Looking Unto the Hidden Zion:  
A Christian Appreciation of the Holy Land

Henry Novello*

In his celebrated work The Land, Walter Brueggemann maintains that the land promised to Abraham by YHWH is a way of organizing biblical theology. He is critical of the dominant categories of contemporary biblical theology which have been existentialist or mighty deeds of God in history formulations. The main problem with these two approaches is that they have ‘distracted us from seeing that this God is committed to this land and that his promise for his people is always his land.’ The inordinate stress on covenant between YHWH and his people, to the neglect of land, is a peculiarly Christian temptation that is reflected in the ‘spiritualizing’ tendency of Christian faith. On the understanding that Jesus Christ marks ‘the end of the law’ (Rom 10:4) and ‘all the promises of God find their Yes in him’ (2 Cor 1:20), and Pentecost marks the fulfilment of the words spoken by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21), the religion of Judaism with its promise of land tends to lose its divinely-appointed character as the focus shifts to the special character of the ‘new’ Spirit which is now proffered to all the families of the earth. This Christian emphasis is reinforced by the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE by the Romans, which is interpreted as a God-given sign that the Temple is no longer required because the Body of Christ is the new Temple of encounter between divinity and humanity (cf. Mk 15:38). What remains of the religion of Judaism in the minds of most Christians is its sacred books which serve merely as background to the much anticipated coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and the new age of the Spirit.

The intention of this essay is to contend that the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ does not make Judaism and the ‘mystery of Israel’ redundant. On the

* Henry Novello is currently an Honorary Visiting Scholar at The Flinders University of South Australia, School of Theology. He taught Systematic Theology at The University of Notre Dame (Fremantle) for five years and has published articles in Gregorianum, Pacifica, Colloquium, and Compass. His special field of interest is eschatology.


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contrary, it will be suggested that the glorified Body of Jesus Christ cannot be properly thought without reference to the chosen land and the city of Jerusalem which Jesus acknowledges in the Gospel story as the place associated with the destiny of Israel (Lk 13:33-34; 19:41). Once it is appreciated that Jewish Scripture has the character of ‘storied place,’ that is, a place which has special meaning because of God’s history of covenant lodged there, which is captured by the name ‘Zion,’ then Jewish Scripture must not be regarded merely as background to the Christian story but rather the concrete ground in which it takes root and is continually nourished.

This essay is structured in three sections that are designed to support the foregoing proposition. The first part will discuss the issue of the covenant from the standpoint of the coming together of right place, right time, and right people, as well as from the standpoint of God’s ‘election’ of Abraham and the land of Canaan. The second part, which is the crux of this essay, will identify some important theological issues that serve to highlight the enduring, special character of Israel. On the basis of the theological issues raised, the third and final section will briefly discuss an appropriate form of Zionism that is congruent with the Christ-event, upholds the mystery of Israel, and will serve to promote critical dialogue between Jews and Christians.

The Confluence of Right Place, Right Time and Right People

The distinction that Brueggemann makes between storied ‘place’ and mere ‘space’ is supported by Gerhard Lohfink’s reflections on why the salvation of the world requires the ‘concrete place’ that is Israel. Lohfink asks the basic question, Why begin God’s ‘silent revolution’ (Gen 12:1-3) that will turn everything toward salvation in Palestine, of all places? Why not begin the revolution among more obvious candidates, such as the Egyptians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Etruscans, or the Inca? In his response, Lohfink discusses the coming together into a single constellation of ‘the right place, the right time, and the right people,’ which includes the concept of election. The fact that God starts in a small and inconspicuous way is true not only of Abraham but also of the land. The land of Canaan has little or no significance in respect of size, but when its geographical location is considered its place in the world no longer

2. Brueggemann, *The Land*, 3-4, distinguishes between ‘place’ and ‘space.’
3. The works of Jewish scholars on the Gospel story are particularly informative in respect of reading the story of Jesus from a thoroughly Jewish perspective. Martin Buber, for instance, wrote about Jesus, ‘I am more than ever certain that a great place belongs to Jesus in Israel’s history of faith’ (*Two Types of Faith*, 13); Joseph Klausner in the conclusion to his book on Jesus wrote, ‘In his ethical code there is a sublimity, distinctiveness, and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code’ (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 414); and Geza Vermes acknowledges the special character of Jesus’ Jewishness when he claims that Jesus should be placed in ‘the venerable company of the Devout, the ancient Hasidim’ (*Jesus the Jew*, 223).
5. Ibid., 32.
appears insignificant, for it is uniquely situated. In The Book of Ezekiel, the Lord God says that he has set Jerusalem ‘in the centre of the nations, with countries round about her’ (Ezek 5:5). The land is truly in the centre of the nations in as much as it lies at the axis of three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa) with a plethora of different cultures, and it lies between two seas (the Mediterranean and the Red Sea) that opened it to the major trade routes of the world. Precisely because of its unique geographic location, all the great powers of the ancient East sought control of this strategic piece of land.

