**Abstract**

Christians in the Middle East today experience fear as thousands are driven out of their homes in Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Palestine. Discussion regarding Christians in the Middle East is centralized around this issue, and the realization that Christianity may soon be displaced from its roots and heritage. However, many are unaware that the population of Christians in the Middle East is growing, due to the influx of Christian migrant workers and refugees in Israeli society. Additionally, many are unaware of the established Hebrew speaking Catholic community of Israel, which welcomes these new Israeli Catholics, creating a dynamic, multicultural community of faithful that speaks to the strength of Christianity in the Middle East. In my work I will demonstrate how this community lives in Israeli society within the Church of the East, as an example of cosmopolitanization.

## Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel

### *2.1 A Socio-Historical Analysis*

As a prelude to my socio-historical account of the Saint James Vicariate, it is necessary to describe membership and identity within the *kehilla* (Hebrew for community). In his article, 'Kehilla, Church and Jewish people,' Fr. David Neuhaus SJ, the Vicar for Hebrew speaking Catholics in Israel, characterizes members as Catholic Christians of both Jewish and Gentile origin who are Israelis or residents in Israel and live in the Jewish milieu. He notes, 'Kehilla members pray and give expression to their faith in Hebrew, with a profound appreciation of the Jewish roots of their faith and practice. They seek to understand the relationship between contemporary Judaism (in all its diversity) and Christian faith today.'[1]

Fr. Neuhaus clarifies that the kehilla is not a mission station or centre for Jewish-Christian dialogue, but rather a community of believers in Christ. He adds,

---

[1] Neuhaus, David, SJ, 'Kehilla, Church and Jewish People,' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=335%3Akehilla-church-and-jewish-people&catid=45&Itemid=153&lang=en.

what distinguishes the kehilla from other Christian communities is the unique context in which it lives in faith, a context that places the kehilla at a crossroads between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people.[2] In addition to celebrating the Eucharist in Hebrew, the Saint James Vicariate publishes prayers, hymns, liturgical books, catechetical books, newsletters and other Christian material in Hebrew. They celebrate the feast days of the Latin Rite—the Roman Catholic Church, as well as particular feast days significant to Jewish Christians. Such feast days include the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, which falls each year on January 25, and the Feast of Saint Edith Stein, which falls each year on August 9.[3] Members who are of Jewish ancestry connect strongly to their Jewish culture and tradition. Fr. Neuhaus, a Jewish-Catholic himself, holds this connection close to his heart. In an interview, he claimed, 'I feel…historically, socially, ethnically – in all senses other than religiously – a Jew.'[4] Other members, who do not share this same connection, are Israeli Catholic citizens and residents who learn Hebrew tradition as members of the Saint James Vicariate.

The Association of Saint James was formally established in 1955.[5] In his article, 'Hebrew Catholicism: Theology and Politics in Modern Israel,' Leon Menzies Racionzer notes that the decision to found the Association of Saint James was

---

[2] *Ibid.*
[3] 'Feasts' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=35&Itemid=141&lang=en.
[4] Franks, Tim, 'Hebrew Catholics' BBC News Jerusalem (4, May 2009), accessed online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8032339.stm.
[5] 'Who are we?' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10171&Itemid=478&lang=en.

promoted by the Latin Patriarchate, in its attempt to aid the thousands of Catholics who arrived in Israel as refugees and migrants in the years following the Second World War and the creation of the State of Israel (1948).[6] In the previous chapter, I discussed the influx of Jewish migrants to Israel. What is not as well known is that within this influx came a large number of Catholics, many of whom were married to Jews at the time.

Racionzer notes that most Catholics emigrated from Eastern European countries and were either converted Jews, or Catholic spouses in mixed marriages. He notes, in a few cases, migrants had no connection at all with Jews or Judaism and emigrated for reasons such as fear of Communism in the Soviet Union.[7] In response to the influx of immigrants in the 1950s, the Latin Patriarchate favoured the creation of a distinct framework within its jurisdiction specially designed to cater to the needs of these Israeli Catholics. Mgr. Vergani, then the Vicar of Israel, decided that pastoral centres would adopt Hebrew as the *lingua franca*, in an effort to connect the multicultural community.[8] The statutes of the Association of Saint James approved on February 11, 1965 state:

> We insist upon a Biblical formation; we try to promote a Jewish Christian culture and a spirituality in conformity with that culture…[We aim] to combat all forms of anti-Semitism, attempting to

---

[6] Racionzer, Leon Menzies, 'Hebrew Catholicism: Theology And Politics In Modern Israel' in *Heythrop Journal*, (Vol XLV, 2004), p. 407.

