

**From Crisis to Grace:
Theological Reflections on Developing Trends in Jewish-Catholic relations,
through aspects of the work of Fr David Neuhaus SJ**

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Introduction

Nostra Aetate is rightly credited as the turning point in Catholic-Jewish relations in the 20th century. With this document, the Second Vatican Council turned its back on replacement theologies and on the “teaching of contempt” which had been the characteristic of popular European Christian narrative about the Jews.² Instead it adopted an entirely different approach, which affirmed the Jews’ continuing place within divine election. What Nostra Aetate deliberately avoided was making any comment on the place of Land within Jewish self-understanding, thus avoiding the geo-political issues that relate to the Jewish people’s “return to history”, to use a significant phrase in Zionist thought. The purpose was to address specifically the post-Shoah reality whereby Christianity needed to address the Church’s apparent complicity, through centuries of anti-Judaic discourse, in the Shoah. In recent years however, the place of Land, has become a persistent issue within the broader Jewish-Christian encounter. This is because Israel is central to how most Jews understand their place in the world. As Rabbi Eugene Korn observes:

“Israel stands at the centre of Jewish self-perception – how most Jews see themselves individually and collectively as a people. Israel is the stage on which Jewish life and peoplehood is played out most vividly in the present, and the key to Jewish spiritual hopes for the future.”³

Yet any theological understanding of Land must also take into account a modern nation state, namely Israel, and this creates its own challenges and dangers. This paper explores how Land is emerging as a critical issue in Jewish-Catholic relations, through the work of the Israeli Jesuit Fr David Neuhaus, with some

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² See further: Mary C.Boys, SNJM: “What Nostra Aetate Inaugurated” A Conversion to the ‘Providential Mystery of Otherness”, in *Theological Studies* 74 (2013), pp.73-104

³ Eugene Korn, *The Jewish Connection to Israel, the Promised Land: A Brief Introduction for Christians*, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008, pp. ix-f

comparative comment from Bishop Kenneth Cragg, the Anglican theologian who died in 2012, known particularly for his work on Islam and Arabic, and who lived in the Middle East for many years.

Father David Neuhaus SJ is one of the leading voices within the Israeli Catholic community and as such is uniquely placed to offer perspective on Jewish-Catholic relations in particular, as well as the wider issues that relate to the current state of Jewish-Christian relations globally. He was born in South Africa to Jewish parents, he travelled to Israel in 1977 when he was 15 years old. He was to find faith through his encounter with Orthodox Catholic Christians, but also had a deep engagement with Islam, both in terms of a study of Arabic and through personal relationships with Palestinian families. He was ordained a priest by Michel Sabbah, the first Palestinian Latin Patriarch whose own ministry and writings have contributed significantly to Palestinian Christian thought. He gained a PhD in political science from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a symbolically important place of learning in Jewish-Israeli consciousness, having been founded in 1918, as a fulfillment of Zionist intent. He went on study theology in Catholic centres in Paris and Rome before returning to Israel. More recently he has served as the Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew Speaking Catholics and Migrants in Israel and on the teaching staff at Bethlehem University (in the Palestinian Territories).

Although Neuhaus avoids the word “convert” to describe his journey, the fact that this secular Israeli Jew not only became a Christian but went on to become a Jesuit priest and theologian makes him both uniquely placed on the one hand and controversial on the other. His uniqueness lies in the fact that he is the only halachically Jewish Israeli Jesuit with a deep engagement with both Israelis and Palestinians, and controversial in that “converts” throws up significant sensitivities in inter-religious dialogue. He himself points out the sensitivity of this, and the sense of vulnerability that many Jews feel towards those that become Christian, as he relates his account of the initial reaction of his own family to this change in his life.⁴ However it should be said from the outset that Neuhaus does not demonstrate a hostility towards Judaism, on the contrary he manifests a deep respect for the Jewish tradition to which he is connected by virtue of blood, as well as faith tradition. In many ways Neuhaus is a living example of what *Nostra Aetate* sets out in written form.

Neuhaus has written numerous articles on the different aspects of his ministry and has published two books. All of his writings reflect a deep pastoral concern for all those of whom he writes: Jews, Christians and Muslims, Israelis and

⁴ The reader is strongly urged to read Neuhaus' first hand account of his own journey of faith, see *Writings from the Holy Land*, pp.5-10

Palestinians, citizens, refugees and migrants alike. The first book, written with Alain Marchadour (2007)⁵ explores the issues of land primarily from an hermeneutical perspective. The second is a collection of his writings on the Holy Land (2017).⁶ He is a public speaker who is in high demand and is a powerful communicator who not only has important insights to bring, but draws powerfully from his own life experience.

This paper focuses on four themes that arise from Neuhaus' work: (1) Jewish identity and the Catholic Church, (2) Salvation of the Jews (3) the Writing of History Together, (4) Attitudes to the State of Israel and matters of justice in respect of the Palestinians.⁷

Jewish Identity and the Catholic Church

From the outset, Neuhaus underlines the need to engage with Jews and Judaism according to current Jewish self-understanding and not allowing a Jewishness of our imagining to replace the Jew of reality in the modern world. This is why the Land is critical to dialogue with Jews, because Israel has become central to their identity. This echoes the words of the Anglican theologian Kenneth Cragg who notes that for most Jews, Israel is how they find their place in the world.

