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The Froman Peace Campaign: Pluralism in Judeo-Islamic Theology and Politics

Benjamin Schvarcz¹  and Miriam Billig² 

¹Department of Politics, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA and ²Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ariel University; Eastern R&D Center, Ariel, Israel

Corresponding author: Benjamin Schvarcz, E-mail: schvarcz@princeton.edu

Abstract

Despite intensive diplomatic efforts, achieving peace between the Palestinian and Israeli populations remains out of reach. This study investigates a recent campaign for religious peacebuilding, focusing on the political theology of Rabbi Menachem Froman and his fellow religious peacemakers, family members, and disciples. Froman's position is twofold: First, religion is necessary for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and second, Israeli settlements should not be considered an obstacle to peace, but rather “the fingers of Israel's outstretched hand for peace.” We argue that “the Froman peace campaign” advances pluralism in both Judeo-Islamic theology and politics. It constructs a synthetic theological view incorporating principles and rituals of both religions. Politically, it promotes a plan for two states in one united confederation. By comparing the peace campaign of Rabbi Froman with that of Rabbi Michael Melchior, another well-known peacemaker, this article contributes to a growing literature on the role of theology in religious peacebuilding

Introduction

The U.S. President Joe Biden has shown less enthusiasm than some of his predecessors for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Biden's administration is skeptical toward “peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians that did not lead anywhere” (Susskind 2021). Nevertheless, President Biden supports the two-state solution, not as a plan to be advanced immediately, but as the future solution to the conflict. As such, the White House has officially objected—even if not strongly condemned—constructions in the settlements which are likely to prevent a future Palestinian state (Kingsley 2021). Pro-peace activists have criticized Biden for not acting boldly against Israel's settlements expansion (Susskind 2021).

However, the view that Israeli settlements threaten peace is arguable (Billig 2015). The view that separating Israelis from Palestinians is the best way to achieve peace is also susceptible to debate. Direct contact between religiously devoted Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims is not necessarily an invitation for war. As Biden's predecessors,

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Obama (2009) and Trump (2017), have recognized, one in Cairo the other in Riyadh, religions have an important role in peacemaking, and people of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faiths are not destined to clash (Huntington 1993, 25; Elazar and Billig 2021).

Similarly, an emerging view in both academia and the peacemaking arena has focused on the reconciliatory power religions also have. In 1987, a project originally defined as “religion and conflict” published *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, an edited volume dedicated to reintroducing religious values into peacemaking (Johnston 1999; Johnston 2014); this was the first major publication in the field of “religious peacebuilding.” It lamented the neglect of religious dimensions in the study and practice of international relations (Johnston and Sampson 1994; Omer et al. 2015; Kind and Owen 2020). Since then, religious peacebuilding scholarship reiterates its view that “while the divisive character of religion is widely recognized, its obverse contributions to resolving conflict are all but totally unknown” (Carter 1994, vii; Johnston and Sampson 1994, 4; e.g., Abu-Nimer 2001, 685–86).

One battleground for this theoretical debate is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A dominant perception of the American and European governments—Trump’s administration being the exception—is that Israeli settlements are a means for Israeli expansionism preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state (Kurtzer 2009; Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde 2020). Religious identities of Palestinian and Israeli inhabitants of the West Bank are considered a crucial obstacle to achieving peace between the two peoples (Zalzburg 2019). Could the situation be reversed so that religion turns out to be an instrument for peace in the Holy Land?

At the center of this article’s narrative is the enigmatic Menachem Froman (1945–2013), Chief Rabbi of Tekoa, an Israeli settlement located about 10 kilometers south of Bethlehem, his fellow peacemakers, disciples, and family members. Together they form what we call “the Froman peace campaign” in that they explicitly and continuously follow, implement, and advance Rabbi Froman’s vision and action for religious peace in the West Bank (or, Judea and Samaria). It is important to note at the outset that our goal is not to laud or condemn Froman’s camp. As we shall see, some of his expressions can sometime seem offensive and we do not intend to legitimize them. Instead, we offer a complex and original understanding of this religious and political phenomenon.

The Froman peace campaign runs against conventional wisdom in two aspects. It breaks with the view of religiosity and settlements as obstacles to peace. Rather, it considers good neighborliness between Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank, and inter-religious dialogue between *pious* Muslims and Jews, as necessary keys to achieving peace in the Holy Land.

Rabbi Froman was recognized by many as a prominent religious peacebuilder (Little 2007; Magid 2019; Shemer 2021). In the mid-1970s, Froman was one of the founders of the religious Zionist settlement movement in the West Bank. In 1986, Froman was described in an Israeli popular newspaper as a rabbi and philosopher, an *illiberal* settler, who preached for individual freedom and peace among Jews of different stripes (Bender, 1986). Following his firsthand *Intifada* experience of 1987 up until his death in 2013, Froman dedicated his life to pursuing peace between Israeli-Jews and Palestinian-Muslims in the Middle East. He worked with Jewish, Muslim, and Christian activists in the region to realize their shared dream for peace.

The Froman peace campaign stands outside of the dominant paradigm, and still bewilders most onlookers (Bar-Yossef 1989; Dalsheim 2014). How could a leader of the settlement movement (Gush Emunim) meet with high officials of its Palestinian foes (AP, 2015)? Was Froman that naïve to think that merely by talking to them he could make real progress toward achieving peace? From within his own Jewish religious milieu the question arises: How dare he say that the Land of Israel does not *belong* to the people of Israel? On the other hand, if he truly believed in the political rights of Palestinians, how could he justify Jewish settlements? Was he acting on liberal or anti-liberal premises? The reluctance of “the Froman peace campaign” from fully and thoroughly expounding its plans for peace increases the mentioned confusion (Harel 2016, 171).

