Review Article

Karl Barth: Supersessionism and Israel, Yeshua and God's Election – a Dialectical Balance?

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Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Israel*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp. viii, 194.

R. Kendall Soulen, 'Consummation at the End of Christendom', pp. 81-106, in *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), pp. xii, 195.

Mark R. Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus* (Barth Studies Series; Aldershot UK / Burlington VT, USA, Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. xx, 124.

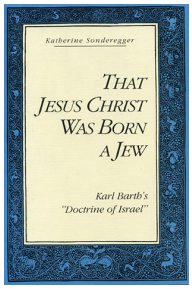
Mark R., Lindsay, *Reading Auschwitz with Barth: The Holocaust as Problem and Promise for Barthian Theology* (Princeton Theological Monograph; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, Pickwick Publications, 2014), pp. xvi, 185.

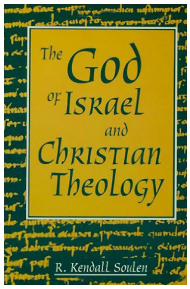
Mark S. Gignilliat, *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel: Barth's Theological Exegesis of Isaiah*, (Barth Studies Series; Aldershot UK / Burlington VT, USA, Ashgate Publishing, 2009), pp.xiv,167.

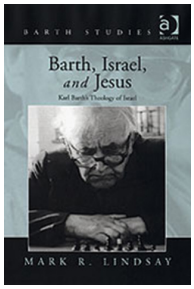
Carys Moseley, *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. x, 219.

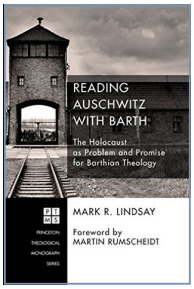
KEY WORDS

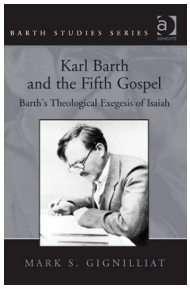
| Yeshua–Jesus–Messiah | The Universal Christ | Salvation–Redemption | Supersessionism–Election | The Bible | Karl Barth | Israel–*Israelitisch* | Nations–Nationalism | Dialectic–Antinomy |

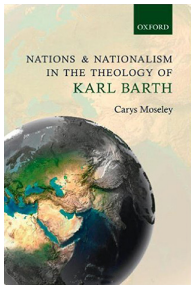












INTRODUCTION

The aim of this review essay is to examine the position of the Swiss Reformed-Evangelical theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) on Israel and the Jews, and to consider the development of scholarship on Barth's position over the last quarter of a century, focusing on recent studies. Initially, we will establish exactly what Barth's doctrine on Israel (ancient and modern, ideal and realized) and the Old Testament was, and how he regarded – teleologically – the ancient Hebrews and Jews.

Born in the second half of the nineteenth century, into a Europe dominated by agnostic liberalism and global-empire building, Karl Barth achieved the near impossible, by turning the European (and to a degree American) theological *status quo* away from Friedrich Schleiermacher and G.W.F. Hegel and back to Christ. When asked by the eminent logician and mathematician Heinrich Scholz (originally trained in theology) what was the basis on which theology operated as an intellectual discipline in the university, Barth is reported to have answered, assertively, 'the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' With Barth there was no beating about the bush, no obfuscatory embarrassed apologetic squirming, no hedging around religious emotionalism, no putting any notion of a 'god' into a box to be analysed from the safe, secure position of the Enlightenment-endorsed human intellect. Nor did he seek refuge from the question by invoking an ill-defined semi-divine substance, invisible, but as comforting as a goddess of human desires, nor yet in paradox and mysticism. No, to Barth the resurrection was the only basis on which you could do theology as a distinctive *Wissenschaft*: all was related to this single event which had cosmic implications. Herein lies the intellectual responsibility that underpinned Barth's massive *Church Dogmatics* (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, circa 6 million words!),[1] issuing from the *analogia fidei*. Yeshua, the Messiah, the Christ, is risen! He is risen indeed.

Karl Barth's enterprise dominated the theology of the twentieth century, and in particular the European religio-cultural landscape leading up to Vatican II: Pope Pius XII commented in 1951, that Barth was the greatest theologian since Aquinas;[2] no mean compliment. (Judging by Barth's severe criticism of philosophy, and scepticism of the natural theological enterprise, he would have preferred to have been aligned with Anselm, or any number of Patristic philosophers and theologians, and less with the pseudo-Aristotle!). What was of greatest importance in Barth's work? Arguably, his bringing the doctrine of the Trinity back into the frame as the ground of all theological endeavour.[3] The

1 Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* (14 Vols. translated and edited G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–77). References hereafter are given as *CD*, followed by the volume, section number (§) and page reference from *The Church Dogmatics* (UK, 1st edition, hardback, not the new translation, paperback 31 volume, edition).

2 Quoted in Karl Barth *Fragments Grave and Gay* (The Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy), London: Collins, 1971, p. i. For a theological biography of Barth see: Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf: nach seinem Briefen und autobiographischen Texten* (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1975); ET: Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1976). For an introduction to Barth's theology see: John Webster, *Barth* (series, *Outstanding Christian Thinkers*; London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2000). Pope Pius XII (1876-1958; pontiff 1939-1958).

