

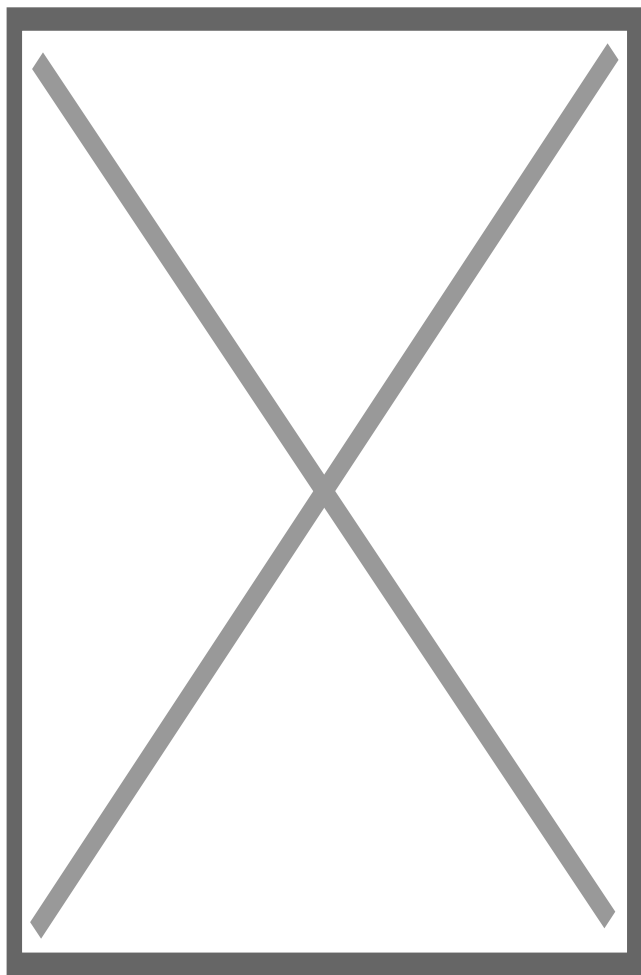
Catholics and Jews discuss Zionism

This provocative book wrestles with a big question: What, if anything, is the theological significance of the emergence of the state of Israel in 1948?

by [Emily Soloff](#) in the [March 2026](#) issue

Published on February 26, 2026

In Review



Catholic-Jewish Engagements on Israel

Holy Land, Political Territory, or Theological Promise?

Edited by Gavin D'Costa, Etienne Vetö, and Thomas Joseph White

Catholic University Press of America

[Buy from Bookshop.org >](#)

RW-REPLACE-TOKEN

What happens when religious Zionists sit down with Catholic theologians to discuss God's promise of land to the Jewish people? With the right scholars and activists, a timely and valuable book.

Catholic-Jewish Engagements on Israel is the newest volume in the Judaism and Catholic Theology series published by the Catholic University Press of America. Edited by Catholic theologians Gavin D'Costa, Etienne Vetö, and Thomas Joseph White, this rich and provocative book wrestles with the question, What, if anything, is the theological significance of the emergence of Israel in 1948? Among the wrestlers are several citizens of Israel, including Yazid Said, an Anglican priest who is a Palestinian-born Israeli citizen and lectures on Islam at Liverpool Hope University.

In the introduction, D'Costa parses the central question further: Is Israel a political territory, holy land, or yet-to-be-realized theological promise? It is a question that has been "on the horizon" of the Catholic Church since the promulgation in 1965 of *Nostra aetate*, D'Costa says, but "not properly addressed" until now. (*Nostra aetate* called for mutual understanding and respect between Catholics and Jews, affirmed the validity of Judaism, and rejected antisemitism.)

Catholic-Jewish Engagements on Israel is not a one-sided Christian examination. Among the Catholic contributors, there is no unanimity as to the theological significance of Israel. Since 1967, most religiously observant Jews "have slowly become united in affirming a theological significance" to the founding of the state of Israel, D'Costa maintains, but within Judaism there are differences of opinion on what that means in terms of sharing the land.

The authors, with one exception, developed their contributions from papers they delivered at a 2021 conference sponsored by the Thomistic Institute at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Bea Centre at Pontifical Gregorian University, both in Rome. The exception is Said, who did not present at the 2021 meeting but was asked to contribute a Christian Palestinian perspective here. The book provides extensive footnotes at the bottom of each page, 15 pages of bibliography, a scripture index, a subject index, and short author bios.

Each of the book's five sections presents alternating essays representing Catholic and Jewish points of view. The authors include well-known academics and interfaith practitioners as well as some younger scholars. Within the essays are novel solutions to the intractable challenge of competing claims on the land from Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. The contributors approach this challenge from a variety of perspectives, including the desire to articulate "a positive theology of the land and people of Israel," interpretations of biblical promises of the land to the Jewish people, the meaning of the promise of land for Palestinians and Jews who live in the region, the ways Catholic and Jewish people view Israel through their theology of the state, and critiques of the attempt to build a theology around the ideas of land, people, and Israel.

One of the most fascinating sections of the book is entitled "The Theology of the State Underlying Catholic and Jewish Approaches to Israel." This section begins with an essay by White, an American priest who serves as rector of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas and is one of the book's coeditors. He examines the state of Israel in comparison to the Holy See through a theological and ethical lens. He suggests that the Catholic Church's natural law tradition could be the basis for Catholic recognition of the right of Jews to self-determination.

Following White, Yonaton Moss (who teaches Abrahamic religions and directs the Center for the Study of Christianity at Hebrew University) offers "Zionism Through the Prism of Biblical 'Gerism': A Proposal," suggesting that the goal of religious Zionism is not only Jewish survival but also the pursuit of justice for all residents of the land. Moss focuses on the biblical concept of *ger*, the foreigner residing in the land alongside Israelites.

Moss notes the biblical admonitions to “love the ‘ger’” (Deut. 10:19) and “you shall not wrong or oppress the ‘ger’” (Exod. 22:20). Fulfillment of those obligations is only possible “in a political and demographic situation of majority and minority populations.” Arab and other non-Jewish residents are essential, Moss writes. “Only through the just and loving treatment of its minority populations can the State of Israel fulfill its biblical promise.” Moss models good interreligious activist engagement, concluding with a question and an invitation. “How can the ‘gerist’ vision of Zionism benefit from Muslim and Christian perspectives . . . ? I would need to hear, and learn, from my neighbors,” he writes.

It is the hope of D’Costa and the other editors that this book will be useful in interfaith dialogue and in discussions among Christians and Jews about Zionism, Israel, and changes in Catholic teaching since *Nostra aetate*. From the opening pages, readers encounter Catholic writers reflecting on Jewish texts and Jewish writers considering Catholic texts in an effort to understand Jews and Catholics as they understand themselves. Indeed, *Catholic-Jewish Engagements on Israel* demonstrates that despite deep theological differences, Jews and Catholics can view each other as partners, allies, and friends in the search for peace and justice.