"Supersessionism":
The Political Origin of a Theological Neologism

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Introduction

In 1972, George Khodr, a prominent Orthodox metropolitan in Lebanon, wrote a report for the World Council of Churches on Eastern Christian "feelings and reactions" to the "Palestine problem."[1] Among many other and varied observations, he raised concern that "a certain Zionist press" had declared "Christian Arabs" to be "enemies of Israel." "It refers," he writes, "not to a simple political feud, in which these Christians are not disunited from their non-Christian compatriots, but to their theological attitude loyal to the Patristic [*sic*] tradition."[2] For Orthodox Arabs such as Khodr, the accusation that fidelity to the fathers—a characteristic claim of Orthodox Christianity especially—made one an enemy of Israel was easily problematic, if not dangerous, as a mischaracterization both of political views and of theological understanding.

It is unclear to what publication Khodr was referring. However, in that same year, A. Roy Eckardt, an American Methodist theologian and "pioneer" of Jewish-Christian relations,[3] published an overview of recent Christian approaches to the State of Israel in *Midstream*, the American, self-designated "Zionist publication"[4] of the Theodore Herzl Foundation.[5] Given *Midstream*'s circulation and the growing geopolitical chasm between the U.S. and Lebanon at the time, one suspects that the

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[1] Metropolitan George Khodr, "The Feelings and Reactions of the Eastern Christian towards Issues Arising from the Palestine Problem" (1972), 4212.07.22/01 Orthodox churches 1965-1978, World Council of Churches Archives.

[2] Khodr, "The Feelings and Reactions," 4.

[3] See Ralph Blumenthal, "Roy Eckardt, 79, a Pioneer in Christian-Jewish Relations," *New York Times*, May 9, 1998. Notably, Eckardt was also a past president and founder of the American Academy of Religion (formerly, the National Association of Biblical Instructors).

[4] "Statement of Purpose," *Midstream* 1.1 (1955): 3.

[5] A. Roy Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives on Israel," *Midstream* 18 (1972): 40-50.

article was unknown to Khodr, but its context, content, and rhetoric are nevertheless of the precise sort that formed the basis of his concerns. In this essay, Eckardt surveys a variety of American and European "perspectives" on Israel. Examining the "more conservative" expressions of those who openly resisted Israel's post-1967 policies, Eckardt draws his readers' attention away from the social, political, legal, or moral objections that these detractors had voiced. Instead, he tells the Zionist publication's readers: these Christians' true "ground for political opposition to Israel" was their adherence to a "traditional" *theological* predisposition, in which "the church, the 'new Israel'" had "taken the place" of "the 'old Israel,' the Jewish people."[6] In other words, Christians who resisted Israel's policies did so, to use Khodr's words, not because of "a simple political feud," but, in Eckardt's characterization, because of their adherence to "traditional" theology. To encapsulate this claim, Eckardt coins an entirely new term: "supersessionism."

Now a half century later, Eckardt's neologism has come to "dominate" the "current scholarly discourse regarding the Church's relationship to the Jewish people."[7] It has served Western theologians well as the chief heuristic device for assessing, and normally rejecting, the "standard theological foundation of the relationship with Judaism" in Christian history.[8] It has engendered a wealth of discussion and debate over the origins of its typical components (e.g., notions that the "church" replaced "Israel" or that the "law" has been "abrogated"), its linguistic roots (e.g., in the Latin *supersedere*), or its various definitions and subcategories. What follows below adds a new dimension by unpacking the origin not of the ostensible components or of the linguistic roots, but of the *neologism itself* as a *heuristic device*—the umbrella category, the taxonomy, the way of reading and labeling theological positions and opponents. Aside from one partial exception,[9] the actual origins of *this* way of categorizing, *this* way of reading, have never entered into the discussion, and that is what we choose to explore here, while also considering some of the effects of the political perspectives in which this theological neologism was forged.

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[6] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 43.

[7] Matthew A. Tapie, "Christ, Torah, and the Faithfulness of God: The Concept of Supersessionism in 'The Gifts and the Calling,'" *SCJR* 12 (2017): 1-18, here 1.

[8] As described in the 2015 statement from the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29)—A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations" 17. For the statement, with commentary, see Philip A. Cunningham, "The Sources behind 'The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4)," *SCJR* 12 (2017): 1-39.

[9] R. Kendall Soulen, "Supersessionism," *Encyclopedia of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Walter Homolka, Rainer Kampling, Amy-Jill Levine, Christoph Markschies, Peter Schäfer and Martin Thurner (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

A Few Clarifications at the Outset

This article proceeds along three primary lines. First, through an examination of the writings of Roy Eckardt, his wife, Alice Eckardt, and their friend and colleague, Franklin Littell, it demonstrates that this categorizing of ancient and modern Christian thinkers under the umbrella of "supersessionism" (along with the label for its proponent, the "supersessionist") originated not in scholarly works of theological history or systematic theology, but in the hostile political environment of burgeoning American Christian support for the State of Israel's military superiority.[10] The rhetoric surrounding these first appearances, we will see below, ensured that the neologisms allowed these authors to diminish the validity of moral, ethical, or political concerns raised by Christians regarding Israel's post-1967 policies by rooting the chief cause of those concerns in an unethical, antiquated, and historic—especially Greek patristic—theology. In other words, it was not the specifics of Israeli policy that comprised the main cause of Christian discontent with the new state, but the underlying and ancient Christian "supersession" of Jews *in toto*. In this way, Christian detraction from Israel was totalized as a product of historic anti-Judaism (or antisemitism) rather than a diverse and worthwhile array of concerns often having little to do with this "traditional" theology.

Second, this article will foreground the way that this tendency to totalize Christian detraction from the State of Israel employed Eastern Christians, Arabs, and church fathers. While each of these figures factors saliently and regularly into the writings under consideration here, they typically function as rhetorical, totalized figures rather than figures governed by the nuances of reality or close textual examinations. To be clear, our focus will *not* be on the figures themselves (Orthodox, Arab, or church father), the characteristics of their approaches to Jews, Jewish practices, Zionism, or the State of Israel, or whether those approaches harbored "anti-Jewish" sentiments that could be designated "supersessionist" according to the term's typical usage. Rather, our focus will be on the totalizing and rhetorical role that each of these played in those writings that first employ "supersessionism" (or "supersessionist") as a category. Our focus, one might say, is not on the varied sets of data, but the origins of a way of *reading* that data.

The third and final part of this article will demonstrate that, in light of their opposition to "traditional" theology and their treatment of Christian Arabs (especially Orthodox) and their "non-Christian compatriots," the Eckardts, Littell, and other likeminded pioneers of American Christian-Jewish relations did not so much overcome the "supersessionism" myth that they identified and rejected as much as they redirected its principal elements toward a new cast of characters. Moreover, given their own explicit and overwhelming personal advocacy for military support

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[10] This essay does not fully explore the entirety of either the Eckardts' or Littell's approaches to Jews, Jewish practices, Zionism, or the State of Israel; rather, it focusses on a specific aspect of those broader approaches—the creation and use of the category of "supersessionism."

for the State of Israel, there came to be little divide between their rhetorical dismissal of those negatively affected by the state and their real support of violence against them.

In light of this exploration, we will conclude by briefly considering the common role played by "supersessionism" as a sort of "gateway" into Jewish-Christian relations for non-Western theologians, especially Orthodox Christians, with the hope of reshaping a historically problematic aspect of Jewish-Christian relations that has tended to confirm, rather than challenge, Orthodox and other Arab Christian hesitancy toward Jewish-Christian dialogue.[11] The present study does not seek to undermine or underappreciate the unprecedented attempts of the Eckardts, Littell, and their contemporaries to undo the drastic effects of historic Christian degradation of Jews. Rather, it draws attention to the negative, and too often neglected, effect that the rhetoric of their theological neologisms had and continues to have on traditions often overlooked in Western interreligious and theological discourse.[12]

The Eckardts, *Midstream*, and Opposition to Arabs Prior to 1972

The decades-long careers of both Roy Eckardt and his wife, Alice, were defined by a persistent dedication to "post-Shoah" theology and the reshaping of Christian approaches toward Jews that fittingly earned them recognition as among the "pioneers" of Jewish-Christian relations. By the late 1960s this commitment to Jewish-Christian relations had become inseparable, for them and for many of their colleagues, from a positive commitment to the State of Israel and regular activism against Arab concerns. While it was the "whirlwind tour of Israel" offered to Roy by the Israeli government in 1966 that firmly pushed their scholarly interests toward this "new direction"[13] of explicit political support, it was nonetheless the Six-Day War of June 1967 especially that led to their increased activities on behalf of Israeli concerns and explicitly against those of Arabs.

