

MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE



Jerusalem

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A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People

**“JEWISH VIEWS OF JESUS AND
JEWISH EVANGELISM”**

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The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus

Editorial

This issue of *Mishkan* focuses on Jesus of Nazareth. Mishkan editors consider this very appropriate as we are still in Anno Domine (the year of our Lord) 2000. Throughout this year the world notes 2000 years since the birth of *This Man* from Nazareth. Our aim in this issue is - to use the German expression "die Heimholung Jesu" – the bringing home of Jesus. We wish to explore the Jewish reclamation of Jesus.

In the Jewish "Heimholung Jesu" (a term which I believe was first used by Schalom Ben-Chorin), one finds several very moving expressions about Jesus. This is especially true when these are seen in light of Church history and what has been done towards the Jewish people in the name of Jesus. Consequently we must consider how Jesus and his name historically have been made a taboo or been prohibited in many Jewish circles.

One is easily moved by the words of Martin Buber in his foreword to his book, *Two Types of Faith*. In the foreword, dated Jerusalem – Talbiyeh, January 1950, Buber writes:

From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother. That Christianity has regarded and does regard him as God and Saviour has always appeared to me a fact of the highest importance which, for his sake and my own, I must endeavour to understand ...

I am more than ever certain that a great place belongs to him in Israel's history and that this place cannot be described by any of the usual categories. Under history of faith I understand the history of the human part, as far as known to us, in that which has taken place between God and man. Under Israel's history of faith I understand accordingly the history of Israel's part as far as known to us, in that which has taken place between God and Israel. There is a something in Israel's history of faith which is only to be understood from Israel, just as there is a something in the Christian history of faith which is only to be understood from Christianity. The latter I have touched only with the unbiased respect of one who hears the Word...

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The Israeli author Schalom Ben-Chorin, who died in 1999, and who was well known in the Christian world for his many books on Jesus and on issues related to Judaism and Christianity has also found his "Brother Jesus" in the man from Nazareth. But to Ben-Chorin Jesus is not the Messiah of the Jews. Ben-Chorin's

“no” to Jesus as Christ/Messiah and his “yes” to be concerned with Jesus and give him a place within the Jewish history (perhaps even *the* place of honor) can be found in his often quoted words about Jewish and Christian perspectives on Jesus: “*The faith of Jesus unites us – faith in Jesus separates us.*”

This sentence is perhaps very appropriate for the contemporary tendency within Jewish Jesus-research vis-a-vis the Christian proclamation of Jesus. But it is much less appropriate and accurate for describing the situation in the first century. Looking at the situation at the time of the New Testament the sentence should rather be, faith in Jesus separates us ... Jews! And Jewish believers in Jesus today will still say, faith in Jesus separates us ... Jews!

Regardless of how sympathetic the picture is of "Brother Jesus" given by Ben-Chorin through his writings, there are certain borders which he as a Jew cannot cross. He therefore also criticized Pinchas Lapidé strongly in 1978 when Lapidé in his book *The Resurrection of Jesus* (English edition 1983 based on the German edition from 1977) spoke for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Here, according to the Ben-Chorin, Lapidé crossed the line of demarcation as a Jew.

Ben-Chorin himself experienced that some in Israel questioned his identity as a Jew because he engaged himself with the Jew Jesus. Along this line it can also be mentioned that he on several occasions defended Messianic Jews and Christian's right to evangelize in a democratic society like Israel.

Another of the 20th century's famous and important Jewish scholars on Jesus, Professor David Flusser, died in Jerusalem in the fall of 2000. Outside Israel Flusser was especially known for his short biography on Jesus. It was first published in German and later translated to many other languages. In 1999 he published a revised version of the book, which is reviewed in this issue of *Mishkan*.

In many of his articles Flusser argued against a Christian theology which claims that it is impossible to know anything about the historical Jesus. He begins his Jesus-biography by saying that “it is possible to write the story of Jesus' life.” For some lay Bible readers this might not sound radical, but in the Flusser's scholarly circles this was a remarkable statement. Furthermore Flusser argued that the historical Jesus had had a Messianic self-consciousness and seen himself as the Son of God – something which has often been questioned by Christian theology. More than anyone else Flusser has inspired Christian theologians to understand Jesus from within the Jewish context in which Jesus lived.

The Israeli author Yaron Avitov has a chapter on Flusser in his book *Shomea b'Moto et Hayam* [In his Death I Hear the Sea] published in Hebrew. According to the *Caspari Center Media Review* September #2, 2000 Avitov maintains:

Flusser believed in the afterlife, and wasn't afraid of death, and was especially looking forward to meeting his favorite Jew, the crucified Jesus. Rumors of 'this Jewish wise-man, who knew more about Jesus than any cardinal', spread all over the Christian world and drew many

to his lectures. 'Jesus is close to me,' agreed Flusser. 'I have an affectionate attitude towards him. I know his religious and moral message, but there is one difference – I'm more pessimistic. If there is any similarity between me and anyone from that time period, it is more likely the elder Hillel. Most of the things that I appreciate about Jesus, are found in him.'

Again, these are moving words said by a Jew about the Jew Jesus. It is hard to believe that one can get any closer to Jesus without surrendering to him.

However, this is exactly what Joseph Rabinowitz did, the Russian Jew who during his visit to Jerusalem in 1882 came to faith in Jesus as the Messiah and would call him "our brother Yeshua." To Rabinowitz, however, Jesus was not only the brother of the Jews. He was also "the Messiah, the Son of God," the "Savior" about whom Rabinowitz could say that he "was crucified for our sins; for this Jesus is not a God who cannot save, for he is mighty to save ..."

Moving are also the words of Jakob Wechsler about what happened at Rabinowitz' services in Kishinev. Wechsler was one of the first in Kishinev to polemicize against Rabinowitz. But he, too, came to faith and writes about this in 1885 saying,

A few months ago who would have believed that the Messianic movement which is emerging among us would have assumed larger and larger dimensions from day to day? As an honest man [Nathanael] asked the honest question over 1800 years ago: 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?', so many asked: 'Can light come forth from Kishinev and the Word of the Lord from Bessarabia?' Others said: 'This movement has no viability, it will soon be blown out and extinguished'. But the words of the Lord the Messiah still apply: 'if these should hold their peace, the stones will cry out', in this case the stones of the prayer house, Betlehem, which Mr. Rabinowitz has erected – these shout and proclaim for time and eternity. They give our hearts hope of soon seeing a large Messianic congregation in Israel. Who would have believed before that around 100 Israelite men would each Sabbath assemble in a house built in honour of Jesus the Messiah? Who would have believed before that a Jew would hear from the mouth of his Jewish brother the name of Jesus the Messiah being lauded on his lips without pursing his lips and stopping his ears ...?

It is our hope that this issue of *Mishkan* will stimulate an interest in the Jewish reclamation of Jesus. It is important for anyone engaging himself with the New Testament to stay in touch with Jewish scholarship in this field and no less important for those involved in Jewish evangelism.

Kai Kjær-Hansen

Radical Gospel Criticism and The Modern Jewish Study of Jesus

Donald A. Hagner*

When a Jewish scholar writes about Jesus it is an event that captures wide attention. Jews, it is thought, have an inside track in understanding Jesus, and there is surely truth in such a conclusion. Jesus himself was a Jew, after all, and his thorough Jewishness is hardly to be doubted. Thus those familiar with the Jewish literature of the time before, during, and after Jesus, and with Jewish religion and culture of the first century – those who know these things from the inside – have a distinct advantage in understanding the Jesus of history.

For all of its truth, however, such an easy conclusion presupposes that with Jesus we have to deal only with matters of continuity with his context. It would be difficult to deny that Jesus was distinctive. Most Jewish scholars are willing to admit this. But with the increasing appreciation of the diversity of Judaisms¹ in the first century, this constitutes little problem for them. It is a fact, however, that they tend to play down what in the Gospels is distinctive – not to say unique – in comparison to what we know of first-century Judaism, even granting all its diversity. There are certain things from their point of view that Jesus cannot have said or done.

Jewish scholars can point to a long tradition of liberal Christian scholarship that has arrived at conclusions similar to their own. The modern Jewish study of Jesus has not been done in a vacuum. The present essay will trace the impact of radical Gospel criticism on the Jewish approach to the Gospels, summarize the modern Jewish estimate of Jesus, and finally look at the implications of Jewish scholarship for Christian scholarship today.

Radical Gospel Criticism

Radical Gospel criticism is a child of the Enlightenment. At the root of that criticism is a view of the world that has no room for a God who acts in history, no room for events that cannot be explained naturalistically – in short, a

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¹ The plural is deliberate. The diversity of first century Judaism is increasingly emphasized. See, e.g., the SBL centennial volume, *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters*, eds. R. A. Kraft and G. W. E. Nickelsburg (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

universe consisting of a closed system of cause and effect, all within the power of human reason to explain. And with the exhilarating freedom from authority that characterized the Enlightenment came a particularly sharp attack on established religion and orthodox Christian beliefs.

With the Enlightenment began the so-called quest for the historical Jesus, indeed with the underlying presupposition that the real Jesus *cannot* have been like what the church affirms concerning him. This approach exists right down to the present in the so-called Jesus Seminar, which is equally a child of the Enlightenment perspective. The historicity of the Gospels was under attack by the English Deists and certain philosophers early in the period of the Enlightenment. In Germany the earliest important representative of the new study of Jesus was H.S. Reimarus², whose writings or “fragments” were published only posthumously by the dramatist and philosopher Lessing in 1778.³ For Reimarus, Christianity was built on a fraud. Jesus was no more than a man who deluded himself and others into thinking that he was the Messiah. The disciples of Jesus stole the body from the tomb in order to be able to make the claim that he had risen from the dead (as though in fulfillment of the fear expressed in Matt 27:64!). The Gospels were unreliable historical sources and Christianity was a hoax through and through.

Less than a century later, in 1835, David Friedrich Strauss published what would become the most famous and influential book on Jesus in the 19th century, *Das Leben Jesu*.⁴ Here again we encounter a full-blown naturalism and hence a deep skepticism concerning the historical worth of the Gospels.⁵ A second highly influential book on Jesus was published by Ernest Renan in 1863. Although very different from Strauss’s treatment of the subject, Renan’s book was equally skeptical about the history recounted in the Gospels.⁶ Here again we find naturalistic presuppositions dominant.

Albert Schweitzer’s famous book reviewing the history of the study of Jesus, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, effectively points out the weaknesses of the 19th century lives of Jesus. As was soon to be said about the Gospels (unfairly), these writings tell us more about the authors themselves than they do about the Jesus

² Albert Schweitzer’s scintillating book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (German original, 1906) had as its original title “Von Reimarus zu Wrede.”

³ A modern edition of the Reimarus fragments in English translation can be found in C.H. Talbert (ed.) *Reimarus Fragments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). The relevant fragment is entitled “On the Intention of Jesus and his Disciples.”

⁴ An English translation was made by the famous George Eliot (Marian Evans) in 1846, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*.

⁵ It is hardly surprising that members of the Jesus Seminar dedicate their first main book, *The Five Gospels*, to Strauss along with Jefferson and Galileo. Their description of Strauss as the one “who pioneered the quest of the historical Jesus,” however, is surprising.

⁶ (Joseph-)Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus* (1863), ET, *Life of Jesus* (1890).

of history. To paraphrase the famous similitude of Alfred Loisy, at the bottom of the well into which their research peered, these scholars saw only the reflection of their own face. As Schweitzer pointed out, these writers succeeded in making Jesus into a polite, 19th-century moralizing gentleman.

My colleague Colin Brown notes that Schweitzer called attention to three major crises in the critical study of Jesus.⁷ These were posed in terms of stark opposites: a purely historical or a purely supernatural approach; John or the Synoptics; and an eschatological or non-eschatological Jesus. New Testament scholarship long ago agreed on the superiority of the Synoptics over John as historical sources, and until the recent, strong challenge from the Jesus Seminar, that Jesus is to be understood as an apocalyptic figure. On the first point, however, New Testament scholars continue to disagree, although not all would like the alternative posed so starkly. Many would like to think of a historical approach with an openness to the supernatural – a historical method which is better, and more adequate to the subject matter, just because of that openness.

In the middle of the 20th century, the skepticism about the historical reliability of the Gospels reached a climax in the work of the highly influential Rudolf Bultmann. Like the giants of the study of the Jesus in the 19th century, Bultmann strictly ruled out the possibility of the supernatural. In his opinion, it was not possible to live in the modern scientific world and believe in the miraculous. The Gospels are so corrupted by the faith of the resurrection experience overlaid upon them that we cannot penetrate behind them to the real Jesus. Bultmann concluded in a famous statement that we could know “almost nothing concerning the life and personality about the historical Jesus.”⁸

Neither the “new quest” of the historical Jesus, begun by Bultmann’s disillusioned students in the 1950s, nor the more recent, so-called third quest – for all the good things one might care to say about it – has overcome the bias against the supernatural. What is most disappointing about the modern study of Jesus is exactly this closed-mindedness. How indeed shall the Bible be made sense of when it is the story of God acting in history and that possibility is ruled out from the beginning? And the irony is that science departed some time ago from the closed system of Newtonian physics that underlies the pre-judgment against anything that cannot be explained naturalistically! Developments in quantum mechanics and chaos theory point to the inadequacy of the simple cause and effect determinism that radical critical biblical scholars since the late 18th century have so dogmatically insisted upon.

⁷ “Historical Jesus, Quest of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. J.B. Green, S. McKnight, I.H. Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992) p. 332. See also his large book on the subject, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought 1778-1860* (reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

⁸ *Jesus and the Word* (German, 1926; ET: New York: Scribners, 1958) p. 14. As if to contradict his own statement, Bultmann wrote this book about Jesus!

In any event, modern Gospel criticism has redefined what is “historical” as only that which can be explained without recourse to anything transcendent. Incarnation and resurrection – two of the central realities of Christianity, testified to by the New Testament – are simply regarded as impossibilities. And thus the Jesus of the Gospels, whose uniqueness is a main point of these narratives, must be made to fit fully, and more or less comfortably, into his context.

The result of modern Gospel criticism is that a large question mark is put over much of the content of the Gospels. Here indeed we come to one of the true oddities of the radical critical perspective: the shift in the burden of proof. So thorough is the doubt about the historical reliability of the Gospels that now what requires “proof” is anything in the New Testament that is claimed to be historical. In other words, the material of the Gospels is unhistorical unless shown otherwise. In this regard the New Testament is treated differently from the way historians treat ancient sources, and this is the cause of much astonishment on the part of classicists who rightly indicate that if such a procedure were generally practiced on ancient sources we would know next to nothing about the ancient world.

Reflecting the same pessimism concerning the trustworthiness of the Gospel tradition are the widely-accepted criteria of authenticity.⁹ The main criterion, “dissimilarity,” insists that before something may be confidently taken as historical it must be distinctive, that is, dissimilar to the beliefs of the early Christians and also to contemporary Judaism. Otherwise the Gospel writers may be thought to have borrowed material from their context and put it into the mouth of Jesus.

Two further factors, quite separate but very important, must also be mentioned: the Holocaust and the affirmation of pluralism as requisite in the modern world. These have had a distinct impact on recent approaches to Jesus and the Gospels. Many have claimed that it is Christian theology that is the root of anti-Semitism, and indeed, that anti-Semitism is to be found in the pages of the New Testament itself.¹⁰ Christology has actually been called “the left hand of anti-Semitism.”¹¹ It is not surprising then to hear calls for the complete redoing of Christian theology, and to encounter the desire for a view of Jesus that will not be divisive, a view that Jews and Christians can agree upon and a common scholarship that will draw Jews and Christians together. This is only in keeping with the tenor of our time with its insistence that the truth question

⁹ For an excellent discussion, see C.A. Evans, “Authenticity Criteria in Life of Jesus Research,” *Christian Scholars Review* 19 (1989) pp. 6-31.

¹⁰ Against such a conclusion, see C.A. Evans and D. A. Hagner, eds., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

¹¹ Thus Rosemary Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

remains open, and that triumphalism must give way to an acceptance of the pluralism that characterizes our world.

In light of the remarks I have made about radical Gospel criticism in the preceding paragraphs, I must add one more paragraph to indicate that I do not advocate an uncritical or fundamentalist approach to the Gospels.¹² Although I am myself an adherent to the view of Professor Birger Gerhardsson that the oral tradition underlying the Synoptic Gospels was a holy tradition, handed on in ways similar to the practice of first-century rabbis and their disciples, and thus highly reliable, at the same time I do not deny the theological overlay upon the Synoptic narratives (nor does Gerhardsson) caused by the post-resurrection perspective of the evangelists. I only believe that the reality of this overlay does not subvert the basic trustworthiness of the narratives as historical accounts.¹³ I furthermore believe that it is extremely important for New Testament scholars to be open to the possibility of the supernatural in history.¹⁴ I of course agree that the Holocaust demands a new sensitivity to how we handle certain New Testament texts that speak negatively about the Jews, although I do *not* think that a complete redoing of Christian theology is required. I too accept the reality of pluralism and would reject triumphalism, yet I cannot in faithfulness to the New Testament witness subscribe to a comfortable two-covenant theory that makes Jesus Christ relevant only to the Gentiles, and not the Jews.

