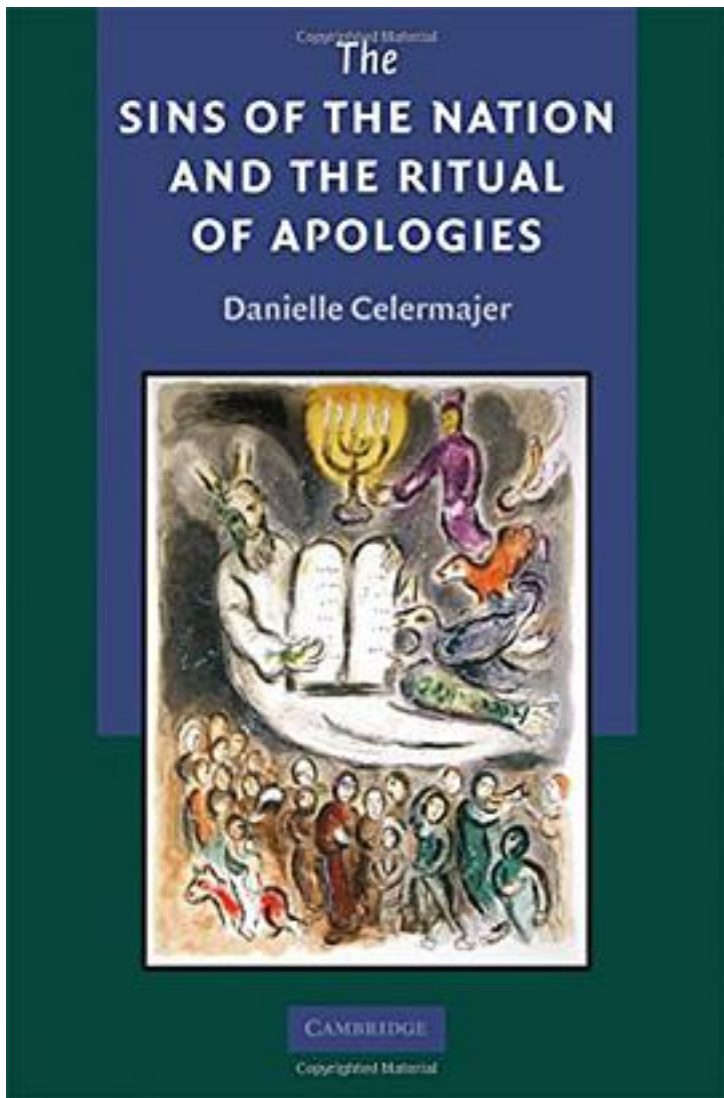


The Sins of the Nation and the Ritual of Apologies



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In the last years of the twentieth century, political leaders the world over began to apologize for wrongs in their nations' pasts. Many dismissed these apologies as 'mere words', cynical attempts to avoid more costly forms of reparation; others rejected them as inappropriate encroachments into politics or forms of action that belonged in personal relationships or religion. To understand apology's extraordinary political emergence, we have to suspend our automatic interpretations of what it means for nations to apologize and interrogate their meaning afresh. Taking the reader on a journey through apology's religious history and contemporary apologetic dramas, this book argues that the apologetic phenomenon marks a new stage in our recognition of the importance of collective responsibility, the place of ritual in addressing national wrongs, and the contribution that practices that once belonged in the religious sphere might make to contemporary politics.

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