

Two witnesses or three:

People with a mission from a non-supersessionist perspective

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Introduction

In this article I want to relate some topics to which I have devoted much of my research, writing and teaching during my active life: (1) the relationship between Israel and the Church, (2) the Messianic Jewish Movement and (3) missiology or mission studies.

I am persuaded that these topics are closely related to each other but making a connexion between these areas of interest is not at all evident. In fact, such a connexion is usually *not* made.

Since the 1970s, there has been a huge change in the theological world and in the churches concerning the relationship between the Jewish people and Christianity, but this new perspective on Israel and the Church seems to have gone almost unnoticed in missionary circles and in missiology.

At the same time, there has also been a huge change in the theology of mission, but this new perspective is hardly ever noticed in declarations on Church and Israel.

And then there is, since the 1970s, the emergence of the Messianic Jewish Movement and Christians who are enthusiastic about it, but you won't hear or read much about them, either in church declarations on Church and Israel, nor in major missional declarations.

So, I might as well have entitled my lecture: *'two or three worlds apart.'*

And yet, there is an intrinsic link between these areas, as I will argue in this lecture. Between the Jewish-Christian relationship, the Messianic Jewish Movement and mission.

My theme is: People with a mission from a non-supersessionist perspective.

There are two questions here.

First, who are the people of God with a mission? And second, how can we envision their mission without thinking in terms of supersessionism, that is replacement theology?

I am particularly interested in the connexion between the answers to these two questions.

But how can I deal with these questions in a satisfactory manner within in the time of one lecture? So much has been written about these questions, and there are so many aspects and viewpoints that could be taken in consideration.

Therefore, I have to limit myself.

My answer to these questions will take the form of an overall picture. And I will do this by concentrating on the recent Declaration of the Church of England, *God's unfailing word. Theological and Practical Perspectives*, published just three years ago in the Fall of 2019.

I find this an instructive and a very important document, for reasons will be explained in a minute.

So, I will take it as a guide, and present those parts that have a bearing on our two questions. Here and there, I shall make some comments which in my view are also important. And I will take the approach of this document further than the authors themselves do, in order to arrive at an overall picture of what 'people of God with a mission' implies.

One preliminary remark is necessary. Firstly, when we say 'Israel', or 'people of Israel', we use their theological name. The historical names for this people are 'Israelites' or 'Hebrews' in the Bible, and 'Jews' since the period of the second Temple. Leaving aside the

different criteria that are used to define ‘who is a Jew’,¹ we can say that there is an ethnic continuity between today’s Jewish communities, the Jews of the Second Temple era and the Israelites of old.²

1) The Context

To begin with, a few remarks about the context of this document.

Nostra Aetate and other declarations

From the 1960s onwards there has been an endless stream of publications about Israel and the Church, both historical and theological, defending a vast array of viewpoints the knowledge of which is beyond anyone’s capacity.

Now it is one thing for a particular author to make his argument, it is another matter when church denominations take position by issuing a declaration. Such texts are prepared by several authors, they involve a lot of discussion between people with different viewpoints, and they formulate a final consensus. And then the church leadership adopts it, which means that the church is committed to its content.

Already in the 1950s a few churches had issued declarations, mainly to denounce antisemitism and the way in which the Christian church has fostered antisemitism and prepared the way for the Shoa.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council adopted the seminal church document *Nostra Aetate*, on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, in which it denounced the anti-Judaism of the Church and called for a new relationship with the Jewish people, recognising that God’s covenant with Israel is still valid. This was the first of a series of declarations in which the Roman Catholic Church has further developed a new vision of its relations with Judaism, the Jewish people in general and the state of Israel in particular.

Other Christian churches have also been engaged in a continuing and deepening reflection on their relationship with the Jewish people and with Judaism. This has resulted in a number of declarations. One of the first was *Israel, Land Volk en Staat* (Land, People and State) of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1970.³

The themes of all these documents are pretty well summed up in the *Charta Oecumenica* adopted in 2001. Section 10 is entitled. ‘Strengthening community with Judaism’ Here is the text:

We are bound up in a unique community with the people Israel, the people of the Covenant which God has never terminated... the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Rom 11.28-29) ... We deplore and condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism, all outbreaks of hatred and persecutions. We ask God for forgiveness for anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians, and we ask our Jewish sisters and brothers for reconciliation. It is urgently necessary, in the worship and teaching, doctrine and life of our churches, to raise awareness of the deep bond existing between the Christian faith and Judaism, and to support Christian-Jewish co-operation. We commit ourselves

- to oppose all forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in the church and in society;
- to seek and intensify dialogue with our Jewish sisters and brothers at all levels.⁴

¹ Orthodox Judaism follows the halakhic rule: a person born of a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism through a recognised procedure. According to this rule world Jewry counts more than 15 million. The Law of Return of the State of Israel uses a broader criterium: at least one Jewish grandparent, resulting in a world Jewry of roughly 27 million.

