

# MISHKAN

A THEOLOGICAL FORUM ON JEWISH EVANGELISM

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# MISHKAN

**A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People**

**"A THEOLOGICAL FORUM ON  
JEWISH EVANGELISM"**

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**United Christian Council in Israel · Jerusalem**

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# Editorial

## A Theological Forum on Jewish Evangelism

Twenty years ago Abraham Heschel challenged Christian theology in a paper on ‘Protestant Renewal: A Jewish View’. He wrote: “The Church must decide whether to look for roots in Judaism and consider itself an extension of Judaism, or to look for roots in pagan Hellenism and consider itself as an antithesis to Judaism.”

In reviewing the development of Christian-Jewish relations in recent years from Jerusalem and from an evangelical viewpoint, we note that Christians are uncovering their biblical-Jewish roots and are recognizing again the significance of the Jewish People in its divine election. This development is reflected in the large numbers of Christian visitors to Israel who are eager to learn more about the Jewish people, and in new emphases upon- the Christian-Jewish nexus in theological study and education.

In recent years Hebrew-Christian/Messianic Jewish movements have also been growing in Israel and the diaspora. Although these movements have been met by scepticism from both Christians and Jews, their significant role as a bridge between the Body of Christ and the Jewish people is being increasingly recognized. It is important that international fora have taken positive notice of this development: among others, the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People in its ecumenical considerations of 1983, and the international consultation of the Lutheran World Federation on “The Significance of Judaism for the Life and Mission of the Church”, 1982.

Finally, Jewish Evangelism has again been firmly placed on the agenda of the Body of Christ. The awareness of our evangelistic responsibility towards the Jewish people was eminently expressed by the Consultation on World Evangelisation in Thailand, 1980, and more recently by the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism in its conference in Newmarket, England, 1983. From an evangelical point of view our positive witness to Jews about Jesus as Messiah and Savior does not contradict, but grows out from the aforementioned recognition of the Jewish People in its divine election and from the recognition of the significance of the Hebrew-Christian / Messianic-Jewish element within the Body of Christ.

The United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI) has followed these developments with great interest. The Council itself has been actively engaged in theological reflection on the biblical basis for Christian-Jewish relations and Jewish Evangelism. Three years ago the UCCI published a study document entitled “Let Jews and Arabs Hear His Voice” (publ. Jerusalem 1961), whose title indicates how close thinking within the Council has been to that of the Lausanne movement. The UCCI has been convinced about the need for international evangelical interaction concerning Christian-Jewish relations, and hopes that this may be achieved through MISHKAN, a theological forum on Jewish Evangelism.

With this first issue of MISHKAN the editors express their gratitude for contributions to the publication of the journal from a number of individuals and from the following societies: Christian Witness to Israel, American Board of Missions to the Jews, Ariel Ministries, Jews for Jesus, Evang.-Luth. Zentralverein fur Mission unter Israel, Evangeliumdienst fur Israel, Finnish Missionary Society and Norwegian Israel Mission.

**Ole Chr. M. Kvarme, General Editor**

# STATEMENT

## THE MESSIAH OF ISRAEL – A MESSIAH FOR ISRAEL?

### An Introduction

by Rev. Walter Riggans

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At the 1975 WCC conference in Nairobi, Bishop Arias said: “We do not have the option of keeping the Good News to ourselves. The uncommunicated Gospel is a patent contradiction.” In response to the same event, John Stott challenged the Assembly to affirm five central aspects of the New Testament’s presentation of the Good

News:

- a) That mankind (all of it) is lost;
- b) That hope and confidence can be found in the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth for mankind’s salvation;
- c) That Jesus of Nazareth is unique and only in him is salvation possible;
- d) That a sense of urgency about evangelism is appropriate;
- e) That a personal experience of Jesus is necessary.

This is also the Conviction of the editors of Mishkan. The Jewish people are as much in need of God’s Good News in Jesus as any Gentile; Jesus is as committed to the Jewish people as to any Gentile. It is my belief that Christians should read the first three chapters of Romans every time they read chapters 9-11 in seeking to find God’s plan for Jew and Gentile with respect to Jesus!

It seems to me that the witness of the New Testament is that

- a) God’s judgment/salvation has come irrevocably into the world.
- b) It has come because- the Messiah has come and brought it.
- c) This Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth and none other.
- d) But more, He is a suffering Messiah.
- e) But more, His death and resurrection are necessary for mankind’s redemption.
- f) But more, this is the eternal will of the Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- g) But more, this is also the witness of the Tenach (Old Testament) when properly understood (e.g. Matt. 26,53; Acts 2, 22-28; I Cor. 15, 3; I Pet. 1,10-12).

All of these points are presented in the New ‘Testament as applying to Israel as well as the nations, and this is the conviction of the editors. The Church is inseparable from the Gospel of the Messiah, Jesus. and can only fulfill her call by Jesus in witnessing to Him in word and deed. We have only one Gospel

to share (Cal. 1,6-7), that God's judgment! salvation has come in Jesus. In other words, the Church cannot present Jesus to Israel in any way that does not affirm and confirm her own foundation in Him, namely that there is no other way to the Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, except through Israel's Messiah, Jesus (1 Tim. 2,5; John 14,6; Acts 4,12).

Jesus' death on the cross was, in the deepest sense, His Father's plan from the very beginning (Rev. 13,8) and so it must not be seen as a cause for dislocation from the Jewish people, but as the strongest possible basis for solidarity.

Sadly, the editors have noted that over the past few years there has been a growing number of evangelical Christians who have lost all confidence in Jewish evangelism, while maintaining a high profile on evangelization of the rest of the world. As Ole Kvarme points out at the outset of his paper, if the Church has no message of salvation for the Jewish people, then she has none for anyone. Of course it is a truism that each religious, ethnic, and social group of persons must be presented with the Gospel in ways that are sensitive to their particularity, and therefore, so too the Jewish people. And, in that, Israel is in need of different approaches than London or New Jersey or Moscow. But the spur behind the initiation of Mishkan is that the Bible says much more than this about presenting the Gospel to Jewish people: "Christian witness to Jewish people actually plays a key role for the universal ministry of the Body of Christ." (Ole Kvarme's paper, Par. 1).

Caught in the middle of this lack of confidence in the absolute truth and necessity of the Gospel of Jesus are the Jewish believers in Jesus as their Messiah and Lord and Saviour. They are an embarrassment to many Christians (evangelical and non-evangelical) who have adopted an anti-evangelical attitude toward the Jewish people.

These Christians don't know how to react to the Jewish believers: Do they affirm them? Or ignore them? Or treat them as an interesting sociological and theological sect? These Jewish believers in Jesus are also a stumbling block to many Jewish people who are very happy for Gentiles to be disciples of Jesus. How should they treat these followers of Jesus? Do they ignore them? Treat them as yet another Jewish aberration? Hate them and accuse them of the most possible treachery? Apply all legal pressures to restore them to the "true path"?

These tensions are vitally important for us to wrestle with, as we seek to help them in their witness to their own people after the flesh and to their own people in the Body of Christ.

So we move into a new venture with the publishing of this new Bulletin on and about Jewish Evangelism. When we think of the variety of attitudes to this in the various Churches, we realize that this venture will also be an adventure. Ole Kvarme's paper speaks well for the editor as an opening statement of our convictions and intent. We covet your responses, statements, and involvement in the task before us.

# STATEMENT

## THE MESSIAH OF ISRAEL – A MESSIAH FOR ISRAEL?

### Some Biblical Perspectives on Jewish Evangelism

by Rev. Ole Chr. M. Kvarme

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A renewed concern for Christian-Jewish relations among evangelicals and the growth of Hebrew-Christian/Messianic-Jewish congregations in Israel and the diaspora have again placed Jewish Evangelism on the agenda of the witnessing Body of Christ. Some years ago in Tokyo a lecture on Christian-Jewish relations prompted the following question from a local theological seminary teacher: “We have heard that some biblical scholars in the West today claim that the Jewish People has its own way to God and is not in need of Christ. But If Christ is not relevant to the Jewish People, how do we dare to proclaim him to Buddhists here in Japan?” This question not only points to the fact that Jewish Evangelism today is disputed, it also implies that Christian witness to Jewish People actually plays a key role for the universal ministry of the Body of Christ.

It is the purpose of this article to clarify the biblical foundations of Jewish Evangelism and to present some biblical perspectives on its nature. We shall mainly draw upon material from Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letter to the Romans and, with reference to the contemporary debate, we shall deal with three corollary issues which will put Jewish Evangelism into a biblical and theological framework:

- the significance of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and as Saviour for Jews and Gentiles,
- the meaning of the continued election of the Jewish People and
- the significance of a growing Hebrew-Christian / Messianic-Jewish entity as a bridge unit between Israel and the Church of Christ.

## Christology and Christian-Jewish Relations

The question about Jesus has always stood, and remains, at the heart of Christian-Jewish relations, with a paradoxical significance: Faith in Jesus caused the separation of Church and Synagogue, but the person of Jesus links those who believe in him, to the Jewish People.

In the last ten years a new theological trend has developed, spearheaded by Rosemary Ruether's book on the theological roots of

Anti-Semitism: FAITH AND FRATRICIDE<sup>1</sup>. In an analysis of the roots of Christian Anti-Semitism, this trend claims that the New Testament faith in Jesus and its teaching about exclusive salvation in him is "the other side of anti-Judaism" and that anti-Semitism is actually "the left hand of Christology"; to maintain the uniqueness of Christ and exclusive salvation in him implies a rejection of the worship of the synagogue and an anti-Jewish bias. In a widely publicized article four years ago Tom Driver joined this trend with its quest for a "new christology"<sup>2</sup>, but his article concluded with an equally important request for the sake of a united humanity that Christians and Jews should stop regarding themselves as God's chosen people and instruments in the world. Driver's clearly stated position, however, raises the following question: Does not such a rigid universalism lead to an equally anti-Jewish bias when he asks the Jewish People to stop regarding themselves as chosen?

However, it is a basic element of evangelical faith that the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ when received in faith is the sole and all-sufficient ground of salvation. Against the positions of Ruether and Driver it will be our contention that the New Testament faith in Jesus is our best defense against anti-Semitism and is the basis for a positive relationship to the Jewish People: within its Jewish context, the New Testament profession of Jesus as Messiah and Saviour develops from and confirms the Old Testament faith in the One God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; it also confirms the chosenness of Israel and the hope for its salvation, and therefore provides the basis for a positive relationship to Jewish identity and to the religious heritage of the Jewish People. We shall see how Acts and Romans actually develop this line of thought.

## One God and His Messiah

The uniqueness of Jesus as Saviour is particularly expressed in the apostolic profession in Acts 4,12 — that there is salvation in no one else and by no other name. It is strange that New Testament scholars have tried to neutralize this profession by comparing it to a love-statement not to be understood literally,<sup>3</sup> or to “the game of children who are not satisfied with the joy of their own game, but are only happy when it is accompanied by the contention that it is better than all other games, if not the best of all.”<sup>4</sup> It cannot be overlooked that this confession concerning the name of Jesus is given in a court proceeding before the Sanhedrin, “from where the Law goes forth to all Israel” (M. Sanh. 11,2), and within or close to the Temple area, the place God had chosen “for his own name” (Deut. 12,5.11.21; 14,23f; e.a.). As a response to the question by what power or by what name the healing of the crippled beggar at the Temple gate had taken place, the proclamation of the One Name stands in a distinct New Testament tradition which lets the Name of Jesus actually take the position of the Name of the One God. This tradition is reflected both in Acts, in John, and in the letters of Paul, but it must have originated with Jesus himself. (Mt. 18,5.20; Mk. 9,38; Lk 24,47 e.a.)<sup>5</sup>

In the book of Acts the apostolic profession of the One Name of Salvation is closely related to its concepts of witness. When the risen Jesus commissions the disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and to the end of the world, this witnessing ministry has a distinct Old Testament background. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet speaks to exiled Israel and tells the people to be witnesses of the One God before all nations. The Lord of Israel will arrange a trial in which all nations will be shown who is truly God: the Lord of Israel or the gods of the pagan nations. Israel is then called to witness before the nations in this trial about the uniqueness, the reality and the deity of the Lord of Israel (Isa. 43,8-13: 44, 7-9).<sup>6</sup> If we go to the book of Acts on this background, we understand why it is important for the apostles to emphasize that they are witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus by the hands of God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Acts 2,30 ff; 13, 30ff). The early apostolic witness closely links the resurrection of Jesus, His Messiahship, the people of Israel, and the Kingdom of God (e.g. Acts 26,5f). The point of their witness is not only that the resurrection has occurred, but that Jesus in this way has been demonstrated to be the Messiah, that Israel’s restoration now has

begun, and that the God of Israel thus has proved himself to be the One God of Salvation for Jews and Gentiles (Acts 3,25—26; 13, 32—34; 24,14—15; 26,5—8).

The witness to the resurrection and the profession of the One Name therefore strongly express that the confession of the One Saviour of Jews and Gentiles is an immediate continuation of the Shma' Yisrael — the profession of the One God of Israel and the world in the Old Testament (Deut. 6,4f). However, as the oneness of God implied His total appropriation of the people in the Old Testament, so did the uniqueness of Christ and his redemptive ministry in the midst of Israel confirm the election of Israel and God's continued claim on his people (Acts 3,19—23). The disciples therefore proclaimed the One Name to their kinsmen 'and urgently called them to repentance, to faith in Christ and to obedience under his Lordship (Acts 2; 3; 13; e.a.).

More than anything else, the uniqueness of Jesus and his Messiah-ship stand out in Acts as Good News for Israel. The Messiahship of the risen Lord implied that the age now had come for the restoration of Israel and the disciples proclaimed to their kinsmen the messianic gifts of repentance, forgiveness of sins and the Spirit (Acts 2,32—38; 5,31f; 13,32—39; 15,14ff). However, in modern Christian—Jewish dialogue, there is a growing tendency to disclaim the title Messiah for Jesus: it is contended that Jesus did not use the title for himself, and that the early claim of Messiahship is a misrepresentation of the Old Testament and Jewish Messianism.<sup>7</sup> Naturally early Christian Messianism is distinct from Old Testament and early Jewish Messianism, but this is nevertheless the background and the conceptual horizon of the former. It is also impossible to deny the genuine character of the synoptic reports in which Jesus confirms the use of the title Messiah as an expression of his identity (Mt. 16,16—26,63f.68; cf.27,37). What is important in our context, however, is the early distinction between the messianic “already” and the messianic “not yet”: the messianic age which is now manifest through the resurrection of Jesus and the gifts of the risen Lord, is still hidden and shall be revealed in glory only through the return of the Messiah; the eschatological renewal of the people through the risen Lord is the first and crucial step towards its final completion by the return of the Messiah (Acts 1,11; 3,19—22; 10,42f; 17,30ff; cf. 5,31 and 13,35ff).

The balance between the messianic “already” and the messianic “not yet” implied for the early apostles a balance between the emphasis on Jesus as the One Saviour of all and the confirmation

that Israel is heir of the promises, a chosen people. This balance was expressed in an openness towards the Jewish People and in their messianic ministry: as witnesses to their Jewish kinsmen and then to Gentiles, they participate in the messianic restoration of the people, and they prepare them for the return of the Messiah and for the final fulfillment of the promises to the fathers (Acts 1,8; 3,19ff; e.a.)

### The One God and the One Saviour of Israel

In his letter to the Romans Paul also professes Jesus as Messiah and Lord (1,3f; 9,5). Attempts have been made to reduce the meaning of the Messiahship of Jesus in this letter to the one function of reconciling the nations with Israel.<sup>8</sup> It is our contention, however, that this profession of Jesus as Messiah must be understood in the wider context of Paul's basic teaching on salvation — his soteriology.

In the first chapters of Romans Paul is concerned to show that the uniqueness of Christ and his redemptive ministry is linked to a fundamental equality of Jews and Gentiles: both Jews and Gentiles are under the wrath of God because of their sin (1,18; 2,5.8; 3,5.9.22f), but in his grace God has provided salvation for the circumcised and the uncircumcised through faith in Christ because of his atoning death and resurrection (3,24f.26.30). In this emphasis on the equality of Jews and Gentiles before God and in his proclamation of the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ Paul is concerned to maintain and safeguard the Old Testament profession of the One God of Israel. In the Old Testament there is dynamic tension between God's holy wrath and his saving grace, and Paul maintains that Jesus in his death and resurrection has finally revealed the righteousness of this One God of Israel.<sup>9</sup> Jesus took upon himself the wrath of God in atoning for the sins of men, so that in him God's grace shall be victoriously at hand for Jews and Gentiles (Horn. 1,16f; 3,30). Paul maintains that the death and resurrection of Christ has demonstrated the justice of the God of Israel: God has proved himself to be just and justifies those who have faith in Christ (3,26).

This equality of Jews and Gentiles as sinners before God, however, does not contradict what Paul says in the same letter about the continued election of the people. We shall return to a more detailed analysis of Paul's understanding of Israel as the chosen people, but here we are concerned to demonstrate the conclusion Paul draws from the equality of Jews and Gentiles and from the redemptive ministry of Christ: He maintains that this puts the particularity of Israel and the universality of God's salvation

into perspective. In emphasizing this equality Paul stresses that lack of faith on part of the Israelites does not nullify God's faithfulness towards his own people (3,3) and he returns to this aspect in Romans 9-11. As he unravels the mystery of the salvation of all Israel, he explains: The Christ-event not only implies that God has bound all men over to disobedience, but in him he shall also have mercy on them all — all Israel shall be saved (11, 25—32.)

In his profession of Jesus as Messiah and Lord Paul is concerned to safe—guard the Old Testament faith in the One Holy God of Israel. Thus Paul in Romans also argues that justification by faith in Christ actually is a continuation of God's covenantal relationship with Abraham and his seed (Romans 4), and he maintains that the new life in Christ also brings fulfillment of the righteous requirements of the Torah (Romans 8 .4 :3,31). For the rabbi from Tarsus, salvation in Christ is a proper continuation and fulfillment of the religious heritage of his people. In line with the Old Testament concept of the oneness of God, Paul therefore develops a christocentric orientation for the present and future of his own people: In revealing the righteousness of the One God of Israel, Jesus came from the Israelites; he died, was resurrected and lives for them, and in him they shall be saved. Nothing expresses this line of apostolic consciousness better than the fact that Paul in his treatise about the continued election of Israel in Romans 9-11 refers to the equality of Jews and Gentiles and to the redemptive ministry of Christ (10,9—17). With a reference to the word about Christ, he then quotes the Old Testament locus classicus for the evangelistic ministry, "How beautiful on the mountains, are the feet of one who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings happiness, proclaims salvation, and tells Zion: Your God is King." (Isa. 52, 7~10)<sup>10</sup>

From this material in Acts and Romans concerning the uniqueness of Jesus as Messiah and Saviour we may draw some preliminary conclusions for the Christian witness to Jewish People:

- 1) A Christian encounter with Jewish People must naturally and necessarily be marked by a living witness to the One Name of the Messiah Saviour. As Jesus is the One who has revealed the righteousness of the One God of Israel for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles, this should today give a renewed, biblical confidence

- 2) to the Gospel ministry among Jewish People and to the claim that Jesus as Messiah is our bridge to the Jewish People and the Jewish faith heritage.
- 3) The emphasis on exclusive salvation in Christ contests the validity of modern theological universalism. This universalism tends to undermine the concept of God in the Jewish Scriptures of the OT and the NT with its dynamic tension between God's wrath and God's grace, and also to undermine the Jewish self-understanding of Israel as a particular, chosen people. In contrast to this universalism, the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah asserts the biblical concept of God and of Israel as a particular, chosen people.
- 4) Although the Church of Christ disagrees with the Synagogue in its interpretation of the Shma' Yisrael and of the Tanakh, we assert on a biblical basis the right and the obligation .of Israel to say the Shma' and to live a Jewish life in Russia, Argentina, France and in Israel. The uniqueness of Jesus as Messiah is a particular basis for fighting anti— Semitism.
- 4) The exclusive salvation in Jesus does not therefore negate Jewish identity but, as a confirmation of the Shma' Yisrael, it fulfills and presupposes a continued particular Jewish identity for Jews who believe In him.

