

VARIATIONS WITHIN SUPERSESSIONISM

By Michael J. Vlach

Many Christians throughout church history have held the view that the New Testament church has replaced or superseded national Israel¹ as the people of God. According to Alister E. McGrath, a “wide consensus” existed in the early church that “the church is a spiritual society which replaces Israel as the people of God in the world.”² H. Wayne House also notes that this view known as “supersessionism” or “replacement theology” has been “the consensus of the church from the middle of the second century A.D. to the present day with few exceptions.”³

Purpose

Discussions concerning supersessionism are not new, but interest in this issue has increased during the last half of the twentieth century as a flurry of books, articles, and declarations from churches and denominations addressed Israel’s place in the plan of God and the traditional view that the church replaced Israel as God’s people.⁴

Yet, even with the increased interest concerning this topic, supersessionism has not often received attention as a theological topic in its own right. Many theological dictionaries and systematic theologies do not specifically

¹ In scholarly discussions concerning supersessionism, the titles “ethnic Israel” and “national Israel” are often used synonymously. Unless otherwise noted, these titles will be used synonymously in this work as well.

² Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, reprint (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 461-62. Cf. E. Glenn Hinson, *Understanding the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 6; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 447; Richard B. Hays and Joel B. Green, “The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers,” *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 222.

³ H. Wayne House, “The Church’s Appropriation of Israel’s Blessings,” *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 77. Pannenberg points out that the “replacement thesis” which involves the verdict that the Jewish people are no longer the people of God “is still influential today.” Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 471.

⁴ This interest has often been traced to events such as the Holocaust and the establishment of the modern state of Israel. See Peter Ochs, “Judaism and Christian Theology,” *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 607; Scott Christopher Bader-Saye, “Aristotle or Abraham? Church, Israel, and the Politics of Election” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1997).

address it or it is treated as a subset within discussions of ecclesiology or Israel.⁵ This article, however, hopes to make a contribution to theology by discussing some of the major issues related to supersessionism. In sum, this article will discuss the importance of supersessionism to theological thought, offer a definition of supersessionism, and address variations within the supersessionist view. Concerning this last issue, this article will address the three main forms of supersessionist theology and explain the variations among supersessionist theologians concerning the future of Israel.

Importance of Supersessionism to Theological Thought

In recent years, greater awareness of the relationship between supersessionism and the major categories of Christian theology has developed. R. Kendall Soulen, for example, claims that the rejection of supersessionism is “fraught with profound implications for the whole range of Christian theological reflection.”⁶ Craig A. Blaising asserts that issues related to supersessionism affect the doctrines of God, anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.⁷ Although it is beyond the purpose of this work to examine fully how supersessionism relates to all aspects of Christian theology, a brief sketch of this relationship will highlight the importance of the supersessionist view to theology.⁸

Doctrine of God

Supersessionism has implications for the doctrine of God because God is often described in Scripture as “the God of Israel” and the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”⁹ What do these titles mean and what are their implications for

⁵ In research for this work, nine theological dictionaries and encyclopedias were examined. None mentioned “supersessionism” or “replacement theology” as a theological category. Diprose also points out that serious discussion of the broader topic of Israel has been lacking. “Of sixteen works published between 1980 and 1994, which I have examined, only five make significant mention of Israel, three make marginal reference while eight omit all mention of Israel.” Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), 2, fn. 5.

⁶ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), x. Cf. Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought*, 176.

⁷ Craig A. Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 44:3 (2001): 443–50.

⁸ In discussing the importance of supersessionism to theology, we will offer quotations from people who make a connection between supersessionism and Christian theology. Our purpose in doing so is to highlight the importance of supersessionism to various areas of Christian doctrine. We are neither affirming nor rejecting the content of these statements.

