Two tendencies played a prominent role in shaping the Christian outlook on the issue of the Jewish People and the land of Israel over the centuries. These tendencies have their roots in the early centuries of Christianity. The first of these tendencies was the so-called theology of "perpetual wandering" perspective with respect to the Jewish People. This theology became so imbedded in popular Western culture that even a plant came to bear its name.

According to the "perpetual wandering" theology, Christians look upon Jews as forever relegated to the status of "displaced persons" among the nations of the world. A prevailing mindset is evident in many of the patristic writings. When the "veil of the Temple was rent" and the covenant between God and his people broken permanently as a result, Jews received "a bill of divorce," as it were, and from that time onwards they were doomed to roam restless over the face of the earth.

This perpetual wandering theology continued in force throughout Christian history into the modern period. The noted biblical scholar who in fact defended Nazism Gerhard Kittel and served as editor of the very influential Theological Dictionary of the New Testament viewed post-biblical Judaism as largely a community in dispersion. "Authentic Judaism," he wrote "abides by the symbol of the stranger wandering restless and homeless on the face of the earth." And even the great Cardinal Augustin Bea, who played such a central role in the development, passage
and initial implementation of Vatican II's historic *Nostra Aetate*, revealed continued traces of a traditional Catholic mindset regarding Jews, the covenant and the land. In a 1966 work titled *The Church and the Jewish People*, Bea falls into the use of language quite reminiscent of perpetual wandering theology. "The fate of Jerusalem," he tells us, "constitutes a sort of final reckoning at the end of a thousand years of infidelities and opposition to God." From that point onward, Bea insists, Jews and Judaism existed merely as a "witness to their iniquity and to the truth of the Christian faith."\(^2\) It is understandable, therefore, according to Bea, why many Christian bodies reacted to the reestablishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948 with considerable consternation and even outright opposition. And we also need to recall that in 1904 when Pope Pius X received Theodore Herzl, the founder of the modern Zionist effort to restore a Jewish state in occupied Palestine, the Pope ultimately offered a theological explanation for his unwillingness to support this effort. In his perspective since Jews did not accept Jesus Christ he could never endorse the notion of a Jewish national homeland—clearly shades of a perpetual wandering theology—even though he indicated to Herzl that he was in no position to stop this effort.\(^3\)

From the above brief sample of Christian approaches to the question of Jews and the land beginning in the Patristic era, it should be evident that a long tradition exists within Christianity of an explicitly theological approach to the land of Israel. In fact, it is fair to say that rarely, if ever, in Christian history has Israel been merely regarded as a "political" issue for the churches. Any adequate understanding of Judaism's attachment to the land within a Christian context must begin with a clear acknowledgment that the churches basically rejected this attachment for explicitly Christian theological reasons.

While chapter four of *Nostra Aetate* is a very brief statement in comparison to most other documents from Vatican II, it in fact contains the seeds of a major theological revolution that undercut the validity of the classical "perpetual wandering" theology of Judaism within the churches. For, in asserting that there never existed any basis for a blanket accusation of deicide and in affirming the continuing validity of Jewish covenantal participation after the Christ Event and the bondedness that Christians and Jews now share through the covenant, *Nostra Aetate* decisively undercut the foundation of the displacement/perpetual
wandering theology of the Jewish People that had dominated Christian theological and popular thinking for two millennia.

For that reason it is quite accurate to argue that the full political recognition of the State of Israel by the Holy See in December 1993 represents the ultimate recognition of that repudiation by Vatican II. The coffin on displacement/perpetual wandering theology had been finally sealed. The formal recognition of Israel helps to create for the first time a situation of a partnership rooted in fundamental equality by eliminating a major component of the traditional theology of covenantal displacement and perpetual homeless for the Jews.

