

Social Justice, Antisemitism, and Anti-Zionism in Historical and Biblical Perspective

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Introduction

Recently, my ministry took me to the country of Poland where I had the opportunity to visit the Nazi concentration and death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau for the first time. I asked the Polish guide if he knew who Tadeusz Borowski was, and he gladly shared information with me about this famous Polish poet and writer who had lived in the very buildings through which I was walking. My interest in Borowski (1922-1951) goes back to a Ph.D. seminar where I was required to read his collection of autobiographical short stories entitled *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*.¹ Borowski, a Gentile, was arrested by the Nazis in Warsaw and spent 1943-1945 imprisoned at various places like Auschwitz and Dachau. His fiancé was placed in Birkenau. Due to his youthful, physical strength as well as cunning he was able to survive till the camps were liberated.

Borowski opened his short history “This Way for the Gas” with the words “All of us walk around naked. The delousing is finally over, and our striped suits are back from the tanks of Cyclone B solution, an efficient killer of lice in clothing and of men in gas chambers.”² The concentration camp was a bundle of contradictions. Things that were helpful – killing lice – were deadly also to humans. One of Borowski’s jobs at Auschwitz was to load and help sort through the belongings dumped on the ramp by the trains that brought mostly Jews. The Jews were told that they were going to take a shower and could come back to get their belongings. Instead, most of them – men, women, and children -- were gassed and put in the ovens. The volume of belongings – clothes, shoes, hats, meat, sausages, bread, cheese, blankets, coats, briefcases, and drink – was enormous because there were hundreds or thousands on each transport that came in. Those who helped with the large piles of belongings were inmates at Auschwitz. They survived on food they were able to set aside for themselves from the ramp (from the food left behind by the Jews) and which the Nazi guards allowed them to keep. This encouraged them to work hard at their jobs. Borowski records a comment by one of the other helpers: “They can’t run out of people, or we’ll starve to death in this blasted camp. All of us live on what they bring.” Yet they all knew what was going on. In this context, Borowski records asking another one of

¹ The short stories comprising this work were written shortly after World War II. The collection of all of his writings was published in 1954, comprising five volumes. The collection in *This Way for the Gas* I assume is a subset of his collected works which was not published in Poland until 1959. It appeared in the United States in 1967. The copy I use is Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* translated by Barbara Vedder (New York: Penguin Books, 1976). In the Introduction, Jan Kott (translated by Michael Kandel) describes the collection as “one of the cruelest of testimonies to what men did to men, and a pitiless verdict that anything can be done to a human being” (12).

² Borowski, 29.

the prisoners helping at the ramp, “Listen, Henri, are we good people?” While the motivations for suicide may be complicated, one must wonder to what extent Tadeusz was bothered by his conscience over these things. He had survived at the expense of so many who had not. In his small apartment in Warsaw in 1951 (when he was just 29 years old), he turned on the gas and killed himself. Apparently, there were victims of the Holocaust after it was over.³

The Holocaust event has colored theological discussions since that time. Some Jewish people as well as some Gentiles have abandoned belief in God because of what He allowed to take place. Maybe He is not really there; or if He is, he is either finite or possesses diminished love. Some Jewish thinkers attribute the Holocaust to Christianity either mistakenly believing the Nazis to be a movement within Christianity or noting the climate of antisemitism in so-called Christian Germany that allowed National Socialism to be promoted. Moreover, various versions of dual covenant theology have been proposed, some of them part of an ecumenical thrust to find a way to bring Jews and Christians together through theological statements.⁴ The problem of evil in Christian apologetics now has its ultimate historical hurdle to overcome. Consequently, in one of the strangest ironies in history, antisemitism is on the rise in the contemporary world proving once again that sin never seems to allow us to learn from history. An additional irony is that the Jewish people, especially those who live in Israel, are the ones who are now accused of practicing social injustice and genocide in the world.

What the Holocaust Should Not Do

Before we address the upside-down way that social justice is addressed in the Middle East, a few issues need to be discussed to provide a frame to the current historical and theological situation. In particular, I want to organize the discussion around “What the Holocaust Should Not Do.” There are several ways in which the Holocaust, as important to history as it is, can cause us to maintain unbalanced and incomplete thinking. Each of these areas needs exploration. The brief introduction provided here should be enough to summarize where our thoughts need to go.

³ In fact, Nazi history is so overpowering, there are 26 memorial and education centers in just one northwest section of Germany alone, which is a sampling from the whole country. See Christine Hartung and Ulrike Schrader, eds., *Response to History* translated by Joseph Swann (Wuppertal-Munster: National Socialist Presbyteries and Memorials, 2015). Out of the voluminous literature on the Holocaust as well as historical research of persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe prior to the Holocaust, two resources that I find useful are Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985) and S. M. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, 2 Vols (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916). Dubnow, a Jewish historian, was killed by the Nazis in 1941.

⁴ See Craig A. Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *JETS* 44 (September 2001): 440-42 and Walter C. Kaiser, *Jewish Christianity: Why Believing Jews and Gentiles Parted Ways in the Early Church* (Silverton, OR: Lampien Press, 2017), 47-48. Dual covenant theology is the view that Jewish people come to God through the Law while Christians come to God through Jesus. There are liberal and conservative expressions of this position.

