

Threading the Needle: Post/Anti-supersessionism and Anti-Zionism?

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“We Choose Abundant Life” (WCAL) provides an excellent example of Middle Eastern contextual theology related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Several elements of WCAL serve to inform theological responses to the ongoing crisis. Notably, WCAL highlights the common spiritual legacy of Christianity and Judaism and affirms Jewish presence in the Middle East, while still openly challenging the framework of Zionism. WCAL also appeals to two sources regularly accused of supersessionism: the 2009 Kairos Palestine document and Palestinian Liberation Theology. Taking up the invitation by WCAL to explore issues raised in the document, I read WCAL with an eye towards anti-Zionism and supersessionism, particularly concerned with the possibility of holding post/anti-supersessionism and anti-Zionism together (i.e., threading the needle). To pursue this, I engage external voices from the US and UK that attempt to carefully navigate these issues and examine WCAL to see whether it might also allow Christians to “thread the needle”, thereby promoting justice, freedom, and equality for all.

Keywords: *Post-supersessionism; Anti-Zionism; Supersessionism; Zionism; Palestinian Liberation Theology; Contextual Theology; Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*

Introduction

“We Choose Abundant Life” (WCAL) provides an excellent example of contextual theology at work, speaking into the complex reality of Christian life in the Middle East today. Looming behind this document is the ever-present reality of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, now exacerbated by the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7th, 2023 and the Israeli state in the aftermath. Several portions of WCAL are particularly relevant to the ongoing crisis and help to theologically inform responses to the situation. WCAL outlines an approach to the Bible that pays particular attention to events on the ground or in the “here and now;”¹ draws attention to the common spiritual legacy shared by Christianity and Ju-

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¹ We Choose Abundant Life Group, *We Choose Abundant Life, Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social, and Political Choices* (Beirut: 2021), 38–41, 43; see also: 6.

daism through the Bible;² welcomes and affirms Jewish presence in the Middle East;³ addresses the conditions for constructive Jewish-Christian dialogue;⁴ cites the creation of the State of Israel as a moment of change and fracture in the region;⁵ and openly challenges the framework of Zionism.⁶ Moreover, WCAL directly appeals to the 2009 Kairos Palestine document in relation to the conflict and thereby invokes the work of Palestinian Liberation Theology, especially as developed by scholars like Mitri Raheb and Naim Ateek.⁷

Taking up the explicit invitation by WCAL to explore and to dialogue with issues raised in and by the document,⁸ I read WCAL with curiosity about two key topics: anti-Zionism and supersessionism.⁹ I was especially interested in understanding how WCAL might inform my own approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In particular, I wondered whether anti-Zionism necessarily entails supersessionism or, conversely, whether post/anti-supersessionism necessitates (Christian) Zionism. Or, is it possible to be both post/anti-supersessionist *and* anti-Zionist, to “thread the needle” so to speak? More specifically, can Christians simultaneously (1) recognize the harm of Christian anti-Judaism/antisemitism, cultivate a positive relationship with Jewish kindred, and recognize God’s enduring covenant with Israel, and (2) fully affirm the dignity and rights of Palestinians, recognize the violence and injustice of Zionism, and call for an end to the occupation, including a right of return for displaced Palestinians? To move towards an answer to this question and to explore the relationship between these two key topics, I first provide an overview of WCAL, highlighting key areas that relate to these topics. I then engage two external voices that attempt to carefully navigate the issues of Zionism and supersessionism: US Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann and the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England. Returning to WCAL, I show how it might provide a way to hold anti-Zionism and post/anti-supersessionism together despite a certain ambivalence regarding supersessionism. Finally, I offer brief concluding

² *Ibidem*, 22.

³ *Ibidem*, 45.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 40; 45.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 22.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 45; see: 32–34. Paragraphs 59–61 challenge all religious nationalism without explicitly naming Zionism.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 23. Both Ateek and Raheb are outspokenly anti-Zionist and are regularly accused of supersessionism.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 6.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 6. See the definitions below for Zionism, anti-Zionism, and supersessionism.

reflections in line with WCAL's aim to promote "justice, freedom, and equality" for all.

Defining Terms

Before delving into the relevant positions staked out in WCAL and exploring the issues above, it is important to define several key terms, especially given their contentious nature.

Zionism – In her recent work *Understanding Zionism* historian Anne Perez offers this basic definition of Zionism: "the view that Jews should have political, cultural, and national autonomy (self-rule) in part or whole of the land of ancient Israel and Judea."¹⁰ In this understanding, autonomy in the land is the defining feature of Zionism; the Jewish people (whether defined ethnically, culturally, or religiously) make claim to some portion of their ancient, ancestral homeland. While initially a primarily secular movement, Zionism increasingly roots these land claims in promises made to the biblical patriarchs.¹¹

However, another understanding of Zionism focuses specifically upon the ethnonationalist political ideology of the modern State of Israel and the resultant actions and policies. As Peter Beinart notes, for some, including many younger American Jews, "Zionism is what Israel does."¹² This type of ideological and praxis-oriented understanding of Zionism leads scholars like Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé, as well as many Palestinian Liberation Theologians, to ultimately equate Zionism with settler colonialism, discrimination, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing.¹³ This view has been reinforced in recent years through Israeli actions like the so-called 2018 Nation State Law which explicitly establishes the Jewish

¹⁰ Anne Perez, *Understanding Zionism: History and Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2023), 2.

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 28; cf. Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), 34–35; Shaul Magid, *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (Brooklyn: Ayin, 2023), 138.

¹² Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Picador, 2013), 181; see: Magid, *The Necessity of Exile*, 112ff; Marc Lamont Hill and Mitchell Plitnick, *Except for Palestine: The Limits of Progressive Politics* (New York: The New Press, 2021), 22. Despite noting that political Zionism has become the dominant Zionist force, Hill and Plitnick suggest distinguishing between "Zionist ideologies" and "Zionist actions." They further advocate focusing on actions to fully understand Zionism. Magid notes that "Jews under the age of fifty do not know Israel as anything other than an occupying power."

¹³ Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé, *On Palestine*, ed. Frank Barat (Chicago: Haymarket, 2015), 51; Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2023), ch. 1; Ateek, *Liberation*, 21; see Magid, *The Necessity of Exile*, 39.

character of the State of Israel, discriminates against non-Jewish Israeli citizens, and actively promotes the settler movement.¹⁴

While Zionism is certainly rooted in the understandable desire to safeguard Jewish people within a secure homeland, it is difficult to ignore the dominant ideology and present actions of its most vocal and vociferous political proponents. For example, current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has praised the controversial Nation State Law as a “pivotal moment” for Zionism that underscores “the founding principle of [Israel’s] existence.”¹⁵ As such, he enshrines Jewish supremacy and continued settlement as core Zionist doctrines. Additionally, at the time of writing, the State of Israel is waging a full-scale military campaign within the Gaza Strip that has killed more than 30,000 Palestinians, internally displaced more than 1.5 million, and put more than 1 million at catastrophic levels of food insecurity, all while continuing the occupation and settlement of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.¹⁶ With this in mind, in this paper I understand Zionism as the ethnonationalist ideology, actions, and policies of the State of Israel to attain and inhabit the totality of “Eretz Israel” at all costs.¹⁷ It must be added that Zionism should not be confused with Judaism, although the two are quite obviously interrelated.¹⁸

Christian Zionism – According to historian Donald Lewis, Christian Zionism is “a Christian movement which holds to the belief that the Jewish people have a biblically mandated claim to their ancient homeland in the Middle East.”¹⁹ As such, Christian Zionism can be seen as a

¹⁴ See: main.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/documents/, accessed April, 2024. The basic law establishes that “the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people” and sees “Jewish settlement as a national value.”; see: Perez, *Understanding Zionism*, 97; Hill and Plitnick *Except for Palestine*, 42; Magid, *The Necessity of Exile*, 20.

¹⁵ Quoted in Perez, *Understanding Zionism*, 98; cf. 64–68. For Netanyahu, this move demonstrates the “founding principles” of the Israeli state because it aligns with the Revisionist Zionism of Ze’ev Jabotinsky and Menachim Begin.

