

MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE



Jerusalem

MISHKAN

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People

"MISSIONS IN ISRAEL 1948-1998"

ISSUE 28 / 1998

General Editor: Kai Kjær-Hansen

United Christian Council in Israel · Jerusalem

All Rights Reserved.

For permissions please contact mishkan@pascheinstitute.org
For subscriptions and back issues visit www.mishkanstore.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Kai Kjaer-Hansen	1
The Messianic Movement in Israel - A Personal Perspective Menahem Benhayim	4
Attempts to Establish a "Messianic Jewish Church" Gershon Nerel	35
External Problems Per Osterbye	46
Hebrew Christianity in the Holy Land from 1948 to the Present Ole Chr. M. Kvarme	55
Trends and Circumstances within the Hebrew-speaking Churches in Israel Baruch Maoz	71
Letter to <i>Mishkan</i> Menahem Benhayim	90
Book Reviews: <i>The Road from Damascus</i> (Richard Longenecker) and <i>What Saint Paul Really Said</i> (N.T. Wright) Hilary le Cornu	94
Book Review: <i>The Mystery of Romans</i> (Mark D. Nanos) Brian Kvasnica	97

Mission and Evangelization in Israel 1948-1998

Editorial

When this issue reaches the readers, the festivities surrounding the golden jubilee, or 50-year anniversary, of the establishment of the state of Israel will be in full swing. *Mishkan* celebrates this jubilee by focusing on the mission of the Christian Church and on the conditions of Messianic Jews in Israel from 1948 to the present.

On April 1 of this year, less than one month before the starting signal was given for the official celebration of Israel's jubilee, Knesset Member (MK) Nissim Zvilli withdrew his support of the so-called antimission bill that he and MK Rabbi Moshe Gafni had framed more than a year ago. This occurred in exchange for a statement made by approximately 50 Christian groups in Israel "to eschew evangelism," according to local and international media.

It is not quite clear how the Christian groups with whom the deal was made themselves construe this agreement. But this need not concern us here. The important thing is that Messianic Jews, along with foreign organizations whose ministry is to reach the Jewish people with the gospel, have made no such pact.

In Anti Freedom Legislation — Report No. 46, April 1998, the Messianic Action Committee (MAC), which has been battling on the front line against this legislation, writes this about the end of the affair for MK Zvilli:

This statement affirmed the state of Israel and disavowed unethical evangelism in any form, but because it did not include a clear reference to the legitimacy of evangelism as such, nor to the importance of freedom of speech — the very issue at stake — the whole Messianic community and most of the Evangelical Protestant churches (which are organizations represented by the United Christian Council in Israel [UCCI] declined to support the statement. Among these are the Evangelical Lutherans, the Southern Baptists, the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, the Church of England, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

... The Messianic Action Committee (MAC) initially agreed to the idea of a statement, but withdrew its support once it became clear that the statement would not include a clear avowal to "proclaim" its faith. The UCCI withdrew for the same reason and at the request of the MAC. No Messianic congregation or organization in the land endorsed the statement, and no Protestant Evangelical church in Israel did so.

Nevertheless, MK Zvilli, who had been under substantial pressure from overseas and within Israel, withdrew support of his own bill and promised to oppose any further efforts to restrict freedom of religious expression in Israel. He also promised to actively oppose his own bill.

It is important to understand that MK Zvilli's withdrawal does not mean the demise of the bill itself. MK Rabbi Moshe Gafni continues to contend for it.

Moshe Gafni is not alone in doing so. That there are others became clear when MK Raphael Pinhasi on May 20 submitted to the Knesset a private member's bill which would outlaw all forms of "preaching with a view to changing another's religion." The bill calls for a penalty of three years imprisonment or a fine of 50,000 shekels (about \$14,000). Prime Minister Benyamin

Netanyahu, in spite of many former obligations to the contrary, voted in favor of the bill, along with his coalition government.

It is perhaps difficult to imagine that the Knesset will indeed pass the bill. But the Messianic Action Committee nevertheless regards this new development very seriously and encourages Christians all over the world to send letters of protest to the Israeli embassy in their country.

Considering the protest already submitted and Netanyahu's previous promises, it is indeed surprising that he voted for the bill.

We at *Mishkan* are eager to see the defeat of this bill and anxious to congratulate the state of Israel for 50 years of democracy and religious freedom. We are now reticent to do so, but in the hope we may soon extend our congratulations, *Mishkan* has called for several articles recounting the story of the gospel's impact in the years leading up to and since the founding of the state. In this issue we have asked Menachem Benhayim, former Israel Secretary for the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (IHCA) to give his personal perspective on developments in Israel among Messianic Jews. His story begins in the early 1960s when he and his wife, Haya, came to Israel.

We have also asked Gershon Nerel, the present Israel secretary for the International Messianic Jewish (Hebrew Christian) Alliance (IMJ[HC]A) to deal with different attempts to establish a Messianic Jewish Church. This issue features part one of that effort as Nerel describes church-planting undertakings beginning at the turn of this century. In a future *Mishkan* Nerel will take us to contemporary times. Note the change of the initials of the International Alliance (from IHCA to IMJ[HC]A). This is indicative not only of the development inside this movement, but also of the Messianic movement worldwide in the past century.

In this issue we go back in time and even venture to print three contributions written back in time in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. If the three authors of those articles, Per "sterbye, Ole Chr. M. Kvarme and Baruch Maoz, had been given the opportunity to express their views in retrospect, they would probably have made changes here and there in their texts. But they have not had this opportunity. Consequently their contributions appear as primary sources to the thinking in the latter years of each of those decades. The only changes made here are the annotation of their manuscripts and corrections of obvious misprints.

Perfection belongs to *ha'olam haba* and imperfection to this world. And in the world to come — in *ha'olam haba* — there will be no need of extra proofreaders, no need for mission or and no need for evangelization. Mission and evangelization belong to this world. Indeed, they do not merely "belong" to this world. And we — Messianic Jews as well as Christians — have an obligation to see them done.

For the gospel came from the Jewish people and was intended for the Jews first. Fifty years of Jewish statehood has provided opportunities to share the gospel, the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes! The crucified and risen Jesus is alive and works among the people of Israel today as his word goes out — and no anti-missionary law can arrest it.

Copyright Kai Kjær-Hansen, All Rights Reserved

The Messianic Movement in Israel

— A Personal Perspective (1963-1998)

Menaheem Benhayim¹

March 17, 1963: Haya and I arrived in Haifa Bay on board the Israeli freighter "Beersheva," after a roundabout journey of almost six weeks from Miami Harbor in Florida. It had proved to be an excellent introduction to the Israel of the 1960s. The captain and crew were a cross-section of the ingathering exiles of Israel.

For us, the encounter with Eastern Jews was exciting, but we had our first shock tremor of East-West tension when a Romanian Jewish cabin steward burst into our cabin one evening, half-hysterical, and described how an Eastern Jew with whom he had a dispute had shouted at him, "It's a pity Hitler didn't finish all of you Ashkenazim." Later in Israel we were saddened to encounter Ashkenazi prejudices towards Eastern Jews.

We ourselves experienced no sense of rejection among any of the Israeli crew although we spoke freely of our faith and desire to settle in Israel. I used my rather archaic Hebrew culled from Scripture, prayer books and some childhood religious Zionist education to communicate with the Israeli crew, and used English with non-Israelis.

It was a misty and chilly morning when we debarked. Estelle Frydland, the wife of Rachmiel, the Israel Secretary of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance, (IMJA) met us at the port and took us to the Alliance center halfway up Mount Carmel. It served as the Israeli office of the IMJA and as a residence, guest home and meeting place. The Frydlands and their infant daughter Judith Christine were host to a steady stream of visitors.

We settled in, and after lunch walked along "UNO" Avenue (later changed to "Ben-Gurion" Ave. following the antizionist UN resolution). "We were like them that dream," as we moved along the avenue, gazing at the houses and trees jutting out of the hillside of Mount Carmel. At the corner of Allenby Street we were astonished to see a billboard on a small decrepit building spelling out a Hebrew Scripture: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." (Isa 53:5)

There was no sign on the building suggesting a church, and it seemed unlikely that a synagogue would feature that prophecy of Isaiah. When we later asked Estelle, she told us it was the home of the Bethesda (Plymouth Brethren) Assembly, and that we could attend their Gospel service that evening. The building was later entirely renovated when permission was granted, but

¹ Menaheem Benhayim is the former Secretary of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance and one of the founders of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel. He has written numerous articles on issues related to the Messianic Jewish movement.

at the time it was a rather dark and dingy hall. There were some two dozen people gathered, and we had our first taste of polyglot meetings. At a subsequent meeting I counted among some 30 people assembled seven languages being used, three consecutively from the front and four more among small clusters of people scattered about the hall.

First Encounters

Nellie Marchinkowsky played familiar Evangelical Gospel songs at the piano. She was a sturdy native Palestinian of German parents, born to Gottlieb Schumacher who had emigrated to the Holy Land with the Templar sect, which they later left. By the time of World War Two the sect had become a hotbed of Nazi sympathizers and, except for a handful, were expelled by the British. Nellie had married Vladimir Marchinkowsky, a Russian Evangelical emigre who left his homeland when it became impossible for him to lecture in Russian universities following the Bolshevik Revolution.

Yohanan Zeidan served as translator as did his sister Miriam. The Zeidan family had grown up in a multilingual culture; their father Salim Zeidan, an Arab Evangelical, had died in 1949; their mother Freda was the daughter of German Jewish believers murdered by the Nazis. Freda had left Germany before the war with the help of Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, a native Jerusalemite believer who obtained an immigrant certificate for her to keep house for him and his family. The Zeidans were then living in a British Mission Compound in Haifa. They spoke fluent Hebrew, English, Arabic and German.

After the meeting, Freda invited us to dinner and we met some of the local believers. Many were East European Holocaust survivors who had been in touch with mission societies in Poland and Romania even before the war and spoke both Yiddish and Hebrew. Later that evening Richard Stoehr visited us. We knew him from visits to the Hermon House mission on the Lower East Side of Manhattan which Rachmiel Frydland had managed before settling in Israel. Richard informed us we were the first American Messianic Jewish couple to settle in Israel, and he wanted to welcome us.

The following day Ruth Kopp, a veteran German Jewish settler and believer, came to take us over to meet Molly Kagan, a social worker. Molly had survived the Holocaust in the heart of Berlin, hidden by German Christian friends. After the war she settled in Israel where, with the help of German friends, she established a social work for Messianic Jews. She was insistent that we have a plan of action for settling. Since I had served in the American Army as a medic during World War II and also in civilian hospitals afterward, she suggested work at a Haifa hospital.

While we were chatting, Rachmiel Frydland walked in after returning from an overnight trip to Jerusalem. Rachmiel had baptized me three years earlier and had been a great help during a personal crisis in the late 1950's. A gifted Talmudist, he had abandoned the Polish yeshiva world two years before the outbreak of war, and then came in contact with a Yiddish-speaking mission in Warsaw where he accepted Yeshua. He lost his entire family in Poland, including a young wife, during the war.

After the war he studied in the UK and then came to New York to take up mission work among its huge Jewish population. In 1961 he felt it was his duty as an unmarried Jewish believer to move to Israel and to bolster the tiny Messianic community in the land. Here he met and

married Estelle, a Sephardic Jew from France.²

During the several weeks we were guests at the center, Rachmiel took us around the country in his small car to meet the scattered believers. He and Estelle worked hard, but were discouraged by the situation. They tried to maintain contact with every known “*yehudi meshichi*,” the common Hebrew term for Jewish believers in Yeshua. One time Rachmiel showed me a letter from an irate Jewish woman who demanded that he remove her name from his mailing list. She had once professed faith (either in Europe or in Israel) but wanted no further contact with believers.

“The Mission” and “The Antimission”

We heard of incidents of harassment of Jewish believers by intolerant neighbors, sometimes urged on by the “*p'eilim*” (the “activists” representing the “Yad L'Ahim” anti-mission society). Originally founded to “rescue” traditional immigrants from secular environments in Israel, the “activists” found it more worthwhile to focus on “the Mission.”

In their eyes its aim was to “snatch” Jewish souls by means of limitless “enticements” to the weak, the destitute, the unlearned, and either ship them overseas or hold them captive in monasteries, convents, Christian schools and homes.

A stream of tales was fed to the secular and religious media; no distinction was made between established mainstream churches (Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic, which did not engage in mission activity among Jews or Moslems) and Evangelical mission groups such as the Anglicans, Lutherans, Plymouth Brethren, Baptists, Nazarenes and Pentecostals. These groups were active during British Mandate times, and were therefore permitted to continue mission work in Israel. There were also “free lancers” and members of various sects (Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others). All were embraced within the term “the Mission.”³

Ben-Meir, “Father of Messianic Judaism” in Israel

While in Haifa we met Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, a brilliant Messianic scholar who had grown up in Jerusalem's ultra-orthodox (*haredi*) community. A discarded Messianic tract in Hebrew started him on a journey of faith which for a while led him out of his native community into the evangelical world. By 1963 he had returned to his Jewish religious roots and was making strenuous efforts to “re-judaize” his evangelical commitment. He dressed, lived and acted as a *haredi* without severing ties with the mainstreams of the Jewish or Christian communities. He may well be called the “father of Messianic Judaism” in its strictest sense of linking faith in Yeshua to a living community within Judaism.

Ben-Meir was in the stream of rabbinic Jews like Lichtenstein of Hungary, Chaim Lucky of Warsaw, and others who refused to sever ties with the synagogue and a traditional Jewish lifestyle despite Jewish and Christian criticism. Like them, he remained for most of his life a proverbial loner, although his impact on the wider movement of Jewish believers did bear fruit toward the

² Rachmiel Frydland, *When being Jewish was a Crime*, (Nashville: Thos. Nelson, 1978); also *Joy Cometh in the Morning*, an earlier version, (Chattanooga, TN: Tennessee Temple Schools, 1972).

³ Osterbye, Per, *The Church In Israel*, Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia (Vinderup, Denmark: Glerup, 1970).

end of his life in the Jerusalem “Netivya” congregation (now “Roeh Yisrael”). While still representing a small minority of Israeli believers, it has been a challenge (some would say a gadfly) within the life of the community, holding up a banner for the Jewish Yeshua, living traditional Jewish lives without apologies.

Evangelical Chocolates for “Ave Maria”!

In September 1963 a coordinated attack was made by Orthodox zealots on several Christian Evangelical and Roman Catholic schools. They were accused of harboring large numbers of Jewish children “brainwashed” into Christian faith. One reporter in a non-religious newspaper reported as fact that at the Evangelical Haifa school, Jewish children were made to kneel before a crucifix and sing “Ave Maria” in exchange for chocolates! These absurdities were spread by the media.

Protests by foreign diplomats were made, and an independent committee was set up by the Israeli government to make an impartial study of the issue. Their report found a total of 95 Jewish children in Evangelical Christian boarding schools, rather than the thousands that Orthodox antimission societies alleged. Nevertheless, in 1965 a law was passed prohibiting boarding schools of one religion from hosting children of another religion in their schools. As a result, the Haifa and Jerusalem Evangelical schools closed down, and took on other ministries. Christian day schools were not affected.

We were based in the Alliance center for several weeks as we made visits around the country. We were impressed by the variety of believers who were drawn into a loose kind of fellowship through the ministry of the Frydlands. A group of Romanian Jews, some a part of the Haifa Lutheran mission congregation, met at the center regularly, with Polish and other Yiddish-speaking Jews.

The Romanian Jews were led by Pastor Magne Solheim, a Norwegian missionary who had served as Norwegian consul in Romania and also ministered to Jews. He and his wife settled in Israel when masses of Romanian Jews, including many Messianic Jews, moved to Israel after the Communist takeover of Romania. The Solheims were prime movers in the establishment of Ebenezer Nursing Home in Haifa in 1976, which was created to minister primarily to elderly Messianic Jews. A large worship center, Beit Eliahu, was also constructed beside the nursing home, and several societies, including the IMJA, contribute to the upkeep of the nursing home.

Bridging the Generation Gaps

Rachmiel confided in me that he hoped one day it would be possible to revive the Messianic Jewish Alliance in Israel, which had collapsed at the end of the British Mandate, been revived briefly after Israeli independence, and again faltered and disbanded.⁴ Had he remained in Israel, he would more than likely have achieved his aim. He still bore emotional scars from his Holocaust experiences. In New York he had once told me of feeling “survivor's guilt.” He felt rejected, like many other Jewish believers linked to “the Mission” (or anything Christian). It

⁴ Gershon Nerel, *Messianic Jews in Eretz Israel (1917-1967), Trends and Changes in Shaping Self-Identity*, approved Doctoral Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, October 1996.

seemed to me that his concern for the impact it might have on his children led to his decision in 1965, after four years in Israel, to resettle with his wife and children in the U.S.A. where he had obtained citizenship.

During those years few second-generation believers remained in Israel and of those who did, few continued in the Messianic faith of their parents. Solomon and Sara Ostrovsky were pioneers from Russia, in Israel from early British Mandate times. They were among those who refused to leave at the end of the Mandate in 1948 when an evacuation was organized for Messianic Jews who felt threatened if they remained during the impending conflict. The Arabs regarded them as Jews while the Jews regarded them as linked to the British, by then a hostile element in the eyes of most Jews. "We do not depend on British bayonets," he told those who tried to persuade him to leave.

The Ostrovskys were committed to the Plymouth Brethren assemblies, spoke excellent Hebrew, and contributed, like the Zeidans, to the promotion of a Hebrew spoken and written milieu for the local believers. They also shared the dispensationalist view of the Brethren concerning the prophetic future of Israel. Nevertheless, the Ostrovskys sensed that their children were in danger of succumbing to peer pressure antagonistic to their faith.

One of their children walking with his parents beside a well-known missionary, upon seeing a Jewish friend of his fled the scene so as not to be identified with the missionary. They decided to send their children abroad for their education, and the children never returned to live in Israel. The parents remained in Israel for many years, but they made periodic extended visits to Canada where the children had settled. Eventually, they left for Canada, where they now live. Ostrovsky once confessed that they may have erred in sending the children abroad, and that it hurt the life of the Jaffa Brethren congregation, which remained small and insular.

By contrast, the Haimoff family, Sephardic Jews, was a striking example of successful integration of Messianic Jews into Israeli life from the first days of statehood. Hayim and Rachel Haimoff were Bulgarian-born and lived in Israel from Mandate times. Hayim had come as a bachelor in 1924, later returned to Bulgaria and married Rachel in 1942 and returned to Mandate Palestine. They raised seven children, living among Jews, sending the children to Israeli State schools, serving in the Israel Defense Forces, marrying believers and continuing with a third, and now a fourth and fifth generation.

At the same time, the patriarchal Hayim (who later changed the family name to Bar-David) worked for an American mission, conducting meetings at the family home as well as engaging in personal evangelism among Bulgarian Jews and other Israelis. The family has made a considerable impact on the believing community in Israel, and four of the children with their spouses and families are an integral part of the Finnish-founded Messianic moshav Yad Hashmona in the Judean hills 15 km. outside Jerusalem. Hayim Bar-David died at the moshav (a cooperative settlement), during the Gulf War in 1991, to which he had been removed for nursing care during his last illness, and there he was buried.

Among the immigrant families of believers able to keep at least some of their children in the faith as well as in Israel were the Smadjas from Tunis, probably the first Eastern Messianic Jewish family in the country. They came to Israel as newlyweds in 1955, settled in a moshav but left when their presence as believers became a controversial subject in the moshav. Victor was invited to serve with the Finnish Lutheran society in the Jerusalem mission school before the law

about boarding schools was enacted, began a youth work, later extended to young adults which continues to this day. After the school ministry ended, he began a publishing work for promoting Messianic Hebrew literature, hymnals and songbooks, much of it translations of Evangelical literature.

The Messianic Assembly: Non-Denominational and Autonomous

Ze'ev (Shlomo) and Yvette Kofsman, postwar immigrants from France, were instrumental in founding in Jerusalem the first Messianic Assembly of Israel and obtaining Israeli status in 1958 for it as a recognized non-profit society. Housed for some time in an American "Assembly of God" installation with connections to that denomination, the congregation was re-organized in December 1969 at its present location on the Street of the Prophets in Jerusalem. The property was purchased from the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), which had used it as a home for their missionaries, but the Messianic Assembly has no denominational link to the C&MA, or to any other foreign body, and is entirely autonomous.

At the time of our arrival, most of the congregations we visited were either linked to denominational mission societies or oriented to denominations like the Plymouth Brethren. The oldest among them were the C&MA, the Southern Baptists, the Scandinavian Lutherans, the Anglicans and small Pentecostal groups. The atmosphere among them sometimes resembled clandestine groups, with not a few unstable people moving in and out. Evangelism was low key, with virtually no high-profile outreach except by eccentric visitors.

I was told of one self-styled American prophet who plunged into Jerusalem's ultra-orthodox Mea Shearim neighborhood with a proclamation in English to its mainly Yiddish-speaking inhabitants. He had to be rescued by Jewish building workers from being mobbed by the natives, who understood what he was about, and shouted, "*Yeshu mayt*" ("Jesus is dead") as they prepared to shower him and his wife with stones.

"They Had All Things Common"

In May 1963 Molly Kagan advised us to spend some time in a kibbutz (a Hebrew commune). The idea appealed to me, as it recalled the primitive Jerusalem church described in Acts (2:44; 4:32) who "had all things common." In my youth I had been exposed to both religious and secular Zionism, and one summer spent three weeks in a "Shomer Hatzair" (Marxist Zionist) camp. Because most New York Jews were then moderately traditional about concepts such as God, the synagogue, kashrut, Sabbath and festivals, the camp did not stress its basically atheist beliefs. Thus, to avoid entanglement with kosher laws, the children were fed a fish and dairy-vegetarian diet.

Kibbutz Mizra, a leading kibbutz in the Israeli movement, to which we applied, was not as discreet. We learned that they related to Judaism and its traditions in a thoroughly secularist way, in addition to processing and selling nonkosher meat. When we offered ourselves as volunteers, we were informed that they would take us if we agreed to stay at least two months, which we agreed was a reasonable minimum.

To avoid any hard feelings which might surface when they learned of our faith, we decided that they should know about it before we began our stay. "We don't have any interest in religious

belief,” the kibbutz secretary pointedly remarked when we told her, “and we wouldn't want any agitation about the subject.” As if to soften her remarks, a colleague later remarked to us, “We have great admiration for the Prophets; in a sense, they were the first Socialists!”

Gedaliah, a kibbutz neighbor, was excited to discover that we believed in Yeshua. He pulled us over to his flat and introduced us to his wife. “Do you know, these are Jews who believe in Yeshu? (the common Hebrew name for Yeshua) ”and the Brit Hadasha (New Testament).” His wife nonchalantly remarked, “So what? Some people are religious and some are like us without any religion.”

Overall, we enjoyed our stay in the kibbutz, although Haya found the communal life too confining. When they asked us after four months to sign up for an additional five-month stretch, we decided to leave.

Family Reunion

While in the kibbutz we had made contact with two cousins who had survived the Holocaust after escaping to Russia. They were the part of my family which had never emigrated from Poland to America during the great tide of Jewish immigration westward before the U.S. quota system was imposed after the first World War. They were children of my father's youngest brother who died in Siberia after fleeing the second German invasion of Poland in 1941. They were now comfortably settled after 14 years in Israel with families of their own, and living in the suburbs of Haifa. One cousin was active in “MAPAI” (Labour party) politics and was a Histadrut official. They were very welcoming to us and wanted to have us settle in with their assistance the day after our first visit with them. I felt that they should know about our faith rather than waiting until they knew us better, reasoning that we might be a political liability to my cousin.

Like my own and Haya's parents, their family had come from a thoroughly traditional background, but it had been shattered in their childhood by the war, and they were now secular. They were not upset, but genuinely puzzled about our faith, and still wanted to help us. At the bar-mitzva of their oldest son, to which we were invited, one of my cousins asked if it would be offensive to our faith if I were invited for an *aliya* to the Torah! I assured them it would not. We remained in friendly contact for many years, but eventually we sensed that, while never unfriendly to us, they were disappointed that we remained Messianic believers.

Rose Warmer: A Pioneer Bible Distributor

It was during this period that we met Rose Warmer, a pioneer colporteur in Israel. Myrna Grant's biography, *The Journey*,⁵ has powerfully related Rose's dramatic story. Born during the closing years of the Austro-Hungarian empire on the eve of the first World War, Rose matured during the years between the wars, went through the Holocaust partly in hiding, then as a slave laborer and later in an extermination camp. After the war, she worked several years as a missionary under Communist rule in Hungary, and finally, emigrated to Israel.

At the time, missionary and Bible book shops, the Christian schools, relief work, and Bible and tract distribution were the main avenues of evangelism. We joined Rose in her Bible and tract

⁵ Myrna Grant, *The Journey*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1978).

distribution work in September for about two months. She could communicate in 14 languages, going from house to house, among Israelis and immigrants from the many lands of the Diaspora, and in the kibbutzim.

Rose had a forceful personality; she lived in the Arab village of Cababir on Mt. Carmel just outside Haifa. She was also like many Central European German-speaking Jews who had been raised by parents devoted to the old imperial German culture, and retained the meticulous manner and character of that milieu. Haya and I were doubtless crass “green” Americans not too well-versed in European sensitivities, and so our association was short-lived, although we remained friends to the end of her life.

Rose was quite fearless in her work. In those years when the Holocaust was acutely fresh in the minds of Israelis and immigrants, many of them survivors, she was attacked by Jews for working “for those who put our people into the fire.” She would reply, “I also went through that fire.”

“Catacomb Believers”

Many other Jewish believers, however, lived double lives, their faith known only to small groups of believers, but concealed from colleagues at work, in school, and sometimes even from immediate family. G. was an active missionary who had given up work as a teacher. A survivor of the Nazi and Soviet eras in Poland, (during the latter period he had been in prison for six months for alleged “anti-Communist” activity), he carried on a kind of underground ministry in Israel on behalf of the American Board of Missions to the Jews.