There is however a disjunction between how Jews see themselves and how Christians understand Jews: Christians seek dialogue with Jews through the lens of faith and religious belief, whereas Jews seek to engage with the world as a people and as a nation. In making this crucial point we are led to the recognition that the Jew of past centuries was a very different Jew from the one whom the church engages with in a post Shoah context. The Jew of the past was a figure of contempt, blamed for the death of Christ, and became conflated with the myth of Wandering Jew.⁸ However the Jew of today is primarily a member of a people who seeks to apprehend its place in the contemporary world. Crucially, this involves not only a theological response to anti-Semitism and the Shoah but also a need to take seriously how Zionism relates to contemporary Jewish self-understanding and issues of "Land" are unavoidable.

⁵ Marchadour, Alain and Neuhaus, David. *The Land, the Bible and History: Toward a Land that I Will Show You*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007)

⁶ Neuhaus, David. *Writings from the Holy Land*, (Jerusalem: Studium Theologicum Salesianum Publications, 2017)

⁷ These themes are drawn from Neuhaus' 2009 article, "Moments of crisis and grace: Jewish-Catholic relations in 2009," *One In Christ*, volume 43/2 (2009), 6-24

⁸ Marchadour & Neuhaus, p.121f; see further P.Colwell: "The Return of the Wandering Jew: The State of Israel as a Theological Challenge for Jewish-Christian relations", in *Current Dialogue* 58, November 2016, pp.22-28

Salvation of the Jews

The “teaching of contempt” carried with it a presumption that the Jew was condemned unless they repented and were baptized. However, in light of Vatican II this matter required re-examination. Should the Church proclaim the Gospel to the Jews or should Judaism be understood as a parallel means towards salvation? This is not a new question, for Jews as well as Christians. Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), for instance wrestles with this particular question in his seminal work “The Star of Redemption” where spoke of the parallel and complementary aspects of the two faiths, with Judaism as the burning core of the star with the rays emanating forth as Christianity, the Church in the world. He understood the relationship as a complementary and even asymbiotic relationship that was essential for both traditions until a full eschatological reconciliation.⁹ It is also part of the discussion around the nature of Covenant in Jewish-Christian relations in writers such James Parkes, John Pawlikowski and David Novak. For Catholic theology this question hinges on Nostra Aetate’s assertion that the Gospel of salvation sprang from the Jewish people, that God “holds the Jews most dear (and) does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues – such is the witness of the Apostle”.

This question appears in different places within Neuhaus’ work. An important issue in this regard is shared scripture, and this can be viewed as *praeparatio eschatologica* rather than *praeparatio evangelica*. He quotes Walter Kaspar in support of this, who emphasized that Jews do not need to become Christians to be saved, but rather continue in faithfulness to God’s commands.¹⁰ And Kaspar elsewhere speaks of the Jews as the “sacrament of otherness”.

However, it is Neuhaus’ article on the events of 2009 where these questions are placed within the wider geo-political context.¹¹ The fundamental question that is posed is whether during the Papacy of Benedict XVI there was a rowing back from the Second Vatican Council towards a conservative retrenchment. In relation to the specific issue of the Jewish people and salvation this becomes a live issue for Neuhaus when these developments are read in the light of the declaration of Pope John Paul II, that the covenant with the Jews is not revoked.¹²

⁹ See further: Franz Rosenzweig, The Star of Redemption, University of Notre Dame Press, 1970 edition; Michael Barnes, Traces of the Other, Chennai 2000; David Novak, Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification, Oxford 1989

¹⁰ Neuhaus, Writings from the Holy Land, pp.155ff. It should be also noted that Walter Kaspar has spoken on Judaism as a “sacrament of otherness”, Address on the 37th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate, October 28th 2002.

¹¹ Moments of crisis and grace: Jewish-Catholic relations in 2009, " One In Christ, volume 43/2 (2009),

¹² John McDade: “The Continuing Validity of the Jewish Covenant: A Christian Perspective”, and Francesco Rossi de Gasperis: “Two Testaments – One Covenant”, in The Month, February 2000

This was widely understood by Jews (and many Catholics) at the time as meaning that there is no requirement to convert to Christianity in order to attain salvation. David Novak for instance, in his recent book on Zionism, states that Christians should believe that the Jewish covenant is not replaced, but merely supplemented by Christianity, implying that Christianity is the covenant of the Gentiles.¹³

However during the Benedict Papacy the theological implications of this came to be teased out when the Bishops' Conferences in Germany and the USA clarified the Church's teaching on the Jews and salvation. The Central Committee of German Catholics in 2009, followed the similar US Jewish-Catholic document of 2002 ("Reflections on Covenant and Mission") which argued that missions to the Jews was an abrogation of the Jewish covenant. The German Bishops however took the view that this was tantamount to a denial of the universality of the Gospel. Similarly the Catholic Bishops in the United States did not rule out evangelization of the Jewish people but argued that it will "take an utterly unique form, precisely because God has already established a particular relationship with the Jewish people."¹⁴

