

## 2

# Aquinas and the Question of Supersessionism

---

DURING THE LAST DECADE the discussion over whether or not Thomas Aquinas's theology is supersessionist has elicited deep disagreement among scholars. Two divergent positions have emerged, one claiming that Aquinas is the standard-bearer of a supersessionist Church and the other claiming that Aquinas avoids supersessionism. This chapter evaluates the scholarly discussion over whether Aquinas's theology is supersessionist with attention to the definition of supersessionism identified above: whether, with the advent of Christ, Jewish Law is fulfilled and obsolete, with the result that God replaces Israel with the Church. I show that the lack of precision with regard to the use of the term and/or the failure to attend to Aquinas's most relevant works, renders scholars' conclusions regarding Aquinas's susceptibility to the charge of supersessionism premature. It should become clear that the question of supersessionism in Aquinas's theology turns on whether Jewish observance of the Law can have a positive theological significance after the passion of Christ, or whether it is always and necessarily "dead and deadly." If the latter is the case then Aquinas's theology is economically supersessionist. If the former is true then Aquinas's theology avoids economic supersessionism.

## 1. “A JEWISH READING OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS”

The question of supersessionism in the theology of Thomas Aquinas began with Wyschogrod’s 1987 article, “A Jewish Reading of St. Thomas Aquinas,” one of the first strictly theological treatments of Aquinas’s view of the Jews.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the greater part of the essay, Wyschogrod is concerned to explain Aquinas’s division of the Mosaic legislation into moral, ceremonial, and judicial law, as well as challenge Aquinas’s claim that the ceremonial law is dead and deadly after the passion of Christ (Ia-IIae q. 103.4). Indeed, Wyschogrod challenges the same teaching that Jules Isaac challenged after the War: idea that Christ abrogates Jewish Law after the passion of Christ. Both Jewish scholars understand this traditional Christian teaching to undermine Jewish existence.

Wyschogrod attempts to explain why Aquinas holds that the ceremonial law becomes sinful after Christ while the other two forms of law, judicial and moral, are preserved as legitimate.<sup>2</sup> The status of the ceremonial law after the passion of Christ is ultimately determined by what Wyschogrod refers to as the “hermeneutics of prefiguration.”<sup>3</sup> Aquinas’s reading of the Old Testament must be read in two senses and these senses correspond to the literal and spiritual meaning of the ceremonial laws: “they were

1. Wyschogrod, “A Jewish Reading of St. Thomas Aquinas,” 125–38. Scholars had treated the topic of Aquinas and Judaism before Wyschogrod’s essay, but the studies mainly discussed Aquinas’s “social policy,” or his teaching on toleration of Jews in Christendom. Although no one would respond to Wyschogrod’s essay for well over a decade, the number of theological treatments of Aquinas’s interpretation of Judaism grew substantially. For this reason, Wyschogrod’s essay can be said to mark the beginning of twentieth-century scholarly attention to Aquinas’s theology of the Jews. Guttman’s and Chenu’s work preceded Wyschogrod’s essay. Guttman, *Das Verhältniss des Thomas von Aquino zum Judenthum*; Chenu, “La Théologie de La Loi Ancienne Selon Saint Thomas.” See also Dubois, “Thomas Aquinas on the Place of the Jews in the Divine Plan,” 241–66. Schenk, “Covenant Initiation,” 555–93. Torrell, “Ecclesia Iudaeorum.” Hofer, “The Circumcision of the Lord: Saving Mystery.” Valkenberg and Schoot, “Thomas Aquinas and Judaism.” Hall, “The Old Law and the New Law.” The theological aspects of Jeremy Cohen and John Y. B. Hood’s work should also be included in this list.

2. The judicial laws can be observed in Israel or any nation so long as they are no longer viewed as binding through enactment by God in the Old Law. Wyschogrod writes, “Thomas knows very well that the Old Law is not going to prove permanent, that there will come a time, or a time has come, when the Old Law, or at least a portion of it, will have been abolished. If this is to be made intelligible, the Old Law must be divided into sharply defined categories so that one segment of it can be considered no longer binding while another can remain in full force.” Wyschogrod, “A Jewish Reading,” 126.

3. *Ibid.*, 129.

ordained for the worship of God at that time, and for prefiguring Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Wyschogrod rightly interprets the spiritual meaning of the Law, which is the prefigurement of Christ, as primary in Aquinas. Since, for Aquinas, ceremonies are professions of faith, to observe the ceremony primarily meant to prefigure Christ after Christ has already come is tantamount to a declaration that Christ has not come. Jewish observance of the Law is, after Christ, a declaration of unbelief. Wyschogrod cites Aquinas’s explanation of this teaching in Ia-IIae q. 103.4 and concludes: “It is here that the transformation from faithful obedience of the *mizvoth* to mortal sin occurs.”<sup>5</sup> The Old Law goes from being a vehicle that pointed to Christ—who justified—to a vehicle that denies Christ and is therefore the occasion of sin.<sup>6</sup> In Wyschogrod’s view, Aquinas “makes the prefigurement hermeneutics the foundation of his teaching of the annulment of the ceremonial law.”<sup>7</sup>

For Wyschogrod, Aquinas’s reading of the ceremonial law presents problems for the “believing Jew.” Wyschogrod reads Aquinas’s teaching as applying to Jews in general. When he asks whether the observance of the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law ought to be interpreted more benevolently, he understands Aquinas’s teaching to apply to the “Jewish reader”:

When the Christian interpreter finds in the myriad details of the Jewish ceremonial law references to the birth, passion and resurrection of Jesus, the Jewish reader cannot help feeling uncomfortable. And most of all, when Thomas makes the prefigurement hermeneutics the foundation of his teaching of the annulment of the ceremonial law, the feeling of discomfort turns into one of positive distress. For even if there is, from the point of view of Christian faith, a large element of prefigurement of Christ in the Old Testament, does it have to follow that someone who refrains from eating pork or who fasts on the Day of Atonement is committing a mortal sin? Must his action be interpreted as saying that ‘Christ was to be born’ (103, 4, Reply) rather than that he had been born, thereby denying Christ? Could adherence to the Mosaic Law not be interpreted much more benevolently, as love of God and his

4. Ibid., 129–30. Wyschogrod writes, “Whatever meaning the narratives and precepts (laws) of the Old Testament may have had at the time they were given, they also had the probably more important function of prefiguring or foreshadowing the coming of Christ.” Wyschogrod’s citations of the *Summa Theologiae* are all taken from the *Blackfriars* edition: Ia-IIae q. 103.4 in *Summa theologiae* vol. 29 ed. Thomas Gilby.

