

**Theology 352.01** -- Fall Term, 2011 – Gasson 201, Thursdays, 2:00-4:25 P.M.

**ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS: TWO PEOPLES, THREE FAITHS.**

**Religion and Ethnicity in the Middle Eastern Conflict.**

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.

*Office Hours:* I will regularly be either in my office, room 312V in the new Campanella Way building, or more likely at St. Mary's Hall mornings from 9:00 to 12:00 any class day. You will find me there a lot of other times as well and are welcome whenever you find me. You can check with me by phone, 552-8215, which rings both in that office and in my room at St. Mary's Hall, to find which of them I'm at.

When you don't find me there, you will often find me at 617-**325-1300** (St. Theresa's Rectory in West Roxbury), and we can set a time for an appointment. Always, please, leave me a number to get back to you.

**Course description:**

Context changes for this course, as it has in other years. I began offering it several years ago for two basic and complementary reasons.

The first is that I have actually done a great deal of direct mediation in the Middle Eastern conflict over a number of years and feel some responsibility to teach about it and open the work to the critique of academic colleagues. I had been in close contact with many principal figures, Israeli, Palestinian and in U.S. administrations. In years from 1993 to 2001 I was very close to the negotiation process, which had only seriously begun with the Madrid Conference of 1991 and which appeared to die with the accession of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister in Israel after the disappointments of the Camp David/Taba negotiations in 2000 and 2001. Through the various stages of stale mate since then I have still kept in close touch with all the participants.

The second is that I have become deeply interested in issues of identity, and the alternative responses to it: whether people are inclined to reach out to those outside their identity circle or to exclude them and see it as unwelcome activity even to speak to them. Ethnic or national identities have been my study for as long as I have worked with peoples in conflict. Curiously, since I have always approached these matters from an ultimately theological perspective, it is only in recent years that I have begun a close analysis of the ways religion has functioned as a fomenter of exclusion and of violent conflict (basically when it has been used for some agenda basically different from its own, such as nationalism, ethnic hostility or revenge), and the extent to which faiths and religions can offer resources for the healing of conflict.

For the earlier years that I gave this course I simply followed the history of the conflict with an eye particularly for these elements. In 2000, negotiations for a political resolution seemed to enter a critical stage. The creation of a recognized Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, determination of the borders of these two states, agreement

on jurisdiction over Jerusalem and particularly over its inner core, the walled Old City, and the return or due compensation for Palestinian refugees, all the major “final status” issues, appeared to be at hand.

But that year’s negotiating process ended in disaster: bitter, escalating partisan fighting throughout what came to be called the Second, or Al-Aqsa, Intifadah. With the death of Arafat, corruption in the Palestinian Authority became an issue, leading to the choice of a majority of Hamas candidates in the January 25<sup>th</sup> election of 2006, and the decision of the United States and Israel to starve their government out. My own book, *Negotiating Outside the Law: Why Camp David Failed*, published in 2004, deals with the negotiating part of this development, but we now have to consider the issues raised by the Hamas government as well.

For as long as the negotiating process seemed at the center of developments, I have concentrated the course on three nodal periods: **1948**, which saw the establishment of the Israeli state and the exile of half the Palestinian population; **1967**, when all the remaining territory of historic Palestine came under Israeli control, **and the period of negotiation, now in suspension but still the main concern, that began with the Madrid Conference of 1991**. But in the most recent years I have found myself returning to the stage I had reached in my concentrated dialogue with Yasser Arafat beginning in 1985, but this time with the new Palestinian power of Hamas, writing regularly to Khalid Mish’al since the January 2006 election, meeting him and his Political Bureau colleagues for a lengthy discussion, in the company of Rev. Jesse Jackson, in August 2006.

Most people believed, with the election of Barack Obama as President of the U.S., that things would change substantially and the United States would be less hesitant to do things that would lead to reconciliation for both Israelis and Palestinians. Arabs found his first actions and his address to the world’s Muslims in Cairo promised to reverse the adverse stereotyping they had so long been exposed to. Israelis were either hopeful for the peace or apprehensive about Obama’s approach to Muslims according to where they stood politically. Obama’s initial stance, calling for the suspension of settlement building in the occupied areas was met by open defiance from a radically Right-wing government in Israel, a development that would have been impossible for an Israeli government had not Obama folded and backed off his demands. Since then we have seen vacillating and weak response from the U.S. government, a conceding of the initiative to the primary proponents of Israeli expansion and prohibition of any criticism of Israeli policy. Whether this will continue to be the case is uncertain, given the initial inclinations of President Obama and his Administration to work for a solution of the area problems.

Leaders of the U.S. military establishment have recently begun to say publicly what they have long believed in private, that the paralysis in relations between Israel and Palestinians has come to endanger the United States quite seriously, whether in its war efforts in Iraq or Afghanistan or in its relations with any of the other regional countries.