The Modern Jewish Estimate of Jesus

The modern Jewish study of Jesus is a 20th-century phenomenon undertaken almost exclusively by liberal or reform Jews. Given the history of the persecution of the Jews and the centuries of hostility, it is truly remarkable to find Jews now writing positively about Jesus. This appreciation of Jesus, it goes

¹² I am reminded of the not very friendly review of my *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* by Brad H. Young, in the journal *Immanuel*. Despite my excursus on "The Use of Gospel Criticism," Young tended to dismiss my book as uncritical and fundamentalistic.

¹³ Birger Gerhardsson's classic treatment of the subject, together with a second small book, has recently been reprinted: *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity with Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). The book contains a new preface by the author and a most interesting foreword by Jacob Neusner. In the latter, Neusner indicates that whereas he had reviewed the original edition of Gerhardsson's book negatively, he has now reversed his opinion and come to the conclusion that Gerhardsson is right. See too Gerhardsson's extremely helpful *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

¹⁴ On this important issue, see the very helpful treatment discussion in C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996). Also insightful is I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

without saying, is *as a Jew*. It is the *Heimholung Jesu*, the bringing home of Jesus, not as a heretic, but as a representative of the best of Judaism.¹⁵

Now it is clear that all that we have discussed above plays well into the hands of Jewish scholars who write about Jesus. Indeed, it could be said that modern Protestant scholarship has made this positive Jewish approach to Jesus possible. The skepticism of radical scholarship concerning the historical reliability of the Gospels allows Jewish scholars under the semblance of scholarly propriety to pick and choose what they will accept as historical in the Gospel narratives. Naturally what is picked by them is that which is consonant with the view that Jesus was no more than an extraordinary teacher/healer. Most of the scholars engaged in the Jewish reclamation of Jesus would share the naturalistic presuppositions of the radical Gospel criticism we have described above. Whether or not they do, however, they welcome the conclusion that Jesus cannot be what the church alleges concerning him. The resurrection of Jesus is of course a crucial dividing point since it is a vindication of the claims made by Jesus and the mainspring of the church's christology.¹⁶

Thus when liberal Protestantism departed from the church's understanding of Jesus, turning him into little more than a wonderful teacher, the way was prepared for Jewish writers to write appreciatively of Jesus. For they too can appreciate the teaching of Jesus and can discern its authentic Jewishness more effectively than others. Jewish scholars who write about Jesus focus solely on the Synoptics and ignore the rest of the New Testament. Here too they reflect the view of liberal Christian scholarship which has driven a wedge between Jesus and the early church. Paul in particular is regarded as the founder of a new religion – a religion quite out of keeping with the religion of Jesus.

An unavoidable conclusion emerges from what we have been observing. The Jewish reclamation of Jesus focuses only on what is in relative continuity with Judaism. Even on many of these matters the reclamation process is not successful, in my opinion. The reason for this is that the teaching of Jesus is itself so closely linked with the person of Jesus that it cannot finally be understood by those who do not face squarely the claims of Jesus concerning

¹⁵ I have described this fully in *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus: An Analysis and Critique of the Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), now available in a reprint from Wipf & Stock, Pasadena.

¹⁶ Journalists looking for an Easter story have in the past taken delight in reporting that the Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide believes in the resurrection of Jesus. They fail, however, to distinguish between resurrection and resuscitation. Lapide apparently believes in the latter only, namely that Jesus was raised from the dead to die again some years later, not that Jesus was raised to a new, eschatological order of existence.

himself, and in particular his announcement of the coming of the Kingdom of God in his ministry.¹⁷

Indeed, it is here that we come to what may be the most important point of all, the supreme point of discontinuity that governs all: the fundamental assertion of the New Testament writers that a definitive fulfillment of the promises of Scripture has occurred and that a turning point in the ages has been reached in the coming of Jesus is unanimously denied by Jewish scholars. For them nothing significant, let alone unique, has occurred in this history of salvation. And for this supreme reason the approach of Jewish scholars to the Gospels is flat and unexciting. Gone is the excitement in the texts about the fulfillment that has come. Gone is the mystery about this person Jesus, and who he is that can do and say such things. Gone is the electrifying realization that the Messiah is present among his people. Gone in short is the gospel, the “good news” itself. Instead, Jewish scholars treat the texts as though they were timeless and frozen, and they find in Jesus a rabbi/prophet with interesting or unusual refinements of halacha.

In fact it is the clear discontinuity with Judaism (which I hasten to add does not cancel out the obvious continuity) that is the Achilles’ heel of the Modern Jewish study of Jesus. The very wise Samuel Sandmel saw this when he wrote:

*True, Jesus was a Jew. True, there are Jewish presuppositions in virtually every paragraph of the Gospels. Yet it is a Jesus at variance with, or over against, Judaism and Jews that constitutes not all, but a great deal of the warp and woof of the Gospels.*¹⁸

Jacob Neusner, too, has called attention to the huge difference:

*So, I think it is clear, the two kinds of piety, the one with its effort to replicate eternity and the perpetual order [Pharisaism], the other with its interest in the end of an old order and the beginning of a new age of history [Christianity], scarcely come into contact with one another.*¹⁹

In the final analysis, Jewish scholarship has repeated what occurred in the 19th-century lives of Jesus. It has reconstructed a Jesus in its own image. It has not brought us to the real Jesus simply because it is either unwilling or unable to address the main parts of the Gospel tradition. Where is the discussion of the present dawning of the Kingdom of God? Where do we read of Jesus’ unparalleled authority, the central position he assigns himself in God’s salvific

¹⁷ This is the thesis of my book *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*. Some reviewers faulted me for making this claim, but I still maintain that those who ignore or reject the personal claims of Jesus will get only so far in understanding his teaching.

¹⁸ *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) p. 342.

¹⁹ “The use of the Later Rabbinic Evidence for the Study of First-Century Pharisaism,” in W.S. Green (ed.), *Approaches to Judaism: Theory and Practice* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978) p. 225. See too Neusner’s *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity Press International, 1991).

activity, or his self-claims? And what of the fact that he seems to have an agenda that transcends national-political aspirations, the land, and even the temple?

All that Jewish scholars can do, in agreement with their liberal Christian counterparts, we again emphasize, is to attribute a large portion of the Gospel narratives to *Gemeindetheologie*, the theology of the post-resurrection Christian community, with the implication that the early Christians either misunderstood Jesus terribly or are guilty of a fraud of stupendous proportions.

Implications of the Modern Jewish Study of Jesus for Christian Scholarship

Although we have been critical of the modern Jewish study of Jesus – and we would be equally critical of radical non-Jewish scholarship such as represented by the Jesus Seminar – there can be no doubt that Christian scholars can learn much from these Jewish scholars.

Undeniably the Jesus of history was fully Jewish, as indeed were all the first Christians. The Christian faith, like its Lord, who was “born under the law” (Gal 4:4), came to life in an exclusively Jewish environment. The thorough study of that Jewish context enriches our understanding of both. It can illuminate passage after passage in the Gospels. We should not underestimate the significance of what is to be learned about Jesus and early Christianity from Jewish scholars. New Testament Christianity is far more Jewish than the average Christian imagines, and it is well worth rediscovering this.

It is no small irony that Jewish scholars tend to respect the historical reliability of the Gospels more than their radical Protestant counterparts. This is often because they recognize the authentic Jewishness of specific data in the Gospels. These ring true to what they know of the first-century Jewish context. Jewish scholars have immediately seen the absurdity of that part of the criterion of dissimilarity that requires rejection of views similar to what one can find in the first century Jewish context. Why anyone should think that the real Jesus cannot reflect his Jewishness and Jewish background is astounding.

But it is perhaps equally astounding that anyone should reject as unhistorical anything in Jesus that sounds like the early church, thus denying *a priori* that there could be any continuity between the faith of the Church and the Jesus of history. If we allow that the faith of the early church has had an impact on the Gospel narratives, as indeed we must in my opinion, that hardly invalidates the entire historical tradition. If we are able to see that Jesus resembled the Jewish context out of which he came, may it not also be the case that there is substantial continuity between him and the faith of his early followers? Is it not worth pondering how the evangelists can be so reliable when they speak of the Jewish Jesus and so utterly unreliable when they

describe him as something more, as the one who was to become the Lord of the church?

What must be avoided is the reductionism, of which Jewish scholars are commonly guilty, that says that Jesus can be fully and completely explained by his Jewishness. It is not a matter of an absolute alternative: that either Jesus was fully Jewish *or* he was the Lord proclaimed by the Church. There is no choice to be made here. On the contrary, he was both fully Jewish and at the same time the Lord who created the Church. Similarly, it is not a matter of the continuity or discontinuity of Jesus with Judaism. We have to face the reality of both continuity *and* discontinuity, which is another way of saying that we must face the reality of something new. The early Jewish church had to do just that. It affirmed the new and, by its fresh reading of the scriptures, was able to see the elements of discontinuity as included under a larger umbrella of continuity. The radically new and surprising things that they discovered in Jesus, for example in the death and resurrection of the Messiah, or the inclusion of Gentiles as full members of the people of God, they now saw as the intended plan of God from the beginning and as indicated already in the scriptures.

What they would not have comprehended is the attempt to understand Jesus by essentially denying his uniqueness and denying that any significant turning point in God's working with Israel had been reached, for these were fundamental convictions of these Jewish Christians. They furthermore would have been incredulous at any suggestion that the Jewishness of Jesus was incompatible with what they were now affirming concerning the risen Christ, the Lord of the Church. They would have been aghast at the idea of two covenants, one for Israel and one for the Gentile church. No, for them the covenant with Israel had come to its intended goal and fulfillment in the new covenant and the Church.

It will remain important for Christian scholars to keep abreast of what Jewish scholars write about Jesus, not only for the positive knowledge about Jesus and his context that can be acquired in this way, but also for the sake of informed and mutually informing dialogue. There is, however, probably no way around the differences that will remain in the assessment of Jesus. Here Christians must hold their ground, professing loyalty to the Jew from Nazareth whom they confess as their Lord, while at the same time exploring the common ground they have with the Jews and, indeed, coming to an appreciation of the Jewishness of the Christian faith, rightly understood. It is from the Jews that the Messiah has come (Rom 9:5), and that Messiah, Jesus, was meant to be "for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). Our deep and abiding disagreements with the conclusions of modern Jewish scholarship must never cause us to forget this.

Extra-Biblical Evidence for Jesus' Existence: Signs of His Presence from Outside Scripture

Darrell Bock*

Several years ago I received a letter propounding a question of a kind which I am frequently asked to answer. The writer was a Christian, to whom the question had been put by an agnostic friend in the course of a lengthy discussion, and it had caused him, he said, 'great concern and some little upset in my spiritual life'.

Here is the question as framed by my correspondent:

"What collateral proof is there in existence of the historical life of Jesus Christ? If the Bible account of his life is accurate, he should have caused sufficient interest to gain considerable comment in other histories and records of the time; but in fact (I am told), apart from obscure references in Josephus and the like, no mention is made."

(F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 13)

Evidence for Jesus in Non-Biblical Texts: An Interesting Question to Ponder

The question Professor Bruce's friend raised is an interesting one to consider. I remember the first time I heard about this question; it came not as a query, but as a claim. I was a student at the University of Texas and a famous debate took place on the campus between a famous Texas Baptist pastor and a famous atheist, Madaline Murray O'Hare. The debate caused so much attention that it was on the radio. As I listened she made the statement that there is *no* credible evidence outside the Bible that Jesus even existed. I have heard variations of this statement many times in subsequent years. Sometimes it shows up in documentaries. The pastor tried to challenge the claim, but as an expert on the Bible, he could only specifically allude to one text by a Roman historian and make a general claim about the Jewish historian, Josephus. The pastor only knew that Josephus had said something about Jesus. When pressed, he did not know the details of the evidence. So he lost an opportunity to make an

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important point about the evidence for Jesus' existence from sources outside of those supporting him.

In fact, it is amazing that Jesus shows up at all in the sources we have. Even a seemingly significant "middle management" figure like Pontius Pilate, the decade-long governor of Judea, goes unmentioned in a single pagan document outside of the Roman historian, Tacitus. What we know of him from first-century documents comes to us through Josephus, Philo and the gospels. After all, not many people were literate and those who did write came from the upper echalons of society. Historical works tended to focus on the major figures and events. Three reasons make the mention of Jesus in this material surprising.

First, we lack records from numerous major figures of the ancient world. What has survived to our time is extremely limited, though important and enlightening. For example, we do not have a single official record of any report which "Pontius Pilate, or any other Roman governor of Judaea, sent to Rome about anything."²⁰ So first of all, we only have a small amount of the material that was surely produced.

Second, we possess few of the potential sources for first-century Judea. In fact, we possess only three major Jewish sources. (1) We have one Jewish historian who lived in the last portion of the century (Josephus). (2) There is one Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria in Egypt (Philo). He only rarely mentions contemporary events in Judea. (3) The most dramatic of discovery the 20th century, the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran, is a collection of documents from a separatist Jewish movement living in the Judean wilderness. Most of the Qumran material, when it treats history, is not dedicated to giving a historical description, but treats history with largely descriptive and symbolic imagery that is more allusive in character. Moving beyond Jewish sources, there is a selection of works from various writers on the history of the Roman Empire (of whom only Suetonius, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger mention Jesus or one called Christ). Our final major source for first-century Judea is the New Testament, but these texts are excluded from consideration in this chapter except for how they relate to what the other sources bring to our attention.

Third, Jesus was, from a Roman perspective, a seemingly minor figure at the time. He was a religious leader from an ethnic minority tucked away in a small, distant corner of a massive ancient empire. He lived in a time when communication was not anywhere near as vast as we are used to today. Not only that, but the bulk of his ministry did not take place in the central city of the minor province, but further north in Galilee. So he lived and worked seemingly

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 19. This work is still an excellent survey of the evidence of the topic for this chapter. Another full discussion of much of the material, especially the key examples from Josephus, is in John Maier, *Jesus: A Marginal Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

on the outskirts of this region. It would be like someone working in the countryside within a distant territory of the United States, say on one of the Pacific territorial islands. For the Romans, there would have been dozens of more important historical figures in the region from the early portion of the first century. Even on the Jewish stage, Jesus was seen originally as a troublemaker by the leadership, one who had been successfully removed. So why would one expect anything to be written about a figure Rome regarded as insignificant and the Jewish leadership had rejected as one making false claims?

Yet traces of his existence are in the record. So what one sees in the documents we do have is amazing, given the limited sources we possess, the views of Jesus that those writing outside the Christian circle would have had and the insignificant locale of his ministry. What we see is evidence of the unusual effects his ministry produced in those who came to follow him. The remarks come with a clear recognition that the growing movement's origins went back to Jesus. In addition, there are statements, both neutral and against Jesus, that confirm his existence. They reveal the issues of debate we will come to see in much more detail in the gospel record. It is this element of the record that is so fascinating. It serves as an introduction to the gospels themselves. So what is the extra-biblical evidence for the existence of Jesus? What does it tell us about him?

The Evidence from Roman or Roman Empire Sources

Bruce characterizes the evidence from Roman historians as "police news." They are reports that indicate aspects of the Christian movement that troubled the Roman authorities.²¹ There is no prejudice in these reports as they are descriptive, given almost in passing as the writer reviews the record concerning key figures.

Suetonius, Claudius 25.4. The first evidence of Christians shows up in a report by a Roman historian who wrote on the lives of 12 emperors of Rome (*De Vita Caesarum, Lives of the Twelve Caesars*). C. Suetonius Tranquillus was a member of the equites and worked as a lawyer for Pliny the Younger until he found administrative positions under the emperors Trajan and Hadrian. This role gave him access to the Roman archives, a rich deposit of historical sources. His work comes from around 120AD and covers the lives of Caesar to Domitian. He also describes events from 49AD involving the emperor Claudius. The treatment is part of a section explaining how Claudius dealt with various ethnic groups. In that year, riots broke out in the large Jewish community in Rome. In fact, Acts 18:2 alludes to the same event when it notes that Aquila and Priscilla were in Corinth. There they became acquainted with Paul "because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome."

²¹ F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 18.

In a short sentence Suetonius explains Claudius' reaction to the riots as:

*He expelled the Jews from Rome, on account of the riots in which they were constantly indulging, at the instigation of Chrestus.*²²

Now the problem with the citation is that Chrestus is not Christ. Yet there are good reasons to suggest that Christ is who is meant. First, Latin style would suggest that a *quodam* would introduce a new or unknown figure, but that is lacking here. Second, though several hundred names of Roman Jews have been found in the Roman catacombs, none of them are *Chrestus*, which suggests a mistake in the reference. The confusion may come from the name *Chrestiani*, a vulgar form of the name for "Christians." This name then probably produced a derivation that saw its founder as *Chrestus*.²³ Suetonius' report apparently regards *Chrestus* as the cause of the riots and leaves the impression the instigator of the riots was in Rome. The historian's source is neither Christian, nor is he a Christian. His hostile perspective emerges in his reference to Christians holding to "a novel and mischievous superstition" (*Life of Nero* 16.2). Suetonius' description comes as he portrays the persecution of Christians under Nero, an example of which follows in the next passage from Tacitus

The Suetonian text is significant, if the allusion is to Jesus, because (1) it shows that within a few decades the movement he spawned had reached from Jerusalem to Rome. It also shows (2) that they had grown to be a source of commotion in the city. Though the text does not make a direct reference to Jesus, the historical effect of his presence surfaces here. Finally, (3) it points to the close connection between the earliest church and Judaism, so much so that the Romans saw them as one group.

