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Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians' Conflicting Theologies of the Land: Is Reconciliatory Theological Dialogue Possible?

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Abstract: This article examines theological positions by some of the most prominent Messianic Jewish and Palestinian Christian authors, who have contributed in significant ways to their respective communities' theological understanding of the land most commonly referred to as Israel-Palestine. Based on selected representative works, the author's goal is to assess the potential, or lack thereof, for fruitful dialogue and theological reconciliation that these theological positions have in themselves. The focus, therefore, is on moral and practical aspects of these theologies, particularly whether they create space for the "other" and relate to them as a brother/sister in Christ and as a legitimate neighbor in the land.

Key words: Messianic Jewish, Palestinian Christian, theology of the holy land, reconciliation, liberation theology, Christian Zionism.

Introduction

Since the Hamas attack in October 2023 and the subsequent ground operation in the Gaza Strip conducted by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the situation in Israel-Palestine has gone from bad to worse. Messianic Jews[1] and Palestinian Christians,[2] who are minorities in their predominantly Jewish / secular and Muslim societies, and who have traditionally sided with their respective nations in support of their political

[1] Messianic Jews are by no means a homogeneous body. Their practices and theological views differ on a number of issues. However, on such questions as the covenantal status of the Jewish people and the role of the land throughout the history of the Jews, almost all Messianic Jews find themselves sharing very similar views. Politically, an overwhelming majority of Messianic believers worldwide stand with the state of Israel and its policies in relation to the Palestinians. Messianic Judaism, in its outset a predominantly western Evangelical movement, has now been increasingly re-visioning itself as a Jewish and not an Evangelical Christian phenomenon.

[2] Palestinian Christians affiliate with a wide spectrum of denominations and church traditions, from the historical Eastern Orthodox, Roman and oriental Greek Catholic (Melkite) churches to the modern Anglican and Baptist Western traditions.

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claims, are now as divided by this new and deepening crisis as perhaps never before. Not only have these two Christ-believing groups been accustomed to finding themselves politically on opposite sides, but their theological disagreements have long been sharp and extremely difficult to overcome.

In what follows, we will examine selected representative works written by some of the most influential Palestinian Christian and Messianic Jewish authors. Their work embodies the main trends that, for the past thirty years, have been shaping the theological discourse of the "holy land" and its peoples. Contributions by western Christian theologians will not be assessed here, for the scope of this article precludes such a voluminous discussion. Some western Evangelical authors have, indeed, made a noticeable contribution to the discussion.[3] However, it is the Christ-believing communities in the land for whom the theological is so intertwined with the existential that the two form a single reality "on the ground." This holds for Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians living abroad who have strong ties to their families and co-religionists in Israel-Palestine. For these two communities, their spiritual leaders and theologians who are brothers and sisters in Christ and neighbors in the land, this discussion is of paramount importance and is a focus of this article.

Modern Western Christian theological thought often tends to be apolitical. This should not come as a surprise, for Christ himself during his earthly ministry pursued no political agenda and, when on trial, rejected any political meaning to be attached to the title, "the King of the Jews." He declared his Kingdom to be "not from this world." (John 18:36 NRSV). That is not to say that Christian theology has never been used to justify political activism or to support political claims. But often when it was so used, it fell under the suspicion of compromise. The example of Christ and the fact that the early church, who defied Caesar worship, was treated by the Roman government as politically untrustworthy, were major factors contributing to the development of early Christian theology's self-perception that it was almost exclusively to be concerned with spiritual matters. This trend has resurfaced more recently. Ruth Langer of Boston College maintains that since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, western civilisation has developed a strong sense of what is religious and what is not.[4] With religion being increasingly pushed to the margins of the public square and made a private matter,[5] both liberal and pietistic theologies in Europe have often responded by confirming their apolitical character in contemporary secularized societies. Today, religious values still

[3] For example, Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to Holy Land Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010) and *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians*, 2nd revised ed. (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2013).

[4] Ruth Langer, "Theologies of the Land and State of Israel: The Role of the Secular in Christian and Jewish Understandings," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 3 (2008): 7.

[5] Commenting on the wording of the new EU Constitution (early 2000s) in which there was no mention of the Europe's Christian heritage, Douglas Murray writes, "For religion not only retreated in Western Europe. In its wake there arose a desire to demonstrate that in the twenty-first century Europe had a self-supporting structure of rights, laws and institutions which could exist even without the source that had arguably given them life." Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London, New York, Bloomsbury, 2017), 5–6.

inform decisions made in the secular realm. Moreover, one can make a case for the growing claims of the religious in the public and even the political sphere. This tendency increased with the rise of Islam in Europe[6] and the instrumentalization of the Orthodox Church by the Russian political regime (the former not being Christian and the latter not being Western).[7] Yet, in general, when religion and theology try to penetrate too far into the public square and trespass beyond the carefully guarded border separating secular from the religious, they often meet strong resistance.[8]

Langer, who is a specialist in Christian-Jewish relations, argues that contemporary Christian theologians have attempted to develop understandings of Jewish relationships with their ancestral land that are devoid of the political dimension. From a Jewish perspective, this is an attempt to recast Judaism according to a particular Christian set of theological values foreign to Judaism itself. The Torah and the rabbinic traditions of its interpretation and application make no distinction between the sacred and the secular realms.[9]

Langer's thesis seems to be to some extent true and can be illustrated by the two groups of Messianic Jewish theologians considered in this article. Those closely associated with the western Evangelical theological tradition, particularly that of dispensational premillennialism tend, in their discourse of the land, to emphasize the spiritual over the moral and socio-political and the conceptual and the meta-historical over the "here-and-now" historical. On the other hand, those theologians who seem to only loosely identify with western Evangelicalism and draw on Jewish theological and cultural heritage, using Langer's language, view the sacred and the secular realms as theologically integrated. They are more sensitized to the "reality on the ground" than the representatives of the other group and are more prepared to think through at least some of the moral, socio-economic, and political implications of their theologies for Jewish life in the conflict-torn Israel-Palestine.

Conversely, Palestinian Christian theologies of the land have taken quite a different trajectory. Most of them[10] range from a relatively moderate *theopolitical*

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[6] For example, The Muslim Vote, a campaign to get Muslim voters to support pro-Palestine candidates, put pressure on a UK Labor Party leader threatening to get voters divert their votes at the next general election to give them to the Green Party or Liberal Democrats if he could not commit to their demands regarding his stance on the Gaza war. Amy Gibbons, "Muslim group issues Starmer with demands to win back lost votes over Gaza," *The Telegraph*, May 5, 2024, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/05/05/we-need-to-win-back-labour-voters-left-over-gaza/.

