

## The Rejection of Supersessionism as an Important Component for South African Christian Opposition of Antisemitism<sup>i</sup>

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### Abstract

*Since Hamas’ attack in Israel on 07 October 2023, antisemitism has been on the rise globally. But antisemitism has had a long history in South Africa as it has had in the West. Yet much antisemitism has been undertaken under the banner of Christianity, and Supersessionism has been instrumental in the fostering of antisemitic sentiments at various times and places throughout the Christian era. Historic Christian antisemitism was arguably the fertile field in which Nazi antisemitism flourished in Germany before and during the second world war. German Protestantism, in the main, either showed vocal support or non-opposition to Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust. Few German Protestants opposed Hitler’s program against Jews. Two prominent opponents were Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and one of their main theological arguments used to oppose Nazi antisemitism was that of Israel’s ‘election’ national and ‘redemption’ status. This article seeks to delineate historic Supersessionism and its influence on historic Christian antisemitism before arguing that it is important to reject Supersessionism if Christians are to oppose antisemitism. The opposition against antisemitism is not founded in philosemitism. Rather, the basis of Christian opposition to antisemitism should be faithfulness to the Word of God. Thus, if South African Christians are to combat the rise in antisemitism, they should begin by looking at their theological stance concerning Israel and eliminate any latent Supersessionism that may contribute to the fostering of antisemitic attitudes. Even when Israel is under God’s judgment, they are still God’s ‘elect nation’ (Rm. 11:28-29), though it must be emphasised that salvation is always by faith in Jesus, whether one is a Jew or a Gentile (Rm. 1:16-17).*

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**Keywords:** Antisemitism, Supersessionism, Israel, Holocaust, South Africa

**Contribution:** This article encourages the South African church to think critically about the role supersessionism plays within Christian antisemitism. The nuanced triune Israel viewpoint of Israel's ontology enables Christians to strongly oppose antisemitism without compromising the Gospel of faith alone in Christ alone for Salvation or Jewish and Gentile equality in Messiah.

## **Present Antisemitism and the Emergence of Religious Antisemitism**

Antisemitism has profoundly influenced the history of Christendom, and this is arguably rooted in Supersessionism. According to Edward Flannery (1985:27), antisemitism began as a Pagan phenomenon, but subsequent "Christian antisemitism" was more hostile and far-reaching. Jikeli (2020:6) notes that religious antisemitism is on the rise among "Christian white supremacists and Muslim jihadists" through a mix of conspiracy theories and theological arguments based on selected religious texts. The unprecedented and barbaric Hamas attack against Israeli civilians on 07 October 2023 included brutalities such as lobbing grenades into bomb shelters, eye gouging of people while alive, the hacking to death with a garden hoe of someone shot in the stomach, bloody executions, the massacre of young Israelis at a music festival, among innumerable others resulting in over 1400 murders and leaving 5400 others seriously wounded (Saberri 2023). The hatred that Hamas showed was not only against Israelis as Israelis but also against Jews as Jews. One Hamas fighter phoned his parents in Gaza, asking them to be proud of him as he claimed to have killed ten Jews with his bare hands (Saberri 2023). This level of antisemitism was not restricted to Hamas alone, but antisemitic sentiment and crime have increased on an international level.

Between 07-23 October 2023, there was a 388% increase in antisemitic incidents of "harassment, vandalism, and/or assault compared to that same period in 2022" (Tanyos 2023). There was a 1000% increase in violent antisemitic and anti-Israel messaging on Telegram by extremists and white supremacists. Germany has seen a 240% increase in antisemitic incidents after the Hamas attack. France saw 588 incidents of antisemitism (Tanyos 2023). Antisemitic incidents in London, between 1st-18th October 2023, increased by 1350%, while anti-Muslim attacks increased by 140% (Dodd 2023) and, according to Houston (2023), online antisemitism increased by 200%.

South Africa also experienced an increase in antisemitic incidents after 7th October 2023. Klawansky (2023) cites the South African Jewish Board of Deputies which has seen 63% of the year's reported antisemitic incidents, including violence, vandalism and assault occurring in the time after 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023. According to Klawansky (2023) some of the incidents included:

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- A Jewish man jogging, who was physically attacked under the pretext of blame for the events in the Middle East.
- A Jewish Rabbi was targeted on the road by a Muslim male who followed him to a BP station and threatened to beat him up, while smacking the Rabbi's car.
- Damage to the war memorial at the Jewish part of a Pretoria cemetery.
- The words "Stop the Gaza genocide" and "Free Palestine" sprayed on a wall of a Jewish cemetery in Durban.
- Many incidents of verbal threats, and "offensive gestures", such as spitting after being accused of "causing genocide".

Houston (2023) notes that in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2003), in the context of the Liberation Struggle, attacks by the uMkhonto we Sizwe predominantly led to civilian casualties. Is it the case that violence against civilians is justified if those perpetrating the violence are regarded as oppressed? Must violence against civilians by a nation regarded as an unjust power be automatically condemned? If this is the case, then a substantial part of the Israeli-Hamas conflict would be one of framing the narrative in the form of the oppressed against the oppressor in which the oppressed can do no wrong. If one can portray Israel as the oppressed party, or Hamas as the oppressed party, it may cause indifference towards the suffering of the one group over the other.

It is interesting to note the Ecclesial silence regarding the 7th October 2023 Hamas attacks. Houston (2023) notes that when these attacks by Hamas took place, church leaders from his own Anglican communion (as well as the wider Christian community) largely remained silent. Yet there were "a few vigils for the Palestinian cause, some generalised prayers for peace and plenty of qualified fence-sitting statements that never mentioned Hamas, let alone condemned Hamas." If one's antipathy against Israel is mirrored by an antipathy against Jewish people in general, it would be easy to regard attacks against South African Jews and Jewish institutions as legitimate expressions of support for Gaza.

Therefore, the Hamas-Israel war is often conflated with antisemitism. Israel's attempt to defeat Hamas, amidst a heavy death toll and displacement of residents in Gaza, is used as a pretext for attacking Jewish people, simply because they are Jews. Schrieber (2024) notes that when the BBC questioned the South African Justice minister, Ronald Lamola, about increased antisemitism in South Africa since 7th October 2023, he claimed that "there is no threat and harm whatsoever to Jewish people" and dismissed such claims as pure inventions. When Democratic Alliance Jewish Councillor, David Shay, quoted Nelson Mandela in Shay's advocacy of Israel, the star of David on his tie was brought into question. According to Mafisa (2024), Democratic Alliance caucus leader, Belinda Kayser-

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Echeozonjoku, warned the speaker that protection of religious symbols and expression is enshrined in the constitution.

The star of David, which is not only part of Israel's flag but a symbol of Jewish identity and religion, was not recognised as such by the council member that brought it into question. Why are such symbols, or the existence of Jewish institutions and businesses, made the target of anti-Israel hatred? If such people would accuse Israel of collective punishment in Gaza, then why do they do likewise to the Jew on account of his Jewish identity and expression, aside from his advocacy of the State of Israel?