¹⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ochaopt.org/content/, accessed June 13, 2024.

¹⁷ See: Jewish Voice for Peace, twitter.com/jvplive/status/, accessed June 13, 2024. Magid, *The Necessity of Exile*, 19. Magid distinguishes between Zionism as an ideology and the State of Israel as a country in order to avoid anti-Israelism and to argue for a better vision of Israel. However, the current facts on the ground call this distinction into question. In light of the situation on the ground, Jewish Voice for Peace sees Zionism as “a colonial ideology built on the premise of «maximum land with minimum Palestinians» which requires the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their land.”

¹⁸ See: *Ibidem*, 99; Daniel Boyarin, *The No-State Solution: A Jewish Manifesto* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023).

¹⁹ Donald M. Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism: From the Reformation to the Twenty-First Century* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 3; see: Perez,

specifically Christian counterpart to Jewish Zionism that envisions the restoration of the Jewish people to the biblical lands of Israel and Judea. This typically manifests as unconditional support for the modern State of Israel.

Israel – Israel has multiple referents, including a constellation of socio-political entities found in the Bible (i.e., the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, the united Davidic kingdom, God’s covenanted people, and/or the descendants of Abraham). Israel can also obviously denote the modern State of Israel. In this article I will use State of Israel or Israeli state to refer to the modern nation-state and Israel to refer to the collection of biblical entities.²⁰

Supersessionism – Systematic theologian Kendall Soulen defines supersessionism as “the traditional Christian belief that since Christ’s coming the Church has taken the place of the Jewish people as God’s chosen community, and that God’s covenant with the Jews is now over and done.”²¹ Also known as replacement theology, supersessionism has regularly inspired anti-Judaism and/or antisemitism.²² Perhaps the most extreme version of supersessionism appeared in the 2nd century when Marcion argued for a complete disjunction between the Old Testament God of Israel and the New Testament God as known in Jesus Christ. For Marcion and his followers, the New Testament Christ and the Old Testament God are two completely separate entities, with Christ being

Understanding Zionism, 109f; Brueggemann, *Chosen?*, 50. Despite diversity amongst Christian Zionists, including varying biblical and theological motivations, all Christian Zionists support the basic land claim made by Zionism.

²⁰ See: Perez, *Understanding Zionism*, 3; Brueggemann, *Chosen?*, 56.

²¹ R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 413; cf. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 181n6. Soulen expands his basic definition of supersessionism to include three primary subtypes: economic, punitive, and structural. Economic supersessionism suggests that God determined that physical Israel would be superseded by the spiritual Church. Punitive supersessionism suggests that God punishes physical Israel for failing to join the Church in recognizing Jesus Christ as the Messiah (and ultimately leads to the charge of deicide and most Christian anti-Judaism). Structural supersessionism refers to the way Christian theology has framed the entire Christian narrative in a way marginalizes the Old Testament and then subsequently marginalizes the God is Israel and the Jewish people.

²² The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, *God’s Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations* (London: Church House, 2019), 12; cf. Gary M. Burge, “Evangelicals and Christian Zionism,” in *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, eds. Donald W. Wagner and Walter T. Davis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 188.

superior to the God of Israel in every way.²³ Other more subtle versions of supersessionism appear as early as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus and continue throughout Christian history.²⁴

However, since the horrors of the Shoah/Holocaust, many Christian theologians have attempted to eradicate supersessionism from Christian theology, instead articulating various post/anti-supersessionist positions that affirm “the present validity of God’s covenant with Israel as a coherent and indispensable part of the larger body of Christian teaching.”²⁵ At the same time, others recognize the “inevitability” of at least some version of supersessionism.²⁶ In this regard, Jewish theologian David Novak helpfully distinguishes between hard and soft supersessionisms. Hard, or maximal, supersessionism aligns with Soulen’s definition above: “the Christian Church has superseded the Jewish people” and has replaced them “as God’s covenanted people, Israel.”²⁷ On the other hand, soft supersessionism means “accepting the historical fact that Jews have remained with the «un-supplemented» ancient covenant while Christians have been called by God to a higher level by their affirmation of Jesus as the Christ.”²⁸ In other words, soft supersessionism makes room for the basic Christian claim that Jesus Christ is Israel’s Messiah who fulfills the Old Testament expectation of a New Covenant. Additionally, soft supersessionism recognizes the historical reality that Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism both supersede Second Temple Judaism which in turn superseded Hebraic Monotheism/Israelite Religion. Both Christians and modern Jews offer an interpretation of the Old Testament in light of subsequent developments: for Christians, the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Israel’s Messiah and his identification with the God of Israel, and for Jews, the

²³ David Willhite, *The Gospel According to Heretics: Discovering Orthodoxy through Early Christological Conflicts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 27.

²⁴ See especially: Soulen, *God of Israel*, chapter 2.

²⁵ Idem, “Post-supersessionism,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 350; Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, “Towards and Anti-Supersessionist Theology: Race, Whiteness, and Covenant,” *Religions* 13, no. 2 (February 2022).

²⁶ Amy-Jill Levine, “Supersessionism: Admit and Address Rather than Debate or Deny,” *Religions* 13, no. 2 (February 2022): 155; see: Scot McKnight, “The Sport of Supersessionism: A Game to Be Played,” in *God’s Israel and The Israel of God: Paul and Supersessionism*, eds. Michael F. Bird and Scot McKnight (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023), 16.

²⁷ David Novak, “Supersessionism Hard and Soft,” *First Things* (February 2019): 28.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 29. Soft supersessionism can be seen as a version of fulfilment theology.

rejection of Christian claims about Jesus and the development of Talmud in the diaspora.²⁹

In this article, when I speak of supersessionism, I have in view the hard supersessionism of Novak that sees the Church as the complete replacement of Israel as God's covenant people, including the extreme version posited by Marcion that rejects the Old Testament out of hand.

Anti-Zionism – Definitions of anti-Zionism depend on prior definitions of Zionism and as such are contested and complex. Perez suggests that the various usages of the term are so diffuse as to potentially render the word meaningless.³⁰ However, if Zionism is defined as the ethnonationalist ideology, actions, and policies of the State of Israel to attain and inhabit the totality of the land at all costs, then anti-Zionism can be understood as opposition to the same ideology, actions, and policies. Thus, as Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) suggests, anti-Zionism refers to “criticism of the current policies of the Israeli state, and/or moral, ethical, or religious criticism of the idea of a Jewish nation-state.”³¹ Shaul Magid prefers instead the language of “counter-Zionism,” a position that opposes Zionist ideology and actions but not the State of Israel *per se*; in Magid's view, the State of Israel must rid itself of the ethnocentrism and chauvinism of Zionism and become an equal home for Jews and Palestinians, discarding its founding ideology to create a better future.³²

Antisemitism – Any discussion of anti-Zionism must also include a clear definition of antisemitism, especially given the regular conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism in recent years.³³ For the purposes of this

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 30; see: Faith and Order Commission, *God's Unfailing Word*, 4; Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2, The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: Processions and Persons* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020), 21. Sonderegger observes a similar understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism in the work of Robert Jenson in *Lutheran Slogans: Use and Abuse* (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2011), 76–77.

³⁰ Perez, *Understanding Zionism*, 149.

³¹ Jewish Voice for Peace, “Our Approach to Zionism,” jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource/zionism/, accessed April 12, 2025; see: Boyarin, *The No-State Solution*, 75. Boyarin sees anti-Zionism as opposition to “the Jewish state or the state of the Jews,” specifically zeroing in upon the ethnonationalism of Zionism but then goes further to oppose all nationalisms and even the very existence of nation-states.

³² Magid, *The Necessity of Exile*, 68–74, 299–300; cf. Daniel Sokatch, *Can We Talk About Israel? A Guide for the Curious, Confused, and Conflicted* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), chapter 2.

