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iii

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UMI
THE STATE OF ISRAEL IN CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS:
TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF LAND AND PEOPLEHOOD
IN JEWISH SELF-IDENTITY

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of St. Michael's College and the Theology Department of the Toronto School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Theology and Jewish Studies awarded by the University of St. Michael's College

Matthew Peter Johnson

Toronto 2001

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If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!
    Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
    if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem
    above my highest joy

< Psalm 137:5-6 (NRSV)

How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity . . . .
For there the Lord ordained His blessing

< Psalm 133:1, 3 (NRSV)
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iii

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CONTENTS

PREFACE ............................................................................................................................... v
INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................... 1

PART I
THE VATICAN AND MODERN JEWISH NATIONALISM

Chapter

I. THE VATICAN AND ZIONISM (1897-1947) .......................................................... 6
III. POPE JOHN PAUL II (1978 - PRESENT) ......................................................... 26

PART II
DIALOGUE: THE WAY TO PROCEED

IV. GENUINE DIALOGUE - UNDERSTANDING THE “OTHER” ..................... 38
V. EREZT ISRAEL ........................................................................................................... 42
VI. AM ISRAEL ............................................................................................................... 80
VII. CONCLUSION ....................................................................................................... 114

Appendices

I. Nostra Aetate, N°4. ...................................................................................................... 122
II. THE FUNDAMENTAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE HOLY SEE AND
THE STATE OF ISRAEL ................................................................................................. 124

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................... 129
PREFACE

Mid-way through my sophomore year at the University of Washington I made the decision to major in, of all subjects, Jewish Studies—an unlikely choice for a young Catholic who had little contact with Jews or Jewish culture. The decision, however, was no passing whim. This study marks the culmination of a MA degree in Theology and Jewish Studies at the University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto, and seven years of undergraduate and graduate studies in the field. Understandably, whenever the subject of my studies comes up in conversation I am almost always asked: “Why are you, a Christian, so interested in Jewish studies?” The reasons vary and have evolved over time.

As a student of history, I have, from a young age, been fascinated by the unparalleled story of innovation, struggle, persecution, and survival of the Jewish people over millenia. I recognized and was drawn by the fact that to study Jewish history is to study world history from a uniquely informed perspective.

This historical fascination became secondary, however, as I came to realize the importance that Jewish studies holds for Christians. The facts have been stated time and again: Jesus was Jewish, the disciples were Jewish, the New Testament comes largely out of a Jewish context and mindset. What is more practical, therefore, in order to gain a more profound understanding of the Christian faith than to study the Judaism from which it derived?

While it is important for Christians to understand the historical and spiritual roots of their faith, I believe the greatest benefit of Jewish studies for Christians lies in the wealth of wisdom, spiritual insight, and simple love for life that is found in Jewish teachings and traditions, both ancient and modern. For too long Christians have suffered from a profound ignorance of this rich tradition, which is rooted in biblical faith, due to the arrogant triumphalism that the Church has proclaimed over the Synagogue. A renewed spirit of humility toward the Jewish people is spreading among many churches today—Catholic and Protestant—that holds promise to turn this profound ignorance into informed enthusiasm.

The regathering of the Jewish people to its ancient homeland and the establishment of the State of Israel has no doubt served as a catalyst for many Christians to develop an interest in Judaism and Jewish history. It is in visiting and contemplating modern day Israel that I believe Christians have the best opportunity to deepen their own faith by discovering the great source of spiritual nourishment that is to be found in Jewish studies. Not only does the modern Jewish State allow Christians to encounter a living and vibrant Judaism in an intense and unique way, the permanence of the Jewish people throughout history and its return to and flourishing in Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) serves as a unique and concrete expression of God’s fidelity to His covenant and promises which Christians also hold dear.

This study was born from five years of traveling, studying and living in Israel and the insights that I gathered during this time from both Israelis and Catholics, in their mutual diversity, regarding their engagement to this unique land and their respective communities and their understandings and misunderstandings of one another. While there is much to be written regarding the need for an improved understanding of Christianity among Jews and Israelis, and while great advances have been made in Christians’ understanding of Jews and Judaism, I feel that there is an
acute need and great opportunity for Christians to gain greater insight into the important role that the State of Israel plays in Jewish self-identity, an issue that is often misrepresented and/or misrepresented by Christians as purely political in nature. This study has been limited to a discussion of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the State of Israel. Space does not allow for a quality examination of how the broad and diverse spectrum of Christianity relates to the Jewish state. Furthermore, the Catholic Church-State of Israel relationship offers the most prominent, historically rich and best documented account of all the organized Christian communities’ approach to the State of Israel. In addition, being a part of various Catholic communities in Israel has afforded me a more intimate experience into their positions than those of other Christian communities. In deference to the Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches in Israel, my friends and many of their members have taught me that the Catholic Church has much to learn from them in regards to improved Christian-Jewish relations.

As with most endeavors, there are many people to thank. I would like to express my gratitude to some of the people who have helped and inspired me in this study: To all of my professors in Jewish Studies at the University of Washington, particularly Prof. Hillel Kieval (now at Washington University) and Prof. Martin Jaffee who greatly stimulated my interest in Jewish history and thought and assisted me in coordinating my first study program at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; to my Hebrew teachers, particularly Ilan Rosenberg, whose enthusiasm, dedication, and sense of humor led me to love (and finally speak) this ancient and modern language; to Fr. Tom Rosica, CSB, whom I met in Jerusalem and who gave me the rewarding opportunity to return to the Holy Land as a volunteer at St. Joseph Hospital; to the Sisters of St. Joseph Hospital who showed my wife and I that great Middle Eastern hospitality by providing us with a home in Jerusalem during my last two years of study; to the Sisters of Sion at Ecce Homo, a community with whom we shared memorable moments of worship and fellowship; to my professors at the University of St. Michael’s College, particularly Sr. Anne Anderson, CSJ, who was a constant and reliable source of help in coordinating my study program in Toronto and Jerusalem; to my professors and the staff at the Pontifical Institute Ratisbonne, the École Biblique, the Hebrew University, and the Hebrew Union College Jerusalem, especially Rabbi Pesach Schindler, from whose teaching, not only I, but also my wife and parents benefited greatly, and Bro. Elio Passeto, who made my wife and me feel welcome in the Ratisbonne community; to Sr. Maureen Fritz, NDS, and the board of the Bat Kol Institute, whose encouragement and financial support helped make my two years of study in Jerusalem possible; to Fr. Marcel Dubois, OP, a great Catholic friend of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel, whom I was honored to study under and am tremendously grateful toward for his invaluable counsel in my research; and to the entire Levenfeld family (Barry, Jill, Tali, Yoni, Gabi, and Dani), who made a welcome place at their Shabbat table for my wife and me on countless occasions.

Special thanks must be given to my family: my parents, Ed and Marty Johnson, who have read and commented on every one of my papers and given me endless encouragement on every endeavor that I have pursued; my brother, sister-in-law, nephew and niece—Ed, Mary, Daniel and Abby Johnson—whose generosity and enthusiasm for life are contagious and have made me a better person; my sister, brother-in-law and nephew—Sue, Don, and Benjamin Antonsen—whose love for adventure has enriched my life by inspiring me to choose the “pump” over the “bottle”; and my parents-in-law, Karl and Ernestine Rohregger (and all of the “Rohrlis”), whose generosity and support helped to make these last three years of graduate studies a rewarding task.

Finally, my deepest thanks and admiration is due to my wife, Franziska, whom I was blessed to meet and marry in Jerusalem. She has been my study partner, my proof-reader, my Hebrew tutor, my constant companion, my inspiration, my best friend and the love of my life for the last five years. You are incredible.
INTRODUCTION

The history of Catholic-Jewish relations has been, to quote a recent Vatican document, "a tormented one." For nearly two millenia the Catholic church endorsed a "teaching of contempt" concerning the Jewish people. In the popular teachings of the Church, Jews were accused for not recognizing Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah, accused of deicide (via the crucifixion), and condemned to wander the world in an impoverished state, to serve as a warning of what happens to those who reject the Christian faith. Early church fathers spewed acerbic anti-Jewish hatred in their homilies and writings, and proclaimed Christianity to be the True Elect of God—the True Israel—a message that would continue to be spread well into the twentieth century.

The twentieth century, however, witnessed two momentous events, one of unspeakable tragedy and the other of unparalleled triumph, which have forced the Church to rethink its

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1 Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” (Vatican City: 16 March 1998), III.
4 St. Gregory of Nyssa (approx. dates, 331-396 CE) referred to the Jews as “slayers of the Lord, murderers of the prophets, enemies of their father’s faith, advocates of the devil, brood of vipers, slanderers, scoffers, men whose minds are in darkness, leaven of the Pharisees, assembly of demons, sinners, wicked men, stooges, and haters of righteousness.” St. Ambrose (340-397 CE) furthered the accusations, saying that the Jewish synagogue was “a house of impurity, a receptacle of folly, which God himself has condemned” (quoted in David Allen Lewis, New 95 Theses: Christian and Jewish Relations, [Springfield: Menorah Press, 1995], 21). Their words are largely echoes of one of the early church’s most influential orators, St. John Chrysostom (344-407 CE), the “golden-mouthed orator”, who, writes Fr. Edward Flannery, “stands without peer or parallel in the entire literature Adversus Judaeos” (Edward Flannery, The Anguish Of the Jews, [New York, 1965], 47). While several modern scholars have noted that Chrysostom’s attacks were not aimed at the Jews directly, but rather primarily at the Judaizing Christians of Antioch (for a balanced view of Chrysostom’s teachings on the Jews, see: Robert Wilken, John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983]), as Marcel Simon argues, “the title ‘anti-Jewish literature’ is a proper and deserved one, for the Judaizing tendencies that appeared in the Church were a phenomenon that had not arisen spontaneously in Christian circles. . . . There could be no Judaizers if there were no Jews” (Versus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire AD 135-425. [London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996], 145).
5 In 1933, the very same year in which Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, German Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber stated in a sermon: “After the death of Christ Israel was dismissed from the service of Revelation. She did not know the time of her visitation. She had repudiated and rejected the Lord’s Anointed, had driven him to the Cross. . . . The Daughters of Zion received the bill of divorce and from that time forth Assuerus wanders, forever restless, over the face of the earth.” Quoted in Harry James Cargas, Shadows of Auschwitz: A Christian Response to the Holocaust. (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 24.
understanding of the Jews: the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel. The revolutionary document of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate, N°.4),\(^6\) which officially exculpated the Jews from the murder of Christ and affirmed that God’s covenant with the Jewish people had never been abrogated, can only be understood in light of these two events. The near extermination of European Jewry during World War II shocked the Church with the disturbing realization of how its anti-Jewish rhetoric over the centuries may have provided the seed from which grew the genocidal antisemitism of Nazi Germany.\(^7\) In addition, the regathering of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland and the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 undermined the long held teaching that the Jews were doomed to wander the world in shame, forever serving as a sign of Christian triumph. As Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook, son of the first Ashkenazi chief Rabbi of Palestine, Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, exclaimed, “When the flag of the State of Israel was raised, all of the Vatican’s doctrines of the outcast, miserable Jew collapsed.”\(^8\)

_Nostra Aetate_ represented such an abrupt change in the Church’s teaching regarding the Jews that thirty-five years later its message is just beginning to find its way into the hearts and minds of many Catholic faithful.\(^9\) Although it may take several more years, or even generations, to reverse the anti-Jewish attitudes that have been deeply engrained by Christian theology over the centuries, _Nostra Aetate_ has given birth to many positive developments in Catholic-Jewish

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\(^6\) For the complete text see appendix I, pp. 122-123.

\(^7\) Christian contempt of the Jews, anti-Judaism, prominent throughout the medieval period, is often distinguished from the modern racial and/or political antisemitism which evolved in nineteenth-century Europe. Some scholars make a further distinction between racial and/or political antisemitism and Nazi genocidal antisemitism which culminated in the Holocaust. Whether Christian anti-Judaism led to the Holocaust, or even contributed to it, is a complex historical question. “What is certain is the Nazi antisemitism did not arise _ex nihilo_;” cf. Paul Mendes-Flohr, _“Zionism,”_ The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 250. Similarly, Raul Hilberg states: “the Nazi destruction process did not come out of a void; it was the culmination of a cyclical trend.” Hilberg summarizes this trend into three successive policies concerning the Jews since the fourth century: “conversion, expulsion, and annihilation.” cf. _Destruction of the European Jews_ (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1961), 3-4


\(^9\) The late John Cardinal O’Connor, former Archbishop of New York and champion of improving Catholic-Jewish relations referred to _Nostra Aetate_ as a “shocking” document, stating that to call it anything less “would be to betray significant naiveté, or even denial, about how bad relations between Jews and Christians in general had been for so many years” (Quoted in Jack Bemporad and Michael Shevack, eds., _Our Age: The Historic New Era of Christian-Jewish Understanding_ [New York: New City Press, 1996], 7-8.)
relations. It is the prayer of all men and women of goodwill that these developments will ensure the “spoil seeds” of anti-Judaism and antisemitism may never again take root in any human heart.

One of the most recent and profound steps of reconciliation between Catholics and Jews was the formalization of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel on December 30, 1993. Considering that the State of Israel serves as the focal point of Jewish identity and as a source of great pride for the majority of Jews throughout the world, the ongoing development of Vatican-Israel relations is sure to play a pivotal role in future Catholic-Jewish dialogue. The overwhelming positive response of Israelis and Jews around the world to Pope John Paul II’s visit to Israel (21-26 March 2000) demonstrated the great importance of this issue in Catholic-Jewish relations. While the complex political problems in the region stemming from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are certain to create disagreements between the two bodies, these difficulties need not hinder further advancement of mutual trust and respect, nor should a more positive Vatican-Israel relationship mean a compromise on the Church’s legitimate humanitarian and spiritual concerns for the Palestinian people. In a sincere desire to reconcile itself to its “elder brothers,” and in light of its recognition of God’s continued covenantal relationship with the Jewish people, the Church of Rome, and all Catholic faithful, must strive to a better relationship with and understanding of the Jewish state.

Part One of this study aims to present the evolving attitude of the Vatican toward the Zionist movement from one of both animosity and ambiguity, as it struggled between theological skepticism of a possible autonomous Jewish entity in the Holy Land and a humanitarian concern over intensified persecution of Jews in the Diaspora, to a more pragmatic and conciliatory

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11 Commission for Religious Relations with Jews: “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” V.

12 While the Pope declared his visit to be a “personal pilgrimage and spiritual journey,” besides representing the Catholic Church as the Bishop of Rome, he also visited Israel as a Head of State, representing the sovereign state of Vatican City. This point was underlined by his official Israeli government reception at the residence of President Ezer Weizman where he addressed Israeli government ministers and members of Knesset.

attitude, culminating in the formalization of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the State of Israel. This brief survey seeks to synthesis much of the conflicting research that has been done on this subject into what I hope is a more balanced view of this complex and contentious relationship. In addition, it highlights the growing recognition and appreciation within the Church of the importance of the State of Israel in the modern Jewish experience. Pope John Paul II has made extraordinary statements and gestures that express his appreciation of this issue—a sorely absent element of recent biographies and surveys of his papacy. Here, I seek to make both Christians and Jews aware of these developments.

Part Two argues that if Catholic-Jewish relations are to proceed upon the fruitful path of reconciliation that they have followed over the last thirty-five years, the Vatican and the Catholic faithful whom it represents, must nurture and actively seek to improve its relationship with Israel. This will be accomplished primarily by Catholics deepening their understanding of the two central and unique features in Jewish self-identity which find their fullest expression in the Jewish state: the Jewish people's fidelity to Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel); and the concept of Am Israel (the People of Israel) which has bound the Jewish people, religious and secular alike, together for millennia. Popular Church commentary on the State of Israel rarely moves beyond the headline-grabbing-conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This survey seeks to provide Christians with greater insight into the importance of Israel for the Jewish people and to initiate the suggestion of how the Jewish state can serve as a rich source of theological reflection for the Church.
PART 1

THE VATICAN AND
MODERN JEWISH NATIONALISM
CHAPTER I

THE VATICAN AND ZIONISM (1897 - 1947)

Before surveying the history of the Vatican's relationship with the Zionist movement and the State of Israel, it will be helpful to briefly examine the structure and function of the diplomatic offices of the Holy See and the various elements which provided the impetus to modern day Zionism. This is done in order to define the terms and titles that will be frequently referred to throughout this survey, and more importantly to highlight the intersection of the sometimes indistinguishable lines of religious and political motivation within Vatican diplomacy and the Zionist movement, which is necessary for understanding the unique relationship between two ancient brothers in faith (Catholics and Jews), on the one hand, and two potent political forces on the other (The Holy See and Zionism).

Vatican Diplomacy

The Lateran Treaty, signed on 11 February 1929, between Pope Pius XI and the Italian government of Benito Mussolini, granted the head of the Roman Catholic Church temporal power and territorial sovereignty over Vatican City¹ and full rights to engage in international diplomacy. Article 24 of the treaty describes the international stance of the Holy See:

With regard to the sovereignty belonging to it in international matters, the Holy See declares that it remains and shall remain outside all temporal rivalries between other States and shall take no part in international congresses summoned to settle such matters, unless the parties in dispute make jointly appeal to its mission of peace, in any case, however, the Holy See reserves the right of exercising its moral and spiritual power.²

¹ Approximately 109 acres centered around the Basilica of St. Peter and the Vatican Palace, as well as various other pieces of property throughout Rome.
According to H.E. Cardinale, the term “Holy See” is often understood in three different ways, which demonstrates a certain degree of ambiguity regarding the distinction between its temporal and the religious functions:

1. The Pope as part of the Roman Curia.  
2. The Pope in his capacity as head of the Church.  
3. The spiritual organization of the papal government.  

Canonically, explains Cardinale, the Catholic Church and the Holy See are two separate entities. The Church, he explains, is the universal body of believers in the Catholic faith, founded by Christ “as an hierarchically organized entity in its own right, pursuing its own spiritual aims with its own means, independent of any other entity or authority.” The Holy See, on the other hand, as stated in Canon Law [Can. 7], stands simply for the organ of government of the Church.

However, some jurists find it inconceivable to distinguish the Holy See from the institution [the Church] which it represents. Cardinale offers some help in better defining this manifold relationship: “The Catholic Church and the Holy See are respectively invested with international juristic personality, but it is the Holy See which acts as the supreme organ of the government of the Church. The Holy See is to the Church what the government is to the State, with the difference that the monarchical constitution of the Church, being of divine origin, is not subject to change.”

As Cardinale states, while one may speak of the two bodies in distinct terms, the relationship between the Holy See and the Church is interdependent, in which one cannot fully function without the other. Thus, to speak of a strictly political or governmental function of the Holy See, particularly in international affairs, as opposed to the religious authority of the Church, as Canon Law may seem to suggest, is a baseless claim. As was noted above, to do so would mean separating the Holy See from the body which it represents. Pope Paul VI himself emphasized the religious element of the Holy See’s diplomacy when he cautioned foreign correspondents at the Vatican, saying: “Do not judge us by your usual yardstick. For the Holy

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3 The central bureaucratic institution of the Church responsible for planning and coordinating Church activity worldwide, consisting of the Secretariat of State, sacred congregations, the tribunals, and various departments of administration.  
5 Ibid., 85.  
6 Ibid.
See’s decisions are based upon the Gospel and her own living traditions, not on the world’s spirit nor on public opinion.”⁷ As will be evident in the following survey of the Vatican’s relations with Zionism and Israel, this complex mixture of theological doctrine and international political concerns makes it difficult to clearly separate the Holy See’s political policies from the Catholic Church’s theological teachings regarding Jews and Judaism. Professor Sergio Minerbi, of the Hebrew University, argues that this influence can go both ways: “While the Church tries to keep its stand toward the Jews separate from its position on Zionism [historically understood by the Holy See in purely political terms] . . . the Vatican’s political position is closely linked to the theology underlying it, but in turn, its theological positions are sometimes dictated by political circumstances.”⁸ His latter point is demonstrated by the purely theological statement of the Church regarding the Jews in Nosstra Aetate N°.4, which was significantly modified in light of the political pressures brought on by Arab countries who felt that it shed a favorable light on the State of Israel (see discussion, pp.22-23).

Within the realm of international diplomacy, the structure and function of the Holy See differs little from the governmental departments of other sovereign nation-states in the world. Overseeing the Holy See’s international affairs is the Secretariat of State, headed by a Cardinal who assumes the title of Secretary of State. Among his many duties, the Secretary of State is the Pope’s chief aide in all matters related to international treaties and the conduct of diplomatic relations with foreign states, and in special circumstances represents the person of the Supreme Pontiff himself.⁹ His broad authority is equal to that of a prime minister and is overruled only by the Pope, who serves as the Head of State within the diplomatic and political activities of the Holy See. Serving the Secretary of State in foreign affairs is the Secretary of the Section for Relations with States (equal in status to a foreign minister), who has responsibility for the Holy See’s diplomatic relations with States, including the establishment of international concordats, and for

⁸ Minerbi, The Vatican and Zionism: Conflict in the Holy Land 1895-1925, xii.
the Holy See’s presence in international organizations. Representing the Vatican in Apostolic Nunciatures (equivalent to embassies) in the respective nations with which the Holy See holds diplomatic relations are the Apostolic (or Papal) Nuncios, usually archbishops, who are given ambassadorial rank. A nuncio’s mission is twofold: to promote the Holy See’s good relations with the civil government to which he is accredited, and to act as the Pope’s representative of the local Catholic Church. In Jerusalem the Pope also appoints an archbishop as Patriarch whose role is primarily ecclesiastical, but because of the Church’s keen interest in the political affairs of the region, the position has often been used for political purposes, as will be seen further on.

While the Holy See is structured and conducts active diplomacy like most other national governments, it is also important to point out that it almost never involves itself in direct political confrontation. Rather the Vatican has a practice of stating only general principles, leaving their concrete application to others. A prime example of this was the Holy See’s inability to agree on a joint statement with the World Council of Churches regarding the Vietnam War, because the latter wanted to mention US bombings, while the former thought that to be too specific. However, the Holy See’s policies and statements regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict arguably serve as an exception to the norm. Because the Middle East is the cradle of

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10 Ibid.
11 The Vatican maintains formal diplomatic relations with 166 nations, including Israel: 69 of these maintain permanent resident diplomatic missions accredited to the Holy See in Rome.
13 To countries with which the Holy See does not hold formal diplomatic relations, an apostolic delegate is often sent. An apostolic delegate does not have official diplomatic status and deals mainly with the local ecclesiastical hierarchy, but de facto, he also maintains friendly relations with the civil authorities. This was the status of Vatican-Israel relations prior to December 1993.
14 The Holy See is especially active in international organizations. It has permanent observer status at the United Nations in New York, the Office of the United Nations in Geneva and specialized institutes, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris. The Holy See also has a member delegate at the International Atomic Energy Agency and at the UN Industrial Development Organization in Vienna. It maintains permanent observers at the Organization of American States in Washington, DC, and the Council of Europe. In addition, the Holy See has diplomatic relations with the European Union in Brussels. In 1971, the Holy See announced the decision to adhere to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in order to “give its moral support to the principles that form the base of the treaty itself.” In 1997 the Holy See became a member of the World Trade Organization. The Holy See is also a participating state in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Source of information: US Department of State; text available at: http://www.state.gov_vatican.html; Internet; accessed 5 April 2000.
16 Ibid.
Christianity and the survival and development of the indigenous Christian communities—the oldest in the world—is considered by the Vatican to be a symbol of the continuity of the Christian tradition, as well as other theological and political reasonings that will be discussed later, the Holy See has been more willing to involve itself in the direct political confrontations of this region than elsewhere in the world.

Zionism

The beginning of modern political Zionism is commonly placed within the milieu of the rise of European nationalism in the nineteenth century, and its most powerful impetus is often believed to be a response to modern antisemitism. In fact, the term "Zionism" first appeared only in the 1890's in the wake of widespread pogroms against the Jews in Eastern Europe. However, the concept of "Zion," the longing for national and spiritual redemption of Jewish life in Eretz Israel, has been an integral part of Jewish self-identity since the Babylonian Exile. Ever since its dispersion, the return to its ancestral homeland has been a central theme in the thoughts, prayers, and dreams of the Jewish people. Psalms 147 speaks of the Lord rebuilding Jerusalem where the dispersed of Israel will be regathered; ‘Next year in Jerusalem’ has been the hopeful cry expressed at the Passover seder and Yom Kippur service for centuries; and generations of religious Jews have turned toward Eretz Israel when reciting the Amida (or Shmone Essre), the central prayer in Jewish liturgy.

Several decades before Theodor Herzl (1869-1904), the founder of the World Zionist Organization and the most seminal figure in modern Zionism, brought the Zionist movement to the international stage out of concern over the Judennot—the problem of the Jews, viz.,

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16 See Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 590. Among his "Thirteen Theses on Zionism", Laqueur states: "Zionism is a response to antisemitism. To note this is not to disparage the original impulses and the character of the movement. All national movements have come into existence and developed their specific character in opposition to and usually in the fight against outside forces. Jewish religion, Zion as a symbol, the nostalgia for the lost homeland and other mystical factors played a role in the development of Zionism. But political Zionism as distinct from mystical longings would not have come into existence but for the precarious situation of central and east European Jewry in the second half of the nineteenth century."


17 "Zionism" was a term probably coined by Nathan Birnbaum (1864-1937), a leader of the Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion), a Jewish group in Eastern Europe devoted to the national resettlement of the Jews in their ancestral homeland.
antisemitism—leaders such as Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795-1874), Rabbi Judah Solomon Hai Alkalai (1798-1878), the socialist Moses Hess (1812-1875), and the members of Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) groups were already promoting and assisting the resettlement of Jews in Palestine, albeit in small numbers. In contrast to Herzl, these men were driven mainly by their concern over the Not des Judentums—the problem of Judaism’s survival in a modern, secular world—and by their religious conviction that the appointed time for the return of the Jewish exiles to Zion had come. Considering these “forerunners” to modern Zionism, as well as the long and deeply held devotion of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael, Paul Mendes-Flohr, professor of Modern Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University, concludes, “As integral to Zionism as its negative reaction to anti-Semitism, is its positive assertion of belief in the messianic prophecy and the historic destiny of the Jewish people.” Another prominent Jewish historian and thinker, Arthur Hertzberg, offers a similar conclusion, yet in slightly different terms which serves to highlight the significant effects of modern nationalism on Zionism. After surveying the long Jewish history to which Zionism is the heir, including the messianic stirrings of the biblical prophets, the revolt of Bar Kokba, and the long litany of references to a restored Zion in Jewish liturgy and literature, he states: “The bond between the people and its land, which it never gave up hope of resettling, was thus never broken, and Zionism is, therefore, the consummation of Jewish history under long-awaited propitious circumstances afforded by the age of liberalism and nationalism.”

The Vatican-Zionist Encounter

As far as officials at the Vatican were concerned, the Jews were free to dream of once again establishing themselves as a nation in their ancestral homeland. The small Jewish communities

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21 Ibid.
which began to take root in Palestine during the mid-nineteenth century caused no disturbance at
the Vatican, as it considered the possibility for a sovereign Jewish state to be simply a utopian
idea (as did the majority of Jews of the time). However, as the Zionist movement gained political
clout under the leadership of Theodor Herzl and as its demands for the formation of a Jewish
national home in Palestine began to find sympathetic ears among world leaders, especially in
Great Britain, the Vatican began to display a somewhat ambiguous, but mostly antagonistic policy
towards Jewish resettlement of Palestine.

On 22 January 1904, seven years after the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland,
Theodor Herzl was granted an audience with the Holy See’s Secretary of State, Rafael Cardinal
Merry del Val. Herzl began the meeting by expressing his desire to obtain the Holy See’s
goodwill for the Zionist cause. The following are excerpts of their conversation which Herzl
recorded in his diary that evening:

Cardinal: I do not quite see how we can take any initiative in this matter. As long as the
Jews deny the divinity of Christ, we certainly cannot make a declaration in their favor.
Not that we have any ill will toward them. On the contrary, the Church has always
protected them. To us they are the indispensable witnesses to the phenomenon of God’s
term on earth. But they deny the divine nature of Christ. How then can we, without
abandoning our highest principles, agree to their being given possession of the Holy Land
again?
Herzl: We are asking only for the profane earth; the Holy Places are to be
extraterritorialized22... It would be in consonance with the great policy of the Church,
Your Eminence, if the Holy See declared itself in our favor—or, let us say, as not against
us.... You could achieve a great moral conquest here.
Cardinal: Certainly, a Jew who has himself baptized out of conviction is for me the ideal.
In such a person I see the physical characteristics of descent from Christ’s people united
with the spiritual elements.... The history of Israel is our heritage, it is our foundation.