Although it was by no means illegal to engage in such activity, he once told me solemnly, “We must live like the early Christians in the catacombs.” He also insisted that Jewish believers be helped to find employment, and their families supported before they were baptized should they suffer dismissal from work or other “sanctions” if their faith became known to our adversaries. He held clandestine meetings in his home in a central area of lower Haifa; no music was sounded, and the believers and inquirers were instructed to come at separate times as inconspicuously as possible. It was reminiscent of the “speakeasies” of Prohibition times in 1920’s America. By some way or other, the Orthodox anti-missionaries got wind of the meetings, and one Shabbat afternoon a band of zealots pounced on the building with shrieks and curses, frightened away those on the way and terrified those inside. The police were called, and the family fled to a Baptist hideout.

This may well have contributed to the alienation of their son from Messianic Jews. When I met him in 1972, now a grown man, we were working for the same shipping company at different branches, and he pretended not to know me. I reminded him that I was a “yehudi meshihi,” and that we had met on several occasions, but he turned away muttering disdainfully “yehudim meshihiim.”

Another missionary's son who worked for a shortwave Hebrew-language radio mission similarly became alienated from the movement. There were good grounds for suspecting that his father fabricated reports about responses to the broadcasts in the mission publication. Its range was extremely limited, with almost no response except by an occasional “ham” radio operator without any interest in the Gospel.

Mission Reports

After awhile I became aware of the problem of mission reporting. I had received some of their magazines in the U.S. and had sometimes sent in contributions on the basis of the reports. It became obvious in Israel that the crucial thing for certain societies and individuals was the report. The vicious cycle of feeding the hungry maw of foreign supporters with exciting stories at any cost corrupted some missions and missionaries.

It was understood that inquirers or new believers must be shielded from the anti-missionaries who would do everything possible to disrupt the lives of believers and their families if they could not persuade them to abandon their beliefs. It was therefore sometimes impossible to investigate the stories of newly “saved” Jews because of the issue of confidentiality. Yet living in Israel, one developed a gut feeling that certain reports simply did not ring true, as exciting as they would sound to sympathetic foreign ears.

One mission worker claimed to go in and out among the ultra-orthodox rabbis and teachers and their disciples preaching a “fundamental” Gospel while trashing their Orthodoxy (certainly a dubious way to win someone over to one's beliefs). No violent reactions or repercussions against the report writer or his family were known to occur. This raised doubts that such negative evangelism actually took place inasmuch as most, if not all, mission magazines are monitored by the anti-missionaries.

There are those who have reported miraculous healings. Recently, the reports about a village of Muslims allegedly converted to Christian faith by “miracles” were exposed as fraudulent by local Arab believers and missionaries. Indeed, for the present, whenever one hears of mass “conversions” among Jews or Arabs in Israel, whether from anti-mission Jewish or from unreliable Christian sources, the words of the wise man must be heeded, “The fool believes everything, but the shrewd person understands what is going on around him”. (Prov 14:15).

I was once asked by a journal I wrote for to investigate a photo report of some 150 Jews who came forward (allegedly to make a decision of faith) at a series of meetings sponsored by Morris Cerullo, a world-traveling evangelist. Someone I knew well as a reliable witness was present and told me what actually happened: “The people came forward,” he told me, “to thank the sponsors of the meetings for providing room and board for three days in a local hotel.” Many of them were long-time believers who might have been unaware that the photographs were being used for unethical purposes.

In fact, I myself was once approached by someone within the IMJA, now deceased, to provide more specifics and drama about Israeli Messianic Jews. I was convinced that in the sensitive Israeli situation one must be careful to protect vulnerable believers, and always remain within the bounds of truth. When I refused to provide detailed accounts, he said to me, “Well, then I'll have to fabricate.” I was shocked, and reported this to the Alliance Headquarters, and was told his fund-raising appeals would be monitored. The hunger for sensation and melodrama at any price is rampant in popular and commercial culture today; unfortunately, it often invades Christian missions and evangelism, producing much shallow, immature and unenduring work.

Two other Israeli “missionaries” of the most dubious moral reputation among local believers have enriched themselves and their families, and continue deceiving gullible foreign supporters despite their local reputations. In some cases, one suspects that at least some of their supporters benefit from their corruption, and turn a blind eye to it.

A Hebrew Catholic Community

A tiny community which we encountered shortly after we arrived in Israel were the Hebrew Catholics. It was a few months after the Israeli High Court in 1962 had ruled on the petition of the Carmelite Brother Oswald Daniel Rufeisen for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return. Rufeisen sought to be recognized in law as a Jew ethnically but Roman Catholic by religion. The majority decision (four justices denying his petition, and one, Hayim Cohen, supporting it) in essence meant that there could be no separation between Jewish ethnicity and Judaism within the framework of immigration law.

At a packed meeting in the Alliance center to which he had been invited to explain himself, Rufeisen asserted: "Israel is an atheistic theocracy in which the atheists of "MAPAM" (a Marxist Zionist party) sit in the government coalition beside ultra-orthodox members. I felt there was no logical basis for rejecting a Jewish Christian." At the time, Rufeisen gave the impression of one completely devoted to conservative Catholic theology while remaining a convinced Zionist, thoroughly loyal to Israel, and hoping to build up a Hebrew Catholic community in Israel.

The life story of Rufeisen has been well-told by Nehama Tec, herself a Polish Jewish Holocaust survivor.⁶ Rufeisen, born to traditional Jewish parents in 1922, became an active Socialist Zionist in prewar Poland. Because of his flawless knowledge of German, he was persuaded to pose as a "volksdeutsch" (a member of the German community living outside Germany), and served as translator to the German occupiers of Poland. In that capacity he rescued hundreds of Jews and partisans from certain death by misinforming his German employers and warning Jews and others of dangerous German activities; he also provided arms to several hundred Jews in the Mir Ghetto before its liquidation, enabling some 300 of them to escape to the forests.

Eventually betrayed, he found shelter in a convent. While in hiding, he read the New Testament and other Christian literature, asked to be baptized, and eventually joined the Carmelite Order in postwar Poland; meanwhile, a brother had settled in Israel, and also many of the Jews whom he had rescued. Rufeisen asked to be transferred to the Carmelite headquarters in Haifa. Here he decided to make a test case under the Law of Return, which granted Israeli citizenship automatically to Jews around the world. At the time, there was no clear legal definition about what constituted a Jew for the purpose of the Law of Return, and to what extent could religious belief or unbelief in Judaism or any other faith be decisive.

It was left to later decisions and an amendment to the law to decide that the secular law of return could tolerate atheism or even hostility to Judaism, but not belief in Yeshua as a prophet, Messiah, Savior, Son of God, or part of the Godhead.⁷ Such personal belief was considered beyond the limits of Jewish nationality in Israel under the Law of Return. Despite warnings by many of the local leaders that the time was not ripe for such appeals to the Court, the American convert James Hutchens in 1974, followed by the Jewish-born Eileen (Esther) Dorflinger in March 1979 and the South African Beresfords in 1989 and 1992 pressed their appeals, which

⁶ Nehama Tec, *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁷ The Israel Supreme Court ruling in the first petition of Beresford et al. to reverse the decision of the Israeli Minister of Interior not to grant them status as Jews under the Law of Return in December 1992.

were denied. Each decision rendered Messianic Jews less legitimate than the previous one. The only positive aspect was that it helped make our presence more widely known.

We also met another Hebrew Catholic Carmelite in Haifa in 1963, Elias Friedman, a South African physician who had entered the Church while doing wartime service in the South African forces. He also had friendly contact with some of the Messianic Jews in the area, and was developing a thesis (later published in his seminal work, *Jewish Identity*).⁸ He works for the creation of a Hebrew Catholic rite approved by the Holy See, parallel to the Melkite, Maronite and other rites with liturgical and organizational autonomy within the church.

Friedman has continued with this vision, which led to the founding of an international Association of Hebrew Catholics. Life in Israel turned Rufeisen around to what Friedman and more orthodox Catholics view as heretical positions in doctrine and practice. Rufeisen has also expressed publicly his regrets for having gone to court, and for having created a precedent which has dogged all Yeshua-believing Jewish immigrants to Israel. He had been offered citizenship by naturalization before the court ruling, and received it afterward.

Rufeisen now believes that, with the demise of the original Jewish Christian movement by the time of Constantine, the church is no longer “catholic” in the sense that Paul defined it in Ephesians 2, nor were the Reformed churches better. Invited to a conference of leaders of Hebrew Messianic congregations, he deplored what he called the Western import of Protestant-style evangelism.

Although we do not always agree, Rufeisen is an engaging personality with a truly heroic past whose friendship I have valued. He reflects the spiritual anguish many Yeshua-believing Jews feel who have suffered as Jews, and are loyal to our people, but desperately desire to find a way to restore the Jewish dimension of our faith. He feels a debt to the Roman Church, not only for his physical rescue during the Holocaust, but also for his access to the gospel; for him there is no alternative in a Protestant Jewish Christianity.

“Fallen By The Wayside”

Over the years we have met not a few inquirers, and even active Messianic Jews who have fallen by the wayside because of this anguish. I remember Joseph who was almost a stereotype of the Nicodemus “secret believer,” confiding only to believers he trusted, and concealing from his family that he had been baptized, although acknowledging that he believed Yeshua to be the Messiah.

He met a lovely second-generation Jewish believer, a young woman who was warmly received by his traditional family, which helped overcome the family prejudices about Jewish believers in Yeshua. They were married under the traditional wedding canopy, the “huppa,” and for awhile it seemed things were going well as he took active part in the life of our small community. He played a significant role in the modern Hebrew translation of the New Testament, and writing and teaching about Jewish sources of the New Testament.

At some point he underwent a crisis of faith, which seemed to focus on the common teaching among fundamentalist Evangelicals that Jews who have not received Yeshua before death by a declaration of faith in him as their atonement for sin are doomed to eternal perdition no matter

⁸ Friedman, Elias, *Jewish Identity*, (Highland, NY: The Miriam Press, 1987).

what kind of lives they lived. "I can't believe that my uncles and relatives murdered in the Holocaust at the hands of those they believed to be Christians are in Hell; and what about those Jews before them who died as martyrs in pogroms, during the Crusades, and at the hands of the Inquisition who, they imply, all went to Hell?" he protested.

"Well, I share your concern about such teaching," I replied. "For me, there may be a theological problem of reconciling the uniqueness of Yeshua's atonement with the final judgment, but that doesn't cancel the fact that God is fair and merciful in judging individual lives. Anyway, it's not Bible interpreters or theologians who judge God's word and judge us, thank God."

He was not reassured, and became increasingly alienated from believers, eventually cutting off all ties with our community. Because of his conviction that the Gospel being preached was antagonistic to Jewish survival, he began to cooperate with anti-mission activists.

Jews in the Russian Orthodox Church

Some time later with the onset of the Soviet aliya, we met Jews linked to the Russian Orthodox church. From Moscow and Leningrad reports were heard of over 1000 Jews, mainly from the intelligentsia, visiting Orthodox churches. A Jewish Russian Orthodox priest by name of Men (later murdered, reportedly by anti-Semites) gathered many Soviet Jews around him, and advised them to emigrate to Israel and to live as Jewish Christians.

One of his disciples was a well-known dissident who worked with Alexander Solzhynetsin and later with Jewish "refuseniks." His father had been a Bolshevik, a leader in the "Yevsektzia" which worked to win the Yiddish-speaking masses in the USSR to the Soviet cause in order to counteract Zionism, Judaism and Hebrew culture. A dedicated Communist, he and his family were nevertheless deported to Siberia during the massive purges of the 1930s. The experience cured his son, Mikhail Agursky, of devotion to Communism, and he searched for new anchors in life; eventually it led him to the Russian Orthodox Church, along with other disenchanting ex-Communist Jewish and gentile intellectuals.

When I learned through an article in the *Jerusalem Post*, (in about 1980) that Agursky was in Israel, I contacted him. Through him I was introduced to other Russian Jews in Jerusalem with Russian Orthodox ties, and tried to encourage them to meet with Messianic Jews. By this time Agursky described himself as a non-confessional believer, had left his Russian born wife and was living with a younger woman, a Hittologist at the Hebrew University. Eventually he returned to his wife and family and took up with a moderate form of rabbinical Judaism, although he remained friendly with me until his death. A number of other Russian Orthodox immigrants who remained steadfast in their ties to the Church found it difficult to integrate into Israeli life, and most of those I knew left Israel.

The End of the World Town: Eilat, 1963

It was after leaving Rose Warmer that we decided to move to Eilat. In October 1963 it was a kind of "wild west" town, bordering Egyptian Sinai a few miles to the south, Jordanian Aqaba across the Red Sea bay, and northward and westward "the great howling wilderness" of biblical memories. It was dubbed the "End of the World town."

In those years we began to see the first young Jewish believers coming from among those

who had heard the Gospel outside their families. Still alive and active were some of the older pioneers from Mandate days like Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, the Ostrowskys and Haimoffs. Gershon Nerel in his doctoral thesis has described this difficult period in detail.⁹

Young people who were growing up in the Jewish State, like the children of the Bar-Davids, the Smadjas, Hirschkos, and a few others, began committing themselves to Yeshua. Several others were first-generation believers whose declarations of faith were not exactly welcome news to their families and friends. The first such believer we met in November 1963 was Baruch (Ricky) Maoz, about two weeks after we arrived in Eilat.

Baruch had been brought to Israel with his younger brother by his mother when they were children. He had been involved with a pioneer kibbutz in Eilat, and during his military service met a family of six Afrikaaners living in town. Peter Venter was a professional miner who worked at the Timna Copper Mines, then a flourishing enterprise outside Eilat. Peter and his wife Anna were Pentecostal and attracted Baruch; for a year and a half they often entertained him in their home and spoke of Yeshua to him.

While working at Timna during leave from the Army, Baruch was injured and hospitalized. There he met Ovadia, a young Yemenite Jew from Trinidad. Ovadia had been hospitalized for psychological observation because of his refusal to comply with Army regulations. He was a wild young Pentecostal who dared Baruch to kneel and challenge God to reveal Yeshua to him. According to Baruch's oral testimony, he had a Pentecostal manifestation and accepted Yeshua. When I met him a few days later, he was wildly Pentecostal himself; he was speaking to almost everyone he met about Yeshua, his speech punctuated with "Halleleuya" and "Toda L'el" (Thank God).

A chain of witness was begun, with Baruch bringing in Lazlo, a young Hungarian Jewish immigrant, and he in turn a young French Jewish immigrant, and then there were two more. There was a lot of excitement, but eventually it faded out, and only Baruch became an enduring part of the Messianic body in Israel. In 1964 Baruch left Eilat for Jerusalem, and became involved with the small community that was developing there, locating himself within a tiny eccentric Norwegian Pentecostal group, which he eventually left.

Not long afterward, Amikam Tavor, a native son of German-Jewish immigrants, accepted Yeshua after attending a Gospel meeting at Bethesda in Haifa, to which he was brought by Arye, a neighbor of ours in Eilat. Both Baruch and Amikam became active in the wider body, and with their skills began to contribute to the indigenization process. Neither of them found a congregational or fellowship framework suitable to their vision of faith for several years.

Baruch, after a stint in the UK for theological study, became committed to the Calvinist Reformed movement. After he returned to Israel in 1968, he married Bracha, the daughter of Romanian Jewish immigrants and was in fellowship with the Jaffa Plymouth Brethren led by the Ostrowskys, then with the Bar Davids in Ramat Gan. In both congregations he found it impossible to submit to the conservative style of fellowship and was asked to leave by the leaders.

⁹ Nerel.

New Hebrew-speaking Congregations Form

In 1978, Baruch helped organize one of the first indigenous Hebrew congregations: “Hesed V’Emet” (Grace and Truth) which then met in Rehovot. Like the Messianic Assembly in Jerusalem reorganized in 1969, it was an amalgam of various Hebrew-speaking Israelis, mainly young marrieds, from various theological and congregational backgrounds. The leaders produced a 21-page constitution heavily imbued with Reformed theology but mildly tolerant of other trends except for the Pentecostal or Charismatic, the latter having taken hold of many of the expatriate missionaries in the mid-1970s. In its early stages the congregation was violently attacked by ultra-orthodox zealots, which was widely publicized by the media.

Several years later the congregation split on personal and theological grounds. David Tel-Zur, a dynamic young Israeli who had been brought to faith through the ministry of the Haimoff (Bar-David) family in Ramat Gan while serving with the IDF with one of their sons, led the greater part of the congregation to nearby Nes Tsiona, and from there to Maaleh Adumim, a West Bank settlement in Judea. It was part of their search for a more Jewish national and religious expression of Messianic faith.

Over the years the splinter group has become more and more separatist in terms of identification with the Jewish nationalist and religious right wings. They have also adopted various Orthodox Jewish patterns of worship, such as the Ark of the Torah, separate seating for men and women, the talit (prayer shawl), and granting full membership only to born Jews, or to gentiles rabbinically converted to Judaism. They have developed a strong sense of community, with most of the members living in close proximity to their center “Hefzibah.”

Meanwhile, the parent congregation, “Grace and Truth,” identifies itself as a “Christian Congregation” in English, but as a “kehila meshihit” (literally “Messianic Congregation”) in Hebrew rather than employing the normal Hebrew equivalent for “Christian” (“notzri”). In theology and practice the congregation has become a Hebrew expression of Reformed Christianity, although it does contextualize Israeli festivals, Sabbath meetings and the like. Like many other congregations in Israel, it has absorbed significant numbers of immigrant believers from the former USSR.

In various ways more and more Hebrew-speaking Israelis were drawn into the Messianic movement. The need to remove any cultural stumbling block to faith created by the widespread use of English and other translations became an issue.

Some of the pioneer missionaries did help form the basis for a Hebrew revival in the Messianic body. To name a few: the Jerusalem Baptist leader and scholar Robert Lindsey, who received much recognition for his research of the Hebrew sources of the Gospels; Ruth Lawrence of Beersheva, who produced one of the early Hebrew hymnals and other literature; Aili Havas, the Finnish missionary who studied at the Hebrew University in its early years and set up the Finnish Hebrew center “Shalhevet-ya” in Jerusalem, later directed by the Finnish biblical and rabbinically-knowledgeable writer and scholar-missionary Risto Santala. Risto produced two works in Hebrew: *The Messiah in the Old Testament* and *The Messiah in The New Testament in the Light of Rabbinic Writings*.

Warren and Linda Graham, of the Christian & Missionary Alliance, have also worked on the promotion of Hebrew literature, as well as in youth camps for the children of Israeli believers. At the same time, they have strongly supported the Hebrew congregations.

Neighbors, Hippies and First Fruits

Even when I worked outdoors for several years in the fierce Eilat sun to earn a livelihood, once we were known as believers, there would be subtle and blatant approaches for help to emigrate, or to obtain money for needy families in exchange for “conversion.” In the 1960s, for many of our neighbors it was unbelievable that American Jews should live in Israel, let alone work as a laborer. At the time there was only a handful of American immigrants in Eilat, yet some assumed we would help them emigrate or make life easier for them through gifts!

Haya was active in distributing Bibles in the many languages spoken in Eilat. She was especially blessed with a gift for hospitality among the constant flow of visitors, believers, inquirers and passers-through in our home.

One good fruit of our life in Eilat was a Dutch “hippy,” John Pex. In the 1960s Eilat was flooded with hippies who developed a shanty town in “the Wadi” on the margins of Eilat. Many would work at odd jobs because of the acute shortage of local labor. John had received a Bible from Haya through a neighbor of ours who knew him. Through reading the Bible he came to faith. Then he left for America to marry Judy, a former hippy herself who had also accepted Yeshua. John came from a Dutch Catholic background and Judy was Jewish, but both were devoted to Eilat and came back as immigrants. They developed a powerful ministry among the hippies and outcasts, many drug-addicted, and have “birthed” a number of our Messianic Jewish leaders. Today they minister to the many foreign workers, immigrants, and locals who flock to Eilat.

Israel Secretary of the IMJA

I was appointed part-time Israeli Secretary of the IMJA in 1976; I continued work in a local shipping company for another year, and then we moved to Jerusalem. My work for the Alliance was basically to serve Jewish believers living in Israel, to serve as liaison with congregations and other bodies in the local community of believers, to provide material help to Messianic Jews when possible, in consultation with local congregations and fellowships, to encourage and to inform both local and foreign believers, and to be available to media and other inquirers.

I was asked to serve on the Advisory Board of the Bible Society of Israel (BSI) along with Naim Ateek, an Arab Anglican; and Robert Lindsey, the American Southern Baptist. This led to greater indigenization of the BSI. A committee was formed for producing the first annotated modern Hebrew New Testament, a separate advisory committee for the Arabic-speaking community, and the beginnings of a diglot classical-modern Hebrew Tanakh was attempted.

An independent survey sponsored by the BSI among a cross-section of the Jewish Israeli population demonstrated an overall positive attitude (53%) to the project. A large number of Israeli Jews, including native Israeli Messianics, find sections of the Scripture virtually unintelligible; some consult foreign language translations (especially English) to understand the text. Already in the 1940s the pioneer Hebrew scholar, Joseph Klausner, had appealed for a modern Hebrew Tanakh paraphrase, because of the increasing alienation of youth from the ancient language. He produced a sample version of his own of one of the minor prophets. A sample of selected texts was commissioned by the BSI employing the services of two Israeli experts, but before the project could get under way the funding for it dried up.

Meanwhile, the gap between ancient and modern Hebrew continues to grow wider, and to paraphrase the English translator Tyndale, the dream of a Bible which even a plowboy may read with profit remains unfulfilled in Hebrew. Recently I learned that a feasibility study has been authorized by a serious sponsor for renewal of the project.

United Christian Council in Israel

The United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI), founded in 1957 by a group of Evangelical societies, did promote indigenous development among Arab and Jewish believers, and tried to encourage the locals to be part of it, but with only limited success. By its nature it projected the image of the Evangelical Mission representing foreign bodies, and was seen as such by the Israeli authorities, at times to the benefit of the local body.

Certainly, in the campaign against the anti-mission law of 1977, the UCCI played the major role in galvanizing both Jewish and Christian opposition to its implementation. Based on the myths of “the Mission,” and the common assumption that Jews had to be bribed to confess faith in Yeshua as Messiah, the law offered a field day for harassment by provocateurs. They could claim that they were offered bribes to induce them to change their beliefs, since a “promise” to give help was considered a felony under the law. There was never any lack of people to claim that promises were made to them, especially when they used these fictitious claims in order to extract money or other benefits from the religious institutions to whom they appealed to be “saved” from “the Mission.”

Actually, Orthodox institutions were constantly “bribing” secular Jews to “return” to Judaism (for many had always been secular). The Canadian-American Jewish writer Saul Bellow reported how a Habad emissary-missionary had offered him a regular stipend if he would convert his kitchen to a kosher kitchen! Secular Jews were constantly crying “mission” to these activities. The constant reports circulated by Orthodox zealots of alleged mission bribery reinforced the myth in the minds of Israelis that the place to go for help in emigration, welfare, and the like was to “the Mission,” and Messianic believers were presumably its agents.

Shortly after we moved to Jerusalem, the Knesset passed the anti-mission law, and the UCCI asked me to serve on the ad hoc committee to deal with the issue, especially monitoring the media and responding to the flow of misinformation by proponents of the law. At the time there were very few Arab evangelicals among the indigenous Christians. They were part of a fourfold minority: a minority within the Arab Christian community, which was a minority within the largely Muslim Arab community, which was a minority within the Jewish State, itself a minority in the Middle East. The Israeli government recognized, however, that the evangelical communities were supported by or affiliated to a huge Protestant Evangelical “hinterland” in Western countries. Their political, financial and moral support for Israel, still largely isolated by Arab hostility, was considered by many Israelis a component of its security.

The UCCI sought to encourage indigenous Arab and Jewish believers to join in its activities but with minimal success. There were political, theological and cultural differences which divided the groups in ways characteristic of fiercely independent Protestant (and Jewish) groups. There were pressures from some to have the UCCI enter into the great political divide over the prophetic and contemporary significance of Israel nationally and internationally. There was also the drive by some towards ecumenism in relation to the ancient and unevangelical churches. This finally

led to the withdrawal of the Anglicans on the Arab side, as well as some of the more conservative Evangelicals on the Jewish mission side.

In a local and international campaign, joined by liberal Jewish and Christian groups inside and outside Israel, the UCCI succeeded in neutralizing the worst aspects of the law, especially making an alleged promise of material assistance to another person a subject of police investigation. The State Attorney Gabriel Bach and the Attorney General Aharon Barak with the approval of the Minister of Justice Shmuel Tamir stated publicly and in writing, that “instructions have been given by the Attorney General that no action, or even inquiry, be instituted by virtue of this law without the prior direct authorization of the Attorney General in person, or the State Attorney in person.” Although attempts were made to harass believers on the basis of alleged bribery, for over 20 years no charge has been substantiated even to the extent of being adjudicated.

“In Israel Caesar is Jewish”

There were issues of witness and evangelism in a Jewish-Israeli context to be dealt with, the methods and impact of Bible teaching, the forms of worship, fellowship, and life within a sovereign Jewish society, a situation which the Christian Church had never faced. The New Testament church could on occasion appeal to Caesar, as Paul did when his life was threatened; in Israel “Caesar” is Jewish, and, ironically, we are far less threatened than Paul or the ancient Nazarenes were by Jewish authorities.

Although the Nazarenes at times suffered for being too far off the mainstream, they remained a Jewish movement; one of the first major conflicts the Church faced was over whether gentiles could be part of it, not whether it was un-Jewish. Our struggle is to be recognized as Jews. Once we are numerous enough and secure enough in our Jewish national and spiritual identity, we will no doubt face some of the intense antagonism that Paul and his followers faced.