³³ See: Perez, 169–179; Antony Lerman, “Antisemitism Redefined: Israel's Imagined National Narrative of Endless External Threat,” in *On Antisemitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017).

article, I follow the definition and guidance set out by the Nexus Task Force in the Nexus White Paper and the Nexus Document:

Antisemitism consists of anti-Jewish beliefs, attitudes, actions or systemic conditions. It includes negative beliefs and feelings about Jews, hostile behavior directed against Jews (because they are Jews), and conditions that discriminate against Jews and significantly impede their ability to participate as equals in political, religious, cultural, economic, or social life.³⁴

In short, antisemitism is hatred or negative feelings about Jews/Judaism *qua* Jews/Judaism. Nexus also expressly stipulates that “criticism of Zionism and Israel, opposition to Israel’s policies, or nonviolent political action directed at the State of Israel and/or its policies should not, as such, be deemed antisemitic” because “opposition to Zionism and/or Israel does not necessarily reflect specific anti-Jewish animus” but instead could reflect legitimate ethical/religious concerns, including opposition to inequality, discrimination, and/or ethnonationalism.³⁵ Moreover, rather than being antisemitic, much anti-Zionism is predicated upon international human rights (including rights for Jewish people) and the expectation that the State of Israel will behave in a just and humane manner as part of the international community.³⁶ With these important definitions established, it is possible to probe WCAL and explore the questions above.

“We Choose Abundant Life”

The WCAL document serves as an excellent example of Middle Eastern contextual theology, a theology that is self-consciously and deliberately concerned with explicating a Christian vision and ethic within the complex context of the modern Middle East.³⁷ As such it reflects Middle

³⁴ Nexus Task Force, “The Nexus Document,” nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/the-nexus-document/, accessed April 12, 2025; The Nexus Task Force, “The Nexus White Paper,” nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/nexus-white-paper/, accessed April 12, 2025.

³⁵ Nexus Task Force, “The Nexus Document,” nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/the-nexus-document/, accessed April 12, 2025; The Nexus Task Force, “The Nexus White Paper,” nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/nexus-white-paper/, accessed April 12, 2025; see: Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 111.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 115.

³⁷ On contextual theology, see: Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002); Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015); Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of

Eastern contextual histories and realities and speaks directly to Middle Eastern issues and concerns.³⁸ WCAL devotes more than half of the document (chapter one) to establishing the geopolitical and ecclesiastical/theological contexts of Middle Eastern Christianity, addressing key issues like colonialism, the Arab Renaissance, the Arab Spring, the COVID-19 pandemic, church decline, ecumenical relationships, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Only after establishing this contextual baseline does the document address current and future challenges and outline specific policies and choices through a theological lens.

The document explicitly calls for this contextual theological approach in Paragraph 3, naming it as the chosen methodology.³⁹ In Paragraph 74, the authors provide further insight into their “here and now” method; they claim to take “social, economic and political developments seriously” and then intend to use this context as the “starting-point” for theological formulation. Because they begin with the realities of injustice and oppression on the ground, their theology is characterized by “justice, freedom, and equality.”⁴⁰ Their approach also includes listening to outside voices (Muslim, Jewish, non-Arab Christian, and the scientific community) to inform their theological expression.⁴¹ In this regard, WCAL exhibits characteristics of two of Stephen Bevans’s models of contextual theology – the Anthropological⁴² and the Praxis.⁴³ With the Anthropological model, WCAL allows the experience of the Middle Eastern present to shape its understanding and expression of scripture and tradition, prioritizing Middle Eastern encounters with God. With the Praxis model, WCAL prioritizes social change and liberation, acting for a better, more equitable future and reflecting critically upon the Christian past (scripture, tradition, and history). With this contextual framework established, WCAL addresses and speaks into the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, making the conflict a determining factor for theological formulation; the Palestinian situation becomes a central fact on the ground for a “here and now” approach.

Culture,” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).

³⁸ For a brief but detailed overview of recent history and concerns, see: M. Raheb, “Introduction,” in *In the Eye of the Storm: Middle Eastern Christians in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. M. Raheb (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023), 1-12; Viola Raheb, “Middle Eastern Theologies,” in *Emerging Theologies from the Global South*, eds. M. Raheb and Mark A. Lamport (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023).

³⁹ WCAL, 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 39.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 40; see also: 6.

⁴² Bevans, *Models*, 54.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 70.

In addition to the general prioritization of the Palestinian cause, several other elements of the document are particularly relevant to the present situation and help to theologically inform responses to the ongoing crisis which has only deteriorated since October 7th. In particular, six elements related to the issues of Zionism/anti-Zionism and supersessionism are worth considering in order to inform our understanding of and approach to the situation.

First, the document draws attention to the “common spiritual legacy” shared by Christianity and Judaism, especially the Old Testament scriptures. The two religious groups share a generations-old relationship in the Middle East that has often been characterized by peace and “togetherness.”⁴⁴ While this is an important acknowledgement, the document stops short of naming the God of Israel as the Christian God or explicitly exploring the theological relationship between Israel and the Church. Although the document’s name comes directly from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, no attention is given to how Middle Eastern Christians should handle the Old Testament or how the Old and New Testaments relate to one another. In addition, the document names the Church as “the new people of God,” although without explicitly claiming that the Church replaces Israel.⁴⁵

Second, WCAL succinctly welcomes and affirms Jewish presence in the Middle East. As a matter of historical fact, Jews “have always been an integral part of the Middle Eastern tapestry and its pluralistic identity.”⁴⁶ With an optimistic view of diversity and plurality and an openness to the other, the document holds out hope for positive interreligious relationships between Christians, Jews, and Muslims, specifically aiming to repair the often fraught relationship between Christians and Jews.⁴⁷ This interreligious attitude assumes continued Jewish presence in the region without specifically addressing how policies related to the future of Palestine might affect this Jewish presence.

Third, and closely related, WCAL stipulates particular conditions for constructive Jewish-Christian dialogue in the Middle East. Here the document turns directly to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a touchstone. For Jewish-Christian dialogue to be meaningful it must be “based on the values of justice, peace, [and] the dignity of creation and humanity,”

⁴⁴ WCAL, 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 20.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 45.

⁴⁷ See: *Ibidem*, 40; see also: 46–47.

with the oppressed Palestinian people named as those in need of justice.⁴⁸ Any dialogue efforts must candidly address “crucial ethical and political issues,” not shying away from the facts on the ground.⁴⁹ This will include directly confronting Israeli policies of occupation and settlement, as well as working together to establish human rights, civil states, and democracy for all.⁵⁰ The document contrasts its approach to dialogue with the approach taken by “Western Christians who are biased towards Zionism,” although it does not specify the exact shape of the “Western Christian” approach.⁵¹

Fourth, WCAL cites the creation of the State of Israel as a moment of change and fracture in the region. With the triumph of political Zionism and the establishment of the Israeli nation-state in 1948, traditional relationships between Christians and Jews were “distorted” and a new situation of enmity, injustice, and fear was created in the Middle East. While the document does not suggest that the previous situation was perfect, it does claim that it was largely defined by “togetherness” and peace. That changed after the “Israeli occupation of Palestine and the conflation of Judaism, Zionism and the state of Israel.”⁵² Twice the document uses the phrase *Nakba* (“catastrophe”) to refer to this development; elsewhere it notes the creation of the State of Israel “came through a dreadful pathway of bloodshed and displacement” at “great cost” to the Palestinian people.⁵³ However, rather than offering a detailed analysis of the *Nakba*, WCAL outsources further discussion of the situation in Palestine to the 2009 Kairos Palestine (KP) document, *A Moment of Truth*.⁵⁴ As Peter Lodberg describes it, the KP document was created “to tell the world about the

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 45.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 40; see: V. Raheb, “Middle Eastern Theologies,” 267. V. Raheb notes that “the document takes a clear, unequivocal stand on justice and humanity, and thus testifies to a living courageous faith, a strength of resistance, a will to reform, liberation and renewal, prophetic visions, and much hope.”

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 45, 47.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 45.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 22; see: Elias Chacour and David Hazard, *Blood Brothers* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books, 1984), 16; 32–34. Chacour writes of the peaceful situation that prevailed in his village and the surrounding region between Christians, Jews, and Muslims before the arrival of Zionist soldiers.