Tacitus, Annals xv. 44. In 64AD, 15 years after Claudius' expulsion of the Jews, a great fire broke out in the city of Rome. The Roman historian and member of the senatorial aristocracy, P. Cornelius Tacitus, discusses the event in his final work, *Annals*. The treatise covers Roman history from 14-68AD. The work dates from around 115-17AD.

It was popularly believed that Nero had ordered this devastating fire. So the emperor came to fix the blame on the Christians. He is said to have burned many at the stake (in a sentence that was said to fit the crime). He fed others to

²² A good brief discussion of this text appears in Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), pp. 83-84.

²³ This suggestion is in Theissen and Merz, pp. 82, 84, nn. 57 and 62. It should be noted that these writers are often skeptical about historical detail, so their making this point is significant. John Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 92, suggests merely a pronunciation confusion in the record. It is Meier who notes the reasons one should think that Christ is meant in this passage. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins*, p. 21, suggests that *Chrestus* is a common slave name.

wild animals. Tacitus' explanation gives us one of the longer texts about Christians in the extra-biblical material. It reads:

Therefore, to squelch the rumor, Nero created scapegoats and subjected to the most refined tortures those whom the common people called "Christians,"[a group] hated for their abominable crimes. The author of this name, Christ, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed for the moment, the deadly superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the land which originated this evil, but also in the city of Rome, where all sorts of horrendous and shameful practices from every part of the world converge and are fervently cultivated.²⁴

Once again the citation is important for a whole series of reasons. (1) It is the one reference to Pilate in a non-Jewish or non-Christian document. Though Josephus and Philo discuss him, Pilate's place in Roman historiography is limited to this one reference about his decision to sentence Jesus to death.²⁵ (2) Christ is described as a Jew slain in Judea under the authority of Pilate, a point the biblical material makes as well. (3) The appeal to the name of Christ, which means "anointed one," indicates that it is the claim of "the anointed" that attaches to this figure. (4) This Christ is the founder of a movement that made its way from Judea to Rome, a point Suetonius' citation also made. The fact that this movement never died out, but remained, grew and spread after Christ's execution makes it worthy of noting. Jesus' death failed to produce the movement's extinction. (5) Tacitus makes it clear that the Romans viewed the Christians with some hostility. In a later text he accuses them of "hatred against the human race" (*Annals* 15.44.4). This charge probably exists because the Christians had beliefs that made them hesitant to engage in acts of reverence for the emperor, acts the rest of the empire performed. Our next citation from Pliny details this dispute. Yet Tacitus' sense of injustice surfaces when he reports that, "Hence, even for criminals who deserve extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed."

We do not know the source of Tacitus' information. It appears to have come from archival reports or some subsequent Roman sources. The perspective is clearly not Christian. Strictly speaking, the one error in his report is that Tacitus cites Pilate as procurator (not prefect). However, the difference may only reflect that Tacitus makes reference to the equivalent office of his time.²⁶

²⁴ This translation mostly follows John Meier's rendering in *A Marginal Jew*, pp. 89-90.

²⁵ Another reference to Pilate appears in an inscription found at Caesarea Maritima in 1961 that refers to him as prefect. See C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background* 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 155-561.

²⁶ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 100, n. 8 and Barbara Levick, *Claudias* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990), pp. 48-49.

Pliny the Younger, Epistles x.96-97. C. Plinius Caecilius Secundus, better known as Pliny the Younger,²⁷ gives us the chance to listen in on the development of civic policy in respect to Christians located in Pontus and Bythnia (in what is now Northern Turkey). A Roman noble and senator, he was governor in that region from about 111AD. He assumed office during the rule of Trajan (98-117AD). Pliny also was a prolific letter writer. The 10th and final volume of his letters contains one epistle to Trajan asking how Christians should be treated.²⁸ Pliny explains, "In investigations of Christians I have never taken part; hence I do not know what is the crime usually punished or investigated, or what allowances are made." Most of the letter concerns his procedure in questioning Christians. It involves a request for advice about whether his approach is a good one. Trajan's reply, which we also possess, assures Pliny that he has "acted with perfect correctness." The key to that policy is getting Christians to declare reverence toward the gods and to the emperor, as well as being willing to curse Christ (*Christo male dicere*). According to Pliny's informants, these acts were something real Christians would not do. Pliny released those who agreed to worship the gods or the emperor. He also set free those who confessed to giving up the faith.

Those interrogated had described the elements of their faith and worship. Here is Pliny's description of their experience:

. . . That it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god [carmenque Christo quasi deo dicere]; and that they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, nor to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded. After this, they went on, it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.

The citation notes that Christians gathered twice on what we know as Sunday, first to worship Christ and then to partake in the agape meal, the Lord's Supper.

The citation is significant. Despite not telling us anything about Jesus' life, it does show (1) that just as the movement had spread to Rome, it also was growing and becoming an issue in still another part of the empire. (2) It gives us our first outside description of their worship and notes the reverence with which Christ was held in the early part of the second century. (3) Their reverence is so focused that worshipping another god is something they refuse to do, even when the state threatens them with severe punishment. For this reason Christians were seen as despising other humans and as not being part of the faithful members of the empire. They were a "perverse and extravagant superstition" as Pliny says later in this letter. (4) There is no set policy on how

²⁷ He also was the nephew and adopted son of Pliny the elder

²⁸ A full presentation of the letter and Trajan's reply appears in Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins*, pp. 25-27.

to deal with them, so Pliny must seek the emperor's guidance. In sum, Pliny reports that Christ is the cultic deity of the movement. This belief is so strong that the Christians see the Roman gods, including the emperor, as anti-god. As we shall see, there was no separation of church and state in this culture. Religion and loyalty were often tightly linked to the authorities who ruled.

Two Other Brief Notes: Thallus and Peregrinus. Two more Roman references come to us indirectly. The Christian chronographer Julius Africanus (170-240AD) writes in the third century about the crucifixion. He reports the remarks of Thallus, a Roman or Syrian who wrote about the history of the eastern Mediterranean in about 52AD.²⁹ The work is now lost, but Africanus tells us about Thallus' third volume. There he comments on the crucifixion of Jesus and the accompanying earthquakes and darkness. Thallus simply explained that this darkness was an eclipse of the sun. This explanation Africanus took as irrational because a crucifixion at Passover time means that there is a full moon, which prevents such an eclipse. Even if coming from Christian sources, Thallus' remark is significant because it shows details about the crucifixion were widespread enough that a non-Christian writer wanted to refute them.

Lucian of Samasota (c 115-200AD) wrote a satire of a Christian convert, who later defects from the faith. The work is known as *The Passing of Peregrinus*. The character is a foil for the worship of Jesus. Lucian argues in chapter 11 that Christians are so enamored with Peregrinus that they revere him as a god " . . . next after the other, to be sure, whom they still worship, the man who was impaled (*anakolopisthenta*) in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world." The reference to impaling is a mocking allusion to the origin of crucifixion, which developed from the older custom of impaling victims.³⁰ This text does not name Jesus, but alludes to him as the founder of a cult that worshipped him. Such worship came despite his execution in Palestine, corroborating the facts cited above. It shows that knowledge of Jesus circulated widely in the second century as a result of the effect of Jesus' life and death.

Source from a Syrian Philosopher

Mara bar Sarapion. We possess one sympathetic report from the first century. It is the letter of a Syrian Stoic philosopher just after the fall of Jerusalem. This event places the letter at about 73AD³¹. The incident which gives rise to his remarks appears to be the expulsion of King Antiochus IV of Commagene

²⁹ It is possible, but not certain, that this Thallus is the rich freedman of Tiberius that Josephus mentions in *Antiquities* 18.167. Africanus' remarks are in *Chronology*, fragment 18.

³⁰ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 102, n. 20.

³¹ Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, pp. 76-79.

(whose governing city was Samosata), a moment described in Josephus' *Jewish War* 7.219-43. He suggests that persecuting the wise is common in a world of violence, but it never pays. Here is his statement:

What good did it do the Athenians to kill Socrates, for which deed they were punished with famine and pestilence? What did it avail the Samians to burn Pythagoras, since their country was buried entirely under sand in one moment? Or what did it avail the Jews to kill their wise king, since their kingdom was taken away from them from that time on?

God justly avenged these three wise men. The Athenians died of famine, the Samians were flooded by the sea, the Jews were slaughtered and driven from their kingdom, everywhere living in dispersion.

Socrates is not dead, thanks to Plato; nor Pythagorus, because of Hera's statue. Nor is the wise king, because of the new law which he has given.

The remarks reflect reports he may have received from Christians. It is Christians who view Jesus as the king of the Jews and as one who was unjustly slain for his wisdom. In addition, there is no note of Roman participation in the death, and the defeat of the Jews is seen as payment for this action.

Yet in another way, Mara's view is that of an outsider, given that he equates Jesus with other wise men. He also gives no hint of resurrection. Jesus is one among many wise men, a typical secular view about Jesus that many adhere to today.

Josephus

The most important extra-biblical evidence for Jesus comes from the Jewish historian, Joseph ben Matthias, better known as Flavius Josephus (c. 36-after 100AD). Josephus was the son of a priest and a Pharisee. He came from a well-to-do family. He had been a commander of Jewish Galilean forces against the Romans in the Jewish War and became a prisoner of war. However, predicting that Vespasian would come to power, he was freed upon Vespasian's ascension. He lived under Roman protection with the approval of this ruler. He wrote a series of historical works tracing Jewish history. He sought to defend the Jews to the Romans. The most comprehensive work was *Antiquities*, which traced Jewish history from the creation to the fall of Jerusalem. In this work Josephus mentions Jesus, James, and John the Baptist. The "Testimonium Flavianum" is the most comprehensive citation of Jesus outside of the Bible. The citation about John does not mention Jesus, but does discuss the significance of his ministry and baptism²⁰ (*Antiquities* 18.116-19). We will not treat it here, but will mention it when John is covered later.

Josephus on James the Just. Josephus mentions the execution of the Lord's brother during the transition of rule from Festus to Albinus in c. 62AD. In the three months during which a Roman ruler was absent from Judea, the Jewish

leadership met under the leadership of a new high priest, Annas the younger. He was the son of the high priestly patriarch Annas, who is mentioned in Luke 3:2, John 18:13, and Acts 4:6. Given the lack of Roman supervision, Annas the younger took advantage of the situation and acted to secure greater control. As Josephus says in *Antiquities* 20.200,

He convened a judicial session of the Sanhedrin and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ – James by name – and some others, whom he charged with breaking the law and handed over to be stoned to death.

Some Jews protested this action. So Annas was removed from his position for exercising authority he did not have. The Romans kept the authority to execute for themselves, so Annas' act was a violation of civil power. The act was part of what had certainly been a long-standing family feud between the family of Annas and the Christians. The conflict had extended back three decades to the life of Jesus. Caiaphas, who was high priest when Jesus was executed, was the elder Annas' son-in-law. Annas the Younger's charge of law breaking recalls the kind of thing said against Stephen years earlier when Caiaphas was still high priest (Acts 6-7). James had been head of the church in Jerusalem for years as Galatians 1:19 notes. Josephus' allusion to the Christ as he identifies James is significant because it suggests a well-known figure who is mentioned without any development. Josephus mentions him in such an indirect manner that it lacks the look of a later insertion.³² Christ's presence here serves to suggest that this figure has already been discussed by Josephus earlier. So the reference here looks back to the earlier fuller treatment of the Christ. It supports the claim that the earlier passage about Jesus is an authentic part of Josephus' work.

Josephus on Jesus. In book eighteen of the *Antiquities* Josephus outlines the various problems that the Judean people experienced under Pontius Pilate, Roman prefect from 26-35AD. The "Testimonium Flavianum" contains the most extensive extra-biblical description of Jesus that we currently possess. The text is cited below as it stands in all the manuscripts we possess. However we note (by underlining) those portions whose authenticity has been challenged.³³ The text comes from 18.63-64.

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of surprising works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew

³² The reference to the "so-called Christ" is not an expression a Christian interpolator would use.

³³ For details, see Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 62 and p. 78, n. 37. Our main Latin manuscripts come from the ninth century, while the earliest Greek manuscripts come from the eleventh century. As Meier notes on p. 57, the Slavonic version of Josephus is unlikely to be authentic. Meier's treatment on pp. 56-88 is also an excellent summary of the debate.

over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again on the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named for him, are not extinct to this day.

Most scholars are confident that Josephus wrote something like this, because the later mention of the Christ in the James citation from *Antiquities* 20.200 assumes a previous mention of this figure. In addition, Eusebius, the church historian, mentions this text in his *Ecclesiastical History* (1.1.7-8) and in his *Demonstration of the Gospel* (3.5.105-06). These writings show that these texts were known by 325AD. Finally four expressions sound more like Josephus than a Christian author, namely (1) a wise man, (2) a doer of surprising works, (3) receive the truth gladly (probably with an ironic, negative force as is often its sense in Greek), and (4) the designation of Christians with a probably derogatory reference to them as a tribe.

Nonetheless, many have questioned whether the underlined portions of this citation go back to Josephus. The underlined portions appear to be things a non-Christian would never say about Jesus. The discussion goes back into the 16th century. Even during that time Lukas Osiander said, "Had Josephus been so inclined, . . . Josephus would have been Christian."³⁴ The confession of Jesus (1) as more than a man and (2) as the Christ, (3) the recognition without qualification of the resurrection and (4) a recognition that he did many things according to prophecy do not sound like the language of a Jewish loyalist.³⁵ These elements lead many to suggest that a Christian interpolator added the italicized portions, or something very similar to them.

Still there are credible suggestions as to what the original wording may have been. An example that reflects a neutral rendering comes from F. F. Bruce.³⁶ The few differences from the above citation are an attempt to make this section read like the other "troubles" described in this book and reflect the corresponding, more negative tone.

Now there arose about this time a source of further trouble in one Jesus, a wise man who performed surprising works, a teacher of men who gladly welcome strange things. He led away many Jews, and also many of the Gentiles. He was the so-called Christ, When Pilate, acting on information supplied by the chief men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who attached themselves to him at first did not cease to cause trouble, and the tribe of Christians, which has taken this name from him, is not extinct even today.

³⁴ Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 67. This work gives a fine summary of the discussion surrounding the text.

³⁵ Origen tells us that Josephus was not a Christian in *Against Celsus* 1.47 and in *Commentary on Matthew* 10.17.

³⁶ *Jesus and Christian Origins*, p. 39.

This text emphasizes the trouble that surfaced as a result of the Christian movement. It turns the confession of Christ into a “so-called” confession. It renders the remark about those who responded to Jesus gladly with the ironic tone that the Greek likely indicates.

Another, even more neutral suggestion comes from John Meier.³⁷ He merely removes the three interpolations. His text reads:

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out.

However, this rendering lacks any mention of the Christ in any form, which is the one feature that seems required by Josephus’ later reference to James as the brother of the so-called Christ.

We cannot determine the sources Josephus used. Nor can we be positive which of the above suggestions is closest to Josephus’ original text. Yet the Jewish historian’s testimony is of great importance, regardless of which shorter version one accepts. Josephus corroborates that (1) Jesus had a reputation as a wise man and a teacher of wisdom. (2) Jesus was a man with a reputation for performing unusual works. (3) Jesus gained a significant following which led the Jewish leadership to respond against him. (4) Jesus was crucified in Judea under Pontius Pilate. (5) The movement Jesus started was still very much alive and well at the end of the first century. This point matches what the Roman historians also indicated. This text removes any doubt one has about whether Jesus existed. It indicates that Jesus caused a stir that significantly impacted history.

One final set of texts remains for us to consider. It is the testimony of the rabbinic tradition. These passages give evidence of the debate those views caused with the church Fathers. How do they fit with what the other writers say?

Rabbinic Sources and Evidence of Debate with the Church Fathers

We treat the rabbinic testimony and that of the Fathers together. However we limit the use of the Fathers to those places where they are reacting to the Jewish position about Jesus. The discussion will not consider debates about the relationship of Jesus to prophecy and Scripture, but only consider points that discuss issues tied to the character of Jesus’ life.

The difficulties in referring to the rabbinic material are the late date of this material and the seeming inaccuracies that are included in the references. Of

³⁷ *A Marginal Jew*, p. 61.

the many candidates often set forth from this material, only two texts from the Babylonian Talmud apparently refer to Jesus. This work is a key official rabbinic text of the sixth century. The citations are not really valuable for recording historical details about Jesus' life. Rather the references may contain an important trace of a fundamental, official Jewish charge against Jesus.³⁸

Two Rabbinic Texts (b Sanhedrin 43a and 107b). The first rabbinic text comes from *b Sanh* 43a.³⁹ This textual tradition is identified as a *baraita*, which means that it is an old tradition. It reads:

On the eve of Passover Yeshu [Jesus] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favor, he was hanged on the eve of Passover. Ulla retorted: 'Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defense could be made? Was he not a deceiver, concerning whom Scripture says [Deut 13:8], "Neither shall you spare neither shall you conceal him?" With Yeshu however it was different, for he was connected to government [kingship?].'

This text makes several interesting notes. (1) There is the clearly apologetic claim that there was a 40-day period allowed for people to come to Jesus' defense versus the gospels' portrait of a rush to judgment. (2) There is an allusion to hanging and stoning, which is the traditional way that Judaism referred to the death penalty. (3) The dating of the execution appears to correspond with John's chronology. (4) If the allusion to Jesus' connection to government is an allusion to his Davidic ancestry, then there is an implicit remark about his ancestral claim to kingship. Each of these points is debated, and the resolution of each detail is not clear.

