

SEARCHING HER OWN MYSTERY TOGETHER: A RESPONSE TO ROCH KERESZTY

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“The Church *is* the continuation of Israel, and the eschatological change Israel experiences in the process is a *renewal* rather than a termination of its covenant-identity.”



1. THEOLOGICAL RETRIEVAL THROUGH ISRAEL-CHRISTOLOGY

I am grateful to Fr. Roch Kereszty for his sympathetic and critical engagement with *Searching Her Own Mystery*¹ (*SHOM*). In writing *SHOM* I had hoped to stimulate theological reflection within the Catholic world regarding the intrinsic connection between the identity of the Church and that of the Jewish people. Kereszty's essay shows that my hopes were not unfounded.

He agrees with my assessment that Vatican II initiated a revolutionary change in Christian attitudes to the Jewish people,

1. Mark S. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery*: Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).

but he also reminds us that “[t]his revolution . . . has not imported some external elements to Christian faith but rather discovered what has been forgotten, neglected, or misunderstood within her deposit of revelation.” I welcome this reminder, which mirrors the perspective expressed in my earlier work, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*: “The church faithfully preserved and carried within it the truths that would allow it eventually to reexamine its history and recognize supersessionism as an error demanding correction.”²

Kereszty effectively summarizes and explains the Israel-Christology that is a central theological premise of *SHOM*. As he recognizes, this Christology derives from Jesus’ messianic role as the King of Israel—a role which occupies as central a place in the gospel of John, the gospel of Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles as it does in the gospel of Matthew. Like Isaiah’s Servant and Daniel’s Son of Man, the figure of Israel’s messianic King embodies the people of the covenant in his own person; he is both an individual and a corporate figure. While Israel-Christology provides the basis for Jesus’ enduring bond with the Jewish people, the particularity of this bond did not lead the first disciples of Jesus to an ethnocentric vision but instead provided the foundation for their universal concern: it is precisely “as son of Abraham and as son of David” that “Jesus is also the son of Adam, the new eschatological Human Being.”

Kereszty aims here to do more than review my book. His essay asks questions and offers constructive proposals intended to advance the Church’s theological reflection on Judaism and her long-term dialogue with Messianic Jews. In the same spirit, I will respond briefly to some of those questions and proposals, knowing that we are at but an early stage of what will hopefully be a lengthy and fruitful journey together as Catholics and Messianic Jews.

2. TYPES AND SACRAMENTAL REALITIES

Kereszty devotes much attention to the subject of typology. He takes as a starting point the following paragraph from my book:

2. Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 211.

The limitation [of typology] arises because typology normally concerns two distinct realities—type and antitype—whose relationship is unidirectional rather than reciprocal. Displaying a pattern that derives from its antitype, the type draws its essential import and power from that which it anticipates or embodies; in contrast, the antitype has its import and power independent of the type. Thus, Joshua as the one who leads Israel into the land is a type of Jesus who leads his people to its messianic inheritance. Joshua is like Jesus, and one might even say that the pre-incarnate Jesus was himself active in Joshua, but we would not say that Joshua was active in and through Jesus.³

Kereszty appears to find this comment intriguing, but also unclear in its meaning:

Kinzer faults the “unidirectionality” of the relationship between the type and the antitype, as if the traditional doctrine would discard the type once it had shed light on the antitype it foreshadows. He does not, however, clarify what he means by the enduring presence of the type in the antitype; to take the above example, it is not clear how he thinks Joshua can be active through Jesus.

Kinzer considers such typological interpretation only limitedly useful, and wishes to go beyond it. Yet he does not elaborate on what he means by a reciprocal relationship between type and antitype. He says that not only was the pre-incarnate Jesus active in and through Joshua, but that Joshua was also active in and through Jesus.

Kereszty accepts the need for a more reciprocal relationship between type and antitype, and so offers his own friendly proposal for how to proceed:

Returning to Kinzer’s example of Joshua-Jesus, Jesus-Joshua typology, I propose the following interpretation of the reciprocal relationship between type and antitype: Joshua antedates and prefigures Jesus in introducing Israel into the Promised Land. But Joshua is also present and active in Jesus, insofar as Jesus introduces the eschatologically renewed and expanded Israel into their definitive heavenly homeland.

3. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery*, 164.