Impact on Israel from Abroad

In the early 1970s three factors impacted on the local body to spur greater cooperation and attention to indigenizing: First, the growing number of Hebrew speakers and native or Israeli-raised believers; secondly, the impact on the Israeli media and public of the “Jews for Jesus” and Messianic Judaism movements in America. During a three-months period in 1973 there was scarcely a day when there was not some reference to Jewish believers in Yeshua in the Israeli Hebrew and foreign-language press, Israeli radio and television. It had become current news!

Thirdly, there was the impact of various international Christian groups; the LOGOS charismatic movement, Christian Zionist groups (such as those led by Dr. Douglas Young), and later in 1980 the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ), and the wider Evangelical movement, especially the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelisation (LCWE).

The LCWE founding conference included three Israeli members (Victor Smadja, Baruch Maoz and myself), and Jews from other countries. At Lausanne in July 1974 the three of us decided that upon our return to Israel, we would gather local Hebrew-speaking believers into some kind of conference framework, but there was congregational resistance initially. Nevertheless, some months later, invitations were sent out, and about 30 believers gathered from

around the country in Jerusalem at the Shalhavetya center for an informal discussion. An organizing committee was set up consisting of the three conveners and several others to create a program for ongoing meetings.

There were sticky issues about participation: Should Hebrew-speaking Roman Catholics, Arab Evangelicals, and non-Israelis take part? It was finally agreed that the only criterion besides Messianic faith would be language; no translation would be provided. This was a sign of the growing frustration of Israelis and other Hebrew speakers with polyglot meetings, or with the use of English as a lingua franca. It became much stickier when topics for discussion came up, and they were many! Should Messianic Jews fight for legal status as a recognized religious community like the Karaites? There was little support for this proposal, although Dr. Alkali, a lawyer by profession, took it upon himself to draw up articles for such a submission. The consensus was that Messianic Jews should seek recognition as a part of the Jewish community and not apart from it.

A Search for Hebrew Messianic Music

There were sessions devoted to creating a basis for Hebrew music to replace the prevalent use of translated English and German hymns with a few traditional Jewish worship songs. A young Peruvian believer, “Moshe” Chavez with an ear for Jewish music, in Israel to study archaeology in the 1960s, had set many Scripture texts to music. He was followed by similar contributions of Peter van Worden, the nephew of Corrie Ten Boom, who was invited with his family to sing some of them on an Israeli TV program. These songs were included in a new hymnal published by YANETZ in 1976 and arranged by Arye Bar-David. Most of the songs were traditional Christian hymns translated into Hebrew, and one Yiddish hymn, (“Mein Liebster Mashiach” by Moishe Rehter), several traditional Hebrew hymns (“Adon Olam,” “Odekha ki anitani,” “Yigdal,” from its English adaptation), several modern choruses and the Chavez and van Worden Scripture songs.¹⁰

Marousia Legrain, a Belgian nun from the order of the Sisters of Zion in Ein Karem, came to our musical sessions and demonstrated the liturgical music she had created for the nuns whose worship is focused on the Hebrew Book of Psalms. She had also been invited by Sephardic Jews to set to music the traditional “birkat ha'mazon” (blessing after meals). Her music was based on research into ancient Hebrew music through analysis of the ancient chants of the Eastern churches and of the synagogue, especially from the East.

There were musical proposals by Yaakov and Esther Horesh, David and Lisa Loden, and others. These sessions may have laid the basis for the music conferences led by the Lodens, Arye Bar-David and Yuval and Elisheva Shomron (Sebastian) several years later. Out of these emerged a series of new Hebrew Messianic songbooks, with songs now numbering several hundreds, published and unpublished. The Lodens, the Shomrons, Arye Bar-David, Batya Segal, Zipporah Bennett and others have made major contributions to the change in sound of Israeli Messianic music.

The impact of the “Liberated Wailing Wall” of “Jews for Jesus” and the Watsons of Canada,

¹⁰ *Halel V'zimrat Yah*, Keren Ahva Meshihit, Jerusalem, 1976. Soft-cover English version, *Praise and Song*, Keren Ahva, Jerusalem.

both influenced by traditional East European Jewish music as well as contemporary Western music, can also be detected in the variegated songs that have emerged and continue to emerge in Israel and in the Diaspora Messianic movement.

There is a parallel here between the development of Israeli folk and popular music developing out of East European (especially Russian and Yiddish) music, absorbing Yemenite and Palestinian Arab sounds, the cantorials and hassidic tunes. Later, the impact of Central European and the Mediterranean sounds from Greece and Judeo-Spanish “romanzas,” and more recently, Western (especially American) pop music have had their impact. Today it would be difficult to describe what is authentic Israeli music. Messianic music is even more varied and hard to authenticate. What shape it will eventually take as much depends on what form the movement takes, whether moving closer to its Jewish sources, or clinging culturally to its Evangelical mentors.

Evangelism and Witness in the Jewish Context

Evangelism and witness in the Jewish context were always subjects of concern. Aggressive outdoor “confrontation” evangelism of the kind carried on by “Jews for Jesus” in America and elsewhere were considered inappropriate for Israel. The infusion of younger Israeli believers and immigrants from Western countries was nevertheless creating a momentum for a higher profile. Many Israeli believers had little of the Diaspora sense of minority status and “walk-softly” attitude, “What will the gentiles or other Jews say?” They usually came from secular or moderately traditional backgrounds while a few had broken with Orthodoxy and entered the secular mainstream before accepting Yeshua.

Yaakov Damkani, the son of traditional Persian Jewish immigrants, has been among the most aggressive and persistent Israeli evangelists. Yaakov has been a leader for the past decade in outdoor evangelism on Israeli city streets and parks and beaches, outside festivals of rock music, theatres and at major public events. In recent years he has extended his outreach to Goa in India where masses of young Israelis have been backpacking after military service in the heavy atmosphere of the contemporary drug culture.

Damkani has published an autobiography in Hebrew and English (*Why Me?*), which reflects the journey of many children of Eastern Jewish immigrants. Uprooted from their traditions, they have plunged into secular Western life with a vengeance. Some, like Damkani, have responded to the gospel, often in its most fundamentalist approach. Damkani maintains a center in Jaffa from which, with the help of foreign volunteers and some locals, he continues his bold evangelistic sorties.

Hebrew Messianic Publications

For eight years (1981-89) I published the Hebrew-language Messianic periodical *B'shuv*. There had been several predecessors who tried to create a Hebrew periodical for believers and inquirers: *Tal* by Ben-Meir; *Lapid* by Kofsman, and *Me'et Le'et* by Baruch Maoz. Except for the last named, now in its 25th year, all have ceased publication. Baruch produces a good professional Hebrew quarterly, but has been biased toward Reformed theology with much material translated from English.

In 1981 I felt that a publication which would seek maximum inclusiveness and encourage original Hebrew material with a stronger Messianic Jewish bias was also needed. *B'shuv* also included holiday, community news, social and cultural information, personal testimonies of faith, and a diversity of opinion articles. I was able to sustain it financially, and reached a peak of 350 paid subscriptions, and printing an average of 500 copies per issue, but it was costing something like US\$10 per copy. I felt that the response was inadequate to justify the cost and effort in producing each issue.

When the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel (MJAI) was re-established in March 1989 I asked them to take it over, and it became a more modest enterprise, *Zot Habrit* (“This is the Covenant”), an organ of the MJAI. In 1997, Tsvi Sadan, a long-time sabra believer with a strong desire to strengthen the Messianic Jewish aspect of our movement, founded a bi-monthly, *Kivun* (“Direction”), to which I have been contributing a regular column.

The UCCI in 1985 helped launch MISHKAN as “a theological forum on Jewish evangelism,” (to meet Jewish objections, the subtitle was later changed to “A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People.”) I have contributed responses and articles from its inception.

Educational Programs in Israel

Israel has been a magnet for Christians and Messianic Jews from abroad seeking educational programs. Some of these, like the King of Kings College, have encouraged local believers to take part, while others, like the Holy Land Institute founded by Dr. Douglas Young, and the Center for the Study of Early Christianity led by Stephen and Claire Pfann, have mainly attracted foreign students. Those Israelis seeking higher education within a context of faith have usually traveled abroad.

Certainly, Israel has sufficient programs for higher education at its universities and technical schools, and believers study at these. Some of them — Jewish, Arab and foreign — have banded together under the auspices of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students to maintain witness and fellowship.

Meanwhile, teaching programs in Hebrew have developed that offer correspondence courses for inquirers, like Emmaus; for special Bible studies, like TELEM, which combines external studies and tutoring within the framework of the Caspari Center; and Netivya Center in Jerusalem, with its emphasis on the Jewish aspect of Messianic faith. Since each of these groups caters to small numbers, the initial attempt to set up a non-denominational framework allowing for diverse perspectives seemed sensible. A committee of congregational leaders worked for almost two years to establish criteria for a national Hebrew Messianic educational institution, but failed to arrive at a consensus, and the parties went their separate ways.

National Frameworks for Israeli Messianic Believers

Attempts to set up national frameworks are nothing new under the Israeli sun. Among the first was the revived Hebrew Christian Alliance of Israel in 1951-2, described by Gershon Nerel in his doctoral dissertation.¹¹ It lasted until 1953, and went into hibernation until 1989 when it was

¹¹ Nerel.

revived as the MJAI (Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel), and continues to function under the leadership of Ilan Zamir and Asher Intrater.

Ilan Zamir comes from a moderately traditional Eastern Jewish background (his parents were Libyan Jews). Faith in Yeshua came through the ministry of “The Shelter” in Amsterdam, a Christian hostel used by many young Israelis on the almost obligatory back-pack trip abroad following the two-three year stint of military service.

Ilan led three other young Israelis to faith while in Amsterdam, and upon return to Israel became active in the believing community. While I was serving as Israel Secretary of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance, he was a valued helper in reviving the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel. At present he serves as president of the “King of Kings (KOK) College” in Jerusalem and Jaffa, which is aimed at reaching local Hebrew-speaking, Amharic and Russian and foreign students. Ilan is also the president of the MJAI, and Asher serves as its secretary.

Asher Intrater, coming from an American Jewish background, has been involved in the American Messianic Jewish movement for many years. He has strongly supported a Jewish emphasis in Messianic Jewish life, including elements of the traditional synagogue. He is also active in the congregation led by Joseph Shulam.

An Echo from the Past

Reporting on its pioneering venture in 1841 with the establishment of the Jerusalem Anglican bishopric of former rabbi Michael Solomon Alexander, the London Jews' Society noted:

*After the lapse of many centuries, an apostle to the circumcision destined for the land of Israel ... begins an era in the history of the Jewish nation and the Christian Church. What the friends of Israel longed for, prayed for and laboured for, was not simply the conversion of a few individuals, but the resuscitation of the Jewish people, the resurrection of the Jewish Church.*¹²

A century and a half later one may feel a sense of some progress made towards fulfilling the apostle's vision of an “Israel saved of the LORD.” A growing remnant of Messianic Jews in the land are learning to work together in the creation of an effective corporate witness. Many challenges and obstacles remain.

Some 80 congregations and house fellowships are scattered throughout the land of Israel. Estimates vary between 3000-5000 believers in number, including gentiles who identify with the Messianic Jewish movement.

Between Two Poles

During the past 15 years there have been serious attempts by some Messianic Jews to disengage from modern and ancient quarrels of the historical churches, to find a way of ministry, worship and life which will be compatible with the situation of a Messianic body within the revived sovereign Jewish homeland. Like the Jewish national revival of the past two centuries, the Messianic Jewish movement has existed in tension with respect to two poles; the first, a determination to launch out away from long-standing traditions, often stagnant and resistant to

¹² Kelvin Crombie, “Early Christian Zionists and the Return to the Land,” p. 53 in *Mishkan* 26/1997, citing *Jewish Intelligence*, 1841.

change, whether in the form of Jewish orthodoxy or Christian conservatism; the second pole recognizes the need for some continuity with what exists and is adaptable to renewed nationhood in relation to language, Jewish symbols, and the practicalities of life in the Jewish homeland.

Both secular Zionists and Messianic Jews have grappled with the way to observe biblical and traditional Sabbaths and festivals, and to adapt a rich and ancient culture within a modern context. Neither movement has succeeded in integrating the elements from the past and the present to provide a balanced acceptable alternative; the tensions on both the secular and religious sides continue, and if less intense, also between the “Messianic Jew” and the “Hebrew Christian.” In Hebrew the term “yehudi meshihi” (literally, Jewish Messianist) makes no distinction between the Messianist who seeks a Jewish approach to New Covenant faith, and the Hebrew Christian who may be defined as a Protestant Jew (or, as a major exponent at present, Baruch Maoz, might phrase it, a “Jewish Evangelical Christian).”¹³

Most Israeli congregations and fellowships reflect the Evangelical Christian streams, from Calvinist to Charismatic, which have influenced their leaders and members. We sometimes hear gentile Christian visitors from abroad making significant comments during visit to Israel. “Oh, we feel so much at home here; the service and atmosphere was just like ours!” Meanwhile, the Messianic Jew winces. “Is this all we have accomplished? A Hebrew adaptation of Western (usually American) Christianity?”

Among the leaders of the move for greater Jewish input into the Messianic movement, I may mention several: David Stern, who has published a number of books on the subject in the quest for a genuinely Jewish approach to the gospel,¹⁴ Joseph Shulam of Netivya, who has worked on the practical aspect of forming Messianic worship frameworks following the main outlines of the traditional synagogue, as well as in his writing, publishing and lecturing,¹⁵ Tsvi Sadan in his writing and teaching has maintained contact with the wider body of Israeli believers, unlike David Tel-Zur who has become extremely separatist. The Messianic Assembly has also in the recent past joined the quest for a more Jewish expression of Messianic faith.

I myself have long seen the need for such a movement. In the monograph “Between Church and Synagogue: The Dilemma of the Hebrew Christian and Messianic Jew”¹⁶ published in the U.K., I set forth the issues as I saw them and the direction which our movement should take within the context of modern national and spiritual renewal.

Ebionite Revival

There have been eccentric movements for reviving the Ebionite heresy, rejecting the ministry of the apostle Paul and genuine fraternity with gentile churches. The most well-known example is that of the “Ir Ovot” settlement in the Negev led by Simcha Pearlmutter.

¹³ Baruch Maoz, “Jewish Christianity: Whither and Why?” in *Israel and Yeshua*, (Jerusalem: Caspari Center Festschrift, 1993), pp. 124.

¹⁴ David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto, Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel, Jewish New Testament, Commentary on the JNT*, (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, from 1988 on).

¹⁵ Joseph Shulam, *Teaching from Zion, Messianic Midrasha*, Netivya, Jerusalem.

¹⁶ Menahem Benhayim, *Between Church and Synagogue: the Dilemma of Hebrew Christians & Messianic Jews. “Tishrei,”* vol. 2, no. 3, Spring 1994, pp. 57-70 (copies of article available from author).

Introduced to faith in Yeshua through fundamentalist ministries in Miami, Florida in the early 1960s, Simcha came from a moderately traditional Jewish background. His attempts to integrate Yeshua into a mainstream synagogue framework were rebuffed, and he founded his own synagogue, then made *Aliya* in 1966 with some of his followers. His parents lived in Eilat for several years, and for awhile we tried to bring them into the wider fellowship of believers, but Simcha preferred his own way of maximal integration into Orthodox Jewish life. The secular media found his community an interesting “item,” living in the desert with two wives. Eventually, he took on the trappings of strict Jewish orthodoxy and religious nationalism, and adapted the talmudic legend about “Messiah ben-Yosef” (Sukkot 52-a), to Yeshua. His first wife Judith later left him, taking with her most of their children, and joined the Yad L’Ahim anti-mission society in Jerusalem.

Messianic Jews and Arab Christians

We are often asked about the relations between Messianic Jews in Hebrew-speaking congregations and Israeli Arabs, especially Evangelical believers. When we first arrived, our main Arab contact was with Arab believers in Galilee in Plymouth Brethren and Baptist congregations. Those believers were quite friendly, and most were fluent in Hebrew. Within the UCCI I had good relations with the Arab members, although there was some tension over political issues with Naim Ateek and the Arab Anglicans. Many other Arab Evangelicals shared our belief in the significance of modern Israel in the process of outworking biblical prophecy. After 1967 we began to meet believers from East Jerusalem and other parts of the land. For most, it was their first encounter with Messianic Jews.

Because of the intense interest in biblical prophecy among Messianic Jews in the wake of the 1967 Six Day War and the impact of the high-profile Christian Zionist movement in Israel, a certain degree of tension was felt in relations between some Jewish and Arab believers. Nevertheless, there were ongoing joint efforts to bring us together. The most successful meeting took place at the Baptist Village in early spring of 1988, when about 200 Jewish and Arab believers from Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, gathered for a full day of worship, discussion, fellowship and a common meal. With the intensification of the intifada it became dangerous for Arabs from the territories to meet with Jews in such public conferences lest they be suspected of “collaboration,” an often fatal accusation. No doubt, political identification on both sides began to influence the situation as violence abounded in the land.

During the angry demonstrations in the wake of the Oslo accords from 1993, many Messianic Jews and Christian Zionists became identified with right-wing politics, with some joining in violent denunciations of the Rabin-Peres government. I felt obliged to warn in my writings and conversation of the danger of believers becoming so identified as a movement with one side of the controversy within Israel. In their unbalanced zeal for predictive prophecy concerning the land, some enthusiasts seemed to have lost all contact with the meaning of the gospel and the life of Yeshua. They forget that Zionism was founded and led mainly by secular Jews who saw it as an instrument for normalizing Jewish life, nullifying traditional Jewish messianism, and creating a “normal” Jewish people, even to the extent of having “our own gangsters, horse thieves and whores,” as one Zionist leader was said to have remarked. It was a clear echo of the cry for a king in the days of the prophet Samuel, or the forecast of the prophet Ezekiel in his vision of the return,

the yearning to be “like all the nations” (See 1 Sam 8; Ezek 20:32-33).

Prophecy and Reconciliation

Most Messianic Jews and our friends believe, as I do, that Zionism has been an instrument in God's hand to accomplish a phase in the divine purpose for the Jewish people. Nevertheless, we are still called to be a reconciling element in the world, and “as far as it depends upon us, to live at peace with all men” (Rom 12:18). In this spirit Haya and I attended the massive peace demonstration in Tel-Aviv at which Prime Minister Rabin was murdered. Like most believers, I was shaken by the tragedy. I sent out a circular letter during the national *shiva*, the seven days of mourning, urging Messianic Jews and Christian Zionists to proclaim the message of reconciliation and to uphold “the messianic faith of Yeshua in the spirit of Immanuel... PRINCE OF PEACE.” It isn't our calling to join up with the successors to the ancient Zealots who destroyed Israel twice by false messianism.¹⁷

The response was generally favorable, but a few were outraged and stigmatized me as a “leftist.” To them it was legitimate to identify with the extreme secular and religious right wing. For myself, I have always tried to apply the biblical dictum, “Decline not to the right nor to the left,” as an excellent guideline for evaluating worldly politics. In that shifting realm it's often impossible to find a true center; I sympathize with believers who prefer neutrality in this area.

In a moving appeal published in the KOK College newspaper, Ilan Zamir wrote after the assassination: “May the Messianic community in Israel be known, not as an extreme political movement, but as peacemakers. God is in control. His promises for Israel will come to pass. Let us be at rest, and lead others to the same rest.”

I continue to support efforts to improve relations within the body with Arab believers. I support the work of *Musalaha*, (reconciliation) founded by Salim Munair, an Israeli Arab brother I've known for many years. He works to further reconciliation among Jewish and Arab believers in the midst of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nevertheless, those Arab evangelicals and expatriates who have bought into replacement theology see no Biblical significance to the national restoration of the Jewish people as a necessary step toward their spiritual restoration and as proof of God's faithfulness to his prophetic word in both Testaments. The gifts and call of God (to Israel) are irrevocable (Rom 11:29). Like the blindness of classical Christianity towards Jewish people, they are not helping the cause of Arab-Jewish reconciliation, nor provoking Israel to jealousy as the church was commanded to do by the apostle to the gentiles (Rom 10:19; 11:11,14)

Light to the Nations

In recent years the flood of foreign workers and students, especially from Romania and the Far East, has challenged Haya and me and other Messianic Jews to reach out to them. Some came as believers, and minister to their people, while others have come to faith here, and new fellowships have sprung up. Despite almost 50 years of Communist indoctrination, it has been heartwarming to experience the openness of many of them to the gospel. Some of the mainland Chinese workers who have come to faith have insisted on being baptized in the Jordan River and have hired buses

¹⁷ Menahem Benhayim, “A Still Small Voice,” *The Messianic Jew*, Volume LXVIII no. 4, 12/95 to 2/96.

to take them to the Galilee. Thus, even in our very unformed state, we are being made “a light to the nations” for many gentiles who came here for purely economical reasons or for vocational and professional studies.

A Day as a Millennium, a Millennium as a Day!

We stand now on the edge of the 21st century in the midst of a stream of events and experiences which can be mind-boggling. Haya and I have, by God's grace, lived our three score and ten, and experienced in our lives tremendous changes which have wrenched the life of the Jewish people and the world, as well as the worldwide body of Messiah.

“But do not ignore this one fact, beloved,” the apostle writes (2 Pet 3:8), “that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years. And a thousand years is as one day.” The latter phrase echoes Psalm 90 with its lament of the shortness of the human lifespan in the face of eternity.

Surely, in giving the other side of the picture of a day as a thousand years, he balances the picture for us. The lifespan of our planet, the 4000 years of the Jewish people, the 2000 years of the Church, the 50 years of the State of Israel, and our own brief lifespans all pale in significance before eternity. Yet God invests them with meaning and hope for those who trust in him through Yeshua.

The Hebrew Bible ends in midsentence: “*Let him go up ...*” (2 Chr 36:23), and the New Testament ends with a word of hope and blessing: “*Come Lord Yeshua! The grace of the Lord Yeshua be with all the saints. Amen.*”

Copyright Menachem Benhayim, All Rights Reserved

Attempts to Establish a "Messianic Jewish Church" in Eretz-Israel

Gershon Nerel¹⁸

The Jew cannot, by the Missionary distinction imposed by Christ, be incorporated into any Gentile form of Christianity; there will always be the Jew and the Gentile in the Communion of the Catholic Church, as well as the Latin, the Greek and the Anglican, and all other branches of the True Vine, which are several. And when he sees his Promise in Christ, he will mould into his national liturgy, acts, rites, and ceremonies which are his and not ours, which if he may not force them upon us, we may not prohibit to him. Does not the Church teach both the Old and the New Testament?

By these words, Popham Blyth, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, expressed in the beginning of our century his conclusions regarding the feasibility of establishing a "Church of the Hebrews"¹⁹

Such ideas about reviving a national Messianic Jewish Church were not only the personal views of Bishop Blyth in Jerusalem. During the previous and present centuries both gentile and Jewish believers in Yeshua (JBY) expressed a desire to establish autonomous entities of modern Jewish disciples of Yeshua.²⁰

At the same time, however, other non-Jewish believers also argued that the Hebrew church should remain under the close oversight of the existing gentile churches as, for example, the Maronites relate to the western church and the Greek and Armenian Catholics to the Latin Church. In their opinion Jewish believers must still remain in full communion with the established gentile churches — acknowledging the authority of a primate or a historical church.²¹

Arguments concerning this issue did not stop until our times, although it seems that one common view prevailed, namely that particularly in the land of Israel an indigenous "Jewish church," or a corporate Messianic Jewish Body, would create an ongoing challenge to the universal church.²² However, throughout the world Messianic Jews made attempts towards creating their independent organizational frameworks, and to constantly develop their own

¹⁸ Gershon Nerel is the Israel Secretary for the International Messianic Jewish Alliance. He received his Ph.D. on "Messianic Jewish Self-identity in Eretz-Israel, 1917-1967" from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ G.F. Popham Blyth, "The Revival of the Church of the Hebrews", *Church and Synagogue*, vol. 4, 1902, pp. 1-3. Cf. idem, *The Jews and Their Claim in 1897*, Jerusalem, Epiphany, 1897, esp. pp. 1&4.

²⁰ Carl Schwartz, "Hebrew Christian Alliance", *The Scattered Nation*, vol. 1, 1866, pp. 125-126, 163-164; C.J. Ball, "A Hebrew Christian Church", *Church and Synagogue*, vol. 3, 1901, pp. 45-51; G.H. Box, "A Hebrew Christian Liturgy", *ibid*, pp. 52-61; "A Hebrew Christian Church", *Bible Lands*, vol. 6, 1921, pp. 127-128.

²¹ H. Heathcote, "The Church and the Spiritual Needs of Enquiring Jews and Hebrew Christians", *Church and Synagogue*, vol. 4, 1902, pp. 48-49.

²² Gustav H. Dalman, "A Jewish Christian Church", *Church and Synagogue*, vol. 3, 1901, pp. 108- 109; Harry L. Ellison, "The Church and the Hebrew Christian", in: G. Hedenquist, ed., *The Church and the Jewish People* (London 1954), pp. 143-167.

hermeneutics and modes of worship.²³

Various Grouping Forms — One Principle

Messianic Jews did not necessarily perceive the idea of forming for themselves a “church” as a replica of the traditional churches. Even the word “church” was often bypassed by them. They looked for unique organizational frameworks where they could easily express their specific characteristics, like observing Sabbath-Saturday, celebrating Passover and the other biblical feasts, as well as practicing circumcision. These efforts stemmed from a desire for a new organism in which they could feel completely at home and fully identify with. Thus, for example, instead of using the word “church,” they used other terms to define their grouping structures, as follows: “brotherhood,” “union,” “alliance,” “association,”²⁴ “guild”²⁵ and also “Christian synagogue.”²⁶

Under these designations Messianic Jews frequently started to develop their new institutions, emphasizing that they rely only upon biblical authority instead of the hellenistic or Roman Christian theologies which still remain the foundations of the historic churches. Therefore such corporations became for JBY the substitutions or synonyms for a normative “church.” Often they also had to speak about a 'National Jewish Church,' in order to avoid misunderstandings.²⁷ Although these grouping forms reflect a large variety of expressions of exclusiveness, nowhere did Messianic Jews want to totally separate themselves from the universal body of Messiah. The central idea for them, however, both past and present, was not to allow their gentilization and assimilation within Christendom — as happened for many centuries. Basically what many Jewish and gentile believers wanted was to establish particular entities which would build a new structure upon the model of the Jerusalem Jewish community of the first century. While focusing on the situation in Israel, it should be remembered that such attempts which took place in the Jewish Diaspora also influenced those who lived here and vice versa. No wonder, therefore, that JBY often referred to such views on a broad international level.