This phenomenon is not relegated to the Israel-Hamas war, but antisemitism has reared its head numerous times before. Cole (2018) notes that there was a spike of antisemitic slurs on social media by Matome Letsoalo and Tameez Seedat who, in response to Shashi Naidoo's derogatory remarks about Gaza and support of Israel, spoke threats against the Jewish community at large claiming what they would do to the Jewish community would be worse than the holocaust. Zagnoev (2018) called on the Jewish community for temperance, regarding the assumption that the Jewish community was under threat. He claimed, at that time, that antisemitic instances were no higher than they had been for the last two decades. Thus, he cautioned those in his Jewish community to be careful how they respond to that kind of hate speech. Yet it is evident that these incidents demonstrate that antisemitism is always latent and awaits pro-Israel and anti-Palestinian statements as catalysts for their vitriol against Jewish people. One must ask what the rate of antisemitic attacks would be if the constitution did not guarantee Jewish people their rights?

One can also think of high-profile cases, such as that of then Student Representative Council President Mcebo Dlamini in 2015, who spoke of his love for Hitler on social media in response to someone's claim that Hitler knew that Jews were up to mischief (as cited by Naidoo 2015). On another occasion, he was cited as claiming that Jews are devils and "uncircumcised in heart" (Anonymous 2015a). It is interesting that Dlamini employed a biblical epithet to describe Jewish people in general. There was something religious in Dlamini's antisemitism that finds expression through Biblical phrases (Acts 7:51). Yet in 2020, Evans (2020) wrote an article concerning Dlamini's written apology for his derogatory remarks and his promise to learn more about Jewish history. Perhaps an ignorance of Jewish history, or the reluctance to believe it, goes hand in hand with antisemitism. One anonymous student (Anonymous 2015b) wrote an opinion piece in the *Wits Vuvuzela*, defending Dlamini's views on Hitler. The author claims that the holocaust incites a pain is only temporarily felt compared to the permanent experience of pain suffered by black African people. The ignorance of antisemitic history gives rise to these unfounded claims because the narrative refuses to look at Jewish history through Jewish eyes. If such

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critics believe the victimisation of Jewish people throughout Jewish history should not be seen through Jewish eyes, then why should they require others to see black African oppression throughout history through black African eyes?

Some of the defining features of the present global antisemitism differ from historic European antisemitism. Jikeli (2020:1) notes that nineteenth-century antisemite, Wilhelm Marr, claimed to be antisemitic but rejected religious arguments for antisemitism. Thus, a distinction is made between “antisemitism” and “religious anti-Judaism”. However, one cannot deny that religious antisemitism was an essential factor of German Protestant support for the holocaust, either vocally or by silent assent. As Barnes (2014:373) concludes, after his thorough treatment of Christian complicity in the Holocaust, “the Protestant churches of Germany were clearly and officially anti-Semitic at this time...bishops, theologians and church councils all affirmed their own anti-semitism.” Barnes (2014:373) also states that “[t]heir antipathy was seen in religious terms and as a consequence of their beliefs.” One cannot claim on this basis that religious antisemitism was the *only* factor at work, however, one should not deny its essential contribution to ecclesial support for the holocaust. Heschel (2011:259) notes that the distinction between antisemitism and anti-Judaism relegates antisemitism to pure racism whereas anti-Judaism is simply theological in nature. As will be seen, there was historically great overlap between anti-Judaism and antisemitism.

The support shown for Hitler’s program regarding Jewish people was mostly uniform across Catholic and Protestant lines. According to Gilbert (1967:35), catholic theologian Hans Küng held that Nazi antisemitism would not have come to exist without Christian antisemitism. In 1964 the Lutheran church officially perpetuated the view that Jewish people were rejected by God for crucifying and rejecting Jesus (Gilbert 1967:35-36). Therefore, Israel no longer has an elect status. At the heart of Christian antisemitism lies the issue of Supersessionism to such an extent that, according to Gilbert (1967:37), a rejection of antisemitism requires a rejection of any notion of Jewish collective guilt regarding Jesus’ crucifixion. But perhaps what is needed is a complete rejection of Supersessionism, which Glaser (2018:101) claims is currently growing.

According to Blaising (2018:85), Supersessionism is the notion that Old Testament Israel has been superseded by the New Testament Church. Glaser (2018:101) defines Supersessionism as the notion that “Jewish people no longer have a role in the plan of God for the ages, due to disobedience and rejection of Christ at his first coming”. Perhaps this is a simplistic definition of Supersessionism, for Covenantalists would not see the Church as replacing Old Testament Israel. Rather, the Church is seen as the continuation, or typological fulfillment of Israel. According to Glodo (2020:662), Covenantalists

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do not believe in Supersessionism and “covenant theology bears no association with anti-Semitic connotations that once accompanied the terms”. Yet, one cannot help but note that Glodo implicitly recognises that Covenant Theology was historically accompanied by both antisemitism and Supersessionism. This raises various questions.

Why has Covenant Theology historically been accompanied by Supersessionism and antisemitism? What exactly is Supersessionism and how did it play a part in the Holocaust that claimed the lives of six million Jewish people. Heschel (2011:258) claims to be one “of a growing number of scholars who no longer find the distinction between theological anti-Judaism and antisemitism to be helpful”, especially when she examines the German Christian Movement during the Nazi regime. Racial antisemitism, not merely anti-Judaism, of the Third Reich was grounded in theological arguments so that the notion of Jewish extermination by leaders of the German Christian movement was rationalized as necessary for the sake of Christ (Heschel 2011:258).

### **A Case Study - The Problem of Protestant Churches in Nazi Europe**

Religious antisemitism in Nazi Europe was widespread and not relegated to a schismatic minority even among those who would not have actively supported the annihilation of Jewish people. Heschel (2011:268) is not claiming that all Protestants supported the murder of Jewish people either. But certainly, the majority of Protestants in Germany supported the Nazi party, the antisemitism of the Nazi party, and Hitler’s rhetoric. The German Christian Movement, which sought to syncretise National Socialism and Christianity, “won two-thirds of the votes cast in Germany’s Protestant church elections on 23 July 1933—thanks in part to strong support from Hitler” (Munson 2018:7). Munson (2018:1) argues that, although antisemitism and anti-Judaism are not wholly distinct categories which are not easy to disentangle, there is a fundamental difference between the two.

Anti-Judaism enabled Jews to convert and become Christians, whereas antisemitism saw no such change in a Jew’s identity. Nevertheless, Munson argues that such nuance does not undermine the religious foundation of antisemitism in Nazi Germany. According to Munson (2018:4), ninety-seven percent of the German population were raised as Christians and identified as such when Hitler assumed power. Hitler’s rhetoric was bathed in theological and scriptural arguments crafted to please the Christian majority of the nation (Munson 2018:4-6). One of the arguments that Hitler employed in *Mein Kampf* defended his antisemitism as “the handiwork of the Lord” and saw in the cleansing of the Temple and the Crucifixion as a rationale to defend his antisemitism.