The second major theological tendency within Christianity over the centuries with regard to post-Easter Jewish claims to the land has been focused on efforts by Christian theologians to replace a supposedly exclusive Jewish emphasis on “earthly” Israel with a stress on a “heavenly” Jerusalem and an eschatological Zion. Emergence of the term “holy land” as the basic referent for this region has been part and parcel of this overall theological tendency. While this tendency certainly has not exercised the same disastrous impact on Christian attitudes toward the Jewish people and their rights to the land, it nonetheless, however more subtly, had the effect of neutralizing (if not actually undercutting) continued Jewish claims. The bottom line of this theological approach was without question that the authentic claims to the land had now passed over into the hands of the Christians. “Jerusalem,” spiritually and territorially, now belonged to the Christians. Neither Muslims nor Jews could control the city after the coming of Christ and it became a holy duty for the Crusaders to return it to Christian hands no matter what the amount of bloodshed involved. The origins of this Christian perspective are to be seen in parts of the New Testament itself. The Letter to the Hebrews and the Book of Revelation are two key books in terms of the development of this viewpoint.

But once again, as with the covenantal displacement/perpetual wandering theology, the real growth of this theological outlook on the land took place during the Patristic era. It began with Justin Martyr in the second century. In his famous Dialogue with Trypho, the first major post-biblical work on Christian-Jewish relations, Justin took up the question of the possible rebuilding of the destroyed city of Jerusalem and what significance this might hold for the Christian community. He expressed
his belief that indeed such a rebuilding will take place. "I and others who are 'right-thinking' Christians on all points are convinced that there will be a resurrection of the dead and a thousand-year (period) in which Jerusalem will be (re)built, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare."4

In another part of the Dialogue with Trypho, Justin introduced for the first time the term "holy land" into the Christian vocabulary. In this section, he contrasted the possession of the land under Joshua with the possession to come upon the return of Christ. In the former case, the possession was only temporary; in the latter case it will be eternal.

For Justin, the approach to the land promises, though eschatological, was concrete and territorial. But the real descendants of Abraham were now the Christians not the Jews (something that Trypho naturally cannot accept). While Christians may not yet have the land, one day they will. The transfer of ownership has in fact taken place. It was this theological vision which eventually would serve as the backbone of the Crusaders' drive for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Holy Land to Christian hands that resulted in the loss of countless Muslim and Jewish Uves.

The term, "Holy Land," thus surfaced in the Christian vocabulary in the context of eschatology and as a direct replacement for Jewish longings for Zion. As Robert Wilken has put it in The Land Called Holy:

Within Jewish tradition eschatology and restoration were almost synonymous, and for Justin eschatology meant a future rebuilding of Jerusalem at the return of Christ. Christian hopes for the future were rooted in the land promise to Abraham and in the words of the prophets about the glorification of Jerusalem. To be sure, the hope of restoration was modified in light of the Resurrection of Jesus; there would be no temple in the restored Jerusalem. Yet Christian eschatology remained wedded to the earth, retaining the realistic features of the restorationist tradition. As Irenaeus would insist, the new Jerusalem would be located "under heaven."5

While this "Holy Land" approach to Palestine does not directly attack the Jewish community in the same way as the "perpetual wandering" theology, it nonetheless has a similar result in the end. Jews no longer retain any claim to the land of Palestine. The concrete historical
views of Justin and Irenaeus would eventually, however, give way to a far more "heavenly" interpretation of the Holy Land and especially of its center, Jerusalem. This perspective emerged in the writings of Origen and was confirmed by his disciple, Eusebius.

Though some within the Christian community continued to cling rather tenaciously to a vision of a restored Jerusalem in the Holy Land, they were forced to give way in the end to the arguments of Origen who, in the third century, interpreted the spiritual prophecies about Jerusalem and the land in general in an entirely spiritual way. His stated goal was to dispel the mistaken view held by Christians that the land promised by God to the righteous pertains at all to the land of Judea. In the perspective of Origen, the Pauline texts that speak of Jerusalem do not in fact describe an earthly city but rather one existing in the heavens. This "heavenly Jerusalem" is destined ultimately to replace the earthly Jerusalem. It was Origen's contention that this understanding in fact constituted the authentic interpretation of the prophetic texts as well. Jews had erred in applying them to an earthly realm. Again, this "heavenly Jerusalem" theology, while not as overtly anti-Jewish as the "perpetual wandering" theology had in fact the same bottom line: Jews had no valid religious claims to the land.