5. Ibid., 132.

6. Ibid., 133.

7. Ibid., 136.

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

commandments, as fidelity to a holy way of life out of which—for Christian faith—the Redeemer was born?<sup>8</sup>

Wyschogrod sees Aquinas' teaching as problematic for reasons that are similar to Isaac and Soulen. For Wyschogrod, the central tenet of biblical faith is that God loves and elected the people of Israel "unto the end of time."<sup>9</sup> Circumcision is "a searing of the covenant into the flesh of Israel and not only, or perhaps not even primarily, into its spirit."<sup>10</sup> This covenant is maintained through the concrete practice of circumcision and observance of Torah.

Israel and the nations have, at times, failed to accept the terms of this election.<sup>11</sup> The Jewish people have failed to live out their election during certain periods, forgetting that their blessing is for service of the nations. And the nations have resented the presence of carnal Israel since the existence of this people is a reminder the nations are not God's elect. Despite failures on both sides, God's love and free election of Israel is irrevocable and divinely intended for the service of the Gentile world. God's plan is to consummate creation *through* Israel's election, fulfilling God's word to Abraham that "in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:3)."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, for Wyschogrod, the election of Israel is about the blessing of the nations, and the distinction between Jew and Gentile is "a sign of hope, not a wall of separation."<sup>13</sup>

Since the covenant is maintained through the practice of circumcision, Aquinas's teaching that this custom is no longer a theologically significant act of worship entails that God has repudiated God's promise to the Jewish people.<sup>14</sup> Such a claim raises questions about God's trustworthiness

8. *Ibid.*, 136.

9. Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 6.

10. Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, 66.

11. *Ibid.*, 9.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, 13.

14. For Wyschogrod, such a problematic view of the election of the Jewish people is not only expressed in the church's attitude toward Jewish observance of Torah. Wyschogrod also thinks it is manifested in how Christians perceive the Jewish identity of baptized Jews. For Wyschogrod, if the church truly believes in "the permanence and centrality of Israel's election as central to its own identity, it will expect baptized Jews to continue to affirm their Jewish identity and continue to observe Torah." However, "if the church truly believes that it has fundamentally superseded God's covenant with Israel, it will prohibit baptized Jews from obeying Torah and maintaining a distinct identity within the church." *Abraham's Promise*, 17.

and the trustworthiness of God's promises. If God desires that circumcision become obsolete or sinful, this implies God desires that the Jews disappear from the world. Wyschogrod argues that such a low view of the Jewish people goes hand in hand with the idea that the disappearance of Jews from the world is "no theological loss":

Were all Jews to recognize the truth, they would cease their stubborn insistence on continuing to exist as an identifiable people and become an integral part of the new Israel—the Church—which is God's new covenant partner in the world. The disappearance of the Jews from the world would be no theological loss because their place would have taken by the new people of God.<sup>15</sup>

For Wyschogrod, the fulfillment and obsolescence of the ceremonial law is a problem because it means God, contrary to his promise, no longer desires for Jews to exist in the world as Jews, and that, consequently, God's promises cannot be trusted.<sup>16</sup>

In light of Wyschogrod's understanding of the election of Israel, it becomes clear that his primary concern in addressing Aquinas is the teaching that Jewish observance of the Law is obsolete or sinful after Christ.<sup>17</sup> Wyschogrod's essay therefore centers the discussion on Aquinas and

15. Ibid.

16. David Novak explains the consequences of this point from the Christian perspective rather succinctly: "For Christians, the answer, paraphrasing Karl Barth, goes something like this: The promises God made through Jesus presuppose that God has already been keeping his promises to Israel. Indeed, for Christians, Jesus was sent to fulfill God's ultimate promise to Israel of redemption and then to extend it to the world. Nevertheless, God's initial promise to Israel is that she will not die but live, and live with duration as a covenanted people. The promises made through Jesus, which the Church accepts as normative, cannot be believed, therefore, if the Jewish people, who have a perpetual claim to be called Israel, are no longer present in the world." Novak, *Talking with Christians*, 11.

17. For a Christian description of this concern see the work of Robert Jenson: "identifiable Jewishness does not long survive within the Gentile dominated church. To be sure, identifiable continuing descent from Abraham and Sarah is perhaps more likely within the church than among those assimilated into the secular world. But even so, if God is to have a people identified by descent from Abraham and Sarah, the church as it is will not provide it. I propose to my fellow Christians that God wills the Judaism of Torah-obedience as that which alone can and does hold the lineage of Abraham and Sarah together during the time of detour. . . . By this time, the world is surely full of biological descendants of Abraham and Sarah who are not jointly part of any recognizable people. What holds some descendants of Abraham and Sarah together as a people is the religion of Torah-observance, and this is true also of the many who do not themselves pay much attention to the *mitzvoth*." Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism." In *Jews and Christians: People of God*, 9.

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

supersessionism on the problem at the “heart of supersessionism,” the double sense of fulfillment of the Law.<sup>18</sup> From his perspective, the question of supersessionism in Aquinas turns on whether or not observance of the ceremonial law after the passion of Christ is dead and deadly for Jews, or if as he asks at the close of his challenge to Aquinas, whether Jewish observance of the ceremonial law after Christ can be interpreted more benevolently.

### 2. MATTHEW LEVERING’S USAGE OF THE LANGUAGE OF SUPERSESSIONISM

As Levering has observed, “A Jewish Reading of St. Thomas Aquinas” represents Wyschogrod’s attempt to bring Aquinas into the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Levering’s response to Wyschogrod can be considered an attempt to explain and defend the traditional interpretation of Christ’s fulfillment of the ceremonial law in the new era of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

#### Levering’s Reply to Michael Wyschogrod

Levering responds to Wyschogrod’s critique by explaining the rationale behind Aquinas’s view that Christ fulfills the Mosaic Law. The purpose of Divine Law, which includes the Old Law, is to direct human beings to the supernatural end of friendship with God by means of knowing and loving. Yet the Old Law only partially achieves this goal by forbidding sinful acts and by restraining disordered desires opposed to the perfection of the rational creature. Christ perfectly fulfills the Old Law in his passion and does so in order to “bring it to an end in His own self, so as to show that it was ordained to Him.”<sup>20</sup> Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Law means that the ceremonial and judicial precepts do come to an end but only in “the positive (teleological) sense of attaining their ultimate end, in which they rest or last forever.”<sup>21</sup>

18. Steven Boguslawski also views the claim that the ceremonial law is useless in and of itself as part of “supersessionist logic.” I will treat Boguslawski below and it should become clear that a significant convergence in definition of supersessionism seems to appear between Wyschogrod and Boguslawski.

19. Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment*, 17.

20. *Ibid.*, 29.

21. *Ibid.*, 30.

However, Christ's perfect fulfillment of the Old Law means that all members of his Body can now share in this fulfillment of the Law. Levering explains that the ceremonial aspect of the Law is indeed a covenant that lasts forever. Aquinas's fundamental answer to Wyschogrod, according to Levering, is "that the Mosaic Law, in a real sense, *is still observed by Christians*."<sup>22</sup> However, the ceremonial law is said to be "forever" only in regard to the "reality which the ceremonies foreshadowed," which are the sacraments of the church. Since the reality prefigured by the Law is still observed by Christians, it has not been revoked, and Levering concludes that it is unfair to associate Aquinas with supersessionism.<sup>23</sup> "While it would be wrong to suggest that Aquinas's thought is a model for contemporary Jewish-Christian relations," writes Levering, "it is equally unfair to tar Aquinas theologically with the 'supersessionist' brush."<sup>24</sup>

Levering seems to use the term supersessionism in three ways. His primary usage of the term refers to the idea that "the fulfillment of Israel's covenants means that they are now revoked."<sup>25</sup> A secondary usage appears to refer to the practice of forced baptism, and a third usage refers to views held by Robert Grosseteste that Jews were heretics.

Each of Levering's uses of the language of supersessionism seems to be problematic, when viewed against uses of the term in previous chapter. Regarding his second use of the term (i.e., the reference to forced baptism), Levering confuses anti-Judaism—especially as it is expressed in acts of violence—with supersessionism. As I pointed out in chapter 1, anti-Jewish violence is not supersessionism.<sup>26</sup>

Regarding the third usage, Levering claims that Aquinas "avoids the *kind* of supersessionism that mars Robert Grosseteste's work."<sup>27</sup> Here, Le-

22. *Ibid.*, 28.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 152. Levering appears to have changed concerning his comment that Aquinas's thought is not a model for contemporary Jewish-Christian relations. In his most recent work, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom*, both Levering and Novak look to Aquinas's engagement with Maimonides' theology as a model to be emulated. Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom*.

25. Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment*, 9.

26. Although it should be noted that Jules Isaac believed the latter could be a motivating cause of the former.

27. *Ibid.* [Emphasis added]. Levering links Grosseteste and supersessionism in two different places: 9; 152fn. 50. In the footnote, he implies that the "supersessionism" Aquinas avoids is forced baptism of Jews and the view promoted by Grosseteste and other medieval theologians that Jews were heretics. I cannot tell if Levering meant to contrast

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

vering's reference to a *kind* of supersessionism hints at a view of supersessionism that seems to distinguish between various manifestations of the problem in Christian theology. However, he does not explain what type of supersessionism it is, exactly, that mars the work of Grosseteste, and this ultimately blurs similarities and differences between Aquinas and Grosseteste.<sup>28</sup>

---

Aquinas and Grosseteste on forced baptism, but if he did, the point is moot since both theologians condemned forced baptism of Jews in agreement with ecclesiastical policy. Friedman explains, “[Grosseteste] repeats the condemnation by his Church of the prevailing political view that the Jews were to be maltreated or exterminated as a means of forcible conversion. He lays it down that the punishment which the Almighty had ordained that the Jews suffer should neither be increased nor diminished by Christians, and recognizes that the Jews should be afforded an opportunity to gain a livelihood by honest work.” Friedman, *Robert Grosseteste and the Jew*, 20 (emphasis mine). Likewise, Aquinas makes the argument that such coercion is against free will and the authority ascribed to parents by the natural law. Cf. IIa-IIae, q 10; 8; 12; III q 68 a. 10. Aside from whether the comparison between Aquinas and Grosseteste is accurate, the more serious problem is Levering's inaccurate usage of the term supersessionism to describe forced baptism. Since antisemitism is not supersessionism, Levering's claim that Aquinas avoids “supersessionism” does not hold.

28. The ambiguity created by the conflating of antisemitism and supersessionism distracts from how Aquinas's theological interpretation of the Jewish people actually shares, at least in a few places in his thought, a particular form of supersessionism also present in Grosseteste's work. This becomes clear when both theologians are viewed in light of punitive supersessionism. According to Soulen, punitive supersessionism consists of the idea that God abrogates God's covenant with the Jews on account of Israel's rejection of Christ and the gospel. It is precisely punitive supersessionism that is evidenced in Grosseteste's letter to the Countess of Winchester: “[The Jews], being guilty of murder, in cruelly killing by crucifixion the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ, lest they might through his preaching [the gospel of] salvation lose standing and caste, because of this sin they did lose their standing unhappily at the hands of Titus and Vespasian, and having themselves entered into captivity, were scattered as captives through all lands and peoples, and they shall not be restored to freedom until the very end of the world. But in the last days, when all the multitude of nations, as is written, shall enter i.e. to faith, then all Israel, namely the people of the Jews, shall attain salvation through the same belief in Christ, and shall come again out of captivity into freedom. In the meantime, however, while the same people of the Jews persisting in their unbelief blaspheme Christ the Savior of the world, and mock at his suffering, they will be held captive under the rulers of the world to the just punishment of their sin.” Again, see Friedman, *Robert Grosseteste and the Jews*, 12–18. See also Robert Grosseteste, *De Cessatione Legalium*, 7. Although Aquinas is opposed to violence against Jewish people, he does adopt, in several places, a punitive supersessionist stance similar to that of Grosseteste. In his *Epistola ad ducissam Brabantiae*, Aquinas states, in his reply to the Duchess's inquiry on whether it is permissible to exact tribute of the Jews, that, “it is true, as the Law declares, that Jews in consequence of their sin, are or were destined to perpetual slavery; so that sovereigns of states may treat their goods as their own property; with the sole proviso that they do not

Nevertheless, the main problem with Levering's use of the term supersessionism is that he defines supersessionism only as "the revoking of the covenant." However, "revoking," implies a punishment due to a violation of a law. The form of supersessionism that has to do with God "revoking" the covenant with the Jewish people as punishment is punitive supersessionism. While Levering may be correct that Aquinas does not teach punitive supersessionism in this context, this is *not* the form of supersessionism with which Wyschogrod is concerned in his reading of Aquinas. Levering's definition of supersessionism permits him to evade or avoid Wyschogrod's main concern with Aquinas's view of the ceremonial law.