Neuhaus notes both the nuancing and clarifying nature of this comment. Furthermore Jewish understandings of divine revelation are always incomplete. So whilst God does not change his mind regarding the Covenant with the Jewish people – for this would render God capricious – the Church also believes that the fulfillment of the Covenant is only found in Jesus Christ. However dialogue must never be used as a means of proselytism and whilst this assertion is welcomed by Jews, Neuhaus notes the persistent tension within Jewish-Christian relations, namely that Catholics come into dialogue with a conviction that Jew and Gentile alike are saved by Jesus Christ.¹⁵ This point bears comparison with that of Bishop Kenneth Cragg, who takes issue with his fellow Anglican James Parkes and his seminal work stresses dual covenant. He suggests that Parkes, and those that have subsequently followed his line of argument, have rewritten the New Testament and the Creeds to suggest that Christ's salvific acts are directed only

¹³ David Novak, Zionism and Judaism, Cambridge 2015, p.143f

¹⁴ Neuhaus, One in Christ pp.15ff; for further discussion on the relationship between the Jewish Covenant and Christianity, see John T.Pawlikowski: "The Search for a New Paradigm for the Jewish-Christian Relationship: A Response to Michael Signer", in J.T.Pawlikowski & Hayim Goren Perelmuter, Reinterpreting Revelation and Tradition: Jews and Christians in Conversation. Franklin, Wisc.: Sheed and Ward, 2000. See also Pawlikowski "Vatican II on the Jews: A Dramatic Example of Theological Development" Presented to the 1999 Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Miami, Florida; Eugene J.Fisher: "The Evolution of a Tradition: From Nostra Aetate to the 'Notes'", in Fifteen Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue 1970-1985, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988; Elliot N.Dorff: "The Covenant as the Key: A Jewish Theology of Jewish-Christian Relations" in Leon Klenicki (ed), Toward a Theological Encounter of Christianity. New York: Paulist Press 1991, pp.43-66; Edward Kessler, An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations. Cambridge, 2010, pp.170-190

¹⁵ Neuhaus: "Moments of crisis and grace: Jewish-Catholic relations in 2009," One In Christ, volume 43/2 (2009), p.17

towards Gentiles and not the Jews.¹⁶ Meanwhile Christianity is born out of an abandonment of the religious exceptionalism that Judaism represents, but not to become a more open form of Judaism but a new community, the Church, which incorporates Jewish understandings of Covenant.

In his discussion of Cragg's approach to Judaism, Baptist theologian Nicholas J. Wood characterizes Cragg's position as one of a theology of fulfillment, rather than replacement.¹⁷ This observation might lead us to ask whether the clarifications of the implications of *Nostra Aetate* discussed hitherto suggest a move from theologies of replacement towards fulfillment rather than dual covenant.

For Neuhaus an important question is whether these developments on matters of covenant reflect a conservative retrenchment under the Benedict papacy? Neuhaus prefers the view that this is merely the outworking of the theological implications of *Nostra Aetate* and what it means to assert that the Covenant with the Jews is not revoked. This point echoes the point of Gavin d'Costa that the Second Vatican Council did not rule out mission to Jews but implicitly endorsed it whilst ruling out coercion and the targeting of one faith over another. Furthermore, d'Costa argues that the claims that the Vatican Council endorsed the view that Judaism is a means of salvation, that Judaism is a valid God given covenant and that missions to the Jews are illegitimate are tendentious as they do not appear in the documents of the Council. Doctrines however do develop and this is reflected in Neuhaus's treatment of the developments regarding salvation during the Benedict papacy.¹⁸

There is, it must be noted, a political as well as theological, significance to the salvific status of the Jewish people, due to the extent that Judaism is now largely defined through Zionist fulfillment in the Land. But this understanding of Jewish salvation through Zionist intentionality has never quite shaken off the charge that it was a negation of the divine, a salvation by human hand. Nevertheless, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 (and its military successes, most notably in

¹⁶ Other theologians have attempted to express a theological recognition of the ongoing validity of the Jewish covenant. This has included Monika Hellwig who speaks of Christ opening the door to enable Gentiles to encounter the God of Abraham. Paul van Buren, who had argued that Christianity had eradicated Jewish elements from its theology in replacing it with a pagan-Christian tradition, culminating in the Holocaust; Christianity it is suggested should return to Judaism and see the two traditions as branches of a single covenant. For Hellwig the issue however is not so much whether one adopts a one or two covenant model but whether Judaism has been superseded by Christianity or whether Judaism has a continuing validity. See further John T. Pawlikowski: "The Search for a New Paradigm for the Jewish-Christian Relationship: A Response to Michael Signer", in J.T. Pawlikowski & Hayim Goren Perelmuter, Reinterpreting Revelation and Tradition: Jews and Christians in Conversation. Franklin, Wisc.; Sheed and Ward, 2000

¹⁷ Nicholas J. Wood, Faiths and Faithfulness: Pluralism, Dialogue and Mission in the Work of Kenneth Cragg and Lesslie Newbigin. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009, pp.101-113

¹⁸ Gavin d'Costa, Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims. Oxford 2014, pp.113-159