But one other observation is of great potential significance. It is the claim that the leadership executed Jesus because he was for them a sorcerer-enticer

³⁸ Both the treatments of Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, pp. 93-98, and of Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, pp. 74-76, discuss the genuine difficulties of drawing accurate, detailed information from this material. They are skeptical about its usability. None the less, the correspondence between this material and the reports of Justin Martyr and Origen about Jewish views in the second century suggest that Jews did raise a charge against Jesus as a magician/deceiver. So argues Graham Stanton, "Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and False Prophet Who Deceived God's People," in *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ*, ed Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 164-80. Each of these treatments explains why other suggested texts are not likely to refer to Jesus or are too late to be of any value.

³⁹ I do not include a discussion of a later portion of this text which engages in a wordplay allegedly involving five of Jesus' disciples named: Matthai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni and Toda. The reference is too problematic to yield much of value, though some have seen allusions at least to Matthew, Nicodemus, Boanerges (John or James) and Thaddaeus in this reference. See Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins*, p. 63.

and a deceiver of the nation. He led the people of Israel astray. The charge comes with a scriptural appeal to Deuteronomy 13:8, which covers how to treat false prophets. It is Jesus' teaching and powers that are attested as controversial. It is here that an ancient echo may exist, one that also has traces in the Fathers and in the gospels.

The second rabbinic text makes a similar claim. It comes from *b Sanh* 107b. Though it alludes to an event whose authenticity is questionable, the text reads:

One day he [R. Joshua] was reciting the Shema when Jesus came before him. He intended to receive him and made a sign to him. He [Jesus] thinking it was to repel him, went, put up a brick, and worshipped it.

Repent,' said he [R. Joshua] to him. He replied, 'I have thus learned from you: He who sins and causes others to sin is not afforded the means of repentance.' And a Master [another major rabbi] has said, 'Jesus the Nazarene practiced magic and led Israel astray.'

Once again the charge is a claim about the exercise of unusual powers and of leading Israel astray. In fact, the two points appear in the same order as the earlier text from *b Sanh*. 43a.

*Similar Texts from the Fathers.*⁴⁰ The rabbinic evidence on this specific point would be more suspect if it did not parallel evidence from the second century church Fathers. Justin Martyr in his Dialogue 69:7 notes that Jews were arguing, "They said it was a display of magic art, for they even dared to say that he was a magician and a deceiver of the people." This language parallels the rabbinic material and comes in the same order as that material. The language about being a magician does not come to Justin from the New Testament, because this term is not used of Jesus there. So its source must come from another place. Justin repeats the claim that Jesus was charged with using magical arts in First Apology 30. In Dialogue 108 Justin notes that Jesus was called a deceiver.

Justin is not alone. Origen also discusses his debate with Celsus in *Contra Celsum*. The Christian reports Celsus' account of a Jew who directly confronted Jesus in *Contra Celsum* 1:68. The Jew challenges Jesus with a seeming concession, "Come let us believe that these miracles were really done by you." However the remark is ironic, because Celsus explains the power by discussing the work of those who profess to perform wonderful deeds. The second-century Jew sets forth two competing options, "Since these men do these wonders, ought we to think them sons of God? Or ought we to say that they are the practices of wicked men possessed by an evil demon?" What is important here is not whether Celsus' report about a confrontation with Jesus actually happened, but that the explanation reflects what was said about Jesus and his

⁴⁰ This section summarizes a much more detailed argument found in Stanton, "Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and a False Prophet Who Deceived God's People," in *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ*, pp. 166, 171-75, 175-79.

power. Here is second-century evidence about the fundamental debate over the source of Jesus' power.

The same debate shows its presence a century earlier in the New Testament. The Pharisees charged that Jesus led people astray (John 7:12, 47). Jesus is said to have a demon in John 10:19-21, leading to a dispute about the source of his power. In Luke 23:2, Jesus is accused of perverting the customs of the people, a charge very similar to leading them astray. Matthew 27:63-64 refers to Jesus as "that deceiver." Finally, Mark 3:22 ties Jesus' exorcisms to the power of Beelzebul, the prince of the demons. Mark 3:22 has conceptual similarities to Matthew 12:24 and Luke 11:15. In other words, the charge testified to by the rabbis and Fathers parallels charges noted in each of the gospels, suggesting a continuity in a series of distinct witnesses. There is enough diversity in how the charges are presented that a dependence on the language of the New Testament is not a likely explanation. A genuine historical echo is very plausible.

Stanton's conclusion is worth citing in full:

I have argued that the double allegation found in Justin's Dialogue 69:7 and in the rabbinic traditions quoted above has deep roots. In his own lifetime Jesus was said by some to be a demon-possessed magician. It is probable, but not certain, that he was also said to be a demon-possessed false prophet.

Two corollaries follow. It is generally accepted that in the first and second centuries Christians and Jews were at odds about christology and the law. It is less frequently appreciated that both the actions and teachings of Jesus were a source of tension and dispute: they were assessed very differently by his later followers and opponents.

The allegations of contemporary opponents of Jesus confirm that he was seen by many as a disruptive threat to social and religious order. His claims to act and speak on the basis of a special relationship to God were rightly perceived to be radical. For some they were so radical that they had to be undermined by an alternative explanation of their source.⁴¹

Conclusion

Our survey provides the answer to the question F.F. Bruce's friend asked in our citation at the beginning of this chapter. Is the extra-biblical evidence for Jesus obscure and trivial? Hardly. The testimony of extra-biblical material raises important historical issues about Jesus. A major element of the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leadership emerges from this material. The Roman and Syrian sources testify only to the origins of the Christian movement, how quickly and persistently it spread and the fact of Christ's execution under Pilate. However, Josephus indicates that Jesus was a powerful and controversial figure, executed under Pontius Pilate as a so-called Christ. Jesus

⁴¹ Stanton, "Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and a False Prophet Who Deceived God's People," in *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ*, p. 180.

was a worker of surprising, controversial power. He was the source of bewitching teaching which caused many Jews and Gentiles to become his followers. The rabbinic material and the Fathers surface the debate that exercise of power generated. Both his power and teaching produced a major controversy for the faith of Israel. Jesus began as a religious teacher on the fringe of the Roman Empire, but his presence and impact had an effect the Romans noted and Jews debated. The effect of his life is why his story in the gospels is so important to trace.

Jewish Views of Jesus before the Modern Era

Richard Robinson*

What do Jews think about Jesus? Try this experiment. Ask a typical, non-traditional or secular Jewish college student who Jesus was. Most probably, the student will know that Jesus was Jewish and will venture an opinion that he was a good rabbi, or teacher or political martyr. Now ask the same question of an older person who grew up speaking Yiddish in Poland or Romania. The chances are that they will have a far more negative view of Jesus. Perhaps they will grab hold of your arm, tell you in hushed tones that they know all about Jesus, that he was a deceiver, or a man who did miracles by the magic name of God, or goodness knows what else. The student is a product of the *Haskalah*, the Enlightenment that began in Europe in the 18th century; the older person, though they live in the 20th century, is a product of Jewish thought on Jesus that is millennia old. Like an ancient stone monument that has weathered the centuries, the pre-modern view of Jesus continues on alongside the modern one, influencing a whole range of Jews even among the younger, Orthodox set (just read some of the online communications from yeshiva students who argue against Jesus). It is this pre-modern Jewish view of Jesus that we will examine in this article.

Talmud

The pre-modern period stretches from the first century to about the 18th. As one peruses the literature over that great expanse of time, one discovers that the Jewish people had much more to say about Christian doctrine, and sometimes more about Christians, than about Jesus himself. In the 20th century it's not unusual for the question, "Who do you think Jesus was?" to be the kicker that jumpstarts a conversation. Frequently the question also becomes a way of turning a conversation about the gospel back to where it should be when the other person wants to talk instead about Jewish believers or about the Trinity or the Church. "Who do you think Jesus was?" was not a question often asked or

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answered in the pre-modern period. Partly this has to do with the fact that "biography" is largely a modern conception, which is true even though we have the various "Lives" written by classical Roman historians. Similarly, no one sought to get at the facts and uncover the real Jesus. Modern, objective history-writing did not exist. But also, the avoidance of the question "Who do you think Jesus was?" had to do with the fact that as time went on, post-first-century Jews increasingly encountered Jesus' followers and ideas in a hostile setting. Jews after the first century were more interested in addressing the followers of Jesus and what they taught, than in finding out about Jesus himself. What little data we have points rather to a rivalry between the two religions of Judaism and Christianity than to any real interest in Yeshua.

What then are our sources for what Jews thought of Jesus in the course of 18 centuries? Which documents would you research to learn about the pre-modern view of Jesus? Our main sources are the Talmud (in which I am including the Mishnah) and the medieval scandal sheet of Jesus stories known as the Toledot Yeshu. In addition there are a few isolated statements found in Justin and Origen; various medieval midrashim, commentaries and polemical writings, much of which parallels material in the Talmud; and a few statements by some of the Karaites. Several books by both Jewish and gentile scholars have been written that explore the statements about Jesus in the Talmud, which is where the attention has centered. So it is with the Talmud that we will begin, and it is worth noting a few points at the outset:

One. There was probably more material about Jesus in the Talmud than we find at present, but because of self- and other-censorship, we have very little in the current editions. Uncensored manuscripts do exist, however.

Two. The variety of names that scholars have thought refer to Jesus are enough to form the cast of a play: "Yeshu," "the Nazarene," "that man," "so-and-so," "Balaam," "Ben Stada," "Ben Pantera."

Three. Not all of these names really wash out as references to Jesus. The consensus these days among Jewish and non-Jewish scholars is that some of these veiled references aren't actually to Jesus at all. Many of those that are actual references are so much later than the time of Jesus as to furnish no independent evidence for him, though they provide a record of what later generations of Jews thought of Jesus.

Four. Whether or not some references were *intended* to refer to Jesus, later rabbinic sources *thought* they referred to Jesus, and this colored how Jews thought about Jesus.

Perhaps the best way to gain a picture of what the Talmud says is to string together the isolated statements into a running "biography." In a way this gives the false picture that if a given rabbi of the second to sixth centuries (the period of the formation of the Talmud) had been asked to tell about the life of Jesus, he would have spun out a running narrative. In reality, he would probably have

had little to say, and no comprehensive picture in his mind of the life of Jesus. So compiling all the Talmudic statements into a coherent biography gives a false picture, because no Jew would have thought *all this* about Jesus in those early centuries, if he or she thought anything at all. But in the constraints of space, here is a cumulative portrait of Jesus based on what the Talmud says. In fact, it is by summaries like this one that scholars have frequently reported what the Talmud says about Jesus.

Let me explain a few things first. As I said above, the consensus of scholars has changed over the years as to which statements in the Talmud really refer to Jesus, especially those portions thought to contain veiled references to Jesus under other names. Jakob Jocz rather uncritically repeats Herford's earlier reconstruction (which Herford later modified) and gives what we might call the "maximalist" picture of the Talmudic Jesus. Others like Joseph Klausner and Morris Goldstein have trimmed this picture to form a "middle ground" picture of Jesus. I have not consulted a "minimalist" on the subject.

In the interests of space, I will reproduce the maximalist summary found in Jakob Jocz.⁴²

I have underlined portions that, in the agreement of the modern scholars I consulted, represent statements that did not originally refer to Jesus in the earlier (Tannaitic) Talmudic material but were thought to refer to Jesus in the later (Amoraic) material.

Additional Tannaitic material included by Joseph Klausner and Morris Goldstein but omitted by Jocz in his summary is indicated in [brackets]. Thus the thing to note in this summary is that the "biography" of Jesus expanded by the Amoraic period to include what is underlined. As will become apparent, it also became a less favorable portrait.

I have put in smaller type Talmudic statements about "Balaam" which neither the Tannaim nor the Amoraim applied to Jesus, but which has been said by some scholars to be veiled references to Jesus. This view is not generally now accepted.

Therefore to approximate the earliest, Tannaitic, picture of Jesus, read only the statements in the following paragraph that are in regular type, neither underlined nor in smaller type.

Jesus⁴³, called ha-Notzri⁴⁴, B. Stada⁴⁵, or Pandira⁴⁶, was born out of wedlock.⁴⁷ His mother was called Miriam, and was a dresser of women's

⁴² Jocz, Jakob. *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, 3rd ed., (Baker, 1979), pp. 59-60.

⁴³ "Yeshua" in the original. Sanh. 43a; Av. Zar. 16b-17a; Tos. Hullin 2:24. In these notes Tos. indicates Tosefta, additional material not included in the modern printed Talmuds but always referenced in Talmudic studies as additional sources. The references in these notes are not intended to be exhaustive, but they are the passages that come under discussion most of the time.

⁴⁴ Sanh. 43a, Munich ed.; Av. Zar. 16b-17a.

hair.⁴⁸ Her husband was Pappus b. Judah,⁴⁹ and her paramour Pandira.⁵⁰ She is said to have been the descendant of princes and rulers, and to have played the harlot with a carpenter. Jesus had been in Egypt, and had brought magic thence.⁵¹ He was a magician,⁵² and deceived and led astray Israel.⁵³ He sinned and caused the multitude to sin. He mocked at the words of the wise, and was excommunicated. [He expounded Scripture in the same manner as the Pharisees,⁵⁴ and some of his teachings could be acceptable to some of the Tannaim.⁵⁵ He said that he was not come to take aught away from the Law or to add to it.⁵⁶] He was tainted with heresy. He called himself God, also the Son of Man, and said that he would go up to heaven. He made himself live by the name of God.⁵⁷ He was tried in Lydda as a deceiver and as a teacher of apostasy.⁵⁸ Witnesses were concealed so as to hear his statements, and a lamp was lighted over him that his face might be seen.⁵⁹ He was executed in Lydda,⁶⁰ on the eve of Passover,⁶¹ which was also the eve of Sabbath;⁶² he was stoned and hung, or crucified.⁶³ A herald proclaimed, during forty days, that he was to be stoned, and invited evidence in his favour; but none was given.⁶⁴ He (under the name of Balaam) was put to death by Pinhas the Robber (Pontius Pilatus), and at the time was thirty-three years old.⁶⁵ He was punished in

⁴⁵ Shab. 104b, Tos. Shab. 11:15, y. Shab. 13d, Tos. Sanh. 10:11, y. Sanh. 25c,d, y. Yeb. 15d, Sanh. 67a. "y" indicates the Palestinian (also called Yerushalmi or Jerusalem) Talmud. Standard modern editions such as the Soncino Talmud are of the Babylonian Talmud.

⁴⁶ Tos. Hullin 2:22-23; 24.

⁴⁷ Shab. 104b; Sanh. 67a.

⁴⁸ Shab. 104b; Sanh. 67a.

⁴⁹ Shab. 104b; Sanh. 67a.

⁵⁰ Reported in Origen, *Contra Celsum*, who is recounting the words of Celsus, who is recounting a report from a Jewish person!

⁵¹ Shab. 104b, Tos. Shab. 11:15, y. Shab. 13d. Under the name of Ben Stada

⁵² Sanh. 43a; Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 69.

⁵³ Sanh. 43a.

⁵⁴ Av. Zar. 16b-17a; Tos. Hullin 2:24; Koh. Rab. to Eccl. 1:8; Yalkut Shimeoni on Micah 1 and Prov. 5:8.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Shab. 116a-b.

⁵⁷ Yalkut Shimeoni Sec. 766, a "Balaam passage." But also in y. Taanith 65b without reference to Balaam. Goldstein thinks this last passage *may* be an allusion to Jesus.

⁵⁸ Ben Stada - Tos. Sanh. 10:11, y. Sanh. 25c,d, y. Yeb. 15d.

⁵⁹ Ben Stada - Tos. Sanh. 10:11, y. Sanh. 25c,d, y. Yeb. 15d, Sanh. 67a.

⁶⁰ Ben Stada - Sanh. 67a.

⁶¹ Sanh. 43a, 67a.

⁶² Sanh. 43a, Florence ms.

⁶³ Sanh. 43a.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Sanh. 106b.

Gehenna by means of boiling filth.⁶⁶ He was 'near to the Kingdom.' He had five disciples.⁶⁷ [His disciples healed the sick in his name.⁶⁸] Under the name of Balaam, he was excluded from the world to come.⁶⁹

What conclusions can we draw from this "maximalist" presentation, containing views of the sages of Israel as well as the speculations of later scholars? Klausner, who doesn't even deal with the Amoraim at all, summarizes the early, Tannaitic view of Jesus (the portion in regular type above), which is more favorable and less hostile than the portrait painted by the Amoraim. This earlier view was that Jesus was truly Jewish, though a transgressor; that his status was greater than the prophets of the Gentiles, and that he had a share in the world to come (though this point seemed to be debated); one of his teachings even "pleased" a Tanna. The portrait is acknowledged by Klausner to be one in which positive traits were given a negative twist, for example, his miracles were deemed "sorcery." Yet, says Klausner, in this early period there was more aversion to the followers of Jesus than to Jesus himself. Maybe so. But we cannot lessen the fact that the Tannaitic spin doctors turned white into black in several instances.