As demonstrated above, supersessionism concerns not only the punitive form that assumes a "revoking" of God's covenant with the Jews as punishment for failure to accept Christ. Supersessionism also consists of what Soulen has called the economic type, and what Isaac viewed as the *double sens* of "fulfilled and obsolete (*dépassée*)" or "fulfilled and expired (*périmé*)." Wyschogrod's critique of Aquinas's teaching on Jewish observance of the Law after Christ is concerned with economic supersessionism *not* punitive, as Levering seems to think when he defines the term only as "revoking the covenant." Nowhere in Wyschogrod's essay does he raise the issue of a punitive revoking of the covenant.

Perhaps because Levering conflates economic and punitive supersessionism, he also seems to miss Wyschogrod's concern that Aquinas's teaching contradicts the biblical claim that God has elected the Jewish people unto the end of time.<sup>29</sup> Wyschogrod's problem with Aquinas's teaching that

---

deprive them of all that is necessary to sustain life." As Hood has already observed, Aquinas believes that the Jews have been cast into spiritual exile for their rejection of Christ and that their social status in Christendom is proof of this. Both Aquinas and Grosseteste view the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. by Titus, as well as Jewish expulsion from Palestine at the hands of Vespasian, as a divine punishment for the Crucifixion. See Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews*, 75. However, such a view was not uncommon among thirteenth-century theologians. Friedman observes that the sentiment of Grosseteste and Aquinas are so strikingly repeated "that one is tempted to believe that Grosseteste's letter was known to Aquinas until [one] recalls that both are only repetitions of the authoritative Church pronouncements on the Jews." See Friedman, *Robert Grosseteste and the Jews*, 33. The Augustinian interpretation of Jewish diaspora was the standard medieval view, and the few places where punitive supersessionism does appear in Aquinas, the claim lacks the elaborate exegetical tapestry that Grosseteste attaches to it. Thomas Aquinas, "On the Government of the Jews," 233.

29. Another reason Levering misses Wyschogrod's primary concern with Aquinas's teaching may be due to the fact that he thinks Aquinas's claim that the observance of the ceremonial law is a mortal sin after Christ only applies to baptized Jews *not to Jews*

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

Jewish observance of the ceremonial law after Christ is a sin is that it undermines the existence and election of Israel, which is visibly maintained precisely through the observance of the Law. It is this aspect of Wyschogrod's challenge to Aquinas that Levering seems to leave unanswered by arguing only that the covenant continues because it is now fulfilled.

Yet Levering also seems aware of Wyschogrod's concern to protect the idea that God wills the corporeal existence of the Jewish people and senses a tension between this idea and his claim that the covenant continues but through the Church. This seems clear at two points in his reply. The first point is when he summarizes Wyschogrod's question to Aquinas as: "How . . . can the Church claim to recognize God's continuing covenant with Israel, which would quickly disappear as a visible reality if all Jews heeded the Church's evangelical call?"<sup>30</sup> The second point is when Levering qualifies his answer to Wyschogrod (which is, ultimately, that the Mosaic Law, in a real sense, is still observed by Christians through participation in Christian sacraments) by stating that Wyschogrod would not recognize the "real sense" in which the covenant continues in the form of Christian identity. He also says the claim that the covenant with the Jews is ongoing in the sense that Christians now observe it is an "apparent paradox" that requires explanation. The continuing of the covenant is a paradox because by sharing in Christ's Jewish fulfillment of Mosaic Law, Jews do not lose their identity but enter into the supernatural fullness of their identity.<sup>31</sup>

It is not clear though, how such a Jew, remains distinguishably Jewish in any sense of the word, i.e., how it differs from Christian identity as such. This view of Christ's fulfillment of the ceremonial law implies that authentic Jewish identity, at the end of the day, is Christian identity.<sup>32</sup> According to

---

*generally*. In a footnote, he denies that Aquinas's teaching that the observance of the ceremonial aspects of Mosaic Law after Christ is a sin applies to Jews. This claim seemed to need more attention in light of how much time Wyschogrod spends on pointing to Aquinas's teaching that the Law is dead and deadly as *the* problem.

30. Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment*, 16.

31. *Ibid.*, 29.

32. If this is in fact Aquinas's view of the relation between Church and Israel, then his view is not unlike that of Karl Barth's. Soulen observes that Barth's theology is ultimately economically supersessionist because it holds that God's covenant with Israel is fulfilled in Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. At that point Israel's distinctive role comes to an end in principle, and the church takes its place. In Barth's view, "God's work as Consummator is joined primordially not to the people of Israel as a whole but to the one Israelite Jesus Christ." Soulen, *God of Israel*, 90.

Bruce Marshall, the claim that the Mosaic Law is fulfilled in Christ is *not* the solution to the problem of supersessionism. This sort of fulfillment

seems to suggest, that what a Jew should do in order to observe God's command regarding his eight-day-old son is take him to church and get him baptized. It seems, in other words, that on this view the way for Jews to observe the law is to become Christians. Now the notion that the law of Moses finds its complete fulfillment in Christ and the Church is, I think, indispensable for Christianity. But this ancient idea is not the solution to the problem of supersessionism. It *is* the problem.<sup>33</sup>

In the end, Levering embraces and defends the traditional concept that Christ fulfills and renders obsolete the ceremonial law, but he denies that this is supersessionism. Although he is right that Aquinas's teaching on the ceremonial law in Ia-IIae q. 103.4 is not punitive supersessionism, the teaching clearly amounts to economic supersessionism since such a view assumes the obsolescence of the ceremonial law. The teaching that Christ fulfills and renders obsolete Jewish Law is exactly what Isaac, Soulen, and Wyschogrod identify as supersessionism. By Levering's own account, Aquinas's teaching in Ia-IIae q. 103.4 has exactly the problematic consequences that Isaac, Soulen, and Wyschogrod foresee. It is not clear how the covenant *with* the Jews can be "ongoing" if Jewish identity is abrogated. From Wyschogrod's view, the claim that the ceremonial law is dead implies that God no longer wills the Jewish people to live as Jews but rather, to live as some other people. Therefore, Levering's interpretation of Aquinas's teaching amounts to economic supersessionism since it assumes Christ's fulfillment of the ceremonial law renders it obsolete.

### Levering's Engagement with Mark Kinzer

Eight years after Levering's response to Wyschogrod, the discussion over whether Aquinas's theology is supersessionist emerges once again, this time in the context of Levering's reply to the work of Mark Kinzer.<sup>34</sup> According to Levering, the question of supersessionism remains a paramount theological question. He states that unless the problem is overcome, Jewish-Christian

33. Bruce Marshall, "Quasi in Figura," 480–81.

34. Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 39.