**Requirements:**

Rather than a mid-term exam, I will require the review of one of the major books on the negotiating process, due Thursday, October 27, a term paper (2,000 words approx.) and a final exam (in class). The paper will count for 40% of the grade, the book review and the exam each 30%.

I will also enforce an attendance requirement. Unexcused absences will be reflected in the grade, and any consistent pattern of non-attendance will be reason to require that you drop the course.

**Readings:**

Mark Braverman, *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land*, Synergy Books, 2010.

Raymond Helmick, S.J., *Negotiating Outside the Law: Why Camp David Failed*, Pluto Press, London, 2004.

Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, Boston, Beacon Press, 2006.

Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, London and New York: Oneworld, 2006. [ISBN 1-85168-467-0](https://www.isbn-international.org/view/title/1851684670)

Those are the basic required course books. I've always had to have my own three-volume Course-Pak printed up in other years, but this year it is all on your Blackboard Vista, which saves a good bit of expense. I've set out longer lists in other years, but felt the list was getting too long and expensive. Two books I specially recommend, as most helpful for understanding the background situation.

Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Charles M. Sennott, *The Body and the Blood: The Holy Land at the Start of a New Millennium; A Reporter's Journey*, Public Affairs (Perseus), 2001.

I've thought, each of the last few years, of making up a list of other recommended books, but the bibliography is nearly infinite on this subject, and I am going to give special place to the series of books on the negotiating process. For these, I will give you a separate list, containing thumb-nail sketches of what each book offers, and you will have your choice among them for the book review due October 27. There are too many of them to ask that you read them all, and my idea is that, choosing among them, you will talk about them among yourselves and so all get familiar with the whole set.

I should at least mention the major books on 1948. The great Palestinian historian of it is Walid Khalidi, now many years at Harvard, who has published many books on the subject, including a major documentation of what led up to 1948, *From Haven to Conquest* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987), and writes regularly in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, of which he was the original editor. I leave it to you to check him out in the library catalogues and in the indices of that Journal. Khalidi's writings contrasted sharply with a standardized Israeli version of the flight of the Palestinians and was generally dismissed by Israeli historians until Benny Morris published, in 1994, *1948 and After* (Clarendon Press, Oxford).

Morris validated a view of the Israeli role in forcing the flight of the Palestinians that led to the emergence, in Israel, of a school of the "New Historians" who re-examined the entire history of 1948 and the subsequent wars between Israel and its neighbors, eventually succeeding so much that the history textbooks in Israeli schools were revised to reflect their thinking. But in more recent years, since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa *intifadah* late in 2000, Morris has soured from his earlier recognition of Palestinian rights. He now takes the position, in a new edition of the earlier work, that while 1948 was an actual example of ethnic cleansing, it was nevertheless exactly the right thing to do, and the Israeli state should now finish the job and drive all the rest of the Palestinians out. This coincides with the desires of the Israeli far Right Wing. He has now alienated the Israeli Left as much as he had earlier alienated the Israeli Right, and is now somewhat of a pariah among Israeli historians. Ilan Pappé takes quite another view

### **Class Calendar:**

- Thurs., Sept. 8                      For an opening class, we should look at the current situation.
- Since we will be concentrating especially on the negotiation stage, with all its frustrations, I would like everyone to get right into my own book, *Negotiating Outside the Law: Why Camp David Failed*.
- Thurs., Sept. 15                      **1948: what happened to the Palestinians.** Jewish, Arab and outside perceptions. How it was described by Palestinians. Shift in Israeli perception from effective denial to the position of the "New Historians." A good Palestinian reference is Walid Khalidi, as mentioned above. You will also find an invaluable account of the half-century before 1948, when the options for that period were determined by actions and alignments, in Rashid Khalidi's book, *The Iron Cage* and Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. (Required reading. I have put these required reading books up near the beginning of the course. You have more time than that to read them and need not be rushed, but you should have a preliminary sense of what each contains as we come to these classes.)