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Why did Protestants embrace Hitler and his antisemitism with little protest? The answer may be more complex than the simple history of Supersessionism in the Church. For example, Pierard (1978:11) argues that various factors contributed to the inability of German Christianity to stand against Nazi injustices against Jews. There was a combination of German national awakening, which belonged to the political realm, and pietism, which regarded Christian faith as a personal and individual affair. Thus, the notion of democracy was seen as incompatible with true Christian faith, for the government was instituted by God and not by people who vote based on selfish interests. In a strange combination of the two, national and spiritual identities were synthesised. According to Pierard (1978:16), German Protestantism advocated that in Christ, Jews and non-Jews are equal, but this does not nullify “biological and social differences”. Equality was, therefore, considered an aspect of the inward state of the heart but that did not give the Christian a right to defy the impositions of the state, for the state was established by God. Nevertheless, Pierard (1978:17) still recognises that antisemitism was deeply embedded “in the German Evangelical experience” through Germany’s medieval history and the writings of Martin Luther.

This is not surprising considering the place of Supersessionism interspersed throughout Christian history. The triumphalist posture of Christendom in the suppression of Jewish people easily leads to their dehumanisation. If Jews who reject the Gospel are Christ killers, who are cursed to suffer ill-treatment and to forever bear their shame, then one could hardly protest the ill-treatment of Jewish people and the stripping of their human rights, even if one would disapprove of their execution. Thus, Christians could support the persecution of Jewish people without any sense of guilt because it was God’s will that they should suffer. Yet such hatred for Jews causes a discordant note for Christians who believe that Jesus was a Jew, that salvation is from the Jews, and who also believe that Israel is still beloved by God (Rm 11:28).

Diprose (2000:177-178) notes that the Russian pogroms and the Holocaust were both instrumental in causing Churches to reevaluate their understanding of Israel, for the contemptuous theological temper of Christianity towards Jews was the fruit of its Supersessionism. The Aryan paragraph, that sought to exclude Jews from organisations and public life, was rejected by the Confessing Church as an infringement upon their confessional position (Munson 2018:9). This did not necessarily emerge due to a rejection of antisemitism in principle. Munson (2018:9) notes that Martin Niemöller, though a critic of the Aryan paragraph when it came to Jewish converts, still regarded the Jewish people as a poison to society, which continually reaps contempt and hatred from the Gentile nations on account of their deceptive ways.

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Niemöller's stance concerning unconverted Jews arguably stemmed from a history of antisemitism and Supersessionism within Christendom. If one is to fight against antisemitism in South Africa, it is important to look at Germany as a test case of where Supersessionism leads and how to combat antisemitism in an environment saturated with Jew hatred. Only then can South African Christians employ these lessons and form a more biblical understanding of Jewish people before latent antisemitism grows more militant. Therefore, it is worth examining Supersessionism in Church history before examining some of the hermeneutical biblical claims of German protestants regarding the Jewish people. Would the Church have actively opposed Hitler if their theology was not informed by Supersessionism?

## History of Supersessionism

The seeds of Supersessionism throughout the history of Christendom were sown early in the Patristic era, but the antisemitism that characterised anti-Jewish sentiment predominated later in Church history. R Kendall Soulen lists three types of Supersessionism that pervaded Christian theology. The first was an economic Supersessionism where the nation of Israel simply serves to prefigure Messiah and through whom the Church gains its privileges and elect status (Soulen 1996:29). In this way the Church does not supersede Israel, but the Messiah certainly does. Thus, it implies an *indirect* Supersessionism of Israel by the Church through its connection to Israel's Messiah. Melito of Sardis claimed that Israel "was precious before the church arose...the people was made void when the church arose" (quoted in Soulen 1996:29).

The second model of Supersessionism to take hold of Christendom was punitive Supersessionism in which God nullifies His covenantal relationship with Israel because they rejected Messiah and the Gospel (Soulen 1996:30). Thus, Israel is under judgment and will always be so. The only way that Jewish people can gain their freedom from God's judgment is to set aside their Jewish identity and to become Christians. But Soulen (1996:31) discerns a deeper form of Supersessionism than both these models, which he calls a structural Supersessionism. In structural Supersessionism, the New Testament forms doctrine, whereas the Hebrew Bible cannot be a basis for doctrine or conclusions regarding the Christian faith. Soulen's stance, therefore, would imply the need for a synthesis of the theologies of the Old and New Testaments, where the New Testament would be read in light of the Old Testament and not just the other way around.

All three forms of Supersessionism likely began early in the Patristic era. According to Ung Hayworth (2023:191), the book of Acts portrays the Church of the Apostolic era as a composite of Jews with

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varying degrees of Torah observance, and non-Torah observant Gentiles. The council of Yavne brought greater degrees of separation between Christians and Jews. According to Diprose (2000:71) the inclusion of the twelfth benediction in the “Eighteen Benedictions” was a curse upon heretics which likely had Christians in mind and to which, he believes, Justin Martyr alluded in his complaint of the Jewish curses against Christians uttered in the synagogues.

If the Epistle of Barnabas is indicative of Christian attitudes towards Jews at the beginning of the second century, it shows that churches had begun to regard the Jewish community as rejected by God, whereas the Church is “the true heir of the divine promises” (Maston 2019:453). Diprose (2000:72) also notes that Barnabas’ view of Israel is that of an unworthy nation which inherited the ceremonial laws in a literal sense but missed the point of them. Moses broke the original tablets of the covenant because Israel worshipped the golden calf and, therefore, would never inherit that covenant. The middle second-century letter to Diognetus regarded the Jewish ceremonial laws as superstitious, ludicrous and worthless (Diprose 2000:73-74). The problem with this line of thinking is that it despises divine commandments and fails to recognise the revelatory nature of those institutions.

Maston (2019:453) also argues that Justin Martyr’s attitude was softer towards the Jewish people which may imply that attitudes within the Patristic era were somewhat varied. Yet it must be noted that the context is an apologetic debate with a representative of Judaism, and this may inform the warmer attitude towards Jewish people that Maston discerns. As Maston (2019:457) notes, Justin Martyr believed that it was permissible for Jewish Christians to continue with Mosaic observances as long as they did not try to persuade Gentiles to do so. However, he also saw it as a sign that they were “weak-minded” (Martyr 2012: Loc2050). Justin Martyr (2012:1645) was not opposed to the idea of a Jewish restoration in a future millennium, but argues for the complete co-inheriting of that millennial inheritance by non-Torah observant Gentile believers in Jesus. Nevertheless, Soulen (1996:39) notes that Justin Martyr believed in a punitive Supersessionism in which physical circumcision is taken as a sign that the nation is cursed and deserving of that curse because they crucified the Messiah. Thus, circumcision would serve as a constant reminder of the bloody defeat by Rome during the Bar Kochba rebellion. Justin Martyr regarded the Church as the true Israel and the nation of Israel was regarded as a “useless, disobedient, and faithless generation” (Diprose 2000:75).