3 Colin E. Gunton, the late professor of Systematic Theology at King's College London, a noted Barthian scholar, had to fight for acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity. An anecdote that illustrates the liberal malaise that had engulfed predominantly Anglican theology from the 1960s is that early in his career one of Gunton's older colleagues at King's, commented to him that believing in the Trinity was like believing in pixies!

triune God is the starting point; revelation (*a posteriori* – after the Christ event), not speculation, for Barth, is the foundation of theology, not questions about this or that 'god', or whether God might exist, or be allowed to exist. The Immanent Trinity from whom issues the action we perceive as the Economic Trinity was the ground of his theological enterprise; the Economic Trinity is then known through the Word of God (John 1, etc.) the Alpha and Omega, Yeshua the Jew, the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, Incarnated, Crucified, Resurrected and Ascended, and awaiting us in the Eschaton. This is the reality of all legitimate intellectual endeavour, the reality of all God-talk, and the nature and teleology of humanity itself. Thus Barth was out of step with most of what the Enlightenment had established as an acceptable basis for theology. So, if Barth almost single-handedly (not forgetting his colleague and friend in ministry and theology, Eduard Thurneysen) brought the triune God back to centre stage, and since it is moving towards half-a-century since his death, a central question is, whither is Trinitarian theology to go after Barth? But, more pertinently, how did Barth overcome the inherent anti-Semitism of European religion generally, the marginalization of Yeshua the Jew specifically? In answering this question we can consider three recent books, studies of Barth's theological enterprise: Mark R. Lindsay's *Barth, Israel and Jesus*, Mark S. Gignilliat's, *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel: Barth's Theological Exegesis of Isaiah*, and Carys Moseley, *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth*; in setting the scene, we can examine two original studies from over twenty years ago, which laid the ground rules for studying Barth and Israel: Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Israel*, and R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*.

But first, what was Barth's position on these issues: the eternal Israel, the ancient Hebrews, the modern Jews, their unique status as God's chosen people, and on the post-war, essentially secular, nation state of Israel?

KARL BARTH AND *ISRAELITISCH*

Barth acknowledged the indisputable election of the ancient Hebrews and the Jews as the chosen people of God, yet also the undeniable failure of the Jewish people now to accept and acknowledge the Christ, their Messiah: born Yeshua the Jew, crucified and resurrected, for all of humanity's potential salvation. Barth develops a kind of dynamic theology whereby the history of the ancient Hebrews, the progress of salvation history, the Christ event, are all time-bound, particular, and yet also universal, where the first axiom – of crucial and fundamental importance – is God speaking to Israel. For Barth, as Colin Gunton has identified, 'the first commandment makes it a different sort of science to all others. You might say history is similar but the point Barth is making is the distinctiveness of theology.'[4] Barth himself on this question commented, 'The fact that God does not permit Israel, the righteous, or the Church to perish means that he cannot allow them to go their way un-accused, un-condemned, un-punished; so grace includes a kind of holy judgement.'[5] Israel's calling is eternal: 'This is the point about Israel; Israel is called to be God's people.'[6] Barth relies heavily

4 Colin E. Gunton, *The Barth Lectures* (London & New York: Continuum, 2007), p.50.

5 Barth, *CD* II/1, §30, p. 357.

6 Gunton, *Barth Lectures*, p.111, on Barth, *CD* II/2.

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on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in particular the fact that Israel has been chosen and cannot be rejected, unchosen, or de-selected, but also that the Gentiles have been chosen temporarily in order to invite Israel to come, to reconsider, and turn to the Messiah, Yeshua, one of them:[7] this is the primary mission of the Church: to the Jew first, then the Gentile! (Romans 1:16.) Israel has set the terms by not so much rejecting the Christ but by not accepting, just yet. This is *resistance*—for a time. This is no rejection of Israel, wrote Barth, but a temporary set-back. Israel's election is particular but of universal intent: Abraham is called that *all nations* might be blessed, thus Israel is called on behalf of *all nations*.[8] All have committed disobedience, and all may know God's mercy (Rom. 11:30–32.) This position is, for Barth, universal in intent and is grounded in Israel's election as God's chosen and beloved. Barth commented:

> Israel is the people of the Jews who resists its election – it doesn't reject – it resists it, the Church is the gathering of Jews and Gentiles called on the ground of its election.[9]

Some of the Gentiles, for Barth, accept this election, but Israel still resists (*widerstehen*, *sich widersetzen*): the two sides of this are brought out by him. But where does this leave Israel? Israel, for Barth, is still Israel. Even in its refusal it is still the people of Yeshua, Jesus the Messiah, the anointed one, the resurrected universal Christ (Χριστός): ‹the electing God and the elected community embrace even this Israel that steps into the void.'[10] Israel's resistance is therefore not the final word.

Therefore, for Barth, even Israel is included in this election; everybody is amongst the elect – *in Christ*.[11] He commented, 'Both Jews and Gentiles are shut up by God in the same prison – then the prison opens and again they are all together. Because God has determined the Gentiles for the mercy in which they now participate and the Jews for future participation and the same mercies.'[12] So for Barth there are two communities (Israel and the Gentiles) but they are one community in the sense that they are both in different ways called and elected.[13]

Barth never ceased to emphasize the fact – lost in much European theology from the time of the so-called Enlightenment – of Jesus's Jewishness. Yeshua the Messiah is Jewish flesh; we are saved by Jewish blood; atonement is grounded in the shedding of blood: holy Jewish blood. (And this assertion was before the Second World War and the holocaust, and the guilt-trip many Europeans experienced following the discovery of Hitler's death camps). If we ignore or marginalize *His* Jewishness, then,

> The Church's whole doctrine of the Incarnation and the Atonement becomes abstract and valueless and meaningless to the extent that this comes to be regarded as something accidental and incidental … [Jewishness] prevents this rounding of the picture of Jesus into a kind of ideal picture of human existence.[14]

For many in a late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century post-modern generation, this very Jewishness thwarts the attempts by Enlightenment-led theologians and philosophers – for example, Schleiermacher

7 Barth, *CD* II/1, §30, p. 148 ff.

8 Barth, *CD* II/1, on Romans 11:30–32

9 Barth, *CD II/2*, §34, p. 236.

10 Barth, *CD* II/2, §34, p. 303.

11 There is a long discussion of the biblical evidence for this: Barth, *CD* II/2, §34, p. 305 ff. However, it may be argued that Barth falls short in acknowledging the wilfulness of humanity in resisting this election and therefore its salvation.