“The Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association”

The proposition to form “The Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association” was earnestly expressed

²³ Gershon Nerel, *Messianic Jews in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967): Trends and Changes in Shaping Self Identity*, Ph.D. dissertation, [Hebrew, unpublished](The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996), esp. pp. 29-45.

²⁴ An American believer in Yeshua claimed and also tried to prove that the American Hebrew Christians were the first ones who established brotherhoods, unions and alliances. Namely, this view is against the common thought that the American Hebrew Christians only imitated in this respect their brethren in England. See: Louis Meyer, “Hebrew Christian Brotherhoods, Unions and Alliances of the Past and Present”, *The Glory of Israel*, vol 1, 1903, pp. 199-203; 230-232; 250-252.

²⁵ The full name under consideration was "The Jewish Christian Guild of the Messiah". See: "An Autocephalous Hebrew Church", *Bible Lands*, vol. 6, #88, 1921, p. 128.

²⁶ An outstanding attempt to establish a Hebrew Christian Synagogue (Beith Haknesset Edat Hameshihit, {sic}) was in Toronto, Canada, by Shabbetai Benjamin Rohold, in 1913-1919. See: Jacob Gartenhaus, *Famous Hebrew Christians* (Chattanooga 1979), pp. 155-156.

²⁷ Alexander Waldman, "The Hebrew Christians and a National Church", *Hebrew Christian Record*, No. 2, July 1910, pp. 26-28.

in an address delivered by Canon Hastings Kelk at a general gathering of JBY held August 12, 1898, at Kelk's house.²⁸ Following this proposition Hebrew Christians convened August 19, 1898 at the residence of I. Th. Altaresky and unanimously adopted a constitution and by-laws.²⁹ However, it should also be mentioned that already in the years 1890-1891 there existed in Jerusalem a "Hebrew Christian Prayer Union," which preceded the established "Assembly."³⁰

"The Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association" had more than 50 members on its list. The patron of the association was B. Heilpern, the president was Dr. Morris J. Franklin from America, while the secretary and treasurer was L. Zeckhausen. The association, "with the object of promoting the moral, intellectual and social culture of its members, and of inculcating the exercise of mutual sympathy, assistance and protection," was closely linked to Christ Church in Jerusalem.³¹

The original constitution of the "Association" included the following words:

*(being) objects of attacks for both the Jew-hating antisemites and the Christ-hating Jews, being patronized by neither and boy-cotted by both, we therefore deem this a proper time and Jerusalem as the most appropriate place for all Hebrew Christians who should be of one heart and of one soul, and who ought to be cemented and united by the two-fold bonds of the Old and New Covenants, to cast off their swaddling clothes and assert their manhood, and take their places in the ranks of the Christian hosts, not as drones but as most active and leading witnesses, as their primitive Hebrew Christian brethren did, whom the Lord declared to be His Witnesses, from the beginning.*³²

It should be noted, however, that the original text of the constitution was significantly revised in its 1901 version, where the sentences which had connotations to the autonomous tendencies or leading status of JBY were erased. Probably this was done under the pressure of the institutional church which sponsored them. Anyhow, the latest evidence for this "Assembly" is found in 1904. Its patron, B. Heilpern, sent that year a letter of appeal to Europe to raise funds for buying a piece of land to build a dozen houses on it for the poor members of the association and thus form a Hebrew Christian colony.³³ Yet the needed money was not found, the houses and the colony were not realized and eventually the community disbanded.

Hebrew Christian Congregation in Jerusalem

Between the years 1925-1929 there was another attempt to establish an independent Messianic Jewish congregation in Jerusalem called "Kehilat Ivrim Meshihiim Biyerushalayim"

²⁸ Hastings Kelk represented the "London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews" and acted as superintendent of 'Christ Church' in Jerusalem.

²⁹ Constitution and By-Laws of the "Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association", Jerusalem, printed at the L.J.S. House of Industry, 1899, p.1.

³⁰ "Jerusalem Notes", *The Jewish Intelligence*, vol. 7, 1891, p. 21.

³¹ "Hebrew Christians of Jerusalem", *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, vol. 16, 1900, p. 20, with a photograph of the members.

³² "Constitution and By-Laws of the 'Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association'", p. 2.

³³ Letter of B. Heilpern, dated March 23, 1904, sent from Jerusalem "To the Secretaries, Society's House, 16 Lincoln's Inn-Fields, London", with additional special recommendations of the British and American Consuls. Oxford, Bodleian Library, dep. C.M.J., d. 58/1-19 (Miscellaneous Papers, no. 247).

(Congregation of Messianic Hebrews in Jerusalem). The founders of this congregation were two Jews, Hyman Jacobs and Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, and a Norwegian Lutheran missionary, Dr. Arne Jonsen. However, in 1927 Ben-Meir left the congregation for theological studies in "Moody Bible Institute" in Chicago.³⁴

Jonsen and Jacobs who remained in Jerusalem published a statement of principles to serve as an enlarged creed or manifesto. This proclaimed their aspirations to restore the original and national entity of JBY as described in the New Testament.³⁵ By this they expressed strong awareness of their need to observe the Jewish national customs and Holy Days originating in the Old Testament, particularly circumcision, the Sabbath and Passover.³⁶

There were heavy pressures exerted on Jacobs and Jonsen from their gentile Mission Boards overseas. The supporters of Jonsen in Oslo and the board of the "Chicago Hebrew Mission" in the USA that supported Jacobs compelled them to keep Sunday and the Sabbath as two days for divine worship. The Sabbath was not to remain the single day for their weekly worship. Theological pressure was also put upon the leadership of this congregation, and they were accused of being "Judaizers" who experimented at keeping only the Sabbath Day or stressing the observance of Jewish festivals according to the Jewish calendar.³⁷

Pressures of this kind, followed also by financial and personal inducements, finally blocked any possibility for such a revolutionary congregation; the idea came to be regarded as "reactionary." Both Jonsen and Jacobs were obliged to face investigators who came to Palestine to learn first-hand about their "Judaizing" tendencies. At last Jonsen had to leave the country and Jacobs became an itinerant evangelist in Palestine. Therefore, this attempt to form an independent Messianic Jewish congregation, alongside the model of the primitive Jewish church, did not survive more than four years.³⁸

The Palestine Hebrew Christian Alliance

After its inception in 1925 in London, the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (IHCA) was involved for many years in endeavors to establish a church of JBY, and particularly in Israel. "It is possible," Shabbetai Rohold stated during the inauguration conference in London, "for a Hebrew Christian Church to exist in Palestine without opposition"³⁹ In fact already in 1921 there was an attempt by Hyman Jacobs to organize a Hebrew Christian Alliance in Jaffa with a few members.⁴⁰ However, only four years later, we read in 1925 about Shabbetai Rohold who acted

³⁴ Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, *From Jerusalem to Jerusalem*, [=FJJ] Autobiographical Sketches (Jerusalem, 1977 (ms.)), p.65.

³⁵ Kurt Hjemdahl, "Arne Jonsen - A Pioneer in Israel", *Mishkan*, 20 (1994), pp. 39-40.

³⁶ Hyman Jacobs, *Religion and Nationality* (Jerusalem, August 1927).

³⁷ Joseph Flacks, "Report", *Jewish Era*, vol. 39, #4, 1929, p. 124.

³⁸ Gershon Nerel, "The Formation and Dissolution of a 'Messianic Jewish' (Hebrew Christian) Community in Jerusalem in the 1920's", in *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem 1997, (forthcoming).

³⁹ Report of the First International Hebrew Christian Conference, Held at Islington, London, 5th-12th September 1925, p.119. Cf. pp 52-59.

⁴⁰ Hyman Jacobs, "Letters from Palestine", *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*, (American), vol. 5,

as the president of 'The Palestine Hebrew Christian Alliance,'⁴¹ and as such he also became the vice-president of the IHCA.

The two central occupations of Rohold as President of the "Palestine Alliance" were the intensive relief work and teaching.⁴² Rohold particularly rendered assistance to the IMJA in connection with the taking over by the IMJA of the large Jerusalem property called "Abraham's Vineyard."⁴³ Yet when Rohold died in 1931 while visiting in Egypt, the work of the local Alliance in Palestine had to be reviewed.

Thus in 1930-1931, after returning to Palestine from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Moshe Ben-Meir and his colleague Hyman Jacobs occupied themselves with fresh attempts to found a large territorial organization of JBY. They too had great hopes to crystallize such an entity through cooperation with the IHCA which seriously considered establishing a Hebrew Christian Church.⁴⁴ The main motivator for this was Sir Leon Levison, born in Safed and first President of the IHCA.⁴⁵ However, after Levison's death in 1935, the IHCA drastically withdrew from its official policy to form a global Hebrew Christian church under its wings.

Yet in Israel the situation was different. In July 1931 the first regional grouping founded by Messianic Jews was named "The First Hebrew Christian Bible Conference" (In Hebrew: "Kinus Rishon LyYehudim Meshichiyim"). Morris Sigel who lived in Damascus was elected president and Miss Asseo from Safed was the treasurer.⁴⁶ In principle, their theological goal was to achieve an interdenominational fellowship without any kind of subordination to the traditional churches and mission organizations in Palestine.

Among their proclaimed aims the principal ones should be mentioned:

To unite Messianic Jews in Palestine and Syria; to establish and support urban branches; to witness corporately both to Synagogue and Church concerning the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope in Jesus; to introduce Jewish thought to Gentile Christians and the Gospel to Jews; to cooperate with the IHCA.

They consciously bypassed any controversial issues like baptism before admission and the definition of the concept of the trinity in order to provide a wide common ground for as many as possible to join their "Fellowship."⁴⁷

1921, pp. 131-133. Cf. Robert I. Winer, *The Calling, The History of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America* (Wynnewood, Pennsylvania 1990), p. 118.

⁴¹ *The Hebrew Christian* (=HC), vol. 1, #3, October 1928, pp. 132; 150-152.

⁴² W.M. Christie, "The Mount Carmel Bible School and the International Hebrew Christian Alliance", *HC*, vol. 3, #1, April 1930, pp. 21-23.

⁴³ "Palestine", *HC*, vol. 2, #2, July 1929, pp.46; 50.

⁴⁴ Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission; Proposed Principles of Faith for the Suggested Hebrew Christian Church; Proposed Constitution for the Suggested Hebrew Christian Church, n.d. (probably 1931/2).

⁴⁵ Leon Levison, "A Hebrew Christian Church", *HC*, vol. 5, #4, 1933, pp. 168-170. Cf. *ibid*, p.111. E. Bendor Samuel, "Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission", *HC*, vol.7, 1934, pp. 144-145.

⁴⁶ Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, pp. 101-103.

⁴⁷ See in my dissertation, pp. 90-94. The official registration of "The Hebrew Christian Fellowship of Palestine" was published in the Palestine Bulletin, dated 27 June 1932, File no. 2896/66.

The Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine and the Near East

In 1933 the "Fellowship" changed its official title and adopted a new name: "The Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine and the Near East" Now Jacobs left Ben-Meir who continued to work together with Morris Sigel. Ben Meir and Sigel wanted to cover not only Palestine but the whole Middle-East, including Lebanon and Trans-Jordan. Haifa — and not Jerusalem — remained the center for the Messianic Jewish community.

The requirements for admission to the "Fellowship/Alliance" were as follows:

Expression in public of faith in Messiah Jesus as personal Savior and Lord; belief in the divinity of Messiah Jesus; belief in his sacrificial death and resurrection; acceptance of the Old and New Testaments as the word of God and as the rule for their faith and lives.⁴⁸

However, no specific historical creed was mentioned as a stipulation for membership in that organization. The reason for that was the desire to present the broadest theological spectrum as a possible doctrinal basis in order to permit maximal membership by avoiding doctrinal confrontation on very problematic issues.

Again, it should be noted that especially during the 1920's and 1930's it was impossible to totally separate between a "Hebrew Christian Alliance" and a "Hebrew Christian Church."⁴⁹ Most likely it was precisely for this reason that not every Messianic Jew in Mandatory Palestine wanted to join or remain a member of the local Alliance. Thus, for example, Hayim Haimoff⁵⁰ refused to officially join the Alliance, and Solomon Ostrovsky⁵¹ decided to withdraw from membership because he believed that "[what] a Hebrew Christian church such as the H.C.A. (Hebrew Christian Alliance) propagates is both in principle and constitution opposed to the spirit and teaching of Holy Scripture"⁵²

In his autobiography, Moshe Ben-Meir mentions a new factor which caused a significant change in the character of the "Palestine Alliance," namely the coming of the German refugees. Ben Meir wrote:

Hebrew Christians who were running away from Germany in the second half of the 1930's, were helped by the IHCA and also sent to Palestine ... They joined the local Alliance. It was logical. They became a majority, and they germanised the Alliance. German became the official language. Germans were elected into office. Fritz Plotke was elected as Secretary instead of me. Hugo Loewenstein became President... The tragedy was that most of these refugees did not plan to settle in

⁴⁸ Constitution and Bye-Laws of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine and the Near East, dated 7 November 1933.

⁴⁹ See Paul Levertoff, "The Possibility of a Hebrew-Christian Church", *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*, vol.7, 1924, pp.132-136. Cf. Moses Klerekoper, "Should There be a Hebrew-Christian Church?", *ibid.*, vol. 19, #4, 1935, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁰ About Hayim Haimoff see: Gershon Nerel, "Rachel Bar-David: Mother of a Modern Israeli Messianic Jewish 'Tribe'", *The Messianic Jew (=HC)*, vol. 67, 1994, pp. 66-70.

⁵¹ Gershon Nerel, "Solomon Ostrovsky: A Pioneer and 'Watchman' in Eretz Israel", *The Messianic Jew (=HC)*, vol. 69, 1996, pp. 5-8.

⁵² Private letter of Solomon Ostrovsky to Ben-Meir, dated 12 March 1935. Probably because of that Ostrovsky never published anything in *The Hebrew Christian*, the quarterly organ of the IMJA, and instead initiated his independent magazine, "Hatzophe," in Hebrew.

Palestine. Those who did not die left as soon as they were able.⁵³

The issue which Ben-Meir raised in this case reflects the constant struggle within Israeli society, namely the difficulty of absorbing the masses of new immigrants on the one hand, and the influence of the newcomers upon the veterans on the other. Could we today, for example, make any comparisons or learn lessons regarding the joining of American JBY into the present "Israeli Alliance of Messianic Jews" etc.? Or, are we supporting enough JBY from Ethiopia and from Russia?

Still, the Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine, whatever designation it had, may be credited for the responsibility it undertook to consistently organize annual meetings for JBY. These believers were scattered in various churches in the big cities of the country, and in the Alliance conferences they could join together for fellowship and encouragement. The Annual conferences were convened in various places: Jerusalem, Ein Karem (then not included in Jerusalem), the "Karmel Heim" in Haifa and in Tiberias. Such consequent conferences⁵⁴ were held almost uninterruptedly until the birth of the State of Israel. The last president of the "Palestine Alliance" was F.J. Plotke.⁵⁵

Jewish Christian Community and the Jerusalem Fellowship

Abram Poljak (also used the name Avraham Ben Shraga as pseudonym), Albert Springer, Agnes Waldstein and Pauline Rose were another group among Messianic Jewish circles in Mandatory Palestine who thought and labored towards establishing a Messianic Jewish Church.⁵⁶ Following his vision, Poljak endeavored to launch a unique world movement of JBY that would be crystallized into a Jewish Church. "Not because I am against the nations," wrote Poljak, "but because I am for the Jews, and know that the Jewish people will listen only to a voice that comes from its own people. The Jewish national Church will be the only one with which the Jews will agree to discuss matters"⁵⁷

After founding in 1935 "The Jewish Christian Union" in Jerusalem, aiming at a worldwide Jewish church, Poljak soon worked simultaneously in Palestine and in Europe. What he initially wanted was to establish Jewish Christian communities, which ought to remain "communities" and not develop into a "church." According to Poljak the Jewish people's church is not to become an outward unit, a unit of organization, but a unit of the Spirit. "Jewish Christianity," he wrote, "ought to be and remain a movement and not to become an established national organization, a state within the state."⁵⁸

The Sabbath liturgy was pivotal in the Jewish Christian communities which were established

⁵³ Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, pp. 103-106.

⁵⁴ *Living Waters From Jerusalem*, ed. C.A. Gabriel, passim.

⁵⁵ "Among Our Alliances: Palestine", *HC*, vol. 19, #3, 1946, p.44.

⁵⁶ Abram Poljak, *Die Juedische Kirche* (Verlag der Judenchristlichen Gemeinde, Koeniz-Bern 1946).

⁵⁷ Abram Poljak, *The Cross in the Star of David* (London 1938), pp.38-39.

⁵⁸ Abram Poljak, "Our Future Communities", *The Jewish Christian Community*, Nos. 6/7, June/July 1939, p. 2.

in Jerusalem⁵⁹ and in Haifa.⁶⁰ The Sabbath service always started on Friday evening with lighting the traditional Sabbath candles — dedicated to the light of the Messiah. The Sabbath was welcomed according to prayers taken from the synagogue Prayer Book. This was followed by prayers for the government of Israel and the peace of Jerusalem. The service closed with the Aaronic blessing.⁶¹

In September 1947 Ben-Meir and Poljak published “Hashofar” (The Trumpet) in Hebrew, which was to serve as the organ of the Jewish Christian Community in Israel. The main work was done by Ben-Meir as Poljak knew no Hebrew. Yet only one issue appeared, in which they often used the Hebrew term “Edah,” meaning more than a regular community or local congregation.⁶² However, instead of focusing on a special Israeli Messianic Jewish identity, shaped by the modern Hebrew language, Poljak and his followers ended up in English and German-speaking countries where they promulgated the idea of reciprocal coexistence between Jews and Christians through regular dialogue between them. Although Poljak emphasized the need to institutionalize the liturgy of the Jerusalem community, eventually this liturgical framework declined, together with Poljak’s movement, after his death in 1963.

A Milestone in 1948

When the British Mandate over Palestine came to an end in 1948, “Operation Grace” was organized as a kind of “spiritual Dunkirk” to evacuate the majority of JBY in Israel mainly to England. However, not all JBY left the country then. About a dozen remained, among them Moshe Ben- Meir, Hayim Haimoff, Shlomo Ostrovsky, Abram Poljak, and Pauline Rose.⁶³ A major consequence of “Operation Mercy” was that with the departure of those evacuees, a community of JBY in Israel ceased to exist, and a new situation emerged. “Operation Mercy” caused generation and tradition discontinuity, i.e. the disintegration of the local fellowships and also interruption of “group overlap.” Thus, following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, another era began in the history of JBY in the Land.

Those very few who remained, reinforced by new JBY who moved into Israel through the massive *aliya* waves of the 1950's and 1960's, together formed new foundations for local believers. They worked hard to eliminate their minority status within the expatriate minorities of churches and missions in Israel. In fact, gradually they did become a self-determined ideological minority on their own. With this new status JBY also endeavored to shape their grouping structures, their liturgy and their theology.

(To be continued)

Copyright Gershon Nerel, All Rights Reserved

⁵⁹ "Building Community in Palestine", *Jerusalem, Organ of the Jewish Christian Community and the Jerusalem Fellowship*, no. 11, August 1947, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Abram Poljak, "Letters From Mt. Carmel", *Jerusalem*, no. 20, May 1948, pp. 4-5.

⁶¹ "The Liturgy of the Jerusalem Community", *Jerusalem*, nos. 44/45, May/June 1950, pp. 1-7.

⁶² Published by "Patmos" Publishing House, P.O.B. 1353, Jerusalem, at "Living Waters" Press. Ben-Meir used the pseudonym Moshe Tal.

⁶³ See in my dissertation, pp. 114-123.

External Problems

Per Østerbye

Any definition of the general opinion of a large body of people on a particular question must be a subjective judgment. Admittedly the judgment may be more or less well-founded — the statistics may be drawn from three or four enquiries, or from conversations with a thousand people, and all available information in books and newspapers — but the judgment is ultimately a subjective one.

It is possible to find indications of an opinion on a particular point in the language, and in our case we find such Hebrew words as *nozri* (Christian), *komer* (minister) and *jeschu* (Jesus). *Nozri* is perhaps a nickname meaning “the Nazarene”, *komer* is used in the Old Testament to mean an idolatrous priest, and *jeschu* is originally — or at any rate was treated as such later — an abbreviation for *jimach schemo ves'ikrono* (May his name and his memory be blotted out). Whatever meaning these words have had previously, they are now used by the majority of Israelis without any derogatory connotations. On the other hand, the root of the words *meschumad* (apostate, a Jew converted to Christianity) and *schmad* (apostasy) means to destroy, to annihilate, and this gives an indication of the attitude to conversion. The High Judge Verlinsky said of the word “*misjon*”, which is used as a loan word in Hebrew, in the case brought against those who had attacked the Beth-El school: “I know that the very word “*misjon*“ makes the blood of every religious Jew boil.”⁶⁴ Finally the word *goy* means “people” or “nation” but especially “Gentile” or “non-Jew”. The use of the word as a term of abuse, and in figures of speech such as “as stupid as a goy”, gives an idea of how the Jews regard, or used to regard, anything that was not Jewish. Yet how much this use — which corresponds to the English expression to “Jew”, meaning to cheat — is indicative of an opinion widely held among Jews, is again a matter of personal judgment.

At the same time, it is true to say that there are some attitudes that are so widely spread, and so firmly rooted in people's minds that they are more binding than religious dogma to the religious, for example. They are regarded as indisputable facts. Sensible people try to avoid adopting prejudices — but all the same they are adopted, even by sensible people. As examples of these prejudices we could cite, for example: “Germans are efficient”, “Scots are tight-fisted”. The following relevant prejudices about Christians are held strongly by most Jews:

1. “A Jew cannot become a Christian and remain a Jew.”⁶⁵
2. “Jews have always been persecuted, especially by Christians.”
3. “A Jew who becomes a Christian is either a *shnorrer* (Yiddish: professional beggar or opportunist) or he is *meschugga* (Hebrew: crazy or insane).”

⁶⁴ *Jerusalem Post* 15-10-1963.

⁶⁵ There are Jews who do not share this view. See, for example, J. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, p. 69 ff.

The first prejudice is an established fact for all Jews, excepting only the Hebrew Christians themselves.⁶⁶ The Supreme Court made a pronouncement in the Father Daniel case, which raised this prejudice to the status of law, although it was admitted in the summing-up that according to tradition a Jew who sins is still a Jew.⁶⁷ The pronouncement is also contrary to a Yiddish proverb “a meschummed is nit ken jid on nit ken goj” (An apostate (to Christianity) is neither a Jew nor a Gentile). After the Supreme Court's dictum, a Hebrew Christian is a Gentile, at any rate as far as the Law of Return is concerned.

The extent to which the second prejudice is alive and effective as a barrier against Christianity, and as an inexhaustible source of resentment against Christians, is shown by a quick glance through the Israeli newspapers. A Scottish missionary in the Annual Report in 1958⁶⁸ gives a complete, and I think quite accurate description of this attitude: “Most people here at the moment seem to think that Christianity is a religion based on the Inquisition, the stake, making a fetish of the cross and surrounding its members with supernatural beings (saints, angels etc.)”

The third prejudice has always been prevalent among Jews. A Jew who becomes a Christian is either an amoral opportunist, who “sells his birthright for a pottage of lentils”,⁶⁹ a psychopath, or at the very least someone who is mentally unstable. It is easier to understand the approach and methods used by people who oppose, privately or officially, the Christian mission, if it is realized how unmoveable this prejudice has become.

A prejudice seeks confirmation, and this applies here. The prejudices mentioned seek confirmation from the practice of the Christian missionaries. Nearly all the accusations, past and present, made against the Christian mission have had as their foundation one of these prejudices, and imaginary or actual confirmation of these prejudices in the practices of the Christian missionaries. We shall now consider these accusations — but only those which have been made most frequently.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Although there are, of course, Hebrew Christians — and Israelis - who use baptism as a means of escaping from their Jewishness, this is only an insignificant minority, especially as most Jews have been filled with national pride ever since the formation of the Israeli State. The International Hebrew Christian Alliance, which has more Christian (Protestant) Jews as members than any other organization in the world, adopted the following resolution at a Congress in 1958, (25. August): "This assembly, which represents Hebrew Christians (Judenchristen) from all parts of the world, expressly declares that Jews who have accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and have been baptized into his Holy Church, have not ceased to be Jews. They still constitute a significant part of the Jewish people. Each member of the Alliance considers himself a Jew, admits with pride and love his membership of the race to which his forefathers belonged, and feels himself bound to serve this people. The Hebrew Christians (Judenchristen) in Israel especially, express their faithfulness to the State in which they live, and to which they belong." ("Der Zeuge 20" November 1958, p. 3). - In 1964 at the conference at Løgumkloster, Denmark, arranged by the Lutheran World Federation, a resolution was adopted, deploring the "unbiblical designation, Hebrw Christian", which implies that there are differences between Christians - as it was said. H. L. Ellison answered in *Der Zeuge* (Nov. 1966) p. 17 with an article headed "Løgumkloster und kein Ende" in which he, with the backing of all the members of IHCA, contested the resolution adopted at the Løgumkloster conference.

