

THE HOLY SEE AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL: THE EVOLUTION OF ATTITUDES AND POLICIES

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PRECIS

Recent events have brought to the fore once again the still unsettled question of the level of diplomatic relations that exist (or, for some, should exist) between the Holy See and the State of Israel. Central to that discussion has been the assumption on the part of many that lying behind the Holy See's present policy are remnants of the ancient Christian "teaching of contempt" against Jews and Judaism. This article seeks to test that theory by analyzing Catholic Church teaching with reference to its traditional and present implications concerning a Jewish state in the land of Israel. Centuries-old Catholic interests in the Holy Land, it is argued, are sufficient to explain contemporary Vatican policies, without recourse to some hidden "theological" motivation. Finally, the pertinent official statements of the Holy See since 1948—culminating in Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris missa* (1984)—are discussed, in order to discern the substance and direction of Vatican policy today.

This article will attempt to analyze in very broad strokes the evolving attitudes of the Holy See toward the rebirth of a Jewish state in the land of Israel. To appreciate the dynamics behind the Holy See's stance vis-à-vis the Israeli state, one must come to grips not only with the immediate sociopolitical implications faced by the Holy See concerning its diplomatic relations with Israel (options having, for example, profound implications for the fate of Catholic minorities throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds) but equally with the major historical factors involved in Christianity's traditional "stake" in the Holy Land and, finally, the extent to which the church's perception of the issue may have been influenced by its theological attitude toward Jews and Judaism, past and present.

It is my general thesis that, just as theological attitudes toward Judaism and

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Islam have in the past deeply influenced the Holy See's perception of Jewish and Muslim presence in the Holy Land, so has the reform of those attitudes as embodied in the Vatican II's "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions"¹ enabled the Holy See to perceive different options in its relationships both with the State of Israel and with Muslim and Arab states. In essence, it will be argued that, as the theological barriers to interreligious dialogue have fallen (from the point of view of the Catholic Church), a wider variety of options has been opened in diplomatic relations as well.² However, the consistency of the Holy See's concern for the welfare of the Christian community in the Middle East, especially in the Holy Land, for freedom of pilgrimage to the holy places, and for a peaceful and just resolution of disputes in the area, rather than theology as such, provides the essential framework for understanding Vatican policies in the Middle East today.

The article will first sketch traditional and present Catholic attitudes toward Judaism and their implications for Catholic attitudes toward Jewish presence in the Holy Land, both historical and theological. These are necessary to frame an understanding of the Church's interest in the area. Within this necessarily general frame, an attempt will be made to interpret the basic concerns that the Holy See has articulated regarding the State of Israel and the future of the city of Jerusalem, which I believe is the major key to the present diplomatic situation from the Holy See's point of view.³

I. The Theological Framework

Catholic attitudes toward Jewish sovereignty over the Holy Land cannot be understood in isolation from Catholic attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. Those attitudes, in turn, can be traced back to late apostolic times. Very early in Patristic times, those passages of the New Testament that reflected the destruction of

¹Text and commentary in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild, America, Association Presses, 1966), pp. 660-668. Subsequent official documents of the Church on Catholic-Jewish relations are to be found in Helga Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Christian-Jewish Relations* (London: Stimulus, 1977) and her *More Stepping Stones* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

²An analogy, if imperfect, might be the opening of diplomatic options that attended the adoption of *oestpolitik* by the Holy See, in which the ideological conflict with communism, while by no means abandoned, was able to be "bracketed" in certain circumstances, allowing a more pragmatic and dialogical approach to Vatican diplomacy with Eastern European nations.