12 Barth, *CD* II/2, §34, p. 305; Romans 11.

13 Gunton, *Barth Lectures*, pp. 118-119)

14 Barth, *CD* IV/1, §59.1, pp. 166 and 167.

Figure 1. Max Klinger, *Christ on Mount Olympus* (1897). Fresco on plaster.
Christ as a blond-haired pale-skinned Aryan, a fair-haired-blue-eyed young man

and Hegel, or today's self-confessed liberals, also multi-faith religionists – to remove Jesus, the historic Yeshua, from his Jewish roots.[15] Jesus's Jewishness is a stumbling-block to those who would seek to reinvent Him into an archetype of ideal human – for example the idealized super-religious shaman Schleiermacher tried to make Jesus into: Christian pseudo-divinity without Jewish flesh. This heresy is epitomized by Germanic art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, such idiomatic imagery reached its height in German civic religious art where Jesus was often reduced to a mere human presented with neo-Classical pagan imagery derived from Greek and Roman culture. An example of this was Max Klinger's *Christ on Mount Olympus* (1897): Jesus as a wise Germanic religious leader, a blond-haired, pale-skinned 'Aryan', a fair-haired-blue-eyed young man conversing with young Greek men and women (an early version of Hitler's vision of the Darwinian triumph of the ideal human, a German, representative of an obedient German Christian and a German Christianity: do we see here god-like Germanic flesh in the place of incarnated Jewish flesh?). (See figure 1.) Barth's agenda is to work explicitly against this heterodox humanism that had come to represent European theology. Colin Gunton, writing on Barth's emphasis on the central importance of Yeshua's Jewishness and the danger of reducing Jesus to an idealized human, asserted:

15 Gunton, *Barth Lectures*, p. 165.

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Figure 2. Hermann Otto Hoyer, *Am Anfang war das Wort* (In The Beginning Was The Word) Oil on Canvas, c. 1930.

> You must not produce some ideal of humanity which is independent of the *israelitisch* equivalent of the New Testament. Therefore, of course, you rule out all forms of Docetism – the doctrine that Jesus only appeared to be human – and you do that by keeping the Old Testament in the picture.[16]

Barth commented that by retaining the Old Testament, the adherents of the New Covenant are protected against all of the multiple forms of Docetism that have bedevilled the Church throughout its history.[17] It is of fundamental importance, and this is clear from Barth's early works (the two commentaries, for example, on the Epistle to the Romans, 1919 and 1921) that we are talking about a Jewish Messiah, sent for the lost sheep of Israel. Yes, He is representative of universal humanity, but this is a Jewish Messiah who represents God's purposes for the world, purposes that teleologically will be realized through what He did: first through Israel, then through the resurrected Christ, and finally through his present people, the Church (both Jew and Gentile).

16 Gunton, *Barth Lectures*, p. 165 (referring to CD IV/1, §59.1, pp. 160 f.)

17 Barth, *CD* IV/1, §59.1, p. 168.

In 1934 Barth was largely responsible for the writing of the *Barmer Erklärung* (*The Barmen Declaration*), which explicitly rejected the National Socialist Party, repudiated Hitler's messianic pretensions, and rejected the Third Reich. It also lamented the influence of Nazism on Germanic Christianity. The declaration argued for the allegiance of the Church to Jesus Christ – God incarnate – and therefore all who claimed to be Christian should resist and repel false 'gods' and false lords, such as the Führer (Barth is reputed to have personally mailed a copy of the Barmen Declaration to Hitler). Within months, Barth was dismissed from his post as professor at the University of Bonn, and was exiled from Germany (returning to his native Switzerland), for refusing to take an oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler. Most academics whether they agreed with National Socialism or not had capitulated; Barth could easily have done so, so as to maintain his exalted position, his chair at the University of Bonn, but he did not: history judges the others, Barth stands clear of the compromise. A few years earlier Hermann Otto Hoyer had painted a picture of Hitler in full rhetorical preaching mode entitled, 'Am Anfang war das Wort'('In the Beginning was the Word'): according to Hoyer's twisted version of John's Gospel, the Word did not descend into Yeshua the Jew, but into the Aryan-European pagan supremo-'god'-and-führer, Adolf Hitler. (See figure 2.)

WHY BARTH AND WHY YESHUA THE ISRAELITE?

Those who criticize Barth for not reflecting the current politically correct apologetic position devoid of value and meaning towards the Jews and towards the state of Israel, would do well to remember that this is the man who in front of thousands in 1946, in Germany, in the ruins of the once magnificent, beautiful and palatial *Kurfürsten schloss* in Bonn, in the land that gave us the Holocaust, stood, and in a lecture, asserted to people who were just recovering from the destruction of Nazi Germany, the absolute ground for our faith in the ancient Hebrews, the Old Testament and the Jews. Let us consider Barth in full flow, pressing home the importance and significance of Israel in relation to Yeshua – Jesus the Messiah. Speaking of the evil that had engulfed Europe over the previous two decades Barth insisted,

> ... right from its roots it [National Socialism] was anti-Semitic, this movement was realized with a simple demonic clarity, that *the* enemy, to them, was the *Jew*. Yes, the enemy in this matter had to be Israel. Because in this Jewish nation there really lives to this day the extraordinariness of the revelation of God.
>
> Jesus, the Christ, the Saviour, and God's Servant, is the one who sets forth and reveals the mission of the nation of Israel; *He* it is that fulfils the Covenant concluded between God and Abraham. When the Christian Church confesses Jesus Christ as Saviour and the Servant of God for us, for all men, also for the mighty majority of those who have no direct connection with the people of Israel, then it does not confess *Him* fully, because *He* was a Jew (as if this 'Jewishness' in Jesus were a *pudendum*, which we had to ignore!). No! nor can the view be that we believe in Jesus Christ, who was just an Israelite, a Jew, by accident, but who might quite as well have sprung from another nation. No!, we must strictly consider that Jesus Christ, in whom we believe, whom we Christians drawn out of the heathen call our saviour, whom we praise as the consummator of God's work on our behalf: *He was of necessity a Jew*. We cannot be blind to this fact; it belongs to the concrete reality of God's work and God's revelation. For Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the covenant concluded by

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> God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and it is the reality of this covenant – not the idea of any or every religious covenant – which is the basis, the meaning and goal of creation, that is, of everything that is real in distinction from God. The problem – if there is one – of Israel is, since the problem of Christ is inseparable from it, the problem of existence as such. The man who is ashamed of Israel is ashamed of Jesus Christ and therefore of his own existence.[18] (See figure 3.)