⁶⁷ At least since Rashi (1040-1105) this has been the normative rabbinical view.

⁶⁸ *The Church of Scotland, Reports to the General Assembly*, 1958 p. 565.

⁶⁹ An expression that has often been used in the anti-Christian controversy.

⁷⁰ Accusations against the Christian schools will be treated separately.

The First Prejudice (Baptized Jews are no longer Jews)

a. “The Mission helps converts to emigrate and settle down in Christian countries.”

This is probably the most frequent accusation. Since 1954 it has appeared at least once a month in one of the “missionary anecdotes” printed in the Israeli newspapers. It comes in various forms. The Mission induces Jews to be baptized and emigrate; the Mission wants to reduce the number of Jews in the country.⁷¹ To this the Church replies that it is their aim to establish an indigenous Church in Israel, and to this end all Hebrew Christians are useful as witnesses to their fellow countrymen. This alone is sufficient to show that the Church cannot be interested in helping Jews out of the country. The reason for the accusation is that especially in the 1950s many Hebrew Christians wanted to emigrate — they were put out of work by pressure applied to their employers by an anti-mission organization, which fights for the return of the Hebrew Christians to Judaism. If this cannot be achieved, then the organization thinks the next best solution is for them to leave the country,⁷² so that they no longer constitute a danger to the Jewish people.

Having looked into this problem rather carefully, I have this to offer on the truth of these accusations and counter-accusations: after reports in German and Hungarian Israeli newspapers that converts were helped on their way to emigration with money and visas, the Roman Catholic institution, “Terra Sancta”, was stormed. The person left in authority by the Latin patriarch, T. Kuehn, announced that “a couple of dozen bona fide Christian families, who slipped through the Iron Curtain with Jewish papers, have been helped. Apart from these, no help has been given to emigrants, and no-one has been baptized.”⁷³ The Ministry for Religious Affairs “presumes”⁷⁴ (a Ministry may *know*, if it wishes, it does not have to *presume*) that some Jews at least have been baptized, in order that they might be helped to emigrate. On the other hand a spokesman for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs said⁷⁵ that it could not be proved that the Mission had helped would-be emigrants in any way.

The origins of the rumours, and the apparent impossibility of wiping them out stem from three factors:

1. The International Refugee Organization, whose agent in Israel has been for many years a Catholic Jew, father Stiassny, has helped mixed couples to emigrate. In this way Jews who were not baptized — or as married to Christians did not have to be, at any rate — have been helped out of the country.
2. WCC's Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees has helped non-Hebrew Christians, some of whom had come to Israel after the revolution in Hungary, to settle down in other countries.
3. Small sects have helped Hebrew Christians — especially during the period 1950-1954 — to emigrate. According to an impartial Jewish investigation (prof. Z. Werblowsky a. o.), no more than twenty Jews have been helped in this way.

⁷¹ E. g. the newspaper *Cherut*, quoted in the book by M. Fraenkel, *Qeren Jaldenu*.

⁷² W. A. Curtis, *With the missionaries* p. 4.

⁷³ *Jewish Chronicle* 5-2-1954.

⁷⁴ *Jewish Chronicle* 5-2-1954.

⁷⁵ *Misjonsblad for Israel* 15-4-1954, p. 41.

The campaign that was and is conducted against “the Mission” on this question is not entirely due to ignorance and misunderstanding. It is also due to the prejudice that exists, reinforced by the *wish* for Hebrew Christians to emigrate, so that the danger they represent can be eliminated. An idea of the hundreds of “emigration anecdotes” is given by the following account, printed in one of the most moderate papers in Israel, *the Jerusalem Post*.⁷⁶ Seventeen families have been converted, and have illegally sold their property for foreign currency; thanks to the Mission, they are now on their way to Brazil.

Later it was shown that actually there were only 4 families, who were not baptized, and had not thought of becoming so. They had — on their own initiative — applied for a visa to Italy!

b. “The Mission turns converts into traitors.”

This accusation too is a very frequent one, though it is expressed in various ways. The Mission turns Jews into Gentiles, into unpatriotic and perfidious citizens, into anti-Zionists, into traitors; it makes them hate their own people, enlists them in the ranks of anti-Semitism, creates out of them a veritable Fifth Column, and so on.⁷⁷ No Christian with whom I have discussed this question has noticed any trace of anti-Zionism, let alone anti-Semitism, among Hebrew Christians, and I have not met any either. Among those who have recently immigrated, I have sometimes seen disappointment, when they find that the actual conditions do not come up to their expectations, but these are exceptions. Many Hebrew Christians make enormous efforts to show that they, as Christians, are loyal and patriotic Jewish citizens — but in vain. It is useless to fight against an old established prejudice, which gives rise to emotions which are expressed as bitterly as this: “These apostates are traitors, and can be suspected of anything, even espionage and sabotage⁷⁸ ... they bring our security, and our very existence into danger by building a bridgehead for our enemies far and near, and by carrying out their harmful work; all apostates are traitors, spies and friends of those who will destroy us.”⁷⁹

The Second Prejudice (Christians have always persecuted Jews)

“The Mission is an extension of the Church’s persecution of the Jews.”

One of the reasons why a Jew finds it impossible to regard a convert as a Jew is that a baptized Jew is considered a turncoat, from the persecuted (the Jews) to the persecutors (the Christians). This attitude was clearly expressed in the Father Daniel case. The summing-up in the Supreme Court brought this commentary in the *Jerusalem Post*.⁸⁰ “The judges found that the persecution of the Jews by the Church has become part of Jewish history and consequently the memory of those martyred by refusing to give up their faith, does not permit them to recognize a man as a Jew, if he has become a Christian.”

The Christian mission is now regarded as a modern form of persecution. We see this in the

⁷⁶ 31-8-1956.

⁷⁷ All these expressions are common in the press, and must therefore cover or, to a certain extent, form the opinion of the readers.

⁷⁸ See J. Ben-Zeev *Ha-Misjon be-Jisrael* (Jerusalem: Qumah, 1963) p. 9.

⁷⁹ *Ha-Misjon be-Jisrael* p. 11.

⁸⁰ Quoted from *Karmel XIX 1* (Jan. 1963), p. 5.

issue of *Ha-Zofeh* for 28-5-1954: “Previously we lived as sheep in a land of wolves, and we were persecuted, now we live in our own country.” (by implication this says: we will not tolerate persecution from Christians here, we want to live in peace). Nearly ten years later the Ministry for Religious Affairs gave a similar pronouncement in the *Jerusalem Post* for the 6th October, 1963: “We have suffered so much persecution in Christian countries, we are entitled to feel that they should leave the Jewish people in peace, and not follow us into Israel.”

Why should the Christian mission be considered a continuation of the persecutions? The reason is that the aim of the Christian mission is misunderstood. The Jewish conception of the aim of the Christian mission has been expressed openly and privately, thus:

1. The aim of the Mission is to extirpate the Jews, by turning them into non-Jews, and then assimilating them into the body of Christians. The Mission, it is said, will continue and complete Hitler's work.⁸¹

2. The ministers belonging to the Mission want to teach, preach and distribute tracts. They want to speak themselves, they cannot listen.⁸²

3. The ministers belonging to the Mission are aggressive and tactless.⁸³

Although in some cases the missionary work is in fact carried out in a regrettable manner, it is not so much what Christians do that causes the accusations, it is the mere fact that Christians *are* in the country at all. On reading and hearing the immoderate accusations, one is given the impression that everything that is still unforgotten and unforgiven, everything which for many European Jews stands between them and Christianity, has now been released and come to the surface in these accusations, which might have been true in Poland, but which are hardly fair criticism of the Churches in Israel.

The Third Prejudice (A Jew who becomes a Christian does so either for material gain, or because he is out of his mind)

“The Mission exploits poverty, unemployment and poor family relationships.”

The word most frequently used in the written and oral complaints against the Christian mission is the word *nizul*: exploitation. An excellent expression of the reasoning that lies behind the countless accusations on this score can be seen in a reader's letter in the most moderate and most respected of Israeli newspapers, *Ha-arez* for 9-1-1963. J. Barur, who is presumably the anti-mission writer of the same name, from *Ha-Zofeh* and other newspapers, writes: “The war against those who preach *schmad* (conversion) is not a war against opinions, but against material bribes. If the disciples of *Jeschu* in our generation would be content with promises of the world to come, as the first disciples were, then we would not fight them; for there would be no-one to listen to them.” In other words the only reason for the success of the Mission — and apparently it is considered successful — is its methods: it “fishes (to use a picturesque metaphor from M. Fraenkel's book, *Qeren Jaldenu*) in the sea of poverty in our midst, using money, clothes and food parcels as bait”; it attracts “homeless and unemployed with promises of a home and a steady

⁸¹ See for example the book, M. Fraenkel, *Qeren Jaldenu*, (no publisher, Jerusalem no year — after 1955).

⁸² A. Gjerding quotes this Israeli opinion in his article "The presence of the Church in the State of Israel".

⁸³ Reference is made to the Postal Mission. Other examples given are tract-distribution, accosting on the street etc.

job as payment for conversion;⁸⁴ it pays people to go to church;⁸⁵ it baptizes young people who want to use their baptism as a means of avoiding National Service.⁸⁶ There are many other examples of accusations of this kind. The first two are the most used, because they are the only ones that can be made to stick. The publicity given to the Mission's generosity has made it possible for the word "Misjon" to be used as a threat by the underprivileged, and to exert pressure on those who have been most to blame in exaggerating the accusations both in degree and extent — viz. anti-mission organizations such as *Qeren Jaldenu*. The complaint that poverty is being exploited by the Mission, is a two-edged sword — since the underprivileged can go to the anti-mission organizations and say: "If you don't help me, I'll go to the Mission!" Admittedly *Qeren Jaldenu* and other similar organizations are fully aware that such people will not gain much through this procedure, but the threats can later be used as "proof" of the assertions of the organizations! *Qeren Jaldenu* in the book of the same name gives an excellent example of this procedure in action. Amongst a lot of alleged documentation, they print this letter on page 12:

I, Abraham ben Schaul Schemuel, who have lived and suffered for 25 years in Our Holy Country, apply to you for the last time, to beg for immediate help, otherwise my wife and son will become Christians. They cannot stand the living conditions any longer. The Mission has promised my wife that they will solve our accomodation problem and find a job for our son, if she will only become a Christian. I would rather be divorced than betray my Faith in the Tora. I want to prevent the conversion of my wife and son; I need a firm promise of help with the rent, and work for my eldest son.

(signed) Schemuel Abraham ben Schaul.

The help given to Hebrew Christians was cut down in the early and middle 1950s, partly because of the campaign in the Israeli press against the Mission, accusing them of "bartering for souls", and partly because the economic situation of the country improved. However, the press attacks on the Mission did not taper off at the same rate as the help did — on the contrary, they continued unabated. Evidence of this, and of the great effect that these attacks have had, was given by the demonstrations outside the Israeli Embassy in New York, staged by a large number of students from the Talmud schools in New York in 1964. They demanded an immediate end to "the exploitations of economic distress in The Holy Land".⁸⁷ Apart from the Hebrew Evangelization Society, and apart from the help given to Hebrew Christians by two other small organizations (Friends of Israel, American Board of Mission to the Jews), the question is whether there are still, today, any Churches or missionary societies in Israel who would want to "exploit" poverty and other social hardship. One answer to the question was given by Dr. Malachi, the expert in missionary matters at the Min. for R. A. He said, in the course of a conversation, that all fundamentalist sects did so.⁸⁸ When I enquired what were the sources for his information, he replied by showing me the missionary magazines from the two societies, mentioned above. In

⁸⁴ *Congress bi-weekly* 4-9-1964.

⁸⁵ According to *Qeren Jaldenu*, 47 families in Jerusalem were "at this moment" (1955?) being paid to go to church.

⁸⁶ *Maariv* 31-7-1953.

⁸⁷ *Jerusalem Post* 23-1-1964.

⁸⁸ This conversation took place in August 1964.

these magazines it was stated that help was given to Hebrew Christians who needed it. Even if Christians go so far as to agree that this help could be called “exploitation”, there are only a few small organizations, for whose doubtful practices all the other Christian Churches have to pay, by being a target for accusations which are in their case neither specific nor demonstrable.

It is easy enough to agree whole-heartedly with the leader printed in the Jerusalem Post for 14-7-1964. After ascertaining that the Protestant Churches were working together in UCC in order to improve relations between Christians and Jews, the editor reaches this conclusion: “It is deplorable that this process of improvement in relations shall be disturbed by a small group applying outdated proselytizing methods that create suspicion and ill-will.”

This is true enough; but one could add that it is deplorable that religious and secular authorities, the press and the body of anti-missionary organizations, to which the State lends its support, should have found it necessary, on the basis of the evangelization methods of a few insignificant sects, to paint the terrifying picture of a mysterious and universal phenomenon that is called “*Ha-Misjon*”.

Copyright Per Østerbye, All Rights Reserved

Hebrew Christianity in the Holy Land from 1948 to the Present

Ole Chr. M. Kvarme

Hebrew Christians represent a small minority in Israeli society. It is difficult to produce satisfactory statistics, but we have reason to believe that they number between 1,000 and 1,100 of which some 200-300 belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and some 700-800 to the Protestant churches and groups; about fifty belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. In this number we have included Jews who are baptized and have a living relationship to their church or assembly, and their children.⁸⁹ In determining their Jewish identity we have, wherever possible, followed Jewish tradition and regarded a person as being Jewish when born to a Jewish mother.

During these thirty years the Hebrew Christian minority has seen many changes and experienced some numerical growth. Just before the founding of the State in 1948, some seventy Hebrew Christians from central Israel had to leave the country, since there was reason to believe, in that delicate situation of spring 1948, that their lives were in serious danger, because of their earlier affiliation with British congregations and communities.⁹⁰ It is difficult to ascertain how many Hebrew Christians remained in the country, but the members of Hebrew Christian groups in the North and elsewhere, who had no affiliation with the British, stayed and the men among them

⁸⁹ This estimate is based on a survey of the following Protestant churches and groups with Hebrew Christian members throughout the country:

A. Jerusalem area: Baptist Church, West Jerusalem; Beit Hamevasser, Pentecostal; Finnish School; Messianic Assembly; Mt. of Olives Bible Centre; two Pentecostal groups, both in South Jerusalem; a group led by J. Schullem.

B. Tel-Aviv area: Baptist Church, Petah-Tiqva; Immanuel congregation, Jaffa; Lutheran Church, Jaffa; Messianic Assembly, Jaffa; Messianic Sabbatarian group, Ramat-Gan; a group led by Baruch Maoz, Rishon le-Tzion; interdenominational group in Herzlia.

C. Haifa area: Bat-Galim (Emma Berger); Bethel Youth Hostel; Bethesda Messianic Assembly; Elias Lutheran Church; Christian Witness to Israel.

D. The rest of the country: Afula-interdenominational; Acre-interdenominational; Ashkelon-Baptist; Beersheba-Messianic Assembly; Dimona-interdenominational; Eilat — no organised group, although Hebrew Christians are present; Naharia — two interdenominational groups and a French group; Natania — a Baptist and an interdenominational group; Nazareth - interdenominational; Rosh-Pinna - "Jews-for-Jesus;" Tiberias related to Church of Scotland; Zikhron-Ya'acov - Emma Berger.

The Roman Catholic Hebrew Christians belong mainly to the congregations of the *Opus Sancti Jacobi* in Jerusalem, Beersheba, Tel-Aviv Jaffa, and Haifa; cf. Hunter, D.M. "Holy Land Christians (4)," *The Tablet*, 7th January 1978, pp 5ff. — The 40-50 Russian Orthodox Hebrew Christians have their centre in Jerusalem. This number for Hebrew Christians in Israel accords with the information given by B. Maoz, "The work of the Gospel in Israel — personal view," *The Banner of Truth* 150, 1976, pp. 24-32, and to some extent with, P. Lapid, *Hebräisch in den Kirchen*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1975, but it is considerably less than asserted by Schalom Ben-Chorin, "Judenchristen in Israel — ein ungelöstes Problem," *Israel Nachrichten*, 15.7.1977. (The revised estimate for May, 1980, is 1,400-1,500, including about 1,100 Protestants, 300 Catholics and 50 Orthodox).

⁹⁰ Cf. M. Benhayim, "Two who were twice redeemed," *The Hebrew Christian* XLVIII, 1975, pp. 109ff. Also S. Wisloeff-Nilssen, "Israelmisjonen og Karmel," *Vaart Land* 14.6.1960.

fought in the War of Independence in the ranks of the *Haganah*.⁹¹

In the first six years the number of Hebrew Christians in the country grew to some few hundreds, as is indicated by information concerning the attempts made at that time to form a Hebrew Christian Union,⁹² to which we shall later return. Mass immigration in the years 1948-1951 brought many Hebrew Christians and some of their leaders to the country. Immigration has similarly played an important role in the growth of Hebrew Christianity in Israel since the mid-1950's. The years 1956-57, 1962-63 and 1970-71 represent tops in the immigration curve, when particularly Hebrew-Christians from Eastern Europe came and joined existing groups, or in a few instances, founded new ones.⁹³

The "Jews-for-Jesus" movement, which has developed in the U.S. since the beginning of the 1970's, has had only a limited impact upon Hebrew Christianity in Israel. In 1972-73, as well, young American "Jews-for-Jesus" came to the country, in order to make their witness present here too, but most of them left after a short stay. A few of them have, however, stayed on and joined Hebrew-English-speaking groups and congregations, and the small group of young Hebrew Christians in Rosh-Pinnah is a spin-off of the "Jews-for-Jesus" movement. This group became well-known through the demonstrations against it in October 1977, and the persecution it suffered as a result.

Whereas immigration has contributed to the growth of Hebrew Christianity in Israel, there remains the fact, which for the sake of proper perspective, we must point out, that the Christian Church has lost many of its members of Jewish origin through their immigration to Israel. This is particularly so in the case of the Roman Catholic Church. In the waves of immigration, especially from Eastern Europe, it seems that several thousands of converted, Catholics, Jews, descendants of such converts, and Catholic spouses in mixed marriages with children that very often were baptized, came to Israel, but lost touch with the Church upon arrival in the country, and for various reasons were quickly assimilated into Israel's Jewish society.⁹⁴

Hebrew Christianity in Israel has similarly lost some of its families, and even leaders, through emigration from the country. These instances of emigration, at the end of the 1950's and in the mid 1960's, were mainly caused by the serious social and cultural, as well as educational and professional, difficulties, which these Hebrew Christian families and individuals encountered.

The number of Hebrew Christians has also slightly grown through births, but the problem of second generation Hebrew Christians is one of the main communal challenges that the movement faces today.⁹⁵ The new Jewish believers who have joined Hebrew Christian groups and

⁹¹ Cf. S. Wisloeff-Nilssen, op. cit.

⁹² The Hebrew Christian Conference in Jerusalem 29-30.1.1954 had 140 participants, *Quarterly News Sheet*, Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews, London, XXIV/1, April 1954, p. 19. — An attempt to form an Israeli Messianic Youth Group, which was advertised in the newspapers, brought more than 200 answers, *News Sheet* XXV/1, April 1955, p. 3.

⁹³ According to H. Samuel, "Den Internasjonale Joede-Kristne forening," *Misjonsblad for Israel*, 123, 1952, pp. 33f, "Hundreds of Hebrew-Christians, mainly from central and Eastern Europe, followed their people to the Land of their Fathers."

⁹⁴ D.M. Hunter, op. cit.

⁹⁵ Cf. the pertinent remarks on this in B.Z. Sobel *Hebrew Christianity — The Thirteenth Tribe* (New York, 1974).

congregations, have been another source of growth; through them a broader spectrum of Jewish communities has come to be represented among Hebrew Christians.

The Hebrew Christians and their Congregations and Assemblies

We can easily distinguish between three categories of congregations, or groups, into which the small community of Hebrew Christians is divided: a considerable number belong to the historical and denominational churches; a second category is represented by the so-called “Messianic Assemblies,” and thirdly there are numerous “private” and “semi-official” groups and circles, where a congregational structure is either lacking or else is very loose.

In comparison with the other churches and assemblies, the Roman Catholic Church has a large number of Hebrew Christians in full time ministries, in the priesthood and the religious life. Many of these, and of the Hebrew Catholic laity, gather for worship in the Hebrew-speaking and Hebrew-worshipping *foyers* in Jerusalem, Beersheba, Tel-Aviv, and Haifa, maintained by the *Opus Sancti Jacobi*.⁹⁶ This *Opus* was established by the Latin Patriarchate in 1955, and entrusted with the care of Hebrew-speaking communities, and with the work of *rapprochement* between Christians and Jews. A particular Hebrew Christian community has not developed within the Roman Catholic church, but a considerable amount of work has been done by the *Opus*, and by others, to translate the Mass into Hebrew and Hebraize the forms of worship, in order to make the life of the community relevant in the Israeli context, and to create a home in the Church for Hebrew, and Hebrew-speaking Catholics.⁹⁷

Among the Protestant denominational churches, it is within the Anglican Church and the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland, that there is found the longest Hebrew Christian tradition in Israel. Already in the first years of the State, the Anglican and Presbyterian congregations in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Haifa, and Tiberias had a number of Hebrew Christian members. Today, however, although there may be some individual believers in other parts of the country, it is only “Immanuel” congregation in Tel-Aviv-Jaffa that actively works among Jews and has a majority of Hebrew Christians. This congregation is also typical of the ecclesial and confessional development in Israel today. It previously belonged to the Anglican Society for Mission to the Jews (now, “Israel Trust of the Anglican Church” — ITAC). The congregation is still supported by ITAC, to which its Anglican congregation workers still belong. But Anglican jurisdiction over it, and the ecclesial connection with the Anglican Church, came to an end in 1978. The congregation now understands itself as independent and indigenous, with its own confessional profile, which can be said to be interdenominational.

In Jerusalem, Haifa, and Tel-Aviv, we find Lutheran congregations with a majority of Hebrew Christian members. The congregations in Haifa and Tel-Aviv have mainly Romanian-speaking members, and have represented since 1949-50 a continuation of the work of the “Norwegian Israel Mission” in Romania before 1948.

The “Baptist Convention in Israel,” present in the country since 1911, has probably the most varied work among Protestant institutions. The majority of their congregants are non-Jewish Americans, but a considerable number of Hebrew Christians are also affiliated to the

⁹⁶ Cf. D.M. Hunter, *op. cit.*

⁹⁷ Cf. D.M. Hunter, *op. cit.*

congregations in Jerusalem, Petah-Tiqva, Netania, and Ashkelon. From 1965 to 1971, a joint Baptist congregation of Hebrew and Arab Christians existed in Haifa, but was then discontinued, mainly because of difficulties in the Hebrew-Arab relationship.

One of the reasons for the decrease in the number of Hebrew Christians in some of the denominational congregations, has been the growth of indigenous “Messianic Assemblies” in Jerusalem, Beersheba, Tel-Aviv, and Haifa. These Assemblies are led by elders who are either Israeli citizens, or at least permanently living in Israel, and, as with the membership, are mostly Jewish. None of the assemblies is subject to foreign churches or societies, although they may, from time to time, receive financial support from groups abroad.

They follow a congregationalist pattern, and are not formally united or connected with each other. The Messianic Assemblies in Haifa and Tel-Aviv-Jaffa, whose history goes back to the 1920's, represent a Plymouth Brethren tradition. The Assembly in Beersheba, which came into being in the late 1960's in cooperation with workers of the “Christian and Missionary Alliance,” represents an extreme Evangelical, interdenominational, trend. The Assembly in Jerusalem, which was founded by Ze'ev Kofsmann in 1948, followed at first a Pentecostal line,⁹⁸ but since the late 1960's has represented the result of a merger of three formerly separate groups, and may now be said to belong to the Evangelical mainstream. The Jerusalem Assembly calls itself, “Messianic Assembly in Israel,” which reflects the self-understanding of this congregation as the one, indigenous Body of Christ in Jewish Israel.

The third and last category is represented by about twenty-five private and “semi-official” groups, scattered throughout the country.⁹⁹ The number of members in each group varies from five to twenty-five. Some of them are led by foreigners, but most are led by Israeli Jews who have found it difficult to join other congregations, or who have wanted to establish a fellowship in their own geographical area. These groups are not homogeneous in any way, and it happens that they blossom for a while and then die away — for various reasons. In Jerusalem and Haifa, there have been small groups with a strong orientation towards the Synagogue, since before 1948. In Ramat-Gan a sabbatarian group has been active since 1960. In the late 1960's, interdenominational groups appeared in Naharia and Acre, and more recently, the Rosh-Pinnah group of the “Jews-for-Jesus” movement, and a group of a Reformed, Calvinistic type in Rishon-Letzion, have come into existence.

As a typical example for many of these groups, there can be mentioned the group that flourished in Ashdod from 1962-63 to 1970-71. Among the immigrants that settled in Ashdod at the beginning of the 1960's were some few Hebrew Christians with an Eastern European background. Through their witness, other Jews came to faith in Jesus the Messiah and were baptized, so that the group eventually consisted of Jews from European, North African, and South American backgrounds. The group used to gather daily for the breaking of bread, and in their communal life its members received assistance both from the Messianic Assembly in Tel-Aviv-Jaffa and from the Pentecostal group in Jerusalem. In 1970-71 the members of this group had to flee the town because of direct persecution; they settled in different places and there joined other groups or congregations.

For the sake of clarity it must be mentioned that none of the denominational congregations,

⁹⁸ Cf. P. Oesterbye, *The Church in Israel* (Lund, 1970), p. 197.