⁹ Williamson writes, “The God of Jesus Christ is the God of Israel, of Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Moses, David. Because the Father of Jesus Christ is the God of Israel, Israel is connected with our faith in God; the connection with the people Israel is part of the church’s proclamation of its faith in God. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms the identity of the God of the church with the God of Israel.” *A Guest in the House of Israel*, 44.

national Israel both in the present and in the future? One's views on supersessionism influence the answers to these questions.

Clark M. Williamson, for example, makes an explicit connection between supersessionism and the doctrine of God when he claims that supersessionism has led the church to an idea of God that is closer to Greek thought than to the biblical concept of God. He says, "Because the Christian tradition de-Judaized itself and interpreted itself as both anti- and better-than Jewish, its classical doctrine of God tells us more about pre-Christian, Greek understandings of God than about the living, covenantal God of the Bible."¹⁰

Christology

Supersessionism is important to Christology since it affects the significance given to Jesus' Jewishness and the Jewish titles He carried such as "Messiah of Israel" and "Son of David."¹¹ Blaising, for instance, believes that supersessionism has not given proper significance to the "Jewishness of Jesus":

One of the most obvious effects of supersessionism in traditional Christology is the effacement of the Jewishness of Jesus from Christian confession. It is remarkable that the great creeds and confessions of the faith are silent on this point, being satisfied simply with the affirmation of Christ's humanity. However, in Scripture, not only the Jewishness of Jesus, but his Davidic lineage are central features of the gospel.¹²

Rosemary Ruether, too, linked Christology and supersessionism when she argued that Christology was the primary factor in the development of Christian anti-Judaism.¹³ She asked, "Is it possible to say 'Jesus is Messiah' without, implicitly or explicitly, saying at the same time 'and the Jews be damned'?"¹⁴ James Carroll asserts that, "A new Christology, faithfully based in the Scriptures. . . will in no way support supersessionism."¹⁵ These statements by Blaising, Ruether, and Carroll, regardless of their accuracy, highlight the importance of supersessionism to the area Christology.

¹⁰ Ibid., 202–3.

¹¹ Cf. Ibid., 41–43.

¹² Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," 445.

¹³ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 64–116. David Tracy refers to Christian anti-semitism as the "revolting underside of Christology." David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 98.

¹⁴ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 246. Williamson adds, "Jesus Christ is the focal point of traditional anti-Judaism and the 'hinge' upon which the replacement of Jews with Gentile Christians turns," *A Guest in the House of Israel*, 168.

¹⁵ James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 587.

Soteriology

One result of the church's reaction against supersessionism in the twentieth century has been the belief of some Christians that Jews can be in a right relationship with the God of Israel without placing their faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, some Christians have adopted "two-covenant theology" and its assertion that ethnic Jews are redeemed through their faithfulness to Torah while the mostly Gentile church is accepted by God on the basis of Jesus Christ's redeeming work.¹⁶ The issue of supersessionism, then, has a bearing on the issues of Christian particularity and what Jews and Gentiles must believe in order to experience salvation.

Ecclesiology

Ronald E. Diprose asserts that supersessionism has particular importance to the areas of ecclesiology and eschatology.¹⁷ Concerning ecclesiology, the acceptance or rejection of supersessionism affects how one views the identity of the church and its members. Is the church the new spiritual Israel? Are Christians true Jews regardless of their ethnicity?

One's understanding of supersessionism also influences how one perceives the relationship of the church to Old Testament promises and covenants. For instance, how is the church related to the promises and covenants of the Old Testament? Does the church inherit Israel's role to be a blessing to the nations?

Eschatology

In regard to eschatology, beliefs concerning supersessionism may influence one's views concerning the kingdom of God, national Israel's future, the land of Palestine, and how one views biblical prophecies related to Israel. If the church is the new Israel, this appears to affect how Old Testament promises to national Israel will be fulfilled. If the church does not replace Israel, what can both national Israel and the church expect in the future? Supersessionism may also influence one's views concerning the nature and timing of the millennium.¹⁸

Recent Events

Issues related to supersessionism have also become significant in light of twentieth-century events. The Holocaust, the modern state of Israel, and controversies in the Middle East between Jews and Arabs have pushed

¹⁶ See Ronald E. Diprose, "Israel and Christian Theology," *The Emmaus Journal*. 10:1 (2001): 66. A further discussion of "two-covenant theology" will be given in the next chapter.