So, the self-revelation of God is in the person of Jesus Christ who was formed from God's chosen people. So if there is – from the perspective of neo-Pagan European religion – a problem with Israel, then this problem is with existence itself: it represents the *krisis* of humanity. For Barth, if you deny Israel, you deny yourself as made in the image of God. Most of the critics of Barth's regard for Israel hold a religiously syncretistic view, which expects Barth to write in an isolated pluralistically self-contained mode oblivious to contradiction and objective truth.

Relative to the enormous body of scholarship on Barth generated over the last half a century, very little has been written on Barth's doctrine of Israel, particularly considering the very heavy Christocentricity of the fourth volume of the Church Dogmatics. It was not until the early 1990s that studies began to emerge.

Sonderegger

Katherine Sonderegger in *That Jesus was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Israel*,[19] offered a nuanced view of Barth's doctrine, but questioned whether Barth really did give religious independence to Israel, independent of the Christ event. Published nearly a quarter of a century ago her findings now have the colour of a particular post-1960s generation (she, likewise, identifies the particular post-WWII central European position of Barth's generation!), but her research is impeccable. She considers Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, and the absolute assertion of the missed Messiah; she analyses the *Church Dogmatics* thoroughly to ascertain the philosophical and theological roots of the election of Israel but also Barth's apparent aversion to Jews despite his assertion of them. Sonderegger then considers in detail Barth's doctrine of Israel, and in particular the election of the chosen people and their present standing. This is all weighed against what she terms Jewish-Christian solidarity (the ecumenical efforts of assorted tribes of religious professionals). Reliant upon closer inspection of *Church Dogmatics*, her conclusion and evaluation considered the relationship of Barth's doctrine of Israel *as the* divine act of justification by Grace. For Sonderegger Barth is a fully dogmatic theologian, with an authoritative doctrine of Israel framed by his understanding of the chosen people. That Barth draws Israel into the 'compass' of Christology, refashioning election and reprobation into the form of the covenanted people, is clear; however, the Jews, Sonderegger asserts (summarizing Barth), pass away to rise with Christ (i.e. Yeshua the Israelite!). This can be seen by some as anti-Semitic, yet Barth set his face against German anti-Semites, particularly when confronted by the Nazis' pogroms, and he stood in solidarity with the Jews. The problem comes in Barth's refusal to countenance the Christian religion and Jesus as yet another parochial world religion that must assert no truths that upset or contradict other religions. Barth scorned liberals, whether so-

18 Karl Barth, *Dogmatik im Grundriß* (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1947), p. 67. My translation, but with Barth's emphasis.

19 Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Israel*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

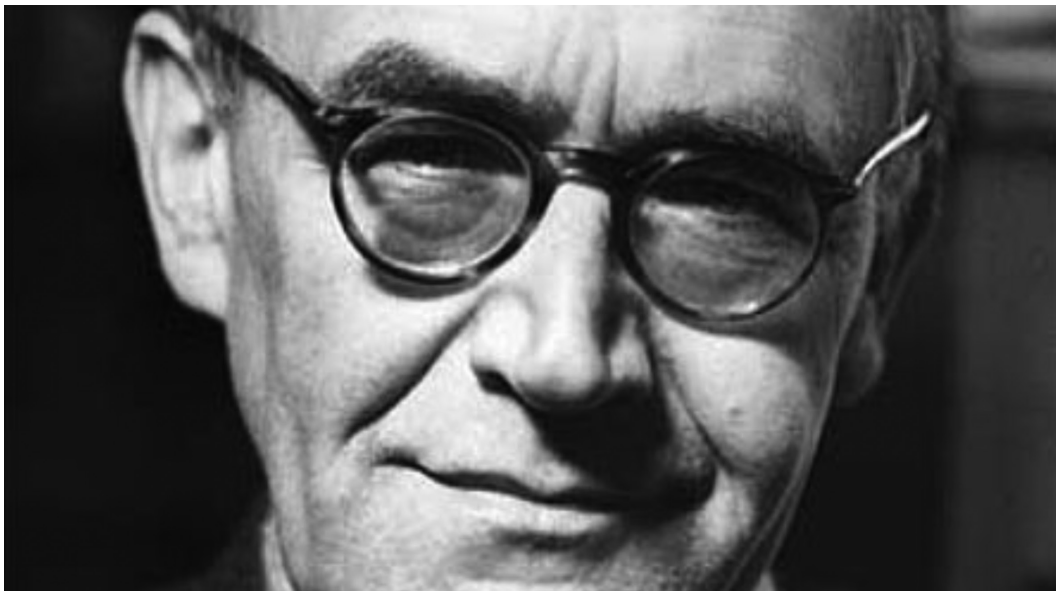

Figure 3. Karl Barth (1946): "*He* was of necessity a Jew. We cannot be blind to this fact. *He* belongs to this concrete reality of God's Word, and *His* revelation ... The man who is ashamed of Israel is ashamed of Jesus Christ and therefore of his own existence."

called or self-confessed, who rejected Jesus's divinity while celebrating Judaism as a quaint ancient religion. Sonderegger notes—

> In the *Israellehre* of Karl Barth, in the mastery, power, and elegant description of the one community of God in Christ, Christian theology can look forward and back, taking up into its doctrinal thought the weight, significance, and gracious condescension of its Messiah, Jesus, born a Jew, and straining ahead to grasp the mystery of the two forms of Israel and the Church, each called and created by God, each determined for its own task, and each waiting in its own place for that one day when God will be all in all.[20]

20 Sonderegger, (1992), p. 179.

Soulen

R. Kendall Soulen presented a chapter/essay on Barth and Israel in *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*: 'Consummation at the End of Christendom.'[21] Soulen, in a sub-section entitled 'Barth on Consummation' presents an accurate and detailed reading of Barth on Israel.[22] Soulen outlines how, for Barth, human history is defined by creation and covenant and the key lies with Abraham, and God's commitment to redeem through the long centuries of salvation history. However, Soulen accuses Barth of what he terms, Economic

21 R. Kendall Soulen, '4. Consummation at the End of Christendom', in *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), pp. 81-106.