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

dialogue is not possible.<sup>35</sup> Kinzer, building on the argument of Wyschogrod, argues that Aquinas's claim that the observance of ceremonial law is a mortal sin represents the "unequivocal supersessionist theological and canonical legacy of the Church."<sup>36</sup> Kinzer argues that this teaching is supersessionist, which he defines as "the *ekklesia* replaces the Jewish people as the elect community in covenant with God . . . the church is the new and spiritual Israel, fulfilling the role formerly occupied by 'carnal' Israel."<sup>37</sup>

Kinzer argues that the New Testament does not support the claim that the ceremonial aspect of Mosaic Law is dead for Jewish Christ-followers—a claim articulated by Augustine in his correspondence with Jerome, and later adopted by Aquinas.<sup>38</sup> For Kinzer, this teaching is a tradition that forces Aquinas to adopt the claim that the Law causes spiritual death for Jews. Kinzer concludes that, "Only a preexisting theological commitment to supersessionism could lead one to be satisfied with the explanation of the relevant biblical texts offered by Augustine and accepted by Aquinas."<sup>39</sup>

Levering takes issue with Kinzer's claim about Aquinas's "preexisting theological commitment" to supersessionism. He rejects Kinzer's exegesis on the basis of a thorough review of several New Testament texts and argues that Aquinas's claim that the ceremonial Mosaic Law is deadly after

35. See the excursus at the end of the chapter.

36. Kinzer does say that Aquinas cannot be held responsible for creating the Christian consensus on the *mortifera* character of the Mosaic Law since he is interpreting ecclesiastical tradition whose roots go back to the early second century and which became official at the second council of Nicaea in 787. Such a view seems to underestimate Aquinas's understanding of the relationship between Scripture and *sacra doctrina*, not to mention overlook the possibility that original insights on relevant texts regarding the Law may exist in Aquinas's works, especially his neglected biblical commentaries on the Pauline epistles. Both Kinzer and Wyschogrod employ a selective reading of Aquinas, a point I will return to below.

37. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 12.

38. See also Carolinne White, *The Correspondence (394–419) between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo*.

39. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 39. Kinzer's view of Aquinas's preexisting commitment does not take into account the fact that Aquinas thinks that Paul teaches (in Gal 5:2) that observance of the ceremonial law after Christ makes Christ no profit and thus must mean it is a mortal sin. Aquinas does not commit to theological positions first and then look for support in Scripture. Aquinas's biblical commentaries represent a critical engagement with the text that accords with his official title of "Master of the Sacred Page." His adoption of the Augustinian view of the Law as dead and deadly is determinatively shaped by his reading of Hebrews and Galatians, as I demonstrate in chapter 8.

the Passion of Christ is an accurate expression of New Testament theology. In short, Levering argues that Christ has fulfilled and “reconfigured” Torah and Temple around himself and that Scripture supports this view.

It is interesting that Levering does not claim Aquinas avoids supersessionism as he did in his original response to Wyschogrod. In his reply to Kinzer’s argument that Aquinas is the standard-bearer of a supersessionist Church, he steps away from the language of supersessionism. Instead, he argues that Aquinas’s fulfillment theology expresses the view of the New Testament.

However, though Levering shifts away from the language of supersessionism, he does use the language of “replacement,” which may indicate he may be more comfortable with the equivalent term, “replacement theology.” After stating that Aquinas’s fulfillment theology expresses the New Testament view, he attempts to describe a positive ongoing role for Jews in the present. He argues that the Jews in fact, do have “a place” in the world, and explains how Aquinas’s view does not “negate” Judaism:

God gave his covenantal people the Torah, as the “place” in which they would be formed in true worship of the one God, and Judaism and Jews continue to possess this covenantal “place” even as Christians invite the Jewish people to discover the messianic fulfillment of this “place.” The fact that in the new covenant Jews fulfill their covenantal obligations (Torah observance) sacramentally, in union with Gentiles in the Body of the Messiah, does not take away the “place” of Judaism and Jews, because this “place” participates in the saving work of the Messiah.<sup>40</sup>

Here, Levering essentially restates the position outlined in his reply to Wyschogrod.<sup>41</sup> The difference is that in his encounter with Kinzer, he states his position in terms of “place” and argues more explicitly that Jewish observances are now practiced in another place: the Church.

Overall, Levering’s approach seems to sidestep the paramount question of supersessionism. In his reply to Wyschogrod the term is conflated with anti-Judaism. In his engagement with Kinzer he seems to drop the language of supersessionism altogether.<sup>42</sup> By addressing Kinzer’s exegesis

40. Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 39.

41. Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment*, 29.

42. In his engagement with Novak, his emphasis on teleological fulfillment seems only to pay lip service to the call for the renunciation of harsh Christian supersessionism. Levering’s argument against Kinzer (that the Church and sacraments are the new place for the Jewish people) sits in direct tension with his approval of Novak’s renunciation

instead of the question of whether Aquinas's theology consists of supersessionism, Levering begs the paramount question put to Aquinas by Wyschogrod: "How . . . can the Church claim to recognize God's continuing covenant with Israel, which would quickly disappear *as a visible reality* if all Jews heeded the Church's evangelical call?"<sup>43</sup>

### 3. BRUCE MARSHALL AND STEVEN BOGUSLAWSKI ON THE LANGUAGE OF SUPERSESSIONISM

Bruce Marshall and Steven Boguslawski acknowledge that the traditional concept of Christ fulfilling and rendering obsolete the ceremonial law amounts to supersessionism. In fact, these Thomists understand the term "supersessionism" to refer to the idea that Jewish Law after Christ is obsolete or cancelled. Their usage of the term overlaps greatly with how the word functions in the thought of Isaac, Soulen, and Wyschogrod.

#### Bruce Marshall on the Supersessionism of the *Summa theologiae*

For Marshall, supersessionism involves "the thought that the gifts God gave and the promises God made to the Jews now apply to us, the Church, *instead of* to the Jews. They have been taken away from the Jews and given to us."<sup>44</sup>

Marshall rightly understands that the affirmation of God's ongoing election of Israel, such as the one in *Nostra Aetate*, raises the question of the status of observance of the ceremonial law, since it is through the observance

---

of harsh Christian supersessionism, since Novak rejects precisely this form of replacement theology. Ironically, Novak uses the language of "replacement" as synonymous with supersessionism in the works that Levering draws upon for his appropriation of Novak's views of supersessionism. Indeed, Novak believes it is the sort of replacement theology articulated by Levering that must be overcome: "Christian supersessionism lends itself to an easy way to proselytize Jews. It simply tells Jews that they are living in an irretrievable past. It thus tells Jews to become 'full Jews,' that is, to become Christians and leave Judaism behind." Novak, *Talking with Christians*, 24. The harsh Christian supersessionism that Novak requires Christians to reject is precisely the argument that invites Jews to become "full Jews" by fulfilling, in Levering's words, "their covenantal obligations (Torah observance) sacramentally, in union with Gentiles in the Body of the Messiah." Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 40.

43. Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment*, 16. [Emphasis added]

44. Marshall, *Quasi in Figura*, 477.

of the Torah that God's covenant with the Jews remains a covenant with the Jews: "The Jewish people," writes Marshall, "cannot be permanently elect unless they can be distinguished at all times from the nations, and the observance of traditional Jewish Law seems to be the one mark by which this distinction can be sustained *post Christum*."<sup>45</sup>

For this reason, Marshall thinks the traditional views of fulfillment, such as the one in the thought of Levering, which claims Torah is fulfilled by observing the sacraments of the church, are supersessionist. Marshall, like Wyschogrod, thinks Aquinas's teaching that the observance of the ceremonial law after Christ is a mortal sin represents supersessionism. He writes,

Thomas clearly regards the continued observance of the Torah after Christ as fatal. That is, the vast bulk of Mosaic legislation, everything in the "Old Law" which Aquinas considers distinctively Jewish (everything, that is, except the ten commandments), has been set aside by the coming of Christ. More than that: everything which pertains to the worship of God in Israel . . . —what Aquinas calls the "ceremonial law"—is now not only useless, but destructive. After Christ these laws are not simply dead (*mortua*), but deadly (*mortifera*); those who continue to observe them "now sin mortally."<sup>46</sup>

An important aspect of Marshall's handling of this teaching in Aquinas is his attentiveness to possible tensions in Aquinas's position on the matter. Marshall suggests there is a positive view of Israel in the Romans commentary and that Aquinas affirms the election of Israel in a way that repudiates supersessionism.<sup>47</sup> The possibility of such a tension suggests that contemporary Thomistic scholarship lacks a complete picture of Aquinas's thought on the subject of the ceremonial law after the passion of Christ.<sup>48</sup>

45. *Ibid.*, 92. Marshall elaborates on this point in another essay: "the Jewish people cannot continue to exist in the long run without Judaism. . . . The irrevocable election of the Jewish people evidently requires the permanence of their religion[;] . . . without a substantial core of faithful Jews, who practice Judaism well and teach their children to do the same, it seems impossible that the Jewish people could endure in the long run. Without Judaism, the Jewish people would surely, if slowly, disappear from the earth, as other ancient people have done. They would cease to be a distinct people, and vanish into *gentilitas*, as medieval Christian theologians called the mass of us not descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Marshall, "Elder Brothers," 122.

46. Marshall, "*Quasi in Figura*," 479. Marshall has in mind Ia-IIae q. 103.4; q. 104.3.

47. Marshall, "Postscript and Prospect," 523–4.

48. In his reply to Marshall, Emmanuel Perrier commented, "If it happens that Aquinas does not achieve a homogeneous doctrine on a given subject, it is always a good

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

For this reason, Marshall's work points to the necessity for filling-out the complexity of Aquinas's thought, especially in the Pauline commentaries.

### Steven Boguslawski on How Aquinas Avoids Supersessionism

Boguslawski argues at length that there is a positive view of Israel in the Romans commentary but, unlike Wyschogrod and Marshall, he argues that Aquinas's view of the Jews in the *Summa theologiae* avoids supersessionism.

The term supersessionism features prominently in Boguslawski's main argument that Aquinas's commentary on Romans represents a correction and development of Augustine.<sup>49</sup> Boguslawski views supersessionism as synonymous with what he refers to as a "problematic Augustinian supersessionism,"<sup>50</sup> that relegates "Israel's divinely ordained prerogatives to prefigurements of the Christian dispensation."<sup>51</sup> By "Israel's divinely ordained prerogatives," Boguslawski means the covenant and Law<sup>52</sup> where "covenant" corresponds to "the pact of circumcision given to Abraham" and Law means the Mosaic legislation.<sup>53</sup> In particular, supersessionism is "relegating Israel's divinely ordained prerogatives to prefigurements of the Christian dispensation."<sup>54</sup>

For Boguslawski, Aquinas avoids supersessionism by maintaining the historical *realia* of Israel's prerogatives of Law and covenant. Aquinas is unlike Augustine because he does not resort to "deconstructing the Jews' historical, covenantal privileges." Rather, Aquinas advances "his own distinctive exegetical contribution to the commentary tradition without

---

method to verify beforehand that one is truly faced with such a situation." Perrier, "The Election of Israel Today," 485–503. Perrier does not seem to recognize why supersessionism is a theological problem. He asserts only that fulfillment is the way to understand the election. But this leaves the Jews, once again, in an ambiguous role that fails to attend to Wyschogrod's challenge to Thomistic studies that God wills there to be Jews in the world.

49. Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews*.

50. *Ibid.*, 4.

51. *Ibid.*, xv.

52. *Ibid.*, xvi; 108, fn8.

53. *Ibid.*, 108, fn8. Novak also uses the language of "prerogatives" of Israel to describe that which is relegated and therefore marks a significant convergence of language between a contemporary Jewish theologian and Aquinas. As I shall demonstrate, Boguslawski's view of supersessionism also shares much with Wyschogrod's view of the problem.

54. *Ibid.*, xv.

deconstructing the Jewish people's historical prerogatives or resorting to theological supersessionism."<sup>55</sup>

In another place, Boguslawski equates supersessionism with the idea that "Christian believers supersede Jews as the *verus Israel*."<sup>56</sup> Taken together, these two components of Boguslawski's view of supersessionism overlap with Soulen's term, economic supersessionism. Boguslawski seems to identify the "deconstruction" of Israel's prerogatives and their status as God's elect people, with supersessionism, which is essentially the same move that Isaac, Soulen, Wyschogrod, Kinzer, and Marshall all make.

Yet unlike Wyschogrod, Kinzer, and Marshall, Boguslawski argues Aquinas avoids supersessionism. He claims that Aquinas differs from Augustine in that Aquinas avoids teaching that the ceremonial is obsolete. Boguslawski explains that, for Augustine, Jewish prerogatives are only allegorical "foreshadowings" of Christian realities. Aquinas, however, strives to preserve Jewish prerogatives as grounded in literal, historical *realia*. Therefore, Aquinas, "corrects and develops Augustine."

