

# **Understanding the New Supersessionism: A Critical Examination of the Theological, Hermeneutical and Political Arguments used to Support the New Supersessionism.**

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## **Introduction**

The relationship between Israel and the Church has been a contentious issue for nearly two thousand years. Anyone who has scoured the corridors of ecclesiastical history hoping to gain insights into this relationship will be able to testify to the voluminous and polarising theologies that have existed throughout different eras of Church history. Often, the already muddied waters of theological interpretation, are further obscured by the influence of whichever political entity is able to exert its influence over the Church and wider society at the time. The historical prevalence of anti-Semitism, which at varying times in history has been codified into Church policy and even national law, has contributed to the challenges faced in seeking to understand the Church's relationship to the Jewish people. Many people would actually argue that the anti-Judaic position of the

Church for a large part of its history has been the cause of much of this anti-Semitism. Suffice to say that the complexities of this topic and the importance of the issues involved mean that any attempt at reductionist explanations and overly dogmatic assertions should be avoided. Although the subject may be complex, the relationship of Israel to the Church and the problems of anti-Semitism are still of extreme interest to many Christians. In fact, so pivotal is this question to the formulation of numerous Christian doctrines that The Commission on Faith and Order (1967) have stated:

*"We realize that in this question [the relationship of the Church to Israel] the entire self-understanding of the Church is at stake"* (Brockway 1988:21)

Such a statement should not be a surprise given that the term "Israel" is mentioned over two thousand times in the Old Testament and seventy times in the New Testament (Diprose 2000:7). In addition to this, the biblical phrase "the God of Israel" occurs over two hundred times and the word "Zion" over one hundred and sixty times. Many Christians recognise that they worship a Jewish Messiah, they study a Jewish Bible, written predominately by Jewish apostles and many Christians interpret the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 11:17 to mean that Gentiles are "grafted in" to a Jewish root. Given that typically the field of Systematic Theology devotes an entire section to Ecclesiology, which as a subject has far less space devoted to it in the Scriptures, then surely Christian theologians need to recognise the need for a comprehensive Theology of Israel, a subject which is given much more space in the Scriptures (Diprose 2008:93). These factors among others demonstrate how the subject of Israel is

“inextricably woven into the very historical and theological fabric of the Bible”  
(Smith 2013:2).

Perhaps one of the most challenging and politically contentious elements in trying to formulate an understanding of the Church’s relationship to Israel is the issue of the Land – a specific geographical piece of territory. It is this issue that often leads to impassioned disputes not only between those living in the Land, but also those in the Church, and around the world. While conflicts about land are present everywhere, the issues surrounding the “Holy Land” are somewhat unique given the underlying biblical considerations that enter into the discussion. For many the Land of Israel is the staging ground for some of the greatest events in biblical history. It was this Land that God promised to Abram and Sarai, it was to this Land that Joshua led the children of Israel, it was here that King Solomon and King David reigned, and it was in this Land that the great Jewish Temples were constructed. For Christians, this was the Land where Jesus was born, it was where He lived and taught and ultimately died, and Christian doctrine teaches that this is where He will return. Therefore, the Land holds great significance and it is very difficult to discuss the theology of Israel and the Church without discussing the Land for the two are indissolubly linked. For as Baruch Moaz explains;

*“Israel denotes both people and the land...the Land is no passive observer, a mere sphere in which Israel as a people operate. It is spoken of as altogether at one with the people.” (2000:191)*

Although questions about the future of Israel and the importance of the Land existed long before the birth of the Modern State of Israel in 1948, it was this

event that added a new dimension to the discussion. Primarily it is a theological one, with Christians weighing in from widely divergent eschatological positions. However it is also a political and humanitarian debate, and often there is confusion and tension in trying to balance these two factors. Although this debate is multifaceted, at the centre of the controversy lies one fundamental question: is there any future purpose for the nation of Israel, and by extension the Land, or has Israel been superseded in the plan of God by the Church? The traditional response of the Church to this question has been that of supersessionism. Simply put, this is the view that "the Church completely and permanently replaced ethnic Israel in the working out of God's plan and as recipient of the OT promises to Israel" (Diprose 2000:2). This being the case, Jerusalem and the land of Israel itself are rendered virtually irrelevant, and the status of Israel as an elect nation no longer serves any practical or theological purpose. Supersessionism quickly became the dominant viewpoint in the Post-Apostolic Church. As the influence of supersessionism grew, it brought with it a shameful legacy of Christian anti-Semitism that persisted, and some would say culminated, in the terrible events of the twentieth century. It has been said that one can trace the abuses of anti-Semitism from Augustine to Auschwitz. Indeed, as Prager and Telushkin note, "Christianity did not create the Holocaust...but it made it possible. Without Christian anti-Semitism, the Holocaust would have been inconceivable" (2003:87). They continue that for, "nearly two thousand years...the Christian world dehumanized the Jew, ultimately helping lay the groundwork for the Holocaust" (2003:92). At this point we need to clarify; this in no way implies that all who hold to a supersessionist theology are somehow anti-Semitic, far from it. Yet, at the same time, as Vlach concludes, "it is undeniable that anti-Jewish bias has often gone hand in hand with the supersessionist view" (Vlach 2010:5).

Two specific events of the twentieth century forced the Church to confront its legacy of supersessionism. First, the tragic events of the Holocaust led to a period of soul searching for Christianity. The tragic and premeditated murder of six million Jews is surely one of the greatest crimes in history. Most poignantly for the Church, this collective sin took place in the heart of historical Christendom (Barnes 2014:8). Post-Holocaust theology has led many theologians to “criticize the church’s supersessionist ideology towards the Jews and Judaism” (Williamson 1993:7). The second event, the establishment of the modern state of Israel after World War two in 1948, was such a global phenomenon that it quite literally forced itself upon those in the Church who were content to ignore it. What before could simply remain a theological debate in the halls of academia burst onto centre stage in full view of a watching world. This was now a defining theological discussion, but it also had the added political dimensions attached to it. These circumstances meant that the church had to “revisit the teaching of supersessionism after nearly two thousand years” (Soulen 1996:10). For many the revival in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of a more literal hermeneutic and a rejection of allegorical interpretations of the bible meant that many were ready to embrace the newly formed state as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy. For others their position on the modern state remained ambiguous, but they did reject supersessionism and re-examined the fidelity of God’s covenantal promises to the Jewish people.

Unfortunately these efforts were exacerbated by the post-establishment history of the state of Israel, as it was quickly thrust into international conflicts with its neighbours. The Arab-Israeli conflict is surely one of the most intractable disputes in recent history. Former Israeli ambassador to the UN, Yaacov Herzog

comments that “no other conflict has stirred the conscience of humanity as the problem of Israel in its Land” (1975:127). This attitude is also found within the church: “as soon as the Land of Israel is mentioned an emotive force is released. There are few people, especially in the Christian church who hold a neutral view” (Wright 1994: 9). Christians interpret the events of the last 60 years in Israel very differently, both with frequent appeals to biblical passages to support their positions, whether of support or condemnation (Brown 2008:10). Terms such as “Zionism” and “Palestinian” “have become highly emotive epithets for fiercely opposing causes” (Horner 2007:2). Given this extreme polarisation within the Church and the wider culture, it is necessary to ensure that terminology is properly defined or else we run the risk of mischaracterising the actual beliefs of the respective viewpoints. For many the term “Zionism” conjures up images and memories of The *Al Nakbah*, the 1948 war – the “great catastrophe”. These terms speak of Israeli occupation, Palestinian displacement and an unquestioning political support for the state of Israel. Further, Zionism in its Christian form is seen as an apocalyptic theology driven by a desire for Armageddon. Palestinians are simply seen as an obstacle to the fulfilment of end-times prophecies (Awad 2008:64). At the other end of the theological spectrum the term “Palestinian” reminds people of the many Arab attempts at destroying the fledgling Jewish state, it recalls the many atrocities of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the frequent vehement Anti-Semitic rhetoric coming from Palestinian leadership. In reality, operating with such ideologically loaded definitions stifles constructive discussion and ignores the fact that both of these definitions are overly simplistic and reductionist accounts of reality as seen from only one particular vantage.

Concerning the terminology employed throughout this paper; "Zionism" shall be used to refer to the movement among the Jewish people to re-establish a national home for themselves in their ancient homeland known as "Zion", the ancient Jebusite stronghold in Jerusalem. Historian Max Dimont comments that Zionism simply means a "return to Zion – that is, a return to Jerusalem. The idea of such a return has permeated Jewish thinking ever since the earliest days of the Diaspora" (2004:413). Historically and politically this began in the Nineteenth century under the benefaction of early pioneer Zionists such as Sir Moses Montefiore and Theodor Herzl who founded the first Zionist congress. The term "Christian Zionism" shall be used to refer to the movement primarily among Gentile Christians that support the Jewish peoples return to the Land. This support is based upon an understanding of the Bible which sees the continued relevance of God's covenantal promises to the Jewish people and attributes the re-gathering of the Jewish people to the Land as an example of God's faithfulness to keep His promises in Scripture. The use of the term "anti-Zionism" will focus on opposition to the recent establishment of the nation of modern Israel (Horner 2007:20), whereas "Anti-Semitism" shall be used to refer specifically to describe a hatred of the Jewish people and excludes racism directed against any other people group. The designation "Palestinian" is used to refer to the people who self-identify as Palestinians living mainly in Palestinian territory in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Finally the term "Christian Palestinianism" refers to the theological movement that has arisen as a response to Christian Zionism. Although these definitions may be contested by some, they will never the less provide a broad outline to facilitate a beneficial discussion. Admittedly many of these terms will need further explanation to draw out the particular nuances in the way there are used but this should be made clear by paying attention to the context throughout the paper.

The phenomenon of the re-establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 has facilitated the presence of a robust and vigorous strand of Christian Zionism within evangelicalism. This in turn has elicited the birth of a reactionary counter movement which is decisively anti-Zionist. This movement has been classified as "Christian Palestinianism" and is an "inverted mirror image of Christian Zionism" (Wilkinson 2007:48). Although this new movement is far from monolithic, there are still clear discernible themes found throughout the work of its proponents. This movement takes traditional supersessionist doctrines and fuses them together with Palestinian liberation theology. This synthesis has given birth to a novel form of supersessionism which has now become known as "the new supersessionism". The aims of this dissertation are to trace the rival doctrinal and hermeneutical understandings of these themes as well as any political arguments that are being used to support them. Due to the presence of a here-and-now political theology, conducive to an anti-Zionist, hard left ideology, the new supersessionism offers an incomplete biblical theology of Israel which in turn prohibits the development of an Ecclesiology that provides a comprehensive understanding of the Church's relationship to Israel.

