

# Thy Kingdom Come

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## Assessing Socio-Political Arguments used to Support Theological Supersessionism

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### KEYWORDS:

| Church | Israel | Palestinian | Supersessionism |  
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### ABSTRACT:

The question of whether Israel has been replaced by the Church in the plan of God has long been debated by biblical scholars. The contemporary debate has focused largely on hermeneutical differences and has given little attention to the way contemporary socio-political situations are being utilised to foster support for a supersessionist theology. This paper will examine the influence of this growing phenomenon within evangelicalism. Specifically, this paper will look at the accusations levied against modern Israel such as racism and apartheid in order to show the way evangelical supersessionists are promoting these accusations in their publications. These claims will be assessed to ascertain their accuracy and relevancy to the issue of supersessionism. This paper concludes that supersessionists cannot resort to exploiting the contemporary political situation in order to make their theological position more plausible and deny Israel's role in the outworking of the Kingdom program.

### INTRODUCTION

Questions surrounding the future of Israel and the relevance of the land existed long before the Modern State was formed in 1948. In fact, this theological debate has a history stretching back almost as far as the Church itself. Any Christian cognisant with the intricacies of eschatology will almost certainly be aware of the controversy. 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the controversy lies one fundamental question: is there any future purpose for the nation of Israel, or has Israel been superseded in the plan of God by the Church?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. The status of Israel as an elect nation no longer serves any practical or theological purpose except to wander the earth as a visible sign of divine judgment. This viewpoint, given impetus by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Bar-Kochba rebellion, 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, or 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). This in no way implies that all who hold to supersessionism 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 twentieth century events have required the Church to confront this legacy of supersessionism and propelled the questions concerning Israel back onto centre stage. The tragic events of the Holocaust led to a period of soul searching for the Christian church. Post-Holocaust theology has led many theologians to “criticize the church’s supersessionist ideology towards the Jews and Judaism” (Williamson 1993:7). The establishment of the modern state of Israel on May 14th 1948 quite literally forced the issue upon even those who were content to ignore it. Answers to the questions concerning Israel could no longer be merely theoretical, now they were political, practical and theological. These circumstances meant that the church had to “revisit the teaching of supersessionism after nearly two thousand years” (Soulen 1996:10). This led many segments of the church to reject the teaching of supersessionism and re-examine the fidelity of God’s covenantal promises to the Jewish people. However, this kind of dramatic revision was not without its problems. The rejection of supersessionism sent reverberations throughout the entire spectrum of Christian theology. The post-establishment history of the state of Israel

and the ensuing geo-political situation have exacerbated these efforts. The Arab-Israeli conflict is surely one of the most intractable disputes in recent history. No other conflict has stirred “the conscience of humanity” as the “problem of Israel in its land,” observed former Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Yaacov Herzog (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). Terms such as “Zionism” and “Palestinian” “have become highly emotive epithets for fiercely opposing causes” (Horner 2007:2). The phenomenon of modern Israel 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 holds to the antithetical Palestinian narrative and fuses it together with traditional supersessionist doctrines synthesising a novel form of supersessionism.

This paper will assess some of the views being promoted by the new supersessionism that are overtly anti-Israel, and comment on the implications for the church. Due to the presence of a here-and-now political theology, conducive to an anti-Zionist, hard left ideology, the new supersessionism dismisses the eschatological content of the Bible, particularly how it relates to the future of Israel and the Jews as God’s people.

## SUPERSESSIONISM AND THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

Before looking at the specific beliefs of this new strand of supersessionism we need a clear grasp of the implications as they relate to eschatology.

Supersessionism 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'. This view, dominant for the majority of Church history, usually espouses an "Augustinian, homogenous eschatology that absorbs and supplants all former Jewish distinctions" (Horner 2007:2). Sometimes known as 'replacement theology' or, more recently, 'fulfilment theology', advocates of this view would all agree that the church has superseded Israel, however this does not mean they are monolithic in their understanding. R. Kendall Soulen has identified 3 types of supersessionism: Punitive supersessionism, which focuses on Israel's wickedness and disobedience as the primary cause for its 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, bequeathed to us as early as Irenaeus, 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. 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 1996:32). 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). Burge argues for a landless and nationless theology, the nation of Israel is lost through spiritual absorption into the church, and the Old Testament Promised Land is lost by means of spiritual expansion that encompasses the world as God's superseding territory (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 implications of this for eschatology, particularly as it relates to the future of Israel, are huge. This is perhaps most easily illustrated by looking at the interpretation of a verse that has long been a stronghold for non-supersessionist belief in a future restoration of Israel. In Acts 1:6-8 we have the disciples' question to Jesus enquiring about the restoration of Kingdom to Israel. Clearly the disciples still held nationalistic hopes concerning the Kingdom, even after 40 days of specific instruction by the resurrected Jesus of the "things concerning the Kingdom of God"(Acts 1:3). Non-supersessionists have generally argued that although Jesus does refuse to address the timing of the Kingdom, he doesn't take issue with the underlying premise of their question. On the other hand, supersessionists see in this episode a demonstration of the disciples' blindness. Burge says that Jesus acknowledges their incomprehension. Jesus, in effect says, "Yes I will restore Israel – but in a way you cannot imagine" (2010:61). At this point I would agree with Burge, I do not think the disciples would ever have been able to