² This is an historical evidence. Even so, we should make this point, because some people nowadays deny this continuity, usually for reasons of political expediency and anti-Zionism.

³ The French Protestant Federation has published a *Compendium* of all official protestant texts from France and several other European countries concerning Israel and the Church: Serge Wüthrich (direction), *Les relations entre chrétiens et juifs*. It was prepared by the Commission of Relations with Judaism, of which I am a member. The Compendium appeared just a few months ago.

⁴ *Charta Oecumenica – Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*, of the European Council of Churches (protestant and orthodox) and the Roman Catholic council of European bishops,

2) The Anglican Document

Finally, also the Church of England

For a long time, there had been no one statement setting out where the Church of England stands in this relationship. This lack has been made up in 2019, by the official document *God's Unfailing Word, Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian–Jewish Relations*, written by the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England. In it, we find all the themes mentioned above, but as we shall see, there are also some differences.⁵

Reactions

What were the reactions? Usually, when a church publishes a document on this topic, the reactions of the rabbis are positive. Messianic Jews usually complain that they are left out of the picture, and Evangelicals generally complain that Jewish evangelism is abandoned. But in the case of the Anglican document, it was rather the other way round. The chief rabbi of England, Ephraim Mirvis wrote in the afterword that he appreciated certain elements, but he regretted that the door for Jewish evangelism was left wide open.

On the contrary, Richard Harvey, a leading Messianic Jewish theologian, gave a very positive reaction. Interviewed by the *Church Times*, he said that he found *God's Unfailing Word* a thorough text. He encouraged all Jewish believers to carefully read it and benefit from its theological insights.

These reactions alone were sufficient to arouse my curiosity. As a Gentile Christian, I have followed the recommendation of my friend Richard Harvey and read the text carefully, even to the point of making it my guide for today's lecture.⁶

Importance

Why do I find this an important document? Firstly, since the Church of England was so late in presenting an official declaration, its authors could benefit from the discussions that have been going until now, so it provides an up-to-date reflexion on the subject.

Secondly, there is the plurality within this church, so it has to reckon with different viewpoints, and the document presents these. Therefore, it does not exclusively adopt a non-supersessionist position, as the other declarations almost always do, but also takes into account the supersessionist perspective – held by a large proportion of the Anglican community,⁷ and of Christian churches worldwide.

Thirdly, it includes a detailed and balanced discussion on Jewish evangelism, no doubt because of the strong Evangelical presence and influence in this church.

Finally, Church declarations on Jewish-Christian relations generally do not pay much attention to mission, apart from saying that Israel is still a witness people of God, that Jews and Christians have a common mission to fulfil, and that Christians should refrain from

adopted in 2001. Notice the wording of the title of this section, different from those of the following sections: 'Cultivating relations with Islam,' 'Encountering other religions and world views.' With respect to Judaism, the churches want to 'strengthen community.'

⁵ In the Preface we read: 'The renewed prominence within public life of concerns about antisemitism, and arguments about the meaning of "Zionism", were reminders that attempts by others to comment on the significance of the Jewish people retain a particular power to damage and divide.

We hope that this document will encourage careful theological thinking about the way Christians teach and preach on Scripture, and about the choices they make with songs, hymns, prayers and visual images for public worship. We hope it will raise awareness of the theological questions that should arise for Christians when engaging with debates about Israel and Palestine. And we hope it will encourage Christians to be confident in venturing into dialogue with Jewish people about God's purposes for us, in challenging antisemitism, and in working together for the common good of our society (p. vi-vii).

⁶ By the way, I also proposed this document to be included in the Compendium that I just mentioned: Serge Wüthrich (direction), *Les relations entre chrétiens et juifs*.

⁷ Cf. www.anglicancommunion.org

organised evangelisation among the Jews.⁸ This is the only official declaration on Jewish-Christian relations to my knowledge, that establishes a link with the missiological shift that has taken place in recent decades and the new paradigm of integral mission that is more and more adopted by Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals. That makes it particularly interesting for me as a missiology teacher.

Messianic Jews not involved and left out of the picture

My critical comment is that Messianic Jews were not involved in the writing process, and their concerns were left out of the picture. The document honestly recognises this:

The emergence over the last fifty years of the movement known as ‘Messianic Judaism’ raises some difficult questions for the historic churches while also being viewed with considerable suspicion by other Jews, so that those identifying with it may find themselves feeling doubly marginalized. The issues raised by conversions between Christianity and Judaism as a religious phenomenon are complex; addressing them does not fall within the scope of this chapter, which has focused on the implications of Christian theology of Christian–Jewish relations for witness and evangelism on the part of the Church.⁹

I find this a serious omission. The document should have included the perspective of Jesus-believing Jews (JBJ), including those who identify as Messianic Jews. Since the beginning of the 19th century, the Church of England has played such an important role in Jewish evangelism and in the movement of the Hebrew Christians, who affirmed their Jewish identity as believers in Jesus. These are the forerunners of the Messianic Jewish Movement that emerged in the 1970s.¹⁰ Today there are still many JBJ within the Anglican family of churches.