#### The Church and its Jewish Origins

However, when a majority of the Jewish People did not and do not accept faith in Jesus, does not the emphasis on exclusive salvation in him then imply that they are rejected, and does it not lead to an anti-synagogue and anti-Jewish bias? Is not Rosemary Ruether, after all, right in her claim that here Is the root of theological anti-Semitism?

In the previous paragraphs we have tried to show that the proclamation of the One Name of Jesus in itself Is a very Jewish matter. In contrast to Ruether, it is therefore our contention that the anti-Semitism of the Church must have another background. When the young church moved away from Jerusalem into the Roman world, the number of Gentile believers increased, while a majority of Jews did not accept the messianic faith. This loss of the original Jewish context of the Gospel caused a tragic development for the Church itself and for its relations to the Jewish People.<sup>11</sup> The Jewish

claim that there is “no other name of salvation” became a triumphant, static and self-asserting proclamation of the Roman, imperial Church: “There is no salvation outside the church.” The Church took the place of its Lord. A triumphant Gentile Christendom came to regard itself as the only and true people of God and the Jewish People as stiff-necked, totally rejected by God under his final judgment. From the 2nd and 3rd centuries this gave rise to the so-called “Adversus-Ioudaios” tradition, which came to influence Christian interpretation of the Scriptures not only throughout the Middle-Ages, but even beyond the Reformation into modern Protestant tradition: The Church is heir to the blessing of the Scriptures, whereas the Jewish People is heir to the curses.<sup>12</sup>

It is important. that the development of such a triumphalist identity within the growing Gentile Church not only implied a rejection of the Jewish People, but it also generated a general rejection of “everything Jewish”, a cutting off of their own roots within the Jewish People, Jewish history and Jewish tradition.<sup>13</sup> The consequences of this development were particularly clear with regard to the Judeo-Christians. From early medieval times powerful Gentile Churches started to demand from Jewish catechumens that they abandon their Jewish heritage and practices and cut the link with their own people. This was certainly one major factor behind the disappearance of the early Judeo-Christian movements from history. The pendulum had swung from the Apostolic Council in 48 AD (Acts 15) when the problem was the inclusion of the Gentiles, to its very opposite: The Church became a Gentile entity with an identity never foreseen nor wanted by Jesus, Peter, James and Paul.<sup>14</sup>

At this point we must then emphasize that the Old Testament and Jewish context of the proclamation of the One Name had a deeper significance than just being the 1st century conceptual background of the Gospel. The Gospel was not and is not a universal, philosophical concept removed beyond time and space. It is essential to the Gospel that Jesus in his human nature was a Jew. Not only was the Gospel proclaimed with the help of Jewish terminology, but it conveyed a reality which very much was an integral part of Jewish history, involving Jews and transmitting Jewish heritage. The content of the Gospel was linked to its context within the Jewish People, presupposing a link to a continued Jewish history: It is a Gospel for Israel and the Nations or, in the words of Paul, “for the Jew first and also for the Greek”. (Romans 1,16) Neither Jesus, nor his apostles nor any of the New Testament authors moved

out of this framework in their understanding of the Gospel and in their proclamation of it. On the contrary, the positive and continued link between the Gospel and the Jewish People was their basic starting point.

It is therefore our contention that anti-Semitism is not “the left hand of New Testament Christology”, but the left hand of a triumphant Gentile Christendom which lost the Jewish Context of its own faith and also came to disregard the New Testament’s own teaching about the Jewish People. For Jewish evangelism today this implies that the positive witness to Jesus as Messiah and Saviour must be shared with Jewish People without any trace of self-complacency and triumphalism vis-a-vis the Jewish People, but with a proper recognition of the Jewish roots and character of our faith and by an affirmation of the continued election of the Jewish People.

### Israel and its Election

The awareness of the Jewish roots of the Church was of course not completely lost throughout the dark Middle-Ages. But it was only the Pietist movement of the 17th and 18th century that developed a new and positive view of the Jewish People and then on the basis of a renewed encounter with the Holy Scriptures.<sup>15</sup> Philip Jacob Spener, the father of Pietism (1635-1705), emphasized the continued election of the Jewish People and stated, “They are the most distinguished stock (or tribe) on earth, the blessed seed of the holy fathers.” It is not surprising that it was Romans 9-11 which led Spener to this statement.

Romans 9-11 is also a proper basis for a more qualified biblical orientation concerning the Jewish People today. It is noteworthy that New Testament scholarship recently has come to recognize the centrality of these chapters for the whole letter, and some even maintain that it is a major concern for Paul in this letter to uproot anti-Jewish attitudes within the Roman congregation.<sup>16</sup> There are three basic elements in what Paul says about his own people in Romans 9-11 which are important also for us.

Firstly, it is significant to note how Paul here speaks about his own people. As he speaks about the tragic fact that a part of Israel” has rejected the Gospel, he does not let this develop into a character description of the Jewish People. On the contrary, faced with the unbelief, of Israel, Paul again and again expresses his love and concern for his own people (9,1ff; 10,1; 11,1) and

admonishes the Gentile Christians in Rome to stand in awe and humility before even unbelieving Israel. (Romans 11, 11f.20f)

Secondly, the way in which Paul here speaks, is founded in the mystery which he unravels for the Romans: The present tension between the believing remnant and the unbelieving majority of Israel must be viewed in the perspective of the eschatological secret that “all Israel shall be saved.” Paul substantiates his warning to the Romans against self-complacency with reference to the Israelites by the expressed conviction that they will be saved. (11,24.25.26) The usual outline of salvation history in Old Testament prophecy implied that salvation first should come to the house of Israel and then to the nations. But Paul now presents an altered outline, and he bridges the gap between Old Testament texts that speak about the faithful “remnant” and about salvation for “all Israel”. He claims that salvation history develops in stages, from the remnant of Israel to the Gentiles in their full number and back to all of Israel (11,25-27).

However, the mystery is not only this outline of salvation history. It includes the relationship of this history to the essence of the Gospel (11,28—32), that salvation comes from the grace of God through Christ alone and can only be received through faith. (Romans 1,16; 9,16.30ff; 10,12ff) The unbelieving Israelites have put themselves under the sternness of God. However, God in his wisdom used the disobedience of these Israelites to let his mercy reach the Gentiles in their disobedience. From this Paul concludes and argues in a typical Jewish-exegetical manner, 17 “How much more shall the disobedient Israelites then receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to the Gentiles?”(11,30ff).

With this conviction and hope for Israel, Paul has provided an effective rebuttal of a simple “replacement theology” which marked the “Adversus-Ioudaios” tradition — that the Church has replaced Israel in God’s history of salvation. But he also gives no room for the classical “two-way theology” which is maintained in many catalogue-circles today<sup>18</sup> — that Jesus is salvation for the Gentiles, whereas the Jews have their own way to God within their own covenant. Paul does not attempt to solve the tension in his own outline: that unbelieving Israelites are under God’s sternness because of their disobedience, but under the hope of salvation because of God’s faithfulness. Faced with their unbelief, what is important for Paul is the fact of their election, which makes them beloved by God, and the hope for their salvation (11,28-32).

This leads us then to the third point: behind Paul’s language

and mystery stands the basic fact of Israel's continued election. Paul's discourse on the mystery of the way of salvation from the remnant of Israel to the Gentiles in their fullness and back to salvation for all Israel (9,6—11.32) ends in a doxology to God for the riches of his wisdom and knowledge (11,33—36) and is preceded by a preamble about the Israelites with a doxology to Christ (9,1—5). In this preamble Paul speaks about his brothers according to the flesh, "They are the Israelites. They were adopted as sons, and they were given the glory and the covenants. They received the Torah, the Temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs and from their flesh and blood came Christ who is above all, God forever blessed! Amen."(9,4f). This seems to be for Paul the only valid and remaining feature descriptive of his Jewish People which should have determined the attitude of the Roman Christians and should also determine our attitude to the Jewish People today. With emphasis on the continued election of the people and the hope for its salvation, Paul is able to maintain a deep continuity within God's history of salvation and a unity of God's faithfulness with the essence of his Gospel (sol grate, 11,28—32). It is. on the basis of the election and the hope for their salvation that Paul himself preaches the Gospel to his own kinsmen and wants the Romans to be united with him in a ministry among the Gentiles that may arouse his people to envy and save some of them (11,14).

These biblical perspectives on the Jewish People are overly important for Christian-Jewish relations and for Jewish evangelism. The implications of these perspectives can be summarized in the following four points:

- 1) The positive witness to Jesus as Messiah can only be shared with Jewish People together with a confirmation of the continued existence of Israel as a chosen people — as a national entity under the particular providence and salvific will of God. (cf. Acts 3,25f.)
- 2) The original Jewish context of the Gospel and the continued chosenness of the Jewish People must therefore also imply a reorientation on the part of the evangelizing Church concerning its own Identity. In its own scripture interpretation, the Christian faith community must take, as basic premises, in a radically new way, its own Jewish roots, its own link to Israel, and the continued significance of the Jewish People.
- 3) With this emphasis on the continued election of the Jewish People and with the awareness of the early

rejection of Jewish heritage within the Church, the evangelizing Church must today therefore also approach the religious heritage of the synagogue in a new and positive way. We acknowledge that the synagogue has kept alive a biblical heritage of which much has been lost to the Church, and we recognize that the Torah — tradition has been and still is essential to the very existence of the Jewish People as the biblical Israel.<sup>19</sup> This implies not only a witness, but also a listening and learning approach on the part of the evangelizing Church in its encounter with the Jewish People.

- 4) The New Testament hope for the salvation of all Israel and the balance between the messianic “already” and the messianic not yet” definitely rules out all static triumphalism on the part of the Church and instead implies an openness towards the future for its relationship to the Jewish People. The present separation of the Church and Israel is not final but will be replaced by an eschatological unity in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The presence of a Jesus-believing remnant within Israel today is a sign and a harbinger of this future unity.

### The Hebrew-Christian and Jewish Identity

What has been said in the previous paragraphs about the uniqueness of Jesus as Messiah and Saviour and about the continued election of the Jewish People, can now be drawn together in a last paragraph about the significance of the Hebrew-Christians for Jewish Evangelism. We shall then also have opportunity to develop further what has been said above about Jewish identity and Jewish heritage.

We already mentioned ‘that the “Adversus-Ioudaios” tradition not only resulted in a rejection of the Jewish People as such, but also clear discrimination towards the Judaeo-Christians. It was particularly the demand of the Gentile Church to Jewish converts that they cut the link to their own people and to the Jewish heritage, which shaped the conviction among Jewish People that Christianity is a Gentile matter — that it is impossible for a Jew to be a Christian. For an evangelistic encounter with Jewish People, it is essential to understand that this background to Jewish objection to the Gospel is a Gentile matter.

However, when Hebrew-Christians today emphasize their Jewish identity, they are also often misunderstood by Christians and have come under the suspicion of a "Judaizing" heresy. The reason for this is partly the hidden influence of the "Adversus-Ioudaios" tradition and partly the fact that the expression "Hebrew/Jewish Christianity" in Christian theology has denoted heterodox sects in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries. But biblical scholars and patristic and archeological research have in later years more and more come to recognize that the first Church in Jerusalem was indeed a Jewish entity within the Jewish People, and that a distinct Judeo-Christian entity developed in Eretz-Yisrael after the time of the apostles for at least 4 to 5 centuries.<sup>20</sup> These were not only heterodox sectarians, but a significant part of them —like the Nazarenes —shared the faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord with the Gentile Christians and had communion with them, yet remained a distinct entity as they continued to practice circumcision, keep the Law and live as Jews in their Jewish surroundings. When Hebrew-Christians today emphasize their Jewish identity, it is because they seek to recover and express -anew the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. This historical perspective is matched by the theological claim that a life with Jesus as Messiah and Lord from a biblical point of view also represents a fulfilled Jewish identity.

The theological basis for a distinct Hebrew-Christian identity within the Church has often been taken from the Acts of the Apostles. The Apostolic decree in Acts 15 established that Gentiles should be accepted into the messianic communion of faith as Gentiles:<sup>21</sup> They would not become Jews by circumcision, but keep the noachide commandments for the sake of the new unity and the table fellowship of Jews and Gentiles. But this decree then by implication took for granted that the Jewish believers would continue to live as Jews according to the biblical heritage and customs of their people. This heritage and these customs were still valid, but the new fellowship and the new covenant in Christ meant that the promises to their fathers now were being fulfilled, and that the Law of Moses and their national heritage therefore had come in a new light. The basic unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ did not wipe out their respective distinctions, and they could still relate differently to the biblical heritage and the customs of the Jewish People —not in a contradictory, but in a complementary way. Both groups were committed to the biblical witness to God's self-revelation, his salvific acts and ethical

instructions, but the Jewish believers would naturally continue to keep national aspects of the Torah which were not binding upon the Gentiles. The distinction is also reflected by Paul as he speaks about Peter as apostle to the circumcised and about himself as apostle to the uncircumcised (Gal. 2,7).

More illuminating in our context, however, is the way Paul in Romans 11 makes room for a positive Hebrew-Christian identity. Paul's hope for the salvation of all Israel is closely related to his own identity as a Jew and to the fact that there is a "Hebrew-Christian entity" in his own time— a "remnant chosen by grace" (11 ,1f.5f) Paul first identifies himself as a descendant of Abraham and a Benjaminite. Within the Jewish People the tribe of Benjamin expressed the continued existence of the whole House of Israel,<sup>22</sup> and Paul argues that God could not have chosen him, a Benjaminite with a commitment and a concern for his own people, (11.131) to be the apostle to the Gentiles if Israel as such were rejected.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, Paul states that there is a Jesus-believing remnant within Israel (11 , 5f). Paul here reserves the phrase chosen/elected (eklogē) for the Jewish believers in Christ and stresses that election is by grace. With this reference to Jesus-believing Israel and to God's grace, Paul actually takes up the line of thought from Romans 3,21-31 concerning justification of the circumcised and the uncircumcised. He thus achieves a significant clarification: Justification by grace through faith in Christ is what realizes and fulfills the election and leads to salvation.

As Paul in Romans 11 confronts the problem of unbelieving Israel and the fact that salvation has come to the Gentiles, he develops further his thoughts concerning the Hebrew-Christian remnant (v. 7-12.13—24). Paul is unwilling to take as a final state the disobedience of the majority of Israel towards God's grace in Christ.

He argues with two known pictures from the Old Testament: From the temple cult he takes the picture of the dough-offering of the first fruit, and from prophetic speech the picture of Israel as a tree. In a typical rabbinic manner he argues and concludes from the partitive to the total: The holiness of the dough-offering implies holiness for the whole batch and similarly for the root and the branches (11,16). Although we cannot determine the precise reference for "dough" and "root", these expressions probably refer both

to the fathers (the “patriarchs”) and the mentioned remnant. What is true for the fathers and the chosen remnant, is true for the whole people. Despite their rejection of the Gospel and their hardening, the unbelieving Israelites are also holy and consecrated to salvation.

The Hebrew-Christian remnant thus has a double significance according to Paul. As a remnant of Israel chosen by grace, they are a constant reminder to the Gentile Christians about the true character of their new identity, that they now have a share in the people-hood of God only by grace and through faith (11,15ff), and they are a sure sign that God will fulfill his faithfulness and promise to all Israel, which will be brought back into fellowship with God through faith in Christ (11,22ff).

The last two centuries have seen the founding of a number of Hebrew-Christian societies and congregations, and a growing Hebrew-Christian/Messianic-Jewish movement has developed both in Israel and the diaspora over the last thirty years. Although it is still a small minority within the Jewish People, this shows that the question of a Jewish entity within the Church and of a Hebrew-Christian identity is no longer only theoretical.<sup>24</sup> The New Testament perspectives we have just presented indicate that this growth of a Hebrew-Christian/Messianic-Jewish movement has great significance for Jewish Evangelism today, and we conclude this paper by pointing to four implications:

- 1) The aim of Jewish Evangelism must be the growth of a Hebrew-Christian/Messianic-Jewish entity as a bridge-unit between Israel and the Church of Christ. Only such an expressed aim can give the evangelizing Church credibility in its proclamation of Jesus as unique Saviour of Jews and Gentiles and its confirmation of the continued chosenness of the Jewish People.
- 2) As we recognize that the Hebrew-Christians are a constant reminder to the rest of the Church about its own Jewish roots and messianic identity, It is important that the Christian witness to Jewish People emphasize the central significance of the Jewish believers for the Body of Christ both in the early Church and today. It is therefore natural that the

- 3) Jewish believers themselves today play a leading role and provide direction for the ministry of Jewish Evangelism.
- 4) As we recognize the significance of the Jewish roots of the Church in general and the biblical significance of the Jewish identity of the Jewish believers, the evangelizing church should therefore today encourage the Jewish believers to develop expressions of their Jewish identity in freedom and on a biblical basis.
- 4) When the Gospel witness to Jewish People is accompanied with a reference to the Jewish identity of the Jewish believers within the Body of Christ, this will eminently express that Jewish Evangelism is neither a question of Gentile versus Jewish identity nor a question of one religious community stealing souls from another. Such a witness will eminently express that the heart of the Gospel is the One Jewish Messiah who renews the lives of Jews and Gentiles, and whom Jews are invited to receive in freedom and as members of the House of Israel.