### **Supersessionism, Anti-Semitism and the Church**

In order to examine the significant features of the new supersessionism a clear grasp is needed of the Church's historical understanding of classical supersessionism and its relationship to Anti-Semitism as evidenced in Church history. Supersessionism, or replacement theology as it is more popularly known, in its broadest sense is the term given to the view that the Church has replaced



Israel in the future plan of God. In this view the covenantal promises regarding Israel's future have now been transferred to the Church, which has become the new 'spiritual Israel'. Walter Kaiser Jr., defines it this way; "replacement theology declared that the Church, Abraham's spiritual seed, had replaced national Israel in that it had transcended and fulfilled the terms of the covenant given to Israel, which covenant Israel has lost because of disobedience" (Kaiser 1994:9). Marvin Wilson takes a broader approach focusing on the etymology of the term "supersede". The term derives from two Latin words (Super and sedre), literally "to sit upon" or "sit over". Wilson comments that "one religion, Christianity, permanently displaces the other, Judaism. By sitting in the place of the other, supersessionism absolutizes the superseding religion, raising it to the level of ultimacy" (2014:246). More recently it has become popular to use the term "fulfilment theology" in an attempt to distance itself from the negative connotations often associated with replacement theology. In this view all the Old Testament promises concerning Israel, the Land and the future Kingdom are seen to be completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This allows proponents to say they do not believe in traditional supersessionism, i.e. the Church has replaced Israel, because it is actually Christ who has replaced Israel by transferring the promises to Himself and we find a spiritual fulfilment of these promises in Him. As one scholar puts it, the promises to Israel "vanish in Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled them" (Riddleberger 2003:68-80). Clearly, there are slightly different theological models and systems that fall under the banner of supersessionism, however in reality their destination is the same, even if they take slightly different roads to get there; they all teach that Israel's calling is superseded, leaving no biblical justification for her existence today (Teplinsky 2013:210).

Throughout Church history, from the early Patristic era, into the modern era, supersessionism has been a widely held theological position. It is possible to discern a number of different models of supersessionism during these periods. R. Kendall Soulen has identified three types of supersessionism: Punitive supersessionism, which focuses on Israel's wickedness and disobedience seeing it as the catalyst for divine retribution and the primary cause for their rejection; Economic supersessionism, which is the view that "carnal Israel's history is providentially ordered from the outset to be taken up into the spiritual church" (Soulen 1996:181); and Structural supersessionism. This third form is different in that it is not so much a doctrinal position like the first two, but it is a hermeneutical position. This view concerns the deeply ingrained bias about how the Scriptures are understood. Soulen argues that the church's standard canonical narrative, given to us by Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons from c.175-c.195, hinges on four key events; Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation. What this means is that we start in Genesis 1, go to Genesis 3, and then leap all the way over to the Gospels. Construed in this way the narrative of Israel's history "contributes little or nothing to understanding how God's consummating and redemptive purposes engage human creation in universal and enduring ways" (Soulen 1996:32). An examination of Christian history as represented in the major historic Creeds and Confessions of the faith will demonstrate how the narrative of Israel, and God's revelation of Himself to them, have been totally eliminated from the church's understanding of the Bible. The history of Israel has "become largely indecisive for the Christian conception of God" (Soulen 1996:33). A fourth variation has recently been proposed by Barry Horner; territorial supersessionism. This view focuses on the land of Israel and is summed up by proponent Gary Burge, who claims, "in a word, Jesus spiritualises the land" (Burge 2010:56). Horner states that Burge argues for a

landless and nationless theology, the nation of Israel is lost through spiritual absorption into the church, and the Promised Land of Israel is now lost by means of spiritual expansion that now encompasses the world (Horner 2010:28). Taking the conclusions of these various forms of supersessionism together, it is easy to understand why any “question of a future for Israel is traditionally met with automatic rejection if not incomprehension” (Blaising 2008:104).

### **The Development of Supersessionism in Christian Thought.**

The acceptance of supersessionism occurred early in the history of the Church. According to some, its roots can be traced to the New Testament itself, still others clearly pinpoint its origin to the post-apostolic period. Much scholarship has been spent in recent times exploring the Judaic heritage of the Church and the Jewishness of Jesus. Initially the Church was viewed as a sect within Judaism, and no one today would really contest the notion that nascent Christianity was made up exclusively of Jews. Koester states that “one could with justification designate the whole first generation of Christians as ‘Jewish Christians’” (Koester 1982:198). Marvin Wilson also comments that; “the New Testament evidence is irrefutable about the beginnings of the Church: in its origin, Christianity was Jewish to the very core. The essentially non-Jewish character of today’s Church is a matter of history, not a question of origins (Wilson 1989:43). Given this understanding, why then did supersessionism become such a dominant view in the early Church? Diprose cautions us here not to be uninformed of the dangers that accompany any attempt to generalise the movement of history, particularly a complex theological matter such as this. However the theology of supersessionism was not formed in a vacuum, there

were a number of mitigating circumstances both internal and external that precipitated the development of theology regarding Israel and the Church in the post-apostolic period. Diprose simply lists the “disastrous Jewish wars of A.D. 66-70, which witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the second Temple” as an event that “began a process which changed the face of Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations” (2000:73). Robert L. Saucy identifies the following factors as contributing to the development of replacement theology; the developing antagonism between Judaism and early Christianity, the destruction of Jerusalem, the refusal of the Jews to accept Christ, and the increasingly Gentile composition of the Church (1993:213-217). H. Wayne House gives a similar list highlighting the destruction in 70 A.D. along with the final rebellion in 135 A.D, the misunderstanding of “in house” discussions between the biblical writers and the Jewish community, the rise of Anti-Semitism in the early Church and the increasing Gentile composition of the Church (1998:98-99). Although other lists could be provided, from these we can deduce the dominant factors that contributed to the rise and acceptance of supersessionism in the Church.

First, the Jewish revolts of A.D. 70 and A.D. 135, which are often referred to as the beginning of “the parting of the way”. These revolts marked a significant turning point for Jewish-Christian relations and for Judaism itself. W.D. Davies comments that “the early Church up to 70 C.E. was a daughter of Judaism: only after that did it leave the nest” (1980:28). With the Temple destroyed, disputes over how to perform Levitical rituals arose. Between the two Jewish revolts a council was convened at the academy of *Yavneh* which began an intensive restructuring of Judaism. This marks the birth of rabbinical Judaism and during the years between the two revolts the relationship between Jews and Jewish-Christians continued to deteriorate. Although this was a decisive turning

point, it was the war of A.D. 132-135 that constituted "the final major blow that severed the two communities" (Richardson 1969:36). Jewish Christians, unable to support the revolt due to the messianic claims of its leader Bar Kokhba, were now considered traitors by the Jews. A commitment to Bar Kokhba would have meant a denial of the Messiahship of Jesus. Wilson notes that "the dissociation and detachment came from them and no longer from the other side" (Wilson 1989:83). These events also contributed to the acceptance of a form of punitive supersessionism within the Christian church who viewed these events as a righteous judgement by God for the sin of deicide, the killing of Christ. Church father Justin Martyr speaking on the destruction of Jerusalem commented that; "these things have happened to you in fairness and justice, for you have slain the Just One...and now you reject those who hope in Him" (Roberts ANF 1:202). As Vlach concludes, these two destructions caused many in the Church to believe that God had permanently rejected Israel and the Church was now the "new Israel" (201:31).

The two remaining factors contributing to the development and acceptance of supersessionism are closely related. The second was the increasing gentile composition of the church and the third was the resultant hermeneutical changes this demographic shift brought with it. One of the indirect consequences of the Bar-Kokhba rebellion was the issuing of a decree from the Roman leader Hadrian which forbade Jews from coming within sight of Jerusalem. This had huge ramifications for the Jerusalem church. Eusebius tells us that "down to the invasion of the Jews under Hadrian, there were fifteen bishops in that church, all which, they said, were Hebrews" (Cruse 1998:111). After Hadrian's decree the church had its first Gentile bishop – Marcus. This compositional change led to the marginalizing of Jewish influence and importance. So much so, that as House

indicates; Jewish influence "had become so irrelevant to the majority of the church that by the fourth century, at the council of Nicea, eighteen members had come from Palestine. Every one was Gentile and not a single Jewish bishop attended" (House 1998:93). As the church was severed from the rich Jewish soil upon which it was born the methods the church used to interpret the bible also began to change. Gentile Christians who had no knowledge of Hebrew relied solely on the Septuagint translation. As House puts it; "the church not only appropriated the special status of the Jewish people, it took over their Bible, the Septuagint" (House 1998:97). These gentile Christians brought with them Greek philosophical ideas such as the allegorical methods of interpretation currently being popularised by the Alexandrian school. The great theologian Origen, who succeeded Clement as the head of the Alexandrian school, laid the hermeneutical foundation for the Church to spiritually appropriate the Old Testament promises made to Israel by rooting allegory in biblical exegesis. The influence of theologians like Origen and Augustine really meant that "from the early third century, with few exceptions, until the reformation the allegorical method held sway" (House 1998:99). Whilst the reformers reacted strongly to allegorical methods of interpretation they did not address them in matters relating to eschatology. It is only in the last century with the rise of the revivalist movements in England and America, which advocated a literal interpretation to the Bible, along with the impact of the Holocaust, which have managed to stem the flow of supersessionist supremacy.