³While *Nostra aetate* also addressed Catholic-Muslim relations (section no. 3), and while its more positive attitudes toward Islam has encouraged dialogue with Muslims and Arabs, thus opening new options on that front as well, this article will be limited, primarily, to Catholic-Jewish/Vatican-Israel relations. For a different perspective on the issues treated here, cf. Richard P. Stevens, "The Vatican, the Catholic Church, and Jerusalem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10 (Spring, 1981): 100-110; and George Irani, *The Papacy and the Middle East: The Role of the Holy See in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1962-1984* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

the Temple in 70 C.E.⁴ began to be used in Christian apologetics against Jews and Judaism. Justin Martyr, for example, utilized the destruction of the Temple as a proof for his thesis that the Mosaic Law had been abrogated in favor of the new, Christian dispensation. Since God foreknew that after the death of Jesus Jerusalem would be destroyed, Justin believed, God commanded that the sheep of the Passover could only be sacrificed in Jerusalem. Thus, the Mosaic Law was only temporary within the divine plan of history.⁵ Various of the Fathers argued (often against Christian "Judaizers" such as the Quartodecimans, who celebrated Passover according to the Jewish calendar on 14th Nisan) that the Jews themselves could no longer celebrate Passover because Jerusalem had been destroyed and the Temple priesthood with it.⁶

The developing self-definition of emerging Christianity in the early centuries of the church's history was of necessity an attempt to define itself in relation to Judaism, both biblical, which it claimed as its own source and validation, and rabbinic, which was emerging in parallel fashion to Christianity during the same period. Since rabbinic Judaism also claimed the validation of the Hebrew Bible, rabbinism's very existence was perceived by some Christians as a threat to Christianity's claim of exclusive continuity with biblical Judaism.⁷

Schooled in the rhetorical styles of late antiquity,⁸ the church Fathers did not scruple over mixing *arguments ad hominem* in with their theological and exegetical apologetics.⁹ The debate over the interpretation of biblical prophecies

⁴E.g., The Epistle to the Hebrews, though some scholars would date this to the period just prior to the destruction. Cf. also various sayings of Jesus as presented in the Gospels written after 70 C.E. according to scholarly consensus; e.g., Mk. 14:58, on which see Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 197-210.

⁵Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 40:1-5 and 46:2. (See Theodore Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*, SBL Dissertation Series 20 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 119-121. For early Jewish interpretations of the destruction of the temple, see Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston), pp. 32-40.

⁶E.g., Aphrahat, *Demonstration against Jews*, 12; Chrysostom, *Eight Homilies against the Judaizers*, 3. Cf. Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), pp. 123-127; and S. G. Wilson, "Passover, Easter, and Anti-Judaism: Melito of Sardis and Others," in Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds., *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 337-355.

⁷For essays on the myriad facets of the apologetic polemical debates on this period, which was formative for both Christian and rabbinic traditions, cf. Neusner and Frerichs, *To See Ourselves*; E. P. Sanders, ed., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, 1981); Alan T. Davies, ed., *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); and Elisabeth Schlusler Florenza, *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976).

⁸Cf. Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁹For convenient surveys of patristic polemics against the Jews, cf. Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); Rosemary R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Antisemitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 117-182; and Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind* (New Haven: Yale

concerning the restoration of Israel,¹⁰ which earlier had to do with issues such as the meaning of the Law and the identity of *verus Israel*, gradually came to be intertwined with the polemic against the Jews and Judaism, with the deicide charge, and with the political situation of the times. St. Jerome, for example, for whom the biblical references to an eschatological restoration of *Eretz Israel* to the Jews was a major preoccupation, argued that the biblical prophecies referred either to events that had already occurred (for example, in the return from the Babylonian captivity) or to the new *spiritual* reality that was the church.¹¹

While Jerome reflects growing Christian interest in the Holy Land as a place of pilgrimage, St. John Chrysostom's debates with Judaizers led to some of the most virulent anti-Jewish rhetoric in Christian history. As Patristic scholar Robert L. Wilken has reminded us,¹² Chrysostom lived in Antioch, a city with a large and prosperous Jewish community. The Christian community Chrysostom sought to lead as bishop was already split between Arianism and Orthodoxy. When he began to fear a further split of his dwindling flock due to those attracted to Jewish ritual and practice, he preached a devastating series of homilies using every device known to the rhetorics of his time. In these sermons, the destruction of the temple and the dispersion of the Jews played a major role. That role was intensified by remembrance of the promise of the Emperor Julian in the previous generation to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