Writing back-to-back articles for *The Christian Century* in August 1967—before Alice had herself visited the region[14]—the Eckardts lamented the Christian "silence" to Israel's near destruction in words of a poignantly anti-Arab tone that clearly reflect the government-sponsored nature of Roy's trip the previous year:

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[11] This essay stems from a larger project examining the various historical, theological, and political dimensions of Orthodox Christian participation in Jewish-Christian dialogue, with a particular focus on the Middle East. One such section will be devoted to patristic approaches to Jews—a topic not under consideration in the present essay.

[12] While Arab Orthodox Christians form a major part of the present examination, such is simply a matter of focus and is not meant to distract from the importance or experiences of other Eastern, Orthodox, or non-Arab Christian traditions (e.g., Greek, Slavic, Syriac, Armenian, etc.).

[13] Alice L. Eckardt, "Growing into a Daring and Questioning Faith," in *Faith Transformed: Christian Encounters with Jews and Judaism*, ed. John C. Merkle and Walter J. Harrelson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2003), 17-36, here 22.

[14] See Eckardt, "Growing into a Daring…," 23. This was also Alice's very first publication (see 34, n. 8).

"Palestine/Israel," they affirm, has only ever been the "original homeland" of the Jewish people "and of no other living nation."[15] The "original and continuing cause of the Arab refugee problem and its recent aggravation has been Arab intransigence and hostility" since "Israel tried to convince them to stay" in 1948.[16] Any "refugees" (a term they place in quotes) really only resisted, and therefore fled, "Jewish sophistication, Jewish intransigence, Jewish power."[17] Such was the nature of the Eckardts' totalized view of Arabs: "The one unbreakable bond that unites the Arab peoples is their conviction that Israel deserves to die."[18] This "bond," in other words, was characteristic not of *some* Arab leaders or spokespeople, but of "the Arab peoples" *in toto*.

Though they thus believed that Arab opposition was rooted chiefly in a sort of monolithic and violent hatred of Israel, the focus of the Eckardts' concerns was the reasons why Christians had come to sympathize with Arab causes. Such sympathies, they lamented, were misguided and due to two main reasons: first, a concern for American missionaries "hard at work in Arab lands"[19] and, second and most importantly, because "Christendom," having neglected its own "Hebraic roots"[20] while claiming the mantle of "the *real* Israel,"[21] had "for centuries" taught that "Jews have no ultimate or integral right to exist."[22] The Eckardts did not seriously entertain any of the legal, political, or moral concerns voiced by "Arabs" or "Christians" (terms that for them did not yet overlap[23]). The problem for Arabs, in the Eckardts' view, was a deeply rooted violent tendency; for Christians, a deeply rooted theology. These twin assertions would, in a few short years, form the basis of Roy Eckardt's coining of the term "supersessionism."

Shlomo Katz, the founding editor of *Midstream*, decided almost immediately to reprint the Eckardts' second article in his journal.[24] He undoubtedly recognized that it was in keeping with his publication's general anti-Arab tone over the preceding two decades. Since its founding in 1955, as Emily Katz has shown, *Midstream*'s contributors generally kept in step with its editor's own views and regularly offered essays that patronized, caricatured, and promoted "assumptions

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[15] Originally published as two separate articles in *The Christian Century* on July 26 and August 2, 1967, I cite the compiled reprint in A. Roy and Alice L. Eckardt, "Again, Silence in the Churches," in A. Roy Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 163-177, here 165.

[16] Eckardt, *Elder and Younger...*, 167-68.

[17] Eckardt, *Elder and Younger...*, 171.

[18] Eckardt, *Elder and Younger...*, 170.

[19] Eckardt, *Elder and Younger...*, 171-72.

[20] Eckardt, *Elder and Younger...*, 174.

[21] Eckardt, *Elder and Younger...*, 171, emphasis original.

[22] Eckardt, *Elder and Younger...*, 170.

[23] In a later revision and expansion, they acknowledge the existence of Arab Christians but do little more (see A. Roy Eckardt, *Your People, My People: The Meeting of Jews and Christians* [New York: Quadrangle, 1974], 122-51).

[24] A. Roy and Alice L. Eckardt, "Silence in the Churches," *Midstream* 13 (1967): 27-32.

about Arab backwardness and the unmitigated benefits that Israeli civilization afforded these minority populations." [25] As such, contributors were generally "unwilling to summon empathy of any sort for Arabs,"[26] and, together with other concurrent publications, "generally decried Arabs as, at worst, obstinate aggressors who acted in bad faith, or, at best, pawns in the Soviet Union's cynical game of geopolitical chess."[27]

Around the same time that the Eckardts' 1967 article appeared in *Midstream*, Shlomo Katz wrote to Roy Eckardt to ask him to contribute "a personal examination of what Israel means."[28] And Eckardt's contribution five months later—the first of at least three more contributions to *Midstream*—does precisely that. While this article does not quite carry the virulence of the earlier articles, Eckardt nonetheless again foregrounds the seemingly natural affinity between the theologically rooted "annihilationist designs" of fellow Christians and the "cancer of exterminationism that pervades the Arab world."[29] By the end of the 1960s, the Eckardts were making their central point abundantly clear for both Christian and Jewish audiences: Christian historic hostility toward Jews had left the Christian soul open and unrefined, in danger of being metabolized into an "Arab sympathizer."[30] As such, any "socio-political" concerns for Palestinian rights and refugees, as Alice Eckardt would later say with shocking forthrightness, were "essentially beside the point."[31] If, in the Eckardts' view, the real problem is with a historic Christian theological predisposition, the need to address other concerns becomes far less important. What they are still lacking, however, is a precise label by which to describe this theological predisposition.

A trip to the Middle East together in 1969 seems to have tempered the Eckardts' generally totalized views of Arabs slightly, but by no means significantly. While they show some concern for Palestinian refugees (without quotes, this time) in their 1969 report of this journey,[32] they assert that such suffering was nonetheless a byproduct of an otherwise and entirely just cause that had been exacerbated by the Arab failure to "bring themselves to recognize" the beneficial "achievements" brought by Israel's victory in 1967.[33] And while they, for the first time,

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[25] Emily Alice Katz, "'A Questioning of the Jewish Status Quo': *Midstream*, Shlomo Katz, and American Zionist Letters at Midcentury," *Jewish History* 29 (2015): 57-96, here 70-71.

[26] Katz, "A Questioning…," 71.

[27] Katz, "A Questioning…," 82, describing an anti-Arab tendency shared by *Jewish Frontier* and *American Zionist*, but less so by *Commentary* (see 87-88).

[28] A. Roy Eckardt, "Eretz Israel: A Christian Affirmation," *Midstream* 14.3 (1968): 9-12, here 9.

[29] Eckardt, "Eretz Israel," 11.

[30] See Roy Eckardt's defense of this term in Eckardt, *Your People*, 174, n. 8. Otherwise, see A. Roy Eckardt, "The Jewish-Christian Encounter," *CCAR Journal* 15 (1968): 22-30.

[31] Alice L. Eckardt, "The Enigma of Christian Hostility to Israel," *Women's League Outlook* 42 (1972): 5-7 and 24-25, here 7.

[32] A. Roy and Alice L. Eckardt, "The Tragic Unity of Enemies: A Report from the Middle East," *The Christian Century* 86 (1969): 73-76. Alice describes this eight-week trip elsewhere as well ("Growing into a Daring…," 23-24).

[33] See Eckardts, "The Tragic Unity," 73.

acknowledge the concerns of local Christians,[34] Roy Eckardt, in a later reworking of this same report, backtracks, suggesting that "stressing Arab rights" too much risks "a strengthening of those forces and interests that are bent upon the destruction of the Jews and Israel."[35] In the end, the *only* way, he argues, for "Arab sympathizers" to "heal the Arab world of its powerful impulse to self-destruction" and to "preclude the terrible eventuality that future generations will have to remember Arabs along with Nazis as the wholesale slaughterers of Jews in the twentieth century" is for Christians to hold to "a categorical insistence upon the ethnic and national rights of the Jews of Israel."[36] In other words, Christians must overcome their historic theology that, seemingly exclusively, had precluded them from both recognizing the virtue of the State of Israel and "healing" the Arabs' pervasive tendency, in Roy Eckardt's explicit view, toward self-inflicted violence. Eckardt's assessment of the State of Israel's various detractors thus regularly comprised both a sweeping generalization of historic Christian theology and a totalized view of Arabs; what he did not posit, so far, was a term by with which to label that theology.