## **Anti-Semitism and Supersessionism in Church History**

It would be disingenuous to simply imply that supersessionism can automatically be equated with anti-Semitism wherever it is found, for there are many theologians who advocate some form of supersessionism and still display an attitude of philo-Semitism. Yet, the tragic history of the Church's relationship with the Jews proves that very often the opposite is true. The presence of Christian anti-Semitism has been called the "longest lasting Jew hatred in history" (Prager 2003:75). Horner notes that "the unsavoury fruit of much anti-Judaism is rooted in supersessionism" (2007:16). Is it really possible to deny that punitive supersessionism with its clear theological belief that the Jews were cast aside due to their wickedness, is neutral in regard to Christian anti-Semitism? On the contrary, as Barnes points; "this triumphalist version of supersessionism is therefore predisposed to anti-Semitism" (2013:65). A look at a small number of the publications produced throughout church history witnesses to this fact. Hippolytus (160-235ce) wrote a volume called "*Expository Treatise against the Jews*" which called the Jewish people a perverse race. The lawyer Tertullian in his "*Answer to the Jews*" accused them of having a disposition towards idol worship. In the mid third century Cyprian wrote a three volume tome called "*Testimonies against the Jews*" making the same charge. Father Aphrahat, a Syrian church father, in a volume called "*Demonstrations against the Jews*" equated Jerusalem with Sodom and Gomorrah. The great bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (345-405) preached a series of sermons entitled "*Orations against the Jews*" which attacked the Jewish people with such vehemence they stand today as a contender for the most anti-Semitic writings in History. To him, the synagogue is a "whorehouse" and "a den of thieves", the Jews are "no better than pigs and goats in their lewd grossness", they are also "lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious, bandits...inveterate murderers, men possessed by the devil". Finally Chrysostom declared that "God has always hated

the Jews, [and] it is incumbent upon all Christians to hate the Jews" (Wright 1994:104-105). The following centuries were marked by numerous vicious blood libels, the demonising of the Jews and institutionalised anti-Semitism. This vicious pattern continued all through the medieval period. The reformation leader Martin Luther, initially seen as favourable towards the Jews, continued the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition with his 1542 tract "*Against the Jews and their Lies*", where he proposed that their synagogues "should be set on fire" for "the honour of God and Christianity" (Cohn-Sherbok 2009:90). In fact, Martin Luther's writings have been so influential that his output has been described as the blueprint for modern anti-Semitic literature (Wright 2002:86). We even find Luther's works referenced during the Nuremburg War Crimes Tribunal as justification for Nazi atrocities. The words of Clark Williamson serve as a reminder for Post-holocaust theology:

*"The Church's theological understanding of itself in relation to the Jews and Judaism was never mere theorising. Theory, interpretation, always has a practical moment. The Church's anti-Judaism reflects and reinforces anti-Jewish practice" (1993:7).*

Admittedly, after the Holocaust many Churches actively sought to remove any trace of replacement theology from their midst. For the most part this has led to a successful reappraisal of Christian theology in this area. To the point that many leading scholars have commented that supersessionism is no longer dominant (Vlach 2010:72) and "the legitimacy of a supersessionist reading of scripture grows ever more dim to the point of vanishing altogether" (Blaising 2008:108).



However many have noticed a resurgence of a particularly aggressive form of supersessionism in recent years.

Does this new form of supersessionism carry with it the risk of reviving this shameful legacy of Christian anti-Semitism? This is a question that carries with it serious ramifications. One social commentator suggests that the ancient doctrine of supersessionism, which had only been suppressed after the Holocaust, has now “been revived under the influence of the Middle East conflict”.<sup>1</sup> Canon Andrew White, a Church of England Middle East representative, says the reason “is that Palestinian Christian revisionism has revived replacement theology. The catalyst for its re-emergence has been the attempt by Arab Christians to reinterpret the scripture in order to de-legitimize the Jews claim to the Land”.<sup>2</sup> He comments that this has already had an enormous effect upon the Church. Given these factors, the new supersessionism constitutes a real challenge for Christian theology in order to ensure we do not see a resurgence of Christian Anti-Semitism.

## **Literature Review of the New Supersessionism**

By theological accounting this movement is still in its infancy, really only forming an identifiable movement for the past twenty years. There is however enough literature to sketch a broad outline of the main beliefs and characters promoting it. The new supersessionism uses theological, hermeneutical and political arguments in its defence. The roots of the new supersessionism come from a number of different sources. The ideological source of the new supersessionism

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips, M. *Christians Who Hate Jews*, The Spectator (16 February, 2002)  
<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/16th-february-2002/14/christians-who-hate-the-jews> last accessed 19th April 2015

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

is a movement that has become known as Christian Palestinianism. This movement advocates aggressively for a pro-Palestinian narrative by using arguments derived from a mixture of Palestinian nationalism and liberation theology. Briefly, the Palestinian narrative focuses on the catastrophe of 1948, when Israeli troops, controlled by imperialist colonial powers, dispossessed indigenous Arabs from their ancient home land called Palestine, which is now under Israeli occupation. This political narrative shapes the theology of Christian Palestinianism which sees Israel as a 'racist state' guilty of 'apartheid', 'ethnic cleansing', and 'genocide'. This position is advocated by authors such as Elias Chacour, a Greek Catholic priest, in his book, *We Belong to the Land* (1992) and his autobiography *Blood Brothers: A Palestinians Struggle for Reconciliation in the Middle East* (1983), and more recently *Faith Beyond Despair: Building Hope in the Holy Land* (2011). These books paved the way for a number of other publications that portray the conflict through the Palestinian narrative. Titles such as Mitri Raheb's, *I Am a Palestinian Christian* (1995) and Riah Abu El-Assal's *Caught in Between: The Extraordinary Story of an Arab Palestinian Christian Israeli* (1999) represent the indigenous strand of Christian Palestinianism.

The major driving force in defining and solidifying international support for Christian Palestinianism has been the Palestinian Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre, popularly known as Sabeel and founded by Naim Ateek in 1994. Ateek's work has been extremely influential in developing the theology of Christian Palestinianism and the new supersessionism. Deeply moved by the events of the first Intifada, Ateek published *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (1989) in which he seeks to set Palestinian liberation theology "in the

context of other liberation theologies from around the world"<sup>3</sup>. Liberationists propose to free man from all that enslaves him socially, economically, and politically through peaceful protest or, if necessary, through revolutionary violence (Blue 1990:90). Liberation theology is "an ethical theology that grew out of a social awareness and the desire to act" (Sanders 1973:168). Finding its origins in the political ferment of Latin America, liberation theology is often referred to as "baptized Marxism". An axiom of the liberation theology movement today is "Social Justice", a practical way to right the wrongs of injustice, inequality and uphold human rights. In Christian Palestinianism social justice becomes the hermeneutical grid through which the entire bible is read. God is seen as always taking the side of the oppressed. It is very easy to see how this liberation theology is being applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this situation, Israel is the oppressor, inflicting injustice and suffering upon others. Ateek gives us a clear example of this in his 2001 Easter message:

*"Jesus is the powerless Palestinian humiliated at the checkpoint...it seems that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him. Palestinian men, women and children being crucified...The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily"<sup>4</sup>.*

In a 2000 Christmas message, Ateek likened the Israeli Government to Herod:

*"We remember the message of peace and love that came down from God to earth in the birth of Jesus Christ, our celebrations are marred by the*

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<sup>3</sup> *Sabeel Newsletter Issue 1: Spring 1994*. <http://www.sabeel.org/datadir/en-events/ev19/files/Issue%201.pdf> pg 5. Last accessed 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014

<sup>4</sup> Ateek, Naim, *Sabeel Easter Message April 6 2001*: <http://www.sabeel.org/pdfs/2001%20Easter%20Message.htm> last accessed 8<sup>th</sup> October 2014

*destructive powers of the modern day "Herods" who are represented by the Israeli government"* <sup>5</sup>

There are really only two options in this reductionist narrative: one either supports the apartheid, wall-building murderous Israelis, or they support the downtrodden persecuted Palestinians. Supporting one of these options is clearly presented as the just cause, the other is unjust.

Naim Ateek is a co-author of the *Palestinian Kairos* document which seeks to call the worldwide community to action on behalf of the Palestinian people who are suffering under Israeli occupation. The document calls on "western theologians" to stop providing theological legitimacy for the infringement of their rights. For them "fundamentalist biblical interpretations bring death and destruction when the word of God is petrified and transmitted from generation to generation as a dead letter".<sup>6</sup> The theology and views of the document draw heavily on themes found in Ateek's *Justice and Only Justice* (1989) and the works of the documents other co-authors like Mitri Raheb's; *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (2014) and Yohanna Katanacho's, *The Land of Christ: A Palestinian cry* (2013).

Sabeel has been successful in bridging the gap between Palestinians and western Christians through international conferences and its Friends of Sabeel International Network. Sabeel and Christian Palestinianism exerts much of its influence seeking to counteract Christian Zionism. In preparation for its 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ateek, Naim, "The Massacre of the Innocents – A Christmas Reflection," Cornerstone, Christmas, 2000: <http://www.sabeel.org/old/news/newslet20/ateek.htm>. Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014 (article seems to have been removed now)

<sup>6</sup> The Kairos Document – *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*. <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/content/kairos-document> last accessed 1st April 2015

International Conference in Jerusalem (2004), Sabeel issued a document entitled “*Challenging Christian Zionism*” in which it condemns Christian Zionism for identifying the gospel “with the theology of empire, colonialism, and militarism”. The statement continues; “Therefore, we categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that undermines the biblical message of love, mercy, and justice.”<sup>7</sup> Naim Ateek in an article entitled *Christian Zionism: The Dark Side of the Bible*, written for Sabeel’s journal *Cornerstone*, describes this theology as “one, if not the most dangerous, biblical distortions that is challenging us today”, and its supporters are “contributing to the oppression and killing of many innocent Palestinians by Israel” (Ateek 2003:1-2).

One initiative that is bringing this narrative into the evangelical world is the Christ at the Checkpoint conferences (CATC), organised by Bethlehem Bible College (BBC), an evangelical institution which “seeks to prepare Christian leaders to serve Arab churches and society”<sup>8</sup>. Brought together under the auspices of Dr. Bishara Awad to provide theological training to Arab Christians. Unfortunately BBC has been the subject of controversy on numerous occasions for perceived anti-Israel sentiments. Dr Jonathan Kuttub, chair of the board of directors at BBC, is a good example of this when in an article seeking to obscure the definition of terrorism he questioned; “Is ‘suicide’ as a component of the tactics utilized sufficiently abhorrent morally to be, itself, outlawed as an illegitimate form of political struggle? Is suicide a “terrorist” tactic, which should be outlawed by the international community?” He concludes that until political violence is outlawed we must have a place for actions that include “the perpetrator taking the supreme sacrifice in an effort to inflict maximum

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<sup>7</sup> Sabeel, 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference Statement: *Challenging Christian Zionism*, <http://www.sabeel.org/documents/5thConfStatementfinal.htm> last accessed on 1st April 2015

<sup>8</sup> Bethlehem Bible College, <http://www.bethbc.org/welcome/about-us/mission> last accessed 1st April 2015

casualties on his enemies as a method for drawing attention to his cause<sup>9</sup>. The college has drawn international attention from monitoring agencies such as CAMERA<sup>10</sup>, and from the secular press for its one-sided coverage of recent events in the Middle East.<sup>11</sup>

The CATC conferences bring together a who's who of scholars from around the globe who support the new anti-Israel narrative. The conferences promotional materials feature images of the ominous Israeli Security Wall. The conference website explains that "the checkpoint and the wall became a focal point and symbol of the conflict".<sup>12</sup> This "separation" wall is now a worldwide symbol of Israeli oppression, calls for its removal feature heavily at these conferences, the spotlight is on the suffering caused by the existence of these checkpoints. So controversial are these conferences that even the Government of Israel has addressed them. In what has been dubbed an "unprecedented advisory", the Israeli Ministry of Foreign affairs issued a warning for Christians to steer clear of the CATC conference. The official announcement stated that;

*"the attempt to use religious motifs in order to mobilize political propaganda and agitate the feelings of the faithful through the manipulation of religion and politics is an unacceptable and shameful act".<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Kuttab, Jonathan, "Victim Terrorism" in *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*. Vol.10 No.1 2003. <http://www.pij.org/details.php?id=76> last accessed 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015

<sup>10</sup> Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America

<sup>11</sup> Miller, Tricia. *Bethlehem Bible College: Purveyor of Anti-Israel propaganda*. Jerusalem Post 10/26/2014

<http://www.jpost.com/Christian-News/Bethlehem-Bible-College-purveyor-of-anti-Israel-propaganda-379858> last accessed 1st April 2015

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bethbc.org/get-involved/visit-us/christ-at-the-checkpoint-conference> Last accessed 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014

<sup>13</sup> Williams, Christine. *New Anti-Semitism tailored for Evangelicals*. (25/03/14).