I am going to make up for this absence at and bring in the Messianic Jewish voice in some comments.

3) Outline

Here is the outline of the document

Foreword by Archbishop Justin Welby

Introduction

PART 1: THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

⁸ See e.g., the document of the Roman Catholic Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable*’ (Romans 11:29): *Reflections on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic–Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate* (2015): ‘The Church is therefore obliged to view evangelisation to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and worldviews. In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews. While there is a principled rejection of an institutional mission, Christians are nonetheless called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews, although they should do so in a humble and sensitive manner, acknowledging that Jews are bearers of God’s Word, and particularly in view of the great tragedy of the Shoah’ (par. 40).

⁹ Section ‘Mission and Evangelism’, p. 59.

¹⁰ The declaration recognises this by adding a special caption to the Section Mission and Evangelism, entitled, ‘Theology and practice: mission to or ministry among?’. It reads:

‘The Church of England has its own history of evangelism specifically addressed to Jewish people. The London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews (LSCJ) was founded in 1809 with the support of prominent Anglican Evangelicals as a missionary society for the conversion of Jewish people, as well as educating the Church about its Jewish roots, and it has numbered notable Anglican supporters over the years. At its peak in 1914 it had around 280 mission staff, with around a third of those being of Jewish descent.

LSCJ has undergone changes in name since its establishment in the nineteenth century that point to the changing context for its continuing work. It became CMJ, Church Missions to Jews, then The Church’s Mission to the Jews, next The Church’s Ministry Among the Jews, and finally, today, The Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People. These shifts in name reveal something of the questions around the nature of the Christian relationship with Jewish people where a task of ministry, being with, and among, seems to be a more appropriate approach than a mission to. Changing attitudes are also reflected in the decision taken in 1992 by the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, to end 150 years of tradition and decline to become the patron of the charity’ (p. 60).

1. A Difficult History
 2. A Distinctive Relationship
- PART 2: CRITICAL ISSUES
3. Mission and Evangelism
 4. Teaching and Preaching
 5. The Land of Israel
 6. Ethical Discernment and Common Action
- Afterword by Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

4) Jews and Christians, who are ‘the people of God’, who is ‘Israel’?

The first chapter presents a long and thought-provoking description of the difficult relationship – to say the least – between Christians and Jews in the past. Special attention is given to the relation between the anti-Jewish teaching of (European) Christianity and the hatred of Jews, or antisemitism, as it is called since the end of the 19th century. The conclusion is that ‘wrong theology has led to wrong action’. Therefore, there is a need for ‘ecclesial repentance for the complicity of churches with the evils of antisemitism’.¹¹

The following chapter, ‘A Distinctive Relationship’, corresponds to the first question of our lecture: who are the people of God, who is ‘Israel’?¹²

The authors notice that there is ‘an apparent tension between Christian and Jewish beliefs about the people of God’. It then summarises the various Christian views on this question by identifying four ‘broad positions.’

The first position is...

... an unqualified denial of the claim of Jewish people since the time of Christ to be part of God’s chosen people. The incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God means that the people of God are now defined as those who receive him and believe in him. Those who do not receive him and believe in him are not part of God’s people today.¹³

This is of course replacement theology, or supersessionism,¹⁴ even though the document carefully avoids using these terms, no doubt because of their negative connotation. Those who hold this view, hardly use these terms themselves. This perspective is adopted by a large proportion of the Christian churches worldwide.

The logical implication is that Jews should be evangelised just like any other people, and invited to become Christian believers.

I should add that most of my colleague mission theologians today take this position of replacement theology. Noticeable examples are the late John Stott and his ‘disciple’ Chris Wright,

¹¹ The Need for Repentance, p. 20.

¹² The document formulates our question in the following way: ‘The history that shapes the identity of Christian faith, as handed down through the Scriptures of the Church, therefore sets Christianity and Judaism in an unavoidable relationship of both kinship and divergence. This is in some sense a family relationship, because the historical origin of Christianity, as of Rabbinic Judaism, lies in the diversity of first-century Judaism... It is also a relationship marked by the lasting effects of the ‘parting of the ways’ between Christianity and Judaism in the first four centuries of the Church (...) When Christians who believe that they belong to God’s chosen people through Jesus Christ become aware that Jewish people may believe that they belong to God’s chosen people without him, they are bound to be aware of the apparent tension. Christians and Jews have different perspectives of ‘belonging to God’s chosen people’ (A Distinctive Relationship, p. 27, 28f).

¹³ *Idem*, p. 29.