1967), were viewed by many Jews as evidence of the saving hand of God. The “stepping back into history” that Zionism represented was a departure from the quietist tone of Judaism hitherto. Rabbi David Hartman, an influential figure in late 20th century religious Zionist thought observes:

“Israel’s return to history as a political community constitutes a proclamation to the world that Judaism and the Jewish people cannot be reduced to a spiritual abstraction. When Judaism manifests itself as the way of life of a particular historical people, as it can do in Israel today, it is a permanent obstacle to any theological view that perceives Judaism as the superseded forerunner of the universalist conceptions of Christian and Islamic monotheism.”¹⁹

The image of the European Jew poring over the Torah and Talmud, awaiting the Messianic age, is one reacted against, and rejected by Zionist thought. Thus Messianic longing becomes actualized in political liberation and statehood, and this represents a pronounced theological challenge both to how Christianity understands and relates to Judaism, but also in terms of matters of theological language concerning “salvation”, “Israel”, “Zion” and also matters of eschatology given the implicit abrogation of eschatology that many schools of Zionist thought represents. It is here that Zionism owes a debt to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who emphasis upon the “will to power” and the importance of myth in culture and civilization more than echo the early Zionist spirit: a movement that sought to free Jews from assimilation and anti-Semitism in Europe and to transform a compliant and emasculated people into one that struggled against history, political power, even the land itself and especially the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, in order to regain an ethnic masculinity. Nietzsche’s appeal to early Zionists contains an inherent logic. Nietzsche came to believe that post-Enlightenment Europe had outgrown all that Christianity had taught and represented.²⁰ Zionists too were reacting against a Christian Europe that held them in chains for too long. It is Zionism’s blend of religion and nationalism, and of its absorption of the religious into the political that represents one of the most significant, though often under-acknowledged, challenges for Jewish-Christian dialogue. To put this point differently, we might say that the “teaching of contempt” has had a theological and a political price to pay.

These questions and challenges set the context for the Jewish-Christian encounter in contemporary times, framed as they are by a post-Shoah context and the realization of messianic longing in the form of Zionism as realized political ideology.

¹⁹ David Hartman, *A Living Covenant*, p.304

²⁰ See further the work of Israeli historian David Ohana, *Political Theologies in the Holy Land: Israeli Messianism and its critics*, Routledge 2010; *Modernism and Zionism*, Palgrave Macmillian, 2012; *Origins of Israeli Mythology: Neither Canaanites nor Crusaders*, Cambridge 2012 (English translation), pp.46ff

Can Catholics and Jews write history together?

Another important issue is the status of history and narrative. Neuhaus believes that the ability to speak of history together, rather than in competing or negating narratives, is central to the search for reconciliation. This is true for Palestinians and Israelis, and it is true also for Jews and Catholics. For Jews how history is told is important to matters of identity, especially as they relate to the Land.

The experience of Jews and land is a crucial issue for much of Zionist thought. Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, Jews were a landless people often viewed as alien in the contexts in which they were found. Leon Pinsker, one of the founding fathers of Zionism also observed:

“To the living, the modern Jew is dead, to the native-born he is a stranger, to the long-settled a vagabond, to the wealthy a beggar, to the poor a millionaire and exploiter, to the citizen a man without a country, to all classes a hated competitor.”²¹

The creation of the State of Israel, and thus Jewish return to landedness, as well as “return to history” is critical to Jewish self-understanding. Likewise matters relating to the Jewish experience during the Shoah, and the role of the church, are also of direct relevance to Jewish encounters in the contemporary world. The contested legacy of Pope Pius XII leads Neuhaus to ask whether it could ever be possible for Jews and Christians to write history together? Whilst the history of Jews and Christians in Europe has been “submerged in a valley of tears”, the story of the Church constitutes sacred history for Catholics. Here this “sacred history” collides with alternative versions of Pius as lacking in courage, and even compassion, to act against the Shoah. Whilst noting the tendency amongst Pius’ defenders to engage in hagiography, he points out that the frequent critics of the then Pontiff also lack critical reflection. The very existence of the Shoah, Neuhaus suggests, is a “resounding accusation against the Pope, the Church and the world”²² however it should be possible, and desirable, to document what the Pope did at the time, to write and own this history together as Jews and Christians, as a vital task on the path to reconciliation, friendship and trust. Edward Kessler likewise stresses the importance of Jews and Christians remembering that in Nazi occupied countries churches were often targeted, and that the future Pope John XIII provided baptismal certificates for Hungarian Jews

²¹ words of Leon Pinsker (1821-1891) quoted in Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons*, London: Penguin Books, 1971, 1983 edition, p.70.

²² Neuhaus: "Moments of crisis and grace: Jewish-Catholic relations in 2009," *One In Christ*, volume 43/2 (2009), p.20

in a bid to protect them from Nazi persecution.²³ This would echo Neuhaus desire for the writing of a common history, and it remains a critical issue that has resonances with other aspects of Jewish-Christian engagement. An important question however is whether such mutual historical writing would still be a sacred history?

Kenneth Cragg has spoken of the problems associated with the sacralization of nationhood (in relation to Israel), and this poses the question as to whether history, as told within a religious or theological framework, seems destined to take on the vestment of the sacred. This is as true of Judaism's telling the story of the Shoah and of foundation of the state of Israel (including, and especially its narrative about its conflicts in 1948 and 1967) as the story of the Catholic Church in history.