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4230/christ-at-the-checkpoint> last accessed 21st April 2015

Supporters of the conference have been quick to respond claiming “Israeli bureaucrats” simply want to silence the voice of these people and keep evangelicals from hearing things that would make them question the standard Israeli narrative.<sup>14</sup> Yet, in light of historian Paul Johnson’s remark that one of the principal lessons of Jewish history has been that repeated verbal slanders are sooner or later followed by violent physical deeds (Johnson 2001:579), and seeing that the most recent conference opened by pledging allegiance to PA leader Mahmoud Abbas (whose doctoral dissertation was entitled “The Connection between the Nazis and the leaders of the Zionist Movement”<sup>15</sup>), coupled with the overwhelming anti-Israel narrative being presented, as well as the religiously fueled imagery depicting Christ suffering at the checkpoints under the heavy-handed Jews, shouldn’t this be cause for concern coming from an evangelical institution, given the Church’s tragic history with the Jews?

The new supersessionism and the narrative offered by Christian Palestinianism has been gaining popularity in the western evangelical church largely due to the efforts of a few high profile evangelical Anglican scholars and left-leaning progressive evangelicals. Through a co-ordinated campaign of conferences, publications, documentaries and social action, “more evidence is emerging that these anti-Israel Christians are succeeding in reaching beyond the evangelical left and influencing the mainstream, particularly the millennial generation” (Brog 2014). As David Brog (2014) warns, these young evangelicals are rebelling against the perceived political conservatism of their parents. As they try to imitate Jesus’ stand with the oppressed, they want to find out for themselves

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<sup>14</sup> Morgan, Timothy C. *Evangelical’s Defend Christ at the Checkpoint from Israeli Critics*. Christianity Today March 2014. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/march/israel-blasts-evangelical-bethlehem-christ-at-checkpoint.html> Last accessed 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014

<sup>15</sup> Williams Christine. *New Anti-Semitism tailored to Evangelicals*. Jewish Press March 25<sup>th</sup> 2014. <http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/new-anti-semitism-tailored-for-evangelicals/2014/03/25/2/?print> Last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2014

who is actually being oppressed in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Brog concludes that “whoever first defines the conflict for these young evangelicals will win lifelong allies”.

Anglican vicar Stephen Sizer is perhaps the most well-known Christian anti-Israel campaigner in the UK today. His doctoral theses was published as a book under the title, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (2004), this was followed, at the request of the publisher, by a more popular level book called, *Zions Christian Soldiers: The Bible, Israel and the Church* (2007). Admitting to previously holding “naïve Zionist views” (Sizer 2000:144-145) his affinity with Palestinian theology was formed through his relationships with Naim Ateek, Jonathan Kuttab, Elias Chacour and Bishara Awad. Stephen Sizer is a former chairman of Friends of Sabeel UK, the founder of the Institute for the study of Christian Zionism (ISCZ) and on the organising committee for the Christ at the Checkpoint Conferences. His work is characteristic of western theologians who promote Christian Palestinianism. We are exposed to the same anti-Israel sentiments found within the native strand. Israel is depicted as a “brutal, repressive and racist state”, a “materialistic society, an apartheid state practicing repressive and dehumanising measures against the Palestinians”<sup>16</sup>. It is not uncommon to read accusations that Israel is engaged in “ethnic cleansing” of the Palestinians as well as comparisons of Israel to Nazi Germany, and comments that the Jews are to be “condemned for exploiting the Holocaust” (Sizer 2004:21). The overtly political nature of his work is easily seen, as he himself admits, explaining the purpose of his book is to “make a case for a covenantalist approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict” (Sizer 2004:261). Preceding the

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<sup>16</sup> Cornell, N. and Sizer, S. “Whose Promised Land: Israel and Biblical Prophecy Debate”. March 1997 <http://www.sizers.org/articles/debate.html> Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014



contribution made by Sizer, is the work of another Anglican clergyman named Colin Chapman. His book, *Whose Promised Land: The Continuing Crisis over Israel and the Church* (2002) has been equally influential in this country. It provides a comprehensive look at the issue of the land through both theological and political lenses. The authors' aversion to modern Israel is identifiable early on in the book and his essential support for a supersessionist reading of scripture is powerfully presented. Both Sizer and Chapman provide the theological undergirding for this modern politically anti-Zionist version of supersessionism. Chapman and others likes to quote from N.T. Wright to support their cause. Wright, an impressive scholar and presiding bishop of Durham, holds to a supersessionist theology, although he is more prone to use the fulfilment language and his work is generally far more theological than it is political. However, Wright has said that Christian Zionism is the same as "Christian apartheid, and ought to be rejected as such" (Wright 1994:75). As Horner has observed, "a doctrinal camaraderie" has developed over the years among Anglican scholars who "have in common an amillennial, essentially Augustinian eschatology that plays out in a repudiation of the contemporary divine validity of national Israel" (2007:85).

Their American counterparts provide additional academic support for the new supersessionism. Perhaps the foremost defender in the States today is Dr Gary Burge, professor of NT at Wheaton College, a leading evangelical institution, which means his voice has considerable authority in the evangelical world. Burge is on the board of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding and on the advisory board for The Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation. Although Burge is a prolific author in biblical studies his main contribution to the new supersessionism are his volumes; *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians*

*are not being told about Israel and the Palestinians* (2013) and, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to Holy Land Theology* (2010). In both these volumes Burge seeks to combat what he terms “Christian Zionist territorial theology” with a spiritualised territorial supersessionism. As Horner comments, “while the style is temperate, the overall thrust is uncompromisingly supersessionist, anti-Judaic, and pro-Palestinian” (2007:46). Another academic whose work has considerable influence in the movement is Donald E. Wagner, professor of religion and director of the centre for Middle Eastern studies at North Park University in Chicago. Wagner tells his story of transformation from supporting Zionism to supporting the Palestinian cause in a chapter; *From Zion to Palestine: A Journey from Christian Zionism to justice in the Holy Land* (1999). His other book, *Dying in the Land of Promise: Palestine and Palestinian Christianity from Pentecost to 2000* (2001) which presents a history of Palestinian Christianity and the influence the *Al Nakba*- the catastrophe, had on it. His other significant volume is *Anxious for Armageddon: Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians* (1995), in which he assails the religious right and Christian Zionists for craving an end-times apocalyptic showdown.

These representative works provide us with a good overall picture of the new supersessionism. The movement is really built upon three strands; traditional supersessionist hermeneutics, Palestinian liberation theology, and an aggressive anti-Zionist narrative. The movement is gaining influence around the world against the complicated backdrop of the ensuing Middle East conflict. Given the complexities of the conflict a number of questions need to be asked. Firstly, with such an overbearing political narrative informing their theology, can we really expect the biblical promises regarding the election of Israel and their national future to be taken at face value? With Israel being portrayed in such negative

terms, hasn't the theological deck already been stacked? Any Christian seeking to understand this issue already knows that based on their Christian principles they cannot support racism or injustice of any sort, and thus, any positive statements or future promises they discover in the biblical text cannot be speaking about the situation today and must be explained some other way. Secondly, with the extreme anti-Israel sentiments being exchanged so freely among these segments of Christianity, and the documented link between supersessionist theology and anti-Semitic behavior, should we be concerned that, as history proves, repeated verbal slanders eventually result in physical misdeeds?

### **Responding to the arguments of the New Supersessionism.**

The new supersessionism relies heavily upon both political arguments and theological arguments. We shall examine both of these. However at this point we need to clarify what is not being suggested here. We are not denying, that as with all secular nations, Israel has many black spots in its history. As a nation, they deal with many of the same problems that other nations face around the world and sometimes they make mistakes in dealing with these situations. We are not suggesting that everyone should hold a Christian Zionist position, or side with the Religious Right over against the Religious Left. We are not denying that there are unbelievable pressures placed upon those in the Christian Palestinian community and they have many legitimate complaints that need to be heard. What is being suggested is that the narrative of the movement known as Christian Palestinianism is offering a skewed perspective that is not conducive to formulating a comprehensive biblical theology of Israel and the Jewish people.

This is not to say that we cannot learn a great deal by listening to the voices of Christian Palestinianism. For instance, the very concept that there even exists an indigenous church, particularly an evangelical church, in Palestinian territory is news to many. The very presence of their voices has served to highlight a minority that may have been hidden in the Church's collective blind spot. It is important to remember that no conflict is one sided and considering that Palestinian Christians are actually on the ground and they are deeply and emotionally connected to these issues, their voices should be heard. This should serve as a corrective to many in the Church who hold to a simplistic account of the situation without even acknowledging their existence. In addition, there are many at the extreme end of the Christian Zionist perspective that hold to an equally simplistic antithetical narrative which has elevated the political situation in Israel-Palestine over and above the unity of the body as taught in the New Testament. The rise of Christian Palestinianism has brought about a welcomed scrutiny of such viewpoints.