¹⁴ The term supersessionism comes from the Latin *supersedere*: to sit above or be superior to. In general parlance, to supersede means to take the place of someone or something, while to be superseded means to be set aside as useless or obsolete in favour of someone or something that is regarded as superior. Other terms are substitution or replacement theology. In recent decades the term ‘supersessionism’ has gained currency among theologians and biblical scholars to refer to the traditional Christian belief that since Christ’s coming the Church has taken the place of the Jewish people as God’s chosen community, and that God’s covenant with the Jews is now over and done. Although never formally defined as a doctrine by the early Church, supersessionism has stood at the centre of Christianity’s understanding of its relationship to the Jewish people from antiquity to recent times. Cf. R. Kendall Soulen, ‘Supersessionism’, in Edward Kessler et al., *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, p. 413f.

two Anglican clergymen of Evangelical persuasion and very influential in the Evangelical mission movement worldwide. In his book *The Mission of God*, Chris Wright has much to say about the missional task of ethnic Israel as God's people in the OT, but towards the end he clearly states that the people of God are now the believers in Jesus, and that 'therefore, it is necessary that the Gospel should be preached to Jews and non-Jews'.¹⁵

Wright also wrote the first draft of the Cape Town Commitment, the latest declaration on world evangelisation of the Lausanne Movement, adopted in 2010, which includes the same supersessionist view on God's people.¹⁶

The second position is...

...an acceptance qualified with some correction that the Jewish people after the time of Christ are God's chosen people. The promise God made to Abraham and his descendants applies to all Jewish people throughout history, religious or secular, who are chosen irrevocably by God to be God's people, living under God's covenant. Yet it is also true that through Jesus Christ the covenant has been made new, and God's will is for all people to enter into the renewed covenant in Christ's blood, Jews and Gentiles alike. Jewish people therefore need to discover and respond to this divine gift as God's irrevocably chosen people.¹⁷

In other words, both ethnic Israel and the Church are God's people. This is the position of many Evangelicals and conservative Protestants.

However, our Anglican document fails to make two important precisions.

First, when authors speak of 'the covenant with Israel', they are not always clear whether they mean the covenant with Abraham, the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant with the Torah, or both.

We should distinguish between the Abrahamic covenant which establishes an everlasting relation between God, the people of Israel and the land, and the Mosaic covenant which is the operational mode of the covenant, and which is conditioned by the obedience of the people. The Mosaic covenant can and has been broken. The New Covenant does not change or replace the Abrahamic Covenant, but it renews the Mosaic covenant by changing the operational mode. The sacrificial system is now obsolete because it has been accomplished and replaced by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we should distinguish between the election and the preservation of Israel as a chosen people, and personal salvation of individual Jews, which is not automatically implied but received through placing one's trust in Jesus, Israel's Messiah.

In my publications I have put forward this view, including the two precisions.¹⁸ It is also shared by Messianic Jewish authors, by and large, even though they are not agreed to which extent the rest of the Torah is still valid for Jewish and for non-Jewish believers.¹⁹

The third position is...

...an acknowledgement of a mystery that the Jewish people after the time of Christ are God's chosen people. The Church...cannot come to a satisfactory theological judgement regarding how Jewish people since the coming of Christ nonetheless remain recipients of God's promises. It has to accept

¹⁵ 'The only and authentic fulfilment of the Scriptures of the Old Testament is found in the new messianic community made up of the disciples of Jesus. This community is the true people of Israel, which has been redefined and enlarged, as it was foreseen in the Old Testament. There is only one and true people of God, created to be a new humanity in Christ, and which is made up of Jews and non-Jews alike who trust in Him. Therefore, the Gospel must, and this is a necessity, be preached to Jews and non-Jews, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Chris Wright, *Mission of God*, chapter 15. Quote from the French edition, p. 622 – our translation). See for his supersessionism p. 304, 322, 344, and 455f., and his antizionism, p. 304 and 458.

¹⁶ *Cape Town Commitment*, Section A, § 9.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁸ Evert Van de Poll, *Israël, de Gemeente en het Verbond* (1988); *De messiaanse beweging en haar betekenis voor christenen* (2005).

¹⁹ E.g., Dan Juster, *Jewish Roots*; Stuart Dauermann, *Converging Destinies*:

that there is a mystery here that transcends its understanding in history, though its meaning will be revealed at the end of time.²⁰

This is the position taken by the Roman Catholic Church and several ecumenical Protestant authors. Like the second position it says that both ethnic Israel and the Church are God's people and that the people of Israel are destined to receive God's promises, including his promises in Jesus Messiah. But there is a difference. Israel is destined to come to the fullness of its salvation through Jesus Messiah, but the way in which Jewish people will encounter their Messiah, the same as Christians recognise in Jesus of Nazareth, is a mystery hidden in the future. It will not necessarily mean that they will at some point become Christians in the sense of the historic forms of Christianity, nor even become believers in the sense of the current Messianic Jewish Movement.

Viewed from this perspective, there is no place for 'institutional' evangelisation of Jewish people, even though Christians can witness of their faith in the context of a personal relationship.²¹

The fourth position is...

an unqualified affirmation that the Jewish people after the time of Christ are God's chosen people... One of the ways in which this has been expressed over the past hundred years has been to speak of two covenants: a covenant with the Jewish people through Moses, and a covenant with the Church through Jesus Christ. Both have been established by God. Both share a common root in the covenant with Abraham, and neither is ultimately independent from the other. Each can learn from the other and each should appreciate and value the other... There are two ways of being the people of God.²²

In other words, the Jewish people and the Church are two distinct peoples of God, each of them following its own way of salvation, separately from the other. This position is taken by

²⁰ Idem, p. 31.