Roy Eckardt's Neologism and "Traditional" Christianity

When Roy Eckardt returned to *Midstream*'s pages in 1972, he offered a contribution ("Christian Perspectives on Israel") that would prove monumental for Jewish-Christian relations and the study of early Christian thought in ways likely little anticipated by him and little recognized still. His article examines a range of Christian perspectives, liberal and conservative, Catholic and Protestant. While the perspectives that he explores are varied, the chief object of his opposition is nonetheless, once again, Christians, who since 1967, in Eckardt's view, had stood guilty of a quadripartite crime: "anti-Judaism," "antisemitism," "anti-Zionism," and "anti-Israelism."[37]

The sense in which Eckardt uses these terms—including the individual meanings, but, more to the point, the nature of the link between them—was, at the time, remarkably recent (if not entirely unprecedented).[38] While both Eckardt's use of these ideas and their prior history warrant their own extended discussion, it is most important, for now, only to note that Eckardt understands the phenomenon of *Christian* antisemitism not merely as a specific manifestation of wider racial, economic, or social opposition toward Jews (as, for example, Zionist forefathers like

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[34] Eckardts, "The Tragic Unity," 74-75.
[35] Eckardt, *Your People*, 177.
[36] Eckardt, *Your People*, 177.
[37] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 40-41.
[38] In fact, Eckardt himself recognized the novelty of his language in 1971; see A. Roy Eckardt, "The Nemesis of Christian Antisemitism," *Journal of Church and State* 13 (1971): 227-44, here 234, and "Anti-Israelism, Anti-Semitism and the Quakers," *Christianity and Crisis* 31 (1971): 180-86, here 180. It is unclear which of these two articles came first, but note the important linguistic difference. Cf. A. Roy Eckardt, "The Devil and Yom Kippur," *Midstream* 20 (1974): 67-75, here 67.

Moses Hess or Theodore Herzl had argued[39]) but as a unique manifestation of *theological* views—that is, of "anti-Judaism."[40] Eckardt similarly characterizes Christian "anti-Zionism" and "anti-Israelism" (both of which are terms that had undergone significant linguistic changes in 1948) as the results of the umbrella concept of "anti-Judaism" (and the antisemitism to which it had given rise) rather than results of ethical, political, or legal objections.[41] In Eckardt's view, "Christian attitudes to Israel, many of which are hostile, must be understood in continuity with the long tradition of Christendom's antipathy toward Jews and the persecution of Jews."[42] Once again, other issues are "essentially beside the point"[43] when the chief issue is theological ("anti-Judaism").

Roy Eckardt first turns to address liberal Protestant Christianity (especially Unitarians), whose casting off of "traditional" Christianity should have led them also to cast off antisemitism/anti-Judaism, but it had not.[44] Next, Eckardt turns toward "more conservative" Protestant Christians, whom he accuses of "theologizing" the "political domain of erstwhile Palestine," by which he means a "resort to Christian religious judgments and scriptural passages in order to question and even to negate Zionist and Israeli claims."[45] The first of his two lightning rods here is a spring 1968 statement from American missionaries in Beirut. While the statement does not appear to have been widely published or noticed,[46] it is tremendously important for Eckardt, so we will briefly review the original statement before continuing with Eckardt's use thereof.

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[39] Moses Hess in *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862); Theodore Herzl in *The Jewish State* (1896).

[40] While not entirely unknown in preceding decades, this view gained exponential traction in the 1960s and 70s, most notably with the publication of Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

[41] Eckardt misleadingly uses an article from Edward H. Flannery ("Anti-Zionism and the Christian Psyche," *JES* 6 [1969]: 173-84) in order to bolster his emphasis on "anti-Judaism" as the cause of antisemitism, but Flannery had posited the former as only *one* possible cause of the latter (see 181 and 183). Nonetheless, Flannery would later change his position: Compare Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 60-61 and the revision of the same section in *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*, Rev. and updated (New York: Paulist, 1985), 62-64.

[42] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 40. The novelty of this language is evidenced by the fact that, in a 1974 revised and expanded version of their 1967 articles above, the Eckardts add the word "anti-Judaism" as a totalizing term to encapsulate the Christian position which they seek to oppose (it was not in the original); see Eckardt, *Your People*, 122-51, here 151 (this revision encompasses other articles as well). Compare Roy Eckardt's distinction between "anti-Judaism" and "anti-Semitism" early in his career in *Christianity and the Children of Israel* (Morningside Heights, NY: King's Crown, 1948), xii-xiii.

[43] Eckardt, "The Enigma," 7.

[44] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 41.

[45] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 42.

[46] See Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 50, n. 10. I cannot find the statement printed anywhere besides *Monday Morning*, a small Presbyterian magazine for ministers, which is the version I cite below: "The Continuing Middle East Crisis," *Monday Morning* 33 (September 23, 1968): 3-6. Eckardt himself only cites an original copy from the authors' file in Beirut.

These missionaries offer seven points with the explicit purpose of helping American Christians better understand the "Middle East crisis."[47] First, they combat a series of "stereotypes" of Palestinian Arabs as uneducated, technologically inept, wandering nomads who failed to see the benefits of the land until Israel first made the "desert bloom."[48] Second and third, they stress the need to listen to the "facts" and "feelings" from "both sides," such as the Arab evidence against the notion that they had left in 1948 "of their own free will."[49] Fourth, the authors question the notion that "might makes right"—whether for Israel itself or for the "many Christians" who believed its military victories were evidence of "God's grace."[50] In the fifth point they challenge the "assumption" that Israel's land-gain in 1967 "represents the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy" (at the time, a growing assertion in American Evangelical circles).[51] Sixth, they remind their readers of the Christian obligation "to minister to the last, the least, and the lost of this world."[52] Their final point stresses the need not only to "bind up wounds but to prevent new ones" by supporting, for example, the UN resolution demanding Israel's withdrawal from its 1967 gains, while "wondering" whether "political and economic pressures" should now be employed in order to persuade Israel to abide by the UN resolution.

Whatever the statement's ostensible "balance" or lack thereof, it clearly raises cultural, historical, political, moral, and social concerns in regard to Christian support for Israel's administration and military superiority since 1967 *(not* 1948). But Eckardt characterizes it exclusively as a *theologically* motivated attempt to delegitimize Zionism and the State of Israel itself (not merely its post-1967 policies).[53] The only portion he quotes comes from the fifth point, though he misleadingly introduces it with the authors' fourth point. Here is his presentation, complete with his own ellipses and bracketed phrases:

> Isn't it too simple to assume that [the military action of Israel] is a manifestation of God's grace?

[47] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 3.

[48] "The Continuing Middle East Crisis," 3. The Eckardts and other likeminded pioneers of American Jewish-Christian relations, such as Edward Flannery, John Oesterreicher, and Franklin Littell, each promoted a version of these stereotypes. For the Eckardts, see above; for Littell, Oesterreicher and Flannery, see below.

[49] "The Continuing Middle East Crisis," 4. This myth was largely abandoned in Israeli society a few years later, but at the time was widely held, including by the same American "pioneers" in the previous note. On the change in Israeli society, see Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "Origins of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: Changes in the Historical Memory of Israelis/Jews 1949-2004," *Journal of Peace Research* 48 (2011): 235-48.

[50] "The Continuing Middle East Crisis," 5.

[51] "The Continuing Middle East Crisis," 5.

[52] "The Continuing Middle East Crisis," 5-6.

[53] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 42. For a wider account of the complex history and political effects (or lack thereof) of Protestant missionary interaction with Zionists and Zionism, see David Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 117-138.

… [We] must challenge the assumption that the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem, and indeed of large portions of Palestine, represents the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament does speak of the return of Israel to the promised land, but Christians should remember three things: (1) the great prophetic voices in the Old Testament…constantly warned Israel that a gracious God would judge severely any injustice his chosen people committed; (2) by the end of the Old Testament period such promises of return were understood as part of the action of *God* at the very end of history rather than of men within history; and (3) the New Testament understands the whole Old Testament experience as having been transposed into a new key by the coming of Jesus Christ: so that the Church is the new "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). If Jesus made it clear that God is to be worshiped neither on Mt. Gerizim nor in Jerusalem (John 4:21) [a misquotation, by the way[54]], can Christians believe that God's promise is fulfilled by the occupation of Palestine by the modern political state of Israel? What do we mean when we sing, "Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel?"[55]

Eckardt immediately follows with a second lightning rod:

The contention of the Beirut group was given renewed voice in a sermon on Palm Sunday, 1972 by Edward L. R. Elson, Chaplain of the U.S. Senate and former head of the anti-Israeli organization American Friends of the Middle East.[56] In seeking to rebuke Christians who allegedly find a fulfillment of prophecy in current administration of Jerusalem, Elson told his hearers that the Christian church is "the new Israel of God."[57]

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the original account of Elson's sermon, so I am unable to compare it to Eckardt's summary. However, suffice it to say that Eckardt's report is not firsthand (and probably not even secondhand), nor terribly balanced, as he relies on the account given in the *Near East Report*—the newsletter distributed by the decidedly pro-Israel lobby group, AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), to members of congress and other Washington notables.[58]

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[54] Eckardt's footnote reads: "Jesus is actually reported by John as saying, "the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father" ("Christian Perspectives," 50, n. 9). Why Eckardt calls this a "misquotation" is unclear, since the statement is not even claiming to have quoted Jesus, but merely paraphrasing what most biblical scholars accept to have been the case.