One wonders if this camp promotes peaceful relations or, rather, the Israeli settlements? Froman’s followers celebrate the difficulty of defining his—and their—thesis. In the beginning of a collection of Froman’s 174 short statements, his daughter Lihraz Froman and his disciple Shlomo Spivak cite the prominent Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz: “Rabbi Menachem was a man of many trades which is why he is so difficult to define” (Froman 2020, 7). This problem generated a variety of somewhat inadequate assessments of Froman’s life project, necessitating a comprehensive study of the Froman peace campaign phenomenon.

Magid (2015; 2019, 125) depicts Froman as “decidedly anti-militant.” Similarly, Omer (2019, 257) writes that “he was known for his antimilitarism.” Glazer (2018, 286) attributes “staunch pacifism” to Froman. However, interviewees told us that Froman used to encourage his students to serve in the IDF and to even promise to marry his daughter to the soldier who would—in the harsh words of 1Samuel 18:25—bring “foreskins of one hundred” terrorists. Moreover, Froman (2014, 89) overtly supported military action arguing that officers “might be responsible for bloodshed by eschewing actions no less than by committing actions.” While military operations might deserve moral criticism, Froman considered renewing the IDF’s deterrence a potential justification for such operations. How could such a warrior’s spirit also work for peace? The answer we got through interviews and from the writings of Froman (2014, 78; 2020, 79) is that killing terrorists is necessary to achieving peace. Hence, whether Froman was right or wrong, his militarism prevents us from placing his thought into a well-known set of received dichotomies. Militarism must be part of our understanding of the man.

Magid finds in Froman’s thought an inspiration for a spiritual post-Zionism for American Jews. He rightly stresses Froman’s critique of the lack of respect on behalf of Israelis toward the Palestinians. However, at least at one point, he attributes to Froman a forceful attack on the settlements and on Zionism altogether. “In Froman’s mind,” Magid (2019, 133) writes, “Zionism... had become a tool to control other people... making Zionism itself an emblem of unfreedom,” a claim reiterated by Omer (2019, 258). In support of this point, Magid cites Froman (2014, 79): “It is forbidden for settlers to build their settlements... in the midst of the destruction of the world of Palestinians.” Is it though an outright objection to the settlements? Magid overlooks the next paragraph—in that very article of Froman—calling for the protection of Israelis and Palestinians residing in the West Bank.

It is permitted and an obligation to prevent the Arabs from destroying the Jewish settlement in the land. It is permitted and an obligation to wrestle with the settlers as far as they come to oppress the Palestinians, and it is permitted and an obligation to fight the government as far as it comes to destroy the settlers.¹

If Froman thought that the settlements are oppressive vis-à-vis the Palestinians, he would propose dismantling them. In fact, we find him supporting the building of settlements that even the Israeli government deems illegal (Froman 2020, 38). Froman and his followers criticize fiercely any form of settlers' vandalism against Palestinians' mosques, olive trees, houses, or cars. Yet, they do not consider the settlement project itself to be destroying the life of the Palestinians, nor do they consider Zionism a symbol of oppression (Harel 2016, 170). Froman's critique of Israel notwithstanding, he proclaimed to have dedicated his life to "the glory of the State of Israel which is the glory of the blessed Rock of Israel" (Froman 2020, 111) and believed that peace would "bring the Zionist movement to its perfection" (Froman 2014, 94).

Omer seems to have changed her judgment of Froman throughout the years. In 2012, she claimed that one need not be impressed by Froman's "talk of peace and reconciliation" (Omer 2012, 27, fn. 36). Froman was first and foremost "a settler whose ideological and religious formations are both selective...and enabling of the very root causes of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." Therefore, she thought then that "it is problematic to categorize him as a 'peacebuilder.'" Seven years later, she relies on Magid to define Froman as a post-Zionist settler even though he is much reluctant to define him as such (Magid 2016; 2019, 127). She is also more open than before to depict Froman as "peacebuilder" when she writes of him: "the supposed religious 'spoiler' (the assumption that 'irrational' religiosity constitutes a 'spoiler' in peacebuilding) is, in fact, a potential peacebuilder" (Little 2007, ix; Omer 2019, 258). This change of perception is yet another sign of the complicated thesis of the Froman peace campaign.

A. B. Yehoshua, the Israeli secular novelist, and close friend of Froman, ascribed to him support for two sovereign states for the two peoples. Yehoshua sees "no contradiction between establishing a Palestinian state... with the existence of an Israeli minority" in that state (Froman 2014, 180). Following Yehoshua, Shemer (2021, 507) claims that the internal contradiction in Froman's thesis—between the settlements and peace—is resolved by his deep support for "the two-state solution..." and his belief that "residents of each [state] would... choose in which country they would be full citizens." But the picture is more complicated.

Froman can indeed be taken as spoiling peacemaking by interfering "with the premises of the two-state solution" (Dalsheim 2014, 71). While the Froman peace campaign remains open to the two-state solution, this must be seen only as one of the plans it considers to be potentially applicable. The other possible plan, as we will later discuss, is one-state. Already in 1992, we find Froman (2014, 86) writing favorably of multi-national politics supporting the establishment of a federal state in the Holy Land. Moreover, the Froman peace camp believes not in immediately applicable solutions but rather in a long process of religious peacebuilding.

What is lacking from the previously mentioned accounts of Froman is an understanding of how theology and politics are intertwined in the thought and practice of

his peace campaign. Religion, we argue, is not merely an additional diplomatic tool for this camp. Rather, their theology demands a continuous and transformative Judeo-Muslim dialogue for its own sake. Living together in the West Bank is not a political compromise, but a goal worth pursuing. Previous accounts do not explain how Froman's politics and theology serve each other.