Nazi Killing of Jews More Than Concentration Camps

First, even within Holocaust studies there is often a singular focus on the labor and death camps created by the Nazis to destroy the Jewish people. Certainly these atrocious methods and places deserve a bulk of the attention. However, other avenues in which Jews were killed should not be overlooked. Perhaps the largest and most symbolic example is the massacre of Jewish people in mass at Babyn Yar in the area of Kiev, Ukraine. Naimark laments:

Regretfully, Western representatives of Holocaust memory often have only the vaguest understanding of the killing of Jews in the east, with the exception of the death camps, Auschwitz being most notable for the sheer power of its symbolism as a “site of memory.” The mass shootings of Jews in German-occupied Soviet territory attracted less interest than the horrifying images of the gas chambers and the crematoria. One could say the same of scholarly examinations in the West of Babyn Yar, which have been strikingly few and relatively recent.⁵

At Babyn Yar, the Germans executed Jewish people mostly by firing-squad beginning on September 29-30, 1941. Around 34,000 were killed on those two days. By the end of the war, 100,000 (mostly Jews) had been killed and buried in mass graves at the ravine called Babyn Yar. Our memory of the Holocaust should not be limited to the death camps, although the numbers there are far greater.

Other Genocides in History

Second, the shadow of the Holocaust should not make any of us forget the other genocides of history. Even in recent times, political leaders “motivated by ideology and immediate gains, are ready to isolate and murder alleged enemies both within their own states and in conquered territories.”⁶ Most historically aware Christians know about Darfur, Rwanda, Congo, Bosnia, Saddam Hussein’s attacks on the Kurds and others, and the tragedy of ISIS persecution of others, especially Christians, in Iraq and Syria. Especially noteworthy for mention is the Turkish genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during and after World War I. Some estimate that the Turks systematically killed 1.5 million Armenians.⁷

One of the most hypocritical events in history was the presence of Soviets on the panel of judges at the Nuremberg trials following World War II. The Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin had been responsible for the intentional death of millions of people in the two decades leading up to the war. Perhaps the most heinous of the government’s actions was the premeditated starving of the people of

⁵ Norman M. Naimark, “Preface” in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory* edited by Vladyslav Hrynevych and Pau Robert Magocsi (Kiev, Ukraine: Dukh I Litera, 2016), 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷ See Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2011), an exhaustive study of over one thousand pages.

Ukraine, especially in the rural areas of the region, in what has come to be called the “Red Famine” or the Holodomor in 1932-33, although the killing had begun earlier and continued later.⁸ Research shows that between 1931 and 1934 more than 3.9 million Ukrainians died of hunger due mostly to Soviet strategy.⁹ Although some Jewish people were included in these numbers, the vast majority were from other ethnic backgrounds. This example provides one small portrait within the massive extermination of human beings by communists during the twentieth-century, a number cited as high as 100 million souls. As one commentator noted: “the Bolshevik plague that began in Russia was the greatest catastrophe in human history.”¹⁰ While Jewish people ended up targets, a wide array of people groups were destroyed as well.¹¹ A focus on the Holocaust should not make us lose sight of other twentieth-century acts of supreme evil.

Antisemitism in Christendom

The most unfortunate discovery, from a Christian point of view, from studying antisemitism over the centuries is the abundant presence of active hatred and antisemitism in Christendom. While an evangelical might take heart in understanding that the largest portion of such developments came through the machinations of the Roman Catholic Church, he will be disappointed when he comes to some of the Reformers and studies what they said about the Jewish people. Three examples are given here as representative of Christendom down through the years. First, the popular church leader John Chrysostom (c. 349-407), Archbishop of Constantinople, who was known as the “golden-mouthed” orator, said the following about the Jews:

⁸ For a definitive, well-documented tragic history of the Soviet regime’s attempt to destroy Ukraine for political and economic reasons, see Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018). The term *Holodomor* comes from the Ukrainian words for “to kill by starvation,” or more specifically *holod* (hunger) and *mor* (extermination). See Applebaum, xxiv.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ David Satter, “100 Years of Communism—and 100 Million Dead,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Online Edition, November 6, 2017; Accessed September 11, 2019.

¹¹ For an insider view of Stalin’s evil, see Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York: vintage Books, 1973). Concerning the Jews, Medvedev notes, “After the war Stalin began to exclude all Jews from the Party and government *apparatus*, covering his actions with talk about counter-revolutionary activities of international Zionist organizations...” (493). The history of Czarist Russia with its pogroms against Jewish people shows that antisemitism in that part of the world pre-dates the rise of communism. Furthermore, after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the decline of communism, the anti-Semitic tendencies lingered off and on. For a detailed presentation of the relationships in one part of the former Soviet Union, see Paul Robert Magocsi and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews and Ukrainians: A Millennium of Co-Existence*, 2nd revised ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018). See especially pages 2-3, 55, 83, 151, 188, 248, 276. Although the Jews receive persecution throughout history in Russia or countries near Russia, the history has not been kind to other ethnic groups as well.