⁹⁹ See note 1.

none of the Assemblies, and practically none of the various other groups have practised national or racial segregation, excluding non-Jews from the fellowship. In some of the congregations and Assemblies, Arab Christians worship together with the Hebrew Christians. That this is not always without its problems, is illustrated by the above mentioned case of the joint Hebrew-Arab Baptist congregation in Haifa. Through the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI), founded in 1956, Hebrew Christian congregations and groups have been in fellowship with Arab Christians from various congregations, but there is today less Hebrew Christian representation in the UCCI than was the case some years ago, since some of the groups with a Hebrew Christian constituency have withdrawn from the Council.

In addition to these three categories, it must be mentioned that there are individual Hebrew Christians who join, and worship, in other kinds of fellowship, like the Arab Brethren Assembly in Nazareth, the Emma Berger communities in Zikhron-Ya'acov and Haifa,¹⁰⁰ and certain charismatic groups in Jerusalem. In the present survey we have not included the small groups of Jews who have joined the "Seventh Day Adventists" and the "Jehovah's Witnesses" in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, and Haifa.

The Quest for a Hebrew Christian Church or Union

The small number of Hebrew Christians and the large variety and complexity of congregations and groups have made the quest for unity and cooperation an existential one. However, the hopes of Hebrew Christian leaders for the establishment of a Hebrew Christian Church, or at least a Union, have not been fulfilled. Already at the end of 1950, a conference in Jerusalem appointed a twelve member committee, representing most of the Hebrew Christian groups in the country, to draw up the statutes of a "Union of Messianic Jews in Israel." One of the resolutions adopted by the conference itself said: "Our understanding of the Messiah's teaching and person is entirely Jewish. The Messiah is the Son of God, but he is not God himself. The Sabbath is the day appointed by God as holy."¹⁰¹ The intention was to present the statutes to the Government in order to obtain official recognition for the Messianic Union. In November 1951, however, the committee was dissolved, partly because it proved impossible to obtain recognition from the Government, partly because of internal disagreement on the doctrinal basis of the Union.¹⁰²

A similar attempt was initiated in 1953 by the Revd. Max Enker, Israel secretary of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance. In January 1954 a committee was elected to lay the foundation for a "Hebrew Christian Alliance in Israel," though not one to be affiliated with the International alliance. The work of this committee too was discontinued after some time, and the attempt did not succeed.

Since the 1950's there have been no similar, organized attempts at establishing a Hebrew Christian Union. The idea of a Union has nonetheless been formally discussed since, at conferences in the 1960's and in the 1970's, mostly arranged by the secretary of the IHCA, or by groups of leading Hebrew Christians. Because of the difficulties created for the Hebrew

¹⁰⁰ For a description of this community, see *Jerusalem Post Magazine* 10.6.1977, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Quoted according to Oesterbye *op. cit.*, p. 168.

¹⁰² Cf. M. Solheim, "Unionen av Messianske Joeder," *Misjonsblad for Israel* 123, 1952, pp. 5f.

Christians by the *Millet*- system, and their consequently difficult legal status, there have been those who have opted for a Messianic Judaism to be recognized by the authorities alongside Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism. Except for the fact that a request for such recognition would never have been granted by the Government — neither Conservative, nor Reform Judaism are recognized communities in Israel — this idea has been strongly rejected by a majority among the Hebrew Christians themselves.

The work for unity has not been without some results: When the Union of Messianic Jews was dissolved in 1951, some Hebrew Christians united to form what they called “Springer - Poljak - Ben-Maeir's Hebrew Christian Community,” a kind of a Messianic synagogue with two small groups in Haifa and Jerusalem, of which the one in Jerusalem is still in existence, though now under different leadership. Similarly, the “Messianic Assembly in Jerusalem,” as already mentioned, has now come to represent an amalgamation of more groups, and the growth and position of these assemblies has in a way taken the sting out of the immediate quest for a single united Hebrew Christian Church in Israel. A certain unity among the Hebrew Christians is also promoted by the secretary of the IHCA, through whom contacts are maintained among them, and who organizes half yearly conferences for Hebrew-speaking Christians, as well as by the nationwide children's camps and youth conferences, arising from the initiative of the Assembly in Jerusalem.

Between Church and Synagogue — the Problem of Identity and Tradition and the Quest for Contextualization

The present secretary of the IHCA has emphasized that Hebrew Christianity is not incompatible with Jewishness, but that it can be de-Hellenized and taken back to its Jewish roots. In their attempts to develop an indigenous theology and indigenous expressions of Christian life and worship, as well as to bring forth again the Jewish roots¹⁰³ of the Christian faith, there is a set of common denominators that unites Hebrew Christians and makes it possible to speak of a Hebrew Christian movement in Israel today. At least a majority is united in criticism of historical Christianity, both because of the negative relationship between the Church and the Jewish People through the centuries, and because differences between the confessional churches are seen as irrelevant for Hebrew Christians who want to forge direct links with early Jewish Christianity, and to renew the Jewish-biblical heritage of the “Early Church.” They are also united in a common commitment to the State of Israel, and in their understanding of the eschatological role of the Jewish People, now back in the Land of the Fathers.

The common ground, however, is more formal and structural than substantive, and within the diversity of congregations and groups, it is possible to distinguish between different trends in the attempt to develop a Hebrew Christian theology and identity. As we briefly analyze, and comment on these trends, we shall see the fundamental credal and ecclesiological problems, involved in the contextualization of Christian faith and life in a Jewish setting.

The most radical trend in these thirty years has been represented by the late M. Ben-Maeir

¹⁰³ Cf. M. Benhayim, "Issues facing the Messianic Jews today," *UCCI News* 1977, No. 1, pp. 14ff.

(died 1979), and by the two groups affiliated with him, in Haifa and Jerusalem.¹⁰⁴ Their Christology has remained somewhat hidden, often, though, taking the form of adoptionism, representing but a doctrinal addition to the Judaism of the Synagogue. Their emphasis on the Messiahship of Jesus has mainly been expressed in the context of a Jewish millenarianism: the returning Jesus, who will be received as the victorious Messiah by the Jewish People, will restore the kingdom to Israel, the Jewish People, and establish the millennium in Jerusalem. For this reason there is no present need to evangelize the Jews. Moreover, the followers of this trend have made a point of keeping a living link with the Synagogue and its worship. They assert that Hebrew Christians, or in this case rather the Messianic Jews, are bound to keep the Mosaic Law, which they to some extent do according to rabbinical *Halakha*, for example in observance of the Sabbath, dietary laws, fasts and festivals. Consequently, they have held aloof from the practice of Baptism and from communion with Christian churches or congregations.

A more moderate trend was represented by the Rev. Z. Kofsmann and his Messianic Assembly, from the beginning of the 1950's. They did not adhere so strictly to rabbinical *Halakha*, and followed a more traditional Pentecostalism in their communal life, marked by greater openness to Evangelical Christianity. However, in the positive affirmation of their faith, they came very close to the Ben-Maeir trend. In their very interesting creed, they professed their faith in the oneness of God, in the Messiahship of Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, in the OT as the word of God, and in the political and spiritual rebirth of Zion, and the eschatological establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. It is significant that, compared with the Apostles' Creed, the divine Sonship and the Lordship of Jesus, his conception by the power of the Holy Spirit and birth of the Virgin Mary, have been omitted. This is hardly accidental, since all that is left of the third article is the Spirit: nothing is mentioned concerning the one, holy, and catholic Church. On the other hand, a Jewish millenarianism is expressed through mention of the rebirth of Zion according to the word of God, and the establishment of the messianic kingdom on earth.

There are obvious similarities between these two trends and heretical Judaeo-Christianity of the second and third centuries mostly identified with the Ebionites. This is particularly the case with regard to their Christology and millenarianism, and their lack of a Trinitarian faith and ecclesiology. A consistent development of this theology seems thus to lead away from communion with the universal Church, and back to the Synagogue with its messianic hope, which has in fact been the conclusion drawn by many adherents of this trend. To the extent that these adherents have remained in, or returned to the Synagogue, they do, however, differ from the Ebionites who constituted a distinct community, separated from the Synagogue. Their millenarian hope too is different from that of early Judaeo-Christianity, in so far as it is connected with a political entity, the State of Israel, wherefore we find here a strong religious-political nationalism.

Today the extent of these trends is more limited than it was ten or fifteen years ago, mainly because some of the groups, including the Messianic Assembly in Jerusalem, have come under new leadership, which has steered them into greater communion with other Christians and with other congregations. The creed, which is described above, is no longer in use in the Jerusalem Assembly, which is now more representative of interdenominational Evangelicalism. This

¹⁰⁴ Ben Maeir, who was closely related to the Scandinavian and North European Karmel movement, expressed his views in many articles in their monthly *Karmel-nytt* (Karmel-News), published in Oslo, since the 1950's. See also S. Wisloeff-Nilssen, "Den Messianske Synagoge," *Vaart Land* 15.6.1960 and 10.10.1960.

mainstream Evangelicalism is, for instance, expressed through the hymnbook, *Hallel-ve-Zimrat-Yah*, which the Assembly published in 1976, and which has the distinctive characteristic of including many biblical psalms, though only a few of them have traditional Jewish melodies. The Hebrew Christian character of this trend is now expressed in having little regard for traditions and feasts of the Church that are not biblically founded, and in trying instead to celebrate the Old Testament festivals with Messianic and new Testament content, as well as in observing Jewish traditions and customs, partly as belonging to the national heritage, partly as a renewal of biblical traditions. That the groups following this more recent trend still have difficulties in defining their relationship to the universal Church on the one hand, and to the Jewish People, the Synagogue and the Jewish traditions on the other, can be seen from *The Passover Haggada to the Glory of our Lord Yeshua ha-Mashiach*, published by the Jerusalem Assembly in 1977.

It has become a tradition amongst Hebrew Christians to celebrate the Jewish Passover meal according to the traditional *Seder*, and with reading from the *Haggada*, but with the addition of a Christological interpretation of the elements of the meal, and with additional New Testament readings.¹⁰⁵ The above-mentioned Messianic Passover *Haggada* is a systematic compilation for such a celebration of the *Seder*. Most of the traditional *Haggada* has been kept, except for some textual elements of specifically rabbinical import, but, where possible, the ritual and the text have been interpreted in relation to Jesus, the wording of the *Haggada* has duly been changed, and New Testament texts have been added. This *Haggada* has many merits, particularly in underlining the connection between the Passover meal, the meal of the New Covenant and the *Pascha* of the New Covenant. However, it is open to question whether the post-biblical and mediaeval traditions of the Passover *Haggada* are the proper context for the synoptic texts on the Last Supper. The relevance of this question is proved by the following features: although the triune God is mentioned once, this *Haggada* lacks a truly Trinitarian structure. It is often mentioned that Jesus is the true Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7f), but it is not clearly expressed that the death and resurrection of Jesus constituted a turning point in the History of Salvation, establishing the New Covenant and uniting Jews and Gentiles in the Body of the Messiah, which is of fundamental importance also for the Jews of today in their relationship to the God of the Fathers. Similarly, the *Haggada* lacks the richness of the Trinitarian and Christologically oriented eschatology of the New Testament (cf. e.g. Rom 8:22-23, 32ff), which is significant, since the eschatological dimension is an important feature of the modern Jewish *Haggada*. This Messianic *Haggada* is therefore still on its way from the Synagogue to the Church, and has not really become a genuine celebration of the *Pascha* of the New Covenant.

In some of the other Messianic Assemblies in the country and among the smaller groups, we find a more consistent, minimalist approach to both the Church and the Synagogue, together with their respective traditions. This approach is manifested principally through an extreme congregationalism, a strong fundamentalism, and a rejection of all tradition, as well as of the development of a systematic theology. From this it can be understood that these circles do not show particular concern for expressing Jewish identity within their communal life, which they try to develop according to a New Testament pattern, in the manner of the Plymouth Brethren, except

¹⁰⁵ Cf. e.g. J. and D. Finklestein, "These found the Way," *The Hebrew-Christian* 49, 1976, p. 23. Also O. Kvalheim, "Sederkveld i Haifa," *Misjonsblad for Israel* 131, 1960, pp. 90f.

that their use of the Old Testament often leads to the kind of millenarianism described above.

Although these different trends are present within the denominational congregations, we find in the latter also a more thoroughly thought out approach, which understands the Jewishness and the 'belonging to Christ' as overlapping identities; the essence of Jewish identity, the election in Abraham, has received a new and deeper meaning through the belonging to Christ. At one and the same time these Hebrew Christians are conscious of a Jewish nationality which, on a secular level, is not irrelevant to their faith in Christ, but is not conditioned by it, and are aware that their belonging to Christ binds them to a community, which takes precedence over their nationality.¹⁰⁶ This understanding of their identity results in a more open attitude both towards post-biblical Jewish traditions, and to traditions and confessional developments in the Church. Where this is possible, then, these traditions are related to each other or are combined, e.g. in the celebration of the festivals of the calendars of both the Church and the Synagogue.¹⁰⁷ It is in these congregations, particularly the Anglican¹⁰⁸ and the Lutheran ones, that work has been done with liturgical material from the "Early Synagogue" and the early Church, in order to find new liturgical forms relevant to the congregations in their Jewish-Israeli contexts.¹⁰⁹ However, it seems that, in spite of these attempts, the denominational congregations have had some problems in developing a Hebrew Christian identity for their members, partly because of their rootedness in the respective denominational tradition, partly because of lack of knowledge about Judaism among the Hebrew Christians themselves, as well as among the congregation workers.

The most thorough attempt to work out a proper understanding of Hebrew Christianity, leading to a proposal for the solution of its dilemma, has been undertaken by Fr. Elias Friedman of the Carmelite Order, particularly in his book *Jewish Identity*.¹¹⁰ Since the Jewish People receives its primary identity from the Election, which is now fulfilled in Christ, the only solution for the modern crisis of Jewish identity is a Hebrew Christian one. On the basis of a "theological prophetism," Friedman accepts the validity of the application of Old and New Testament prophecy to the Jewish People today, with respect to both their return to the Land, and their future general conversion. From a biblical and humanistic point of view, however, he asserts that it is important for Hebrew Christians to keep their distinct national identity, and proposes that a Hebrew-Catholic Community be canonically erected within the Roman Catholic Church, on the same basis as e.g., the Maronite and Melkite communities. In addition to its "theological prophetism" and distinct communal existence, the Hebrew character of this community should be expressed through the incorporation in its liturgy of elements from the Synagogue ritual, elements

¹⁰⁶ This view is reflected in S. Gilboa, "The Life of the Lutheran Communities in the Holy Land," in *A Faithful Witness* (Lutheran World Federation; Geneva, 1975).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. (concerning this problem of tradition) B. Maoz, "Tradition — Yes or No and Which?" (Hebrew), *Me'et Le'et* 10, 1976, pp. 8-23.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. material in the collection of lectures "From the Second Step" (Second Judaic Course of the Jerusalem Archbishopric; April, 1966).

¹⁰⁹ In addition to more specific monographs, cf. e.g. E. Werner *The Sacred Bridge, Liturgical Parallels in Synagogue and Early Church* (New York, 1970).

¹¹⁰ The book, printed in Agra, India, 1974, by Capuchin Fathers Press, is an amplified version of an article that appeared in *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* Rome, June 1969, "Le Problème de l'Identité devant la Théologie Chrétienne et ses Incidences Apostoliques."

compatible with the principles of Christianity, following the example of the Church of nearly two thousand years ago.

Although Fr. Elias Friedman's proposals have been discussed in various fora, they have not yet been acted upon. It is, therefore, only within the *Opus Sancti Jacobi*, and through a Hebraized ritual, that Hebrew Catholics are able to express their identity, their other means of doing so being commitment to, and identification with the State of Israel. As this state of affairs leaves unresolved the problem of the national distinction of Hebrew Catholics, and the question of their identity and role within their Church, the contribution made by Fr. Elias Friedman is still a challenge that ought not to be allowed to die away.

Some Critical Comments

There is reason to believe that Hebrew Christianity in Israel will continue to develop through denominational congregations, interdenominational assemblies and various groups. Probably the smaller groups, if they do not fade away, will in due time develop into interdenominational assemblies or denominational congregations. In spite of the critical attitude to confessional differences, it is most probable that confessional distinctions will remain, since they are based not only on cultural and historical factors, but on basic hermeneutical differences.

Although its voice is not so much heard today as earlier in our period, heretical Hebrew Christianity is still a threat to groups within the movement. This threat can only be overcome through a properly biblical refutation, but it is equally important for the congregations and assemblies positively to develop sound expressions of their Hebrew Christian identity, and for the predominantly Gentile Church willingly to accept the Hebrew Christian entity in its midst. As the Hebrew Christians preserve their national distinction, their congregations should not, however, practise national segregation, either in their own communal life, or in their relationship to other congregations.

In development of a Hebrew Christian identity in these years, an important part has been played by the embracing of Zionism. The sense of political solidarity with the Jewish People in its present historical situation is understandable and even justifiable on Christian, socio-ethical grounds. However, when specific political attitudes are made absolute, and when political rule and events are understood to be revelatory on the basis of biblical prophecy, there is a danger of developing a triumphant religious nationalism, which determines and conditions unity with fellow Christians who do not share a similar vision, or fall outside its scope. This obviously has been, and is, a stumbling block in the relationship between Hebrew and Arab Christians. But unity between Hebrew and Arab Christians is essential for the credibility of the Church of Christ in Israel today. Just as this imposes particular demands on Arab Christians *vis-a-vis* Hebrew Christians and the Jewish People, it also makes it necessary for Hebrew Christians to develop political expressions of their national identity and sentiments that are compatible with a common social ethic, while at the same time developing a solidarity with the universal Body of Christ that is given precedence over both their nationality and their nationalism.

In spite of the different attempts that have been made to reach the desired goal, the Hebrew Christian movement is still in the process of renewing the Jewish-biblical roots of its Christian faith, and of finding for that faith appropriately contextualized expressions.

In their preaching and witnessing, Hebrew Christians tend to make extensive use of Old

Testament proof-texts, particularly concerning the Messiahship of Jesus, thus resembling the early Christian testimonial collections.¹¹¹ Rabbinical sayings are also often quoted for the same purpose.¹¹² This usage may sometimes be superficial, but it is important for the development of a Hebrew Christian identity that help is given to see and to express the unity of the two Testaments, particularly from the point of view of salvation history, and to bring out the Old Testament and Jewish background of the New Testament in general, and of the life and ministry of Jesus in particular. The Hebrew Christian congregations and Assemblies should further try to find new credal formulations, to express adequately the Christian faith in their own context. Just as in the past the original function of the historical creeds was to express the biblical faith in new and particular circumstances, so now the new situation in Israel seems to demand credal reformulations, for the sake of consolidating the congregations, and for that of their witness to their fellow Jews.

In their common worship, it should be possible for the congregations and assemblies to leave behind Western traditions, and let the Jewish roots of Christianity be adequately expressed, eventually also to the point of including such elements from the Synagogue ritual as are compatible with New Testament teaching: We think here of prayers and hymns, of the traditions concerning the reading of the Scriptures, and of liturgical symbolism.¹¹³ Although the Assemblies and most of the groups are marked by an anti-liturgical attitude, it should nevertheless be possible here too to celebrate a liturgy of Holy Communion in such a way as to reveal more plainly its connection with the old Passover meal.

Particularly difficult is the question of the liturgical calendar and the festivals. Should they follow the Jewish calendar, or the Western tradition in the celebration of the *Pascha* and of Pentecost? What are they to do about the Old Testament Day of Atonement, and what about *Hanukka* and Christmas, which often fall within a short space of time from each other? The problem is too complex for a solution to be worked out in the present paper. Because of the circumstances we shall anyhow have to reckon with a degree of overlapping. As has already been done, *Hanukka* and *Purim* can be celebrated as national festivals, enhanced though their significance may be by the Hebrew Christians' new faith in the God of the Fathers, and the *Pascha* can be marked through a *Seder* sometime during the Passover-Easter period, and a celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Day. Contrary to current practice, the *Seder* should not in our opinion adopt the rabbinical *Seder* and *Hagga*; rather there should be an attempt to develop a genuine celebration, building on elements from the early Jewish Passover, and on early Christian traditions, for instance, the *Homily on the Passion* by Meliton of Sardis.

Finally, the Hebrew Christian congregations and assemblies need to find a genuine solution to the problem of the Mosaic Law. It is difficult to say that the Law is binding in the same way that it was for the first Hebrew Christians, because of the hermeneutical gap, separating the present from that period and from Old Testament times. For basic theological reasons the rabbinical

¹¹¹ Cf. C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London, 1953), and R. Harris *Testimonies*, Vol. I-II (Cambridge, 1916-1920).

¹¹² Cf. F. Kenton Beshore *The Messiah of the Targums and Rabbinical Writers* (Montrose, California 1971).

¹¹³ A popular attempt to do this has been the *Seder Tefilah* of the earlier group of the Mt. of Olives Bible Centre.

Halakha cannot be accepted as an interpretative tradition. At the same time it must be taken into consideration that the Law, which has been confirmed by the establishment of the New Covenant through the Messiah and the Spirit, has thereby been given a new context and a new direction. There is no reason why Hebrew Christians should not practise circumcision as a sign of their physical descent from Abraham, or why they should not keep the original Sabbath, i.e. the seventh day, as their day of rest. Beyond this, they should, in their individual and communal lives, create appropriate forms for expressing their conviction that the Law has not been abrogated as the will of God, but that the New Covenant presents a truly biblical alternative to both rabbinical *Halakha* and secularist libertinism.

Copyright Ole Chr. M. Kvarme, All Rights Reserved

Trends and Circumstances within the Hebrew-Speaking Churches in Israel

Baruch Maoz

Israel is a democracy modified by the circumstances in which the young Jewish State is forced to live: waves of immigration, repeated wars, terrorism at home and abroad, a developing industry and a plethora of Jewish cultures and philosophies all vie for a place in the national consciousness.

It is also a democracy under duress. The circumstances in which Israel came into being and under which it has laboured ever since are such as would discourage democratic practice. A nation struggling for its very existence while, at the same time, trying to discover its own self-identity is not likely to develop pluralistic tendencies. On the other hand, democratic principles are accorded more than mere lip service by most Israeli citizens, with the exception of the Orthodox, who openly proclaim their desire for Israel to be governed according to rabbinic traditional law.

The secular and the religious therefore both mingle and contend in Israel as Israelis seek to formulate the national mores by which they bind themselves to each other in religious, cultural, political and social terms.

This is a time of opportunity for the church to make its own distinct contribution to the ongoing process and raise up a standard for Christ. Unfortunately, its most prominent spokesmen have not yet learned the art of unabrasive confidence that commands respect, nor has the community achieved that level of maturity that attracts attention.

There is complete freedom in Israel for all recognized religions to practice their faith. This freedom is preserved by both legislation and governmental determination. It includes the freedom to evangelize. But Jewish-Christians are not accorded the status of adherents to a recognized religion. Jews are not supposed to believe in Jesus. There is, therefore, no such thing as a Jewish-Christian, and Israel has no obligation to preserve the religious liberties of a non-existent community.

How the Church is Viewed

In light of the history of the church's attitude toward Israel, it is hardly surprising that the church in Israel is viewed by the secular Jew (80% of the population) with a respectful antagonism, and by Orthodox Jews with angry disdain. Both find it difficult to understand how a religion of love could behave with such violent anger toward a sister religion, let alone one with which it has so much in common. While the church's obvious political influence is recognized, that influence is viewed with a suspicion bred by the experience of two millennia.

Most Jews don't know how to differentiate between Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Coptic or Protestant, evangelical or non-evangelical. Consequently, when Israelis witness the shamefully bitter contests between historic churches over the control of gaudily-decorated holy sites and the

parade of relics, crucifixes and holy icons (so repugnant to the Jewish mind) they tend to attribute such behaviour to all who profess any kind of allegiance to Christ.

The church's artistic achievements may be applauded. But its reputation for a narrow fundamentalism that has been as willing to persecute scientists as it has persecuted Jews does little to enhance its reputation among average Israelis. Churches are allowed to exist in Israel, more to be tolerated than welcomed, so long as they do not engage in evangelism. Jewish-Christians are considered by the religious Orthodox and those influenced by them as a threat to the existence of the Jewish people.

New Developments: Modern-day right-wing evangelical support for Israel is often looked upon as a boon to be taken advantage of, but one which is unlikely to last because it is believed to be based on ulterior (eschatological or evangelistic) motives. The church as such has little appeal for the great majority of Israeli citizens.

The left wing of the church is largely understood today as being divided into two unequal parts. The first is increasingly critical of Israel in light of its present conflict with the Arab-Palestinians. The other is busily trying to compensate for the church's historic animosity toward the Jews by exercising a non-critical support of Israel. Such friends of Israel buy Israel Bonds and support Israel politically. Members of the other group have nothing to say about Israel's present-day moral predicament, nor do they seem to be concerned when Jewish-Christians in Israel find their liberties threatened, their property damaged, their privacy invaded and their right to worship questioned. This, in turn, does little to encourage the Israeli public to look upon the church as a morally courageous society of people dedicated to the furtherance of the Gospel of God's grace and to the welfare of each member of the human race.

The church has very little attraction for the average Israeli Jew largely because it does not seem to have much to offer and because its reputation has been sullied by a history of Christian unworthiness.

How the Gospel is Viewed

Naturally, the average Israeli's attitude to the Gospel is coloured by his view of the church. The Gospel as such is not widely known in Israel. Most Jewish Israelis consider it to be a hellenised aberration which broke off from Judaism and then removed itself yet further from its origin by deifying a human so as to make him equal with God. To embrace such a faith, especially in light of 2,000 years of persecution, is tantamount to national treason. It is to turn one's back upon one's tradition and national identity while embracing a lower grade of religion that, at best, is a step towards Judaism's higher moral and theological attainments.

Evangelism has not yet impacted Israeli society so as to demonstrate the Gospel's relevance to Jewish minds and lives. Nor has the Gospel been presented in such a way as to demonstrate its real appeal.

New developments: The slow but steady emergence of an Israeli Jewish church, orthodox in doctrine yet sufficiently at one with the people so as to effectively address them, is a promising development. The church's growing visibility and its increasingly more faithful practice of the Gospel are according its message a credibility in Israeli Jewish eyes which it has not enjoyed for almost a century.