However, the incompatibility of Jewish observances and Christian faith was a notion that developed over time. The Quartodeciman controversy only later became the Quartodeciman schism, which was an unfortunate ruling that would have deemed the Apostle John and other Apostles as heretics. According to the personal testimony of Polycarp, John and other Apostles always kept the yearly

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memorial of Messiah's death and resurrection according to the date of Passover in the Jewish festal calendar and not according to the solar calendar (Eusebius 1998:184). But this sentiment was not shared by numerous theologians of the patristic era. According to Maston (2019:456-457), Ignatius (in the second century) regarded Christian observances of Judaism as nonsensical, and the key observance opposed was that of the Sabbath. This was seen to be superseded by observing the Lord's Day. Maston (2019:457) also notes that the epistle to Diognetus regarded the observance of "Sabbath, circumcision and special days" as ridiculous.

The division within the body of Christ over Passover can be seen to parallel the growth of antisemitic rhetoric within Christianity. According to Flannery (1985:51), Chrysostom regarded Jewish people as degenerate due to their killing of Christ. Chrysostom also believed that God hates the Jews and that it is the duty of Christians to hate them (Flannery 1985:51). Chrysostom regarded antisemitism as a sign of love for Christ. His counsel was heeded by the Christendom of the Middle Ages. The legalisation of Christianity made conversion to Christianity fashionable. This not only protected Jews who converted to Christianity from reprisals by unconverted Jews, but it also made conversion to Judaism illegal (Pritz 2019:461).

Pritz (2019:462-463) further elaborates on antisemitic policies of Christendom which exacted heavier taxes from Jews, made it illegal for Jews to own slaves, made it a capital offense for a Jew to marry a Christian, forbade Jews to build synagogues, caused Christian converts to Judaism to have their worldly goods confiscated, mandated Jews and Muslims to wear distinguishing clothing and confined Jews to ghettos in many European cities. No doubt these measures of identifying clothing and ghettoization influenced the Nazi approach to dealing with Jews that led to the systematic murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust. Barnes (2014:2) summarises Church policy against Jews, consisting of vilification of Jews in 100- 400 AD, then boycotts and exclusion in 400- 1100 AD, deportations in 1100- 1500 AD and lastly, ghettoization in 1500- 1800 AD. He notes that the Holocaust went through these same stages before proceeding to genocide.

According to Pritz (2019:463-465), Christian theologians regarded Israel's continued existence as necessary to preserve Old Testament scripture and bear perpetual witness to their own shame through their suffering. This punitive Supersessionism did not serve as a basis for the extermination of Jews, but it certainly justified Jewish persecution. According to Pritz (2019:470), in his book "The Jews and their Lies", Luther suggested that physical violence was permissible against Jewish people, and his virulent antisemitism was employed by Hitler to justify the Holocaust. One cannot state that Luther is responsible for advocating the systematic genocide of the Holocaust. Luther (2018:301) counsels

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German nobles against excessive cursing and personally harming Jewish people because they have already done much of that to themselves by cursing Christ. Yet he deemed those who show kindness and hospitality to Jewish people as Jesus' worst enemies. Nevertheless, Luther's tractate certainly contributed to the animus of German Protestants against Jews, that made it impossible for them to defend Jewish people at their time of need.

Barnes (2014:33) notes that about 40% of Protestant pastors were supportive of the Pro-Nazi "German Christians" and most Protestant theologians were silent concerning the plight of Jews or actively vilified them. Even Karl Barth, claimed to struggle with antisemitic antipathy. In a letter to Dr. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt in 1967, Barth states:

I am decidedly not a philosemite, in that in personal encounters with living Jews (even Jewish Christians) I have always, so long as I can remember, had to suppress a totally irrational aversion, naturally suppressing it at once on the basis of all my presuppositions, and concealing it totally in my statements, yet still having to suppress and conceal it (Barth 1981:262).

Barth acknowledged that his antisemitism "could have had a retrogressive effect on [his] doctrine of Israel" (Barth 1981:262), which highlights the two-way effect of theological Supersessionism and Christian antisemitism. Though Supersessionism lay a doctrinal foundation for Christian antisemitism, antisemitism itself also affected Barth's theology. Yet, Barnes (2014:39-40) does not regard him as personally antisemitic but as one who inherited antisemitic Christian teaching. This is evident in three places within Barth's letter to Dr Marquardt. Firstly, he categorises these sentiments as reprehensible. Secondly, he celebrates that his sons did not share that antipathy. Lastly, he is encouraged that Dr Marquardt could see that he was attempting to improve on his antisemitic tendencies (Barth 1981:262).

In the case of most German Christians, the cost of Philosemitism was high, and few were willing to pay the price. Thus, if the Jews are cursed by God, why would someone jeopardise their own future for such people? According to Barnes (2014:40), Pastor Georg Althaus served a six-month jail sentence for asking God to defend Jewish people in a confirmation class. Apparently, Althaus protested his innocence by stating it was his pastoral duty to pray for Jewish people, which was rejected by the prosecution based on Martin Luther's antisemitic rhetoric.

The rise of Communism did no favours to Jewish people, who were perceived as its architects. The Jews became a scapegoat for the problems within society, and the antisemitic forgery, the "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion," was instrumental in equating the term Jew with communism (Flannery

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1985:207). According to Ben-Itto (2005:232-233), such sentiments were also expressed in a South African antisemitic forgery used to vilify Jewish people in Port Elizabeth in 1934. An article in *Die Rapport* claimed that a letter had been stolen from the Western Road synagogue, Port Elizabeth, that shed light on a global persecution of Christians by Jews. The Rabbi took the author of the article to court for libel and a Rhodes Varsity Hebrew scholar, George Frank Dingemans, debunked the letter as a forgery in his capacity as an expert witness. The prosecution sought to invalidate his witness by asking questions about his relationship to Jewish people. When asked why, as a Gentile, he was sympathetic to Jewish people, he replied by stating that he was sympathetic to all nations but also to the Jew “because my Lord and my Saviour was a Jew and he said, ‘Salvation is of the Jew’” (Ben-Itto 2005:256). Jesus’ Jewishness was rejected by the prosecution with the rhetorical question, “If Jesus was a Jew, why didn’t he have a crooked nose?” (Ben-Itto 2005:256). Thus, one cannot claim that the situation in Germany was unique, but factors within European Protestantism fed support for the Holocaust.