Here we are left with important questions to ponder. In particular, how does "sacred history" (i.e. the theological understanding of the place of the church within history) intersect and dialogue with political narratives of land that have taken on the vestiges of the sacred, albeit with an overt to secular language. A second question is whether as history written together by Jews and Catholics means that the writing of "sacred history" has had Jewish participation in the process of its writing?

The State of Israel and the Palestinian Question

This last point brings face to face with one of the defining question concerning Jewish-Christian, dialogue, that of understandings of the State of Israel but also the failure, thus far, of Palestinian self-determination. It is because Israel is so central to their self-understanding that Jews will inevitably come back to Christian perceptions of Israel. Thus Neuhaus asks "does the State of Israel take on theological significance within the dialogue with the Jews? How does the modern State of Israel relate, if at all, to the Bible? Concomitantly what should the position of the Church be in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, a part of whom are Catholics?"

A consistent complaint from Jewish dialogue partners is that the Catholic Church has been reticent in recognizing Israel as integral to Jewish identity. Neuhaus identifies four reasons why this has been the case. The first of these is a wariness of theologizing the political which brings with it some of the dangers that are associated with fundamentalist movements, such as Christian Zionism.²⁴ The

²³ Edward Kessler, "I am Joseph, Your Brother": A Jewish Perspective on Christian-Jewish Relations since Nostra Aetate No.4", in *Theological Studies* 74 (2013), pp.48-72

²⁴ For an in depth analysis of Christian Zionism see: *Land of Promise? An Anglican exploration of Christian attitudes to the Holy Land, with special reference to Christian Zionism*, Anglican Consultative Council, 2012

second reason concerns the ongoing conflict in the region - unresolved issues relating to Palestinian refugees and Palestinian nationhood, Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the building of settlements and land which seizures have all impacted negatively upon Palestinians, including Catholics as well as Eastern Orthodox and other Christian communities. Thirdly there is the matter of different readings of the Biblical land. Catholics and Jews read the Bible differently in relation to the land.²⁵ Here Neuhaus makes the point that Israel is understood as having a wider meaning than merely “Jews in the Land”, which is how it is understood in Judaism. In Catholic theology Israel also means the Church, and the Biblical concept of land is a place of transformation through the Resurrection, where the land that is called holy is not restricted to Biblical lands “but rather comes to signify the face of an earth transformed by Jesus’ victory over sin and death.”²⁶ This point is also reflected in current Palestinian theologies of land, most notably that of the Lutheran scholar Munther Isaac, who maintains that Christianity has universalized understandings of “Land” with a call and expectation to seek justice in any land where Christian witness and mission are exercised.²⁷

Finally in this list of four reasons why the Catholic Church is reticent to recognize the place of Israel in Jewish self-understanding is the different understandings of Jewish vocation. This is where Neuhaus expresses his anxiety with Zionism. He asserts that many Catholics are ill-at-ease with notions of Jewish return to the land and that since Vatican II the Church has fought against anti-Semitism “so that Jews might find their home and their security among the nations of the world and fulfill their historic vocation.” He concludes this point with the distinction drawn by Pope Benedict XVI on differentiating between the Church’s relationship to the Jews (spiritual and religious) and the attitudes towards the State of Israel (political) as offering a coherent distinction within dialogue, noting in conclusion that Catholic cannot ignore the concerns of justice.

The visit of Pope Benedict to the Holy Land in 2009 was a significant milestone in Jewish-Catholic relations. During that visit the Pope visited the Western Wall, and Edward Kessler echoes the perception of many Jews that this contributed to a final repudiation of a “theology of perpetual wandering”.²⁸

Meanwhile the Pope also spoke, during his visit of the basic link between the Church and Israel, but also did so whilst in Jordan, a predominantly Muslim

²⁵ “Moments of crisis and grace: Jewish-Catholic relations in 2009,” *One In Christ*, volume 43/2 (2009), pp.22ff

²⁶ Moments of crisis and grace: Jewish-Catholic relations in 2009,” *One In Christ*, volume 43/2 (2009), p.23

²⁷ Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land*. Langham Monographs, 2015

²⁸ Kessler, op.cit, *Theological Studies* 74 (2013)

country, a not insignificant detail. Pope Benedict in doing this laid down a challenge to much Arab Christian discourse that seeks to deny the connection of Judaism to the Land, and which prefers to lay emphasis upon a close Christian-Muslim symbiosis.

This Christian-Muslim emphasis in Palestinian writing is fundamental. Father Rafiq Khoury – a Latin Catholic Priest – suggests that relations with Muslims is a particular vocation for Middle East Christians. Yet he sees dangers in attempting to create a separate Christian identity in the region that is homogenous in character but rather needs to develop a truly ecumenical identity within a predominately Islamic culture.²⁹ However, this trend is most pronounced in the work of the Lutheran Pastor Mitri Raheb, who underlines the umbilical nature of Christianity's relationship to Islam by suggesting that the Qur'an is the Bible inculturated into Arab culture. Raheb suggests that Muhammad's experiences in Medina echo those of St. Paul in his disagreements with Jews regarding the legacy of Abraham and whether it was for the Jews alone.³⁰ All of this raises important questions – how Western Christian theology should engage with Palestinian Christian thought in all its diversity, and how engagement with Jews and Muslims is impacted.