As a nation, then, Israel was constantly forced to interact with other nations, with their cultures and religions. This inevitable contact with other nations ‘must have sharpened their understanding and their powers of discernment’ in respect of what it means to be the people of God. At the same time, however, this contact posed the constant threat of apostasy and the temptation to manage the land ‘like all the other nations’ (1 Sam 8:5, 19-20). But the miracle of Israel’s faith is that it was able not to surrender to the impressive religions of the nations that surrounded it—even in the midst of crises and catastrophes, such as the Babylonian Exile, Israel managed to cling to its peculiar faith rooted in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. There is ample evidence in Jewish Scripture of contact with other cultures (e.g. Canaanite myth, Egyptian wisdom, Persian Zoroastrianism, and Hellenistic philosophy), but these imported materials are always placed within the framework of Jewish faith which persistently asserts the sovereignty of YHWH, the one God, ruler over nature and history, who has entered into covenant relationship with Israel, for the sake of the world’s salvation.

The reason why the land of Israel is the right place is intelligible enough, but a more difficult question is, ‘Why was God so late in beginning salvation history with Abraham?’ The high cultures of the ancient East that preceded the emergence of Israel were centuries older and much more impressive than the culture of Israel, so why did not God begin this new work of salvation with them? Lohfink responds that this is part of God’s design in as much as the late origins of Israel form ‘the condition for the possibility of the new.’ This is to say that only when the cultures of the ancient East had reached their zenith with respect to intellectual thought and the development of social systems, could these be taken up and critiqued by Israel’s own peculiar character as the chosen people destined to carry out their divinely-appointed mission in the chosen land. This is apparent in that the founding event of Jewish faith is the Exodus—Israel’s unique character is forged in the exodus from Egyptian society that ‘used religion to fortify existing relationships of domination.’ In light of the Exodus, YHWH reveals himself as the One who does not legitimate existing social

6. Ibid., 33.
7. Ibid., 34.
8. Ibid.
conditions, but acts redemptively to liberate his people and pave the way for the creation of a new society centred on the Torah.

The right place and the right time amounts to nothing, of course, without the right people who would willingly accept and commit themselves to living out the truth of the Torah. A Jewish legend tells of how the Torah was offered to all the nations, but only Israel was prepared to place its trust in God and carry out the divine mission of the Torah.\(^9\) The conclusion to the legend corresponds to the way Abraham responds in faith to God’s command to leave his country and go to the land that God will show him.\(^{10}\) Israel’s election as the people of God is not to be regarded as something for its own sake, as is made abundantly clear in Moses’ address to the people at the boundary crossing of the Jordan. The tradition of Deuteronomy is placed at this momentous juncture when Israel listens to Moses speak about the new existence of Israel in the land promised to Abraham. Central to Moses’ speech is not only the theme of promise, but also the motif of demand that arises out of being party to a covenant relation with God who gives the land to Israel for a divine purpose. At the heart of Israel’s experience as the people of God lies this dialectic of promise and demand. What is asked at the boundary is not courage to overcome enemies in the land, but courage to keep Torah. The crossing of the Jordan is not entry into a safe ‘space’ after the experience of the wilderness wanderings, but entry into a special context of covenant, of historical ‘place’ charged with hidden meaning and the promise of ineffable blessings to come. As gift of God, the land was at no time simply the property of the people, yet the constant temptation of Israel was to forget its gifted existence and to be seduced by the gods (manipulation of things for human ends). Israel in the land is under a specific mandate to live as the people of God, to make the land what God intends to make of it, which can only come about by a faithful cooperation between the people and the land. The land, in other words, signifies a mission, and, as Martin Buber highlights, the cooperation in view is truly reciprocal:

Just as, to achieve fullness of life, the people needed the land, so the land needed the people, and the end which both were called upon to realize could only be reached by a living partnership. Since the living land shared the great work with the living people it was to be both the work of history and the work of nature. Just as nature and history were united in the creation of man, so these two spheres which have become separated in the human mind were to unite in the task in which the chosen land and the chosen people were called upon to co-operate. The

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9. See ibid., 35, where Lohfink cites one of the Jewish legends regarding the offering of the Torah to all the nations.