¹⁷ Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought*, 4.

¹⁸ Diprose asserts that, "The abandonment of the hope of a future messianic kingdom in favour of the conviction that the Church itself embodies this kingdom now, was a logical development stemming from *replacement theology*." Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought*, 173. Emphasis in original.

questions and issues concerning Israel and supersessionism to the forefront of theological discussions. Commenting on the significance of the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel, Soulen states, “Under the new conditions created by these events, Christian churches have begun to consider anew their relation to the God of Israel and the Israel of God in the light of the Scriptures and the gospel about Jesus.” This includes a “revisiting [of] the teaching of supersessionism after nearly two thousand years.”¹⁹

Defining Supersessionism

Currently, there is no universally accepted title for the view that the church is the new Israel who has replaced national Israel as the people of God.²⁰ The most common title used in recent scholarly literature to identify this position is “supersessionism.” Commenting on this term, Williamson writes, “‘Supersessionism’ comes from two Latin words: *super* (on or upon) and *sedere* (to sit), as when one person sits on the chair of another, displacing the later.”²¹ The titles “replacement theology” and “displacement theology” are also commonly used and are often viewed as synonyms for “supersessionism.”²²

In recent years, some theologians have offered definitions of supersessionism or replacement theology. According to Walter C. Kaiser, “Replacement theology. . . declared that the church, Abraham’s spiritual seed, has replaced national Israel in that it had transcended and fulfilled the terms of the covenant given to Israel, which covenant Israel had lost because of disobedience.”²³ Diprose defines “replacement theology” or “supersessionism” as

¹⁹ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), x.

²⁰ As Marten H. Woudstra observes, “The question whether it is more proper to speak of a replacement of the Jews by the Christian church or of an extension (continuation) of the OT people of God into that of the NT church is variously answered.” Marten H. Woudstra, “Israel and the Church: A Case for Continuity,” *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 237. Woudstra believes that the terms, “replacement,” and “continuation” are both acceptable and consistent with Biblical teaching.

²¹ Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, 268, n. 9.

²² House equates the two designations “replacement theology” and “supersessionism” and sees them as being interchangeable. See H. Wayne House, “The Church’s Appropriation of Israel’s Blessings,” 78. In this present work, we will use the titles “supersessionism,” “replacement theology,” and “displacement theology” as synonyms. We do want to acknowledge, though, that these designations are not entirely satisfactory to those who view the Church more as the continuation or fulfillment of national Israel. See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 333–34; Millard J. Erickson *Christian Theology*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 1058–59.

²³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “An Assessment of ‘Replacement Theology’: The Relationship Between the Israel of the Abrahamic-Davidic Covenant and the Christian Church,” *Mishkan* 21 (1994): 9.

the view that “the Church completely and permanently replaced ethnic Israel in the working out of God’s plan and as recipient of Old Testament promises to Israel.”²⁴ Soulen also explains what he believes is the essence of supersessionism:

According to this teaching [supersessionism], God chose the Jewish people after the fall of Adam in order to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. After Christ came, however, the special role of the Jewish people came to an end and its place was taken by the church, the new Israel.²⁵

Herman Ridderbos asserts that there is a positive and negative element to the supersessionist view. “On the one hand, in a positive sense it presupposes that the church springs from, is born out of Israel; on the other hand, the church takes the place of Israel as the historical people of God.”²⁶

These definitions from Kaiser, Diprose, Soulen, and Ridderbos appear consistent with the statements of those who believe the church is the replacement of Israel. Bruce K. Waltke, for instance, declares that the New Testament teaches the “hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant.”²⁷ According to Hans K. LaRondelle, the New Testament affirms that “Israel would no longer be the people of God and would be *replaced* by a people that would accept the Messiah and His message of the kingdom of God.”²⁸ LaRondelle believes this “people” to be the church who replaces “the Christ-rejecting nation.”²⁹