²¹ This is the position taken by RCC in the *The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable* (Vatican, 10 December 2015), prepared by Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Jews and published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This text, which marked the 50th anniversary of the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, affirms that Jews do not need to be converted to Catholicism to find salvation since God did not revoke his covenant with Israel. 'The Church is therefore obliged to view evangelisation [to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views... In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews.'

At the same time, it affirms the universality of salvation in Christ: 'The Church is the definitive and unsurpassable locus of the salvific action of God. This however does not mean that Israel as the people of God has been repudiated or has lost its mission. (...) Though there can be only one path to salvation... it does not in any way follow that the Jews are excluded from God's salvation because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. That the Jews are participants in God's salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery (...)

It is the belief of the Church that Christ is the Saviour for all. There cannot be two ways of salvation, therefore, since Christ is also the Redeemer of the Jews in addition to the Gentiles. Here we confront the mystery of God's work, which is not a matter of missionary efforts to convert Jews, but rather the expectation that the Lord will bring about the hour when we will all be united.'

Some other passages worth quoting are: 'Judaism and the Christian faith as seen in the New Testament are two ways by which God's people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own. The Scriptures which Christians call the Old Testament is open therefore to both ways. A response to God's word of salvation that accords with one or the other tradition can thus open up access to God, even if it is left up to his counsel of salvation to determine in what way he may intend to save mankind in each instance (...)

The New Covenant does not revoke the earlier covenants, but it brings them to fulfilment... The term covenant, therefore, means a relationship with God that takes effect in different ways for Jews and Christians (...)

The theory that there may be two different paths to salvation, the Jewish path without Christ and the path with the Christ, whom Christians believe is Jesus of Nazareth, would in fact endanger the foundations of Christian faith. Confessing the universal and therefore also exclusive mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to the core of Christian faith. So too does the confession of the one God, the God of Israel, who through his revelation in Jesus Christ has become totally manifest as the God of all peoples.'

²² Idem, p. 31f.

several Protestant and Catholic authors, as well as some Protestant Churches.²³ They conclude that there is no need for a Jew to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, not even in a mysterious new way. Usually, they are strongly opposed to Jewish evangelism (often denounced as ‘proselytism’).

Here again, a precision needs to be made. The Anglican document uses the term ‘two covenant theology’ in the sense of two ways of salvation. This happens quite often, but these are in fact two distinct ideas. One can hold the view that Israel has its own covenant with God, without saying that Israel does not need the New Covenant.²⁴ I have just mentioned the view of Messianic Jewish authors, which is also my view, which affirms the covenant with the people of Israel as well as the New Covenant for Jews and non-Jews, while also affirming the universality of salvation in Jesus Messiah.

Once again, we see that the text of the Anglican document has not taken into consideration the reality of the Messianic Jewish Movement.

Where does the Anglican church stand? Post-supersessionism

The document has the honesty to acknowledge that the four views are represented among Christians, but it also states that the first (supersessionism) and the fourth (two ways of salvation) are incompatible with Biblical teaching and with the Anglican tradition.²⁵

Hence, the document follows the second view, while recognizing the value of the third one.

As an Evangelical Protestant, I agree with that. This position is shared by many Evangelicals, Charismatic Catholics and Messianic Jews.

In academic terms, this is post-supersessionism, a theological perspective that deliberately leaves behind supersessionism.²⁶

Who is ‘Israel’?

Another way to put the question who God’s people are, is to ask: In what way do Jewish people living after God’s revelation in Jesus Christ continue to be Israel? In other words, in which ways is God still the God of Israel?²⁷

The authors of the document take up this question by a detailed exegesis of Romans 9-11, which I have no time to go into, but from which I quote one very important statement:

The message in these chapters is that no claim to be ‘Israel’ can rest on anything other than God’s gracious promise, and that God’s gracious purpose for Israel, though apparently thwarted, has not been set aside by God and therefore cannot be dismissed by Gentile Christians... Part of Israel has been ‘hardened’... Yet that part of Israel remains Israel, and God’s purpose abides that ‘all Israel will be saved’, both the part that has been hardened and the part that has already received God’s promise in Jesus Christ.²⁸

The name ‘Israel’ is given by grace to those whom God has freely chosen, as the document rightly says. And we would add: the same is true for the name or title ‘people of God’. This is also an expression of God’s grace. The people who bear this name can only be grateful for that. There is no reason for boasting, elitism, or feelings of superiority.

²³ One of the first churches to adhere to the two-ways-of-salvation-view and therefore reject any form of mission to the Jews, was the Protestant Church of Rheinland in Germany during its synod in 1980, in the document.

