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The Vatican and Palestine

The Catholic Church and the Question of Palestine. by Livia Rokach

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A few conclusions are relevant. In the first place, the old taboo about criticizing Israel in the U.S. has definitely been broken. Events since 1977 have made it possible; the election of the Likud, whose strident rhetoric and rigid philosophy have led to adventures such as the invasion of Lebanon in 1978 and in 1982; the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor; the bombing of the PLO headquarters in Tunis; and the escalation of the iron fist policy in the occupied territories.

In the second place, there has been substantial improvement in the quality of scholarship on these issues. This is apparent in the works under review, even those such as Gilboa's and Spiegel's, which try to peddle the traditional clichés.

More importantly, however, these studies should pave the way for other more empirically oriented and narrowly focused studies that still need to be conducted. For instance, using existing data, one might examine precisely how key American policymakers see the U.S.-Israel relationship as benefiting the U.S.—in the area of security, in the region itself, and so on. Or, one might examine in what ways the U.S.-Israel relationship costs the U.S. politically, economically, and otherwise.

Finally, there is always a danger in assuming that so-called special relationships among states are permanent. What about those people within the government and outside who question the wisdom of such an alignment of the U.S. in a volatile region? Events in the region, especially in recent times, certainly make it more difficult to argue for a special relationship. What prevents a shift away from it? The fact of the matter is that the majority of the American public is at odds with the policymakers on this and other foreign policy issues such as Central America. The opinions of key members of the elite also seem to be changing. What will it take to

translate public and elite perceptions into concrete policies?

The Vatican and Palestine

The Catholic Church and the Question of Palestine, by Livia Rokach. London: Saqi Books, 1987. 207 pages. Notes to p. 218. Index to p. 229. \$45.00.

Reviewed by Kail C. Ellis¹¹

The formulation of Vatican policies has always been elusive and somewhat mysterious. Rarely are these policies publicly debated or discussed, and what is known about them is deduced primarily from papal encyclicals, official statements, or the visits of Vatican officials. Furthermore, the Vatican's Middle East policies tend to receive attention only when they are the focus of Israeli complaints: the controversial visit of New York's John Cardinal O'Connor to the Holy Land in January 1987, during which meetings between him and high Israeli officials were scheduled in contravention of Vatican policy; the refusal to give theological significance to the establishment of Israel in catechesis and preaching; and Israeli protests over Kurt Waldheim's visit to the Vatican in 1987 are a few examples of recent Vatican-Israeli tensions.

Livia Rokach's study of the Vatican's historical interest in the Holy Land begins with the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland in May 1897 and ends in 1982 with an account of the first years of Pope John Paul II's pontificate. Sara Graham-Brown's "Afterword" brings the study to 1987.

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The Catholic Church's early attitude towards Zionism was not ambiguous. Rokach informs us, for example, that in 1904 Pope Pius X wrote to Theodor Herzl that "We are unable to favor this movement [Zionism]," and Benedict XV, fearing that Zionism aimed to "oust Christianity from its previous position [in the Holy Land] and put Jews in its place," opposed the Balfour Declaration and so delayed the ratification of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine until June 1922. Although the Vatican could not prevent the partition of Palestine in 1948, it continually expressed concern for the Palestinians, notably in the encyclicals of Pius XII and in the establishment of the relief agencies for the refugees. Rokach also attributes the refusal of the Western powers to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital as early as 1949–50 to the Vatican's adamant opposition.

The first major shift in closer Catholic-Zionist relations took place in 1965 with the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. This declaration, Rokach observes, resulted in the formation of National Secretariats for Catholic-Jewish relations in Europe and the United States, the establishment of training courses for Catholic teachers, and the sponsorship of conferences, lecture series, seminars, and workshops, many of them jointly sponsored by Jewish organizations, which allowed the theme of the state of Israel to be insinuated into and later to appear openly on their agendas.

