

Resolving Middle East Conflict Requires More Than Prayers

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On March 12, EthicsDaily.com re-published an important [article](#) by the Rev. Mark Woods, editor of Britain's *Baptist Times*. In the article Woods describes the desperate situation in Gaza, even after the cessation of the recent armed conflict there, and pleads for "prayer, understanding and financial support" for both the churches in the Holy Land and its peacemakers.

Woods correctly observed that Israel's continued closing of Gaza's borders – thus cutting off food, medicine and other necessities of life – makes for an impossible situation that cannot endure any longer.

He applauds international donors for responding generously to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza (if only the donations could reach those in need) and is encouraged by America's "renewed interest in and commitment to the Middle East." Looking further ahead, Woods recognizes that any satisfactory solution needs to be a "just and lasting solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will require compromise on both sides, but which now seems unlikely given the rightward turn of the Israeli government.

In short, Woods gets almost everything right. Almost.

If I'm reading him correctly, he believes "Israel holds the key" – not just to opening the borders for needed aid to reach the Gazans and to permitting the development of a "modern-day Marshall Plan for the region," but also to that "just and lasting solution" to the conflict itself.

Yes, he grants that people of faith and others deeply committed to justice and peace in the region could have an important role in ending the conflict and, on the longer term, overcoming the "the hatred and fear of generations" with sacrificial love. That's where our support of them with "prayer, understanding and financial support" comes in.

I want to take issue with my British Baptist brother not on any of those points, but rather on his claim that Israel holds "the" key to short- and long-term solutions.

To be sure, Israel holds "a" key – a key one, in fact. But not the only one.

We – all Americans, and especially American Christians – hold a key (also a key one) to opening the borders for life-saving aid and to bringing justice and peace to what we call the "Holy Land."

But our refusal to use our key to unlock justice and peace surely must subject us to God's condemnation. Following Woods' counsel we, indeed, need to be praying for

understanding and financially supporting those who are working for justice and peace in Palestine-Israel.

Much more, however, is required of us.

Given the immense economic, military and political support we provide Israel – a nation that continually flouts international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions, United Nations resolutions and our own U.S. laws and foreign policy directives – we the people, as citizens of our democracy, must faithfully exercise our God-given political power to halt our nation's direct complicity in Israeli aggression and deprivation against Gazans, its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, its continued expansion of settlements in those territories, its destruction of Palestinian homes and farms, its restriction of movement to Palestinian places of work, education, healthcare and worship, and its killing and maiming of innocent Palestinian civilians.

Instead of doing what is required of us, we remain silent and complacent, unwilling to use the keys that are available to us to open the doors of compassion, of justice, of peace, of reconciliation.

Now, in our silence and complacency we – not just our president and his administration and not just senators and representatives, but we the people – are allowing Israeli interests to control who will and will not be chosen to serve in even non-policy making positions.

The withdrawal of former ambassador Charles W. Freeman Jr. from his nomination to be chairperson of the National Intelligence Council, despite his strong support from the Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Blair, shows how ready and willing we are to have our own national interests be dictated by the representatives of another government.

Commenting on his withdrawal, Freeman writes:

“It is apparent that we Americans cannot any longer conduct a serious public discussion or exercise independent judgment about matters of great importance to our country as well as to our allies and friends. The libels on me and their easily traceable emails show conclusively that there is a powerful lobby determined to prevent any views other than its own from being aired, still less to factor in American understanding of trends and events in the Middle East. ...The aim of this lobby is control of the policy process through the exercise of a veto over the appointment of people who dispute the wisdom of its views, the substitution of political correctness for analysis, and the exclusion of any and all options for decision by Americans and our government other than those that it favors.”

Prayers are certainly in order, make no mistake about that. But those prayers ought to include not just petitions. They ought to include confessions and commitments, too.

Prayers of confession are needed so we can seek God's forgiveness for our silence and our complacency and complicity in evil.

Prayers of commitment are needed to tell God that we're not any longer requesting God alone to do what is also our mission and work: to be participants in building an inclusive community of justice and peace, of compassion and reconciliation – even, maybe especially, in the land where our faith was born.

It is, to use Woods' word, "key" to our Christian faith.