10. Traces of this legend are to be found amongst Christian theologians as well. A case in point is Maximus the Confessor who wrote that, ‘It is not as if God chose Israel alone, but Israel alone chose to follow God.’ Cited, ibid., 36.
holy matrimony of land and people was intended to bring about the matrimony of the two separated spheres of Being.\textsuperscript{11}

Few Christians would be aware of this Jewish understanding of the people in the land as a concrete manifestation of the unity of the God of history and the God of nature, and how God is working to overcome the separation introduced between the spheres of nature and history by the sin and violence of humankind.\textsuperscript{12} There is a fundamental difference, though, Buber explains, between the election of the people and the election of the land; namely, the former arises in the course of history, while the latter ‘must have taken place in the very act of the Creation itself’ so that the land is a ‘microcosm’ of the whole world, and the union of people and land concerns the perfecting of the world by the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.\textsuperscript{13} Israel was simply never meant to be ‘like the other nations;’ rather, it has a God-given destiny and mission to be ‘a light to the nations’ by practicing justice and righteousness in the land so that the Shekhina will bring about the regeneration of the land and the eschatological renewal of the face of the earth.\textsuperscript{14}

Theological Issues to Raise

(a) The Jewish understanding of the election of the land as part of the original act of creation certainly bolsters the argument that the land be regarded as a way of organizing biblical theology, but it also serves to bring together the land (creation) and the Torah (redemption) in such a way that redemption is portrayed as the completion of God’s work of creation. This is especially the case when the notion of the pre-existent Torah as the foundation of the world, which belongs to Jewish wisdom traditions, is factored into the equation. After the Exile, Jewish thinkers began to explore wisdom’s relationship with God, and these explorations yielded such writings as the Book of Proverbs, Job, Sirach, Qohelet, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Wisdom came to be acknowledged as pre-existing the creation and as the heavenly original of the Torah, and as having established herself in Zion (Sir 24:8-12).\textsuperscript{15} The portraying of Wisdom as God’s special agent in the creation of the world (Prov 3:19-20; 8:22-31; Sir 24:3-4) makes it clear that her having pitched camp in Zion is intended for the good of

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\item \textsuperscript{12} The earth bears the curses of human sin, as both the story of Creation and the story of the Flood in the Book of Genesis testify (cf. Rom 8:19-23).
\item \textsuperscript{13} Buber, \textit{Israel and Palestine}, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 51-52. Buber explains that there are 3 types of wickedness spoken of by the Haggada: bloodshed, idolatry, and pride. Pride is wicked because it pollutes the land and causes the withdrawing of the Shekhina which the humble cause to dwell in the land. This is the same view as that expressed by Augustine who saw sin as pride.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Wisdom was acknowledged as present everywhere in the world (Sir 24:7) but it was believed to have come to dwell pre-eminently in Israel (Sir 24:23).
\end{itemize}
all the lands and all the peoples of the earth.

When we move to the Christian thought-world, the Jewish notion of the pre-existent Torah is further developed into the notion of the pre-existent Torah Incarnate: that is, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel, is the eternal Word of divine Wisdom made flesh. The eschatological revelation of Jesus as risen from the dead is the basis for this Christian profession of faith. The Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead summed up the firm hope, held on to in the midst of suffering in fidelity to God (this is the wisdom tradition of the passio justi), that final justice for Israel, as well as for the world, was to be expected from God, and God alone. By raising Jesus from the dead, God has vindicated and revealed him as ‘the Holy and Just One’ (Acts 3:14) who will be the agent of God’s final judgment (Acts 17:31). Jesus, who had an extraordinary sense of the destiny and mission of Israel, came to be regarded as the pre-existent Word of God made flesh (Jn 1:14), which means that he ‘embodies and personifies to perfection Israel’s Torah, the Wisdom of God, faithfully and obediently lived out in a disordered world, that is to say, in a world where goodness does not succeed in being victorious.’

The mission of Jesus was not to abolish the Torah but to see it lived out to perfection (Mt 5:17) for the final salvation of Israel and the world. As the Elect One who is the Torah Incarnate, the mission of Jesus cannot be properly considered apart from the election of the people of God and the election of land promised to Abraham. The very fact that the incarnation of the eternal Word of divine Wisdom took place in the land of Palestine amongst the Jewish people testifies to the legitimacy of the doctrine of God’s election of both the land and the people. And as long as creation and history remain an unfinished and fragmented process that is groaning for its final salvation, both the land and the people must be seen as retaining their special, divinely-appointed character, as the next theological point to which we now turn will seek to elaborate.