Though Julian's plans were thwarted by his untimely death, the very possibility, according to Wilken, caused a shock wave in the Christian community "for generations afterward."¹³ The destruction of the temple and the diaspora had come to be seen as a sort of inverted proof for the divinity of Jesus and the abrogation of the "old" covenant in favor of the new. The destruction of Jerusalem, it was argued, represented divine punishment on the Jews for their alleged rejection and killing of Jesus. The diaspora was thus seen as a continuing "proof" that the Jesus whom "the Jews" had killed was, in fact, divine. Why else would God want to punish them so severely? Because Jews suffer, the logic went, they were to be seen as an "accursed" people. As they had broken their covenant with God by refusing to acknowledge Jesus, the "fulfillment" of that covenant,

University Press, 1971). The essays in Davies' *Antisemitism* respond to Ruether's thesis. An important recent study is John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹⁰E.g., Is. 25:6-8, 58:12; Ezek. 39:17-20. For a summary of Jewish attitudes toward the destruction of the temple, the Exile, and the hope for the return, cf. W. D. Davies' "Reflections on the Territorial Dimensions of Judaism" in his *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 49-71.

¹¹Jerome is arguing here not only with Jewish interpretations of the biblical text but equally with those whom he calls "judaizers" (*judaizantes*) or "half-Jews" (*semihudaei*), among whom he includes Tertullian, Irenaeus, Victorinus, Lactantius, and Apollinarius. All of these, as Robert L. Wilken points out, were Christian millennialists (in his "The Restoration of Israel in Biblical Prophecy: Christian and Jewish Responses in the Early Byzantine Period," in Neusner and Frerichs, *To See Ourselves*, p. 450).

¹²Wilken, *Chrysostom and the Jews*.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

so God had passed the covenant to a new people, one taken from among the nations (*goyim*), who believed in Jesus. This people formed the church, the "new" people of God who had replaced the "old" people, the Jews, in God's plan of salvation.

Christian anti-Jewish polemics surrounding the land, now set forth also in the context of the deicide charge, intensified in the period after Chrysostom. By the fifth century, it was clearly a political as well as a theological issue for the church. Under Byzantine rule, Palestine had become a major center of monasticism and the site of numerous churches. Pilgrims streamed to Jerusalem to worship at the holy places where Jesus walked and where the great events of the Bible had taken place.¹⁴ The church, in short, had come to have a major institutional stake in *Eretz Israel*. Wilken describes the dynamic that took place:

During this period Christians began to use the term "holy land" with specifically Christian overtones to describe the actual land of Palestine. . . . [T]he term had been rejected by earlier Christians as inappropriate. Christian hope was set on a heavenly kingdom. . . . Now, however, Christians had begun to appropriate a new symbol, the land of Israel itself. The earlier debates between Jews and Christians centered on the meaning of the Law, on the interpretation of Christ, . . . and on the significance of the destruction of the second temple. But Christians had made no claim on the land. Indeed they claimed to be devoted only to a heavenly city. Now they had a real interest in the actual city, and the consequences were far reaching.¹⁵

While Christian aspirations for actual control of the Holy Land were blunted by the Arab conquest and the subsequent failure of attempts to recapture the land in the Crusades, the theological frame established in this period and the tradition of biblical interpretation developed to buttress its claims continued to influence Christian attitudes toward Jewish presence on the land for centuries. The fears represented in the following quotation from the fourth-century works of Theodoret of Cyrus' commentary on Ezekiel, for example, have a curiously contemporary ring. Indeed, remarkably similar fears were articulated in editorials in the Catholic press from the time of the first Zionist Congress of Basel in 1897 until the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948.¹⁶

¹⁴John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrimages before the Crusades* (Jerusalem, 1979). For ancient documents describing pilgrim routes, see P. Geyer, ed., *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna, 1898), vol. 39, p. 25; and G. Gamurrini, *Studia Documenti di Storia e Diritto* (Rome, 1888), pp. 97-184.