When comparing the definitions of Kaiser, Diprose, Soulen, and Ridderbos with the statements of those who openly promote a replacement view, it appears that supersessionism is based on two core beliefs: (1) national Israel has somehow lost its status as the people of God; and (2) the church has replaced or superseded national Israel as God’s people. Supersessionism, then, in the context of Israel and the church, is the view that *the New Testament church has superseded, or replaced national Israel as the people of God*. The result is that the church has become the new Israel and is the inheritor of God’s covenant blessings originally promised to national Israel in the Old Testament.

²⁴ Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought*, 2.

²⁵ Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 1–2.

²⁶ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 333–4.

²⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 274. Waltke also states, “The Jewish *nation* no longer has a place as the special people of God; that place has been taken by the Christian community which fulfills God’s purpose for Israel” (275).

²⁸ Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1983), 101.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Variations Within Supersessionism

Supersessionism asserts that the church is the new Israel who replaces national Israel. Yet within supersessionism there are variations. When speaking of variations, we are not asserting that there are mutually exclusive forms of supersessionism. Rather, we are acknowledging that there are different emphases within the supersessionist position.

Retributive or Punitive Supersessionism

“Retributive” or “punitive” supersessionism emphasizes Israel’s disobedience and punishment by God as the reason for its displacement as the people of God. As Gabriel J. Fackre explains, retributive supersessionism “holds that the rejection of Christ both eliminates Israel from God’s covenant love and provokes divine retribution.”³⁰ This form of supersessionism asserts that Israel is permanently punished and rejected because of its refusal to believe in Christ.³¹ Never again will there be any theological significance to national Israel because the church is now the new Israel. Fackre links the retributive replacement view with the later writings of Martin Luther and more recently with the reconstructionist movement of J. H. Rushdoony.³²

In describing this variation of supersessionism, Soulen prefers the title, *punitive supersessionism*. With punitive supersessionism, “God abrogates God’s covenant with Israel. . . on account of Israel’s rejection of Christ and the Gospel.”³³ Because the Jews reject God’s action in Christ, “God in turn angrily rejects and punishes the Jews.”³⁴ Loraine Boettner appears to have espoused a punitive or retributive supersessionist view when he wrote:

It may seem harsh to say that “God is done with the Jews.” But the fact of the matter is that He is through with them as a unified national group having anything more to do with the evangelization of the world. That mission has been taken from them and given to the Christian Church (Matt. 21:43).³⁵

³⁰ Gabriel J. Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 148.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.* David Chilton espouses this form of supersessionism when he writes, “The Bible does not tell of any future plan for Israel as a *special* nation.” David Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler: Reconstruction Press, 1985), 224. Fackre believes that retributive replacement theology “has regularly provided the justification for anti-Semitic acts that extend to Klan reprisals and the Holocaust.” Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective*, 149.

³³ Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957), 89–90.

Economic Supersessionism

The second form of supersessionism is *economic supersessionism*. According to Soulen, economic supersessionism is the view that “carnal Israel’s history is providentially ordered from the outset to be taken up into the spiritual church.”³⁶ With this position, Israel corresponds to Christ in a merely prefigurative and carnal way. Christ, with His advent, “brings about the obsolescence of carnal Israel and inaugurates the age of the spiritual church.”³⁷ Thus, Christ’s coming renders everything that characterized the economy of salvation in Israelite form obsolete and replaced by ecclesial equivalents.³⁸

“According to economic supersessionism,” Soulen writes, “Israel is transient not because it happens to be sinful but because Israel’s essential role in the economy of redemption is to prepare for salvation in the spiritual and universal form.”³⁹ Economic supersessionism, according to Soulen, “logically entails the ontological, historical, and moral obsolescence of Israel’s existence after Christ.”⁴⁰

