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# Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament

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## Peer Reviewed

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In sum, this worthwhile book repays careful reading. While some of its contents will be of interest primarily to political philosophers, Dalin's, Michael Novak's, and Marshall's essays in particular are accessible and intelligent undergraduate-level introductions to the contemporary Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

*Boston College*

KATHERINE RICHMAN

*Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament.* By James Chukwuma Okoye. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006. xix + 178 pages. \$28.00 (paper).

In this book the author does an excellent job relating the Christian understanding of Mission to the Gentiles to the Old Testament Scriptures. He considers a wide range of Old Testament texts with New Testament writings and key Roman Catholic Church documents relating to the theology of mission. His writing is clear and concise and accessible to the educated lay reader and graduate student in theology. The book's division into fourteen chapters, with accompanying discussion questions at the end of each, makes it an ideal textbook for semester-long graduate courses on Mission Theology. Okoye's detailed treatment of the Old Testament text also makes this book suitable as a text for graduate survey courses on the Christian/Roman Catholic theological understanding of the Old Testament as it brings many insights from historical criticism into conversation with classic Christian theological concerns.

Readers will be impressed by the way Okoye uses the methods associated with historical criticism to bring to light the exegetical nuances of classic Old Testament passages without making the conversation burdensome with notes on textual minutiae. Both readers with only an introduction to biblical Hebrew and those with considerable training will find much to appreciate in Okoye's careful attention to the biblical text. He effectively models ways in which biblical scholarship can inform theologians' contemporary concerns. This breadth will make the book especially useful for graduate students and seminarians.

Okoye's first two chapters offer a rich summary of the key issues surrounding the discussion of Mission Theology today. There the author sketches four primary models of mission in the Old Testament, which organize the subsequent chapters. The first model is the universality of salvation (Chapters 3–5). The second is the "community-in-mission" wherein Israel's experience of election is understood as a pattern for all of humanity to follow (Chapters 6–8). The third model is the "centripetal mission" model where the nations are drawn toward Israel's moral monotheism (Chapters 10–11). The final model of mission is "centrifugal mission" that comes with the expectation of the conversion of the Gentiles (Chapter 12).

It is important to note that Okoye's book is concerned throughout with the Christian understanding of the Old Testament and how these texts fit into a Christian Theology of Mission. Such an orientation restricts the book's appeal to Christians and scholars of Christianity. Although Okoye is clear, from the beginning, about his intended audience he seems to offer little of interest to

Jews and scholars of Judaism or to scholars of interreligious dialogue. While Okoye briefly discusses the way the Church's understanding of Mission has been articulated within the context of interreligious dialogue in Chapter 2, more explicit statements about the Catholic Church's special relation to the Jewish people should have been included, particularly in light of the book's focus on the Christian Old Testament Scriptures. When Okoye references Israel in his work, the presumption is that the Church is continuous with Israel; nowhere does he nuance the idea of Israel as existing apart from or prior to the Church.

*Fairfield University*

ANGELA KIM HARKINS

*Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam.* By Peter C. Phan. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005. xxiv + 324 pages. \$35.00.

This is the first paperback edition of Peter Phan's study of the catechism Alexandre de Rhodes, SJ used in the evangelization of Vietnam in the seventeenth century. It consists of two parts: an exploration of the socio-cultural, theological context that set the evangelization strategies of de Rhodes and a translation by Phan of de Rhodes' *Catechism*. The book is included in Orbis' *Faith and Culture series*.

Phan's thesis is that de Rhodes creatively addressed the central issue in evangelization: the missionary must be clear that religious conversion is the call to live the gospel, not to abandon one's cultural heritage. Since Pedro Arrupe's introduction of the term "inculturation" into the discussion it has assumed a central place in missiological and theological studies.

The impetus in de Rhodes' reassessment of missionary strategy was evoked by the realization that missionaries had relied too heavily on their own conversion experiences, as well as the influence provided by the commercial traders with whom they travelled to the East, to establish their position in a foreign land. It became clear to de Rhodes that local people often associated Christianity with being "Western," particularly in dress, manner and linguistic expression. Such commonly recognized challenges faced Western missionaries everywhere they went. However, Phan, more importantly, reminds us of the deeper and more elusive conundrums they faced when trying to communicate Western Christian concepts of "existence," "a personal God," "matter and spirit," "immortality," etc. These embedded concepts require profound rethinking in a context that has a cultural world-view, shaped by Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism, that is so alien in its comprehension of these notions.

A major factor in de Rhodes' success was his realization that language embraces an incipient theology about the ultimate meaning of life. To the extent that Vietnamese cultural and linguistic expression was not inconsistent with the gospel de Rhodes advocated disentangling Christianity from its "western" clothing and donning the Vietnamese "way of being." The success of de Rhodes' attempt can be seen in his *Catechismus*. Over eight days, he