Goldstein's take on the Tannaim is that they showed resistance but not animus towards Jesus. There is, he says, no slur on birth or parenthood of Jesus in Tannaitic period – a conclusion he reaches by discounting *Contra Celsum* on that.⁷⁰ Jesus is only mentioned casually, because "Jesus was not of primary concern to Judaism in the first two centuries." According to Goldstein, the stress in the early period was on what was good and valuable in Judaism, not on what was wrong with other beliefs.

Toledoth Yeshu

Whereas the Talmud never gives a running story of Jesus' life, it is different with the Toledoth Yeshu. This amazing piece of literature might best be described as the scandal sheet of Jesus stories. "Piece of literature" is actually not an accurate way to describe the Toledoth Yeshu, because the story is not a fixed text but is found with all kinds of variations, as though a reporter's UPI dispatch were edited to meet the needs of a dozen different newspapers. Text fragments have been found in the Cairo Genizah, which was constructed in the

⁶⁶ Gittin 56b-57a.

⁶⁷ Sanh. 43a.

⁶⁸ Tos. Hullin 2:22-23); y. Shab. 14d; y. Av. ³²Zar. 40d-41a; Av. Zar. 27b - cf. Koh. Rab. on 1:8.

⁶⁹ M. Sanh. 10:2; Avot 5:19.

⁷⁰ Cf. note 9. Goldstein expresses doubt that the anti-religious Celsus is reporting the views of a real person, therefore discounts its evidence for what second-century Jews thought about Jesus.

seventh century, and the narrative is mentioned in sources as early as the ninth century. The "original" has been dated as early as the fourth to as late as the 10th century, but defining what the "original" consisted of is as elusive as trying to define where the surface of a planet like Jupiter, composed of layers of gases, actually begins. That's how it is when the final product is the result of continual accretions.

In an era that knew nothing of modern biographies, the Toledot Yeshu reads strangely indeed. Jocz gives a highly condensed summary which is reproduced here; Goldstein's version runs to a full six pages:

The main gist of the story is the assertion that Jesus was an illegitimate child, that he performed miracles by means of sorcery which he learned from the Egyptians; that he acquired the power of performing miracles by stealing the Ineffable Name from the Temple and sewing it underneath his skin; that he was arrested on the eve of Passover; that he was hanged on a cabbage stem (the reason given is that Jesus had previously adjured all trees by the Ineffable Name not to receive his body, but he failed to adjure the cabbage stem, which does not count as a tree!); that his body was removed on the eve of the Sabbath and interred; that the gardener removed his body and cast it into a cesspool.⁷¹

To Jocz's mini-summary can be added such details as that Jesus' real father was Joseph Pandera who seduced his mother Miriam; that Yeshu gathered 310 disciples and proclaimed that he was the fulfillment of messianic prophecy, including Isaiah 7:14 and Ps. 110:1; and that after his death, Simeon Kepha, identified with Paul, proclaimed that Yeshu wished his followers to be separate from the Jews, and to replace Jewish practices with other customs.

From the Tannaim to the Amoraim to the Toledoth Yeshu, the progression is almost like a game of telephone where the end product has become something sometimes similar to, but often quite unlike, the original. The ingredients of this medieval concoction are compounded from statements found in the New Testament, in the apocryphal gospels, and in the Amoraic mis-identification of various Tannaitic remarks with Jesus.⁷² Like in the slogan on McDonald's signs around the world, "millions and millions" have been served with this dish, as Klausner tells us:

At one time it had a wide circulation ... in Hebrew and Yiddish among the simpler minded Jews, and even more educated Jews used to study the book during the nights of Natal Christmas) ... Our mothers knew its contents by hearsay – of course with all manner of corruptions, changes, omissions and imaginative additions -- and handed them on to their children.⁷³

Further:

⁷¹ Jocz, p. 63.

⁷² Goldstein, Morris. *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition* (Macmillan, 1950), p. 158.

⁷³ Klausner, Joseph. *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching*. (Macmillan, 1949 ed.), p. 48.

We can gather from it what was the view of the Jews on the life and teaching of Jesus, from the fifth to the tenth centuries (for many of the statements must be earlier than the time when they were set down in writing) ... We see from it that the attitude to Jesus became worse when the Gentiles began to embrace the new faith and to despise Judaism; and that it became still worse when the Christians, of non-Jewish or Jewish origin, began to persecute the Jews and 'throw stones into the well whence they had drunk.' Nothing in the Gospels was denied: it was only perverted into a source of ridicule and blame.⁷⁴

The midrashim

The midrashim, the works of polemics, the medieval commentaries – these are our further sources for understanding the pre-modern view of Jesus. In any number of instances the midrashim especially give a parallel account to something already in the Talmud. The polemic documents tended to focus on theology and scriptural interpretation rather than on the person of Jesus. Some highlights nevertheless stand out, and I will give a brief account of some of the most interesting.

- We find an anonymous work from the 10th century, reported on by Jacob Mann. The uniqueness of this document is that it describes Christian belief as holding that Jesus was the entire Trinity.⁷⁵

- The Karaites. As is well known, Karaism rejected rabbinic authority and interpretation and claimed to go right back to the Bible. The 10th century Jacob Kirkisani recounts the rabbinite view that Jesus was the son of Pandera. Interestingly, the Karaites did not seem to absorb seventh to ninth century "conventional wisdom" about Jesus. In Chapter 8a of his Book of Lights, Kirkisani tells us that Jewish opinion about Jesus is highly varied. Some say he is a prophet,⁷⁶ others not. Some say he was a righteous teacher, and the rabbinites hold him to be a miracle worker (a view Kirkisani attempts to refute).⁷⁷

- Rashi, commenting on Shab. 104b, interprets Ben Stada of Jesus and explains that he brought magic from Egypt because of Egyptian export controls on magic. He does not identify Balaam with Jesus.⁷⁸

- David Kimhi in his "Disputation" argued that Jesus is not the Messiah with reasons still given by Orthodox Jews today: he did not gather the tribes, he did not rebuild the Temple, he did not bring in peace; likewise, while not discounting the resurrection outright, he uses the argument still heard that

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

⁷⁵ Goldstein, p. 170.

⁷⁶ Along with Mohammed, so Goldstein, p. 170.

⁷⁷ Goldstein, p. 173.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 183.

Jesus should have appeared to more than just a few people if he intended to evoke faith in himself.⁷⁹

- Maimonides mentions that Jesus was a Jew, while in uncensored editions of the Mishneh Torah, he says that Jesus thought himself to be the Messiah, that he caused Israel to perish by the sword and to change the Torah.⁸⁰

- Judah Leon de Modena (15th century) wrote *Maggen Vehereb* (Shield and Sword). It mostly dealt with Christian doctrines, which it naturally argues against, but interestingly, describes Jesus himself in much more positive terms. Jesus is said to have been a teacher who picked the best in the three sects of first-century Judaism. He followed the Pharisees for the most part, but disagreed in such matters as washing the hands. The Pharisees thereafter opposed him, yet he gathered the *am ha-arets* to himself. His self-designation as "Son of God" indicated his role as a messenger from God. He did not proclaim himself God nor Messiah. As Goldstein observes, Modena is an early forerunner of modern Jewish "Jesus-criticism."⁸¹

Conclusion

The pre-modern period saw the rise of a view of Jesus that still colors the views of traditional, Orthodox, non-liberal Jews. The Tannaitic period frequently portrayed Jesus in negative terms, but left room for the fact that a great teacher could appreciate Jesus' teaching. In addition the Tannaitic passages testify to the existence of such practices as healing by Jesus' disciples in his name. In the Amoraic period opinion hardened against the person of Jesus, and by time of the *Toledoth Yeshu*, a full blown parody of the gospels had been concocted. It is this last writing which has influenced our grandparents and great-grandparents, especially those from Eastern Europe who still spoke Yiddish and did not engage in the so-called "scientific criticism" as did Western Europeans. To this day, the influence of the *Toledoth* is felt; so is the influence of medieval polemics (especially apparent in Orthodox refutations of the gospel), while more secular, liberal Jews have been more likely to have been influenced by the modern "Jewish reclamation of Jesus."

For further reading (in reverse chronological order).

1950. Goldstein, Morris: *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition*. New York: Macmillan. This remains the best work in English I have found. It is comprehensive,

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

readable, and written non-polemically. In addition an annotated bibliography lists the chief books and articles on the subject of Jesus in the Jewish tradition, with comments and mini-reviews.

1949. Jocz, Jakob: *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: A Study in the Controversy Between Church and Synagogue*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House (1979 – 3rd edition). A classic must-read by a Jewish Christian scholar.

1942. Herford, R.T.: "Jesus in Rabbinic Literature," *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (modifying some of his views in his 1903 book below).

Klausner, Joseph: *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching*. New York: Macmillan (1949 ed.) A standard.

1903. Herford, R.T.: *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc. (1975 ed.) Outdated but one of the pillars of modern Jesus-in-the-Talmud research.

Messianic Judaism and Jewish Jesus Research

Michael L. Brown*

The purpose of this article is to evaluate recent Jewish research on the person and work of Jesus in terms of its implications for Christian scholarship and evangelism in general and, more specifically, Messianic Jewish scholarship and evangelism. I will not attempt to provide a survey of the relevant material (as this has been done by Donald Hagner in this issue, supplementing his earlier monograph).⁸² Rather, I will interact selectively with the representative results of that material, especially from the perspective of Messianic Jewish theology and ministry. Should “the Jewish reclamation of Jesus” – to borrow a phrase from Hagner – be viewed as positive or negative for evangelicals, especially Messianic Jews? Is it filled with promise, fraught with pitfalls, or both? In keeping with these questions, the material will be treated under three main headings: 1) Positive Developments; 2) Negative Trends; 3) Ongoing Issues. To facilitate the discussion, I will make reference to several recent works as representative of the major scholarly trends we are seeking to analyze.

Positive Developments

One of the first obstacles faced by Messianic Jews is the battle to convince fellow Jews that “Jesus is one of us.” He is not, Jewish believers in Jesus argue, the founder of an alien new religion called “Christianity” as much as he is the promised Jewish Messiah – and hence, the Savior of the world. Properly

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⁸² Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984). It is important to remember that Jewish scholars, to some extent, have reclaimed Jesus as a Jew through the centuries, as noted by Yehezkel Kaufman, *Christianity and Judaism: Two Covenants* (Eng. trans.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), p. 49: “It is the opinion of Geiger, Graetz, and other Jewish scholars – and also many more liberal Christian scholars – that Jesus was wholly Jewish in outlook. Jesus did not intend to break with tradition, or to found a new religion; and certainly he did not imagine that he was founding a religion of the gentiles.” Kaufmann, however, finds this view to be “incompatible with orthodox Christianity,” stating that “it is difficult for Christian theologians to accept its implications” (ibid., pp. 49-50).

conveying this truth has been an ongoing struggle for more than 1500 years, and every act of “Christian” anti-Semitism has only heightened the tension and deepened the misunderstanding. Further exacerbating the problem has been the fact that to the extent Jesus – or, *Yeshu* as he is commonly referred to in traditional Jewish circles – was known as a Jew among our people, he was primarily known as an apostate, a deceiver, a false prophet, a misguided idolater, a bastard now burning in hell.⁸³ So, in Jewish eyes, Jesus was either a Christian (probably of European extract, based on the prevailing religious iconography) or an apostate Jew (based on the rabbinic traditions). There was not much room for the *appreciation* of Jesus the Jew among our people, let alone his reclamation.

In light of this, it must be said unequivocally that the Jewish reclamation of Jesus is an extremely positive development. The very fact that collaborative Jewish-Christian volumes such as *Hillel and Jesus* can be written is a huge step

⁸³ The classic, medieval collation of these legends is *Toledot Yeshu*, still studied in some ultra-Orthodox yeshivas (the complete Hebrew title is *Sefer Toledot Yeshu HaMashiah* or *Sefer Toledot Yeshu HaNotsri*; cf. further Kaufmann, *Christianity and Judaism*, pp. 49-50, n. 3; for all the major versions, cf. Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* [2nd ed.; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1994]). While some Hebrew scholars claim that the Talmudic *yešu* reflects a natural philological development (from *yešu'a* > *yešu'* > *yešu*) rather than a polemical one (*yešu* standing for *yimah šemo wezikro*, “may his name and memory be obliterated”), there is no question that the polemical usage became prevalent in rabbinic circles. The widespread nature of this pronunciation through the years is seen most clearly in modern Hebrew usage, where Israelis are familiar with Jesus as *Yeshu* rather than *Yeshua*. Interestingly, the Koran uses a mistaken name for Jesus (Arabic *'isa* instead of *yasu'a*), apparently based on the fact that Mohammed learned the pronunciation of Jesus' name from Jewish sources, not realizing that these Jews referred to Jesus disparagingly as “Esau” (Arabic *'isa*). Thus, throughout the Talmud and the Koran, the name of Jesus is incorrectly rendered in Hebrew/Aramaic and Arabic. Does this reflect a spiritual battle over “the name” (cf., e.g., Acts 4:7; Phil 2:9-11)? With regard to Jews, this is not simply a matter of pronunciation, since a Hebrew speaker or religious Jew reading the Tanakh will not realize that the strange name “Yeshu,” which he has heard for years, is actually *yešu'a*, found as a proper name 27x in the Tanakh (most notably, in the person of the post-exilic High Priest, Joshua/Yeshua, a Messianic prototype; see, e.g., Zech. 3:1-10; 6:9-15; Ezra 3:1-9). Regarding the pronunciation and spelling of Yeshua's name that would have been current in his day, there is evidence of the mutation of gutturals in Mishnaic Hebrew (cf. M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* [repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 1978], p. 23), along with evidence of the confusion and even loss of gutturals in later Samaritan Hebrew (cf. Angel Saenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* [Eng. trans., Cambridge: Cambridge, 1993], pp. 153ff., with reference especially to the work of Z. Ben-Hayyim). However, it is very difficult to prove that *orthographic*, final *'ayyin* completely dropped out (even in a proper name) as early as the first-second century. Note also that in Syriac, the name is spelled *yešu'*, preserving the final *'ayyin* without the non-syllabic glide vowel (called *patah furtivum*) which developed in Hebrew morphology when case endings disappeared.

forward, especially since such scholarship is not just the occasional research of a Jewish professor (like Joseph Klausner's work of a previous generation) but rather is reflective of mainstream trends.⁸⁴ How can it be negative when Lawrence H. Schiffman, a traditional Jew and a leading authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls, writes on "The Jewishness of Jesus: Commandments Concerning Interpersonal Relations";⁸⁵ when Professor Irving Zeitlin authors a volume entitled, *Jesus and the Judaism of His Time*;⁸⁶ when Rabbi Philip Sigal discusses the halakhah of Jesus according to Matthew's Gospel;⁸⁷ when Israeli scholars such as David Flusser and Shmuel Safrai lead the Jerusalem School for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels in its efforts to recover (and thereby rediscover) the Jewish background to the Gospels?⁸⁸ All this presupposes the Jewishness of Jesus and the fact that he can only be rightly understood as a Jew among Jews – in terms of his message, his mission, and his mindset.

Here then are a number of specific trends that must be viewed as extremely positive. First, Jewish scholars, both conservative and liberal, tend to be somewhat less skeptical of the veracity of the New Testament witness of Jesus than do non-Jewish, liberal New Testament scholars.⁸⁹ Thus, the picture of Jesus that emerges from a straightforward reading of the Gospels is generally assumed to bear some resemblance to the historical Jesus, a view that stands in

⁸⁴ J. H. Charlesworth and Loren L. Johns, eds., *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (Eng. trans.; New York: MacMillan, 1925).

⁸⁵ In Arthur E. Zannoni, ed., *Jews & Christians Speak of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), pp. 37-53.

⁸⁶ Irving M. Zeitlin, *Jesus and the Judaism of His Time* (New York: Basil Blackwell/Polity Press, 1988).

⁸⁷ *The Halakah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew* (Lanham, MD: Univ. Press of America, 1986). Unique to Sigal's approach is the fact that he accepts Matthew's picture of the Pharisees but distances them from the "proto-rabbis." In other words, these *perushim* are not the Tannaitic forerunners of the prominent Talmudic leaders.

⁸⁸ Key works by David Flusser include *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995); idem, *Jesus* (repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997); idem, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (Tel Aviv: MOD, 1995); for an introduction to the work of Shmuel Safrai, see his articles in idem, ed., *The Literature of the Sages: Oral Law, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 35-210. For a representative application of their methodology, cf. Brad H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody, NH: Hendrickson, 1995).