#### NOTES:

- 1) R. Ruether, Faith and Fratricide, The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism, New York 1974.
- 2) According to partial reprint in Jerusalem Post, 21.12.1980.
- 3) Cf. Krister Stendahl, "Na Other Name", Christian Witness and the Jewish People, Geneva 1976.
- 4) P. von der Osten-Sacken, GrUndzuge einer Theologie im Christlich-JUDISCHEN Gespraech, Munich 1982, p. 161.
- 5) A positive attempt to understand Acts 4,12 on its Old Testament background is found in M. Saebo, "No Other Name, Seven Theses on the Claim to the Uniqueness of Christ from the Perspective of the Old Testament Concept of God," Christian Witness and the Jewish People, Geneva 1976. Cf. also S. Aalen, Jesu kristologiske selvbevissthet. Et utkast til "Jahvistisk kristologi", TTK 40, 1969, p. 1ff.
- 6) Cf. A.A. Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness, Cambridge 1977, pp. 35ff and pp. 125ff.
- 7) Cf. e.g. J. T. Pawlikowski, Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue, New York-Ramsey 1982. An interesting Jewish response to the modern christological debate and the inherent attitude to the Jewish People, is found in E.B. Borowitz, Contemporary Christologies: A Jewish Response, New York — Ramsey 1980.
- 8) Thus by P. von der Osten-Sacken, op. Cit.
- 9) Cf. Isa. 59; Ps. 90,7ff; Exodus 20,Sf and the other Old Testament texts quoted in Romans 3,10-18 as a basic background to the line of thought in 1,18-3,20; 3,21-31.
- 10) Cf. C. Friedrich. Evangelizomaj. THWNT Vol. II, Stuttgart 1935/1960, p. 705 H. Concerning the background to Paul's use of this quotation, one should refer both to Pesiqta Rabbati's interpretation of Isa. 52,7 that speaks of the messenger who will come and proclaim, "the time *for* the Kingdom of Heaven has come." (P.R. Sic) and Jesus' statement in Luke 4,43; cf. Acts 10,36.

- 11) The most comprehensive study of this development is found in M. Simon, Verus Israel. Etude sur les relations entre chretiens et juifs dans l'Empire Romain (135-425), Paris 1948. Cf. also RengstorlKortzfleisch, Kirche und Synagoge, Vol. 1, Stuttgart 1968.
- 12) O.H. Steck. Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten. Untersuchungen zur Uberlieferung des deuteronomistischen Geschichtsbildes im Alten Testament. Spätjudentum und Urchristentum WMANT 23, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1967. On this point I am indebted to Oskar Skarsaune for his references. Cf. his The Proof from Prophecy, A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type. Provenance, Theological Profile, Dissertation Oslo 1981.
- 13) Cf. James Parkes, The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue. A Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism. ed. Philadelphia 1961, p. 394ff.
- 14) Cf. The penetrating challenge from Abraham J. Heschel in his paper "Protestant Renewal: A Jewish View", in The Insecurity of Freedom. Essays on Human Existence, New York 1966, p. 168ff.
- 15) For this and the following on Pietism and Spener. cf. Rengstorl-Kortzfleisch. op.cit. both end of Vol. 1 and particularly Vol. 2, Stuttgart 1970.
- 16) E.g. Jacob Jervell, Cud og hans fiender. Forsok pa a fortolke Rometbrevet, Oslo 1973.
- 17) Here and in other instances Paul uses the qal-va-chomer argument (from the lighter to the heavier/from the less to the more important).
- 18) As exemplified by e.g. A. Roy Eckardt, Elder and Younger Brothers, The Encounter of Jews and Christians, Schocken edition, New York 1973.
- 19) Cf. the definition of Torah in E.E. Urbach. The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs, Jerusalem 1975, Vol. 1, p. 2861 and Cf. also the treatment of this topic in E. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism. London 1977 cf. the index for worksrighteousness".
- 20) The main contributions to this study and research have been given by B. Bagatti, The Church from the Circumcision, Jerusalem 1971; J. Danielou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity, London-Philadelphia 1964; Mancini, Archeological Discoveries Relative to the Judaeo-Chnstians, Jerusalem 1970; and R. Prim, The Jewish Christian Sect of the Nazarenes. Dissertation at the Hebrew-University (mimeogr.) Jerusalem 1981.
- 21) Cf. to this also the Cornelius story in Acts 10.
- 22) Cf. O. Michel, Der Brief an die Roemer, kritisch.exegetischer Kommentar ueber das Neue Testament, Goettingen 1966, p. 266.
- 23) Cf. to this also J. Jervell, op.cit.
- 24) For the American scene, cf. D. Juster, A Messianic Congregation, the Hebrew Christian, Vol XLIX, 1976 No. 2 pp. 74ff and D. Rausch, Messianic Judaism: Its History. Theology and Polity, New York, Toronto 1982.

For the Israeli scene, cf. the present writer, "The Development of Hebrew Christianity", in Tantur Papers on Christianity in the Holy Land, Jerusalem 1981, pp. 315-342, and also his Messianske Joder, En kristen minoritet i Israel, Oslo 1979 (Norwegian) and Christiansfeld 1979 (Danish).

# RESPONSE

## THE MESSIAH OF ISRAEL – A MESSIAH FOR ISRAEL?

by Rev. Baruch Maoz

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### The Jewishness of the Gospel

One of the basic concepts upon which Pastor Kvarme's article rests is expressed by the following quotation: "The Gospel was not and is not a universal, philosophical concept removed beyond time and space. It is essential to the Gospel that Jesus in his human nature was a Jew. Not only was the Gospel proclaimed with the help of Jewish terminology, but it conveyed a reality which very much was an integral part of Jewish history, involving Jews and transmitting Jewish heritage." The essential Jewish character of the Gospel is a matter frequently ignored or denied by Jewish and Christian theologians alike, each for his own reasons. Such practice is denying the facts. For example, the most superficial perusal of the book of Acts will indicate that both the apostles and the church they founded were thought of as being eminently and necessarily Jewish, even to the point of possibly excluding non-Jews (Acts 10:34-35; 11:17-18). So entrenched was this view that a special effort was needed in order to make it clear to both Jews and Gentiles that the Gospel had a much wider reference than the Jewish people (Ram. 2:9-16; 4:9-12 and Eph. 2:11-22.)

This surely must mean that we are neither to think of the Old Testament nor the Jewishness of the New Testament as mere scaffolding, now to be removed and dispensed with. as one deals with something inferior and no longer necessary. On the contrary, Jewishness must be recognized as part of the very fibre of the Gospel; it is as integral to the Gospel as the warp is to the wool. Pastor Kvarme puts it succinctly when he says, 'Justification by faith is a continuation of God's covenantal relationship with Abraham and his seed. . .For the rabbi from Tarsus, salvation in Christ is a proper continuation and fulfillment of the religious heritage of his people.' The Gospel is "Good News for Israel" before it is good news to the world at large, and even this wider application is in fulfillment of God's covenantal promises to Israel.

### The Gospel and the Jewish People

Such a view of the Gospel immediately implies a necessary relationship between the Gospel and the Jewish people, and hence an affirmative reply to the question posed by the title of the article. Paul discerns a tension between Israel's calling and its disobedience, between the people's destiny and their historical national reality. That is why I am surprised at Pastor Kvarme's statement in reference to Israel's election when he says that this election "seems to be for Paul the only valid and remaining feature descriptive of his Jewish people which should have determined the attitude of the Roman Christians and should also determine our attitude toward the Jewish people today." Israel's election is surely one such determining factor, but our disobedience is another.

Knowing Pastor Kvarme, I can only assume that this is a case of overstatement in reaction to rabid proselytisation on the one hand and anti-Jewishness on the other. On both scores, I find myself once again in agreement with him.

Of course, it is no less true that Paul looks to the day when, by the gracious power of God, Israel will be once again obedient, “grafted in again” to use the apostle’s own expression. Hence, the disobedience of Israel in no way undoes their election. God is true, though every man a liar.

It is this biblical expectation which gives body to Pastor Kvarme’s assertion that the Gospel does not constitute a rejection of Jewishness, but its affirmation. The universalism of the Gospel must never be interpreted to the exclusion of the Jews. Rather, it is to be thought of in terms of bringing the “stranger” into the “commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:19), many coming from the east and the west to sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who as a group are described everywhere as representing the people of Israel at large. This means, once again, that before the Gospel addresses anyone, it addresses the Jew. New Testament universalism is, as Pastor Kvarme has demonstrated, the outcropping of Old Testament monotheism; Israel’s present is to be explained and its future anticipated in relation to Jesus.

### The Gospel and Continued Jewish National Existence

It must then be concluded that the continued national existence and welfare of the Jewish people are as integral to the Gospel as the Old Testament is to the New — and that the relationship between these two couplets is more than merely incidental. If we sincerely believe that the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old, why are we so reticent regarding the claims of the Gospel upon Israel? Does not such an attitude betray an incipient Marcionism? Is this attitude not susceptible to the charge of anti-Semitism to a greater degree than any evangelistic aspirations might be? To my mind, some level of concern for the Jew, expressed in evangelistic terms is essential to the welfare of true Christianity. It is a tangible expression of the Church’s conviction that God is unfailingly true, and of the sincerity of its claim to the Old Testament. The security and salvation of all men hangs upon God’s faithfulness in spite of human disobedience.

It is here that the Church has failed so dismally in understanding the Gospel, hanging salvation upon human worth and forsaking the obligations implied by the grace of God to sinful man. As Pastor Kvarme says, in its attitude to the Jewish people “the Church took the place of its Lord”, and then forgot to pattern its behaviour after that of its Lord, in wrath remembering mercy. Perhaps lacking confidence in its rightful claim to the Old Testament, the only means by which the Church seems to have tried to secure that claim was to thrust out Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In consequence, the very hermeneutic adopted in relation to the Old Testament was one which largely sidestepped historical realities. A Christological assumption was made, but never truly tested by the progressive nature of revelation. This assumption was then used to force the Old Testament into a Christological strait-jacket because it could not be trusted to speak for itself. One sad result of this method has been an increasing loss of the New Testament as well as of the Old. Conscious of this, a corrective effort is presently being made by many. But, once again, this is being done at the cost of Old Testament integrity because it is largely characterized by identification of Jewishness with Judaism, assuming that these both equally proceed from Old Testament revelation.

### The Synagogue

It is here that Pastor Kvarme’s article is most in need of correction. “The synagogue” is spoken of as if it were true and legitimate Jewishness and hence normative for all Jews. This is to ignore the fact that Judaism as developed by the rabbis actually misconstrues Old Testament teaching on many cardinal points. To consider Judaism in the way that Pastor Kvarme does, is to distort the

true meaning of rabbinical piety, forcing meanings onto its practice and doctrine never intended by the rabbis. Such is the practice among many who use rabbinical traditions as if they were hidden expressions of Christian truth (as in most “Christian Seders”, for example). The result is a sad attempt to consecrate far Christian service what is essentially non-Christian, sometimes even anti-Christian and very often decidedly unbiblical. This can only be achieved by doing an injustice to both rabbinicism and the Christian Faith.

Of course, it must be recognized that religion is a major contributor to national culture in any nation, and for a Jew to be a Jew—even in Christ—he must make use of traditional rabbinical means of expression. But this is quite another matter and does not assign religious authority to the traditions used. We must also recognize that the self-identity of any nation, most pronouncedly that of the Jews, is primarily subject to God’s Word and not to some religious and historical autonomy.

### Scattered Criticism

A few remarks in closing are in order on issues relatively minor to the main thrust of the article:

- 1) Pastor Kvarme speaks of the “the balance” achieved between the ‘not yet’ and the ‘already’ of eschatology. This is usually spoken of in terms of tension rather than balance and I could not help wondering if our writer’s preference was intended and, if it was, what fruitful field of understanding was implied thereby. I could only wish he had further enlarged.
- 2) The precise relationship between Paul’s ‘all Israel’ in Romans 9-11 and Pastor Kvarme’s ‘all men’ seems contradictory to Paul’s discussion in that passage as well as to Pastor Kvarme’s understanding of it. Further elaboration may have clarified this matter.
- 3) We are told that “it was only the pietist movement of the 17th and 18th centuries that developed (a) positive view of the Jewish people”. This is historically incorrect. The calvinistic countries evidenced such a positive attitude quite apart from the pietists, as is attested by the 1645 Scots Directory For Public Worship, to name only one example.
- 4) A discussion of Israel’s “continued election” would have been very helpful to the subject at hand. To what is Israel elected? What duties incumbent upon Israel are implied by that election? The total lack of any onus laid upon the Jewish people is a most serious omission.
- 5) Pastor Kvarme attributes to us Jewish Christians lofty motivations. Unfortunately, the facts do not generally support this gracious evaluation. We are told that Jewish Christians tend to emphasis their identity as Jews because they “seek to recover and express the Jewish roots of their Christian Faith.” The self-assertiveness that lays at the bottom of so much of this emphasis has often obscured the real issues and played an all-too-prominent part in modern Jewish Christianity, rendering all concerned a major disservice.
- 6) The precise nature of the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people is a subject deserving more thought and care than is often given it. Is redeemed Israel to be thought of as “within the Church”, or should we rather think of the Church as within Israel? Perhaps they somehow exist side by side, interlocked in areas of shared identity? On the basis of which reply we deem correct, in what sense should Jewish Christians serve “as a bridge between Israel and the Church”? To put the same question in other terms, to what extent is it legitimate to speak

(from page 39)

of non-Jews in Christ as Gentiles and in what way does this conflict with biblical practice (see I Pet. 2:9-10; Eph. 2:11; 4:17; I Cor. 12:2, cf contra Eph. 3:1; Rom. 11:13, 15-16)?

(Continue on page 39 → Continued from page 22)

Pastor Kvarme has given an excellent article worthy of careful reading by all who wish to grapple with the truth of their claim to the Old Testament. He has demonstrated that Jesus can be ignored only by the obscurantist, who would probably benefit from this article more than anyone else if he could only be prevailed upon to read it. Upon completion of the third reading, my response is identical to that which followed the first: I wish I had said that, and I wish I could have said it so well!

# STATEMENT THE GOSPEL AND JEWISH REFUTATIONS

by Menachem Benhayim

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The following article is based on a study of some recent literature published in English by Orthodox Jewish objectors to the Gospel. It does not purport to be an exhaustive study of this genre nor to present Orthodox-Jewish refutation literature as the Jewish mainstream response to the Christian faith.

The article deals with the background of the refutation literature, the scriptural argument in the Gospel refutations, the significance of Jewish messianism and the selective attitude of the refutation literature, and the challenge of the messianic faith in Jesus to Jews and Christians.

“What do Jews think of Jesus?” a Christian friend was said to have asked the German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. “They don’t,” was the terse reply. Rosenzweig, who had himself once been on the verge of accepting baptism as a Christian believer, was of course exaggerating, or perhaps expressing the wish as father to the thought. For, to the ever-recurring distress of the Jewish religious mainstream, Jesus and Christian faith — somewhat like Banquo’s ghost in “Macbeth” — continually return to haunt Jewish Orthodoxy, and occasionally even disquiet modern Jewish secularists.

The fact remains that Jesus is the only personality from the ancient world who still has the power to command the devotion — or disdain — of untold Jews and Gentiles. Former Israeli Supreme Court Justice Haim Cohen, in his book about the trial of Jesus, refers to “60,000 odd books said to have been written on the life of Jesus in the last century alone.”<sup>1</sup> Included in that were the works of major Jewish scholars like G.G. Montefiore, Joseph Klausner, Geza Vermes, Alfred Edersheim, David Flusser, and many more. One minor but painful facet of this vast literary outpouring

about the life of Jesus and the faith which has sprung from that life, has been the literature of refutation.

The modern renaissance of a Jewish commitment to Jesus and the New Testament, with its assertion of the Jewishness of New Testament Christian faith, has seemed particularly pernicious and threatening to many in the established Jewish community. In an age when Jewish solidarity is no longer expressed by Orthodoxy in religion, the classical approach of a “closed-ranks” anathema to the “apostate” has had much less affect. Meanwhile, the head-on challenges presented by movements like Hebrew Christianity, “Jews for Jesus,” Jewish Evangelism, Messianic Judaism and the like fairly cry out for a reply. And not a few Orthodox Jews have been responding vigorously.

### The Definitive Response

As far as Traditional Judaism is concerned, the definitive response to the Christian Gospel was given in the ancient world when the two faiths went their separate ways: one totally involved with the Jewish people, the other with the Gentile world. We can't assign a particular date in history when the decision was consummated. Even after the “birkat haMinim”<sup>2</sup> was introduced into the Jewish liturgy, and after the Bar Kochba revolt (during which the Judaeo-Christians were persecuted for their refusal to accept the Judean Rebel's Messianic claims and for their subsequent withdrawal from the revolt), there is ample evidence of a continuing Judaeo-Christian community presenting its challenge from within Israel. Certainly, however, it wasn't too long into the Middle Ages before both Church and Synagogue, each for its own reasons, had conspired to seal the decision that Jesus and Jewishness were mutually exclusive.

The Christian polemical tradition of “Adversus Ioudaious” and the forced Medieval debates between representatives of Church and Synagogue added nothing to the Jewish position which excluded the New Testament and Jesus from Israel. Meanwhile, Judaism was concerned with the survival of a national-religious monolith under very adverse conditions. A powerful Gentile Christendom was not something to contend with merely on the basis of theological and faith issues.

### Defensive Refutation

Judaism had no strong inner drive to take the offensive in proclaiming

its message as the much weaker primitive Christians had done, first within the Jewish world and later within the classical pagan world. Judaism, of course, did have its universal elements and a certain “centrifugal” drive sometimes expressed by a missionary outreach to Gentiles,<sup>3</sup> but this impetus eventually fell into disrepute, no doubt helped along by Christian and Moslem militancy. Thus, the need to refute a contending faith has usually been related to an urgent defense of Judaism and Jews against hostile Gentiles, or followed missionary inroads into the Jewish community.

As a result, Jewish refutation literature is often extremely defensive. And in the foreground, much of this literature today not only results from the perceived threat of Christian evangelism to Jewish survival, but from the fact of massive Jewish defection from Orthodox Judaism and the threat of assimilation and secularism. The Jewish refutationist often feels as much threatened by the breakdown of Jewish religious solidarity as the challenge posed by the Gospel’s proclamation, or Hebrew Christianity and its derivatives.

### The Missionary Challenge

An interesting insight into this sense of internal danger is found in an introduction to the anti-missionary booklet, “The Real Messiah: A Traditional Jewish View Of Christianity,” published by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. In an introductory article the editors stress that, when dealing with “the missionary challenge”, an attempt must be made to reach out to every Jewish youth “denied his heritage” by (unnamed) “apologists and compromisers” who have “led the bulk of American Jews away from a beautiful and meaningful Torah heritage and who are thus largely responsible for the sadly vulnerable state of so many Jewish youth today.”<sup>4</sup>

In Israel too there is a constant waving of the banner of missionary menace raised by the Orthodox media. Shrill and hysterical at times, it can only be compared to those beleaguered ultra-conservatives in the West who are convinced of an omnipresent “leftist mafia” and “Red” subversion everywhere. Here too a liberal or humanistic Judaism “soft” on Christianity is sometimes held up as a major culprit in the alleged missionary threat to Jewish national and spiritual existence.

To put the issue in proper proportion, however, it should be remembered that major Jewish streams are quite content to ignore the whole matter of refuting the Gospel. Much of conservative, traditional

Judaism, on the one hand, devotes itself by and large to shoring up its own isolation from the alien world — Jewish and non-Jewish, concentrating its efforts on its own style of “Torah Judaism.” Secular Jewry, on the other hand, also tends to ignore the issue since, for the secularist, religious issues are relegated to the realm of private conscience and private discussion, if any. In a sense, the attitude of the mainstream of secular Jewry parallels the Conservative Orthodox attitude in stressing a lifestyle as the most effective antidote to “alien pastures” — in their case, a commitment to a thoroughly humanistic and non-religious lifestyle.