(b) Another theological issue to arise from reflection on the paschal mystery of Christ is that while the risen Jesus is regarded by Christians as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel, this must not be taken to mean that salvation is fully accomplished or completed. The Torah and the promises of God have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus, but for the rest the eschatological harvest remains to be brought in. Frans Jozef van Beeck is emphatic in his tone when making this basic point that is not sufficiently appreciated by Christians:

It must be pointed out ... with all possible emphasis, that the Christian reinterpretation of Jewish eschatology amounted not to its abolition but—if anything—to its sharpening. To put this differently: the

17. Ibid., 66.
fundamental asymmetry between Judaism and Christianity is based on the conviction that the Law and all God's promises have been fulfilled in Jesus, now that he 'has risen as the first-fruits of those who have died' (1 Cor 15:20; cf. 23). But for the rest, the harvest remains to be brought in: the Christian Church continues to aspire, like Judaism, to the fullness of salvation.\(^{18}\)

It is evident that the face of the earth is yet to be fully renewed, for the powers of sin and death continue to wreak havoc and seem to have the upper hand in world affairs. The reality of the kingdom of God is not easily discernible, either in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or anywhere else in the world (cf. crucifixion of the Messiah), although to the eyes of faith it is the hidden reality that holds all things together and the absolute future of the world (cf. resurrection of the Messiah). Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, acknowledges that the fullness of salvation is yet to come when he says that 'not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies' (8:23). Three important points are contained in this passage. Firstly, since we only have the 'first fruits' of the Spirit, we continue to groan inwardly in the present life until our bodies our redeemed in the risen life to come. Secondly, our groaning inwardly is inextricably linked to the groaning of creation, hence Paul views nature and history as forming a fundamental unity, which is an idea integral to Jewish thought, as we saw above. Thirdly, salvation in Christ will only be completed at the Final Judgment when our bodies will be redeemed, that is, when we will enjoy a transformed 'bodiliness' that is fitted for the risen life (cf. 1 Cor 15:51-52). Paul, to sum up, understands the general resurrection of the dead in terms of the resurrection of Christ, and therefore as mediating eschatological salvation to humanity and the world.

On the issue of the 'bodily' resurrection of Christ, furthermore, this should not be considered in isolation from either the land or the people of the covenant, both of which are indispensable to the individuating of the person of Jesus Christ as the Torah Incarnate. A consensus view has emerged in Catholic thought today regarding the inadequacy of a physiological understanding of bodily resurrection,\(^{19}\) and this can be used to illuminate the connection between the bodily resurrection of Christ and the history of his mission in the land. At the heart of the issue, explains Joseph Ratzinger,\(^{20}\) lies the distinction between 'physiological unit' and 'bodiliness.' The atoms and molecules that make up the physiological unit do not add up to the human being; instead, the identity of the

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 67-68.

\(^{19}\) See the comprehensive article by Bernard P. Prusak, 'Bodily Resurrection in Catholic Perspectives,' Theological Studies 61/1 (2000), 64-105. Prusak reviews the works of Rahner, Ratzinger, Schillebeeckx, O'Collins, Greshake, and Küng.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 94.
living body depends upon matter being drawn into the soul’s power of expression. The identity of the body, in other words, derives not from matter but from the person, and the term ‘bodiliness’ is used to convey this fact. As we reflect on this issue, explains Gisbert Greshake, it becomes apparent that it is through the body that one establishes the many relationships by which one grows into the world, and also takes the world into self, thereby shaping oneself as a person.\(^2\) Gerald O’Collins lends his support to this consensus view when he says that it is the particular bodily or embodied history ‘which makes up the story of every person.’\(^2\)

On this understanding, the bodily resurrection of Christ involves the history of his individuation as a person, which took shape within the process of his mission to Israel. This implies that the particularity of his bodiliness is inextricably tied to his relationships with the land where he was born and the people with whom he interacted in carrying out his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God. The resurrected body of Christ must not, then, be thought of as lifted up out of his Jewish world or separable from the world as a whole; rather, it means that the risen Christ retains his ‘world-reference’ that is inscribed both on his person and the history of his mission to Israel (NB. as the Torah Incarnate who is without sin, he has left only good effects on the world). The risen Christ, to be sure, represents final salvation for the whole world, but we must not lose sight of the fact that his bodily resurrection takes place in the context of a particular history, so that in this eschatological event we are to see first and foremost God’s consummation of the holy matrimony of land and people, which includes in its purview the final restoration of the unity of nature and history in a ‘new creation.’

In light of the fact that the fullness of salvation in the Risen One is yet to transform the world, Christians in the meantime, like Jews, must take courage and live a life of tested faith in hopeful expectation of the final establishment of God’s reign in a new creation. It is an injustice to view Judaism as obsolete because superseded or supplanted by the ‘new covenant’ forged by the shedding of the Messiah’s blood for the forgiveness of sins, and, furthermore, such a view makes a mockery of God’s covenant made with Abraham, Moses, and David. There is but one covenant associated with the chosen people and the chosen land, which at various stages in Israel’s history is given a new interpretation in light of historical events impacting upon Israel. Clearly the unexpected and unforeseen event of a crucified Messiah (1 Cor 1:23-24) represents the most radical and

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\(^2\) Ibid., 83. See also David Coffey, ‘Christian Anthropology,’ *Faith and Culture: Bicentennial Reflections*, edited by Margaret Press and Neil Brown (Sydney: Catholic Institute of Sydney, 1988), 130-141, at 138-140. The author explains that as the process of individuation of the person, bodiliness involves not only a material element but also a formal principle that acknowledges the person’s own history of free actions and decisions.