Shain (1994:3-4) argues that the roots of South African antisemitism lay in anti-Jewish sentiments that existed before 1930. The same accusation of Jewish Bolshevism levelled in Germany was echoed in South Africa. The existence of philosemitism did exist, but theological arguments were strong justifications for antisemitic publications. The *Land en Volk* published an article which claimed that Jews tortured Jesus on the cross and they continued to slander Jesus (Shain 1994:35). On this basis, it was argued that Jews should not be granted citizenship in a Christian country. Although other factors contributed to the exacerbation of antisemitic policies and sentiments, historic Christian theology, with its foundation of Supersessionism, lay at the heart of Protestant antisemitism both in Germany and in South Africa.

## **Hermeneutical Claims of Antisemitic Protestants**

How did Hitler succeed in implementing his plan to exterminate the Jewish population of the Third Reich? Christian antisemitism has punctuated the history of Christendom but did not go as far as seeking the annihilation of the Jewish people. As has been noted, some Church Fathers regarded the Jewish people as a perpetual witness to their shame. How could they continue to be so if they are exterminated? McClenagan (2020:2) contends that Hitler radicalized the anti-Jewishness of several Protestant texts to harness active support (or at least non-resistance) of the Holocaust, especially regarding the German Christian Movement.

In contrast to scholars who regard “Christian anti-Judaism” as strictly theological in nature, whereas Nazi antisemitism was racially antisemitic, McClenagan (2020:3-4) argues that racial antisemitism was

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growing within German Protestantism throughout the decades preceding the Holocaust. Antisemitism, concurrent with the rise of the Nazi party, was a blend of theological and racial antisemitism. Seminal radical ideas had already begun to permeate Protestantism before Nazism further radicalized it. McClenagan (2020:6) notes that Liberal scholars, such as Adolf von Harnack argued that the Church succeeded in protecting itself against “the stunting effect of [the Old Testament’s] Judaism” by virtue of it being relegated to an inferior status to the New Testament. According to McClenagan (2020:11), Pastor Friedrich Wieneke argued that the God of the Old Testament differs to the God of the New Testament. This led to a Marcion-like revision of the New Testament to free it from references to the Old Testament. Other pastors within the confessing church, like Gerhard Schmidt, sought to maintain the Old Testament as Christian literature but argued that it is based on Old Testament teaching that Luther rejected the Jews (Barnes 2013:70).

The disregard for the Old Testament was not rooted in Luther or in the Reformers, but arguably found its origins in a liberal understanding of Scripture as not fully inspired and inerrant. The Old Testament was regarded as vestigial and, therefore, dispensable. Combined with Luther’s rhetoric, this perspective provided a strong invective against Jewish people. Probst (2009:442) lists seven “severe recommendations” by Luther concerning Christian treatment of Jews, which include the burning of synagogues and Jewish schools, the destruction of Jewish homes, the confiscation of Jewish religious literature, the prohibition against Jewish instruction, the removal of protection for Jews in their travels, the prohibition against Jewish money lending at interest, the confiscation of Jewish wealth, and subjecting Jewish people to harsh labor. The last point eerily resembles the treatment of Israel in Egypt prior to the Exodus. Luther did not believe that baptized Jewish converts should be treated in this manner. Yet, as violent as the persecutions were that Luther proposed, so was the vitriol that manifested in the German Christian Movement. Luther’s writing was employed as an apologetic for racial antisemitism, even though he did not extend his sentiments to Christian Jews.

One of the strongest denunciations of Nazi antisemitism came from Bonhoeffer who sought a ‘worldly’ Christianity that was embodied in a life lived in community. Soulen (1996:17) regards this form of Christianity as something Bonhoeffer believed was rooted in the Old Testament. In a letter to Eberhard Bethge in 1944, Bonhoeffer bemoaned the otherworldliness of Christian hope, and rather argued that the New Testament needed to be read more in light of the Old Testament than had been previously done (Bonhoeffer 2010:367). One should not take Bonhoeffer’s denunciation of Nazi antisemitism as indicative that Bonhoeffer disagreed with the notion that Jewish people are guilty of crucifying the Messiah. But in assessing what the Church’s response should be to the Nazi Aryan clauses, Bonhoeffer recognised that there was to be a future salvation and restoration of the people of Israel, whom he

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regarded as both “loved and punished by God” (Bonhoeffer 1965:226). Phelan (2022:6, 8) believes that Bonhoeffer’s views concerning the punitive divine judgment of Israel likely moderated over time. Nevertheless, it is arguable that the notion that Israel is still beloved by God was seminal to a later expressed sentiment that Israel is the “apple of God’s eye” and remain a holy people (Phelan 2022:8). This was rooted in his exegesis of Romans 9-11.

This may mark a development away from Bonhoeffer’s earlier sentiments in support of sanctions against Jewish people in 1933. Though Bonhoeffer felt pity for the Jews who were persecuted by Hitler he still thought that this was part of their punishment for crucifying the Messiah (Munson 2018:10). This seems to be Bonhoeffer’s motivation for believing in an eschatological salvation for Israel as that would be the mechanism through which antisemitism would end. Ramusson (2007:375) argues that Barth’s critique concerning the treatment of Jews was sterner than Bonhoeffer’s. In 1933, Barth gave a sermon based on Romans 15:5-13 in which he emphasised the Jewish centrality of the Covenant, of Salvation, and of the Messiah (Munson 2007:375). Thus, Barth’s vocal opposition to Nazi antisemitism was based on Israel’s ‘election’ and their continuing validity in the economy of God’s dealings with humanity. For Barth, salvation was from the Jew and Jesus never ceased to be a Jew.

This sentiment regarding Jewish people differs from that expressed by the Evangelical bishop, Martin Sasse, in 1938, who distributed 100,000 copies of the pamphlet, “Martin Luther on the Jews: Away with them!” (Hauger 2017:225-226). According to Hauger (2017:225-226) the arson of 1400 synagogues was seen as the fulfillment of Luther’s legacy. In contrast to the Supersessionism of these German Evangelicals prior to the Second World War, the Weissensee statement of German Evangelicals in 1950 acknowledged Evangelical complicity in the holocaust. They started to acknowledge “the belief in the lasting election of Israel and the special relation of the church to Judaism” (Hauger 2017:227-228). Though Luther was not the theological basis to justify the annihilation of Jewish people, he still supplied a theological foundation for Protestant antisemitism. Thus, Protestant churches were unable to protest the extermination of the Jewish people.

Theological changes because of the shame of one’s own guilt may lead to a pendulum swing to another extreme or error. Hauger (2017:233-234) notes that the Bremen declaration of the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany) in 2015 opposed any evangelism of Jewish people. One is left wondering how this stance can be married to Paul’s claim that the Gospel is “the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rm 1:16). One cannot interpret this statement as arguing that Jews may come to believe the Gospel without evangelistic enterprise or without a commission for Jewish evangelism. Paul’s statement is prefaced against his mission endeavours,

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where he always seemed to take the Gospel to the Jewish people first before continuing with His mission to Gentiles (Ac. 13:5, 14-15; 14:1; 17:1, 1017; 18:4, 19; 19:8). If one would argue that Paul could do so because he was a Jew and not a Gentile, then one should at least advocate the support of Jewish Believers in evangelizing their fellow Jewish brethren but not the disavowal of Jewish evangelism *in toto*.