### “Anti-Evangelism”

Refutation literature, therefore, should not be approached as a kind of dialogue or debate between contestants raising serious objections or making lucid defenses of faith and practice. It is usually a form of “anti-evangelism,” viewed by its proponents as a weapon in the fight for Jewish survival.

In the relatively moderate work of David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod published by the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York and its Task Force on Missionary Activity, the authors, in an emotional “final word” to potential “Jewish Christians” (always between double quotation marks), appeal to a sense of Jewish loyalty in the face of “your ancestors (who) clung to their faith ... remembering the fate of six million murdered because they were Jews . . .”<sup>5</sup> Ignored is the fact that many Holocaust victims were Hebrew secularist, non-Orthodox Jews and not a few were Hebrew-Christians.

### The Use of Skeptical Literature

As in the use of critical literature by skeptics, secularists and others who dispute Christian faith, Jewish refutation literature raises provocative questions about specific points of the New Testament and traditional expressions of Christian faith. In this respect, it adds little to the arguments of liberal “modernists” or skeptical unbelievers and seems to draw much of its material from these sources. This Jewish refutation literature seems to be surprisingly unaware of the work of Jewish and Christian scholars in recovering the Jewish milieu out of which the New Testament events and writings grew (work usually ignored also by Western scholastics.) This unawareness seems, however, to be a clearly tactical move, for this same Wyschogrod who co-authored the above-cited refutation booklet was quite ready to defend Jesus and even Paul

for their rabbinic methods of teaching and practice in an article he wrote on the Law — Torah — in a Lutheran journal<sup>6</sup> and at a conference with Evangelicals<sup>7</sup>! But the awareness that Jesus and Paul were thoroughly Jewish is lost sight of in refutation writing.

In a recent work by Gerald Sigal, the author (a committed Orthodox Jew) gathered a selected number of New Testament incidents and Old Testament proof texts and proceeded to “demolish” them by what often amounted to a *reductio ad absurdum*. Although professing to eschew skeptical criticism, Sigal uses familiar lines of attack which, notwithstanding the pious disclaimer of respecting the faith of pious Christians (Gentiles), tries to reduce Christian faith to nonsense. Jesus is even taken to task for causing the death of Gadarene swine! When one considers the abhorrence of swineflesh among Orthodox Jews, Sigal’s concern for the Gadarene swine (in the Holy Land!) is ludicrous, and typical of his desire to score points come what may.<sup>8</sup> Sigal and similar refutationists make free use of rationalistic methods of attack upon the New Testament and Christian faith in a manner they would totally reject when applied to the Hebrew Scriptures, Talmud or rabbinic belief and practice.

There is, of course, no attempt made to find solutions to problematical texts; only the most negative conclusion is drawn. Thus, the fact that John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to inquire, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3) is used to deny the historical validity of John’s witness to Jesus’ baptism and initial ministry, as recorded in the early section of the Gospels. The possibility that the Baptist’s imprisonment and imminent death might have affected his disposition, raising doubts about his own ministry as well as the ministry of Jesus, is not seriously considered.

#### Jewish Orthodox and Evangelical Christian Textual Problems

The same critical position is taken with regard to the conflation of Old Testament texts — a practice not unknown in rabbinic writings<sup>9</sup> — where the writers or speakers are charged with gross ignorance of their Hebrew Bible.<sup>10</sup> Neither will the Orthodox Jewish critic consider the possibility that textual differences may also rest upon divergent textual traditions. The Masoretic text, which he regards as totally and immutably fixed, was actually settled several centuries after the New Testament canon was finalized. This poses a exegetical problem as well for Christians, who also accept the Masoretic version of the Hebrew Scriptures as

inspired. At the same time they recognize that citations from the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament are sometimes derived either from the earlier Septuagint Greek translation of the Tenach or a variant Hebrew text relative to the Masoretic.

Orthodox Jews face problems similar to those of Christians when dealing with internal textual differences which require reconciliations: for example, between Exodus and Deuteronomy, between the Books of the Kings and the Chronicles, or between the first two chapters of Genesis. They sometimes develop ingenious solutions, but seldom accept modern critical proposals of conflicting authorship, contradictory accounts, etc.<sup>11</sup> And when it comes to matters of the miraculous, whether the Nativity of Jesus, the miracles of his ministry, or the Resurrection and Ascension, the refutationist are aligned with the same skeptics who ridicule the miracles recorded in the Hebrew Bible.

The Jewish Orthodox refutationist tends to be a very selective rationalist and critic, limiting his method to New Testament interpretation only. If the Virgin Birth is inconceivable, is the birth of Isaac to a woman of 86, well past the menopause, any more conceivable? Is the ascension of the prophet Elijah any less incredible than the ascension of Jesus? Similarly, the historicity of the Patriarchs, the theophany at Mount Sinai, the books of Esther and Daniel, are subject to the same kind of hostile questioning by skeptics as are the Gospels. Perhaps, like Shylock, the Jewish refutationist has learned to “better the instruction”, employing the selective exegesis so long practiced by Christian interpreters in their attacks on Jews and Judaism!

#### The Diversity of Jewish and Christian Interpretations

Berger and Wyschogrod, in the work cited above, were somewhat aware of the shakiness of a Jewish Orthodox position based on purely rationalist argument. They write:

“You might come to the conclusion that we consider religious beliefs to be based purely on rational proofs. But this is not our intention. Religious beliefs are to a large extent based on faith, and this is true of both the Jewish and Christian believer.”<sup>12</sup>

This leads them to a somewhat more cautious approach toward the New Testament proof texts derived from the Tenach. Nonetheless, like other Orthodox Jewish writers, they too ignore that these proof texts similarly apply the whole range of traditional Jewish exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures which does not restrict itself to the “pshat”, the plain primary meaning of the text, but goes beyond it in some very creative (some might be tempted to say bizarre) ways of building on the biblical text.

The point is not that Rabbinic and New Testament exegesis of Biblical texts are identical or at least similar, but that the rabbinic sages and the New Testament writers, often sharing the same intellectual and cultural milieu, recognized the legitimacy of handling Scriptures in diverse ways. For instance, Paul's use of the commandment from the Torah concerning threshing oxen to teach support for ministers of the Gospel<sup>13</sup> may seem fanciful to some in the light of the primary pragmatic-humanitarian meaning of the text, but if we consider the rabbinical use of a text against joining a mob ("to decline after many")<sup>14</sup> as support for the principle of majority rule in rabbinic teaching, we may wonder who is being most imaginative.

### Harmonizing Scripture

We may well ask whether any living language or literature can remain fixed and static, untouched by currents of renewal, reinterpretation and elaboration. Berger and Wyschogrod insist that texts cited should be in harmony with the totality of Scripture, which "would make it fit smoothly into the entire pattern of Biblical religion," and not make it say "something altogether unexpected and peculiar in the context of the Bible as a whole."<sup>14</sup> This is something which all believers could agree with, except for the limitations which the refutationists place on the total context of Scripture. If, as the Talmud states — and certainly the writers of the New Testament believed, "all the prophets prophesied only for the days of the Messiah"<sup>15</sup>, then the search for Messianic meaning in Scripture becomes a basic pattern of "Biblical religion". Obviously at times the result will seem "altogether unexpected and peculiar" to someone who rejects this basic premise, but no more so than the biblical teaching about circumcision applied to the heart<sup>16</sup> will seem "unexpected" and "peculiar" to someone who insists on restricting the use of the term "circumcision" to the physical rite.

### The Messianic Thread

The pursuit of a Messianic thread throughout Scriptures neither began nor, we might stress, ended with the New Testament era. Much able work has been done in modern times in gathering Messianic interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures from traditional Jewish sources. The Finnish Hebrew scholar Risto Santala has made an impressive collection of rabbinic sayings which throw light on Messianic interpretations of the Hebrew Bible and which are in many ways

parallel to the New Testament handling of the same texts.<sup>17</sup> Jewish non-Christian scholars have also been combing the vast areas of Jewish literature in their quest for an understanding of the Jewish context of the New Testament writings.

Apparently Medieval Christian scholars were aware of these Jewish sources. During the famous debate between Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman and Pablo Christian in 1263, references were made to them: Nahmanides challenged his adversaries,

“If it would be true that the wise men of the Talmud believed in Jesus and in the truth of his religion, how then did they themselves remain faithful to the religion and practices of the Jews?”<sup>18</sup>

A clever response, if — as the great Medieval rabbi charged his adversaries, — “you are trying to impute from their words,” that the Sages of Israel were Christian believers.

The attempt to press traditional rabbinic texts into a proof pattern for Christian faith has seemed outrageous to some Jews. Actually, the argument is NOT that the Sages of Israel believed in the Messiahship of Jesus, nor would necessarily have believed in him had they heard the Gospel. Rather, it rests on the fact that the concept of Messiah as found in the New Testament has remarkable and consistent parallels in normative non-Christian Jewish literature. The New Testament should therefore be approached on that basis, and not on the basis of rationalist assumptions and prejudices which could with the same ease “demolish” many of the Sages of Israel in their handling of the Hebrew Bible.

#### The Messiah: Divine or Human?

Another example of a modern usage of Jewish sources in New Testament exegesis occurs in the trinitarian work of the 19th century Hebrew Christian Pauli. In his classic, The Great Mystery: How Can Three Be One?,<sup>19</sup> he relies entirely on Jewish rabbinic sources in the targumim, the Zohar, and rabbinic commentators, underscoring what later scholars (without evangelistic intent) like Professor Albright<sup>20</sup> and Professor Werblowsky of the Hebrew University<sup>21</sup>, for example, had noted from traditional Jewish sources: namely, that within Judaism there has also been a vision of a superhuman, even divine Logos-memra, sometimes related to the Messiah.

Far more incredible is the kind of “superman” Messiah that Arye

Kaplan describes in “The Real Messiah”,<sup>22</sup> one who is a totally human personality,

“a religious Jew, a Tzadik ... a most respected leader in all Jewish circles ... (yet) the world will begin to recognize his profound wisdom and come to seek his advice ... He will teach all mankind to live in peace and follow God’s teachings ... (and) the entire world recognizes what Judaism really is, and the Torah is acknowledged as God’s true teaching to the world ...”

We are not told precisely how this remarkable human Messiah will go about bringing “all Jewish circles” in their astonishing modern diversity to acknowledge his Messiahship, nor even how this purely human figure will persuade the torn, fragmented world of history to seek his advice and to recognize Torah Judaism as divine truth. Either he has magical powers of persuasion and is more than mere man or there is a magical transformation of human nature and human history, which of course brings the process into the realm of supernatural Messianism.

Kaplan’s scenario of a modern Messiah is of course no more binding on Orthodox Jews than the Zohar’s divine Metatron who is part of a triune Deity. In that tradition, nothing less than the “Shema”, allegedly the core of absolute monotheism, is ingeniously applied by the Kabbalists (with the aid of a proof text from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15:4) to prove how three in the Godhead can be one!<sup>23</sup>

The refutationist can, of course, choose to ignore those trends in Judaism which parallel and reinforce the New Testament Messianic concept of a divine Messiah. They may concentrate instead on contrary trends in Judaism<sup>24</sup> or, ironically, rely on the widespread skepticism and disillusionment with the supernatural among many Jews, and therefore insist that the Messiah is not able to transform Israel and the world immediately nor soon after his coming.

#### Rejection of “Superman” Messiah

Certainly, the traditional concept of a Messianic “superman”. whether human or divine, who would at his coming transform all of Jewish and Gentile life has been rejected by many Jews. Some Jews have instead opted for belief in a Messianic Age<sup>25</sup>, a gradual utopia brought about by common human effort. Modern Zionism in large measure was a revolt against Messianic expectation and speculations

about his coming. In one sense, it was a logical outcome of a humanistic Messianism, for when no purely human personality made a successful claim to Messiahship (notwithstanding several flawed pretenders), then a consistently humanist ideology supplanted the longed-for Messianic redemption.

### The Sacrificed Messiah

In some ways parallel to secularist skepticism, Jewish Orthodoxy is likely to interpret the doctrine of a sacrificed Messiah at his first coming and his second triumphant advent as a teaching of desperation to account for Jesus' alleged failure to meet Jewish national expectations of a true Messiah. Although there is the rabbinic concept of Messiah ben Joseph who is slain for the people's sins while Messiah ben David is the triumphant Messiah, these tend to be viewed as making their appearance within the same generation. Berger and Wyschogrod, who profess a firm belief in the coming of the Messiah, make a comparison between Jesus and the 17th century false Messiah Shabbetai Zvi:

“In both cases a Messiah ended his career in a way that made continued belief in him impossible; in both cases, the impossible was made possible by redefining the role of the Messiah so that it would fit this man's career.”<sup>26</sup>

The fact that Shabbetai Zvi and all the other Messianic pretenders in Jewish history have become nothing more than scholarly footnotes in history while Jesus remains a potent force and challenge in the life of Israel and the world is completely ignored. We might well paraphrase the rhetorical question of a modern Christian, “Who burns for or against Julius Caesar today? But men do burn for or against Jesus Christ.” Indeed, who burns for or against the “Messiah” Bar Kochba, Shabbetai Zvi or Jacob Frank today in or out of the Jewish world?

### Gamaliel's Challenge

We are reminded of the challenge thrown out by Rabbi Gamaliel in that ancient confrontation between Church and Establishment Judaism within a totally Jewish context:

“So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”<sup>27</sup>

The very vigour of Jewish refutations of the Gospel 19 centuries after its original proclamation in the Land of Israel is as much an evidence that Gamaliel's test has been passed as is the zeal of modern Jewish evangelism and a resurgent Judaeo-Christianity. No less evidence is furnished by the worldwide mission of the Church, its survival in the face of inner corruption, schism, and external attacks, and its cavalcade of benefactors and martyrs.

Some Jewish refutation literature concedes a positive aspect to Christian history in such areas as civilization and culture recognizing the Church's role in the transmission to the nations of the Hebrew Scriptures and some of the basic concepts of Judaism. However, there remains a tendency for the refutationist to dwell on the darker side of Church history which is quite often made synonymous with Gentile history, even in its secular aspect.

The strangely naive concept of 'Messianic redemption (as reflected for example, in the Kaplan scenario cited earlier) rules out for Jewish Orthodoxy any concept of a Messianic outworking within history on a canvas of centuries or millennia. Thus the astounding "problem", as Professor Joseph Klausner defined it in his introductory chapter to "Jesus the Nazarene",<sup>28</sup> is the fact that a faith born among Jews, relying upon a Hebrew Scriptures and a Hebrew Messiah, became the faith of millions of Gentiles among a multitude of nations . in our era, of only a minority of the Jews, seems in refutation literature to be irrelevant to Messianic categories.

#### Jewish and Christian responsibility

Christian triumphalism has, with its frequent denial of Jewish significance in the Messianic fulfillment, greatly reduced the Impact of such an evidence when refuting Jewish attacks on the Gospel. The fact remains that historic churches have time and again been instruments for weakening and threatening Jewish national and spiritual survival.

Christian evangelism among Jews has by and large failed to convince Jews — if and when it has tried to do so — that such evangelism is not aimed at the destruction of Jews as a people. There remain significant Christian theological trends supporting the absurd teaching that the Jewish Messiah in effect came to do away with the Jewish people and faith! This, of course, impinges on the issue of Jewish national survival, and the appalling indifference of large sections of believing Christendom towards that issue.

Notwithstanding real Christian culpability from both an historical and biblical perspective on the plane of world and Jewish history, refutation literature seems to be strangely lacking in even partial recognition of responsibility for crises and failures in both Orthodox Judaism and in the world. The prophetic spirit of national self-criticism is almost totally lacking. Yet to argue, as Orthodox refutationists almost always do, that Judaism is not exclusive in its view of salvation (“any Gentile can have a portion in the world to come,” a standard statement based on a talmudic dictum about the righteous Gentiles<sup>29</sup>) is rather meaningless when nothing is done to convey this perception of Judaism to the Gentiles.

It is argued that Gentiles only need to fulfill the Laws of Noah, which include a prohibition of idol-worship, murder, and fornication. How Gentile idolators, marauders, cannibals and others ignorant of these commandments are to learn of this option available in the world to come is not indicated, but it is certainly not by Jewish mission or an information campaign to Gentiles.

It seems that the boast of traditional Judaism (and most other Jews) that Judaism seeks no converts nor has a belief in any exclusive salvation is an escape from the implications of a universal faith. True, historical factors have often shaped this view, and major historical churches, along with Islam and modern Marxism, have done their part to sap any missionary zeal that once may have existed in Judaism. However, it is still a weak argument to claim belief in a universal God who has given an eternal truth to one people alone, yet in turn be content to keep that lifegiving truth to oneself.

### Jewish Truth and Gentile Truth?

Jewish particularity is so strongly upheld in some refutation literature that the Jewish nature begins to take shape as a kind of entity separate from the total human species. Thus, for Berger and Wyschogrod the Gentile Christian who believes in the triune nature of the Deity is NOT guilty of idolatry, but the Jewish Christian is guilty of the gravest sin.<sup>30</sup> Other writers are less generous and are convinced that Christian trinitarianism is a form of idolatry or polytheism.

In some of the literature there is a clear insinuation that an intelligent and sensitive Jewish person given the same faith data confronting an intelligent and sensitive Gentile, cannot or may not come to the same conclusions about faith. If faith were really determined by genes or ethnic ties, this would be conceivable; otherwise, it is nonsense to suggest that one person may reasonably

believe in a faith which for another human being is absurd, false and even harmful. The attitude of an inherent superiority of Jews and Judaism is evident in a particularly hysterical work by an American Jewish “expert” on missions. In the work of Samuel Levine “You take Jesus, I’ll take God,”<sup>31</sup> the explicit assumptions that missionaries and Hebrew Christians are incredibly stupid is so pervasive that one can only surmise that the book was written in order to provide an emotional catharsis for the writer and other Jews similarly distressed by the “missionary menace”.

Here, too, there is the standard disclaimer that nothing is written to criticize or attack the faith of the pious Christian — that is, non-Jew. Then follow the crude attacks on every basis for Christian faith, the character of Jesus, the apostles, and the writers of the New Testament, with frequent distortions of the plain meaning of the Biblical text.

After professing to admire Christian missionaries among pagans, a work which he commends as “highly meritorious,”<sup>32</sup> Levine can still write that “to be a Christian you must forfeit your brains” and “Christianity is the panacea for the sorry soul, but it is not truth;”<sup>33</sup> but of course this untruth, as found in Paul’s writings, “was good enough for the ignorant, unsophisticated pagans in his neighborhood.”<sup>34</sup> Thus we face a restatement, albeit in a cruder way, of a persistent refutationist belief that spiritual and theological truth can be at one and the same time totally false and unacceptable when considered by any Jew, even a non-committed Jew, but true and acceptable for a Gentile. In view of contemporary Jewish abhorrence of all missionary work (including Gentile conversion to Judaism), theological and spiritual truths become almost a matter of genetics.