[7] Since the beginning of the first phase of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014, evangelical Christians in Ukraine have been divided over the issue of growing social and political / military involvement of Christians. Many believers in both Ukraine and Russia took an "apolitical" stance as truly spiritual and criticized those brothers and sisters actively involved. Many believers in Ukraine have reconsidered their pacifism (escapism?), since the beginning of the all-out Russian aggression in 2022, while in Russia, vast swaths of evangelical Christians continue to adhere to it. Paradoxically enough, behind this theological façade sometimes lurks a various measure of support of the Kremlin's narratives and policies. An "apolitical" stance of Christians whose country is at wat is often self-delusional. See elucidating analysis in Andreas Patz, "Radicalization of Christian Relations: The Case of Russian and Ukrainian Christians," *Bogomyslie*, no. 32(2) (2022): 118–145.

[8] Langer, "Theologies," 8.

[9] Langer, "Theologies," 2, 10.

[10] Apart from a small number of Christian Zionists.

approach to a radical political theology — *liberation theology* — with much stress on ethical demands. While much of the Messianic Jewish theological discourse is heavy on biblical theology and wary of political agendas, the Palestinian Christian discourse is characterized by a strong ethical and political concern while considering the land itself as an *atheological* issue.

Messianic Jewish Theologies

Most Messianic Jews in Israel and worldwide base their Israelology,[11] including their understanding of the place of the promised land in the life of the Jewish people, on dispensationalist theology. The most important work in appropriation of classic Christian dispensationalism to the needs of the emerging Messianic Jewish movement was done by American Messianic theologian, Arnold Fruchtenbaum. Richard Harvey contends that *Messianic dispensationalism* of Fruchtenbaum, including his view of the future of Israel, "may be taken as representative of the majority of Messianic Jews, and those who have written on the subject."[12] In his seminal book, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology,* Fruchtenbaum places considerable emphasis on the significance of Israel for God's eternal plan in the past and in the future. However, he looks at Israel's present condition merely as transitory from past promises to future glory, a "parenthesis" in God's original intention. His discussion of the current state of the Jewish people mostly revolves around the covenantal status of Christ-rejecting Israel and the relationship between Israel and the church in the "present age." The modern Israeli state and the promised land are only a locus where all the action of the cosmic drama of the future coming(s) of Christ and the final restoration of Israel will unfold.[13]

At the beginning of Christian dispensationalism, the idea of a thriving Jewish life in what was then the Ottoman Empire's Palestine was far from being materialized. A theology of the present-age Israel was, indeed, not yet possible. But it was certainly possible in the first decade of the 21st century. Yet Fruchtenbaum's 2010 curriculum, "Israelology: The Doctrine of Israel" with Ariel Ministries, is no different from the much earlier book it was based on, in that it shows almost no attempt at formulating a vision for Israel in the present age.[14] Fruchtenbaum himself recognizes that the "Israel present aspect is 'Dispensationalism's weakest area'."[15] Hence, he attempts to work out a

[11] The term popularized by a prominent American Israeli Messianic Jewish theologian Arnold Fruchtenbaum. In his definition Israelology refers to a biblical doctrine of the past, present and future of Israel.

[12] Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology. A Constructive Approach* (Paternoster, 2009, repr. 2014), 234.

[13] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology (Ariel Ministries Press, 1994). Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Eschatology and Messianic Jews: A Theological Perspective," in Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Baltimore, MD: Lederer Books, 2001), 211–18. Jacob J. Scholtz, "Israelologie: 'n Bybels-teologiese perspektief oor Israel se verlede, hede en toekoms," In die Skriflig 51, no. 1 (2017): a2231, https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i1.2231. English version can be accessed at https://faithequip.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Israelology-article-by-JJ-Scholtz-translated-into-English-12-July-2017-pdf-1.pdf.

[14] Arnold Fruchtenbaum's 2010 curriculum "Israelology: The Doctrine of Israel," outline available at "Israelology: The Doctrine of Israel," Systematic Theology Course, Ariel Ministries.

[15] Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology*, chap. 9, the Mosaic covenant and the law of Moses, Israel present, EPUB.

Messianic dispensational theology of Israel in the present. But what comes up as a result has little to do with the state and the people of Israel. Rather, Fruchtenbaum discusses the identity of the modern Messianic Jewish movement and offers a more adequate theology of the movement (still mostly an American phenomenon at the time of his writing) that is distinct from all existing Christian views. But his Messianic dispensational Israelology seems to soar high above the ground and offers no *moral-political* theology of Israel (the state and the people) for the current "dispensation."

It may seem strange, therefore, that some of the most devout supporters of the Israeli state and its policies adhere to dispensationalism — "a theological perspective which has been historically the most critical of the political pretensions of 'Christendom,' and which for generations has been shunned by social justice critics as 'too heavenly minded.'"[16] How could a theology so apolitical be charged as "politicized" and even "racialized," as dispensationalism is often referred to by its critics? Judith Mendelsohn Rood and Paul Rood explain that in the course of the Arab-Jewish confrontation, *dispensationalism was married to political Zionism.* The result was the new politicized form of Christian Zionism that differed greatly from both earlier Christian Zionism and the "normative" dispensationalism of a century ago. Early dispensationalists, Rood & Rood maintain, "clearly appreciated the rights and hopes of the Arabs in Mandatory Palestine" and followed "an ethic of compassionate justice."[17] According to the authors, the crisis of contemporary Christian Zionism is rooted in bad *praxis*, not in bad *theology*.[18]

Dissenting voices within the Messianic Jewish theological milieu part company with dispensationalism on both significant and not so significant points. But despite the differences, moral and political questions pertaining to present-day Israel occupy little space in almost all of these theological systems. In his 275-page classic, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, American Israeli Messianic Jewish theologian David Stern included only one page about Palestinian Arabs and not a single line about Arab Christians.[19] At the time of Stern's writing (mid-1980s), for the nascent Messianic Jewish community in the land, the relationship with the "other" was both existentially and theologically under the radar. Almost twenty years and two intifadas later, in the 2007 revision of the *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, while giving considerably more attention to the Messianic Jewish community

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[16] Judith Mendelsohn Rood and Paul W. Rood, "Is Christian Zionism Based on Bad Theology?" *A Journal for the Theology of Culture* 7, no. 1 (2011): 45. As Lisa Loden notes, whilst Messianic believers prefer to position themselves as distant from "politics", their restorationist eschatology "is in itself a political theology." Lisa Loden, "An Examination of the Biblical Motifs of Blood and Breath: Towards a Public Theology of Reconciliation in the Body of Christ in Israel and Palestine" (MTh diss., South African Theological Seminary, Johannesburg, 2024, pending publication), 132–3.

[17] Rood and Rood, "Christian Zionism," 50, 51.

[18] Rood and Rood, "Christian Zionism," 52. For critical discussion of dispensationalism and its implications for the Christian Zionist / Palestinian Christian relationship, see Philip A.F. Church, "Dispensational Christian Zionism: A Strange but Acceptable Aberration or a Deviant Heresy?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 375–98. This paper by a Trinity Professor John Feinberg was presented at the first edition of the "Christ at the Checkpoint" conference in 2010. What makes the copy at yumpu.com particularly interesting is that it retained critical comments by a prominent Palestinian Protestant theologian Yohanna Katanacho.