22 Soulen (1996), 'Barth on Consumation,' pp.85-89.

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Supersessionism. Soulen writes of three forms of supersessionism: Punitive Supersessionism, Economic Supersessionism, and Structural Supersessionism.[23] The use of the term 'economic' appears to invoke triune language, and perhaps it is the Immanent Trinity that should be being considered, not solely or by necessity the Economic Trinity.[24] Despite Israel's apparent rejection of the Messiah two thousand years ago, is not Israel eternally elected, is not Israel's election part of the eternal counsels of God? Does the election of the Church replace this eternal immanent election? Is this a fair reading of Barth – that all the Jews will eventually accept Christ because the Church has theoretically superseded within the economic working out of salvation in the world? This is perhaps not wholly accurate: for Barth, reading from Scripture, all will be transformed and all will be changed (1 Cor 15:51f.), there will be neither Jew nor Gentile, Christian or Pagan, the boundaries, even the racial divisions will disappear: *with and in the eschaton*. Therefore within the Immanent Trinity Israel is eternally elected, Israel stands eternally. Barth rejects Punitive Supersessionism (that Israel is totally rejected as a punishment), however, Barth does accepts the apparent paradox of Economic Supersessionism because of the universality of Christ's redemption, but Israel does still abide: watching and waiting, awaiting the coming of the Messiah. It is perhaps important for Barth's critics to note (though Barth would perhaps not have quoted this particular parable) that Yeshua the Jewish Messiah spoke the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:31-46) to a Jewish audience: what is important is God's judgement and the individual's eternal place *post mortem*. So what importance does elected status hold in a religious context? In this context we must note Barth's oft-asserted comment that all religion is unbelief.[25] As Christians we are enfolded into the covenanted, chosen people of God. History, for Barth, ended with the Christ event: we live in the working-out of salvation, awaiting the last word. Soulen:

> For Barth, God's covenant with Israel marks the point at which God's work as Consummator initially engages humankind in concrete, historical form. (p. 86.)
>
> ... the covenant so established, Barth insists, is eternal; it cannot be abrogated or set aside. (*CD* IV/1, p. 23). (p. 87.)
>
> ... For Barth, therefore, God's fidelity to the consummation of the world can be nothing other than God's fidelity to God's eternal covenant with the people Israel.' (p. 89.)

Argument then ensues over the role and place of Israel after the crucifixion-resurrection. However, it can be stated that perhaps Barth places too great a stress on the individual Jesus Christ, rather than on his context as a Jew and his belonging in a Jewish community, in the covenanted nation. Barth, Soulen notes, argued that Christ does not destroy God's covenant with Israel but fulfils and confirms it. Perhaps Soulen focuses too much on the temporal reality – the 'this world' – of Israel (p.91) and not on the eternal in his criticism? Soulen's work, though now nearly twenty years old, firmly established many of the ground rules

23 For a brief explanation see, Theological Studies website: http://www.theologicalstudies.org/resource-library/supersessionism/325-three-categories-of-supersessionism

24 The Economic Trinity is the operation of triune persons of God within the world; the Immanent Trinity is the inter-relationship of the triune God in eternity, within God's self, so to speak.

25 See, Barth, *CD*: I/2, §17 'The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion', p. 280; see also, II/1, §25 'The Fulfilment of the Knowledge of God', p.3; II/1, §26 'The Knowability of God', p.63; II/1, §. 27 'The Limits to the Knowledge of God', specifically, pp. 179-256; I.2, §17 '2. Religion as Unbelief ', p. 298-325, and IV.1, §57 'The Work of the Reconciler', p. 45.

and structures for examining Barth and Israel. It furthermore raised pertinent questions with universal implications, in particular the real and temporal nature of Jewish flesh and calling and how Israel stands in relation to the Church.

BARTH, THE STATE OF ISRAEL, AND JESUS

Lindsay

Mark R. Lindsay (Director of Research at MCD University of Divinity, University of Melbourne) in *Barth, Israel and Jesus*, has tackled what in many ways is the most difficult Barthian subject – with considerable political implications (and yes, theology, like the Bible, is political, Barth knew and understood this): Lindsay has traversed the minefield of post-modernity in examining the question of Barth and Israel. What the Barthian scholarly tradition makes of Barth's relationship to, and his doctrine of, Israel varies according to the current *Zeitgeist*, and for that matter the personal politicized prejudices of academics who often seem bent on point-scoring and advancing their status than in objectively explicating Barth's position.

So what do we make of Lindsay's scholarship? First, this is in effect the second volume in Lindsay's work on Barth and Israel. The first volume[26] was from his doctoral work on Barth's opposition to Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust, after which he realized that to complete the job this volume was needed on Barth's mature work. Lindsay notes how the debate has been focused on Barth's theological stance towards the Jews during the period of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, but the question of Barth's position towards Israel in the post-war years still needed to be addressed succinctly. Lindsay asks whether Barth's own theologising in the aftermath of the Holocaust take that horrendous event into account in his later writings on Israel and the Jews, therefore he explores potential answers through an analysis of the doctrine of reconciliation.[27] First we have an introduction to Jewish-Christian relations since 1945 (an analysis of obstacles along the way, an enquiry into confessional *mea culpas* – effectively church statements addressing the Holocaust). This leads neatly and logically into material on Barth and the Jewish people (in effect, the historical debate and the context of controversy. These reveal Barth's ambiguity and how scholars have understood him, an understanding that has not always taken into account Barth's personal relationships with Jews). The question of Israel inevitably leads, for Barth, into the question of and value accorded to natural theology. Here Lindsay's analysis and thesis really take off, for this is at the heart of the question – what he terms a case study of the Holocaust as a theological *locus*. Lindsay then moves into Barth's understanding of and relations with the idea of the state of Israel, the recreation of Israel: the state in relation to Barth's doctrine of creation (*De Gubernatione* and the King of Israel); the role of Israel as witness in what is termed the rule of God; and what Lindsay succinctly defines as and explores under the title, political support for Israel as a theological necessity. We now near the heart of the thesis, the point at which Lindsay makes a brave effort to extend the debate beyond the work of Katherine Sonderegger and also her criticism

26 Mark R. Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: The Theological Basis of Karl Barth's Opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2001).

