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Supersessionism in Early Christianity

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I attended my first CSBS meeting in 1979. The meeting that year was in Saskatoon and I had just finished the first year of my doctoral program. I have a number of vivid memories from that meeting, partly because it was my first academic conference, and partly because, as it turned out, I returned to Saskatoon three years later to take up my first teaching position, with the result that my memories of the meeting became fixed and focused through the lens of my subsequent years of happy experience on the University of Saskatchewan campus. Among these memories, one of the most prominent is the anti-Judaism seminar.

In 1979, the seminar—“Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity”—was in its third year. The papers that year dealt with the Gospels and Acts; they were later published as part of the two-volume collection of papers emerging from the seminar, also entitled *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*.¹ The issues that were being addressed in the seminar were issues that had absorbed my interest for a number of years. In the first year of my theological studies, curious about the rapid transformation of early Christianity from a Jewish messianic movement to a Gentile religion, I stumbled across James Parkes’ *The Conflict of the Church and the*

¹Peter Richardson, ed., with David M. Granskou, *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity. Vol 1: Paul and the Gospels* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986); Stephen G. Wilson, ed., *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity. Vol 2: Separation and Polemic* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986).

Synagogue, a prescient work published in 1934, the year Hitler came to power.² Parkes was an Anglican priest who had become absorbed with the issue of antisemitism while working in refugee relief following the First World War. His quest for the origins of the kind of antisemitic attitudes that were prevalent in Europe led him to an exploration of Christian teaching about the Jews, and eventually led him back to the writings of the apologists and early church fathers. Under his guidance I read for the first time the *adversus Judaeos* writings of the early church (writings “against the Jews”) and saw how this tradition, forged as an apologetic device to help the church make its way in the Roman world, fostered anti-Jewish attitudes within Christianity that eventually contributed to the rise of antisemitism.

Parkes’s book had a profoundly unsettling effect on me, in part because it raised questions about the New Testament itself. Parkes served as a stepping stone for me to other authors who were wrestling with the depiction of Jews and Judaism in the New Testament— first Jules Isaac, Gregory Baum and Rosemary Ruether, and not long afterwards others such as Peter Richardson, Lloyd Gaston, Steve Wilson and Alan Segal. This early experience had the effect of raising for me a set of scholarly questions that have absorbed me ever since.

Thus it was that when I attended my first CSBS meeting and became aware of what was going on in the anti-Judaism seminar, I knew that this was a society in which I could find a home. And so it has been for the intervening 30 years. I am grateful for the rich contribution that CSBS has made to my scholarly life over these years and I am deeply honoured in this my thirtieth year of membership to serve as the Society’s President.

From anti-Judaism to Supersessionism

The Anti-Judaism seminar was a Canadian contribution to an intense discussion that had been underway since the end of the

²James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (London: The Soncino Press, 1934), reprinted by Hermon Press (New York) in 1974.

Second World War. After the war, when the gates to Auschwitz and Treblinka had been thrown open and when victors and vanquished alike were being forced to ask, along with the victims themselves, how such an industry of genocide could have been conceived and carried out in the centre of Christian civilization, scholars began to assess the extent to which Christian tradition itself was responsible. Given the negative depiction of some Jews and some aspects of Judaism in parts of the New Testament, it was inevitable that this scholarly assessment would deal not only with later Christian theology and exegesis, but with the New Testament itself.

From the beginning, and indeed until relatively recently, the dominant categories for this discussion have been “anti-Judaism” and “antisemitism.” “Is the New Testament antisemitic?” or “Do we find anti-Judaism in the New Testament?” are the terms in which the question has been posed. The name adopted for the CSBS seminar is one example. The central theme of Ruether’s landmark book is another: she speaks of Christianity’s “anti-Judaism, which constantly takes social expression in anti-Semitism,” and which she sees as rooted in the “christological hermeneutic” of the New Testament itself.³ In recent years, however, these “isms” have been joined by another. “Supersessionism,” a term denoting traditional Christian claims

³Note also her subtitle: Rosemary R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1974), 116. Also, for example: Gregory Baum, *Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic? A Re-Examination of the New Testament* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1965), originally published as *The Jews and the Gospel: A Re-Examination of the New Testament* (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1961); George M. Smiga, *Pain and Polemic: Anti-Judaism in the Gospels* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992); William Reuben Farmer, ed., *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999); R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964); Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

that the church has replaced Israel in the divine purposes and has inherited all that was positive in Israel's tradition, appears with increasingly frequency in this discussion.

Of course, related words have long been used in Christian tradition with a positive (even triumphalistic) valence. As early as 1790, William Paley could speak of the "supersession" of the Jewish law that had occurred with Christ.⁴ Thelwall's 1870 translation of Tertullian's *An Answer to the Jews*, published as part of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* and thus for a long time the standard English version, is another early example. The title for Chapter III, a title provided by Thelwall himself, is "Of Circumcision and the Supercession [sic] of the Old Law."⁵ In the 1873 translation of F. C. Baur's *Paulus*, we read this statement concerning Stephen and the Hellenists: "That the essence of true religion did not consist in outward ceremonials, connected with a temple service confined to an appointed spot, was the one great idea, through which, at that time, Judaism saw itself superseded by Christianity."⁶

In more recent years, however, the tenor of these terms has undergone a shift, as they increasingly have been drawn into the unfolding discussion concerning anti-Judaism, antisemitism and the NT, where they have come to function as a negative designation for traditional Christian teaching about the Jews and Judaism. While I do not claim to have done an exhaustive search, the earliest instance I have come across is the 1971 English translation of Jules Isaac's *Jésus et Israël*, where we read that the Gospels were written in a period of increasing hostility, a period when the church was separating from the synagogue and Christians

⁴William Paley, *Horae Paulinae*, (London: Printed by J. Davis, for R. Faulder, 1790), 167. This is the earliest appearance of the word recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁵Vol. 4 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885–96).

