

**Gavin D’Costa and Faydra L. Shapiro, Eds.**  
***Contemporary Catholic Approaches  
to the People, Land and State of Israel***

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This volume has its roots in an international conference in Jerusalem in June 2019 that was convened by editors Gavin D’Costa, a British lay Catholic, and Faydra Shapiro, an Orthodox Jew living in Israel. They brought together Catholic theologians from Europe, the United States, and Israel / Palestine to present their perspectives on the challenges facing Jews and Catholics with regard to theologies of the Land and State of Israel. They did so in the presence of Jewish and Arab respondents “who had deep vested interests in that land” (xix). This volume gathers together these papers, many of them revised “in the light of this diverse witness and questioning” from non-Catholics (xx).

There are two sets of interlinking questions (xviii). First, what do Roman Catholics think about the land promise made to the Jewish People in terms of the Old Testament (where there can be no doubt that this is central to the Jewish Covenant) and the New Testament? Does reading the Old Testament through the Christological lens of the New Testament permit the validity of the Old Testament claims regarding the Jewish people? What significance does the New Testament itself attribute to Jerusalem and the land for Christians?

These challenges are introduced poignantly in His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa’s preface. As the Latin rite Patriarch of Jerusalem, he represents the ancient heritage of the Franciscans in the Holy Land, with service to Christian Arabs and pilgrims. He presents some of views held by Jews and Catholics and argues for the necessity for dialogue between them.

The essays are presented in three parts: “Listening Again to Scripture” (four essays), “Mining the Tradition (four essays), and “Seeking Justice and Peace” (four essays), followed by two Jewish responses. The “Listening Again to Scripture” section is addressed to Catholics and reviews the foundation for Catholic-Jewish relations since the Second Vatican Council. It introduces biblical and theological insights for ways in which Catholics approach the intricate questions of the Church-Israel relationship, especially with reference to Romans 9-11.

Lawrence Feingold, a Jewish convert to Catholicism, has written the first chapter of this part, "The Return to the Land of Israel as an Eschatological Sign in the Light of Romans 11." He presents the event as a sign "pointing to the fulfilment of history" (3) but without the millenarian-dispensationalist interpretations of certain evangelical Protestants. "Israel's identity and mission are inextricably linked to her Messiah, to whom her very existence and election point" (8). The eschatological sign is "the land wedded to its people, populated with its faithful people, as portrayed in Isaiah 62:4-5, related to the return of the Chosen People to the Land... [This] can also be seen as a sign or type of the approach of the return of the Messiah" (11). "Holiness [of the Chosen People in the Land] should be understood according to the biblical teaching on social justice" (19).

Etienne Vetö, Director of the Cardinal Bea Centre in Rome's Gregorian University, asks "Why does God promise and give the land?" He argues that "what is at stake is a purified or transfigured conception of the land... which includes the call to share the land" (23). "[I]f one asserts that God's hand is at work there, then the presence of the Palestinian people cannot be exterior to God's design," referencing rules for resident aliens in Ezekiel 47:22 (31-32). In this essay he asks the pertinent questions for Catholic positions on the complex issues relating to the return of Jews to the land and the relationship of Jews and Palestinians. Ambiguities are acknowledged, and, he admits, many challenges remain.

Catholic questions regarding Israel's relationship to the Promised Land after Christ are presented by Jean-Miguel Garrigues and Eliana Kurylo. They review the millenarian eschatology of Christian theologians before Augustine of Hippo. Then they point to Vladimir Solovyov's eschatological theocratic ideal in connection with the Jewish people, followed by Jacques Maritain's "opinion that we touch two realities in the Land of Israel: the struggle for survival and the resurrection of the Jewish nation, but also the mystery of redemption carried by the Church" (54). Post Vatican II developments in Christian-Jewish relations are seen as "a sign that the eschatological hopes discussed in this article are starting to be fulfilled" (56).