However at the outset it seems that the accusation levelled against Christian supporters of Israel that they portray an 'Israel-is-always-right' attitude is merely being countered with an anti-Zionist 'Israel-is-always-wrong' attitude. While this is not surprising, seeing that "Palestinian nationalism...arose as a response to emergent Zionism" (Wright 1994:221), does such a reactionary movement provide a good foundation for theology? Another factor concerning evangelical support is raised by Mark Tooley, president of the Institute for Religion and Democracy: "the new mythology that the evangelical left hopes to perpetuate about the Middle East is just as loaded as the politically charged

theology that all pro-Israel evangelicals are alleged to have".<sup>17</sup> In short, the claim from anti-Zionists that Christian Zionism is an exclusive theology driven by a political agenda also applies equally well to their own theology. In addition, it seems that this movement is uncritical in distinguishing between the different types of Christians who believe in any sort of future role for the Jews. It seems that anyone who expresses any sort of support for Jewish restorationism is immediately lumped together with those at the extreme end of the Christian Zionist position, such as Jerry Falwell and John Hagee. A straw-man caricature of all pro-Israel Christians is then constructed around their actions. In reality, this parody is highly inaccurate. The body of Christ today is a global amorphous body that cannot be constrained to one particular stereotype. The reasons many Christians support Israel are diverse and multifaceted. Admittedly, some do hold an apocalyptic eschatology that envisages Israel as a sign of the second coming. Others take a more nuanced approach, and their support comes from the belief in the fidelity of God's covenantal promises to the nation of Israel. Still others support Israel simply because it is a fellow democracy in a region filled with regimes that undermine freedom of religion. And many just support Israel out of compassion for the historical suffering the Jews have undergone throughout history.<sup>18</sup>

## **Responding to Political and Ideological Arguments**

Another very troubling aspect of the new supersessionism is that most of these Christian supporters of the Palestinian cause do not seem to take into account

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<sup>17</sup>Tooley Mark. *Evangelical Left Targets Israel*. The Institute on Religion & Democracy blog. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2010. <http://juicyecumenism.com/2010/04/05/evangelical-left-targets-israel/> Last accessed 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014

<sup>18</sup> Moon, Luke. *The Latest Threat to Evangelical support for Israel*. *The Tower Issue 16*: <http://www.thetower.org/article/the-latest-threat-to-evangelical-support-for-israel/> last accessed 7 October 2014

that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians are Islamic. Anti-Semitism is well documented and rampant in certain portions of the Islamic world.<sup>19</sup> This Islamic influence is clearly visible in Christian Palestinianism. It seems, both have found camaraderie around common enemies: Zionism and Israel. Thus, “the replacement theology of Palestinian Christians, as it is spread in the Land, now finds a common language with a Muslim replacement theology (Nerel 2005:217). The verbal mantras of pro-Palestinian Christians such as ‘occupation’, Zionist entity’ and ‘Nazi’ are common place in the more radical lexis of vocabulary found in segments of the anti-Semitic Arab media (Lochery 2004:3). It is no surprise that Stephen Sizer’s articles attacking Israel and Zionism have been published in the Al-Aqsa Journal, and his campaign involvement includes such groups as the Islamic Human Rights Commission, Crescent International and the Muslim Association of Great Britain (Wilkinson 2007:49). Most recently, Sizer spoke at the New Horizon Conference in Iran. He was to address the topic of “Christian Jihad vs Christian Zionism”, as well as speaking about the influence of the Zionist lobby in England. The conference was clearly an anti-Semitic conference which according to Iranian state-run Press TV intended “to unveil the secrets behind the dominance of the Zionist lobby on the West”.<sup>20</sup> The conference featured an array of holocaust deniers and conspiracy theorists. The presence of a leading evangelical scholar at this conference, who has claimed that anti-Semitism must be “repudiated unequivocally” (Sizer 2007:15) is illustrative of the blurred lines appearing within the Christian pro-Palestinian perspective. Stephen Sizer has since been disciplined by his Diocese and banned from commenting on anything relating to the Middle East. The Right Reverend Andrew Watson, the Bishop of Guildford commented:

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<sup>19</sup> *Anti-Semitism-Muslim/Arab World*, Anti-Deformation League. <http://www.adl.org/anti-semitism/muslim-arab-world/> last accessed 6<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>20</sup> *Press release: Iran Hosts 2<sup>nd</sup> International New Horizon conference*. September 20<sup>th</sup> 2014. <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/09/30/380593/new-horizon-confab-2014-opens-in-iran/> last accessed 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014

*"By associating with or promoting subject matter, which is either ambiguous in its motivation, or (worse still) openly racist, he has crossed a serious line. I regard these actions as indefensible... Stephen's strong but increasingly undisciplined commitment to an anti-Zionist agenda has become a liability to his own ministry and that of the wider church"<sup>21</sup>*

This episode is a good example of how an anti-Zionist position infused with Palestinian nationalism can override the pertinent theological considerations that should be addressed and cause adherents to regress perilously close to reviving the anti-Semitic calumnies so prevalent throughout Church history. Even the avidly pro-Palestinian academic Edward Said has acknowledged that "the whole of Palestinian nationalism was based on driving all Israelis out"<sup>22</sup>. Such a statement should cause consternation for those supporting a theology that is infused with Palestinian nationalism.

This does raise another issue with advocates of the new supersessionism who would claim they are anti-Zionist but not anti-Semitic. Desmond Tutu, patron of Sabeel, comments; "The Israeli government is placed on a pedestal and to criticise it is to be immediately dubbed anti-Semitic." (Tutu 2005:12) Now it is very important to realise that as a democracy, an imperfect democracy, criticism of Israel can be important for positive change. A valid, albeit negative criticism of Israeli policy should not be considered anti-Semitic. In a government consisting of both religious and secular groups, having those on the left and the

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<sup>21</sup> Statement on the Revd Stephen Sizer by the Bishop of Guildford, 09/02/15.  
<http://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/whats-on/news/detail/2015/02/09/statement-on-the-revd-stephen-sizer-by-the-bishop-of-guildford>  
last accessed 6th April 2015

<sup>22</sup> Blume, Harvey. *Setting the Record Straight*. Atlantic Online September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/interviews/ba990922.htm> last accessed 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014

right, you will not find fiercer debate about Israeli policies than within Israel itself. Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* wrote the following; “criticising Israel is not anti-Semitic, and saying so is vile. But singling out Israel for opprobrium and international sanction – out of all proportion to any other party in the Middle East – is anti-Semitic, and not saying so is dishonest.”<sup>23</sup> In reality, I don’t think anyone is being labelled anti-Semitic for just criticising Israeli policy; however questions are being raised when condemnations of Israel cross the line from valid criticisms into denigration that could be classed as anti-Semitic. This is a very serious charge, and the line between the two can often be very difficult to judge “since this new anti-Semitism can hide behind the veneer of legitimate criticism of Israel”<sup>24</sup>. Former minister Nathan Sharansky, who as a dissident in the former Soviet Union monitored anti-Semitism, laid out the criteria for distinguishing these boundaries in his article “Anti-Semitism in 3D”<sup>25</sup>. The 3D’s test of the new anti-Semitism are: demonization, double standards and delegitimation.

It is important to realise that anti-Zionism is a relatively new phenomenon and understanding its modern usage is informative. Although many new supersessionists would agree with Sizer that “anti-Zionism is not the same thing as anti-Semitism” (Sizer 2007:15), history proves that this distinction is not as clear as many would like. During the war “anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union was rampant to an extent that it is impossible for anyone never having lived in that country to imagine” (Johnson 2001:570). Importantly, in the post-war period,

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<sup>23</sup> Friedman, Thomas. *Campus Hypocrisy*. New York Times, October 16<sup>th</sup> 2002.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/16/opinion/campus-hypocrisy.html> last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014

<sup>24</sup> The Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism. *FAQ: The Campaign to Defame Israel*.  
<http://antisemitism.org.il/eng/FAQ:%20The%20campaign%20to%20defame%20Israel> Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014

<sup>25</sup> Sharansky, Natan. *3D Test of Anti-Semitism*. CFCA 21<sup>st</sup> December 2009.  
<http://www.antisemitism.org.il/article/17763/3d-test-antisemitism-demonization-double-standards-delegitimization> last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2014



the Soviet campaign against the Jews was "conducted under the codename of anti-Zionism, which became a cover for every variety of anti-Semitism" (2001:572). From the early 1950s, the Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda stressed the links between Zionism, the Jews in general, and Judaism. (Johnson 2001:575). Johnson comments that the fact that "Zionism in practice stood for 'the Jews' became quickly apparent" (2001:575). Hundreds of publications, rivalling that of the Nazi output, emanated from the Soviet Union portraying Zionists and Israeli leaders as being engaged in a world-wide conspiracy, along the lines of the *Protocols of Zion*. After the 1967 Six Day War, the Soviet propaganda machine became the main source for anti-Semitic material in the world. Johnson again notes that, "in doing so they assembled materials from virtually every archaeological layer of anti-Semitic history" (Johnson 2001:575). Dan Cohn-Sherbok in his volume *Anti-Semitism* (2009) explains that during the 1970's the left-wing media created new themes to manipulate public opinion- Zionism was equated with racism and even Nazism, and Israel was seen as a terror state seeking the genocide of the Palestinians (2009:313). He concludes "here then is a new form of Judaeo-phobia, political in character yet rooted in inherited stereotypical images from the past" (2009:264). Unfortunately this language is replicated throughout almost every publication that propagates the views of the new supersessionism.

Disturbingly this Soviet-inspired propaganda was closely replicated throughout the Arab world by Russia's allies. Johnson notes that the difference was more in form than substance, the Arabs were less thorough in their use of ideological jargon; they would use the word "Jews", whereas the Russians would employ the codename "Zionists". The Arabs openly published the *Protocols of Zion*, printed in innumerable editions, remade for TV, and even appearing in Arab school

textbooks. All these editions, it should be added, were specially edited for Arab readers, and the Elders were presented in the context of the Palestine problem (Johnson 2001:576-577). In fact, as recently as 2014 an Arabic edition of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion was available on the Egyptian government's State Information Service website.<sup>26</sup> This is a troubling reminder of just how pervasive these narratives are in certain parts of the world.