²⁴ Simon Schoon, a leading voice in Jewish Christian dialogue in the Netherlands from the 1980s onwards, maintains that ‘a radical rejection of the two-ways-of-salvation-teaching will always lead to a new form of supersessionism, making a full dialogue impossible’ (Simon Schoon, *Onopgeefbaar verbonden*, p. 166). But this is simply not true to the facts. There are many expressions of a non-supersessionist position, affirming the validity of God’s covenant with Israel, that do not hold to the idea of two ways of salvation.

²⁵ *Idem*, p. 39.

²⁶ Post-supersessionism has been defined as ‘a loose and partly conflicting family of theological perspectives that affirm God’s irrevocable covenant with the Jewish people as a central and coherent part of the teaching of the Church. These perspectives seek to overcome understandings of the New Covenant that entail the abrogation or obsolescence of God’s covenant with the Jewish people, of the Torah as a demarcator of Jewish communal identity, or of the Jewish people themselves’. Cf. R. Kendall Soulen, ‘Post-supersessionism’, in Edward Kessler et al., *op. cit.*, p. 350f.

²⁷ *Idem*, p. 32.

²⁸ *Idem*, p. 36.

Who are the people of God?

We should notice also that when the NT uses the term ‘Israel’, it always means the ethnic Jewish people, never the Church. There are not two Israels, nor a new spiritual one instead of an old national one.

On the contrary, the NT does use the term ‘people of God’ as a reference to Israel, and *also* with respect to the community of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles.²⁹

So, the latter, that is the Church, shares the name that was given to ethnic Israel. That is a better way of saying than that there are two peoples of God. Either side by side, as the two-ways-of-salvation-theory has it (position four), or one having replaced the other, as supersessionism says (position one). That would make God, in the words of Robert Spaemann, either a bigamist or a divorced husband who has remarried another partner.³⁰

Rather, the people belonging of God have become divided.

Divided over the Messiahship of Jesus the Son of God.

And it has been enlarged, by non-Jewish believers in Jesus, who ‘once were excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world, but now brought near by the blood of Christ, to become heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2.11-12 and 3.6 NIV). They are now in the sphere of the people of God.

So, there are now two communities who share in the position of being God’s people, by the grace of God: both ethnic Israel and the Church. These communities partly overlap, in the Jesus-believing Jews.

According to the promise revealed by prophets and apostles, they will once be united. Their destinies are converging.³¹

5) Israel, the Church and Mission

Now, how does this discussion on the people of God relate to the theology and practice of mission?

Two witness or three

Here is my fundamental conclusion. Since ethnic Israel is not rejected, it remains called to be a witness people of God. And since the Church is also ‘people of God’, it is also a people with a mission, namely, to be witness people of God and of Jesus his Messiah.

So there two witnesses.

And perhaps three, if we may single out the Jewish believers because of their specific situation: they take part in the mission of Israel and in the mission of the Church.

A broad view on the mission of the Church

This brings us to the second question: what is the mission of the people of God? This question is taken up in the second part of the document, in chapter 3, ‘Mission and Evangelism’

²⁹ There are only very few explicit uses of the term ‘people of God’ in relation with disciples of Jesus. According to Hebrews 4:29, ‘there remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God’. 1 Peter 2:9-10 says: ‘But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (cf. Exodus 19:6). Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.’ These are quotes from two passages in the OT that originally refer to the people of Israel: Exodus 19:6 and Hosea 2:23. According to Peter Sibley (‘Was Ethnic Israel’s Mission Transferrable?’), the authors of the two epistles had in mind the Jesus-believing Jews. This might well be the case, but when Paul quotes the text from Hosea in Romans 9:25-26, he evidently refers to ‘us whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles’ (verse 24). In 2 Corinthians 6:16 he quotes the promises in Ezekiel 37:27, ‘I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’, and applies them to the New Testament believers.

³⁰ Quoted by Jan-Heiner Tück in his opening lecture during the Symposium, ‘Jesus, also the Messiah of Israel?’, University of Vienna, July 11, 2022.

³¹ This view closely follows the details of the imagery of the two olive trees in Romans 11. It is also held by Messianic Jewish authors. Some call it ‘olive tree theology’, e.g., David Stern, in his *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*. For the idea of converging destinies, see Stuart Dauerman, *Converging destinies*.

The chapter begins with the ‘Five Marks of Mission’.³² This is a summary of holistic or integral mission formulated first by the Anglican Church, and which has won wide acceptance among other Christian traditions.³³ Here is the official wording:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

- (1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- (2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- (3) To respond to human need by loving service
- (4) To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- (5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.³⁴

This is the general mission of the Church in the world. We find this a profitable approach. Much too often, discussions about mission and the Jewish people are focused on evangelism. But while mission includes evangelism, it is much broader than that. There is a general consensus on this point between Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals worldwide.

Several authors have shown that the Church is sent into the world with several missions or mandates. We can call them collectively ‘mission’, as long as we see that the mission of the Church consists of more mandates than only the Great Commission to communicate the Gospel among all nations.