The Jewish people were driven by their drunkenness and plumpness to the ultimate evil; they kicked about, they failed to accept the yoke of Christ, nor did they pull the plow of his teaching. Another prophet hinted at this when he said: 'Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn heifer.' . . . Although such beasts are unfit for work, they are fit for killing."¹²

While his eight homilies against the Jews contain some valid theological reasoning and use of Scripture, statements such as these provided fodder for Christian attitudes that could never see God as still having a plan for the Jewish people. The harshness of the statements jolts thinking Christians today and certainly offends the Jewish people. In fact, the Nazis used Chrysostom's teachings to attempt to win the Christians of Germany over to their anti-Semitic agenda:

These pronouncements became in later centuries a source of inspiration to anti-Semites and also to the Nazis who otherwise had not much patience with Christianity. St. John Chrysostom was frequently quoted and reprinted in the Third Reich as a witness for the prosecution; after the Holocaust, this became an embarrassment for the church and attempts were made to explain their words in the historical context. It was said that the general discourse at the time was aggressive, brutal, and extreme. At a time of struggle for survival and recognition, Christian forgiveness and salvation were not in demand. These anti-Jewish attacks continued and grew even sharper after Christianity had become a state religion in the Roman empire.¹³

Other Church Fathers besides Chrysostom could also be cited as examples of anti-Jewish bias that could feed open hostility, although Chrysostom seems the worst in the early church.

Our second example of antisemitism spawned in Christendom can be found in the Spanish Inquisition initiated by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, famous for funding the explorations of Christopher Columbus in the late fifteenth century. In the same year that Columbus sailed the ocean blue (1492), Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews from Spain. Although the Inquisition took on expanded scope over the next three centuries, its early purpose was primarily to deal with the problem of Jewish converts to Christianity. It was thought that some of the converts were just pretending allegiance to the Church to prevent persecution or that they had actually apostasized and gone back to private practice of Judaism.¹⁴ Benzion Netanyahu refutes the usual interpretation that Spain's leaders were attempting to deal with this "religious" problem by removing the Jews from Spain. Instead, at the

¹² John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos, Homily I*, 5-6.

¹³ Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 48.

¹⁴ Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995), xiii-xiv. The Israeli historian Netanyahu is the father of Benjamin Netanyahu, the current prime minister of Israel as this paper is written although an election is scheduled soon. The book is dedicated to Jonathan Netanyahu who was killed leading the rescue operation at Entebbe on July 4, 1976. The massive tome is almost 1400 pages.

foundation of the opposition to Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants, many of whom had been brought up in the church, was *race* and not *religion*:

Thus we see how, in the midst of a people whose Christian zeal could in no way be doubted, a theory based on racism appeared whose three major articles of faith were: the existence of a *conspiracy* to seize the government of Spain; the ongoing “contamination” of the “blood” of Spanish people; and the need to do away with these frightful dangers through a genocidal solution of the converso problem.¹⁵

Evidence that race was the driving force and not religious persecution comes from the fact that any religious problem the Jews and/or converted Jews were causing at the time was minor.¹⁶ As a result of the racial fears, Jews were prohibited from intermarriage, forbidden from holding high offices, sometimes tortured, eventually expelled or even worse – even if their families had been Christians for a couple of generations. In short, everything was in place, perhaps for the first time in history, to join virulent antisemitism to a theory of race so as to protect the purity of a peoples’ view of themselves.¹⁷ This is before Luther and more than four centuries before Hitler. All of this was done in the name of Christianity.

A third black mark of Christian antisemitism appears in one of evangelicalism’s heroes – Martin Luther (1483-1546), the father of the Protestant Reformation. His book *On the Jews and Their Lies* written three years before his death (1543) is the most famous of his anti-Jewish polemical works that uses harsh, vulgar, and murderous language.¹⁸ Luther at that stage in his life came to the conclusion that it was impossible to convert the Jews to the Christian faith.¹⁹ His analysis covers many passages with appropriate interpretation and correct rebuke of some of the views of the Jewish people of his day. He goes overboard, however, into hateful antisemitism on several occasions. He bemoans that the Jews have a “bloodthirsty, vengeful, murderous yearning and hope.”²⁰ At the Nuremberg trials, Nazi war criminal Julius Streicher was asked about prior anti-Semitic literature. He defended himself this way:

Anti-Semitic publications have existed in Germany for centuries. A book I had, written by Martin Luther, was, for instance, confiscated. Dr. Martin Luther would very probably sit in my place in the defendants’ dock today, if this book had been taken into consideration by the

¹⁵ Ibid., 990-91.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1113.

¹⁷ The inside jacket of my copy of Netanyahu’s book summarizes: “This was the first time that extreme anti-Semitism was wedded to a theory of race—a union that would dramatically affect the course of modern history.”

¹⁸ One of Luther’s books written in the same year (1543) was *On the Holy Name and the Lineage of Christ*, another source of strongly worded anti-Jewish sentiment.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies* translated by Martin H. Bertram (Online edition; AAARGH, 2009), 2.

²⁰ Ibid., 14.

Prosecution. In the book *The Jews and Their Lies*, Dr. Martin Luther writes that the Jews are a serpent's brood and one should burn down their synagogues and destroy them.²¹

After the trial, Streicher was executed for his crimes against humanity. Luther, however, was also on trial that day. The Christian looking at this evidence today should not be judged for being perplexed. How can Luther be so right on biblical authority and justification by faith alone, but so wrong on his hatred for the Jews?