An essential distinction is to be made between Froman and other thinkers proposing a one-state solution such as Butler (2012). While Froman certainly shares her basic aspiration for fairness and justice for Palestinians, that is not his primary concern. The Froman peace camp is motivated more by hope for a future religious peace than by regrets for past injustices (Froman 2020, 80–81; Steen-Johnsen 2020). That is evident from the fact that Froman celebrated, not regretted, the outcomes of the 1948 and 1967 wars as manifestations of historical progress. As we will explain, Froman's critique of Zionism springs from his yearning to a messianic peace that is religiously transformative by producing a new Judeo-Muslim theology and politically effective by keeping the settlements intact.² Consequently, the Froman peace camp efficiently obscures its thesis to conceal a radical theology from Jewish Orthodoxy and a proactive settlement project from Western and Israeli liberal diplomacy.

The Froman peace camp advocates a unique view that does not fully conform to the conventional available ideologies of liberalism, conservatism, Zionism, post-Zionism, pro-Palestinian, pacifism, right or left wing. Hence, we ask, what is the theological-political inner logic of this group's peace campaign?

While scholarship has recognized the peaceful role of interreligious dialogue (Kadayifci-Orellana 2013) less explored are the theological aspects of peacebuilding (Dubois and Hunter-Bowman 2015). Scholars have addressed the positive role of religion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Abu-Nimer 2004; 2011; Dubensky 2016). But a rigorous analysis of the political theology underlying campaigns for religious peacebuilding is lacking. So too with exploring the political theology advanced by Froman and his disciples, both within and without Gush Etzion (an area south of Bethlehem). Addressing this gap, we explore an original and creative theology aimed at facilitating Israeli-Palestinian peace, expounding on the role of theology in religious peacebuilding. How people committed to conflicting religious and national identities can have mutual constructive relationships? That is a central focus of the field and for this study (Lederach 2015).

These Israeli peacemakers promote pluralism in Israeli-Palestinian politics and in Judeo-Islamic theology combining principles and rituals from Islam and Judaism (Day 2021). They hold, as Schmidt-Leukel (2017) lays out the pluralist position accounting for the phenomenon of religious diversity, that "more than one of these religious messages is true, although none is superior to all the rest." Comparing Menachem Froman with Michael Melchior, another prominent Israeli rabbi and religious peacemaker, will clarify the special traits of Froman's pluralistic theology. We elaborate on this argument in the second and third sections below entitled "A New Theological Language" and "Transcending Nationalism."

On the political level, the Froman peace campaign proposes a union of two states, Palestinian and Israeli, which rule simultaneously over the same territory. This is a vision of two competing sovereign powers in one space which, in the context of the European Union, is known as "constitutional pluralism" (Avbelj and Komárek

2012). We show how the Froman camp draws on this European model to advance a pluralistic approach to politics in the Holy Land. Furthermore, we argue, the theology and politics of the Froman peace campaign are designed in a mutually beneficial way. On one hand, Judeo-Muslim theology serves the political goal of keeping the settlements intact and in peace. On the other hand, the politics of an Israeli-Palestinian federation serves a theological messianic vision. This argument is presented in the third and fourth sections entitled “Transcending Nationalism” and “Political Plans.”

Our sources were obtained through the following research methods: (1) textual analysis of both published and unpublished articles and books of the main protagonists in the Froman peace campaign; (2) 12 interviews with informants who self-identify as Menachem Froman’s fellow peacemakers, disciples, or followers: Hadassah Froman, Michael Melchior, Yakov Nagen, Shaul David Judelman, Elyahu McLean (twice), Andrew White, Reut Froman, Gideon Elazar, Tziona Ben-Gedalya, Matityahu Kahn, and Shlomo Spivak; (3) published interviews; (4) observations of six events, including meetings, lectures, and interfaith dialogues that took place in 2018 and 2019 between Israeli-Jews of the Froman peace campaign and their Palestinian-Muslim counterparts. This research focuses mainly on the efforts of the Froman camp to push Israeli Jews toward pluralism in Judeo-Muslim theology and in Israeli-Palestinian politics. The Palestinian response to this campaign remains beyond the scope of this article. Hence only one component of a larger social, religious, and political conversation is analyzed here.

A New Theological Language

The Intifada of 1987 had triggered Menachem and Hadassah Froman’s work for peace with their Palestinian neighbors. On February 6, 2018, we observed a dialogue between Hadassah and Khaled Abu Awwad, a Palestinian-Muslim peacemaker. They both presented their political-religious views to a group of young Israeli religious-Zionist girls from a pre-military seminary. Khaled, who spoke first, said that to him the 1987 Intifada was “the Intifada of honor” because the problem of the Palestinians at that time was not economy but rather the disrespectful approach of the Israeli rule toward them.

Hadassah described how she and her husband, “Menachem,” came from contradictory political backgrounds: She came from the religious right and he from the secular left. “When we decided to marry, these two motives conflated.” She also described their shared enthusiastic pro-settlement ideology and activities in the 1980s. But then, in 1987, “the first Intifada broke out. The [Palestinians] told us: We are here, we aren’t transparent... I said to Menachem: ‘They throw stones because they want contact with us.’ Menachem said [to me]: ‘You are delirious.’” But Rabbi Froman eventually adopted his wife’s point of view, as he said:

For all of us, the Intifada was the beginning of a mental process to understand what was happening. My wife says that the Palestinians stoned us because they want human touch with us. [For] many years we passed through this road and we didn’t speak to them. They wanted a human exchange so they throw stones” (Little 2007, 344).

Perhaps unknowingly echoing a notion developed by Frantz Fanon (Nayar 2011, 23), Hadassah and Menachem thought that through a violent struggle the uprising Palestinian demanded the recognition and respect of the Israelis. Three distinctions need to be made between Fanon and Froman: (1) The Froman camp rejected the view of the Israelis as colonialists in the Holy Land; (2) it strongly condemned Palestinian violence; and (3) it did not apologize for Israel's military successes (Rabbi Froman was proud of his fighting role in 1967). Despite all these differences of opinion, Froman believed that he had to respond in a manner that would deeply honor his Palestinian neighbors by producing a new theological language.