[7] Racionzer, Leon Menzies, 'Hebrew Catholicism: Theology And Politics In Modern Israel' in *Heythrop Journal*, (Vol XLV, 2004), p. 407.

[8] *Ibid.*

develop mutual understanding and friendly relations between the Catholic world and Israel.[9]

The vision of the Association of Saint James was to implant the Church within the Jewish people in such a way that Jews who become Christians should be able to preserve their national character, in much the same way that members of any other people or nation are able to do so. According to Racionzer, a leader of this nationalist vision was Carmelite priest, Fr. Daniel Rufeisen, who fought for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return.[10]

Fr. Rufeisen, born in Poland, was raised Jewish and became an active member of the Zionist movement. In 1943, after being imprisoned for helping Jews in the ghetto of Mir, Poland, he began to experience a religious conversion to Christianity. In 1946 he took the name Brother Daniel, and in 1952 he was ordained a priest in the Carmelite order.[11] To escape anti-semitism in Poland, Fr. Rufeisen began the process of *aliyah*—return to Zion. Dick J. Int'l, in his article, 'Israel's Law of Return: Analysis of Its Evolution and Present Application,' notes that it was in 1958 that Fr. Rufeisen applied for immigrant status under the Law of Return so that he could be registered as a 'Jew' on his identity card. The Ministry of the Interior

---

[9] *Ibid*.
[10] Racionzer, Leon Menzies, 'Hebrew Catholicism: Theology And Politics In Modern Israel' in *Heythrop Journal*, (Vol XLV, 2004), p. 408.
[11] 'Our founders' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=38&Itemid=145&lang=en&limitstart=20.

refused to register him as a Jew due to his Catholic status.[12] Fr. Rufeisen's case went as far as the Israeli High Court (*Rufheisen v. Minister of the Interior*). He first claimed that the concept of religion and nationality were separate; one could be culturally Jewish without practicing the Jewish faith. He then argued that he was a Jew because his parents were both Jewish and that the Minister of the Interior's refusal to grant him *oleh* (citizen) rights was discriminatory. Despite the legitimacy of Fr. Rufeisen's claims, the High Court, in a four to one decision, held that a Roman Catholic could not be a Jew according to the standards of the Law of Return. Justice Landau claimed, 'A Jew who, by changing his religion, cuts himself off from the national past of his people ceases thereby to be a Jew in the national sense to which the Law of Return gives expression.'[13] As a result of this case, the Law of Return, which originally guaranteed automatic citizenship in Israel to all Jews, was amended so that it excluded Jews who belonged to a religion other than Judaism. According to Int'l, *Rufheisen v. Minister of the Interior* is considered to be one of the most notable cases in Israeli history, as the Israeli government has handled multiple identity cases under the Law of Return.[14]

Soon after the trial, Fr. Rufeisen managed to become a citizen of Israel through the process of naturalization. In Israel, he became a leader of the *Oeuvre de Saint Jacques* and in 1965, in accordance with the pastoral effort to integrate

---

[12] Int'l, Dick J., '*Israel's Law of Return: Analysis of Its Evolution and Present Application'* in *Dickinson Journal of International Law* (vol. 12, no. 1, 1993), p. 104.
[13] Int'l, Dick J., "*Israel's Law of Return: Analysis of Its Evolution and Present Application"* in *Dickinson Journal of International Law* (vol. 12, no. 1, 1993), p. 105.
[14] Int'l, Dick J., "*Israel's Law of Return: Analysis of Its Evolution and Present Application"* in *Dickinson Journal of International Law* (vol. 12, no. 1, 1993), p. 104.

Catholic immigrants, founded the Hebrew speaking community in Haifa. He believed that Christianity should be connected to its Jewish roots and educated his Catholic community in Jewish and Hebrew expression.[15]

[15] 'Daniel Rufeisen Carm' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=271:daniel-rufeisen-carm&catid=38&Itemid=145&lang=en.