⁶F. C. Baur, *Paul: The Apostle of Jesus Christ* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1876), 1.59. The German word was "aufgehoben" (abolished, repealed, revoked). See also the English version of William Wrede, *Paul* (London: Green, 1907), 181.

were declaring the Jewish law to be “superseded.”⁷ Several years later, in his introduction to Rosemary Ruether’s *Faith and Fratricide*, Gregory Baum spoke of the “unmistakably negative” character of “the entire Christian tradition,” which has taught that “the religion of Israel is now superseded, the Torah abrogated, the promises fulfilled in the Christian church,” and so on.⁸ In works published during the next few years, including the second volume of *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, we encounter scattered instances of a similar use of “supersede”⁹ and also of “supersession.”¹⁰ The terms also appear in several church pronouncements and formal documents during this period.¹¹ Such

⁷ *Jesus and Israel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 294. Isaac’s original was “périmée” (lapsed, no longer valid, out-dated): *Jésus et Israël* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1948), 427–28.

⁸ *Faith and Fratricide*, 6; also p. 21. In his earlier publication *The Jews and the Gospel* (later re-issued in a slightly revised form as *Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?*), written as a response to Isaac’s work, Baum had attempted to defend the New Testament against any charge of anti-Judaism or antisemitism. The introduction to *Faith and Fratricide* offered him an opportunity to declare that these works no longer represented his position on the issue.

⁹ In his discussion of “Justin Martyr’s Argument with Judaism,” Lloyd Gaston said that Justin believes that “his group and its social and cultural worlds . . . supersede” those of Trypho and the Jews; in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity. Vol 2*, 77. Franklin H. Littell described “the superseding or displacement myth” as the “cornerstone of Christian Antisemitism”; *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 2; also p. 30.

¹⁰ According to Martin B. Shukster and Peter Richardson, Barnabas wrote out of a concern about a change in Roman policy (whether having to do with plans to rebuild the temple or with the *fiscus Judaicus*) because it would be “obscuring the political signs of Christian supersession” (“Temple and *Bet ha-Midrash* in the Epistle of Barnabas,” in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity. Vol 2*, 24). Also Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 95; Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 31; Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 114.

¹¹ A working group convened by the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches, in collaboration with the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and chaired by Franklin Littell, produced “A Statement to Our Fellow Christians” that includes the declaration: “in Christ the Church shares in Israel’s election

occurrences, however, are relatively infrequent. John Pawlikowski's 1980 work *What are they saying about Christian-Jewish relations?* can be taken as typical of the period. While he refers on two occasions to "Christian supersessionist approaches to Judaism,"¹² his survey of "what they have been saying about" Christian approaches to Judaism is generally carried out under the heading of other categories (e.g., "replacement theology").

During the past twenty-five years, however, not only have these descriptive terms appeared with increasing frequency, but the frequency has evidently reached the level at which the phenomenon so described can qualify as an "-ism." A 1987 paper produced by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and commended to its church members for study and reflection provides an early example. In a section expanding on the affirmation that "Christians have not replaced Jews," the document stated: "Sometime during the second century of the Common Era, a view called 'supersessionism,' based on the reading of some biblical texts and nurtured in controversy, began to take shape." The document went on to observe that while this view quickly became the orthodox position, it can now be seen as "harmful and in need of reconsideration."¹³ Another example is found on the first page of Kendall Soulen's 1996 work *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*: "For most of the past two millennia, the church's posture toward the Jewish people has come to expression in the teaching known as supersessionism, also known as the

without superseding it" (paragraph 3; included as an appendix in Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 135). For other examples, see Michael J. Vlach, "The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004), 73–74.

¹²*What Are They Saying About Christian-Jewish Relations?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 39, 54.

¹³"A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews" (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1987), 8–9.

theology of displacement.”¹⁴ Initially the term seems to have appeared most frequently in theological discourse,¹⁵ but increasingly it has been picked up by biblical scholars¹⁶ and has passed into popular usage.¹⁷

¹⁴R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 1.

¹⁵Donald G. Bloesch, “‘All Israel Will be Saved’: Supersessionism and the Biblical Witness,” *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 130–42; Robert R. Hann, “Supersessionism, Engraftment, and Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Reflections on the Presbyterian Statement on Jewish-Christian Relations,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 27 (1990): 327–42; Clark M. Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 268, n. 9; Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), 31; John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 213–14, 278; Douglas Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 23 and passim; Eugene B. Korn and John T. Pawlikowski, eds., *Two Faiths, One Covenant? Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 3 and passim; Vlach, “The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism.”

¹⁶“Is John supersessionist?” is one of five key questions taken up in R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 2001), 5. See also the short article by Helmut Koester, “Historical Mistakes Haunt the Relationship of Christianity and Judaism,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21/2 (1995): 26–27, with the heading (provided by the editor) “Strugnell and Supersessionism”; Krister Stendahl, “Qumran and Supersessionism—and the Road Not Taken,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 19, no. 2 (1998): 134–42; Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Lloyd Kim, *Polemic in the Book of Hebrews: Anti-Semitism, Anti-Judaism, Supersessionism?* Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006); Bruce W. Longenecker, “On Israel’s God and God’s Israel: Assessing Supersessionism in Paul,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 58 (2007): 26–44.