As mentioned, one of the most bewildering features of Rabbi Froman's religious and political view was that he simultaneously supported Israeli-Palestinian peace and the settlements in Judea and Samaria. In contrast to the Western view that the settlements are an obstacle to achieving peace in the region, Froman (2014, 142; Nagen 2017b) likened the settlements to fingers of the Israeli hand outstretched for peace with the Palestinians. He said: "I think that here, in the Land, the place in which inter-religious peace can be achieved in the most powerful way, is in the settlements" (Cohn 2012). It is "on the boundaries between the Islamic original culture ... and the settlers, who commonly are religious" that peace can be built on religious grounds and through religious language.

A widely held opinion in peacebuilding scholarship is that peace must be based on mutual respect (Little 2007). Yet, Froman contended, respecting the Arabs cannot be achieved by artificial diplomatic gestures. Rather, respecting the Palestinians means, *inter alia*, having a deep, honest, direct, and continuous religious conversation (Froman 2014, 141–43). Peace between Muslims and Jews therefore necessarily means religious peace. Religion lies at the heart of the conflict, and thus must be part of the solution. That was, according to Yakov Nagen, a disciple of Froman who became a religious peacemaker in his own right, "the great insight of Menachem Froman" (Nagen 2017b; see also Nagen 2017a; 2017d). This peace camp disapproves of the exclusion of religion from "liberal peacemaking" (Newman et al. 2009) and from the liberal public sphere more generally (Calhoun 2011).

Froman (2014, 141–43) stressed that "the Palestinians are not in the Western world. Their spiritual world is very different." Following Huntington's thesis, Froman described the Palestinians to belong to a non-Western civilization. But, Froman believed, religion could become the source for easing the clash. Hence, he concluded, "it is impossible to reach peace agreements with them in Oslo and Washington ... [rather,] an effort must be made *to stand outside of ourselves* ... [and] respect their cultural world." According to him, the Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank share a primitive sense of connection to the land that the Israeli liberal bourgeoisie in Tel Aviv is not able to grasp. A primitive local rootedness was shrewdly devised by Froman to tacitly guard against the framing of colonialism directly threatening the settlements so dear to his heart.³ On this view, direct touch, primitive love of land (Froman 1994; 2020, 108, 125), religious devotion, and deep respect between the two populations in the West Bank are key to peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and to coexistence between Western and Islamic cultures.

Froman's thesis, we argue, does not merely require adding religion to the toolkit of the Western diplomat. Moreover, co-existence is not his highest goal. Instead, he and his followers present to their interlocutors—whether Israeli followers, Christian clerics, or Muslim sheikhs—a challenging transformative theology combining principles of two religions: Judaism and Islam. The Froman camp constructs a new religious identity, in which, to use the words of Meir (2015, 14): “the ‘we’ is not eternally opposed to a ‘they’ [...] there is an interchange between the inner and the outer.” This interreligious theology serves in turn as a theological basis for Froman's political alternative to the famous “two-state solution” (Slater 2001).

In a filmed interview, Froman hinted at why, and how, the settlements are a vehicle for peace:

Here [in Judea and Samaria] we [Palestinians and settlers] live together. Here, **we also share a religious faith.** That is why, with God's help, here lies the chance, **inshallah, inshallah**, with God's help, that inter-religious peace will be achieved... between the state of Israel, the state of Palestine and the rest of the countries in the region (Cohn 2012).

The rhetoric of Froman is of a shared religious faith, a shared God, a shared Holy Land, and a shared utopian peace. Each of these points will be elaborated upon throughout the article. To clarify the uniqueness of this vision, let us begin by describing a less idealistic view of religious peacebuilding in this conflict, one considered more pragmatic.

Rabbi Michael Melchior is a religious peacemaker, leader of The Religious Initiative for Peace, formerly a Member of Parliament (Knesset), Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, and a close friend of Rabbi Froman. Both men have worked shoulder to shoulder seeking peace with the Palestinians. In January 2002, a few months after al-Qaeda's attacks on the United States, and during an intense Palestinian uprising, the two men convened, alongside prominent representatives of the three Abrahamic faiths, for an interreligious peace summit in Egypt's Alexandria. Of the Israelis in that summit, Melchior was the most involved in its preparation (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002; Landau 2003, 21). The conference concluded with a shared prayer “for true peace in Jerusalem and the Holy Land,” and with a “commitment to ending the violence and bloodshed that denies the right of life and dignity” (Landau 2003, 51).

Peace, according to Melchior, should be based on common values and religious faith, not solely upon interests. Melchior rejects what he pejoratively calls “the secular peace,” i.e., exclusive focus on national interests and neglect of religiosity (Weiss and Mizrachi 2019). He believes in a peace process that combines both interests and religious values. Rabbi Melchior counts among his achievements making connections and generating mutual understanding between religious and political leaders on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian breach. One such story is about the need to mitigate the anger of Muslims agitated by a flyer circulated in Hebron in the late 1990s depicting the prophet Muhammad as a pig. In response, Rabbi Melchior organized a meeting in which the Israeli Chief Rabbi persuaded the Mufti of Hebron that from a Jewish point of view that flyer was considered blasphemy (Landau 2003, 21–22).

Rabbi Melchior also played a role in solving the 2017 Temple Mount Crisis. His Religious Peace Initiative coordinated talks between the Israeli police and Islamic streams and found a path to compromise.