[55] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 42.

[56] This was an erstwhile pro-Arab organization with which, it appears, the CIA was involved. See Hugh Wilford, "American Friends of the Middle East: The CIA, US Citizens, and the Secret Battle for American Public Opinion in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947–1967," *JAS* 51 (2017): 93-116.

[57] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 42-43.

[58] *Near East Report* (March 29, 1972). See also the subsequent issue (April 5, 1972), which reports on the Christian reactions to the Palm Sunday sermons. On the *Near East Report*, see John L. Moore, ed., *The Washington Lobby*, 3rd ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1979), 143. For another description of this Palm Sunday event and the response from Christians Concerned for Israel (to be

One need not to defend or even sympathize with either the "Beirut group's" statement[59] or Elson's in order to recognize that Eckardt cites two American Presbyterian statements (though he does not mention that affiliation) and examines both as if they are exclusively *theological* objections to Israel. Even further, he obscures the fact that these statements were *responses* to a specific theological claim by characterizing the point to which they were each responding (Christian belief that 1967 was the fulfillment of prophecy) as "alleged." As Eckardt himself will acknowledge in the same article, this phenomenon was, by 1972, hardly "alleged."[60] After all, another Presbyterian, Nelson Bell (founder and editor of *Christianity Today,* as well as Billy Graham's father-in-law), had written on July 21, 1967, "That for the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible."[61] Such was even more thoroughly confirmed by the 1500-person conference *Christianity Today* held in Jerusalem in 1971, which was attended by both David Ben-Gurion and Zvi Werblowsky (a prominent scholar and periodic advisor to the Ministry of Religious Affairs) and focused on the connection between biblical prophecy and Israel's six-day victory.[62] Yet, in Eckardt's overall rendering, this was not an inner-Christian debate, in which the Beirut authors or Elson had waded into theological waters regarding biblical prophecy and its fulfillment in the church *because* fellow Christians had affirmed those same prophecies on behalf of Israel's military victories. It was not a debate in which theology was one aspect of otherwise worthy social, political, or other concerns—whatever the quality of that theology. It was, rather, an exclusively theologically motivated—seemingly *ex nihilo*—attempt to delegitimize Israel itself (rather than merely challenge its post-1967 policies).

Having thus established the seemingly and theologically *sui generis* nature of Christian opposition to the State of Israel, Eckardt introduces an entirely novel term, immediately following:

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addressed below), see Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 159-60.

[59] An "open letter" from the same "Beirut group" a year later is far more castigating of Israel's actions. Nonetheless, even there they attempt to be "evenhanded" (lamenting, for example, the presence of "bigoted anti-Jewish propaganda pamphlets"). For the full version, see "Middle East Crisis Continues," *Monday Morning* 34 (September 22, 1969): 3–6, and for the Eckardts' characterization of the statement, see *Encounter with Israel*, 257.

[60] Sources on this phenomenon abound. See, e.g., Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), or, more recently but with different emphases, Jason Olson, *America's Road to Jerusalem: The Impact of the Six-Day War on Protestant Politics* (Lanham: Lexington, 2018).

[61] L. Nelson Bell, "A Layman and His Faith: Unfolding Destiny," *Christianity Today*, July 21, 1967.

[62] See Olson, *America's Road*, 112-14. Cf. Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 45.

Here are spokesmen who intrude theological *supersessionism* into the political domain. The fact that the church, the 'new Israel,' has taken the place, allegedly, of the 'old Israel,' the Jewish people, becomes the ground for political opposition to Israel.[63]

After offering *Midstream*'s readers this neologism, Eckardt displays again his earlier tendency to view "traditional" theology as a sort of impetus that had allowed Christians to become "Arab sympathizers." This "Christian traditionalist-negative stance toward the Jewish people" (as he later describes it[64]) had enabled these Christians to share the goal of Israel's enemies:

The surface insistence that theology is to judge politics is a cloak for other purposes. Reputedly Christian reasoning has become, in fact, an ideology to justify and advance a specific political program: the forcible transfer of land to the foes of Israel.[65]

Concluding this section soon after with reference to a French Christian publication, *Témoignage chrétien* (though he neither quotes nor cites anything specific from it),[66] he more clearly specifies his understanding of the more traditional "Christian right," claiming that "traditional supersessionist theology"—which he now defines as the belief that "the church is the fresh, spiritual 'new Israel' replacing the outmoded, evil 'old Israel'"—had combined with a leftist "condemnation of Zionism and Israel."[67] For Eckardt, this newly designated "supersessionist theology" is neither temporal nor simply a product of contemporary circumstances; it is cosmic; it is "traditional." It is, in his characterization, not a theological *response* to prophetically rooted *Christian* support for Israel, but "*the* ground" from which springs a uniquely Christian opposition *to Israel itself*. With Eckardt's assertions, within a self-described "Zionist publication" with an established history of anti-Arab rhetoric, it is no wonder that someone in Metropolitan Khodr's position raises the concern that Christian Arabs were being portrayed as "enemies of Israel" not because of "a simple political feud," but because of their devotion to ancient Christian traditions.[68] Eckardt indeed casts "traditional" Christianity in little else than a villainous role and, in this particular article, overlooks entirely the actual perspectives

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[63] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 43. Emphasis mine.

[64] *Your People*, 110.

[65] "Christian Perspectives," 43. Eckardt later revises the language in such a way that makes his point about "the hidden but real intention of the Beirut churchmen" even stronger (*Your People,* 111).

[66] The only citation he gives is his own, unpublished talk the previous March: "The Churches, Anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust." There is a chapter by the same name that appears two years later in *Your People* (7-28), which one can assume is the published version of the talk, but he does not quote *Témoignage chrétien* there either.

[67] Eckardt, "Christian Perspectives," 43.

[68] Khodr, "The Feelings and Reactions," 4.

of Arabs, Christian or otherwise, except to identify them as the real cause of "so-called Israeli militarism."[69]

When Eckardt later turns in the same article to "evangelical literalism," he is no longer on the extreme attack. While he clearly rejects their desire (no longer "alleged") to interpret/justify the State of Israel through a prophetic/eschatological lens, he does not, on the whole, condemn them, perhaps *because* their political support of Israel had made their theology less problematic for now.[70] Similarly, when he turns to the "theological justifications for the State of Israel" espoused by Catholic thinkers like John Oesterreicher and Edward Flannery (whom we will address below), he does so with trepidation, holding that such positions, while largely laudable, nonetheless risk imposing "a double standard" on Israel that may diminish or obscure the "objective historical, moral, and juridical considerations" that are the "primary elements in the support for Israel that are increasingly affirmed and shared by Catholics, Protestants, and others" who unite with "those who speak from the standpoint of secular-ethical authentication and of international law."[71] Eckardt concludes the essay by again reemphasizing that, whatever one's "spiritual" views in regard to its people or historic founding, Israel stands with "historical and moral" justification.[72] And it is thus to its founding, and toward its people, that the Christian must react with "celebration" and "thanksgiving" "because their Jesus Christ was and remains a Jew."[73]

Franklin Littell's Neologism and the "Greekness" of Christianity

After Roy Eckardt coined the term "supersessionism," its rise in Jewish-Christian/Israeli-American relations as the chief descriptor for the "traditional" Christian views of Jews did not quickly reach beyond his circle of family and friends.[74] Two years later, Alice Eckardt uses the concept to describe Christianity's "genocidal" tendency—"if not for racial genocide for Jews, then for religious genocide through conversion"[75]—which had caused Christianity to see itself as the "new Israel," thereby entailing "the death of the 'old Israel'" and comprising *the* reason why more Christians did not rally to support Israel in June 1967, the potential moment

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[69] "Christian Perspectives," 44.
[70] The Eckardts' critique of this sort of "Christian Zionism" becomes clearer later: see Alice and Roy Eckardt, "The Achievements and Trials of Interfaith," *Judaism* 27 (1978): 318-23, here 320.
[71] See "Christian Perspectives," 47-49, here quoting 49 and 47. Eckardt is speaking primarily of the members of Christians Concerned for Israel, to whom we will return below (see also n. 58 above).
[72] "Christian Perspectives," 49. Cf. Eckardts, "The Achievements," 320.
[73] "Christian Perspectives," 49.
[74] Cf. David Nicholls, "Modifications and Movements," *JTS* 25 (1974): 393-417, here 397-98, which employs the term, but with a meaning entirely unrelated to Eckardt's, as if Nicholls too was coining it.
[75] Alice L. Eckardt, "The Holocaust: Christian and Jewish Responses," *JAAR* 42 (1974): 453-69, here 454.

of a "second Holocaust."[76] But besides the Eckardts, few would have more success in promoting this basic narrative than their friend and fellow pioneer in Jewish-Christian relations and "post-Shoah" theology, Franklin Littell.