¹⁷As an internet word search will readily demonstrate. See also James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 587.

Advantages and limitations of the term

Yet while “supersessionism” has taken its place in the discussion alongside “anti-Judaism” and “antisemitism,” it does not function simply as a synonym for either of these terms. To be sure, there is a considerable measure of overlap among all three. But each of the terms tends to highlight different aspects of the larger phenomenon. Just as it has proved useful to recognize and articulate distinctions between “anti-Judaism” and “antisemitism,”¹⁸ so it is readily apparent that “supersessionism” brings a distinct aspect of the phenomenon into focus. If antisemitism refers to hateful attitudes and actions directed toward Jewish people per se—that is, an ethnic, social and often political phenomenon—and if anti-Judaism refers to statements and formulations designed to defend and bolster Christian claims about themselves by denouncing what were perceived as Jewish counter-claims—that is, a theological and socio-religious phenomenon—then supersessionism refers to the kind of Christian self-understanding that might be seen to undergird such anti-Judaic rhetoric and antisemitic activity.

For this reason, the introduction of “supersessionism” as an analytical category makes a positive contribution to the discussion and helps to move it forward. Supersessionism focuses attention on the issue of self-definition, which in many ways is antecedent to

¹⁸ Because of its origin in discredited late-nineteenth-century racial theories, some have argued that “anti-Semitism” should not be used at all (e.g., Smiga, *Pain and Polemic*, 11), while others have followed James Parkes’s lead in using only the unhyphenated “antisemitism” in an attempt to distance the term from such theories (Alan T. Davies, ed., *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* [New York; Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979], viii). For attempts to differentiate anti-Judaism and antisemitism, see, e.g., William Klassen, “Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity: The State of the Question,” in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity. Vol 1*, 5-12; Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 60, and “Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism: A Necessary Distinction,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 (1973): 581–88; Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, 8. See also the distinction implicit in Ruether’s statement that Christianity’s “anti-Judaism . . . constantly takes social expression in anti-Semitism”; *Faith and Fratricide*, 116.

any attitudes, speech or actions directed against (anti-) the other. Since Christian treatment of Jews and Judaism—whether expressed in verbal, social or political terms—was rooted in the church’s own self-conception with respect to the tradition and heritage of Israel, our understanding of the former will be enhanced by a clearer perception of the latter. Thus by encouraging a shift from the external domain (Christian opinions, speech and action directed towards another group) to the internal (Christian self-definition and self-understanding), the concept of supersessionism helps to bring important questions into focus.

At the same time, however, the concept carries with it some limitations, especially for those of us who study the development of the Christian movement in its formative stages. Supersession describes a situation where one entity, by virtue of its supposed superiority, comes to occupy a position that previously belonged to another, the displaced group becoming outmoded or obsolete in the process. The term thus properly applies to a completed process of replacement. For this reason, it is most immediately applicable in a situation where “Christianity” and “Judaism” are—or are perceived to be—more or less separate entities and the church is recognizably non-Jewish. Take, for example Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. Justin argues that the church is a largely Gentile entity (117-123), existing separately from “you Jews” (11.2); that the old law and covenant have become “obsolete,” and have been “abrogated” and replaced by a new law and covenant (11.2-4); that the church has now become “the true spiritual Israel” (11.5); that the scriptures are no longer “yours, but ours” (29.2); and so on.¹⁹ For such a version of Christian self-definition, supersessionism is clearly an appropriate category.

Even so, it is worth noting in passing that this is not the only way in which Justin construes the relationship between the church and Israel. Sensitive both to Roman respect for tradition

¹⁹ All quotations from *St. Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho*, ed. Michael Slusser, trans. Thomas B. Falls, revised and with a new introduction by Thomas P. Halton (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

and to Greek notions of immutability, he is nervously aware that to speak of a *new* Israel, a *new* covenant, a *new* law, and so on, concedes a certain priority to the Jews and suggests a certain caprice or mutability on the part of God (*Dial.* 23, 30). Why should God establish one covenant and people and then replace them with another? And so Justin also speaks about the old Israel and its institutions in such a way as to suggest that they never had any positive, divinely authorized role to play at all. As he says to Trypho: “We too would observe your circumcision of the flesh, your Sabbath days, and, in a word, all your festivals, if we were not aware of the reason why they were imposed upon you, namely, because of your sins and your hardness of heart” (*Dial.* 18.2). Further, he argues that, in their attachment to the *prima facie* sense of scripture, the Jews simply demonstrated their blindness to the deeper, spiritual reality that should have been apparent all along. Indeed, pointing to prophetic passages that condemned aspects of Jewish sacrifice and ritual (e.g., Mal 1:10-12), Justin concludes that the writers of scripture and the saints of old were well aware of a spiritual and christological reality that represented the real meaning of scripture (*Dial.* 40.1–42.4). How are we to characterize this second line of argument? Is supersessionism an appropriate category here? After all, supersession by definition ascribes a certain provisional legitimacy or validity to the superseded entity in the period prior to the point of supersession. If no legitimacy or validity were recognized at all, would we have passed beyond supersessionism to something else? The point could be debated, though since for Justin the old covenant was established by the same God, supersessionism is probably still applicable in this case, even if it represents a more negative strain than one in which Jewish ordinances and traditions are seen to have had a proper and legitimate role to play in the past. Nevertheless, the observation demonstrates the need for a typology of supersessionism,²⁰ a matter to which I will return.