imagine the supersessionist teaching on Israel because it is not consistent with the clear intent of the promises they had received. In effect, Jesus would be saying, “I am the long awaited Jewish Messiah promised through the Jewish Scriptures. Now that I am here though, your purpose, election, nationhood, and covenantal promises are being rendered obsolete, or at least altered beyond recognition. In fact, the coming of the Jewish Messiah is the very event that spells the end for Israel!”

While many 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), many have noticed a resurgence of a particularly aggressive form of supersessionism in recent years. This new expression of supersessionism is overtly political, overly pejorative, anti-Zionist, deeply critical of modern Israel, and often sails dangerously close to the line - if not past the line - between legitimate criticism and classical anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, when understood against the backdrop of the Church’s less than illustrious record of Jewish persecution, “this is, at best, unfortunate” (Smith 2013:5).

#### THE NEW SUPERSESSIONISM AND CHRISTIAN ANTI-ZIONISM.

While many of the foundational theological arguments for the new supersessionism remain the same, and have been addressed by others elsewhere, the novel elements we shall examine are the arguments that are based on quasi-political motifs and nationalistic aspirations. The roots of the new supersessionism come from a number of different sources. The ideological fountainhead of the new

supersessionism is a movement that has become known as Christian Palestinianism. This movement advocates aggressively for a pro-Palestinian narrative by using arguments derived from Palestinian political theory 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. This political narrative shapes the theology of Christian Palestinianism which sees Israel as a ‘racist state’ guilty of ‘apartheid’, ‘ethnic cleansing’, and ‘genocide’. As such, any Christian who broadly believes in any sort of future for Israel is uncritically lumped together under the umbrella of Christian Zionism, now guilty of holding to a “gun-slinging, Armageddon-fixated ideology” (Clark 2007:256), they are all complicit and charged with “justifying colonisation, apartheid and empire-building”<sup>1</sup>. Generally, Christian Palestinianism targets high profile “celebrity” Zionists such as Jerry Falwell and John Hagee, and constructs a straw-man caricature of all pro-Israel evangelicals around their actions. This parody is highly inaccurate. The evangelical community today is a global amorphous body that cannot be constrained to one particular stereotype. The reasons many evangelicals 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

1 Sabbah Michel, *Religious Leaders Statements on Christian Zionism*: <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/religious-leaders-statement-on-christian-zionism>. Last accessed 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014.

democracy in a region filled with autocrats who undermine freedom of religion. And many just support Israel out of compassion for the historical suffering the Jews have undergone throughout history.<sup>2</sup>

The fountain head of Christian Palestinianism is the Palestinian Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre, popularly known as Sabeel. Founded by Naim Ateek in 1994, the work of Sabeel has been the major driving force in defining and solidifying international support for Christian Palestinianism. The vision of this new movement was to set Palestinian liberation theology "in the context of other liberation theologies from around the world"<sup>3</sup>. Palestinian theology has been described as "supersessionism clothed in the robes of liberation theology" (Wilkinson 2007:61). 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". Liberation theologians advocate a sort of revised humanism as the cure for the continued problems of injustice. 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 reality though, social justice is a politically charged term for those on the left side of the political spectrum. 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. For progressive evangelicals in the western church, too often "social justice is the sheepskin socialism wears to make inroads into evangelicalism" (Vicari 2014:76). It is very easy to see how this pseudo-theology is being applied to the Israeli-Palestinian situation. 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>

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. It is easy to see why Middle East historian Neil Lochery says that these recent attempts to portray Israel as the new apartheid state, "have lowered the intellectual bar even further" (2005:11).

This narrative has been gaining popularity in the 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

2 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.

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

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

the millennial generation” (Brog 2014). As David Brog warns, these young evangelicals are rebelling against the perceived political conservatism of their parents. As they seek to uphold and imitate Jesus’ stand with the oppressed, they want to decide which party is 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 the most well known anti-Israel campaigner in the UK today, having published two books on the topic, many articles, as well as speaking at numerous conferences around the world. He is the former vice-chairman of Friends of Sabeel UK, and founder of the Institute for the study of Christian Zionism (ISCZ). His work is characteristic of western theologians who promote Christian Palestinianism. Unfortunately, we are exposed to the same invective 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>5</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). At a 2012 Christian conference that featured an array of speakers advocating the pro-Palestinian narrative, Israel was again lambasted for being “the only state in the world that can defy international law”<sup>6</sup>.