⁸⁹ Interestingly, this is the flip side of the coin in which non-Jewish scholars who are highly critical of the reliability of the New Testament literature often treat rabbinic literature as though it were historically far more reliable. Thus they are more critical of the literature with which they have greater familiarity – and which they studied through the eyes of liberal professors – and less critical of literature with which they have less familiarity. Cf. on this the older article of Phillip S. Alexander, "Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament," *ZNW* 74 (1983), pp. 237-246.

stark contrast with, e.g., the nihilistic and widely-publicized views of the Jesus Seminar.⁹⁰ Whether it is the educational background of the Jewish scholars in question (generally, they did not study at Christian seminaries and were therefore not weaned on Gospel criticism) or whether they find it easy to relate to the Jesus of the New Testament, the fact is that they tend to take more seriously the religious debates between Jesus and his contemporaries, along with the main substance of his teachings and actions. Thus, even a scholar of critical acumen like Jacob Neusner, is willing to interact with the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel rather than "those fabricated historical figures [who] are too many and diverse for an argument."⁹¹

Second, the *Jewishness* of Jesus is assumed, along with the necessity of reading the New Testament through Jewish eyes. Since, on *a priori* grounds, they recognize Yeshua as a kinsman after the flesh, it is only natural that they relate to him in the milieu of first-century Judaism(s). Out of the various leadership models that have been proposed for Jesus – from charismatic holy man (e.g., Geza Vermes) to innovative Pharisee (e.g., Harvey Falk) – most all of them are Jewish.⁹² To offer a simple illustration, when I first came to Israel in 1986 and began to witness to some Israelis in my broken Hebrew, I realized quickly that I did not need to tell them – as I did Jews in America – that I was a *Jewish* follower of Jesus. It was self-evident! Similarly, it is self-evident to most contemporary Jewish scholars that the Jesus they are studying lived and died as a Jew in Jewish cities and villages surrounded by Jews of all backgrounds. Thus, Charlesworth states that among the conclusions of the Hillel and Jesus symposium (out of which the volume of the same title arose) are that, "Hillel and Jesus were historical teachers and *devout Jews* who lived in pre-70 Palestine" and that, "In the search for ... Hillel and Jesus, documents other than the New Testament and Rabbinics must be studied. Among these are texts from

⁹⁰ For a trenchant critique of the methodology of the Jesus Seminar, cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997); see also Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew from Nazareth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

⁹¹ Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus: An Intermillennial, Interfaith Exchange* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. xv. He states, "That is not to say the historical Jesus is not a presence within and behind the Gospels; it is only to affirm that the Gospels as we read them portray Jesus to most of us who propose to know him. I write for believing Christians and faithful Jews; for them, Jesus is known through the Gospels" (ibid.).

⁹² Cf. Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973); see also idem, *The Gospel of Jesus the Jew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); idem, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1985).

Early Judaism, especially the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.”⁹³

Third, it is commonly recognized by Jewish scholars – sometimes in contrast with Christian scholars⁹⁴ – that the New Testament sources are often more reliable than the (later) rabbinic sources. Of interest in this regard is the observation of Charlesworth that the younger scholars (meaning both Jewish and Christian) who contributed to the *Hillel and Jesus* volume tended to be skeptical of the degree to which a “solid historical depiction” of Hillel and Jesus was possible, “especially of Hillel,” since

*we have written traditions about Jesus that not only derive from the century in which he lived, but in some cases only a decade or two from the time of his ministry. With Hillel we are forced to evaluate traditions that in some cases were not written down until the sixth century C.E., or approximately 500 years after Hillel.*⁹⁵

The fact that Christian scholars (especially in the past) often treated rabbinic sources in an uncritical fashion can be attributed to a lack of expertise in the field or to the absence (in the past) of a comprehensive critical methodology suitable for treating the rabbinic literature.⁹⁶

Fourth, there is a recognition of the diversity of “Judaisms” in the first century, and Jesus and his followers are placed squarely in that life context and religious milieu. Thus, the relevant texts are not read simply as “Christian” vs. “Jewish” as much as they are read as expressions of varied Jewish beliefs and systems of practice (Pharisaic, Sadduceean, Essene, Zealot, Messianic, Apocalyptic; etc.).⁹⁷ I am aware that scholarly terminology does not always reflect this (see below, Ongoing Issues), but at least there is a tacit understanding of the diverse backdrop that can be recognized as a “first-century Judaism.” While it is true that charges of heretical beliefs were lodged against both Jesus and his disciples (see, e.g., Matt 26:59-66; Acts 6:8-14; 21:27-28), for the most part, this is seen today as a matter of intense conflict arising

⁹³ *Hillel and Jesus*, pp. 460-461, my emphasis in both quotes.

⁹⁴ See again Alexander, “Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament.”

⁹⁵ *Hillel and Jesus*, p. xiii.

⁹⁶ Of course, the myriad works of Jacob Neusner in particular have changed the complexion of rabbinic studies, and many Jewish scholars now approach their own traditional texts with a thorough-going critical apparatus once reserved only for the Scriptures.

⁹⁷ As far back as 1983, Geza Vermes pointed to the need for a new “Schürer-type religious history of the Jews from the Maccabees to AD 500 that fully incorporates the New Testament data” (*Jesus and the World of Judaism*, 87-88). In 1987, Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs edited a volume entitled *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1987). Although the title seemed somewhat novel at the time, I believe that the concept of first century “Judaisms” has become increasingly commonplace in scholarly literature.

out of inter-Jewish debate and rivalry. Thus, Paul could split the Sanhedrin by reference to his belief in the resurrection, thus sparking an inner-Jewish squabble (Acts 23:1-10). Although it was necessary for Paul to refute the charge that he had been disloyal to the customs of his people (e.g., Acts 21:17ff.; he merely needed to *remind* those who didn't know him that he was a Jew (e.g., Acts 22:3ff.; 23:1, 6), in contrast with the situation today in which Messianic Jews must fight for recognition *as Jews*, finding it difficult to lay claim to the word "Judaism."⁹⁸ In this vein, the whole subject of the alleged antisemitism of the New Testament can be reopened in a fruitful way, since even the sharp rhetoric found there is increasingly recognized as internecine, all-in-the-family polemics. As noted by the Christian scholar Craig Evans with regard to the Dead Sea Scrolls:

The polemic found in the writings of Qumran surpasses in intensity that of the New Testament. In contrast to Qumran's esoteric and exclusive posture, the early church proclaimed its message and invited all believers to join its fellowship. Never does the New Testament enjoin Christians to curse unbelievers or opponents. Never does the New Testament petition God to damn the enemies of the church. But Qumran did. If this group had survived and had its membership gradually become gentile over the centuries and had its distinctive writings become the group's Bible, I suspect that most of the passages cited above would be viewed as expressions of anti-Semitism. But the group did not survive, nor did it become a gentile religion, and so its criticisms have never been thought of as anti-Semitic. There is no subsequent history of the Qumran community to muddy the waters. We interpret Qumran as we should. We interpret it in its Jewish context, for it never existed in any other context, and thus no one ever describes its polemic as anti-Semitic.⁹⁹

I believe this perspective is being increasingly recovered by contemporary Jewish scholars, unless they simply write off all "hostile" texts as subsequent, non-Jewish layers added to the earliest documents by an early "Church" that was already separated from "the synagogue" and antagonistic toward it.¹⁰⁰

Fifth, the self-awareness of Jesus, along with his ministry, are often analyzed in the context of first-century Messianic expectations, frequently with respect to the Scriptures. While this by no means reflects a universal trend among Jewish scholars, I believe we can recognize a general movement in this direction, in contrast with the views of some liberal Christian scholars who do not believe

⁹⁸ Cf. now Carol Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism: A Rabbi's Journey through Religious Change in America* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1999).

⁹⁹ Craig A. Evans, "Introduction. Faith and Polemic: The New Testament and First-century Judaism," in idem and Donald A. Hagner, eds., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 8 (for his entire article, see pp. 1-17). I cited this in my discussion of alleged anti-Semitism in the New Testament in my recent work *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: General and Historical Objections*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 158-159 (for the full discussion, see pp. 145-175).

¹⁰⁰ Cf., e.g., Hyam Maccoby, *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

that even a passage such as Isaiah 52:13-53:12 factored into the self-consciousness of Jesus.¹⁰¹ In contrast with this, Hagner can cite a Jewish scholar such as S. Ben-Chorin, who “does not regard it as impossible that Jesus combined the image of the Son of Man (Dan 7) with that of the Suffering Servant of God (Isa 53),” and who actually believes that “Jesus may well have seen his death as an inevitability and have thought of his death as ‘a kind of offering.’”¹⁰²

Negative Trends

In spite of this positive analysis, some caveats must be raised. As evangelicals who long to see Jewish people recognize their Messiah, and as Messianic Jews who may (unconsciously) suffer from a feeling of rejection, it is all too easy for us to celebrate prematurely. There are some potential dangers in the current scholarly trends.

First, to the extent that Jesus is seen as “one of us” his uniqueness can be downplayed or missed entirely. We must avoid compromise in our views here at all costs, lest we lose sight of the very reason for which Jesus entered the world – viz., to save us from our sins (Matt 1:21; John 1:29), to redeem us from iniquity (Titus 2:14), to reconcile us to God (2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 2:11-22), to forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:7; Rev 1:5b). No extraordinary rabbi or exalted holy man or gifted teacher or radical leader could do this. Only the Messiah could pay for our sins. Having said this, however, I do believe that the traditional Jewish concept (with hints already in Scripture) that “the death of the righteous atones” can be utilized here to help bridge the gap between the Jesus of contemporary Jewish scholarship and the Messiah Jesus whom we follow and serve.¹⁰³ In any case, the Jewishness of Jesus pertains to his human nature; in reclaiming this, we must not lose sight of his transcendence. Put

¹⁰¹ Cf. the classic expression of Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1959), reaffirmed now in her essay, “Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?,” in William H. Bellinger and William R. Farmer, eds., *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), pp. 88-103.

¹⁰² Hagner, *Jewish Reclamation*, p. 206, with specific reference to S. Ben-Chorin, *Jesus in Judaism* (Wuppertal: 1970), pp. 42-43, among other Jewish scholars. Cf. further Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, pp. 422-423, and note the non-polemical discussions of Jesus in Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (New York: Oxford, 1998; note the title to this work!), pp. 23-49; and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Jewish Messiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), pp. 61-79 (the chapter is entitled “Jesus the Messiah”).

¹⁰³ See Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Theological Objections*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), #3.15.

another way, we must remember that the Messiah of the Scriptures is also the Christ of Christianity, which leads to the next caveat.

Second, the Jewish Jesus is always a mere man and Jewish messianism itself is generally viewed in totally non-supernatural terms. However, while the subject of Yeshua's deity is misunderstood, rejected and/or ignored in recent Jewish scholarship, we can try to build a bridge of understanding by utilizing the Old Testament picture of a divine Messiah along with first-century Jewish beliefs in intermediary figures.¹⁰⁴ In this way, without losing the distinctiveness of our confession of Yeshua, we can still be served by the contemporary scholarly trends among Jews who reject him as Messiah.¹⁰⁵

Third, Jesus is sometimes reclaimed as a Jew at the expense of Paul, who becomes the "villain" in that all deviation from "Judaism" is now placed at his doorstep.¹⁰⁶ In this regard, Neusner notes that "not a few apologists for Judaism (including Christian apologists for Judaism) distinguish between the Jesus who lived and taught, whom they honor and revere, from the Christ whom the Church (so they say) invented. They will maintain that the apostle, Paul, invented Christianity; Jesus, for his part, taught only truth, which, as believers

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, #'s 3.1-3.4, for extensive discussion.

¹⁰⁵ An important volume in this respect is William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM, 1998). Of considerable interest to the debate of Jewish background to the concept of Jesus' deity is Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), although many controversial theories are espoused by the author. See further Michael E. Lodahl, *Shekhinah/Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion* (New York: Paulist, 1995). It should be noted that none of these authors are being cited here in the more narrow context of the present article, *viz.*, Jewish Jesus research; rather, they are cited because of the broader relevance of their writings.

¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the most extreme contemporary example comes from Hyam Maccoby, *Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1986). Cf. the older, classic work of Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul* (Eng. trans., New York: MacMillan, 1943), and note the question of Kaufmann, *Christianity and Judaism*, 51, reflecting the exact opposite approach: ". . . if Jesus was faithful to the Law, what support or basis is there in the teachings of Jesus for Pauline Christianity?" The recent volume of Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew from Tarsus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), while reviewing a broad range of scholarly discussion, does not, in my judgment, give sufficient emphasis to Paul's Jewishness. For a unique approach by a Talmudic scholar, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1994); cf. further Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale, 1990), and note the reviews of recent Jewish scholarship on Paul by Richard Robinson, "My Yiddishe Paul? - Recent Writings on Paul's Jewishness and Their Significance for Jewish Missions," *Mishkan* 20 (1994), pp. 13-22. For an unusual *anti-missionary* approach, portraying Jesus as the good Jew and Paul as the apostate, cf. Beth Moshe (pseudonym), *Judaism's Truth Answers the Missionaries* (New York: Bloch, 1987).

in Judaism, we can affirm.”¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, this artificial separation between Jesus and Paul dates back to some early, heretical Messianic Jewish sects (e.g., the Ebionites in contrast with the Nazarenes)¹⁰⁸ and it must be categorically rejected, since our faith can only remain intact if the entire New Testament witness is received as self-consistent.¹⁰⁹

Fourth, we must also not flinch when the “otherness” of Jesus – as somehow *un-Jewish* – is addressed by Jewish scholars, as if being “included” in the fold were more important to us than being followers of the despised and rejected Messiah. We must always be willing to go outside the camp and bear the reproach he bore (in the language of Heb. 13:10-14), recognizing that, for more than 1900 years, we have been living in the times Jesus warned of: “They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God” (John 16:3). As the people of God worshipping and serving in the new life of the Spirit, we must invite “the synagogue” to come to us.

Ongoing Issues

Scholars still speak freely of “Jews” and “Christians” in the first century, even before the destruction of the Temple. There should be a rethinking of terminology that is historically – not to mention theologically – more precise, especially in light of the developed meaning of “Christian” through the centuries. As I suggested in 1995,

*Because ‘Christianity’ quickly developed into a predominantly Gentile religion, at times quite hostile to its Jewish roots, I believe scholarly references to ‘Jewish Christianity’ may present an unnecessary oxymoronic problem. Terms such as ‘Messianic Jewish’ and ‘Messianic Judaism’ may be more appropriate, descriptive, and in fact, accurate when applied to the first followers of Jesus.*¹¹⁰

In 1991, Gabrielle Boccaccini argued that “Christianity” be recognized as a “Judaism,” citing the judgment of scholars who underscored the “Jewishness”

¹⁰⁷ Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus*, xiv. Neusner does not accept this view.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem/Leiden: Magnes/Brill, 1988); Jacob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: The Relationship Between Church and Synagogue* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 141-200. For the primary sources, cf. A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

¹⁰⁹ An important recent study is David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

¹¹⁰ See Michael L. Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer* (Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 291-292, n. 223.

of early Christianity.¹¹¹ In this vein the comments of Scot McKnight on the alleged antisemitism of the Gospels are relevant:

*The early Jewish Christians, it seems to me, thought of themselves as true Jews and saw nonmessianic Jews as false Jews. But these early Jewish Christians saw themselves, then, as for Judaism (defined messianically). Thus, they were 'anti-nonmessianic Judaism' or 'anti-disobedient Judaism' but not simply 'anti-Judaism' (which kind?).*¹¹²

Put another way, Jewish believers *today* must wrestle with the question of who we really are, according to the New Testament and according to the historical development of our faith, where we perceive that development to be in keeping with New Testament foundations. Most of us would find the wording of a leading New Testament scholar commenting on Heb. 13:13 to be oversimplified when he claims that "Christ is outside the camp of Judaism, and the readers are encouraged to go to him where he is. To remain within the camp of Judaism would be to be separated from him."¹¹³ Yet no less an authority than Neusner could argue that, in his view, bringing the *contradictions* between Jesus and the Torah into bold relief would help "Christians identify the critical convictions that bring them to church every Sunday" while "Jews will strengthen their commitment to the Torah of Moses – but also respect Christianity."¹¹⁴ In other words, fealty to Jesus means the rejection of Judaism

¹¹¹ See his *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), esp. 13-18; note, however, the strictures in the Foreword by J. H. Charlesworth, xviii. Cf. also Gabrielle Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways Between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹¹² "A Loyal Critic: Matthew's Polemic with Judaism in Theological Perspective," in Evans and Hagner, *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity*, pp. 55-79 (here 57, n. 5); see further Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 535-537. Cf. also David Stern's rendering of Gal 1:13-14 in the *Jewish New Testament*, where the Greek term *ioudaismos*, which simply means "Judaism," is rendered "traditional Judaism" "in order to make it absolutely clear that Sha'ul was not speaking about what is today called Messianic Judaism . . ." (David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* [Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992], p. 522. However, if Paul referred to his old way of life as "Judaism," how then would he have described his new way of life? For Stern's response to this, cf. *ibid.*, p. 522. Cf. also above, n. 18, for related references.

¹¹³ Leon Morris, "Hebrews," *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:151.

¹¹⁴ *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, xii-xiii. Neusner's views, though carefully articulated, are fairly extreme: Christianity and Judaism⁴⁶ are totally autonomous faiths, and it is inaccurate to refer to a Judeo-Christian tradition. Nonetheless, there are at least two points in Neusner's argument that can be fruitfully appropriated: first, the fact that "Christianity" is not a daughter religion to Judaism; second, the fact that the framers of the primary religious documents of the two faiths (i.e., the authors of the New Testament and the authors of the rabbinic literature) treated the Hebrew Scriptures in very different ways. There is quite a difference, to say the least, between virtually every

and embracing of Christianity; fealty to Judaism means the rejection of Jesus. How do we respond to such a syllogism?