⁵³ WCAL, 12, 26; 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 23; Kairos Palestine, “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering,” (2009), kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/files/; see V. Raheb, “Middle Eastern Theologies,” 264.

consequences of the Israeli occupation from a theological point of view” and WCAL allows it to do this work.⁵⁵

Fifth, WCAL openly challenges the framework of Zionism by repeatedly opposing all forms of religious/ethnic nationalism and by expressly contesting Zionist policies and practices. As such, the document can be considered anti-Zionist as defined above; it opposes the ethnonationalist ideology, actions, and policies of the State of Israel to attain and inhabit the totality of the land at all costs. However, rather than aiming criticism exclusively at Zionism, the document argues that nation-states in general “cannot be built on particularities, such as religion, race, or colour,” but should instead be built upon “what humanity has in common.”⁵⁶ Paragraphs 56–64 work out this general opposition to religious/ethnic nationalism primarily by arguing against Islamic nationalism and arguing for secular, democratic, civil states that “remain equidistant from all religions” and where “citizenship can be applied without discrimination or exception.”⁵⁷ WCAL refutes “the concept of the religious state” and envisions civil states based upon “the principle of equality among members of the same society, regardless of their cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic affiliations,” thereby undermining the logic of Zionism.⁵⁸ Turning explicitly to Zionism, WCAL opposes the unjust policies of occupation and settlement carried out by the Israeli state.⁵⁹ However, alongside this opposition to religious/ethnic nationalism, the document also calls for “the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state.”⁶⁰ Although it does not stipulate how a Palestinian state might escape the problems of religious/ethnic nationalism, the assumption seems to be that an independent Palestine would be a secular state, granting equal citizenship to people of all faiths and ethnicities alike.

Finally, as mentioned above, WCAL endorses the 2009 Kairos Palestine (KP) document as an authoritative voice on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, thereby invoking Palestinian Liberation Theology, especially the work of Mitri Raheb and Naim Ateek.⁶¹ M. Raheb is a contrib-

⁵⁵ Peter Lodberg, “Palestinian Contextual Theologies,” in *Emerging Theologies from the Global South*, eds. M. Raheb and Lamport (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023), 255; see: Perez, 158–159.

⁵⁶ WCAL, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 32–33. With this logic, WCAL is equally critical of Israel and any Islamic nation-states, including Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 46; 32.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 46.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 47; see: Kairos Palestine, 3.

⁶¹ WCAL, 23.

uting author for both WCAL and KP, while Ateek contributed to KP.⁶² The KP document and these theologians are stridently anti-Zionist, even if KP never uses the words Zionism or anti-Zionism. The KP document declares that the “Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity,” and “an evil that must be resisted.”⁶³ Reflecting upon KP, Ateek notes that the charges leveled by the document are “the equivalent of declaring Zionism heretical” because it legitimizes violence and injustice in the name of God and distorts the image of God in both Palestinians and Israelis.⁶⁴ In the same essay, Ateek claims that “Zionism *is* the problem” in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.⁶⁵ M. Raheb highlights the illegality and injustice of “Israel’s settler colonial project” but also draws direct attention to Christian Zionism, arguing that it is “dangerous to Palestinians and Palestinian land.”⁶⁶ Ateek and M. Raheb are not isolated voices. In 2006 a group of Palestinian Christian leaders issued the Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism, “categorically [rejecting] Christian Zionist doctrines as false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.”⁶⁷

Both Ateek and M. Raheb, as well as Palestinian Liberation Theology in general, are also regularly accused of supersessionism by critics because of their understanding of the relationship between Israel and the Church and their handling of the Old Testament.⁶⁸ In fact, Munther Isaac concedes that many Palestinian and other Middle Eastern Christians are

⁶² *Ibidem*, 49; see: Kairos Palestine, 4.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 9; 12.

⁶⁴ Naim Stifan Ateek, “A Concluding Theological Postscript,” in *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, eds. Donald W. Wagner and Walter T. Davis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 219; see: Ateek, *Liberation*, 36.

⁶⁵ Idem, “Postscript,” 217. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁶ Raheb, *Decolonizing*, 50; cf. Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 47–98.

⁶⁷ Michael Sabbah, Swerios Malki Mourad, Riah Abu El-Assal, and Munib Younan, “The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism,” (August 22, 2006), imeu.org/article/the-jerusalem-declaration-on-christian-zionism/, accessed January 24, 2024; see: Lodberg, “Palestinian Contextual Theologies,” 251–52.

⁶⁸ Todd Walatka, review of *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestinian Conflict*, by Naim Stifan Ateek, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 14, no. 1 (2019): 1–2; Robert Benne, “Political Supersessionism,” *First Things* 281 (March 2018): 12–15; Richard Harvey, “Towards a Messianic Jewish Theology of Reconciliation,” in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land and the Israeli-Palestinian Context*, eds. Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 91; cf. Colin Chapman, “A Biblical Perspective on Israel/Palestine,” in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land and the Israeli-Palestinian Context*, eds. Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 294; Michael G. Azar, “‘Supersessionism’: The Political Origin of a Theological Neologism,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 16, no. 1 (2022): 17.

functional, if not theological, “Marcionites.”⁶⁹ And yet, M. Raheb, Ateek, and others reject this characterization of their theologies as supersessionist. For example, M. Raheb regards “replacement theology” as a “supremacist Christian ‘rejection theology’” that is responsible for the “tragic history” of the Shoah/Holocaust, implicitly differentiating his perspective from this “supremacist” theology.⁷⁰ Likewise, Issac explicitly rejects supersessionism while at the same time articulating something like Novak’s soft supersessionism: “I am not saying that the church has replaced Israel. Instead, I believe that we joined Israel. We became part of Israel. I believe that Jesus is the true Israelite.”⁷¹ Elsewhere, he uses the language of “incorporation” to explain his viewpoint, again expressly rejecting the notion of “replacement.”⁷² So too does Ateek. Rather than speaking of replacement, Ateek notes that the New Testament deepens, expands, and reinterprets “the Old Testament in light of the coming of Jesus Christ.”⁷³ For Ateek Jesus Christ is the hermeneutical key that must determine the Christian approach to the relationship between Israel/Church. This is also the perspective taken by the KP document; it maintains the unity of the Old and New Testaments, while claiming that Jesus Christ came to fulfill and cast “new light” upon the Old Testament.⁷⁴ However, KP comes closer to hard supersessionism when it expands “the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God” to “include all of humanity,” thereby verging upon the erasure of biblical Israel.⁷⁵ While it does not use the language of replacement, KP unequivocally stresses the universality of the Kingdom of God as presented in the New Testament and avoids addressing the particularity of Israel’s election in the Old Testament.

In exploring these six elements, it becomes clear that WCAL is unambiguously anti-Zionist, plainly opposing the ethnonationalist ideology, actions, and policies of the State of Israel. The document’s contextual framework practically necessitates this perspective; as a key Middle

⁶⁹ Munther Isaac, “Reading the Old Testament in the Palestinian Church Today: A Case Study of Joshua 6,” in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land and the Israeli-Palestinian Context*, eds. Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 218.

⁷⁰ Raheb, *Decolonizing*, 94.

⁷¹ Isaac, “Old Testament,” 227–28.

⁷² Idem, *Wall*, 94–95.

⁷³ Ateek, *Liberation*, 83.

⁷⁴ Kairos Palestine, 7–8.

⁷⁵ Kairos Palestine, 8; cf. David J. Rudolph, “A Messianic Jewish Response,” in *God’s Israel and The Israel of God: Paul and Supersessionism*, eds. Michael F. Bird and Scot McKnight (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023), 112. Rudolph levels the charge of “Jewish erasure” against New Testament scholars N.T. Wright for articulating a position that bears similarity to the position of Kairos Palestine.