[19] David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988).

in modern Israel, Stern's discussion of the policies of Israel regarding the Palestinians and the relationship between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians was still limited . When laying a theological groundwork in Chapter IV, Sections E-4, E-5, and E-6, Stern did not go far beyond the basic contention that the rights of those Palestinians who wish to live peacefully in the land were to be preserved.[20]

That is not to say that Messianic Jews in Israel have ignored the plight and the claims of the Palestinians, particularly Palestinian Christians. On the contrary, grassroots dialogue and cooperation between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians have grown and developed over the past three decades. Rather, that means that major "pioneer" Messianic Jewish theologians, such as Arnold Fruchtenbaum and David Stern, who represent (and personify) the two most widely held theological positions within the movement (dispensational premillennialism and historic premillennialism, respectively), have failed to think through moral-political implications for Israel or to inquire into the Israeli Messianic Jewish identity *vis-à-vis* their Arab Christian counterparts, and have not deemed this an urgent theological task.

American Messianic Jewish leader Richard Nichol holds an eschatological view that carries a promise for developing a more robust Messianic Jewish theology of moral responsibility in the world. In his article "Are We Really at the End of the End Times? A Reappraisal," Nichol sounds a word of caution against an over-emphasis on the end times motif in dispensational theology and calls for some disengagement with it, lest it becomes an excuse for "not making life's hard choices." Nichol maintains that over-identification with the "End of Days" produces an attitude that downplays the biblical mandate to improve society and the world.[21] Richard Nichol's amillennialist theology places much value on the Jewish believers' moral responsibility in the present age. Unfortunately, he does not suggest implications for the political realm and stops short of making connections with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Another American Messianic Jewish author and educator, Mark Kinzer, is one of the most creative Messianic theologians of the last two decades and is a representative of the second of the two groups of Messianic Jewish theologians discussed at the outset of this article. Kinzer is not necessarily a critic of dispensationalism, but he departs from classic dispensationalist discourse. In his book, *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen,*[22] Kinzer sets out to show that the gospel of Christ was and still *is* good news for the Jewish people. There exists a theological consensus within the Messianic Jewish movement regarding the gathering of Jews and the emergence of the Jewish state in the 20th century. But until very recently, it was based almost exclusively upon selected Old

[20] David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007).

[21] Richard C. Nichol, "Are We Really at the End of the End Times? A Reappraisal" in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Baltimore, MD: Lederer Books, 2001), 203–9.

[22] Mark S. Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen: The Resurrected Messiah, the Jewish People, and the Land of Promise* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).

Testament prophecies.[23] *Jerusalem Crucified* puts a New Testament foundation under the already established position and adds a whole new dimension.

Kinzer proposes a re-configuration of the *euangelion* of Jesus' death and resurrection from the traditional post-second-century ecclesial interpretation, whereby the fundamental truths that define the essence and existence of the Jewish people were denied. Rather, he posits that the *euangelion's* original apostolic meaning emphasized an enduring significance of the Jewish people, Jerusalem, and the land of promise. In Kinzer's reading of the New Testament, particularly Luke and Acts, the Jewish people have been, and still are, at the centre stage of God's eternal plan, and thus, of Kinzer's theological system. His theology of the land is Israel-centred, but only as far as Jesus himself is the "messianic representative of the Jewish people," whose life's events "foreshadow and order the course of Jewish history."[24] "Jesus' suffering and death constitute a proleptic participation in the intensified exile of the Jewish people that will begin a generation later. Correspondingly, Jesus' resurrection serves as the pledge and efficient cause of Jerusalem's ultimate redemption" (Jerusalem being a symbol of the land as a whole).[25] If Jesus identifies himself with Jerusalem (and, therefore, with the land in its entirety), he also identifies himself with theeoplee to whom the land was promised. This trajectory of identifications points to the ongoing theological significance of the land and affirms the Jewish people's enduring covenantal identity.[26] It would perhaps be more accurate to refer to Mark Kinzer's view as an *Israel-centred Christology* of Jerusalem and the land.

In Kinzer's treatment, modern Zionism — cultural, political, and religious — is a complex movement which, despite its secular origin, "was rooted in the central themes of traditional Jewish religious life that constituted the portion of the *euangeloin* carried through history by the Jewish people."[27] He acknowledges the action of God in the reestablishment of a Jewish home in the land of Israel, but he distinguishes between the national life, on the one hand, and the state "that orders its affairs," on the other hand. The state is but a necessary instrument and not a goal in and of itself. Therefore, the conditions of Jewish life, including the state, should be construed as a prophetic anticipation of something greater that is yet to come and not an eschatological redemption (not even its first stage).[28]

Yet, for Kinzer, "the establishment of a Jewish national home in the land of Israel… constitutes a historical fact of enormous theological significance."[29] Although a peripheral topic of his overall theological agenda, in *Jerusalem Crucified,* the Jewish state becomes an object of Kinzer's historical, moral, and political theologizing. The state has a preliminary and provisional character in relation to the Messianic Kingdom,

[23] Michael Rydelnik, "Is the Modern State of Israel a Fulfillment of Prophecy?" Borough Park Symposium, Papers, 2014, https://boroughparksymposium.com/papers/#tab-id-2, exemplifies a standard Messianic Jewish treatment of the prophecies.

[24] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chap. 1, the resurrected Messiah and Jerusalem, EPUB.

[25] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chap. 1, the resurrected Messiah and Jerusalem, EPUB.

[26] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chap. 1, the resurrected Messiah and Jerusalem, EPUB.

[27] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chapter preview, EPUB.

[28] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chapter preview, EPUB.

[29] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chap. 6, general theological assessment, EPUB.

whose coming will rupture the order of this world (and the state of Israel) as we know it. Several practical conclusions follow from this thesis. (1) Israel may make territorial concessions upon its prudential judgments "if it determines that such decisions would advance the welfare of its people and promote the good of its region."[30] (2) Provided that the conditions are created for the thriving of Jewish life in Jerusalem, including freedom of access to Jewish holy sites, the state can negotiate any creative solutions to complex political, national, and religious problems in the spirit of justice and peace. (3) Jewish disciples of Christ need not approve of every policy or action of the Israeli state, but this does not imply that they can adopt a neutral posture in relation to Middle-East politics. Rather, all believers in Jesus, Jews and non-Jews alike, are to show solidarity with the Jewish people, knowing that their presence in the promised land is a miracle of the Holy Spirit and that Christians are bound to the Jewish people as brothers and sisters. Because "the spirit of anti-Semitism is identical to the spirit of anti-Christ" and because anti-Zionism in some of its forms can be a "socially acceptable cloak for anti-Semitism," it should make us "all the more eager to speak constructively, if not always positively, about the inevitably ambiguous fruit of Israeli politics."[31]

In the practical section of *Jerusalem Crucified,* the author provides a package of theological parameters rather than a body of theological imperatives. These parameters are set within the broad framework of his "ecclesial Zionism," in which the author believes, advocates of the left, right, and centre can all shape their arguments. But it is prudential and ethical considerations that should decisively shape those arguments. Detailed practical outworking of any theological framework, Kinzer maintains, can imprison us in a dogmatic box with its unyielding judgments.[32] This implies that Messianic Jewish theology and, for that matter, any Christian theology of the land need not seek to work out detailed practical conclusions or recommendations beyond those shaped by ethical principles derived from "ecclesial Zionism" and by prudential considerations that prioritize the well-being of the Jewish people in the promised land.

