

REVIEW

Richard Lux

The Jewish People, the Holy Land, and the State of Israel: A Catholic View

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Richard Lux's *The Jewish People, the Holy Land, and the State of Israel: A Catholic View* is a book long overdue. The author is an experienced participant in Christian-Jewish dialogue whose primary interest is theology, and the book covers a wide swath of complex topics, primarily from the Roman Catholic perspective. He has chapters on "Church Teaching on Jews and Judaism," "The Jewish People," "The Holy Land," and "The State of Israel." Lux also offers a brief synopsis of Palestinian (Christian) perspectives on Israel.

Much of the book is a crisp overview of material well-documented elsewhere. He reviews the now discredited hard supersessionist theologies that reigned in Christendom from the time of Augustine until the Second Vatican Council. He also discusses the transformation of those teachings, most prominently the current Church's affirmations of the religious value of Judaism after Jesus and the role that the Jewish people continue to play in God's sacred history, as well as the importance of both for Christian self-understanding. While this is familiar territory to inter-faith professionals, Lux's concise retelling carries enormous value. I know from speaking to innumerable audiences that young Christians today are unfamiliar with the toxic history of their church's teaching of contempt. (Lux quotes the famous line by Edward Flannery, in *The Anguish of the Jews*, about this history: "it was torn from Christian (and secular) books" [p. 1].) Christianity's modern theological *volte face* is also largely unknown even to historically oriented Jews who are generally knowledgeable about modern culture. As a result, both communities fail to truly appreciate the breathtaking changes the Church made in this area, which limits their abilities to advance substantive changes in the religious understanding of each other. About half a century after Vatican II, the widespread dissemination of *Nostra Aetate's* teachings remains the Church's most important challenge regarding this theology.

Lux also takes us on a brief tour of Christian covenantal theologies regarding Christianity's unresolved relationship with its elder brother (e.g., Are Jews and Christians members of the same covenant with God?), the Christian attachment to the Holy Land (e.g., Is it indeed a Holy Land, or more precisely just holy sites that were the scene of early Christian history?), and the Vatican's ongoing ruminations about its relationship with the State of Israel (Is the State simply a political entity or does its creation have religious significance?).

The book is most engaging when it suggests future directions for some of these topics. Outlining the notion of Holy Land as a "Sacrament of Encounter" (p. 59), Lux points to the need for Christians to move beyond the historical significance of the Holy Land and to probe its meaning for contemporary Christian experience and religious life. He also identifies the need for Christians to wrestle with the theological significance of the Jewish State of Israel, something that the

Anglican historian and theologian James Parkes called for shortly after Israel's establishment in 1948. Parkes' plea engendered little significant Christian discussion—largely, I believe, due to its political incorrectness at that time. Later, W.D. Davies, Marcel Dubois, and John Pawlikowski all expressed the need for a theological understanding of the Jewish return to Zion and a reconsideration of the religious significance of “landedness” for Christian thought. However, their overtures have not been taken up with great energy. Since Israel occupies such a central role in Jewish thought and self-identification for Jews today, I am hard-pressed to think of a topic other than the significance of a Jewish return to Zion that would be more fruitful in bringing Jews and Christians together in serious dialogue today. The author deserves credit for raising this topic anew for our serious reflection.

Lux draws close to Jewish theological sensibilities when he outlines the Holy Land as a Sacrament of Encounter and discusses a Theology of Presence that is a function not of history but of the living, personal human-divine encounter. For Jews, incarnation cannot be literal, but it is no less theologically or spiritually powerful. Jewish scriptures teach that God's earthly dwelling is among the covenantal people of Israel, for they are God's earthly sanctuary: “Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (Ex 25:8). Thus Jews, too, have “A Theology of Presence” that is centered in the Jewish homeland. Whether literally or metaphorically, the Land is the locus of God's incarnation and ongoing life with His children. If it is in the Land that a Christian can sense and relate to God most intensely and where God is most present, as Lux argues, then it is not unlike Jewish holiness built around covenantal values and promises that are best fulfilled in the Land. While Jews do not talk of a “sacramental experience” (p. 60), this idea of holiness of the Land deserves to resonate with theologically-sensitive Jews.

The book is slightly marred by occasional errors. For example, Jerusalem is not Islam's most important city, but third behind Mecca and Medina (p. 67), and Israel's Sinai Campaign was not fought in 1955, but in 1956 (p. 108). However, these blemishes are minor compared to the book's strong assets as a primer for the uninitiated and as a prophetic call for further theological reflection by Jews and Christians who have made the dialogue a central part of their spiritual life.

On its finest level, Richard Lux's *The Jewish People, the Holy Land, and the State of Israel: A Catholic View* is an invitation. It is a gift that merits acceptance, and its challenge should be taken up and nurtured. Let us hope that unlike Parkes' call, Lux's book finds receptive hearts and minds, and that it succeeds in raising our awareness of the high stakes both communities have in rethinking the Jewish People, the Holy Land, and the State of Israel.