*2.2 Changing Demographics*

As Fr. Neuhaus rightly points out, the Church is re-founded every generation because every generation sees a new wave of migration of Catholics to the Holy Land. While the first group of migrants, both Jewish and Christians alike, came predominantly from Western and Eastern European countries with arguably 'Zionist' and religious motives, the next generation came predominantly from the former Soviet Union with a different mentality. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's emigration policy changed, and, in 1990, 800,000 Russian immigrants reached Israel. According to Shapira, Israel had not encountered a group of immigrants who were so well educated and represented such impressive human capital as this Russian influx.[16] In fact, the Russian immigrants as a group had a higher level of education than that of the host society.[17] The Israeli government thought that these immigrants would take the place of Palestinians in secondary sector jobs. On the contrary few of them took these jobs, and in most cases, only temporarily. These immigrants had escaped the underdevelopment of their countries, and they would not settle for 'Arab jobs.'

In his work, 'New Wine in Old Wineskins,' Fr. Neuhuas notes that within this influx of Russian migrants were thousands of Russian Christians, some of them Russian Catholics.[18] In 2003, Mgr. Jean-Baptiste Gourion, auxiliary bishop to Michel Sabbah, publicly stressed his mission to accommodate the Russian immigrants who

---

[16] Shapira, Anita, *Israel a History*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014), p. 453.
[17] Shapira, Anita, *Israel a History*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014), p. 454.
[18] Neuhaus, David, SJ, 'New Wine in Old Wineskins' in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, (vol. 57, no. 3-4, 2005), pp. 207-236.

were Christian. He appointed two Eastern European priests to minister Catholic communities in the Russian language.[19] Polish priest, Fr. Slawomir Abramovsky, established a center for Russian Catholics at the Latroun monastery in Jerusalem, and later worked with the Russian community in Haifa. Polish priest, Fr. Jan Hlavka worked at the Latroun monastery.[20]

In addition to the 1990 wave of Russian immigrants, Israel recruited an influx of non-Jewish migrant workers in the aftermath of the First Intifada (1987-1991). Since Russian immigrants refused to seek secondary sector jobs, Israel was left without a cheap labour force. According to Vivian Jackson, in her article, 'This is Not the Holy Land: Gendered Filipino Migrants in Israel and the Intersectional Diversity of Religious Belonging,' migrant workers were hired en masse to fill agricultural and construction roles previously held by Palestinians of the Occupied Territories.[21] David Bartram, in his work, 'Foreign Workers in Israel: History and Theory,' notes that they have come in large groups from Rumania as construction workers, Thailand as farmers, and the Philippines as domestic service workers (Batrim 314).[22] By 2010, Israel was home to 200,000 migrant workers—

---

[19] Neuhaus, David, SJ, 'New Wine in Old Wineskins' in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, (vol. 57, no. 3-4, 2005), p. 223.
[20] 'Chronology' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2661:chronology-c-2000-2007&catid=39&Itemid=146&lang=en.
[21] Vivienne, Jackson, 'This is Not the Holy Land: Gendered Filipino Migrants in Israel and the Intersectional Diversity of Religious Belonging,' in *Religion & Gender* (vol. 3, no. 1, 2013), p. 9.
[22] Bartram, David, 'Foreign Workers in Israel: History and Theory,' in *International Migration Review* (vol. 32, no. 2, 1998), p. 314.

predominantly Christian migrant workers from the Philippines, India and Latin America, alongside African asylum seekers (Goldman 2010).[23]

Fr. Neuhaus notes that these communities are the newest members of the Saint James Vicariate. Statistics by the Ministry of Interior prove that these communities continue to grow at a rapid pace: 71,352 new migrants have arrived in Israel since 2014.[24] While it is difficult for these migrant workers to attain citizenship, they wish to remain in Israel, and remain Catholic in Israel.[25] However, many of these migrants live in areas that are predominantly Jewish, and some choose to hide their Christian identities in fear of losing their work contracts.[26]

Since its establishment in 1955, the Association of Saint James has experienced change demographically, and has fluctuated in membership. Fr. Neuhaus notes that while kehilla membership numbered in the thousands in the 1950s, it decreased to about 200 in the 70s and 80s due to an intensive period of assimilation into Jewish society. In the last two decades, the kehilla has grown to about 800 people due to the influx of migrant workers. The Association of Saint James constitutes an autonomous Vicariate within the Latin Patriarchate of

---

[23] Goldman, David, 'Israeli Christians: Uncomfortable Minority, Mutual Opportunity,' First Things (11, October, 2010), accessed online: http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2010/10/israeli-christians-uncomfortable-minority-mutual-opportunity.