²⁰ That is, even in a situation where the church and Judaism are separate entities, supersessionism is not a single conception but can appear in several forms. Soulen has made a helpful beginning in differentiating three

Justin represents a movement that, by the middle of the second century, is predominantly Gentile, is settling down for the long haul in the Roman world and is beginning to make extensive and creative use of Greek thought-forms to express and proclaim its message. To be sure, we should be cautious about assuming that even in Justin's day "Christianity" and "Judaism" represented two separate and distinct entities. Recent study has led us to recognize that it is too simplistic to talk of a "parting of the ways" that was complete and definitive by the time of Justin. Instead, the evidence suggests "a rich and variegated continuum of Jewish, Christian, and 'Jewish-Christian' identities in dynamic competition, contact, and conflict,"²¹ a situation that continued to play itself out for several centuries beyond the time of Justin. To the extent that this is true, it suggests that Justin's supersessionism needs to be seen less as an interpretation of an actual completed process of separation and more as an attempt to hasten the process and establish it as normative. Of course, Justin represented a portion of the movement that perceived itself as fully separated from Judaism and he constructed his supersessionist argument on the basis of this perception. He also represented the portion of the movement that became dominant. But even so, as with all forms of self-definition, supersessionism has to do as much with social construction as with objective realities.

forms of supersessionism: economic (where an old economy of salvation is replaced by a better one, for which it served as a necessary first step); punitive (where the old covenant with Israel is abrogated because of Israel's disobedience); and structural (where the Christian economy of salvation is structured in such a way as to move from "fall" to "redemption" skipping over the story of Israel entirely). See *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, esp. pp. 29-31.

²¹ Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), xi. Also Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

When we move behind Justin, however, into the earlier transitional period and back towards the first generation of the movement, we encounter a situation where it is progressively less realistic for anyone to speak of two separated entities and thus where the limitations of supersessionism as a category become even more apparent. The movement begins with a Jewish messianic prophet of the end-times, who gathered a band of disciples around him in preparation for the imminent arrival of the reign of God. Or, if you prefer to start a little later, the church begins as an eschatological renewal movement completely within a variegated Judaism, a community of Jews who believed that God had identified the coming Messiah by raising Jesus from the dead, and who set out to proclaim this Messiah to Israel. For the next few generations of the movement, what eventually comes to be known as Christianity comprises a variety of groups sprinkled throughout the Mediterranean basin—some primarily Jewish, some largely Gentile and many of them ethnically diverse, and all of them together representing a variety of relationships, actual and perceived, with the traditions of Israel and the world of contemporary Judaism.

Throughout this formative and transitional period, as these various groups worked to find living space for themselves and to create the social structures necessary for survival, they were necessarily engaged in processes of self-definition. While elements of these processes were inevitably taken up into the supersessionism of the second century, they originated in a social context where supersessionism is less applicable as a descriptive category and they stood alongside other factors that were at play in a social context where membership was ethnically mixed and group boundaries were fluid.

Used as a broad category, then, supersessionism occludes variations and issues that were important in the formative period. What might loosely be described as supersessionism at a lower resolution displays significant differentiation at a higher. Moreover, this is just part of a larger set of self-definitional options where, at either end of the spectrum, “supersessionism” is not

really applicable. The purpose of this paper is to provide a more finely-drawn typology of the various ways in which groups of Christ-believers in the first formative century and a half conceived of their relationship to the phenomenon of “Israel” in its various dimensions.

Early Christian Self-definition: A Typology

Supersessionism—the belief that the church has replaced the Jewish people as the people of God—is a construal of the relationship among three more-or-less fixed elements: (1) the Christian church, essentially Gentile and completely separated from Judaism and the Jewish people; (2) scriptural Israel, the people at the centre of the collection of writings considered as scripture by both church and synagogue; and (3) the Jewish people, considered by Christians as superseded by the church. In the formative period, however, what we are dealing with is not three relatively fixed elements but three sets of more fluid variables: (1) a range of conceptions concerning the place and status of Jewish and Gentile believers within groups of Christ-believers of varying ethnic composition; (2) a range of conceptions concerning the nature and purpose of scriptural Israel and its religion, as understood in relation with new beliefs about Christ and his significance; and (3) a range of conceptions concerning the place and status of the continuing Jewish people and their religion.

In each case, the range of conceptions was determined by different answers to the following sets of questions. (1) With respect to groups of Christ-believers and their ethnic composition: On what terms were Gentiles included? Did an identifiably Jewish entity have any distinct, ongoing status within the group? What was the relative status of individual Jewish and Gentile members? In more general terms, did Jew and Gentile continue to be significant categories, or were these identities thought to have been dissolved and transcended? (2) With respect to scriptural Israel: Did scriptural Israel have positive validity as the people of God in the past? If so, were the basic elements of Israel’s self-understanding (covenant, torah, temple, land, etc.) considered valid as these were understood by Jews themselves? Or were they

considered valid only as they were reinterpreted in light of Christ belief? (3) With respect to the continuing Jewish people and their religion: Had Israel as a distinct entity been totally absorbed into the church, so that continuing Judaism was devoid of theological significance? Or was Judaism seen as a continuation of scriptural Israel in some way, but only in negative terms? Or was Judaism seen in some way as a more positive ongoing embodiment of scriptural Israel?

If I were able to carry out a longer study here, I would want first to look at these three sets of questions in turn, in order to identify the range of answers that seem to have been in existence in the formative period, before attempting to provide anything like an overall typology. In the interest of economy, however, I will have to be content with this simple identification of the analytical questions, and allow the various options to emerge in the context of the typology itself.