I used to say that if Luther had died five years earlier so his anti-Semitic books would not have been published late in his life, the relationship of Jews and Protestants would have been better since that time. I no longer voice this opinion. Last year, I was using Luther's lectures on Isaiah 63:1-6, given as early as 1530, over a decade before his worst books. Isaiah is describing the picture of a victorious Messiah who comes from Edom after judging them in the end-time days. Luther without warrant and using extreme allegorical interpretation identifies Edom as an ungodly synagogue, that is, the Jews. Edom refers to "red Jews" who are "bloodthirsty and murderous." He goes on to say that "every calamity of the Jews is for the sake of Christ." Luther apparently rejoices that the second coming of Jesus will be the final destruction of the Jewish people, contrary to the overall message of Isaiah.²² Such vitriolic language forces the genuine Christian to ponder the strength of the sin nature when even the greatest of Christians can think this way.²³ It is clear that Christian antisemitism cannot hide in the shadows of the Holocaust.²⁴

Jewish Persecution of Christians

Another area for which there must be balanced thinking in light of the Holocaust involves Jewish persecution of Christians. It may seem odd to address this in such a context, but a brief review is

²¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal: Nuremberg 14 November 1945 - 1 October 1946*, Vol. 12 (Nuremberg, 1947), 318. The transcripts in English translation can be found online at the Library of Congress website under Military Legal Resources: https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/NT_major-war-criminals.html.

²² Martin Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah*, Vol. 17 edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1969).

²³ Bernard N. Howard, a Jewish Christian, gives three proposals for responding to the Lutheran legacy of antisemitism: 1. Luther's antisemitism should be acknowledged without qualification; 2. Luther's antisemitism should—as far as possible—be understood; 3. Luther's antisemitism should harm his reputation. See "Luther's Jewish Problem," The Gospel Coalition; Internet; <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/luthers-jewish-problem/>; accessed September 12, 2019.

²⁴ Other case studies of Christian antisemitism could have been chosen: The history of Czarist Russia with its pogroms against Jewish people shows that antisemitism in that part of the world pre-dates the rise of communism. Furthermore, after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the decline of communism, the anti-Semitic tendencies lingered on.

warranted. The Jewish people certainly have a right to voice the true statement that persecution has gone mostly one way against them. The other side, although historically smaller in volume, is still grievous nonetheless. Virtually every Christian knows that the Jewish leaders of the first century took part in the murder of Jesus outside Jerusalem. Believers should not use this as it has been used in history to label the Jews as the Christ-killers and give them sole blame for the death of Jesus.²⁵ In the book of Acts, the first Christian martyr (Stephen) was killed by Jewish hands (Acts 7). Jewish persecution of the church at Jerusalem was so great that it displaced most Christians who lived in the city (Acts 8:2). The rest of the book of Acts describes the Jewish efforts to silence the Apostle Paul, but he escapes death. But he stands trial before Roman leaders with the Jews as his accusers. This is similar to what is found in the Apocalypse. Near the end of the first century, Jewish communities were involved in slandering Christians before the pagan Roman authorities at Smyrna (Rev. 2:9) and Philadelphia (Rev. 3:9). The second century continued the hostility between the two groups leading to the further divide between Jews/Judaism and Christians/Christianity. The martyrdom of Polycarp in AD 155 or 156 is often cited as an instance where Jewish people helped in the indictment and execution of a Christian.²⁶ However, by the time Christianity emerges as the religion of the Roman Empire in the early fourth century, a robust replacement theology had developed which eliminated any discussion of the role of Israel and the Jewish people in God's sovereign plan of history going forward.²⁷ The divide was viewed as permanent except for those few Jewish persons who would come into the Church on the Church's terms. The Jewish communities were now unable to mount persecution of Christians.

Perhaps the biggest change in Jewish perception of Christianity is that the New Testament itself is now viewed as anti-Semitic: "Meanwhile some Jewish, Christian and post-Christian critics have identified the New Testament itself as the source of the problem, seeing the role ascribed to the Jews in the New Testament as part of a 'culture of contempt' leading directly from John's Gospel to the gas chambers."²⁸ Of special note would be passages like John 8:44, Rev. 2:9, and Rev. 3:9 where, according to

²⁵ I gave a paper last year at the Pre-Trib Study Group entitled "Why the World Hates the Jews." I propose that Christians should not look at Jewish people as the "Christ-killers" and should instead develop a full-orbed theology of the cross to help explain our views to Jewish people and others. This paper is scheduled to be published in a future edition of the *Journal of Dispensational Theology*.

²⁶ See *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, XIII. The account of the death of Polycarp is given in *The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna: Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp*. This work is part of the Apostolic Fathers collection and is sometimes titled *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. Scholars are divided over whether the account is a Christian exaggeration and spurious relative to its statements about the Jews; see David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 52A (Dallas, TX: Words Books, 1997), 162.

²⁷ The history of the development of replacement forms of theology in which the Church replaces Israel in God's plan has been well documented. Some sources to consider are Kaiser, *Jewish Christianity*, 21-36; Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); and Michael J. Vlach, *The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

²⁸ Duncan MacPherson, "Difficult Conversations, *cont'd.*," The Society for Biblical Studies Newsletter, Vol. 12, Issue 2; Online, www.sbsedu.org/L3_e_newsletter30.6.14DifficultConversation2.htm; accessed September 11,

many Jewish interpreters, Jesus describes all Jews as descended from Satan and treats them as a synagogue of Satan.²⁹ Christian scholars have responded to these charges.³⁰ However, the believer must understand, in light of all that has happened, how the New Testament would be read by Jewish people, sometimes in an anachronistic way.