[24] 'Coordination of the Pastoral for Migrants - A Film,' produced by the Christian Media Center (2015).

[25] Neuhaus, David. SJ, 'Jewish Israeli Attitudes Towards Christianity And Christians in Contemporary Israel,' in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East* eds., Anthony O'Mahony, and John Flannery, p. 359.

[26] Neuhaus, David. SJ, 'Jewish Israeli Attitudes Towards Christianity And Christians in Contemporary Israel,' in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East* eds.,Anthony O'Mahony, and John Flannery, p. 362.

Jerusalem, and has active communities in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Haifa, Beer Sheba, Tiberias and Nazareth.[27] It is important to mention that in the 1950s, the kehilla had a strong connection to its Jewish roots, for most members, like Fr. Rufeisen, were Jewish converts to Catholicism. While the Saint James Vicariate attributes this connection as a significant part of its Catholic mission today, kehilla members are culturally diverse, and evidently kehilla identity is not static. Fr. Neuhaus states:

> Our communities, small in size, are very diverse. We have faithful from many parts of the world…in addition to Israelis. Some are Jews and some are not. Some are Israelis, some have been here many years, some have just arrived. Some speak Hebrew, some do not. Some are Catholics by baptism at birth, some are Catholics by baptism late in life.[28]

Indeed diversity poses structural challenges within the Saint James Vicariate, as it embraces a multicultural community. The community is connected by the Jewish roots of its faith and the Hebrew vernacular, however new migrants take time to learn Hebrew, identify with Hebrew Catholicism, and adjust to Jewish Israeli culture. According to Fr. Neuhaus, the Saint James Vicariate takes on the responsibility of accommodating Catholic migrant communities, for there is very

---

[27] 'Communities' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14&Itemid=420&lang=en.

[28] Swanson, Karna, 'Israel's Hebrew-Speaking Catholics' Zenit (8, June, 2008), accessed online: http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/israel-s-hebrew-speaking-catholics.

little institutional support for them in Israel. In doing so, he notes, 'there is a constant vigilance in order to build community and not allow divisiveness or factionalism to enter.'[29]

[29] Swanson, Karna, 'Israel's Hebrew-Speaking Catholics' Zenit (8, June, 2008), accessed online: http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/israel-s-hebrew-speaking-catholics.

*2.3 Kehilla Identity*

It is evident that the Hebrew speaking Catholic community of Israel is a complex reality. While some Hebrew speaking Catholics come from Jewish families and keep Jewish tradition close to their hearts, other Hebrew-speaking Catholics, for example, are ingrained in Indian Catholic traditions, Filipino Catholic traditions, Eritrean traditions. How does the Saint James Vicariate live in community? As previously mentioned, the Saint James Vicariate calls priests to serve cultural communities. For example, Filipino priest, Fr Michael Grospe from the Philippines from the diocese of San Jose was invited by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to serve the Filipino community. Fr. Tojy Jose was invited to serve the Indian community. In an interview with the Christian Media Center, he states that he specifically caters to their spiritual needs, for example, weddings, Indian festivals and feast days. On Christmas each year, the Indian community makes a procession from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. There they bare witness to their faith with penitential practices and pray for better days. Fr. Tojy Jose notes that it is important for Indian Catholics to gather as a community for support and strength in the Holy Land.[30]

By maintaining their respective cultural traditions while actively living the Hebrew Catholic tradition, these Hebrew speaking Catholics are examples of cosmopolitanization. In accordance with Werbner 's definition, the Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel belong to different ethnic and cultural localisms simultaneously. However, one may argue that while these Hebrew speaking

[30] 'Coordination of the Pastoral for Migrants - A Film,' produced by the Christian Media Center (2015).