Before I turn to the typology, I need to make three additional comments about my procedure. First, I recognize that in many cases the evidence that I appeal to for any given position is subject to different interpretations. Since my interest here has to do with viable options rather than historical description, it is enough for my purposes that a given interpretation has been suggested and plausibly defended. The validity of the typology does not depend on a demonstration that it is the only or the most preferable interpretation. Second, it is not possible, within the constraints of this paper, to enter into any detailed discussion of the examples cited for each type. Third, in most cases there is no clean and simple correlation between individual authors or writings and discrete types. Justin is certainly not the only author who presents us with a more complex interweaving of strands that can be separated out into different types.

The typology contains five major types, most of which have two or more sub-types.

1. A Relationship of Binary Opposites

In this type, Israel in whole or in part is seen as the binary opposite of the true people of God. Two sub-types can be identified.

1.1 Israel in toto as the binary opposite of the true people of God

Marcion represents the primary exemplar of this type, though similar dualistic patterns are found in some forms of Gnosticism, and Marcion himself was famously able to appeal to some aspects of Paul in support of his views. In this type, Israel as an undifferentiated ethnic-religious entity is considered *in toto* as categorically distinct from and inferior to the group of Christ believers. There is no continuity at all between the religious institutions and people of Israel in the past and the Christ-believing group in the present. The two groups are not simply distinct, but in their defining characteristics they are binary opposites of each other—or, to use the category that Marcion chose for the title of his major work (*Antitheses*), they are antithetical.

For Marcion, of course, this antithetical relationship is rooted in a duality of gods. The God of Israel—the god who created the material world, the god who gave the law, a god of harsh justice and judgment—is distinct from the Father God proclaimed and revealed by Christ. This duality of divinities generates other dualities all the way down the line: material/spiritual; law/gospel; Christ/the messiah of Israel; the people of Israel/the people of Christ. Marcion did not deny the existence of this other god; the created order itself served as evidence for this god's existence. And so for Marcion the people of Israel, its institutions and even its messiah had a certain validity and function. But in its validity and function, it was set over against that of the people of Jesus at every point.

Gnostic cosmologies were much more complex than Marcion's, just as Gnostic heavens were more heavily populated. But the resulting pattern of relationship between Christ believers and the people of Israel is functionally much the same. Typically, the created order is seen as the misguided work of the Demiurge, a lesser deity who gave the law through Moses and who led Israel to believe that he was the only god. Christ, by contrast, was the

emissary of the supreme deity, who descended into the created world for the sake of those human beings within whom an element of the divine spirit could be found, in order to provide them with the knowledge they needed to extricate themselves from the material world and to make their way back to the supreme deity. Again the people of Israel and the people of Christ are set over against each other across a cosmological divide.

Like Marcion, Gnostic teachers (e.g., Valentinus) also looked for support to the apostle Paul, whose binary oppositions (law/grace, spirit/flesh, and so on) readily lent themselves to such purposes. The only text, however, that I would cite with reference to this type is Paul's statement in Gal 3:19 that the law was ordained "through angels by the hand of a mediator." Since the passage goes on to say that mediation is somehow set over against the oneness of God (v. 20), the statement might be taken to imply that the law originated with angels rather than with God, which in turn could imply a categorical duality of peoples.

1.2 Israel as containing polar opposites within itself from the beginning

We have had occasion to notice one example of this type already, in Justin's argument that the true christological meaning of scripture was readily apparent to the spiritually discerning within Israel all along, and that it was only because of their fleshly blindness that the rest of Israel could not see beyond a literal understanding of Israel's scripture, laws and institutions. In this line of reasoning the church is not so much a new entity that replaces Israel, as it is a fuller manifestation of a portion of Israel that was represented by the saints of old. Israel always contained within itself a "true" and a "false" Israel. It is important to note that in this construal, "True Israel" is understood not in the sense of a remnant that was faithful to the covenant, set over against the rest of Israel who were unfaithful or sinful. Rather, faithfulness to the covenant as most Jews would have defined it was itself false. Those who constituted "true Israel" were already in a real sense Christians. While advocates of this approach might make use of

such things as prophetic denunciations, concepts of a remnant, and so on, these traditions are thoroughly Christianized, so that they have to do with Christian belief, not with covenantal faithfulness.

In addition to Justin, clear examples of this type can be found in Ignatius. For Ignatius, the reason that the prophets were persecuted was that they “lived according to Jesus Christ” (*Magn.* 8.2). Further, the prophets “hoped in him [Jesus] and awaited him. And they were saved by believing in him, because they stood in the unity of Jesus Christ” (*Phil.* 5.2). The theme comes to striking expression a century or so later in a tractate “against the Jews” attributed (falsely) to Cyprian, where scriptural figures are presented in contrasting pairs:

Moses they cursed because he proclaimed Christ,
 Dathan they loved because he did not proclaim Him. . . .
 David they hated because he sang of Christ,
 Saul they magnified because he did not speak of Him. . . .
 Jeremiah they stoned while he was hymning Christ,
 Ananias they loved while he was opposing Him . . .²²
 And so on.

First-century writers were more inclined to work with themes of newness and fulfillment, which means that, at best, there are only hints of this type in the New Testament. To be sure, we encounter texts where Torah religion and Christ belief are presented as binary opposites—especially in Paul (law/grace; works/faith; Hagar/Sarah) and John (law/grace and truth; “the Jews”/believers; below/above). However, the other essential element of this type—the belief that saints of old were explicitly aware of Christ—is not explicitly present.