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22 Herzl proposed extraterritorial status for the holy places in his famed book, Der Judenstaat, in 1895: "The sanctuaries
of Christendom would be safeguarded by assigning to them extraterritorial status such as is well known to the laws of the
nations. We should form a guard of honour about those sanctuaries answering for the fulfillment of this duty with our
existence. This guard of honour would be the great symbol of the solution for the Jewish Question, after eighteen
(New York, 1946), 30.

Herzl may have had in mind the extraterritorial status of Great Britain in China following the treaties of 1842-
1844: "Extraterritoriality is in essence the extension of jurisdiction beyond the borders of the state. It embodies certain
rights, principles and immunities which are enjoyed by the citizens, subjects or protégés of one state within the
boundaries of another, and which exempt them from local territorial jurisdiction and place them under the laws and
judicial administration of their own state. Extraterritoriality is often confused with ex-territoriality, but the latter refers
only to the immunities accorded a diplomatic envoy and his suite in accordance with international law, while the former
may be said to involve the establishment of an international servitude by elevating the nationality principle of jurisdiction
over the territorial principle." - Sir Francis Pigott, W. R. Fishel, The End of Extraterritoriality in China (Berkeley and
But in order for us to come out for the Jewish People in the way you desire, they would first have to be converted.23

Cardinal del Val politely promised Herzl that he would consider his request and assured him of an audience with the Pope. Three days later, 25 January 1904, Herzl was received by Pope Pius X. The Pope’s response to Herzl’s request for the Holy See’s support of the Zionist cause reinforced Cardinal del Val’s message and summed up the Church’s understanding of its spiritual superiority to the Jewish people and revealed the theological grounds for the Holy See’s opposition to Zionism.

We cannot encourage this movement. We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem—but we could never sanction it. The soil of Jerusalem, if it was not always sacred, has been sanctified by the life of Jesus Christ. . . . The Jews have not recognized our Lord, therefore we cannot recognize the Jewish people.

. . . There are two possibilities. Either the Jews will cling to their faith . . . in that case they will be denying the divinity of Jesus and we cannot help them. Or else they will go there [to Palestine] without religion, and then we can be even less favorable to them. The Jewish religion was the foundation of our own; but is was superseded by the teachings of Christ, and we cannot concede it any further validity.24

Herzl requested that the religious issue be avoided for the sake of the Jews who were suffering persecutions all over Europe. “I don’t know if Your Holiness is acquainted with the full extent of this sad situation,” said Herzl, “We need a land for these persecuted people. . . we are not asking for Jerusalem, but for Palestine—only the secular land.” “We cannot be in favor of it,” the Pope replied. Herzl reiterated his previous plea, “does Your Holiness know the situation of the Jews?”

The Pope responded:

Yes, from my days in Mantua. Jews lived there. And I have always been on good terms with Jews. Only the other evening two Jews were here to see me. After all, there are other bonds than those of religion: courtesy and philanthropy. These we do not deny to the Jews. Indeed we also pray for them: that their minds be enlightened. This very day the Church is celebrating the feast of an unbeliever who, on the road to Damascus, became miraculously converted to the true faith [St. Paul]. And so, if you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we shall have churches and priests ready to baptize all of you.25

24 Ibid., 1602-1603.
25 Ibid., 1604. These comments may also reflect certain eschatological views prevalent in the Church at that time that any large-scale regathering of Jews to their ancient land was a sign of the End Time, in which the majority of, if not all, Jews would have to come to faith in Jesus Christ before returning to the land of promise. Cf. Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages (London: Scolar & Warburg, 1957).
Following this meeting Sokolow stressed that his audience with the Pope had "led to a most national home in Palestine, concluding with the declaration: "We shall be good neighbors." According to Sokolow, he expressed this sympathy for the Zionists' effort to establish a Jewish home in Palestine. Sokolow, in a meeting with Nessim Sokolow, a leader of the Zionist Organization in London, the 1917 Balfour Declaration and the laws are securing everywhere. In addition, on a May 4, 1919, Parliament, declaring: "I have full sympathy for the national plan of the Jews in Palestine. We want Palestine, sovereign, independent and fair, where the Jews are assured everywhere."

Sokolow's statement was essentially a reaffirmation of Zionism's commitment to a Jewish Homeland in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration was a significant document that affirmed the right of the Jewish people to establish a national home in Palestine, which was a crucial step towards the realization of a Jewish state. Sokolow's message was a strong endorsement of this declaration, expressing the hope that the Jews would establish a sovereign and independent state in Palestine, which was a significant achievement for the Zionist movement and a step towards the establishment of Israel.
satisfactory attitude on the part of the Vatican towards Zionism." However, following the Balfour Declaration (2 November 1917), in which British Foreign Secretary James Balfour announced: "His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object," the Vatican, in fear that the Jews might succeed in establishing autonomous rule in Palestine which was not subject to British supervision, voiced its opposition toward Zionism. This fact has lead some historians to interpret the occasional gestures of favor toward Zionism by the Vatican as simply patronizing gestures, void of any real belief that Jewish sovereignty in Palestine would be possible. The day after the British takeover of Jerusalem (11 December 1917), Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Cardinal Gasparri expressed the Holy See’s concern over the status of holy sites in the city to France’s official representative to the Vatican, Charles Loiseau, stating: “It is hard to take back the part of our heart which has been given over to the Turks in order to give it to the Zionists.”

A more hostile reaction to increasing British support for the Zionist movement came from Francis Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster. Cardinal Bourne visited Palestine between December 1918 and March 1919 and sent regular reports of his experience to the Holy See. In a letter to the British prime minister and Lord Balfour dated 25 January 1919, he wrote:

The whole movement [Zionism] appears to be quite contrary to Christian sentiment and tradition. Let Jews live here by all means, if they like, and enjoy the same liberties as other people; but that they should ever again dominate and rule the country would be an outrage to Christianity and its Divine founder. It would mean, moreover, most certainly, the controlling influence of Jewish, which is German, finance. Is this really what England desires after recent experiences?

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Regarding Bourne’s letter, Lord Balfour wrote bluntly, but perhaps with some insight, to the prime minister, stating: “I suspect that the motive of most of them [Catholics] is not so much anxiety for the Holy Places as hatred of the Jews.”

In addition to the reports of Cardinal Bourne, Pope Benedict XV received continued warnings from Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Monsignor Luigi Barlassina, claiming that “atheism, Communism, and immorality were rampant among the new Jewish immigrants.” After learning of the preparations taking place in London and at the Paris Peace Conference (January 1919) to support Zionist claims to Palestine, the Pope delivered a major speech emphasizing the important position which the Oriental Church holds in Christendom, and expressing the Church’s fear over infidels (the Jews) gaining political control in Palestine.

There is one matter on which we are most specially anxious, and that is the fate of the holy places [in Palestine], on account of the special dignity and importance for which they are so venerated by every Christian. Who can ever tell the full story of all the efforts of our predecessors to free them from the dominion of infidels, the heroic deeds and the blood shed by the Christians of the West through the centuries? And now that, amid the rejoicing of all good men, they have finally returned into the hands of the Christians, our anxiety is most keen as to the decisions which the Peace Congress at Paris is soon to take concerning them. For surely it would be a terrible grief for us, and for all the Christian faithful, if infidels were placed in a privileged and prominent position; much more if those most holy sanctuaries of the Christian religion were given into the charge of non-Christians.

We learn, too, that non-Catholic foreigners, furnished with abundant means and profiting by the great misery and ruin that the war has brought on Palestine, are there spreading their errors. The Pope’s fears were undoubtedly being fed by Barlassina, who, in his pastoral letter of 20 July 1920, emphasized the danger of “autocratic Zionist domination” that sought “to eliminate all that is not Jewish.” In addition, the Holy See was heavily influenced by the Arab population of Palestine, among whom were many Catholic faithful. This is witnessed by the fact that many of

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35 A few days following the Pope’s speech, Cardinal Gasparri explained the Pope’s remarks to the Belgian representative to the Vatican: “The danger we most fear is the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.” Pierre van Zuylen (Rome) to Foreign Minister Hymans, March 16, 1919, no. 57/26, ABRE, St. Siège 1919-20; quoted in Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism: Conflict in the Holy Land 1895-1925*, 131-32.
the arguments used by the Vatican to combat Zionism were appropriated from the local Arab leaders.

Minerbi aptly summarizes these arguments into four main positions which the Vatican held toward Zionism from 1895 through the mid 1920’s:

1. The Zionists were not religious and were even anti-religious. Therefore, they were not fulfilling biblical prophecy and had nothing to do with the promised return to the Holy Land.
2. Zionist immigration would sweep the Christians out of Palestine and would destroy the country’s Christian Character.
3. The possibility that a Jewish government would be formed was intolerable.
4. The Jews were causing radical changes in the traditional life-style of the local population. And the accelerated modernization they were inducing was often damaging to moral values.40

Concern for the status of holy sites, the well being of the local Arab Christian communities, a possibility to re-establish some political influence in the Holy Land which had been almost completely lost during the centuries of Muslim rule,41 and most significantly the Church’s long held belief that the Jews had no right to a renewed national life, since the Church had replaced them as God’s covenant people, were the main factors underlying these four arguments. The latter, theological, position was upheld by Pope Benedict XV’s successor, Pope Pius XI (1922-1939). In a speech at his first secret consistory on 12 December 1922, Pius XI stated that the rights of the Roman Catholic Church in the Holy Land were manifestly predominant not only to those of “Israelites and Infidels” but to adherents of all other religions.42 However, it was also Pius XI who condemned racism in his 1937 encyclical, Mit brennender Sorge, and stated in a 1938 speech: “Anti-Semitism is unacceptable. Spiritually we are all Semites.”43 While this latter statement may be a vague sign of positive change in the Catholic Church’s attitude toward the Jewish People, they clearly should not indicate any change in the Holy See’s attitudes towards the Zionist

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movement. While Vatican officials continued to display humanitarian concerns over increased antisemitism, they remained at odds theologically with the idea of autonomous Jewish settlement in Palestine.

**World War II**

Following Hitler's assumption of power in 1933 Germany and the passage of the 1935 Nuremberg laws, which stripped German Jews of civil and political rights, there was a dramatic increase in legal and illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine—from 9,553 in 1932 to 61,854 in 1935. Some Church representatives went so far as to actively support the Jews in their attempt to escape the Nazi persecution by finding refuge in Palestine, although these acts were considered extraordinary and purely temporary measures.

Official Vatican policy toward Zionism throughout World War II remained ambiguous at best. While Pope Pius XII (1939-58), successor to Pope Pius XI, did speak out publicly on at least six occasions, calling for universal brotherhood and defending the rights of Jews as a member of the human family, the Holy See never issued its support for Jewish emigration to Palestine as a solution to the atrocities being suffered by the Jewish people under the Nazi regime. Despite public praise of the Pope by Jewish-Zionist leaders, such as Dr. A. Leo Kubowitzki, Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress during World War II, and Moshe Sharett, Israel's first foreign minister and second prime minister, for his efforts to save Jews during the war, many critics (Jewish and Christian) arose, and continue to arise, condemning Pius XII for not having done more to defend the Jews.\(^{45}\)


\(^{45}\) John Morely, a contemporary critic of the Vatican's policies during the war, who expresses the sentiments of many critics of Pius XII, states: "[The Pope] chose reserve, prudence, and diplomatic presence in all the [European] capitals over any other goal or need. This approach does not seem to have been motivated by malevolence or anti-Semitism, but was caused by an inability to depart from cherished ecclesiastical or personal concepts to confront the evils besetting Europe and the Jewish people.

...It must be concluded that Vatican diplomacy failed the Jews during the Holocaust by not doing all that it was possible for it to do on their behalf. It also failed itself because in neglecting the needs of the Jews, and pursuing a goal of reserve rather than humanitarian concern, it betrayed the ideals that it had set for itself. The nuncios, the secretary of state, and, most of all, the Pope share the responsibility for this dual failure." Cf. John F. Morely, *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews During the Holocaust 1939-1943* (New York: Ktov Publishing House, Inc., 1980), 209.
Laying aside the question of guilt or lack of Vatican intervention during the war, it is important for the purposes of this study to note that the unimaginable horrors of the Holocaust greatly affected many aspects of Western political, social, and cultural life, the Vatican being no exception. Although change in official Church doctrine regarding the Jews was slow in manifesting itself, the Holocaust, and the eventual establishment of the State of Israel, would greatly challenge and eventually transform official Catholic teaching regarding the Jews. Improved relations with Jews on religious grounds would have significant political consequences for the Holy See’s relationship with the State of Israel.

In regards to the Holocaust, a later Vatican document stated: “The step taken by the Council [of Vatican II] finds its historical setting in circumstances deeply affected by the memory of the persecution and massacre of Jews which took place in Europe just before and during the Second World War” (Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra Aetate” (No. 84), Rome, December 1, 1974, “Preamble”). The ramifications of the newly established State of Israel on the Church’s changing attitude toward the Jews are not expressed explicitly in Vatican documents or statements due to the political and theological problems which it raises, but as will be proposed later, a renewed and vibrant Jewish nation in the Holy Land could not help but place traditional Catholic theology of the suffering, displaced Jew into question.
CHAPTER II
THE VATICAN AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL (1948 - 1978)

The sheer political facts on the ground following Israel’s defeat of its Arab enemies in its 1948 War of Independence, and its subsequent acquisition of control over East Jerusalem and the West Bank following the 1967 Six-Day War, would eventually force the Vatican to adopt a more pragmatic, but still extremely cautious, approach to its dealings with the nascent Jewish state. However, the initial stages of Israel’s statehood witnessed an increased antagonism by the Holy See toward the Zionist enterprise on both religious and political grounds. On the very day of Israel’s declaration of independence, an article in the Vatican publication, *L’Osservatore Romano*, articulated in no uncertain terms the supersessionalist theology underlying the Holy See’s opposition to Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land: “Modern Zionism is not the true heir of Biblical Israel, but a secular state... therefore the Holy Land and its sacred sites belong to Christianity, the True Israel.” The Vatican also continued to stress its concern for safeguarding holy places, and the need for free access to these sites for all the faithful of the three major religious bodies (Christians, Muslims, and Jews). In a clear demonstration of its opposition to Israeli rule, particularly in Jerusalem, shortly after the end of the War of Independence, the Papal Delegate to Palestine was stationed in the Jordanian controlled section of the city and the Vatican exerted pressure on Catholic states to establish their embassies in or near Tel Aviv, rather than in Jerusalem—Israel’s designated capital. The Holy See further antagonized Israel by condemning it

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1 Not an official publication of the Vatican, but a vehicle for official Vatican statements.
3 January 1949.
for failing to carry out the full internationalization plan proposed for Jerusalem by the United Nations, while at the same time it (the Holy See) held cordial relations with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which refused to relinquish its rule over the Old City of Jerusalem (home to the majority of Christian holy places in the city), barred Jews from visiting their religious shrines, and systematically desecrated and destroyed synagogues and Jewish holy sites.  

More congenial moments are to be found on record, however, such as the time Israel’s Ministry of Religious Affairs presented to Msgr. Antonio Vergani, the Latin Patriarchal Representative in Jerusalem, a check in final compensation for war damage to Catholic institutions. In a formal letter to the Israeli government on 16 November 1955, Msgr. Vergani thanked the government for the “constant assistance I was given in the settlement of the various questions outstanding between the Roman Catholic Church and the State of Israel within the latter’s territory.” However, previous Vatican conduct (i.e. its condemnation of Israel and support of Jordan, and its many antagonistic statements toward Zionism prior to and following Israel’s independence) planted seeds of deep mistrust and anger among Jewish audiences, which remain firmly rooted to this day, regarding the Vatican’s policies toward Israel, especially its request to hold a seat at the negotiating table that will determine the “permanent status” of Jerusalem.

The papacy of John XXIII (1958-1963) saw the birth of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the issuing of its revolutionary document Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate), in particular its brief (fifteen lines in Latin) but unparalleled statement about the Jewish people (No. 4), which transformed the Catholic Church’s attitudes toward Jews. According to Dr. Eugene Fisher, former Executive Secretary of

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5 Ibid.


7 For the Vatican’s most recent stance on Jerusalem see Symposium of Presidents and Delegates of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences on Jerusalem. Text available at http://www.albushra.org/latpatra-english.html; Internet.
the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States, this document contained two particularly significant achievements: "First, it ended definitively all speculation that the Jews as a people could be held collectively responsible for the death of Jesus. . . . Second, reading Rom. 9:4-5 in the present tense (‘Their are the sonship and the glory and the covenant and the law. . . ’), the Council opened the way to a more positive articulation of the Church’s relationship with the Jews as people of God [quoting the document]: ‘Now as before, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their fathers; he does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the call he issues.”⁸ These two pronouncements, albeit implicitly, served to preclude any negative theological position on a Jewish return to the Land of Israel, and thus held possible positive political ramifications for the State of Israel. For if Jews were not being accused collectively for killing Jesus,⁹ their dispersion from their land could no longer be understood as a punishment from God for this act. More significantly, the recognition of God's continued fidelity to his covenant promises for the Jewish people, in which possession of Eretz Israel is central, afforded a clear opportunity for a positive theological interpretation of the new Jewish state, which in turn could lead to an explicit political endorsement. Precisely because of these possible political ramifications, the Council's declaration on the Jews was one of the most bitterly contested of all statements. Church representatives from Muslim nations, as well as the more theoretically conservative clergy, displayed hostile opposition to the statement. These opposing forces succeeded in preventing the adoption of the document until the very end of the Council, and then only in a modified form. For example, the original document stated: "May Christians never present the Jewish people as one rejected, cursed or guilty of deicide."¹⁰ In the final version, even though it was upheld that all Jews were not responsible for the death of

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⁹ It is important to note that the official teaching of the Church on the death of Christ had always been that Christ "underwent his passion and death freely and out of infinite love because of the sins of men in order that all might reach salvation," as stated again in Nostra Aetate, N."⁴.
the words "guilty of deicide" were omitted, and a concerted effort was made to point out
that the Jewish authorities of Jesus' day pressed for his execution. Those in opposition to the
statement, especially the Arab bishops, felt that expunging the guilt of deicide from the Jews so
explicitly would leave too little room for objecting to, on theological grounds, a Jewish national
home in the Holy Land.12 Cardinal Augustine Bea, entrusted by John XXIII to be the chief
architect of Nostra Aetate, was compelled, in response to these critics, to clarify the strictly
religious and moral purpose of the declaration, stating:

As regards to the Jewish people, it must again and again be made clear that the
question is in no sense political, but is purely religious. We are not talking about
Zionism or the political State of Israel, but about the followers of the mosaic religion,
wherever in the world they may dwell. . . Such renewal is so important that it is
worth while to expose ourselves to the danger of some people abusing this
Declaration for political ends. Our duties are to truth and justice.13

Nevertheless, due to the importance of the State of Israel in Jewish self-identity, the Council's
declaration, which encouraged "mutual understanding" and "brotherly dialogues" between Jews
and Christian, was bound to have political consequences, since Jews would naturally seek to
include it in any such dialogues.

The first signs of a more pragmatic approach toward Israel on the part of the Vatican
came under the leadership of Pope Paul VI (1963-1978). While he maintained the Vatican's
traditional policies toward events in the Holy Land—non-recognition of Israel, humanitarian
support for Arab refugees and local Christian communities, and special emphasis on the
protection of holy places—his visit to Israeli territory during a Holy Land pilgrimage in January

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10 Emphasis mine. Quoted in Geoffrey Wigoder, Jewish-Christian Relations Since the Second World War (New York:
11 The document also emphatically states, in repetition of previous official Church statements: "Christ underwent his
passion and death freely and out of infinite love because of the sins of men in order that all might reach salvation." For
the full text of Nostra Aetate, N. 9, see appendix I, pp. 122-123.
12 Geoffrey Wigoder, Jewish-Christian Relations Since the Second World War, 78.
1964 (before *Nostra Aetate* was adopted) where he met with Israeli President Zalman Shazar and other Israeli officials was a significant step toward reconciliation.14

Despite a destabilization of relations following the 1967 Six-Day War, Catholic-Jewish relations continued to improve as a result of *Nostra Aetate*, as did Vatican-Israel relations, albeit at a much slower pace. In December 1969, the Vatican Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity released a document in support of better Catholic-Jewish relations, which included an unprecedented statement recognizing the importance of the State of Israel for Jews: “Jews have indicated in a thousand ways their attachment to the land promised to their ancestors,” and that “the existence of the State of Israel should not be separated from this perspective.”15 On 6 October of the same year, Paul VI officially received Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban in Rome. Although the Vatican stated that the meeting did not imply any change in its attitude toward the political situation in the Holy Land (claims it would repeat after the historic meeting between Paul VI and Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir on 15 January 1973), the Pontiff’s comments to Eban revealed the Vatican’s pragmatism coming into play, and articulated the theological and political shift taking place in Rome: “The period of the Crusades is ended. . . it is now a question of harmony and coexistence.”16

Still under the pontificate of Paul VI, the newly established (22 October 1974) Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews published the official Vatican document *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration of ‘Nostra Aetate’ N°.4* in order to practically implement the message of Second Vatican Council. Although it made no mention of the State of Israel and was considered a purely religious document, the *Guidelines* put

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14 However, the Vatican took great pains in demonstrating that the Pope’s visit to Israeli territory was in no way recognition of the State. The Pope never once mentioned the name ‘Israel’, and his letter of thanks for the hospitality he had received was simply addressed to ‘President Shazar, Tel Aviv’ (Quoted in Geoffrey Wigoder, *Jewish-Christian Relations Since the Second World War*, 109). Nevertheless, the Pope’s physical presence in Israeli territory was a significant message in itself of a slowly changing Vatican policy.


forth an exhortation to Christians by which the issue of Jewish nationalism would inevitably arise. Namely, it stated that Christians must “learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.” Furthermore, the document reinforced the message of Nostra Aetate, disputing the popular teaching that Judaism was a fossilized religion by stating that its history did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem, but rather had gone on to develop a rich religious tradition. The specific reference to the “destruction of Jerusalem” is very significant since Jewish presence in Jerusalem, and specifically its dominion over the Temple cult, was a main source of Jewish national identity—an identity that was shown by the modern State of Israel to never have been completely lost despite the vast vicissitudes of Jewish history spanning nearly two millennia. Both the exhortation to understand Jews as they define themselves and the declaration that the spiritual vitality of the Jewish people continues to the present day, invited Christians, albeit tacitly, to develop a greater appreciation for the importance of the reborn Jewish state in Jewish self-identity. Far greater and more explicit gestures of good-will by the Vatican toward the State of Israel, however, were soon to come under the pontificate of a new young and charismatic cardinal from Krakow.
CHAPTER III

POPE JOHN PAUL II (1978 - PRESENT)

With the ascension of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła to the papacy in December 1978, the Jewish people and the State of Israel found a unique friend in Pope John Paul II. His deep affinity for the Jewish people was shaped by his intimate knowledge of Polish Jewry. Among his closest companions were Jews, some of whom were ardent Zionists and later settled in Israel. As a young man during World War II he took part in several actions by the Polish resistance movement to end the Nazi occupation in Poland and he was personally involved in efforts to save the lives of endangered Jews.¹ For many years, Wojtyła was also associated with the Krakow-based group of Roman Catholic intellectuals, Znak (Sign), which, partly in reaction to antisemitic traditions in Poland, has always been fervently pro-Jewish and pro-Israeli.²

With such a background and a genuine affinity toward the Jews, whom he has referred to as our “elder brothers”, the new Pope from Krakow was prepared to deepen Catholic-Jewish relations further and faster than any of his predecessors.³ After more than twenty years of his pontificate, few would argue that he has failed to do just that. Rabbi Michael Shevack of the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding states, “No other Pope has said or done more to forge a spirit of love between Jews and Catholics than John Paul II.”⁴

²Ibid.
The same sentiment can surely be stated regarding the Pope’s role in Vatican-Israel relations. According to papal biographer Johnathan Kwitny, John Paul II proposed to spend his first Christmas as Pope in Bethlehem. Upon receiving this information, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Casaroli reminded the Pontiff that Bethlehem was in the West Bank, under Israeli occupation, and that the Vatican did not recognize Israel. The Pope responded, “let’s recognize Israel now.” Ultimately the Pope conceded to Casaroli upon the latter’s explanation of the seriously negative repercussions that such a hasty decision would cause for the Church in Arab countries, as well as the Vatican’s policy of not recognizing nations with disputed borders.5

Nevertheless, in his courageous and undying efforts to strengthen relations between Catholics and Jews, and in recognition of the importance of statehood in the Jewish mindset, John Paul II repeatedly gave recognition, albeit unofficial, to the State of Israel in his public addresses:

The Hebrew people after tragic experiences, after suffering the extermination of so many sons and daughters, willing for security, has given life to the State of Israel.6

For the Hebrew people, living in the State of Israel and having for that land a precious testimony of faith, we want security and just tranquillity and peace, that are basic for any nation and a condition of life and progress for any society.7

After the tragic extermination of the Shoah, the Hebrew People has started a new period of its history. Like any civil nation, it has a right to a country, in accordance with international law.8

With these statements John Paul II transformed the Vatican’s ambiguous, and sometimes hostile, position toward the State of Israel to an unqualified recognition of its legitimacy. Thus, it is of little surprise that under this pope’s leadership the State of Israel and the Jewish people’s

6 Homily in Toronto, Canada, 5 October 1980; quoted in Michael Shevack and Jack Bemporad, Our Age: The Historic New Era of Christian-Jewish Understanding, 76.
attachment to its ancestral homeland is explicitly mentioned for the first time in the official Vatican document, *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (24 June 1985).

The history of Israel did not end in the year AD 70. It continued, especially in a numerous Diaspora which allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness—often heroic—of its fidelity to the One God and to “exalt God in the presence of all the living” (Tobit 13:4), while preserving the memory of the land of their forefathers at the heart of their hope (Passover Seder).

Christians are invited to understand this religious attachment, which finds its roots in biblical tradition, without, however making their own particular religious interpretation of this relationship.

. . . The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law.9

Many Jewish groups criticized the document’s caveat for Christians to refrain from proposing any religious interpretation of the relationship between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, as a sign of Christian ambivalence toward Jewish self-understanding.10 The reasoning behind the Church’s cautious approach will be discussed in further detail below (33-34). Let it suffice to say for now that the controversy primarily arose from a lack of understanding, mainly due to the fact that this was the only one of the three Vatican documents devoted to Jews and Judaism that sought no consultation from Jewish circles. Conversely, others praised the document for its clear declaration of Israel’s legitimacy under international law, and considered the statement to be a tacit recognition of the State.