Eastern reality on the ground, the Palestinian situation demands a theological response that pursues justice and liberation in light of Israeli occupation, oppression, and violence. As such, WCAL fully endorses and follows in the footsteps of the liberation theology of Kairos Palestine. In doing so, WCAL rejects religious/ethnic nationalism in general and Zionism in particular, as all religious/ethnic nationalisms ultimately undermine the human equality and freedom central to the Christian vision. While WCAL envisions a renewed relationship between Palestinian Christians and Israeli Jews characterized by truth-telling and peacemaking in dialogue, this relationship entails the rejection of Zionist ideology and policies. Again, WCAL unequivocally promotes anti-Zionism, even if it does not fully explain the ramifications of such a position.

However, WCAL is more ambivalent regarding supersessionism, whether it be Novak's hard or soft variety. Apart from acknowledging the shared Old Testament heritage of Christianity and Judaism and briefly referring to the Church as "the new people of God," the document otherwise remains silent about the relationship between the Church and Israel. Given the important nature of the Church/Israel relationship to theological discussions of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the centrality of the conflict to WCAL, this virtual silence is somewhat surprising. Perhaps more explicit treatment of this topic is ultimately beyond the scope of the document. However, the silence could potentially be interpreted as in line with Soulen's structural supersessionism, especially in light of the passing "new people of God" comment; said differently, WCAL does not robustly address the relationship between the Church and Israel because the Old Testament and biblical Israel are marginal to its overall theology.⁷⁶ Additionally, by endorsing the KP document, WCAL opens itself to the same charges of supersessionism that are directed against Palestinian Liberation Theology. While many Palestinian theologians dispute accusations of replacement theology and often explicitly reject something like hard supersessionism, their emphasis upon fulfillment in Jesus Christ and their downplaying of the chosenness of Israel, demonstrates an ambiguity similar to that found in the WCAL document. In the end, WCAL is neither clearly supersessionist (hard or soft) nor clearly post/anti-supersessionist, leaving the way open for multiple perspectives.

⁷⁶ Soulen, *God of Israel*, 31–33; 49.

Threading the Needle

In Paragraph 4 WCAL commits to “deep dialogue” regarding the issues raised in the document. This dialogical posture includes openness to responses from Christian siblings, ecumenical institutions, and “entities of good will that desire to work for a just peace and the common good for all people in the Middle East.”⁷⁷ As a fellow Christian, as an ordained Episcopal priest, as a scholar trained in World Christianity, and as someone committed to justice and liberation for all of God’s children, I embrace this invitation to explore the issues raised in the document, especially as they might inform my own approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. As noted above, several elements of WCAL are particularly salient to the Palestinian plight, most notably the document’s clear anti-Zionism. However, when it comes to supersessionism, another key topic related to Palestine-Israel, WCAL is more ambivalent. This intriguing dynamic prompted me to further reflect upon the relationship between these two important topics and to specifically wonder whether anti-Zionism necessarily entails supersessionism or, conversely, whether post/anti-supersessionism necessitates (Christian) Zionism. Or is it possible to “thread the needle” and be both post/anti-supersessionist *and* anti-Zionist? To demonstrate the possibility of threading the needle, I first engage two external voices that attempt to carefully navigate this space: US Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann and the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England. Then, I return to WCAL to show how it can be read to support anti-Zionism and post/anti-supersessionism despite its ambiguity. Finally, I offer concluding remarks that briefly highlight the importance of threading the needle. Framed as an issue of “justice, freedom, and equality” for all, this reflection is directly relevant to the overall ethos and aims of WCAL.⁷⁸

External Voice: Walter Brueggemann – As an Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann regularly considers issues related to biblical Israel, including election, the covenant, and the land. In *Chosen?*, Brueggemann aims specifically to read “the bible amid the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” in order to provide context and clarity for Christians concerned with the situation on the ground. As his starting point, Brueggemann begins with the undeniable Old Testament claim that Israel is God’s chosen people; all that follows bears this fact in mind. He admits up front that he is “grateful” for the founding of the State of Israel as a response to the Shoah/

⁷⁷ WCAL, 6.

⁷⁸ See: *Ibidem*, 39.

Holocaust and acknowledges a concern for its ongoing security.⁷⁹ At the same time, he openly laments the injustice perpetuated by the Israeli state against the Palestinian people and maintains that work must be done to secure their human rights. He further contends that “it will not do for Christian readers of the Bible to reduce the Bible to an ideological prop for the state of Israel, as though support for [the State of] Israel were a final outcome of biblical testimony.”⁸⁰

Unsurprisingly, during the course of the book Brueggemann speaks directly to supersessionism and Zionism. Pulling no punches, he declares that supersessionism, defined as “the notion that Christianity has displaced Judaism as the faith of the chosen” and thus a form of hard supersessionism, is “a historical absurdity and a theological scandal.”⁸¹ Brueggemann consistently maintains that Israel is uniquely elected by God and that “the Bible makes no sense without this claim.”⁸² This notion is reaffirmed throughout the Old Testament from the earliest Abrahamic tradition to the later prophetic/exilic tradition; it is simply inescapable. At the same time, Brueggemann also acknowledges the Deuteronomic “if” attached to Israel’s possession of the land; while the gift of the land is unconditional, possession of the land is based upon obedience to Torah.⁸³ Importantly, Brueggemann also highlights the relationship between the chosen and the unchosen. Beginning with the call of Abram in Genesis 12, Israel’s chosenness always entails the blessing of the nations. As Brueggemann puts it, other peoples are always “in the sphere of God’s attentiveness.” Moreover, he notes that the New Testament employs this theme of God’s all-embracing attentiveness to make the unique Christian claim that Gentiles are admitted “as a part of God’s people.”⁸⁴ Unfortunately, Brueggemann does not here address precisely how the Church should understand itself in relation to Israel, although he is unequivocal that supersessionism is not a legitimate option.⁸⁵ Brueggemann is unflinchingly post-supersessionist.

Turning to Zionism, Brueggemann is first careful to distinguish between modern Zionism and the biblical usage of Zion as location and

⁷⁹ Brueggemann, *Chosen?*, xiv–xv.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, xv.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 19.

⁸² *Ibidem*, 15.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, 28–29; 18. In Exodus 19:5 Israel’s chosenness also seems to be predicated upon obedience to Torah.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 23; see: Wil Gafney, “Commentary on Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16,” *The Working Preacher*, workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/, accessed May 4, 2024.

⁸⁵ Brueggemann, *Chosen?*, 19, 47, 56.

promise; the two are related but separable concepts.⁸⁶ Regarding modern Zionism, Brueggemann traces a disturbing development; while initially the nation-state could claim to be a “legitimate heir” of biblical promises regarding Zion, by the time of the Six-Day War in 1967, the movement had devolved into “a hardened Zionism that combined a desperate aspiration with an uncompromising ideology that supported the state of Israel and its security at all costs against all comers.”⁸⁷ Thus, Brueggemann sees modern Zionism as a “hardnosed” political ideology characterized by “conquest.”⁸⁸ He criticizes the current government for its positions that maintain the unjust status quo, including its “brutalizing, uncompromising policy” towards Palestinians.⁸⁹ He also criticizes modern Zionist claims that equate “the *state of Israel* [i.e., the land] with the *faith of Israel*.” While it is possible to read the Old Testament as equating Judaism with the land, modern Zionism presents this as the *only* possibility. However, Brueggemann is quick to point to other Jewish interpretations that equate Judaism with Torah observance rather than land theology.⁹⁰ Brueggemann’s criticism comes to a head when he writes,

The reduction of Zion to Zionism as a hardnosed ideology brings with it the danger of reducing the claim of God’s fidelity to God’s people into a one-dimensional possibility. The capacity to critique such ideology is exceedingly difficult, but it is characteristically the ongoing work of responsible faith to make such critique of any ideology that co-opts faith for a one-dimensional cause that is taken to be above criticism.⁹¹

With this, Brueggemann clearly articulates an anti-Zionist position without naming it as such. He then likens criticism of Zionism to the work of the ancient prophetic tradition, before relating “every uncompromising ideology” (i.e., Zionism) to idolatry. But he is not finished: he also chides Christian Zionism in particular for failing to consider the “contextual realities” of the situation in Palestine-Israel.⁹² By this he is referring to the

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 41–47.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 49.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 53, 50.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 51, 55. At the time of publication, the State of Israel was governed by Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 35–36; cf. Magid, *The Necessity of Exile*, 131–54, 214–15; Boyarin, *The No-State Solution*, 25–35.