The latter account was described by Melchior on March 5, 2018, at an event in Jerusalem, which we attended, dedicated to the commemoration of Rabbi Froman and his legacy five years after his passing. Melchior expressed appreciation for Froman's pioneering religious peacebuilding in the Holy Land: "When we present new audiences with the idea of religious peace in the Middle East, they always say: 'Alright, this is Rabbi Menachem [Froman]!' Because he saw in every crisis an opportunity." However, despite their partnership and mutual appreciation, Melchior and Froman represent two distinct conceptions of religious peacebuilding.

Religion and identity are elements of Melchior's pragmatic diplomacy. In his attempts to create peace, he seeks points of agreement between two different camps. Froman, however, in asking Israelis "to stand outside of ourselves," seeks a theological inner transformation of both conflicting sides. For Froman, religion is not the maidservant of political negotiations; rather, a new theological language is to replace old political rivalries.

When asked about the relations between Melchior and Froman, the former Vicar of St. George Church in Bagdad Andrew White, replied shortly: "Melchior was different, he loved Froman and was inspired by him." A hint to the contrast can be traced in the views of Roie Ravitzky, a former director of Rabbi Melchior's Religious Initiative for Peace. The main goal of this Initiative is to expand the "tent of peace" to include religious leaders who were previously excluded from governmental peacemaking processes. This could be achieved, according to Ravitzky, by providing a platform in which:

... everyone can forge a path with their own theology, with their own political perception, to support peace and reconciliation, and from many different religious conceptualizations. This could preserve very serious disagreements. We are *not* looking for consent. We try to build bridges over radical disagreements (Litman 2013).

Religious leaders might have totally different theological views and nonetheless find a practical middle path to compromise upon. Ravitzky provides an example: A Zionist-settler-rabbi from Hebron would not be able to support establishing a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria; nonetheless, he could easily accept the notion of an extended Palestinian municipality in those areas. Similarly, an Islamic leader could accept the existence of a Jewish self-ruled autonomy within a larger Arabic political framework, but not a Jewish state replacing the Islamic Caliphate. According to Ravitzky, therefore, the task is to negotiate and construct bridges between contradicting political theologies. He and Rabbi Melchior are *not* advancing a transformative theology. Muslims and Jews are not asked to harmonize their contradicting theologies; rather, they should develop a *practical* path consistent with their different theologies.

This vision does not satisfy the religious and political aspirations of the Froman peace campaign. In an essay entitled "Peace with the Arabs—Entrance to the

Garden of Eden” found in the Hebrew University Archives, Froman (n.d.a; n.d.b; n.d.c; n.d.d; n.d.e) expounded upon “the spiritual value of peace with the Arabs.” He argued, based on Jewish mystical writings, that by hosting three Arabs, Abraham became the first person to find the entrance to the Garden of Eden. By following Abraham’s example of openness and hospitality, Israeli settlers are best suited to develop mutual religious understandings with their Palestinian Muslims neighbors, leading their way to the Garden of Eden, i.e., to salvation.

Another biblical figure inspiring scholarship on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is Moses. Relying on Said (2003), Butler (2012, 28) finds in Moses, “the Arab-Jew,” a model for improving relations between Palestinians and Israelis. In her view, Moses the Egyptian defies the dichotomy between the Jew and Arab categories.⁴ Hence, Butler calls for a cohabitation of Arabs and Jews that would replace their current repressive relationships. Whereas Butler sees in Moses “a more diasporic origin for Judaism,” Froman would stress Moses’ unfulfilled love for the Holy Land guiding his leadership (e.g., Deut. 3:23). The Froman peace campaign cannot accept Butler’s (2012, 215) rejoinder that “it is not the Moses who leads the people out of the wilderness who is most important here, but rather the one who *wanders*.” If the Jews are wanderers, they are colonialists in Palestine. In contrast, Froman’s primitivism concept assists him in making a case for Jews as natives in their biblical homeland. Another interesting comparison between the two thinkers is that while Butler stresses fusion in ethnic identities of Palestinians and Israelis, Froman promotes a theological fusion between Muslims and Jews. That corresponds well with an additional difference: While Butler primarily seeks correcting past and present injustices, Froman is after an ideal religious future peace.

Transcending Nationalism

The Talmud, according to the medieval French scholar Rashi, likens God to a householder whose ox left the stable (symbolizing the Jewish exile from the Holy Land) for a medical treatment, and instead a horse came in (symbolizing the incoming Muslims). The owner becomes attached to the horse and will keep it in the stable even when the ox returns (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 98b). Similarly, Rabbi Melchior explained to us, now that the Israelites’ descendants have returned from exile, the Muslims still have their place in the Holy Land. Thus, Melchior believes that it is a religious duty of Israeli Jews to find the way to live peacefully with their Arab neighbors in that land.

For Rabbi Froman, however, while this goal is very important, he aspired for an achievement on a more universal scale. In the Hebrew University archives lays an essay handwritten by Froman (n.d.a; n.d.b; n.d.c; n.d.d; n.d.e) that was to be translated into Arabic and distributed among Palestinians. There Froman argued that “Israelis and Palestinians can show the entire world how Islam and the West can respect each other. If Israelis and Palestinians succeed in building Jerusalem (Al-Quds) as their shared capital city... [it] will become the capital peace of the whole world.” His dream is of a universal peace to which peace in Jerusalem between Palestinians and Israelis is not a final goal, but a crucial first step.

While Froman's hope was clearly laid out, his political plans remained, perhaps intentionally, unclear. In 1989, Froman is reported to have met with Faisal Al-Husseini, a Palestinian politician, and having presented to him a plan for the establishment of two governments in Jerusalem serving its two—Jewish and Arab—populations (Bar-Yossef 1989). Later Froman explicitly linked the fall of the Berlin Wall to his vision: "I would not want to see after the Berlin Wall already fallen that we put up a Hebron Wall, certainly not in Jerusalem" (Little 2007, 346). Froman's Jerusalem plan, unlike other peace plans, aimed at higher ideals than "mere" local tranquility. His ambition was to metaphorically "build Jerusalem" by a joint action of Palestinians and Jews. This indicates that a religiously transformative shift for peace is essential for Jerusalem's construction. What did he mean by this? Is Jerusalem not already built?