If Jesus and his first Jewish followers simply brought to realization the promise of the Torah and prophets, then should this faith be considered the true Judaism?¹¹⁵ If we respond in the affirmative, then what does this say of Rabbinic Judaism? Do we then call it a counterfeit or false Judaism?¹¹⁶ If we respond in the negative, then do we, in fact, accept the simple dichotomy between “Christianity” and “Judaism”?¹¹⁷ And do we posit any difference between the earliest stratum of this faith – i.e., when its adherents were almost

document in the New Testament – from the Gospels to the epistles to Acts and Revelation – and the primary rabbinic writings. Cf. further Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991); idem, *Telling Tales: Making Sense of Christian and Judaic Nonsense. The Urgency and Basis for Judeo-Christian Dialogue* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1993). Neusner has teamed with the Targumic specialist Bruce Chilton to produce a series of volumes that seek to provide Jewish and Christian perspectives on foundational beliefs, although Chilton’s excellent, scholarly work is often so sensitive to Jewish beliefs that, for many Christians, his presentation of their views may seem to fall short. Cf. now their *Jewish-Christian Debates* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); *Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs* (London: Routledge, 1995); *Intellectual Foundations of Christian and Jewish Discourse: The Philosophy of Religious Argument* (London: Routledge, 1997); *Types of Authority in Formative Christianity and Judaism* (London: Routledge, 1999); *Jewish and Christian Doctrines: The Classics Compared* (London: Routledge, 1999); *Revelation: The Torah and the Bible* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1995); *The Body of Faith: Israel and the Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1996); *God in the World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997); *Comparative Spiritualities: Formative Christianity and Judaism on Finding Life and Meeting Death* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2000; for citation purposes, note that in the last four works, Chilton’s name occurs with the middle initial D.).

¹¹⁵ Do we then as Messianic Jews also use the term “completed Jews” – considered highly offensive by the Jewish community – when describing ourselves?

¹¹⁶ Cf. Dan Gruber, *Rabbi Akiva’s Messiah: The Origins of Rabbinic Authority* (Hanover, NH: Elijah Publishing, 1999).

¹¹⁷ Cf., e.g., Kaufman, *Christianity and Judaism*; more recently, cf. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1992). As I noted in *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, General and Historical Objections*, p. 215, n. 6, already, in just the second century CE, the church leader Ignatius could say that, “if any one celebrates the Passover along with the Jews, or receives emblems of their feast, he is a partaker with those who killed the Lord and His Apostles” (cited in⁴⁷ David A. Rausch, *A legacy of Hatred: Why Christians Must Not Forget the Holocaust* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), p. 20. More broadly, Ignatius claimed that “it is wrong to talk about Jesus and live like the Jews. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism but Judaism in Christianity.” See his Epistle to the Magnesians 10:3, cited in Samuel Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian Univ. Press, 1977), p. 214.

all Jews – and its subsequent strata – i.e., when almost all of its adherents were gentiles? Or is our simple solution to state that the New Testament, Messianic Jewish faith is the outgrowth of one particular kind of Judaism (e.g., apocalyptic as per Alan Segal) which then expands its borders to take in Messianic gentiles?¹¹⁸ These questions call for careful articulation.¹¹⁹

A final point of caution has to do with our *attitude*. As we interact with contemporary Jewish scholarship on Jesus, we must be careful not to bow down to Rabbinic Judaism and/or Jewish scholarship in general. In other words, our New Covenant *apologetic* must be bold and clear, our *proclamation* of Yeshua the Messiah totally forthright. More specifically, we must beware of any movement towards Two-Covenant theology in the guise of making peace between long-separated brothers, something which is especially appealing when it involves men whose writing tone is irenic and constructive. One way to prevent this is to do our best to insist on being included in Jewish-Christian dialog and discussion, using the very assumptions of today's Jewish scholarship ("Jesus is Jewish and can only be understood against his first century Jewish context") to buttress our point. Our presence is absolutely necessary in order to help recreate the first-century setting! Of course, there has been a conspicuous absence of Jewish believers in Jesus in most every aspect of Jewish-Christian dialog, be it popular or scholarly, for obvious reasons (but not by our choosing).¹²⁰ The dialog would quickly become a debate, since Messianic Jews, by their very existence, dispute the mutually affirming, "you have your

¹¹⁸ Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1986), esp. pp. 68-95.

¹¹⁹ I am aware, of course, that many Messianic Jews will feel that these questions are redundant, having been answered in various apologetic works dating back two decades or more. I would argue, however, that while Messianic Jewish scholars have succeeded in: 1) calling the Church to a new appreciation of its Jewish roots; and 2) making room within the Body for Jewish believers to express their faith as Jews, it has not fully wrestled with: 1) the diverse nature of the Church worldwide; and 2) the radical newness of Yeshua's message and mission, as reflected both in the Gospels as well as in the rest of the New Testament. The fact is, as stated above (n. 33), the followers of Jesus produced foundational documents radically different from those produced by the rabbis, reflecting the strong divergence between the two faiths.

¹²⁰ Naturally, it will be difficult for Messianic Jews to convince the *Jewish* participants in inter-faith dialog to include them; it is the *Christian* participants in such dialog who must see the inclusion of Messianic Jews as a *sine qua non*. As Professor Craig Keener noted to me in a personal communication, "For Jewish scholars to protest against the existence of Messianic Jews is to protest against the very foundation of all believers in Jesus, so a genuine dialog where *both* Jewish and Christian scholars have a voice dare not a priori exclude Messianic Jews." In fact, he suggests – quite insightfully – that Messianic Jews can actually serve as a bridge in the dialog!

religion I have mine,” approach to interfaith discussions.¹²¹ Rather, we who are both Jewish and who believe that Jesus is our people’s Messiah reopen an ancient wound and renew an ancient conflict, highlighting the exclusive and radical claims of our Savior and challenging our Jewish brethren with their ongoing rejection of Yeshua. This will create some tension, and it leaves us with a potentially ironic situation, for, while I believe that the Jewish reclamation of Jesus is quite positive for Jewish evangelism as a whole, it could actually lead to more intense and even violent opposition of Messianic Jews as we recover the unique dynamics reflected in the Gospels and Acts.

In this regard, let me close with an interesting experience I had while attending a conference of the Society of Biblical Literature in Chicago in 1988. After presenting a paper in my area of expertise, viz., Old Testament and Semitics, I decided to broaden my horizons and visit a large New Testament seminar where leading scholars were discussing some key themes in Matthew’s Gospel. As they began to discuss the nature of Jesus’ conflict with the religious authorities, I couldn’t help but give my views, even though I was neither a New Testament specialist nor a Matthew scholar. Yet my views were quite warmly received, leading to some private interaction with a number of the participants after the seminar was over, one of whom was Donald Hagner. I explained to them that my insights were due to my experience as a Jewish follower of Jesus: It was easy for me to relate to the Lord’s conflict with the Pharisees, to his clash with the traditional – and at times unbiblical – religious authorities, to his interpretation and application of Torah, to the opposition he received. I had a living context in which to read Matthew’s words! To the extent that Jewish Jesus research helps us recover that first-century context – with all its varied dynamics – we will be well served.

¹²¹ Cf. the volume written for Christians by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, *How Firm a Foundation: A Gift of Jewish Wisdom for Christians and Jews* (rev. ed.; Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 1997), with a Foreword by the respected evangelical leader Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie. It is well known that Rabbi Eckstein is strongly opposed to Jewish followers of Jesus continuing to identify themselves as Jews, both in practice and name.

Will the Zionists Welcome the Prophet from Nazareth? - Attitudes towards Jesus in "The Brenner Event"

Tsvi Sadan*

On 24 November, 1910, Joseph Chaim Brenner published a column in *Hapoel Hatzair* ("The Young Worker") entitled "In the Newspapers and Literature."¹²² In this article, Brenner leveled severe criticism against the way in which current writers and columnists presented their views concerning the phenomenon of Jewish conversion to Christianity, a problem that Zionism itself was supposed to solve. The appearance of Brenner's article initiated what came to be labeled by Simon Bernfeld as the "The Brenner Event."¹²³

Brenner (1881-1921) was born in the Ukraine, immigrated to Eretz Israel in 1909, and was killed in the Arab uprising of 1921. A writer of some note, he produced not only novels and plays but also contributed extensively to the press and was himself an editor of the London-based newspaper *Hameorer* (1906 - 1907). Brenner was an adamant secular nationalist who identified himself in both word and action with the "workers" - the young Jewish immigrants whose ideal was to become farmers and builders of the land. He inspired many of his generation and his columns, written on many and varied subjects, were, in the words of Samuel Shneider, "one of the more brilliant prisms in which modern Jewish existence is reflected."¹²⁴ Not only do his writings reflect the Zionist attitude towards the question of nationalism and

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¹²² *Hapoel Hatzair* (1907 - 1914; 1918 - 1970) - the weekly publication of the political party by the same name. The editor (at this time) was A. J. Aharonovitch. For further details on newspapers in this period, see D. Yudilovitch, *Ledivrei Yemei Haitonut Be'ertz Yisrael* (Tel Aviv, 1936), vol. 2; Z. Pebzner, *Shivim Shana Laitonut Hayisraelit Be'ertz Yisrael* (1932); Nurit Govrin, ed., *Manifestim Safrutiim*, (Tel Aviv University), 1984

¹²³ S. Bernfeld, "Meora Brenner," *Hatzfira*, Vol. 53, 16.3.1911, p. 1.

¹²⁴ S. Shneider, *Olam Hamasoret Hayehudit Bechitvei Joseph Chaim Brenner* (Tel Aviv: Reshafim Publication, 1994), p. 11.

tradition but they are also of great significance in establishing the Zionist response to Jesus and the New Testament.

Brenner's argument in the article was aimed against his Zionist colleagues' obsession with the phenomenon of conversion (to Christianity). "The Brenner Event" itself, however, was sparked off specifically by the opinions which Brenner also expressed therein on Jesus and the New Testament. The issue which Brenner's views brought to the surface was that of Jewish identity. He forced his readers to consider the possibility that Jews could think positively about "Christian ideals" while retaining their Jewish identity.

The Problem of Conversion

Whereas in previous centuries the major Jewish experience of conversion to Christianity had been compulsion, frequently in a choice between conversion or death, the age old problem took on a new form in the 18th century. With the emergence of the *maskil* - the "enlightened" Jew following the activity of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) and the general era of Enlightenment in Europe, Jewish conversion to Christianity was no longer a matter of compulsion but had also become one of attraction. The critical eye with which the *maskilim* viewed traditional Jewish life tended to go hand in hand with a turning towards the surrounding society. Thus in addition to his childhood Jewish education, the *maskil* frequently taught himself the vernacular of his society and immersed himself in its various disciplines because he was drawn by the promise of Jewish emancipation which the Enlightenment offered.

The Jewish desire to be accepted amongst their now more tolerant neighbors proved very powerful. It was the desire, for example, which led David Friedlander (1779) to suggest that the Jews convert *en masse* - a course which many Jews actually followed.¹²⁵ This new form of conversion, and the motivations which lay behind it, were perceived as equally if not more dangerous to Jewish survival as the former threat of conversion under duress. Consequently, the phenomenon was constantly discussed in every possible forum, including the Zionist camp. As with the rest of Jewish society, the Zionists were faced with the challenge of deciding what attitude to adopt towards those Jews who chose to convert to Christianity, a decision that also entailed determining their views on Jesus and the New Testament.

One of the most prominent Zionists to address the issue of conversion was Jabotinsky, who devoted a whole article to the subject in the Odessa-based Jewish newspaper *Razsviet*, asking the specific question: "Why is it forbidden

¹²⁵ J. Katz, *Masoret Vemashber* [Tradition and Crisis], (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1986), pp. 284-297.

[to convert]?"¹²⁶ Guided by his feelings, Jabotinsky's initial assertion was that even the worst of Israel's enemies could not but understand that the greatness of Judaism lies in its people's ability to "suffer unceasingly for the sake of some ancient banner."¹²⁷ For Jabotinsky, Jewish greatness lay in Jewish martyrdom and for this reason alone converts to Christianity could not be tolerated. Beyond the mere emotional level, however, Jabotinsky considered conversion to be the sign of a serious moral flaw which manifested itself in contempt for all things sacred.¹²⁸ The Jew who converts for convenience's sake and for his own personal gain and thus forsakes his people cannot in any way be trusted – certainly not in the matter of participating in the formidable task of strengthening Jewish nationalism. Where conversion was the result of "internal conviction," however, Jabotinsky took a different stand. Thus he affirmed that in the case of a person who converted out of true faith, his conversion was "for his honor and not for his disgrace."¹²⁹

Jabotinsky's concern over the "rash" of conversions was mirrored in the writing of other columnists. A few months later, the Villna-based newspaper *Haolam* began running a series of articles by Jacob Leshchinsky in which he reported the results of a comprehensive survey which he had conducted on "conversion [*shmad*] in various countries." In the opening words of the first article, Leshchinsky explained why he had undertaken the survey: "Although the word *shmad* has always been monstrous in the people's eyes, it has now almost ceased to irritate the nerves of the more prominent among our nation."¹³⁰ Like Jabotinsky, Leshchinsky perceived conversion as a form of moral degeneration. He thus also considered the growing concern over its prevalence as the manifestation of a strong and healthy national sensibility.

During the same period, Simon Bernfeld's series of articles entitled "Nevochei Hazman" ("The Perplexed of our Time") was also being run in the Villna-based newspaper *Hed Hazman*.¹³¹ Bernfeld, a man of considerable influence, shared Jabotinsky's view that conversion was the sign of a "contagious moral sickness." Bernfeld expressed the opinion that those who claim that the New Testament contains superior moral values to those found in Judaism say so only in order to justify their conversion. The truth is that the New Testament does not contradict the *Torah* and thus a person does not need

¹²⁶ Z. Jabotinsky, "Metofaot Hehavai shelanu," in Zeev Jabotinsky, *Ktavim*, Vol. "Felitonim," Ari Jabotinsky: (Jerusalem, 1954), 69-80. Originally published in *Razsviet*, 5.10.1910.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 72.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 75.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 77.

¹³⁰ J. Leshchinsky, "Hashmad Ba'aratzot Shonot," *Haolam*, Vol. 1, 19.1.1911, p. 14.

¹³¹ *Hed Hazman*, also known as *Hazman*, a daily newspaper published in Vilna whose editor was B.Z. Katz.

to be baptized in order to achieve the moral standards set by the New Testament. Thus, for example, a Jew can oppose divorce without becoming a Christian. The real issue at stake is neither morality nor theology, according to Bernfeld, but the converts' wish to separate themselves from their people.¹³² The ugly face of conversion is that those who seek it are willing to falsify the truth to justify their actions.¹³³

As spiritual descendants of the *maskilim*, Jabotinsky, Leshchinsky, and Bernfeld typified the growing concern of those who, having distanced themselves from traditional Jewish life, were now having to face the consequences of their actions. What they perceived as an "epidemic" was not the result of the people's contempt for *Torah* and Jewish life but a symptom of the exhaustion from which the Jewish people were suffering in consequence of the treatment which they had long received at the hands of the surrounding Christian society.¹³⁴ Therefore, although many condemned the phenomenon in no uncertain terms, not all were quick to reject those who had converted and some, like Bernfeld, demonstrated a measure of sympathy towards them and attempted to persuade them to return to the fold.

Brenner's Response

Brenner's purpose in writing his article was to criticize what he considered to be the unhealthy emphasis which the Jewish press was placing on the negative aspects of Jewish life. It was the press's habit to conduct an annual survey summarizing the lack of Jewish achievements over the past year, a review which conveyed the impression that "everywhere, visions of hatred and boycott from without and of spiritual and material depletion and decline from within - this and only this constitute our world three hundred and sixty-five days of the year."¹³⁵ Brenner particularly attacked the exaggerated reaction to the conversion phenomenon and its alleged effects on the Jewish community. In Brenner's eyes, such overwrought claims created the notion that the problem was so widespread that millions of Jews were standing at a crossroad trying to make up their minds whether to stay Jews or to turn to Christianity.¹³⁶ Brenner considered this not only a false portrayal of reality but also one which dangerously diverted people from the goals towards which such Zionist labour parties as *Hapoel Hatzair* were striving. Instead of wasting effort in trying to persuade converts to return, the nationalists should concentrate on the real problems facing the Jews of his time, such as the closing of borders against

¹³² S. Bernfeld, "Nevochei Hazman," *Hed Hazman*, Vol. 262, 9.12.1910, p. 2.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Ch. Brenner, "Baitonut Uvasafrut," *Hapoel Hatzair*, Vol. 3, 24.11.1910, p. 6.