Now, to be fair, this history still doesn't prove that everyone who is anti-Zionist is automatically engaged in anti-Semitic activity, this definitely is not the case, but the danger is often there. This is where Sharansky's 3D test comes in. Unfortunately, it is possible to find examples of all three D's in the writings and actions of the new supersessionism. The accusations of racism and apartheid, along with Nazi comparisons serve to both demonise and delegitimise the state of Israel. It should be pointed out that the use of comparisons to apartheid and the Nazis is specific. They represent two of the greatest evils of the twentieth century, and they thus become legitimate targets for elimination!<sup>27</sup> The logic follows that if Israel is engaged in both of them, then she becomes a legitimate target for elimination. As it happens, this claim is far from accurate and displays the one-sided narrative explicit throughout the movement. Kenneth Meshoe, member of the South African Parliament, comments; "This ridiculous assertion trivialises the word apartheid, minimising and belittling the racism and suffering endured by South Africans of colour".<sup>28</sup> Like most Western democracies Israel still struggles with the discrimination its minorities face and actively seeks, by

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<sup>26</sup> Egyptian Government Website includes Arabic copy of The Protocols, April 10<sup>th</sup> 2014, <http://blog.adl.org/international/egyptian-government-website-arabic-copy-of-the-protocols> last accessed 7th April 2015

<sup>27</sup> The Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism. FAQ: The Campaign to Defame Israel. <http://antisemitism.org.il/eng/FAQ:%20The%20campaign%20to%20defame%20Israel> Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014

<sup>28</sup> Meshoe, Kenneth. *Pro-Palestinian ads misrepresent apartheid*. The Examiner, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2013. <http://www.sfoxaminer.com/sanfrancisco/pro-palestinian-ads-misrepresent-apartheid/Content?oid=2339168> last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2014

law, to eradicate these problems.<sup>29</sup> This is the exact opposite of apartheid. Israel has a multi-ethnic, multi-racial society, a liberal democracy whose legal system upholds equal rights for all its citizens. Israel's 25% non-Jewish minority have equal voting rights and can hold seats in parliament. Arab citizens have absolute freedom of movement in Israel, Palestinian patients can lie next to Jewish ones in Israeli hospitals, and both Jews and Arabs study at the top universities together. No legitimate comparison can be made and such comparisons are far more indicative of the approach towards Israel by those making the judgement.<sup>30</sup>

The Nazi comparisons so prevalent in Arab-media, and sometimes sheepishly suggested by those supporting the new supersessionism are no less shocking. This is clearly what human rights scholar Irwin Cotler has called "Ideological anti-Semitism" (Dershowitz 2003:211), a component of the new anti-Semitism. Not only was the Jewish-Nazi conspiracy used as a background by the Soviet propaganda machine to support charges of Israeli atrocities (Johnson 2001:576), but militant leaders of Arab nationalism also utilised this terminology, as "both right and left, saw in Hitler's Germany the model of successful nationalism...an inspiring guide in the struggle against their two great enemies, the West and the Jews." (Lewis 1986:160) In effect, says Lewis, "the world was thus treated to the strange spectacle of Hitler's erstwhile allies attacking Hitler's foremost victims by calling them Nazis and racists" (Lewis 1986:163). The fact that this rhetoric has once again found its way into Christian circles should be a cause for concern for those from all theological persuasions.

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<sup>29</sup> Kerry, John F. *Secretary's Preface Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2013*.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> Last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2014

<sup>30</sup> Sharansky, Natan. *3D Test of Anti-Semitism*. CFCA 21<sup>st</sup> December 2009.

<http://www.antisemitism.org.il/article/17763/3d-test-antisemitism-demonization-double-standards-delegitimization> last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Perhaps the most noticeable element of the new supersessionism is the double standards and one-sided approach being used to criticise Israel. To speak of supposed Israeli “apartheid” whilst simultaneously ignoring the well documented gender, sexual, and religious apartheid existing throughout the Middle East is to apply a double standard. To condemn Israel as one of the chief human rights violators in the world without condemning the rampant human rights violations by surrounding nations is a double standard. To omit the fact that Israel has consistently been judged as one of the freest societies in the world with the highest standards of human rights, is a double standard.<sup>31</sup> To claim that it is due to Israeli actions that we have no peace, without highlighting the many rejected peace offers made by Israel, without discussing the Khartoum Summit’s infamous “three no’s”: No Peace with Israel, no negotiations, no recognition, and without addressing the Charters of both the PA and Hamas that call for Israel’s destruction, is a double standard. To criticise the Security Wall and call for its removal, without addressing the ideology that makes it necessary, is a double standard. Such reductionist evaluation only serves to muddy the theological waters rather than bring clarity to the situation.

## **Responding to Hermeneutical and Theological Arguments**

The theology of the new supersessionism is derived from the system of hermeneutics they use, that is, those principles of biblical interpretation that allow them to support their claims. Vlach comments that examining these claims “is important since the hermeneutical foundation of a theological perspective has an important influence on how people who hold that perspective approach and interpret biblical texts” (2010:79). Theology has generally been divided into two

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<sup>31</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World: Israel 2014*. <http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/israel-0#.VD0vwZV0zVI>  
Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2014

categories on the subject of Israel and the Jews; supersessionists and non-supersessionists. This dispute has often been characterised by the correct use of literal and spiritual interpretation, or literal and allegorical interpretation. Supersessionists argue that non-supersessionists interpret parts of the bible literally that are supposed to be interpreted spiritually. Non-supersessionists respond that actually supersessionists spiritualize parts of the bible that should be interpreted literally (Blaising 2014:152). One area where this is seen is the way that the new supersessionists give interpretive priority to the New Testament over the Old Testament. Colin Chapman states that the "New Testament authors give them an authoritative interpretation of the Old Testament", and that, "everything in the Old Testament has to be read through the eyes of the apostles. It is they who, so to speak, give us the right spectacles for a genuinely Christian reading of the Old Testament" (2002:184). In a similar vein Stephen Sizer comments that non-supersessionists "fail to recognise how Jesus and the apostles reinterpreted the Old Testament" (2007:36). Steve Motyer also comments that "the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy and other 'Israel' texts must be approached from the perspective of this basic New Testament teaching" by this he means the "wonderful, exciting task of re-thinking our understanding of the scriptures in light of Jesus Christ"<sup>32</sup>. Although such sentiments sound very appealing to the New Testament Christian, practically, the effect is that the New Testament empties the scriptures of any of their distinctive Jewish characteristics. This change is fundamental and happens at the "canonical narratological level of interpretation" (Blaising 2014:155). A reality shift occurs from the *promise* of the Old Testament to the *fulfilment* of the New. As Blaising further explains this fulfilment now takes place in an alternate

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<sup>32</sup> Motyer, S. *Israel in the Plan of God*. Evangelical Alliance Consultation Paper, June 2003. <http://www.christilling.de/articles/stevemotyer.pdf> last accessed 9th April 2015

reality. This shift is from a material, earthly and ethnic Israel, to a heavenly, spiritual and non-ethnic reality (2014:156). This reality shift is what N.T. Wright refers to when he says "Jesus spent his whole ministry redefining what the kingdom meant. He refused to give up the symbolic language of the kingdom, but filled it with such new content that, as we have seen, he powerfully subverted Jewish expectations" (Wright 1996:471). Ultimately then, all the promises relating to Israel, the people and the nation, are universalised under the redefined symbolism of the kingdom of God which is now presented as a homogenous spiritual entity. As Horner rightly states, "here is an attempt to linguistically adorn what in reality is the offensive face of supersessionism" (2007:186).

This Christocentric transference hermeneutic is equally prominent in the writings of Christian Palestinianism. Naim Ateek says that "Palestinian Christians are looking for a hermeneutic that will help them identify the authentic word of God in the bible" (1989:79), aside from the Barthian overtones this statement seems to contain, it clearly identifies the quest for a "new" way to interpret the bible in light of their current political situation. Ateek goes on to suggest a "new" hermeneutic for Palestinian Christians. Actually it is not new, it is very similar to classic supersessionist hermeneutics, but there is a new feature, which is the integration of Palestinian political theory. Ateek suggests "the canon of this hermeneutic is nothing less than Jesus Christ himself", Jesus is thus the "true hermeneutic, the key to understanding the bible". He says that to understand God we must "begin with Christ and go back to the Old Testament and forward to the New Testament and beyond them" (1989:80). In other words, as Ateek concludes; "the Word of God incarnate in Jesus the Christ interprets for us the word of God in the Bible" (1989:80). At this point we could ask what role the

subjectivity and presuppositions of the interpreter play when each one is allowing Jesus to “interpret the Word for them”. In Christian Palestinianism the interpretation is clearly not as simple as “Jesus interpreting the word for us” but a system heavily influenced by the immediate political situation of the Palestinians. The Palestinians have suffered greatly in the current conflict and undoubtedly injustices have occurred, because of this Daniel Juster has noted that, “Arab Christians have developed a theology out of their pain: They have interpreted the Scriptures through the lens of their own circumstances while at the same time disregarding the original context of the Scriptures. This is faulty exegesis.”<sup>33</sup> Lisa Loden claims that “due to cultural, historic and political factors, Arab Christians have numerous difficulties with the Old Testament” (Saa’d 2008:15). Ateek similarly expresses the belief that the New Testament ‘de-Zionizes’ the Old Testament which is a “potentially dangerous document” (Ateek 2000:208). As Arab pastor Philip Saa’d has noted; “due to the political reality of the modern state of Israel younger Christians have a hard time accepting literal interpretations of the Land and Israel as a fulfilment of prophecy. They are more inclined to support replacement theology, or a spiritualising of the Old Testament” (Saa’d 2008:116). Although this spiritual hermeneutic may be preferred due to the influence of the present political situation, it stands very much in the tradition of classic supersessionism found within Augustinian and Reformed Christianity that has been responsible for much of the animosity between Christians and Jews throughout Church history.

This supersessionist methodology is fraught with serious problems for biblical theology. While even non-supersessionists would agree that within the

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<sup>33</sup> Juster, Daniel. *Palestinian Freedom and Justice: A Messianic Perspective*. The Controversy of Zion May 4<sup>th</sup> 2012. <http://thecontroversyofzion.com/2012/05/daniel-juster-palestinian-freedom-and-justice-a-messianic-perspective/> accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2014

understanding of progressive revelation there are ways in which the New Testament does shed previously unknown light on many areas. For instance the Christological fulfilments of the various Hebrew feasts or the annulling of stipulations from the Mosaic legislation. The New Testament also fills in many theological details that are only hinted at in the Old Testament such as details about heaven and hell and individual salvation. However, recognising that there are points of continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments is not the same as using the New Testament to radically “reinterpret” the teachings of the Old. For where is the hermeneutical principle clearly taught that what the Old Testament authors intended through a specific text is only valid if it is reiterated in the New Testament? If this is the standard it means that the Old Testament cannot provide a fixed reference point for itself. Considering that over two thirds of the bible is what we call the Old Testament, this is a serious problem for any exegete wanting to use the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. Kaiser correctly asks the question; “why would a rule be imposed on the revelation of God that demands that the Old Testament passages may not become the basis for giving primary direction on any doctrines or truths that have relevancy for New Testament times? This is only to argue for a canon within a canon” (1998:219). Yes, there is a new Christological focus of the New Testament authors, and surely they used the Old Testament passages in a variety of different ways, but it has not been proven that the New Testament authors believed themselves to be “reinterpreting” and thus nullifying the original authorial intent of the Old testament writers. A more historically sensitive study would reveal that the New Testament develops Old Testament teaching as divine history progresses, but the teaching of the Old Testament is not lost in the process (Jelinek 1998: 233). This approach is preferable as it recognises the authority of the New Testament to revoke or add referents to the Old Testament



promises in ways unforeseen by the authors, yet at the same time it allows the Old Testament texts to retain their integrity as revelation by paying attention to the original intent of the authors (Vlach 2010:96).