Echoing Pope Benedict, Neuhaus has noted how anti-Judaism is a significant part of Middle Eastern discourse and whilst it is often suggested, as Raheb does, that this due to Arabic being the common factor, such a narrative is also found in non-Arabic speaking societies such as Turkey and Iran, and therefore Neuhaus concludes, this anti-Judaic discourse is forged out of Islam rather than Arabic. And we might further note that in terms of classical Islam, Jews were the primary religious other, something that came to be a significant theme in the work of influential Islamist thinkers of the mid-twentieth century including, and especially, Sayyid Qutb.³¹

To speak of Jewish-Catholic relations implies that there is merely a single discourse. Neuhaus however points out that there are at least two distinct paradigms with regard to the Jewish-Catholic encounter. The first is the more familiar Western European narrative of Jewish minority status within a

²⁹ Samuel J. Kuruvilla: "Theologies of Liberation in Latin America and Palestine-Israel in Comparative Perspective: Contextual Differences and Practical Similarities", in *HLS 9.1 (2010)* 51-69

³⁰ Mitri Raheb: "Contextualizing the Scripture: Towards a New Understanding of the Qur'an – An Arab Christian Perspective", in *Studies in World Christianity*, October 1997, pp.180-201; see also Leonard Marsh: "Whose Holy Land?", in *Studies in World Christianity*, ??

³¹ See further: Ronald L. Nettle, *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations*, Oxford, 1995; Neil Robinson: "Sayyid Qutb's Attitude to Christianity: Sura 9.29-35 in Fi Zilal Al-Quran", in Lloyd-Ridgeon, *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*. London: MacMillan 2001; P. Colwell: "To Defend Faith? Themes and Concepts in the Writings of Sayyid Qutb and Rowan Williams", in *Living Stones Years Book 2015: Martyrdom and Christian response to conflict in the Middle East*. *Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust*, 2015

powerful, and often anti-Semitic, Christian ecclesial and cultural context. This is the narrative against which *Nostra Aetate* reacted and sought to speak a different language as how the church speaks of the Jews and Judaism. Jews were the outsiders in the European story, blamed for killing Christ, and often blamed for social calamity. In this paradigm the Shoah is the main reference point for Jewish-Catholic relations and the creation of the State of Israel the means by which Jews return to history and claim their own destiny.

However a second narrative is that which arises out of a Middle-Eastern, Arab narrative where the main reference point is the “Nakhba” (literally “calamity”) that ensued from the creation of Israel as a Jewish State. This meant that for the first time Christians, including Catholics, have lived as a minority under Jewish political power. This alone makes Israel-Palestine a unique context for Jewish-Catholic relations, what Neuhaus calls a reversal of power relations. Thus the daily reality of Israeli occupation means that the nature of the dialogue is profoundly different from that within the European context.³² However in this context it is the primacy of Islam in Middle Eastern society that holds and forms the narrative. Yet, as Neuhaus and Jamal Khader observe in their 2005 article, Catholics of the region (Latin and Eastern) seek to engage with Jews as they understand themselves within the context of the Holy Land, which is in marked contrast to *Nostra Aetate* which avoids matters of the Land. Yet this is within the significant challenges of the acute political situation faced by Palestinian Muslims and Christians.³³

The paradox however is that the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 contributed to the de-pluralization of the Arab world, where once vibrant Jewish communities in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen almost completely disappear as a result of the geo-political changes that the creation of Israel set in train.³⁴ The often neglected experience of Jewish Arabs, many of whom found themselves expelled from lands where they had existed for centuries, is another aspect of this depluralization. These communities often had a deep engagement with Eastern Christian communities in those contexts, as well as Islam. Arriving in Israel they brought with them this experience of lost pluralism.³⁵ Neuhaus further points out that the only country where there is a

³² David Neuhaus: “Catholic-Jewish Relations in the State of Israel: Theological Perspectives”, in Anthony O’Mahony and John Flannery (eds), The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East, London: Melisande 2010, pp.237-251

³³ Jamal Khader & David Neuhaus: “A Holy Land Context for *Nostra Aetate*”, in Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations, Boston College Volume 1 (2005-2006): pp. 67-88 <http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol1/iss1/art8>

³⁴ Neuhaus, Writings from the Holy Land, p.189

³⁵ See further: Bernard Lewis, The Jews of Islam, Princeton University Press, 1984; Martin Gilbert, In Ishmael’s House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands, Yale University Press, 2011; Malka Hillel Shulewitz (Ed), The Forgotten Millions: The Modern Jewish Exodus from Arab Lands, London: Continuum, 1999

developing dialogue between Judaism and Eastern Christianity is Israel.³⁶ However, and additionally, the experience of Arab Jews points to how Israel has radically reshaped religious and cultural identity, which points to how religious self-understanding can reshape and redefine the geo-political status quo. It is within this context that Catholic-Jewish dialogue is unfolding and may prove to be of critical self-importance.³⁷