¹⁵Wilken, "Restoration of Israel," pp. 463, 467. Wilken notes too that recent archaeological evidence has established that there were numerous vibrant Jewish communities throughout Israel in the Byzantine Era. In fact, these increased dramatically throughout the period. Such communities would have served as a constant reminder that the Hebrew Scriptures were open to another interpretation than that of the Christian and thus would have been a source of continuing theological irritation to Christian spokespersons.

¹⁶Cf. Esther Yolles Feldblum, *The American Catholic Press and the Jewish State, 1917-1959* (New York: KTAV, 1977); and Stevens, "The Vatican."

There is today in Jerusalem the church of the cross, the church of the Resurrection, the church of the Ascension, the church on Mt. Sion, the church in Holy Bethlehem, and many other churches. If the temple of the Jews is rebuilt, will these be destroyed, or will they continue to be held in honor? . . . And once again there would inevitably be conflict and strife, we following our way of life according to our beliefs, and they preferring a form of worship according to the Law.¹⁷

Christian theology was never solely negative toward Jews and Judaism. Alongside the ancient "teaching of contempt"¹⁸ outlined above, one can also find a more positive acknowledgment of the indebtedness of Christianity to biblical Judaism and a sense of the importance of Jewish witness to the Hebrew Bible as God's Word. For example, during the Middle Ages it was an excommunicable offense to disrupt Jewish worship services. While all remnants of paganism were ruthlessly stamped out, Jews were the only non-Christian group legally recognized in Christian Europe.¹⁹

As the traditional Christian attitude toward Jews and Judaism in general was one of theological ambiguity, so the attitude of the Catholic Church was ambiguous toward the Zionist movement in the decades before the declaration of the Jewish state. On the one hand, the interpretation of the diaspora as divine punishment on the Jews led some Catholics to view a reborn state of Israel as virtually a theological impossibility—unless the Jews first repented their "rejection" of Jesus, converted, and were thus reconciled with God, who would then no longer impede their return to the land of promise. Such a return, however, could be seen by both Jews and Christians as a sign of the End Time. This latter potential quite naturally made many people very cautious about the whole question. The famous reply of Pope Pius X to Theodor Herzl's plea for papal support of the Zionist cause may illustrate the influence of ancient theological categories on his thought; certainly, it reflects this eschatological caution:

We are unable to favor this movement. We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem—but we could never sanction it. As head of the Church I cannot answer you otherwise. The Jews have not recognized our Lord. Therefore we cannot recognize the Jewish people,

¹⁷PG 81, 1252a-1253c; cited in Wilken, "Restoration of Israel," pp. 465-466.

¹⁸The term was coined by French Jewish historian Jules Isaac in the late 1940's. See his *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, tr. Claire Huchet Bishop (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1964); and his *Jesus and Israel*, tr. Claire Huchet Bishop (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1971).

¹⁹Edward A. Synan, *The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). A major shift toward the negative in Christian treatment of Jews and Judaism began approximately in the thirteenth century, reaching its peak by the sixteenth. Cf. Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983). One can see anti-Jewish rhetoric and legislation escalating as the Crusades failed and as all Europe felt itself more and more besieged by the external onslaught of Islam. The efforts to enforce the internal "unity" of Christendom are thus

and so, if you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we will be ready with churches and priests to baptize all of you.²⁰