Surprisingly, however, Levine appends a selection from a correspondence between himself and a Hebrew Christian in which he relates to his adversary in his correspondence as a reasonable person in complete contradiction to the spirit of the book. This suggests that personal confrontation between a respectful Hebrew Christian can sometimes balance the tendency of the Orthodox Jewish refutationist to see his adversary as someone less than human, a complete stereotype.

### Moratorium Proposal

During the furor over the so-called “mission law” passed by the Israeli Knesset in December 1977, a liberal and distinguished scholar and teacher, Professor Shlomo Avneri of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, addressed an interfaith meeting in the Holy City. He appealed to Evangelicals to voluntarily declare a moratorium

on evangelism to Jews, at least until to the end of the century, in the light of the post-Holocaust trauma.

Obviously, those who believe that the Great Commission of the Gospel applies to all people and to all times cannot accept such a proposal. Objections to the Gospel need to be dealt with in the light of the contemporary situation of Judaism and the Jewish people. An emphasis on the Jewishness of New Testament faith needs to be developed, not as a superficial missionary tactic, but in the context of a total commitment to Jewish national survival and existence as a people. Let the Jewish evangelists and missionaries, whether engaging in a campaign, personal witness or refuting Jewish opponents of the Gospel, test themselves again in the light of the apostle's heart cry:

“I speak the truth in Messiah, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema and cut from Messiah for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites. ...<sup>35</sup>

Recognizing our kinship with those who ever remain Israelites, whether followers of Jesus or not, we must seek and find ways of responding to the challenge of our faith which remains Israelite truth, no matter how harshly and unfairly it is interpreted by our adversaries. For like the apostle Paul, we believe in the hope of Israel, which is as irrevocable as the gifts and call of God.<sup>36</sup>

#### NOTES:

- 1) Haim Cohen, “The trial and death of Jesus”, Weidenfeld Nicolson 1967, p.9.
- 2) Birkat haMinim: A malediction in the Amida (the 18 Benedictions Shmona-Esray) originally directed against “the heretics and Nazarenes,” but later amended to read “the slanders”, (“hamal shinim”) probably under Christian pressure.
- 3) See Matthew 23:15: “...for you compass land and seek to make one proselyte”.
- 4) Arye Kaplan, “The Real Messiah: A Traditional Jewish View of Christianity”, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, p. 7-9.
- 5) David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod, “Jews and Jewish Christianity” Ktav Publ. 1978, p. 67.69.
- 6) Michael Wyschogrod, “The Law: Jews and Gentiles” (From “Speaking of God today: Jews and Lutherans,” Fortress Press. Phila. 1974, p. 3-14).
- 7) Wyschogrod, “Judaism and Evangelical Christianity”, Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation Ed: Tanenbaum, Wilson and Rudin, pp. 34-52, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids. Michigan 1978.
- 8) Gerald Sigal, “The Jew and the Christian Missionary, a Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity”, Ktav, New York. 1981, pp. 205-206.
- 9) Among the rabbis it was customary to pick a phrase here, a word there, and apply it by way of illustration, or show how it fulfilled the Scriptures. A Mishna teacher of the school of Rabbi Ishmael quotes Lev. 14:39, 14:44 (‘and the priest shall come again, and the priest shall come in’) as though one phrase followed the other, although actually separated by four verses. (Makkot 13b) Rabbi Joshua HaLevi says in Halikot Olam; 2:2: “The way or Gemara is to shorten the Scriptures, and it does not cite them as they are.”: (adapted from Introduction of Henry Einspruch to his modern-language translation of the Gospel of Matthew. published by Lederer Foundation. Balt. Md.. 1939, 1964 (4th ed.) An even more extreme attitude to biblical exegesis is found in the rabbinic dictum: “Saress haMikra v’darshehu” (Twist the Scripture and exegete it) Baba Bathra 119.
- 10) For example, Matthew’s conflation of texts from Jeremiah and Zechariah (27:9-10) or the conflation in Acts of the tombs of Joseph and the Patriarchs (7:16).

- 11) A well-known example is “shamor v’ zachor”, on the Sabbath command in Exodus 20:8 and Deut. 5:12 which the rabbis explain as being uttered at one and the same time by God but heard separately by human ears.
- 12) Berger & Wyschogrod, “Jews and Jewish Christianity”. Ktav, P. 15.
- 13) Deuteronomy 25:4; I Corinthians 9:9; I Timothy 5:18.
- 14) Exodus 23:2 “*You shall not follow a multitude to do evil...turning aside after a multitude...*” (aharei rabim I hatot) which in a rabbinic pilul was cited as a basis for accepting a majority ruling (Baba Metzia 59B).
- 15) Sanhedrin 99a.
- 16) See Deuteronomy 30:6; 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:26; (Cp Romans 2:28-29).
- 17) Santala. Risto, HaMeshiah Ba’Tanakh L’Or Sifrei Ha.zal, The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of the Writings of the Sages of Israel, Yanetz, P0B 151 Jerusalem.
- 18) Quoted from “The Real Messiah” Ed. Kaplan, see footnote No, 4.
- 19) Tzvi Nassi (Pauli), The Great Mystery: or How Can Three be One?, Yanetz, Jerusalem.
- 20) Albright, Wm.F. From the Stone Age to Christianity, Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1957, pp. 371-3.
- 21) Heard at a Vigil (Leyl Shmurim) on Judaism & Christianity at the Hebrew University.
- 22) Kaplan Ibid.
- 23) They applied the root “shema” (normally meaning hear”) in a secondary usage, meaning to gather, rally, or unite, as in I Samuel 15:4, and the threefold mention of Deity (YHWH, ELOHIM, YHWH) in the Shema, followed by ECHAD (ONE), as a proclamation to Israel concerning the oneness of the “three exalted (or supreme) archetypes (or sources)” “avot elyonim.” Cited from Zohar, vol. III, p. 231, and How Can Three Be One?, p. 21.
- 24) For example, Maimonides (Rambam) who posited a thoroughly human Messiah.
- 25) The common argument of both Orthodox, Secular and Liberal Jews is their appeal to an unredeemed world, physically and socially. Cp. 2 Peter 3:4 “...all things have continued as they were...”
- 26) Berger and Wyschogrod, p. 23.
- 27) Acts 5:38-39.
- 28) Joseph Klausner, Yeshu Hanotzri, “The Problem”, Massada Publishers, Sixth Ed. 1969, p. 17.
- 29) “Behold there are righteous among the Gentiles who have a portion in the world to come.” R. Joshua in Tosef. Sanhedrin 13:2).
- 30) Berger and Wyschogrod, “The accepted Jewish view is that belief in ‘shittut’ (partnership)... the term that came to be used for the trinitarian concept of God ... does not constitute idolatry for Gentiles but does for Jews.” p. 33. This “accepted” view is nevertheless disputed in other refutation literature.
- 31) Samuel Levine, You take Jesus, I’ll take God: How to Refute Missionaries, Hamoroh Press, Los-Angeles, 1980.
- 32) Ibid, p. 12.
- 33) Ibid. p. 64-65.
- 34) Ibid. p. 89.
- 35) Romans 9:1-3.
- 36) Romans 2:29; Acts 28:19-20.

# RESPONSE

## THE GOSPEL AND JEWISH REFUTATIONS

by Rev. Ronald H. Lewis

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It is difficult to respond to an article which is so precise and with which there can be little argument. At a Jewish-Christian Consultation held by the United Reformed Church in the U.K., an orthodox Rabbi was heard to remark that Church and Synagogue are sisters of a common mother, united often by their mutual antipathy. The same Rabbi recently defended the right of a Messianic Jew who worked for a Mission to remain in the local Council of Christians and Jews on the grounds that he, the Rabbi, would also have to be excluded, because he witnessed to the Jewish faith. He recognized mission.

Benhayim recognizes the often forgotten fact that Judaism was missionary, and that this is covered up by much rabbinical teaching on Noachic lines. Proselytes were sought. Today, there is never an outcry from the Jewish press when a Christian accepts Judaism, nor any question about motives or inducements. How much, too, it needs to be emphasized that one can be a secular Jew, even deny a belief in God, and yet still be considered a Jew; yet the completed Jew, the Hebrew Christian or Messianic Jew is considered to have become a Gentile. There are exceptions, and when it suits the Jewish press, they will acknowledge some of our number as Jews if they seem to bring honour to Jewry. Hebrew Christians are among the numbers of dead included in the Holocaust, as Benhayim so poignantly reminds us. I was really impressed with the point made, that some writers pour scorn upon New Covenant miracles, yet hold a literalist view of the Hebrew Bible. Beware, however, for this might lead one to be more critical in New Covenant scholarship — and indeed, a more scholarly approach often reveals deeper meaning and helps the faith to be strengthened. Christians' defenses have often lacked scholarly consistency. The stress on looking at the totality of Scripture is to be welcomed, and would tie in with those who now see the importance of seeing Scripture not only in its setting but also in its place in the Canon.

Benhayim is so right to warn against those Christian trends which encourage the refutation writers by separating Jesus from the Jews and vice versa.

There are some points with which I would want to take issue. Certainly not all Christians would agree that prophecy is prophesied only for the days of the Messiah. This is to ignore that aspect of prophecy which is forthtelling, i.e. is a commentary upon current events in the light of God's Word. This must be said, despite some New Testament examples of the predictive usage, and also some rabbinic examples of similar argument.

I feel we are on more definite ground when Benhayim demands that the New Testament be approached not on the prejudices of the Jewish sages, but on the parallels with non-Christian Jewish writings.

I must confess to uneasiness when arguments wax ontologically upon the Trinity,

because I do not believe it was meant to be used ontologically and the result has often been a Christianity which gave the impression and often actually was tritheistic rather than Trinitarian. This plays right into the hands of the refutationists. Jewish mysticism became as gnostic as some of the worst of the mystery religions, and the parallels there are not helpful. St. John's Gospel deserves to be understood in its Jewishness, with the Logos being God's actively spoken word becoming flesh rather than used as a Greek metaphysical principle, even though it coincided closely in time with such thought when put into Greek. It is too easy to be led astray by Jewish mysticism and let the better arguments go by the board, to let the real claims of the Messiah be misrepresented, as Benhayim obviously realizes.

A Jewish Professor, an expert on Jewish mysticism, speaking in Israel to a conference of believers, said that it was shameful to him that Shabbatai Zvi, the false Messiah, received such support, while the better claims of Jesus were ignored.

# STATEMENT

## THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DOGMA OF NICAEA – GREEK OR JEWISH?

by Dr. Oscar Skarsaune

*Dr. Skarsaune is a lecturer in Patristic Studies and Church History at the Free Faculty of Theology in Oslo. His doctoral dissertation deals with Justin's dialogue with Trypho: "The Proof from Prophecy - A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition."*

### 1. The Call for de-Hellenization

One of the outcomes of Jewish Christian encounters and dialogue in modern times has been a greater awareness of the Jewish roots of Christianity. It has become evident that the New Testament, some of the other early Christian writings and early Christian liturgies, are all deeply embedded in their Jewish mother soil. The conviction has often been expressed that the way to a more original and authentic expression of the Christian message is to uncover these Jewish foundations.

The negative counterpart of this project is sometimes coined in the slogan "de-Hellenization of Christianity". Convictions underlying this concept can perhaps be summarized as follows: During the period of the Old Church, the Christian message was dressed in a Hellenistic garb. Dogmas concerning God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are permeated with Greek concepts and Hellenistic metaphysics. This process of Hellenization contributed to a mutual estrangement between Judaism and Christianity. The Church's present task should be to retrace its steps and disentangle the Jewish substratum from the Hellenistic superstructure. Of special relevance is the Christological dogma. One has to ask whether Christ's uniqueness is adequately expressed in Greek conceptuality, such as the Nicene creed. Perhaps a more original Jewish formulation of Christology is needed - especially in the Christian encounter with Judaism.

Such a notion has not only been fostered by Jewish Christian encounter —it also coincides with a general anti-metaphysical trend in much of modern philosophy and theology. Especially among Protestants there has been a long-felt uneasiness over classical formulations of Christological and Trinitarian dogmas. Perhaps it

is fair to say that dialogue with Judaism has reinforced this uneasiness. No wonder, then, that the call for de-Hellenization has had numerous and vigorous proponents.

It is not my purpose in the present article to deny the validity of such an approach, no doubt based on an intuition that should be taken seriously. At the same time, such a project is open to oversimplification: I wish here merely to point out some factors which should not be overlooked in the context of an effort at de-Hellenization.

First, I should like to call attention to the parallel phenomenon of Hellenization within Judaism. Often, when Christian scholars complain of early Christians who used Greek concepts and ideas to express their theology, it is overlooked that these concepts had already been used for centuries by Jews and been given Biblical and Jewish connotations. The present article will not, however, dwell on these problems in general. We shall look at a particular case. The Christological dogma.

## 2. The Creed of Nicaea — non-Biblical Concepts

“We...believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only begotten—that is, from the substance of the Father (ek tes ousias tou patros) — God from God, light from light, true God from True God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father (homoousion to patri), through Whom all things came into being ...”

These are the essential Christological, anti-Arian, clauses of the creed adopted at Nicaea. As was pointed out at a very early stage by vigorous opponents of this creed, such statements concerning Christ contain two non-Scriptural expressions: “From the substance of the Father” and “of one substance with the Father” (the famous homoousion). The fact that these words are not used in Scripture was considered an effective argument against the creed as a whole. The efficacy of this argument is not only shown in the frequent use made of it by Arians and semi-Arians, but also in the amount of labor and energy spent in its refutation by the Niceneans, first and foremost by Athanasius bishop of Alexandria and the foremost defender of the Nicene creed. It seems that there was some uneasiness in relation to these expressions among the Niceneans themselves.

Such facts teach an interesting lesson concerning the Early Church:

It was considered a novel, debatable procedure to formulate belief in Christ in non-biblical terms. The Church was used to the language of Scripture and regarded terminological innovations with great reserve — even as late as in the fourth century.

One learns more about the meaning of the creed by reading Athanasius' report of the proceedings at the council. Originally, says Athanasius, the bishops wanted to draw up a statement of faith which limited itself to Scriptural language. They proposed to say that Christ was “from God”, that He was “the true Power and Image of the Father” etc. (De decr. 19). Their object was to cut off all feasibility of Arius' insistence that the Son was a creature. But the Arians took the sting out of these formulas by agreeing to them! They found that these expressions could all be referred to created beings. In order to make it quite clear how these Scriptural phrases should be understood, the bishops then added “from the substance of the Father” and “homoousion”. These formulas should thus be taken as interpretative expressions, elucidating the meaning of Scriptural formulas.

What was at stake becomes clear when we take a closer look at some of the arguments used in the debate. One common premise is the identification of Christ with the Divine Wisdom, spoken of in the Old Testament and in several Jewish writings from the intertestamental period. (In Rabbinic writings this Divine Wisdom is identified with the Torah — an important concept.) Let us briefly recapitulate some of this material and its early Christian versions.

### 3. The Jewish Foundation of the Nicene Creed

In Sirach 24 the Torah is identified with God's Wisdom, thereby taking a cosmic significance. This is carried further by the Rabbis who identified the Torah with Wisdom in Prov. 8: 22ff. They made the further equation on Wisdom with Reshit in Prov. 8:22 and in Genesis 1:1. Thus, the Palestinian Targum reads: “By Wisdom God created heaven and earth”. To the Rabbis this meant that by the Torah God created heaven and earth. Hence the saying of Rabbi Akiba:

Beloved are Israel, for to them was given the precious instrument (that is, the Torah); still greater was the love, in that it was made known to them that to them was given the precious instrument by which the world was created.” (Ab. 3:15).

Equally famous is the simile in Gen.Rab. 1:1,

“As a rule, when a human king builds a palace, he does not build it by himself but calls in an architect. The architect does not plan the building in his mind but makes use of rolls and tablets to know how to make the rooms and wickets. Even so the Holy one, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and created the world. The Torah declares ‘With Reshit God created’ (Gen 1:1) and Reshit is none other than the Torah, as it is said. ‘The Lord made me Reshit of His way’ (Prov. 8:22).

This concept was carried further by the Jewish mystics in the Sefer Yetzirah. Here the 22 letters of the alphabet and the 10 Sefiroth (emanating from God), represent the ideal matter and forms out of which the world was created.

“Stripped of all its symbolism and mystical formulations, the underlying philosophy of the Sefer Yetzirah is the celebrated Theory of Ideas.”<sup>1</sup>

To some extent the same may be said of the Rabbinic concept, as was recognized by Maimonides. Commenting on the notion that God “looked” (or contemplated) into the Torah he says, “Plato uses this very expression when in saying that God contemplates the world of Ideas and thus produces existing beings”. (Guide to the Perplexed II:6). The Jewishness of this Rabbinic concept issues out of an identification of “the world of ideas with the Torah of Moses. But, structurally, the Rabbis come very close to Plato. The Talmud teaches that, prior to its birth, the pre-existent human soul knows the entire Torah and forgets it at the moment of birth I (T. B. Nidda 30b).

This Hellenization of the concept of Torah within mainstream Judaism runs somewhat parallel to a similar development of the Wisdom concept in Alexandrian Judaism, although there the development was more rapid and reached its peak as early as Philo. In the Wisdom of Solomon, (SAP.SAL), God’s Wisdom is identified with His Spirit. This is more than a mere personification of a concept. In an important passage (7:22ff) there is a description of how Wisdom emanates from God’s various attributes. Wisdom is seen to be identical with the Logos.

Such a view is carried further by Philo. For him, Wisdom and Logos are interchangeable concepts. Logos is the sum total of the world of Ideas. In reply to a question as to where the world of ideas is located, Philo answers in terms strongly reminiscent of the rabbinic

simile in Gen.Rab. when he says that God — like an architect building a city —

“conceived beforehand the models of its (the worlds) parts and out of these He constituted and brought to completion a world discernible only to the mind. Then, with that for a pattern, (he made) the world which our senses can perceive” (De opif. mundi 17-20).

One can immediately perceive that the Philonic world of ideas (Logos) comes very close to the rabbinic concept of Torah. Philo is even more Platonic, because, for him, the world of ideas is not to be identified with the Torah<sup>2</sup> a view in which he is closer to later trends evident in the sefiroth speculations of Cabbalism.

New Testament Scholars have become increasingly aware of the importance of these Jewish concepts to the formation of New Testament Christology. Important passages such as John 1:1-18 echo both Wisdom and Torah motives. Heb. 1:3 echoes Sap.Sal. 7:26. The importance of Wisdom texts only increases in the Church Fathers. The "Logos" Christology of the early Fathers could as well be branded "Wisdom Christology". It is Jewish and Hellenistic at the same time because the main categories were borrowed from a Judaism already deeply influenced by Hellenism.

It is this Wisdom Christology which is reflected in the first formulas proposed by the bishops at the council of Nicaea: Christ is “the true power and image of the Father” — similar terms recur in the creed itself: “light from light”, recalling Sap.Sal 7:26 where Wisdom is a radiance of the true Light (God), first echoed in Heb. 1:3 and often repeated since. “Through Whom all came into being” recalls the mediation of Wisdom at the creation, a favorite theme of New Testament Christology.

