

Faith and Politics in Iran, Israel and the Islamic State

Theologies of the Real

Religious faith has been gaining in reach and influence throughout global politics over the last three decades, most prominently in the Middle East, and theologies of this nature are based on the understanding that faith in God is to be based, primarily and predominantly, on the realness of God's presence. The West, accustomed to its own discussion on religion and politics emphasizing democracy and individual freedoms, has been at a loss to explain and engage these rising religious politics. Through an innovative approach to the role of faith in politics, *Faith and Politics in Iran, Israel and the Islamic State* considers political theologies of the real formulated during the twentieth century and proposes that, while religion in the West has been committed to absolutist vision, these theologies have drawn their strength from a commitment to their concrete, divinely infused reality.

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For Ifat, Avigail, Dudu and Dror

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book straddles the line between essay and reflection. In it I try to frame a phenomenon that is occurring in real time, the rise of political faith in the non-Christian monotheistic world. The turgidity of the previous sentence is, perhaps, my motivation to embark on this quest. There seems to be no way to speak of these new theologies in the Middle East without enforcing a categorical separation between faith and politics. The immediate conceptual framework available is a historical one, appreciating traditions for their stable continuity and not, say, for their non-linear dynamics of ideas. The theologies of the real, motivating so many people in the here and now, appear pale and dilapidated after being curtailed by history and political theory.

I wanted to begin to suggest a different way to consider these emerging theologies. This book begins and ends by taking theologies of the real to mean what they say and to say what they mean. I approach them by reading whole texts, because whole texts are quite often the medium of choice for self-expression by theologians (and believers) of the real. The flow of the text, its moral and devotional duty to participate in the creation of the very world in which its composers and readers live, these make it a unique medium for the articulation of politics. Preserving this virtue of the text, and with it the elusive integrity of these theologies of the real, has been my top priority. The language of this book is often associative and figurative, but only because of the conviction that in the real these theologies celebrate, the associative and the figurative are as concrete at anything.

I do not offer any solutions. I certainly have my thoughts on the problems presented by Islamic State (IS), Iran and Israel to their immediate

environment and to the rest of the world. Still, this book was not meant to provide recommendations and action items. My purpose throughout this endeavor is mainly to make these theologies of the real accessible, on their own terms and merits, for meaningful contemplation and (perhaps) conversation. This purpose has led me to forgo many scholarly privileges, like extensive references to the words of others. I hope my decisions have (my) desired effects on you, my gentle readers.

As for acknowledgments, they are my favorite part of any book. I would like to thank Asaf Hazani for his thoughts, his direction and his friendship. He is my partner in crime, my ideal reader and my most effective teacher. I am thankful to Major General Gershon Hacohen for his friendship, guidance and passion. Gershon represents the very best of Israel's past, present and future, and I am proud to be his student and his friend. I would like to thank Eliran Barel for his remarkable generosity of mind and heart. Shaul Setter saw me through various rough patches and offered intellectual companionship of the highest order, and for this I am in his debt.

Dave Stephenson, my brother from another mother, put many of my thoughts into the context of the world at large, as only he can. I am grateful for his friendship and his presence. I thank Professor Boaz Ganor for inspiring me to approach this project with the serious glee I hope it deserves. It is a pleasure to thank Mr. Lewis Bateman, my legendary editor at Cambridge University Press for his professionalism, his many kindnesses and his faith in me. Heartfelt thanks go out to Sara Doskow at Cambridge University Press, who saw this work through with dedication and grace.

Finally, everything I am and everything I do comes from my wife, Ifat, and my three children, Avigail, Dudu and Dror. I thank them for making me the person I am and for allowing me the time and presence of mind to write this book. It is all theirs.