Economic supersessionism, or “nonretributive” supersessionism as Fackre calls it,⁴¹ takes a milder approach to Israel’s disobedience than the punitive replacement view. It stresses “the unique act of God in Christ, rather than the displacement of Israel by the church.”⁴² The emphasis of this view is on the person of Christ and the new covenant era He inaugurated. With His coming, Jesus, the ultimate Israelite, fulfills all God’s plans and promises regarding Israel. All those who are in Jesus, then, are the true Israel. As Vern S. Poythress declared:

Because Christ is an Israelite and Christians are in union with Christ, Christians partake of the benefits promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah. With whom is the new covenant made? It is made with Israel and Judah. Hence it is made with Christians by virtue of Christ the Israelite. Thus one might say that Israel and Judah themselves undergo a

³⁶ Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 181, n. 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁸ *Ibid.* The replacement of the law of Moses with the spiritual law of Christ and the replacement of circumcision with baptism are two examples according to Soulen.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30. Dubois writes, “Now that the messiah has come, the church—*versus Israel*—has taken the place of the ‘old’ Israel and the Jewish people no longer has any reason to occupy the historic land of Israel.” Marcel J. Dubois, “Israel and Christian Self-Understanding,” *Voices From Jerusalem: Jews and Christians Reflect on the Holy Land*, eds. David Burrell and Yehezkel Landau (New York: Paulist, 1992), 65.

⁴¹ Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective*, 149.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 149–50.

transformation at the first coming of Christ, because Christ is the final, supremely faithful Israelite. Around him all true Israel gathers.⁴³

According to Fackre, this supersessionist view has no active theories about the fate of Jews who rejected Christ nor does it stress God's special curse on Israel.⁴⁴ Those who hold this form of supersessionism usually "do not emphasize land issues or give any theological significance to the present state of Israel."⁴⁵

Structural Supersessionism

The third type of replacement theology according to Soulen is *structural supersessionism*. This is a deeper form of supersessionism than both the punitive and economic views. In fact, for Soulen, it is foundational for punitive and economic supersessionism.⁴⁶ Whereas punitive and economic supersessionism are "explicit doctrinal perspectives," structural supersessionism concerns how the standard canonical narrative as a whole has been perceived.⁴⁷ According to Soulen, "Structural supersessionism refers to the narrative logic of the standard model whereby it renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping Christian convictions about how God's works as Consummator and as Redeemer engage humankind in universal and enduring ways."⁴⁸

Soulen argues that the standard canonical narrative model, which the church has accepted since Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, turns on four key episodes: (1) God's intention to consummate the first parents whom God created; (2) the fall; (3) Christ's incarnation and the inauguration of the church; and (4) the final consummation.⁴⁹ He says two facts stand out from the narrative content of this standard model.

⁴³ Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2d. ed. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 106. Cf. John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1972), 106-07. Rudolf Bultmann states that "the new *aeon* has dawned in the Christ-event." As a result "the people of God, the true Israel, is present in the Christian community." The people of God is no longer an "empirical historical entity. Rudolf Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann, trans. James C. G. Greig (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969), 71.

⁴⁴ Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective*, 149.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁶ "The problem of supersessionism in Christian theology goes beyond the explicit teaching that the church has displaced Israel as God's people in the economy of salvation. At a deeper level, the problem of supersessionism coincides with the way in which Christians have traditionally understood the theological and narrative unity of the Christian canon as a whole." Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 181, n. 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

First, the foreground of this standard model emphasizes God's engagement with human creation in "cosmic and universal terms."⁵⁰ Second, "the foreground completely neglects the Hebrew Scriptures, with the exception of Genesis 1–3!"⁵¹ The standard model, according to Soulen, tells how God engaged Adam and Eve as Consummator and how God's consummating plan for them was disrupted at the fall. The story, then, "leaps to the Apostolic Witness interpreted as God's deliverance of humankind from the fall through Jesus Christ."⁵² Thus, "God's purposes as Consummator and Redeemer engage human creation in a manner that simply outflank the greater part of the Hebrew Scriptures and, above all, their witness to God's history with the people of Israel."⁵³ What is the result of this leap over the Hebrew Scriptures, according to Soulen? "As a result, God's identity as the God of Israel and God's history with the Jewish people become largely indecisive for the Christian conception of God."⁵⁴