- Thurs., Sept. 22      The religions: Jewish, Christian, Muslim. This seems the right time to bring these into the discussion, as by the time of the Second World War the attitudes within the three religious communities over these issues had pretty well established themselves, not that they were impervious to modification afterwards. What had each of these religious faiths to offer that was pertinent to the situation? How far were the popularly established attitudes consonant with the genuine teachings of the respective faiths? Rabbi Marc Gopin's *Holy War, Holy Peace* would be helpful here.
- Like myself, Marc holds that, if we are to get to the peace, we have to deal with those who appear most troublesome in the situation, and that the religious communities, so entrenched in the Right-Wing positions of their respective sides and so excluded from the "peace process" by its more secular participants, are particularly important to it. This is what has had him paying close attention to the religious settler movement, and me both to them and to Hamas.
- Also very important is Mark Braverman's *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land*, (required reading). This is a highly theological book, as is right for this class. Mark examines the sense of special entitlement felt by Jews and accepted too readily by many Christians, which he finds ultimately damaging to Jewish faith and to the integrity of Israel.
- Thurs., Sept. 29      The intensely religious turn that relations between the two peoples have taken since September 28, 2000, the day that Ariel Sharon visited the platform known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary (Haram al-Sharif), accompanied by 1000 armed men.
- Contrasting narratives held by Israelis and Palestinians about that day, about the meaning of the violence that has erupted since then, and the actual intentions of both sides. This includes the 2006 invasion of Lebanon and the 2008-9 incursion into the Gaza Strip.
- Thurs., Oct. 6      Progress of the Al-Aqsa Intifadah, the death of Arafat, Sharon's Unilateral Disengagement program for Gaza and the West Bank, his disappearance from the stage after forming his Kadima Party, and Prime Minister Olmert's course to the debacle in Lebanon.
- Thurs., Oct. 13      If you are not well into one of the books on the negotiating process set for review by Thursday, October 27<sup>th</sup> you had better get into it.

Second World War, the *Shoah* and the subsequent traumatized consciousness of Jews and Israelis; war action in the Middle East; *aliyah* immigration, blockade running, growing conflict; 1947 Partition Resolution, up to the declaration of the State of Israel. Our interest will be particularly in the legal consequences of 1948, as they affect the negotiating process of the present. We will be looking at the various documents that bear on those legal consequences, with reference to this stage and subsequently to the aftermath of the Six-Day War of 1967.

Thurs., Oct. 20

**1967: Israeli capture of all the remaining territory of historic Palestine**, as well as further territory taken from Egypt and Syria.

To deal with this we will first have to look at the early development of the Israeli State, its alliances first with Britain and France, the invasion of Egypt in 1956 and the demand from the United States for return of all territory captured in that war. We will then take up the background to the 1967 war, with the rival interpretations by Israeli and Arab historians, the course of the fighting and capture of territories, world reaction and the resulting strong American alliance with Israel

Thurs., Oct. 27

**Book Reviews due** by this day. We will also talk of the **requirements for the Term paper.**

**Effect of 1967 on the Arab and Muslim worlds.** This could take up the whole class, but if possible I will get on to the remaining matters.

Arrival of Likud in government in 1977 election. **Expansion of settlements.** 1978 and 1982 invasions of Lebanon. 1985 PLO-Jordanian peace initiative. 1987 *Intifadah*. My own Course-Pak papers are presupposed for this class.

Thurs., Nov. 3

**Reaching the U.S.-PLO dialogue.** The full first volume of my Course-Pak papers deals with this process.

Thurs., Nov. 10

The Gulf War, Madrid Conference, **Oslo agreement.** Volume 2, Part I of my own Course-Pak papers will accompany discussion of these topics. The two Rabin years: painful knitting together of the two peoples.

Thurs., Nov. 17

The Netanyahu years: effort to rescind the Oslo recognition of the Palestinians' legitimacy as a people. Resultant election of Ehud Barak as Prime Minister with a strong

commitment to reaching a peace settlement, leading to the negotiations of 2000.

- Thurs., Nov. 24      **Thanksgiving Day.** No class.
- Thurs., Dec.1      The Camp David and Taba negotiations: how near did they get? The breakdown into hostilities: Sharon on the Temple Mount, September 28, 2000, and subsequent events. The account in my book, *Negotiating Outside the Law: Why Camp David Failed*, focuses particularly on this period, and my own advisory papers on the negotiations are in Volume 3 of the Course-Pak. We will be looking at them in class.
- Tues., Dec. 6      The debacle since. The “Separation Barrier” and full reinstatement of occupation. Death of Arafat, succession of Mahmoud Abbas. Elections of 2006, with victory by Hamas; invasion of Lebanon; Fatah-Hamas split of June 2007; Operation “Cast Lead,” attack on Gaza December 2008 into January 2009, the Arab Spring of 2011, unity pact between Fatah and Hamas, bid for recognition of a Palestinian State by the UN. Political figures currently on the stage: Binyamin Netanyahu, Avigdor Lieberman, Mahmoud Abbas, the Hamas leadership, presently in various degrees of power; Yossi Beilin, Avraham Burg in the wings; and in prison: Marwan Barghouti. Relation of what is happening there to American foreign policy, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the contest over the place of Iran in the Middle East and the future of American prospects in the world.
- It is late in the course to be looking at all these current things, but I trust we will have been talking of them all along.

**Final Exam:** I’ll have to be sure of this later, but I expect it to be Thursday December 15<sup>th</sup>, 9:00-11:00 AM