A strong advocate for a Jewish state (notably even before 1948), Littell founded Christians Concerned for Israel shortly after the Six-Day War (later to be succeeded by the still-active National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel). Like Roy Eckardt, he despised the American missions center in Beirut, noting that it had become "nothing but a pumping station for Arab League/Muslim Holy War propaganda for the destruction of Israel and the Jews."[77] Accordingly, as we will see further below, the image of "the Arab" that he regularly put on display was consistent with, if not even more negative than, that of the Eckardts and *Midstream* above: Arabs regularly appear in his writings as violent, Communist-directed pawns who had wrongly garnered the sympathy of liberal Christians.[78] And the reason that so many Christians had fallen for Arab propaganda was for him, as it was for the Eckardts, the "traditional" Christian view of Jews and Judaism.

Despite the fact that his works generally reveal an unfamiliarity with late-antique Christian thought—he claims for example that Nicea "set off the 'Old Testament,'" as opposed to the "New Testament," and thereby set "in place" the "superseding myth, which already carries the genocidal undertone,"[79] when Nicea did not at all deal with the issue of canonicity, never mind the other inaccuracies implicit in this statement—Littell regularly totalizes and blames the patristic period for offering to Christianity an antisemitic, "superseding" view of Jews to which Nazis, Arabs, and their Christian sympathizers would eventually hold.[80] As he shows in his most well-known work, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (1975), there are few reasons for Christian "anti-Zionism"—the "new code word for Antisemitism"[81]—beyond this ancient "*superseding* or displacement myth," which had for millennia declared that "the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Jesus Christ, that 'the old Israel' was written off with the appearance of 'the new Israel.'"[82]

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[76] A. Eckardt, "The Holocaust," 464, with reference to Emil L Fackenheim, *Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1968). Despite Eckardt's implication, Fackenheim did not share her "supersessionist" vocabulary, though he did share the general idea (see *Quest for Past…*, 23).

[77] Franklin H. Littell, "Reflections on a Visit to Israel," *The Reconstructionist* 36 (February 1970): 7-12, here 10.

[78] Littel makes this link amid Arabs, Communists, and misled Christians throughout his works. See, e.g., Franklin H. Littell, "Historical Reflection: The Holocaust and Beyond" (Speech at Eastern College, 1985), TLITFZ201307000204, Subseries 12.5: Speeches, lectures, and article manuscripts, 1938-2006, Franklin H. Littell Papers, Temple University, 6-8.

[79] Littell, "Historical Reflection," 4.

[80] See, esp., Franklin H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 24-43, where Littell, unlike the Eckardts, at least directly cites some early Christian sources.

[81] Littell, *The Crucifixion*, 97.

[82] Littell, *The Crucifixion*, 2. Emphasis mine. This develops the same point regarding the "superseding theory" that Littell had explored earlier in "Christendom, Holocaust and Israel: The Importance for Christians of Recent Major Events in Jewish History," *JES* 10 (1973): 483-97.

In his 1982 "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust" (an essay originally presented at a Jerusalem conference on Nazism), Littell provides, akin to the Eckardts, a groundbreaking way to label and reify the notion that Christian resistance to Israel was a misguided enterprise, rooted in both an unfortunate adherence to church fathers and misdirected sympathies with Arabs, with no legitimate political or ethical basis.[83] Overall, he seeks to show in this essay how Christianity can "become credible again."[84] His chief concern is liberal Protestantism, which had, in his view, been deceived by Communists and the recent attempt of refugees in the "Near East" to "create a 'Palestinian' identity" (we will return later to his use of quotation marks here).[85] And more specifically at fault is the liberal tendency toward "universalism," which, as Littell explains, is rooted in the "Greek" ideas with which the gentile fathers had tainted Christianity's Jewish roots and thereby dismantled the particularity of the Jewish people.[86] This triumph of Greek universalism over Jewish particularity came with (or led to) accusations of deicide[87] and the notion that "with the New Dispensation the historic mission of the Jewish people is ended. They are to scatter, wither away and disappear from history. The 'New Israel' has superseded the old."[88] The patristic writers "took over" the Jewish Scriptures, promulgated a "radical break between the age of the Jews and the age of the Church,"[89] and thereby created the "superseding theory" that disregarded Jewish history entirely. For one who remains faithful to this way of thinking, recent events present a challenge: "To the supersessionist," he summarizes, "both the Holocaust and a restored Israel are unintelligible."[90] Here Littell offers a neologism, "the supersessionist," the concrete exponent of Eckardt's "supersessionism." Though Cyprian, a Latin writer—and a notably unique one at that—is the only patristic authority that Littell cites (in a discussion primarily of *Greek* ideas),[91] for him, all are equally guilty in providing the foundation of later Christian resistance to the State of Israel.

The *restored* State of Israel has, according to Littell, once and for all put to bed the "Greek-philosophical" view of history and its "old myth of Jewish decline and disappearance" that had viewed Jews as a "fossil."[92] Christians who fail to recognize this are guilty of the "terrorist weapon, political Antisemitism [*sic*]," to which

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[83] Franklin H. Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," in *Papers Presented to the International Symposium on Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National-Socialism (1919–1945)*, ed. Jacob Katz (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel, 1982), 455-83.
[84] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 455.
[85] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 456.
[86] See, Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 457-60.
[87] See Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 462.
[88] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 463.
[89] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 464.
[90] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 465.
[91] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 462-63.
[92] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 466-67.

their "centuries of theological and cultural antisemitism" had led.[93] Thus, for Christians to become credible again they must abandon their triumphalist ways (which, along with "supersessionism," is the real problem for Littell).[94] They must acknowledge and come to terms with the Holocaust, particularly the Christian involvement; they must reject universalism (which was, for Littell, the "Greek" legacy of the patristic era) and recognize the particularity of the Jewish people; they must acknowledge Christianity's own roots in Judaism. And most especially, they must support the State of Israel—that is, the "reborn Israel"—and avoid the temptation toward "even-handedness."[95] Consistent with the Eckardts, for Littell, Christian resistance to Israel's policies was rooted in a poor, traditional, and "Greek" theology; he does not seriously consider other reasons.

The Political Roots of "Supersessionism": A Summary

The *ideas* often denoted by the term "supersessionism" (e.g., that the "church" has replaced "Israel") are rooted in writings long before the twentieth century, and its nominal (supersession) and verbal (to supersede) counterparts had appeared before 1972, for example among Protestants who had "superseded" Jewish fidelity to Torah and, though surprisingly rarely acknowledged, other Christians (i.e., Roman Catholics).[96] But the *way of categorizing*—the "-ism" in which the "-ist" believes, the newly identified "traditional doctrine" and totalizing heuristic device for assessing and rejecting historic and contemporary Christian teaching on Jews— originated amid the heresiological and political concerns of Roy and Alice Eckardt and Franklin Littell. The line of reasoning which led to the creation of this taxonomy is rooted not in theological scholarship that entails a close reading of ancient texts, but in a quite specific chain of events: 1) the Eckardts' and Littell's strong reactions to 2) fellow (American Protestant) Christians, who themselves had reacted to 3) the growing body of Evangelical Christians who, because they saw new and exciting evidence of biblical prophecy and God's ongoing covenantal fidelity to his people, justified and exulted in 4) Israel's clear demonstration of military superiority in and administrative policies after the Six-Day War.

In this environment, the neologisms debut as tools *not* to demonstrate (for their opponents assert otherwise) but *in order to reify* the claim that Christian objection to the State of Israel (rather than to the prophetically/biblically based approval of its post-1967 policies) was rooted above all in a "traditional" condemnation of the

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[93] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 468.

[94] See Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 480.

[95] Littell, "Christian Antisemitism and the Holocaust," 481.

[96] See, e.g., H. Christopher, "On Instrumental Music in Churches of Christ," *Lard's Quarterly* 4 (1867): 349-68, here 353. For brief examinations of the linguistic precursors to "supersessionism," which I am not offering above, see, e.g., Soulen, "Supersessionism"; Terence L. Donaldson, "Supersessionism and Early Christian Self-Definition," *JJMJS* 3 (2016): 1-32; or Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 9-24.