Rokach faults the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity for negotiating with Zionist organizations which purported to represent world Jewry and above all, the Jewish religion. Such claims, she asserts, were fraudulent, given the polycentric structure of Judaism. By dealing with groups such as the World Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Com-

mittee in what were purely religious matters, the Vatican legitimated the Zionist claim to represent Judaism and to speak in its name. Judaism, especially Orthodox Judaism, Rokach states, was not remotely interested in dealing with the Church or Christianity, since the easing of interreligious tensions might encourage mixed marriages and other forms of "assimilation" of Jews living in a Christian environment.

The correctness of the Holy See's warnings about ignoring the centrality of the Palestinian question was proven by the rise of the Palestinian resistance movement after the June 1967 war. At the same time, according to Rokach, the Vatican seemed to be moving toward the de facto recognition of Israel, as indicated by the papal audience granted to Golda Meir in January 1973 and by later visits by other high Israeli officials. This was balanced, however, by Paul VI's call, in July 1974, for the recognition of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians, months before the UN granted observer status to the PLO.

Rokach generally credits Paul VI for his stand on the Palestinians, even going as far as to describe him as the "Pope of the Palestinians." Her depiction of his successor, Pope John Paul II, at least initially, is less generous.

John Paul II, Rokach points out, lacked his predecessor's training in the subtleties of Vatican diplomacy. His views on the Middle East, moreover, influenced by his experience with the sufferings of European Jewry in his native Poland, gave the impression that he leaned toward Israel. John Paul was deeply concerned with the fate of the Lebanese Christians, but his statements on their behalf, his impulsive announcement that he wished to visit Jerusalem, and his support for the Camp David agreements were indications of his basic unfamiliarity with the complexities of the Middle East. It was not until April 1982 that John Paul II invoked his predecessor's

statements on the Palestinians by referring to them as "a people," thereby putting them on a par with the Israelis.

Pope John Paul, however, proved to be a quick study. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 brought home to him the centrality of the Palestinian question to any Middle East settlement. The expulsion of the PLO from Beirut and the papal audience granted to Yasir Arafat on 15 September 1982 unleashed a head-on conflict between Israel and the Vatican and gave rise to accusations of Vatican anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism by Israeli leaders and other Jewish groups. Pressures by Zionist groups and even members of the U.S. Congress on the Vatican to recognize Israel increased substantially as a result. Such efforts were clearly evident during John Paul's September 1987 visit to the United States.

Rokach's book concludes with some important observations. Her insight that *Nostra Aetate* ended up being less an instrument of interreligious understanding than a means of legitimating Zionist goals under cover of theological dialogue is crucial to an understanding of the pressures on the Vatican to establish diplomatic rela-

tions with Israel before there is a Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement. She also points out that the basic conditions of Vatican policy regarding Jerusalem and the Holy Places and the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination remain intact. Yet, she seems disappointed that the Vatican has never officially condemned Zionism and even that it has official contacts with the Israelis.

If Rokach's study is to be faulted, it is because it seems to lack an appreciation for the Church's universal mission, particularly after Vatican II, of promoting international understanding and peaceful development among nations. Vatican policy claims that is driven by a concern for justice, without which there can be no peace. Such concern, especially as it relates to the Arab-Israeli conflict, cannot be exclusive, nor can its satisfaction be realized by official anathemas. Despite this apparent lack of appreciation, Rokach's book provides Vatican watchers and students of the Middle East alike with a valuable work on the Catholic Church's policies toward the crucial Palestinian problem.

SHORTER NOTICES

The International Dimension of Palestinian Terrorism, by Ariel Merari and Shlomi Elad. Boulder: Westview Press and the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1987. 104 pages. Tables to p. 121. Appendices to p. 142. Notes to p. 147. \$18.00.

Written by two of Israel's numerous terrorism experts, this book provides an overview, a rather superficial one with some pretensions of theory, of "Palestinian international terrorist activity." It focuses on the 1968-84 period, examining ideol-

ogy and strategic and tactical considerations. Tables and appendices at the end provide detailed statistics of type of action, location, group responsible, and so on. A penny for each time the reader comes across the word "terrorist" or "terrorism" would make this monograph well worth reading.

Israel: The Changing National Agenda, by Avram Schweitzer. London: Croom Helm, 1986. 169 pages. Index to p. 174. \$38.00