#### 4. Nicaea — An Answer to the Hellenist Arius

The issue that divided parties in Nicaea was the status of Wisdom. Should Wisdom be conceived as an integral part of the Divine essence - so held the Niceneans - or should it be construed as a created power, at least an outside entity having been brought forth in a certain moment prior to creation - as held by their opponents, Arius and his friends

It is instructive to observe how two of the main antagonists, Eusebius and Athanasius, handled the long-established simile of light and its radiance (Sap.Sal. 7:26). Eusebius, bishop of

Caesarea, slightly inclined to support Arius, voiced his reservation against a possible implication of this simile. He says, while light is never without its radiance, and while the radiance is a necessary outflow of light, not so with the Son in relation to the Father. The Son did not come into being before the Father made him by an act of His will. He is not a necessary effluence of the Father's essence. (Demonst. Ev. 4:3).

Thus, while the radiance imagery is inconvenient to Eusebius, it serves as a main argument for Athanasius. Exactly as light is never without its radiance, so the Father is never without his own "radiance", His Wisdom, His Son. Athanasius was not the first to use this argument. Origen and Dionysios of Rome had used it to the same effect. Dionysios argued that if God's Son should have come into existence at a certain moment then God was without Wisdom and Reason (Logos) up until that time. Athanasius insisted that the expressions "from the substance of the Father" and "homoousion" are meant to be no more than conceptualizations of the radiance imagery — an imagery which is clearly Scriptural (Sap .Sal., Heb. 1:3).

Hence, the premise from which both sides argued assumed an identification of Christ with God's Wisdom. The point the Nicaeans sought to make was that God's Wisdom was an eternal, uncreated effluence of His very essence. God's Wisdom was not a created being.

It is useful to compare this position with the ideas of Arius himself because Arius was a more consequent thinker than most of his friends. Arius realized the impossibility of making God's Wisdom a created power. Beginning from a position altogether Platonic, he maintained that divine attributes cannot be separated from the divine essence. The divine essence is an absolute unity and, in the final analysis, all divine attributes — wisdom included — coalesce into and are identical with the divine essence. Consequently Arius cannot identify Christ with God's wisdom. He explodes the foundations of the old Wisdom Christology maintaining that Christ can be called Wisdom only in a secondary sense insofar as he participates in the divine attributes (but not in a perfect manner).

Philosophically speaking, Arius was no doubt the most consistent Hellenizer in his theology. At the same time, his position probably would coincide with the Jewish answer to Nicaea. There is an interesting parallel from a much later date.

## 5. Medieval Jewish Parallels to the Nicaean Controversy

Following the famous disputation of 1263 in Barcelona between Paul the Christian and Nachmanides, king James and his attendants visited a synagogue. Raymon of Pennaforte delivered to the Jews present a sermon on the Holy Trinity. Among the Jews who heard him was Nachmanides, who answered Pennaforte in these words:

“Wisdom in the Creator is not an unessential quality. God and His wisdom are one. God and His will are one. God and His power are one and if this be so, wisdom and will and power are one whole”.<sup>3</sup>

There is another interesting parallel to Nicaea during the Middle Ages, in which Nachmanides also took part. As we have remarked, in Rabbinic literature God’s presence is expressed by the term Shekinah. The Shekinah is not a Divine hypostasis, like Wisdom, but denotes God Himself in His presence. However, in a few — probably late — Rabbinic texts there is a dialogue between God and His Shekinah. This paved the way for the later, medieval concept, in which one must speak in terms of a hypostasis. This led to an interesting discussion concerning the nature of this hypostasis.

”... R. Saadia Gaon, Maimonides, and even R. Judah ha-Levi held the view that the Shekinah, which they identified with Divine Glory, ‘is a form superior to the angels, mighty in its creation, radiant with majesty and light’ and is called ‘the Glory of the Lord’... the Sages refer to it as ‘Shekinah’” (Saadia, Beliefs and Opinions, II);

This is the creation of God — the first of His works having preceded the formation of matter. In the language of Maimonides, this is “the created light which God caused to dwell in a given place”. Such a view is apparently less dangerous than that of an hypostasis of an uncreated being which implies a complete contradiction of the principle excluding all corporeality from the concept of God.

The view of Maimonides was already rejected by Nachmanides. He raised a serious objection:

“If one should say that Shekinah is a created glory with regard to the verse (and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle) and others, how can we apply the terms ‘Blessed be He’ and ‘the Blessed’ to such a created being? Moreover, one who prays to a created glory is, as it were, an idolater! However, many statements by our Sages point to the fact that the name Shekinah stands for God, may be He blessed”.<sup>4</sup>

The parallel with the Arian controversy is striking. Maimonides’ and Saadiah’s descriptions of the Shekinah run quite parallel to Arius’ description of the Logos, while Nachmanides can be said to provide one aspect of the “Nicæan” answer: over against Arius, the Fathers pointed to the fact that prayers were directed in Scripture to Christ.

To a very great extent. Jewish polemics against the Church’s Trinitarian dogma during the Middle Ages ran along the lines indicated by Nachmanides in the first quotation given above. The main argument was that any thought of hypostatized divine attributes would destroy the absolute unity of God, because it entails corporeality. In its philosophic formulation, the argument is of Greek origin, but this in no way detracts from its “Jewishness”. With biting irony, the Jewish polemicist Efodi writes to his former friend David Bonet Bohgiorno, now a convert to Christianity (1396):

“Be not like thy (Jewish) Fathers, who held any change in God to be impossible...and by the uttermost energy of their thought removed all corporeality from Him considering Him to be pure Spirit according to philosophic thinking and explained the deeper meaning of Scriptural verses which according to their literal meaning as though meant as a veil to those who cannot see clearly. Do you not act like that! By all means, do not remove corporeality from Him. Rather, believe that He (that is, One of His three Persons) has become flesh when His blood was to be poured out as an atonement for His peoples’ sins”.<sup>5</sup>

In their polemics against the dogmas of Trinity and Incarnation, the Jews were convinced they had philosophy on their side — and “philosophy” here means neoplatonism or neoaristotelianism. They were probably right. They were philosophically superior, just as Arius was superior in the Nicæan controversy. To a mind trained in the best of Hellenistic philosophy, the dogmas of Trinity and Incarnation must at all times have presented themselves as philosophical monstrosities, not easily accommodated within a Greek framework.

## 6. The Real Stumbling Block: The Person of Jesus

It seems to emerge from our observations so far that the christological dogma is essentially non-Greek. True, the concepts were

Greek and the building material for New Testament and Old Church Christology were taken from a Judaism already deeply influenced by Hellenism. To a great extent, this Hellenistic heritage is common to both religions and belongs to their very foundations. But Nicaea was not created by Greek concepts; it had existed previously and went much deeper.

As a testimony, let us adduce a Talmudic passage which contains a discussion with a min, that is a heretic who was a Jew by birth. He was also probably a Christian because his argument recurs in Christian writings from Justin Martyr on.

“A min once said to R. Ishmael b. Jose; ‘It is written ‘Then the Lord caused brimstone and fire to rain from the Lord on Sodom and Gomorrah’ — but ‘from Him’ it should have been written!’ (Gen. 19:24). A certain fuller said, ‘Leave him to me, I will answer him. (He then proceeded) It is written ‘And Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zilla, hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech’, — but he should have said, ‘my wives’! Such is the Scriptural idiom’. ‘Whence do you know that?’ asked he (R. Ishmael). ‘I heard it in a public discourse of R. Meir (AD 150)’ he (the fuller) answered” (T.B. Sanh. 38b).

The passage describes an imaginary debate between R. Meir and Jewish Christians which supposedly took place in Palestine where such arguments were common. This is confirmed by the fact that Justin Martyr, who wrote at the same period, uses the same argument as does the Min to prove a duality of “Lords” in Gen 19:24, one on earth and one in heaven. Justin’s argument shows every trace of inherited tradition from Jewish-Christian origins.<sup>6</sup> The arguments on both sides are entirely Scriptural. No philosophic concepts are brought forth. In their degree of “Hellenization”, both parties would probably be on equal footing. Their sharp division had little to do with Hellenism — it had another root. To put it quite bluntly, the controversy was not a result of an encounter with Hellenism but with the historical person of Jesus.

Prov. 8 speaks in terms of personification of Wisdom, Sap.Sal. 7 of a hypostasis. The Rabbis related the personification of Wisdom from Proverbs to the Torah calling’ it “God’s daughter”. As we have seen, this was important building material for New Testament Christology. But a personified concept is one thing; It is altogether something else to meet God’s Wisdom and Power, not as personified or hypostatized, but as a real, living person. That was what Christians from a very early date — certainly before Paul — thought had happened to them, and this is the starting novelty of the New Testament. A mature, sublime expression of this understanding is to be found in the prologue to St. John’s Gospel. Conceptually,

there is not much new. In 1.Hen. 42 it is said that Wisdom sought an abode among men, but found none; In John it is said that the Logos came to His own but they did not receive him. The Rabbis taught that the world was created by the Torah; In John all is made by the Logos. In Sirach 24:8 God's Wisdom — Torah "tabernacles" in Jacob; In John the Logos "tabernacles" among men. More parallels could be added. Conceptually, there is no great difference and yet the difference is enormous. It is the difference between a personification and a real, living person. This is the stumbling block which no de-Hellenization can remove.

To sum up: The Christological dogma of the Early Church was as offensive to Hellenistic philosophy as it was to Judaism. To see the god of the philosophers incarnated in a crucified man was considered to be, pure and simple, not possible. Perhaps the New Testament writers were right when they sought to acknowledge — not the god of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

#### NOTES:

- 1) I. Epstein, Judaism. A Historical Presentation, Penguin Books, 1968. p. 228.
- 2) E.E. Urbach correctly stresses this difference. The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs, Magnes Press, Vol. I, p. 200.
- 3) The quotation is taken from Nachmanides' own report on the disputation, translated in O. Shaw Rankin, Jewish Religious Polemic (Edinburgh 1956), pp. 179-210, quotation p. 209. The whole passage runs as follows: "...Raymond of Pennaforte rose up and gave a discourse on the subject of the Trinity and asserted that the Trinity was wisdom and will and power. 'And had not also the Master,' he said, 'in a synagogue in Gerona assented to what Fra Paulo had said on this point?' At this I got to my feet and spoke as follows: 'I ask both Jews and Gentiles to give me their attention on this matter.' When Fra Paulo asked me in Gerona if I believed in this Trinity, I replied: What is the Trinity? Do you mean that three material bodies, of the sort that men have, constitute the Godhead?" He said: "No." Then I asked: "Do you mean that the Trinity consists of three subtle substances such as souls or that it is three angels?" He said: "No." Or do you mean," I enquired, "that the Trinity is one substance which is a compound of three substances such as are those bodies which are compounded of the four elements?" He said: "No" "If that is the case" said I "then what is the Trinity?" He answered: "Wisdom and will and power." To which I replied that I acknowledged that the deity was wise and not foolish, and will without possibility (44), and powerful and not weak, but that the expression "Trinity" was entirely misleading. For wisdom in the Creator is not an unessential quality (44) but He and His wisdom are one and He and His will are one and He and his power are one — and, if this be so, the wisdom and the will and the power are one whole. And even if these were unessential qualities of God, the thing which is the Godhead is not three but is one, bearing three unessential qualities."
- 4) Urbach, op.cit. pp. 40f.
- 5) Rendered here from the German translation (selective) in E.J. Rosenthal, 'judisches Antwort', in Kirche und Synagoge, Handbuch zur Geschichte von Christen und Juden, ed. K.H. Rengstorff and S. von Kortzfleisch, Vol.1 (Stuttgart 1968), pp. 347-49. Efofi was perhaps the most significant Jewish polemicist against Christianity in the Middle Ages, due to his profound knowledge of Christian doctrine, especially the New Testament.
- 6) Dialogue with Trypho. 56; 60:5; 127:5; 129:1.

# RESPONSE

## THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DOGMA OF NICAEA — GREEK OR JEWISH?

by Rev. Daniel C. Juster

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The bifurcation of Hebraic thinking and Greek thinking as respectively functional and metaphysical-ontological is a widely held conclusion of modern scholarship (cf. O. Cullman, Christ and Time, also Bishop J.S. Spong, The Hebrew Lord). Yet, in my view, this absolute separation of functional thinking as Hebraic and metaphysical thinking as Greek can not be maintained. Functional thinking at least implies statements about the nature of being or it would lead to relativism in questions concerning the nature of reality. (This distinction has been used to bolster relativism in theology.) The real question is rather one which raises the issue of how a metaphysic that is implied by biblical teaching compares and contrasts with a Greek metaphysic. Because all human beings are created in the image of God, communication and evaluation with regard to metaphysical views is cross-culturally possible.

In raising this question, we need to ask how early church Christological formulations are true to the Scriptures in their cultural-historical context and to the metaphysical implications of Scripture. This is the basic position of Dr. Skarsaune as I interpret him, and I believe that his thesis is correct on most points (cf. also R. Longenecker, The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity).

First of all, we need to note that rabbinic and even intertestamental thinking was influenced by Greek categories. Beyond this, Professor Marvin Gruber of Spertus College of Judaica used to maintain in his classes that Jewish formulations about God, His singularity and His non-corporeality (especially in Maimonides) are fully Aristotelian and not significantly biblical.

Hence, the attempt to undercut the concept of the uni-plurality of God and the divinity of the Messiah as though these are Greek concepts that must give way to the more biblical and Jewish concept of God's singularity is patently false. Dr. Skarsaune shows, and I believe rightly, that Arian attempts were more Greek-philosophical and more contrary to Scriptural implications than were Athanasian formulations.

The question of Christological formulation must first deal with the amazing biblical data, from Theophanies in the Tenach to the logos theology of John 1. It is probable that John's logos theology has a probable origin more in the concept of the memra (Aramaic "word") than in the Stoic concept of logos (cf. MacNamara, Targum and Testament). This does not mean there was no prior Greek influence on Jewish conception nor that the Spirit of God does not use both Jewish and Greek conceptions to reveal truth (since all languages have degrees of conceptual translatability). The very language of the New Testament is a Greek so influenced by Hebraic thought patterns that some have thought that Aramaic originals were behind the Greek gospel texts. Yet, the language of the New Testament is still a variant of Greek.

When all of this is taken into account, it places the whole dialogue on Christology upon a less simplistic and more fruitful foundation. The Nicaean statement in the light of all of this is neither totally Greek and unacceptable nor an accurate metaphysical statement of biblically implied truth. Those dimensions of Nicaea implied by the Bible, in my view, still are “Son of God”, “only begotten from the Father”, “begotten not made (created)” and “light from light”. Other dimensions of the Nicaean formula are biblically defensible, if properly defined, but are unhelpful in a Jewish context because they lend themselves to connotative misunderstanding. “God from God” and “true God from true God” are phrases that too easily lend themselves to misconception. These statements emphasize divinity to such a degree that the humanity of the Son and His submission to the Father are eclipsed (e.g., a danger of docetism). New Testament Christology, at least with regard to the relationship of the incarnate Messiah to the Father, in all biblical language and in all apocalyptic pictures of the Father and the Lamb in heaven, reflect subordinationist overtones. “One substance” language is difficult philosophically even if there are reasons for its use. He is in His divine nature everlastingly one in being with the Father. Perhaps other language such as “one in essence” or “one in His divine being” could be more helpful.

Dr. Skarsaune has shown the value of the Nicaean formula in the light of Scripture and Jewish rabbinic thought. He has given evidence that Greek vs. Hebrew bifurcation can not simply be used in dismissing this creed. However, due to its tendency to misinterpretation, is there not a need to reformulate the same truths safeguarded by Nicaea in order to better communicate to the modern Jewish mind? Let us look to the very Jewish roots that influenced the Nicaean creed and from these roots speak afresh to our day. The basic question addressed to Jew and Gentile from the Messiah is “Whom do you say that I am?” That the New Testament Scriptures reveal Him as the risen Messiah is at the center of Christological controversy. The supernatural risen Messiah transcends the issues of Hebraic and Greek categories because His work was not conceived by the mind of man.

# REPORTS

## U.S. JEWISH BELIEVERS SURVEYED

By Amy Adelstein

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The results of a comprehensive survey of Jewish Christians in the United States have been released by the Jews for Jesus ministry. Moishe Rosen, executive director of the organization comments, “The nature of the anti-evangelical propaganda put forth by institutions such as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee is basically an attack on the credibility of those Jews who believe in Jesus. However, until recently, little evidence existed on the true character of the Jewish Christians.”

Rosen set out in 1972 to gather the facts. A survey was conducted to which there were 1,400 responses. Then in 1978 a more extensive survey was done by the Graduate Theological Union Library in Berkeley, California. In 1982 Jews for Jesus initiated a third survey which served to confirm earlier findings that the Jewish believer population is quite typical of the general U.S. Jewish population. Mitch Glaser, minister-at-large with the organization, designed the new survey for the purpose of determining how to minister to Jews who had come to believe in Jesus. Beverly Jamison, the statistician and computer programmer for the project, received her training in applied mathematics and combinatorics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she also served as a teaching assistant. She has been published in professional journals such as Studies in Applied Mathematics, Advances in Mathematics and The Fibonacci Quarterly.

The survey responses were analyzed in three major profiles: demographic, social and spiritual. The demographic profile includes age, education level and family composition. The social profile includes migration pattern, Jewish holiday celebration, nomenclature and church attendance. The spiritual profile includes initial attraction to the Gospel, factors influencing spiritual decisions, and perceived greatest needs of the Jewish believing community.

The survey was sent to approximately 8,000 Jewish believers in the U.S.; the response rate was 16%. The Statistics in the present survey are based on the first 1,014 responses to the questionnaire. The data was collected between March of 1982 and October of 1982, but the survey is still continuing. Over 100 questionnaires are being sent out each month as new Jewish believers are being referred to Jews for Jesus. The responses for the present study were entered on a computer with the short answer questions coded for ease of tallying. The statistics from the survey were compared where possible with those of the U.S. Jewish population in general.

### Demographic Profile

An overview of the demographic profile shows that the Jewish believing population in the U.S. is typical of the general Jewish population. This indicates that, contrary to allegations from Jewish leaders, adherence to the Gospel is not restricted to any particular sector of Jewish people, such as the

extremely young, the less educated or those with weak family ties.

Seventy-two of the respondents were in the 25-44 age range. However, while the American Jewish believer population is predominantly youthful, only 0.6% are less than 19 years old. Also, the age curve is not a normal distribution. The median age at 34 is flanked on the upper side by a large spread of ages and on the lower side by a heavy concentration at around age 29.

When weighed with the rest of the demographic data, it becomes evident that the majority of Jewish believers in the U.S. are career and family oriented. The American Jewish believer population has considerably more education than their non-Christian Jewish counterparts, according to the survey. Excluding those under 25 years of age, the average number of years of schooling reported was 15. Less than 3% of the respondents had not completed high school compared with 15% of the non-Christian Jews. Whereas 60% of the Jewish believers were either college graduates or had completed a significant amount of college studies, only 32% of the general Jewish population had attained as much education.