Jewish people as a whole. It was this "traditional" theology, rather than salient political, legal, or ethical concerns, that effected a uniquely *Christian* resistance that enabled the Christian to share the nefarious goals of Israel's Arab enemies. Since, for the Eckardts and Littell (and here, they are not alone), Israel was in the right morally, historically, legally, politically, socially and in many other ways of speaking, Christian resistance *must* be theological.[97] What is not opposed as an "Arab front" or deception by "Arab propaganda" is opposed as bad theology.[98]

The Rhetorical Figures of Arabs, Eastern Christians, and Church Fathers

The chief objects of the Eckardts' and Littell's criticisms in the texts considered here (and several of their other writings) are European/American Christians whose "supersessionism" had left the door open to misguided sympathies with Israel's enemies. "Arabs" themselves, however, function as little more than rhetorical figures distanced from the nuances of reality. They do not amount to much more than ignorant rejectionists whose tendency toward violence allowed them to be dragged along by Communists while mischievously molding the theologically predisposed American Christian into an "Arab sympathizer." The accompanying terms that each of these pioneers themselves use to describe Arabs unfortunately add a dark dimension to their stalwart defense of Jews and a Jewish state in the decades following the Shoah. And still worse when one turns to the manner in which they handled the nuances of *Palestinians*—particularly Littell,[99] who was wont to place "Palestinian" in quotes, who suggested that "Palestinians" were demographically comprised of *post*-Zionist Arab immigrants who thereby had no longstanding tie to the land[100] (thus not really "refugees"[101]), and who held that "Palestine," as a political concept, was "entirely a myth, a product of propagandists of the PLO and their supporters and fellow-travellers [*sic*]."[102] One's concern for the State of Israel or for revising historic Christian teaching after the Shoah does not have to come with a regular dismissal of Palestinian history and interests, but for these American pioneers, it did.

Their considerations of Arab and Palestinian Christians themselves, insofar as they were explicitly acknowledged at all, likewise tended more toward rhetoric

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[97] In addition to the many examples above, see Eckardts, "The Achievements," 320.

[98] Cf. the Eckardts' description of the Americans for Middle East Understanding (founded in 1967) in "The Achievements," 321.

[99] Cf., e.g., Eckardts, "Tragic Unity of Enemies," 75.

[100] See Littell, "Historical Reflection" 5-6, where he favorably cites Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984). Peters' work was roundly rejected by the majority of the scholarly (including Israeli) community, but it was quite impactful for those in the anti-Palestinian movement like Littell. Shortly before her death in 2015, Prime Minister Netanyahu called Peters to praise her for all she had done "for Israel" (Ron Grossman, "Joan Caro, author of controversial book on Israel, dies at 78," *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 2015).

[101] See, e.g., Littell, "Christian Antisemitism," 456 above. He elsewhere speaks of Palestinian "refugees" with quotes but of Jewish refugees (from Arab nations) with none ("Reflections on a Visit," 7).

[102] See Littell, "Historical Reflection," 6.

than reality. In 1992, Littell asserted, in his regular column for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, that the claim to be a "Palestinian Christian" was little different from the "Deutsche Christian" movement and attempt to make Jesus Aryan.[103] He referred to Christianity in the Holy Land in 1970 as "repulsive, coming from the very lowest level of Christendom" holding that it would be "gain for Christianity pure and undefiled if the [Israeli] government would simply expel the 'Christian' money-changers and bigots from the country" (though, notably, he spoke more positively of European and American Christians residing there).[104] When it came to Eastern, particularly Orthodox, Christianity, to which the majority of Arab Christians hold, these writers react either with disdain (especially Littell) or shocking oversight (especially the Eckardts). Littell more than once agreed with the notion (expressed at a 1910 meeting of American and European missionaries) that had the "Church of Syria" been more faithful,[105] it would never have had to suffer the dominance of Islam and ensuing reduction to the "little fossilized remains of Christian communities" that it had become.[106] Roy Eckardt's introduction to his own edited 1970 collection, *Christianity in Israel* (remarkably comprised exclusively of European and Israeli, notably governmental, sources[107]), says nothing of the Orthodox, the largest single block of local Christians.[108] Perhaps he considered such oversight to be justified, since he elsewhere does not include Orthodox Christianity as among "the two main branches of Christianity" and asserts that its future relations with Jews did not "look very promising."[109]

Though their own views of patristic thinkers as principle villains in the Jewish-Christian saga may not have been the cause of their low regard for Orthodox Christianity, it assuredly did not help, and scholars even still notably lament Orthodox

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[103] Franklin H. Littell, "Lest We Forget #636: The Aryan Jesus" (typescript, Philadelphia, April 15, 1992), Temple University. "Lest We Forget" was a weekly column that Littell wrote for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Thus, these claims were meant for a wide audience.

[104] Littell, "Reflections on a Visit," 9-10. Littell would repeat similar views in 1984 as well: "the Christian presence 'in the Holy Land' is scarcely representative of Christianity at its best." Franklin H. Littell, "Teaching the Holocaust and Its Lessons," *JES* 21 (1984): 531-35, here 533. This context has to do with Holocaust education/scholarship in Israel, where he also remarks on the misuse of the Holocaust among "a type of right-wing Israeli politics."

[105] See, e.g., Littell, "Christianity and Totalitarianism" (speech at Glenview Community Church, Glenview, IL, 1965), TLITFZ201310000219, Subseries 12.5: Speeches, lectures, and article manuscripts, 1938-2006, Franklin H. Littell Papers, Temple University, 3 and "Like a Mighty Stream" (speech at the Conference on "The Instinct for Righteousness," Houston, 1985), TLITFZ201504000014, Subseries 12.5: Speeches, lectures, and article manuscripts, 1938-2006, Franklin H. Littell Papers, Temple University, 2. He seems to have viewed the state of the nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox Church and the later rise of Communism similarly. See, e.g., Littell, "Christianity and Totalitarianism," 4.

[106] "Like a Mighty Stream," 2. Littell is summarizing the 1830s assessment of the American Board of Commissioners, and he uses the same point in a variety of places. See, e.g., Franklin H. Littell, "The Holocaust and the Christians," *Journal of Church and State* 41 (1999): 725-38, here 729.

[107] A. Roy Eckardt, ed., *Christianity in Israel* (New York: American Academic Association for Peace in the Middle East, 1971).

[108] Eckardt, ed., *Christianity in Israel*, 2.

[109] See *Your People*, 189 and footnote. Interestingly, Eckardt here admits that it is "unwarranted" to ignore Orthodox Christianity in interreligious discussions.

devotion to patristic literature as an assumed reason why Orthodox Christian-Jewish dialogue has not reached a standard more acceptable to Western Christianity.[110] Yet, for all of the culpability that these pioneers place on the church fathers, they do not betray much knowledge of patristic literature at all. They are, like Arabs and Eastern Christians, chiefly rhetorical figures. Roy Eckardt, for example, examines the "foundations of Christian antisemitism" in the early period while depending *entirely* on secondary citations of patristic writers.[111] Not even in his doctoral thesis—which Alice Eckardt later remembered as bringing both of them "face to face with the *Adversus Judaeos* history" that inspired their "new thinking" in order to overcome "traditional theology"[112]—does he cite any patristic writers, but rather offers a blanket summary that they *all* "denounced the Jewish religion as a work of the Devil and said Jews were destined for eternal torment in hell."[113] Littell, likewise, offers no evidence that his understanding of patristic literature went beyond an introductory level[114] and his generalizations of patristic writings are only slightly less sweeping than Eckardt's.[115] Despite claims to summarize the "the thinking of the church fathers" and to draw that "thinking" directly to "gas ovens and crematoria,"[116] the "church father" for these pioneers remained little more than a "rhetorical," or perhaps "hermeneutical," church father: an antisemitic and poor reader of Scripture unworthy of serious attention.

Such is by no means to claim that church fathers did not harbor some, or even many, of the ideas denoted by the Eckardts' and Littell's "supersessionism" (any more than the preceding consideration of their "rhetorical Arabs" should imply that no Arab has ever borne the sort of violent hatred for Israel that they so often foregrounded).[117] The varied forms of "anti-Judaism" among the church fathers or the subsistence of antisemitism in certain Eastern Christian or Arab communities—both of which are important, and far more trodden, topics of study—constitute, in the case of our examination of these pioneers, separate issues. To use a relevant, albeit imperfect, analogy from another common topic in Jewish-Christian relations, our focus here is not on Jewish approaches to Torah per se, but on the misdirected Christian tendency to categorize all such views, whatever they are, under the umbrella of "legalism." Our focus is not on *the data* per se, but on *the way of reading*

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[110] R. Kendall Soulen, "Jewish-Christian Relations: Patristics and Orthodox Churches," *EBR* 14:234-235, here 235. Cf. Sandrine Caneri, "The Orthodox Church in Dialogue with Judaism: Toward an Official Document?," *The Wheel* 17/18 (2019): 33-40.

[111] See *Your People*, 7-28, here 13. Eckardt depends largely on the work of James Parkes and Gregory Baum.

[112] Eckardt, "Growing into a Daring…," 20.

[113] Eckardt, *Christianity and the Children of Israel*, 1-2.