On the other hand, and this many have forgotten, two weeks after the meeting, Cardinal Merry del Val, the Vatican Secretary of State, communicated the following to Hertzl, which I believe reflects the more positive side of the Holy See's traditional role as protector of the Jews: "If the Jews believe they might greatly ease their lot by being admitted to the land of their ancestors, then we would regard that as a humanitarian question. We shall never forget that without Judaism, we would have been nothing."²¹ That is, while very cautious about possible theological interpretations of a Jewish return to the land, the Catholic Church could deal positively with such an eventuality if it were understood on primarily moral or humanitarian grounds. Such official ambivalence toward the Zionist cause appears to have continued over the years. Nahum Sokolow, a leading Zionist figure at the time of the Balfour Declaration, reported that an audience with Pope Benedict XV had "led to a most satisfactory attitude on the part of the Vatican towards Zionism."²² Michael J. Pragai, in his study of Christians and Zionism, concluded that this audience "served as an important encouragement for the Zionist Movement and facilitated the assigning of the Mandate to Britain."²³ While not wishing to oppose Zionism, perhaps out of the same sense of theological caution that prevented an official endorsement, expressions of concern for the holy places and the local Christian communities continued to be made over the years in the pages of such influential Catholic journals as *Civiltà Cattolica* and *L'Osservatore Romano*.²⁴

No official condemnation of Zionism was ever issued by the Holy See, and the United Nations partition plan was passed with positive votes from the Catholic countries of Latin America. The Holy See's attitude over the years leading to the emergence of the State of Israel, then, cannot be seen either as overwhelmingly pro-Zionist or as anti-Zionist, though it has articulated a set of concerns remarkably consistent with the Roman Church's ancient "stake" in the Holy Land, as will be seen below. In other words, seen as a secular event, the Church can take a positive view toward the State of Israel, but, if the state is interpreted as itself a fulfillment of the biblical promises, a more cautious reaction emerges. In any event, policy protective of the access to the holy places and the survival of Christian communities surrounding them is clearly articulated in all periods.

understandable today.

²⁰January, 1904. Cited in Marvin Lowenthal, ed. and tr., *The Diaries of Theodore Herzl* (New York: Dial Press, 1956), pp. 429-430.

²¹Cited in A. James Rudin, *Israel for Christians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 121.

²²Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1919), vol. 2, p. 53.

²³Michael J. Pragai, *Faith and Fulfillment: Christians and the Return to the Promised Land* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1985), p. 152.

²⁴Stevens, "The Vatican," pp. 102-105.

II. *Renewed Theological Understandings of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*

The declarations of Vatican II on Religious Liberty, Ecumenism, and Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra aetate*) revolutionized the Catholic Church's attitudes toward non-Catholics in general and toward the Jews in particular. It is a curious but significant fact that no previous Council had ever taken a systematic, doctrinal look at the Church's relationship with the Jewish people.²⁵ The framers of *Nostra aetate*, no. 4, were thus able to draw on the positive elements of the Church's ambivalent tradition in seeking to frame a theological understanding at the dawn of the third millennium of an often tragic history. One may say that the Council's selectivity represents in itself a certain hermeneutic regarding that tradition.

There is no doubt that awareness of the Holocaust was on the minds of the 2,221 Fathers who voted *placet* on the declaration on October 28, 1965,²⁶ yet more than the Holocaust lay behind the declaration. As Tommaso Federici has written, behind the document also lay the fruits of the biblical, liturgical, and even ecclesiological movements of the twentieth century.²⁷ Thus, *Nostra aetate*, no. 4, can properly be seen as a miniature (the section comprises only fifteen sentences in Latin) prism of the renewal efforts of the Council as a whole.

While leaving open a number of traditional questions and opening still more for future consideration, what *Nostra aetate* achieved is a twofold clarification of ancient misunderstanding. First, it ended definitively all speculation that the Jews as people could be held collectively responsible for the death of Jesus: "[W]hat happened in His passion cannot be blamed against all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today. . . . [T]he Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the holy Scriptures."²⁸ Second, reading Rom. 9:4-5 in the present tense ("Theirs 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: "Now as before, God holds the Jews most dear for

²⁵Previous conciliar statements, such as the suppressive legislation of the Fourth Lateran Council in the thirteenth century were disciplinary, not doctrinal, in character and had fallen into desuetude by the time of Vatican II. Cf. Eugene J. Fisher, "The Evolution of a Tradition: From *Nostra aetate* to the Notes," *Jewish-Christian Relations* 18 (December, 1985): 32-47.

