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Foreword

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Foreword

John Merkle

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On behalf of everyone connected with the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning, I am pleased to express our gratitude and delight for the opportunity to have had our center co-sponsor the conference, "Religion, Politics, and Peacemaking: Perspectives from Haigazian University, Lebanon, and the College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University" (CSB/SJU). The essays by Jon Armajani, Suha Naimy, Wilbert van Saane, Paul Haidostian, and Mary Dana Hinton published in this volume are based on presentations at this conference, which was the Thirty-First Annual Peace Studies Conference at CSB/SJU and took place on the campus of Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, on October 29, 2018.

This conference continued the collaborative relationship among Haigazian University, CSB/SJU, and the Jay Phillips Center that began in March 2014 when Paul Haidostian, President of Haigazian University, delivered the lecture "Religious Diversity in the Middle East Today: A Blessing or a Curse?" at Saint John's University with the sponsorship of the Jay Phillips Center. The cooperative relationship between these institutions continued with a co-sponsored seminar at Haigazian University on interreligious and intercultural relations that brought together presenters from Haigazian University, CSB/SJU, and other institutions to discuss those themes as they relate to the Middle East and North Africa in the modern period. CSB/SJU faculty participation in Haigazian University's annual Armenian Diaspora Research Center conferences, presentations in undergraduate courses at Haigazian, the involvement of CSB/SJU and Haigazian students in joint programs, and ongoing conversations among members of these college and university communities also have been crucial components of the collaboration.

The conference on religion, politics, and peacemaking constituted yet another opportunity for this partnership to flourish, while having at its foundation the Jay Phillips Center's goals of promoting dialogue, understanding, friendship, and civic engagement across lines of difference. The center's work is carried out in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate* and its call for dialogue and collaboration among followers of various religions. It thereby supports CSB/SJU's coordinate mission, which promotes the study of the intersection of global cultures and community sustainability while CSB/SJU's institutional learning goals highlight engaging globally and embracing difference. The collaborative relationship between the Jay Phillips Center and CSB/SJU, as also between this center and Haigazian University, manifest these principles that are especially relevant in a world of diversity where peace and conflict are often interlaced.

The essays published here explore some of the nuances, tragedies, and aspirations involved in the complex interactions among individuals and communities in a textured modern landscape while suggesting possible pathways for peace in the context of interfaith relations. In a world where conflicts often lead to violence, not only on battlefields across the globe but also in places of worship, the need for interfaith understanding is especially pressing. These essays take seriously those conflicts and suggest the abundant possibilities for peace that interfaith engagement can unleash. They examine these possibilities in many contexts while focusing on modern currents

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in religion and politics. It is during tumultuous times such as these that colleges, universities, and centers for interfaith learning can offer the intellectual, ethical, and spiritual resources that can uncover the sources of conflict and illuminate paths for peace.