The Vatican’s *Notes* was indeed more calculated and cold in expressing the significance of the Jewish bond to the Land of Israel than were the words of the pope himself. In addition to the quotations above (27), he made a profound and insightful statement regarding the Jewish people’s attachment to Jerusalem, which, considering the contentious issue of the city in the history of Vatican-Israel relations, was one of his boldest proclamations:

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Jews ardently love her [Jerusalem], and in every age venerate her memory, abundant as she is in many remains and monuments from the time of David who chose her as the capital, and of Solomon who built the Temple there. Therefore, they turn their minds to her daily, one may say, and point to her as the sign of their nation.\textsuperscript{11}

Such statements demonstrate the pope’s sincere and enthusiastic initiative in bringing the issue of Jewish statehood into the dialogue. Having recognized the Jewish people’s “precious testimony of faith” for the Land of Israel and its right to a country “in accordance with international law,” John Paul II delicately wove the religious and the political together into a cogent argument for the legitimacy of the Jewish state. For him it was simply a matter of time and proper circumstance before the growing wave of positive religious dialogue between the Church and the Jewish people would sweep into the realm of political dialogue between the Vatican and the State of Israel, culminating in formalized diplomatic relations. In fact, already in November 1991, if not earlier, John Paul II had begun working secretly towards establishing formal diplomatic relations with Israel.\textsuperscript{12} Shortly after the signing of the Oslo Accords at the White House on 13 September 1993, he spoke of his pleasure in the advancement of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the fact that this would finally make possible the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Israel, boldly stating, “as for my recognition of the State of Israel, it is important to reaffirm that I myself never had any doubts in this regard.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{The Formalization of Diplomatic Relations}

On 30 December 1993, the \textit{Fundamental Agreement Between the Holy See and the State of Israel} was signed in Jerusalem, leading to the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two states on 14 June 1994. This historic event was the greatest point of progress in the Vatican’s “evolving attitude”\textsuperscript{14} toward the Jewish state (and toward the Jewish people in general) since the

\textsuperscript{12} Kwitny, \textit{Man of the Century: The Life and Times of Pope John Paul II}, 630.
Second Vatican Council. Considering the centrality of the State of Israel in modern Jewish history and thought, the implications of this shift in Vatican policy for Catholic-Jewish dialogue cannot be overemphasized. Yossi Beilin, Israel’s deputy foreign minister at the time of the accord, spoke passionately of the religious significance of the agreement at the signing ceremony:

Formally, the accord that we are signing today is between a small state and an even smaller one. Its repercussions, however, go well beyond geographic boundaries, touching the hearts of millions of Jews and over a billion Christians. Behind this document are thousands of years of history characterized by hatred, fear, ignorance and scant dialogue. There have been only a few years of understanding, and too many of darkness.15

Beilin, a secular Israeli politician, delivered the speech wearing a kippa and concluded by reciting, in Hebrew, a prayer for peace.

Rabbi David Rosen, former chief rabbi of Ireland and currently the Anti-Defamation League’s co-liaison to the Vatican, makes it clear that the significance of this accord for the wider Israeli public greatly exceeded all previous Vatican council statements on the Jews, stating, “The importance of this diplomatic accord in opening Israeli-Jewish eyes to the changed reality of Christian-Jewish relations is often underestimated. Before the accord, whenever we tried to inform people of the transformations in the Church teaching towards Jews and Judaism, we invariably faced the question: ‘If things are so good, why doesn’t the Holy See have diplomatic relations with the State of Israel?’”16 Rabbi Jack Bemporad explains why the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See could give rise to such powerful emotions among Jews: “Next to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the resurrection of Israel is for Jews perhaps the single most important event in the history of Judaism. . . . Thus when the Holy See established full diplomatic relations with the State of Israel, it was far more than a mere brotherly gesture. For Jews, it was a

powerful symbol of full recognition and legitimacy, an open declaration to the world that Judaism continues to have a purpose in God's plan for human history.\textsuperscript{17}

Building upon the reference to the State of Israel in the Notes (a strictly theological document), the Fundamental Agreement (a political accord) served to advance the Church's understanding of the Jewish People beyond a mere theological phenomenon only, often interpreted in contrast to Christianity, to a viable, independent national reality in the world—a body politic. For Jews, both in Israel and abroad, the significance of this event was not seen as simply a gesture of political goodwill by the Holy See, but as the Catholic Church's recognition of the State of Israel as an integral component of Jewish hope, Jewish faith, and Jewish identity. In other words, it can be said that the Church was finally seen to be fulfilling its own admonition in the 1974 Guidelines: "strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience." Even though a far more explicit recognition of the dual nature of Jewish identity and the Jewish people's long held desire to dwell once again in Eretz Israel was expressed shortly after the issuing of the Guidelines (nearly two decades before the Fundamental Agreement) by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (20 November 1975),\textsuperscript{18} it was the act of official recognition by the highest levels of the Vatican's diplomatic offices, with the full blessing of the Pope, which reached a greater audience and spoke most poignantly to Jews.

However, as extraordinary as this event was, for some, Jews and Christians alike, the Vatican's recognition of Israel after more than four decades since its founding was a source of much disappointment, and even anger. The fact that this step took so long, particularly while the Jewish people were struggling to recover from the Holocaust, was an inexcusable offense.

\textsuperscript{17} Our Age: The Historic New Era of Christian-Jewish Understanding, 74-75.

\textsuperscript{18} The document states in part: "In dialogue with Christians, Jews have explained that they do not consider themselves a church, a sect, or a denomination, as is the case among Christian communities, but rather a peoplehood that is not solely racial, ethnic, or religious, but in a sense a composite of all these. It is for such reasons that an overwhelming majority of Jews see themselves bound in one way or another to the Land of Israel. Most Jews see this tie to the land as essential to their Jewishness. Whatever difficulties Christians may experience in sharing this view, they should strive to understand this link between the land and the people which Jews have expressed in their writings and worship throughout two millennia as a longing for the homeland, holy Zion." National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Statement on Catholic-Jewish Relations (20 November 1975), quoted in Fisher, "The Holy See and the State of Israel," 201-202.
Despite the many advances in Catholic-Jewish dialogue since Nostra Aetate, the Vatican's refusal to grant official diplomatic recognition of Israel caused many Jews to seriously question whether the Church's age-old theological anti-Jewish prejudice was not the reasoning behind such a policy.

In 1987 Henry Siegman expressed such doubt, stating:

The Vatican's refusal to establish normal diplomatic relations is arbitrary and deeply offensive. The Vatican has normal ties with the most oppressive and morally odious regimes. It maintained formal diplomatic ties with Nazi Germany until the very end of World War II. Apparently it considers only the State of Israel undeserving of its recognition... Its diplomacy persists in reflecting an anachronistic Catholic view that saw Jewish exile as punishment for Judaism's rejection of the message of Christianity. 19

This disillusionment with Vatican policy is important to note, as it helps to highlight the extremely cautious and often painfully slow movements toward change that take place within the Holy See, which, as in this case, often serve as a point of great frustration. A letter of Sir D'Arcy Osborne, British Ambassador to the Vatican during World War II, to the British Foreign Office on 7 March 1947 expresses well the sometimes "inscrutable" workings of Vatican foreign policy:

Not only is the atmosphere of the Vatican supranational and universal... but it is also fourth-dimensional and, so to speak, outside of time... for example, they can regard the Savoy dynasty as an interlude, and the Fascist era as an incident, in the history of Rome and Italy. They reckon in centuries and plan for eternity and this inevitably renders their policy inscrutable, confusing and, on occasion, reprehensible to practical time-conditioned minds. 20

In defense of the Vatican, Rabbis Jack Bemporad and Michael Shevack point out that the Church was simply keeping to its policy of the non-recognition of nations with disputed borders 21 and that once the 1993 Palestinian-Israeli peace accords were established the Vatican immediately formalized its relations with Israel. They remind their readers that it was also a considerable length of time before other countries such as South Africa, the Kingdom of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and

21 See footnote 5 (p.27) for examples of the inequitable application of this policy.
even the United States\textsuperscript{22} were granted full diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Furthermore, the two rabbis explain, as do some Christian commentators,\textsuperscript{23} that the Church has been careful not to align itself too closely with so-called “biblical fundamentalists” who draw, in the Catholic Church’s view, oversimplified and even dangerous theological equations from the rebirth of the Jewish state, which often serve to determine political boundaries via reference to certain biblical passages.\textsuperscript{24} “When you consider the difficult political aura around Israel, the worrisome violence in the area, the fear of retaliation by terrorists,” the rabbis conclude, “the Church has been amazingly forthright in her support of Israel.”\textsuperscript{25}

Eugene Fisher, writing prior to the \textit{Fundamental Agreement}, argues that the cautiousness and slow pace of development observed in official Vatican documents and statements, from \textit{Nostra Aetate} to the \textit{Notes}, in regards to the State of Israel demonstrates a great amount of respect for the Jewish people, in that it does not want to presuppose its own definition of the religious significance of the State of Israel to Jews, given the wide range of opinions on the subject among Jews themselves.\textsuperscript{26} Rather, each step, even half-step, taken by the Vatican is carefully measured and clearly defined before proceeding forward. Although this process often appears painfully slow, explains Fisher, the result is a substantive and lasting policy.\textsuperscript{27}

Bishop Jorge Mejia, former Secretary of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, adds further insight into this issue in support of Fisher’s argument. He explains that changes within the Vatican are never sudden because there is an extreme sensitivity to guarantee the authenticity of the Church’s Apostolic Tradition. The positive side of this cautious attitude, he

\textsuperscript{22} Full diplomatic relations between the United States and the Vatican were not formalized until 1984.
\textsuperscript{23} See Fisher, “The Holy See and the State of Israel,” 201.
\textsuperscript{24} Bemporad and Shevack, \textit{Our Age: The Historic New Era of Christian-Jewish Understanding}, 79.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 210.
reassures, is that once the change has been made the Church clings to it tenaciously and does not retreat.28

The extremely pragmatic calculations on the part of the Holy See should also not be overlooked in its final decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel. It was certainly no coincidence that the decision came immediately after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 between Israel and the PLO, as was explicitly expressed by the Pope himself (above, 29). The new Israel-PLO agreement provided the Vatican with the justification it would need in response to Arab criticism over a Vatican-Israel agreement. When indeed Arab criticism did arise following the Fundamental Agreement, Vatican officials were able to respond, “We certainly do not want to be more Catholic than the Pope. If Yasser Arafat has shaken the hand of Yitzhak Rabin, why should we not do the same?”29

Regardless of how one views the Vatican’s caution in formalizing diplomatic ties with the State of Israel—as antagonistic or as a wisely calculated step—it is difficult not to recognize the great potential which the agreement brings for future advances in Catholic-Jewish relations. Despite caveats issued by the Vatican Secretariat of State, explaining that “interfaith dialogue between Judaism and Christianity is one thing, and relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel are quite another,”30 the fifteen point political accord is ripe with religious significance. Some of the most notable statements are found in the preamble:

The Holy See and the State of Israel. . . . Aware of the unique nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and of the historic process of reconciliation and growth in mutual understanding and friendship between Catholics and Jews; . . . Realizing that such an Agreement will provide a sound and lasting basis for the continued development of their present and future relations. . . . Agree upon the following Articles.31

30 Ibid., 38.
The recognition of the “unique” relationship between the Church and the Jewish people can be understood as saying that the relationship between the Holy See and the State of Israel is not a typical political alliance between two states. The Holy See-State of Israel relationship, while at the same time being viewed in strict political terms within the context of international relations, can only be fully understood in light of the relationship between two religious bodies: Catholics and Jews. Just as the Holy See cannot be separated from the Church, nor the State of Israel be properly defined apart from Judaism, so too the political agreement between the Vatican and Israel cannot be understood apart from the theological issues concerning both bodies. The statement that the agreement provides a basis for the “continued development” of present and future relations between the Vatican and Israel recognizes that this is only the starting point in a process that will hopefully bring Catholics and Jews to a fuller understanding and greater appreciation of one another.

Indeed, the most recent visit of John Paul II to Israel (21-26 March 2000)—a trip that the Pope had desired to make for a long time—was made possible (or at least much easier) because of the official diplomatic ties that exist between the two nations, as well as continued advances in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In his speech upon arriving at Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion Airport, the pontiff explicitly tied the diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel with the opportunity for deepened Catholic-Jewish relations, stating:

Many things have changed in relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel since my predecessor Pope Paul VI came here in 1964. The establishment of diplomatic relations between us in 1994 set a seal on efforts to open an era of dialogue on questions of common interest concerning religious freedom, relations between Church and State and, more generally, relations between Christians and Jews. . . With new-found openness towards one another, Christians and Jews together must make courageous efforts to remove all forms of prejudice. We must strive always and everywhere to present the true face of Jews and Judaism. . . at every level of attitude, teaching and communication.32

Prior to his visit, the Pope also stated that his trip to the Holy Land was to be “an exclusively religious pilgrimage in its nature and purpose,” and that he would be “saddened” if anyone were to attach any other meaning to it.33 Likewise, the Apostolic Nuncio in Israel, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, underlined the strictly personal and spiritual meaning of the visit in a succinct statement, clearly meant to diffuse Arab criticism which would interpret the visit as a gesture of political advocacy for the Israeli government: “John Paul II will come to the Holy Land as head of the Church.”34 Such statements, however, must be understood simply as efforts in political tactfulness. The fact is that the Pope also bears the title of Head of State, representing the sovereign state of Vatican City. This point was underlined by his official reception at the residence of President Ezer Weizman—certainly not a site of religious significance in the Church’s history of salvation—where he addressed Israeli government ministers and members of Knesset. Such a visit confirmed with action the Pope’s many words demonstrating his keen sensitivity to the importance which the State of Israel holds for Jews and Judaism. Part two of this study will discuss the central importance that the State of Israel will play in future Catholic-Jewish relations, and what Catholics must learn about the Jewish experience in order to better understand its importance.

PART 2

UNDERSTANDING THE “OTHER”
CHAPTER IV
GENUINE DIALOGUE: THE WAY TO PROCEED

Recognizing that relations between Christians and Jews “have scarcely ever risen above the level of monologue,”¹ the 1974 Vatican Guidelines emphasize the need for the two bodies to enter into a genuine dialogue. The document explains that a genuine dialogue is one that “presupposes that each side... wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other.” For Christians, the document continues, this understanding will only come through a sincere striving “to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.”

The years following the Church’s revolutionary proclamations concerning the Jews have witnessed encouraging signs of this Christian “striving”, not only through the courageous words and actions of John Paul II himself, but through the increasing number of Catholic clergy, lay leaders, scholars and students (not to mention the various Protestant groups) who have, in some instances, literally devoted their lives to acquiring a fuller understanding of the Jewish experience, both ancient and modern, and in the process helped to reconcile Jews and Christians. And while official statements from the Vatican are vitally important, even more significant is the assiduous work of those individuals who have embraced a vocation to be reconcilers with their elder brothers and sisters in faith. For, ultimately, genuine dialogue does not take place between institutions, but between individuals. Several of the most prominent members of this group are quoted throughout this paper, including: Edward Flannery, Eugene Fisher, John Oesterreicher and Marcel Dubois. Others are doing ground-breaking work through schools, institutions, and

religious orders devoted to Christian-Jewish dialogue, particularly those in Israel, including: The Pontifical Institute Ratisbonne, The Ecumenical Research Fraternity, The Pontifical Biblical Institute, The Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Studies at Tantur, The Bat Kol Institute and the Sisters and Brothers of Sion. Indeed, much progress has been made in the area of Christian-Jewish understanding, however some areas of fundamental importance have not received the attention due to them.

Still today, after more than fifty years of Jewish statehood, there is no other issue that Catholics must strive to better understand than the significance of the State of Israel in Jewish life. An orthodox rabbi’s response to Fr. Flannery upon the latter’s asking, “What do you expect of Christians today?”, expresses the desires of a large section of world Jewry: “Just respect our tie with the State of Israel, nothing else.” Rabbi Henry Siegman, in an address to Christian colleagues, elaborates on this point which Jews have expressed to Christians time and again, stating: “It is impossible to understand Jews, nor can anyone communicate meaningfully with them about their fears and aspirations, without an appreciation of the role of the State of Israel in Jewish consciousness.” Some Christian leaders have embraced this message from their Jewish dialogue partners and are themselves expressing the vital importance of this issue. Fr. Flannery, for one, has stated resolutely that Christian understanding of the State of Israel in Jewish consciousness will serve as the “ultimate gauge and supreme test of the health and progress of the dialogue.”

One of the most easily decipherable reasons why many Church leaders have felt uncomfortable focusing on the issue of Jewish attachment to the State of Israel is because they

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often feel that Jews are driven by a partisan political agenda when they make reference to this subject. Even if this could be true on occasion, by excluding Israel due to claims that it politicizes the dialogue, Christians are abandoning the ecumenical enterprise by refusing to recognize a fundamental aspect of Jewish self-identity.

The late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel provides profound insight into what a genuine ecumenical undertaking should possess, which can greatly assist Christians in their approach to Jews and Judaism: "The ecumenical perspective is the realization that religious truth does not shine in a vacuum, that the primary issue of theology is pretheological, and that religion involves the total situation of man, his attitudes and deeds, and must therefore never be kept in isolation."

Heschel's words are echoed in a statement by Flannery: "In the Western world, in a secularized age, the relationship of Church and Synagogue no longer depends so much on theology, as in earlier times, but rather on personal, psychological, and sociological issues that impinge more on day-to-day human relationships of Christians and Jews (i.e. antisemitism, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel)." Such an understanding is crucial for Christians to begin to relate to the manifold issues in Jewish self-identity embodied in the State of Israel. Fr. Marcel Dubois helps bring the fundamental issues of modern Jewish nationalism (as represented in the State of Israel) into focus, as well as to succinctly articulate the need of Christians to better accommodate these issues, in the following statement:

If Christians feel so ill at ease in interpreting the peculiar brand of Israeli nationalism, it is because they are not yet capable of accommodating in their faith the complex elements which, for the Jewish consciousness, are absolutely fundamental...

For the Jewish conscience, even if these elements are not clearly situated and recognized, Israel’s election [Am Israel] and its link with the land [Eretz Israel] are absolutely vital realities. If Christians wish to understand the Jewish destiny, the return to Zion, and the attitude of the Israelis, they must at least take into consideration the traditional inspiration of this national sentiment, connecting it with its sources, respecting it as felt from within.

6 Flannery, "Seminaris, Classrooms, Pulpits, Streets: Where We Have to Go", 136.
7 Dubois, "Israel and Christian-Self Understanding," 70.
The remainder of this study will focus on the two central and unique features in Jewish self-identity, mentioned above, which find their fullest expression in the State of Israel: the Jewish people’s fidelity to its ancestral homeland (Eretz Israel); and the reality of “the peoplehood of Israel” (Am Israel) which has bound the Jewish people, religious and secular alike, together for millennia. These two issues will be examined for the purpose of bringing Christians to a better understanding, and not necessarily an endorsement, of the role of the State of Israel in Jewish self-identity. That is to say, the purpose of this endeavor is not to convert Christians into unquestioning supporters of Israeli political policies, but to expose them to a side of the conversation that they have often misunderstood or simply ignored. While the ultimate goal is to relate to these issues as they play out in contemporary Jewish self-understanding, doing so requires a fundamental knowledge of some of the grand and ancient themes of Jewish history from which they are derived. Thus, in addition to dealing with why Christians have difficulty in relating to the realities of Eretz Israel and Am Israel and what can be done to remedy this, a significant part of the discussion will deal with the historical underpinnings of these two colossal themes.
CHAPTER V

ERETZ ISRAEL

Difficulties for Christian Understanding

For most Christians it is difficult to understand why land is so closely linked to Jewish self-identity. While the concept of “Holy Land”—primarily, the land that served as the stage for salvation history and Jesus’ earthly ministry—is present in Christianity, the notion of a “Christian homeland” does not exist as it does in Judaism. Traditionally, Christianity has understood itself as a universal religion, in which a particular earthly geography is acknowledged in the historical facts of Jesus’ life on earth, but has held little significance in how Christians express their religious orientation.1 Despite the fact that Christianity inherited from Judaism a land oriented tradition and that, as some scholars argue in varying degrees, Jesus, his disciples and the early Church in Jerusalem, may have even held to this tradition (which was wrapped up in the larger issues of Divine covenant, Jewish nationalism, and the political issues of first-century Palestine),2 it is clear that very early on in the developments of Christianity any identification with Eretz Israel as a foundational element in its relationship to God was abandoned.

W.D. Davies, in his pioneering study of land tradition in early Christianity, argues that the New Testament's treatment of the land promises in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) can be classified, at best, as ambivalent. While recognizing that there are certain strata within the New Testament that regard the land and the Jerusalem Temple as significant in a territorial sense, Davies argues that for the most part its teaching transcends the two. He explains that the New Testament "personalizes 'holy space' in Christ who, as a figure of history, is rooted in the land... but, as Living Lord, he is also free to move wherever he wills." Davies explains this spiritualization in part to the fact that the majority of the audience to which the New Testament writings were addressed was Gentile. These new Christians were remote both from the land and the historic faith of Israel, "a community for whom Jesus Christ was the new Law and the Prophets, who sums up the past, fills the present, and leads the way to the future. For such Christians, therefore, future hopes and expectations were tied to the figure of the martyred and resurrected messiah, and not to the promise of the land."

This tendency in traditional Christian theology to spiritualize the Land of Israel and, in effect, to "de-Judaize" the Church, is also rooted in a practice of allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, which, ironically, was heavily influenced by the Hellenistic Jewish world, particularly the works of Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE - 65 CE). This allegoric interpretation, which in its simplest form ascribes an esoteric or deeper spiritual meaning to the literal words and symbols of the text, took root early in the Christian tradition (i.e. Paul's Letter to the Galatians, the Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Hebrews), and was carried on by the Church Fathers...

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4 Ibid., 367.
(e.g. Origen, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and Augustine). Both Christian and Jewish theologians have regarded the extreme use of this type of biblical interpretation to be detrimental to Christianity’s understanding of Judaism, as it easily reduces the “concrete narrative, hopes, [and] expectations with a living people and a geographical land, to paradigms of Church dogma.”

The Church’s lack of familiarity with the religious and historical significance of Eretz Israel in Jewish self-identity, in addition to the various Christian prejudices and political concerns discussed in this paper, has been made evident by the deliberate avoidance of the issue in the official statements of Vatican councils (discussed in chapters two and three). As was shown, even when the State of Israel was mentioned in the 1985 Notes it was qualified with the caveat, “the existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious.” Despite the best efforts of some to explain the pragmatic reasoning behind this (see above, 33), the fact was that most Jews were left with a prima facie interpretation of the document, which appears to qualify the validity of the bond between the Jews and their land. Such an approach, argues Anthony Kenny, was “a serious flaw in the Church’s dialogical method.” While the official recognition of the State of Israel by the Holy See and Pope John Paul II’s recent visit to Israel has helped to remedy this flaw to a certain degree, there is clearly much more to be done.

**Bridging the Gap**

First, Christians should resist the natural impulse to interpret and attempt to define Judaism with the religious categories of Christianity. That is to say, they must strive to adopt the admonition of the Church council which has been quoted throughout this paper: “to learn by what essential traits

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the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.” This process should begin with patient and prayerful listening by Christians to their Jewish brethren, who have from biblical times to the present expressed their fidelity to Eretz Israel through their words, their writings, and their actions. This willingness and ability to listen is particularly key to the ecumenical enterprise between Christians and Jews. For genuine dialogue requires not only respect for the identity of the “other,” but, as a veteran in the field, Marcel Dubois, states, “a great silence” on the part of Christians, who for too long have sought to dominate Jewish ideas with Christian interpretation.⁹

Although this type of engagement is possible anywhere Christians and Jews gather together, nowhere is there the possibility of a more fruitful encounter than in the State of Israel. Not only is Israel the only place where one witnesses Jews physically engaged with the land which they have held dear for millennia, it is the one place where Jews constitute the majority and possess sovereign political power, which endows them with a historically unparalleled opportunity of self-expression and self-fulfillment. In addition, a visit to Israel offers the unique opportunity to further ground the Christian in his or her own faith tradition which originated in this very land.

Finally, when Christians are called upon or desire to express the engagement of Jews to Eretz Israel, especially in the context of educational institutions or ecclesiastical conciliar statements, they will do well to cite generously from Jewish texts in order to allow the subjective Jewish voice, in all of its diversity, to represent its understanding of the rich territorial tradition in Jewish history. Initially, this may appear to be an impossible task. Faced with the heterogeneity of modern Jewish perspectives on the significance of Eretz Israel for Jews, the non-Jew who invests a serious investigation into the matter can easily feel overwhelmed by any attempt to come to a consensus. However, as John Pawlikowski, a long time Jewish participant in Christian-Jewish

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dialogue, explains: "Despite all of the differences of viewpoint on Israel among present-day Jews. . . a central motif will clearly appear. . . virtually all hold Israel to be at the very center of their contemporary self-identity. . . even those Israelis who choose not to interpret Israel in strictly religious terms, tend in their so-called secular language and terminology, to echo the spirit of the land tradition that permeates the Hebrew Scriptures and the rabbinic tradition." Indeed, as previously stated, to understand the importance of Eretz Israel in modern Jewish identity it is essential to have a basic understanding of the unique land doctrine which traditional Judaism has held since biblical times. A uniqueness, explains W.D. Davies, which "lies not in the emotional experience that gave birth to it. . . . but in the theological intensity with which it is held."11

The parameters of this paper do not allow for a comprehensive examination of the immensely complex land tradition in Jewish thought.12 However, in line with the overall purpose of this paper—i.e. to present for Christians a more profound understanding of Judaism and Jewish thought—I will highlight some of the fundamental aspects of this tradition and some of the most influential voices of Jewish history which have given it expression. This is intended to serve as a starting point for Christians to understand why this particular strip of territory along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea continues to hold such an important place in Jewish self-identity.

The Universal Attachment to Place and the Role of Sacred Space

Clearly, the sense of displacement and homelessness [territorially speaking] has been a pervasive theme both in the ancient world and contemporary culture. The yearning to belong somewhere, to have a safe and secure homeland is not unique to Jews, it is an emotional and universal pursuit. Likewise, the importance of sacred space is not unique to Judaism. Mircea Eliade writes that sacred space, especially in the ancient religious mind-set, “makes possible the ‘founding of the world’: where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence.”13 Eliade further explains that, “Sacred space possesses existential value for religious man; for nothing can begin, nothing can be done, without a previous orientation—and any orientation implies acquiring a fixed point. It is for this reason that religious man has always sought to fix his abode at the ‘center of the world.’”14

It is from these universal primal desires for security and belonging, as well as for a sense of meaning and importance in the wider context of creation, which is brought about through proximity to the earthly source of the divine realm, that the Jewish land doctrine finds its roots. However, it is the Jewish people’s unparalleled devotion to the particular strip of land along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea—a devotion that has withstood not only centuries of displacement from that land, but the Jewish people’s adoption of the language, customs, and

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14 Ibid., 22.

The Hebrew Scriptures refer to the Jerusalem as the center of the earth in Ezek. 38:12. Here the Hebrew term for center, *tēḇur,* literally means “navel”, although some scholars have considered the term to have more geographical sense like “plateau,” or “rounded hill” in this particular reference in the Book of Ezekiel. The expression, *omphalos* (Grk.), is used more clearly in reference to Jerusalem in the Book of Jubilees (a retelling of the Book of Genesis composed in the late second-century BCE in Hebrew, preserved in Greek) and the Hebrew phrase, *tēḇur ha aretz,* is found throughout Jewish midrashic literature. One of the most famous midrashic commentaries (*Tanhuma* to Leviticus, *Qadoshin* 10) builds upon Ezek. 38:12 to make the following proclamation: “As the navel is in the middle of the person, so is Eretz Israel the navel of the world (tēḇur ha aretz), as it is written, ‘That dwell in the navel of the earth’ (Ezekiel 38:12). Eretz Israel is located in the center of the world, Jerusalem is the center of Eretz Israel, the Temple in the center of Jerusalem, the heikhal in the center of the Temple, the ark in the center of the heikhal and in front of the heikhal is the ‘even sheteyyiyah from which the world was founded’” (‘ed. Baber IV, p.78), quoted in Philip S. Alexander, “Jerusalem as the Omphalos of the World: On the History of a Geographical Concept,” Judaism 46, 2 (1997): 145-158). This tradition was likely drawn from ancient Greek culture in which there were number of *omphalos* of the world, of which the *omphalos* stone in the Temple at Delphi was the most prominent.
national identity of its respective cultures of displacement—which has set it apart from all other examples of a people-land relationship which modern day scholarship can present. For many who are willing to accept such categories, this age-old bond which has found concrete expression in the State of Israel, is truly a “mystery”, if not a “miracle”.

The Land in the Bible

So pervasive is the issue of territory in the biblical story that someone who has only a cursory knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures will recognize that the promise and possession of “The Land”\(^\text{15}\) (the “Land of Canaan”, as it is called throughout most of the Pentateuch)\(^\text{16}\) is an integral part of the story of the Hebrew people beginning with the call of God to the patriarch Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. . . . To your offspring I will give this land” (Gen. 12:1, 7).\(^\text{17}\) Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the issue of The Land is central to three aspects of the evolving saga of the ancient Israelites, which survive, albeit in evolved forms, among the Jewish people of today: Divine covenant, national identity, and future redemption (the last two being rooted from the first).\(^\text{18}\)

a) Land of the Covenant

Soon after Abram and his wife Sarai leave the country of their origin at the Divine command and receive the promise of their offspring’s future inheritance of the Land of Canaan to which they

\(^{15}\) Throughout Jewish tradition until this day, the Land of Israel is most commonly referred to as simply Ha’aretz—“The Land”.