27 Barth, *CD* IV/1, 2 and 3.

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of Barth.[28] Lindsay explores the function of Israel in Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, which posits a Christological election as the presupposition of dialogic possibilities, which neatly leads into the – to adapt, as Lindsay does, a Barthian axiom/soundbite – Jews in the far country, seen in relation to the royal man and the ministry of the reconciled community (but which community: Christian or Jewish, or Christian-Jewish?). Lindsay opens by asserting that,

> We come in this chapter to the crux of the issue with which we have been dealing to this point, the question whether or not Barth's theological understanding of Israel and the Jewish people was affected by his reflections on and experiences of the Holocaust and the re-emergence of Israel as an independent nation-state. More particularly, if his *Israellehre*[29] was affected, how did this understanding manifest itself in arguably the most 'Christian' of all doctrines, the doctrine of reconciliation. (p. 87.)

In the conclusion Lindsay does his best to advance beyond the impasse: does Barth fail to see Israel and the Jews independently of the Christian revelation? (Should he – if we accept the Israelite nature of Jesus, and the truth of the Christ event?) Sonderegger's claim that Barth fails to accord post-biblical Judaism (issuing essentially from the inter-testamental community and from the fall of Jerusalem) religious significance, independent of the Church is, to me, treated ambivalently by Lindsay: he neither denies nor asserts, but walks an academic path:

> In truth, however, the dependence is mutual. In Barth's view, Israel does indeed find its essential being in solidarity with the Christian community; but equally, the Christian community is nothing without Israel. Sonderegger is correct to say that for Barth the Synagogue has no independent existence. What she has ignored, however, is that for Barth the Church has no genuine independence as the people of God apart from the Synagogue. (p. 105).

Perhaps Lindsay needs a stronger ecclesiology in this book: either Christ Yeshua the Jew was the incarnate Son of God and the church is His temporal body, which places, relativizes (but does not deny!) Israel in relation to the body of Christ (whether *ecclesia invisibilis* or *ecclesia visibilis*), or *He* was not and we can try to live happily ever after in self-contained inward-looking religio-agnostic communities pretending that all religions are equal in the hope of offending no-one, and ignoring their contradictions. Alternatively, we can acknowledge a degree of almost dialectical complementarity which must stand within time until the *eschaton*. Complementarity because the two sides must stand as complementary theses; postlapsarian humanity will find it impossible to derive sufficient truth and understanding from the observations and information – theologically – of both Israel and the Church. Sufficient, that is, to truly assess the question: we have partial descriptions of the two because we are *in* salvation history, we await the final completion in the *eschaton*; this is why – to coin a Barthian phrase – we are living in *Krisis*. The German word *Krisis* holds to more than the English crisis because – particularly in Barth's theological usage: God is humanity's *Krisis*, its urgency, its promise, and its threat; without God's revelation we can cosily move on at our own pace, losing ourselves in lifestyle consumerism, trying to build the world around us to our satisfaction, happily inventing our own religion. When God takes hold of us we are forced into the urgency of facing the

28 Sonderegger (1992).

29 *Israellehre*, Barth's teaching about Israel.

reality into which we have sinned ourselves.[30] This emphasis on *Krisis* is so often an offensive position to post-modern religious relativists, because it fails to acknowledge Israel and the Church as independent and self-contained, autonomous and equally valid (valid, but without truth claims, so that all religions can get along nicely together). Lindsay's work tries bravely to steer through the minefield, but not without explicit drive Barth would have given it. Nonetheless this is a bold and important study, well researched, scholarly. Sadly it will be ignored by ecumenicists and religionists who try to close their eyes to Barth, who hide from the difficulties of the Israel-Jewish question because of Western liberalism, even post-modern sentimentality, in the light of two crucial twentieth century events: the horrendous, nihilistic evil of the Holocaust, and the crisis of relations between the state of Israel and its neighbours.

Lindsay has recently continued this work with a monograph examining in detail the precise theological nature of the Holocaust in the context of Barth's systematic analysis: *Reading Auschwitz with Barth: The Holocaust as Problem and Promise for Barthian Theology*.[31] Here, the impact on theology of the Holocaust – the *Shoah* – of the Jews must for Lindsay be seen as profound, with far-reaching consequences for the church's self-understanding and its doctrine of God. Lindsay therefore explores the relationship between Barth's massive *corpus* and a post-Holocaust understanding; he extrapolates a dialogue demonstrating how Barthian scholars and the Church in all its forms need to gain some understanding of the implications of Hitler's so-called Final Solution, but also to balance it with Barth's call for a return by Western Christians to the Jews as the chosen people, to Israel, and to the *whole* Bible. Lindsay here, in the opening section, is prepared to face the *tremendum* (the terrible, the overwhelming nature, of the holocaust). Lindsay then moves on to what he terms 'the Barthian Barrier.' That is, Barth's position on natural theology and how this affects an understanding of the Holocaust, or the *Shoah* as witness (the extent to which the Holocaust testifies positively to God, yet also negatively to humanity's depravity). Lindsay then considers the dialectics of revelation (that is, deliberates in 'conversation' with Eliezer Berkovits[32]), but insists on the proclamation of the solidarity of crucified suffering; finally he issues a caution to post-Holocaust theology, that is, a warning that we may say too much and over-emphasize the *Shoah*. This dialogue does expose flaws not only in post-Holocaust theology but also in Barth's failure to confront the *Shoah* – for Lindsay – directly, or fully. Lindsay is right that Barth failed to confront the Holocaust directly as the later volumes emerged, after WWII, of *The Church Dogmatics* (because Barth rightly gives little or no ground to natural theology: the *analogia fidei* is the sole ground for understanding God's actions in the world, not an event such as the *Shoah*, although, of course, it was horrific and shocking, diabolical

30 See, Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (Zweite Fassung 1922; Theologischer Verlag Zürich (TVZ): Zürich, 1999), p. 532. This is Barth's commentary on Romans 14:1 to 15:13 'Der Krisis des freien Lebensversuchs' ('The *Krisis* of Human Freedom and Detachment'), p.532. See also, Nicolaas Bakker, *Der Krisis in der Offenbarung Karl Barths Hermeneutik, dargestellt an seiner Romerbrief-Auslegung** (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974. *: 'The Crisis in Revelation - Karl Barth's hermeneutics embodied/represented in his interpretation of the Epistle to the Romans.'