[114] See, for example, Franklin H. Littell, *Historical Atlas of Christianity*, 2nd rev. and exp. (New York: Continuum, 2001), 23-38.

[115] E.g., *The Crucifixion*, 24-32.

[116] Eckardt, *Your People*, 14 and 13.

[117] Regarding the applicability of the term "supersessionism" to patristic writers, see Michael G. Azar, "Origen, Scripture, and the Imprecision of 'Supersessionism,'" *JTI* 10 (2016): 157-72; Charles Meeks, "Superseding Patristic Supersessionism: Hilary of Poitiers and Cyril of Alexandria on Hosea 1–3," *JTI* 14 (2020): 87-101; and Donaldson, "Supersessionism."

the data, especially when that way of reading developed in sources with little demonstrated knowledge of the data itself. Our focus here, in other words, is the totalizing way that the Eckardts and Littell employed Arabs and church fathers as rhetorical constructions that served their tendency to root contrary Christian political outlooks in the theological soil of "supersessionism."

While the term "supersessionism"—the heuristic device, the way of reading—would eventually rise to prominence in more theologically oriented writings and with more scholarly precision,[118] it originated nonetheless from a political outlook in which Arabs featured prominently, but were scarcely considered, church fathers were regularly alluded to, but hardly read, and Orthodox Christian Arabs—who, one might say, combine the worst of both worlds—were unworthy of serious attention, except to be implicated explicitly and implicitly, as both Arabs and "traditional" Christians, in crimes against Jews and the State of Israel. These sorts of mischaracterizations, oversights, or outright dismissals of ancient peoples and traditions were undoubtedly due to the pioneers' primary focus of affirming Jews, Jewish concerns, and the State of Israel: to borrow a phrase from elsewhere, their sentiments toward Arabs and Palestinians, Christian or otherwise, formed the "negative side" of what one might call their "Israel hermeneutic."[119] Because of that, these tendencies of dismissal or oversight unfortunately amounted to something strikingly similar to the historic "supersessionism" or the *Spätjudentum* myths that these pioneers sought to overcome.

"Supersessionism" Redirected

The pioneers did not reject the idea that there was a "new Israel"; they simply believed that it was not the Christian church. For them, the "new Israel" was the State of Israel that had been "resurrected," as Littell believed, from the Jewish "crucifixion" in the Shoah and the centuries preceding it.[120] For the Eckardts, 1948 was likewise a "resurrection,"[121] but *not* merely of the Jewish people or a "resurrection of Israel."[122] Rather it was a resurrection of the "*State of* Israel,"[123] a resurrection of the "*Medinat* Yisrael,"[124] which had its "founding fathers" in the early proponents of Zionism and Palestine's early Jewish colonies,[125] toward whose

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[118] Especially with the publication of R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). See also Donaldson, "Supersessionism."

[119] Cf. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 64.

[120] The namesake idea of Littell, *The Crucifixion* (see, e.g., 130).

[121] See, e.g., Alice Eckardt and A. Roy Eckardt, *Encounter with Israel: A Challenge to Conscience* (New York: Association, 1970), 58-72. This book was requested as a development of their 1967 *Christian Century* articles (see Eckardt, "Growing into a Daring…," 23).

[122] Eckardts, *Encounter with Israel*, 19.

[123] Eckardts, *Encounter with Israel*, 16, 158; emphasis mine.

[124] Eckardts, *Encounter with Israel*, 70; emphasis mine.

[125] Eckardts, *Encounter with Israel*, 80.

"sacrificial toil" the long-neglected land had looked with hope.[126] This new Israel never "stole the land away from its inhabitants"[127] because the latter had not been properly organized anyway, and it is therefore to *this* Israel and *this* resurrection that the Christian must react with celebration. It is no wonder that Roy Eckardt told a group of Houston clergy in 1970 that a true Christian must support the State of Israel—for Jesus would have been "an Israeli" in contemporary terms, and it is therefore "in an Israeli munitions factory" that one finds true Christian witness.[128]

And so the other elements of "supersessionism" were also redirected. For these American pioneers, it was no longer ancient Israel that was moribund and fossilized; it was the Arab (even specifically *Christian*) communities of erstwhile Palestine. It was no longer Jewish history that could be violently written off; it was Arab history (and still more Palestinian, insofar as they believe it ever existed). It was no longer Jewish religious practices that were worthy of supersession; it was "traditional" Christianity in general, if not Eastern Christianity specifically. It was no longer Jews, but "Arab nations" who were "real disciples of the devil," along with Christian sympathizers and agents of "evenhandedness," the UN, and the WCC.[129] It was no longer the people of Israel that was the "barren" womb out of which new life would spring, but the uncultivated, "malaria-infested marshes…barren land" of Palestine that was the "desert" which the State of Israel made to "bloom."[130]

Rhetorical Violence and Real Violence

Numerous scholars have concurred with a point that the Eckardts and Littell were admirably among some of the first to make: that centuries of *rhetorical* violence against Jews (largely by means of "hermeneutical" or "rhetorical" Jews rather than encounters with "real" Jews) were bound one day to culminate in *real* violence against Jews, as it had most especially under the Nazis.[131] Whether it is a "red

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[126] Eckardts, *Encounter with Israel*, 45.

[127] Eckardts, *Encounter with Israel*, 233.

[128] As quoted in "See Christ in Israeli bombs," *National Catholic Reporter*, February 4, 1970. See a similar point in *Your People*, 181-82. The newspaper report of this event comes just below another article wherein Edward Flannery assures an American Jewish meeting that the US would continue military support of the State of Israel, thereby resisting the temptation to "evenhandedness." At the same meeting, Flannery declared that he was "suspicious" of "many of those who shed copious tears for Arab refugees but never fail to turn that problem into a big stick with which to beat Israel." See "Bishop's Aide Hopes for Closer U.S.-Israel Ties," *National Catholic Reporter*, February 4, 1970.

[129] A. Roy Eckardt, "The Devil and Yom Kippur," 70, 72, 67, 69.

[130] John M. Oesterreicher and Edward H. Flannery (on behalf of the Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall), "A Statement of Conscience" (Nov 17, 1967), available in "Middle East - collation of documents and comments prepared by Jerusalem Rainbow Group," Box 68, Folder 5, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, American Jewish Archives, 61-66. The authors also call the notion that Arabs were driven out of their homes in 1948 a "gross misrepresentation," but fail to specify why. For Roy Eckardt's approval of this statement, see "Christian Perspectives," 48.

[131] See, e.g., Barbara M. Meyer, "Structures of Violence and the Denigration of Law in Christian Thought," *SCJR* 13 (2018): 1-21.

thread"[132] or a "ghastly line"[133] that links church fathers to concentration camps and Nazi propaganda, it is one that is commonly asserted. And if for that reason alone, the scholar and participant in interreligious dialogue must always be keenly aware of such rhetoric. In that light, our discussion of the origins of a theological category that was coined with rhetorical figures and that served to ignore or mischaracterize, if not "supersede," the varied detractors from the State of Israel, cannot ignore the link between the disparaging rhetoric of the Eckardts, Littell, and several other pioneers toward Arabs (Christian or not) and their *actual* and *explicit* support of violence against them. Their rhetoric was hardly unrelated to the actions they promoted.

Examples abound, but here must be limited to a select few: Roy Eckardt and Littell signed on to a June 1970 letter petitioning President Nixon to send fighter-bombers to Israel in order to maintain its military superiority—a letter which John Oesterreicher organized on behalf of numerous other Catholic and Protestant pioneers in Jewish-Christian relations.[134] Oesterreicher and Flannery had earlier that year called for defunding "Arab refugee camps"[135] *on behalf of* Seton Hall's Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies, and a month before the June letter, Oesterreicher had written to President Nixon, on the institute's letterhead*,* asking him to show "similar firmness" on behalf of Israel as he had promised in Vietnam.[136] In the years preceding, the founding director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Studies at Chicago Theological Seminary, Andre Lacocque, praised the richness of Jewish culture and explicitly mocked the supposed vacuousness of Arab as a "confrontation between a western sensibility on the one hand and a vicious complex [*sic*] of inferiority on the other hand," while confirming that God was on the side of "His People," rejecting any attempt of "the 'Christian' Arabs" (note the use of quotes) to claim to be "Israel," and refusing to "cry crocodile tears on the Arab victims" any more than he would a mass murderer and rapist.[137] And even if other scholars and founding pioneers did not go quite so far, one should still not overlook other, more subtle, but equally important, links between scholarly literature and real violence, such as evident in the origins of W.D. Davies's now-classic book on "the land,"[138] which he wrote at the request of a "prominent government figure in Israel"

