
Book Review

Gaza: Liberation Theology in the Face of Genocide

By Hugh Williams

John Munayer and Samuel Munayer, eds, *The Cross and the Olive Tree: Cultivating Palestinian Theology amid Gaza* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2025), 156 pages.

Writing a book today about liberation theology is enough of a challenge. Writing this book from a Palestinian perspective in the face of the Gaza genocide is another thing altogether—some might say it is impossible. And yet, this small text proposes to talk things over among eight young Palestinian theologians.

In certain respects, this is an amazing accomplishment of consequence. Gustavo Gutiérrez points out boldly in his classic *A Theology of Liberation* from 1973 that liberation theology is about the very meaning of Christianity and of the mission of the Church. For the editors and authors to speak of a work being guided by the “hermeneutic of Christ” will inescapably invoke an ongoing tension within Christianity of the continuity and discontinuity between Jesus’ historical life and teachings and the Church’s later varied preaching of the Christ.

Though this tension is nowhere thematized, it is implicit in the text’s well-articulated commitment to non-violence amid the Gaza genocide, a genocide that is never in question in the discussion. What *is* in question is how resistance, liberation, and reconciliation are to be understood and practised in the light of a theology trying to come to grips with Gaza.

There are deep divisions within Christianity between supporters of Christian Zionism and those who have taken up the Palestinian cause of liberation. However, it is the internal empowerment and connectedness among Palestinians and their supporters that is the text’s primary focus. And as difficult as it may be, there must be communication. There must be this effort to talk things through, because Palestinian liberation theology is desirous of an alternative future rooted in non-violence, plurality, and collaboration. This is where the conversation around liberation and reconciliation must be conducted, and done in the face of Gaza, where the death toll as of the book’s publication was estimated at 186,000 (it is much higher as I write this review).

But then the question must be asked directly: What of this commitment to non-violence in the face of Gaza? The answers given by the authors remain at best tentative and open. Again, Gutiérrez showed us how a liberation theology in Latin America had to come to terms with how the exploitation and misery of oppressed peoples results from an institutionalized violence that is responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent victims. This also means there must be reflection on the complex problem of the oppressed people’s counter-violence. Liberation theology challenges the tendency in Christianity’s history to ignore or even accept the violence establishing and maintaining an oppressive order while condemning the violence used by the oppressed to change this order. In liberation theology, there is a refusal to equate the unjust violence of the oppressor with the just violence of the oppressed.

With this deep background, which again is not thematized in the text, there is an acknowledgement that many if not most Palestinians now see reconciliation as irrelevant until liberation has been achieved. There is a deep and justifiable suspicion that reconciliation is used as a tool of colonialization. And there is the deep conviction that Zionism and Palestinian liberation are in mortal contradiction.

And yet, all the authors assert that liberation and reconciliation need each other, for one without the other only leads to further oppression. However, reconciliation requires careful and strict guidelines where the process must be Palestinian led and indigenizing so that the Zionist narrative will be deconstructed. The text acknowledges that not all Palestinians have to engage with Israeli Jews, certainly not Gazans. The text’s Christian-centric viewpoint on reconciliation is also forthrightly acknowledged so that it simply may not be applicable to others from other traditions and backgrounds.

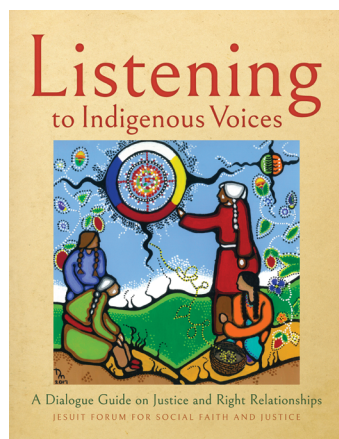
The text does provide a powerful theological perspective on the settler colonial project of Zionism and its

parallels with the similar project undertaken in North American history. Where it is perhaps limited and incomplete is in the recognition of colonialism's deep interconnection with capitalism and capitalist global development. This is often a limitation in accounts of settler colonial treatment of Indigenous populations in both Palestine and North America.¹ This is the case here, in what is otherwise an excellent text that lays some groundwork for an important ongoing struggle for both liberation and reconciliation.

1 The Palestinian analyst Abdaljawad Omar gives a succinct account of these connections in his recent interview for *Monthly Review* (October 2025). The Eastern Mediterranean is viewed by many as the cradle of anti-imperial dreaming, and yet it remains violently fractured and administered. Settler colonial Zionism in this context is not a historical anomaly but a necessary instrument essential to a geo-political trinity that has governed the region since the colonial partitioning: the circulation of oil, the logic of capital accumulation, and the strategic dismemberment of Arab political possibility. It is in this sense that Zionist Israel is not just protected, it is viewed as structurally indispensable.

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