

kyrkan får täckmantel av ”kulturell”, vilket gör att de ostört kan ta plats i det offentliga rummet. På så sätt förblir en nunnas dräkt osynlig, medan varje muslimsk huvudbonad är föremål för offentlig granskning i full omfattning. Bokens huvudsakliga studieobjekt, Collège des Bernardins, som är en renoverad cistercienserklosterbyggnad från 1300-talet, är också enligt Oliphant ett exempel på en sådan dynamik. Å ena sidan utformar det sin verksamhet som kulturell och fokuserar på konstutställningar, och skapar därmed ett sätt att uppmuntra en sekulär publik att engagera sig i det. Å andra sidan beskriver Oliphant många tillfällen då akademins mer självpromoverande karaktär blir tydlig – dess försök att understryka katolicismens viktiga roll i Frankrikes historia och arv, vilket leder till att romersk-katolska privilegier upprätthålls gentemot andra religiösa grupper.

På det hela taget är Oliphants bok en mycket intressant och relevant studie, vars både styrka och svaghet ligger i det studerade materialet. Å ena sidan gör den detaljerade studien av Collège des Bernardins det möjligt för henne att förbli mycket konkret i sin analys. Å andra sidan innebär fokuseringen på kollegiet att det behövs fler studier för att bekräfta Oliphants iakttagelser (och några av dem refereras redan i boken). Detta ska dock inte läsas som en kritik av boken, utan snarare som en uppmuntran att följa i Oliphants fotspår.

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**Emma O'Donnell Polyakov. *The Nun in the Synagogue: Judeocentric Catholicism in Israel*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2020. 230 s.**

Emma O'Donnell Polyakov invites the reader to follow her journey through the slopes of Jerusalem's hills to discover the new Catholic approach to Jews and Judaism, born among

Catholic monks and nuns living in the State of Israel. With her, one enters various monasteries, hermitages, and private quarters to listen to the voices of those who dedicate their life to praying for the Jews.

The study focuses on a phenomenon of Judeocentric Catholicism in Israel, developing further the ideas expressed by the author in previous publications. Written in an appealing style, it presents lived post-Holocaust and post-conciliar developments in the Catholic relation to the Jews, Judaism, and the state of Israel, giving voice to those monks and nuns who exhibit the attitudes of the “new philosemitism”. Through their personal narratives, O'Donnell Polyakov's study explores how this new philosemitism is linked, on the one hand, to the history of supersessionism and the *teaching of contempt*, and on the other hand, to the identity of those who chose to devote their lives to Jewish-Christian dialogue and praying for Israel. They often came from Jewish or mixed Jewish-Christian background and some of them experienced the Holocaust first hand. She refuses to offer “a concluding evaluation of the phenomenon” (p. 203), but rather prefers to share her analysis with the reader, pointing to the aspects of the movement that can be potentially beneficial or harmful to Jewish-Christian relations.

The book is based on interviews with approximately eighty nuns and monks in Israel and West Bank, and operates within the framework of lived religion. The structure is somehow unconventional: a patchwork of chapters of analytical discussion and narrative “portraits” – vignettes presenting individual informants. The role of the latter is “not to simply transcribe our meeting but to communicate the subtleties of interpersonal encounters that elude the standard academic writing” (p. 9). The content is presented within four parts: “The Jewish People Through a Christian Lens”, “A Judeocentric Catholicism”, “Religious Identity After the Holocaust”, and “Praying for the Jews”. The first part presents the Christian image

of the Jews and investigates how it is being constructed, pointing also to Christian responses to the state of Israel. The second part provides a historical background of the phenomenon of Judeocentric Catholicism and starts exploring personal narratives regarding that experience. The third part brings forward the stories of Holocaust survivors who converted to Catholicism and conducted their monastic life in Israel, focusing on hybrid Jewish-Catholic religious identity, post-Holocaust theology, and the role of the trauma in their conversions. The final part concentrates on the challenges of Christian prayer for the Jews, in particular the tensions resulting from the mission of the Church to evangelize all the nations and the soteriological role of Christ.

O'Donnell Polyakov is Assistant Professor of Religious and Theological Studies at the Merrimack College and her research interests revolve around contemporary Jewish-Christian relations, with a focus on memory and place, religious ritual, and interreligious studies in Jerusalem, as well as antisemitism. She describes various communities appearing in the book with easiness, reflecting her familiarity with the context of their life and work, and demonstrates a nuanced approach to the political context of contemporary Israel and the all-permeating reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, the author exhibits outstanding alertness and sensitivity when it comes to sensing supersessionist tropes and theological ideas about the Jews that might threaten Jewish self-understanding. As in her previous book, *Remembering the Future* (2015), the author uses the ethnographic method, however, this time to an even larger extent, and does so with skill and grace: the transition between the empirical data and the analytical sections of the book seems seamless and easy to follow.

Undoubtedly, the study is an important contribution in the field of interreligious studies and a trailblazer in the study of philo-semitic Catholic monasticism as well as the

Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel. One of its strengths lies in the applied methodology, very well suited for the topic. While it allows for the discussion of important theological problems in Jewish-Christian relations, it leaves a lot of space for personal narratives, making the book more heartfelt than most publications in the field. The author is a skilled ethnographer not steering away from the problematic implications of some convictions exhibited by the informants. At the same time, she presents them in an empathic way, suggesting how meaningful the encounters with them were for herself. In a sense, she becomes a “tender narrator”; a term proposed by the Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk for a narrator approaching their protagonists with respectful empathy. The choice of the topic is another merit of the book. While a plethora of publications about Christian Zionism can be easily found, this phenomenon remains under-researched, and thus, *The Nun in The Synagogue* is an important contribution, proving the author’s familiarity with the studied environment. Finally, O’Donnell Polyakov’s prose is very engaging, therefore making the book a pleasant and accessible reading also for those whose interest is not necessarily academic.

The only area that could benefit from further improvement are the theoretical reflections, which could be amplified in some points. In particular, the section on inter-ritual sharing and appropriation seems to require further elaboration and might be easier to understand after adding more context of the Christian rationale for doing so. Moreover, deepening the discussion regarding the Christian will to share their belief in Jesus might add more nuance to the representation of the phenomena. It might benefit from addressing further questions such as whether “the hope that Jews will recognize Jesus as the messiah is still essentially a desire for conversion” (p. 191) or whether it could be understood as a merely eschatological hope, and how the interviewees could simultaneously bear witness and respect the Jewish

theology without wishing to influence it. As these questions lie at the core of theology of religions, it might add to the understanding of the tension implicit in the Jewish-Christian relations, especially in Israel. Finally, a concise recapitulation of the ways in which these monks and nuns “push boundaries of Catholic thought on Judaism” (p. 197–198) placed in the concluding section of the volume would help the readers to take with them a clearer picture of the phenomenon. However, these minor imperfections do not reduce the overall significance and value of the publication.

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