Kereszty interprets my comment as a critique of typology in general, and as an invitation to rethink all typology in such a way that Joshua could be seen as “active in and through Jesus.” In fact, that was not my intent. I offered the example of Joshua and his relationship to Jesus to illustrate a species of unidirectional typology which I find unobjectionable. The Joshua-Jesus correspondence, like all *personal types* in Scripture (such as Abel, Melchizedek, Moses, Aaron, and Jonah), has a necessarily unidirectional orientation. *Personal types* are individuals who are situated according to the narrative of Scripture in a particular time and place, and the account of their lives in some way prefigures the New Testament account of the life and work of Jesus. I do not find fault with this interpretive move, which maintains the intrinsic significance of these figures in the biblical narrative and poses no threat to the integrity of Jewish teaching or life.

While *event types*—such as the flood, the death of the firstborn in Egypt, the passage through the Red Sea, and the entry into the land of promise—display more reciprocal features than do *personal types*, they are still to a great extent unidirectional in character. As particular events that occurred at particular times before the coming of Jesus, the relationship between the type and antitype could not be otherwise. *Event types* prefigure the life and work of Jesus, and the heavenly power active in these events is also active in a consummate fashion in Jesus; thus in a certain limited sense they are re-enacted and re-lived in him.⁴ But *event types*, like *personal types*, remain *predominantly unidirectional* in their meaning. Both *personal* and *event types* point us to their antitype, but live on within it mainly in a *hermeneutical sense*—that is, in providing the necessary interpretive framework for rendering intelligible the antitype’s meaning.

My concern in discussing typology in *SHOM* was to distinguish such predominantly unidirectional forms of typology from living realities in the life of the Jewish people which the

4. The reciprocal dimension of event types appears vividly in Revelation 15:3, which depicts the victorious martyrs as singing “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” The “song of Moses” mentioned here is the hymn which Moses and Israel sang after passing through the Sea of Reeds (Ex 15). This shows that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt is not entirely swallowed up by the greater deliverance effected by the Cross and Resurrection, but lives on as an enduring witness to the same saving power of God.

category of typology as traditionally construed cannot adequately encompass. In the eighth chapter of *SHOM*, entitled “Jewish Life as Sacrament,” I focus on five such realities: the Jewish people itself; the Sabbath; the Land of Israel (and its center, the City of Jerusalem); the Torah; and the Mitzvot (i.e., those commandments from the Torah which have shaped Jewish life for the past two millennia, and continue to do so today). While these realities have a typological dimension, their significance—even in relation to the person and work of Jesus—is richer and more complex than the category of typology can accommodate.

This distinction between types and existing Jewish realities provides the conceptual context for the statement from *SHOM* which Kereszty commends as “a more cautious way” of formulating the type-antitype relationship:

Jesus and the Torah are not two separate realities, one of which points to the other. They are so bound together that wherever Jesus is, there is also the Torah. Israel and the Torah are ordered in relation to Jesus—he is the master of the Torah and the King of Israel, just as he is the Lord of the Sabbath. But he is never apart from Torah, Israel, and the Sabbath.⁵

In fact, this was not my attempt at providing a more nuanced definition of the type-antitype relationship. Instead, it was part of my argument that Torah, Israel, and the Sabbath (along with the Land and the Mitzvot) *transcend* the type-antitype relationship, and should be viewed in *sacramental* rather than *typological* terms. They do so because Jesus engages with each of them as living realities that shape his own life—not only as important figures or events from the past that inform his imagination, but as a sacred text he heard, read, and touched; as flesh-and-blood people whom he dealt with morning, noon, and evening; as a holy day on which he worshipped and studied with his community; as the land upon which he walked and the city to which he and his family journeyed as pilgrims every Passover; and as the network of sacred practices that structured his earthly life. Moreover, these realities continue to function in Jewish life today much as they did in the life of Jesus.

5. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery*, 164–65.

I argue in the eighth chapter of *SHOM* that Jesus remains intimately connected to these five realities of Jewish life—which is why they should be seen as sacramental rather than typological. Consequently, the Church encounters these pillars of Jewish existence whenever she encounters Jesus, and the Jewish people encounters Jesus whenever it engages these sacramental realities. Thus I am not attempting to redefine typology; instead, I am urging Christian theologians to employ a broader and more dynamic conceptual framework when considering living components of Jewish life which cannot be confined to the Jewish past.

