

The Theology That Lost Its Timeline

Supersessionism, Covenant, and the Crisis of Legitimacy in European Political Tradition

Abstract

This article presents a critical reassessment of classical Christian supersessionism and its downstream political expression in European doctrines of sacral monarchy. Drawing on patristic sources—including Augustine of Hippo—and contrasting them with covenantal texts from the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), it argues that supersessionism rests on a hermeneutical displacement that is textually indefensible on a plain reading.

The modern reconstitution of the State of Israel presents a historical development that directly contradicts classical theological claims of permanent Jewish dispersion. The article further contends that European doctrines of divine-right monarchy—especially within the Anglican tradition associated with the House of Windsor—derive their symbolic legitimacy from supersessionist assumptions, and therefore inherit their conceptual vulnerabilities.

The conclusion is that supersessionism and divine-right monarchy, in their classical forms, can no longer be sustained as coherent frameworks of legitimacy, and that anti-Jewish and anti-Israel narratives function—whether intentionally or structurally—to preserve a theological architecture upon which the authority of the Church of Rome and the House of Windsor were historically constructed.

I. Introduction: Theology as Infrastructure of Power

European political authority did not emerge in a vacuum. It was scaffolded by theological claims that shaped legitimacy, hierarchy, and sovereignty for over a millennium. Among these, supersessionism—the belief that the Christian Church replaced Israel as the covenantal community—served as the foundational premise upon which all subsequent claims of ecclesiastical and monarchic authority depended.

The central thesis of this article is direct: if supersessionism is hermeneutically unstable and historically falsified, then political doctrines derived from it—especially sacral monarchy and divine right—must be recognised as historically contingent constructions rather than expressions

of divine inevitability. The implications extend beyond theology into the legitimacy narratives of living institutions, including the Church of Rome and the British Crown.

II. The Patristic Construction: Israel Displaced

Following the Siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE, early Christian thinkers interpreted the destruction of the Temple not merely as a Roman military victory but as a divine verdict—a theological turning point in which God’s covenant was irrevocably transferred from the Jewish people to the Church. This was not a marginal opinion. It became doctrinal infrastructure.

Justin Martyr, writing in the *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 160 CE), declared:

“For the true spiritual Israel... are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ.” — Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 11

Irenaeus of Lyons, in *Against Heresies* (c. 180 CE), asserted:

“The Church is the seed of Abraham... inheriting the promises.” — Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V

Tertullian, in *An Answer to the Jews* (c. 200 CE), stated bluntly:

“The old law has ceased... and the ancient covenant is abolished.” — Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, ch. 3

Eusebius of Caesarea, the court historian of Constantine, drew the explicit historical conclusion in his *Ecclesiastical History*:

“The whole nation was driven from their land... and thus the Church of Christ... flourished in their place.” — Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, ch. 5

These statements are not rhetorical flourishes. They constitute a systematic displacement of Israel from covenantal centrality—a transfer of status: Israel out, Church in. The destruction of Jerusalem served as the empirical proof. The theology supplied the interpretive framework. Together, they produced supersessionism: the doctrine that would shape European civilisation for the next two thousand years.

III. Augustine’s System: Survival Without Sovereignty

The most sophisticated and durable formulation of supersessionism came from Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE), whose theology dominated Western Christianity for over a millennium. Where

earlier Fathers had emphasised simple replacement, Augustine introduced a more nuanced—and more politically consequential—framework.

In the *City of God*, Augustine argued:

“The Jews... by their own Scriptures bear witness to us that we have not forged the prophecies about Christ.” — Augustine, *City of God*, Book XVIII, ch. 46

In *Against Faustus*, he reinforced the point:

“The Jews who slew Him... are thus by their own Scriptures a testimony to the truth of the Church.” — Augustine, *Against Faustus*

And in his commentary on Psalm 59 (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*), he formulated the pivotal doctrine:

“Slay them not... scatter them... lest they forget Your law.” — Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Psalm 59

This is the critical pivot. Augustine rejected annihilation of the Jews—but not their subordination. His framework established what later scholars would call the “witness people” doctrine: Jews must survive, because they validate Christian claims by carrying the very scriptures that Christians interpret as prophesying Christ. But they must remain scattered—without sovereignty, without land, without covenantal primacy.

Augustine encoded a permanent geopolitical condition into theology. Jewish survival was permitted; Jewish restoration was not. The equilibrium was precise: existence without power, survival without sovereignty. Any disruption of that equilibrium would threaten the theological structure itself.

IV. The Tanakh: Direct Contradiction

The Hebrew Bible—the source both traditions claim as authoritative—says something materially different from what the Church Fathers asserted. It presents a consistent framework of eternal covenant, conditional exile, and inevitable restoration.

The Covenant as Irrevocable

Jeremiah 31:35–36 establishes the permanence of Israel’s national existence in language that admits no qualification:

“Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night... If those ordinances depart from

before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever.” — Jeremiah 31:35–36

The covenant’s duration is pegged to the existence of the natural order itself. So long as the sun and moon endure, Israel endures as a nation before God.