One unfortunate fact of post-Holocaust times is that some Jewish people do persecute Messianic believers in Israel.³¹ It is quite common for the boycotting of a Jewish business man who rents or sells property to a church or group of Christians, especially if they are ethnically Jewish. Furthermore, attempted violence takes place on occasion: “A concert for the so-called Messianic Jewish community in Jerusalem two weeks ago turned violent when more than three dozen Jewish and right-wing extremists attacked members of the audience. For seven hours, about 40 right-wing extremists, so-called hilltop youth from the West Bank and members of the self-styled anti-assimilation group Lehava cursed and screamed, sprayed pepper spray and tossed live frogs at members of the community.”³² We can only pray that such events will not escalate and people are not hurt. It would be a tragic testimony for some Jewish people to become persecutors after all that has been done to them. One good sign is that many Jewish leaders seem to be coming forward to defend Christians against persecution around the world.³³ According to a recent British government report, at the present time, Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world, mostly due to Islamic oppression although not exclusively so.³⁴ This may provide a way for Jews and Christians to understand each other. Christians are the most persecuted *religious* group while Jewish people have been the most oppressed *ethnic* group in history.

2019. Some respected liberal theologians in Christendom have asserted that John’s Gospel sees the Jews as a symbol of evil. See Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 104-105.

²⁹ For example, see Gerald Sigal, “How Does the Book of Revelation Promote Hatred of Jews?,” Online; <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/how-does-the-book-of-revelation-promote-hatred-of-jews/>; accessed August 22, 2019.

³⁰ James D. G. Dunn, “The Question of Anti-semitism in the New Testament Writings of the Period” in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* edited by James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 177-211.

³¹ Estimates vary but there may be roughly 20,000 evangelical Messianic believers in Israel today.

³² Nir Hasson, “Messianic Jews’ Say Police in Jerusalem Didn’t Protect Them From Right-wing Mob,” Haaretz, June 14, 2019; one of the singers and musicians at the concert is part of the Friends of Israel family and supported by the ministry.

³³ See Tom Wilson, “Jews and the Persecution of Christians,” *First Things*, February 13, 14; Online, <https://firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/02/jews-and-the-persecution-of-christians>; accessed September 12, 2019.

³⁴ “Christian Persecution,” *Israel My Glory*, 77 (Sep/Oct 2019): 8.

Upside-Down Social Justice in the Case of Israel

In light of the oppression and misrepresentation of the Jewish people down through the years, it is not surprising that the nation of Israel is today wrongfully considered a colonial and genocidal oppressor who is destroying the Palestinian people. This way of arguing against the Jews of Israel increased after the Six-Day War in 1967 and, in particular, took off in earnest after the 1982 First Lebanon War.³⁵ Although there have been difficulties from time to time, the military strength of the Israel Defense Forces simply prevents a frontal attack by Arab forces. While terrorist activity continues, the Arab leaders, especially in the Palestinian Authority are expending much energy to convince the world that the Jews in Israel are a Western imposition into the Middle East and have no right to be there. After the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Arab mayor of Nablus, Bassam Shaka'a, was asked to describe the response of the people in the so-called occupied territories. His answer expresses the narrative perfectly:

No one was surprised by the criminal attack on Lebanon. It is a continuation of Israel's policy aimed at exterminating our people, physically and politically. It is a continuation of the battle started by Israel at the very beginning when it considered the land to be its land, and sought to build a "pure" Israel without the inhabitants.³⁶

Notice the reversals, the upside-down language mirroring the Holocaust. The Palestinians have been criminally attacked. The goal of Israel is the extermination of the Palestinian Arabs. This is taken to mean elimination by death and not just the end of any self-rule possibilities in the political realm. The real issue is the land which Israel wrongfully considers to belong to the Jewish people. So the Jews have usurped the land belonging to someone else. Israel wants a pure nation with no other ethnic groups like the Palestinian Arabs. The portrait of Nazi Germany is superimposed on the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel, on this view, consistently practices social injustice and does so, apparently, by its own existence as well as its actions. The Arab narrative is somewhat surreal and absolutely false. There are over one million people living in Israel who are not Jewish. Some of them, even Muslims, belong to the Israeli Knesset or parliament. Israel does not target Palestinian Arabs for killing like Hitler's storm troopers. Furthermore, it does not target children for indiscriminate killing.³⁷ The hypocritical nature

³⁵ The word *Palestinian* applied to both Jews and Arabs living in the area in the first half of the twentieth century. Since then, especially gaining ground in the 1960s when the PLO was formed, the word was hijacked so that it refers to an ethnic group. As such it is a failed designation. The term was created for political reasons.

³⁶ Cited in the interview article by Ghassan Bishara, "All Palestinians are Living One Battle, Inside and Outside," *Palestinian Journal* 11 (Summer/Fall 1982): 94.

³⁷ See Alan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2003), 189-96. Dershowitz does a good job of handling the charges from an ethical point of view. Standard histories of modern Israel will also help at least to the point that they were written. For example, see Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 1998). Gilbert does a good job of letting facts speak for themselves including allowing the critics of

of the narrative can be seen in the PLO's automatic payment of a stipend to anyone who murders a Jew in Israel.³⁸

Two ways in which the Arab narrative about Israel is being advanced in the world are practical political pressure and the promotion of a version of Christian theology that supports the political pressure. In this way, the so-called Palestinian cause seeks to foment Christian opposition to Israel.