Perhaps I have failed to do justice to the way *personal* and *event* typology transcend a unidirectional type-antitype relationship. I would welcome a more nuanced and dynamic approach to these forms of typology. However, I think it unlikely that even such a reconfigured model of typology could provide an adequate conceptual framework for understanding the realities of Jewish life which I discuss in the eighth chapter of my book. To convey the intimate bond between Jesus and these Jewish realities, we must draw upon the richer language and conceptuality of sacrament.

3. OBSERVANCE OF TORAH

As seen above, I discuss Torah/Mitzvot in the eighth chapter of *SHOM* as core sacramental realities of Jewish life. I do not address this topic extensively in the remainder of the book, and the volume contains no sustained argument for the importance of Torah observance among Jewish disciples of Jesus. However, I do offer such an argument in an earlier monograph, and the issue inevitably arises in any substantive theological exchange between Catholics and Messianic Jews from the Diaspora.⁶ Therefore, it is fitting that Kereszty addresses this question in his essay and offers his own proposal for a way forward.

Kereszty first asserts that observance of the Torah by Jewish disciples of Jesus should be *permitted*, provided that such observance does not derive from a theologically improper motive: “There does not seem to be any valid theological reason in

6. See my *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*.

the Catholic Church for prohibiting Messianic Jews from observing the Torah, as long as they make it clear that they are justified not by works of the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ.” What might constitute a *proper* motive? Kereszty does not offer a thorough discussion of this question, but he does present one commendable orientation which Messianic Jews—and apparently Jews in general—might adopt toward Torah observance: “observing the Torah might become a powerful way for the Jewish people to bear witness to Adonai’s faithful love which has saved them time and again from extinction and has preserved them in spite of 1700 years of harassment and persecutions.” With these words Kereszty goes beyond stipulating a merely *permissible* motive for Jewish Torah observance; he evidently recognizes such observance as an appropriate and valuable response to the love God has shown to Israel. Nevertheless, Kereszty cautions against viewing Torah observance as the sort of obligation whose violation constitutes a sin: “The Catholic Church, however, cannot accept the belief that a Jew who no longer keeps the dietary and ceremonial prescriptions of the Law but observes its moral code commits a sin.”⁷

I am grateful for the direction in which Kereszty’s thinking moves. By expressly affirming that Torah observance should be *permitted* for Jewish disciples of Jesus, he charts a course that departs from the teaching on this subject offered by Thomas Aquinas and from the canonical Catholic baptismal requirements which were in force from the Early Middle Ages until the pontificate of John XXIII.⁸ By offering a theological motive for such observance that he commends, he also goes further toward a validation of Messianic Jewish practice than does Justin Martyr (who thought such practice should be *permitted* but discouraged).

7. Alluding to 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Kereszty supports this conclusion by citing the example of Paul: “[Paul] himself acknowledges that he does not always keep the Torah since he has become not only a Jew with the Jews, but a Gentile with the Gentiles.” It should be noted that an increasing number of New Testament scholars no longer believe that this text implies that Paul violated explicit Torah commands when with Gentiles. See David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

8. All Jewish candidates for baptism were required to renounce Torah observance with these words: *Horresce Judaicam perfidiam respue Hebraicam superstitionem* (Disavow Jewish unbelieving, deny Hebrew superstition).

However, I think that expansion and refinement of the conceptual instruments involved in the discussion will promote even greater progress in the direction Kereszty is already heading.

As I see it, the primary issue is whether Israel's enduring covenant entails any *objective corporate responsibilities* rooted in the Torah—a sacred document whose *telos* centers on the Messiah (Rom 10:4) but also includes the definition and preservation of the Jewish people as a distinct community (Rom 9:4–5). Kereszty rightly attributes this preservation to “Adonai’s faithful love,” but Torah observance has functioned historically as far more than a token of gratitude for this divine act: in reality, it has been the most effective instrument which Adonai has employed to accomplish that end. Are the Jewish people as a whole not summoned to cooperate with the divine purpose by wielding the tools that God has provided for the realization of that purpose? Before entering the conflicted zone of moral theology and attempting to assess the precise moral status of individual Jews who have no regard for Torah observance, this question of an objective corporate responsibility must be addressed.