Variations Within Supersessionism on the Future of Israel

As Ridderbos has pointed out, it may seem natural to assume that supersessionism necessarily leads to the view that national Israel has no future in God's plan and that it has "has lost its function in the history of redemption."⁵⁵ This, however, is not the case for all supersessionists. Although many supersessionists have adopted a permanent punitive replacement view in which Israel will never again have a special place or role in the plan of God,⁵⁶ not all supersessionists have come to this conclusion. Some supersessionists, while holding that the church is the new Israel who supersedes national Israel, still hold that national Israel has a special place and future hope in God's plan.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ For example, Christ appears as the incarnation of the eternal logos and humankind appears as descendants of the first parents and as possessors of a common human nature. *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 355.

⁵⁶ Berkhof states, "It is very doubtful. . . whether Scripture warrants the expectation that Israel will finally be re-established as a nation, and will as a nation turn to the Lord." Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 699. Cf. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2000), 191.

⁵⁷ We are not asserting that these supersessionists are all agreed concerning the details of national Israel's future or that all would describe Israel's hope in the same manner.

Ridderbos, for instance, believes there is “tension-filled unity” concerning Israel’s rejection and its election.⁵⁸ He asserts that, “the church takes the place of Israel as the historical people of God.”⁵⁹ For him, “This means a new definition of the people of God, and likewise a new concept of Israel.”⁶⁰ This belief, though, does not lead him to conclude that Israel has been permanently removed or that it has lost its function in the history of redemption.⁶¹ For Ridderbos, the historical bond between God and Israel continues to be maintained with real significance:

Thus, on one hand Paul is able to see the church of the gentiles as endowed with all the privileges and blessings of Israel, and to see it occupy the place of unbelieving Israel, and yet on the other hand to uphold to the full the continuation of God’s original redemptive intentions with Israel as the historical people of God.⁶²

Ridderbos believes this tension regarding Israel’s rejection and election is no contradiction: “There is therefore no contradiction between the definition of the essence of the New Testament church as the people of God and holding to Israel as the object of God’s irrevocable gift of grace and calling.”⁶³

John Y. B. Hood asserts that there was a “dualistic view” concerning the fate of Israel among theologians of the Middle Ages.⁶⁴ According to Hood, “Medieval Christians believed Jews would eventually accept Christ and be saved, but they also saw them as dangerous infidels who had been rejected and punished by God.”⁶⁵

Hood notes that Thomas Aquinas, like other medieval theologians of his day, accepted the supersessionism theory as a “given,” yet Aquinas also held to a future salvation of national Israel.⁶⁶ Hood says that Aquinas dealt with the

⁵⁸ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 356.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 333–4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 360–1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁶⁴ John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), xii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Aquinas believed in a future mass conversion of the Jews based on his interpretation of Romans 11: “Potest etiam designare terminum, quia videlicet usque tunc caecitas Iudaeorum durabit, quousque plenitudo Gentium ad fidem intrabit. Et huic concordat quod intra subdit de futuro remedio Iudaeorum, cum dicit et tunc, scilicet cum plenitudo Gentium intraverit, omnis Israel salvus fiet, non particulariter sicut modo, sed universaliter omnes.” Thomas Aquinas, “Super Epistolam Ad Romanos”; available from http://www.tacalumni.org/Aquinas/TOMA_075.txt; Internet; accessed 12 November 2002. Especially significant is the last part of this statement in which Aquinas asserts that Paul believed “all Jews will be saved in a general sense.”