In another essay laying in the Hebrew University archive, entitled "For the End of Days," Froman (n.d.a; n.d.b; n.d.c; n.d.d; n.d.e) argued that peace cannot be conceived merely as a give-and-take negotiation because no Jew or Arab can give up on Jerusalem. Instead, a spiritual solution is necessary for making the situation beneficial to both sides. Peace cannot be achieved if each side wants to take and not to give. But if Jerusalem can become a spiritual and religious capital, then both Muslims and Jews can win by elevating the city's honor. Froman testified that the late Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat (1929–2004), whom he had considered a friend, approved of this idea.

The President of the United States will be glad ... to enter into history books as the one who has re-established Jerusalem as the religious capital of the world. This role fits the spiritual roots of the United States of America, and the special, religious, personality of the man now standing at its head.

For Froman, it is now clear, Jerusalem is unique in its spirituality, and in order to build the Holy city, it should be recognized as such, first by local Muslims and Jews, then by American Christians, and then by the rest of the world.

According to his theological and political vision, Froman proposed "Yerushalom" as a name for Jerusalem incorporating the Hebrew words "yeru" and "shalom," meaning: "they shall see peace." In another archival essay, entitled "Yerushalom," Froman (n.d.a; n.d.b; n.d.c; n.d.d; n.d.e) wrote that the Jewish tradition embraces "the concept that Jerusalem has a place on earth that belongs to heaven."⁵ Hence, he argued, Jerusalem should be taken out of national pride competitions between the two peoples. Instead, Jerusalem should "express our ability to transcend the national conception in its narrow sense" by declaring it to be an exterritorial spiritual city connecting east and west. Yet again, Froman (2021) wrote that "we do Jerusalem no honor if we insist that it will be to us what Belgrade is to Yugoslavia. Jerusalem deserves to be more: A realization of our potential to rise above the narrow sense of nationalism." The wish to transcend the narrowness of nationality is an important feature of Froman's thought as his closest life companion, his wife Hadassah, testified in her previously mentioned dialogue with Khaled Abu-Awwad.

"The Field" is the location of an important project of inter-religious dialogue. It is in an area south of Bethlehem (known to Israelis as "Gush Etzion"). The Abu-Awwad

family dedicates that space to promote ideas of non-violence, Palestinian human rights, and dialogue between local Palestinians and Israelis. To fulfill the latter goal, Khaled Abu-Awwad (a religious Palestinian) and Shaul David Judelman (a religious Israeli and disciple of Froman) co-direct the Roots Project, taking place in The Field. It facilitates continuous conversation and activity for children, teenagers, men, and women, of the two populations, and it also hosts interreligious dialogues between Muslim and Jewish clergy. Khaled Abu-Awwad and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger, two speakers of the Roots Project, were invited to a meeting of the Women Wage Peace movement in the city of Modi'in. Schlesinger said there that "the memory and the way of Rabbi Froman inspires everything we're doing at Roots."

In her conversation in The Field with Khaled, Hadassah explained how she became involved in the project. "After [Menachem] passed away, the Abu-Awwad family came to me and said, Let's do this." Now she will succinctly present her understanding of the Roots Project and its relationship with her husband's vision and legacy: "Palestinians knew Menachem. For them, this [project] was an option to find a way that is not 'either-or,' but a [way to] unify Judaism and Islam, and that's what we're doing here." The aspiration to *unify*, though not *assimilate*, is at the center of Froman's vision.

This lofty idealism has profound roots in Froman's religious Zionism. In his youth, Froman was close to Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, an influential figure for the right-wing religious-Zionist settler movement (Hellinger et al. 2016). Since then, Froman remained committed to his teachings and those of his father Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), the famous Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine (Little 2007, 355–56). In one often cited passage, Rabbi Kook (the father) wrote that "the aspiration to unify all humanity into one family calling in the name of God" is the greatest end to aspire to. Rabbi Kook thought that in the future the world will "move from nationalism to generality;" then "the narrow nationalism which contains the vices of excessive private love" shall be destroyed (Kook 1985).

In her talk at The Field, Hadassah presented her husband's interpretation to this argument of Rabbi Kook. According to Froman, Rabbi Kook's first stage of salvation has already been achieved by Israel's physical, military, technological, political, and economic power. Zionism's successful efforts to establish a Jewish state is a signal, according to Hadassah and Menachem Froman, that the first stage of salvation is over. The second stage of salvation is universal and transcends the boundaries of a nation. That second stage requires destroying narrow nationalism and building a Zionism which holds dear the universal values of mercy, love, justice, and peace (Froman 2017, 175–77).

Hadassah developed this idea in a conference at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem on March 14, 2019. She said that now is the time for meta-Zionism (Froman 2017, 176). For her, "being a religious-Zionist means opening one's eyes and seeing where God leads us." She, just like her late husband and Rabbi Melchior (as explained above), believes that God speaks to humanity through reality (Froman 2014, 108). Accordingly, if the Arabs live in the Holy Land, it is because God wants them there. "The two peoples seat here now. There is a reality. We have a work of connection to do... [The Muslims] also believe in the One. With all differences we need to search for a common path, respect each other, and believe in a potentially

great connection.” This work of connection, she argues, can and should be achieved by following Rabbi Kook’s vision of destroying the first “egoistic” and natural stage of nationalism and building a “universalistic” and spiritual salvation (Glazier 2015). By unifying Islam and Judaism, the Temple shall be built (Froman 2017, 230).