Practical Political Pressure: BDS

Here I do not really want to talk about the use made of the United Nations to advance the Palestinian Arab cause, although it is always present. Instead, I want to rehearse briefly the campaign to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israel (known as the BDS movement). One of the leading websites is bdsmovement.net which alleges to promote freedom, justice, and equality. It encourages specific ways in which people can get involved to oppose Israeli apartheid (as the narrative is described). Several articles are posted to advance the narrative. Two of the prominent sources of the published online presentations are the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) and the Palestinian Campaign for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). To get a flavor of the articles, a snapshot on a recent day showed the following titles (partial listing):³⁹

- “Boycott AnyVision: Israel’s ‘Field-Tested’ Facial Recognition Surveillance Company”
- “PACBI Welcomes Statement by More than 500 Filmmakers Against ‘Close-Up’ Initiative Normalizing Israeli Apartheid”
- “The BDS Movement Calls to Boycott Three Anti-Palestinian German Clubs”
- “Boycott Pop-Kultur Berlin Festival 2019”
- “No Impunity for Ethnic Cleansing in Jerusalem – Boycott Israel Now”
- “Democratic Socialists of America Commit to National BDS Organizing”
- “Human Rights Organizations Based in Israel Voice Concern before Bundestag President over Motion Defining BDS as Antisemitism”

The entire range of boycotting, divesting from, and sanctioning Israel is meant not just to hurt Israel economically (which has not happened yet), but to put the narrative in front of people, especially in the West. Knowing that most people do not know the actual conditions on the ground in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the presentations hope to produce anti-Israeli thinking while producing sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs. It does not matter if the presentations are true or false.

Israel, even among Israeli citizens, to be heard. I have not seen that kind of honesty and transparency on the other side.

³⁸ David Bedein, “Who Says That Crime Does Not Pay?” *Israel Behind the News*; August 22, 2019; Online; https://israelbehindthenews.com/who-says-that-crime-does-not-pay/18944/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ibn-today; accessed August 22, 2019.

³⁹ Snapshot taken on September 13, 2019.

Besides boycotting the purchase of Israeli products, a most troubling practice of the BDS movement is to attempt to keep Israeli speakers from being heard at various events, especially on college campuses in the United States. Dershowitz points out several examples:

- A letter (April 2002) signed by 125 academics was printed in the *Guardian* (Great Britain) calling for a moratorium on support for Israeli academics and universities;
- A signatory of the above mentioned letter fired two scholars from an academic journal just because they were Israelis;
- A teacher at Oxford University rejected a Ph.D. applicant just because he had served in the Israel Defense Forces.

Such attitudes have also generated discrimination against Jewish students at some prestigious universities. At the 2015 November “Students of Color Conference” (SOCC) at the University of California, two Jewish students from UCLA witnessed the BDS narrative first hand. In response to participation in the conference, one of those Jewish students, Arielle Mokhtarzadeh, made the following observations:

Over the course of what was probably no longer than an hour, my history was denied, the murder of my people was justified, and a movement whose sole purpose is the destruction of the Jewish homeland was glorified. Statements were made justifying the ruthless murder of innocent Israeli civilians, blatantly denying the Holocaust in which six million Jews were murdered. Why anyone in their right mind would accept these slanders as truths baffles me. But they did. These statements, and others, were met with endless snaps and cheers. I was taken aback.⁴⁰

The SOCC meeting taught the absurd idea that the intifadas were peaceful uprisings against Israel. The message was clear: Jewish students who did not get on board with the anti-Israel, anti-Semitic program were not welcome in the progressive movement against racism. There has developed a “dubious bond between the progressive movement and pro-Palestinian activists who often engage in the same racist and discriminatory discourse they claim to fight. As a result of this alliance, progressive Jewish students are often subjected to a double-standard not applied to their peers—an Israel litmus test to prove their loyalties to social justice.”⁴¹ In addition, a chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) at Northeastern University “was so persistent in their anti-Semitic harassment—from defacing the statue of a Jewish donor to disrupting Holocaust awareness events—that the university was forced to temporarily suspend the organization in 2014.”⁴²

⁴⁰Anthony Berteaux, “In the Safe Spaces on Campus, No Jews Allowed,” *The Tower Magazine*; February 2016; Online; www.thetower.org/article/in-the-safe-spaces-on-campus-no-jews-allowed/; accessed August 21, 2019.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

It is no surprise, in light of such a political climate on many college campuses, that a study of Jews and antisemitism in the ethnic studies or Middle East studies departments are sometimes rejected since so-called Palestinian studies using the Arab narrative predominate and are considered sacrosanct.⁴³ Therefore, the campus is often not a pleasant place for a pro-Israel student, especially if they are Jewish. In fact, the emphasis on social justice in dealing with Israel has been turned upside-down on its head. This pursuit for social justice is actually leading in our day to a strengthened antisemitism. As one commentator noted, “Social justice ideologues are not interested in issues, resolution or fairness. They mean to win at any cost, even if it means, as in the case of anti-Semitism, promoting the us/them binary code which always and inevitably divides people and prevents them from considering their common humanity.”⁴⁴

Theological Pressure: Liberation Theology

Added to the political pressure of the various expressions of the BDS movement, more troubling for the evangelical believer may be the utilization of liberation theology to advance the Arab narrative in the Middle East. Liberation theology developed in the last half of the twentieth century as a theological way of thinking about the oppressed peoples of the world.⁴⁵ Various authors stressed different areas, various parts of the world, and specific people groups, although the original progress was in Latin America within Roman Catholicism. The generalized form sees salvation as political deliverance rather than individual rescue from sin. Specialized forms of liberation theology would be black theology and feminist or womanist theology. Two key passages often sloganized in liberation theology are Jesus’ statement “the truth shall make you free” (John 8:22) and Moses’ demand to Pharaoh “let my people go” (Ex. 9:13 et al).