“dualities” of this view. “He [Aquinas] made an effort to explain how it was possible for Jews to be at the same time chosen *and* rejected, ignorant *and* malicious Christ-killers, damned *and* destined for salvation.”⁶⁷

John Calvin’s views on Israel also appear to evidence a rejection/acceptance tension. According to Willem VanGemeran, “Some have seen the utter rejection of Israel in Calvin’s writing, whereas others have also viewed the hope for national Israel.”⁶⁸ Williamson, for example, believes there is a tension in Calvin’s writings on this issue when he states, “On the one hand, Calvin strongly insisted that God’s promise to and covenant with the people Israel was unconditional, unbreakable, and gracious. . . . On the other hand, Calvin often makes statements exactly opposing the above.”⁶⁹

At times, Calvin made statements consistent with a replacement view. For him, the “all Israel” who will be saved in Romans 11:26 is a reference to the church composed of Jews and Gentiles.⁷⁰ He also took the standard replacement interpretation that the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16 refers to “all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who were united into one church.”⁷¹ At other times, though, Calvin made statements that seem to indicate he believed in some form of a future for the nation Israel. In his commentary on Isaiah 59:20 he writes:

Paul quotes this passage, (Rom. xi. 26,) in order to shew that there is still some remaining hope among the Jews; although from their unconquerable obstinacy it might be inferred that they were altogether cast off and doomed to eternal death. But because God is continually mindful of his covenant, and “his gifts and calling are without repentance,” (Rom. xi. 29,) Paul justly concludes that it is impossible that there shall not at length be some remnant that come to Christ, and obtain that salvation which he has procured. Thus the Jews must at length be collected along with the Gentiles that out of both “there may be one fold” under Christ. (John x. 16). . . . Hence we have said that Paul infers that he [Christ] could not be the redeemer of the world, without belonging to some Jews, whose fathers he had chosen, and to whom this promise was directly addressed.⁷²

⁶⁷ Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews*, xii.

⁶⁸ Willem VanGemeran, “Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 45:1 (1983): 142.

⁶⁹ Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, 131.

⁷⁰ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 255.

⁷¹ John Calvin, “Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians,” *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 21 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844–56; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 186.

⁷² John Calvin, “Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah,” *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 8, 269.

Noting Calvin's remarks here, VanGemenen declares, "Calvin in his Isaiah commentary goes on record in favor of a national restoration of Israel to the covenant."⁷³

A dualistic view of Israel can be found in the writings of George Ladd. Ladd asserts that the church is the new "spiritual Israel."⁷⁴ Yet he also believes that "The New Testament clearly affirms the salvation of literal Israel."⁷⁵ He bases this conclusion on his study of Roman 11. Commenting on Romans 11:26 and its statement that "all Israel will be saved," Ladd comments, "It is difficult to escape the conclusion that this means literal Israel."⁷⁶

Millard Erickson, too, holds that the church is the new Israel, yet he also believes in a future salvation of national Israel. "To sum up then: the church is the new Israel. It occupies the place in the new covenant that Israel occupied in the old. . . . There is a special future coming for national Israel, however, through large-scale conversion to Christ and entry into the church."⁷⁷ He also says, "There is, however, a future for national Israel. They are still the special people of God."⁷⁸

Wayne Grudem, in his discussion of Israel and the church, espouses a supersessionist view when he states that "many New Testament verses. . . understand the church as the 'new Israel' or new 'people of God.'"⁷⁹ Yet he also declares that Israel as a nation has a divinely ordained future. "I affirm the conviction that Rom. 9–11 teaches a future large-scale conversion of the Jewish people," he says.⁸⁰

Supersessionists are agreed that the church is the new Israel, but there is no consensus among them concerning the future of national Israel. Some believe that national Israel has been permanently rejected by God while others assert that national Israel still has a special covenantal relationship with God. Thus, there are variations within supersessionism concerning Israel's future.

⁷³ VanGemenen, "Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy (II)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 46:2 (1984): 290.

⁷⁴ George Eldon Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 1053.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 861.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*