

**Ronald Kronish, Ed.**  
***Coexistence & Reconciliation in Israel:  
Voices for Interreligious Dialogue***  
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**EUGENE KORN**

ebkorn@gmail.com

Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation,  
Jerusalem 9104601

Peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians has been an (often futile) obsession for every American president and administration from Jimmy Carter thru Barak Obama. It is the enterprise of presidents, prime ministers, kings, politicians, and diplomats, and the goal has usually been to reach a negotiated treaty largely imposed from above. This book is not about peacemaking, but peacebuilding—the slow, arduous work of rabbis, imams, priests, teachers, and psychologists. Peacebuilding is all about bringing people together in a dialogical and educational process to help local community and religious leaders learn how to live in peace with each other. It is about achieving psychological, educational, and spiritual transformations, and nurturing trust over many years.

Long time American-born Israeli interfaith activist Rabbi Ron Kronish has compiled a collection of essays penned by his Jewish, Christian, and Muslim colleagues in Israel that gives the reader a glimpse into the variegated peacebuilding activities and organizations in Israel. Described from different religious perspectives, these activities usually fly under the radar in the violence-prone and media-frenzied theater of Israeli-Palestinian relations. This is not a scholarly book, but an important and accessible read for anyone interested in understanding the reality of relations in Israel and what is required for Israeli Jews, Muslims, and Christians to ultimately live in peace and understanding with each other.

*Coexistence & Reconciliation in Israel* is organized around five units: Jewish-Christian Relations in Israel; Jewish-Muslim Relations in Israel; Trialogue with Jews, Christians, and Muslims (although ‘trialogue’ is a linguistic *faux pas* since the ‘dia’ of ‘dialogue’ means ‘through’ not ‘two’); Educating for Peaceful Coexistence; and Reaching Out to the International Community. Each unit contains numerous eminently readable essays averaging ten pages in length.

Many of the essays emphasize that interfaith dialogue in Israel differs in significant ways from Jewish-Christian dialogue in America and Europe. In Israel, Jews are the majority and their interlocutors are minorities, hence the power dynamics present in Western dialogue are reversed. And of course, Christians are a

minority within the non-Jewish minority. Second, always in the not-so-distant background of every Israeli interfaith encounter lurks the painful ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. (Most Israeli Christians and Muslims identify as Palestinians, which adds another layer of complexity to the encounters.) In this context, there is little time or patience for nuanced theology or psychological theory; practical issues always come early to dominate the encounter. Third, while Israel is a pluralistic democracy, Israeli living patterns conform to those of other Middle East countries. Most people live in monolithic blocs or communities that are not conducive to serious self-critique or natural interaction with the religious or ethnic other. Ignorance of the other's faith is the norm, while awareness of the other's humanity is at a premium. As a result these separate living patterns allow hostile stereotypes to run amok. For many, organized dialogue and peacebuilding activities provide the first opportunity for direct interaction with and experience of the other's personhood. And finally, in the land of the Bible and the crossroads of ancient empires, history and tradition always weigh heavily on the interfaith participants.

The book supplies a fairly comprehensive picture of the breadth of interfaith organizations and activities in Israel. (There are some important omissions, such as the Rainbow Coalition, a 50-year old interfaith organization of academics in Israel, and the relatively new Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation.) Perhaps it is inevitable that in survey books of this type the essays do not always cohere and lack a certain depth. Too often we do not learn about the detailed workings of these organizations or what their activities really achieve. One notable exception is the book's delineation of the model elements of interfaith dialogue developed and successfully used by the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI): (1) personal interaction, i.e., getting to know the other as an individual human being; (2) interreligious text-based learning; (3) discussing core issues of the conflict; and (4) taking action, separately and together. Trust here is the key, because only after the dialogue members come to know and trust each other (the first step) can the subsequent steps have any hope of success.

In sum, *Coexistence & Reconciliation in Israel* provides a good overview of and introduction to the activities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims who do more than passively wait for peace to arrive in the region. These activists are committed to doing what they can to ensure that when the presidents, prime ministers, and diplomats finally agree on a political solution, it has a decent chance of success because people on the ground will have created a critical mass of Jews, Muslims, and Christians who have learned to understand each other and who will strive on individual and communal levels to help the solution take root in the minds and hearts of this troubled region's citizens.