Facing the horrors of the Holocaust must lead to a reevaluation of the theological underpinnings of Protestant support for Hitler's treatment of the Jews whether that be for the persecution of Jewish people, or for the elimination of Jewish people. Some of the theological commitments of Protestant Germany that lent support to Hitler's antisemitism were as follows:

- The New Testament is authoritative for the life of the Believer, but the Old Testament is inferior, containing value as a negative witness against the Law and against Jewish people, or having little value at all.
- If the Old Testament is to have continuing validity, then it must be read according to one's theology of the New Testament, but it should not be read on its own terms.
- The Jewish people were Christ killers and, therefore, cursed. Thus, a Christian should allow Jewish people to bear that persecution. To oppose it is to oppose the will of God.
- Luther's arguments supported the burning of synagogues and Jewish schools, destroying Jewish homes, confiscating Jewish religious literature and wealth, prohibiting Jewish education and money lending at interest, removing protection of Jews when they travelled, and forcing harsh labour on them.
- The support of Jewish Christians and the lack of support for Jewish non-Christians betrayed a sentiment that Christian Jews were no longer Jews but Christian. Yet those who supported the persecution of Christian Jews betrayed a viewpoint that a Jew is always a Jew. But in both cases persecution against non-Christian Jewish people should not be opposed.
- The Church has replaced the Jewish nation as God's people and Jewish people are rejected as a nation, having no future national restoration in view.

Nevertheless, one's reevaluation of these theological premises should not be primarily founded upon philosemitism but upon faithfulness to apostolic teaching, which takes to heart the totality of the biblical witness in both testaments.

## **How the Christian Believer is to Understand the Church's Relationship to Israel**

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Though crisis may cause Believers to reevaluate their theology, there is a danger that reactionary theology may serve as a pendulum swing to an opposing error. Nevertheless, one must recognise that the theological opposition to Nazi antisemitism by Bonhoeffer and Barth employed arguments that maintained the 'elect' status of national Israel. In the case of Nazi Germany, Supersessionism was arguably an essential factor (though not the only factor) in Protestant non-resistance and/or support of the Nazi antisemitic agenda.

One of the substantial challenges lies in the relationship of the New Testament to the Old Testament and the area of Biblical Theology. One may argue that if the Old Testament is taken on its own terms, one would likely believe in a future national restoration of Israel. Pate, et al (2004:105-118) argue that the nationalism of the Jewish people during the first century was not rooted in the eschatology of the Old Testament prophets but in the nationalism of the intertestamental apocryphal writings. If the eschatology of first-century Jews were truly informed by the prophetic writings, they would know that the future was not national but multinational. However, these authors overplay the universalism of Old Testament eschatology. There are certainly promises of blessings for all nations in the eschaton and various levels of Gentile integration into Israel's society, inheritance, and worship. Nevertheless, when one takes the totality of the Old Testament eschatological picture, there are also promises that portray Israel as central, the subservience of Gentile nations to Israel, and distinction between Israel and the nations of the world.

The portrayal of Israel's future restoration is one of a geopolitical restoration predicated on a spiritual restoration (Ung Hayworth 2023:169-173). Deuteronomy 30:1-8 predicts that when Israel repents, after they have experienced exile among the nations, God will regather them to the land, circumcise their hearts, and they will again keep the commandments that God commanded in the book of Deuteronomy. Yet a mosaic lifestyle will not be necessary to enter the New Covenant. Rather Ung Hayworth (2023:55) argues that the Law that is written on Israel's heart in Jeremiah 31:31ff., is not the Mosaic law but the dynamic of the Holy Spirit that will change the disposition of Israelite hearts to enable their obedience. Thus, Deuteronomy promises that the result of the nation entering that New Covenant is that they will again keep the commandments that they were never able to fulfil beforehand. Thus, one should not regard the New Covenant as synonymous with the Deuteronomic covenant but a covenant that, unlike that made at Sinai, accomplishes what the Mosaic Covenant could never accomplish.

Nevertheless, one cannot ignore that Romans 9-11 implies a new reality through the coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection. God takes from the one nation of Israel and divides them into two groups. Those rejected are Jews by first birth alone while God chooses those Jews who have a second birth

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through faith in the Gospel. The 'first-born' is rejected so that God may choose the 'second-born', i.e. those who have second birth through regeneration. When one recognises that Ishmael and Esau were both first-born, while Isaac and Jacob were second-born, one can discern a clever play on words characterising the first-born as "children of the flesh" and the second-born as "children of promise" (Rm 9:8). Thus, the election Paul writes of is one where Jews who are born Jewish by first birth only are rejected. God has elected those Jews who are 'second-born', but they have the privileges of the first-born and constitute true Israel as the salvific elect. The comparison that Paul makes is even more significant when one recognises the importance of the first-born son and the law of inheritance within the Old Testament context. Romans 9 does not constitute an argument between Calvinism and Arminianism in as much as it is proving God's faithfulness to true Israel even though many within the nation are going to a lost eternity. The point Paul is making is that one cannot be a Jew outwardly but must be one in heart. This does not contradict Old Testament prophecy for God had promised that the New Covenant would cause a change of inward disposition for the Israelite with whom the New Covenant is made.

The New Covenant is not synonymous with the Mosaic Covenant, for obedience cannot be the basis of one's salvation. Rather, God's saving work is the basis of one's obedience. In Ephesians 2:11-13, Paul teaches that Gentile believers were aliens to the commonwealth, or citizenship, of Israel, but now they are brought near, meaning that they have in some manner become part of Israel. In Galatians, Paul condemns those who would teach that circumcision is necessary for salvation and for inclusion into the Israel of God. A Supersessionist reading of the New Testament would understand these truths to mean that the Church is Israel and there is no longer a purpose for Israel as a nation. National Israel is seen as vestigial and of no consequence. This is partially understandable as Paul argues that they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel (Rm 9:6). If ethnic Jews reject their Messiah and are rejected as true Jews, and if Gentiles are integrated into Israel's spiritual community as full partakers of Israel's spiritual blessings, then why would one object to the notion that the Church is the new Israel? Lest one mischaracterise those who hold to this theology as teaching that the Church replaces Israel, there is a nuanced argument made by Progressive Covenantalists in that the Church does not replace Israel, but rather Jesus inherits those promises. The Church has those promises conferred upon them through their connection to Messiah (Merkle 2020:129-130). However, though this is not primarily a Supersessionist ecclesiology, it could be regarded as a Supersessionist Christology. Jesus takes the place of the nation, as the antitype of the nation.