With the formal establishment of the modern State of Israel by the United Nations in 1948 these "anti-land" theologies relative to the Jewish People in classical Christian thought came under intense pressure, especially in Catholicism where the Holy See had to react to this establishment. In light of Pope Pius X's response to Theodore Herzl in 1904 cited earlier tremendous hesitation developed within Vatican circles about political recognition of the new state. The initial decision was to deny formal recognition though in all candor evidence has now surfaced in Israeli archives that many of the country's leaders were not actually eager for such recognition lest it enhance the Catholic Church's claims regarding Jerusalem. When Pope Paul VI visited the Holy Land during his papacy he allowed almost no political recognition of his presence in the country and never referred to the State in any public address.

Gradually, however, the Holy See's position was modified to the point where by the early 1970s "de facto" recognition was accorded Israel in the sense that Israeli and Vatican diplomatic officials now held official exchanges even though full, formal diplomatic recognition continued to
be withheld. In the initial discussion regarding the proposed text of the 1974 Vatican Guidelines on Catholic-Jewish Relations issued to commemorate the tenth anniversary of chapter four of Nostra Aetate a section on the State of Israel was to be included in light of Nostra Aetate's undercutting of the "perpetual wandering" theology as a result of its insistence on continued Jewish covenantal inclusion. But a premature release of this information led to its removal from the final version of the statement. But the impetus for full or "de jure" recognition did not grind to a complete halt. In fact the Guidelines most-quoted line about the need for Christians to come to understand Jews "as they define themselves" strengthened the necessity for the Church to recognize the deep-seated attachment to the land as a hallmark of authentic Jewish self-identity.

Two other documents further enhanced the movement toward formal recognition of Israel. The first occurred in a 1984 document Redemptionis Anno from the pen of Pope John Paul II. In this document he anticipated the formal recognition that came to fruition later on in his papacy: "For the Jewish People who live in the State of Israel and who preserve in that land such precious testimonies of their history and their faith, we must ask for the desired security and the due tranquility that is the prerogative of every nation and condition of life and of progress of every society." This statement clearly exhibits on the part of John Paul II a sense of the deep intertwining of faith and land within the Jewish People.

The 1985 Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church which commemorated the twentieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate, added to the process of Christian reflection on the meaning of land in terms of Judaism within Catholicism, especially when we contrast what is said in this document with the classical Christian outlook rooted in the theologies of "perpetual wandering" and the "heavenly Jerusalem." Two statements in the documents are especially relevant for this discussion. The first affirms that "The history of Israel did not end in seventy A.D. . . . It continued, especially in a numerous Diaspora which allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness . . . while preserving the memory of the land of their forefathers at the heart of their hope." The second argues that "The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without a trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted.
within God's design." Clearly, these statements repudiate the classical "displacement theology."

This gradual process of removing theological objections within Catholicism to the idea of an independent Jewish state, as has already been noted, reached its climax in the December 30, 1993 signing of the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel. While primarily a political agreement, it clearly has been read by major Catholic and Jewish leaders such as Rabbi David Rosen, the late Cardinal John O'Connor as well as Cardinal William Keeler and the then U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican Raymond Flynn as bringing to an end the difficult history in Christian-Jewish relations regarding Jewish territorial dreams. While it remains legitimate for Catholic leaders to criticize this or that particular policy of an Israeli government all basis for arguing theologically against the idea of a Jewish national state has been permanently eradicated. The document itself links the Fundamental Agreement to the overall effort begun at the II Vatican Council to set the Christian-Jewish relationship on a path of reconciliation, growth in mutual understanding, and friendship.

In other Christian communities that do not involve themselves in the formal recognition of nation-states as does the Holy See, the process of removing remaining vestiges of the "perpetual wandering" theology of Judaism has been somewhat less dramatic but nonetheless quite real. Any number of Christian communities have publicly acknowledged the Jewish ties to the land of Israel as an authentic dimension of the Jewish religious perspective over the past several decades. But we have also witnessed a strong critique in certain sectors of Protestant Christianity that has called for divestment from Israel and strongly rebuked notions of Christian Zionism. While there is no question that significant sectors of the Christian Zionist community have gone beyond legitimate theological boundaries in bestowing an internal Christian theological meaning on the State of Israel while failing to offer any critique whatsoever of its specific policies towards Palestinians, the attack on Christian Zionism has often seemed to deny any legitimacy to Jewish theological interpretations of the State. While echoes of a similar critique have surfaced in some parts of the Catholic social justice community, the voices have generally not been as loud and intense and have not been endorsed at the level of the Vatican.
In addition to official Christian documents, individual theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, have reflected on the significance of the reestablishment of the State of Israel. While no clear consensus has emerged, perspectives have been offered that contain the seeds of further development.