In "The Resurrected Land of Israel," Isaac Vikram Chenchiah (England) reflects on the biblical bonds that connect people to land, using imagery of the human body. Ranging widely through the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, he develops an analogy between Jewish attachment to "*Eretz Israel* [as] the land of the Jewish Temple" and "as land of Christ, whose own body is the true Temple" (76). This essay will challenge readers to find a relation to the other contributions to this book.

Section II, "Mining the Tradition," begins with a fine essay by Christian Rutishauser, S.J., entitled "Land and State of Israel—Theological Reflections from a Roman Catholic Perspective." He sketches the promise in the Hebrew Bible, noting the renewal of the covenant after the Exile, and eschatological hopes (Micah 4:1-5; Isaiah 66:22). A sketch of Jewish theological interpretations of the Land (mentioning Abraham Kook, Martin Buber, and Joseph B. Soloveitchik, among others) is followed by Catholic and Protestant approaches (in Church statements and writings of individual theologians). He also highlights Pope Francis' call for a two-state solution and for social justice, and the comparatively less attention Francis gives to the question of political sovereignty (98). Within a few pages Rutishauser

draws attention to major questions to be faced by Catholics involved in discussions about Israel, especially in dialogue with Jews.

Matthew Tapie looks at a Christological interpretation of the land, putting Thomas Aquinas' views on land in dialogue with *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2002). He focuses in particular on the phrase "land of the living" from Psalm 27:13 with reference to the resurrection in the final days.

Next, Gavin D'Costa asks, "Is there a Roman Catholic biblical view regarding the Jewish people living in the land called Israel?" (122). He grants that the Palestinians have a right to a state / homeland. However, he writes, "given the growing appreciation of the continuing validity of the Jewish covenant which is never revoked by God" (144), there is a theological significance to their presence in the land of Israel. This introduces a tension he identifies: "affirming any state theologically is normally not part of the Catholic tradition" but "the state may be used instrumentally to achieve God's will regarding the settling of the Jewish people in the land called Israel" (144).

Dirk Ansorge's chapter raises the question "Does a Christian Theology of Sacraments Help to Achieve an Affirmative Approach to the State of Israel?" This question is answered in the negative. Because the Catholic sacraments are based explicitly on Christology, "[t]he concept cannot be transferred to any reality outside the Christian Church" (164).

Opening the next section, "Seeking Justice and Peace," David Mark Neuhaus, S.J., offers "A Catholic Perspective on the People, and Land and State of Israel." A Jew who converted to Catholicism, he offers the declaration: "I remain a Jew, an Israeli, a Catholic, a Jesuit, and yet these characteristics... are not turned into arguments for the exclusion of others" (189). He offers a personal experience that bridges the dichotomies of life in Israel and in the West Bank. He has walked alongside Jews and Arabs (Christian and Muslim) for several decades and gives a picture of the Church's call to "promote justice and peace for all inhabitants of the Holy Land" (190) in all its complexity. "The Church must promote a vision of the land in which all people, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Christians and Muslims, can be at home and enjoy citizenship in a political entity that guarantees the common good" (190).

In "Tractatus Theologico-Politica: Palestinian Suffering and the Official Catholic Teaching on the State of Israel," Antoine Lévy, OP, a Dominican who was born to a (non-religious) Jewish family, reviews the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in terms of Church statements regarding a just and sustainable peace. He argues that "the religious dimension is key to finding a just political solution to the conflict" (215), explaining that the Church derives her theology of social justice from the Bible. He then ambitiously recommends that Catholics dialogue with leaders in Israel in order to offer a well-intentioned challenge to those who may fail to live up to biblical ideals. He acknowledges that this challenge will require a new approach by Catholics and an openness to constructive criticism on the part of Israel's leaders. The reviewer notes that a moral and spiritual miracle will be proclaimed if this comes to pass!

His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, writes about “Christian Communities in Israel and Palestine.” He offers a poignant picture of daily life for Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims, faced with Israeli oppression and calls for reconciliation and peace based on justice as a sign of the challenge for all to imitate divine love. Achieving a two-state solution and securing equality for the Palestinians living in Israel would be the foundation for Israel to make amends for past political crimes. Christians throughout the world should encourage the Jewish people to move toward reconciliation with Palestinians so that “all of us creatures of God... live in peace, justice, equality, and security” (233). His review of the history of the region is one-sided, omitting discussion of Israel’s peace proposals and of Palestinian leadership’s own decisions.