\(^2\) Prusak, ‘Bodily Resurrection,’ 81.
difficult of the series of reinterpretations, with the exception, perhaps, of the Nazi Holocaust of World War II.  

(c) The previous point about living in anticipation of that day when our bodies will be fully redeemed, together with a fully redeemed creation, gives weight to what Buber intends when he talks about 'the looking unto the hidden Zion.' In Judaism, the hidden character of God's reign in the world is expressed above all by the Jewish understanding that the Shekhina will not move from the west wall of the Temple—the Faithful One stands behind the west wall of the shattered sanctuary and 'will send down the dew of revival and will give new life to the dead.' To the religious Jew, the name Zion means what is intended by the land as 'holy' land, that is, what it is to become according to its election by the living God; the name implies a 'supra historical mystery' that engenders hope and meaning because, being beyond history, it confers on history an open-ended texture, especially when a better and new future seems impossible. Zion symbolizes, then, the steadfast commitment of YHWH to his land and his people, and Israel's trust in the Faithful One who 'gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist' (Rom 4:17).

The Christian tends to apply the meaning of Zion to the shattered Body of the Holy One whom God has raised from the dead, but this should not be done in a way that discredits the understanding expressed by Buber in respect of the hidden presence of the Shekhina in the west wall of the shattered Temple. The Christian expectation in the midst of the world's groaning for salvation is for the return of Christ when he will consummate the kingdom of God and completely recreate the face of the earth. From where will the new creation praise and glorify God? The prophet Isaiah spoke not only of God creating 'new heavens and a new earth' but also of creating a 'new Jerusalem' of joy and rejoicing (Isa 65:17ff), and a very similar vision is described in the Book of Revelation where the 'new Jerusalem' is portrayed as the 'Bride, the wife of the Lamb' (Rev 21:2).

23. For the Jewish people, Auschwitz symbolizes the radical experience of the absence of God (cf. Jesus' cry of God-forsakenness on the cross), while the experience of Jerusalem (creation of the State of Israel in 1948) symbolizes the abiding presence of God who brings into existence the things that do not exist (cf. Jesus' resurrection from the dead).
24. Buber, Israel and Palestine, 142.
25. Ibid., 52.
26. Ibid., 133, 141, & 147. Buber asserts that what the 'political Zionists' fail to acknowledge is the 'suprahistorical mystery' that the name 'Zion' implies.
27. The theme of impossibility is integral to the biblical story and is often expressed by the 'barrenness' of women who feature in the story. Israel is a people created out of impossibility. Sarah is old and barren (Gen 11:30; also Gen 25:21 & 29:31 where we are told that Rebekah and Rachel are barren) yet Abraham believes the word spoken to him by God and the result is the miraculous birth of Isaac, the child of the promise. God makes all things new when all seems hopeless and the future closed off. The fact that Jesus is born of the virgin Mary, in the power of the Spirit, expresses the same point about how God acts to initiate a new history for the salvation of the world. The Spirit of God could rightly be thought as the possibility of God in the midst of chaos, decay, and death. See the essay by D. Lyle Dabney, 'Naming the Spirit: Towards a Pneumatology of the Cross,' Starting With the Spirit, edited by Stephen Pickard & Gordon Precece (Hindmarsh, South Australia: Australian Theological Forum Inc., 2001), 28-58.
21:9ff), so that in the new creation God's throne is established in the holy city of Jerusalem. In both these Jewish and Christian writings, Jerusalem is portrayed as the centre of the fully redeemed world to come, that is, as the eschatological centre of the world. On this view, the eschatological event of Christ's coming in glory represents the climactic point of God's covenant established with Abraham, a covenant that contains the divine promise of future blessings for the entire world. As long as both Jews and Christians await the fullness of the promises of God amidst the turmoil, injustices and tribulations of history, both find themselves looking upon the hidden Zion.

(d) A final theological point that I wish to raise relates to the manner in which the first Jewish Christians dealt with the problem of proclaiming a crucified Messiah. Paul states that the preaching of a crucified Christ is 'a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles' (1 Cor 1:23). The earliest Christians could not, then, present their Gospel message to the Jewish world without first attempting to resolve this scandal: How is such a death in accordance with God's plan expressed in Jewish Scripture? To address this problem, the motif of the passio justi was made use of, that is, the motif of the just one who suffers despite fidelity to God's will and who feels abandoned by God to adversity. According to this tradition, which is given abundant expression in the supplicatory psalms or psalms of lamentation, it is precisely in the absence of God that the suffering just one proclaims trust in God, for ultimately the just person can turn only to God for vindication in a situation of distress and affliction.