Leading Catholic theologian David Tracy, in discussions relative to the theological significance of the Holocaust, saw the issue of a Jewish theology of the land within a broader setting of a return to the significance of history within the Christian community. Tracy has long been an advocate of such a return. So, while he offered no specific understanding of the Jewish land tradition from a Christian theological perspective, he clearly acknowledged the legitimacy of such a discussion if one grounds theological discussion within the context of history. By implication Tracy was suggesting that the problem that many Christians past and present have had with theological discussions regarding Israel is rooted in an inadequate historical basis for theology where the tendency has been strong to see theology as exclusively supernatural and standing apart from an historical context. The patristic discussion regarding Jerusalem, discussed above, might be seen as one example of the tendency Tracy is rightly critiquing. Other Catholic scholars such as John Oesterreicher, Charlotte Klein, Bruce Williams and Kurt Hruby have also taken up consideration of the place of Israel in Christian theology. Williams and Klein have been particularly strong in emphasizing a specifically redemptive dimension to the State of Israel from the Christian perspective, though in a manner quite different from that of many Christian Zionists where the notion of Israel tends to lose specific Jewish meaning. On the Protestant side J. Coos Schoneveld, Walter Harrelson, and Alan Davies are scholars who have expressed similar views. An excellent summary of Catholic positions in the initial stages of this discussion can be found in the late Anthony Kenny’s volume *Catholics, Jews and the State of Israel.*

No consensus currently exists among the relatively few Christian theologians who have taken up the land question. In my own personal reflections on the place of the land in Christian thought, three issues remain central. They are not easily integrated. First, I would certainly wish to maintain some significant differences between Christianity and Judaism regarding the present meaning of the biblical land tradition. It
is my firm belief that one result of the Christian theology of the Incarnation is an equalization of all land in terms of sacredness. While Jerusalem and the Holy Land may evoke a certain spiritual and historical significance for Christians from the standpoint of theological principle they are no more sacred than Geneva, Rome, Rio, or Chicago. Second, I do clearly acknowledge the centrality of the land to the basic definition of covenant within Judaism.

Professor Ruth Langer rightly challenged me on this point in her response to my plenary presentation at the international conference at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in September 2005. She also makes the point about the centrality of land for Jewish religious identity in an essay published in the electronic journal of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations. If we take seriously the central assertion in the 1974 Vatican Guidelines about the need for Christians to come to understand Jews as they define themselves, then there is simply no way of ignoring the land question which, as Langer clearly demonstrates in her recent article, is a central component of contemporary identity both for religious and secular Jews. And third, since I affirm from a theological perspective an inherent bonding between the Church and the Jewish People, I recognize that the Jewish sense of land as integral to the understanding of covenant makes some claims on my faith as well. This is especially the case if we understand the Jewish and Christian covenants as distinctive, but integrated, as Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, has strongly argued.

How to relate these three realities remains a continuing challenge for all Christian theologians who take seriously the Church's deep-seated relationship with Judaism, myself included. At this point I cannot say that I have come to an entirely successful resolution of the matter. But I do know that I cannot be content with falling back into a perspective which says, as St. Paul did in Romans, that the solution remains a mystery known only to God. I feel compelled to continue to reflect on this matter and work toward some constructive resolution.

Two Christian biblical scholars, Walter Brueggemann and W.D. Davies, have been particularly helpful along this line. Their research and writings, coupled with Jewish reflections on the issue by Lawrence A. Hoffman, Ruth Langer, Yehezkel Landau, and others, have assisted
theologians such as myself in framing the issue from a Christian standpoint.

As Brueggemann sees it, the central problem for Christian believers "is not emancipation but *rootage*, not meaning, but *belonging*, not separation from community but *location* within it, not isolation from others *but placement* deliberately between the generation of promise and fulfillment."13 Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, Brueggemann maintains, present homelessness as a central human problem, and they seek to respond to it in terms of promise and gift. No truly believing Christian can avoid making land a central category in his or her belief system. On this point Brueggemann is unbending: "landed" faith is as much an imperative for Christians as for Jews.