[132] Littell, *The Crucifixion*, 1.
[133] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 405.
[134] "Christian Clergy Calls on Nixon to Back Israel," *B'nai B'rith Messenger*, June 26, 1970.
[135] "Judeo-Christian Institute Demands Withdrawal of Support for Refugee Camps until Terrorism Terminates," *The Jewish News*, February 27, 1970.
[136] Night Letter to President Nixon (May 2, 1970), Series 1.5, Box 16, Folder 45, The Monsignor Field Archives and Special Collection Center, Seton Hall University.
[137] Andre Lacocque, Letter to Howard Schomer (Executive Director, Specialized Ministries Department, National Council of the Churches of Christ), July 18, 1967, in "Middle East - collation of documents and comments prepared by Jerusalem Rainbow Group," Box 68, Folder 5, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, American Jewish Archives, 37-39.
[138] *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

who had called *during* the Six-Day War to ask if Davies would "would go on record as a scholar…to defend Israel's claims to Palestine and Jerusalem."[139] As it happens, Davies' book was featured a few years later in a lengthy discussion in *Midstream*, with a variety of other notable scholars participating.[140] Some of the same scholars had also joined Davies, Eckardt, Lacocque and others in publishing a statement in the *New York Times* shortly after the Six-Day War that affirmed the *theological* reasons why Jerusalem should remain "united" under Israeli control.[141]

Indeed, "the land," for obvious reasons, became a central issue in these scholarly Jewish-Christian encounters (and remains one still).[142] And here once again was a place where the pioneers' support for overcoming the "supersessionist" claim that Jews had no right to the land melded with their supersession of Palestinian claims, and the border between rhetorical and real violence proved porous. In the wake of the Six-Day War, Israel announced a series of building plans for the newly burgeoning city of Jerusalem, including, among other features, a "ring" of "neighborhoods" on the hilltops around Jerusalem (now to be designated *as* Jerusalem). In June 1971, after concerns had been raised about what these building plans might mean for non-Jewish populations, most of the pioneers above, and more, issued a statement in Israel's defense.[143] The plans, they assured, were merely a "renewal" of rundown areas and in no way a threat to the wellbeing of Arab populations (the designation, "Palestinian," is notably absent). And after a group of bishops in Jordan had written to the Vatican expressing concerns over the building plans a few months earlier, Oesterreicher offered a scathing response along the same lines. The bishops, he asserted, were peddlers of "propaganda" and "alarmists" wrongly using the name of Christ. Though he labeled the concern that the building plans would hinder free access to the holy sites as the result of an "imagination run wild," he offered a hypothetical caveat: "Their fears," he said with striking prescience, "would have some semblance of rationality, if that 'Hebrew Belt' was a series of military fortifications or a row of police stations, and not a scattering of apartment houses." He further reminded them that "Jesus…was a Jew, not a Jordanian" and hoped that they, like Jesus's crucifiers, would be forgiven for their ignorance.[144] Given his close association of Jesus and the State of Israel here, and his censuring of Christians who had opposed its policies, Oesterreicher's concluding allusion to

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[139] Truman G. Madsen, introduction to W.D. Davies, "Israel, the Mormons and the Land," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo: Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1978), 79.

[140] W. D. Davies et al., "Symposium: The Territorial Dimensions of Judaism," *Midstream* 29 (1983): 32-43.

[141] The advertisement/statement ("Jerusalem Should Remain United") is found on p. 12 of *New York Times*, July 12, 1967.

[142] Most recently, see Philip A Cunningham, Ruth Langer, and Jesper Svartvik, eds., *Enabling Dialogue about the Land: A Resource Book for Jews and Christians* (New York: Paulist, 2020).

[143] A copy of "Statement of Concerned Christians [CCI] Adopted at Emergency Conference on Jerusalem and Israel," along with a press statement from Littell, June 10, 1971, is available in pp. 24-29 of "Christians Support Unified Jerusalem," an undated collection of reports and statements prepared by the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Archives.

[144] As quoted in "Judeo-Christian Studies Director Accuses Jordanian Bishops," *NC News Service*, April 22, 1971, available in pp. 18-19 of "Christians Support Unified Jerusalem" (see previous note).

Jesus's crucifiers (Luke 23:34) is familiar, but with a different set of referents. Whereas the ancient "supersessionism" myth so foregrounded by the pioneers of Christian-Jewish relations had identified Jesus's messiahship (and Jewish supposed rejection thereof) as the determining factor in the possession of the land, Jesus's Jewishness (and Arab supposed rejection thereof) was now employed to serve the same purpose.

Conclusion

In the shadow of the Shoah and amid concerns for Israel's survival and superiority during its tumultuous beginnings, the Eckardts and Littell—alongside several others—dedicated much of their lives toward the unprecedented work of revising a history of theological degradation of Jews and Jewish practice. In so doing, they coined the new umbrella category of "supersessionism" (and "supersessionist") under which to group historic and contemporary Christian views they felt unworthy of the name of Christ. Never before had this category functioned as the chief heuristic device under which to assess historic and contemporary Christian approaches to Jews and Jewish concerns. Yet, in this desire to overcome the past, to close the door on "traditional" Christian views, and to throw their theological weight behind Israel's military superiority, they opened other doors toward "supersessionist" views of Arabs and Orthodox Christians.

The place that "supersessionism" now holds in theological literature on Jewish-Christian relations is far more nuanced, and the category continues to serve well as Christians seek to come to terms with historically harmful teachings and ongoing susceptibility to antisemitism. However, while the concept has functioned well as a means for Western-based Christians to revise and repudiate past teaching in order to make more theological space for Jews and Jewish concerns, it has also served as a means of excluding or delegitimating Christians outside of the West, who do not wish to "arrange," as the Palestinian Lutheran pastor Munther Isaac has said, their "thinking in a way to fit the paradigm of Western theology."[145] Though the term remains Western in origin and primarily Western in its usage, and though Orthodox and Arab Christians in general still have never formed major components of the mainstreams of Christian-Jewish relations, the concept often nonetheless functions as a sort of "gateway" for their entry into Christian-Jewish relations. Even while scholars sometimes recognize that Orthodox Christianity's historical relationship with and contemporary approach to "supersessionism" might be "different,"[146] the expectation that Orthodox and other Arab Christians can and should operate or be assessed under this umbrella remains common.

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[145] Munther Isaac, "Challenging the Empire: Theology of Justice in Palestine," in *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context*, ed. Rafiq Khoury and Rainer Zimmer-Winkel (Berlin: AphorismA, 2019), 253–64, here 257.
[146] Meyer, "Structures of Violence," 3. See also Harold Smith, "Supersession and Continuance: The Orthodox Church's Perspective on Supersessionism," *JES* 49 (2014): 247–74.

In light of its highly politicized origins among Western theologians who had significantly low regard for Orthodox and other Arabs, the manner in which proponents of Jewish-Christian relations employ the term vis-à-vis the theologies and concerns of Orthodox and other Arab Christians needs careful consideration. To spotlight "supersessionism" in such a way that non-theological concerns and realities are diminished or dismissed,[147] or to portray it as the chief, even exclusive, reason why various Arab Christians, particularly the Orthodox, criticize or challenge the State of Israel or hesitate to join Jewish-Christian dialogue by its established standards,[148] at best, misleads, and, at worst, excuses its own kind of "supersession"—and more sharply so if asserted by scholars and religious leaders with no ongoing experience of daily life in the lands controlled by Israel since 1967.[149] The problem, in this case, has not been the empty Arab or Orthodox seat at the table of Jewish-Christian relations as much as it has been the manner in which the table itself has often been set.

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[147] Cf. Kalman J. Kaplan and Paul Cantz, "Israel: 'Occupier' or 'Occupied'? The Psycho-Political Projection of Christian and Post-Christian Supersessionism," *Israel Affairs* 20 (2014): 40-61. Related examples of categorizing Israel's Christian critics as proponents of "supersessionism" or "replacement theology," and so softening the potency of their criticisms, abound in both popular and scholarly literature. A particularly acute example is Andrew D. Robinson, *Israel Betrayed*, 2 vols. (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2018), with the two volumes tellingly titled, "The History of Replacement Theology" and "The Rise of Christian Palestinianism."

[148] Cf. Petra Heldt. "A Brief History of Dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Jews," in *Orthodox Christians and Jews on Continuity and Renewal: The Third Academic Meeting between Orthodox Christians and Jews* (*Immanuel* 26/27), ed. Malcolm Lowe (Jerusalem: Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel, 1994), 211-224, here 212.

[149] For a critique of Western scholarly tendencies to accentuate anti-Jewish motifs among certain Palestinian theologians while downplaying or ignoring entirely their explicit critiques of "anti-Judaism" and antisemitism, see Michael J. Sandford, "Is Jesus Palestinian? Palestinian Christian Perspectives on Judaism, Ethnicity and the New Testament," *Holy Land Studies* 13 (2014): 123-38.