It is not at all clear, based on Boguslawski's analysis, that Aquinas avoids this move. The main problem with Boguslawski's argument is that nowhere does he address Aquinas's teaching in the *Summa theologiae* that the observance of the Mosaic Law is a mortal sin because it amounts to a declaration of unbelief in Christ's passion. For this reason, his claim that Aquinas avoids deconstructing the literal meaning of circumcision and Mosaic Law to Christological prefigurements does not hold.

#### 4. THE CEREMONIAL LAW IN AQUINAS'S PAULINE COMMENTARIES

All the scholars in the discussion over whether Aquinas's theology is supersessionist agree that the question turns on what Aquinas teaches about ceremonial law. Levering says that Aquinas teaches exactly what Wyschogrod is concerned to address: that Jewish observances becomes obsolete after Christ and that Jews can now only enter into the fullness of their Jewish identity by participating in Christian sacraments. Levering claimed this teaching was not supersessionism, but his usage is idiosyncratic and also confuses the term with anti-Judaism. In his most recent engagement with

55. *Ibid.*, 29.

56. *Ibid.*, 127.

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

Kinzer, Levering drops the term, but restates his position that the place for Jews to maintain the “ongoing” covenant is the Church.

Marshall and Boguslawski, on the other hand, understand the term supersessionism in a way that substantially coincides with Isaac and Soulen’s critique of the Christian claim that with the advent of Christ, Jewish Law is “fulfilled and expired” or “fulfilled and obsolete.” Both scholars view the Christian claim that the Jewish Law is obsolete as a problematic idea and therefore provide significant agreement upon the question raised by Wyschogrod’s “Jewish Reading of St. Thomas Aquinas.”

However, these scholars disagree about where Aquinas stands in relation to the question of supersessionism: Boguslawski argues Aquinas’s teaching in the Romans commentary and *Summa theologiae* avoid supersessionism. Marshall thinks Aquinas’s teaching in the *Summa theologiae* is supersessionist, while the Romans commentary is not supersessionist.

What can we conclude? The discussion over the question of supersessionism in Aquinas’s theology contains a substantial overlap and consensus in the use of the term supersessionism, with the exception of Levering. This consensus over the meaning of the term coincides with the work of Isaac and Soulen. Therefore, my analysis of the discussion indicates that there is a rather straightforward way to pose the question that guides the rest of the study: the question of supersessionism in Aquinas’s theology turns on whether Jewish observance of the Law can have a positive theological significance, or whether it is always and necessarily “dead and deadly.”

In order to tackle question of supersessionism in Aquinas’s theology, a more thorough analysis of Aquinas’s teaching on the ceremonial law in the commentaries on Paul’s letters is necessary. Although Marshall and Boguslawski’s work broadens the discussion on whether Aquinas’s theology is supersessionist to include Aquinas’s Romans commentary, all scholars in the discussion over whether Aquinas’s theology is supersessionist have overlooked Aquinas’s extended reflections on some of the most relevant texts on the subject of the Jewish people: his commentaries on Paul’s letters to the Galatians, Hebrews, and Ephesians.

As I show in the next chapter, Aquinas comments extensively on Jewish observance of the ceremonial law before and after Christ’s passion in these commentaries. What sort of theological status does Aquinas attribute to the ceremonial law in the Pauline commentaries and how does this teaching relate to the teaching in the *Summa theologiae*? Does Aquinas teach that the ceremonial law is “fulfilled and expired,” in the words of Jules

Isaac, or do these practices retain a positive theological significance after the passion of Christ?

## EXCURSUS

Levering's engagement of Kinzer appears in *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*. The larger aim of the project is to engage the work of Jewish theologian David Novak. In the context of Levering's engagement with Novak, the language of supersessionism becomes rather complex and more idiosyncratic than in his engagement with Wyschogrod. "Jewish-Christian dialogue," Levering writes, "begins with the question of 'supersessionism'" and he offers his own definition of the term: Supersessionism is "what happens when Christian theologies leave no theological space for Judaism or Jewish theologies leave no theological space for Christianity—due to the Christian proclamation that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God incarnate who fulfills God's covenant with Israel and reconfigures Israel around himself."<sup>57</sup> It is not clear what Levering means here by the phrase "no theological space." The definition of supersessionism seems odd for several reasons. For one thing, it seems unrelated to previous uses of the term by Soulen, and others. For another, the definition seems to define supersessionism so narrowly that it is hard to imagine how any theologian could manage to be supersessionist. Apparently, any theologian who provided "theological space" of some sort for Judaism avoids supersessionism. On this definition, Justin Martyr or Melito of Sardis could be said to avoid supersessionism. Even Marcion could be said to avoid supersessionism, since he provided a theological space for Judaism, albeit an entirely negative one, completely opposite the church. Such a definition evacuates the term of its meaning.

More important than this definition of supersessionism is Levering's view that Jewish-Christian dialogue still "begins with the question of supersessionism." In order to overcome the problem of supersessionism, Levering draws upon David Novak's understanding of supersessionism, which he argues points the way forward for Jewish-Christian dialogue. In Novak's view, supersessionism consists of two forms: mild and harsh. The mild form holds the promise for moving forward in Jewish-Christian dialogue while the harsh prevents dialogue. The mild form of Christian supersessionism is characterized by two positive affirmations: 1) Jesus Christ is the Messiah and 2) the covenant with the Jews has not been revoked. Mild

<sup>57</sup> Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 12.

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

supersessionism, explains Levering, is the view that Christianity “solves the problems of Judaism better than Judaism can do without Christianity because Christianity provides the savior to whom Judaism has always looked.”<sup>58</sup> Because of this particular Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, “Christianity ‘supersedes’ Judaism in the sense of ‘going beyond it.’” As an example, Novak offers Edith Stein as one who “goes beyond” Judaism in her conversion to Christianity. According to both Novak and Levering, mild supersessionism is unavoidable for Christians because it involves the claim that Jesus Christ “goes beyond” Judaism. And yet, this mild form does not need to be “anti-Jewish” and does not require “condemnation of Judaism.”