Jamal Khader is a parish priest in Ramallah and has been affiliated with the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem for many years. He offers a reflection on “Christian-Jewish Relations from a Christian Palestinian Perspective.” His reading of the Bible as “one book, beginning with creation and ending with the Second Coming of Christ” (236), reflects his strongly Christological orientation to the Hebrew Bible. He contrasts this with another reading that “is used to justify the occupation of my land and the oppression of my people” (238). He has in mind religious arguments in support of Zionism by Christians and Jews alike, which conflict with his claim that the Bible should not be used to buttress political claims to the land.

In Part IV of this collection, “In Conversation: Jewish Responses,” Karma Ben Johanan and Faydra Shapiro enter into a form of dialogue with the Catholic contributors to the book by composing responses to the chapters. In her response “Jewish-Christian Relations and the Irrevocable Problem of Political Theology,” Ben Johanan focuses on the claim found in the title of the 2015 statement of the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “The Gifts and Call of God are Irrevocable.” She asks: Is there a theological meaning to the relationship between the Jews and the Land of Israel? Should Catholics regard the modern Jewish *State* of Israel as somehow mediating this meaning? Ben Johanan summarizes the tension found among the Catholic authors as follows:

[T]he tension is embodied in a complicated relationship between two theological trajectories. The first trajectory is focused on the singular role played by the history of the Jews in the history of salvation. This reasoning seeks to include the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel in the twentieth century, and to some extent also the establishment of the state of Israel and the moral challenge posed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the concept of the irrevocable covenant between God and the people of Israel...The other trajectory stands in tension with the application of the irrevocability of the covenant to the current Jewish people residing in Zion, seeing this kind of Jewish-Christian political theology as incommensurable with the Catholic profound suspicion toward the divinization of politics (256-57).

In response to these tensions, Ben Johanan identifies in the chapters two approaches to the relationship between the history of salvation (the theological

approach) and political or “worldly” history (the secular approach). The first is that “a strict separation is needed between theology and politics, since this is the only way to protect religion (and politics too) from the abuse of theology or of faith in the service of unjust regimes...Theology has to come to a halt when it is facing politics. This means that the Jewish people’s current presence in the Land of Israel has to be understood in purely secular terms” (257). This view is seen in Neuhaus’ writing, for example. The opposing view is that the Catholic Church should offer theologically-influenced judgments about worldly events. Lévy is representative of this view.

In “Jews, Catholics and Israel: Can We Find a Shared Language?” Shapiro advocates a two-state solution because this would be morally correct and good for Israel (273). When considering Catholic views, she argues that the trajectory of the Holy See’s documents flowing (slowly but methodically) from *Nostra Aetate* is “on an obvious and inevitable collision course with the reluctant arm’s length attitude that the Vatican has taken toward the State of Israel” (278). She gives the example of the apparent “reluctance” of the Holy See to entering into full diplomatic relations with Israel in December 1993. By contrast, Catholics might see that Israel “holds out the possibility of offering the Jewish people enough normalization to awaken the ability and desire to assess our uniqueness and our unique role in the world” (281). Referring to Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones being revived (in chapter 37), Shapiro challenges Catholics, who affirm that Jews “possess a specific theological significance,” to acknowledge God’s work today: “The State of Israel stands in that long moment between the physical rebirth and the spiritual animation to come... It is only with security and stability that Jews might have the possibility of developing a deeper engagement with the world” (282). This rich essay warrants a thoughtful Catholic response. Also, her question, “Can we find a shared language?” is followed by a set of suggestions for dialogue between Jews and Catholics on the Land and State of Israel.

The book’s contributors engage with a series of important topics in Catholic-Jewish relations. It also will help Catholics to interact productively with each other in a process of developing a Catholic theology of Israel.