2. A relationship of discontinuity and supersession

In this type, which represents supersession proper, Israel is seen as an old entity that has been displaced and rendered obsolete by the church, a new entity in which any distinction between Jew and

²² Pseudo-Cyprian *Adversus Judaeos* 3.3; cited by Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, 105–6.

Gentile no longer has any fundamental significance. Again, two sub-types can be identified.

2.1 Israel as a failed entity, rejected by God and replaced with a church drawn primarily from the Gentiles

The distinguishing characteristic of this sub-type is the emphasis on Israel's sin and failure, which result in God's rejection of Israel and the creation of a new people as Israel's replacement.²³ This sub-type, then, is characterized by a sequence of sin, rejection and replacement. The focal point of Israel's sinfulness, of course, is its rejection of the messiah, though this is often seen as the culmination of a longer legacy of sin and rebellion. In this sub-type it is possible for the institutions of temple and Torah to be given some element of positive significance, even if the emphasis falls on Israel's lack of faithfulness to them. Still, the tendency more often is to think of these institutions, at least at the literal level, simply as part of an era of failure and to locate any positive significance in their symbolic christological meaning.

Many instances of a sin-rejection-replacement pattern of thought can be adduced from New Testament material. In Matthew, the closing injunction, which might be rendered as a command to "make disciples of all the Gentiles" (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη; 28:19), would then be the final piece in a pattern of displacement that has been building throughout the Gospel: "many will come from east and west . . . while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" (8:11-12); "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that produces its fruit" (21:43); "you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets" (23:31); "all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children'" (27:25). The ending of Luke's two-volume account of Christian origins might likewise be read as the culmination of a similar pattern. Here, after using the words of Isa 6:9-10 to denounce his Jewish hearers for their lack of response to his message, Paul declares: "Let it be known to you then that this

²³ This sub-type corresponds more or less to Soulen's "punitive supersessionism"; see *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 30.

salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen” (Acts 28:25-28). In John the pattern perhaps is declared at the outset: “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:11-12). In the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition of the later Gentile church, this theme receives massive exegetical buttressing, as every prophetic denunciation of Israel is pressed into service.²⁴ In some strands of this tradition, the decisive rejection is thought to have taken place not at Golgotha but at Sinai—specifically, in connection with the incident of the golden calf (Exod 32). Because Israel rejected God, God withdrew the promised covenant from them, as symbolized by Moses’ smashing of the first set of tablets (*Barn.* 4.7-8; 14.1; Justin *Dial.* 131.3-132.1; Tertullian *Answer to the Jews* 1.6). The way is clear, then, for Justin and others to see the actual Mosaic institutions as imposed on Israel simply because of their sinfulness (e.g., *Dial.* 18.2).

2.2 Israel as an entity of the past, having had a certain preparatory role to play but now superseded by a church in which ethnic distinctions have no fundamental significance

In this sub-type, a more positive role is ascribed to the institutions of Torah and temple, and thus to Israel as a people. This role, however, is understood in Christian terms to such an extent that it is fully subordinated to, and seen simply as preparation for, the new institutions of salvation brought into being by Christ, who has abrogated the old covenant by fulfilling it and has instituted a new covenant in its place.²⁵ An essential element of this abrogation is the eradication of any theological distinction between Jew and Gentile. Even if, in some versions of this sub-type, the people of the new covenant might be described as a new Israel, this new

²⁴ For details, see Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, 95–106; Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 124–49.

²⁵ This corresponds to Soulen’s “economic supersessionism”; see *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 29.

Israel is a universal community in which the defining marks of the old Israel have been rendered obsolete.

There is no shortage of New Testament material that might be read in accordance with this sub-type. Returning to Matthew, the closing injunction could just as easily be read as a command to “make disciples of all the nations” (28:19) rather than “all the Gentiles.” If we combine this with Matthew’s strong emphasis on fulfillment—the era of the law and prophets as coming to an end with John the Baptist (11:13); Jesus as the giver of a new law (e.g., 5:21-48); Jesus as greater than the temple (12:6); and so on—the result is a new community of disciples, drawn from all nations without distinction and characterized by baptism and adherence to Jesus’ new teaching (28:19-20). Peter’s speech to Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43) can be read in a similar way: the message that God “sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ” (10:36), is both the fulfillment of prophetic testimony and a demonstration that “God shows no partiality” and will accept people from “every nation” (10:34-35). Various themes in the writings of Paul—that the law functioned as a pedagogue until Christ (Gal 3:24); that Christ was the end of the law (in both senses of the term; Rom 10:4); that God is impartial (Rom 2:12), making no distinction between Jews and Gentile (Rom 10:12; cf. Eph 2:14-16); and so on—can readily be construed in the same way. In Hebrews, while there is little explicit attention to Jew-Gentile distinctions, the idea that the first covenant was “only a shadow of the good things to come” (10:1), which now indeed have come with the new covenant, readily lends itself to such an interpretation.

3. A relationship of continuity, redefinition and reconstitution

This type overlaps with the previous sub-type in that the institutions of Torah and temple are understood to have played an important preparatory role, though this role has also been significantly redefined on the basis of the fulfillment believed to have taken place through Christ. What differentiates this type, however, is that here an important place in the state of fulfillment is ascribed to an identifiably Jewish entity, which is seen as

representing the continuation of Israel (e.g., the faithful remnant). In this type, then, the new people of God is a reconstitution of the old, constructed on the basis of a reduced Jewish entity (to which Gentiles are added) but thoroughly redefined around Christ.

