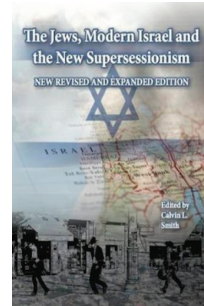


Book Review

Calvin L. Smith.

The Jews, Modern Israel and the New Supersessionism
Kent, United Kingdom: King's Divinity Press, 2013. Pp. 290. Paper.
ISBN 13: 978-0-9562006-1-7.

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False representations, crude caricatures, and monolithic portrayals of Israel and pro-Israel Christians lacking nuance and objectivity are the things that Smith seeks to rebalance in his second edition of *The Jews, Modern Israel and the New Supersessionism*. With six new essays, several essays reworked and material from the first edition revisited and updated, the book is internally coherent, multi-disciplinary and focused in its overarching aim, (loc.463). The introduction effectively sets out the book's fourteen chapters and three divisions, also offering the reader a definition of the new Supersessionism as follows: a political agenda where the theology is made to fit, not vice versa, (loc.402). This second edition exuberates nuance, assisting the reader to reflect honestly and objectively upon Israel historically, contemporarily and eschatologically, (loc.4984). The book's contributors come from across the Evangelical theological spectrum, therefore the disingenuous claim that all non-Supersessionists are a narrow minded, peripheral and fanatical segment of the church is undermined (loc.449).

The book is aimed at the lay Christian to supplement a scarcity of resources available to the non-theologically trained (loc.432), nevertheless, this collection of scholarly essays exhibits anything but straw man arguments

proof texting and Christian Zionist rhetoric. Rather, Smith aims for the middle ground between what has been a highly polarized and at times tumultuous topic, neither idealizing nor demonizing Israel, but portraying God's faithfulness to Israel, (loc.295). Smith takes this approach as he believes that triumphalist Supersessionism harms evangelistic endeavors to the Jewish people, not only undermining the continuing relevance of the gospel for Jews but also delegitimizing a manifestly Jewish form of Christianity. Smith then seeks to differentiate between hardline or punitive Supersessionism and soft or economic Supersessionism; he rejects the notion of Israel being sinless, rejects two ways of salvation i.e. one for gentiles and one for Jews; and rejects an Israel right or wrong approach but equally rejects an Israel always wrong approach. Smith also rejects that God loves Jews more than Arabs, and therefore highlights the importance of distinguishing between corporate Israel and individual Jews and Arabs. Smith in taking this middle ground approach rejects the apartheid language so often used to describe Israel's action toward Arabs, showing this not to be the case and eschewing the pejorative nature of the current debate regarding Supersessionism. Smith believes a lot more nuance is needed in this discussion, challenging stereotypical attitudes which tar all non Supersessionists with the same brush. Such stereotypical attitudes Smith believes fail to differentiate between various non

Supersessionist theological positions because they are often rooted in biblical illiteracy, though Smith does believe that there are problems of biblical illiteracy in both Supersessionist and non-Supersessionist camps. Throughout this revised edition it is clear that Smith does not make one's position on Israel a test of orthodoxy, however he does view it as an important issue and one which deserves honest reflection and careful thought and analysis.

In the first division Maltz illustrates how the early church fathers e.g. Justin Martyr (135AD) saw no danger as they sought to construct a Platonic Christian worldview, for purposes of evangelism and fueled by anti-Semitism, (loc.645). Horner builds upon Maltz theological platform showing the uninterrupted line of Jewish church leadership until 135AD when the Romans prohibited Jewry, also demonstrating the parallel trajectories of Supersessionism and non-literal interpretations of Scripture, (loc.1018). Chapter two finishes with a good example of Augustine's eisegetical and arbitrary interpretation of Ps.59.11, associated with Neo-Platonism and a more allegorical interpretative approach, (loc.1188). All of this may challenge the ordinary and untrained Christian reader to reexamine their Bible to avoid eisegetical interpretations based on a Platonic dualistic Christian worldview, inherited from an anti-Semitic biblical interpretative tradition, (loc.660, 752). In ch.3 most readers will be left disturbed as Barnes describes how reformers like Martin Luther instigated violence toward the Jews, and how Germany's churches supported and praised religiously motivated anti-Semitic laws, (loc.1396). At this stage of the book the powerful realization is reached that Supersessionism is more than ivory tower theorizing, but has had horrific implications in the lives of millions of Jews, (loc.1442-1464).

In ch.4 Wilkinson brings the first ray of hope when the UK church after much post holocaust theological reflection helped reestablish the nation of Israel in 1948, through key influential people, (1890).

The second division investigates Supersessionism in light of the Bible.

Cheung explains throughout ch.5 the recent move by scholars toward the view that the "Israel" of Rom.11:26 refer to ethnic Israel, thus remaining consistent with its usage elsewhere in the book, (loc.2252). In ch.6 Diprose critiques economic Supersessionism and also examines a key verse employed to support punitive Supersessionism (John 8:30-47), without which the arguments supporting punitive Supersessionism would be groundless, (loc.2489). Diprose also discusses the nature and scope of Galatians 3:26-29, highlighting its soteriological not Supersessionist context (loc.2606). I found particularly useful the chapter on Apostolic Jewish Christian hermeneutics and Supersessionism by Prash contrasting the westernized dualistic either / or approach, against the more holistic Jewish Christian hermeneutical approach. Smith in the third division throughout ch.13 presents the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as complex and far from homogenous, undermining straw man arguments presenting Arab Christians as monolithically anti-Israel, or blanket claims of the Israeli government protecting or persecuting Christians among other points. Ch.14 ends with Taylor's somber warning to the church that it has a responsibility in the way it witnesses to the Jews and the nation of Israel, in the same way that it is responsible to accurately represent Christ to any other people group, (loc.5237).

Cheung's very effective and coherent essay should nullify any reservations that Rom.11:26 refers to anything other than ethnic Israel,

nevertheless, Andy could have elaborated more upon the use of the term Israel in 1 Corinthians 10:18. The historical survey in section one is an excellent primer to the subject, as was the second division examining the subject from a biblical point of view. However, most contemporary Supersessionists disassociate themselves from such anti-Semitic traditions, and see no discord between Supersessionism and Philo-Semitism. Therefore, a response to the likes of N.T. Wright's views on modern Israel would have been beneficial. N.T. Wright also interprets Israel from an Christological perspective and argues not only from Romans and Galatians but also from Hebrews, from a covenantal perspective charging pro-Israel Christians with heresy. In this respect Smith could have provided a defense of why ones position on Israel isn't a test of orthodoxy, as a response to Wright. Finally, Smith contributed a most excellent chapter regarding modern Israel and Israeli politics leaving the reader doubtless as to the necessity of a more nuanced approach to this topic. However, as contemporary non-Supersessionist arguments revolve around social justice, more may have been said in this respect, e.g. many immigrants to Israel in 1948 were homeless, and those Jews who attempted to return to post holocaust Europe found themselves unwelcome. Notwithstanding the many Jews ejected from Arab countries in 1948 that were dispossessed and sent into exile, despite many of them wishing to stay in their countries of origin. Therefore the twin-tale of tragedy for Jews and Arabs resulting from the establishment of Israel in 1948 could have been introduced and elaborated upon as an issue of social injustice, as it affected both Jews and Arabs.

This second edition is a valuable resource to the Evangelical community to contribute

to the scarcity of resources dealing with Supersessionism. Furthermore, it is effectively pitched for the layman only very infrequently assuming familiarity with theological jargon, e.g. words like Semi-Pelagianism, (loc.1054) and soteriological, (loc.2382).