Leviticus 26:44 addresses the scenario of exile directly—and explicitly denies that it constitutes covenant termination:

“And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God.” — Leviticus 26:44

The Promise of Physical Return

Deuteronomy 30:3–5:

“Then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee... And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it.” — Deuteronomy 30:3–5

Ezekiel 36:24:

“For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.” — Ezekiel 36:24

Isaiah 11:11–12:

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people... and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” — Isaiah 11:11–12

The textual framework is unambiguous. No allegory. No abstraction. A simple sequence: exile, then return. The covenant is not revoked. Exile is disciplinary, not terminal. Restoration is national, geographic, and physical—not merely spiritual. Supersessionism does not emerge from these texts naturally. It requires reinterpretation against their plain meaning.

V. The Event That Should Not Have Happened

For nearly two millennia, the Jewish people remained dispersed across dozens of countries and continents—a condition that many Christian theologians interpreted as ongoing confirmation of

supersessionism. Augustine's equilibrium appeared stable: the Jews survived, but without sovereignty. The theology held.

Then history intervened.

In 1948, the State of Israel was established. Not symbolically. Not spiritually. Literally. A people dispersed across continents regathered. A language dead for everyday use for over two thousand years was revived as the national tongue. A sovereign state formed in the same geographic locus described in the biblical texts. Subsequent decades saw mass ingathering of Jewish populations from Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, Ethiopia, and the former Soviet Union—precisely the “four corners of the earth” that Isaiah described.

For a doctrine built on the assumption of permanent dispersion, this is not a minor anomaly. It is a timeline problem of the most fundamental kind. Under the patristic model, Jewish political restoration was not anticipated. Under Augustine's framework, it was structurally prohibited. Yet it occurred.

The question is unavoidable: if the Jewish people were meant to remain scattered as theological evidence for Christian truth, what does their return signify? From a strictly textual standpoint, modern Jewish restoration aligns more closely with the Tanakh's explicit predictions than with any patristic expectation. The early Church Fathers, on this specific question, were proved wrong by history.

VI. From Theology to Thrones: The Political Transmission

Supersessionism did not remain an abstract theological doctrine. It became the foundation of institutional power across Europe. The logic chain was direct and cumulative:

If the Church is the “New Israel,” then it inherits covenant authority. If it inherits covenant authority, it holds divine mandate over history, law, and sovereignty. If monarchs rule under that authority, then monarchs rule by divine right. The transfer can be stated precisely:

Israel → Church → Monarch

This chain underpinned the authority of the Catholic Church throughout the medieval period, the doctrine of papal supremacy, the sacralisation of European kingship, and the emergence of “divine right of kings” as a formal political doctrine. Every European monarch who claimed to rule by God's will was, whether consciously or not, drawing on a theological framework that began with the displacement of Israel.

VII. Anglican Coronation Theology: Biblical Kingship, Recycled

The coronation of English—later British—monarchs at Westminster Abbey, conducted under the authority of the Church of England, preserves the supersessionist structure in its most ritually explicit form.

Since the medieval period, the coronation rite has included: recognition of the monarch by the people; a sacred oath before God; anointing with holy oil; investiture with regalia; and enthronement. The decisive moment is the anointing—performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury—which is explicitly modelled on the consecration of kings in the Hebrew Bible.

The Davidic Template

The Anglican rite consciously draws from 1 Samuel 10 (anointing of Saul), 1 Samuel 16 (anointing of David), and 1 Kings 1 (enthronement of Solomon). The monarch is presented not simply as a political ruler but as *rex consecratus*—a king set apart by divine sanction. The anointing prayers invoke the wisdom of Solomon, the justice of David, and the principle of divine election.

This is typology in the strict sense: the English monarch is cast as a successor figure to the kings of Israel.

Supersession Embedded in Ritual

For the typology to function coherently, several assumptions must hold: biblical Israel must be historically completed or superseded; its covenantal role must be transferable; and its political-theological categories must be available for reuse. In other words, the coronation rite presupposes that the authority once vested in Israel's kings is now available to Christian monarchs.

Without that assumption, the typology collapses. Why should a Gentile monarch inherit Davidic symbolism? On what basis is sacred kingship transferable outside Israel? The answer historically given was supersessionism: the Church is the new Israel, and therefore its rulers can legitimately occupy that symbolic space.

The House of Windsor

Under the House of Windsor, this structure continues. The monarch remains Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The coronation rite retains its sacral elements. Even at the coronation of Charles III in 2023, the anointing remained hidden from public view as a sacred act—the moment at which, symbolically, divine authority is conferred.

The monarchy’s legal authority derives from Parliament. But its symbolic authority—the aura of sanctity, the language of divine appointment—derives from a theological chain that begins with supersessionism. The Crown’s metaphysical dimension rests on the claim that biblical kingship was transferred through the Church to Christian rulers.