Richard Harvey is a British Messianic Jewish leader and theologian who surveyed Messianic Jewish understandings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2012. The survey was part of his larger endeavor to formulate proposals for the development of a Messianic Jewish theology of reconciliation, which would include "the need for hope and the development of intra-group discourse that can engage strategically with other conflict partners."[33] Harvey reiterated the commonly held Messianic Jewish belief in the eternal covenantal promise of the land to the Jewish people. He also recognized that as a light to the nations, Israel was and is called to be, among other things, "a model of social justice."[34]

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[30] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chap. 6, specific theological questions, EPUB.

[31] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chap. 6, specific theological questions, EPUB.

[32] That is indeed a helpful caution by Mark Kinzer. However, such a restraint comes with a cost. See Conclusion below.

[33] Richard S. Harvey, *Towards a Messianic Jewish Theology of Reconciliation. The Strategic Engagement of Messianic Jewish Discourse in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Ware, 2012), 2.

[34] Harvey, *Towards*, 3.

The survey was conducted among the Messianic Jews from several different countries (mostly Israel, the UK, and the USA). It revealed a profound pessimism of the participants and a lack of hope for any human peace process in the immediate future and, at the same time, a strong eschatological hope linked to the Second Coming of Christ.[35] Such a stance, unlike a conventional Christian Zionist uncompromising position, could account for the fact that the majority of the respondents did not view the possibility of territorial negotiation as something unthinkable.[36]

Conclusion

When Messianic Jews engage in the discussion about the modern state of Israel, the Jewish people, and the promised land, they often choose one of the two discourses at hand. It is either *why* the political state has the right to exist (referring to the past — prophecies) or *for what purpose* it exists (referring to the future — eschaton). But their theological systems, apart from broad principles like those proposed by Mark Kinzer, lack an apparatus to allow these believers to answer the question of *how* it should exist in the present. There seem to be three main arguments for this. (1) Israel's present condition is transient; the current political state is provisional. (2) Development of a detailed moral-political Israelology within any theological system is unnecessary and can carry a danger of a narrow and dogmatized practice. (3) Modern Western theology has tended to be "apolitical"; much of the Messianic Jewish theology is no exception. This means that when Messianic Jews and Jewish Christians try to evaluate the policies of Israel or, for that matter, the policies of the Palestinian Authority or Hamas, and respond to the challenges concerning violence, social injustice, access to resources, nationalism (both Jewish and Palestinian), illegal settlements, right of return, etc., *they have to rely on rather general theological principles laid within a relatively narrow (Israel-centred) theology*[37] *and on sources originally outside their own theological system, like political Zionism, to form their opinions and inform their actions*. For obvious theological reasons, non-Zionist and anti-Zionist narratives have very little appeal for the larger Messianic Jewish community. As Dan Cohn-Sherbok has noted, "Messianic Jews are ardent Zionists."[38] Mark Kinzer

[35] Harvey, *Towards*, 29.

[36] Harvey, *Towards*, 29.

[37] A good example is Robert Nicholson's article "Theology and Law: Does the Modern State of Israel Violate Its Call to Justice in the Covenant by Its Relation to International Law?" in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel & the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 249–280. Nicholson outlines a small number of rather basic moral/legal principles Israel should abide by in relation to the Palestinians (mostly Israeli Arabs and not Palestinians living on the occupied territories). For him, the Israeli state should (1) persecute Israeli citizens who do violence to Palestinian people and property; (2) make high-quality healthcare and education available to Israeli Arabs; (3) teach all Israeli citizens that "Palestinians are created by God in his image and are entitled to respect and the fullness of human rights."

[38] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "Introduction" in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Baltimore, MD: Lederer Books, 2001), xi. According to a retired Israeli professor of Jewish Studies and a Messianic Jew, David Friedman, Messianic Jews in Israel and worldwide are more supportive of historical Zionism and of a strong Israel than the broader Jewish community is. David Friedman, "The Doctrine of Election, the State of Israel, and 'End-Times'" in *Christian Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, eds. Wesley H. Brown and Peter F. Penner (WCIU Press and Neufeld Verlag, 2008), 128.

explains, "*Zionism and Messianic Judaism are linked within God's providential design.*"[39] The question is whether the movement's Israelology is essentially formulated and will be cemented as a Messianic variety within the larger Zionist worldview or, as Richard Harvey hopes, it will continue to develop "its understanding of Israel in the present, as the people of God and as a people like others… to effectively integrate faith, identity and daily life in political and eschatological context" and work out "a practical theology of reconciliation with Arab Christians and the Arab population in the light of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."[40] For that to happen, Messianic Jewish theologians should be able/willing to positively engage with Palestinian Christian theologies of the land. But the history of the Messianic Jewish and Palestinian Christian theological dialogue shows that so far, such an engagement has not happened. The reasons will be specified in the following section.

Palestinian Christian Theologies

The most comprehensive theological work produced by the Palestinian Evangelical scholarship to date is a book by a professor at Bethlehem Bible College and one of the initiators of the Christ at the Checkpoint conference, Munther Isaac.[41] Isaac's main thesis is that the biblical concept of the land has changed from *particular* in the Old Testament to *universal* after the Jesus-event. As a result of the coming of the Messiah, the land of Israel lost its particular theological (redemptive) role it had had under the Old Testament covenants with Abraham and the people of Israel. This universalization was anticipated in the Old Testament from the very beginning, and in the present era, it takes shape in three ways:

(1) Universalization by expansion — As the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), the land also "spread" to include these new territories. The significance of the promised land and Jerusalem is that it is the starting place from which the presence of God began to expand to the rest of the world.

(2) Universalization by reproduction — The presence of the church in these new lands, in a sense, turns these places into a "holy land," where the church embodies the Kingdom's ideal of justice. By "replicating" the Israel model in new lands, the promised land is universalized.

(3) Universalization in the consummation — Expansion and reproduction both point towards a time when the renewal of the whole created order will bring complete redemption to the universe.[42]

In a similar vein, the particularity of the nation of Israel is changed — Israel is now universalized in her Messiah, the ideal Israelite who represented all of Israel and who

[39] Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified,* chap. 6, EPUB.

[40] Harvey, *Mapping,* 260, 261.

[41] Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centred Biblical Theology of the Promised Land* (Langham Monographs, 2015).