⁹¹ Brueggemann, *Chosen?*, 53; cf. xvi–xvii. Already in the introduction, Brueggemann flagged the difficulty of critiquing Israel or Zionism by noting the weaponization of antisemitism. He calls for Christians to have courage to speak up about human suffering.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 51.

oppression and suffering of the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israeli state.⁹³ For too long, Western Christians have minimized Palestinian concerns because of a perceived “deep debt that is owed to the Jews” on account of the Shoah/Holocaust. Today, Brueggemann writes, “the actual suffering of human bodies and the deprivations imposed by harsh force expose as inadequate old ideologies that have long seemed to be beyond question.”⁹⁴ Christians must not allow these “old ideologies” (i.e., Christian Zionism) to cause paralysis, but must instead “be zealous, relentless advocates for human rights” and engage in “truth-telling that is attentive of bodily suffering.”⁹⁵ This is unquestionably anti-Zionism.

Then, Brueggemann moves to hold together anti-Zionism and post/anti-supersessionism. Recognizing the “brutality of the Shoah” (one of the primary motivators of post/anti-supersessionism) *and* the “brutalizing” of Palestinian bodies by the Israeli state (one of the primary concerns of anti-Zionism), Brueggemann proclaims his commitment to both Israel’s security and Palestinian human rights, “*not one without the other*.”⁹⁶ Brueggemann already intimates this position in the introduction when he writes,

I have not changed my mind an iota about the status of Israel as God’s chosen people or about urgency for the security and well-being of the state of Israel... [however, that cannot] cause blindness or indifference to political reality and the way in which uncriticized ideology [i.e., Zionism] does enormous damage to prospects for peace and for the hopes and historical possibilities of the vulnerable [i.e., Palestinians].⁹⁷

Thus, Brueggemann provides one example of post/anti-supersessionist held together with anti-Zionism.

External Voice: God’s Unfailing Word

In 2019 the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England released *God’s Unfailing Word* (GUW), a short document articulating an

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 57.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 55.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 58, 59.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 58. Emphasis added.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, xvi; see Magid, *The Necessity of Exile*, 19. Like Magid, Brueggemann distinguishes between Zionism as an ideology and the State of Israel as a nation-state. Like Magid, his position is anti-Zionist but not anti-Israelist. Brueggemann also does not believe the two-state solution is viable. Thus, the “secure” Israel of Brueggemann’s vision must look markedly different from Israel as it exists today; it must no longer be a Zionist state but instead a state where both Jews and Palestinians possess freedom, peace, and security.

Anglican theology of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism and providing practical guidance for Christian-Jewish relations.⁹⁸ In its explication of theological frameworks and critical issues, GUW naturally discusses supersessionism and Zionism. To get at the issue of supersessionism, GUW first traces the clear history of Christian anti-Judaism and acknowledges the contention that Christianity itself is inherently antisemitic.⁹⁹ The document candidly admits that “historic Christian anti-Judaism was undoubtedly used to give legitimation to [modern] antisemitic ideas.”¹⁰⁰ In response, modern theologians began to reassert the core biblical conviction that Israel are God’s covenant people, ultimately leading to a full-scale reevaluation of the doctrine of supersessionism – the “flawed Christian theology that denies the continuing place of Jewish people and of Judaism as a community of faith in the purposes of God.”¹⁰¹

Moving to a theological discussion of supersessionism, GUW makes a candid declaration up front:

While Christians have responded in different ways to Jewish self-understanding as God’s people, they should neither reject it as simply mistaken nor accept it as independent from God’s saving work in Jesus Christ. The relationship between Christianity and Judaism is characterized by both kinship and divergence.¹⁰²

With this statement, GUW preemptively rejects hard supersessionism, while affirming a position seemingly in line with Novak’s soft supersessionism. The document then goes on to explicitly repudiate the extreme supersessionism of Marcion, to affirm the unity of God’s actions in the Old and New Testaments, and to highlight the distinctive hermeneutical perspectives of Christianity and Judaism. In approaching the Old Testament, Christianity and Judaism will necessarily diverge; Christians read the Old Testament in light of Jesus Christ and draw conclusions that Jews simply cannot and will not accept.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Faith and Order Commission, *God’s Unfailing Word*, v-vi; see: The Episcopal Church, “Christian-Jewish Relations: Theological and Practical Guidance for the Episcopal Church (2021),” episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/, accessed June 7, 2024. My own Episcopal Church expressly bases its guidance upon *God’s Unfailing Love*.

⁹⁹ Faith and Order Commission, *God’s Unfailing Word*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 15.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, 16–19; see: 111n45. This endnote highlights and affirms Novak’s distinction between hard and soft supersessionism.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, 23.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, 24–27. The documents states, “for Christianity the Old Testament needs to be read alongside the New, in whose light it is understood to have a prophetic dimension throughout, as a set of texts that look forward to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.”

Only then does G UW turn to the crux of the supersessionist matter: who are God's chosen people? Who is Israel? First, G UW addresses the claim made by Christians and Jews alike that they are God's chosen people. The document traces four broad positions regarding whether the Jewish people retain their chosenness even after God's revelation in Jesus Christ: 1) unqualified denial, 2) qualified acceptance, 3) appeal to mystery, or 4) unqualified affirmation.¹⁰⁴ Then, the document frames the issue slightly differently, considering whether the Jewish people still constitute Israel in a post-Christ world. Again, the document outlines four answers that correspond to the previous four positions; the Jewish people are 1) no longer Israel and have been replaced by the Church; 2) still Israel in a limited/diminished way alongside the Church who is also Israel; 3) still Israel mysteriously along with the Church; or 4) fully coterminous with Israel apart from the Church.¹⁰⁵

With these four positions staked out, G UW contends that the Church of England must choose between positions two and three because both affirm "the continuing participation of the Jewish people in Israel as God's gift and God's creation" and recognize that "Jesus Christ [is] the Son of God made incarnate for the salvation of all, Jews and Gentiles alike," as expressed in the historic creeds.¹⁰⁶ The document rejects position one because it expresses hard supersessionism. G UW rejects position four because it seemingly undermines the ultimacy of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ in preference for a two covenant approach; the old covenant continues unaffected by God's action in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷ G UW recommends positions two and three because they make room for the important notion of fulfilment, a concept which unifies the Old and New Testaments and crucially explains the "new thing" that God has done in Jesus Christ; in the crucified Christ the God of Israel has acted in a way still "in accordance with the scriptures" but that also alters the perception of all that has come before.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, G UW argues that "to believe that fulfilment lies for all in relation to Christ does not mean that it must lie for others in joining what we perceive to be our present relation to Christ."¹⁰⁹ Thus, the document thereby exhibits post/anti-supersessionism by completely repudiating hard supersessionism, while at the same time affirming the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations in

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 29–32.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 32–33.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, 39; 34–35.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, 34–35; 31.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 37–38.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 40.

Jesus Christ (i.e., soft supersessionism) and acknowledging that Judaism will necessarily disagree with this Christian claim.