31 Mark R. Lindsay, *Reading Auschwitz with Barth: The Holocaust as Problem and Promise for Barthian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, Pickwick Publications, 2014).

32 Lindsay pays special attention to Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1973), also, Eliezer Berkovits, *With God in Hell: Judaism in the Ghettoes and Deathcamps* (New York: Hebrew, 1979).

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and nihilistic – *tremendum*), but his approach was, nonetheless, far more enlightened than many of his contemporaries. However, Lindsay's conclusion is more positive:

> Without resorting to a natural theological epistemology, and thereby risking letting the *Shoah* become too decisive a word for the church (as though there were no other), Barth's own theological grammar allows him to affirm much of what the post-Holocaust movement has wanted to say, yet avoiding the danger that some have fallen into, of allowing the Holocaust to say too much. (p. 168.)

ISAIAH

Gignilliat

Mark S. Gignilliat's, *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel: Barth's Theological Exegesis of Isaiah*, clearly sets the Book of the Prophet Isaiah in a Christian context; however, declaring it the fifth Gospel raises serious questions about supersessionism, which are not really tackled here, and neither is the question of Barth's doctrine of Israel. The ground of Gignilliat's work is in the history of interpretation. This is a work which charts the relationship between exegesis and dogmatics, and is not shy to expose the failure of historical criticism, seen in the limitations of an hermeneutic of suspicion. Gignilliat therefore faces the pertinent question of how to do theological exegesis – he is also critically aware of the need to engage the text rather than losing oneself in a constant analysis of method. This is a work primarily about listening to how Barth engaged as a theological witness with the text of Isaiah. (This listening is a dialectical relationship between exegesis and theology and given the specialization that isolates all academic disciplines, any move that blurs the edges of individualistic specialized focus is to be applauded.) Therefore this work acknowledges and complements Barth's premise that the Bible is a unique means by which God communicates His presence to His church: theological explication cannot therefore be separated from exegesis. If exegetical analysis is disconnected from witness and illumination, then what is left is (as Barth never ceased to assert in his mature years) antiquarian studies, which are often of little value! For example, 'Barth understood the deadly effect of Old Testament [antiquarian] scholarship on the life of a preacher who must engage these texts as the word of God for the people of God.' (p. 23.) Gignilliat therefore asserts that in this context Barth sees the Old Testament as confessional and classical (this separates Barth from the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*[33] tradition). In Barth's day rejecting the confessional and classical effectively marginalized a concept of truth, yet nowadays Postmodernism and the relativity of truth generated by humanity's Fall actually aids Barth: 'The Old Testament is what it is because the self-communicative God has deemed it to be so in relation to God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. To seek verifiability outside this realm is to abstract the discussion into philosophical categories foreign to God's revelation of himself.' (p.59.) But this does not stop Barth rejecting elements of the Old Testament generally and certain aspects of Isaiah specifically, which Gignilliat deftly handles. All this, and more, is brought together in the final chapter which forms an extended conclusion. Here Gignilliat considers

33 The history/science of religions school, based on a comparative-historical method for the study of religion, which emerged amongst a group of German Protestant theologians associated with the University of Göttingen in the 1890s.

Figure 4. The young Karl Barth (1919): "The ancient Hebrews should not become Germans, rather the Germans should become ancient Hebrews." (c.1913.)

the theological implications of Barth's Isaianic exegesis: Barth may have had no single uniform methodological approach to the Book of Isaiah yet there is a single identifiable motif (typically Barthian) of Yeshua the Jew, born of Jewish flesh, rooted in the soil – the promised land – of the Old Testament. This does allow Barth to focus on Isaiah's prophetic Christology without overtly reading an assumed Christological conclusion from the text (does this issue from a respect for the text along the lines of form criticism?). Therefore Gignilliat concludes that 'Barth's theological exegesis of Isaiah is multi-layered and multi-functional' (p. 139); he is, however, aware that not all of Barth's reading of Isaiah is persuasive (he identifies Barth's interpretation of Isaiah 24 as wanting, and the analysis of Isaiah 48 – a central text from the perspective of theological exegesis – is considered by Gignilliat insufficient).

This is a highly considered work that identifies an important omission in Barthian studies – the Hebrew heritage of Yeshua the Jew, and the prophetically Christological nature of Isaiah. Theological exegesis (rooted patristically in a style which fell out of fashion with the so-called Enlightenment) is receiving more and more attention. Most readers of Barth's theological exegesis focus on the New Testament leaving his theological exegesis of the Old Testament in undeserved ignominy. Gignilliat's addresses this short fall.

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THE NATIONS

Moseley

Carys Moseley in *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth*, takes Barth's criticism of German nationalism – the corrupting influence of Nazism on the German Protestant Churches – as her starting point. This criticism may have become fashionable after the Second World War, but Barth was issuing such a criticism from the pulpit already in the early years of the twentieth century (before the First World War)! Mosely notes:

> [Barth's] notebooks preparing for confirmation classes for teenagers are valuable evidence of the development of his theology, given that he saw the task of theology as being connected to worship, preaching, and teaching within the church before it was an academic discipline. Even at this time Barth was critical of the nationalist and anti-semitic bias in German theology, for he says 'The ancient Hebrews should not become Germans, rather the Germans should become ancient Hebrews.'[34] This expresses the Pauline tenet that Gentiles are grafted onto the wild olive tree of the true Israel by faith in Christ. In the 1930s, Barth would come to articulate this position with much greater dogmatic sophistication. (p. 38.) (See figure 4.)