Related to the question of social justice, Israel, and the Palestinian Arabs, one encounters several avenues of liberation theology that converge on the notion that Israel is an apartheid state that should be confronted through BDS and other means. These various elements combine to form what has been labeled Christian Palestinianism.⁴⁶ At the center of this movement is an Anglican priest named Naim Ateek who could legitimately be called the “father of Christian Palestinianism.” He was eleven

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Channa Newman, “Pursuit of ‘Social Justice’ Gives Strength to Anti-Semitism,” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle*, December 2, 2018; Online; <https://jewishchronicle.timesofisrael.com/pursuit-of-social-justice-gives-strength-to-anti-semitism/>; accessed August 21, 2019.

⁴⁵ A couple of resources on liberation theology are Ronald Nash, ed., *Liberation Theology* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1984) and Deane William Ferm, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987). I have sometimes made the comment that liberation theology is Marxism with Bible verses sprinkled on it.

⁴⁶ Paul R. Wilkinson, *Israel Betrayed, Volume 2 - The Rise of Christian Palestinianism* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 60. Wilkinson says he calls this movement Christian Palestinianism “because it represents the antithesis of biblical Christian Zionism.”

years old in 1948 and witnessed what he considered unfair treatment of his Christian Arab family, which lost its home as the Israelis moved in. His seminal work *Justice and Only Justice* serves as the foundation document for a Palestinian liberation theology.⁴⁷ The dissemination of his views has largely been accomplished through the organization named Sabeel which he founded in 1989. *Sabeel* is the Arabic word for *way*, *channel*, or *spring*. The stated intention is to promote the liberation of Palestinians by nonviolent methods. There are chapters of Sabeel in many countries including the United Kingdom and the United States.

Wilkinson succinctly describes Naim Ateek and his organization Sabeel in rather strong and broad terms:

Sabeel's propagation of a Palestinianized version of Roman Catholic liberation theology, its blatant distortion and de-Zionization of God's Word, its monstrous conception of a Marcionite Jesus arrayed in Palestinian robes, its promotion of an interfaith agenda at complete variance with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and its seduction of Western evangelicals already ensnared by replacement theology, have made it a potent and destructive force within the church.⁴⁸

To unpack this summary, we start by noticing the respect for the roots of liberation theology and the perception that support from the Catholic Church will be necessary for them to accomplish their agenda. The next two parts, de-Zionization of God's Word and the Marcionite Jesus, stem from the devaluing of the Old Testament in Christian Palestinianism. Ateek notes that among Christian Palestinians a major change took place in how the Old Testament was viewed:

Before the creation of the State [of Israel], the Old Testament was considered to be an essential part of the Christian Scripture, pointing and witnessing to Jesus. Since the creation of the State, some Jewish and Christian interpreters have read the Old Testament largely as a Zionist text to such an extent that it has become almost repugnant to Palestinian Christians. As a result, the Old Testament has generally fallen into disuse among both clergy and laity, and the Church has been unable to come to terms with its ambiguities, questions, and paradoxes—especially with its direct application to the twentieth-century events in Palestine.⁴⁹

Ateek further commented that “the emergence of the Zionist movement in the twentieth century is a retrogression of the Jewish community into the history of its very distant past, with its most elementary and primitive forms of the concept of God.”⁵⁰ Ateek sees the Jews as going back to a tribal

⁴⁷ Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

⁴⁸ Paul R. Wilkinson, *Israel Betrayed, Volume 2 - The Rise of Christian Palestinianism* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 69.

⁴⁹ Ateek, *Justice*, 77.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

god. One sees in these words echoes of replacement theology. The Old Testament is downgraded, and the promises to Israel about the land and future of national Israel are thrown away.

Part of the equation for Ateek and Christian Palestinianism is the clear statement that they are seeking a special hermeneutic: “Palestinian Christians are looking for a hermeneutic that will help them to identify the authentic Word of God in the Bible and to discern the true meaning of those biblical texts that Jewish Zionists and Christian fundamentalists cite to substantiate their subjective claims and prejudices.”⁵¹ When reading this, one readily understands that liberation theology is not conservative in orientation. Ateek’s teaching is that the plain, literal meaning derived from grammatical-historical interpretation will not work for the Christian Palestinians because it is not what they want to see in Scripture. So they are searching for an alternative. It is they who are subjective and not the Zionists and dispensational fundamentalists who are bringing their prejudices to the text. Do the Christian Palestinians believe they have no prejudices themselves? We must read Scripture as God gave it and follow its lead even if it takes us into territory we were not expecting and do not really like.

The next part of Wilkinson’s summary notes that Sabeel is an interfaith organization which really has nothing to do with the gospel of eternal life. The official full name of Sabeel is the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. As an ecumenical organization it attempts to bring together various groups who share one thing: a dislike for Israel’s alleged mistreatment and oppression of the Palestinians. Consequently, support comes mostly from the mainline denominations in the United States and various church groups around the world who are not committed to the literal interpretation of the Bible. Sabeel in this sense would represent a segment of the liberal spectrum in Christendom.