3.1 Israel as succeeded by Christ, who provides the sole point of continuity between Israel of the past and the church of the present

In this sub-type, continuity is located solely in Christ, who is seen as summing up and embodying Israel in himself. In some versions of this sub-type, not only is the community of Christ-believers considered to be “Israel” by extension but no categorical distinction is made between Jewish and Gentile believers. In such cases, this sub-type overlaps to a considerable extent with the previous one. Still, the concern to identify Christ, in his Jewishness, as a point of continuity between Israel and the community of those who believe in him suggests that it should be located within this third type.

An early example of this sub-type might be found in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, where he argues that all who believe in Christ are ipso facto part of the family of Abraham, and this precisely because Christ himself is the “seed” of Abraham, the entity to whom the divine promises were given (Gal 3:16; cf. Gen 12:7; 22:17-18). Of course, the form of the argument might suggest that Paul is cutting Israel out of the story entirely; he uses the singular form of the collective noun “seed” (σπέρμα) to set the individual person (Christ) and the collective group (Israel) in contrast rather than in continuity. In addition, he does not go so far as to identify Jesus explicitly as Israel, a step that is taken later by Justin.²⁶ Still, the idea is at least latent. A more substantial—even if more subtle—example of the sub-type is present in Matthew. In the first four chapters of his Gospel, Matthew presents the

²⁶ “As Christ is called Israel and Jacob, so we, hewn out of the side of Christ, are the true people of Israel” (135.3). Justin bases the first part of his statement on the identification of the suffering servant with Jacob in LXX Isa 42:1-4.

beginnings of Jesus' ministry as a kind of recapitulation of the story of Israel—a sojourn in Egypt (2:13-15); an exodus (2:19-21); a period of testing in the wilderness (4:1-11), the citations from Deuteronomy all having to do with lessons that Israel was to have learned in the wilderness; and so on. Matthew makes the identification explicit by quoting the second half of Hos 11:1 (“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt have I called my son”; Matt 2:15).

3.2 Israel as succeeded without remainder by a Jewish remnant, supplemented by Gentiles who come in to replace unbelieving Jews

In this sub-type and the next, the Jewish entity that provides a strand of connection between scriptural Israel and the new community is not simply Christ himself, but a group of Jewish Christ-believers who form a distinct core. What differentiates the two is a different conception of the means by which non-Jews are added to the core. In this sub-type, all but the believing remnant have been rejected by God because of their unbelief; Gentile believers have been brought in to take their place. This sub-type, then, is another example of a rejection-replacement pattern.

Paul's olive tree analogy in Romans 11 provides one example. Here the olive tree represents Israel as a whole, the branches being seen as individual Israelites. Some of the natural branches are broken off “because of their unbelief” (11:20) and Gentile believers—“wild olive shoot[s]” (11:17)—are grafted in. In verse 19 Paul presents one possible interpretation of the situation: “You will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’” Opinions differ on whether Paul himself endorses this view. But even if he does not (on which more in a moment), he is aware that some of his Gentile readers were prepared to see themselves as replacing Jewish unbelievers. Another example might be provided by the Acts of the Apostles, a narrative that begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome. On one hand, the existence of an identifiably Jewish church seems to be important to Luke; in the early chapters he emphasizes the great numbers of those who

“became obedient to the faith” (6:7) and even towards the end we find a reference to the “many thousands of believers there are among the Jews” (21:20). On the other hand, in Luke’s account of Paul’s missionary activity, there is a recurring pattern in which Paul first preaches in the synagogue, encounters opposition from his Jewish hearers and then declares that he is turning instead to the Gentiles, who, by contrast, “will listen” (28:28).

3.3 Israel as succeeded without remainder by a Jewish remnant, supplemented by Gentiles who are added to the Jewish core

This sub-type also assigns an important role to a Jewish remnant, but here the Gentile component of the church is perceived not as replacing Jewish unbelievers but as joining the company of Jewish believers and thus receiving a share in the blessings of Israel. Usually the inclusion of Gentile believers is understood within the framework of one or other of what I have elsewhere termed the Jewish “patterns of universalism,”²⁷ though reinterpreted with respect to the new beliefs about Christ. That is, Gentile believers are perceived as becoming linked to an Israel reconstituted around Christ, to which they relate in a manner analogous to the situation of proselytes, God-fearers or participants in the end-time blessings of Israel.

Returning to Romans 11, one can observe that Paul’s assent to a replacement idea is tepid at best. The NRSV’s “that is true” is an over-translation of the more ambiguous καλῶς (v. 20); the remainder of the verse seems to contradict the assertion that the natural branches were broken off to make way for the wild-olive implants; and Paul’s own statement in v. 17 places the emphasis on inclusion rather than replacement: “you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in *among them* (ἐν αὐτοῖς)” —that is, among the natural branches that remain—“and *have become partners* in the rich root of the olive tree.” Another example might be found in John’s Gospel, where on two occasions the Evangelist speaks of a second entity being added to an identifiably Jewish core: the “other sheep

²⁷ *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

that do not belong to this fold” whom Jesus will bring into the flock (10:16) and the “dispersed children of God” for whom Jesus will die in addition to the nation itself (11:51-52).

4. A relationship of solidarity and mission

In this type, the group of Jewish Christ-believers exists as a remnant or renewal group within a larger Israel that continues to be recognized as God’s covenant people. Israel’s covenantal identity continues to be based on temple worship and Torah observance, which are understood in traditional terms and have not been re-defined by Christ-belief in any fundamental way, and on the expectation of God’s promised deliverance. Jewish Christ-believers are differentiated from their Jewish compatriots by their belief that Jesus has been appointed to be the coming messiah and by their determination to call on Israel as a whole to recognize Jesus as well. Any Gentiles who want to share in the recognition of Jesus are expected to come into a proper relationship with Israel as a whole, through proselytism or some other appropriate means.