Acknowledging a corporate Jewish responsibility for some form of Torah observance takes us beyond seeing such observance as a commendable but optional pattern of life. However, it need not imply that each individual Jew, regardless of his or her circumstances, bears this responsibility in the same way or to the same degree. For example, Jewish legal and moral tradition recognizes that those Jews who have been raised without any experience of Jewish practice lack personal culpability for their adult failure to observe those components of the Torah which apply only to Jews. It may even be the case that they should be counseled *not to adopt* such observance “more rapidly than they can intellectually and emotionally handle.”⁹ We find a similar example in Catholic thought concerning baptized Protestants who remain outside the visible communion of the Catholic Church. While Catholic teaching recognizes an objective responsibility for all baptized Christians to enter that visible communion, it also acknowledges that formation from childhood in Protestant ecclesial settings may result in a condition of “invincible ignorance” of

9. David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 259–61.

this responsibility. Such ignorance renders the individual Protestant innocent of sin in failing to live out this responsibility. Both of these examples demonstrate our point: asserting an objective corporate responsibility (e.g., applicable to the Jewish people in general or to the baptized in general) need not entail the kind of individual responsibility that results in sin for those who fail to embrace it.

We can extend this analysis of the moral status of Torah observance for Jews by asking about the nature of the responsibility to undertake it. Let us assume, with Kereszty, that this responsibility differs in gravity from the obligations imposed on all human beings by the universal moral law. How then should we understand this particular responsibility? Are there analogies in Catholic life that might help us to answer this question? Since the distinctive Jewish mission in the world is priestly in character, I would suggest that the most suitable concept to draw upon in this case is that of vocation. In Catholic tradition a person who has a vocation to the priesthood or to religious life receives a gracious invitation from God that is also a summons and a challenge. It may be possible for such a person to evade his or her vocation without committing sin, but the choice to answer the call is more than a commendable self-initiated act of devotion; to embrace a vocation is to offer a *grace-empowered response* to a divine call.

Let us pursue the analogy further. Not every vocation to the priesthood or to religious life is on the same level. Some are on the order of invitations which can be respectfully turned down without negative consequences for the persons concerned or the world around them. In these cases God appears to present to the individual two options, either of which the person may freely choose; in anthropomorphic terms, we might say that God may prefer one option over the other, but offers to bless either choice. On the other hand, some vocations have a more peremptory character. The summons comes with a sense of urgency and demand, like the prophetic call given to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Paul. How much poorer the world would be if Mother Teresa had rejected the call to religious life, or Karol Wojtyła had become a professional actor rather than a priest. How much poorer still would the world be if no Jews responded to their priestly vocation!

To capture adequately the traditional Jewish understanding of its covenantal responsibility, this analogy of vocation must

be pressed even further. It is one thing for a Catholic to resist a vocation (whether a gentle invitation or a peremptory summons) when the call is first extended, and an entirely different thing for a Catholic to accept a vocation and then later decide to forsake that vocation and adopt a different path. Even in such cases the circumstances may render the person guiltless, but the act of turning away from a previously accepted call is of greater gravity than never answering the call in the first place.

According to Jewish tradition, this is the situation which Jews face in every generation. Our ancestors accepted the covenant at Sinai with the words, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (Ex 24:7), and in this way they imposed a solemn obligation on their descendants for all ages to come. We enter the covenant at birth, before we are able to choose for ourselves. We may decide later to abandon the covenant, but we do not make the decision as neutral agents previously uncommitted to the mission of Israel. We are part of a family, and membership in that family means that its mission is our own. We may accept or reject the mission as individuals, but we render our decision as those for whom a promise has already been uttered.

The above is not an argument that Jewish disciples of Jesus should observe the Torah, nor is it an argument for a particular way of understanding the moral consequences of their failing to do so. In fact, it is not an argument at all. These paragraphs represent only a preliminary attempt at expanding the conceptual universe within which such arguments may be offered. A vast terrain lies between the moral status of a valuable but optional pattern of life (on the one hand), and a set of practices whose non-observance constitutes a sin equal to the violation of a universal commandment (on the other hand). This terrain must be explored and charted before we can adequately address questions that were unaskable—and perhaps inconceivable—in the pre-*Nostra aetate* era.