One must ask what the end game really is for Christian Palestinianism. What would victory for their cause look like? Is it a nation called Palestine that will be run by the Islamic radicals with Jews living inside of it? That does not match the rhetoric of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. Is the end game the destruction of the Jews so that only Palestinian Arabs remain? This fits the rhetoric of the PLO but is hardly consistent with Christian teaching. It would be doing to the Jews what they are complaining that the Jews have done to them. Is the end game a two-state solution? The leadership of the Arabs has consistently rejected a two-state solution the many times it has been offered beginning in 1947. It appears that what is really going on is a Christian expression of Palestinian Arab nationalism. Christ and the Bible are not at the center.

The final point in Wilkinson’s summary is that Sabeel has been seducing Western evangelicals who hold to replacement theology to the detriment of the church. Evidence of this comes largely from the founding of Christ at the Checkpoint (CATC) in 2010, a conference sponsored every other year by Bethlehem Bible College located in the area under control by the Palestinian Authority. Noticeably, there is cross-over between Sabeel and CATC. Among those claiming evangelical credentials, Stephen Sizer, noted Anglican antagonist of Israel, Gary Burge, and Ateek have been involved at CATC as well as Sabeel. Gary Demar, Hank Hanegraaf, and Colin Chapman, among others, have led the charge to

⁵¹ Ibid., 79.

advance the same Arab narrative among evangelical Christians.⁵² According to Wilkinson, CATC has superseded the more liberal Sabeel due to its evangelicalism. The CATC website affirms, “We feel compelled to address the injustices that have taken place in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, particularly the Palestinian lands under occupation.”⁵³ One wonders why CATC singles out Israel when so much of the violence in the area is initiated by the Islamic terrorists. Further explanation of what they believe fleshes out the possible reason – their replacement theology.

We do not condemn the Jewish people and we reject any forms of anti-Semitism. In fact, many of our supporters are Israeli Jews who believe that the present Israeli treatment of the Palestinians does not reflect the deeper moral values of Judaism itself. We simply wish to find a life in the entire Holy Land that is free of discrimination and injustice, where each person can live without prejudice toward their race or religion. This also means we reject theologies that lead to discrimination or privileges based on ethnicity. Worldviews that promote divine national entitlement or exceptionalism do not promote the values of the Kingdom of God because they place nationalism above Jesus.⁵⁴

Notice the swipe at Zionism and the implied idea that dispensationalists place nationalism in the case of Israel as more important than Jesus. Again, I applaud the notable idea of living without prejudice in political matters, but what is the end game? If they succeed what will it look like? Both the Jews and the Muslims would have to come to an understanding simultaneously about such things. It will take the second coming of Jesus to make this a reality, but then the land will clearly belong to Israel with no disputes.

Conclusion

The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, of which I am a part, began as a ministry of social justice to defend the Jewish people. After Kristallnacht on November 9-10, 1938, a pogrom against the Jews by the Nazis, a group of Christian leaders and businessmen met to help with a response to the injustice that was being carried out under the swastika. Among them were Lewis Sperry Chafer, the President of Dallas Theological Seminary, and H. A. Ironside, pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, both strong dispensationalists. They decided to form The Friends of Israel Refugee Relief Committee to help Jewish people who were fleeing from Nazi tyranny and oppression. They were not wrong to do so. Social justice of these kinds have a place in Christian thinking and action.

⁵² For a good summary of this issue, see Thomas Ice, *The Case for Zionism: Why Christians Should Support Israel* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2017), 39-40.

⁵³ <https://christatthecheckpoint.bethbc.edu/about-christ-at-the-checkpoint/>; accessed September 13, 2019.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

To close, I want to give some practical recommendations for action, social and spiritual, to respond to perhaps the greatest social justice issue of our time – antisemitism.

1. Consider the common sense things. Buy Israeli products, books written by Israeli authors, and Jewish magazines and resources. Write letters to the editor when you see anti-Semitism near you. Verbally stand against those who speak evil of the Jews using the old stereotypes.
2. Read and observe widely in various sources so that you are not hypnotized by the charisma of one author or speaker. Part of your studies need to be in Jewish history.
3. Attend a church, if possible, that is pro-Israel and accepts what the Bible says about Israel – past, present, and future. The church should not be afraid of dispensationalism.
4. Study your Bible following a literal understanding and fully embrace dispensationalism; this will lead you to believe that Israel has a right to the land and God has a future for His chosen people. This understanding should increase your love for the Jewish people.
5. Befriend Jewish people where you live. Centuries of persecution and forced conversions make many Jewish people believe that the very act of evangelism is anti-Semitic. They must learn that there are Christians who love them in the name of Jesus. But do not be afraid to share the gospel.
6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and your Jewish friends.
7. Make a trip to Israel with a pro-Israel group. Although you cannot see all the facts on the ground through a tour, it will increase your awareness nonetheless.
8. Do not accept all actions of the present Israeli government as right just because it is Israel. Analysis must be done. They must be held to account. However, the interpretation of the facts on the ground should not be done based upon the reporting of *Al Jazeera*.
9. Remember that Jesus is Jewish. How can we not love the Jewish people? The Apostle Paul said, “From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Rom. 11:28).