The motif of the passio justi characteristic of the psalms of lamentation underwent a significant development, however, which is readily apparent in the Book of Wisdom (2:10-20) where the just are persecuted not despite the fact that they are upright and righteous, but precisely because they bear faithful witness to the living Lord. While the sufferings are still seen as putting the faith of the just to the test so that they may be proved to be worthy of God (cf. Wis 3:5), nonetheless the primary emphasis falls on depicting the suffering endured as proof of their justice: the persecution of the upright who adhere to the Torah becomes the sign of divine election. This later development of the motif of the passio justi is a principal source of the Gospel narratives of the passion of Jesus, for Jesus is cast in the role of the one who is unjustly put to a shameful death for having irritated and disturbed the powers-that-be by his authoritative proclamation of the unconditional love of the Father for his impoverished people.

Apparently abandoned by God, Jesus' faith in God is put to a decisive test by his scornful rejectors. The renouncement on Jesus' part of any kind of self-justification before his enemies (MK 15:29-30), and the acceptance of his unjust suffering unto death without expecting any saving act on the part of God as

28. The Second Vatican Council also acknowledged the Holy City as the eschatological centre of the world when it declared that at the end of time 'the elect will be gathered in the Holy City whose light shall be the glory of God, when the nations will walk in his light' (Nostra Aetate 1).
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demanded by those who mock and taunt him (Mk 15:31-32), is thoroughly consistent with the motif of the just one depicted in the Book of Wisdom. This absence of any self-justifying appeal to God serves to highlight Jesus’ complete and sole trust in God, that is, his total faith-abandon to the Father who falls silent during his hour of distress and need: the God whom Jesus addresses as Father does not allow himself to be invoked as Jesus’ personal saviour, for this would mean that God is on the side of Jesus ‘over against’ those who reject and mock him. By accepting a shameful and unjust death at the hands of sinners because of his utter fidelity to God, Jesus’ passion becomes the proof both of his divine election and the integrity of his justice. And since Jesus on the cross does not cease to relate to those who abandoned and rejected him, then Jesus becomes ‘Man for Others to the end, the representative of all of humanity, and the faithful witness to, and representative of, a God who is Father to each person at the expense of none.’

In light of this wisdom tradition of the passio justi, according to which Jesus suffers as a faithful Jew, should not the crucified Jesus be considered as the associate of suffering Jewry, as Marc Chagall has portrayed in his famous painting White Crucifixion? The challenge for Christians here is not to regard Jesus as the victim of Jewish rejection, but rather as the exemplar of rejected Jews who have none but God to commit themselves to in their suffering as the people of God. While we may regard some Jews, especially those who were in positions of power, as complicit in the death of Jesus, nonetheless the Jewish people as a whole must not be held responsible for his death, as official Church teaching has long been at pains to communicate to the faithful. It was the sin

29. This point is made by Frans Jozef van Beeck, Christ Proclaimed: Christology As Rhetoric (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 419.
30. Ibid., 419.
31. In this painting, Jesus on the cross, covered only by the vestment worn by Jews at prayer, is surrounded by scenes from pogroms—Jews killed, hunted down and driven away, synagogues burning, Torah scrolls desecrated. This question is also raised by Frans Jozef van Beeck, Loving the Torah More than God?, 29, 62-66.
32. It should be noted that to the Jewish mind, the meaning of innocent suffering is that the faithful know that they represent God in the world. Emmanuel Levinas, for instance, is critical of Christianity’s ‘mystification of suffering,’ that is, the view that Christ’s suffering, and suffering undertaken in Christ’s name, has an atoning or expiating significance. See Fran Jozef van Beeck, Loving the Torah More than God?, 47-52.
33. Jews have legitimate concerns about Passion plays because they usually depict the Jews as responsible for the death of Jesus. In the sixteenth-century, so pervasive was this view that the Roman Catechism explicitly refuted it: the Jews alone were not responsible for the suffering endured by Christ, for ‘sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured’ (Roman Catechism 1, 5, 11; cf. Heb 12:3). The Council of Trent appealed to a key New Testament text to make plain that the sins of all humankind caused the death of Christ (1 Jn 2:2). Unfortunately, the Church’s teaching barely filtered down to the average Christian, and this situation has persisted right down to our time, culminating in the horrors and crimes of the Holocaust. In light of the Holocaust, Vatican II was moved to unequivocally assert in its groundbreaking declaration Nostra Aetate that ‘neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during the passion’ (#4).

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of the world that put Jesus to death. That Jesus is the eternal Word of divine Wisdom become flesh, as Christians claim, means that he embodies to perfection the Torah of God, faithfully lived out and rigorously tested in a world where the powers of sin seem to have the upper hand and overshadow the kingdom of God. What the paschal mystery of Christ reveals is the manner in which God has overcome the sin of the world, but the fullness of the victory won in his passing from death to the risen life is contained in his person and is yet to transform created reality into the promised new creation.