W.D. Davies analyzes the required Christian appropriation of the biblical land tradition in somewhat greater detail than Brueggemann. He feels that, after all is said and done, the New Testament must be described as ambivalent on the land question, a view shared by another New Testament exegete long associated with the Jewish-Christian dialogue, John Townsend. In light of this, how Christians view the Hebrew Scriptures as a central resource for their faith perspective becomes crucial in terms of an approach to the land tradition in terms of the faith perspective of the Church.

Davies insists that there exist various strata within the New Testament that appear to take a critical approach to the land promises inherent in the Hebrew Scriptures. One passage, namely Acts 7, rejects them out of hand. However, there are other passages in which the land, the Temple, and Jerusalem in a clearly geographical sense are viewed in a quite positive light regarding their continued relevance for Christian self-identity. Davies's conclusion is that the New Testament leaves us with a twofold witness with respect to the land tradition. On the one hand, there is a sense in which faith in Christ takes the believer beyond the "confines" of the land of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple; yet, on the other, the New Testament's basic history and theology can never totally escape concern about these realities. For the New Testament writers, holy space exists wherever Christ is or has been. The Christ Event has universalized the land tradition of the Bible in a significant way, but not eliminated its centrality. Davies summarizes the impact of the Christ Event on the land tradition in this way:
It (the New Testament) personalizes "holy space" in Christ, who, as a figure of history, is rooted in the land; he cleansed the Temple and died in Jerusalem, and lends his glory to these and to the places where he was, but, as Living Lord, he is also free to move wherever he wills. To do justice to the personalism of the New Testament, that is, to its Christocentricity, is to find the clue to the various strata of tradition that we have traced and to the attitudes they reveal: to their freedom from space, and their attachment to, spaces.¹⁴

A recent addition to this Christian discussion is the biblical scholar Richard Lux of the Sacred Heart School of Theology near Milwaukee. He is currently at work on a book on the subject. In this connection he has offered glimpses into his thinking in several recent lectures and in an article in the electronic journal *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations.*¹⁵ Lux builds his argument for the indispensable nature of the land tradition for Christian faith by focusing on the sacramental tradition in Catholic Christianity and applying it to the experience of a visit to the Holy Land for the Christian believer. For Lux the Holy Land has a strong potential for making Christ present to Christians. As Christians reimage their relationship to the Holy Land, according to Lux, they can assert that "As Christ is the sacrament of our encounter with God, the Holy Land is a sacrament of our encounter with Christ. . . . We can call this mediation of Christ in the Holy Land, a sacramental encounter; thus, the Holy Land, itself, becomes for us a sacramental experience."¹⁶

My own position is somewhat closer to that of Davies than to Brueggemann or Lux, though I share their commitment to Christian faith as "landed" faith. If I would have a question to address to Davies, it would be how he might relate the viewpoint expressed in the passage cited above to the perspective of some Jewish scholars such as Ellis Rivkin who have argued for a certain "universalization" of land and Temple as an integral element of the Pharisaic reform during the Second Temple/Middle Judaic period.

In my judgment, dialogue with Judaism on the land question can greatly assist a recovery of "landed" faith in Christianity where such a notion has often been marginalized or totally pushed aside. It can help Christians see anew the need for expression of such a "landed" faith
perspective in its prayer and worship. In Catholic Christianity the liturgical reforms of the eleven Vatican Council virtually eliminated any expression of a "landed" faith in its liturgical cycle. That is why I believe Richard Lux is making an important contribution to the current discussion with his emphasis on the sacramentality of the land, even though I would part company with him in terms of an exclusive focus on Israel in terms of this sacramentality.

In terms of the renewed theology of Christian-Jewish bonding I would turn to model of Christianity and Judaism as following interrelated but distinctive paths to salvation. In such a perspective the biblical land tradition becomes a point of both of unity and a point of distinctiveness between Jews and Christians. Both traditions need to be rooted in the land. That is their point of agreement. But they are distinctive in terms of the territorial expression of that joint commitment. Nonetheless both have much to gain from an intense dialogue on the biblical land tradition.

Notes


16. Ibid., 18.

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