[42] Isaac, *From Land,* 360–2.

lived up to her calling and potential. Isaac is careful not to identify with the so-called replacement theology that Israel was *not* replaced by the Gentile church. Rather, the church was grafted into the "olive tree" of Israel. This process necessitated the growth of the tree, and consequently, the expansion of the land.[43] Although it remains unclear whether this conception is essentially different from the supersessionist worldview, Isaac repeatedly asserts the continuity between biblical Israel and the church and denies the popular teaching whereby the Jews have been rejected by God and are under judgment for killing their Messiah.[44]

Isaac's *missional theology* of the land calls for a kind of territorial ecclesiology in which the mission of the church is both defined by its territorial context and is a response to this context. The church makes her mission agenda through engaging with the social, political and economic spheres. Isaac maintains that contemporary churches define themselves in terms of doctrine and beliefs and not territory. Their mission efforts focus on individuals and people groups. In contrast, a missional theology of the land thinks territorially. Territorially minded theology will take a different shape in each new land, depending on cultural, social, economic, and political realities.[45] Isaac outlines some of the virtues of this theology that will be emphasized regardless of the context. Those are tenancy and equality (the land is God's; no group can claim its possession and ownership over other groups); justice in social, political, and economic spheres; pursuit of peace, fellowship, and reconciliation; care for creation (ecological concern).[46] Isaac then goes on to show how this theology speaks to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Where dominant political narratives (political Zionist and political Muslim) lay exclusive claims to the land or speak about *dividing* it, and where the reality on the ground is one of injustice, occupation, and oppression, the church should take up the challenge to preach a theology of a *shared* land. "Such a theology emphasizes that all the inhabitants of the land must share the land and its resources *equally* and have the same rights, regardless of their ethnicity or religion."[47] This vision is underpinned by the argument Isaac has been developing throughout the book, namely, that "the original Promised Land has lost its strictly *theological* significance. It is no longer a distinct 'holy land' that is set apart for God."[48]

Munther Isaac offers a theology of the land that is more ethically conscious and praxis-oriented than Messianic dispensational theology. Since he is a Palestinian Arab living in the West Bank, he may tend to address the situation more directly and thoroughly than many Messianic Jewish theologians based in or from the US. Also, such Christian and universal virtues as justice, equality, reconciliation and fellowship follow more naturally from a Christ-centred and universalized theology of the land than they do from an Israel-centred, particularistic theology of the land that most Messianic Jews

[43] Isaac, *From Land,* 363, 364.
[44] Isaac, *From Land,* 377–8.
[45] Isaac, *From Land,* 365, 367, 368, 370.
[46] Isaac, *From Land,* 370–2.
[47] Isaac, *From Land,* 379.
[48] Isaac, *From Land,* 373.

adhere to. Isaac warns against idolizing the land,[49] but he seems to take it to the other extreme when he completely de-theologizes the land and the Jewish people. This stands in sharp contradiction to the very core of all Messianic Jewish Israelologies. And this is when territorial ecclesiology, as the author of *From Land to Lands* has it, comes to a dead end. Territorial ecclesiology assumes that Jesus-believing communities in any particular land work out a common mission based on their unique context. But the task becomes virtually impossible in Israel-Palestine, where the body of the Messiah is torn between two opposite hermeneutical (and political) approaches to the theology of the land and its peoples. The two parties may still agree that justice and equality are important. They may still aspire to a meaningful reconciliation and fellowship. But their conceptions of justice and equality will be different. The community of Messianic Jews will expect that their Palestinian co-religionists will recognize the priority of Jewish life in the land and the covenant-based Jewish possession of the promised land. They will expect all Christians – Palestinian Christians included – to show solidarity with the Jewish people, because the latter's presence in the land is divinely ordained. Then and only then can just coexistence be possible and relative equality become a reality. Palestinian believers, on the other hand, will insist that the right hand of reconciliation and fellowship will not be given to the Jews – Messianic Jews included – until justice and equality are fully restored.[50]

Yohanna Katanacho, another prominent Palestinian Evangelical theologian, follows a similar logic in his 2013 book *The Land of Christ: A Palestinian Cry*. Although in the Old Testament, God had entrusted the promised land to Abraham and his descendants, Christ became the owner of the land (and the whole earth), because he is the seed of Abraham and the fulfillment of prophecy. The possession of the promised land is thus no longer defined by the Abrahamic covenant.[51] For Katanacho, the reason multiple versions of the borders of the promised land are in different books of the Old Testament and that the land promise to Abraham had no borders mentioned at all is because in God's eternal redemptive plan for the whole world (the whole earth), Christ was to become the ultimate owner of the land after the inauguration of the new covenant.[52] Katanacho also problematizes the identification of the present-day Jewish people and the modern state of Israel with biblical Israel by pointing to the multiple meanings of "Israel"

[49] And not without a reason. According to Rabi Arik Ascherman, a leading advocate for faith based human rights work in the land, for many Israelis, indeed, "the Land has been elevated to the level of *avodah zarah* (idolatry)." Arik Ascherman, "When Land is God," *Tikkun* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 49.

[50] Miroslav Volf argues that "strict justice" is impossible and criticizes the "first justice, then reconciliation" stance. Miroslav Volf, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice: A Christian Contribution to More Peaceful Social Environments," Capps Lecture, February 8, 2001, https://www.livedtheology.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/20010208PPR.01-Miroslav-Volf-Forgiveness-Reconciliation-and-Justice-A-Christian-Contribution-to-a-More-Peaceful-Social-Environments.pdf. Mendelsohn Rood cites Volf in her critique of the Palestinian Christian *Kairos,* a document issued in 2009 by Palestinian Christian lay leaders, theologians, pastors and activists from all church backgrounds. Judith Mendelsohn Rood, "The Messianic Movement and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Understanding the Evangelical Palestinian Resistance with Postscript," *Messianic Jewish Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflic*t, February 16–18, 2015, New York, NY.

[51] Yohanna Katanacho, *The Land of Christ: A Palestinian Cry* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 40. Kindle.

[52] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 15, Kindle.

in both Testaments.[53] Finally, he challenges a popular Messianic Jewish interpretation of Ezekiel 37, whereby the Jewish people were supposed to repopulate their land *before* their spiritual restoration. Katanacho takes the message of Ezekiel 33–37 and other similar texts to say quite the opposite: "Only those who repent will come back, for no one can legitimately be in the land unless he or she is in harmony with God."[54] These three hermeneutical arguments (land borders, Israel's identity, and prophecies) challenge Jewish exclusive claims to the land occurring in theological systems shared by most Messianic Jews.