VIII. The Structural Fault Line

The restoration of Jewish sovereignty introduces a structural contradiction into this entire framework.

Theological Assumption	Post-1948 Reality
Israel’s political role is complete	Israel exists as a sovereign state
Jews remain permanently dispersed	Jews regathered from “four corners of the earth”
Covenant transferred to the Church	Covenant continuity asserted by text and events
Biblical kingship typology is transferable	The original referent (Israel) persists and governs

The coherence of typological transfer depends on exclusivity. If the original covenantal subject persists—not as a relic but as a living, sovereign nation—then the claim of replacement loses its logical foundation. The typology does not disappear, but it ceases to be exclusive. It becomes imitation, not inheritance.

IX. Reassessing Divine Right

The doctrine of divine right, in its classical form, rests on three pillars: theological mediation (the Church as conduit of God’s will), scriptural typology (biblical precedent for sacred kingship), and continuity of sacred authority (an unbroken chain from biblical Israel through the Church to the Crown).

If these inputs are contested—if the theological mediation is based on a questionable premise, if the typology lacks exclusivity, if the chain of authority rests on a displacement that history has reversed—then the output changes. The monarchy associated with the House of Windsor remains legally valid. Parliamentary sovereignty is untouched. But the theological grounding of the Crown’s sacral dimension is no longer self-evident. It becomes historically conditioned rather than absolute—a shift from metaphysical necessity to historical construct.

X. The Function of Anti-Jewish and Anti-Israel Narrative

This analysis permits a structural observation that is rarely articulated directly.

For centuries, the theological and political architecture of European power depended on a specific narrative: that the Jewish people had lost their covenant, that their dispersion was permanent, and that the Church had inherited their role in the divine plan. From this narrative flowed ecclesiastical authority, sacral monarchy, and civilisational hierarchy.

The persistence and restoration of Jewish national life—culminating in the State of Israel—disrupts that narrative at its root. If the disruption is acknowledged, the entire downstream structure requires reassessment.

It follows that narratives which delegitimise Jewish continuity, deny the significance of Jewish return, or challenge the legitimacy of the State of Israel serve—whether intentionally or structurally—to preserve the older theological framework. Anti-Jewish sentiment and anti-Israel discourse are not merely prejudice or geopolitical disagreement. They function as load-bearing elements in an architecture of legitimacy.

Specifically: the authority of the Church of Rome, historically grounded in its claim to be the “New Israel,” is directly implicated. If Israel is restored, the Church’s exclusive covenantal claim is weakened. The authority of the House of Windsor, symbolically grounded in Anglican coronation theology’s appropriation of Davidic kingship, is similarly affected. If biblical kingship was never actually transferred, the sacral aura of the Crown is a historical artefact, not a divine reality.

The implication is precise: anti-Jewish and anti-Israel propaganda is not incidental to these institutions’ legitimacy narratives. It is foundational. The denial of Jewish covenantal continuity is the precondition upon which the Church’s claim to be the “New Israel”—and all that follows from it—depends.

XI. Conclusion: From Divine Certainty to Historical Contingency

Supersessionism was never a trivial doctrine. It was a civilisational claim. It enabled theological authority, political hierarchy, and the sacralisation of power across Europe for nearly two millennia.

But it depended on a specific reading of history: that Israel’s story had ended. That the Jewish people would remain scattered witnesses to another tradition’s triumph. That the covenant had moved on.

History did not comply.

The Tanakh asserts covenantal continuity in unambiguous terms. The early Church Fathers asserted displacement. Modern history has delivered restoration. These three elements cannot be harmonised without fundamental reinterpretation of the patristic position.

The result is not the immediate disappearance of churches or monarchies. It is something more consequential: the transformation of what was once presented as divine certainty into a debated historical interpretation. Once that shift becomes explicit, the question is no longer theological alone. It becomes political: who derives legitimacy from which story—and what happens when that story no longer holds?

The early Church Fathers staked their authority on the claim that Israel was finished. The Tanakh said otherwise. History has now spoken. The implications for every institution built upon that original claim remain to be fully reckoned with.

Notes

1. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 11, c. 160 CE.
2. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies (Adversus Haereses)*, Book V, c. 180 CE.
3. Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews (Adversus Judaeos)*, ch. 3, c. 200 CE.
4. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History (Historia Ecclesiastica)*, Book III, ch. 5, c. 313 CE.
5. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, Book XVIII, ch. 46, c. 426 CE.
6. Augustine of Hippo, *Against Faustus the Manichaeum (Contra Faustum Manichaeum)*, c. 400 CE.
7. Augustine of Hippo, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, commentary on Psalm 59 (Psalm 58 in Vulgate numbering).
8. Jeremiah 31:35–36. All Tanakh quotations follow the King James Version for accessibility.
9. Leviticus 26:44.
10. Deuteronomy 30:3–5.
11. Ezekiel 36:24.
12. Isaiah 11:11–12.

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