These two narratives of the Jewish-Christian encounter are powerfully illustrated by the perception of the Jew in the European as compared to the Middle Eastern context. The European Christian sees the Jew primarily as the victim of a misreading of the Christian tradition - the Middle Eastern Catholic sees the Jew often as a soldier, policeman or settler. Furthermore, Christians of the region do not see themselves as sharing the same experience of anti-Semitism that is felt in European Churches, existing in a context of Jewish dominance.³⁸ This mirrors the contrast, even conflict, between the centrality of either of the Shoah or Nakhba. Notwithstanding this juxtaposition, Neuhaus notes that the official documents of the Catholic Church afford a pre-eminence to its relationship to Judaism, both in terms of the Jewishness of Jesus, the place and authority of the Old Testament and what the New Testament says about the ongoing validity of the Jewish covenant.³⁹

Neuhaus' juxtaposing of these two anti-Judaic trajectories – that the Jew belongs neither in Europe nor the Middle East – is revealing in terms of much of Jewish, and particularly Zionist, consciousness where these two anti-Judaic narratives are often conflated and understood as having common roots. To return to Neuhaus' starting point with regard to Judaism, self-understanding is the important starting point for Catholic relations to Judaism, and critically the sense of belonging and land are central to this and why narratives, old and new, that reject Jewish legitimacy in the land (whether in Europe or in the Middle East) are so problematic for Jews.

Yet matters of justice need to take centre stage within the Jewish-Catholic encounter, otherwise the emphasis upon “common heritage” will fail to see the issues as they confront Palestinian Christians. This is most sharply demonstrated when it comes to the Old Testament as a clear example of shared heritage, with the risk that the Biblical Israel will be confused with the modern State of Israel. It is for this reason that Palestinian Christian thought and religious practice has sometimes avoided use of the Old Testament. The former Latin Patriarch Michel

³⁶ Neuhaus, Writings, p.197

³⁷ See Neuhaus' article “Shimon Balas – a Jewish Arab at 80”, in Writings from the Holy Land, pp.97-108

³⁸ Jamal Khader & David Neuhaus: “A Holy Land Context for Nostra Aetate”, in Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations, Boston College Volume 1 (2005-2006): pp. 67-88 <http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol1/iss1/art8>

³⁹ Neuhaus, Writings, pp.188-191

Sabbah was one of the first writers to identify a problem that exists within Palestinian hermeneutics, whereby difficulties with particular texts could lead towards a new Marcionism, the early Christian dualist belief that rejected the Old Testament and the God of Israel, denounced by Tertullian as a heresy in 208CE.

Be that as it may, Palestinian Christians are left with significant changes with regard to the shared language of both Biblical Israel and the modern Jewish State that bears that name. Kenneth Cragg underlines the critical issue:

“How should we read now the ardent prophecies of ‘the land’ and return from exile? In particular, how should Arab Christians do so in the painful ambiguity of ‘blessing the Lord God of Israel’ when the Israel is that of Menachem Begin, Moshe Sharon, Rabbi Kahane and the Ansar internment camps – not the Israel of Zechariah the priest or of Luke the Christian in their Benedictus?”⁴⁰

These hermeneutical challenges are relevant to the historical narrative because of the way in which, as Cragg puts it, “statehood is sacrilized” which he declares cannot be unilaterally undertaken in the modern world.⁴¹ How key texts from the Hebrew Scriptures are understood within Judaism, and how Christian writers *assume* they are understood by Jews, is a critical issue both in terms of how scripture relates to history and whether it has religious or secular status within Judaism. Rabbi David Hartman for example argues that for secular Zionists (who were the founding fathers and mothers of Israel), the Biblical narrative offered an anthropological framework rather than a divine directive:

“It was not valued as a way of discovering how to live one’s daily life in the presence of God but rather as a way of discovering and legitimating new expressions of Jewish peoplehood”.⁴²

Thus the language of “Israel” becomes an important issue to be addressed in Jewish-Christian relations precisely because of its theo-political ambiguity.

Yet this is an issue that remains problematic within Jewish-Christian dialogue. Neuhaus illustrates this with an incident from the 2010 Synod for the Catholic Church in the Middle East when the Greek Catholic Archbishop Selim Bustros raised concerns about the confusion between conflating the Biblical and political language which led in turn to a very public demand by Rabbi David Rosen that

⁴⁰ Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, p.237

⁴¹ Hermeneutics is also a critical issue for contemporary Palestinian writers, see M.Raheb (ed), *The Biblical Text in the Context of Occupation: Towards a new hermeneutics of liberation*, Bethlehem 2012

⁴² David Hartman, *Israelis and the Jewish Tradition: An Ancient People Debating its Future*. Yale University Press 2000, p.8

the Archbishop's remarks be repudiated by the Curia.⁴³ Rosen's remarks, it could be argued, illustrate a point of view of many within Judaism that are engaged in Jewish-Christian dialogue that fails to take adequate account of Arab Christian self-understanding and not to even acknowledge that there is an issue of concern in this regard. What Rabbi Rosen's remarks illustrate is the extent to which the Christian reference points in dialogue are framed within a Western discourse and how the emphasis of Eastern Christianity are not considered important enough to be of dialogical significance. This acute sense of being excluded from the broader dialogue is another important theme in Palestinian Christian writings, most vividly expressed in the world of Mitri Raheb who suggests that the recasting of Western Christian theology in a way that dispenses with replacement theology with regard to Judaism has in turn created a new-replacement theology whereby the Palestinian people are replaced by Israel:⁴⁴