On the other hand, a Dispensational reading of the New Testament would deny that the term Israel applies to the Church in any sense of the word. Blaising (2018:98), advocating a Progressive

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Dispensational approach, argues that Gentile believers “are not being added to Israel, rather Jews and Gentiles are both being redeemed and remade in Christ, transitioning from an old humanity into a new humanity”. This theological paradigm takes seriously a grammatical-historical hermeneutic of the Old Testament prophetic passages, which indicate a future national restoration of Israel. Maltz (2013:25) expresses concern that “Jews, as no other people have suffered more from allegorical thinking by the Church.” According to Maltz (2013:28-29), this approach to Israel’s ontology was rooted in a platonic dualism whereby national Israel were regarded as “earthly people, crude, hard-hearted, materialistic murderers.” The Spiritual nature of the Church as the new Israel led most Christians to regard national Israel as vestigial while the Church alone is enduring and valid.

This stance arguably forgets that, while Jews who reject the Gospel are cut off from their own olive tree (Rm 11:17) and not regarded as true Jews (Rm 9:6), Paul still regards them as an ‘elect people’ according to Romans 11:28. Paul teaches that there are two perspectives that one must hold in tension concerning the unbelieving segment of the Jewish people. From the perspective of the Gospel, they are enemies for the Believer’s sake but from the perspective of God’s ‘election’, they are still “beloved for the sake of the Fathers”. Thus, the stance that regards Jews *only* as a cursed, rejected people under God’s wrath (as could be derived from an exegesis of Rm 9:19-23) is a caricature of Pauline teaching. That is, unless one recognises that Paul holds that view in tension with the notion that they are still beloved by God as His ‘elect’ nation. This statement indicates that God is faithful to the promises He gave to Israel’s forefathers. Yet any restoration of their fortunes depends upon their repentance. Paul does not venture into describing what kind of restoration Israel will experience beyond soteriological categories (Rm 11:12, 25-27). Nevertheless, Paul does not argue that they will regain their election, or that at some future point they will again become beloved, but that they are *still* beloved.

Some Believers may argue that the “all Israel will be saved” in Romans 11:26 is not speaking about a national eschatological revival of the nation, but simply of all Jews who accept the Gospel of every age. It is true that Paul defined the true Jew as a Jew that is saved (Rm 9) and has also spoken of Gentile inclusion into Israel’s tree in Romans 11:17-24. Nevertheless, the immediate context of Romans 11 speaks of Israel in its unbelief, to whom God shows faithfulness in presently preserving a chosen remnant (Rm 11:7). In this verse, Israel is defined as those who were seeking for something and failed to attain it. Yet Paul does not define what it is they have been seeking for and failed to attain. Perhaps this is because he has already stated that they were seeking a law of righteousness, which they failed to attain (Rm 9:31). Whatever the unattained is, it states that only the elect, chosen by grace, did attain it. This text clearly distinguishes the ‘elect’ and the method of their election as “chosen by grace”. “Their transgression” is the transgression of unsaved Jews (Rm 11:12). “Their rejection” is the rejection of

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unsaved Jews. This rejection will one day become their acceptance. Verse 15 parallels the statement made in verse 12.

Thus, one may argue that “their fulness” in verse 12 indicates a future reversal of the present state of disobedience among the nation. Schreiner (2008:596) paraphrases the thought as follows, “the trespass of the Jews leads to salvation for Gentiles, and the salvation of the latter produces jealousy and salvation in the former.” Moo (1996:689) understands a similar reference to a future fulfillment for national Israel, but what is specifically intended depends on the definition of “fulness”. Moo argues that this depends on whether there is a qualitative sense to “fulness” or a quantitative sense. A qualitative sense merely speaks of “the full restoration of the blessings of the kingdom that she is now, as a corporate entity, missing” (Moo 1996:689). If a quantitative referent is intended, this would mean that an eschatological revival and salvation of a larger number of Jews is meant.

Moo (1996:690) believes this future restoration may be qualitative and quantitative. In this case, it must also mean what it does for the Gentiles, where “fulness” is translated as the “full number”, and not “all the Gentiles”. This also applies to Israel’s fulness, that the Potter “made some for noble use” according to his sovereignty. Yet the clear allusion to Jeremiah 18 indicates that God’s sovereign choice is not arbitrary but is relational and in concert with the way Israel responds to the prophetic call of God to repentance. According to Jeremiah 18:7-8 God may decree judgment against a nation, but if they repent from their sin, He will relent from the calamity spoken. Or in Jeremiah 18:9-10, God may speak concerning good purposes, but if the nation rebels, God will think better of the good concerning which He spoke. Thus, God’s choice of whether a Jew is made into a vessel of honour or dishonour relates to their acceptance of His word or His rejection. As Paul states in Romans 9:32, Israel did not attain the law of righteousness because they did not pursue it by faith, but by works.

However, for the purposes of this article, it matters little whether there is a restoration of Israel’s fortunes to them in a quantitative or a qualitative sense. Paul intends to communicate a reversal of the present state of belief regarding ‘elect’ Israel. Thus, it does not matter whether “all Israel” is to be understood as an eschatological revival of national Israel or as an eschatological restoration fulfilled in a saved remnant within national Israel. In both cases, Paul is speaking of a reversal of Israel’s present state. Their transgression and failure are turned to fullness (Rm 11:12) and their rejection is turned to acceptance as life from the dead, implying a revival of many within the nation if not all (Rm 11:15). Thus, Paul’s note that God is able to graft severed branches back into their own olive tree must be read in this context.

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Nevertheless, one must not take the notion of a future restoration as necessarily implying the whole nation without qualification, even if one were to take it in a quantitative sense. In assessing the theology of pseudepigraphic writings of the first century, Elliott (2000:621-634) notes that there is a remnant motif in the literature that speaks of the destruction of many within the nation and a restoration for a surviving remnant. This was regarded as a future vindication of the pious remnant of Israel's suffering at the time that the pseudepigraphal writings were penned (Elliott 2000:637). In a similar fashion, Joel 2:30-31 speaks of a remnant of those in Jerusalem escaping the judgment of the Day of the Lord by calling on the name of YHWH. Thus, through heartfelt contrition, repentance, and trust in YHWH's mercy, God preserves a remnant (Jl 2:12-13), though Joel 2:30-32 implies that many others will be destroyed in the day of wrath (cf. Rm 9:22, 27-29). The fact that Joel calls Israel to contrition and repentance signals that their salvation is a gift of God's grace, not that their repentance merits their salvation.

Notwithstanding the notion that there will be a future eschatological restoration of a repentant remnant of the nation, Romans 11:28 speaks of the present state of Israel in their unbelief. Paul does not speak of the saved remnant of the nation of this present time. On the one hand, they are enemies from the perspective of the Gospel. On the other hand, they are beloved for the sake of the Patriarchs because their election is without repentance. Both the word *ἐχθροί* (enemies) and *ἀγαπητοί* (beloved) have the same referent. Thus, even in their unbelief, Israel is still an elect nation that needs mercy. From its establishment as a nation, Israel's status as God's nation was conditional, Ex 19:5-6, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This verse is important because it is appropriated to all believers (Gentiles included) by Peter (1 Pt 2:9).