At his talk in Modi’in, Khaled Abu-Awwad explained that whereas God selected Jerusalem as the location to which Jews direct prayers, eventually Mecca was deemed the sacred place for Muslims’ prayer, so as to avoid conflict, as a message of reconciliation. “If God wanted us [Muslims and Jews] to fight [each other] he would direct Muslims towards Jerusalem” rather than to Mecca. As Rabbi Froman brings Muslims into his theological account, so too Khaled Abu-Awwad brings Jews into his own.

However, Rabbi Froman extended the theme of prayer-directions to unify Islam with Judaism. In an interreligious dialogue with a Muslim leader in Turkey, Rabbi Froman stressed that in Istanbul, the Jew prays south-east toward Jerusalem and the Muslim prays in the same direction toward Mecca. From Istanbul, the Jew and the Muslim pray in the same direction to the same God (YouTube 2019; Little 2007, 348). Rabbi Froman referred there to both a book attributed to King Solomon and to the Quran saying that “Both books are the words of One God.” This is not merely religious diplomacy. Rather, it is a work in progress aimed at combining Islam and Judaism into a complex theology with political implications for Israeli-Palestinian relations.

In January 1992 (immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991), Froman proposed a vision of multi-national and multi-religious states to overcome the narrow egoistic form of religion and nationalism (Froman 2014, 83–86). This, he thought, would aid the virtue of modesty to prevail over vanity. Such states, Palestine and Israel included, will need to deal with the challenge of combining “the will for uniqueness” of each national or religious group “and the need to unite” them (Froman 2014, 86; 2020, 111). Hence, tension between *unification* and *uniqueness* lies at the center of Froman’s thought and legacy. That tension cannot be easily resolved. Neither religious Palestinian nor Israeli peacemakers in the West Bank are expected to rejoice in an inter-religious marriage (Mizrachi and Weiss 2020).⁶

Political arrangements, Froman believed, reflect the virtues and vices of citizens. “Narrow nationalism” is characterized by anger and cruelty while peace is characterized by the virtues of modesty, wisdom, and compassion that enable seeing not only one’s own perspective on justice but also that of the other side of the conflict (Froman 2014). The next section explains how political arrangements can be shaped to enhance these virtues.

Political Plans

The old national state, Froman argued, cannot solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Froman 2014, 89). Since Palestinian and Israeli inhabitants of Judea and Samaria are mixed, it would be difficult to separate them. In addition, the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is too dear to both Palestinians and Israelis, and thus cannot be divided into two separate states. Further physical and political separations will only intensify enmity.

Therefore, Froman argued, peace between pious Muslims and Jews can be achieved by meeting, neighboring, touching, talking, respecting each other, and developing mutual understanding. The conflict will be solved by: (1) A theological vision combining principles of both Islam and Judaism, and (2) a political arrangement according to which Palestinians and Israelis have mixed states in the Holy Land, i.e., two states without borders, as well as two governments in Jerusalem. The first is a pluralist theology; the second, a pluralist polity.

In an essay entitled “A Call for Internal and External Peace” found in the Hebrew University Archives, Froman proposed the following alternative:

It is reasonable to establish two national entities in the land occupying the same territory. On that land, there will be two flags, two presidents, two systems of leadership. The Jews of every part of that land will belong to their own entity ... and the Palestinians of every part of the land will belong to their own entity.

This is similar to, if not identical with, the vision of two states in one land, also known by other names, such as “Two States, One Homeland,” and “A Land for All” (Times of Israel 2016). Froman’s proposal remains ambiguous and devoid of practical details. Hadassah Froman told us accordingly that her husband’s plan was not finalized but only generally supported recognizing the national rights of the Palestinian people without dividing the Holy Land.

When Yakov Nagen was asked about the idea of “one state,” he replied by criticizing the “the two-state solution.” Nagen said that Rabbi Froman compared the left’s Jewish State to “a Western state totally separated from all its [Middle Eastern] neighbors” (Baram 2015). Nagen is not willing to give up on the Jewish character of the state. Instead, he proposes a confederation in which each side preserves its national identity. Yet, he admitted then that he was not capable of providing the details of this plan.

Two years later, he wrote more about this political solution, again criticizing the Oslo conception of the two-state solution (Nagen 2017a). Nagen presented two points he heard from a Palestinian sheikh: (1) Palestinians and Israelis are not playing a zero-sum game as the Oslo Accords suggest. Instead, they should view the land as belonging to them in common; (2) the Oslo Accords did not take into account the religious background of the conflict, and thus were doomed from inception. Nagen’s proposed alternative is “a confederation, the existence of two states unified under one collective political entity. Every person would simultaneously be a citizen of their respective nation as well as a citizen of the confederation” (Nagen 2017a).

Europe is for Nagen a source for inspiration. Palestinians and Israelis will be part of a confederation like French and German citizens make part of the European Union. The proposed confederation will be named the “Abrahamic Union” to stress the collective identity of Arabs and Jews. The confederation will contain an open border and a “tangible presence of each people in the partnering country.” That Israeli settlements continue to exist in the West Bank, is, as discussed above, essential for Froman and his followers. To a certain extent, their entire religious peace project represents an effort toward achieving that goal.

But comparing the internal dynamics of the Middle East and of Europe is problematic. To our question about political solutions to the conflict, Shaul David Judelman replied that while “two states, one homeland” is a brilliant idea, it is not applicable so long as there is no trust between the two populations. Judelman therefore proposes a long process of trust-building rather than hastily signed political agreements.