Trying to deconstruct the opponents' views is not all Katanacho aspires to. He devotes a large part of the book to promoting the *Kairos Palestine* document and a distinct hermeneutical approach taken by that document — an approach that is based on an "ecumenical post-liberal theopolitical" reading of the Bible.[55] Such a reading calls for a theological and moral evaluation of the political realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since God created humans in his image and likeness, any act of dehumanization of people whom God created is a sin. Thus, the separation wall, the checkpoints, and land-grabbing policies stemming from the occupation manifest both personal sins and structural injustice.[56] Katanacho defines the four-fold mission of the promised land as presented, directly or by implication, in the *Kairos* document.[57] It is to be (1) the land of faith (The land of the Bible helps people understand the Bible and inspires faith in the God of the Bible.); (2) the land of peace (The identity of the land is tightly connected with the message of the prophets and of the Prince of Peace who came to destroy the power of evil and all the structural injustices.); (3) the land of reconciliation (Here enemies are to be transformed into brothers and sisters.); (and 4) the place of hope(The identity of the land as the land of Jesus' resurrection should not be eclipsed by eschatological expectations and associations with Armageddon.)[58] Katanacho also appeals to the reality of the land as tribal rather than national land — with borders and with responsibilities of every tribe to maintain their portion of the land as part of their divine inheritance.[59] In all this, the land is portrayed as having universal theological meaning.

Not only does *Kairos* theology identify the sin of oppression and dehumanization, but it also outlines the principles of resistance. Those are love for the enemy, justice, human dignity (opposing ideologies and policies that seek to rob any human beings of their dignity), non-violence (resisting evil by doing good), protection of children, defense of the oppressed, fair and just political solution to sharing of the land between Israelis

[53] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 17, Kindle.

[54] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 31, Kindle.

[55] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 52, ff, Kindle.

[56] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 53, Kindle.

[57] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 55–8, Kindle.

[58] The author clearly polemicizes with dispensationalism here, but Messianic dispensational theology, too, associates the promised land with hope — a hope of spiritual and national restoration of Israel in the "Jewish Millennium."

[59] This last point seems dubious to come from a Palestinian Arab, since the tribes between whom the land was divided were all Israeli tribes.

and Palestinians (whether one-state or two-state), and hope (hope for resurrection with Christ, but also for a better life in the land, albeit "hoping against hope").[60]

A distinct feature of Katanacho's theology is his emphasis on God's "heart and nature," as opposed to abstract and "hard-hearted" theologies he is in polemic with — theologies (and especially eschatologies) that focus rather on "'God's agenda' or the so-called prophetic programs."[61] A "merciful Christocentric eschatology," both Katanacho and the *Kairos* document promote, reminds the world that God speaks in and through the pain of the Palestinian people and that the only path the Palestinian church should follow is in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the ultimate messenger of justice and love.[62]

A more accentuated critique of the Zionist state as well as Israel-centred theologies comes from Mitri Raheb, another co-author of *Kairos Palestine*, a historian, an Evangelical Lutheran pastor, and a leader of different social projects and institutions in the Bethlehem area. In his book *Faith in the Face of Empire*, Raheb offers a political-theological reading of the Bible through the prism of the Palestinian context, thus introducing a *Palestinian-centred hermeneutics* of the Biblical narrative.[63] He postulates a new identity, *Am Haaretz*, the native "People of the Land," the Palestinians; he does this without trying to establish a Bible-backed Palestinian Arab nationalistic narrative. For Raheb, the Palestinian people are not pure Canaanites or Arabs who came from the desert. They are Muslims, Christians, and Palestinian Jews who represent "a critical and dynamic continuum from Canaan to biblical times, from Greek, Roman, Arab, and Turkish eras up to the present day."[64] By contrast, European Jewish emigrants of the late 19th–early 20th century were "people of Jewish faith… for whom the Old Testament was part of their religious memory, yet without a geographical dimension."[65] In the context of the rising European nationalism, these people found themselves unwanted in Europe. Then "the historical memory of Christians located them in a distant country called Palestine," and when a political opportunity presented itself, European nations began to facilitate the migration of European Jews, who had "little or no connection to the land and its history" to Palestine.[66] Thus, while Zionist authors emphasize religious, historical, and psychological ties of the early European Jewish immigrants with the land,[67] Raheb presents them as almost total strangers who chose to identify with Palestine only because they no longer belonged in their home countries.

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[60] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 58–60, Kindle.

[61] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 70, Kindle.

[62] Katanacho, *The Land of Christ,* 71, Kindle.

[63] Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).

[64] Raheb, *Faith,* chap. 1, history and identity, EPUB.

[65] Raheb, *Faith,* chap. 1, history and memory, EPUB.

[66] Raheb, *Faith,* chap. 1, history and memory, EPUB.

[67] The sense of recapturing identity with the land by early immigrants is well detailed, for example, in Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism,* trans. Haim Watzman (Waltham, MA: Brandies University Press, 2011). See also Uzi Rabi, Chelsi Mueller, "A Critical Survey of Textbooks on the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Working Paper,* no.1 (2017), Tel Aviv University, MDC for Middle Eastern and African Studies Working Paper Series, 31–3.

Raheb takes his argument one step further when he seems to endorse Shlomo Sand's controversial theory according to which a modern Jewish people was "invented" by Jewish intellectuals in Germany, while Evangelical Christians together with Jewish Zionists, who wanted Palestine to be colonized by Jews, came up with the concept of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.[68] By subscribing to the view that Jewish nationhood is a modern fiction and that the attachment of the modern Jews to the land is a product of a racist ideology constructed for purely political reasons, Raheb asserts radical discontinuity between the biblical Israel and the present-day political state pretentiously named Israel. He effectively dismisses a Jewish claim to the land as historically illegitimate.[69] For Raheb, the modern state of Israel established on Palestinian soil is purely a Western-type colonial project which turned strangers to the land into natives and natives into strangers.[70] Israel is nothing but another empire like those before it. None of the empires that occupied Palestine survived. God's plan is, and has always been, about the marginalized, not about the empires. One day the settlements in the West Bank will be gone, and the wall will be dismantled. The empire will fall, and the meek, i.e. the Palestinian people, will inherit the land. Therefore, a Palestinian theology of the land should emerge not simply as contextual theology, but as *liberation theology*.[71] It calls for resistance, but a special kind of resistance. It is non-violent in nature and creative in its expressions. Creative resistance helps the oppressed articulate their fears, faith, and hopes through stories, poetry, painting, theatre, music, and dance, thus creating a culture of hope and life, and not, of victimhood and death.[72]

According to Naim Ateek, a leading Palestinian liberation theologian and a founder of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, at least some of the Old Testament representation of Israel, the land, and even God is "tribal" and less developed than a more universalized view found in other parts of the Old Testament, but mainly in the

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[68] Raheb, *Faith,* chap. 2, new Jewish voices, EPUB.

