

LCJE- Conference 27-31 May 2013

Session 6- What's in a name?- A response to Herby Geer:

Replacement theology and supersessionism- the use and misuse of the term.

Alex Jacob- The Church's Ministry among Jewish People (CMJ)

In the world of Jewish-Christian relations and theological reflection names, terminologies and definitions are of great importance. Often this importance is rooted in a “power game”, for whoever gets to “define the brand, term or name” (for example Jew/Messianic Judaism/Israel/Chosen) is exercising power and shaping the subsequent debate.

I appreciated the paper submitted by Herby Geer, I felt the tone and style of his paper was very good and assessable. I liked the parallel he drew between the symptoms of his friend's Celiac disease and the ‘Church disease’ which manifests itself in arrogant supersessionist teaching and potentially destructive anti-Semitism.

In terms of content his diagnosis is excellent where he states:

Within the Messianic movement, Supersessionism (Replacement Theology) and Dual Covenant Theology have been seen as the bookends of error that condemn the Jewish people to a future without a gospel witness. They are opposing views but the resulting belief is that either the Jews do not need the gospel, or the Jews do not deserve the gospel.

In addition to this he gives a helpful overview of the historical development and theological nuances within supersessionist thought by quoting from R K Soulen (from the book-*The God of Israel and Christian Theology*) and also affirms the importance of responding to the errors of supersessionism by developing a clear Biblical theology. He is right in pointing the reader towards the understanding that this requires a serious engagement with the nature of Covenants as given in the Scriptures and the nature of God's election (past, present and future).

For me, I see primarily supersessionism undermining the identity of the Church and blunting or distorting our Christian witness to the wider

Jewish world. However, it may also bring forth further problems, for supersessionism means “to take the place (seat) belonging to another”. This act of usurping (a sort of malignant game of musical chairs) or theft maybe creates a climate in the Church where we find it hard to submit to Jesus as Lord. His place is on the throne of our lives. We learn individually and corporately to recognise His voice, respond to His call and to discern the prompting of His Spirit. For us to submit fully to Jesus as Lord means being in the right place, this therefore rules out sitting in the place belonging rightfully to another. We must find our right seat and then recognise the Lordship of Jesus over us individually and corporately.

For me, in responding to Replacement theology and supersessionism it is necessary to provide a positive Biblical path which offers a way forward. This way forward is found by:

- emphasising the continuity between the Covenants
- exposing the errors which are at the heart of Replacement theology/supersessionism (and Dual covenant theology)
- maintaining a clear Biblical distinction between the Church and Israel
- celebrating the role of Jewish Believers in Jesus (both within the Church and the wider Jewish world)
- affirming God’s ongoing faithfulness to Israel (Romans 15v8)
- Sharing the Gospel lovingly and in ways which are “contextually appropriate” with Jewish people and non-Jewish people everywhere.

In conclusion, I realise this is a path which has been neglected by many or hidden from others. I have tried to ‘open this path up’ in my own writing (I am thankful that Herby Geer kindly refereed to my first book- *The Case for Enlargement Theology*- ISBN-978-0-9567831-1-0) and I am sure that the paper submitted by Herby Geer and our ongoing reflection will also be a help to ‘opening up this path’ for many.