The Jewish-Christian Church is beginning to take shape in Israel. It is becoming increasingly

more confident of both its Jewish and Christian identities, as well as becoming more articulate in communicating the Gospel to its own people.

Public marches, congregational meetings open to all who wish to attend, intelligent presentations of the Gospel to Jewish listeners in terms which are as meaningful as they are potentially compelling, a growing social concern and a willingness to stand up and be counted, regardless of the price — these are developments which bode well for the future.

Arabs and Jews in Christ

The present conflict between Jews and Arabs is not without its effect upon the life of the church in Israel. Above all, it creates an opportunity for Jewish and Arab Christians to demonstrate how the Gospel unites members of warring nations in the teeth of their conflicting national aspirations and their fierce loyalty to their respective peoples.

Arab and Jewish evangelical Christians in Israel have largely managed to avoid being caught up in the whirlwind of hatred, anger and retaliation which is sweeping the Middle East. Both have sought, and at times purposely created, opportunities for international fellowship. The Christian Student Movement enjoys the active participation of both Jews and Arabs. National evangelistic campaigns have been opportunities for cross-national and cross-cultural witness. Arab-Jewish conferences have been held and Arab and Jewish congregations meet from time to time for fellowship.

Of course, potential tensions are always present. All Jewish-Christians whose health and age permit them to do so serve in the armed forces, and are at times called up to do duty on the West Bank and Gaza. Many Arab Christians either live on the West Bank and Gaza or have relatives living there. But the determined goodwill of both Jews and Arabs in Christ has so far superseded their personal and national interests, allowing the light of the Gospel to shine in a very dark place.

Both Christian communities are too small to make much of an impact upon their respective peoples. Neither of them have achieved the social, moral or cultural status let alone religious — that could serve as a platform for a nation-wide impact. This is one of the frustrations which young Christian communities have to face anywhere in the world. They are also repeatedly faced with the angry protests of their people for consorting with "the enemy." Nonetheless, both Jewish and Arab Christians make the most of every opportunity in order to witness to the peace-making power of the Gospel of their Lord. They have found the courage to resist abuse, threats and the fear of aspersions cast upon already-doubted national loyalties in order to testify to a greater loyalty which unites them.

Opposition to the Gospel

Opposition to the Gospel in Israel takes many forms, most of which are passive. Israeli society is generally intolerant of even slight divergences from accepted norms. Even political discussions are conducted with more heat than light — and the Gospel undeniably diverges from what is today generally accepted as the norm in Israel. Indeed, the Gospel, by its sheer but undeniable existence, challenges the Jewish norm at its most basic levels. The Gospel actually denies much of what Jews have been taught to hold dear for two millennia. It challenges a Jew's view of God, of sin, of salvation and of the world. It calls into question the grounds of his own self-definition because it insists that a true Jew is one who acknowledges God's call to him in

Christ, turns from his sin and from any effort to be acceptable to God through his own achievements, and believes in Jesus, the God-Man, who only can save the world. It refuses to budge from the claim that there is no salvation by any other means than the shed blood of the Messiah, applied by the Holy Spirit and embraced by man in faith and repentance. The Gospel threatens to disrupt just about every accepted norm which Jews hold dear. All this in the name of a religion that, in the mind of most Jews, has a dishonourable reputation.

Consequently, while most Israelis would do little to harm Jewish-Christians, few would do anything to protect them when they become the focus of religious antagonism. This leaves a wide open field for an aggressive minority who would stop at nothing to erase the Gospel challenge from Jewish national awareness, particularly when their own basis of power and influence among their people is directly threatened by the Gospel. If Jesus is the Christ, then the rabbis were wrong to reject him and the whole course of Israel's last 2,000 years are an awesome mistake.

Israel is a self-proclaimed democracy, with very little experience of democratic practice and with a large and respected minority of Orthodox Jews who openly deny the legitimacy of democratic mores. The greater majority of Israeli citizens immigrated from communist and Near Eastern countries, where there has been little experience of the democratic process and where religious and ideological pluralism are hardly known. Orthodox Jewry openly states that it denies the right of democracy and that it is working for the day when Israeli life will be governed by rabbinic directives.

In relation to Jewish-Christians, the end result of these factors is a rather free hand for those who are adverse to the Gospel witness in Israel. They are restrained only by political considerations overseas and the small measure of thoroughly democratic conviction in Israel. Contrary to popular opinion, most Israeli Jewish-Christians have no difficulty in finding employment or in playing a useful role in their society. Their children are not harassed and they lead as normal a life as any in the country. The more prominent Jewish-Christians — or those thought to be such — will sometimes have their mail tampered with, their telephones tapped and their names besmirched in public. Congregational premises, especially new ones, are sometimes the object of vandalism. Congregational activities are sometimes disturbed by organizations such as Yad L'Achim, a quasi-governmental agency which receives moral and financial support from both public and undisclosed governmental sources. Most of the information clandestinely gathered by Yad L'Achim is an unreliable confusion of facts, imagination and outright distortion. Their harassment campaigns are ridiculous and unworthy of sincerely religious people, let alone of a people who themselves have been the object of religious intolerance for so long.

Continual efforts are being made to pass legislation which will either forbid or restrict evangelism. Children are not allowed to be taught a religion other than that of their parents, even with their parents' consent. The sincere goodwill and social concern of the church is restricted by legislation which was enacted on the assumption that Christian compassion is motivated by ulterior and unworthy motives. Petty officials abuse anti-littering laws in order to forbid the distribution of tracts and local municipalities harass congregations by selective application of zoning restrictions in order to forbid the use of buildings for congregational activity. Newspapers, at times, refuse advertisements from Jewish-Christians and evangelistic bodies, while hotels and halls for rent have been known to withhold their services.

Nevertheless, evangelism is still legal in Israel and the Israeli church is increasingly making

the most of every opportunity.

Gentile Christian Attitudes Toward Jewish Evangelism

Jewish evangelism is viewed by expatriate gentile Christians in Israel in a number of ways.

1. Some, influenced by liberal theology and by the widespread dilution of evangelical commitment, consider Jewish evangelism to be an unacceptable Christian activity. Israel's uniqueness is understood as consisting of a particular relation to the Gospel of Jesus Christ: the Jews have Moses and gentiles have Christ. We dare not belittle any man's religion, let alone one given by God from Sinai. Following the Holocaust, we dare not presume to teach the Jews about God. Gentile Christians have neither the right nor duty to preach the Gospel to the Jews, nor must Jews believe the Gospel to be saved. Many Dutch and German churches and a growing number of groups in the USA and Continental Europe adhere to this point of view. The Christian Embassy is influenced by it. Because this theory is finding increasing acceptance among evangelicals please allow a slight digression: Unfortunately, those who hold to such views neglect to recognize that the Mosaic Law was never equipped to save, except by pointing to Christ, and that the blood of Jesus is absolutely necessary for any man's salvation. If Moses could save, Christ need never to have died. Nor is a humble insistence upon the Gospel's exclusive claims and its superiority in relation to all other religious views tantamount to belittling another man's religion. Respect does not necessarily imply agreement. To confuse Jewish rabbinical custom with the Law as given by God to Moses on Sinai is, at best, a grievous error. Rabbinic tradition is the product of 2,500 years of interpretation of the Scripture, reinterpretation of previous views, conflict with the Gospel and reaction to extremely adverse circumstances created on the whole by "Christian" unkindness. Any view which denies the relevance of the Gospel to the Jewish people is far removed from the New Testament, which records apostolic surprise that gentiles were allowed to believe the Gospel, not that the Jews were addressed by it. Faith in Jesus Christ was then considered to be so Jewish that even when it was understood that gentiles were permitted to follow him, it was not altogether clear that they were not bound to become full-fledged Jews in order to do so.

Nor is the Holocaust a reason for Christians to abstain from evangelizing the Jews. True, centuries of institutionalized Christian anti-Semitism have erected a supposedly insurmountable barrier to Jewish evangelism. True, evangelism of the Jews should be conducted humbly (may the evangelization of any people be conducted otherwise?). But these are not reasons to refrain from evangelizing the Jews. On the contrary. No greater evil can be perpetrated against the Jewish people than that of refusing to call them to the mercies of God in Christ. No true comfort can be extended to the people of Israel apart from the saving benefits of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Israel's uniqueness consists of its particular national obligation to the Gospel, not of its being excused from it.

2. Others, holding to the opinion that Israel no longer has a special role in the purposes of God, believe that Israel should be evangelized just like any other nation in the world. Many Christian organizations working in Israel, particularly among the Arabs, are of this persuasion. Some find their Gospel efforts on behalf of the Jews frustrated by an incipient antagonism on their part toward the Jews. Others are doing an excellent work in the country.

3. The third group holds to the view that the Jewish people continue to occupy a special place in the purposes of God. Some hold to a pronounced pro-Zionist stance, often intermingled with

their proclamation of the Gospel. Some separate between their pro or anti-Zionist views and their duty to preach the Gospel. Others are fascinated with the possibility that the outworking of Israel's destiny indicates the proximity of the End Times. In some cases this fascination obscures the major concern to preach the Gospel to Israel. Happily, this tendency is fast disappearing among those actively involved in Jewish evangelism in Israel, but it is still to be found among Christians worldwide.

A number of missionaries and missionary societies originally came to Israel with a view towards evangelizing the peoples of that country, but have in fact refrained from any form of evangelistic activity because the government has indicated that any such activity would ensure a refusal to renew their visas. In some cases, such threats have been ignored and faithful witness is maintained while openly evangelistic organizations have been targeted. There has not been one proven case in which an individual working with a recognized society was refused a visa due to his or her own evangelistic activity. There is a growing conviction among expatriate Christians in Israel that the indigenous Israeli church should shoulder the major burden of the evangelistic undertaking. For this reason, many are cooperating with local churches, even working under the jurisdiction of the National Evangelistic Committee on specific short-term projects.

The United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI) has very few local Jewish members. It has not succeeded in establishing an ongoing relation between its (expatriate) member bodies and the emerging Hebrew speaking local church. This has reduced the evangelistic opportunity of many of the organizations involved in UCCI, as well as their willingness to engage openly in such activity, thereby widening the gap between itself and the Hebrew speaking congregations. Most of its member bodies are consequently foreign missionary societies and some Arab churches.

A great number of non-Jewish Christians, particularly those who are concerned with atoning for the shameful manner in which the church has treated the Jews over the centuries and with cultivating good relations with the Jewish people, are embarrassed by the existence of the Jewish-Christian church. Many simply ignore the existence of Israeli Jewish-Christians. The reason is obvious: the existence of a Jewish church implies the legitimacy, indeed, the need to evangelize the Jewish people. Oppressed by the past, many Christians are reticent to undertake any engagement which might threaten their efforts at reconciliation. The Jewish community is very much aware of the church's discomfort and has consistently taken advantage of it by intimating that recognition of the Jewish-Christian church is a threat to Jewish-Christian relations. The result has been a growing exposure of Jewish-Christians to non-Christian Jewish harassment.

On the other hand, those concerned with Jewish evangelism in Israel have often been exposed to information that is neither objective nor altogether reliable.

Factors Effecting Jewish Evangelism

Christians outside of Israel are often thrilled to hear of large numbers of "secret believers" in Israel (one report speaks of 100,000!). Most insiders agree that their number is too small to be significant. To what extent may individuals who secretly profess a faith in Christ, but give no evidence of that faith in their lives, be considered Christian? On the other hand, a relatively large number of Jewish-Christians in Israel maintain few, if any, contacts with the local congregations. Such believers are largely ineffective in their witness and less accessible to the instructing, supporting and sanctifying ministry of the church.

There is some doubt as to the exact number of Jewish-Christians living openly in Israel. Part of the difficulty has to do with one's definition of the term "Jewish-Christian." Does it include non-Jewish spouses married to Jews? Does it include the younger children of believing families? Opinions as to the number of Israeli Jewish-Christians, therefore, vary from under one thousand to over three thousand.

Until recently, most of the Israeli Jewish-Christians lived on the fringes of society. Few achieved prominence in their fields and few were able to live as part of Israeli society and in a manner which demonstrated the relevancy of the Gospel to Israeli Jewish life. All this is changing. The Gospel is having its sanctifying and enabling effect on Jewish-Christian lives, so that more and more believers are doing well at work, at home and in society.

40%-50% of Israeli Jewish-Christians were born in Israel. 20%-30% hail from North African and Middle Eastern countries and 30% from the Communist World, the USA and West Europe. Israeli culture as a whole is in a state of boil. Nothing may be aptly described as characteristically Israeli, except the vigorous inefficiency with which things are done in Israel. Israeli Jewish-Christians come from richly diverse backgrounds, so that Israeli congregations have not yet developed features of their own. In many cases translation is provided during worship services into two or three, or more languages. Many preachers themselves speak in halting Hebrew. There is a conscious desire to develop styles of private and congregational life that will be both noticeably Jewish and consistently Christian. Attempts to create an indigenous hymnody are constantly being improved. Teaching and preaching styles are increasingly removed from the American and Northern European patterns imbibed from the missionaries. Biblical Feasts are celebrated as a means of national and cultural identification, and congregational architecture is being modified.

Naturally, repeated mistakes are being made. This is inevitable in every human process. But meaningful advances are achieved. The tension between contextualisation and syncretism is proving to be a fruitful one and the results so far are encouraging.

Local congregations are playing an increasingly valuable role in the lives of Israeli Jewish-Christians. They are also increasingly earning the right to do so by the quality of their pastoral care, the wisdom and spirituality of their teachers and the distinctly moral standards they are learning to establish.

Until the 1980's, most congregations were very dependent upon their leaders. Strong personalities, not sufficiently mollified by Gospel influences, created deep divisions among believers. Today we are seeing welcome changes. An increasing effort to work together is being evidenced. The National Pastors' Fellowship is but one encouraging indication of this trend. Many Israeli churches are characterized by the lack of a coherent ecclesiology. Few have church officers, and at the helm of most stand individuals described as "leaders" rather than "pastors." The Pastorate, plurality of eldership, division of labour between elders and deacons — these are all foreign to many churches. Preaching is generally ad lib, with little preparation and few systematically planned teaching programs. The duties and privileges of congregants are seldomly spelled out and almost as seldomly known. Most churches do not have constitutions or statements of faith. The realities of life are impinging upon the status quo and demanding its alteration. More and more conscious thinking is being devoted to the subject of church life, inter-congregational cooperation and the national task of evangelism. Fear of establishment is giving way to a desire to

cooperate. The National Pastors' Conference, which has been meeting on average twice yearly since 1981, is a major factor in the growing desire of congregations to work together and to learn from each other.

Psychological Factors Effecting Jewish Evangelism in Israel

Life in Israel imposes an extraordinary psychological burden upon its citizens. Israeli Jews are deeply affected, consciously and otherwise, by 2,000 years of misery and bitter persecution. These are not merely events of the past; they are deeply ingrained into Jewish self-consciousness and effect all aspects of Jewish life. Even feasts of celebration and rejoicing, such as Passover and the Day of Independence, carry with them a deep sense of sorrow and of the need to be constantly vigilant in the struggle for existence. As a part of the Passover celebration, Jews all over the world sing of the mercies of God in the face of "every generation, when (the nations) stand over us to devour us - and the Holy One, blessed be he, rescues us from their hand." Please note that the song is written in the present tense, not the past.

Israeli Jews are all the more aware of this sense of constant foreboding due to the particular circumstances into which the Jewish State was born and has been forced to exist. The news is broadcast every hour - and almost each edition brings news of another soldier killed, another bomb dismantled, the danger of nuclear capability in Arab countries, a Libyan nerve gas factory and the such like. Israelis often travel abroad under the protection of security measures. They picnic with their children in parks guarded by young soldiers in full battle gear and attend the opera with a pistol in the back of their belt.

One of the most important means by which Jews have managed to cope with the challenges of sheer existence has been their sense of community. Witness how Israelis, who at one moment are at each other's throats, will band together at the slightest indication of a security threat. Israeli Jewish-Christians, therefore, have an added psychological burden to bear: some in the community, quite vocal and influential, insist that Jewish-Christians have excluded themselves from the nation by going over to the other side. The whole world is often thought of in terms of "them" and "us," and Jewish-Christians are conceived of as having crossed that barrier, thereby losing the right to belong to "us."

Of course, a sense of community is very important for all healthy human beings. But it is doubly important to societies in which community is a necessary means for existence, and Jewish society in Israel is one of such.

In the West, when individuals choose to forsake one religion and embrace another, they are merely exercising their human rights. Among societies such as that to which Israel belongs, such a decision involves a threat to one's very right to exist. Should a traitor be allowed to live? True, in Israel no one is actually threatened with murder because of his conversion, but parents still conduct mock funerals, disown their converted children and refuse to speak with them for years. The Orthodox community often describes them in terms which insinuate that they are not to be accorded the respect which is due to all human beings.

Due to the small number of Jewish-Christian communities and their present under-developed communal life, Jewish-Christians in Israel are all the more exposed to the psychological strains which are the inevitable cost of faithful discipleship, and which frequently accompany even the less-than-faithful adherence to Christ.

The Moral and Theological Scene

The Israeli Jewish church is just emerging from the cocoon in which, for 1,800 years, it has slept. It still does not have the full blown beauty it is destined to have. Immaturity, shallowness and self-contradiction are inevitable by-products of the need to build the church and defend it, to learn and to teach at one and the same time. Few prominent Israeli Christians have a theological education which adequately equips them to understand the questions now pressing upon the congregations. Few have the experience to cope with the problems arising. Issues such as the relationship of Jewish-Christians to their gentile brethren, to the Mosaic Law, to Jewish custom and to Christian traditions all beset the Israeli church, clamouring for immediate attention. Should Israeli Christians worship on Saturday or Sunday? How do they explain the Trinity, the deity of Christ or the saving work of the Holy Spirit? Should they keep the Jewish Feasts? May they keep the Feasts? Must they keep the Feasts? If they have any obligation to keep the Feasts, are those obligations religious or merely cultural? What are the moral implications of the Gospel and how are they to be worked out in Israeli society? Are the regenerate free from the Law and so at liberty to live according to inner leadings — or should the Law continue to play an active role in their ethical decisions? What do we mean by "Law"? Is there any difference in this respect between Jews and gentiles in Christ? What is paramount — the Spirit or the Scriptures? These are some of the issues facing Israeli Jewish-Christians today. They require a high level of moral and theological sensitivity, of biblical knowledge and of integrity. It is not altogether clear whether the emerging Israeli Jewish-Christian church has the necessary equipment with which to formulate correct answers to these demanding questions. In some areas, to err is to cross the fine border between heresy and truth, so that much caution is needed.

A low level of discipline in the churches, coupled with a highly subjective view of spirituality, makes theological and ethical discussion extremely difficult. The fact that many conducting these discussions are themselves relatively new Christians, with little or no church background and an impoverished theological perspective, has both magnified the difficulty and perpetuated it. Progress is being made, but much more is needed. The growing willingness of Israeli churches to cooperate and to learn from each other is an important step toward a more competent interaction with the issues at hand. The courageous decision taken by the three evangelical Lutheran congregations working among the Jews in Israel not to establish their own synod, but to work for the erection of a national instrument for inter-congregational cooperation, is but one example of this encouraging trend.

Literature, Art and Education

Three active Christian publishing houses are to be found in Israel, two of which have their own publication programs. These are supplemented by other publishing endeavours initiated by individuals and Christian bodies. One graphics company owned and run by Christians is also active, along with one printing and binding plant.

Yanetz Press, directed by Mr. Victor Smadja, was the first of the existing Christian publishing houses. (He was preceded by Dugit Press and by the UCCI publishing department, operating under the title "Nur".) These are now almost defunct. Yanetz majors in the publication of devotional and biographical material. HaGefen Publishing, established by Christian Witness to Israel, majors in evangelistic, expository, theological and devotional material. HaGefen also

provides translation, publishing and distribution services to other Christian bodies in Israel and abroad. Another organization provides publishing services but does not have a publications program of its own, while others have publication programs which are implemented through existing bodies.

Some 130 Christian titles are now available in Hebrew. The Bible Society in Israel has been working on a Hebrew annotated New Testament which is scheduled for publication in 1990. Two magazines for adults and one for children are also available. Dugit Press, run by the Southern Baptist Convention in Israel (SBC), has recently initiated the publication of a Life of Christ written in Israel, with an evangelistic purpose in mind.

Daily Vacation Bible Camps are organized twice yearly under the auspices of the Messianic Assembly in Jerusalem. More such are being planned by congregations in central Israel.

Mishkan, a semi-annual international theological journal on Jewish evangelism, is edited and published in Israel under the auspices of the UCCI. It is the only theological journal devoted to the study of the history, theology, ethics and methodology of Jewish evangelism and Jewish-Christian relations.

A number of Study and Conference centres have been active in Israel. Two are operated by the Israel Trust of the Anglican Church. The Beit Immanuel Study Centre was opened in 1981 by ITAC. It has recently closed its doors with the hope of opening again under the new auspices of a local cooperative endeavour. The Anglican Conference Centre on Mount Carmel continues to provide facilities for the Israeli church to meet, study and relax. Beit Yedidya in Haifa, run by Keren Achva — an Israeli charity, provides instructive conferences for the many who are willing to attend a strictly controlled program, limited to a list of approved speakers. Immanuel House (ITAC) and the Baptist Village (SBC) also provide conference facilities which are frequently used by many of the congregations. CWI makes its spacious offices and hall available for conferences and the Lutheran congregations in Haifa and Tel Aviv have also rented out their facilities at cost.

The Norwegian Lutheran Mission established a Theological Education by Extension program in Israel and has produced a growing number of courses written specially for Israel and, in some cases, by Israeli authors. They have had an average enrollment of 20 and have made a significant contribution to the spiritual and educational welfare of those congregations whose members have availed themselves of their services. Preaching in the churches is improving and there is a growing desire on the part of many to be exposed to a systematic course of instruction in the Scriptures. The number of theologically trained Israeli Christians is still small, but growing.

At present, serious discussion is being held as to the possibility of a national cooperative effort on the part of all or most of the Hebrew speaking congregations in establishing an Israeli Seminary. An ad hoc committee has formulated drafts of the Statement of Faith and of the Constitution and By-Laws. These have been submitted for approval to the National Pastors' Conference. It is proposed that the Seminary would be governed by the churches through a Senate in which all cooperating churches will be represented. At the time of writing, the future of this endeavour is unclear. But the mere fact that discussions of this nature are being held evidences promising growth in the Israeli church.

Expatriate and Indigenous Christians

Expatriate churches and Christian organizations have been in Israel since well before the establishment of the State, indeed, for two millennia. They are likely to remain.

Expatriate bodies and local Christian churches in Israel are groping after relations appropriate to their respective roles. Past colonial attitudes on the part of foreign bodies, the church's history of Jewish persecution, local desire to develop indigenous Christian expression which would equip the believers to relate to, understand and address contemporary Israeli Jewish life, countered with the sense of hurt felt by the missionaries, all contribute to the present confusion. Happily, there is a large measure of goodwill on both sides. That goodwill, coupled with the determination on the part of local and expatriate Christians to work together, will go a long way in resolving present tensions.

Most expatriates worship in their own churches, although a growing number are beginning to relate to Hebrew speaking congregations and a number have shared in the founding of such. The Evangelical Lutherans, the American Southern Baptists and the Open Brethren are examples of this trend (the Brethren have almost always laboured for indigenous congregations). Some organizations - notably ITAC, the SBC and CWI — have made significant steps toward indigenising their work in the country.

The local church is still too unstable and too unpredictable to undertake the administration of most of such endeavours. It is certainly very far from being able to make even small but significant contributions toward covering the costs involved. Local impatience with necessary expatriate caution and lack of expatriate confidence in local ability exacerbate underlying tensions. As already indicated, the UCCI has not succeeded in gaining the confidence and participation of local Hebrew speaking congregations. But a growing number of expatriate Christian workers relate to the National Pastors' Conference, the National Evangelistic Committee and to the activity of LCJE (Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism).

LCJE (see below) has an active chapter in Israel which has contributed meaningfully to the life of the local churches. It also provides a context in which expatriate and local bodies can converse, cooperate and influence each other.

Evangelism

Following the establishment of the State of Israel and the departure of a large number of Jewish-Christians, the local church more or less went underground. In fact, with possibly one or two exceptions, for a long time there were no Hebrew speaking congregations to be found. Evangelism was therefore conducted with an extremely low profile. Missionaries dared not be found engaging in evangelism for fear that they would be forced to leave the country. Jewish believers lacked the encouragement and support of Christian communities and were often advised by the missionaries to abstain from overt Christian witness. An unfounded fear gripped many, and they refused to make public profession of their faith, let alone engage in open evangelism. During the first 35 years of the Jewish state, evangelism was largely conducted through personal witness, while the newspapers were full of horror stories of missionaries preying on the poor and needy, and anti-missionary organizations doing everything in their power to intimidate.

The 1980's have witnessed the blossoming of indigenously led, locally encouraged and openly conducted evangelism, including tracting and other forms of street evangelism,

Evangelism Explosion, newspaper advertisements, the use of municipal billboards, national marches and the like.

Door to door work in Israel was pioneered by Operation Mobilization, presently directed from their Haifa office by Mr. David Zeidan. Tens of thousands of books have been sold and hundreds of thousands of tracts given out by the volunteers who came to work with this fine organization. Eleven Christian bookshops and Bible shops are active in the main cities and Bible distribution is regularly carried out in the Kibbutzim.