Also, if this method of New Testament re-interpretation has set a precedence for a new normative hermeneutic why can it not be consistently applied? What about all the passages that show the New Testament authors interpreting the Old Testament promises in a straight forward manner with no re-interpretation? Take the Old Testament promises about the Messiah; his being born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14 cf. Matthew 1:20), that he would be heir to King David's throne (2 Samuel 7:12-14 cf. Luke 1:32-33), that a messenger would prepare the way for him (Isaiah 40:3-5 cf. Luke 3:3-6), that he would be betrayed (Zechariah 11:12-13 cf. Matthew 26:14-16), that he would be crucified with criminals (Isaiah 53:12 cf. Matthew 27:38), that his hands and feet would be pierced (Zechariah 12:10 cf. John 20:25-27) and that he would be resurrected (Psalm 16:10 cf. Matthew 28:2-7). Bonar asks "are not these fulfillments strong arguments in favour of the literality of all that yet remains behind? Nay, do they not furnish us with a distinct, unambiguous, and inspired canon of interpretation? (Bonar 1876:247) While Bonar may be slightly overreaching with his conclusion, and remembering his use of the term "literal" is largely devoid of the controversy surrounding the correct meaning of this term in contemporary hermeneutical discussions, he does raise the question of why proponents of this hermeneutic seem to only apply their re-interpretation and transference approach to promises relating to Israel and the Land? However, even in this regard the "new" hermeneutic fails, as there are many instances where the New Testament authors clearly uphold and reaffirm many of the promises and expectations of Israel's story. Darrell Bock in a chapter entitled *The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts* (2013) argues that the

church roots its message in Israel's promises. It is a story in continuity with Israel's promised hope contained in God's covenantal promises to her. He says "the entire saga involves Israel's restoration. For all that Gentile inclusion and equality brings, we never lose sight of the fact that it is Israel's story and Israel's hope that brings blessings to the world" (Bock 2013:169). Specifically, in Luke 1:32-33 Mary is promised that her son will be given David's throne and will rule of the House of Jacob forever. The mention here of the Davidic throne is deeply rooted in Old Testament hope. The Davidic throne recalls the great covenant made with King David in 2 Samuel 7:18-16, which promised a Seed, a House and a Kingdom. This Davidic covenant is reiterated and confirmed as a national hope throughout the Old Testament. Luke's theology is saturated with Davidic language and themes that indicate an earthly fulfilment and contains no mention of any transference or redefinition of these promises. Bock comments that Luke 1:32-33 represent a continuation of Israel's story. Jesus not only has a regal position (1:32) but an everlasting reign (1:33) over a specific people – "The House of Jacob", which is another way to refer to the nation of Israel (2013:170). In addition to the Davidic themes we see the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant with Israel in Mary's hymn (1:54-55). Mary clearly expresses national sentiments as she talks about the Messiah coming to Israel in fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant. Perhaps the most pertinent theme related to the claims of supersessionism is the reaffirmation of the national salvation of Israel. In Luke 1:68-69 Zechariah announces that a Davidic Horn has been raised up for his people. Zechariah's praise is focused on God's visitation in messianic redemption (1:68). The language used here by Zechariah is that of Israel's national salvation, as the God of Israel is blessed using common Old Testament terminology (Bock 2013:170). Bock concludes that "such nationalistic features argue against reading these verses as holding only 'transferred Christian

significance' for Luke" (2013:171). In Luke 1:71-74 we find political connotations connected with this deliverance. Thus, redemption involves both political and spiritual elements, both nationalistic themes (Luke 1:71, 74) and the offer of forgiveness (1:77-78) (Bock 2013:171). In the Old Testament this linkage between national and spiritual blessings is quite common but what the New Testament legitimately provides here is not a total "reinterpretation" of the political elements but details about the division of these aspects as they are tied to the first and second comings of the Messiah which at this point had not been revealed to Zechariah. Although there are many more Old Testament themes which we could mention, these are sufficient to highlight the potential flaws in the supersessionist hermeneutics. Bock concludes his study by noting that:

*"this warns us not to rewrite the story that the Torah and the Prophets give us about original Israel. We can add the nations into the promise through Christ the ultimate seed, but we cannot lose sight of the hope in the promised one that belonged to original Israel and exists for her."*

(2013:176)

## **Covenant Confusion**

This faulty hermeneutical system has repercussions in other areas of theology. This is easily seen in the way supersessionists have created a radical dichotomy between the "Old covenant" and the "New covenant. For them, as we have seen, the New Testament takes priority so all the promises to the Jews in the Old Testament are now fulfilled by Jesus Christ. However, such a simplistic reduction

of the scriptures into just "Old" and "New" covenants displays a general unfamiliarity with the specific contents of these covenants and the structural outworking of them as revealed in the Bible. This one-dimensional annulling of the "Old covenant" stipulations is used by the new supersessionists to disenfranchise any promises from relating physically to the Jews. The problem is that no attempt is ever made to really define what is meant by "Old covenant" or to specify how many covenants there actually are in the Bible. In actual fact, there are 4 major covenants in the bible; the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant and the New/Messianic covenant. All of these are found in the Old Testament, and all of them are also found in the New Testament, which means such a simple arbitrary two-fold distinction is insufficient to capture the depth of all the covenantal promises. The main problem is the way in which supersessionists conflate the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants into one homogenous composite which they call the "Old Covenant". This leads to the vague but constant refrain that the New has replaced the Old in order to prove the national promises to Israel have no more physical significance. Invoking the language of Hebrews 8:13, Sizer comments that "the writer goes on to explain that the old covenant with Israel is now obsolete because it has been superseded (2007:37). Similarly Alex Awad, professor at Bethlehem Bible College, comments that "the message of Christianity is a universal one that is not interested in ethnicity or territory. The New covenant ushered in by the coming of the messiah made the Old covenant obsolete".<sup>34</sup> Gary Burge similarly mentions the "New covenant which abrogates the Old" (2004:167). In another volume Burge clarifies what he means by Old covenant. He argues from Hebrews that Jesus serves as a Temple that exceeds the earthly

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<sup>34</sup> Nicholson, Robert. *Evangelicals and Israel: What American Jew's don't want to Know (but need to)*. Mosaic Magazine. October 6<sup>th</sup> 2013. <http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2013/10/evangelicals-and-israel/> last accessed 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

Temple and its limitations (8:1-6) just as he oversees a New covenant which makes the former obsolete (8:6, 13). From this he comments that "given the incarnation, the present religious structures that Judaism promoted have become redundant" (2010:98). So far non-supersessionists would be able to agree with Burge, if we are strictly talking about the Mosaic covenant which was always supposed to be temporary until the time of Messiah, but Burge then makes a startling addition to his argument. He says "in such a breath-taking theological framework, it would make sense that yet another legacy of Judaism – the Land – would likewise meet abrupt comparisons" (2010: 98). It is here that we see the way supersessionists conflate the two covenants. Why would it make sense to suddenly add the Land promise from the Abrahamic covenant to the discussion in Hebrews which clearly deals with the regulations of the Mosaic covenant? Burge, Sizer and others must claim that the New covenant makes the Abrahamic covenant obsolete in order to support their supersessionism. While the New Testament clearly teaches the regulations for righteousness contained in the Mosaic covenant are terminated by Jesus, the Scriptures do not give such support for the abrogation of the Abrahamic covenant. In fact, according to Galatians 3:17-18, Paul specifically refuted such a notion. There are further implications that result from such methodology. Firstly, the comment by Burge that the religion and the Land promises are obsolete is tantamount to saying that the nation and the people themselves are obsolete, given the symbiotic relationship in both the bible and Jewish culture which so closely associates the Land with the people. How is this any different than the typical Augustinian legacy which consigns the Jews to universal abandonment for their sins, to be a wandering, homeless, rejected and accursed race? The troubling repercussion is that this Augustinian teaching has "bequeathed a supremely dominant and enduring anti-Judaic legacy" (Horner 2007:22). A modern resurgence of this

concept in the writing of the new supersessionists along with the already volatile and emotional atmosphere that surrounds discussions concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may present an opportunity for history to repeat itself? The second point of concern with the supersessionist Old covenant – New covenant dichotomy is that the term Old covenant is synonymous in the minds of Christians with the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. Wilson insightfully points out that due to the church's long time use of this term, "Christians are often semantically preconditioned to regard the Hebrew Bible as inferior or antiquated in relation to the New" (Wilson 2014: 26). He expands further that Christians have been historically influenced to think pejoratively about the Old Testament because negative terms such as "superseded", "abrogated" or "annulled" have been associated with it. This unfamiliarity with the Old Testament has historically led many Christians to become uncomfortable with the content of the Old Testament and propose a variety of solutions to the "problem of the Old Testament". Marcion, a second century church father wanted to see the Old Testament removed from the canon altogether. Although Marcionism was rejected by the Church, the influence he had was considerable. Wilson notes that "vestiges of neo-Marcionistic thinking continue to plague the church, especially in various expressions of Judeophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism" (2014:27).