[69] Raheb grounds his analysis of the identity of the Eastern European Jewry (Ashkenazi) in the problematic theory popularized by Sand, who argues that Ashkenazi Jews are descendants of the Khazars, a Turkish tribe believed to be converted to Judaism in the Middle Ages. "Mitri Raheb and Naim Ateek: Contextual Palestinian Theology," Mitri Raheb and Naim Ateek speak at the first Christ at the Checkpoint conference, 2010, video, 1:46:41 (06:27–07:00), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToNfPBJu7ck&ab_channel=ChristatTheCheckpoint. Raheb questions an exegesis whereby many Christians identify modern Jews as descendants of Isaac, "as if there were not four thousand years of history in between, as if history had been on hold and frozen…" (Raheb, *Faith,* chap. 2, questioning the prevailing narrative, EPUB). Thus, according to Raheb, there could be no genetic trace found between Bethlehem-born King David and Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and Netanyahu, the Ashkenazi, on the other hand. Yet, in a strange twist of logic Raheb asserts that such genetic connection could be traced between David, Jesus and him, Mitri Raheb, who "was born just across the street from where Jesus was born," as if there were not two thousand years of history in between, as if Raheb's ancestors could not come from, say, Turkey or Iraq just a few centuries ago. How long should one live in the land to qualify as a native and part of *Am Haaretz*? Raheb does not seem to provide an answer. A short but illuminating discussion of the question, how much time it is necessary for Jews to become natives in the land, is found in Ilan Troen and Shay Rabineau, "Competing Concepts of Land in Eretz Israel," *Israel Studies*, Special Issue: Zionism in the 21st Century, vol. 19, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 172.

[70] Raheb, *Faith,* chap. 2, questioning the prevailing narrative, EPUB.

[71] Liberation theology is construed as antithesis to "imperial theology" which includes "the *theologia gloriae* of the so-called Christian Right," i.e., dispensationalism, etc. Raheb, *Faith,* chap. 5, imperial theology, EPUB.

[72] Raheb, *Faith,* chap. 9, creative resistance, EPUB.

New Testament. This imperfect picture is overcome and transcended in Christ, who is the focal point of the New Testament. For Ateek, everything in the Bible that does not match the standard of Christ is not authoritative.[73] In his book *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation,* Ateek offers a detailed analysis of the contrasting teachings in the Old Testament that shows that within the Hebrew Bible itself a radical reinterpretation of old texts that emphasized exclusivity and chosenness of some took place, and that the reinterpretation from *some* to *all* was brought to completion in the New Testament.[74] Like Munther Isaac, Ateek de-theologizes the land; and like Mitri Raheb, he uses the designation *Palestinian* anachronistically to make it a theologically and politically charged concept when referring to Christ as "a Palestinian who lived in Palestine."[75]

Conclusion

Many will find Raheb's negotiation of identities, namely, his association of the Old Testament Israel with the *people of Palestine* and today's Palestinian Christians with the Old Testament Israel, while denying non-Middle Eastern Jews any historical and genetic connection with the biblical Israel, both confusing and troubling. Like books by some of the leaders of the Messianic Jewish movement that were written for the movement and completely ignored Palestinian Christians, this book by Raheb, too, leaves Israeli Messianic Jews completely out of the picture. The same disregard of the Messianic Jewish community is characteristic of the writings of Naim Ateek.[76] It seems that as adherents of "imperial theology," Messianic Jews are to be resisted rather than sought to be reconciled with — and resisted not as fellow believers, but as part of "Rome," the Empire.

The thought patterns of liberation theologians are rather large-scale. They write on Christian Zionism, but do not seem to "zoom in" on Messianic Jews in Israel, who are geographically Christian Zionism's closest representatives. They discuss reconciliation, but as a large-scale political peace and reconciliation between Jews and Arabs, and not a small-scale grassroots reconciliation between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians amidst the ongoing conflict. Because liberation theologians tend to be preoccupied with the grand schemes of things, this diverts their attention from presumably less

[73] "Mitri Raheb and Naim Ateek: Contextual Palestinian Theology," 44:08–47:15. By implication, for Ateek, all that in the Old Testament which is "tribal" and has been "transcended by Christ" is not authoritative.

[74] Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), chap. 6–7, Kindle.

[75] "Mitri Raheb and Naim Ateek: Contextual Palestinian Theology," 48:32–36. Naim Ateek, being the eldest of the theologians considered in this section, is the one whose suit was followed by the other three and not the other way around.

[76] Ateek's seminal book *Justice and Only Justice* was published in 1989. At that time, the Messianic Jewish community in Israel was small in number, immature and still trying to figure out their own identity and place in God's plan and work out their theology. Understandably, there is no reference to Messianic Jews in that book. However, as Ateek continued to focus on Palestinian Christians, he also continued to ignore an ever-growing reality of the Messianic Jewish presence in Israel. Ateek's diction is similar to that of his Messianic Jewish counterparts, Fruchtenbaum and Stern, who published their ground-breaking works around the same time as Ateek, and in the books that followed they happily avoided addressing the topic of Arab Christians in a meaningful way.

significant topics — those pertinent to the relationship with their Messianic Jewish counterparts. Their biblical hermeneutics is arguably less integrated and elaborate than that of Munther Isaac, while their ethical stance seems to be more uncompromising and less loving of enemies than that of Yohanna Katanacho.[77]

Is there hope?

Mark Kinzer's highly affirmative assessment of the covenantal status and the vocation of the Jewish people in the present aeon seems to be overly optimistic, and his Israel-centred theology remarkably unproblematized. But so is Ateek's Palestinian-centred theology. Theologies born out of existential struggle are bent on the points they try to make. Understandably, they are not always passionless, objective enquiries. Palestinian Christian and Messianic Jewish theologies of the land are polemical. That is why all attempts to look at the New Testament as a continuation of the Old (by the Messianic theologians) and to interpret the Old through the prism of the New (by the Palestinian Christians) yield opposite results. It is as though the two parties feel called by God to follow paths totally independent of each other, paths so different that they are mutually exclusive. It is, indeed, hard to imagine that ardent Messianic Jewish Zionists and staunch advocates of Palestinian liberation can find a mutually acceptable platform for fruitful theological dialogue.[78]

Identifying obstacles

In addition to the issues already mentioned in the main section of the article, these four factors present further obstacles.

Identity policies. The power of the Gospel's appeal lies in the fact that the Jews and the Gentiles' new identity in Christ, that unites them, takes precedence over their national identities (without cancelling them) that divide them. The theologies under consideration, it seems, effectively reverse this for their adherents. From ignoring the reality of the Christian/Messianic "other" as do Fruchtenbaum, Stern, Raheb and Ateek, to implicitly conveying the idea that my non-Messianic compatriot is at least apart of God's plan and God's people and is as close to me, if not closer, as the Christian "other," as does Kinzer, the theologians and practitioners on both sides operate within parallel theological universes reproducing Christianized versions of their respective national-political narratives.

Lack of theological vision of a life together. This is especially true of the Messianic segment, whose Jew-centred theologies exclude models like Isaac's "territorial ecclesiology," Katanacho's "tribal responsibility," or any other model where the well-being of the Jewish people in the land is not prioritized over the Palestinians' well-

[77] At the 2018 edition of the Christ at the Checkpoint, the author of this article heard Katanacho say from the pulpit that he would be willing to lay down his life for his Messianic Jewish brethren. Theology of Katanacho and Isaac, in the former's own classification, can be characterized as *reconciliation theology*.