Catholics are part of their respective cultural traditions and Hebrew Catholic tradition, they may not necessarily integrate with other ethnic communities, and thus better fit Werbner's definition of transnationals—those people who move and build encapsulated cultural worlds around them. While this argument is valid, as Fr. Neuhaus has voiced his concern about community building, the Saint James Vicariate works continuously to prevent such isolation within the kehilla.

In 2011, Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal appointed Fr. Neuhaus Coordinator of the Pastoral for Migrants. Since then, Fr Neuhaus and members of the kehilla have worked to establish a new centre for migrants in Tel Aviv, Our Lady Woman of Valour, which opened its doors in March 2014. In a city where there is no established Catholic presence, and tons of Hebrew-speaking Catholics, Our Lady of Valour provides a church that seats 250 people, a rooftop chapel, and two apartments for the Sisters from the Philippines (Saint Paul of Charters) and Sri Lanka (Perpetual Help). According to Indrani Basu and John Albert, in their article, 'Tel Aviv Catholic church serves growing migrant community,' the church holds five 'Sunday' masses, though interestingly all but one take place on Saturday, which is Israel's Sabbath and the only day migrants have off from work.[31] While cultural groups have mass in their own languages, there is plenty of opportunity for migrants to interact. Fr. Neuhaus jokingly comments about the Sisters from the Philippines and Sri Lanka that the centre houses, 'They get along perfectly except

---

[31] Basu, Indrani, and John Albert, 'Tel Aviv Catholic church serves growing migrant community,' *Washington Post* (2014), accessed online: http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/tel-aviv-catholic-church-serves-growing-migrant-community/2014/05/19/89fade2e-df86-11e3-9442-54189bf1a809_story.html.

when it comes to the kitchen' as they prefer different foods.[32] One of the main priorities of the Centre is to integrate migrant children as best as possible into Hebrew speaking society. Migrant children of diverse cultural backgrounds gather once every two weeks for Mass in Hebrew. Before mass they study and read catechism books in Hebrew.[33]

While cosmopolitanization occurs on a micro level within the Hebrew Speaking community of Israel, does it occur on a macro level, within the wider Church of the East? Or, does it occur on an interreligious level between Jews and Christians? The next chapter will explore inter-ecclesial relations within the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which is predominantly Arab, and Jewish-Christian relations in the Holy Land.

---

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*

## Presence in Inter-ecclesial and Inter-religious Relations

*3.1 Ecclesiastical Complexity*

Within the jurisdiction of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel belong to a larger community of Eastern Catholics, and the wider community of Eastern Christians. Here it is important to give an overview of the ecclesial context of Christianity in the contemporary Middle East, to better understand the transnational Church of Israel. In his work, Anthony O'Mahony groups the Churches of the Middle East into five families: Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental and Eastern Catholics, Anglican and Protestant, and Assyrian Church of the East.[34] As one of the five groupings, the Eastern Catholic family includes six patriarchates[35]: the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Greek Catholic Church, the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Chaldean Church, and the Coptic Catholic Church. Within the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem lives the Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel, the Saint James Vicariate.[36]

---

[34] O'Mahony, Anthony, 'Christianity in the Middle East,' in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, eds. Anthony O'Mahony and John Flannery, (London: Melisende, 2010) p. 7.

[35] According to H.E. Bishop William Shomali, Patriarchal Vicar for Jerusalem and Palestine, the title of patriarch is not much different than the title of archbishop. It is a prestigious title, which was given to Jerusalem in the 5th century, as it was given to the other four seats of the Church (Alexandria, Antioch, Rome and Constantinople). The patriarchate is the jurisdiction of the patriarch.

[36] Interestingly, Racionzer in his study, 'Hebrew Catholocism: Theology And Politics In Modern Israel,' attributes the reality of the kehilla to Cardinal Tisserant, who placed the community of Hebrew Catholics in Israel under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation of Oriental Churches. In 1954, Cardinal Tisserant, head of the Congregation for Oriental Churches claimed, 'The mass in Israel? Not Latin and not Byzantine but rather an Aramaic rite, for example that of the Syrians.' However, the