\(^{16}\) “Land of Canaan” is derived from the Canaanite peoples who were primary inhabitants of the land, according to the biblical narrative (Gen. 12:5-6). Interestingly, the authors of the Hebrew Bible do not discard this title for the land even after its conquest under Joshua and the Israelites (Josh. 5-11), thus not disguising the fact that the land of Israel once belonged to other peoples and had to be taken by conquest.

\(^{17}\) All biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible, unless stated otherwise.

\(^{18}\) It is important to note for the purposes of this paper that the central issue is not the historical veracity of the biblical account of land promises, but rather the recognition that the promises, through interpretation, have become a powerful force in Jewish thought until this day. As Davies states, “Not the mode of its [the Promised Land’s] origin matters, but its operation as a formative, dynamic, seminal force in the history of Israel” (The Territorial Dimension of Judaism, 8).
had arrived, the Book of Genesis relates the poignant and somewhat mystical process of covenant making between God and Abram, in which Abram’s and Sarai’s names are changed to Abraham and Sarah (17:5,15), the commandment of circumcision is prescribed (17:10-14) and the promise of land is repeated at each step (13:14-7; 15:7; 18-21; 17:8). Again, at the conclusion of Akedat Yitzhak (“The Binding of Isaac,” Gen. 22:1-18)—not only the most heart-rending episode of the Genesis narrative, but one of the most formative moments of the Jewish spirit—God reaffirms His covenant with Abraham, repeating the promise that his offspring will “possess the gate of their enemies” (Gen. 22:17). With subsequent generations the covenant and the promise of possessing the land is reestablished: first with Abraham’s son Isaac (Gen. 26:3-4) and then with Isaac’s son Jacob (Gen. 28:3-4, 13; 35:12), who would eventually be called “Israel” (Gen. 35:10). From this point on the covenantal land promise is recalled over and over throughout the Scriptures during some of the most significant events in the story of the Israelites: At the death of Jacob and Joseph (Gen. 48:21; 50:24); in God’s revelation to Moses through the burning bush (Ex. 3:8,17); at the moment of the Israelite’s Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 13:5); in God’s Ten Commandments to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20:12); upon the Israelites conquering of the land under Joshua (Josh. 24:1-13); in David’s psalm of thanks to the Lord upon the king’s delivering the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and establishing his capital there (1 Chronicles 16:17-18); in Solomon’s prayer at dedication of the First Temple (1 Kings 8:34,36,40); and in Ezra’s discourse before the people after the return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian Exile (Neh. 9:7); as well as in the Psalms and Prophets (Ps. 105; Jer. 11:5; 25:5; 32:22; Ezek. 20:42).

The Hebrew Scriptures establish emphatically that the Israelites’ occupation of the Land of Canaan is an inseparable element of the covenantal relationship between themselves and God. Thus, for the Jews, in biblical times and beyond, exile from that land became a symbol of servitude and bondage, an inescapable reminder that their relationship with God, although not
abrogated, was significantly diminished, as is demonstrated in the Psalms and later in rabbinic and medieval Jewish literature and liturgy (see below, 52-53; 55-59).

b) Land of the Nation

Tied to the initial Divine land promise to Abraham was the pledge to “make you [Abraham] into a great nation” (Gen. 12:1). Likewise, at each renewal of the Covenant, along with the promise of land, God assures Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he will bless and increase their offspring, making them a “company of peoples” as numerous “as the stars of heaven” (Gen. 15:5; 26:4; 28:3). Detailed genealogies of the “sons of Israel” (i.e. Jacob’s twelve sons and their descendants) are given (Gen. 46:8-25), each one representing a distinct tribe (Gen. 49:2-28) who was allotted a particular piece of territory in the Land of the Promise (Josh. 12:7-21:44). In this way, the identity of the ancient Israelites as a people was intimately linked to the land of the covenant.

The national importance of possessing The Land comes into sharp focus under the rule of King David and his establishment of Jerusalem as the religious and political center of his kingdom. It is in Jerusalem where David’s son King Solomon builds the First Temple, providing a permanent abode for the Shekina (Divine Presence) which had previously traveled with the people in the Ark of the Covenant. Jerusalem, and the Temple in particular, became the national and religious symbol par excellence which united the northern and southern kingdoms, Israel and Judah.

Even more significant than David’s conquering of the city and Solomon’s construction of the Temple is the fact that the Bible relates that God Himself chose the city as His eternal dwelling place (1 Kings 9:3; Ps. 132:13-14), forever fixing Jewish religious and national focus to this particular piece of mountainous territory some 50 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. “Zion,” the term synonymous with Jerusalem and at times representing the entire Land of Israel, was the seat of temporal power for the kings of Israel, where leaders of the twelve tribes would
come to deliberate (1 Kings 8:1) and the city to which pilgrims would make *aliyah* \(^{19}\) three times a year (during the Feasts of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot) in obedience to God’s command through Moses to offer sacrifices in the Temple (Deut. 16:16).

c) **Land of the Redemption**

Not only is the Land of Israel central to the people’s past and present in respect to its covenantal relationship with God and its national identity, it is the focus of its future hopes. It is the one land in which the *axis mundi* described by the Prophets would become manifest—the land of the final Redemption: where the “ransomed of the Lord shall return” with “everlasting joy upon their heads” (Isa. 35:10); where the “wolf shall live with the lamb” (Isa. 11:6); where the radiance of the Lord shall replace the light of the sun and the moon (Isa. 60:19); where God shall establish a covenant with the beasts of the field and birds of the air, abolish “the bow and the sword” (Hosea 2:18), protect His people from famine, make “the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field abundant” (Ezek. 36:30); cleanse His people from all unrighteousness (Jer. 33:8); set His sanctuary among them, place His servant David [the Messiah] over them as King (Ezek. 37:24,27); and betroth them as a husband does a wife (Hosea 2:19).

Even among the highly idyllic descriptions of redeemed life in The Land, Robert Wilken aptly points out that, in keeping with the ancient Hebrew mind-set, “these descriptions are always subservient to a territorial realism... a place of memories as well as hopes, with a past and a future... Hence there could be no genuine fulfillment of the promise that was not historical, which is to say, political.”\(^{20}\) Indeed, Israel’s longing for redemption in its land, expressed so

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\(^{19}\) The Hebrew word *aliyah* comes from the verb *la’alot* (to ascend). This verb is used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe travel from Egypt to the Land of Canaan (Gen. 13:1) and movement from within the Land of Israel to Jerusalem (Ps. 122:3-4). *Aliyah* remains a contemporary Hebrew term to describe the immigration of Jews from the Diaspora to the State of Israel. New immigrants are referred to as *Olim* (“those who go up”) and those who leave Israel are often given the pejorative title of *yeridim* (“those who go down”). Besides the fact that Jerusalem lies in a hilly region, *aliyah* clearly carries the connotation of a spiritual ascent.

poignantly by its prophets and rooted in the covenantal promises, is born out of the concrete historical experience of exile. This is witnessed among the first exiles to Babylon, who expressed the longing and love for their land that would be echoed by countless Jewish exiles down the ages:

By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat and there we wept when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there we hung up our harps.
For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy (Ps 137:1-6).

For the exiles of Israel, redemption is inextricably tied to their physical presence in the land of their ancestors, the Land of the Covenant—Eretz Israel—and in the city which sits as its crown: Jerusalem. In no other land will this great redemption take place. Let us now turn to the principal heirs and expositors of the biblical tradition to consider the role of Eretz Israel, and more particularly Jerusalem, in rabbinic literature.

The Land in Rabbinic Legends and Laws

Rabbinic literature, most of which was written or edited after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE and the failed Bar Kokbah revolt in 135 CE, proceeded to extol The Land and highlight its place of vital importance in the life-force of Judaism with increased fervor as the rabbis were faced with a severely diminished Jewish population within Eretz Israel. Although the rabbis were successful in sustaining a vibrant Judaism in the Diaspora, in which the synagogue
replaced the Temple and prayer and Torah study substituted for the sacrifices, they never let go of The Land; it pervaded the legends (aggadot) and laws (halachot) of the people.

a) Aggadot

Some of the most lavish praises and fanciful attributes are ascribed to Jerusalem in the many aggadot (narrative, illustrative, or homiletic teachings, opposed to halachic [legal] teachings) of Rabbinic literature. These served to instill a loving memory for the city among the Jewish people in hopes that they may one day reclaim The Land and reinstate the Temple cult. On a more immediate and practical level, the rabbis also sought to encourage the Jews of their day to remain within The Land and to continue to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem despite the economic and social difficulties in doing so.21 Thus, it is said that of the ten measures of beauty bestowed upon the world, Jerusalem took nine (Kiddushin 49b). One who has not seen Jerusalem in its splendor is said to have never seen a beautiful city in his life (Sukkot 51b). One who prays in Jerusalem is said to be as one who prays directly before the Throne of Glory, for the gate of heaven is located there (Midrash Ps. 91:7). Among the ten miracles said to have been wrought in Jerusalem are: “No man was ever attacked [by a demon]. . . No man was ever met with an accident. . . . No buildings ever collapsed (Avot de Rabbi Natan 35). . . .The meat of the holy sacrifices never became putrid; no fly was seen in the slaughter-house. . . .No serpent or scorpion caused harm in Jerusalem; nor did any man say to his fellow, ‘The place is too crowded for me to lodge overnight in Jerusalem’”(Pirke Avot 5:5).22

As in the biblical descriptions of The Land, these descriptions, though highly idyllic, remain acutely concerned with the importance of the physical reality of Jerusalem. Unlike much of Jewish apocalyptic literature before and during the Second Temple period, and subsequent Christian teachings, which often emphasize the “heavenly Jerusalem” over the “earthly

21 Davies, The Territorial Dimension of Judaism, 35.
Jerusalem," rabbinic Judaism subordinates the "Jerusalem above" to the "Jerusalem below." This is seen most evidently in the talmudic account which relates that the Holy One Himself stated: "I will not enter heavenly Jerusalem until I enter earthly Jerusalem" (Ta'anit 5a). A similar tale reminds the reader that "God has sworn that His Presence will not enter heavenly Jerusalem until earthly Jerusalem is rebuilt [i.e. the Jewish people return to it]" (Tanhuma Pekudei, 1). Such tales not only served to comfort Jews in exile, but, through their continuous recounting until this day, reveal the strong territorial aspects involved in Jewish hopes for redemption.

b) Halachot

As is well established, Jewish tradition has always stressed the importance of combining Torah study and theory with practice and good deeds. Thus, it is fitting that the unique and distinguished status of The Land in rabbinic tradition is not only expressed in the form of aggadic instruction, but also in concrete halachot.

Regarding The Land as a whole, nearly one-third of the Mishnah, the foundation of the Rabbinic legal code, is concerned with mitzvot ha'teluyot ha'aretz (laws dependent upon the Land of Israel). Of the six orders of the Mishnah, nine-tenths of the first (Zera'im), fifth (Kodashim) and sixth (Tohorot), as well as significant portions of the remaining three orders (Mo'ed, Nashim, and Nezikin) contain such laws, mainly dealing with issues of agriculture and the temple cult. One famous rabbinic text goes as far as to claim that the only reason for Jews to keep to any of the laws outside Erez Israel is to ensure that they will still be familiar with the observances which possess intrinsic value only when performed in The Land (Sifrei Ekev 43). The very sanctity of

23 See Pirke Avot 4:5: 3:10
26 Nahmanides (or Ramban, 1194 - 1270), the great medieval Jewish bible commentator and philosopher from Spain, cites this rabbinic text in his commentaries.
The Land was due in part to the fact that observance of certain laws were tied to it, as explained in 

*Mishnah Kelim* 1:6-9:

> There are ten degrees of holiness. The Land of Israel is holier than any other land. Wherein lies its holiness? In that from it they may bring the *Omer* [the barley sheaf offered between Passover and Shavuot], the First Fruits [offering], and the Two Loaves [offering], which they may not bring from any other land. The walled cities are still more holy. . . within the wall [of Jerusalem] is still more holy. . . The Temple Mount is still more holy. . . The Sanctuary is still more holy. . . The Holy of Holies is still more holy, for none may enter therein save only the high Priest on the Day of Atonement at the time of the [Temple] service.”27

Davies states that the implication of such teaching is that “Jewish sanctity is only fully possible in The Land. . . Exile is . . . an emancipated life. . . The law, itself, therefore, . . . might be regarded as an effective symbol of The Land: it served as a perpetual call to The Land.”28 Indeed, almost every aspect of Jewish life in the Diaspora served as a perpetual call to the memory of the Jewish life in The Land, to the incompleteness of Israel as a nation in exile, and to the future hope of redemption. This call is expressed most poignantly in the prayers and customs of Jews throughout the ages.

*The Land in Jewish Liturgy and Customs*

It is the heightened focus on Jerusalem in Jewish liturgy and customs, born in the early rabbinic tradition, expanded during the medieval period and relevant to this day, that best demonstrates the past, present and future importance of The Land in Jewish life. The rabbis, being the direct heirs and expositors of the biblical tradition, naturally adopted and carried on the biblical land tradition. At the same time, they used it to serve the needs of their day: namely, to preserve the memory of the Temple and the closeness to God which the people experienced through the divine services performed within its confines; to unify Jews throughout the Diaspora; and to stand as a symbol of

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hope for future redemption. It is the liturgical life and customs of the Jewish people which, above all, demand the largest part of our attention, as it was the daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms of Jewish religious life that were the most formative elements of Jewish thought in regards to the Land of Israel up until the modern era, and continue to inspire many Jews of today.

a) Jerusalem of Memory (Past)

One could say that all prayers which make reference to Jerusalem help to preserve the memory of the city simply by the daily repetition of its name, as witnessed most prominently in the Amidah (or Shmoneh Esrei) and the Birkat Hamazon (the blessings said after meals). There are, however, elements of the liturgy which are explicit in their purpose to uphold the memory of Zion, and particularly the Jerusalem Temple.

A significant part of the liturgical year is devoted specifically to the remembrance of the Temple's destruction (Zecher Lechurban). Three weeks of sorrow, which include nine days of mourning, are devoted to this theme. These three weeks culminate in a day of heightened mourning, including a twenty-four-hour fast, on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av (Tisha b'Av). This is the day, according to rabbinic tradition, on which both the First and the Second Temples were destroyed. During the Mincha (afternoon) service of Tisha b'Av a poignant prayer called Nachem (“comfort”) is added to the fourteenth benediction of the Amidah:

Console, Lord our God, those who mourn for Zion, those who mourn for Jerusalem, and the city that is in mourning and in ruins, despised and desolate - mourning because she is bereft of her children, ruined of her dwellings, despised in the loss of her glory, desolate without inhabitants. She sits with her head covered in shame like a barren woman who never gave birth. Legions have devoured her, worshippers of alien gods have possessed her; they threw Your people Israel to the sword, and wantonly murdered the pious ones of the Most High. Therefore, Zion weeps bitterly and Jerusalem raises her voice, “O my heart, my heart [breaks] for their slain! O my inwards, my inwards [ache] for their slain!” For You, O Lord, consumed her with fire.

29 The Amidah is the prayer in Jewish liturgy and is the central component of the three daily services: Shachrit (morning), Mincha (afternoon), and Maariv (evening). Whenever the Talmud refers to tefillah (“prayer”) it is referring to the Amidah, and not any other blessing, supplication or psalm. It consists of three introductory benedictions, thirteen petitions, and three concluding benedictions, which include praises to God and the fundamental needs of the people of Israel.
and with fire You will rebuild her, as it is said: I will be to her, says the Lord, a surrounding wall of fire and I will be for a glory within her midst (Zech. 2:9). Blessed are You Lord, who consoles Zion and rebuilds Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{30}

The same personification of Jerusalem as a mother bereft of her exiled children and longing for their reunification, seen here, is also witnessed in the Jewish marital blessing\textsuperscript{31} and in the benediction over the reading of the haftarah.\textsuperscript{32} This metaphor of a mother’s (i.e. Jerusalem’s) relationship with her children (i.e. the people of Israel) signifies an understanding that the memories of past glories and the hopes of future redemption do not reside merely in the hearts of the people, but in the very essence of The Land itself. One cannot be complete without the other.

The most obvious attempt to preserve Jerusalem’s memory in Jewish liturgy is the very structure and content of the synagogue services themselves. The Jewish sages of the second century CE, under the leadership of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai of the famed council of Yavneh, were convinced that the Temple service would be suspended for only a brief period, following its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE. They therefore took deliberate steps to preserve the memory of the temple rituals by transferring as many of the Temple rites as possible to the synagogue. Sacrifices were restricted to the Temple, but there were a number of temple rites which were unrestricted. Since the times when the sacrifices would have been offered at the Temple were regarded as especially propitious, the rabbis established the schedule of some of the synagogue services to correspond with the Temple sacrifices (Berachot 26a). For example, the afternoon synagogue service was called \textit{Mincha}, which was the name of the afternoon offering of the Temple. Likewise, the “additional” services on Sabbaths and festivals were called \textit{Musaf}, which corresponds to the \textit{Musaf} (additional) sacrifices offered at the Temple on these days. The Psalm of the day, recited by the Levites following the daily morning sacrifice, was also incorporated into


\textsuperscript{31} “May the barren one [Jerusalem] rejoice and be happy at the in-gathering of her children to her midst in joy. Blessed are You Lord, who gladdens Zion with her children.”

\textsuperscript{32} The haftarah is a section from the Prophets which is read following the Torah reading in the weekly synagogue service. The relevant benediction states: “Have mercy on Zion for it is the abode (\textit{bein}) of our life... Blessed are You Lord, who gladdens Zion with her children.”
the synagogue liturgy. Each of the seven Psalms is preceded by a brief introductory superscription which makes explicit reference to the Temple, such as the following superscription for Sundays: “This is the first day of the week on which the Levites in the Temple used to say. . . .” (Ps. 24 follows).

Furthermore, the ancient rabbinic councils instituted daily morning readings from the Bible (Numbers 28:1-8) and the Mishnah (Zevachim 5) which describe the sacrificial rite of the Temple. Reading about the sacrifices, the rabbis taught, was an acceptable substitute for performing the sacrificial rite—until the Temple could be rebuilt. This recital of the laws of the Temple sacrifices was also made an integral part of the Musaf services for Sabbaths and festivals. The Kedushat Hayom in the Musaf Amidah for the three pilgrimage festivals and for Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) was expanded by the rabbis following the destruction of the Temple to recall the ritual offerings of the day, as prescribed in the Bible, in order to perpetuate the memory of the Temple and its central importance for the spiritual life of the community. On Yom Kippur the synagogue liturgy also includes an elaborate description of the Temple rites for this most holy day in Judaism, when sins are annulled, as they were performed by the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). The wording of the Avodah, as this prayer unit is called, is a medieval composition, but the practice of verbally “performing” the Temple rites on Yom Kippur dates back to the rabbinic period.  

The purpose of reciting the daily sacrifices, and verbally reenacting the Temple rituals for the festivals and Yom Kippur was not only for the perpetuation of the Temple’s memory. It was also vitally important for reassuring the Jewish masses, especially those who had known the sacrificial cult first-hand, that there would continue to be a way to petition God for the absolution of their sins. The rabbis, therefore, instituted teachings to meet the needs of the people. An often cited Talmudic story pictures a discussion between God and Abraham on how Israel might be

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33 Ibid., 85
forgiven in absence of the Temple. Abraham says to God: “Well and good, while the Temple is in existence. When the Temple will no longer be, what will be then?” Answers God: “I have already provided for them in the Torah the order of the sacrifices. Whenever they read it, I will credit them with having brought the offerings before Me and grant them pardon for all their transgression” (Megillah 31b; Ta’anit 27b).

Despite this compensation made for the loss of the Temple ritual, an undying feeling of lack existed in the hearts of many Jews, from the biblical prophets to Judah HaLevi in the twelfth century, all the way to the disciples of Elijah Wilna and Israel Baal Shem in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, due to their state of exile and the absence of the Temple cult. The late Rabbi Hayim Donin explains the spiritual significance of the Temple sacrifices and their importance to Jews in the following way:

The Hebrew word for sacrifice, korban (pl. korbanot), contains within itself the word karo which means ‘near.’ L’hakrav (‘to sacrifice’) can be literally translated as ‘to cause to draw near.’ By bringing korbanot, by giving up something precious to them, the people were drawn closer to God. It was the way they expressed their gratitude to God. It was the way they asked for pardon and atoned for their sins after repenting. It was the way they joined in the celebration of a pilgrimage festival. It was the way they expressed their humility before God and their obedience to His will.34

In an echo of the territorial dimension of halachot expressed in rabbinic literature (see, 54-55), a Spanish Jew of the thirteenth century who took a vow to emigrate to Eretz Israel offers his explanation of the unique standing of Jerusalem and the Temple that supports Rabbi Donin’s words: “There (in Jerusalem, or near it) is the place for fulfilling the commandments and receiving upon oneself the Kingdom of Heaven. Our worship there is acceptable, for there is the House of our God and the Gate of Heaven.”35

There was no other Jewish poet of the medieval period, however, who expressed so passionately the agony of separation from The Land and the deep longing to be reunited with it

34 ibid., 117-118.
than Judah HaLevi. His many liturgical poems (piyyutim), although romantic in style, possess the concrete earthliness that is so prominent in biblical and rabbinic literature and give poignant expression to the cry of the collective Jewish heart of his day:

Beautiful heights, joy of the world, city of a great king,  
For you my soul yearns from the lands of the West.  
My pity collects and is roused when I remember the past,  
Your glory in exile, and your temple destroyed.  
Would that I were on the wings of an eagle,  
So that I could water your dust with my mingling tears. . .

. . . How I shall kiss and cherish your stones.  
Your earth will be sweeter than honey to my taste.  
. . . The air of your land is the very life of our soul.  

HaLevi’s words continue to echo in the hearts of Jews even in a day in which the Jewish return to Zion has been realized. They serve now as they did in his day to underline the eternal Jewish pledge of allegiance to Zion: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem. . .”

b) Jerusalem of Unity (Present)

In addition to being a custodian of memory, Jewish prayer plays a large role in preserving Jewish unity, particularly in the Diaspora. First of all, Jewish prayer is predominantly communal prayer. Through a cursory reading of a Jewish prayer book (siddur) or by witnessing a synagogue service one will find that nearly all of the benedictions and petitions are formulated in the plural. When a Jew prays he is not praying for himself alone, but for the entire community of Israel. The Talmud instructs that even when one is on a journey, far removed from his community, and is praying for his own personal safety, he should incorporate the entire community of Israel into his prayer (Berachot 29b-30a). Thus, through prayer a Jew is made acutely aware that he is not only an individual before God, but is part of the larger community of Israel. Rabbi Dennis Isaacs explains the significance of this element of prayer, stating: “[Prayer] provides the Jew with a powerful

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means of identifying himself with that people and with its past... It fulfills a basic human need—the need to belong. Jewish prayer becomes a document of identity."

The surplus of prayers regarding Jerusalem throughout the liturgy provides an additional intensity to this sense of communal unity. Although prayers and customs may differ from culture to culture, the centrality of Jerusalem remains constant across cultures. Jerusalem is a common focus, a common heritage, a common hope, a common ideal, a common destiny among the majority of Jews around the world. Even in modern Israel's political arena, parties which are vehemently opposed to each other on most issues are united on retaining Jerusalem as the united and undivided capital of the State of Israel. Jerusalem resonates within them as their historical, spiritual, and national center. Jewish liturgy, "the central medium for the expression of Judaism's most cherished principles of faith and practice," through its ubiquitous prayers and customs regarding Jerusalem, has played a central role in preserving this unified stance.

While the entire corpus of prayers regarding Jerusalem can be credited with providing and nurturing this universal connection among Jews with the city, there are certain traditions and prayers which express this unity more explicitly than others. For example, the concluding chant of the Seder meal—"Next year in Jerusalem!"—has resounded at Jewish tables throughout the Diaspora during the festival of Passover for centuries, reminding the worshipers that no matter how they may have prospered in the lands of exile, their true fulfillment as Jews awaits them only in the Land of Israel and in the restored citadels of Jerusalem.

Attachment to the Land of Israel and to Jerusalem is so central to the liturgy that the designated prayers for dew and for rain accord with the seasons of this region (during the three pilgrimage festivals) rather than with the climate of the land in which the worshiper is reciting the prayers. Thus, no matter where they are in the world, when praying Jews beseech God to bless the land with dew or rain, their hearts are united in prayer for the Land of Israel and the city of

Jerusalem, as they implore: “Give dew to placate Your land. . . the city [Jerusalem] left like a (deserted) booth, make her into a crown with Your hand—with dew.”

The most symbolic and efficacious act of unity in the liturgy, however, comes not in the form of a prayer, but in the way in which one orientates oneself during prayer. Three times a day when a Jew stands to pray the Amidah, he faces the holy city of Jerusalem, in accordance with the following talmudic precept:

If one is standing outside Eretz Israel, he should direct his heart toward Eretz Israel. . . If one is standing in Eretz Israel, he should direct his heart towards Jerusalem. . .If one is standing in Jerusalem, he should direct his heart towards the Temple. . .If one is standing in the Temple, he should direct his heart towards the chamber of the Holy of Holies. . . It emerges that one standing in the East turns his face towards the West, one standing in the West turns his face towards the East, one standing in the South turns his face towards the North, and one standing in the North turns his face towards the South. It emerges that all of Israel direct their hearts to one place (Berachot 30a).

The Amidah itself is a powerful unifying force in the liturgy. “The petitions contained within it [the Amidah],” writes Jakob Petuchowski, “have always made the Jew aware of the needs of the whole Jewish people. By rehearsing those needs he identified himself with his people, and he was taught to think not only in terms of his individual needs, but also in terms of the needs of all Israel.” Appropriately, Jerusalem and the restoration of the Temple service are strongly emphasized among the petitions. Clearly, the unifying effect of Jewish communities around the world engaging in this common prayer of Jewish needs and aspirations, in which the theme of Zion is central, while at the same time orientating their hearts, minds, and bodies toward Jerusalem, cannot be overemphasized.

A further example of this profound devotion to Jerusalem in Jewish liturgical life is found in the four blessings of the Birkat Hamazon (grace after meals), a part of the liturgy that is widely

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40 Emphasis Mine.
recognized as having its origins in the pre-rabbinic period. The third blessing is devoted specifically to the theme of Jerusalem:

Have mercy, Lord our God, upon Israel Your people, upon Jerusalem Your city, upon Zion the abode of Your glory, upon the kingship of the house of David Your anointed, and upon the great and holy House over which Your Name was proclaimed. And rebuild Jerusalem, the Holy City, speedily in our days. Blessed are you Lord, who in His mercy builds Jerusalem. Amen

The purpose behind instituting such a benediction is to stress that the worshiper's consumption of food and drink by no means indicates that he has forgotten the plight of Jerusalem and the need for the Temple's restoration. This concept is supported by a separate talmudic tradition which teaches that when one prepares a meal one should leave out some small part, as to always keep the memory of the destroyed Temple and its need for restoration in the forefront of the Jewish worshipper's mind (Bava Batra 60b). Regarding Birkat Hamazon, Rabbi Dennis Isaacs states, "nothing is more suited to ennoble and elevate the lowly urge for satisfaction of the requirements of our body than to associate them with the highest, holiest matters of the Jewish commonwealth. As a rule, the person whose needs are satisfied is apt to forget those of others, and even more so those of the community. This blessing, however, awakens in us, at the time of the satisfaction of our bodily needs, the plea for Divine mercy for Israel, God's nation and its most precious possessions."

d) Jerusalem of Redemption (Future)

The rebuilding of Jerusalem, its re-establishment as the capital of the Jewish nation and the reinstitution of the Temple rites as the spiritual fountainhead of Jewish religious life are essential components of redemption, and constitute the majority of prayers regarding Jerusalem in Jewish liturgy. However, these prayers differ significantly in style, content, and emphasis, due to the

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42 Reic, 162.
43 Ibid.
44 Isaacs, 45.
45 Donin, To Pray as a Jew, 94.
different milieus from which various forms of liturgy emerged and to the liturgy’s natural chronological development over the centuries. Stefan Reif, a scholar of Jewish prayer texts, has provided a helpful summary of the main variants within the liturgy regarding the restoration of Jerusalem:

The theological and political significance of Davidic rule and the building of Jerusalem are stressed in some prayers while in others the dominant theme may be the cultic shortcomings of exile and how these will be made good by the restoration, or Israel’s tragedy and how its pain may be assuaged by God’s mercy, or the exercise of his power as purveyor of joy or recompense. Descriptions of the future may be oriented towards security, the recovery of what was lost, or the messianic eon. It may be presupposed either that it is primarily God’s presence that requires to be restored to Zion, or that his special favor will be obtained when Jerusalem again becomes the center of his cultic service.