The Five Marks are one example of this integral view, among others.

In my publications and teaching I have put forward the model of Mission in Four Mandates, which I call ‘Multiple Witness’.³⁵ We are witnesses through our life of discipleship, through the communal life of our faith community, through our actions to serve our neighbour in society, and through the Word that we make known.

It is very similar to the Five Marks that the document takes as a reference point.

Here is a comparative table:

<i>Five Marks</i>	<i>Multiple Witness, through...</i>
	...living a Christian life (discipleship)
Teach, baptise and nurture new believers	...being a church community
Proclaim the Good News	...communicating of the Gospel
Loving service, Transforming unjust structures Creation care	...service in society, social and environmental

Mission to Israel and mission with Israel

The document then applies the general mission to the specific mission of the Church towards the Jewish people.

The first two marks ‘are linked directly to Christian practices of evangelism that seek to share the gospel of Christ with those who have not received it and to assist them in becoming his disciples.’ This is a highly sensitive issue, both in Christian and in Jewish circles, and the document offers a lengthy discussion of the arguments in favour and of the objections that have been brought in against evangelizing Jewish people today.

³² Chapter ‘Mission and Evangelism’, p. 51.

³³ Chris Wright makes much use of this model of Five Marks in his publications. E.g., in *The Five Marks of Mission: Making God's mission ours*, he combines the five marks of mission into three focuses: evangelism/teaching, justice/compassion, and creation care. He argues that God is concerned for all three of these focuses and although evangelism is central, it is not the whole of God's mission in the world.

³⁴ The ‘Five Marks of Mission’ were first developed as four marks by the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984, and then adopted by the 1988 Lambeth Commission of bishops of the worldwide Anglican Communion. A fifth was added in 1990, based on the missiological and biblical implications of the creation and environmental crisis. Since then, the definition is as follows: See <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>

³⁵ E.g., Evert Van de Poll (sous dir.), *Mission intégrale*, ch. 1, 2 and 3.

As for Mark three, four and five, ‘there is a degree of overlap with the significant potential for common ground between Christianity and Judaism in ethical understanding and moral action’.³⁶ As the authors rightly say, ‘the breadth of this understanding of mission provides scope for considering ways in which Christians may share in God’s mission with those outside the Church,’ in this case, with people of Israel. A whole chapter is devoted to the common mission of Jews and Christians in the areas of humanitarian work, social justice, combatting violence, antisemitism, and pursuing peace and reconciliation (chapter 6, ‘Ethical Discernment and Common Action’).

The whole picture –people with a mission, two witnesses or three

I find the approach of the document *God’s Unfailing Word* profitable, because it connects the question of Jewish-Christian relations with the theology of integral mission. It talks about the mission of the Church in general, and of its mission to the Jewish people in particular, including evangelism and the common mission of Jews and Christians in society.

Even so, the document does not go far enough, it does not relate the theological view on the lasting covenant of Israel to the whole area of mission. So, let me follow the lead and take it further. When we consider that the calling of the Jewish people is irrevocable, then we must also affirm that their mission as a people is still valid.³⁷ So we should include a third, and perhaps a fourth area: the mission of Israel in general, and of Israel to the Church in particular. Now, the mission of Israel is not absent from the document. Here and there it is mentioned in passing. E.g., ‘Jewish people have also been called to bear witness to God’ (p. 54). But sadly, this is not developed further in a special section or chapter.

With respect to this subject we can mention another Anglican publication: *Jews and Christians: Perspectives on Mission*. Interestingly, it places these perspectives side by side, which rarely happens. It gives an overview of the ideas of mission in Judaism, from Biblical times to the present, and a critical reflexion on the mission of the Church from a Christian author, who apparently dislikes Jewish evangelism in our day.

However, while it brings together Jewish and Christian voices on mission, even this interesting publication does not cover the whole area. It does not talk about the mission of Israel from a Christian point of view, nor does it listen to Jewish views on the mission of the Church. And it completely leaves the Jesus-believing Jews out of the picture – the third witness.

Taking all this in consideration, and taking the picture given by the document *God’s Unfailing Word* as a lead, we would enlarge this picture by the following overall picture of God’s people with a mission.

We distinguish between two or three witness people and their respective missions. And we also take into consideration that there are Jewish views and Christian views on these missions. Here is the picture:

<i>(A) Mission of Israel and of the Church</i>	
1. Mission of Israel	Jewish views / Christian views
2. Mission of the Church and its roots	Jewish views / Christian views
<i>(B) Mission with Israel</i>	
3. Common mission	Jewish views / Christian views
4. Witness of Messiah	
<i>(C) Mission to Israel</i>	

³⁶ Chapter ‘Mission and Evangelism’, p. 52.