It is also important to remember that Israel's nationhood is unconditional in that Jeremiah 31:35-37 promises that the nation will never cease to be a nation before YHWH regardless of their past sins. The Abrahamic covenant, which was passed on to Isaac, and then Jacob and to the sons of Israel, is shown to be an unconditional covenant in that God alone took on the burden to fulfil it when he passed through the animal pieces (Gn 15:10-21). God alone was faithful and the only one qualified to walk through, and powerful enough to be faithful, even to a remnant. The conditional part still required every Israelite to be circumcised to be part of the nation. God's promises are unconditional because He will never fail.

According to this view, it would then logically flow that Israel's election is assured on the basis of God's faithfulness according to the Abrahamic covenant, but individual Jews will only enjoy the ultimate fulfillment of the promised Divine privileges if they receive them by faith in their Messiah. Nevertheless, Gentile believers are called upon not to boast against the natural branches (Rm 11:13) and to recognise

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that unsaved Jews are still beloved by God, though they be in rebellion and under the condemnation of sin unless they repent. Thus, the mysterious tension remains that on the one hand Jewish unbelievers are still part of the nation of Israel, to whom belongs the Divine privileges (Rm 9:3-5). On the other hand, are regarded as enemies due to their unbelief.

Yet, even if one is to regard the referent of “enemies” and “beloved” (Rm 11:28) as only speaking of an elect remnant of national Israel currently in unbelief but that will one day get saved, the national human identity is still foundational to the argument Paul is making. It is impossible to know whether the Jew who walks down the road will one day repent (such as with the Apostle Paul before He encountered the Lord) and, therefore, the Gentile Believer has an additional reason to refrain from boasting against the natural branches that are cut off from their own tree (Rm 11:18). This twofold perspective regarding unsaved Jews as enemies and as still beloved was also a major argument for Barth and Bonhoeffer in their opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust at a time when antisemitism was unrestrained.

Not only are Israel still regarded as God’s ‘elect nation’, but the Gentile contingent of the Church is indebted to the Jewish contingent. Jewish brethren share their spiritual blessings with believing Gentiles (Rm 15:27). Even though Gentiles are co-heirs with Jews, Paul still recognises Jewish primacy in both evangelism and in Gentile salvation (Rm 1:16-17). It is not only Jesus that mediates these blessings to Gentile believers, but believing Jews also mediate them in a secondary sense. Jewish primacy is the given reason that Paul would desire himself accursed if that would save his fellow Jews (Rm 9:1-5). Jewish primacy is not only seen in the book of Acts, where the Church began as a wholly Jewish assembly into which Gentiles were later added, but as Horner (2013:38-39) notes, the first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem were all Jews until the rebellion of Bar Cochba. It was the Roman prohibition of Jews to “be within sight of Jerusalem” that changed the Bishoprik of Jerusalem to be wholly Gentile until 1841 (Horner 2013:38). After the rebellion of Bar Cochba, Horner notes a decline in Gentile acceptance of Jews. He argues that Justin Martyr was central in a move away from a Jew-centered eschatology toward one that was Gentile-centered through the belief that the Church was the “true spiritual Israel.”

However, Ung Hayworth (2023:294) has produced a theological model, arguing that Israel can exist in more than one form simultaneously. Jesus is regarded as the perfect Israel, and the Church is spiritually Israel due to its relationship to Jesus and the central role played by the remnant of Israel that are born again. Thus, unless one claims that Jesus and the Church are synonymous terms, one must agree that there is both oneness and distinction between Jesus and His Church. Both Jesus and the Church are identified with Israel. Jesus predicts a future repentance of the nation in accepting Him as their Messiah

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before He returns (Mt 23:39). Peter also promises that if Israel repented, Jesus would return and restore all things promised by the Old Testament prophets, which includes a national restoration of the Jews to their geographical and political privileges (Ac 3:19-21).

If the majority of German Protestants would have held firmly to this theological perspective, then how could they have supported the Nazi persecution of Jews even if one were to believe it to be a consequence of their rejection of Messiah? This was basically the argument that Barth and Bonhoeffer used to oppose Nazi antisemitism. Thus, a belief that the Church is the “true spiritual Israel” need not lead to a Supersessionist view of the nation and a disregard of their elect status, because Israel exists in more than one form simultaneously. To hold that the Church is the outworking of Israel’s spiritual ontology does not automatically divest national Israel of an eschatological national restoration. One wonders if more Protestants also shared those sentiments whether Protestant Christianity would have opposed Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust.

It is difficult to claim that would have been the case. It may not be the case that the majority of German Protestants would have opposed Hitler’s antisemitism. There are other motivating factors that would have contributed to the Church’s non-resistance against Nazi antisemitism, including the motive of self-preservation, fear, German nationalism, and the conflation of communism with the Jewish people to name a few. But if the majority of German Christians would have shared Barth and Bonhoeffer’s commitment to the notion of Israel’s national election and future restoration, it is unlikely that the theological arguments used to defend the notion of a permanent rejection of national Israel would have been employed to validate the theological anti-Judaism within German Protestantism.

## **Conclusion**

It is beyond the scope of this article to comment on how South African Christians should appraise the situation in Gaza and what their support and/or criticism should be. Nevertheless, one must recognise that opportunistic antisemitism tends to blatantly surface in conflict situations. One cannot overlook the Islamic antisemitic influence in South Africa. Likening the situation in Gaza to “Apartheid” further fuels antisemitic sentiments. The use of the word “genocide” exacerbates antisemitism, even though only Hamas is avowed in their resolve to exterminate Israel, and not Israel the Palestinians. One must recognize that even under judgment, Israel is regarded as ‘elect’ and “the apple of God’s eye” (Zch 2:8; Rm 11:28). Thus, South African Christians should evaluate their understanding of the Church’s relationship to Israel if they are to combat such antisemitism effectively.

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If Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer are to serve as models of the Christian fight against antisemitism at a time when antisemitism becomes the prominent ideological atmosphere, one must recognise the centrality of God's promises to Israel and their 'election'. Mere sentimentality and philosemitism will not suffice. One must have a deep-seated theological conviction. Additionally, the Old Testament predicts eschatological events concerning Israel's future restoration. This could possibly serve as an important factor in opposing any contemporary Christian antisemitism without denying the centrality of the Gospel and salvation by faith at a time when some philosemitic Protestants have embraced the notion that Jews should not be evangelised. This would be true, both in South Africa and abroad. Evangelical Believers (whether Dispensational, Covenantal, or otherwise), should emulate Paul's attitude of brokenness over Israel's lost condition. He wished that He could be accursed for their salvation, not primarily because they were His kinsmen (Rm 9:1-5). Rather, Paul grieved because they are God's historic covenant people to whom first were given these Divine privileges that they will only be able to enjoy through faith in their Messiah, Jesus.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (Rm 9:1-5 LSB).

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