Reif further explains the different nuances present in the liturgical supplications for redemption from the period immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple to a time when the concrete reality of Jerusalem’s institutions were only a vague memory:

[Immediately following the destruction] there is the keen anticipation of a recovery from the disasters that befell these institutions and the expectation of an almost imminent restoration of the city of Jerusalem, the Temple and its service, and the special relationship with God that they represent. God’s compassion and mercy will bless Israel with security, and the people’s prayers, as well as their offerings, will attract divine favor.

As even the vaguest folk memories of actual Jerusalem institutions fade throughout the passing of centuries, so the prayers chosen most commonly to relate to them become less embedded in experience and convey a more futurist and messianic message. God’s infinite power will bring unexpected joy and recompense to those suffering the pain of exile and persecution. A detailed picture is painted of an idealized future, with Jerusalem functioning with more than its former glory. The Temple and the Davidic kingdom are presupposed and each group of Jews is seen to be playing a part in the scene.

The two classic examples of early petitionary prayers which express the expectation of the immediate restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple services are witnessed in the Birkat Hamazon (quoted above, 63), and in two benediction of the weekday Amidah: Birkat Yerushalayim and Avodah:

64 Reif, 167.
47 Ibid., 166.
48 Ibid., 167.
Birkat Yerushalayim
Return in Mercy to Jerusalem Your city and dwell therein as You have promised; speedily establish therein the throne of David Your servant, and rebuild it, soon in our days, as an everlasting edifice. Blessed are You Lord, who rebuilds Jerusalem.

Avodah
Look with favor, Lord our God, on Your people Israel and pay heed to their prayer; restore the service to Your Sanctuary and accept with love and favor Israel's fire-offerings and prayer; and may the service of Your people Israel always be favorably received by You. May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in mercy. Blessed are You Lord, who restores His Divine Presence in Zion.

Beyond the apparent expectation for an imminent restoration of the city and the specific reference to the sacrifices, the above benedictions possess an economy of expression and simplicity of language that is distinct from the more colorful vocabulary of later prayers. The Hosha'ananot for Hosha'ana Rabbah, a collection of piyyutim recited on the seventh day of Sukkot while circling the bimah seven times (a commemoration of a similar Temple ritual around the altar), serves as a stark contrast to these earlier prayers:

Help us to reach the final redemption; adorn us with angel-like radiance; attach us firmly to You. . . bring us to Your House with song and exultation; strengthen us with relief and deliverance; glorify us with the lofty Temple; hearten us with the rebuilding of Your City as it was formerly; arouse [our hearts] to Zion when it will be established; grant us the privilege to behold the City rebuilt on its site; let us rest in joy and gladness. . .

Furthermore, as Reif notes above (64), as the exiles of Jerusalem spread throughout the Diaspora and as the progression of time takes them farther and farther away from the concrete experience of Jerusalem and the Temple, a far more idealized future for the city, brought about by the Messiah, begins to express itself in the expanding liturgy. Some of the most well-known prayers expressing this powerful and glorious messianic redemption are found in the various piyyutim, dating from the seventh century onward. Many of these piyyutim were born out of the intense sufferings experienced by the Jewish communities throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, helping to instill hope for the future. The number of piyyutim are legion and most have long since

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been forgotten, but there are some that found particular favor and have won a permanent spot in Jewish liturgy. An example of one such piyyut is the popular hymn of Lekhah Dodi, composed by Rabbi Shlomo Halevy Alkabetz (1505-1584) in Safed. While it is sung at the Friday Kabbalat Shabbat service in order to welcome the "Shabbat Queen," only the refrain and three other stanzas relate to the Shabbat theme. The remaining six stanzas are devoted to Jerusalem, the final redemption, and the coming of the Messiah:

Sanctuary of the King, royal city, arise, go forth from the ruins; too long have you dwelt in the valley of tears; He will show you abounding mercy.

Shake the dust off yourself, arise, don your glorious garments - my people. Through the son of Yishai of Bet Lechem [i.e. the Messiah], draw near to my soul and redeem it.

Arouse yourself, arouse yourself, for your light has come; arise, shine. Awake, awake, utter a song; the glory of the Lord is revealed upon you.

Do not be ashamed nor confounded; why are you downcast and why are you agitated? The afflicted of my people will find refuge in you; the city will be rebuilt on its former site.

Those who despoil you will be despoiled, and all who would destroy you will be far away. Your God will rejoice over you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

To the right and to the left you shall spread out, and the Lord you shall extol. And we shall rejoice and exult, through the man who is a descendant of Peretz [i.e. the Messiah, son of David, son of Peretz; cf. Ruth 4:18-22].

The benedictions of the Amidah concerning Jerusalem, and prayers such as Lekhah Dodi, reveal a small picture of the diverse views of redemption in Jewish history, from a very concrete political reality in the former, to an idealized messianic dream in the latter. The inclusion of both types of prayers in the standard Jewish liturgy to this day has laid the foundation for the various ways Jews of the modern period envisioned and have experienced the restoration of the Jewish national homeland.

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50 Ibid., 132.
The Land in Modern Jewish Thought

a) A Transformation of Ancient Ideas

As for most of medieval Christendom, the rise of the Scientific Revolution in the mid-sixteenth century marked the very beginnings of change in traditional religious (i.e. talmudic) Jewish thought, which had served as the fundamental framework for the Jewish people’s existence and the glue that held the people together in the Diaspora. The new science broke with the traditional Aristotelian concepts of a finite and hierarchical cosmos in favor of a more machine-like universe, which is infinite in space and homogeneous in structure and can be defined in terms of simple mathematical ratios, brought an inevitable rejection of established religious ideas by an increasing number of Western intellectuals. These “rationalists”, as they are often referred to, rejected what they considered to be the irrationality (i.e. the mystical nature) of the traditional religious mind-set and were driven by the desire to construct original theories based on the concrete, mathematical principles of natural law. With the onset of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, these principles of rational scientific inquiry were used in critique of traditional social structures, religious doctrines, and political systems. Leading Enlightenment reformers emphasized the virtues of cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism, and, above all, advocated the “extension of human freedom—intellectual, economic, political and creative freedom—to further the perfecting of moral, rational men.” In both periods there were Jewish intellectuals who were influential in

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51 Historians often point to the publication of Copernicus’s Concerning the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres in 1543 as the beginning and to Newton’s Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy in 1687 as a climax of the Scientific Revolution.
bringing the winds of change to world Jewry, the most prominent being Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), respectively.

According to historian Arnold Eisen, it was Spinoza’s Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (Theological-Political Treatise) and Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem (or On Religious Power and Judaism) which set the agenda for much of Jewish thought in the modern period. Eisen traces the role of The Land in modern Jewish thought back to the formative influences of Spinoza and Mendelssohn. He argues that, despite the differences between them, Spinoza and Mendelssohn defined a three-fold process of demystification, resymbolization, and politicization in regards to Eretz Israel. Through the widespread influences of their thought, Eisen explains, The Land was stripped of its traditional “many-layered dress of imagery and significance” (demystification); once a distinct locus of God’s unique dwelling place, the particularity of Land reemerged as “a universal symbol of human brotherhood and peace, located wherever those dreams of all mankind attain fulfillment (resymbolization)”; and “the Jewish polity [became] a nation among nations, its territory one among many others,” dependent now on normal modes of political action (politicization).

The influence of Enlightenment thinking and the revolutionary works of Spinoza and Mendelssohn could be witnessed in the rise of the Haskalah, a nineteenth-century Jewish intellectual movement which began in Western Europe and spread eastward to Russia. The maskilim (“enlighteners”; singular, maskil), as the proponents of this movement were called, were a loose group of social critics, largely made up of men who were reared in traditional Judaism.
from which they were seeking escape. Chief among their causes was to radically reform traditional Jewish education based on rabbinic and medieval thought by emphasizing the importance of studying secular subjects, modern languages, and being trained in practical and productive labor. They were not Jews who wished to completely abandon their Judaism, but rather to synthesize their religious principles with the broader cultures in which they lived, all in pursuit of a greater universalistic humanitarianism. Naturally, such thinking held no room for the traditional concepts of Eretz Israel. In example, one prominent maskil, Nachman Krochmal (1785-1840), describes the history of the Jewish people as a cycle of birth, maturity, and destruction. At the pinnacle of the third cycle, it is not national sovereignty that is triumphant, but philosophy.57

Likewise, religious reformers, such as Israel Jacobson (1768-1828), Abraham Geiger (1810-74), Kaufman Kohler (1843-1926), and Jewish philosophers like Herman Cohen (1842-1918), considered “Zion” primarily as a universal symbol of an enlightened humanity, rather than a physical place of Jewish Promised Land; a point-of-view exemplified through Cohen’s words: “...the moral world, as it evolves in history, is our true Promised Land...We thereby view the entire historical world as the future abode of our religion. And it is only this future that we acknowledge as our true homeland.”58

Even among early Zionists, who were a small percentage of Jews in the late nineteenth century, there were those, including two of Zionism’s most prominent leaders, Leo Pinsker (1821-91) and Theodore Herzl (1860-1905), who did not consider the Land of Israel as necessary to remedy the problems which Jews were facing in the Diaspora. Although Herzl would eventually embrace the Land-of-Israel-only objective in the Jewish national movement, he and Pinsker were of the “territorialists” fold, which included others such as Ber Barachov, Shlomo Kaplanisky, Berl

Katznelson, Israel Zangwill and Ben-Zion Dinur—men who “disdained romantic hue and religious import attached to the Land of Israel,” and sought to establish Jewish sovereignty in any given land.

b) The Preservation of Fidelity to The Land

Nonetheless, as demonstrated through the “Uganda Crisis” (1903-1905), The Zionist majority, nourished by historical memories and messianic hopes, made clear its territorial bonds with Eretz Israel. Historian of Zionism, Shmuel Almog, notes that “although reality was ruled by the ethnic principle, collective consciousness sustained the memory of the Land of Israel. To some extent, this territorial awareness tallied with the Jews’ very existence.”

This fidelity with the Land of Israel was expressed by prominent Jewish leaders, both in a religious orthodox fashion (i.e. rooted in the Covenantal promises and messianic hopes expressed in traditional rabbinic Judaism) and in a cultural, nontraditionalist religious fashion. The latter group included men such as Moses Hess (1812-75), Ahad Ha’am (1856-1927), A.D. Gordon (1856-1922), and Martin Buber (1878-1965). For these, the desire for a Jewish return to Eretz Israel was born out of a mix of socialism, nationalism, romanticism, and a desire to preserve Jewish traditions, more so than any overt religious devotion to The Land. In example, Ahad Ha’am, sometimes referred to as the “agnostic rabbi”, promoted a “Cultural Zionism” in which a Jewish state would serve to protect Judaism from the threat of assimilation that it faced in the Diaspora, more so than to protect Jews from antisemitism. He believed that the Jews’ loss of spiritual isolation in post-Emancipation Europe threatened to “obliterate our national

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60 The Sixth Zionist Congress (August 1903) debated an offer by the British Government to allocate territory for Jewish settlement in East Africa. The resolution won by a slim majority, but those opposed threatened to dissolve the unity of the World Zionist Organization. Two years later during the Seventh Zionist Congress an Anti-Uganda resolution was passed, affirming the original Basel program, namely: “The establishment of a legally-secured, publicly recognized home for the Jewish People in Palestine.”
61 Almog, 50.
62 Ibid., 51.
characteristics and traditions, and thus gradually... put an end to our existence as a people. ... We must [therefore] secure our future by gathering the scattered members of our race together in our historical land. ... where alone we shall be able to continue to live as a people."63

In the same line as those orthodox "forerunners" of modern Zionism mentioned in chapter one (11)—Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai (1798-1878) and Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795-1874)—there are two modern "halachic thinkers,"64 whose writings on the Land of Israel are worth special attention: Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972).

Arthur Herzberg states, "Modern Zionist thought is the creation of a whole gallery of passionate and extraordinary men, but even among them a few stand out as originals. Abraham Isaac Kook [known most popularly as Rav Kook] is one of this handful." Kook's writings stand out among religious Zionist literature because they possess a unique ability to synthesize diverse stages of Jewish thought—traditional and modern—against a highly mystical backdrop. That is to say that he was able to harmonize aspects of the modern politicization and resymbolization of the Land (as defined by Eisen, above, 68) with its traditional mystical qualities of inherent holiness in an inclusive Divine plan.65

Rav Kook, the first chief rabbi of British Mandate Palestine, considered the mostly secular Zionist movement as part of a purging process that would bring Judaism out of the degenerate state to which it had sunk in the Diaspora. Thus, he was able to extol the Marxists and atheists who despised traditional Judaism, yet struggled for Jewish independence in Eretz Israel, as purifiers of the faith and divine instruments in the process of redemption. "Every labor and activity, spiritual or material," wrote Kook, "that contributes directly or indirectly to the

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65 Eisen, 286.
ingathering of our exile and the return of our people to our land is embraced by me with an affection of soul that knows no bounds." Conversely, Rav Kook chastised those, both religious and secular, who stood in opposition to the Jewish return to The Land, and accused them of chilul HaShem (profanation of the Name of God).

While Rav Kook held to the concept of universal redemption, stressed by the Jewish religious reformers of the Enlightenment, he also held passionately to the uniqueness of Eretz Israel as the earthly confines from which this redemption would emanate to the world. For Eretz Israel is the one place, according to Kook, where the Jew people could experience a renaissance of spirit, by which "all the civilizations of the world will be renewed." For Kook, Eretz Israel was the only place for a fulfilled Jewish life:

Apart from the nourishment it receives from the life-giving dew of the holiness of Eretz Israel, Jewry in the Diaspora has no real foundation and lives only by the power of a vision and by the memory of our glory, i.e., by the past and the future. But there is a limit to the power of such a vision to carry the burden of life and to give direction to the career of a people - and this limit seems already to have been reached. Diaspora Jewry is therefore disintegrating at an alarming rate, and here is no hope for it unless it replants itself by the wellspring of real life, or inherent sanctity, which can be found only in Eretz Israel.

Kook's writings further differ from those of cultural Zionists, such as Ahad Ha'am, in that they are imbued with traditional biblical and rabbinic patterns of thinking. For Kook, the longing for an unbounded Jewish life in Eretz Israel, which burned "unceasingly, with a steady flame, in the collective heart of [the Jewish] people," is truly a foundational desire for an "authentic Jewish life. . . that is fashioned by all the commandments of the Torah." "Hidden away in the deepest

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66 Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Chazon (Jerusalem: Association for Publishing the Works of Chief Rabbi A. I. Kook, 1941), 278.
recesses of their souls,” Kook continues, this desire “exists even among the backsliders and sinners of Israel.”

For Rav Kook, a Jewish person’s connection to Eretz Israel cannot be fully comprehended by even the most sublime human reason. Rather, it can only be felt, as he writes, “through the Spirit of the Lord which is in our people as a whole, through the spiritual cast of the Jewish soul.” With this caveat he goes on to offer a definition of the meaning of Eretz Israel for the Jewish people that further distinguishes him from the pure nationalists and culturalists of the Zionist movement in his day:

Eretz Israel is not something apart from the soul of the Jewish people; it is no mere national possession, serving as a means of unifying our people and buttressing its material, or even its spiritual, survival. Eretz Israel is part of the very essence of our nationhood; it is bound organically to its very life and inner being. . . .

To regard Eretz Israel as merely a tool for establishing our national unity—or even for sustaining our religion in the Diaspora by preserving its proper character and its faith, piety, and observance—is a sterile notion; it is unworthy of the holiness of Eretz Israel. A valid strengthening of Judaism in the Diaspora can come only from a deepened attachment to Eretz Israel. The hope for the return to the Holy Land is the continuing source of the distinctive nature of Judaism. The hope for the Redemption is the force that sustains Judaism in the Diaspora; the Judaism of Eretz Israel is the very Redemption.

Kook’s unique blend of rabbinic, mystical and modern thought and his efforts to reconcile the entire people of Israel in an inclusive bond to The Land, even if that bond lay dormant within the heart of the Jew, has made his writings attractive to a wide variety of Israelis today—from the national religious movement of Gush Emunim (“Block of the Faithful”) to self-styled secular Israelis whose Jewishness is defined by a connection to Jewish culture and history—and has been instrumental in a renaissance of covenantal patterns of thinking in various streams of Judaism today—from orthodox to reform—which embrace the biblical/rabbinic vision of Jewish return to Eretz Israel. This in turn, makes Kook’s writings a valuable source of reflection for the Christian

71 Ibid., 421.
72 Ibid., 419.
73 Ibid., 419-420.
74 Ibid., 419.
Another prominent Jewish voice of the twentieth century who helps give expression to the ineffable delight and renewed religious conscience of many Jews following the 1967 Six-Day War, during which the State of Israel established sovereign rule over Jerusalem and the “West Bank” (the regions of Judeah and Samaria), is the late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Rabbi Heschel’s writings on the Land of Israel, particularly his book *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, are a source of profound insight into a modern Jewish religious perspective which is anchored in the biblical and rabbinic spirit, and endowed with the mysticism of the Eastern European Hassidic movement. Heschel stands in the stream of modern Jewish thought, witnessed in Rav Kook, which emphasizes the limitations of reason to grasp the full significance of the religious life and “seeks to recover biblical faith as an inward dynamic process.” Thus, his writings are highly lyrical, opposed to the predominantly analytical styles of most critical studies on the subject, but nonetheless are also rooted in a sound historical consciousness. Yet, unlike Kook, Heschel wrote in the post-Holocaust era, a fact that confers added poignancy to each of his statements and accentuates the great mystery of religious life which he sought to express. Furthermore, Heschel’s writings are of special significance to Christians because of his deep involvement in Christian-Jewish dialogue and the fact that he often wrote with the purpose to provide Christians with a deeper understanding of Jewish self-identity. Rabbi David Hartman explains Heschel’s underlying message to Jews and Christians alike regarding the meaning of the Jewish return to The Land and to Jerusalem, as follows: “The modern world, haunted by the bleak perspectives of the twentieth century, has been given a concrete symbol of hope by the return of [the Jewish

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75 For a description of the effects of the Six-Day War on Jewry, see below, pp. 104-105.
76 Judeah and Samaria constitutes the heart land of the State of Israel and the biblical Land of Israel. Jerusalem is the geographical and spiritual center of this region.
People] to its land. . . . The statement—"Next year in Jerusalem"—is no longer restricted to the
domain of sermons and prayers, it has become a reality. . . . it means that the word of God as
revealed in the biblical structure has become flesh in the living, bodily return of this people. . . . A
new echo of God’s concern for history has been heard as Israel returns.78

In Israel: An Echo of Eternity, Heschel traces the land tradition in Judaism, and includes
a statement meant to elicit the understanding of Christians who hold a fidelity to the Hebrew
Scriptures, saying: "To abandon the land would make a mockery of all our longings, prayers, and
commitments. To abandon the land would be to repudiate the Bible."79 Yet, he also seeks to
clarify that Judaism should never exalt The Land as one does an idol.80 "We do not worship soil,"
he states emphatically.81 Rather, as his daughter Dr. Susannah Heschel explains, he saw The Land
as being deeply absorbed with Jewish history and faith, and thereby, "‘endowed with the power to
inspire’ moments in which God’s presence is palpable to us, ‘to invoke in us the ability to be
present’ to God’s presence."82

The Roman Catholic reader cannot help but appreciate the sacramental significance of
Eretz Israel (i.e. its inextricable dual nature of concrete terrestrial importance and innate spiritual
significance) which Heschel draws from the land tradition in Judaism. This sacramentality of The
Land is accentuated further in his statements about Jerusalem:

In Jerusalem there are houses, sewage, buses, lampposts. Yet she is more than a
city among cities; she is a city full of vision, a city with an extrasensory
dimension. . . Jerusalem is not divine, her life depends on our presence. Alone she
is desolate and silent, with Israel [the people] she is a witness, a proclamation.
Alone she is a widow, with Israel [ibid.] she is a bride. . . Zion is not a symbol,
but a home, and the land is not an allegory but a possession, a commitment of
destiny. . . Jerusalem is more than a place in space. . . a memorial to the past.
Jerusalem is a prelude, an anticipation of days to come. . . It is not our memory,

79 Abraham Joshua Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, 44.
80 Rabbi David Rosen, former Chief Rabbis of Ireland and currently the Director of the Anti-Defamation League in Israel,
presents an interesting discussion about what he sees as the idolatry of the Land of Israel in certain streams of modern-
day religious Zionists, and some of the violent repercussions which have come from it, including 1995 murder of Israeli
Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a young religious Jew who disagreed with the government’s ceding territory to the
81 Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, 120.
82 Ibid., xxiii.
our past that ties us to the land. It is our future. . . Spiritually, I am a native of Jerusalem. I have prayed here all my life. My hopes have their home in these hills. . . Jerusalem is never at the end of the road. She is the city where waiting for God was born, where the anticipation of everlasting peace came into being. . .

What is the mystery of Jerusalem? A promise: peace and God’s presence. 83

Marcel Dubois, a Dominican priest who has lived and taught in Jerusalem for almost forty years, recognizes the importance of this sacramentality in the religious Jews’ relationship to Jerusalem, stating: “. . . for the Jew, Jerusalem is simultaneously a mystery and a reality. . . A city where the profane and the sacred, the human and the divine, history and eternity are interwoven.” 84 Dubois also highlights the similar significance which the city has often held and should always hold for Christians, namely that the earthly Jerusalem is “ultimately the sacrament of the kingdom of God.” 85

For Christians down the ages the holy sites have often served as a means to bring one into contact with the mystery of Christ’s incarnation. To this day pilgrims come by the plane load every year to find spiritual nourishment through encountering the physical land of biblical history and revelation. However, as Dutch Reform minister Simon Schoon, himself a long time resident of Israel and leader in Christian-Jewish relations explains, this relationship to Jerusalem and the Holy Land held by Christians generally allows for little understanding of Jewish attachment to The Land, “as it lacks the view of Judaism as a living reality.” 86 Because many Christians, due in part to the ingrained teachings of replacement theology and a simple lack of exposure to modern Judaism, dismiss Jewish religious faith as an insignificant and fading phenomenon, they choose to view present-day Israel in purely political terms. Heschel, acutely aware of this view, has his Christian reader in mind as he eloquently explains the profound mystical and religious significance of The Land in modern Judaism:

83 Ibid., 8, 14, 15, 18, 29, 32, 36.
84 Dubois, “Israel and Christian Self-Understanding,” 81.
85 Ibid., 86. Dubois also makes the important distinction that a Christian’s attachment to Jerusalem does not involve any form of national belonging territorial possessiveness, as it does for the Jews.
What is holy about the Holy Land? It is not only because its space is filled with frozen echoes of a voice heard in the past. Eretz Israel is a prelude, an anticipation. The Holy Land is regarded as the place where the divine plan of history can unfold its pristine and unique meaning.

The land of Israel has been sanctified by the words of the prophets, by the suffering of a whole people, by the tears and prayers of thousands of years, by the labor and dedication of pioneers. Such sanctity is precious to God, vital to the people, a light within history. The State of Israel is not only a place of refuge for the survivors of the holocaust, but also a tabernacle for the rebirth of faith and justice, for the renewal of souls, for the cultivation of knowledge of the words of the divine. By the power and promise of prophetic visions we inhabit the land...

The land presents a perception which seeks an identity in us. Suddenly we sense coherence in history, a bridge that spans time.

Israel reborn is an explicit rendering of an ineffable mystery. The Presence is cloudy, but the challenge is unmistakable. Heschel again turns his attention to his Christian reader in speaking of the Jewish people’s return to and rebirth in The Land which brought about the State of Israel—an event that, for Heschel and for many Jews, cannot be explained apart from a Divine operative:

It is dangerous to regard political affairs as religious events; yet since the time of Abraham we were taught that political affairs are to be understood within the orbit of God’s concern. We must not expect the history of politics to read like a history of theology. Instances of God’s care in history come about in seeming disarray, in scattered fashion - we must seek to comprehend the unity of the seemingly disconnected chords.

To the eyes of the heart, it is clear that returning to the land is an event in accord with the hidden Presence in Jewish history. It is a verification of the biblical promise... Returning to the land is an event in which the past endures, in which the future is foreshadowed... To our conscience Israel reborn is holy. This is why in the inner chambers of our anguished souls the State of Israel is holy. Such words contain not only great efficacy in bringing a renewed and deepened appreciation among Christians for the Jewish people’s fidelity to the Land of Israel and its recognition of the ineffable mystery of Israel reborn as a sovereign nation, but may serve as a point of Christian reflection for a deepened understanding of its own relationship to the Holy Land and as a concrete example of God’s presence in history, two points that are worthy of greater discussion.

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58 Ibid., 137-38.
The Land in Dialogue

Before exploring the issue of Eretz Israel in Judaism as a point of Christian spiritual reflection, however, the issue demands a more immediate response from the Church which has officially stated that the "gifts" of God (i.e. the Covenant) to the Jewish people have never been abrogated. In order to uphold this statement it is incumbent upon the Church to acknowledge the centrality of The Land in Judaism, as it remains inextricable to the idea of Covenant in nearly every stream of Judaism today. Further still, in its fidelity to the Scriptures (both the "Old" and New Testament), the Church must recognize the strong emphasis on the importance of The Land throughout the Bible. From this recognition the subsequent equation should be easily deduced: the bond between the Jewish people and the Hebrew Scriptures, even for those who are non-religious, results in a natural bond between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel.

Admittedly, this renewed respect of the land tradition in Judaism within the Church asks for a revolution of the traditional Christian conceptions of Judaism, but no more so than the Vatican Council's statements on the Jewish people in other equally important respects. In fact, as has already been demonstrated through the statements of church councils, catholic theologians in the dialogue, and Pope John Paul II himself, a deepened understanding of this issue is beginning to find its way into mainstream Catholic thought. The long awaited formalization of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel has done much to abate Jewish distrust of the Catholic Church and Christians in general, as well as to encourage Catholics in a more open discussion of the importance of those issues for Jews, such as Eretz Israel, which are bound to the

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99 *Nostra Aetate* No. 4 states: "Now as before, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their fathers. He does not repent of the gifts he makes or the calls he issues." For full text see appendix I, pp. 122-123.

90 According to Rabbi David Rosen, many Jews, particularly Israeli Jews, "fail to appreciate the distinction between the Catholic Church and other Christian churches and denominations..." This is often cause for these Jews to measure the advancement of Christian-Jewish relations according to actions of the Catholic Church and the Holy See in particular. (Rosen, "The Millennium in the Land of Israel," 34).
State of Israel. Thus, as Vatican and Israeli diplomats sit down at the negotiating table, as Catholics and Jews come together at the table of dialogue, and as Israelis struggle to steer their nation's course in the peace process, a course which the majority hopes will bring—beyond the absence of warfare—a renewed dignity in respect to the quality of life for Palestinians living among them and a greater sense of personal security, it is critical for the Church to deepen its understanding of the intense bond between Jews and the Land of Israel and to express that understanding to their Jewish brothers and sisters. By doing so, the Church may continue to demonstrate to Jews that it is truly listening to them, and is a genuine advocate for a secure and prosperous Jewish existence anywhere in the world that Jewish communities may be established, above all in the Land of Israel.  