In considering the question of Zionism, GUW begins with four guiding principles before offering a definition. First, Christians should acknowledge that most Jews embrace some version of Zionism as part of Jewish identity. Second, international law stipulates that the State of Israel is entitled to security. Third, international law further stipulates that the Palestinian people are entitled to human rights and security. Fourth, the current situation “presents grave moral difficulties and is ultimately untenable.”¹¹⁰ Only after stating these considerations does GUW define Zionism as “an organized Jewish movement to facilitate Jewish return to the land of Israel” or more broadly, the basic desire for a Jewish homeland in the Middle East. It further asserts that “the vast majority of Jews support the existence of the State of Israel,” even if they disagree in their assessments of Israeli policies.¹¹¹ Then, in order to safeguard the conversation of Zionism from verging into antisemitism, the document reintroduces two examples of antisemitism from the introduction: antisemitism includes “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination” and “applying double standards” (i.e., singling the State of Israel out for behaviors also perpetrated by other state actors). This does not necessarily preclude criticism of Zionism, the State of Israel, or Israeli policies/actions, but it does provoke and prioritize caution.¹¹²

With this groundwork established, GUW turns to explore various Christian theological responses to Zionism. GUW first highlights Christian Zionism, or “Christian support for a Jewish homeland or state on explicitly Christian theological grounds.”¹¹³ Since the Protestant Reformation, various strains of Christianity have advocated for the return of the Jewish people to their biblical homeland and then offered support for the creation and maintenance of the State of Israel. However, other Christians foreground the “Palestinian narrative of dispossession, oppression, and discrimination” and thereby actively oppose the theology of Christian Zionism, the actions of the Israeli state, and “the claims of political Zionism.”¹¹⁴ Here, GUW draws particular attention to the emergence

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 74.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, 76.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, 77–78; see: 9–10. These examples are drawn from the working definition of antisemitism provided by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, 79.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 80. Notably, GUW narrows the focus of Christian resistance to “political Zionism” and Israeli actions rather than a more generalized “Christian anti-Zionism.” I comment further on this distinction below.

of Palestinian Liberation Theology in response to the “tragedy and exile” the *Nakba*, specifically pointing to the Kairos Palestine document as an expression of Palestinian realities and concerns.¹¹⁵

After laying out these two seemingly opposing positions, the document contends that it is possible to hold together Christian Zionism and Palestinian Liberation Theology “within certain limits.” These limits are 1) the recognition of the continuing participation of the Jewish people in Israel alongside the Church and 2) a commitment to the universality of God’s love and justice as imaged in Jesus Christ, “the servant and Lord of all.”¹¹⁶ However, if either theology departs from these parameters, it must be abandoned. For example, Christian Zionism must be rejected if and when it sets “aside the ordinary requirements of justice for the sake of supposed prophetic fulfillment” or denies human rights to Palestinians.¹¹⁷ So too, Palestinian Liberation Theology if and when it verges into hard supersessionism or discards the scandal of particularity.¹¹⁸ Thus, GUW offers no explicit expression of general anti-Zionism, although it does allow criticism of Israeli actions and rejection of Christian Zionism in certain circumstances. This potential to reject Christian Zionism is held in tandem with a similar potential to reject Palestinian Liberation Theology; this avoids applying a potentially antisemitic double standard in the case of Christian Zionism.

Ultimately, GUW’s expressed perspective on Zionism turns on careful language and strategic definitions, starting with its initial definition of Zionism. When it chooses to define Zionism as the desire for a Jewish homeland rather than the ideology and actions of the State of Israel, it creates a degree of separation between Zionism as ideal and the reality of Zionism on the ground. Because Zionism is so defined, anti-Zionism is almost automatically precluded; to assert anti-Zionism with this idealistic, homeland definition of Zionism in place would be to assert antisemitism because it would deny the right of secure Jewish existence in an established Jewish homeland. This definition of Zionism alongside

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 81–82.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 82.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 83; see: Harvey, “Towards a Messianic.” 100. As a Messianic Jew, Harvey contends that Christian Zionists “must still give opportunity for self-critical reflection on present issues of justice, peace, and reconciliation,” further noting that “Israel is to be a means of justice, peace, and reconciliation with her neighbors... sharing her resources, welcoming the stranger, and seeking peace actively.”

¹¹⁸ Faith and Order Commission, *God’s Unfailing Word*, 83–84; see: Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 66.

the potential charge of antisemitism functions to insulate Zionism from criticism, even if certain expressions of Zionism (i.e., “Political Zionism”) or Israeli policies and actions are fair game. However, G UW *does* allow criticism and rejection of certain expressions of *Christian* Zionism. For example, the document says, “If certain expressions of Christian Zionism would propose that some people within the land of Israel should have no rights – or indeed that others there hold no responsibility for them – then they need to be firmly rejected.”¹¹⁹ Despite making careful distinctions and choices of language, by allowing this particular criticism of Christian Zionism, G UW actually implicitly expresses or at least moves towards general anti-Zionism. The hypothetical situation described (lack of rights, lack of responsibility in supporting the rights of others) actually describes the reality of Zionism on the ground in Palestine-Israel. And as G UW suggests, this unjust, inhumane reality must “be firmly rejected.”¹²⁰

In final analysis, G UW attempts to carefully navigate the complex spaces of supersession and Zionism, urging caution and nuance when addressing these sensitive topics. The document ultimately articulates a clear post/anti-supersessionist position, rejecting hard supersessionism but embracing a version of Novak’s soft supersessionism. When it comes to anti-Zionism, G UW hedges by carefully defining Zionism before finally implying an anti-Zionist position via its criticism of Christian Zionism. As with Brueggemann, G UW provides another example of holding post/anti-supersessionism and anti-Zionism together, although in a much less straightforward manner. For neither G UW nor Brueggemann, does post/anti-supersessionism necessarily entail Christian Zionism or anti-Zionism entail supersessionism.

Back to WCAL – As established above, WCAL unambiguously articulates an anti-Zionist position but appears mostly ambivalent concerning supersessionism. However, its endorsement of Kairos Palestine and its close relationship to Palestinian Liberation Theology might imply a latent supersessionism. At the same time, the internal logic of WCAL points in a different direction; if followed consistently, core themes in the document preclude hard supersessionism and its most sinister ramifications. Therefore, it is possible to read WCAL as a document that promotes anti-Zionism and at least allows, if not supports, post/anti-supersessionism.

Throughout the document, WCAL upholds a dialogical approach, seeing dialogue as a key component of civil society. The posture of dialogue

¹¹⁹ Faith and Order Commission, 83.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, 83.

is recommended for various relationships: between the authors and their interlocutors;¹²¹ amongst Middle Eastern Christian youth;¹²² between the various churches;¹²³ between Christian youth and Church leadership;¹²⁴ between Christians and the unspecified other;¹²⁵ between Church and world;¹²⁶ and between Christians, Muslims, and Jews.¹²⁷ When it comes to dialogue between Christians and Jews, WCAL counsels Christians to listen to and accept “the truth of their faith as they present it, rather than seeking to undermine their faith or project our own concepts onto it.”¹²⁸ This advice presents a direct challenge to supersessionism, as Jewish voices regularly contend that supersessionism undermines Judaism, or as Novak puts it, requires “an abandonment of Judaism.”¹²⁹ The claim that the Church replaces Israel epitomizes the projection of a Christian concept onto a Jewish concept, again violating WCAL’s dialogical approach. Thus, if Christians take Jewish self-expression and concerns seriously as this dialogue advice recommends, they should ultimately reject hard supersessionism.

In terms of politics, WCAL champions the liberal values of diversity, equality, freedom, justice, human rights, the right to self-determination, democracy, and nondiscrimination.¹³⁰ This political outlook has roots in WCAL’s understanding of humanity created the image of God; all human beings are worthy of dignity and respect because they bear God’s image “regardless of origin, religious affiliation, or political choice.”¹³¹ With a contextual theological methodology driven by “justice, freedom, and equality,” WCAL implores Christians “to be in solidarity with the oppressed and support those whose rights have been violated.”¹³² While the document primarily highlights these values in order to address the plight of Palestinians and other Arab populations, they also serve as a roadblock

¹²¹ WCAL, 6.

¹²² *Ibidem*, 7.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, 21; see: 35–36; 42.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, 27.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, 10; 43.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, 42.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*, 22; 40; 45–46.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*, 40; see: Faith and Order Commission, xxii.

¹²⁹ Novak, 28; cf. Levine, 5; Ephraim Mirvis, “An Afterward,” in *God’s Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations* (London: Church House, 2019), 104; David Fox Sandmel, “Israel, Judaism, and Christianity,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, edited by Tikva Frymer-Kensky et. al. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 161.