Furthermore, she analyses the historical overview of Barth's understanding of nationhood in his early and middle periods, laying emphasis on the pneumatological roots in his exegesis of the Pentecost narrative. Therefore this situates the importance of Israel in the concept of nationhood. Barth's analysis is shown by Moseley to be by default biblically sourced, an analysis that side-lines the 'corrosive effects' of source criticism, particularly in relation to Genesis and the Acts of the Apostles. Moseley places great emphasis on Barth's critique of German nationalism whereby the answer to National Socialism is to define and recognise nationhood as *distinct* from the state. Does this work? If the key is found in the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2) then this leads, as Moseley demonstrates, to a doctrine of creation: the election of Israel is part of the election of the community of the people of God. Thus the apparent division of the people of the world into nations leads us to recognise nations as communities of people who are called to seek God, no more than that:

> Nationhood . . . is understood as the sphere of the divine command, as a human construction. Barth tacitly accepts the view derived from his plain reading of Scripture that the division and re-division of human history into nations is postlapsarian . . . The Pentecostal narrative is the transformation of Babel, not its simple reversal, as people from every nation can now hear the Gospel in their own language. (p. 203.)

Do we see Israel, from the Western perspective, as essentially an ideal, or as the confused reality of an actual nation state? Moseley deals deftly with these questions, as also she does with the question of whether the Jews are a race or a religious people. (p. 122f.) And where does this leave the secular nation state of Israel today, relative to the ideal of Israel to be realized in eternity? The jury is still out for most. Likewise, Isaiah's criticism of the nations and what little value can be accorded to them is often at best overlooked, at worst omitted from studies:

> Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. ... Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.
>
> (Is. 40:15 and 17).

34 '*Die alten Hebr[*äer*] sollen keine Deutschen warden, aber Sie alten Hebräer.*' Moseley is here quoting from, Karl Barth, *Konfirmandenunterricht 1909-1921* (Zurich: TVZ, 1987), p. 2.

CONCLUSION

As a student Barth conformed to his theological heritage in nineteenth century neo-Protestant Liberalism; however, as a young pastor in a depressed mining/working-class valley he became 'Comrade Barth, the Red Pastor.' Part of this reaction to his Liberal heritage was to espouse veiled Marxism, but also to give equality to the ancient Hebrews, the Old Testament, and the Jews who were his contemporaries. By comparison, the exponents of the nineteenth-century Liberal heritage, to which Barth was subjected as a student, sought to Germanize the ancient Hebrews, and also Aryanize Jesus: in response we noted how Barth's reaction was to state that the ancient Hebrews should not become Germans, but the kaiser's Germany should rediscover their heritage in God's chosen people! (See figure 4.) After the Second World War, and in the light of the Holocaust and the founding of the modern nation state of Israel, supersessionism fell out of favour in the West. However, Barth had already rejected supersessionism during his first ministry in the mining village of Safenwil, (before not only the Second World War but the First!), he grounded this rejection of the Germanizing of the Jews by referring to the Bible, and the self-revelation of the one true God. Barth was ahead of his time; one only has to assess his comments on and the place awarded to Israel in his first edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* (1919) to see this. Unlike his Liberal critics he achieves this equality not by rejecting the divinity of Yeshua, Jesus Christ, reducing him to a holy man, a prophet, so as to give equality to all religions and religious perceptions, no, but by paradoxically giving equal *elected* status to both Israel and the Church. Barth was ahead of his time, but also grounded his doctrine in the early Church and the Patristic tradition of creedal Christianity.

Barth's anti-supersessionist position is consistent from circa 1913 through to his death in 1968. The expression of this rejection, complemented by the affirmation of the Jews' covenant with God and Israel changes over the decades: it become more nuanced, and theologically explicated. His early declaration was in some ways a pseudo-Marxist reaction to his nineteenth-century Liberal neo-Protestant heritage, whereas the later pronouncements are presented as deeply considered systematic theology.

An often over-looked element in Barth's dialectical theology is this antinomy: Supersessionism and Israel, the Church's authority balanced by the continuation in equality of Israel and the exalted status of the Jews as the chosen people in the promised land. Yeshua and God's Election – how do we accept the paradox of this dialectical balance? We cannot close the antinomy, we must stand and await its conclusion in the eschaton. Soulen noted how one of Barth's students – Dietrich Bonhoeffer – admonished 'that we must not speak the last word before the last but one'![35]

A reasoned analysis of Barth's position is that his theology is not, and cannot be classified as, supersessionist: Israel, it can be argued, has *self-elected to take a back seat* since the Christ event. This does not amount to the Jews being superseded: they are still eternally elected in the Immanent Trinity, and if they had accepted Jesus – Yeshua – as the long-awaited Messiah, the Christ, then salvation history would have been the same, but the working-out would have been different over the last two thousand years. We noted earlier Barth's severe criticism of religion, which did not stop

35 Soulen (1996), quoted on p. 174.

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short of the churches. While some Christians may criticise Israel for failing to acknowledge and turn to the Messiah, it is only fair to note that much of the time the churches fail to give appropriate acknowledgement to the Christ event (which hardly puts them in a position to believe they have superseded the Jews!). So does supersessionism end up as an argument between two failing and inadequate religions that focus too much on their own self-interests and the all-too-worldly? Is supersessionism merely an argument over who is the present recipient of God's favouritism: two bright and precocious children, both of whom have been top of the class, who both believe – whatever happens – they are teacher's favourite?

Barth refused to iron-out the difficulties, he refused to force a conclusion: neither liberal Judaism nor liberal Christianity could begin to approach the truth about the dialectical standing between the Church and Israel, however much this relationship appeared contradictory, the relationship between them was symbiotic. These studies by Lindsay, Gignilliat, and Moseley – whether of the eternal Israel, the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the role of the nations in God's purposes – exemplify Barth's conclusion that the Synagogue *not only has no* independent existence from God's self-revelation, but also the Church has no genuine independence as the people of God *apart from* the Synagogue. There is still much to Barth's understanding of Israel, and the respect accorded to the Jews, the deference to the historical Israel and the ancient Hebrews, and to the place of the modern nation state of Israel, that has yet to be explicated. Lindsay, Gignilliat, and Moseley's work, building on the perceptions of Sonderegger and Soulen, is a good start in what will be a fruitful analysis of Barth and Israel.

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