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91 This is especially true with regards to the negotiations over the permanent status of Jerusalem, a highly sensitive issue among Jews of all persuasions, in which the Vatican has requested to have a role. For a definitive Church statement on the issue of Jerusalem, see *Symposium of Presidents and Delegates of Catholic Bishops' Conferences on Jerusalem*. Text available at [http://www.al-bushra.org/latpstra/english.htm](http://www.al-bushra.org/latpstra/english.htm) (Internet); and *Jerusalem: Considerations of the Secretariat of State*, Vatican, May 1996. Available at [www.al-bushra.org/](http://www.al-bushra.org/) (Internet).
CHAPTER VI

AM ISRAEL

Closely connected to, yet distinct from, the issue of Eretz Israel in Jewish self-identity is the concept of Am Israel. As seen in the previous chapter, their connectedness lies in the covenantal promises laid out early on in the biblical text. From the biblical perspective the two concepts cannot be fully defined apart from each other. Am Israel is only fully expressed within Eretz Israel and the latter holds little meaning apart from the former. Ideally, as the biblical prophets foresaw in the final redemption, the two would be forever joined together. Yet, in the reality of the Diaspora, Jews were forced for thousands of years to live apart from the land to which their identity was so closely tied. While the Diaspora existence in no way wiped out the importance of Eretz Israel it did accentuate the importance of Am Israel in Jewish life. For this existence demonstrated that the Jews were most capable of surviving the absence of The Land, something they could not have done without the notion of peoplehood.

As in the case of Eretz Israel, it cannot be overemphasized that Am Israel is a highly complex and diverse historical and theological issue. It should go without saying that neither the ancient Israelite religion, nor the historical phenomena of Judaism (ancient to modern), nor the highly developed forms of modern Jewish thought (philosophical, political, religious, cultural, etc.), are in anyway monolithic in their presentation of most issues, let alone one as complex as Am Israel. A thorough and comprehensive analysis of such a difficult subject is obviously beyond the scope of this study. Even a generalized survey—one that is fair to the subject—would
require more space than is allowed here. Keeping in mind the diverse nature of Jewish thought throughout the ages, particularly in the modern period, the focus of the following chapter will be to distill the fundamental characteristic of Am Israel which finds varying degrees of expression in contemporary world Jewry and the State of Israel, namely, that the Jewish people constitute both a distinct religiously based community and an ethnic people bound by lineage and culture. Of course, as Kurt Hruby states, “Present day Jewish positions can only be understood on the basis of historical reality, which is the reinterpretation of certain constants of Jewish life in the light of the present.” Therefore, it will be important to consider some of the principal formative events in the peoplehood of Israel from the biblical period up to the present day. While the obscurity of antiquity ultimately causes the origins and formation of biblical concepts such as Eretz Israel and Am Israel to elude us, how Jews have interpreted and developed these concepts, and the fact that they serve as key elements in the Jewish experience today, has become a factor of undeniable historical and theological significance. The discussion of ancient texts particularly in this paper should be understood in that context. Finally, we will consider some of the obstacles that have prevented Christians from relating to this unique quality in Jewish self-identity and the challenges that lay before them in overcoming these obstacles.

The Chosen of God

a) The Biblical Account: A Covenantal People

The biblical concept of Am Israel in Jewish self-identity has already been touched upon in the above discussion of The Land. In this discussion it was shown that just as the concept of Eretz Israel is founded in the Divine covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so is the concept of Am


Israel (48-49). This covenant of “peoplehood” is established with God’s initial call to then “Abram” in the land of Haran (Gen. 12:2), finds concrete physical expression in the act of circumcision carried out on all male descendants of Abraham (Gen. 17:11-14), blossoms into nation-like proportions with the offspring of Jacob (i.e. the twelve tribes)—whose name is later changed to “Israel”—and is endowed with a strong sense of polity with the institution of the kings of Israel. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures it is made clear that these “Israelites” (Heb. bnei Israel, lit. “Sons of Israel”) are a distinct people, distinguished from all other peoples (i.e. Egyptians, Moabites, Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites, etc.), and, indeed, the “Chosen of God”.

After the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the biblical narratives, psalms and prophets are completely focused on this people’s development as a nation and its covenantal relationship to its God. A covenant, simply defined, is a process whereby two parties make a binding agreement. While various human relations are governed through the category of covenant in the Bible—i.e. between kings, friends, tribes, etc.—the most predominant idea of covenant in the biblical context is the unique concept of a relationship between God and a specific people—the People of Israel. However, unlike other instances of covenant in the ancient Near East, God is not simply the guarantor of the covenant but is party to it, and the People of Israel are not simply party to the covenant, they are formed by it. That is to say that the people’s identity as a “people” is constructed through their relationship with God. According to this biblical understanding this is not a situation in which an existing people, possessing an autonomous national dimension, are enriched by acquiring a theological mission. Rather, the theological or religious dimension is part and parcel of their very identity and formation as a people. This is illustrated through the Abrahamic covenant:

As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come
from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you. (Genesis 17:4-7).

Significantly, the above event (i.e. the changing of Abram's name to "Abraham") takes place after the birth of his son Ishmael, whose mother is the servant Hagar, and before the birth of his son Isaac, whose mother is Abraham's wife Sarah (whose name was also changed from "Sarai"). While Abraham pleads with God to bless his son Ishmael, to which God agrees (Gen. 17:18-20), God states emphatically to Abraham, before Sarah is even pregnant: "My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year" (Gen. 17:21). Again, after Isaac's birth in the midst of a dispute between Sarah and Hagar over whose son shall be most honored, God states: "It is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you" (Gen. 21:12). In other words, the biblical message is that the peoplehood of Israel is not simply defined strictly by a biological lineage, but through Divine election, sealed in an exclusive covenant.

The people's Divine "choseness" is again highlighted and a new dimension is added to it in the account of their enslavement in Egypt under the Pharaohs and their subsequent deliverance. As told in the Book of Exodus, the God of Israel, no longer able to bear their sufferings, commands Moses to "bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Gen. 3:10). Moses, God's chosen deliverer, leads the Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt into the desert of Sinai, where at the base of a great mountain, God establishes another covenant with the people—a covenant involving detailed commandments (mitzvot) and sets them apart from all other peoples, declaring: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession [Heb. s'gulah] out of all peoples...you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). In this, the Sinaitic covenant, the people are further endowed with

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3 Emphasis mine.

4 The Hebrew word mitzvah (pl. mitzvot) is usually translated as "commandment." However, since this translation tends to restrict the term to a narrow, legalistic definition, and neglects its more profound dimensions in Jewish thought, I choose to use the term mitzvah itself.
the vocation to live according to a prescribed set of Divine precepts—in modern Jewish parlance, “to accept the yoke of the mitzvot”.

The Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants are the formative moments of Israel’s somewhat paradoxical identity as a people of a distinct ethnic lineage (i.e. descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and a religious community inextricably bound to a life of service to God through the mitzvot (i.e. the “Laws of Moses” given at Sinai). The first covenant is established as “everlasting” (Gen. 17:7) and stresses primarily the future blessing and flourishing of a distinct line of descendants from Abraham. It entails only one external condition on the people: the act of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14). In contrast, the second covenant stresses a strict religio-legal commitment and its fulfillment is conditioned upon the people’s faithfulness to God.\(^5\) This dual identity makes for a certain tension within the community of Israel, which is secure in its identification as a people set apart by God, but struggles to understand its standing before God as covenantal people when they have violated the precepts of that covenant, and are faced with exile from their land. The rabbis of post-biblical Judaism were particularly aware of this tension.

b) Post-Biblical Israel in Exile: A People of Cosmic Proportions

As in the understanding of Eretz Israel, the rabbinic authors look at the relationship between God and the People of Israel from a predominantly biblical perspective, rooted in the concept of covenant. In typical rabbinic fashion, the rabbis elaborate on the message of the biblical text, often using relational metaphors to describe the special bond between the people and God. The most common metaphors are those of father-child (Shabbat 14:4); king-subject (Mechi'ta, Ex. 20:2), and husband-wife (Exodus Rabbah 15:31). Such poignant descriptions undoubtedly served to solidify the people’s identity as the “Chosen People,” called to be God’s witnesses to the world (Isa. 44:8). In turn, this teaching, along with spiritual isolationism and the ever-present threat of

\(^5\) Cf. Exodus 19:5-6 and Duet 7:6-12.
religious persecution, helped to bring a certain degree of cohesiveness to the Jews of the Diaspora.

However, an even more significant development in post-biblical literature with regards to the understanding of the peoplehood of Israel is the placing of Israel (the people) beyond the boundaries of the covenant into the realm of the cosmic. Such developments likely arose from the troubling condition of Israel’s state of exile following the failed Bar Kokbah Revolt, which put into question the continued validity of the covenant. While biblical theology never goes so far as to say the covenant could be annulled, the fact of Israel’s transgressions poses a serious challenge in the mind of the rabbis for articulating the covenant’s continued validity, particularly that of the Sinaitic covenant, in which God makes his blessings conditional upon a life devoted to His mitzvot. In post-biblical Judaism, therefore, different religious language is adopted that eases this tension. In rabbinic literature, covenantal language is sometimes replaced with a more cosmic orientation of Israel’s relationship with God. While the biblical understanding of “covenant” serves primarily as a historical category, stating that at a given time God established a relationship with the people of Israel and that relationship has been played out in history as indicated by God’s presence with His people, certain rabbinic writings choose to ground Israel not in historical terms, but in cosmic terms, in which Israel is created into the very fabric of the world. Some sources state that the world was created for the sake of Israel, others state that the thought of Israel was present in the mind of the Creator at the six days of creation, while still others indicate that Israel’s existence preceded the creation of the world. What ties these different expressions together is the common perspective of viewing Israel through cosmic lenses. From this point-of-view, Israel’s significance to God becomes part of a larger framework. As the rabbinic authors saw it, the move away from covenantal language did not represent a weakening of the traditional concept of covenant, but created a far more powerful relationship in which Israel’s status as a people is grounded above the relativity of history and the vicissitudes of contemporary reality.
To cite one example of this cosmic orientation let us look at a classical midrashic\(^6\) text from the Amoraic period, *Genesis Rabbah* (fifth century CE). This text offers an interpretation of Genesis 1:1—“In the beginning God created”—stating:

Six things preceded the creation of the world; some of them were actually created, while the creation of the others was already contemplated. The Torah and the Throne of Glory were created.... The creation of the patriarchs was contemplated.... [the creation of] Israel was contemplated... [the creation of] the Temple was contemplated... The name of the Messiah was contemplated.

This passage presents six cardinal values whose existence preceded the creation of the world: Torah, Throne of Glory, Patriarchs, Israel, Temple, and Messiah. The Torah and the Throne of Glory were already present in reality, while the other four—the Patriarchs, Israel, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah—were pre-existent, contemplated realities. As is common in midrashic literature, this interpretation is immediately followed by an alternative view:

R. Huna, reporting R. Jeremiah in the name of R. Samuel b. R. Isaac, said: “The intention to create Israel preceded everything else.” This may be illustrated thus: A king was married to a certain lady, and had no son by her. On one occasion the king was found going through the marketplace and giving orders: “Take this ink, inkwell, and pen for my son,” at which the people remarked: “He has no son: what does he want with ink and pen? Strange indeed!” Subsequently they concluded: “The king is an astrologer, and has actually foreseen that he is destined to beget a son!” Thus, had not the Holy One, blessed be He, foreseen that after twenty-six generations Israel would receive the Torah, He would not have written therein, “Command the children of Israel” (Numbers 28:2).

The king’s mentioning of writing instruments—ink, inkwell and pen—can be understood as a metaphor for the written medium—the Torah. The written medium of the Torah is emphasized because if it is presented as being pre-existent to creation, as in the previous passage, one could think of it as simply a spiritual or abstract entity. Instead, the parable wants to highlight the

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\(^6\) *Midrash* (noun), in its most general sense, refers to the homiletical exegesis and interpretation of Scripture (i.e. the Hebrew Bible). More specifically it constitutes a distinct literary genre, generally fixed to the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods of rabbinic Judaism, which is either halachic (legal) or aggadic ( illustrative) in content, and “either exegetical, homiletical, or narrative in form” (Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*. 2d ed. [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981]: 122-123). The very term, *midrash* (derived from the Hebrew root-word *d’r sh*—to search, to inquire), reveals the precise intent behind this distinct form of scriptural exegesis: to move beyond the literal sense (*p’shar*) of the text in order to penetrate the “spirit” of the Scripture; “to scrutinize the text more deeply and draw from it interpretations which are not always immediately obvious... [in order] to show the full import of the work of God, the Word of God” (Renée Bloch, “*Midrash*,” in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice*, ed. William Scott Green [Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978]: 29, 31).
concrete reality of the Torah as a text that addresses the people of Israel. If it addresses Israel, argues the midrash, then the Torah itself must have been formulated with Israel as its recipient. Thus, it concludes: “the intention to create Israel preceded everything else.”

This text is particularly significant because it in turn not only gives cosmic status to the people of Israel, but presents them as the primary purpose of creation. This transition further bolsters Israel’s position against historical frailty. It is a way of taking the same components that existed in the biblical covenantal thought structure, removing them from the historical realm—i.e. conditionality, the susceptibility to sin and error, etc.—and grounding them in a cosmic context, which serves as a guarantee of Israel’s inviolability before God. Therefore, rather than Israel’s covenantal status which defines them as a people being called into question, it is anchored in a higher order of being. In the face of prolonged exile and increasing Christian polemics claiming to be the “True Elect of God”, such teaching becomes an invaluable anchor for the preservation of Jewish faith and customs.

Despite this cosmic rendering, the understanding of peoplehood in Judaism never loses its earthly element, namely, the concept that the Jewish people constitute a distinct ethnic people. As Zwi Werblowsky writes, “Membership in this particular historic group is required by birth. No further religious rite is needed to obtain full-fledged status as a member of this covenantal community.” Some have even found the idea that all Israel is not intended to be “religious” (i.e. in terms of the traditional rabbinic precepts of Torah study and observance of the mitzvot) implied in an early midrashic text. In addition to emphasizing the priority of genuine intention in prayer (kavanah), the text, set in the context of a moving dialogue between the people and God, presents the author’s desire to unite the entire community of Israel:

“We are poor and have not the wherewithal to bring sacrifices.” God replied: “I desire words, as it says, ‘Take with you words, and return unto the Lord’ (Hos. 14:2) and I

will pardon all your sins." The "words" here referred to are words of the Torah, as it says, "These are my words which Moses spoke unto all Israel" (Deut. 1:1). Then they said to God: "We know no Torah." "Then weep and pray unto Me and I will accept [your remorse]..." (Exodus Rabbah 28:4).

Even though the text assumes a basic devotion to God among the people and does not make room for a "secular" expression of Jewish identity, as will later be understood in modern terms, it is extraordinary in the sense that it undermines a rigid, legalistic understanding of Jewish religious life that would exclude certain Jews and serves to purport a more inclusive picture of the Jewish people. In much the same spirit, the great medieval philosopher and biblical commentator, Maimonides argues that no matter how qualified a Jew may be in terms of personal piety and devotion to Torah, he will not be deemed worthy of olam ha'ba ("the world to come") if he fails to identify with the fate of his fellow Jews. Even Maimonides who considered the essence of the people as linked to a life of Torah and mitzvot, recognized the reality of the diversity of the people and the vital importance for its most disparate factions to identify with each other as one whole—Am Israel.

This sense of Jewish unity and the notion of the Jews as a "people who dwell apart" (Numbers 23:9) was accentuated by their minority status in greater "Christian" Europe. The medieval notion of Christendom which united the political powers of the government with the religious authority of the Church, left little if any room for Jews to assimilate into the larger culture. Through exclusionary legislation and anti-Jewish rhetoric (i.e. accusations of Jewish ritual murders of Christian children, poisoning of wells by Jews, the alleged blasphemous, anti-Christian character of the Talmud, etc.), the gap separating Jews from the greater "Christian" public gradually widened. Hruby explains that this ghetto life experienced by the majority of

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8 It is important to note here, as will be highlighted later on, that the definition of a "secular" Jew cannot be fully removed from a religious context despite the fact that membership in the Jewish people is not primarily voluntary. The definition of "Jew" is only fully cogent when made in religious terms—e.g. election by God—which are rooted in the biblical texts.


European medieval Jewry served in “producing their [the Jews’] own culture and language, distinguished from non-Jews by their manners, style of dress and, in short, by a myriad of details which make up the fabric of daily life.”\(^{11}\) Similarly, the hundreds of thousand of Jews living in Muslim lands experienced an often less hostile but similar experience of isolation, and thus a peculiar cultural identity, under the inferior condition of dhimmitude.\(^{12}\) Under these conditions, the traditional biblical and rabbinic texts and customs served as the defining center around which the Jews oriented their lives, and the rabbis were the community leaders. Thus, there was little questioning by Jews or non-Jews that the Jewish people represented both a distinct cultural/national entity and religious tradition. However, with the rise of secular modern nationalism in the eighteenth century throughout western and central Europe and the unprecedented opportunities that this would offer Jews for assimilation and acculturation, the traditional structures of Jewish self-identity would be seriously tested and indeed transformed.

**Modernity: A Challenge for Jewish Self-Identity**

The dual nature of the Jewish people, inherent in the biblical account of its formation and evident in post-biblical writings, is greatly challenged with the rise of revolutionary scientific and philosophical theories which question traditional religious thought (represented in the Jewish world by the teachings of Baruch Spinoza, see above, 67-68) and the dawn of the Enlightenment which favored humanitarian universalism over the Christian religious hegemony which had dominated Europe for centuries (represented in the Jewish world by the teaching of Moses

\(^{11}\) Kurt Hruby, “Israel and the Nations in Modern Jewish Thought,” 18.

\(^{12}\) Those Christians and Jews (“Peoples of the Book”) who surrendered to invading Muslim armies without fighting and were able to pay the jizhia (tribute or poll tax) were granted a pledge of protection (the dhimma) by their conquerors from the threats of jihad—“Holy War” (i.e. massacre, deportation, slavery, etc.). However the dhimmi (lit. “protected people”) status entailed a legal and social inequality in relation to Muslims as well as constant financial exploitation in the form of ransoms by the Islamic umma. Bat Ye’or, a pioneer researcher on the subject of the dhimmi status states: “Jews and Christians had to accept the condition of inferiority, humiliation and constant vilification. To describe this condition of humiliation and fear shared for over a millennium by Jews and Christian on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe), I use the term dhimmitude” (Bat Ye’or, “Jihad and Dhimmitude: Challenges for the Future,” in *Christians and Israel: Essays on Biblical Zionism and Islamic Fundamentalism*, ed. Matt Johnson and Nicola Goodenough [Jerusalem: ICEJ, 1996], 119).
Mendelssohn, see above, ibid.). During this revolutionary period the Church's influence over public life was in decline as there was a significant shift to a more pluralistic society in which religion was looked upon more and more as a purely individual matter with no fundamental relationship to the nature of the state—a shift in understanding that affected large sections of European Jewry as well.

a) Reforming Judaism: Am Israel as a Solely Religious Idea

This phenomenon of individualized religion had its most potent and pervasive expression under the French Revolution. On 28 September 1791 the French National Assembly adopted a proposal that all "individuals of the Jewish persuasion" were to enjoy the rights of full citizenship in France. The walls of the ghetto had finally come down, affording Jews full civic rights. For the Jews of France, and soon after for the Jews of other western and central European countries, this act of emancipation marked an unprecedented opportunity for widespread assimilation and acculturation. From then on, something new took place within the countries affected by these developments, "no longer were there Jews living in Strasbourg, Vienna, Frankfurt or London, but rather French, Austrian, German, and English people whose religion was Israelite." But this change which promised untold liberties to the Jewish masses for the first time in their long history in Europe, also greatly upset the basic structures of traditional Jewish thought and posed a serious crisis of Jewish identity. For, as has been made evident in our discussions above, in traditional Judaism no absolute bifurcation of the secular and the religious ever existed as was now being suggested. The idea that religion is a matter of individual conscience, a simple adherence to a formal body of beliefs which can be easily separated from other, more mundane, aspects of life—a concept more easily accepted in Christianity—was almost completely foreign to the Judaism

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14 Kurt Hruby, "Israel and the Nations in Modern Jewish Thought," 19.
of that time, with the exception of Mendelssohn's writings. Salo Baron succinctly summarizes this unique challenge that European Judaism faced as it was thrust into the age of Emancipation:

Under secular modern nationalism . . . the fiction arose that Jews were nothing but a religious group. The protagonists of this idea forgot that such divorcement of nationality from religion in the Christian world had been the result of a protracted evolution from the Reformation through the American and French Revolutions, the decisive factor being the deadlock of the Wars of Religion. Judaism, which had not gone through that process, would have had to undergo an even greater transformation, since the doctrine of the chosen people and the Jews' physical descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had always been an integral part of their faith. \(^{15}\)

Yet, this new way of thinking was not completely imposed upon the Jews by external forces. There were many Jews who were eager to rid themselves of the ethnic/cultural peculiarity of Jewish peoplehood in favor of a more Christianized faith based Jewish identity. This is demonstrated most clearly in the response of The Assembly of Jewish Notables in France to Napolean’s questioning of the French Jewish leadership about whether or not Jews could be loyal French citizens. The Assembly’s position is made clear in the opening lines of the response in which it claims to speak “in the name of all Frenchmen professing the religion of Moses.” \(^{16}\)

Likewise, the leaders of Reform Judaism in Germany championed the cause to eliminate, or at least blur, the ethnic and national features of traditional Judaism and emphasize the strictly religious mission of Jews. Toward this goal, The New Israelite Temple Association in Hamburg, founded by the early Reformers in 1817, significantly altered the synagogue liturgy and developed a new prayer book in which German prayers were added and traditional prayers (i.e. prayers for the coming of a personal Messiah and “national” prayers for the restoration of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland) were omitted or modified. \(^{17}\) Even those Jewish


religious leaders who espoused a more traditional, halachic-based Judaism, such as Rabbi Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875) and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) were sometimes prone to a definition of Jewishness which strongly emphasized its religious nature. Hirsch, the founder of Jewish neo-orthodoxy in Germany supported, for a short while at least, the idea of "a German citizen of the Israelite religion".

b) Estrangement from Religion: The Secular Jew

At the same time, the process of acculturation and assimilation, which characterized the Jews' emancipated status, lead to the estrangement of a large number of Jews from any type of religious identification, much in the spirit of Spinoza. These became the modern Jewish secularists. They were Jews who had grown up in an environment where modernity was felt to be incompatible with an attachment to traditional, organized religion. Rather than the theological and metaphysical issues that had dominated Jewish thought, they were primarily concerned with the political, sociological, or cultural facets of the Jewish condition. Surely, these Jews drew on ancient Jewish religious beliefs and hopes, but they recast them in a uniquely modern context in which adherence to these beliefs in a traditional sense was no longer necessary. In contradistinction to the Jewish religious reformers, these secular Jews (among them: nationalists [e.g. Zionists], autonomists, culturalists, socialists, Marxists, communists, etc.) clung primarily to the ethnic and cultural dimension of Jewish peoplehood as the defining element of their Jewishness. This process of secularization took place in both western Europe and among the millions of Jews in eastern

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19 Hirsch is considered as the founder of Jewish neo-orthodoxy in Germany, a movement which sought to put halachic Judaism in harmony with certain aspects of the modern world. See: Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Die Religion im Bunde mit dem Fortschritt" (1854), in Judaism Eternal: Selected Essays from the Writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, ed. and trans. I. Grunfeld (London: Soncino, 1956), 224-238


Europe (i.e. the Russian Pale of Settlement), albeit at a slower pace and with unique ideological patterns among the latter.  

Manfred Vogel states the essence of the secularists’ position:

Jewish peoplehood is seen as the carrier of a national cultural heritage like any other nation. This cultural heritage may, of course, have its special contribution to make, but the existence of the Jewish people . . . its raison d’être are conceived with no reference to a divine cosmic working of salvation. The religious grounding is removed. It is conceived purely in horizontal terms with no vertical reference. This formulation can be encountered in the context of socialism [particularly in eastern Europe]. That is the vocation of the Jewish people and the significance of its heritage is taken to be the bringing about of secularized social justice. The Jewish people becomes the instrument in the realization of secularized socialism.  

Vogel also makes an important distinction between those secularists who perceive Jewish peoplehood “in the full sense of the term”—i.e. including a distinct political dimension—which is primarily expressed by the Zionists, and those who hold to a “restricted ethnic formulation” of Jewish peoplehood—i.e. those who do not uphold a distinct political dimension among the Jewish people, but instead, seek to contribute unique Jewish social ideals to the political dimension of their host nation.  

Vogel explains that the latter group, which was the most numerous, believed that by leaving out the political dimension it would allow the ethnically distinct Jewish people to go on living with the political context of their respective host nations as any other ethnic group. This formulation, he writes, “serve[s] very conveniently as a rationale for the half-way existence of emancipated diaspora Jewry, an existence which wants to be both separate and distinct from the host nation and at the same time included within the social, economic, and political life of the

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22 It is important to note that process of modernization in the Jewish Diaspora is neither chronologically, geographically, nor ideologically uniform. The millions of Jews in eastern Europe, for example, experienced social and cultural assimilation much slower than their brethren in the West, partly due to the isolation of large Jewish communities in the Pale of Settlement. In addition, the Jews of the Orient (largely Muslim Lands) were isolated from the modern revolutions of Europe and for the most part remained within the social and ideological structures of traditional Judaism until their settlement in modern State of Israel. On the modernization of Oriental Jewry see: A.N. Chouraqui. Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968); and Norman A. Stillman. The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979).  
23 Vogel, “The Link between People, Land and Religion in Modern Jewish Thought,” 23.  
24 Ibid., 19,21,23.
host nation."23 This form of existence was most congenial to emancipated Jewry in the Diaspora, according to Vogel, because it does not "run head-on against the reality of the Jewish phenomenon in the past, a reality whereby the Jewish people always understood itself and was understood by others as a distinct, separate group of an ethnic nature. Nor does it fly in the face of the present reality where the Jewish entity continues to be distinct not only as a religious community but as an ethnic entity.

This formulation... (in contradistinction to the formulation which sees the Jewish people as merely a 'church'), precludes the necessity of making the preposterous claim that ethnically the Jewish people are one and the same as the host nation... however [in contradistinction to the Zionists] it does not radicalize this distinction by including the political dimension within the ethnic formulation."26

A seminal figure of this group is the famed historian of Russian Jewry, Simon Dubnow (1860-1911), who championed the diaspora-affirming idea of Jewish autonomism. Writing during the nationalist ferment of early twentieth-century Europe, Dubnow pointed to the evident intent of all Central and East European nationalities to win self-determination as a sign that Jews could accomplish much the same. Robert Seltzer explains that Dubnow's optimism for the possibility of Jewish autonomism in the diaspora was based on his conviction that "the future of multinational states, such as Russia and Austria-Hungary lay in a constitutional order leaving in the government's hands matters of general concern, while guaranteeing nationalities full autonomy in the realms of education and culture."27

Zionists, secular and religious alike, were far less optimistic about the opportunity for autonomous Jewish existence in the diaspora. In the face of the rapidly deteriorating bonds—social, cultural, spiritual and psychological—of Jews with the community of their forefathers in the wake of Emancipation, and the increasing sentiments of a more racially motivated

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23 Ibid., 21.
26 Ibid.
27 Seltzer, "Secular Jewish Thought in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History, 703.
antisemitism (opposed to the traditional anti-Judaism of medieval Europe which was largely based on religious prejudice). Zionists believed that Jews could only survive as a people within the sovereign boundaries of a new Jewish commonwealth.

