who do you hope will read it?

This discovery did not come to light in an academic setting somewhere in the West, and it was not the outcome of a study I undertook in a research center, but was the gradual accumulation of knowledge I gained “on the field” by observing the movements and processes that were taking place in Palestine over a prolonged period. In short, I was observing, analyzing and trying to understand what was happening around me. I have been observing the geo-political and socio-religious field in Palestine daily for the last twenty-five years.

I am also a pastor, who has to walk to the pulpit Sunday after Sunday to “translate” scripture to those sitting in the pews. And as a pastor I refuse to separate the reality of this world from the reality of the Bible by preaching a “cheap gospel” that neither challenges reality nor is challenged by it. This particular challenge, a personal one, an ongoing one, and a deeply serious one is the environment in which I made this discovery.

Living the struggle of Palestine, as a Christian who wrestles daily with scripture, and being an academician, who seeks to analyze and understand what is going on in and around oneself, has provided me with a unique environment and setting for writing this book. The parameters for this experiment are living on Palestinian soil, under Israeli occupation, as a Christian. This book is the attempt to document this experiment so that the findings will not be lost, but will be available for a wider audience to build upon.

What are the “empires” past and present that you refer to?

The line of empires that occupied Palestine started with the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greek, Roman, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans, and British, to name the main ones ending with Israel as a colonial power.

Why is it so important to understand both Biblical and geo-political history when addressing the situation in the Middle East?

The Bible has a context: it is a Middle Easterner book. It deals with real issues of real people in real time. Unfortunately, the Bible was so much spiritualized that it lost its original flavor. It’s high time to rediscover the original setting of the Bible and to bring it into a dialogue with the current context of Palestine. In fact, my point is that religions developed as the power to challenge the prevailing empires.

You write (p 84) “If Israelis and Palestinians are frank with themselves, they need to admit that the state project they respectively worked so hard to achieve for the last sixty years or so has failed”? What does this mean in light of the Secy of State John Kerry’s current diplomatic initiative?

Secretary of State Kerry is serious in wanting to strike a deal between the Israeli and the Palestinians towards a two-states solution. He is well aware that this is the last chance for such a solution to fly. I hope he will succeed, but unless both Israeli and Palestinians are ready to “rethink” their strategies and assumptions, a deal will not be possible.

In your opinion, what is the greatest danger facing Christians in the birthplace of Christianity? What is their greatest hope?

The greatest danger facing the Christian community in the Holy Land is the continuous instability that forces them to leave their homeland and to emigrate somewhere else. They hope for peace with justice and to live in a country where the human rights are protected and where liberties are honored and where a civil society is strong and pluralism is valued.

Your final chapter, “The Spirit”, opens with this line: In the Middle East there is too much religion and too little spirituality (p 109) Why do you say this?

If you look at the Middle East you will see that religious groups are in demand, because of the hopelessness many see around them. In the streets of Jerusalem you will see more Orthodox Jews, and in the Arab world you see more veiled women and men with beards, and yet the violence is on the increase. The region is losing its core values, its human values and its soul. The Middle East needs a new spirit, a new vision and a new hope. This is what the last chapter of the book is about.

From the Introduction

Jesus was a Middle Eastern Palestinian Jew. If he were to travel through Western countries today, he would be “randomly” pulled aside and his person and papers would be checked. The Bible is a Middle Eastern book. It is a product of that region with all of its complexities. While it might seem that I am stating the obvious, I firmly believe that this notion has not been given enough attention. In fact and in spite of being a Middle Easterner, I have come to discover the importance of the geo-politics of the region only in the last ten years. I began to sense that it was not merely by chance that the three monotheistic religions and their sacred scriptures, for good or for bad, hailed from the same region. The starting point for this approach, as well as for this book, is geo-politics. For me, as a Palestinian Christian, the realization of this fact made for a fascinating discovery.

This discovery did not come to light in an academic setting somewhere in the West, and it was not the outcome of a study I undertook in a research center. It was, instead, the gradual accumulation of knowledge I gained “in the field” by observing the movements and processes occurring in Palestine over a prolonged period. In short, I was observing, analyzing, and trying to understand what was happening around me. In that sense this book is not “less scientific” for not having been developed in a Western academic setting with Western methodology; I would argue that it is “more scientific” because it is based on lengthy and measured observation on the ground in Palestine. Observation is the mother of science. Observation helps us identify patterns or logical facts even if we feel that things are utterly illogical and unpredictable. I have been observing the geo-political and socio-religious fields in Palestine daily for the last twenty years. But I am also a pastor; I have to walk to the pulpit Sunday after Sunday to “translate” scripture to those sitting in the pews. And as a pastor I refuse to separate the reality of this world from the reality of the Bible by preaching a “cheap gospel” that neither challenges reality nor is challenged by it. This particular challenge, which is personal, ongoing, and deeply serious, is the environment in which I made this discovery.

What I present here is a theology from and for the Palestinian context. But again, this should not undermine the outcome, or question its seriousness. On the contrary, I believe that living the struggle of Palestine, as a Christian who wrestles daily with scripture, and as an academician, who seeks to analyze and understand what is going on around me, has provided me with a unique environment and setting for such a discovery. The parameters for this experiment are living on Palestinian soil, under Israeli occupation, as a Christian. This book is my attempt to document this experience so that the findings will not be lost but will be available for a wider audience to build upon. The setting of this experiment is highly singular; it might not be possible to replicate it in the future.

The stark reality of the yearly decreasing percentage of Christians in Israel-Palestine and throughout the Middle East will remove an important component—the Christian element—of the setting for this book. My generation might be the last in Palestine to struggle with scripture and its meaning in its original context of permanent occupation.

When I went to Yale Divinity School in June 2012 to write this book, I thought I knew how it would look. My intention was to introduce a new theory in biblical hermeneutics, one that I have been developing for almost a decade. I wanted it to be an academic work that would speak mainly to theologians and students of theology in a language with which they are familiar. Yet, after a week of discerning, I decided that this is not who I am. Instead of writing a book about methodologies and fundamentals that would be understood only by experts in theology, I opted to write a popular book that would be accessible to laypeople who are looking for the Bible to make sense, but also for those who are interested in the Middle East in general and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular, as well as the millions of others who feel the heat of the empire in their daily struggle. Instead of discussing the theory of hermeneutics, I decided to lay out how the actual reading of the Bible in the Middle East today might, could, and should look.