Similarly, Nagen (2017a) writes that the vision of a confederation “is not attainable in the short term.” Support for this skeptical view is found in Shlomo Spivak’s story about Rabbi Froman. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin (1937–2004), the founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, said to Froman (according to the testimony of the latter): “You and I can make peace in five minutes.” Sometimes, however, when speaking with his students, Froman added a qualification: “let’s not deceive ourselves, let’s not make peace in *five minutes* but in *five hundred years*” (Spivak 2015). This is yet another sign that for the Froman peace campaign, signing peace agreements cannot replace the hard and daily work of producing direct contact and trust required for real, tangible, and sustainable peace (Weiss and Mizrahi 2019).

The politics of two states in the same Holy Land serves the messianic theology of salvation through unifying Islam and Judaism, without assimilating them. Likewise, pluralistic theology serves the politics of the Israeli settlement project in Judea and Samaria. In other words, the Froman peace campaign develops a theology to justify their presence in the West Bank. This point was clearly expressed by Froman in the early days of the settlement movement during the 1980s: “we must make peace with the [Palestinian] neighbors... [otherwise,] we [the settlers] won’t survive here for long” (Spivak 2015). Hence, pluralism in the theology and politics of the Froman peace campaign are mutually beneficial.

In the mind of Froman and his followers, religion and politics go hand in hand to produce a language that does not conform with contemporary Western diplomacy. This is not the language of either Israeli left-wingers supporting a total separation between Palestine and Israel as two independent states or of Israeli right-wingers supporting the status-quo of occupation or the annexation of the West Bank. This is a language of pluralism in theology and in politics: On the theological level, Muslims and Jews should pursue their shared worship of God; on the political level they should live in the same land while being citizens of two united states.

Conclusions

For many, the religious and political views presented by Froman and his followers are difficult, if not impossible, to grasp. As we have shown scholars have had difficulties in making sense of Froman’s ideas and actions. Pursuing peace while simultaneously keeping the settlements intact is an extraordinary approach. Confronting this counter-intuitive thesis, we have offered throughout this article, a comprehensive explanation of the distinct theology and politics underlying the Froman campaign for religious peace.

The radical demand of the Froman camp for a transformative theology, or a theological change of heart, requires that Jews accommodate Islamic principles within their own theological worldview. Similarly, Froman’s approach requires that

Muslim partners for peace develop a complimentary theology adopting Jewish principles and rituals. A pluralistic Judeo-Islamic theology can bring peace to the people of the Holy Land. In the words of Schmidt-Leukel (2017): “there is a potential, an inclination, a longing in us that finds fulfillment through encounter with the real other—reciprocally—and thus leads to a new ‘we.’” The creation of this new “we” through a transformative theology in the Palestinian-Israeli context was an important insight which Froman brought to his intimate followers and to the dialogue with his Palestinians counterparts but remains concealed from Jewish Orthodoxy.

As a result of Froman’s utopian approach to political affairs, his plans for Jerusalem and for the entire Holy Land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea are also ambiguous. Furthermore, the Froman peace campaign does not believe any political plans can be immediately implemented to solve the conflict in the foreseeable future. That view certainly fits the political goal of the Froman peace campaign, namely preserving their proactive settlements project. Their concept of “two states in one land” represents a pluralist approach to Israeli-Palestinian politics.

The Froman camp constructs a pluralistic theology to serve political interests, and it proposes pluralistic politics to serve its theological vision. On one hand, pluralism in Judeo-Islamic theology enables this camp to defend the Israeli settlements in the West Bank (or Judea and Samaria) as the best instruments to achieving peace between pious Muslims and Jews. On the other hand, pluralism in Israeli-Palestinian politics is considered a crucial step forward toward transcending nationalism and messianic salvation. Establishing two governments in one city and two states in one land is, in Froman’s view, the path to transcend and destroy politics of narrow nationalism and replace them with a model of reconciliation between Eastern and Western civilizations. This campaign focuses not on the past, but on the future. It does not strive to correct past injustices or to regret Israeli military successes. Rather, it conceives Israeli-Palestinian peace to be a crucial step in a long path that would eventually lead to a universal messianic peace.

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Notes

1. This article, which was published only a few months before the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, legitimized rebelling against Rabin’s government should it ignore the security needs of the settlements.
2. In contrast to Magid’s (2019, 135) suggestion, Froman’s critique does not miss out earlier forms of humanistic Zionism of Jabotinsky and Begin.
3. Perhaps surprisingly for a peacemaker, the primitivism he shared with his Muslim counterparts meant also denouncing same-sex relationships, earning Froman a backlash from liberal factions (Froman 2009).

4. Butler would therefore challenge Froman's assumption that Israeli Jews represent the Western civilization (Omer 2019, 258).
5. Similarly, Nagen (2017c) wrote that "tradition believes [the Temple Mount] to be the place when heaven and earth kiss."
6. This concern was communicated to us in conversations with two women of the Froman peace camp (their names are kept anonymous). To our question about the chance that ritualist emotional connection would bring to inter-religious marriage, Hadassah Froman replied that intermarriage is "a great threat" that should be prevented. Indeed, certain medieval Sufi Jews ended up converting to Islam (Goitein 1953). To the question if "he had religious reservations about praying with those of other religions," Rabbi Froman replied that he is more afraid of his children becoming unbelievers than converting to Islam or Christianity (Jerusalem Post 1999).

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Dr. Benjamin Schvarcz is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Princeton University’s James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions. His research focuses on Jewish political thought in two distinct realms: Rabbinic literature of late antiquity and modern Israel. Schvarcz’s work has been published at *The Harvard Theological Review* and *The University of Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought*. His article on a political theory of partnership in rabbinic laws of neighbors is forthcoming at the *Jewish Quarterly Review*.

Prof. Miriam Billig is a faculty member of the Department of Sociology and Urban and Regional Planning at Ariel University, Israel. She is also the Scientific Director of Eastern R&D Regional Research Center. As per a mandate by the Israeli Ministry of Science and Technology, Billig is responsible for the promotion of academic research applicable to the region of Judea and Samaria.