A distinctive, if not unique, aspect of Neuhaus' writings concern the changing nature of Christianity within Israel itself. He has carefully charted the trends regarding Christian communities that came to Israel as a result of Eastern European migration where people of Christian faith have a Jewish family connection, Hebrew speaking (including Catholic) congregations, Messianic movements and those that have come as migrant workers or asylum seekers.⁴⁵ He identifies two significant challenges here. The first is with the transmission of the faith in a majority Jewish (and secular) context, with a trend (particularly amongst those of Eastern European heritage) to emigrate elsewhere (Western Europe and North America). The second challenge is an ecumenical one, for whilst amongst Palestinian (Arab) Christians there is a strong impulse towards what Neuhaus calls an "ecumenism of solidarity", there has been a resistance to acknowledging the fact of Christianity in Israel itself is increasingly plural. There are here divergent ecumenical trends in relation to Judaism. The Palestinian ecumenism of solidarity has often problematized Judaism, seeing it as lacking historical rootedness in the land and thus sees greater need to stress a closer familial relationship with Islam. Meanwhile many of the non-Arab Israeli Christians, seek greater integration and recognition with the State of Israel, seek a deeper understanding of Judaism, often wishing to emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus. Neuhaus' observation that ecumenism "thrives where political (or ideological) interests converge – pro Palestinian or pro Israeli" also points towards how inter-religious concerns impact at a deep level with emerging ecumenical identity.⁴⁶ However this ecumenical identity is one that finds its context in the Land: Land therefore matters in respect of Christian

⁴³ Neuhaus, Writings p.194

⁴⁴ Mitri Raheb: "Shaping Communities in times of Crises: Narratives of Land, people and Identities", www.mitriraheb.org

⁴⁵ For a detailed account see Neuhaus: "The Challenge of New forms of Christian Presence in the Holy Land", in *Tantur Fest*, p.133-145

⁴⁶ "So that they may be one" p.53

identity and theology, and this, I would suggest is a significant implication of Neuhaus' work.

Conclusion: Moments of Crisis and Grace

In the 2009 article that has already been mentioned, Neuhaus reflected upon events of that year and how they map the developing journey of Jewish-Catholic relations.⁴⁷ 2009 was a tumultuous year for Jewish-Catholic relations which had begun with Israel military action in Gaza and included controversies concerning the Fraternity of Pope Pius X⁴⁸ and the Williamson affair⁴⁹, along with matters already discussed in this paper, such as accounts of Pope Pius XII and his actions during the Shoah, matters relating to the mission amongst the Jews that arose from the clarifications from the Conferences of German and US Bishops, Israel-Vatican relations and ending with the visit by Pope Benedict to the Holy Land.

Neuhaus, noting that the word "crisis" has its roots in the Greek word κρίσις meaning judgment, decision or discernment. Thus the events of 2009 came to be seen as moments of "crisis and grace". Much of the necessity of "crisis" in Jewish-Catholic relations is the need to work through the implications of *Nostra Aetate*, and the documents of the Second Vatican Council, taking seriously the reality that the Jew of older Christian imagining is not the Jew of the 21st century. The Land is central to this crisis: Israel means that Jews are able to speak for themselves, no longer, in the words Kenneth Cragg "haunted by the trauma of homelessness." Yet, as Neuhaus shows, moments of crisis in the unfolding story of the Church's ancient relationship with Judaism, also move this story forward into insights of grace, but one where the lived experience of Christians in the Land is central and not peripheral.

This is a strikingly similar chord to that of Kenneth Cragg - he also saw the uniqueness of the place of Christianity in the Holy Land. He notes that for Christianity, being an incarnational faith, events and place have a sacramental quality. The sacraments are instituted in a place, with physical objects. Being born and existing in a place of sacramental institution gives a unique quality to Palestinian Christianity, and of course sacrament is also a means of grace:

"Such is the way of sacraments, and sacred geography can be one of them, the physical bespeaking the spiritual at the rendezvous with history...to be 'resident', however, as 'natives' are, is to be peculiarly in a privilege of grace. The

⁴⁷ Neuhaus: "Moments of crisis and grace: Jewish-Catholic relations in 2009," *One In Christ*, volume 43/2 (2009), 6-24

⁴⁸ The lifting of excommunication of four bishops, ordained by Mgr Marcel Lefebvre, the Fraternity having rejected the documents of the Second Vatican Council

⁴⁹ Bishop Williamson had cast doubt on aspects of the Holocaust

Palestinian Christian is born into the very precincts of faith. It will be the Christian answer from everywhere, local or distant, that we need the same tests of faith...namely justice, tragedy, vicarious experience and the way through suffering and reconciliation."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Kenneth Cragg, Palestine: The Prize and Price of Zion, London: Cassell, 1997, p.218f