Middle Eastern Christianity is distinctly plural in ecclesial identity; liturgical and linguistic cultures; its orientation towards religion, politics and church-state relations in their respective societies. It is important to note that the transnational Church of Israel mirrors this complexity. Rather than focusing on the denominational breakdown of Christians in Israel, Fr. Neuhaus deems it helpful to distinguish Israeli Christians by social, political and cultural factors. In his work, 'Jewish Israeli Attitudes Towards Christianity And Christians In Contemporary Israel,' he places Israeli Christians into four groups. The first group consists of Christian Arabs, who according to official statistics make up more than 90 percent of Christians in Israel. He notes that most of these Christian Arabs are citizens, as they reside in Israeli borders.[37]

The second group consists of the large number of expatriates mostly of European and North American origin. Many of these expatriates are not citizens, but are long-term residents. The third group, less clearly identifiable and yet of unknown proportions, consists of the myriad of Christians who have immigrated to Israel in recent years, particularly from Russia and Ethiopia within the waves of Jewish immigration. Fr. Neuhuas notes that they receive citizenship on arrival. The final group consists of the tens of thousands of foreign workers from the Philippines,

---

suggestion to utilize the Syrian liturgical rite in Hebrew was not popular, as many Jewish converts to Christianity from the West were accustomed to the Latin Rite. In 1957, Pope Pius XII permitted the kehilla to use Hebrew in the Latin Rite. For references please see: Leon Menzies Racionzer, 'Hebrew Catholicism: Theology And Politics in Modern Israel' in: *Heythrop Journal* (vol. 45, 2004), p. 406.

[37] Neuhaus, David, 'Jewish Israeli Attitudes Towards Christianity And Christians in Contemporary Israel,' in *World Christianity: Politics, Theology, Dialogues,* eds. Anthony O'Mahony and Michael Kirwan, (London: Melisende, 2004), p. 348.

Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa. These migrants find it difficult to gain citizenship, but have established families, speak Hebrew and set up permanent residences in Israel.[38]

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, mirrors the complexity of Middle Eastern Christianity. While members of this Patriarchate are of the same ecclesial rite, cultural, social, and political differences are part of its reality. Fr. Twad states, 'To complicate [our] complex reality further, it is one diocese with many states,' covering Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Cyprus.[39] While the Latin Patriarchate is multicultural and transnational, statistics show that it is highly populated by Arab Catholics. In his article, 'Promised Land,' O'Mahony notes that the conflict between Arab and Jew has coloured the political debate over the ecclesial jurisdiction. It has been argued that there should be a Catholic identity for Israel separate from the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. However, the Latin Patriarch understands this particular challenge to be historic, as the Church of Israel is a church open to culture.[40]

If this particular challenge is no longer a concern to the Patriarchate, what are temporary issues that face the jurisdiction? What is the responsibility of the Latin Patriarchate as it lives in Israel? According to Fr. Emil Salayta, President of the Ecclesiastical Court within the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the identity of the Patriarchate has three dimensions. First, it has a responsibility towards Christians

---

[38] *Ibid.*
[39] 'Introduction to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem,' Latin Patriarchate Youtube Channel, accessed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3qzki981rI.
[40] O'Mahony, Anthony, 'Promised Land,' *The Tablet* (9, October, 2010), p. 7.

of the World, for he claims, 'we are the mother church.' Second, it acts as a bridge connecting Arab Christians and Arab Muslims. He states, 'we share our culture language, tradition, and food with the Arabs [Muslims].' He also notes that the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Church of the East is connected to the Church of the West, and is in communion with the Rome. Third, it has the responsibility of hosting the universal Church—to serve pilgrims and give witness of Christ in the Holy Land. It must be open to administer to all Catholics and Christians who come from different areas of the world to understand the roots of their faith.[41]

While Fr. Salayta mentions the bridge between Arab Christian and Arab Muslims, he does not mention the bridge between Israeli Christians and Israeli Jews. The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem is primarily Arab in hierarchy and composition.[42] Nevertheless, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem recognizes the vocation of the kehilla. In 2001, the Synod of the Catholic Churches in the Holy Land expressed this recognition:

> There is a group within the Jewish people who have come to know Christ as Savior. They are part of our local Church and they live in their own special conditions. We must preserve open bridges of communication between our Churches and this community in order to exchange experiences so that we can learn from one another and so

---

[41] 'Introduction to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem,' Latin Patriarchate Youtube Channel, accessed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3qzki981rI.
[42] Neuhaus, David, SJ, 'Kehilla, Church and Jewish People,' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=335%3Akehilla-church-and-jewish-people&catid=45&Itemid=153&lang=en.