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

6 MacEoin, Dennis. *The Christian Aid Conference on Peace and Justice in the Holy Land*. January 8th 2013. <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3529/christian-aid-conference-holy-land> Last accessed 1st October 2014.

Such a comment is disingenuous at best, and preposterous at worst, given the level of Christian persecution throughout the world today. The one-sided narrative continues targeting Israeli actions as the main reason there is no peace in the region. Another speaker at this conference, who is associated with Sabeel, indicated that “most Christian churches are intimidated by the Jewish Lobby”<sup>7</sup>. The power and controlling influence of the Jewish lobby, along with the Christian Zionist lobby, are portrayed in terms that are reminiscent of traditional anti-Semitic calumnies all too prevalent throughout the Middle East. One initiative that is bringing this narrative into the evangelical world is the Christ at the Checkpoint conferences (CATC), of which Stephen Sizer is on the organising committee. The conference, which is in its third year now, brings together a who’s who of scholars from around the globe who support the new anti-Israel narrative. The conference 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>8</sup>. This “apartheid” 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. A church in London recently erected a mock version of the wall on its premises to show solidarity with those suffering this injustice, while disregarding any attempt to present a counter-narrative that might provide a fuller picture of reality.

7 MacEoin, Dennis. *The Christian Aid Conference on Peace and Justice in the Holy Land*. <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3529/christian-aid-conference-holy-land>. Last accessed 1st October 2014.

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

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”. 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>9</sup> However, is there not at least partial justification for their concern, considering 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>10</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, gun toting, colonizing Jews? Especially considering 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).

These three strands; supersessionism, liberation theology, and an aggressive anti-

Israel narrative have blended together into what is being labelled the new supersessionism. 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, the theological deck has 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. Then, in steps the solution – the hermeneutics of supersessionism.

### RESPONDING TO THE NEW SUPERSESSIONISM

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 necessarily 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. In the volatile and emotional

9 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 13th October 2014.

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

atmosphere that surrounds these discussions, both in secular and religious settings, agreement is found with the statement of Dr. Glaser that, “the only place we will find answers to the profound questions that will ultimately shape how we view the Middle East – especially the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians – is in the Bible, the Word of God” (Glaser 2014:21).

In assessing some of the specific components of the new supersessionism, it seems at the outset that the accusation against Christian Zionists 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>11</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.

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 that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians are Islamic. Islamic anti-Semitism is among the most egregious and prevalent in the world today. This Islamic

influence is clearly visible in Christian Palestinianism. It seems, both have found comradery 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>12</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. Even the avidly pro-Palestinian academic Edward Said has acknowledged that “the whole of Palestinian nationalism was based

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

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



on driving all Israelis out"<sup>13</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 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>14</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>15</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>16</sup>. The 3D's test of the new anti-Semitism are: demonization, double standards and delegitimisation.

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, 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

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

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

15 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 10th October 2014.

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

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).

Disturbingly this Soviet-inspired propaganda was closely replicated throughout the Arab world by Russia’s allies. 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 2001:577). Is it any wonder we still see events such as the New Horizon conference in Iran we mentioned earlier? What does it do to the testimony of the Church when we have Christian ministers speaking at these events?

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>17</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>18</sup> Like most Western democracies Israel still struggles with the discrimination its minorities face and actively seeks, by law, to eradicate these problems.<sup>19</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>20</sup>

17 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 10th October 2014.

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

19 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 11th October 2014.

20 Sharansky, Natan. *3D Test of Anti-Semitism*. CFCA 21st December 2009. <http://www.antisemitism.org.il/article/17763/3d-test-antisemitism-demonization-double->

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 is frankly, unbelievable.

Perhaps the most obvious elements of the new supersessionism are 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 to give

a one-sided interpretation.<sup>21</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 biased interpretation. 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.

## CONCLUSION

The new supersessionism is built upon a three legged foundation. Traditional replacement theology, liberation theology and Palestinian nationalism. This paper has charted the growth of this movement and examined some key components of its narrative. In short, we found that such a strong emphasis on a here-and-now political theology will not produce an environment conducive to a proper understanding of the biblical data concerning Israel. The focus upon contemporary political realities, viewed through a one-sided narrative, has produced a theology that ideologically and practically disinherits any future for national Israel in the plan of God. As such, these socio-political arguments have been challenged and found to be inadmissible for use in the construction of a correct biblical theology concerning Israel and the Jews.

At the same time we need to acknowledge

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standards-delegitimization. Last accessed 11th October 2014.

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

that there is real pain in the Palestinian Christian community and injustices have occurred. Because of this Daniel Juster has noted, “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>22</sup> We need to work together and reclaim a narrative that seeks to place the interpretation of the Scriptures back in their original context, unhindered by the ingrained supersessionism of the past, and free from newly imposed political narratives of the twenty first century. Then we can affirm the Pauline promise in all its fullness that God has not rejected His people whom he foreknew.

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

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