[78] Hence Richard Harvey's understanding that the intergroup discourse can emerge between those on both sides who hold on to "moderate" positions. Harvey, *Towards*, 31.

being. *Peaceful coexistence* and a *life together* differ. The former term describes a life without war. Such an existence may be relatively comfortable for the stronger party and much more difficult for the weaker party. The latter term describes a life as one spiritual family of God in Christ, where there is no more injustice, fear, or distrust. As much as political will is required to achieve a peaceful coexistence between the two nations, so an imagination of a life together of the two communities of faith requires a theological will.

In-group resistance. Russ Resnik, a Messianic Jewish Rabbi and author, writes: "In seeking a balanced approach that doesn't align fully with either side, we risk marginalization by both sides."[79] He goes on to illustrate his point by mentioning that in some Messianic Jewish circles, Richard Harvey became "subject to marginalization because of his decision to participate in CatC (Christ at the Checkpoint - YM)." Although Resnik believes that such marginalization is a mark of a "prophetic position," very few on both sides are willing to walk that path. Even if we tread very carefully and take a measured stance (like that of Russ Resnik himself), our theological position may still be either unpopular or too general to serve as a guide for action.

Lack of empathy. Another obstacle is theologies' compassionless character. As Ruth Langer points out, for the dialogue to be successful one should try to understand the person on the other side from within their terms of reference and then try to respond accordingly.[80] This is more than an exercise in intellectual objectivity. It takes an ability to empathize with the "other" if we are to look at the situation through the eyes of our opponent. Mubarak Awad talks about "the lack of compassion and human sensitivity associated with the positions of Christian Zionists for the real people living in the Holy Land…"[81] whilst his Messianic Jewish counterpart, David Friedman, explains that "a people (Jews - YM) bent on this very legitimate need (survival - YM) *cannot* be expected to act altruistically."[82] Yet, for the theology of the land to be able to leave its "comfort zone" of conventional dichotomies and uncompromising stances and take a step towards the "other," that is not perfunctory, it must be compassionate.[83]

In peace education, the idea has been proposed that the two communities in conflict form "a new collective memory that is in some sort of coherence with the former rival's

[79] Russ Resnik, "What Should Messianic Jewish Leaders Say about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Kesher*, Issue 34 (Winter/Spring 2019).

[80] Langer, "Theologies," 2, 17.

[81] Mubarak Awad, "Their Theology, Our Nightmare," in *Christian Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, eds. Wesley H. Brown and Peter F. Penner (WCIU Press and Neufeld Verlag, 2008), 63.

[82] David Friedman, "The Political Reality of Living in Israel, with a Suggested Path towards Reconciliation," in *Christian Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, eds. Wesley H. Brown and Peter F. Penner (WCIU Press and Neufeld Verlag, 2008), 80. An Orthodox Jewish academic Daniel Boyarin appropriates Hillel's famous expression, as if polemicizing with Friedman: "If we are not for ourselves, other Jews say to me, who will be for us? And I answer, but if we are for ourselves alone, what are we?" Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), xiv.

[83] An Israeli Jewish theologian, poetess and reconciliation worker Lisa Loden asks: "What does mercy look like in terms of land? Perhaps it means letting go of some of our ideas of entitlement." Salim J. Munayer, Lisa Loden, *Through My Enemy's Eyes. Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine* (Paternoster, 2012), 222, Kindle.

collective memory."[84] Perhaps the *process* whereby a "bridging" theological narrative is developed on the critical concepts that create divisions between Palestinian Christians and Israeli Messianic Jews[85] could be envisioned as a long-term goal.[86] But, if germane at all, such an endeavor can be imagined only wistfully given the current state of affairs in both the political arena and between the two groups of believers in the land. It is a well-attested fact that grassroots reconciliation efforts suffer when the political situation deteriorates. The current violent phase is the worst in the last half century, and thus, a giant hampering factor. Regarding dialogue, while over the past 10-15 years there seems to have been an incremental growth in awareness among Messianic Jewish theologians of a need for some level of interaction with their Palestinian Christian counterparts, the latter have experienced a growing frustration with the perceived unwillingness on part of the Messianic Jewish side to engage in a meaningful way that would bring real change.

If a mutually acceptable position is ever to be worked out, it will probably be found beyond the certainties of each respective position and in the area of the uncertain. The parties should be willing to take pains to revisit the beliefs lying at the center of their theological systems. The Palestinians might want to challenge their belief that Israel (although it is extremely difficult to define or identify "Israel") is completely outside God's plan as it is unveiled in the New Testament (This may or may not have implications for the Palestinian Christian theology of the land.). Messianic Jewish scholars might want to ask themselves a difficult question: "Do we truly believe that, for God, Jewish existence in the land is of a higher value than anybody else's?" And if a Jewish-Palestinian reconciliation theology begins to take shape, it will be a miracle akin to that of Christ, "who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:14 ESV).[87]

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[84] Daniel Bar-Tal, Yigal Rosen, "Peace Education in Societies Involved in Intractable Conflicts: Direct and Indirect Models," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 79, no. 2 (June 2009), 568.

[85] These theological areas include chosen people, land, covenant and justice. Munayer, Loden, *Through My Enemy's Eyes*, 149, Kindle.

[86] "To this point, all attempts to work towards a bridging theology have failed." Loden, "An Examination," 151.

[87] Over the past few years, since the first draft of this article, a new generation of Palestinian Christian theologians has emerged (Yousef Al Khouri, Tony Deik) who champion social justice and whose stance leaves no room for reconciliation. In Salim Munayer and Munther Isaac's own theological approach there has been a perceptible lean towards a liberation / indigenous stance and rhetoric. For succinct but informative report of this gradual shift in the leading Palestinian Christian peace and reconciliation workers and theologians, see Sophia Lee, "Fractured Are the Peacemakers," *Christianity Today*, March 18, 2024, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2024/april/israel-hamas-war-palestinian-peace-reconciliation-musalaha.html?utm_source=CT%20Weekly%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=94043&utm_content=16296&utm_campaign=email. Speeches at the last Christ at the Checkpoint conference (May 22–25, 2024) and the fact that no Messianic Jewish speakers have been invited, are indicative of this turn.

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Конфлікт теологій землі месіанських євреїв і палестинських християн: чи можливий богословський діалог задля примирення?

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Анотація: У цій статті розглядаються богословські позиції деяких з найвидатніших месіанських єврейських і палестинських християнських авторів, які зробили значний внесок у богословське розуміння землі, яку найчастіше називають Ізраїлем-Палестиною. На основі вибраних репрезентативних праць автор ставить собі за мету оцінити потенціал (або його відсутність) цих богословських переконань для плідного діалогу та богословського примирення. Тому основна увага приділяється моральним і практичним аспектам цих теологій, зокрема тому, чи створюють вони простір для «іншого» і чи ставляться до нього як до брата / сестри у Христі і як до законного сусіда, що ділить з ними землю.

Ключові слова: месіанський єврейський, палестинський християнський, богослов’я святої землі, примирення, богослов’я визволення, християнський сіонізм.

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