³⁷ In a recent article which is included in a forthcoming publication, Jim Sibley has examined the common assumption that the people of Israel, having failed to carry out its mission in the time of the OT, has lost its position in God’s redemptive purposes, and consequently, that its mission has been transferred to the Church. His conclusion: ‘Following an examination of key Scriptures and a review of God’s redemptive purposes for the election of Israel as well as Israel’s specific missions, it has become evident that if the literal sense of Scripture is to be taken seriously at all, ethnic Israel has neither been supplanted or replaced’ (Sibley, Jim. ‘Was Ethnic Israel’s Mission Transferrable?’) The clearly implies, although Sibley does not state it explicitly that the same can be said of its mission.

<p>5. Mission of the Church to Israel Jewish views / Christian views</p> <p>6. Mission of JBJ to Israel</p> <p>(D) <i>Mission to the Church</i></p> <p>7. Mission of Israel to the Church Jewish views / Christian views</p> <p>8. Mission of JBJ to the Church</p>

I shall summarise each point by giving a short description of the particular mission in question, as I understand it.

First, the mission of Israel and of the Church

The people of Israel is called to be a witness of the one God, to make known to the nations his Name and his revelations in word and action, and to be a sign of his faithfulness.

We should distinguish between how Judaism sees the ongoing mission of Israel, and Christian views on this mission which are based on the Scriptures.

The Church has an integral mission in the world that could be summed up by the Five Marks, or our by our model of Multiple Witness.

Interestingly, there are also Jewish views on the mission of the Church, some saying that it is part of the preparation of the coming of Messiah by spreading monotheism, by making known the Name of God and his revealed Torah.

Secondly, common witness.

To begin with, the Church shares the mission of Israel to be witness to the one true God, and to foster the moral values that are revealed in the Torah.

Even the specific mission of the Church to be a witness of the Messiah is also rooted in Israel. All the mission mandates of the NT were given to Jewish believers first. Jesus and the apostles based their mission on the Hebrew Scriptures. The Gospel has gone from Israel to the nations.

Thirdly, the mission of the Church to Israel

This is often expressed in terms of evangelism, and this is a highly sensitive issue. Apart from Jewish views, that are most often very much opposed to what they call ‘Christian proselytism’, the Christian views range from a categorical no to an emphatic yes. The document takes the position of a conditional yes.³⁸

Again, we should acknowledge that JBJ are in a special position to be a witness of Jesus Messiah *within* Israel, and in a fully Jewish context. Non-Jewish believers can strengthen their testimony but should not replace it.

One other comment: the mission to Israel also includes: living the Christian life in such a way, individually and as a Church, that Israel will be provoked to jealousy, prayer, practical solidarity and in our days, repentance for the wrongdoings of the past.

Fourthly, mission of Israel to the Church

This area is hardly touched in publications on Israel and the Church, and never in mission studies. But it is a reality that the Jewish people have something to say and something to give to the Church. They are the custodians of God’s word, as Augustin said. Jewish knowledge of Hebrew and the Bible are rich sources for Christian Bible studies.

³⁸ Some quotes: ‘The Son of God became incarnate to bring fullness of life for all, and the Church is called to witness to that... The role of the witness is simply to be faithful in that pointing away from self to the one who has spoken and acted. Such witness to Christ need not involve words, but neither will it be afraid to give an account of itself when invited to do so (...)

That Christians should bear witness to Christ in this sense in their relations with Jewish people is therefore to be expected. Where there is opportunity for dialogue about matters of faith in this context... Christians will want to remember with gratitude that Jewish people stand in a unique relationship to the God of Israel who has drawn near to us in Christ. Where there is an opening for witness to include words, it will therefore be in the context of a dialogue in which Christians expect to learn and receive from Jewish participants. Jewish people have also been called to bear witness to God; Christians will be concerned to attend to that witness also whenever there is an occasion humbly to offer their own (...)

Nonetheless... all should appreciate opportunities to speak with Jewish people about matters of faith as occasions for Christians to listen, receive and learn from the witness of others, while also bearing witness themselves to God’s grace “in a humble and sensitive manner” (p. 54-55).

Moreover, JBJ have a mission, as Jews, to remind the Church at large of its Jewish roots. And also to represent the Jewish church with a Jewish expression of the Gospel, without which the Church is not complete

A unique panorama.

Now you will not find this or a similar comprehensive panorama in any book on mission theology that I know of. Just looking at the diagram is enough to realise that there are so many aspects that should be brought together if we want to get a comprehensive view about how Israel and the Church are involved in the mission of God, as two witnesses, or three, when we consider the special position of the JBJ.

Concluding remark

Each of these elements is sufficient to spend a whole lecture on. I will not do that. I must limit myself to presenting the overall picture. Perhaps I should develop it in a publication, but I do not dare to hope that I will succeed. So, I leave it at this, as my *Unvollendete Symphonie*. Or as my farewell programme, if you like, for future teaching and research. I hope it will give my successors, or perhaps some of you some ideas to work on. There could be interesting topics here for a doctoral research as well.

But I have said enough.

Let me close by taking up the words of the Old Testament preacher of Jerusalem:

‘I have cast my thoughts as bread on the water. And I have divided it in seven, even eight shares. How shall I / you find it back in many days?’

Who knows...³⁹

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