that this community can develop according to its own particularity and as a part of the community of faithful in our countries[43]

Given these dimensions, one of the major challenges the Latin Patriarchate faces is accommodating the new wave of migrants and refugees, many of whom are Christian. The Latin Patriarchate caters to these people, as I have demonstrated, by calling priests to serve specific cultural communities, and establishing pastoral centres like Our Lady of Valour Centre for Migrants. However, it is necessary to recognize that the Saint James Vicariate has largely taken on the responsibility of catering to these migrant and refugee communities, for they wish to partake in Israeli, Hebrew speaking society, rather than Arab speaking society. As previously mentioned, Fr. Neuhaus, Vicar for the Hebrew Speaking Catholics in Israel, was appointed coordinator of the migrant centre. While the Latin Patriarchate is convinced that the Jewish Arab divide no longer affects relations within the institution, it is impossible to ignore its presence in Israeli society, of which the Church is a part. This being said, the Latin Patriarchate as a whole works to serve the migrant community. In January 2015, in honour of the Celebration of World Migrant and Refugee Day, the Arabic language parish at Saint Saviour Church in Jerusalem welcomed about 40 Filipino Catholics with their priests to celebrate mass.

[43] This statement was taken from the following source cited by the Saint James Vicariate: 'Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land' (Diocesan Synod of the Catholic Churches), The General Pastoral Plan, 2001, 156.

While the mass was said in Arabic, the second reading was in English and there were prayers of the faithful in English and Tagalog.[44]

*3.2 Jewish-Christian Relations in the Holy Land*

In preparation for the Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for the Middle East, called by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, Fr. Neuhuas prepared work on Catholic-Jewish relations in the State of Israel.[45] According to Fr. Neuhaus, Catholic-Jewish relations in Israel are sharply distinguished from the type of relations that exist in Western Europe and North America, where Jews and Catholics have been in healthy dialogue for the past six decades. Most of the official dialogue that goes on in Israel is between expatriate Christians and foreign-born Jews. Fr. Neuhaus notes that this dialogue tends to be conducted along the same lines as dialogue in the Western world, 'often minimally taking into account the particular context in Israel.'[46] Dialogue is happening at the institutional level—between religious officials for example, but it does not necessarily make a presence on the ground—in local Israeli society. There are several reasons why dialogue between Jews and Christians in the Holy Land are particularly challenging. The most evident reality is that the majority

---

[44] 'Celebration of World Migrant Day in the Jerusalem parish' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=249:celebration-of-world-migrant-day-in-the-jerusalem-parish&catid=58&Itemid=122&lang=en

[45] Neuhaus, David. SJ, 'Catholic-Jewish Relations In The State of Israel: Theological Perspectives,' in *The Catholic Church In The Contemporary Middle East*, eds., Anthony O' Mahony, and John Flannery, (London: Melisende, 2010), p. 237.

[46] Neuhaus, David. SJ, 'Catholic-Jewish Relations In The State of Israel: Theological Perspectives,' in *The Catholic Church In The Contemporary Middle East*, eds., Anthony O' Mahony, and John Flannery, (London: Melisende, 2010), p. 240.

of Catholics in Israel and Palestine are Arabs. Local Catholics who are Palestinian Arabs tend to focus on justice and peace as an essential element of dialogue. Jewish Israelis who are interested in dialogue with Christians are sometimes unwilling to engage in this "political" concern. Furthermore, Jews nor Catholics can ignore the presence of Muslims and Islam in their society. As previously mentioned by Fr. Salayta, Arab Catholics attempt to be a bridge between Catholic Church and Islam. Fr Neuhaus states, 'The Christian Arab and the Muslim Arab, whatever their religious differences might be, live in one society, speak one language, share one culture and experience one socio-political reality.'[47] He points out that large number of Israeli Jews also have their origins in Muslim countries (Moroccan and Yemen Jews, as previously discussed in chapter one); however, Israeli Jews are not making the same effort as Israeli Catholics to be a bridge between Judaism and Islam. According to Fr. Neuhaus, there is almost no inter-religious dialogue that takes as its starting point the shared cultural heritage of the Muslim world.[48]