The antagonism and often violent resistance that Jews met as they sought integration into the cultural, economic, and political life of the modern "pluralistic" societies of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe, was certainly a major factor in secular Zionists’ motivation to actively seek the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state, but also worthy of note was their deep disgust of orthodox Judaism's passivity in face of this violence, particularly during the Russian pogroms (1881-1921). This antipathy was expressed most poignantly by the famed Hebrew poet Haim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934) in the "City of Slaughter". Following the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, Bialik interviewed some of the Jewish survivors and prepared a report on the atrocities. From this experience he penned the poem denouncing not the Russian mobs, but the Jews themselves. The poem soon became a "symbol of the Zionist revolt against traditional Judaism's supine acceptance of Exile and the millennial humiliation of Jewry." The desire to free the Jewish people from this age-old state of deprecation under the rule of the gentile nations and to restore strength and dignity to it, as in the days of the Macabees, was a great impetus to the secular Zionists.

c) A Synthesis of the Religious and the Secular: The Orthodox Zionist

There were of course those rare figures within the orthodox communities who championed this political Zionist cause, chief among them, Rav Kook. As discussed above (71-73), Rav Kook

28 See footnote 7, page 2.
demonstrated the unique ability in the orthodox Jewish world to portray modern Zionism, even at its most secular, as an expression of Divine endowment within the Jewish soul. In the footsteps of Rabbi Judah HaLevi (probable dates, 1075-1114) and Rabbi Jacob Möllen (1356-1427), known as the Maharil, Kook’s belief in the innate sanctity, or “treasured uniqueness”\textsuperscript{31} (Heb. s’\textit{gula}. cf. Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4), of the Jewish people in its entirety allows him to see the source of the “desire for freedom... the longing for a life worthy of the name for man and community... and the unbounded Jewish life... even among the backsliders and sinners of Israel,” as “the Power of God.”\textsuperscript{32} The s’\textit{gula} of the Jewish people, for Kook, is its “internal chosenness” rooted in the Abrahamic covenant, which he refers to as the “internal covenant” (distinct from the Sinaiitic covenant which he calls an “external covenant,” which provides a “sanctity of choice” among observant Jews).\textsuperscript{33} For Kook, the greatest sanctity among the people of Israel and its unique essence in the world is not expressed through righteous individuals who are committed to a life of \textit{mitzvot}, but through those Jews who feel an inner connection to all other Jews and are committed to the revitalization of Jewish national life.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, for Kook, the process of redemption is envisaged not as the separation of the holy and the profane (as in mainstream orthodoxy), explains Vogel, “but rather as the transformation of the profane in its entirety into the holy, thus inclusive of the profane political dimension, the category of peoplehood is grasped in its full ethnicity.”\textsuperscript{35}

In stark contrast to the Messianic idea and long hoped for redemption in Zion which was relegated to “meta-history” and a “life lived in deferment”\textsuperscript{36} within mainstream orthodoxy, Kook powerfully expressed the need for irrevocable Jewish action in the concrete realm of history to re-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, “Are We a Nation, or a Religion?” \textit{Jerusalem Post}, 22 October 1999.
\item Riskin, “Are We a Nation, or a Religion.”
\item Ibid.
\item Manfred Vogel, “The Link Between People, Land and Religion in Modern Jewish Thought,” 26.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
establish a Jewish commonwealth in Eretz Israel, an acute desire of many Zionists. Writing between 1920 and 1930, Kook penned the following words that touch the essence of the secular Zionists' nationalistic enterprise of his day:

The claim of our flesh is great. We require a healthy body. We have greatly occupied ourselves with the soul and have forsaken the holiness of the body. We have neglected health and physical prowess, forgetting that our flesh is as sacred as our spirit. We have turned our backs on physical life, the development of our senses, and all that is involved in the tangible reality of the flesh, because we have fallen prey to lowly fears, and have lacked faith in the holiness of the Land.

Our return will succeed only if it will be marked, along with its spiritual glory, by a physical return which will create healthy flesh and blood, strong and well-formed bodies, and a fiery spirit encased in powerful muscles. Then the once weak soul will shine forth from strong and holy flesh, as a symbol of the physical resurrection of the dead.

. . . . The securing of the structure of the world, which is now tottering in the bloody tempest of war, demands the upbuilding of the Jewish nation. The building of the people and the revelation of its spirit are one and the same process; it is indispensable to the rebuilding of the shaken world, which is waiting for the supreme and unifying force that is to be found in the soul of the Holy Congregation of Israel. The soul of Israel is full of the spirit of God, the spirit of the Name, and no man who is responsive to the demands of his own soul can be silent at this great hour. He must cry out to the slumbering powers of our people: Awake and rise to your task.

d) The Ethnic Solidarity of American Zionism

The increase of antisemitism throughout Western and Eastern Europe continued to fuel the fervent Zionist sentiment, as expressed by Rav Kook, for a renewal of Jewish pride and strength and to bring about the acceptance of Zionist ideology among larger sections of the Jewish masses during the early decades of the twentieth century. Despite considerable waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine in the early twentieth century (approx. 100,000 between 1882 and 1923), ardent Zionists who gave up all for the cause of creating Jewish settlements in Palestine, remained very much in

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37 Prof. Anita Shapira, in her book Land and Power: the Zionist Resort to Force. 1881-1948 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), offers an insightful exploration of how concepts derived from Jewish antiquity (e.g. redemption, messianism, etc.) "gained vitality and were translated from the lofty plane of abstraction to the sphere of practical action" among the Zionists (p. viii).

the minority of world Jewry. The vast majority of Jews during this period, primarily from Eastern Europe, sought new life in America (approx. two million between 1880 and 1914). However, many of the Eastern European Jews brought to America a significant empathy for the Zionist cause and an unambiguous affirmation of Jewish nationality, which soon became “a touchstone of . . . accommodation” between them and the large number of Western European Jews (primarily from German speaking lands) who had preceded them.39

Thus, the early Jewish American experience possessed a profound ethnic solidarity which included tangible and ideological support for those Jews seeking to establish a secure nation for themselves in Eretz Israel.40 The fact that this ethnic solidarity did not represent a conflict of national allegiance in America as it had in European nations, allowed American Zionism to flourish. A prominent leader of American Zionism, Louis D. Brandeis (1856-1941)—the first Jew to be appointed a U.S. Supreme Court justice—summarized this point in a 1915 lecture, entitled, “The Jewish Problem: How to Solve It,” when he affirmed that “Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will ever live there, will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so. . . Indeed loyalty to America demands that each American Jew become a Zionist. For only through the ennobling effect of its strivings can we develop the best that is in us and give to this country the full benefit of our great inheritance.”41

39 Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., “The American Experience,” in The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 355. The Western European Jews who were among the first large group of Jewish immigrants to America from 1840 to 1880 were largely products of Enlightenment/Reformation thinking which downplayed any ethnic or national element of the Jewish people and portrayed Judaism as simply a religion. This understanding still holds some influence over modern American Jewry, however, Zionism, the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel has done much to strengthen the ethnic element.
40 Ibid., 356.
This study does not allow for a full discussion of the history of the strong Zionist influence in America, which has been expressed in both religious and secular terms. Suffice it to say that this pro-Zionism (later pro-Israelism) would become the uniting factor and the defining symbol of the majority of American Jewry. The galvanizing event for this phenomenon, as well as for Zionist sympathies worldwide, was the genocidal antisemitism of Nazi controlled Europe that lead to the destruction of two-thirds of European Jewry in the Holocaust.

d) The Holocaust: A Commandment for Jewish Survival

No topic has drawn more attention nor been more thoroughly examined in modern Jewish thought than the implications of the Holocaust on Jewish life. And while the immensity of the subject defies consensus on a variety of related issues, there can be little doubt that no event has been more formative of Jewish self-identity in the modern world. The fact that the Holocaust presents the reality of evil on such a massive and grotesque scale leads most thinkers to admit that it overwhelms them, and is simply beyond them. Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, nobel laureate and witness to the atrocities of the concentration camps, says that there is no other honest reaction:

The impact of the Holocaust on believers as well as unbelievers, on Jews as well as Christians, has not yet been evaluated. Not deeply, not enough. That is no surprise. Those who lived through it lack objectivity: they will always take the side of man confronted with the Absolute. As for the scholars and philosophers of every genre who have had the opportunity to observe the tragedy, they will—if they are capable of sincerity and humility—withdraw without daring to enter into the heart of the matter; and if they are not, well, who cares about their grandiloquent conclusions? Auschwitz, by definition, is beyond their vocabulary.44

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At the same time, serious Jewish thinkers on the subject consider it their duty to try and come to terms with the Holocaust, even if those terms can be tentative at best.\footnote{Eugene B. Borowitz, "Confronting the Holocaust," in \textit{Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide} (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1983), 187.}

In an effort to describe the transforming impact of the Holocaust on Jewish life, Wiesel calls Auschwitz\footnote{Auschwitz was the largest of the Nazi concentration camps and claimed the most lives. Thus, it is often used as the symbol for the Holocaust as a whole.} the new "Jewish Sinai"—that which sets "the context and content of contemporary Jewish views of God, humankind, religion and Judaism."\footnote{Borowitz, "Confronting the Holocaust," 191.} For Wiesel, this new Sinai seriously challenges the traditional Jewish understanding of God's sovereign power, Divine reward and punishment, the messianic redemption, and ultimately the concept of the Jews as the Chosen People.\footnote{See Elie Wiesel, \textit{Memoirs: All Rivers Run to the Sea}, vol. 1. (New York: Knopf, 1995), 82-84.} Wiesel himself states that this view is not unique to him or his time, as witnessed in the repudiation of traditional Jewish theological maxims beginning with Spinoza and Mendelsohn. However, others, such as Richard Rubenstein, have argued that the Holocaust should sever whatever ties may remain in modern Jewish thought to traditional Jewish doctrines, particularly that of the Jewish people's choseness. Rubenstein states: "The evil the Nazis perpetrated upon the Jews requires, at the very least, that Jews give up any claim to be chosen, . . . [given that] in much Jewish teaching, choseness means suffering for God's sake. . . . I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will. The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. . . . The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept."\footnote{Quoted in Eugene B. Borowitz, "Confronting the Holocaust." 193, 195.}

While Wiesel has never renounced faith in God, stating that the Jew in him would not allow it, he says that no answer exists for the question of God's role in the Holocaust. "Auschwitz is conceivable neither with God nor without Him," affirms Wiesel, "Perhaps I may someday come to understand man's role in the mystery Auschwitz represents, but never God's."\footnote{Elie Wiesel, \textit{Memoirs: All Rivers Run to the Sea}, 84.}
that Wiesel is sure of is that promoting Jewish survival, in which the State of Israel plays a central role, has become an unshakable tenet for all Jews after the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{51} Similarly, Rubenstein, who dramatically redefines traditional Jewish belief in God without completely denying the existence of God (or what he refers to as “omnipotent Nothingness”),\textsuperscript{52} underscores the fundamental need for Jews to take action in securing their own existence as a people, in much the same spirit as the early Zionists’ call for concrete Jewish action following the “holocaust” of their day—the 1903 Kishinev pogrom. Eugene Borowitz summarizes Rubenstein’s position:

Though no supernatural basis for Jewish continuity exists, the Jews, compelled by history to be Jews, should now affirm their Jewishness to attain self-protection and mutual caring. The State of Israel models a transformed Jewish identity because it reasserts the naturalness of being a Jew and gives proper attention to one’s body and a connection to the soil. With choseness abandoned, the State of Israel need reflect no special standard of quality. It rightly does whatever it must to ensure its survival in an amoral universe.\textsuperscript{53}

Emil Fackenheim, a reform rabbi and former prisoner of the Nazi concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, before becoming a professor of modern philosophy at the University of Toronto and later at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, spent much of his early career trying to refute men like Rubenstein by restoring the concept of revelation to a more prominent place in the liberal Jewish religious conscience which regarded Judaism primarily as a religion of reason. He would ultimately agree, however, with Wiesel and Rubenstein that it was not possible to speak of God’s presence in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.\textsuperscript{54} He would also agree that the Holocaust represents the new Sinai for the Jewish people from which there can be seen a new “revelation.” He detects this revelation not in any transcendent meaning of the Holocaust, but in the Jewish people’s response to it—i.e. their insistence on not relinquishing their Jewishness despite all they had

\textsuperscript{51} Borowitz, “Confronting the Holocaust,” 193.
\textsuperscript{53} Borowitz, “Confronting the Holocaust,” 196.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 200.
suffered. While there was no "redeeming Voice" heard at Auschwitz, there was a "commanding Voice," Fackenheim insists, and that "commanding Voice" enunciated a "614th Commandment." The new commandment, he says, is that "the authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another posthumous victory." Fackenheim spells out the details of this commandment in the following statement:

We are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, second, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with Him or with belief in Him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other posthumous victories.

Borowitz explains that contemplation of the Holocaust reoriented certain aspects of Fackenheim's earlier thought, helping him to better cherish the full peoplehood of Israel: "When arguing for the centrality of revelation in Judaism, he had demeaned Jewish secularism. . . [Now] he no longer finds it useful to distinguish between religious and secular Jews. . . . his criterion for Jewish loyalty [has] changed. . . Any Jew, regardless of label, who helps preserve and maintain or, better, enriches the life of the Jewish people, fulfills the supreme commandment of our time."

Fackenheim, as do Wiesel and Rubenstein, considers the State of Israel to be of vital importance for the survival of Jewish peoplehood in its fullest sense. Borowitz explains that for Fackenheim the State of Israel is "the ultimate fulfillment of the 614th commandment. Nothing else Jews have done so fully sums up, expresses and symbolically projects the Jewish people's rejection of death, its return to life, its willingness to face the ambiguities of history and its insistence on remaining visibly, demonstrably, proudly Jewish. The State of Israel is the

53 Ibid., 202.
55 Ibid.
incomparable answer Jews have given to the incomparable evil of the Holocaust. It is important to note, however, less this understanding of the State of Israel be misinterpreted, that Fackenheim spurns any idea that the Jewish state is God’s compensation to the Jewish people for their suffering, as also do Wiesel and Rubenstein.

Fackenheim’s writings are particularly important because they represent the thinking of a great number of post-Holocaust Jews who fall between the traditional orthodox view that ascribes all events to Divine providence and the extreme modern rationalist view that wants to do away with God all together. For many of these Jews, preserving the memory of the victims has become the bedrock of their Jewish identity. Furthermore, although Auschwitz was utterly evil and despite the utter silence of God that many felt in its chambers, Fackenheim demonstrates the tremendous courage and determination often displayed by the people of Israel over the centuries by emphasizing the need not to despair humanity nor to deny God’s presence in history lest we be left with the nihilistic world-view that some believe, in addition to traditional Christian anti-Judaism, lead to the Holocaust itself. In the formulation of the 614th commandment Fackenheim encapsulates “the impetus that motivated the Jewish people’s extraordinary postwar

59 Ibid.
60 Wiesel states: “Israel as a recompense for the Holocaust is a far too expedient explanation, one that borders on blasphemy. The two experiences have in common only the people who lived them” (Elie Wiesel, Memoirs: All Rivers Run to the Sea, vol. 1 [New York: Knopf, 1995], 170).
61 See footnote 7, p. 2.
62 Christian theologian, John T. Pawlikowski, has stated: “At least indirectly, Western liberal thought was responsible for the Holocaust... It paved the way for greater human freedom and self-sufficiency without realistically assessing the potential of the destructive forces within mankind to pervert this freedom into the cruelty revealed by the Nazi experiment. Thus the Holocaust shattered much of the grandeur of Western liberal thought. In some ways it represents the ultimate achievement of the person totally ‘liberated’ from God” (John T. Pawlikowski, “The Challenge of the Holocaust for Christian Theology,” in Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb [New York: Paulist Press, 1990]: 243).

An even more poignant statement on the issue comes from a Jewish survivor of Auschwitz, Viktor Frankl: “If we present man with a concept of man which is not true, we may well corrupt him. When we present him as an automaton of reflexes, as a mind machine, as a bundle of instincts, as a pawn of drive and reactions, as a mere product of heredity and environment, we feed the nihilism to which modern man is, in any case, prone. I became acquainted with the last stage of corruption in my second concentration camp, Auschwitz. The gas chambers of Auschwitz were the ultimate consequence of the theory that man is nothing but the product of heredity and environment—or, as the Nazis liked to say, “of blood and soil.” I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers” (Viktor Frankl, Doctor and the Soul: Introduction to Logotherapy [New York: Knopf, 1982]: xxv; quoted in Ravi Zacharias, Can Man Live Without God? [Dallas, London, Vancouver, Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1994], 25).
return to Jewishness and which continues to empower much of Jewish life today. 63 Many post-war Jews did indeed experience a dramatic return to and embrace of their Jewish identity in witness to the historic struggles and monumental triumphs experienced by the nascent Jewish state.

e) The Six-Day War: A Renewed Sense of Pride in Jewish Identity

The great rejoicing in the Jewish world over the declaration of the independent State of Israel in May 1948 was short lived by the imminence of war. Victory of that war brought relief, despite the many killed, but also time for somber reflection on the recent destruction of the Holocaust. Not long after came the Sinai Campaign of 1956, in which the fledgling nation battled with Egypt to preserve its security and viability. Despite two wars, constant terrorist infiltration, economic boycotts by Arab states, and an overwhelming influx of refugees (684,201 between 1948 and 1951),64 the State of Israel remained standing and Jews around the world took great pride in its accomplishments.

However, none of these victories came close to the euphoric affect on Israelis and world Jewry as Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War of June 1967. With more and more details of the Holocaust becoming public knowledge,65 and the growing war cries of Arab leaders to “drive Israel into the sea”, the Jewish world poised itself for another life and death struggle as war grew imminent. A euphoria and pride, which cannot be overemphasized, swept through the Jewish world when at the end of the war the Israeli Army stood victorious over five Arab armies with Jerusalem and the regions of Judeah and Samaria66 as its own.

The war was a major turning point for many Jews in their devotion, or lack thereof, toward the State of Israel. It galvanized Jewish identity in many whom had little attachment to

63 Borowitz, 203.
65 The trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichman took place in Israel in 1961.
66 See footnote 74, p. 74.
Judaisn or Jewish culture, giving rise to a tremendous unity among world Jewry and confronting many for the first time with the uniqueness of the Jewish people among the nations of the world. In addition, it caused a resurgence, if only for a brief time among some, of belief in a guiding and protective Divine hand in Jewish history. Elie Wiesel offers a glimpse of the powerful effects of the war on world Jewry in his novel, Beggar in Jerusalem:

University students flooded embassies to enlist to the fight; the Hassidim of Williamsburg declared days of fasts and prayer; youngsters from assimilated homes organized fund raising drives and joined in protests; millionaires cast aside their businesses and took off for Jerusalem; community leaders went sleepless night after night because of the great efforts and profound anxiety. Never was the Jewish people so united...so ready to offer and sacrifice everything it had, its 'might, heart, and soul'. Even if we knew every last detail of the war, we would still not understand what happened; even if all the military and political secrets were suddenly disclosed, we could not measure the great mystery in which we are encloaked as if by the command of the Almighty Himself.67

While the immediate effects of the war and its victory have naturally diminished in the following decades, which have included more deadly wars, a painful Palestinian uprising (Intifada) and, in some respects, an even more painful peace process, the Six-Day War, as would any event of such magnitude, has left a stamp of pride and fulfillment on modern Jewish identity that cannot be underestimated.

f) The Contemporary State of Israel: The Israeli Jew

Jewish history spans over four millenia and is comprised of a complex variety of movements and ideologies. The issue of Jewish peoplehood has clearly not been immune to the vicissitudes of this history. However, despite the various renderings of Jewish identity from the biblical Tribes of Israel to the rationalists of the Enlightenment, there has existed a fundamental understanding that Jews do not consider themselves as solely members of a religious body, but also as members of a.

people; a particular Semitic "family." \(^{68}\) "Here lies the difficulty inherent in all considerations of Judaism and of the Jewish condition. . ." writes Marcel Dubois, "Judaism comprises two inseparable elements: a nation whose vocation is religious, a religion whose basis is national. The entire history of the Jewish people could be summarized in the history of its oscillation between these two poles: secular and sacred; political and religious; historical and mystical; . . immanent and transcendent, particular and universal.\(^{69}\)

This unique synthesis of the religious and national dimensions of Jewish peoplehood formed by the historical figures and events discussed above finds concrete expression today in the State of Israel. One stark example of this is the marriage process between an Israeli Jew and a non-Jew. If a non-Jew wishes to marry an Israeli Jew in Israel, the non-Jewish spouse is required to undergo an orthodox conversion to Judaism\(^{70}\) even if his or her Jewish spouse is not religiously observant. This means that the non-Jew must assume a religious identity which far exceeds that of his or her Jewish spouse. The reason is that under Jewish halacha someone who is born to a Jewish mother is considered Jewish even though he or she may not live in observance of Jewish religious law, while one outside of Judaism who wishes to become a part of the Jewish people must first go through a formal process of religious conversion. Thus, in present day reality, one can be identified with the national component of the Jewish people by right of familial relations without being religiously observant, whereas a non-Jew may not access the national component of the Jewish identity without first acquiring the religious identity.


\(^{70}\) It is interesting to note that the dual nature of Jewish identity is even present in the conversion process to Judaism. This process is comprised of two essential elements (apart from a guided study) which parallel the biblical development of the People of Israel: first, a ritual immersion in living water (milav) followed by the taking on of a Hebrew name—symbolizing one's rebirth as a Jew and entrance into a new family-people as a son or daughter of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and second, the acceptance of "the yoke of the mitzvot"—demonstrating commitment to laws of the Torah and the religious mission of the Jewish people (See, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, "Are We a Nation, or a Religion?" Jerusalem Post, 22 October 1999).
Indeed, the State of Israel represents the diverse community that is the People of Israel. André Neher (1914-1988), former director of the department of Jewish studies at Strasbourg University and one of the leading Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century, describes the duality of the secular and religious that defines the Jewish state:

Assimilated Jews as well as Marxists, socialists, communists and atheists all collaborated, together with religious Jews and Jewish believers, to promote the state. Is the State of Israel a religious or a secular state? It is both at once, sacred and profane in an inextricable fashion, and this makes it a Jewish state. If it had been created as a purely religious state, it would not be a Jewish state; if it had been established as a thoroughgoing Marxist state, it would not have been Jewish either. It is a Jewish state because it is both. The state of Israel offers and exemplar of the co-existence of atheism and belief as well as their daily collaboration on every level.71

Most Christians, who are predisposed to defining Jews in strictly religious terms, have little problem relating to the religious circles of Israel and the Jewish world, but the fact that most Israelis define themselves as secular, some even as atheists, yet fully Jewish, presents somewhat of a quandary.

A.B. Yehoshua, Professor of comparative literature at Haifa University and prominent voice of secular Israeli society, helps to explain this secular-Israeli identity in a discussion about the Jewishness of the State of Israel:

As a result of our stay in the diaspora, the Jewish religion assumed that our national sentiment could not be expressed in architecture, in possessions, or even in language, as they are expressed for other peoples. For us, everything was concentrated within religious texts, and therefore religion is today one of the primary sources of Jewish culture, of Jewish history. As a result, even complete atheists such as myself find in it a source for the components of their personal identity...

Under no circumstances is the “Israeli” to be placed in opposition to the “Jewish,” for this would be a grave error. The Israeli does not stand in opposition to the Jewish, and the two terms are not contradictory. In my opinion, the Israeli contains within himself that which is Jewish. In a sense, the Israeli is the complete Jew.72

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Yehoshua represents the overwhelming point-of-view of Israeli society, and I would venture to say of world Jewry, that secularism and Jewishness are by no means contradictory. Chava Tuniansky, an expert of international standing in Yiddish and the culture of Eastern European Jewry, opens a window into the self-understanding of a typical secular Israeli home that is a transposition of traditional Jewish values through a modern, rationalist, historically minded lens:

I was raised in a quintessentially secular Jewish home. My parents believed that Judaism was not so much keeping the mitzvot as it was identifying with the history of our people, with Jewish creation, with the moral and spiritual values that do not belong to religion. My father could sit with me and study the week’s Torah portion and read Shalom Aleichem and see the same values in each. From the Jewish texts, we drew such values as altruism, consideration, caring for the needy, love for the truth and the love for peace. The sources of humanism are Jewish. For us, Judaism is [made up of] exactly those values that are called universal today. All the rest are just customs that give practical expression to these values, but they are certainly not the value itself.73

The views represented by Yehoshua and Tuniansky further demonstrate that despite the efforts of many Jewish-Israelis to seek autonomy from the Divine oriented precepts of religious Jewish life, their very identity as “Jews” identifies them with a heritage that is decidedly religious. Rabbi David Hartman describes the inevitable encounter of the sacred and the profane in the contemporary Israeli experience:

If you are a Jew, you cannot remember Jewish history and ignore the prophets. You cannot touch the Land without coming across Rabbi Akiva. You cannot dig your foundations without encountering the Second Temple. As you plumb deeper in the archaeology of your soul, you discover strands which are incomprehensible if you do not have some larger covenantal religious perspective. If you speak Hebrew as your everyday language, even your casual conversations echo Mishnaic and Biblical Hebrew. . . A purely secular and technological consciousness is blocked by the very presence of this community in this land, where it encounters a dialectic between historical memory and the wide-open options of the modern world.74

As the late Rabbi Hayim Halkyve Donin has suggested, this unique amalgam of the national and the religious in Jewish peoplehood is perhaps more “mystical” than rationally definable.75 For this

73 Orna Coussin, “A Drooping Flag,” Ha’aretz Supplement (Tel Aviv), 20 April 1999, B6.
reason, not only have historians and sociologists found it difficult to neatly categorize the Jewish people, but Jews themselves have been hard pressed to offer a clear-cut answer to the question: “Who is a Jew?”

**Jewish Peoplehood: A Challenge for Christian Understanding**

The concept of peoplehood in Judaism, as described above, finds no direct parallel in Christianity. In Christianity, there is no bio-ethnic identity; there is no “Christian people” which is bound by ancestry. Consequently, Christians are often less than understanding about Jewish ties, secular or religious, to the State of Israel.

When religious Jews speak of their attachment to Israel in religious terms, Christians often become skeptical, feeling that it is little else but political subterfuge. This Christian reaction is humorously demonstrated through a story of two priests who came to Israel in order to visit the holy sites and came across a kibbutz where a Bible class was in session. The priests were invited to participate in the study by the headmaster. When the class was over, the two pilgrims continued their journey and began to exchange impressions. “The one thing I did not like about the lecture,” said one, “was the political indoctrination the children underwent.” “What do you mean?” asked his companion. “Well,” he replied, “don’t you remember how often they were told that the day will come and ‘Israel will be third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth’?” “My dear friend,” exclaimed the other priest, “that was not politics! It happened to be one of the most beautiful prophecies of Isaiah, chapter 19, verse 24.”

Conversely, it is often the predominantly secular condition of Israeli society which makes many Christian theologians reluctant to confer any theological significance upon the Jewish state. This stance, much in-line with the 1948 statement in *L'Osservatore Romano* (quoted above, 20),

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76 Ibid.
if not already a sign of an anti-Israelism, runs the danger of deteriorating into outright antisemitism.\footnote{David Flusser, \textit{New Christian Understanding of Judaism} (Jerusalem: Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora of the World Zionist Organization, n.d.), 12}

Fr. Flannery offers a cogent argument against those Christians who criticize Israel for its secular make-up, stating, "Does this secular condition deprive Israel of identification with the Israel of biblical times? . . . More than once in times past the people of Israel has strayed from the sacral path, from their calling. The temptation ‘to be like all nations’ (1 Samuel 8:20) remains an ever recurring one. Prostrate before the golden calf, on the high places of the Baalim, or before the altars of modern secularism, Israel remains Israel, for there is but one Israel."\footnote{Edward H. Flannery, “Israel Reborn: Some Theological Perspectives,” in \textit{Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue}, ed. Marvin Perry and Fredrick M. Schweitzer (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 380-81.} Ironically, the theologians and scripture scholars who disqualify the State of Israel from any religious significance based on its apparent disharmony with biblical Israel are the ones who should best know that since biblical times the Jews have not only constituted a religion but also a body politic.