Luke’s portrait of the Jerusalem church as we find it in Acts conforms to this type. For example, he describes the church as containing “many thousands” of Jewish believers, all of whom “are zealots for the law” (21:20), and he presents its message as directed first to those who “are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to” Abraham (3:25), a message having to do with the “universal restoration” that God would effect by sending “the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus” (3:20). On the matter of the Gentiles, while there were differences between those who advocated circumcision and the “apostolic decree” promulgated by James, both positions corresponded to options that currently existed within the Jewish world. If the Q document preserves the viewpoint of a distinctive group, it might provide us with another example of the type.

5. A relationship of co-existence in anticipation of the final redemption

The defining characteristic of this type is the positive status that is ascribed to continuing Israel, the Jewish group identified simply by its adherence to the covenant of Moses and the traditions of the Torah. In one way or other the perception is that Israel itself continues to have theological validity as God's covenant people, a validity that exists alongside—and is not negated by—the theological status of the new community of Christ-believers. This type does not carry with it any necessary conception, however, of how this new community relates to scriptural Israel, or of what relative status is assigned to Jewish and Gentile believers, and so on. Consequently, this type might overlap with one of several sub-types surveyed already. Nevertheless, it needs to be separated out as a distinct type.

5.1 Israel apart from the church as having some theological validity, in that “all Israel will be saved” through Christ

Central to this sub-type is Paul's statement that “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). While Rom 11:25-27 is subject to several interpretations, this sub-type is best represented by an interpretation which understands salvation as an end-time occurrence accomplished through Christ (in contrast either to an ongoing process or to an occurrence separate from Christ) and “all Israel” as a corporate, ethnic-religious entity (in contrast either to a mass number of individual Jews or to the church itself). If Israel itself will experience divine redemption in the future, its identity as God's covenant people must have some continuing validity in the present (“for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”; Rom 11:29).

5.2 Israel and the Gentile church as co-existing peoples, relating to God through parallel covenants

The defining characteristic of this final sub-type is the belief that Israel continues to enjoy a valid and sufficient relationship with God through the covenant of Moses, while the Gentile church is a distinct people with its own valid and sufficient relationship with God through Christ. According to Lloyd Gaston, this was Paul's

own view.²⁸ Although he has not been able to convince many others,²⁹ a more certain example of this sub-type is found in the Pseudo-Clementine literature, the pertinent parts of which probably go back to the second century C.E. This literature represents the viewpoint of a Jewish Christian group that has given up any attempt to convince Jews to accept Christ and Gentile Christians to accept the law of Moses. As long as they truly follow one or the other, that is all that matters: “It is therefore the peculiar gift bestowed by God upon the Hebrews that they believe Moses; and the peculiar gift bestowed upon the Gentiles is that they love Jesus” (*Rec.* 4.5; also *Hom.* 8.5-6). Of course, those who, like themselves, are able to “recognize both” (*Hom.* 8.7) are doubly blessed.

Concluding observations

I have space here to make only a few brief observations by way of conclusion. Since supersessionism was my point of departure, let me return to this.

The most clearly supersessionist sub-types are those found in my second category (“a relationship of discontinuity and supersession”). For all intents and purposes sub-type 3.1, in which Christ functions as the sole point of continuity, is supersessionist as well. Any corporate representative defined in such a way as to exclude rank-and-file members of the represented group can hardly be seen as effecting continuity in any real sense of the term. On the surface of it, sub-type 1.2, where Israel is presented as having contained two opposing groups from the beginning, is not supersessionist; the church is simply the continuation of a group that has been present all along. Still, one can be forgiven for thinking that such a tendentious construal of Israel’s history simply serves as a cover for an essentially supersessionist pattern of thought.

²⁸ *Paul and the Torah.*

²⁹ His most enthusiastic supporter has been John G. Gager; see *The Origins of Anti-Semitism and Reinventing Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

On the other hand, the two sub-groups at the extreme ends of the spectrum are clearly not supersessionist. If Israel represents in some sense the polar opposite of the church (1.1) or if Israel continues to exist as a distinct covenant people alongside the church, supersession is not an appropriate term to describe the relationship between the two. Sub-type 5.1, having to do with the expectation that at the end “all Israel will be saved” through Christ, is ambiguous, in that it could be coordinated with either supersessionist or non-supersessionist understandings of the relationship between Israel and the church.

Finally, the remaining sub-types (3.2, 3.3 and 4) can be described as non-supersessionist but unstable. In that each of them is built on the existence of a distinctly Jewish group of Christ-believers, these sub-types represent an element of continuity and contested identity that would be similar to the self-definition of other sectarian, remnant or renewal groups within a larger, diverse Jewish world. But circumstances conducive to the existence of such sub-types proved to be precarious. On one hand, it proved increasingly difficult for Jewish groups of Christ believers to remain within the Jewish world. On the other, the decision to include Gentiles led eventually to a demographic shift in which the Jewish component of the church diminished and major strands of the movement became largely Gentile. In such circumstances these sub-types tended to be transmuted into other, usually supersessionist, types.

In the end, however, a typology is a tool of analysis, which means that any value possessed by this one would need to emerge from its utility in providing insight into the more complex world of actual texts and social constructions—which is work for another day.