The Israel chapter of LCJE has been responsible for a number of seminars which served as catalysts for new forms of evangelism. It also initiated and administered on behalf of the Israeli churches the sending of a group of Israelis to help in evangelistic efforts among Jews in London. More such are being planned elsewhere in the world and LCJE Israel intends to cooperate by encouraging Israeli Christians to participate. LCJE does not wish to supplant the church. It has premeditatedly avoided areas of activity which the local church has chosen to undertake and is doing all it can to encourage the National Evangelistic Committee to carry out the work itself. But its contribution as a catalyst, a facilitator and a context for expatriate and indigenous cooperation is invaluable. In 1984, the National Pastors' Conference formed a National Evangelistic Committee over which they appointed three senior pastors for oversight. The Committee has since conducted a number of street campaigns and is finding increased reception among churches which have hitherto hesitated to cooperate. The Committee also has as its purpose to encourage local congregations to undertake the evangelistic task, and to help identify and equip potential evangelists in the churches. In addition to support from local congregations, the Committee is presently enjoying generous support from every home crusade in Australia.

The focus, therefore, is moving from individuals and expatriate bodies to local churches.

There are no legal restrictions on evangelism in Israel, except to minors. This is not to say that local and religious officials cannot use laws which do not have as their purpose the restriction of evangelism, or that they do not do so. But evangelism as such is completely legal in Israel.

Social and Political Responsibility

Until recently, Israeli Jewish-Christians had limited vital contact with society. Politics were eschewed and social responsibility was limited to those who belonged to Christian fellowships. There was no premeditated, concerted attempt to respond to human need. Sermons were seldom if ever devoted to current social or political issues and any involvement in these areas was considered to be positive evidence of a low level of spirituality. The church was thought of as a city under siege, Jericho-like, tightly shut with none going out and none entering. The church said little to the burning issues facing Israeli society and had very little impact.

Most of those who met and were addressed by Israeli Jewish-Christians were themselves fringe individuals, social misfits or otherwise socially indisposed. The make-up of the church was therefore such that its members had little mind to address society and little equipment with which to do so. The church was looked upon as a haven for the less esteemed members of society, and therefore was less able to engage the attention of the mainstream.

A tendency to ignore social and political realities by escaping into a morbid eschatological speculation further distanced the church from the social and political message of the Old Testament prophets, as well as that of the New Testament. This trend has been reinforced by an

allegorical method of interpretation which has banished the church from every-day realities of life and rendered its message irrelevant.

Here and there one can see beginnings of change. Welcome efforts have been made by Israeli Christians to address the question of abortion in Israel (40,000 abortions per annum!). Politics forcefully obtrude onto every Israeli's agenda and the church is now evidencing a growing political awareness which tends to converge on the two opposite political poles. Some Israeli Jewish-Christians support the extreme right wing, while others are more inclined to the left. The majority are increasingly sensitive to the moral issues involved in Israel's present-day conflict, while adhering to their people's national aspirations for a secure homeland. Issues such as AIDS and public morality have also been addressed, not always knowledgeably, but with a developing sense of vocation.

The Future

The realities of life are forcing themselves onto the Israeli church, shaping it on both congregational and intercongregational levels. Developments are also equipping the church to respond more competently to the opportunities now evident.

The number of Jewish-Christians in Israel is steadily growing through immigration and as the fruit of evangelism. House groups are becoming congregations and leaders are learning to pastor. A sense of order is beginning to emerge. Teaching in both biblical and theological terms is improving and spiritual discipline is more consistently and more intelligently applied. Churches are beginning to draw together on more than personal grounds and cooperation is growing. Increased doctrinal maturity, moral achievement and social commitment are according the church a more ready audience. At the same time, they are bringing the church to a growing awareness of opportunities, duty and privilege.

One of the most promising developments is that of the National Pastors' Fellowship of Hebrew Speaking Congregations. Its activities have resulted in an increase of inter-congregational cooperation among a growing number of churches. More and more areas of shared need are becoming opportunities for fellowship and mutual edification. Lutherans, Plymouth Brethren, Baptists, Charismatics and non-Charismatics, Jewish-Christians, and Messianic Jews — these and other groups of Christians are serving one another and seeking for ways of extended cooperation that will not require compromise in areas which distinguish each from the other. The twice-yearly national conferences organized by the National Pastors' Fellowship and the ongoing activity of the National Evangelistic Committee set up by the churches which attend the Conferences are all contributing to this promising development. The conference meets every six months and is administered by an Organizing Committee which is re-elected every five years. Most of the Hebrew speaking congregations and house fellowships in the country attend, and a good number of these play an active role in the meetings. "Different, but not divided" is an appropriate description of the trend in Israel today on both regional and national levels — a most promising reality, but one whose achievements are still rather tenuous. They are capable of being erased with the sweep of a hand. Judging by the process taking place, the church of Christ in Israel is sure to grow. The direction of its growth is still unclear, but the process is already taking place.

Expatriate and Indigenous Relations

Present trends indicate that a higher level of cooperation will be achieved between expatriate and indigenous bodies in the future. So long as there are expatriate Christians in the country, the need, the duty and the opportunity for such cooperation will exist. But those expatriate bodies who continue to exist in cultural ghettos, or encourage others to do so, are likely to become increasingly and more obviously irrelevant. Other expatriate bodies will see their role in terms of player-coach, with more and more of the game handed over to the local team. If the local church can provide spiritually mature, theologically balanced and administratively able leaders, the process will be a smooth one. But a further burden is laid upon the local church: its leaders are going to have to divorce themselves from the sometimes abrasive and impatient manner in which they have treated their fellow servants in the Lord's vineyard.

Jewish and Arab Christian Relations

The nature of the ongoing conflict, and its resolution will be major influences in determining the nature of future relations between Jews and Arabs in Christ. On the other hand, Christ has more say in the lives of his disciples than do politics, and both Jewish and Arab Christians have given evidence to their recognition of his ultimate authority (see Appendix 2). There is every reason to believe that they will continue to rejoice in the fellowship which they enjoy with each other in Christ. However, it is quite likely that the present divide which separates Jew and Arab will continue to widen before there is any resolution to the conflict. Christian brethren on both sides of the divide will find it increasingly difficult, even dangerous, to relate to each other in practical ways other than prayer and sincere goodwill. It is to be hoped that they will not be swayed by the animosity swelling in the hearts of their peoples, and that they will continue to honour Christ by the way they relate to their brethren — and to their political foes.

Education

Efforts to provide local Christians with a biblical and theological education in Israel have yet to bear fruit. The increasing number of Jewish-Christian Israelis who are expressing their interest in such, and the renewal of efforts to satisfy this interest, both give reason to hope for the future. Present efforts may well come to nought, but Israel without a Jewish-Christian Study Centre within the next five to ten years is simply unthinkable.

Evangelism

Evangelistic endeavours will increase in Israel, governed and executed by the local church in cooperation with expatriate bodies. Rabbinic Orthodox opposition will undoubtedly increase in violence and it is possible that our chief legislative body will enact laws in order to restrict Christian witness. Harassment of local believers and the expulsion of missionaries are likely. Israeli believers are presently engaged in efforts to secure the liberties accorded by law (Israel has no constitution) and may well need the support and advice of overseas Christian bodies.

A greater sensitivity, born out of the fact that evangelism is being carried out by local believers, will result in the growth of new congregations all over the country. Their emergence from a ghetto mentality will enlarge the church's influence on Israeli society.

The congregations as such will play an increasing role in Jewish evangelism in Israel, to the benefit of all involved.

Impact on Israeli Society

From the above it is obvious that the Jewish Israeli church is steadily moving towards the place where it will be able to make a significant impact on the society in which it lives. It is growing in its sense of national calling, in its social responsibility and in its willingness to bear the cost of public exposure. Its understanding of the Faith is increasingly more credible and the quality of its life more convincing. Numerical growth has made an important contribution both in the extent of the church's witness and in the confidence of its members. Intercongregational cooperation has enabled the believers to speak with a united voice and is making more efficient use of resources a practical reality. These all harbour great promise for the future. Coupled with the determination of Jewish-Christians to address their own people with the Gospel, such developments are leading toward a national confrontation between those Jews who believe in Jesus as God's promised Messiah, and those who deny his claim to David's throne. Such an event cannot but be described in cataclysmic terms as to the turmoil it is likely to bring. It will only be resolved by a national turning of Israel to Christ, as promised in the Prophets. Paul compared the effects that such a turning will have on the world to "life from the dead" (Rom 11:11,15).

Copyright Baruch Maoz, All Rights Reserved

Letter to *Mishkan*:

A Response to Naim Ateek's article in Issue 27

I wish to respond to the article of Naim Ateek in Issue 27/97 "The Earth is the Lord's: Land, Theology and the Bible."

In calling for "dezionizing" Scripture because of an allegedly "Christ-centered hermeneutic," the ghost of Marcion's "dejudaizing" the gospel obviously comes to mind. For Naim Ateek, Zionism remains "racist" in and out of Scripture. As a committed Palestinian Christian, and out of his personal and national experience, it seems to him a necessity.

For myself, as a committed Messianic Jew and out of my own personal and national experience, it might be equally reasonable to call for *dechuraching* the New Testament. In the light of the horrendous abuse of Scripture by historic churches and Christ-professing folk for some 1900 years, a few Jewish mavericks have suggested such a course.

Jews suffered and died because of the deicide myth, entire communities were degraded and violated in Catholic Spain, Orthodox Russia and Lutheran Germany. The New Testament has been made to appear anti-Jewish and genocidal, in part or in whole, in the eyes of most Jews and also many professing Christians in the wake of the Holocaust. Yet most Messianic Jews vigorously resist the tendency to delegitimize the New Testament and all the historical churches. We distinguish between legitimate use and illegitimate abuse of Scripture.

We also recognize that Zionism — like the Church — is not all of one piece. Stressing the worst part of a movement as its true representative is characteristic of both anti-Semitic and antichristian prejudice; hence, the inevitable call for physical and/or spiritual "final solutions." Basic to both anti-zionist and anti-Jewish theology has been the belief that after Jesus, the Jewish people have neither the need nor the right to exist as a nation in their ancestral homeland. They should assimilate, preferably into the Church; some of the Church Fathers were already preaching this, and condemned even orthodox Nazarene Christianity.

This belief is not abandoned even by those who out of pragmatic considerations accommodate themselves to reality; a Jewish state and people continue to exist long after their expected demise, but its end is still hoped for by assimilation or secularization.

In his introductory remarks, Naim Ateek affirms that "the Holy Spirit was active in guiding the writers (of Scripture) as they recorded the story of salvation ... which reaches its climax in Jesus Christ." This seems to accord with Paul's statement to Timothy: "All Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness" (1 Tim 3:16-17). Yet Paul wrote this when the New Testament canon was barely begun, and the Scripture in view was the Hebrew Tanakh. There was no suggestion that Paul or the Holy Spirit considered these Scriptures "incomplete ... and in some parts a very dangerous document," as Naim Ateek does.

Like classical replacement theology, he argues that the focus of Scripture is not on land but on the Kingdom of Heaven, a very Jewish concept to this day, which relates to God's reign on earth ("thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in Heaven"). He writes: "Faith in Christ has shattered the importance of geography and can no longer be limited to one locale." He cites

Solomon at the First Temple dedication: “It was made clear that God never limited himself to one land.” One could draw the same conclusion from the opening of Genesis.

Nevertheless, when addressing the Athenians on Mars Hill, the apostle Paul both confirms and particularizes this truth: “[God has] made of one blood all nations ... and determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” (Acts 17:26) Furthermore, in the great end-time vision of the Revelator, he pictures the 12 tribes of Israel along with multitudes from “all nations, kindreds and peoples standing before the Lamb” as identifiable entities, (7:4-10) and in the final chapter of Revelation (22:2) we read of “the tree of life (whose) leaves are for the healing of the nations.” This hardly suggests the dissolution of the nations or “the shattering of geography.” If it does, we may well ask why Palestinian nationhood is so important to uphold, or the need to develop a Palestinian theology, as Naim has produced in his book *Justice and only Justice*.

Indeed, the Gospel that opens the New Testament introduces Jesus-Yeshua as “son of David, son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1), dwelling in “the Land of Israel” (2:20-21), whose name is given as Yeshua, “for he shall save (*yoshia*) his people from their sins” (1:21).

It is true that the apostle Paul expanded the concept of “his people” to Christian gentiles “ingrafted” to a Jewish tree with Jewish roots (Rom 11:16-23). Was this done to shatter the special calling and geography of Israel? By no means! Paul emphasizes that “God has not cast away his people” and offers as proof his own Israelite identity and that of the Nazarene Jewish believers as a remnant within Israel (11:1-5). In fact, the calling of the gentiles into the Church was “to provoke (Israel) to jealousy (10:19; 11:11,14).” Paul is confident of Israel's final restoration, which he compares to “resurrection from the dead” (11:15), and assures his gentile readers that “all Israel shall be saved” because “the gifts and call of God (to Israel) are irrevocable” (11:25-29). Those gifts and call included nationhood and land, with exile from the land the penalty for national sin.

The fact that there are Jews and Zionists who have distorted these gifts and calling no more invalidates their *authentic* expression than the historic distortions of the Church's gifts and call invalidate their *authentic* expression as the Body of Christ. Both parties have paid for sin in the past, and face judgment for their sins whether by physical or spiritual exile from the promises of God.

Naim Ateek's “foundational understanding of the centrality of Christ” is no less problematic than his theology of the land. One can only ask, to what Christ is he referring? Did Christ have a true humanity within a historical and social context? Was he a true Jewish man living among his people in the first century land of Israel?

Was he the one who told his disciples that they would reign with him one day judging the twelve tribes of Israel? (Matt 19:28) And when he sent them out to “teach all nations ... and to observe every thing I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19,20), did this include the Sermon on the Mount, and his assurance that he had not come to destroy the Torah and the Prophets but to fulfill them? Did this fulfillment abolish the special national calling of Israel in the land of Promise? Jeremiah, prophet of the New Covenant, had assured his people, that despite exile in judgment for their sins, God's involvement with Israel was as immutable as the heavenly bodies (Jer 31:31-37).

Like some modern liberation theologians, Naim Ateek would remove God and his Messiah-Christos from history when it concerns the Jewish people. Every other people can benefit from a

selective liberation theology except Israel, just as traditional Jewish theologians and dual-covenant Christians will acknowledge the validity of the Church for every other people but the Jewish people.

Ultra-orthodox Jewry has also sought to isolate Jews from history, and therefore passionately opposed political Zionism. Secular Jews, on the other hand, have passionately sought to recreate national Israel to be “like all the nations,” which was the main motive behind their leadership of the Zionism of Jewish “normalcy.” But for Jews and Christians who believe in God's sovereignty over history, the Jewish people and Israel can neither be isolated from history nor become “like all the nations.” We may well apply Pascal's dictum here that “God is not the God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Neither the Jewish people nor the Church can escape the consequences of this biblical and historical reality.

I have long shared with many other Jews and Christians in efforts to correct injustices to Palestinians and others. I also believe it is necessary for biblically committed Jews and Christians to work to promote Jewish-Arab reconciliation, especially within the Body of Christ. For too long, mainstream churches have in essence collaborated with Jewish religious isolationists and Jewish secular assimilationists in the flight of mainstream Israel from its authentic biblical calling.

The challenge facing the believing Church and believing Israel is to come to terms with this calling within history. The Jewish people and the land of Israel have been intensely involved in human history for four millennia, and especially during the two millennia of the Christian era. As we approach the third millennium of our era, it is time to recognize the foundational biblical truth of Israel as nation and people, which calls for neither “dezionizing” nor “dechurcing”!

Copyright Menachem Benhayim, All Rights Reserved

Book Reviews

The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry. R. Longenecker (ed) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. xv + 253 pp (paper).

What Saint Paul Really Said. N.T. Wright. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. 192 pp. (paper).

Reviewed by Hilary le Cornu

These two books deal, in interrelated ways, with the nature and character of Paul's "conversion." The former is the second volume in the McMaster New Testament Studies series designed to address "particular themes in the New Testament of crucial concern to Christians today." The collection of essays it contains focuses on various aspects of Paul's "conversion." The experts invited to collaborate have contributed articles covering the history of interpretation of Paul's conversion (Corley), his Christological and eschatological views (Longenecker and Marshall), his mission to the gentiles (Donaldson), the concepts of justification (Dunn), reconciliation (Kim), covenant theology (Longenecker), the "Mosaic Law" (Westerholm), and the Holy Spirit (Fee), his attitude towards women (Gundry-Volf), and his ethics (Hansen).

The guiding principle behind the collection is the attempt to understand the character of "conversion" in general and Paul's "conversion" in particular. The editor suggests four possible definitions of "conversion." This term itself is identified as "a radical change of thought, outlook, commitments, and practice, which involves either an overt or a subconscious break with one's past identity." Alternatively, Paul's "conversion" can (should) be understood as a "transformation" — as a "new perception and a marked change in form or appearance, but not necessarily a break with the past." It is simply a call and a "summons to a new career or a particular pursuit" (p. xiii).

This issue links together the two major aims as expressed in the introduction: helping readers gain a "more informed understanding of the impact that experience (i.e. his "conversion") had on his life, thought, and ministry, and a better appreciation of how Paul's experience functions as a paradigm for Christian conversion" (pp. ix-x). The formulation of these goals and the way in which they are worked out in most, if not all, of the essays indicates that the contributors are attempting to place Paul the Jew into their Christian framework. The choice which each makes regarding which definition of "conversion" s/he (there is a [token?] female contributor) adopts has clear and determinative implications for his/her interpretation of particular aspects of Paul's thought.

In lieu of reviewing all the articles, I will summarize Donaldson's review of Paul's mission to the gentiles. In its careful examination of whether Paul's apostleship in this regard constituted a rejection of "Jewish particularism" or was an expression of "Jewish universalism," this paper

reviews most of the premises assumed, in one way or another, by the rest of the contributors. On the one side is the renunciation of the Torah as exclusivist because it promotes the election of one people, Israel, and “justification by faith” as a rejection of “works of the Law” and/or the “legalism” (or, more positively, covenant) which similarly expresses Jewish restrictiveness. On the other is God’s “universalism” in providing salvation for all through Jesus and (thus) his status of Creator rather than Covenant-maker, including the gentiles within the kingdom.

This contribution is perhaps the closest the book comes to adopting the definition of conversion as “call.” Thus while Donaldson still wishes to qualify Paul’s Jewishness to some degree, he concludes that: “Paul’s self-description as an ‘apostle to the Gentiles’” (Rom 11:13; cf Gal 2:7-9), in fact betrays a fundamentally Israel-centered view of his missionary activities. He is not to be understood as one who has abandoned his Jewish identity, and now is proclaiming a nonparticularist message addressed to indistinct, generic humanity. No, he is a Jewish apostle (Rom 11:1), who on behalf of Israel and for the sake of Israel’s ultimate salvation, is declaring to the non-Jewish nations that in Christ they too can be members of the family of Abraham (cf. Rom 4, Gal 3) (p. 77, cf. 63, 83).

The basic question raised by the collection, which nevertheless remains implicit, is this: to what extent is Paul Jewish and to what extent did he become a “Christian” upon his conversion? Here, although many, if not all, of the contributors are at pains to recognize the Jewish origins of much of Paul’s thought, few, if any, define conversion in terms of a “call.” Conversion in its strict sense, as a “radical break with one’s past identity,” appears to be the most appealing Christian option. Not only does it guarantee the transformative power of Jesus but it also proves the uniqueness of the Christian message. Similarly, the two determining features which emerge from the collection as a whole are the necessity of admitting gentiles into God’s kingdom, and Jesus’ death and resurrection which accomplished this task.

Thus attitude might explain why the two twin goals of the collection intermesh so easily. Because Paul’s conversion experience is related to his “becoming a Christian,” his conversion can function as a paradigm for Christian conversion per se. Yet such conversion also seems to haunt Christian theology, since Paul’s “Jewish ghost” is in fact still alive and well. The “simplicity” (cf. above) of a “call” — which merely represents “a summons to a new career or a particular pursuit” — appears to imply that Paul’s experience could not really have been life changing or earth shattering if he remained Jewish!

Wright’s book neatly fits into the framework of this collection since it addresses another question of apparently crucial concern to modern-day Christians: the “resurrected” claim (frequently made by Jews but here posed in a new book by the English essayist, A.N. Wilson) that Paul is the villain who founded a Christianity which utterly distorted Jesus’ original intention. Wright’s thesis, stated quite simply and lucidly, is that Paul is, on the contrary, the faithful interpreter of Jesus. This book possesses a drive towards interpreting Paul’s “conversion” in terms of a “call” which confirms his Jewish identity.

In working out this argument, Wright first of all establishes Paul’s credentials: “not just a Jew, but as a Pharisee, not just as a Pharisee, but as a Shammaite Pharisee, not just perhaps, as a Shammaite Pharisee, but as one of the strictest of the strict” (p. 26). Unfortunately, despite Wright’s best intentions, this Jewish framework is erroneous, a fact which is liable to give critics an opening to refute his overall argument. Wright derives the fundamentals of Paul’s theology

from his “zeal for a holy revolution in which pagans would be defeated once and for all, and in which as well, renegade Jews would either be brought into line or be destroyed along with the pagans” (p. 28). Thus, if the source of this zeal is misidentified, the basis of Paul’s theology is also likely to collapse. Therefore, although Beit Shammai did align itself with the “zealots” all the New Testament evidence points to Paul belonging to Beit Hillel rather than to Beit Shammai. Wright acknowledges the truth of this himself, when he makes the telling statement: “If later, as a Christian, he [Paul] argues for positions (on divorce, for instance) which are more like those of the Hillelites, this must be seen as part of the effect of his conversion, not as reflecting the agendas he had embraced in his pre-Christian state (p 30). Were it not for the fact that, in this day and age, such a mistake is academically unjustified, it would be far easier to applaud Wright’s efforts.

***The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter.* Mark D. Nanos.**

Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996, Pp. ix, 435.

Reviewed by Brian Kvasnica

According to Nanos, “the mystery of Romans is revealed when we realize that the Paul we meet in this letter is engaged in confronting the initial development of ... a misunderstanding of God’s intentions in Rome manifest in Christian-*gentile* exclusivism (p. 10).” *The Mystery of Romans* uniquely posits that Romans was written to prevent a *gentilization* of the Jesus movement, whereas Galatians was written to counter Judaizers.¹¹⁴ As a heuristic aid one could speculate that Romans was written to arrest the *result* of the *mis*interpretation of Galatians: Gentile followers of God through Jesus began to forget their continuing relation to history, to the root — God’s work in the people of Israel.

In the first chapter, Nanos passionately argues for a new perspective on Paul and the Law and asserts Jewish issues — customs and ethnicity in God’s election — as fundamental for a proper reading of Romans. Chapter two, “The Historical Backdrop and Implied Audience,” argues with a growing segment of Romans scholarship that Romans was written solely to *gentiles* who had an identity separate from their “parent synagogue.” Differing from traditional Protestant exegesis, Nanos finds in his third chapter the “weak” of Romans to be the *non-Christian Jews* in Rome — their weakness being a lack of faith *in Jesus*, while the “strong” are Christians, typically gentile.

¹¹⁴ “While Galatians corrects the error of compromising the unique monotheistic assertion of the Shema on the side of Jewish exclusivism: the Lord is *our* God and gentiles must become Jews if they are to be his people...; Romans corrects the corresponding error of Christian gentile exclusivism: the Lord is *our* God and Jews who do not give up being Jewish (circumcision and Torah/customs) are no longer the people of God (or at least not equally so)” (page 30 n14 ; see also p. 13-14 and 337-371).

The "strong" are to accept the "weakness" — lack of faith in Jesus — of the non-believing Jews by demonstrating their solidarity with "the weak" by not placing a stumbling block, a supersessionist "eat as you please" view upon non-believing Jews. Nanos' emphasis upon accommodation and bearing with each other finds similar expression in Stanley K. Stowers' important *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews and Gentiles*.¹¹⁵ The title of Stowers' tenth chapter sums well the similar emphasis: "Faithfulness as Adaptability: An Ethic of Community for Gentiles," although Stowers finds "strong" and "weak" to be "dispositions of character." "The Apostolic Decree and the 'Obedience of Faith'" (chapter four) traces the Noachide laws and argues that Paul implicitly taught the apostolic decree by upholding the law for gentiles through the "obedience of faith" and by proclaiming that God is the One God (the *Shema*), over *both Jews and gentiles*. Hence both types of people are valid and necessary followers of God. Nanos' argument here remains weak by not engaging with other secondary work on the *Shema* in the Apostolic Witness (New Testament). A harmonization of the accounts of Paul in Rome as recorded in Acts and Romans is propounded in chapter five — "Paul's Two-Step Pattern and the Restoration of 'All Israel'" and Nanos uniquely interprets 13:1-7 by taking "governing authorities" as "synagogue authorities" in chapter six. In asserting the believing-gentiles' submission to the "synagogue authorities" which are earlier tacitly included in the "weak" — those not having faith in Jesus, Nanos is left with believing gentiles submitting to non-believing Jews. Such a proposition seems contradictory on two accounts: practical issues of ecclesiastical authority and Paul's pre-Jesus experience persecution of the Jesus movement. In the summary chapter which tackles the anomaly between Galatians 2:11-21 and Romans' Law-respectful injunctions, Nanos employs Peter Tomson's ground-breaking *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990: 222-236) in arguing that the incident at Antioch turned on Peter's discrimination against the gentiles causing disunity rather than Peter's denial of Jewish dietary laws. Nanos rightly thrusts the reader back into the complicated and explosive issues of gentile identity within a Jewish movement and criticizes the anti-Jewish and anti-nomistic readings of Paul which have pervaded Christianity even until today.

The Mystery of Romans is packed with inviting if sometimes conjectural interpretations which often draw heavily on the ground-breaking work of others. Nanos' work is an example of the dissemination of the "new perspective on Paul" as it finds its way to the pulpit, inspiring with its Jewish contextualizing of Romans. Nanos' invigorating work has caused me to return to the Apostolic Witness with both critical and constructive lenses. The *Mishkan* readership will profit from and enjoy reading *The Mystery of Romans*.

115 New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.