The intermarriage rate among Jewish believers in the U.S. is perhaps slightly higher than that among the general Jewish population. Though some Jewish institutions have cited intermarriage rates for the general American Jewish population as ranging from 35% to 50%, no definitive statistical surveys have yet been published. Of the 64% of the Jewish believers surveyed who indicated that they were married, 19% had spouses who are other Jewish believers, and 72% had Gentile believers as spouses (8% are married to Jewish unbelievers).

### Social Patterns

An overview of social patterns shows that the Jewish believing population in the U.S. like the general Jewish population, is moving away from traditional concentrations in urban centers. Also, the survey shows that once a Jewish person becomes a believer, his commitment to a Jewish lifestyle is usually maintained or expanded. This indicates that believing in Jesus is an affirmation rather than a rejection or Jewishness.

The trend among Jewish people to migrate from urban centers disperses the U.S. Jewish population from the few traditional concentrated centers to more general contact with the Gentile population. While the migration pattern is somewhat more pronounced among Jewish believers than among the Jewish community as a whole, it is typical of the majority age group involved.

The American Jewish believer population shows a strong Jewish identity as demonstrated by interest in celebrating Jewish holidays. Twenty-five percent of those responding did not celebrate any Jewish holidays, with 35% celebrating some, and 40% celebrating all the holidays. Further breakdowns by spouse and age data indicated two major trends: a sharp increase in holiday practice among those Jewish believers married to other Jewish believers, and a greater level of celebration of holidays among those under age 30.

Only 9% of Reform Jews and 34% of Conservative Jews making up the general U.S. population considered themselves traditional in religious observance (gauged by a formula combining the celebration of Jewish holidays, Sabbath observance and the keeping of the dietary laws) in comparison with 40% of the Jewish believers surveyed who regularly celebrate the Jewish holidays. While Orthodox Jewish statistics indicate a 75% level of observance, it should be noted that Orthodox Jews comprise less than 15% of the Jewish population in the U.S. Whereas 65% of the Reform and 53% of the Conservative Jews considered themselves moderate in religious observance, 35% of the Jewish believers said that they celebrated the Jewish holidays “sometimes”.

The commitment to Jewish identity among American Jewish believers is shown again by the “religious labels” with which they identify. Over 80% of those who responded to the question in the survey desired to be identified as “Jewish” as well as “Christian”. Less than 10% indicated that they wished to

be identified as “Christians” only, with no Jewish nomenclature added.

Jewish believers in the U.S. affiliate with most major denominations according to the survey, although most frequently with those that are evangelical. Since most of the respondents gave only the name of their churches, it was often difficult to make a denominational determination. Therefore, almost 375 Jewish believers who regularly attend church were not included in the breakdown. In the 48% of the cases where a denomination could be identified, the most prevalent were Baptist (14%), Assembly of God (6%), and Presbyterian (4%). Significantly, 10% attend Messianic congregations.

One hundred sixty respondents, or 15% of the total, noted that they do not attend worship services anywhere on a consistent basis. This figure seems high for a group of otherwise committed Christians. It could indicate some difficulty with the cultural adjustment to a predominantly Gentile church environment.

The occupations and professions of U.S. Jewish believers responding to the survey were comparable to those of the general Jewish population. Thirty-two percent of the Jewish believers were employed in professions or technical fields, whereas 27% of the general Jewish population were so employed.

While only 16% of the Jewish believers listed manager or administrator as an occupation, compared with 32% of the general American Jewish population, this could be accounted for by age difference. Most managers and administrators are between the ages of 45-64, which comprise 29% of the general Jewish population in the U.S., but only 14% of the Jewish believer population. Therefore there are only about half as many Jewish believers in the age group of managers and administrators as there are among the general Jewish population.

### Spiritual Dimension

An overview of the spiritual dimension shows that the most common initial attraction to the Gospel, as well as the most common agent directly influencing a spiritual decision, turned out to be individual believers. The greatest perceived needs resulted from the effort to integrate both faith in Christ and Jewish identity. This implies that complex cultural issues are often significant issues in Christian growth.

Although many gave several answers to the question of initial attraction to the Gospel, the figures in the survey are based on assigning one primary reason to each respondent. This was done for the purpose of obtaining meaningful percentages.

While 47% indicated that their primary attraction to the Gospel came through an individual, only 5% cited a group or agency. Even more significantly, only 3% attributed a life crisis as a major force in their consideration of the claims of Christ. This seems to dispute charges leveled by the Jewish community leaders of emotional instability among Jewish people who come to faith in Jesus.

Sixty-two percent of those surveyed said that the direct agent who helped influence their decision to become a Christian was a person, with friends comprising the largest single answer on a breakdown of “person”. Although the Bible and other books had a great deal of impact on their initial attraction to the Gospel, only 6% acknowledged these as the direct agent leading to their commitment to Jesus. Of books other than the Bible, those relating to Messianic prophecy played the largest role.

Where initial attraction was attributed to various groups, the church figured prominently over Jewish Christian and mission organizations. However, aid in coming to Jesus was attributed to a Jewish Christian body by slightly more respondents than those who noted such assistance by a church. This suggests that the testimony of Jewish believers may be crucial to the actual conversion process among Jewish people.

The three major categories of perceived needs of American Jewish believers were fellowship with other Jewish believers, evangelism of non-Christian Jews, and Jewish identity, defined as the importance of

integrating a Jewish lifestyle with faith in Jesus. Again, this reinforces the strong continuance of Jewish identification among Jewish believers in Jesus.

In summing up his evaluation of the survey finding, Moishe Rosen said, “One of the least known and least visible groups of Christians is those of us who are Jews. As a result, many Christian leaders have all too quickly accepted the disinformation supplied them by Jewish community leaders. While the rabbis would like others to believe that we are intellectually deficient, emotionally dishonest, the facts bear out the opposite conclusion.”

# REPORTS

## THE LAUSANNE CONSULTATION ON JEWISH EVANGELISM

by David Harley

*Rev. Harley is lecturer in Old Testament Studies at All Nations Christian College, Herts, England, and International Coordinator of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism.*

During the past 3 or 4 decades a number of major international conferences on world evangelism have been held in different parts of the world. The Jewish people have received some mention at these conferences but they have never been central in the deliberations. This probably reflects accurately the fact that Jewish evangelism does not have the same priority in the mind of the 20th century church that it did in the church of the 1st century. Therefore, It is partly in an attempt to foster greater concern for the Jewish people and to increase co-operation among those involved in Jewish evangelism that the LCJE was formed.

The LCJE (The Lausanne Consultation for Jewish Evangelism) was born in 1980. In June of that year the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation held a consultation in Thailand. This in itself followed an earlier conference, held at Lausanne, where a vision was shared for reaching the world with the gospel. However, it is one thing to have a vision and quite another to implement it, so the concern of the consultation in Thailand was to seek to work out the implications of that vision for different groups of people. The consultation was thus divided into 18 mini-consultations, one of which was concerned with “Reaching the Jewish People”.

Prior to the consultation, 14 groups met all over the world to discuss issues relating to Jewish evangelism: Where were the major Jewish communities? What were the main social and religious changes that were taking place among them? What were the potential areas of cooperation between churches and mission agencies?

The groups who discussed these issues produced over 50 papers and a precis of them formed the basis for the mini-consultation in Thailand. The group that met there in June 1980 consisted of 20 Jewish and Gentile believers — pastors, mission leaders and theologians. They experienced an amazing degree of harmony in spite of their differences in methodology and theological standpoint. Somehow their common concern for the Jewish people seemed of greater importance than their particular mode of ministry or their interpretation of prophecy. Consequently they experienced a greater sense of unity than almost any of the other mini-consultations, much to the surprise of the other delegates! They also produced a booklet, as the result of their discussions and the previous work, which was published as the Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 7, “Christian Witness to the Jewish People”.

They also decided that God had begun to do something among them which should continue. They had valued their fellowship and for the future they needed each other’s cooperation. Consequently they formed the task force that is now known as the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism.

The five-fold purpose of this task force is to gather and catalogue information useful in Jewish evangelism and to furnish such material in an occasional publication; to provide a platform on which

Jewish missions can meet to coordinate strategies; to monitor and report trends in the Jewish community; to stimulate theological and missiological research related to Jewish evangelism; and to arrange for consultations that will be useful to those engaged or interested in Jewish evangelism.

Since its inception, LCJE has published an international directory of Jewish missions and a number of other publications including annotated bibliographies of books and journals are planned for the future. LCJE has also been the means of fostering cooperation between missions; a notable example of this was the three-week evangelistic campaign in London in 1983, "The Messiah has Come", which involved seven mission agencies.

In September 1983, LCJE met for its second consultation in Newmarket, England. Fifty-two delegates representing seventeen Jewish missions, seven theological institutes and a number of Messianic congregations participated. More than half of the participants were Jewish. The consultation was devoted to the clarification of basic theological issues relating to Jewish evangelism, notably the theological significance of Israel and the place of the Messianic congregations in the body of Christ.

The following statement was issued by the Consultation and is commended to the churches for study and action:

We rejoice in the growing number of Jewish people who believe in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. These Jewish believers are variously known as Hebrew Christians, Jewish Christians, Christian Jews or Messianic Jews, depending on personal preference or the culture in which they live.

We also rejoice in the enrichment of the Church as a result of the added insights and Biblical Jewish Customs and practices (e.g., Passover) provided by these Jewish believers in Jesus.

We appeal to our fellow Christians to recognize that Jewish believers have the freedom to keep or not to keep certain customs and practices that are prescribed in the Mosaic Law, while continuing to rely solely upon the sufficiency of Christ for salvation. The Law which was given by God through Moses is part of the heritage of both Jews and Christians.

We affirm that God has not cast away His people, and we call upon all Christians to pray that the Jewish people may be saved. Furthermore, we call upon all Christians to acknowledge the continued election of the people Israel and their return to the Land of the Fathers as evidence of God's faithfulness.

We believe that Scripture teaches that it is our Christian duty to speak the truth in love and to comfort Israel (Isaiah 40:1-11, Matthew 11:28-30, Acts 3:19) proclaiming that Jesus is the only way to the Father. We realize that to fail in this is to betray our Lord and Saviour. We call upon all Christians who claim to be friends of the modern state of Israel to sustain, support and to cooperate with the Christian community within the Land: Jew and Arab and other.

We proclaim that it is a fundamental tenet of the New Testament that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone. Yet it is frequently maintained today that the Jewish people have their own covenant which is sufficient for salvation, and that therefore Christians have no evangelistic obligations to Jews. On the contrary, we believe that the mission to the Jewish people is the foundation stone upon which the Christian mission to all the peoples of the world is built. It is the Jewish people who were the original focus of Jesus' mission, and even when the church widened its approach to include the Gentiles, its witness was still "to the Jew first". If this foundation stone is dislodged, then the universal mission of the Church is in danger of theological collapse.

We rejoice in the growing cooperation among Jewish missions, as exemplified in the recent "Messiah has come" evangelistic campaign in London, England. We urge that this spirit of cooperation be emulated elsewhere

by those concerned to reach the Jewish people with the Gospel.

The work of LCJE continues to expand. Regional co-coordinators have been appointed and a steering committee has been set up. Individuals, congregations and societies are being invited into membership. If we are to reach out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and bring them to know their Messiah, we who have this common burden need to work closely with each other. We need each other's gifts and insights. We need to avoid unnecessary duplication. We need to act jointly wherever this is desirable and possible. It may be under the good hand of God that LCJE can play some part in facilitating such good stewardship.

If you would like to know more about the LCJE and the recent consultation at Newmarket please write to:

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# REVIEWS

## WHO'S PROMISED LAND?

by Colin Chapman

Lion Publishing: Tring, Herts, England, 1983

This is a book written out of sympathy for the Palestinian refugees, a sympathy which basically colors all that follows

- 1) by omitting and misrepresenting historical facts;
- 2) by quoting various sources (Arab, Jewish, and “neutral”) which comment primarily on the negative traits of the Israelis;
- 3) by using the kind of theology which spiritualizes biblical promises made to the Jewish people (it takes promises away from the Jewish people, and applies them to the Church as if the Church had totally replaced Israel); and finally
- 4) by applying the moral condemnations of the Hebrew prophets primarily against the Israelis — with very little attention to the injustices common in other societies of the Middle East.

These four points indicate how Chapman’s sympathies have affected the four chapters of his book:

- 1) “Facts and Figures” (a historical review)
- 2) “Call the Next Witness” (a review of opinions)
- 3) “The Land Before and After Jesus Christ” (theological presuppositions: the Church has replaced Israel)
- 4) “Is There Any Word From the Lord?” (interpretive principles: moral standards still apply, historical promises no longer apply).

Chapman, especially in chapter three, claims that all the promises and prophecies of the Bible which relate to the Jews and the Land of Israel have already been completely fulfilled in Jesus’ first coming. Therefore, he supposes, it is impossible that the land of Israel or the Jewish people can still have any special significance in God’s plan for history. All the promises made to the Jewish nation now apply to the Church, he believes, and all the promises related to the land now refer to our inheritance in heaven.

Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of prophecy, but Chapman thinks that all prophecy related to salvation is already fulfilled in Jesus’ first coming. This is a serious misreading of the Scriptures. Such a spiritualizing approach to the Scriptures has little need to dwell on the Second Coming, because the Second Coming emphasizes a literal return to the Land of Israel. But precisely a literal return is what the Bible teaches; it teaches that Jesus is coming again to a very specific place. Out of all the possible places in the world Jesus could choose to reappear, the Bible specifies the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Chapman himself believes this prophecy (Acts 1:11), but he denies the significance of any promises relating to the land or the Jews during the present time between the First Coming and the Second Coming — and when he discusses the Second Coming, it is in an appendix after the epilogue!

However, the Second Coming is important

according to the Bible because it is then that Jesus will be vindicated as Saviour of the world in the eyes of the world. His Resurrection and Ascension and His spiritual presence in the hearts of His followers vindicate Him in their eyes, but not yet in the eyes of the world. This final and total vindication of God's saving work through His Son Jesus remains yet to be accomplished.

Precisely those biblical prophecies which promise the regathering of Israel into the Land are the prophecies which also reveal to us the above-mentioned purpose and importance of such a regathering. They reveal that God does not regather Israel for the sake of Israel; He does not regather the nation so that Jews can have a place in which to survive. Israel's survival as a nation is guaranteed at least as long as the sun, moon, and stars remain (Jer. 31) — whether the nation is in the land or not. Moreover, the biblical view is that God is not so very proud of Israel who has been “profaning My Name among the nations” (Ez. 36:20-21). God says, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act (in regathering Israel), but for my Holy Name's sake so that the nations will know that I am the Lord!” (Ez.36:22-23).

Unbearable complications arise when this promise is spiritualized as if it referred to the gathering of Christian believers from all nations into heaven:

- 1) Spiritualistic interpretation would require us to suppose that those who are being gathered into heaven are the same ones who have been profaning God's name among the nations. This is not a likely characteristic of people on their way to heaven.
- 2) Spiritualistic thinking would lead to the further unlikelihood of people being gathered into heaven only for God's benefit, but not for their own benefit.

Chapman seems to avoid the immediate problems that result from spiritualizing this prophecy. He determines that this is a prophecy that should be taken literally, as referring to the return from Babylon over 2500 years ago (i.e., he rejects spiritualizing in this case.) However, when Chapman discusses a sister prophecy about an envisioned return (Amos, ch. 9 discussed on Pp. 240-1), he first agrees that it should be taken literally as referring to the ancient return (as above), but then he has a problem that doesn't fit his theology: Amos envisions what Chapman calls a “permanent return” when the people “will never again be plucked up from the land that I have given them” says the Lord your God”. Chapman's theological presupposition (that the Jews and the land are no longer significant) allows him no alternative but to spiritualize this permanent return as referring to the ingathering of Gentiles into the Church.

We can then still ask the question: For whose sake will this final return take place? The Bible is clear that it is not for Israel's sake that the return of Ezekiel's vision would take place. This is much more amazingly obvious during the present return of the Jews than it was during that ancient “peaceful return” as Chapman calls it. The Jews have suffered greatly at every step of this unpeaceful return; it really seems not to be for their sake. No Jew would ever have schemed to revive a Jewish State at the cost of the Russian pogroms and the Nazi Holocaust. Yet those events have been major constituents in the process of the revival of the State. The Jews want a State so as to escape such horrors, yet those very horrors were what finally jolted the Gentile world into action to help the Jews start the State. Moreover, though the State of Israel has brought great joy to most of the Jewish people, it has also meant great suffering for them:

- 1) They continue to be objects of ongoing terrorism.
- 2) Jews, with the Arabs, have suffered from all the wars between Israel and her neighbors.
- 3) They suffer from mounting internal dissension over these and other problems, not least of which is a profound crisis in Jewish identity.

Clear purpose replaces the above complications when spiritualizations are abandoned. The simple straightforward historical meaning of God's promised regathering makes the purpose of that promise ever so clear: that the nations will know the Lord is God.

In our day when this particular, peculiar people is again in this particular land for the fourth time in history, not only Jewish and Christian thinkers are sitting up and taking notice. Even ungodly nations are stumbling over the oddity of such an insignificant number of people occupying so much of the world's attention. Some of this attention is being drawn to the God of Israel, even if it is only expressed in ridicule of Jews and others who quote the Bible in connection with the Jewish regathering. The focus of all this, according to the Bible, is not meant to be on Israel (and her holiness or lack of it), but on the continuing rule of God which will be vindicated one day in the eyes of all nations when Jesus comes again.

Evangelical Christian interest in the regathering of the Jewish people to the land of Israel is not a regression to some false pre-Christian political hopes, as Chapman thinks; it is exactly the opposite. It is a forward look to the total vindication of Jesus who will one day be recognized for who He is — not only by present-day believers in Him, but by all nations including the Jewish nation.

This is not the unbiblical, proud Gentile, spiritualizing replacement theology which claims that the Church has totally replaced Israel. Neither is this the other extreme, a recognition theology which believes in recognizing Rabbinic Judaism as a parallel way of salvation. This is remnant theology which declares — with the New Testament — that Christians are a New Israel. The basis of this New Israel is the Jewish nation chosen by God and represented before Him as always by the faithful remnant which consists of the Jewish followers of Christ. We who are followers from among the other nations now also belong to this remnant by being grafted into it (Rom. 11:17), which means that we, as they, now have some kind of a family relationship also to those Jews who don't realize that their Messiah has already made a first appearance. We have become a part of this same specific and peculiar family originally chosen by God and maintained by His faithfulness to them. We join this same family which has not been rejected, but has been established by God in Christ more firmly and absolutely than ever before. We do not become Jews in any ordinary modern sense of the word; but, by joining the remnant of Israel, we enter a special family relationship also with non-Christian Jews.

In Christ, the perfection of the remnant, God renewed His covenant with Israel. The covenant is new, but the people are the same (Jer. 31:31-37). They are the same people, because it is the same faithful Lord God who is renewing His covenant by putting it within them.