One of the most concerning challenges surrounding Catholic-Jewish dialogue is that Israeli Jews are unaware of their Catholic neighbours. According to Fr. Neuhaus, Israeli Jews tend to have little knowledge of Christianity in general and also little knowledge of the Catholic Church that lives in their society. He notes the sad reality that many Israeli Jews have never consciously met an Israeli or Palestinian Christian. Some would not even know of their existence. One might ask

---

[47] Neuhaus, David. SJ, 'Catholic-Jewish Relations In The State of Israel: Theological Perspectives,' in *The Catholic Church In The Contemporary Middle East*, eds., Anthony O' Mahony, and John Flannery, (London: Melisende, 2010), p. 242.
[48] *Ibid.*

how this is the case considering the continuous influx of migrant workers and refugees who identity as Christian? Many of these Christians hide their identities, worshipping secretly, in order to blend in with their Israeli-Jewish neighbours. Fr. Neuhaus adds that often migrant children hide their Christian identity at school and some of these children, who have explicitly Christian names, are renamed by their parents.[49]

Considering that Jews are unaware of Israeli Christians, and the Catholic Church of Israel, do they recognize the Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel—those who share aspects of their culture and tradition? On the local level, some Hebrew speaking Catholics engage in promoting better relations with Jews in the Holy Land. For example, in February 2015 kehilla members in Jerusalem, together with a Jewish synagogue community, inaugurated a study group, where more than 30 people gathered to study the Torah.[50] However, Fr. Neuhaus notes that the kehilla is careful to remain a discreet presence in Israeli society. The very fact that there are Jews who have recognized a call to enter the Church is a sensitive issue within Jewish-Catholic relations. Fr. Neuhaus suggests that perhaps it is not yet time for Hebrew Catholics to be prominent in the dialogue between the Jewish people and the Catholic Church. Rather, it is a time for the kehilla to pray for the success of future dialogue between the Church and the Jewish people, as the relationship

---

[49] Neuhaus, David, 'Jewish Israeli Attitudes Towards Christianity And Christians in Contemporary Israel,' in *World Christianity: Politics, Theology, Dialogues,* eds. Anthony O'Mahony and Michael Kirwan, (London: Melisende, 2004), p. 360.
[50] 'Studying the Word of God Together' Saint James Vicariate, accessed online: http://www.catholic.co.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=263:studying-the-word-of-god-together&catid=51&Itemid=114&lang=en.

between Christians and Jews slowly mends. By expressing the Jewish roots of their faith as a community within the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel highlight the importance of this existing relationship to a majority Arab population.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that the Catholic Church in Israel mirrors the complexity of the society in which it exists, as it also mirrors the complexity of Christianity in the Middle East. While religious pluralism contributes to this complexity as Jews, Christians and Muslims share the Holy Land, additional social, cultural, and political layers extenuate the contemporary challenges Israel faces as a transnational, multicultural society.

The Saint James Vicariate can be viewed through a lens of cosmopolitanism in several ways. In the context of the Church, the kehilla is an Israeli Catholic presence in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which is highly composed of Arab Catholics. Additionally, it is a Latin Catholic presence in the wider Catholic Church of Israel, which as we recall consists of Melkite, Syrian, Armenian, Coptic and Chaldean Catholics. Its unique presence is recognized in the transnational Christian Church of Israel and in the wider context of Middle Eastern Christianity. The Saint James Vicariate lives within a reality of ecclesial diversity, while belonging to a universal Church.

In the context of community, the kehilla welcomes Israeli Catholics from around the world. While cultural diversity has posed challenges to the structure of the kehilla (as some members are Catholics of Jewish origin, while others are Catholics of Russian, Filipino, and Eritrean origin), it also provides a richness to Hebrew Catholic identity, as it is constantly growing in the Holy Land.

In the context of larger Israeli society, the Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel choose to be an active part of the Israeli-Jewish milieu. Many Hebrew Catholic children are enrolled in Jewish state schools. The Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel are a presence in inter-religious relations between Jews and Christians as they give witness to the Jewish roots of their faith, and fully embrace their Hebrew Catholic collective identity. We can see that the Saint James Vicariate—the Hebrew speaking Catholics of Israel, or rather the kehilla is part of multiple cultures and localities in Israeli society, as it crosses social, political, and religious boundaries.