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Mind of Terror (Book Review)

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ing feels like something taken right from newspaper headlines. However, after this cataclysm, Robert's final thoughts are not about William or Jimmy or even Darla. Even as he makes love to Darla, his thoughts drift back to Lien and Perfume River. Is this the height of infidelity, suggesting that Robert and Darla live a sort of romantic lie? I don't think it is. Butler's vision is bigger than that, approaching Wendell Berry's suggestion that individual love between two people must be integrated into the community—in this case, into a community that, through the tangle of international politics and plot twists of history, literally extends across the world to races and cultures far different from our own, but

whose very otherness affirms both our humanity and our individual loves.

In *Perfume River*, what lie underneath all the violence and drama of our contemporary world are far greater forces: memory and history and our subconscious lives, threatening to surface in all of us, but truer and bigger and more real if we bring them into the open and manage them together.

Perfume River, then, is a story about politics or polarization in the place it hits us most intimately: in our relationships to fathers and lovers. As such, it couldn't be more pertinent to many of our families, especially those of us who can feel the fracture of those families as it happens.

The Mind of Terror. Saada, Tass, with Dean Merrill. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016. 240pp. ISBN: 978-1496411877. Reviewed by Charles Veenstra, Emeritus Professor of Communication, Dordt College.

Perhaps the best way to understand terrorism, particularly in the Middle East, is to listen to someone who once called himself a terrorist and practiced indiscriminate violence against those who, he believed, took Palestinian land. Well-known for his earlier book, *Once an Arafat Man*, in which he describes his former actions against Israelis, Tass Saada now wrestles with the question of how to deal with terrorists. After fighting with Arafat in the Palestinian struggle against the Israelis, Saada moved to the United States and later became a Christian. In *The Mind of Terror*, which has the subtitle "A Former Muslim Sniper Explores What Motivates ISIS and Other Extremist Groups," Saada wishes to use his experience to provide insight into the minds of members of extremist groups in the Middle East. He is a former Muslim who founded *Hope for Ishmael*, a nonprofit organization that works to reconcile Arabs and Jews. He also developed the Seeds of Hope Christian School in Jericho.

After describing the various extremist organizations in the Middle East, Saada explains how the thinking of the members of these groups is different from that of people in Western culture. For example, the notion of *honor*, tied to membership in a group, is much more important than *individual* responsibility. Because Saada left his family and apologized for the sins he had committed, his father responded by affirming that code of honor; address-

ing Saada, he tells him, "as long as you live, we will have nothing to do with you." (23). Honor is a key principle for Middle Eastern groups, and if one violates anything a family considers honorable, there is no forgiveness. Given that perspective, Saada cautions Christians to avoid shaming any Muslim.

Saada explains that there are two hurdles that are very difficult for Muslims. "The first is *accepting the offer of free grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ*." (29): No grace exists in Islam. "The second hurdle for a Muslim mind to get over is *the value of democracy*." (32). He explains why these are barriers by exploring the mindset of Muslims. He knows that Americans will have a difficult time thinking in a very different way because we believe in individualism. Muslims, on the other hand, do not separate the state from their religion.

"What makes a terrorist?" is the title of the third chapter. Saada here claims that six motivations drive various groups: you are in anguish over the violent loss of an innocent loved one, friend, or group member (38); you firmly believe your opponent's faith is wrong or at least corrupted (41); you are sickened and disgusted by western society's decadence (45); you want your homeland back (47); you grow weary of day-in, day-out discrimination and maltreatment (51); and you can't stomach the United States' rock-solid backing of Modern Israel (57). Combining his own experience with that of

others, the author helps us understand those who hold these six motivations in the Middle East.

To discover the roots of conflict in the Middle East, Saada goes all the way back to the life of Ishmael, the supposed ancestor of modern-day Arabs, who was sent out of Abraham's home. Arabs today have heard for thousands of years about their homelands, "you don't belong here." Since Europe and the United States have supported Israel, Arabs have continually attacked them as well as the Jews. Arabs, according to Saada, have felt left out for a long time.

Section Two deals with the "Now What?" question. We can respond, he says, in several ways, and he uses a chapter to deal with each of these possible responses to terrorism: we can worry, we can fight back, we can wish for solutions that never will happen, or we can chalk it up to end-time prophecy. He rejects all of these and provides "A Better Way" in Section Three.

He relies heavily on the work of Gary Burge, a well-known scholar of God's purpose for Israel, to describe God's plan for Ishmael as well as Isaac. The prophet Ezekiel's vision of peace and mutual respect for all, claims the author, "does not square with current paradigms in the Holy Land, either Israeli or Palestinian." (127). Clearly the goal of Saada's writing is that Jews, Muslims, and Christians should live side by side in harmony.

Saada wants us to develop a mind of peace—not just a "nice theory—that is our calling" by referring to Colossians 3:15: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as member of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." (137). With an abundance of examples, he gives powerful evidence of the value of his Christian perspective in how we should work with terrorists. Of course, he emphasizes prayer, but no less than that, he is determined to work hard by confronting anyone who attempts to block his efforts toward peace. He has the courage to challenge anyone who stands in his way, and he does this by inviting his critics inside his school

and his home so that he can show them how he lives out his life for Christ. He wants to be heard and he explains how respecting all people and listening can do promote healing.

There is much more to the book about neutralizing terrorism and following the way of Jesus. What I find very encouraging is his open and bold discussion with those who disagree with him. Rather than resorting to violent actions or violent speech, he explains his position and invites his opponents into a conversation. He has replaced his sniper rifle with the word of God.

Is there any hope for the Middle East? While Saada provides silver linings and many examples of everyday heroes who are living out the principles he recommends, he does not claim that these efforts mean that peace will break out. But, honestly, the question is not whether all of his recommendations will succeed; instead, we have to be faithful. We are called to be obedient to what the Lord God requires of us; success is up to him, not us. Many people are demonstrating how to honor God while living in troubled times. His examples are hugely inspiring.

There is hope. Many people, in a variety of situations, are living out what God requires: caring for the alien, listening to those with whom we disagree, being a faithful witness in difficult situations, etc. One-by-one, little actions count. I have met the author and have heard him explain how we can work for peace. His building of a Christian school in an area where people are hostile to the Christian faith, and then his telling his critics that if they burn down his school, he will rebuild it immediately, is a true inspiration of how we should live. I highly recommend this book to all who care to look beyond what we hear daily on the news media. Saada provides many examples throughout the book that not only make it very interesting reading but also show how God's people throughout the world are, by his grace, able to provide exciting glimpses of the Kingdom in action.