

Robert Nicholson: When I think about the West and what makes the West the West, I think about the spirit of the West. I think about the culture of the West. And for me, and I'm speaking as a person of faith, the spirit of the West is a spiritual vision, is a particular revelation that animated and actually made the West. We think of the West as being the land of democracy, and we think of some of these other procedural aspects of the West; but the substance of the West, the heart of the West, actually comes from the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible is the wellspring for all of the good things that we know to be part of the West. And for me, when I think about the Hebrew Bible, I think about the Hebrew people. I think about the people of Israel, the Jewish people. And so I look at Israel today, and how could I not—as a Christian, as an American, as a Westerner—be struck by that fact and think that has something to do with me, as a Westerner, as a Christian, as I'm thinking about the future of my own civilization.

Robert Nicholson: Christians, like Jews, people who carry this idea of revelation, transcendent meaning, worshipping the Hebraic God, the Biblical God, face opposition from many fronts. Of course, we all know about the Middle East and the opposition from violent Muslims. But there is other opposition as well. And in the West we are facing opposition from post-Christian society, people who have grown up, whether they know it or not, in the West, in the land that was informed by Biblical faith, but rejected that faith, rejected that vision, and see those who carry that vision as enemies, as people who are backward, try to bring civilization back to the dark ages. So Christians, to the extent that they want to practice their faith, worship their faith, talk about their faith, face increasing opposition in post-Christian and or secular society so that their voices are being marginalized, and they are thinking about okay, not only what is our future in the Middle East, but what is our future in the West, that place that our faith has actually created. And so it's not as existential as what's happening in the Middle East, but its making a lot of Christians wonder, what is our future, how do we fit in this post-modern society?

Robert Nicholson: I speak to many Middle East Christians from Iraq, from Egypt, from Lebanon, from Jordan, from Iran. And one of the universal themes that I hear them say is where is the West? Where is the Vatican? Where are the American Christians? They claim to be so Christian, and here we are, their brothers and sisters in Christ, and they don't seem to think about us at all. Why is that? I ask myself this question as well. I think part of the problem is that for Western Christians, the Middle East is far away. It's just not in our world. Another reason is that some Western Christians look at Eastern Christians and don't see them for whatever reason as truly Christian, or truly connected to them. And that's another problem. But I think, you know, from the perspective of geopolitics, I think that many Christians do identify with Christians in the Middle East, do feel sympathy, compassion, solidarity with them, but they don't know what to do. Hanging over all of this is the question of Islam. What do we in the West do with Islam? How do we confront it? When we confront it are we making it worse? If we stick up for persecuted Christians are we actually putting them in more danger? These are big questions that are being debated within the

Christians community and many Middle Eastern Christians who live in fear, who are hostages within their own society, often will say to a Western Christian, “please stand in solidarity with us. Please show compassion, please support us, but whatever you do, don’t say anything. You are going to make it worse”, which further complicates this relationship. As a Western Christian, what do I do? What is the right course of action to preserve and protect these communities?

Robert Nicholson: What is an ideological war? It is a war of ideas, and we often think about a war of ideas in terms of a war of values, we believe in freedom, we believe in dignity, we believe in such and such. But I see it actually as more a struggle or a battle of a clash of stories. The West, the Hebraic tradition that gave birth to the West, has a particular story. It is a story of where man came from, where he is going, and who he worships. And that story is the story that drove the West for the vast majority of our history. You look at other civilizations, the Islamic civilization. They too, they have a story. It’s not just static sort of ideas. These are clashes of stories. And as I think about an ideological struggle, it’s not just let’s figure out what are the specific values that we have, so we strengthen them in the face of other values that are set against them. It’s actually about recovering the story. Hebraic tradition brought the idea of narrative into history. Before the Hebrews, pagans saw history as essentially cyclical. It was these periods of rise and fall of gods who spawned other gods really going off into the future with no end in sight. The Greeks, when they were thinking about the future, they were thinking about what is the good, what is the good life. How do we think about it? How do we philosophize about how to live as humans. Again, really no story in Greek tradition. The Hebrews, Israelites, in writing the Bible, introduced the idea of story to the world that other cultures, other religions picked up upon, and so now we have a world of stories. And unfortunately, what happens in the 21st century if you are a young American, the story is my story. It’s about me. It’s about individual achievement or opportunity or celebrity or fame. And I want to make my story on my Facebook page. I am not living for any greater story. And that to me is the great tragedy of the West. We have lost our story. We don’t remember what it’s all about. There is no narrative. The narrative is my narrative. And at the end of the day that can only go so far. And what you are going to find is people will become disillusioned, depressed, they’ll ask themselves what is all for? And the reality is unless you recover the story, unless you are living for something, unless there is an end for all that we do, we are really just struggling in the dark. And that really to me, is the crisis of the West right now. We are struggling in the dark.

Robert Nicholson: There is an assault on Jews and Christians across the world right now. Some of it takes place in the Middle East. Some of it takes place in the West. And it happens in different ways. In the Middle East it has to do with sort of the clash with another religion. In the West it has to do with the clash with the post-religion, with a way of life that says religion doesn’t matter and in fact it undermines the future of humanity. So, in the West we are not on the brink of disaster as Christians and Jews are in the Middle East, but we are facing a struggle no less intense. There’s an assault on the belief and the practice of any sort of religion that carries moral content, that puts theories forward that says human beings ought to live in this kind of way. This is what we think God requires of us. This, as Christians and Jews, this is the way that we believe we should live in society together. We have opponents here in the West, in our own countries and cities who reject

that unequivocally. Who say “it is not only something we disagree with, but it’s something we are going to move to suppress. We are going to begin to enact political and legal measures against your religion, to begin to exclude you from the public square as people who have nothing to contribute to this public discourse.” That’s a big, big problem and I think Jews and Christians are still trying to grapple with that. I’m an American, what’s happening right now in America, it’s happening slowly, but there’s a common theme. We are being pushed out. People are saying to us “your vision, your religion, we don’t like it. And it’s not actually the West. You’re actually the problem of the West. We need to root you out and get rid of you. We need to contain you. And I think Jews and Christians who I believe have maybe the most to say in public discourse, need to be fighting for their right. We need to recognize that there is a struggle and begin to fight that struggle. We cannot be passive in this moment. This is really the fight of our generation. What will the role of Christians and Jews be in the future of the West.