The Second Vatican Council’s conception of the Church as the ‘pilgrim people of God’ moving toward its heavenly destiny, and as the ‘sacrament of salvation,’ confirms this eschatological character of the Church as carrying out its mission in the time between the first coming of the Lord and the second.4 The ‘already’ present reality of the kingdom of God in the midst of the Church exists in dialectical tension with the ‘not yet’ aspect of a final transfiguration of this age into the glory of Christ, through whom all things have been made. The suffering of the Church on account of representing Christ in a sinful world should be seen not merely as giving witness to the redemptive power of the cross, but also as solidarity with observant Jews suffering on account of faithfulness to the Torah, while anticipating the glorious reign of the Faithful One from his dwelling place in Zion, which is the eschatological centre of the world.

The Zionist Idea and the Meaning of ‘Holiness’

We have seen that according to the religion of Judaism, the association of the people with the land signifies a divine purpose, thus the land as gift is connected with the command to be a blessing. The concept of ‘holiness’ here means to belong to God, but as a people joined to the land in holy matrimony, so that the category of the holy should not be restricted to religious symbols and public worship.5 The paper has also shown in what ways theological reflection on the paschal mystery of the Holy One supports this understanding of the holy matrimony of people and land. As the Torah Incarnate, Jesus belongs unreservedly to God, and his mission to Israel takes on meaning only within the framework of the holy matrimony of people and land according to the covenant that God made with Abraham for the final salvation of the nations. The discussion hitherto has led us to the position that Israel’s existence is to be conceived neither as a purely political entity, nor in purely religious terms, but in

34. *Lumen Gentium* 1, 9, 48. The eschatological nature of the Church is highlighted by Chapter VIII (48-51) of *Lumen Gentium*.
35. Buber, *Israel and Palestine*, x, says that the reality of the holy matrimony points to more of a 'theopolitical' rather than a strictly religious concept of holiness as is found in the Priestly tradition. It should be noted here that Zionism is even criticized from within Judaism itself. The American Council of Judaism, for example, was founded in 1943 to oppose Zionism. One of the Council’s representatives, Rabbi Elmer Berger, stated that, ‘A religion cannot be allied with a State without having its spiritual integrity destroyed.’ Cited by Kevin Smyth, ‘Zionism,’ in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 6 (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 395-396, at 394.
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theopolitical terms that acknowledge God's history of covenant lodged in the land.

It is this religious conviction regarding the land as both gift and mission that is rejected by secular Zionism, according to which there is no divine mystery at the heart of Israel's existence; rather, the Jewish people are simply entitled to the free development of all their powers in their own country just like any other people. This position is inadequate, though, for the obvious reason that it betrays the holy character of God's election of both land and people. If the high purpose behind the mission of the people in the land is not acknowledged, if Israel renounces the suprahistorical mystery that the name of Zion implies, then it renounces the heart of reality itself and its God-given destiny to be a people consecrated to God. The desire of the secular Zionists to be 'like the other nations,' to have a homeland 'of our own,' even if that came down to accepting a land other than Palestine, amounts to a renunciation of the reality of the 'holy' land. Buber insists that Palestine, and Palestine alone, is the fatherland and the 'place' of Jewish identity where vows have been exchanged, where promises and demands have been made.

The secular Zionists do concede that there are sacred treasures in Israel's history, primary amongst which are the 'idea of God' and the possession of 'the Bible,' but they argue that these alone are responsible for making Palestine the 'holy' land, thus they can be retained wherever the Jewish homeland might be. This view, note, is strikingly similar to that held by most Christians in relation to Judaism, that is, the Torah is simply moral instruction issued by God that can be practiced in any space, and where it is practiced a sense of holiness is communicated. What is totally missing from this picture is the land and what makes this land holy. As Buber explains:

It goes without saying that Palestine did not make itself the Holy Land, but what made it the Holy Land was its election by the living God and His promise, of which the Bible is the record. What is the point of the Jews taking somewhere or other an idea of God which they have sterilized by their departure from the action of God and a Bible which

36. In order to simplify matters, I will refer to only two types of Zionism: 'secular Zionism' and 'religious Zionism.' The former embraces all those conceptions of Zionism that have a merely practical (e.g. L. Pinsker) or political (e.g. T. Herzl) flavour, whereas the latter recognizes God's election of both the land and the Jewish people in a holy matrimony that has a special divine purpose (e.g. M. Buber).