### **Justice and only Justice – for the alien?**

A further theological issue which has very practical ramifications is raised by the new supersessionism with regard to the issue of Justice in the Land. Naim Ateek takes the title of his book *Justice and only Justice* from a verse in Deuteronomy that reads: "Justice and only Justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and

possess the land which the Lord God is giving to you" (16:20 NASB). Ateek claims that "the most basic and crucial issue of the Israel-Palestine conflict is that of Justice" (1989:115). Of course for Ateek, being a Palestinian himself and espousing liberation theology, he is primarily concerned with showing Gods heart for justice towards the oppressed. Much time is spent detailing the injustices suffered by the Palestinians at the hands of the powerful Israelis. Now, while both Israel and the Palestinians have their apologists who argue for their respective positions, the concept of justice in the Land becomes theologically interesting when western theologians who support the pro-Palestinian position utilise it. The position basically uses various texts from the Old Testament (Deut 16:20; 10:18-19; 27:19; 26:12-13; Exod 22:21; Lev 19:33-4) which detail Israel's obligations towards the alien and strangers sojourning among them. It is usually then pointed out that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians falls short of this standard rendering any claim to the Land promises null and void. Chapman comments that two aspects of the law are relevant to the issue of the Land. One concerns the theft of property and the other "has to do with the treatment of foreigners or aliens in the land" (2002:203). He goes on to list biblical injunctions from the Torah along with quotations from political figures to prove that modern Israel has departed from the standard of Justice in their treatment of Palestinians. Stephen Sizer also warns that "36 times in the Hebrew scriptures the Jews were warned to be compassionate to strangers and aliens because they should remember their own collective experience living as aliens"<sup>35</sup>. Sizer issues a challenge to Christian supporters of Israel; "if they appeal to Genesis to claim the promise of the Land, what about Exodus and the commandments not to

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<sup>35</sup> Sizer, Stephen. *An Alternative Theology of the Holy Land: A Critique of Christian Zionism*. The Churchman, 1999. [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/113-02\\_125.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/113-02_125.pdf) last accessed 15th April 2015

steal, kill and covet? If they believe in the predictive element of prophecy, what about the prophetic demand for justice?"<sup>36</sup>

To begin with, a sincere desire for justice should be taken seriously by all Christians and being wilfully blind to this, even if it contradicts your narrative is unacceptable. However the juxtaposition of either believing in prophecy or hearing the prophetic demand for justice is a false one, the two concepts are not mutually exclusive, even with the complexities of this conflict both sides can be concerned with justice. One feature curiously absent from the "justice" arguments in the new supersessionist's literature is any mention of injustices that innocent Israelis have suffered. To affirm this is not to deny the suffering of the other, but it would invalidate the argument that one side is solely responsible for inflicting injustice, this again is a reductionist narrative. In response to Sizer's challenge about appealing to Genesis but not taking the commands of Exodus seriously, the answer is that the text in Genesis and Exodus are stipulations of two different covenants, the Abrahamic and the Mosaic, it has already been shown how this conflation of the two into one is problematic and we see this surfacing again here. Following from this, it is a little disingenuous to build a theological anti-Israel polemic by utilizing texts from the Old covenant when, as demonstrated, the entire supersessionist framework relies upon the argument that the Old Covenant has been made obsolete. So why try to invoke its stipulations as guidelines for interpreting the current conflict? Is it obsolete or is it not? However even if we ignore these issues the argument still renders itself invalid due to the selective nature of the texts employed to prove it. The bible does clearly show that God loved the stranger sojourning in Israel and expects Israel to extend compassion to them. Crucially though, in context, "the scriptures

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid



presuppose the stranger has first submitted to the God of Israel and the covering of His people" (Teplinsky 2013:215). The protection of the stranger was dependent on a reciprocal acceptance of the Jewish nation-state, various religious regulations, and Yahweh as the only true God. Ruth the Moabitess expressed this principle so clearly with the famous phrase to her mother in law Naomi; "your people shall be my people, and your God, my God (Ruth 1:6). It seems contrived to try and fit this situation to the current Palestinian situation. Although a very small percentage of Palestinians are Christians and do worship the same God, the overwhelming majority are Muslim. As Smith concludes, "the fair treatment of the alien was conditional on being in covenant with the congregation and God of Israel" (2013:188).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has provided a broad investigation into a fairly recent theological movement known as the new supersessionism. This movement utilizes a previously existing supersessionist hermeneutic and has fused it together with a mix of modern anti-Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. It has been shown how the fusion of these elements provide the theological and ideological foundation for the new supersessionism. This has been examined historically, hermeneutically and theologically. The overtly political nature of the new supersessionism, along with the strong anti-Zionism present within the system is heavily influenced by the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to such a degree that scripture is being interpreted in a way that makes the current political situation a hermeneutical grid for interpretation instead of the actual biblical text itself. In addition, the link between classical supersessionism and anti-Semitism

has been explored as there is considerable concern that a new, overly pejorative, expression of supersessionism could result in similar actions throughout Christendom today.

The first major section of the paper focused upon the relationship between supersessionism and anti-Semitism in church history. The various different ways of defining and understanding supersessionism were discussed along with the attempts of modern theologians to circumvent the negative connotations often associated with the word supersessionism. It was noted that supersessionism has a history going back to the second century and has been a dominant viewpoint for the majority of Church history. Soulen's threefold classification of supersessionism into distinct types; punitive, economic and structural, were discussed. This classification helps show how the Church fathers viewed the Jewish people, and how they theologically supported these different types of supersessionism. The paper then looked at the multiple factors which gave rise to supersessionism in the early Church. Although scholars vary, the major events that precipitated the onset and acceptance of supersessionism were the Jewish revolts of A.D. 70 and A.D. 135, the increasing Gentile composition of the Church and how the influx of Greek thought and the allegorical method of interpretation influenced traditional Jewish hermeneutics. Finally this section documented the tragic relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. Although careful to highlight that supersessionism is not equivalent to anti-Semitism, the paper did show that supersessionism in Church history has been responsible for much of the Christian anti-Semitic literature produced by the Church. Although supersessionism was reassessed with the advent of Post-Holocaust theology, it was also noted how many scholars in recent years have noticed a resurgence of supersessionism given fresh impetus by the conflict in the Middle East.

The literature review provides a broad outline of the major thinkers contributing to this resurgent expression of supersessionism. The influence of Palestinian Christian Liberation theology was explored addressing the writing of Naim Ateek amongst others. The overview demonstrated that the movement advocates heavily for the pro-Palestinian narrative of the current conflict and uses liberation theology to portray the Palestinians as the oppressed people suffering injustice at the hands of the Israeli's. It was shown how the movement has garnered international support due to a concerted effort of conferences and high profile media campaigns. A number of western academics responsible for popularising the new supersessionism in evangelical circles were pointed out. Stephen Sizer and Colin Chapman in the UK, along with their American counterparts such as Gary Burge and Donald Wagner. The survey highlighted the close relationship between the indigenous Christian Palestinian movement and the western academics who support it. The presence of a strong anti-Zionism was found to run throughout the movement.

The paper then focused on responding to the arguments of the new supersessionism. This segment opened by acknowledging the positive elements that can be learnt from this movement. Primarily, the need to acknowledge injustice regardless of how it fits with our preconceived theology. Also to allow Christian Palestinians to have a voice in these matters. The paper then responded to both the political and ideological arguments along with the theological and hermeneutical arguments used by the new supersessionists. The extreme anti-Zionism within the movement was challenged by noting the influence of Islamic anti-Semitism and highlighting the historical link between the term Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. It was concluded that the overly strong

Palestinian nationalism has led to an extreme form of anti-Zionism which is desperately one-sided and subsequently has resulted in some remarks and actions that fall under the category of anti-Semitism.

The examination then turned towards the hermeneutics of the new supersessionism. It was shown how both the native and western strands of Christian Palestinianism both give interpretive priority to the New Testament over the Old Testament, going as far as saying that the New Testament "re-interprets" the Old. This results in a radical Christocentric transference hermeneutic where all physical promises to Israel are universalised and spiritually fulfilled in Christ Jesus. It was noted that this method was replete with problems for a theology attempting to understand the relationship between the Church and the Jews. Ultimately, it means that the Old Testament can never be an independent fixed point of reference. Rather it is better to understand that the New Testament develops Old Testament teaching through progressive revelation, but also allows the Old Testament texts to maintain their integrity and authority. After this, a major theological consequence of this hermeneutic was examined. The New supersessionism was shown to be guilty of conflating the Abrahamic covenant with the Mosaic covenant by placing them under a composite heading of "Old Covenant". This allowed them to use the theology of the book of Hebrews, which clearly teaches the annulling of the Mosaic covenant by the work of Christ, to prove that the physical promises made to the Jews in the Abrahamic covenant had also been fulfilled in Christ. This idea was challenged by noting that Paul in Galatians 3:17-18 seems to specifically contradict the idea that the Abrahamic covenant could be done away with by the termination of the Mosaic covenant. The final issue examined was the claim made by the new supersessionists regarding the issue of justice for the alien in

the Land. The claim is that modern Israel fails to fulfil the mosaic instructions regarding fair treatment of strangers living among them and is thus disqualified from claiming any of the other promises in the Old Testament. We briefly noted the way this argument is again based upon a faulty technique of conflating the various covenants as well as employing a very selective approach to choosing scriptural references. When the full context of the passages regarding treatment of strangers in the Land are examined it becomes clear that these passages have a reciprocal element that supposes the strangers acceptance of the God of Israel.

Taking the findings of this paper together we can deduce that although the new supersessionism is similar to classical supersessionism, it has been revitalised through the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The link between supersessionism and anti-Semitism is well documented in Church history and a resurgence of such a pejorative form of supersessionism is a real cause for concern considering the pattern of history which indicates that repeated verbal slanders against the Jews, or against Israel the "collective Jew", may result in similar displays of shameful Christian anti-Semitism. Although the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is considerable and everyone should feel free to criticise Israeli government policy or point out injustices committed by Israel, too often anti-Zionism has become a cover for classical anti-Semitism. This was shown to be the case in post war Russia along with much of the Islamic world, and unfortunately this pattern is being repeated in segments of the new supersessionism. This is antithetical to a proper biblical theology of Israel and the Church. As far as the specific method of interpretation used by the new supersessionists it can be stated that although this Christocentric hermeneutic that gives NT interpretive priority over the Old is linguistically appealing, exegetically it falls short of providing a system that can consistently utilise the

grammatical-historical method of exegesis. It is unwarranted by the example found in scripture and proponents are inconsistent in their application of it.

As the new supersessionism is a relatively new movement it is bound to undergo considerable refinement to its theology. Additionally, its close relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which shows no signs of dissipating, means that it will likely continue to gain considerable support. For this reason it should be the focus of attention for biblical scholars. Whilst this paper has interacted with a number of factors relating to the new supersessionism there remains considerable scope for more detailed analysis. An area of future research would be to further explore the historical linkage between the Church's acceptance of supersessionism and Christian anti-Semitism. This study could help provide a warning to theologians today who can see if patterns are being replicated. An additional area that demands more research is the growth of Messianic Judaism in Israel. Most Messianic Jews in Israel consider themselves to be very much a part of the House of Israel, albeit a believing remnant, and simultaneously part of the Church. If they are correct in this then supersessionism encounters a real problem. An additional factor raised by the new supersessionist argument pertaining to the treatment of aliens is that of Christian ethics. The field of study would benefit from a protracted discussion regarding the ethical treatment of people involved. What guidelines can we deduce from the text? Are these guidelines applicable to the situation today? There would be plenty of opportunity for actual case studies to be assessed next to a biblical system of ethics in regard to the current conflict. These studies would then allow for a new narrative of Israel and the Church to be produced which considers theological, hermeneutical, political and ethical factors as they relate to the issue of supersessionism. Such a study would be of great importance to the Church worldwide.



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