It is not at all clear, based on even the most basic definition of “supersede,” how these two claims—(1) Jesus Christ is the Messiah and (2) the covenant with the Jews has not been revoked—are supersessionist in any way, since though the claims are in tension, Christ is not at all described as fulfilling and making obsolete Jewish Law and then replacing Israel with Church. Novak’s language of a “mild” supersessionism as “going beyond” is too ambiguous to be helpful. His second term, harsh Christian supersessionism, is a more precise definition. Harsh supersessionism is more problematic than mild, in Novak’s view, because it has the Church replacing the Jewish people.<sup>59</sup> Harsh supersessionism is the view that “the Jewish people are no longer special people in the eyes of God; they lose their covenantal prerogatives altogether, and fall back to the status of all other peoples.” Novak is concerned here to protect the elect status of carnal Israel, as is Wyschogrod. In particular, Novak rejects what he refers to as the use of “teleological logic” of harsh supersessionism, which is used in the Christian interpretation of the relationship between Israel’s covenants (the Old Testament) and Christ (the New Testament). Here, Novak’s concern clearly correlates with the “heart of supersessionism” as defined in chapter 1. The Old, for Novak, should not be seen as the earlier “potential” to the New or as prior “cause.” In contrast to such logic, Novak proposes a “parallel relation” between Jews and Christians that avoids “teleological” arguments of one entity replacing the other.”

Levering quotes approvingly of Novak’s rejection of harsh Christian supersessionism but backpedals when he speculates about what *sort* of teleological logic Novak actually rejects. “Viewed in light of Christ, biblical Israel—and Judaism—find teleological fulfillment in Christ, but not

58 Ibid., 14.

59 Novak, *Talking with Christians*, 41.

the kind of fulfillment that can be seen to emerge necessarily from the operation of the mechanism, nor the kind of teleology that brings about its own fulfillment from within its own resources and that has value only in its end or goal. God's Word includes his good gifts to Israel. *That these gifts are ordered to a further fulfillment is indeed teleological, but the gifts cannot be reduced to an immanent and mechanical teleology.*" Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 21.

Novak does not mention "types" of teleological logic or specify any distinction in relation to the term whatsoever. Yet Levering attempts to create a distinction where Novak offers none. Here, Levering proposes one form of teleology that is legitimate and another that is illegitimate, which he calls "mechanical." The mechanical is identified as problematic because it somehow reduces God's "good gifts to Israel." "I take it that [Novak] means to exclude a *mechanical teleology*, stripped of real final causality that treats biblical Israel as a mere mechanism by which God brings about Jesus, and which has no value once Jesus arrives."<sup>60</sup> He implies that a non-mechanical teleology that provides "real final causality" and that leaves the opposite of "no value" (some value?) for Israel would be acceptable to Novak.

It is important to unravel this terminology in order to try and understand what problem Levering understands the language of harsh supersessionism to identify. "Real final causality" is the form of teleological logic that is acceptable (to Levering) so long as it does not deny "realities" that Jews and Christians affirm together. Levering asks: "Once one allows for teleology, does one bring in supersessionism . . . through the back door? Assuming an appropriate time and setting, cannot Jews tell Christians to 'come home'? Yes, but neither Christians nor Jews can do so *in a manner that denies or discards the realities that Christians and Jews affirm together.*"<sup>61</sup>

This qualification about an "acceptable form of teleology" that does not discard "realities" Christians and Jews affirm together seems as if it is a way of sidestepping Novak's harsh Christian supersessionism. Levering seems to say that teleological logic is acceptable to Novak so long as it does not discard or deny "the realities that Christians and Jews affirm together." Yet Levering does not say what Jewish "realities" must not be denied. He mentions "good gifts to Israel," and "Sinai." Based on these terms, I take "realities" that Jews and Christians affirm and cannot be denied to mean God's gift of the Law and covenant with the Jews. If this definition is accepted,

<sup>60</sup> Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 25 (emphasis mine).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 22 (emphasis mine).

## Aquinas on Israel and the Church

the form of teleological logic of harsh Christian supersessionism (a distinction created by Levering and not Novak) that is “acceptable” must therefore positively “affirm” Jewish realities in a way that affirms Israel as somehow valuable. But if this is the case, why not refer to this form of acceptable teleological logic as mild supersessionism, since the mild form already positively affirms Israel’s covenant? Again, “mild supersessionism” is defined as the idea that the Jews are not rejected as God’s covenant people and the covenant is affirmed as an ‘ongoing reality’ that possesses positive meaning. Levering’s category of acceptable teleology, which he also refers to as “real final causality” ultimately says nothing positive about Israel. “Mechanical teleology” only identifies, in ambiguous terms, what cannot be said about biblical Israel: e.g., one may not reduce biblical Israel’s realities; one may not say that biblical Israel has no value. Nothing is said about what exactly must be affirmed about Israel. The distinction between acceptable (real final causality) and unacceptable (mechanical) teleology ultimately seems like a way of stepping around Novak’s rejection of harsh Christian supersessionism, which Novak defines as, “the Jewish people are no longer special people in the eyes of God; they lose their covenantal prerogatives altogether, and fall back to the status of all other peoples.” The distinction between an unacceptable and acceptable teleology essentially takes the teeth out of Novak’s definition of harsh Christian supersessionism.

Novak is explicit that the mark of Christian supersessionist logic is the teleological logic that assumes the replacement of the Jews as God’s elect people with the Church. He writes, “Christian supersessionists assert that God has rejected the Jews *and replaced them with the Church*. . . .”<sup>62</sup> In Novak’s view “the heart” of supersessionism is the teleological logic that requires that the “Church replaces the Jewish people as Israel.”<sup>63</sup> He writes, “if the New Testament replaces the Old Testament and the Church replaces the Jewish people as Israel, then the old has been overcome—that is, has been superseded—by the new.” Novak’s whole purpose in calling for the renunciation of harsh Christian supersessionism is that the replacement of one entity by another prevents the sort of parallelism that he points toward as a solution for Jewish-Christian dialogue. Moving beyond harsh Christian supersessionism, especially its teleology that requires that the Church replace carnal Israel as God’s elect, is Novak’s aim, as the title of his article indicates: “From

62 Novak, *Talking with Christians*, 9.

63 Ibid.

Supersessionism to Parallelism in Jewish-Christian Dialogue.”<sup>64</sup> Thus when Levering claims “Novak’s way of handling the loaded term of ‘supersessionism’ identifies a path for Jewish-Christian dialogue” he seems only to pay lip service to Novak’s understanding of the term.

For both Novak and Wyschogrod, Christian supersessionism refers to something far more precise. For Wyschogrod and Novak, *the* problem with supersessionism is the idea that the advent of Christ also entails that Jewish Law is obsolete and results in the Church replacing the Jews as God’s elect community. In both of Levering’s engagements with these Jewish theologians, the main concern of the Jewish thinkers regarding the paramount question of supersessionism is bypassed—whether God intends carnal Israel to exist or be replaced by the Church.

SAMPLE

64 Ibid., 8.