¹³⁰ WCAL, 47; 33.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, 32.

¹³² *Ibidem*, 39; 49.

against anti-Judaism and antisemitism, the most pernicious effects of supersessionist theology. Prioritizing justice, freedom, and equality for all should preclude any anti-Jewish animus, thereby raising the alarm against supersessionism. Although these values cannot contradict supersessionist theology *per se*, they most certainly contradict its effects. Once again, the logic of WCAL works against hard supersessionism.

Thus, despite its apparent ambivalence, WCAL ultimately opens the way for a post/anti-supersessionist position alongside its anti-Zionism. With its dialogical vision and prioritization of just peace, WCAL aims to create positive relationships between Christians and Jews, moving from polemics to rapprochement. And although it certainly prioritizes the ongoing effects of the *Nakba*, it also acknowledges the tragedy of “centuries of antisemitism.”¹³³ While it lacks a clear recognition of God’s enduring covenant with Israel, neither does it preclude such a theological position. WCAL is certainly full-throatedly anti-Zionist and allows for post/anti-supersessionism.

Concluding Remarks – Like “We Choose Abundant Life,” the post-Holocaust theology that emerged after World War II was itself a contextual theology responding to facts on the ground. In its case, European Christian civilization had decimated or allowed the decimation of nearly the entire population of European Jewry in an outbreak of rabid antisemitic violence. In the context of this horrendous situation, it made complete sense to fundamentally rethink the supersessionist theology that allowed or even elicited the Shoah/Holocaust and to support the emerging State of Israel through Christian Zionism.¹³⁴ For example, Soulen explicitly states that the “new conditions” created by the Shoah/Holocaust are a determinative factor for his rejection of supersessionism.¹³⁵ For Soulen it is impossible to read the Bible in a supersessionist manner after Auschwitz. Likewise, Scott Bader-Saye claims “we can no longer write theology as if the Holocaust never happened.”¹³⁶ Relatedly, Donald Wagner demonstrates

¹³³ *Ibidem*, 45; cf. Kairos Palestine, 15. KP is much more explicit here than WCAL: “We condemn all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we call on you to condemn it and oppose it in all its manifestations.”

¹³⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Christian Zionism and Mainline Western Christian Churches,” in *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison*, eds. Göran Gunner and Robert O. Smith (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 185; cf. Brant Rosen, “Rising to the Challenge: A Jewish Theology of Liberation,” in *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, eds. Donald W. Wagner and Walter T. Davis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 67; Faith and Order Commission, 16.

¹³⁵ Soulen, *God of Israel*, x; cf. 2–3.

¹³⁶ Scott Bader-Saye, *Church and Israel after Christendom: The Politics of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 2.

how “the colossal evils of the Nazis and the Holocaust” elicited the liberal Christian Zionism of figures like Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Krister Stendahl.¹³⁷ Commenting upon this trend, M. Raheb observes that liberal Christians have made “the Holocaust the hermeneutical key for Christian theology after 1967.”¹³⁸

Recognizing the magnitude of the Shoah/Holocaust remains vitally important for Christian theology, especially in light of renewed antisemitism. But the facts of the Shoah/Holocaust are not the only facts on the ground. As WCAL, KP, and Palestinian Liberation Theologians point out, there are also the facts of the *Nakba*. Since 1948 the Palestinian people have faced discrimination, oppression, dispossession, violence, imprisonment, exile, and death at the hands of the Zionist Israeli state. Archbishop Elias Chacour describes this harrowing experience firsthand, recording how his entire village was dispossessed, how the neighboring village was massacred, how his father and older brothers were kidnapped and abandoned in Lebanon before sneaking back across the border, how he was falsely accused and then assaulted by an Israeli military policeman, and how his father was reduced to working as a hired hand in his own stolen orchard.¹³⁹ This is only one story of hundreds of thousands more, as roughly 750,000 people (85% of the Palestinian Arab population) were dispossessed with the initial creation of the State of Israel and the process of dispossession continues with Israeli settlements.¹⁴⁰ These conditions created by the ongoing *Nakba* should be a determinative factor in Christian theology leading to a rejection of Zionism. It should be impossible to read the Bible in a Zionist manner after Deir Yassin, Sabra and Shatila, and Gaza.¹⁴¹ Christian theologians should also say, “we can no longer write theology as if the *Nakba* never happened.” Both set of facts – the Shoah/Holocaust and the *Nakba* – must be accounted for because Christian theology claims that context matters; that opposing colonial

¹³⁷ Wagner, “The Mainline Protestant Churches and the Holy Land,” in *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, eds. Wagner and Walter T. Davis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 146–58. Quote from 150.

¹³⁸ Raheb, *Decolonizing*, 39; see: Isaac, *Wall*, 14; Ateek, *Liberation*, 32–36; idem, “Postscript,” 219. Ateek dubs post-Holocaust theology a “price-tag” theology providing Christians with a vehicle of repentance for the guilt accrued during centuries of European Christian anti-Semitism.”

¹³⁹ Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, 36–72.

¹⁴⁰ Perez, 88; see: Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017* (New York: Picador, 2020), 74; Chomsky and Pappé, 27.

¹⁴¹ Perez, 79; Khalidi, 75, 158–59; Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld, 2006), 90–92.

realities matters;¹⁴² and that listening to other Christian voices, especially the marginalized, matters.¹⁴³ Both sets of facts must be accounted for in order to faithfully respond to the full “here and now.” Christians must articulate a post-Holocaust *and* post-Nakba theology, and to do so, they must be post/anti-supersessionist *and* anti-Zionist.¹⁴⁴

“We Choose Abundant Life” indicates that this is possible, especially when read alongside other voices that also attempt to navigate this difficult space. Brueggemann, *God’s Unfailing Word*, and WCAL may all be read in ways that advocate post/anti-supersessionism *and* anti-Zionism. Brueggemann and GUW make their post/anti-supersessionism clear, while more indirectly espousing their anti-Zionism. Conversely, WCAL is clearly anti-Zionist but more circumspect regarding post/anti-supersessionism; its logic allows a post/anti-supersessionist direction despite lingering ambiguity. However, taken together, these three pieces provide evidence that anti-Zionism does not necessarily entail supersessionism, nor does post/anti-supersessionism necessarily require Zionism. It is possible to thread the needle and to be both post/anti-supersessionist *and* anti-Zionist. But more than being a possibility, it is the only way forward to find a lasting peace in the Middle East. Only a post-Holocaust *and* post-Nakba theology can lead to justice and reconciliation. Drawing upon the work of Ateek, Anglican theologian Kwok Pui-Lan writes, “only by acceptance of responsibility, repentance, and restoration of human rights can justice, peace, and reconciliation be achieved.”¹⁴⁵ This responsibility, repentance, and restoration means opposing Christian anti-Judaism and antisemitism *and* affirming the dignity and rights of Palestinians; it means recognizing God’s enduring covenant with the Jewish people *and* recognizing the violence and injustice of settlements and occupation; and it means cultivating positive relationships between Christians and Jews built on “justice, freedom, and equality” for all in the land, as WCAL

¹⁴² See: Kwok Pui-Lan, *The Anglican Tradition from a Postcolonial Perspective* (New York: Seabury, 2023), 20. Kwok asks specifically whether the Anglican Communion “will be a relic of the colonial past or a bridge to the postcolonial future” but this question could also be asked more broadly of Christian theology.

¹⁴³ Cf. Volker Küster, “Intercultural Theology Is a Must,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38, no. 4 (October 2014); Ustorf, Werner, “The Cultural Origins of ‘Intercultural’ Theology,” in *Intercultural Perceptions and Prospects of World Christianity*, eds. Richard Friedli et al. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010); Justo González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 52.

¹⁴⁴ See: Brueggemann, *Chosen?*, 55.

¹⁴⁵ Kwok Pui-Lan, *The Anglican Tradition*, 205.

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suggests.¹⁴⁶ Embracing responsibility, repentance, and restoration means being post/anti-supersessionist *and* anti-Zionist.

¹⁴⁶ See: *Ibidem*, 39.