



# Stress Test: The Israel-Hamas War and Christian-Jewish Relations

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# **STRESS TEST**

**THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR AND  
CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS**

No conflict has tested Christian-Jewish-Muslim relations to the degree that the Hamas attack in October 2023 and the ensuing war has. The editors of this collection have assembled timely, succinct essays that address head-on the most divisive issues occasioned by the invasion and the war, and by the persistence of terrorism and occupation in the so-called “holy land.” The brief essays are written at an introductory level and designed for undergraduates and adult religious education audiences, and they include discussion questions, a bibliography, and a timeline (1945-2024). The authors are advanced Christian scholars of Christian-Jewish relations, some with extensive teaching and travel experience in Israel/Palestine, and members of The Council of Centers of Jewish-Christian Relations (CCJR; <https://www.ccjr.us>). The book lends itself to classroom use, and an intensive or semester course could be built around it.

In Part One on “Frank Dialogue,” in chapter 1, “Conflicted, Not Confused,” by Carol Rittner, and in the “Epilogue: An Enormous Effort,” by Rittner and John Roth, the editors explore how we should prepare our communities for the days after the war. Chapter 2, “Impact of the Israel-Hamas War on Christian-Jewish Relations,” by John Pawlikowski, and chapter 3, “Reflections on Catholic-Jewish Relations in Light of the Israel-Hamas War,” by Philip Cunningham ask whether the criteria of “just war” apply in a conflict where non-combatants are turned into human shields for one side’s fighters, and weapons of mass destruction obliterate the distinction between civilians and combatants. In chapter 4, “A Dream Betrayed,” Christopher Leighton interrogates the different meanings of the term “holy land.” Part Two discusses “What We Owe Each Other.” In chapter 5, “Protesting the Israel-Hamas War,” Mary Boys discusses how the rhetoric of criticism of Israeli government decisions may turn into antisemitism and anti-Judaism. When do representations of Palestinians and Arabs in the war recycle anti-Islamic tropes? In Chapter 6, “Catholic-Jewish Relations and Their Discontents,” Massimo Faggioli examines how teaching dialogue may facilitate more effective public discussion of the war. In chapter 7, “Learning and Lamenting,” Elena Procaro-Foley identifies anthropological convictions that religious persons share, providing common ground for discussing the war. In chapter 8, “The Israel-Hamas War,” James Paharik asks how memories of the *Shoah* and the *Nakba* become instrumentalized in the conflict. Part Three gathers essays on the theme, “I Will Not Be Silent.” In chapter 9, “Admitting the Sins of Christian-Jewish Dialogue,” Michael Azar asks which sins participants in dialogue need to repent of, e.g., how Christian-Jewish dialogue has inadequately engaged with Arab Christians. In chapter 10, “Stresses of the Israel-Hamas War,” Peter Pettit examines how a ministry of “radical accompaniment” can be a faithful stance during the war. In Chapter 11, “Holocaust Remembrance, Theodicy, and Christian Zionism,” Sarah Pinnock shows how our notions of theodicy underpin justifications of war. In chapter 12, “Making the Best of What We Have,” John Roth explains how one can be a “pro-Palestinian Zionist.”

After reading this valuable collection, the reader will come away thinking more critically about the shortcomings of contemporary interfaith work and how various Jewish and Christian interlocutors hear critiques of the war. The very structure of Christian-Jewish dialogue (in which Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab Christian interaction is usually marginal) disadvantages us in discussing the war and its implications. In fact, these voices should be more intentionally invited into dialogue. Another concern this book might raise for readers is a concern Jews in Christian-Jewish dialogue might have that some Christians are calling into question the “just war” tradition of ethical discernment and moving toward various forms of pacifism (and considering pacifist perspectives, evaluating the conflict). All of us should be concerned that many younger Christian students and scholars are much more likely to be concerned about the Israeli occupation and treatment of Palestinians than about the survival of the world’s only Jewish state. After 9/11, the United States fought two bloody wars to counter anti-American enemies. On what moral grounds do American citizens stand to criticize the government of Israel’s conduct of this war without falling into hypocrisy? In many mainline Christian denominations, there are competing movements of pro-Palestinian and pro-Arab advocates, on one hand, and relationally oriented leaders committed to interreligious dialogue, on the other. This book may facilitate a better understanding between these intra-Christian movements, which sometimes accuse each other of extremism.

While this book raises valuable questions that all should ask themselves, it also has shortcomings. Some contributors note that they lack a professional background in international relations, diplomacy, and the history of the modern Middle East. Including essays by scholars in those disciplines would strengthen this collection. Additionally, most of the contributions were penned in the summer of 2024. Given the long-term nature of the war, what's the half-life of this book? It could be supplemented by a handbook on dialogue strategies that offer better approaches to understanding the war and responsible action than the angry and sometimes violent protests in 2023-24 on our university campuses and global cities.

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