4. THE MISSION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The matters I have focused upon in this response to Kereszty—Israel-Christology, Jewish sacramental realities, and Torah

observance—are all intertwined. In my presentation of Israel-Christology in *SHOM* I propose that Jesus' messianic embodiment of Israel establishes an unbreakable bond with the Jewish people that places the risen Messiah at the hidden heart of Jewish life, even when his name is there unmentioned or unmentionable. The presence of the resurrected Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the midst of Jewish life imparts a sacramental character to its most cherished pillars—Torah, Mitzvot, Shabbat, the land of Israel, and the Jewish people itself. It is the christologically imparted sacramental character of Mitzvot that Jewish disciples of Jesus explicitly and consciously acknowledge when they undertake observance of the Torah. Thus, for Messianic Jews Torah observance becomes more than a means of expressing gratitude to God, and also more than a means of cooperating with God in the noble work of preserving the Jewish people; it becomes a graciously bestowed means of communing with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

This all points to the significance of the mission of genealogical-Israel after the Incarnation, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. That mission provides the rationale for Jewish disciples of Jesus to maintain their identity as Jews and their identification with the Jewish people as a whole: in embracing Jesus as the Messiah, Jewish followers of Jesus are called to enter explicitly and consciously into the mission which many of their Jewish brothers and sisters already undertake implicitly and with an imperfect awareness of what they are doing. Among other things, this is a mission of bearing witness to the faithfulness of God in the Messiah (Rom 15:8).

Kereszty refers briefly to the enduring mission of genealogical-Israel:

[H]er survival to the end of time is not just one of many possible historical scenarios; it becomes, rather, a necessary part of God's providential plan of mercy. In this sense, then, Israel has a mission according to the New Testament. God wills its existence so that after the full number of the Gentiles enters the Church, all Israel may be saved.

He also asserts that this truth was recognized by the Church's great teachers of the past:

Bernard [of Clairvaux] here (and elsewhere) expresses in a new and passionate way a general patristic belief: Israel is the object of a special providence and will exist until the end of history, when all Israel will be saved.

However, Kereszty's essay does not elaborate on the positive content of that mission, and the Church's great teachers of the past have even less to say on this topic. Yes, Israel will exist until the end of history; and yes, at the end of history Israel will corporately embrace Jesus as its Messiah. But the mission of Israel between the Resurrection of Jesus and his return consists of more than mere survival, and Israel's priestly calling involves more than bearing witness to the judgment of God upon covenant-infidelity.

I stress this point not in order to find fault with the excellent essay of Kereszty, but as a way of underlining the main thesis of *SHOM*. I argue there that the Jewish people and the Jewish way of life (i.e., Judaism or "Torah") are intrinsic to the identity of the Church, and that this truth has far-reaching implications for every facet of the Church's life and teaching. In other words, the mission of the Jewish people also includes the service it renders to the Church by its mere existence. When the Church ignores genealogical-Israel or consigns her relationship with the Jewish people to a discrete theological or diplomatic compartment, she unwittingly suppresses an essential dimension of her own being and suffers loss in the process.

These reflections on the mission of Israel provide the necessary context for my response to Kereszty's most passionately formulated questions:

Regarding the New Testament Church, what does Kinzer mean by the phrase "the eschatologically renewed Israel"? Is she simply the continuation of the Old Testament Israel, with the addition of the discovery that Jesus is the Messiah and that the Gentiles are invited to join the people of Israel? Is the body of Christ simply the social body of converted Jews and Christians?

I answer that "eschatologically renewed" means far more than the addition of the Messiah and some Gentiles to an otherwise unchanged community of Jews. The Church *is* the continu-

ation of Israel, and the eschatological change Israel experiences in the process is a *renewal* rather than a termination of its covenant-identity. But eschatological change also involves the rupture of this age by the power of the Resurrection, and so “eschatological renewal” must introduce elements that are genuinely “new.” What are those elements? The remaining questions of Kereszty help us to see them:

Or is she the one and unique *ecclesia*, consisting indivisibly of the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, the extension on earth and perfection in heaven of the personal, risen body of the Messiah, true God and true man? Is the one body of the one *ecclesia* animated by the Holy Spirit in whom Christ is acting and suffering today and up to the end of history? I know Kinzer believes that Jesus is God and man in one being, but does he draw these consequences *from that belief*?

I answer these important questions of Kereszty with an unequivocal “yes.” The Church is all of these things—but only *with* and *in relation to* genealogical-Israel, the Jewish people as a whole, who are themselves changed irreversibly by the Incarnation, death, and Resurrection of the Messiah. It is here that we again confront the significance of the Jewish mission in the world.

CONCLUSION

Just as Kereszty has responded to *SHOM* by beginning a dialogue rather than offering a review, so I have attempted to take the same approach to his insightful essay. I have sought to clarify several key issues, and to open wider a door for more intense and sustained interaction. As the conversation continues, I pray that the Holy Spirit may enable us to search more deeply the riches of the one who is the mystery of both the Church and genealogical-Israel, that in him we may discover one another, and in the process find ourselves. □

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