A far more disturbing phenomenon, however, is the anti-Zionist behavior that has taken root among so called “liberalists,” both in society-at-large and in Christian circles in particular. Protestant theologian Roy Eckardt places the root of this brand of anti-Zionism in the favoring of universalism over particularism which arose during the Enlightenment period.\footnote{See: Roy Eckardt, \textit{For Righteousness’ Sake: Contemporary Moral Philosophies} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).} Explaining Eckardt’s argument, Flannery writes, “Liberal opinion prizes universality and accordingly favors social and political inclusiveness. The universal is favored as an ideal and as more spiritual than the particular, which conversely is seen as limiting and exclusive. . . [thus] nationalism and ethnicity [take] on a pejorative meaning. . . ‘[they] are identified as barriers to ideal human relationships and goals. A truly enlightened people of God will transcend all such barriers.’”\footnote{Flannery, “Israel Reborn: Some Theological Perspectives,” 374-375.} It is popular among those who hold this view, in order to avoid charges of antisemitism, to claim a
deep respect for Jewish identity while simultaneously trying to demonstrate that it does not require a return to Zion and the establishment of a Jewish nation. Rabbi Henry Siegman, in a speech to the International Liaison Committee in Jerusalem, exposes the duplicity inherent in such a position, when he explains how such a view is often seen from a traditional Jewish perspective:

Ironically, it is those who deny the possibility of Jewish nationalism who in fact introduce insupportable and irrelevant theological considerations. It is a phenomenon that brings the Christian right and the Christian left into strange fellowship. Opposition to Israel from the Christian right has the advantage of familiarity and requires no elaboration. The opposition from the left is a more recent phenomenon: their hostility is a peculiar blend of an uncritical celebration of the third world and a theological antisemitism that is nourished by a Christian universalism which cannot abide the earthiness of Jewish particularity. [Many] of those on the Christian left, love Jews as disincarnate, suffering servants, ghostly emissaries and symbols of an obscure mission. They cannot abide Jews who are flesh-and-blood people, who are men like other men in all their angularities and particularities, who need to occupy physical space in a real world to fulfill whatever aspirations they may have. They are distressed by the notion that Jews should want a flesh-and-blood existence as a people in the real geography of this world.

The Catholic Church, and Christians in general, must make a distinct effort not to allow this type of prejudice to mar its understanding of Judaism and the Jewish people, not only for the sake of Jewish-Christian dialogue, but for the sake of its own philosophical integrity and spiritual vitality.

David Flusser, a distinguished Jewish scholar of early Christianity, comes to the heart of the issue in his insightful articulation of the challenge that lays before Christians today:

In its supreme effort not to lose its influence, it [Christianity] often seeks to prove that it is modern. As Western civilization tends to suicidal sympathy towards forces that undermine it, many Christian leaders sincerely stress the revolutionary aspect of Christian thought. Sociology, not theology or history, is their slogan. They often do not see that the revolutionary element of Christianity is also Jewish in origin. And as the cherished pagan, or neo-pagan, world does not know or even oppose Judaism and wrongly sees the State of Israel as a bulwark of cruel reaction, there are Christians who join these forces, betray their own Christian heritage and become foes of the Jews and their State.

... Christianity can recover its pristine strength. It seems to me that a clash between the tendencies in Christianity, the pro-Jewish and the anti-Jewish, is inevitable and that the victory of the first over the second is the great chance for Christianity today. If I am not wrong, this will only be possible if Christians are prepared to accept Judaism as it is, as a religion and as a body politic.

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82 Dubois, “Israel and Christian Self-Understanding,” 66.
83 Ibid., 66-67.
84 Emphasis mine. Flusser, New Christian Understanding of Judaism, 16.
From a certain perspective, fertile ground exists for a fruitful dialogue on the issue of *Am Israel* between Catholics and Jews. For Catholics also have a profound historical understanding of themselves as the "people of God". In speaking of the Church, the Second Vatican Council, in non-triumphalist or exclusionary reference, employs the image of the people of God more than any other.\(^{65}\) While official Church teaching no longer upholds Catholics as the entire people of God, it does stress their uniqueness as a strong, identifiable community united by a common history and common future hopes. There is even a sense of Catholic identity that goes beyond faith and the observance of religious precepts to the idea of a shared Catholic heritage that one can be born into,\(^{66}\) albeit devoid of any ethnic element. Martin Buber, renowned Jewish social and religious philosopher, was able to recognize the potential that the "people of God" idea had as a starting point for dialogue:

"Israel is unique... and is not subject to any genus or category. It does not exist in history as a 'pigeon hole' just to contain Israel... It is the only point of departure from which we other Jews can hold dialogue with Christians, because it is the only situation which offers the existential possibility of a response. Only the two of us, the Church and Israel, know what Israel really means."\(^{67}\)

If Buber was able to propose such an idea in a day when the Church looked upon Israel as rejected by God and upon itself as the true Israel, how much more are we capable of today?

Finally, with all this having been said, it warrants repeating that the effort to gain a deeper appreciation for the concept of *Am Israel* in Jewish self-identity, and thus for the importance of the State of Israel in Jewish life, need not hinder the Church, nor the Holy See in particular, from exercising its "moral and spiritual authority"\(^{68}\) in regard to the conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians, nor should it be cause for favoring one party above the other in this conflict. Rather,

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\(^{66}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{67}\) Quoted in Hruby, "Israel and the Nations in Modern Jewish Thought," 27.

\(^{68}\) See quotation from the 1929 Lateran Treaty, p. 6.
the pursuit of a deeper understanding of Jewish self-identity should aid the Church in a sincere effort to uphold justice in this conflict, in which it finds itself intimately involved, by refusing to be lead astray by an anti-Zionist spirit which seeks to delegitimize the importance of the State of Israel in Jewish self-identity.
CONCLUSION

The century-long relationship between the Vatican and the Zionist movement—now embodied in the State of Israel—has been a troubled yet ever improving one. It can only begin to be understood in the context of the much longer and more complex Christian-Jewish relationship which has been defined from its very beginning by serious tensions. Christianity's cultural and political dominance throughout much of this relationship and the prevalent belief among Christians that they had replaced the Jews as God's chosen people, not to mention the ubiquitous accusations toward Jews as perpetrators of deicide, helped to foster a tenuous and truncated Jewish existence in Christian lands of the Diaspora. This existence was too often embittered by a brutal Christian animus which wavered between the desire to expel Jews for their stubborn refusal to accept the "true faith", and to preserve them in socially and economically subordinate roles as a sign of what happens to those who reject that faith. Such deep-seated anti-Jewish sentiment which survived into the modern era clearly held no room for a renewed Jewish national life, especially in the Holy Land, as was being espoused by the early Zionists. It was only after the incomprehensible destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust and the subsequent realization of the Zionist dream in the founding of the State of Israel that significant steps began toward a rethinking of the Church's teachings on the Jews.

The Second Vatican Council and its revolutionary document Nostra Aetate breathed new life into the Church and marked the beginning of a dramatic reconciliation between Catholics and Jews. Tremendous theological ground was covered in a short period of time through subsequent Vatican conciliar statements which sought a renewed Christian appreciation for the Jewish roots of Christianity and for the Jews themselves as a covenantal people whose faith continues to hold
meaning today. However, through all this progress, the existence of a sovereign Jewish state in what constitutes much of the Christian Holy Land, continued to serve as a point of contention in Catholic-Jewish dialogue. The Holy See dealt with the issue mostly in pragmatic political terms, expressing concern over the status of Christian Holy sites and the well-being of the local Arab Christian communities, all the time maneuvering for a stronger negotiating position in both areas. Concern over backlash against Christian communities in Arab countries which opposed the establishment of Israel was further cause for the Vatican to withhold any explicit support for the Jewish state. To exactly what extent a traditional anti-Jewish sentiment lay behind the Church's antagonistic approach toward Israel is difficult to measure. However, what is clear is that most Jews saw this approach, particularly the refusal of the Vatican to recognize Israel on a diplomatic level, as a clear continuation of the age-old policy of Jew hatred.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel in 1993 was a long and painfully awaited step that did little to erase the troubled past for some Jews, but marked the removal of a significant barrier of doubt in the minds of most others, particularly Israelis, regarding the Church's stance on the legitimacy of the State of Israel's existence. Unknown to many, this process toward formal recognition began with the advent of John Paul II's papacy, and although the final agreement was made under the most pragmatic of terms in the wake of the Oslo Agreement, the pope's statements regarding the Jewish state over the last twenty years reveal his understanding of the Holy See-Israel relationship as one that extends well beyond a politically expedient alliance between nations, to the realm of deep spiritual bonds between two ancient brothers in faith. John Paul II's most recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which had all the trappings of an official state visit, provided strong reinforcement to his long held desire for stronger relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel. The scene of the pontiff placing a prayer of contrition over the Church's past hostilities toward Jews in the Western Wall—not only the holiest site in Judaism but in many ways the national center of modern Israel where military
and state ceremonies are held—served as a powerful symbol of how far the Church has come in embracing its Jewish brothers and sisters more fully.

As Israel develops into the world’s largest Jewish population, and increasingly serves as the center of Jewish life for the first time since the fall of the Second Temple, the Church’s ability to better understand the role of the State of Israel in Jewish life will be pivotal in ongoing Catholic-Jewish dialogue.¹ For the Church especially, deepening ties between the Holy See and Israel will afford it the fruitful opportunity to deepen its understanding of central aspects of Jewish self-identity embodied in the Jewish State. For, as Robert Seltzer states, “to understand Zionism and, therefore, the State of Israel is to understand the extraordinary vulnerabilities of being Jewish in the twentieth-century, the intense longing for redemption from the conditions that exposed the Jews to these vulnerabilities, and the powerful source of hope within the Jewish tradition.”² This dialogue must proceed not only on the diplomatic level—indeed, not even primarily there—but between churches and synagogues, priests and rabbis, and ultimately between average Catholics and Jews. The diplomatic ties between the Holy See and the State of Israel have simply opened the door and provided the impetus for a dialogue that must be carried out in a more candid manner between those who will ultimately determine whether a more profound understanding of the “other” will be realized.

The Church must pursue this understanding not only to prevent a serious impoverishment of Catholic-Jewish relations, but in order not to deprive itself of a deeply enriching encounter for its own spiritual condition. As one Christian theologian, Robert Everett, has proposed, “Zionism and the State of Israel have profound ramifications for Christians and Christian theology that, if understood correctly, have important implications for our theological self-identity.”³ A similar

view is expressed in the 1973 French Bishops’ document, *Statement by the French Bishops’ Committee for Relations with Jews*, demonstrating that a sensitivity to this issue has been present in the Church for some time, which states: “Its [the People of Israel’s] partial gathering in the land of the Bible... can enlighten the life of Christians and add to a more profound understanding of their own faith.”

In particular, renewed Jewish life in *Eretz Israel*, with its unprecedented discovery and preservation of biblical sites, its flourishing religious and academic centers of study, and its vibrant and concrete expression of fidelity to its ancient homeland, can serve as a source of inspiration for a renewed appreciation of the importance that the earthly Holy Land can and should play in Christian spirituality. Reflection upon the sacramental qualities of *The Land* expressed in traditional forms of Judaism holds great possibility for a more profound Christian understanding of such issues as the Incarnation and the dynamic balance between the humanity and divinity of Christ—missing in many popular Christologies today. This heightened appreciation for the earthly Holy Land and, in turn, for the human nature of Christ can serve to endow the Christian faith with a creativity and imagination that is more emboldened to positively shape and reshape those social structures that will promote justice and peace in the concrete


5 On 25 March 1974, Pope Paul VI issued the Apostolic Exhortation, *Nobis in animo*, concerning the needs of the Church in the Holy Land. This document describes the ancient Christian tradition of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the needs of the churches and institutions developed over the centuries to care for pilgrims and the holy places they come to visit, and especially the need to ensure the “continued survival of the ‘Christian community which originated in Palestine two thousand years ago”’ (Paul VI, *Nobis in animo* [Washington, DC: USCC Publications, 1974]). Dr. Eugene Fisher comments that “*Nobis in animo* also illustrates that the question of a ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ and/or ‘earthly Jerusalem’ is still in need of theological resolution by the Church. Paul VI tried to reconcile the two through application of sacramental terminology: ‘Sentiments of faith and piety impelled the first Christians to seek almost physical contact with the Holy Places and to hold impressive liturgical ceremonies there. It is of course true that Christianity is a universal religion. But it is also a religion based upon a historical revelation.’ Alongside the ‘history of salvation’ there exists a ‘geography of salvation.’ Thus the Holy places possess the invaluable quality of providing faith with an indisputable support, enabling the Christian to come into direct contact with the setting in which ‘the word became flesh and dwelt among us.’ Catholic-Jewish dialogue, especially in Israel today, holds great hope for resolving this ancient dilemma. The particularity, one might say ‘incarnation,’ of the Jewish people in the land offers deep insight for Catholic theology today” (Eugene Fisher, “The Holy See and the State of Israel: The Evolution of Attitudes and Policies,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24, no. 2 [Spring 1987]: footnote #47, 205-206).
realms of human experience, rather than passively deferring to a “descending Christology”\(^6\) in which the status quo is often deferred to as divinely ordained. This reflection not only holds significant ramifications for the way in which we treat our “neighbors” but for the way we respect our own well-being as “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19), and the welfare of “the earth and all that is in it” (Ps. 89:11).

The State of Israel may also serve as a powerful and concrete sign of God’s fidelity to His covenantal promises. In light of the Church’s own fidelity to the Hebrew Scriptures and its recognition of God’s eternal covenant with the Jewish People, in which land-promise plays a central role, Christians should joyfully celebrate this modern-day Jewish rebirth and renaissance in the Land of Israel. Such an affirmation need not be motivated by eschatological interests as is sometimes emphasized in different Christian circles. Rather it should be tied to the irrevocability of Israel’s covenants and promises as proclaimed in both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament.\(^7\) From this perspective, God’s fidelity to His covenantal promises to the Jewish people is a powerful sign of His fidelity to the promises which Christians hold most dear, and, ultimately to all humankind. At the very least, Christians should rejoice in the fact that the Jewish people, after centuries of dispersion and persecution, have found security and prosperity in the State of Israel. The Jewish people’s permanence throughout history and their overcoming tremendous odds to once again reside in the secured borders of a sovereign Jewish state, can alone serve as a point of deep inspiration for all peoples, especially Christians.

Finally, it is the State of Israel that allows Christians to genuinely encounter the “other” in Judaism. Only with a secure State of Israel, in which Jewish life is endowed with a unique sense of confidence and its various traditions and cultures are allowed to develop and flourish in a

\(^6\) The model of “ascending” and “descending” Christologies was developed by German theologian Karl Rahner. Theologians such as Karl Rahner have helped to emphasize the prototypical relationship between our Christology and the way in which we understand the relationship of human freedom and Divine will (See: Karl Rahner, “On the Theology of the Incarnation,” in Theological Investigations, Vol. IV [Baltimore: Helicon, 1967], 105-120). For further discussion of “ascending” and “descending” Christologies, see: Monika Hellwig, “Christology and Attitudes Toward Social Structures,” in Above Every Name: The Lordship of Christ and Social Systems, ed. Thomas Clarke (Ramsy, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 13-34.

\(^7\) C.f. Jeremiah 31:35-37 and Romans 11:29
predominantly Jewish context, are Christians afforded the opportunity to encounter Jews and Judaism in their most potent forms. This point highlights the utter importance for Christians, especially church leaders and bible teachers, to visit Israel personally and to engage themselves as much as possible in the daily life of the country. For many Christians, this opportunity is sure to serve as a catalyst to open them up to the wealth of wisdom, spiritual insight, and simple love for life that is found in Jewish teachings and traditions, both ancient and modern. For too long Christians have suffered from a profound ignorance of this rich tradition due to the arrogant triumphalism that elements within the Church have proclaimed over the Synagogue. An encounter with the living and vibrant Jewish life in Israel is needed to turn this profound ignorance into an informed enthusiasm that will prove to be a source of great spiritual enrichment.

Above all, the Church must pursue a relationship with Israel in a spirit of love, the only way befitting of Christ’s representatives on earth. For, as the Apostle Paul wrote, those acts which are unaccompanied by love, no matter how pious they may appear, are of naught (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). This is a love marked by a humble desire to understand the “other” in a prayerful, reflective attitude which finds its source and strength in the Word of God.\(^8\) It also involves, as the Pope has expressed, frankness and the freedom to disagree in a brotherly manner when there is reason to do so.\(^9\)

In its ongoing dialogue with the State of Israel and the Jewish people, the Church would do well to assume upon itself the admonition of the prophet Isaiah: nahamu. nahamu ammi. yomar eloheykhem, darbu al-lev yerushalayim—“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem” (Isaiah 40:1). To “speak tenderly” is the translation of the Hebrew expression dabru al-lev (lit. “speak to the heart”). The “heart” represents the inner person; the seat of all emotions, passions, appetites, and memories. The Church of Rome should not only speak

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from its heart, it must also speak to the heart of the Jewish people. When such an approach will be taken, surely untold blessings await not only Jews and Christians, but the world entire.

It seems fitting, in keeping with a spirit of love and solicitude and in light of the significance of the State of Israel for both Christians and Jews, to conclude with a prayer offered by Christians and Jews for the well-being of Jerusalem and the State of Israel.

GOD OF ABRAHAM, of Isaac, and of Jacob,
of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel,
 Lord of the Living, Giver of life!
  We turn to You:
Shelter the life of Israel and its neighbors.
Grant them and us vision, valor, and skill to pursue peace
Grant them and us patience and perseverance to achieve it.
Give us, friends of Israel, the wisdom and strength
to uphold its independence and security,
to champion its cause, with justice for all
and malice toward none.
Lord, our God, King of the universe!
  You said: “the earth is mine.”
You declared it at the very moment
You took the people of Israel as Your treasured possession
and placed on them the burden of being a holy nation.
Lord our God, You are Sovereign of all the lands, cities, towns,
and villages of the globe.
Still, You singled out the Land of Israel as Your land, and
The City of Jerusalem as Your city,
Let Your blessing rest on this holy city.
May it, the capital of Israel, be open to all who love its
beauty and seek its prosperity,
May it be the city of neighborliness, fellowship, encounter, and
Peace.
May it cease to be the object of strife between
Jews and Arabs,
May it never be a bone of contention between
Jews and Christians!
May the city ever be dear to us, ever be part of our concern
and prayer.
May we all learn to feel and say with Israel’s exiles by the
rivers of Babylon:
“If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither.”

AMEN.

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APPENDICES
APPENDIX I

NOSTRA AETATE, No. 4

The following is section four of the Second Vatican Council’s 1965 Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate) regarding the Jewish people:

As the Council searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the spiritual bonds which tie the people of the New Covenant to the offspring of Abraham.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God’s saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ—Abraham’s sons according to the faith (cf. Gal. 3, 7)—are included in this patriarch’s call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is symbolically prefigured in the exodus of the chosen people from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy made the ancient covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 11, 17-24). Indeed, the Church believes that by his cross Christ, who is our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making the two one in himself (cf. Eph. 2, 14-16).

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: “Theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenant and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh” (Rom. 9, 4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the apostles, the Church’s foundational stones and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation (cf. Luke 19, 44), nor did the Jews, in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed, not a few of them opposed its dissemination (cf. Rom. 11, 28). Nevertheless, now as before, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their fathers; he does not repent of the gifts he makes or of the calls he issues—such is the witness of the Apostle (cf. Rom. 11, 28-29; also cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: A.A.S. 57 [1965], p. 20). In company with the prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord with a single voice and “serve him with one accord” (Soph. 3, 9; cf. Is. 66, 23; Ps. 65, 4; Rom. 11, 11-32).

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is then so rich, the Council wishes to foster and commend mutual understanding and esteem. This will be the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies and of brotherly dialogues.

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True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. John 19, 6); still, what happened in his passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new People of God, the Jews should not be represented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this followed from Holy Scripture. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work and in the preaching of the Word of God they teach nothing save what conforms to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

The Church, moreover, rejects every persecution against any man. For this reason and for the sake of the patrimony she shares with the Jews, the Church decries hatreds, persecutions and manifestations of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and by anyone. She does so, not impelled by political reasons, but moved by the spiritual love of the Gospel.

Besides, Christ underwent his passion and death freely and out of infinite love because of the sins of men in order that all might reach salvation. This the Church has always taught and teaches still; it is therefore the duty of the Church to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and the fountain from which every grace flows.
APPENDIX II

FUNDAMENTAL AGREEMENT
BETWEEN THE HOLY SEE AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL

December 30, 1993

Preamble

The Holy See and the State of Israel,

Mindful of the singular character and universal significance of the Holy Land;

Aware of the unique nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and of the historic process of reconciliation and growth in mutual understanding and friendship between Catholics and Jews;

Having decided on 29 July 1992 to establish a 'Bilateral Permanent Working Commission', in order to study and define together issues of common interest, and in view of normalizing their relations;

Recognizing that the work of the aforementioned Commission has produced sufficient material for a first and Fundamental Agreement;

Realizing that such Agreement will provide a sound and lasting basis for the continued development of their present and future relations and for the furtherance of the Commission's task,

Agree upon the following Articles:

Article 1

1. The State of Israel, recalling its Declaration of Independence, affirms its continuing commitment to uphold and observe the human right to freedom of religion and conscience, as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other international instruments to which it is a party.

2. The Holy See, recalling the Declaration on Religious Freedom of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 'Dignitatis humanae', affirms the Catholic Church's commitment to uphold the human right to freedom of religion and conscience, as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other international instruments to which it is a party.

The Holy See wishes to affirm as well the Catholic Church's respect for other religions and

their followers as solemnly stated by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in its Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, 'Nostra aetate'.

Article 2

1. The Holy See and the State of Israel are committed to appropriate cooperation in combating all forms of antisemitism and all kinds of racism and of religious intolerance, and in promoting mutual understanding among nations, tolerance among communities and respect for human life and dignity.

2. The Holy See takes this occasion to reiterate its condemnation of hatred, persecution and all other manifestations of antisemitism directed against the Jewish people and individual Jews anywhere, at any time and by anyone. In particular, the Holy See deplores attacks on Jews and desecration of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries, acts which offend the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, especially when they occur in the same places which witnessed it.

Article 3

1. The Holy See and the State of Israel recognize that both are free in the exercise of their respective rights and powers, and commit themselves to respect this principle in their mutual relations and in their cooperation for the good of the people.

2. The State of Israel recognizes the right of the Catholic Church to carry out its religious, moral, educational and charitable functions, and to have its own institutions, and to train, appoint and deploy its own personnel in the said institutions or for the said functions to these ends. The Church recognizes the right of the State to carry out its functions, such as promoting and protecting the welfare and the safety of the people. Both the State and the Church recognize the need for dialogue and cooperation in such matters as by their nature call for it.

3. Concerning Catholic legal personality at canon law the Holy See and the State of Israel will negotiate on giving it full effect in Israeli law, following a report from a joint subcommission of experts.

Article 4

1. The State of Israel affirms its continuing commitment to maintain and respect the 'Status quo' in the Christian Holy Places to which it applies and the respective rights of the Christian communities thereunder. The Holy See affirms the Catholic Church's continuing commitment to respect the aforementioned 'Status quo' and the said rights.

2. The above shall apply notwithstanding an interpretation to the contrary of any Article in this Fundamental Agreement.

3. The State of Israel agrees with the Holy See on the obligation of continuing respect for and protection of the character proper to Catholic sacred places, such as churches, monasteries, convents, cemeteries and their like.

4. The State of Israel agrees with the Holy See on the continuing guarantee of the freedom of
Catholic worship.

Article 5

1. The Holy See and the State of Israel recognize that both have an interest in favouring Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Whenever the need for coordination arises, the proper agencies of the Church and of the State will consult and cooperate as required.

2. The State of Israel and the Holy See express the hope that such pilgrimages will provide an occasion for better understanding between the pilgrims and the people and religions in Israel.

Article 6

The Holy See and the State of Israel jointly reaffirm the right of the Catholic Church to establish, maintain and direct schools and institutes of study at all levels; this right being exercised in harmony with the rights of the State in the field of education.

Article 7

The Holy See and the State of Israel recognize a common interest in promoting and encouraging cultural exchanges between Catholic institutions worldwide, and educational, cultural and research institutions in Israel, and in facilitating access to manuscripts, historical documents and similar source materials, in conformity with applicable laws and regulations.

Article 8

The State of Israel recognizes that the right of the Catholic Church to freedom of expression in the carrying out of its functions is exercised also through the Church's own communications media; this right being exercised in harmony with the rights of the State in the field of communications media.

Article 9

The Holy See and the State of Israel jointly reaffirm the right of the Catholic Church to carry out its charitable functions through its health care and social welfare institutions, this right being exercised in harmony with the rights of the State in this field.

Article 10

1. The Holy See and the State of Israel jointly reaffirm the right of the Catholic Church to property.

2. Without prejudice to rights relied upon by the Parties:

   a. The Holy See and the State of Israel will negotiate in good faith a comprehensive agreement, containing solutions acceptable to both Parties, on unclear, unsettled and disputed issues, concerning property, economic and fiscal matters relating to the Catholic Church generally, or to specific Catholic communities or institutions.

   b. For the purpose of the said negotiations, the Permanent Bilateral Working
Commission will appoint one or more bilateral subcommissions of experts to study
the issues and make proposals.

c. The Parties intend to commence the aforementioned negotiations within three months
of entry into force of the present Agreement, and aim to reach agreement within two
years from the beginning of the negotiations.

d. During the period of these negotiations, actions incompatible with these commitments
shall be avoided.

**Article 11**

1. The Holy See and the State of Israel declare their respective commitment to the promotion
of the peaceful resolution of conflicts among States and nations, excluding violence and
terror from international life.

2. The Holy See, while maintaining in every case the right to exercise its moral and spiritual
  teaching-office, deems it opportune to recall that, owing to its own character, it is solemnly
  committed to remaining a stranger to all merely temporal conflicts, which principle applies
  specifically to disputed territories and unsettled borders.

**Article 12**

The Holy See and the State of Israel will continue to negotiate in good faith in pursuance of the
Agenda agreed upon in Jerusalem, on 15 July 1992, and confirmed at the Vatican, on 29 July
1992; likewise on issues arising from Articles of the present Agreement, as well as on other issues
bilaterally agreed upon as objects of negotiation.

**Article 13**

1. In this Agreement the Parties use these terms in the following sense:

   a. The Catholic Church and the Church - including, inter alia, its Communities and
      institutions,

   b. Communities of the Catholic Church - meaning the Catholic religious entities
      considered by the Holy See as Churches sui juris and by the State of Israel as
      Recognized Religious Communities;

   c. The State of Israel and the State - including, inter alia, its authorities established by
      law.

2. Notwithstanding the validity of this Agreement as between the Parties, and without
detracting from the generality of any applicable rule of law with reference to treaties, the
Parties agree that this Agreement does not prejudice rights and obligations arising from
existing treaties between either Party and a State or States, which are known and in fact
available to both Parties at the time of the signature of this Agreement.

**Article 14**

1. Upon signature of the present Fundamental Agreement and in preparation for the
   establishment of full diplomatic relations, the Holy See and the State of Israel exchange
   Special Representatives, whose rank and privileges are specified in an Additional Protocol.
2. Following the entry into force and immediately upon the beginning of the implementation of the present Fundamental Agreement, the Holy See and the State of Israel will establish full diplomatic relations at the level of Apostolic Nunciature, on the part of the Holy See, and Embassy, on the part of the State of Israel.

Article 15

This Agreement shall enter into force on the date of the latter notification of ratification by a Party.

Done in two original copies in the English and Hebrew languages, both texts being equally authentic. In case of divergence, the English text shall prevail.

Signed in Jerusalem, this thirtieth day of the month of December, in the year 1993, which corresponds to the sixteenth day of the month of Tevet, in the year 5754.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

FOR THE HOLY SEE

Additional Protocol

1. In relation to Art. 14 (1) of the Fundamental Agreement, signed by the Holy See and the State of Israel, the 'Special Representatives' shall have, respectively, the personal rank of Apostolic Nuncio and Ambassador.

2. These Special Representatives shall enjoy all the rights, privileges and immunities granted to Heads of Diplomatic Missions under international law and common usage, on the basis of reciprocity.

3. The Special Representative of the State of Israel to the Holy See, while residing in Italy, shall enjoy all the rights, privileges and immunities defined by Art. 12 of the Treaty of 1929 between the Holy See and Italy, regarding Envoys of Foreign Governments to the Holy See residing in Italy. The rights, privileges and immunities extended to the personnel of a Diplomatic Mission shall likewise be granted to the personnel of the Israeli Special Representative's Mission. According to an established custom, neither the Special Representative, nor the official members of his Mission, can at the same time be members of Israel's Diplomatic Mission to Italy.

4. The Special Representative of the Holy See to the State of Israel may at the same time exercise other representative functions of the Holy See and be accredited to other States. He and the personnel of his Mission shall enjoy all the rights, privileges and immunities granted by Israel to Diplomatic Agents and Missions.

5. The names, rank and functions of the Special Representatives will appear, in an appropriate way, in the official lists of Foreign Missions accredited to each Party.

Signed in Jerusalem, this thirtieth day of the month of December, in the year 1993, which corresponds to the sixteenth day of the month of Tevet, in the year 5754.
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