The advantages of a biblically based remnant theology when compared with Chapman's misguided replacement theology are:

- 1) God remains faithful to his promises. This means that we in the Church of Jesus Christ have no reason to fear that our God, who chose the Jewish people and then supposedly abandoned His promises to them, will one day treat us likewise and abandon us too. God will not deny us the benefits of His promises — just as He has not denied the Jewish nation the benefits of His promises to them. God negates neither the promises of punishment nor the promises of blessing. Chapman, in contrast, denies the promises, but applies the punishments!
- 2) We have good reasons to rejoice over the continued existence of the Jewish People and especially over the existence of the Christian Jews, since they, as the faithful remnant, are the root of the family of God which we have joined. We are related to them as to gracious brothers who accept us into the family.
- 3) We are also related to the Jews in

some kind of ongoing family relationship different from our relationship with any other nationality — including our own. We need to struggle for their sake and ours to define more exactly just what that family relationship is. As they cling to the vision of genuine Messianic world peace when “nations do not learn war any more”, are they not God’s call to Christians to remain equally literal about the Messiah’s return in answer to the prayer, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven”?

Chapman has no positive theological space for the survival of a Jewish nation which has an identity intrinsically different from that of any other nation. He thereby seems to represent the theology of those Christians who protested that they were not anti-Semitic nor anti-Jewish, who indeed did not themselves hurt Jews, but who did nothing to help the Jews escape the Nazis. Such Christians feel no family relationship. If anything, they seem to feel animosity for a people who stubbornly cling to their specific identity, especially when some among this people yet consider that identity to be God-given — in contradiction to the premises of replacement theology.

- 1) Our own continued existence as the Church of Jesus Christ is safeguarded when we respect God’s reminder to us that He is a God who reveals himself in history. The Jews, by preserving their identity in some way, serve just this function, helping to keep us where God wants us: dependent on his grace as revealed in history. They are specific evidence that God does not just rule over history, granting religious inspiration to mankind in general, but that He entered into history Himself in a most concrete fashion by Incarnation into a specific land and a specifically prepared people. Ongoing Jewish existence serves as a reminder of the physicality of God’s Incarnation; it helps keep us close to the literal, historical acts of God among us. We have no need to be any more or less literal about the land or the Jews than God Himself.

It is otherwise all too easy to slip into some kind of philosophical universalism based on the inspiration of human religious genius. This is exactly what happens to us when we get away from our biblical roots which reveal that God rules from within history. One need only look at those theological seminaries where spiritualization has already gone beyond Chapman’s weakening of the historical preparation for the Second Coming. Even the First Coming is spiritualized by some theologians; they claim that the teachings of Jesus are important and not His person as Lord and Saviour!

### Conclusion

According to the Bible, God’s ways are revealed in history. If we are open to His ways as He continues to reveal them, He can guide our thinking and correct our misconceptions:

- 1) For example, when Jesus died but then rose and soon departed, His followers were jolted into changing their thinking about God’s strategy for achieving His rule on earth.
- 2) Today we modern Christians, including Chapman, must change our thinking about the Jews. We must finally recognize our family relationship with them because we are seeing that God is doing what we thought improbable, if not impossible. God continues to preserve this peculiar nation: He saved many of them from the holocaust and is regathering them to the land of Israel for His purposes.
- 3) Historical events such as these are jolting us into slowly grasping what the Scriptures

have always taught about these purposes — that God is faithful to the Jewish people, who are yet “beloved because of the fathers”. As God gathers Jews out of the nations and brings them back into their promised land (into a land of tremendous difficulties, and often against their own will), He is involving them in His preparation to vindicate Himself one day in the eyes of all nations.

**Halvor Ronning,**  
**American-Institute of Holy Land Studies, Jerusalem**

*The next issue of MISHKAN will feature Colin Chapman’s response to this review.*

## **JESUS, THE GOSPELS AND THE HEBREW LANGUAGE**

**The Four Gospels Translated into Hebrew by William Greenfield in 1831, and  
Evangiles de Matthieu et de Marc traduits en hebreu en 1668 par Giovanni Battista  
Iona retouches en 1805 par Thomas Yeates, and Evangiles de Luc et de Jean traduits  
en hebreu en 1668 par Giovanni Battista Iona retouches en 1805 par Thomas Yeates.**

**Jean Carmignac (editor)**

Introduction par Jean Carmignac (Traduction hebraïques de Evangiles rassemblees par Jean Carmignac). Brepols, Turnhout-Belgique, Bruxelles 1902, XLII ‘pp. 82, XLI+ pp. 370, pp. 420. Price B.F. 1050; 1350; 1350.

These three volumes constitute a step towards a promising publication of New Testament translations into Hebrew.

The series, which is projected finally to consist of ten volumes, will contain the most important Hebrew Gospel translations from Shem Tob Ibn Schapruts “Jewish” translation of Matthew at about 1380 until the complete translation of the New Testament by F. Delitzsh in 1877. About twenty different translations of all or part of the Gospels will become easily accessible; half of these have never before been published. For economic reasons, it has been necessary to produce only a selection, but the publishers hope that this series will create both a need and an opportunity for additional publications containing the Gospel translations which were not included. This desire also includes translations of the other parts of the New Testament.

Today there are about 90 translations of all or part of the New Testament into Hebrew. However, this tradition of translations has stirred surprisingly little interest among scholars. Pincas E. Lapidé has contributed to a study of the subject in Hebraisch in den Kirchen (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1976). Personally, I have investigated translations of Matthew 1:21 and the rendering of the name of Jesus in this tradition (Studier i navnet Jesus, Aarhus 1982, pp.208-221, 228-238, English Summary pp. 369-381), but there is still a need for research.

The tradition of translations of the New Testament into Hebrew has its own worth in that it sheds light on the work done in different times by different translators who wanted to express a message which originally came from the Jews in a Hebrew adequate for Jewish readers. It is therefore wrong for U. Becker to say of E. Hutter, who in 1599 was the first to publish the whole New Testament in Hebrew, that his Bible editions have mere bibliographical value today (RGG III, 1959, 497). In addition, no less interesting are the attempts from the Jewish side to

translate the New Testament or sections of it in the course of their struggle against Christian missions. The publishers intend for this series to contain three such translations of Matthew. Also to be included are quotations from the Gospels as contained in the Jewish counter-polemics of the Middle Ages. Another welcome feature will be two Gospel translations done by Roman Catholics in the beginning of the 17th centuries. We also find a 1668 translation of the Gospels by the baptized Jew, Giovanni Battista Iona. This translation, based on the Vulgate, had to wait a full 30 years before it was published. In more recent times, the whole New Testament was translated by Catholics only in 1970. This is also the first time that the translation of Yeates has been published. (The translations of Iona and Yeates are available in vols. 2 and 3 as a parallel text.)

The main purpose for this publication of Hebrew New Testament translations is to provide a means of New Testament research for those involved in the necessary attempt to identify the Semitic substructure, “le parfum semitique” or “le parfum de la Palestine au debut de l’ere chretienne”. Carmignac thinks that Jesus most probably spoke an Aramaic dialect; however, this does not eliminate the possibility that Jesus spoke Hebrew, a language which was spoken and alive in his times (shown by evidence from Qumran and Murabba’at. (Cf. also his article on “Studies on the Hebrew Background of the Synoptic Gospel, ASTI VII, 1968-69, pp., 64-93, where he argues in favour of the existence of a pre-synoptic text for the Gospels.) Recent developments in research seems to indicate Hebrew rather than Aramaic as the language of Jesus. Even Matthew Black in his third edition of An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts (Oxford 1967, 49), must admit: “We must nevertheless allow, possibly more than has been done before, for the use of Hebrew in addition to (or instead of) Aramaic by Jesus himself, especially on solemn festive occasions.”

No complete Aramaic Gospel-translation exists (“Quel beau sujet pour une these de doctorat: ‘Retroversion d’un Evangile en arameen!’”), and the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic is considered by Carmignac to be secondary in relation to the difference between Semitic and Greek thinking. For this reason, a translation of the New Testament into Hebrew is the second best option when the Semitic substructures of the Gospels are to be analyzed. Jesus and the first disciples spoke and thought within Semitic language categories. Carmignac emphasizes and rightly so, that a back-translation is and remains a back-translation and, as such, cannot directly lead us back to an original Hebrew text. The tradition of translations into Hebrew has, of course, its history of origin and its own presumptions, all of which should be taken into account. Yet a reader of a modern Hebrew translation of the New Testament is kept on course in relation to basic semitic concepts which would be easily forced into the background when it is the Greek text which is being interpreted.

In addition, these publications contain an introduction to the life and works of the respective translators and a short language analysis by Carmignac. In vol. 1, space has been found for Samuel Bagster’s long “Memoir” of Greenfield (pp. XV-XXXVII). This is not to be regretted, but it does make it more difficult to understand why Iona’s interesting introduction (“Prooemium” in Latin-Hebrew) was left out of vol. 2.

As an introduction, Carmignac has composed a list of the Hebrew translation-tradition, which is the most complete listing I have seen. He does, however, mention that this is not, a complete listing, and to those who would like to cooperate in extending it, he says, “et merci d’avance a ceux qui pourraient completer cette liste!” Undoubtedly, Aarhus (Denmark) is not the best place from which to do such investigation! However, some of the most prominent features should be mentioned.

The list is divided into 4 categories: A) Published Works; B) Identified Mss; C) Unidentified Mss; and D) Translations which have been lost. The usefulness of this list, however, would be greatly enhanced by certain corrections. In category A’, Carmignac

mentions only the year and not the place of publication. For some of the translations it would have been helpful to mention where they could be consulted, as some are extremely rare. This is not only true of some of the older translations, but also of some of the more recent such as Y. Elihai & Y. Blum: John (1967) and Matthew (1970). These are found in neither the “National Library” nor the “Ecole Biblique” in Jerusalem, nor (we suppose) in the British Library in London. A copy is available for consultation in the little library of Ratisbonne in Jerusalem. In category ‘B’, year and translator are mentioned but the signature indicators for individual manuscripts are omitted. These are mentioned later in category ‘C’, but here the translators are not mentioned. True, most are unidentified manuscripts; however, it is possible to give an approximate date of writing, a practice which has been adopted by others.

Because this series will become the standard work in this field, some inaccuracies should be mentioned. F.A. Christiani published the Epistle to the Hebrews in 1676, not in 1673. According to F. Delitzsh, the Gospel of Luke by H.C.I. Frommann ended with chapter 22:14. R.L. Lindsey published the Gospel of Mark in 1969 and not in 1970, and a preliminary sketch was available already in 1966. The title page of the New Testament that was published in Rome in 1975 mentions David Kinneret as well as Johanan Bauchet. Ms Sloane 237 in the British Library in London contains Rev. 1:1 to 2:13a, not Rev 1:1 to 2:12. Whether the translator of Ms Cambridge University Library 00.1.32 should be called Rahibi or Rachabi, as Lapide insists (op.cit., p.93), is still a matter of conjecture.

The Letter to the Romans by J.H. Callenberg (1732) is not a “pure” Hebrew translation, but “In Germanicum Judaeorum idioma transferi.. .“ Other such translations are not included in the list. Was it indeed Callenberg who published a Hebrew translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews around the year 1747? Other additions to the list may be mentioned. A Hebrew edition of the Gospels which was based on the Living Bible was published in Israel in 1977 and the whole New Testament in 1979. Moishe Immanuel Ben-Meir produced for “Christian Victor” a Hebrew edition of the Gospel of John with explanations (New York, 1958). In 1975 Anthology of the Gospels was published by Companions of Saint Michael (Gent, Belgium), where Bauchet & Kinneret (1975) is rendered with a few alterations.

Finally, there are some books in the list which cannot be characterized as translations. This is true of H.P. Chajes’s Markus-Studien (Berlin 1899) and of G. Aicher’s Hebraische Wortspiele im Mattäusevangelium (Bamberg 1929). Chajes undoubtedly attempted to understand the Gospel of Mark from a Semitic background; he did back-translate a few verses or parts of verses. It is also true that Aicher composed a long list of Hebrew ‘plays-on-words’ he found in the Gospel of Matthew. However, neither of these are continuous translations. Similarly one may question whether J. Zurishaday’s HaBrit should be included in such a list, or his refutation, which was first published in two volumes in Jerusalem in 1937-38 (Carmignac mentions the enlarged edition of 1947), where he translates single verses from the New Testament. From Israeli research into the life and teaching of Jesus come Hebrew publications such as those by David Flusser which contain many translations of single passages into Hebrew.

Retouched editions are listed. There is room to doubt if Hutter’s separate editions of Matthew (1599) and Mark (1600) were retouched in relation to the text of the polyglot edition of 1599. Neither can this reviewer understand why F. Petri’s translation of Luke (1574) was not mentioned in its revised form, which was published in 1581.

Criticisms of the list drawn up by Carmignac should not be allowed to overshadow the main issue: This series constitutes an excellent tool for those who wish to work with the Hebrew tradition of translation as well as for New Testament research which, through these translations, will be able to breathe in a little of “le parfum semitique”.

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# REVIEWS

## UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFICULT WORDS OF JESUS

by David Bivin and Roy B. Blizzard  
Makor Foundation; Arcadia, California; 1983.

This book opens with a foreword by Dr. Robert L. Lindsey, whose own work in the establishing of the central thesis is presented in chapter seven of the book. There follows an introduction and seven chapters, leading to the final two entitled, “Recovering the Original Hebrew Gospel”, and “Theological Error Due to Mistranslation.” An appendix of twelve sections rounds off the book, each section devoted to a text in the synopsis (one obvious weakness is that John’s Gospel is not dealt with at all). Finally, there is a very short bibliography.

This reviewer is in basic agreement with the thesis that Jesus’ home language, as that of Palestinian Jewry, was Hebrew and that the value of understanding first-century Judaism(s) and Jewish culture(s) cannot be over-stressed for understanding the teaching of Jesus. However, he found this book disappointing.

The book is clearly intended for laymen not scholars: It reads like journalism, not scholarship and will not be convincing to scholars. Is it true that “Most Christians ... tend to just read over the Synoptic Gospels” (Page 19), and that they do so because they can not understand them apart from a knowledge of Hebrew?

The authors believe that we must go beyond seeing the gospels as Aramaic or Greek in origin. Fundamentally, their concern is to establish that Hebrew was a living language in Jesus’ day, relying heavily on M. M. Segal in 1927 and the reformed Matthew Black in 1967. However, their treatment is superficial. They dismiss the theory of a Greek origin for the synoptics with a mere 49 lines and mention only in passing their reason for this, which is the Gospels’ “poor *Greek*” (Page 36).

Chapter six gives us the heart of the book, presenting the thesis that there is a “Hebraic undertext” (Page 79) to the extant Greek texts. The evidence quoted for this view is the actual “sentence structure” of the New Testament Greek and the “many literalisms and idioms present, which are peculiar to the Hebrew language” (page 79). This is hardly sufficient evidence for such a weighty theory.

Another unfortunate aspect of the book is that the authors have confused two distinct but related issues: First, that there was an original Hebrew manuscript of Jesus’ life, and second, that we need to understand the Jewish milieu of first-century Palestine in order to understand Jesus. Few scholars would take issue with the latter statement. Yet the authors use this as circumstantial evidence to prove the former.

Two final substantial criticisms are called for: The authors denigrate Greek as if it were un-Jewish while in Jesus’ time it was not, and they do not deal responsibly with the theological and ecclesiological implications of their position. The fact is that our canonical gospels are in Greek, not Hebrew. Should this be “corrected” by replacement with or addition of a Hebrew “Life of Jesus” conjecturally reconstructed by scholars? Or is it merely to be regretted and ignored? In either case, what are the implications of our practice?

Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus will influence many laymen. For this reason the authors must deal responsibly with the issues they have raised. As a passionate student of Hebrew and of Jesus’ Jewish context who is in basic agreement with the authors’ quest, I hope they will start again and produce a more substantial piece of work.

**Walter Riggans**  
Christ Church, Jerusalem

### Response by David Bivin to the above review

Pastor Riggans agrees with our thesis, namely that: 1) Hebrew was a living language in Jesus’ day; 2) Jesus’ home language, as that of Palestinian Jewry, was Hebrew; and 3) the value of understanding first-century Judaism

and Jewish culture cannot be overstressed for understanding the teaching of Jesus. Such views are seldom expressed by scholars outside of Israel; I assume the reviewer may have been influenced by his long residence in this country.

The authors plead guilty to the charge of writing for the layman, and not the scholar. We were indeed trying to distill and popularize for the layperson many of the exciting discoveries made by Jerusalem scholars during the last 15 years. After all, this is the ultimate goal of New Testament research; if the non-specialist cannot profit from our research, what have we then accomplished?

It is untrue that the authors state or imply in the book that the use of the Greek language is un-Jewish. We were protesting the overemphasis on Hellenism in the theological seminaries. Apparently, the reviewer disagrees with only one of the authors' conclusions, that there existed an original Hebrew gospel. While he notes that the authors' evidence for a Hebrew undertext is the Hebrew sentence structure and the many Hebrew idioms underlying the Greek text, he finds our evidence insufficient. However, the case he makes for his own position is extremely tenuous.

How is the reader of the Gospels to understand such well-known sayings of Jesus as, "if your eye is good (bad) your whole body will be full of light (darkness)" (Matthew 6:22-23)? "Good eye" and "bad eye" are not Greek, but Hebrew idioms for "generosity" and "stinginess." Or "Whatsoever thou shalt bind (loose) on earth shall be bound (loosed) in heaven" (Matthew 16:19)? "Bind" and "loose" each have a second meaning in Hebrew meaning — "to forbid" and "to permit."

The reviewer's concern over the theological implications of the recent discoveries in Jerusalem is well-justified. For instance, if the existence of an original Hebrew Life of Jesus from which the Synoptic Gospels were ultimately derived could be conclusively proven, the impact would be staggering. We would then have a much greater need for a thorough acquaintance with 1st century Palestinian Judaism in order to understand the New Testament. It would become the task of the translator to convert the Greek of the Synoptic Gospels to Hebrew **BEFORE** attempting to translate the text. Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus amply illustrates the necessity of Hebrew as a tool for understanding the words of Jesus.

Contrary to the reviewer's opinion, this book, popularly written as it is, will probably interest not a few scholars since many of the discoveries of the "Jerusalem school" are presented here for the first time. Hopefully, laymen and scholars alike will thus be spurred to correct the overemphasis on Greek and Hellenistic theology that has prevailed in the Church and its academic institutions since Rudolf Bultmann wrote his influential Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition in 1921.

**Continued from inside cover**

The United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI) has followed these developments with great interest. The Council itself has been actively engaged in theological reflection on the biblical basis for Christian-Jewish relations and Jewish Evangelism. Three years ago the UCCI published a study document entitled "Let Jews and Arabs Hear His Voice" (publ. Jerusalem 1961), whose title indicates how close thinking within the Council has been to that of the Lausanne movement. The UCCI has been convinced about the need for international evangelical interaction concerning Christian-Jewish relations, and hopes that this may be achieved through MISHKAN, a theological forum on Jewish Evangelism.

With this first issue of MISHKAN the editors express their gratitude for contributions to the publication of the journal from a number of individuals and from the following societies: Christian Witness to Israel, American Board of Missions to the Jews, Ariel Ministries, Jews for Jesus, Evang.-Luth. Zentralverein für Mission unter Israel, Evangeliumsdienst für Israel, Finnish Missionary Society and Norwegian Israel Mission.

**Ole Chr.M. Kvarme**  
**General Editor**