²⁶"The step taken by the Council 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" (n. 4)*, Rome, December 1, 1974, "Preamble").

²⁷Tommaso Federici, "Study Outline of the Mission and Witness of the Church," *SIDIC*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1978), pp. 25-34.

²⁸Abbott, *Documents of Vatican II*, p. 666.

the sake of their fathers; he does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues."²⁹

These two statements effectively destroy the basis for the negative theological assessment of the destruction of the temple and the diaspora, discussed above. If the Jews as a people cannot be held responsible for Jesus' death, then there exists no reason for an angry God to destroy their temple in retribution. If rejection of Jesus cannot be cited as the reason for the exile, then the return of Jews to the land is no longer to be feared on theological grounds.

Subsequent official documents of the Holy See and major statements of the popes on Catholic-Jewish relations have successively clarified and reinforced these two basic theological affirmations. Speaking in Mainz on November 17, 1980, for example, Pope John Paul II characterized Catholic-Jewish dialogue as "the meeting between the people of God of the old covenant never retracted by God (Rom. 11:29), on the one hand, and the people of the new covenant, on the other," and as "the encounter between today's Christian churches and today's people of the covenant concluded with Moses."³⁰ The Mainz declaration affirms both the continuity of the Jewish people (and of today's Judaism) with biblical Israel, on the one hand (thus refuting all "replacement" or "supersessionist" theologies of fulfillment), and the permanent, ongoing validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people in the present era, *post christum*,³¹ on the other.

A text issued by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jewish People³² in 1985 goes farther than any previous official Catholic document in applying the general theological affirmations of Vatican II to the specific issues of this article. Because it has been misunderstood—and, consequently, negatively received by some—the text deserves to be treated here at some length. Speaking in the context of "the permanence of Israel" (as a people) as "a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God's design," the state-

²⁹Cf. Rom. 11:28-29. *The Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* significantly uses the same language with reference to the Jewish people.

³⁰*Origins* 10 (December 4, 1980): 400 (reprinted in Eugene J. Fisher, *Seminary Education and Christian-Jewish Relations* [Washington, DC: National Catholic Education Association, 1983], pp. 87-89).

³¹For commentary on John Paul II's Mainz statement, see the address of Archbishop John R. Roach to the Synagogue Council of America on March 12, 1981. Speaking as President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Roach commented: "The phrase 'never retracted by God' needs to be underscored. It at once rebuts all old claims of Christian triumphalism (the so-called 'teaching of contempt') and opens up the way for an entirely new relationship between two living traditions on the basis of mutual respect for each other's essential religious claims. . . . Note also the pope's insistence on the church's acceptance of the continuing and permanent election of the Jewish people" (*Origins*, May 7, 1981; reprinted in Fisher, *Seminary Education*, pp. 93-96).

³²Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church," *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 24, 1985; available in English from the U.S. Catholic Conference, Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, Publication no. 970 (hereafter, "Notes").

ment mandates that Catholics "must rid ourselves of the traditional idea of a people *punished* or preserved as a *living argument* for Christian apologetic."³³ The rebuttal here of the theories of Justin Martyr and Chrysostom, as sketched above, could not be more clearly stated.

The document goes even farther in defining a positive theological understanding of the diaspora (to replace the negative assessment of the "teaching of contempt" as "divine retribution") and in acknowledging the promise of the land (*Eretz Israel*) as an essential aspect of God's eternal covenant with the Jewish people. There is here, it should be noted, no hint of the notion—presented erroneously, I believe, by some biblical scholars—that the Jewish covenant or its land aspect (see, for example, Gen. 28:10-22)³⁴ is in any sense "conditional" upon the people's moral behavior. The full statement reads:

The history of Israel did not end in A.D. 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 him 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 (e.g., *Passover Seder*).