37. Practical and political Zionists such as Leo Pinsker and Theodore Herzl, for example, were not committed to Palestine. For them it is merely a question of expediency, of which land (Palestine, Argentina, Uganda, Morocco, or America?) is to be chosen as a homeland. They did acknowledge, however, that Palestine has 'emotional' value for the Jewish masses. See Buber, Israel and Palestine, 123-142. Buber makes an important distinction between the terms 'homeland' and 'fatherland:’ the former means a land which people regard as home, as a ‘space’ to exercise freedom in safety, whereas the latter expresses the connection between the people and their forefathers, and thus the need for courage to embrace the mission and destiny of Israel.
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they have deprived of its content, as 'their most sacred' possession? ...
A 'most sacred' possession is always tied to memory and hope, to places and events, to this-and-not-that, here-and-nowhere-else. 38

The proponents of a religious form of Zionism, such as that advocated by Buber, are not against the creation of a Jewish state. As in Jewish Scripture, the question is not whether Israel should have a king to rule over the people in the land; rather, the issue is that the king, as the land manager, must manage the land as a gift entrusted to him, thus his principal activity is understood to be the reading of the Torah. 'Such a view of kingship asserts a dominant conviction of the Bible which is against the wisdom of the world.' 39 The leaders of the Jewish state are required to see 'the hidden Zion that the prophets made visible by demanding it.' 40 The Jewish state is a legitimate entity provided that it is understood as a precondition or the way to the realization of the ideal implied by the name Zion. In the minds of the secular Zionists, however, the goal is the building up of the Jewish state, and Zion is treated as a 'myth' that merely fires the imagination and the yearning of the Jewish masses for a homeland.

Buber, as a Hasidic Jew exiled from Nazi Germany and a settler in Palestine, believed that the success of the Jewish return to Palestine would be measured by the quality of its relations with the Arab population. The self-determination of the Jewish people in Palestine must be achieved in a manner that fully respects and upholds the rights of any other community, so that cooperation with the Palestinians is indispensable to the mission of regenerating the holy land. 41 Notwithstanding the fact that most Arabs refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the State of Israel and thus are anything but cooperative with Israel which is seen as the enemy to be destroyed, Israel must remain true to its sense of divine mission in the land and work tirelessly to establish peace and solidarity with the Palestinian people in order to realize its destiny. 42 The name of Zion must not, in other words, be impoverished by reducing its meaning to a purely political reality that relies upon sheer power over others:

If Israel reduces Zion to a 'Jewish community in Palestine,' it will not get the community. If it only wants to have a land like other lands, then the land will sink down under its feet just as the nation will melt away if it only wants to be a nation like other nations ... The people must learn to love Zion ... The whole heart of the people must be caught up in this burning love ... the name 'love of Zion,' as it is used in everyday

38. Ibid., 127.
40. Buber, Israel and Palestine, 142.

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speech, is too narrow, since those who use it mostly have merely a territory, namely the land of Palestine, in mind; but what is at stake is ‘Judaism itself in its totality,’ one that now has a centre and has set out again on the road to its perfection by virtue of this centre.\(^43\)

Christians too, must learn to love Zion, notwithstanding the fact that the crucified and risen Body of Christ is considered the new locus of encounter between God and humanity. The Jewish prophets foretold a new heart that God would give his people (Jer 31:31-34; Ez 36:26-28), and although the Christian holds that this has come about by being conformed to Christ, in the Spirit, nonetheless as long as the desires of the human heart remain unfulfilled because the fullness of salvation is yet to come, we too find ourselves looking unto Zion and praying for the glory of the Lamb of God to shine forth from the Holy City and create all things new.

**Conclusion**

The category of history in the biblical story must not be interpreted as though the events that took place between YHWH and his people could have happened anywhere on the face of the earth. Rather, Israel only related to YHWH in the context of the land of Canaan that is considered part of the original act of creation. The very fact that Christians claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the pre-existent Torah Incarnate, the Elect One, through whom God created the world, should be seen as providing strong support to this Jewish doctrine of election. The proclamation of Jesus, risen from the dead, as the Holy and Just One, is meaningful only in the context of his mission in the land, for he personally embodies God’s redemptive purpose for the holy matrimony of land and people.

The history of the holy matrimony of land and people has a special, sacramental character, and the Church as the ‘sacrament of salvation’ is configured to the Holy Land and the Holy City as the eschatological centre of the world. What makes the land holy is not the superior morality of its people, but rather the fact that the people have been joined to the land by God’s election for a divine purpose. This is no different to what makes the Church ‘holy’—it is not the superior moral quality of its members, but the sacramental presence of Christ that confers holiness to the Church. Christians, no less than Jews, await the eschatological harvest of salvation to be brought in; both find themselves looking unto the hidden Zion in the eschatological hope that the glory of God, who gives life to the dead and brings into existence the things that do not exist, will shine forth from the Holy City and transfigure all the nations.

\(^{43}\) Buber, *Israel and Palestine*, 145. Buber is here presenting the views of Ahad Ha’am (A. Ginsberg) who is the creator of a ‘cultural Zionism.’

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