Christians are invited to understand this religious attachment which finds its roots in biblical tradition, without however making their own any particular religious interpretation of this relationship (cf. Statement on Catholic-Jewish Relations, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, U.S.A., Nov. 20, 1975). 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.³⁵

Bishop Jorge Mejia, then Secretary of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and one of the signers of the document, noted in an explanatory text, published in *L'Osservatore Romano* on the same page as the *Notes* themselves, that this was the first time the Commission had made reference "to the land and the state" (of Israel), and that the section was "taken up with extreme precision" by the Commission. Given this, the text deserves careful scrutiny as a major articulation, though concise, of the Holy See's present attitude toward land and state. How does it read, then, in terms of the schema of ancient and modern theological attitudes described thus far in this article?

³³*Notes*, VI, U.S.C.C. edition, p. 18.

³⁴An excellent treatment of the land promise in Gen. 28:10-22 from the perspective of Catholic biblical scholarship can be found in Manuel Oliva, *Jacob en Betel: Vision y Voto* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 1975), pp. 101-108.

³⁵*Notes*, VI, "Catechesis," it should be noted, is a much stronger term in this context than, e.g., "religious education," since it connotes the *official* handing on of the faith tradition of the Catholic Church. The dynamic underlying *Notes* is thus one dealing, by definition, with aspects of the Church's own self-understanding and not simply with "external" relations with non-Catholics.

First, the explicitness and, indeed, the pointedness of its rejection of certain interpretations of the *Galuth* (diaspora) and the destruction of the temple, as noted above, give the statement a very strong "edge" for a Vatican document and should disabuse any lingering suspicions that ancient anti-Jewish polemics are any longer a functioning element in the way in which the Holy See perceives the return of Jews to *Eretz Israel* and the establishment of a Jewish state there. The diaspora is not seen as the result of divine retribution but as part of "God's design," allowing the Jewish people to give universal witness to God's fidelity to the promises made to them as "a chosen people" precisely through their continuing fidelity to God's eternal covenant with them.

Second, the promise of the land is acknowledged as an essential aspect of this permanently valid covenant, so that the relationship between the Jewish people and *Eretz Israel* ("religious attachment") is acknowledged as having its origin "in biblical tradition" and is, therefore, to be seen as an aspect of *Christian* faith to be presented as such in Catholic teaching and preaching.³⁶ The theological and, indeed, doctrinal "stake" of this statement, therefore, is not to be underestimated.

Having made this remarkably strong affirmation of the validity of the people Israel's claim to the "possession" of the land (biblically understood, as in Genesis),³⁷ the *Notes* add a word of caution against jumping beyond the biblical relationship to the relatively extreme views floating around in various circles today. I believe that this *caveat* constitutes a warning for Catholics against adopting a fundamentalist interpretation of the biblical promises, for example, as espoused by the Rev. Jerry Falwell or Rabbi Meir Kahane. This understanding of the *caveat* is clear in the *Notes'* reference to the 1975 Statement of the U.S. bishops. This reference, interestingly, is the only such direct reference in the *Notes* (or in any previous such document issued by the Vatican Commission) to a statement made by an episcopal conference. Hence, it is not to be taken lightly as an interpretative tool for judging the intent of the *Notes*.

The statement of the U.S. bishops on this point reads:

In dialogue with Christians, Jews have explained that they do not consider themselves as a church, a sect, or a denomination, as is the case among Christian communities, but rather as 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 land and people which Jews have expressed in their writings and worship

³⁶The document thus has a certain hermeneutical force as an authoritative interpretation of the meaning of the biblical text.

³⁷Cf. footnote 34, above.