¹³⁶ An indirect reference to Achad Haam's "Al Shtei Haseipim" published in *Hashiloach*, Vol. 23, August 1910.

immigration and the other obstacles in Eretz Israel which were preventing the nation from fulfilling its vision.¹³⁷

Brenner's anger was further aroused by the apparent inconsistency in the world-view of the so-called "free thinkers" (*chofshim*). While the latter considered themselves to have been liberated from the yoke of religion they still retained the traditional religious Jewish attitude towards Christianity. Contrary to many of his contemporaries, Brenner remained loyal to the radical secularist values to which he was committed. In his opinion, the fact that other secularists were engaging in religious polemics mired them in the old-age, futile question of the superiority of Judaism and Christianity, an issue which had long been outmoded and had no longer any place in secular life or thought. Free thinkers should be able to judge any idea, whatever its content, on the basis of its intrinsic merit without regard to its source. It was, in fact, Brenner's liberation from the synagogue which enabled him to regard Christianity in an "objective" light: "I, for example," he wrote, "do not see any greatness in the warmth of the good old days which were founded on sycophantic requests towards some father in heaven for livelihood."¹³⁸

Brenner's distinction between "religion" and "nationality" allowed him to contend that the embracing of Christian ideals did not necessitate conversion to Christianity since it is the "form of life" which a man adopts which distinguishes him, whether as a Jew, Christian, Buddhist, or Muslim. In this respect, Brenner considered religion to be subject to the ever-changing realities of psycho-economic and human-national conditions. This being so, all religions will inevitably deviate from their own ideals - Christianity from Jesus' original teachings in the New Testament and Judaism in its divergence from "biblical Judaism." Given both his status as a "free Hebrew" and the nature of religion itself, Brenner maintained that because he was no longer under the "hypnosis" of the Old Testament he was able to see and to declare without fear that: "The New Testament is our book ... our spiritual heritage."¹³⁹ As somebody who had been liberated from the tyranny of tradition, he could perceive things in their true perspective and assert that: "There is no fundamental difference between the submissive ascetic world view of the prophet from Anatot and that of the prophet from Nazareth."¹⁴⁰

Being an atheist, Brenner similarly maintained that one's personal opinion in regard to religious issues should have no bearing on one's national convictions. Just as one could be a national atheist so one could also be a national religious humanist, and so forth. Moreover, although he could not relate personally to such a path, "a person from Israel can still be a good Jew,

¹³⁷ Ch. Brenner, "Baitonut Uvasafnut," p. 8.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 6.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

devoted to his people with all his heart and soul, without fearing this legend [of the atoning death of the Son of God] as some kind of strangled meat but treat it with religious trembling.”¹⁴¹ His colleagues’ intense emotional reaction towards those who converted to Christianity or even towards those who merely voiced a positive attitude towards Jesus and the New Testament led nowhere, he objected. Rather, religious questions should be left to the “shaved headed” of both religions.¹⁴² The “young workers” must realize that religion is a polluted source whose authority over Jewish life must be rejected. The proper way to solve the “Jewish problem” was not by upholding Jewish religious values but by upholding Jewish life. Rather than dealing with theological topics, his readers should cry along with him: “There is no messiah for Israel. Let us be strong soldiers and live without the messiah.”¹⁴³ The Jewish task was to toil towards building a spiritual and economic home for the Jewish people regardless of their religious convictions. The sickness of exile cannot be healed through religious enactment or ordinances but only by “unceasingly feeling ourselves to be Jewish, to live our Jewish life, to find the Jewish way to work, to speak our Jewish language.”¹⁴⁴

Careful examination of Brenner’s article reveals that his aim was neither to attack Judaism nor to promote Christianity. What he really hoped to demonstrate was that the correct way to express Jewish life was through radical secular nationalism. Such a path excluded any focus on either Jewish converts to Christianity or Christian beliefs *per se*. Obsession with these subjects was inconsistent with the secular world view and would inevitably bring despair. Brenner’s appeal to the “young workers” was therefore that, few as they were, they should do their utmost to express their Jewishness by living a productive life in the Land. In the process of this exhortation, Brenner contrasted the religious community’s negative reliance on financial assistance with the secular Jewish community’s striving towards self-sufficiency, a comparison designed to demonstrate the superiority of the latter over the former, whose members seek in vain the help of “some father in heaven.”

Can any Good Thing Come out of Nazareth?

Brenner’s militant attack against Jewish sentimentalism could not go unchallenged. In fact, the publication of his article provided many people with the opportunity to examine the relationship between nationalism and religion, as well as that between Judaism and Christianity, and by so doing to come to some kind of resolution concerning the ⁵⁵meaning of secular Jewish nationalism.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁴² A derogatory name for a priest, Brenner uses it here also to designate rabbis.

¹⁴³ Ch. Brenner, “Baitonut Uvasafrut,” p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

The debate itself was initiated by an anonymous feature article published in the Jerusalem-based newspaper *Hacherut*.¹⁴⁵ *Hacherut* reacted venomously to Brenner's suggestion that the New Testament should be considered part of the Jewish heritage and to his comparison between the prophet from Anatot and the prophet from Nazareth. On the strength of such statements, the newspaper accused Brenner of being a *misioner* (missionary). Furthermore, by asking "How much? How much are you [plural] getting for your labour?" *Hacherut* also accused *Hapoel Hatzair* of participating in such despised work.¹⁴⁶

Hapoel Hatzair's party council in Jerusalem responded to this insinuation by writing to *Haor*¹⁴⁷ and intimating that acts of violence against *Hacherut* might ensue.¹⁴⁸ The debate developed from there on, reaching its peak during March 1911 and continuing on throughout the rest of the year and into 1912. Its intensity drew the best thinkers, writers, leaders, and ideologists into the fray. Among these were Achad Haam, Eliezer Ben Yehuda, David Ben Gurion, Menachem Shenkin, David Gordon, Joseph Vitkin, Joseph Klausner and many others.¹⁴⁹

Although the debate was later understood in terms of the issue of "free speech," due in large measure to the line of argument pressed by Ben Yehuda¹⁵⁰ and adopted by *Hapoel Hatzair's* constituency, the actual topic on the agenda was the fight over Jewish identity in regard to conversion.¹⁵¹ Since the debate was primarily conducted within Zionist circles, the challenge was: Will the Zionists welcome the prophet from Nazareth and make him part of the Jewish camp, or not? To answer this question, I will examine the views of the two main players in the debate – Brenner himself and Achad Haam.

Brenner and Jesus

What did Brenner actually think about Jesus and the New Testament? Rumors about his own conversion to Christianity had begun some four years earlier while he was living in London and had befriended Paul Levertoff, a messianic

¹⁴⁵ *Hacherut* (1909 – 1916) was published twice weekly and, for a time, thrice weekly, in Jerusalem, edited by A. Elmaliach and H. Ben Atar.

¹⁴⁶ "Kfira o Hasata," *Hacherut*, Vol. 18, 2.12.1910, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ *Haor*, also named *Hatzvi*, *Hashkafa*, *Mevaseret Tzion* (1891 – 1893, 1910 – 1915). A daily newspaper published in Jerusalem and edited by Eliezer Ben Yehuda. See D. Yudilovitch, *Ledivrei Yemei*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁸ Vaad Hapoel Hatzair, "A letter to the editor," *Haor*, Vols. 241-46, 12.12.1910, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ For a detailed account of the debate, see N. Govrin, *The Brenner Affair: The fight for free speech (1910-1913)*, (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1985) [Hebrew].

¹⁵⁰ E. Ben Yehuda, "Hapoel Hatzair Vehacherut," *Haor*, Vol. 224-49, 15.12.1910, p. 1. For Achad Haam's contribution, see below.

¹⁵¹ See also David Knaani, *Haalia hashnia Haovedet Veyachasa Lamasoret* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Hapoalim, 1976), p. 80.

Jew and founder of the organ "Testimony to Israel." It was typical of the times that people were frequently accused of being missionaries for various specious reasons, not the least of which were personal vendettas. The ease with which *Hacherut* in fact asserted that Brenner was such a missionary is sufficient to confirm the frequency of such charges. In response to the accusation Brenner crisply asked:

Is it not a matter of the madness and villainy of wild ignoramuses? Isn't it clear that the only people capable of bringing such charges are those who are ready to sell themselves for a penny at a moment's notice? When they read in some article the words 'New Testament' and 'Christianity' the picture of the missionary coin immediately flashes in front of their eyes and their little brain becomes confused, and the plot is ready?!¹⁵²

Brenner's explicit avowal of atheism should have been enough to persuade all who were willing to listen that whatever his views about Jesus and the New Testament, they did not correspond in any measure to the accusations brought against him. Brenner himself took pains to clarify what he thought about Jesus, possibly in anticipation of such reactions as those which he received from *Hacherut*: For Brenner it was obvious that an atheist who has no god cannot believe that he has either messengers or a son. He likewise flatly rejected any attribution of divinity to Jesus. Yet although he was a mere human being, to Brenner he was a figure as fascinating as Moses, Isaiah, Mohammad, or Goethe. The columnist wished to know whether he was a poor shepherd or a proud individual whose listeners mocked him. Brenner's search for knowledge about Jesus was severely hampered, however, by the fact that the only information about him comes from religious books which are by their very nature polluted. Thus Brenner had no sure way of knowing who Jesus really was.

Although Brenner considered the Jews' flight to Christianity a sorry sight he assumed that the motive which drove them to it was personal gain. "Indeed," he wrote, "each and every year dozens, hundreds, of the sons and daughters of Israel destroy [*mashmidim*] themselves from the fold of our people for the sake of some personal gain, almost without any spiritual struggle, and accept the Christian faith."¹⁵³ While he deemed such motives wrong and unacceptable Brenner had no problem with those Jews who wanted to treat Jesus with "religious trembling." Brenner elaborated on what he meant by this "religious trembling" in a manuscript entitled "Shmad Venotzriut: Od Leberur Hainyan," first published by Nurit Govrin:

The nations that we are dwelling in are not Christian. [They are] of different churches: Anglicans, Lutherans, Provoslavic – but Christians they are not. A Jew who leaves his people and moves to another [...] is a meshumad but not a Christian [...]. The meshumadim are making a deal. In our eyes this is a despised deal. But what has that to do with Christianity?

¹⁵² Ch. Brenner, "Sheela," *Hapoel Hatzair*, 9.12.1910, p. 13.

¹⁵³ Ch. Brenner, "Baitonut Uvasafrut," p. 6.

What has that to do with Christian ideals? [...] Some come and tell us: Our nationality requires that we deny Christian ideals, since it is on account of these that we have been killed all day long [...] And so? Well, our nationality does not require us to curse Yozel [Jesus], may his name be blotted out, just as our nationality does not require us to despise the Christian Tolstoy. Some of us see in the Jesus story a world tragedy and our hearts go out to him, the suffering prophet [...]. Some of us see in the whole deal about prophecy a ridiculous comedy – and in his disciples fools who strayed from the way [...]. Although I, to my regret or joy, am not a Christian no one can take away from me the right to treat Jesus and his disciples with a deep spiritual trembling, just as I have the right to ridicule that awful comedy. If anyone finds in my writing a call for the ‘seduction of Israel’ or ‘Shmad’ – in my eyes he is a complete ignoramus. And maybe even worse.¹⁵⁴

Brenner is here redefining the traditional concepts under whose rubric the issue of Jewish conversion to Christianity had always been discussed: assimilation, conversion, and *shmad*. Assimilation occurred mostly through intermarriage and gradual integration into the surrounding society. Conversion was a more conscious decision to turn to another religion, while *shmad* was the most extreme form of conversion whereby a Jew took upon himself the Christian religion and faith by undergoing baptism. While Brenner still regarded the *meshumadim* as the lowest and most despised converts, he considered their motive to be exclusively personal gain and asserted that they do not care who Jesus was or what the New Testament teaches. To the term *notzri* he applied the original meaning of those who follow the Jew from Nazareth.

By thus removing the religious layers which have disguised Jesus, Brenner was able to affirm that accepting Jesus does not necessarily mean accepting Christianity. His secularist colleagues who claimed to have liberated themselves from religious prejudices and superstitions should perceive Jesus in this non-religious manner. Like any other historical figure, Jesus may be liked or disliked, worshipped or hated, understood or misunderstood. Whichever the case may be, how one treats Jesus should have absolutely no bearing on one's loyalty to one's people.

It is thus clear that while Brenner's view of Jesus remains a far cry from the Christian perspective his ideas were very alarming to his fellow Jews. As much as he did not know, Brenner did know this: Jesus was as good a prophet as Jeremiah and the New Testament reflects the same spirit as the Old. As such, Jesus should be a welcome addition to the wealth of Jewish heritage and if one can find values in his teaching and in the New Testament as a whole one can safely apply them in his life without risking his Jewish identity or injuring the Jewish nationalist cause in any way. 58

In light of such views, it is easy to see why the reactions towards Brenner were so harsh. In welcoming the prophet from Nazareth, Brenner was seeking

¹⁵⁴ N. Govrin, *Brenner Affair*, pp. 195, 196.

to redefine the meaning of who is a Jew. Following Brenner's formulation, the question "who is a Jew?" was no longer to be defined by negating the other, be they Christian or a member of any other religion. Being a Jew should be defined positively through recognizing true values wherever they are found and by adopting them to suit the unique Jewish way of life. It is little wonder that *Hacherut*, in its simple, unsophisticated understanding perceived that the logical conclusion of Brenner's argument was the realization of all the Christian missionaries' prayers and hopes. Stripping his high rhetoric bare, Brenner was in effect proposing that, in the words of an anonymous writer in *Hacherut*, "a convert can be a Jewish nationalist, just as the converts of the British mission who call themselves 'Hebrew Christians' claim."¹⁵⁵ Joseph Klausner, who did not appreciate *Hacherut's* charges, shared the same concern. He could not but see in Brenner's views a refusal to admit the simple fact that those Jews who converted have in fact been "ripped out" of their people. He further thought that Brenner's views put into question the very existence of Judaism. For him,

*All the martyrs who have sanctified the Name, the myriad of human offerings which the people of Israel have made, have all been sacrificed on the altar of the difference between the world view of the prophet from Anatot and that of the prophet from Nazareth.*¹⁵⁶

For Klausner, who like Brenner, wished to free himself from the shackles of tradition, the denial of the difference between Jeremiah and Jesus was too radical. It was not the expression of someone possessed of free opinion but of someone free from opinion altogether. Brenner, as the name of Klausner's article "Freedom and Heresy" indicates, does not deal with issues of free speech. Rather, he brings forth heretical views that are dangerous to Jewish existence.

Achad Haam and Jesus

Achad Haam stepped into the debate through a letter to B. Ledijinsky, a member of the "Odessa council",¹⁵⁷ three weeks after Brenner's article was published. Although his involvement lay primarily behind the scenes, his personal status and influence contributed much to its course and its final conclusion.¹⁵⁸ Derived from various articles published in *Hed Hazman* and the Tel Aviv-based newspaper *Haachdut*,¹⁵⁹ who justified Brenner's right to express

¹⁵⁵ "Kfira o Hasata," *Hacherut*, Vol. 18, 2.12.1910, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ J. Klausner, "Cherut Veapikorsut," *Hashilgach*, Vol. 24, 30.1.1911(?), p. 89.

¹⁵⁷ The Odessa council represented the Chovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) who had such councils in many cities. Part of their task was to channel contributions for different projects in Israel, amongst them *Hapoel Hatzair*.

¹⁵⁸ B. Halpern and J. Reinharz, *Zionism and the Creation of New Society* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2000), pp. 176, 177.

¹⁵⁹ Achad Haam, "Lakvutza shel Hapoalim, Ein Ganim," 4.11.1911," in *Igrot*, p. 402.

his ideas about Christianity in the way he did,¹⁶⁰ Achad Haam understood Brenner's view as representative of the "young" – the younger, more radical generation of secular Zionists, mainly from the "second immigration" (1904-1914). Consequently, Achad Haam was outraged by these "impudent lads" who sought to free the living present from the dead past.

Achad Haam's assumption that Brenner's views represented those of the "young" had serious consequences regarding his evaluation of Brenner's statements. In direct response to the article, Achad Haam submitted a formal protest to the "Odessa council" through the letter to Ledijinsky, where he requested they stop their financial support to *Hapoel Hatzair*, because the latter was publishing views which contradicted everything for which the "Lovers of Zion" stood. What particularly aggravated Achad Haam was the suggestion that Jewish martyrdom was in vain. This constituted a national insult which could not be ignored.¹⁶¹

In addition to his personal correspondence, Achad Haam articulated his criticism of Brenner in an article entitled "Torah Metzion" published in the Odessa-based newspaper *Hashiloach*. Right at the beginning of the column, Achad Haam censured the tendency of those eastern European Jews who claimed to possess a "free national conscience" while claiming to have nothing in common with Judaism.

*The God of Israel? – They do not 'request sycophantly' as their fathers did from some 'father in heaven.' The Holy Scriptures? – They are already 'free from the hypnosis of the Holy Scriptures' [...] They do not negate the possibility of being 'a good Jew' and at the same time 'trembling before the Christian legend of the Son of God who was sent to mankind and through his blood atoned for the sins of generations'.*¹⁶²

His objection was: If these people divorce themselves from the Jewish past, in what sense can they be Jewish nationalists? In Achad Haam's eyes, the Jewish past cannot be detached from its "religious spirit." This spirit does not belong only to the past but is in fact the living power which currently operates in the formation of a new way of Jewish life. The divine power, said Achad Haam, cannot be ignored – even by those who do not believe in God – since the "real historical power" which has guided the nation for thousands of years cannot be denied. To reject this history, to turn one's back on it, is to deprive

¹⁶⁰ Sagi-Nahor [Jacob Vitkin], "Rifrufim," *Haachdut*, Vol. 11-12, 13.1.1911, p. 23. See also Shimoni, "Michtav Miyafu," *Hed Hazman* Vols. 55, 56, 57, 20-22.3.1911.

¹⁶¹ Achad Haam, "To Mr. B. Ledijinsky, Odessa, 14.12.1910," in Arie Simon (ed.), *Igrot Achad Haam*, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1958), 4: 323. The issue of Jewish martyriology as justification for Jewish existence was raised also by J. Klausner, "Cherut Veapikorsut," B"Ch., "Haleumiut Vehadat (2)," *Hed Hazman*, Vol. 42 (afternoon addition), 3.3.1911, p. 1.

¹⁶² Achad Haam, "Torah Metzion," p. 407.

Jewish nationalism of all meaning, given that the latter is a result of the same historical power that is presently at work.

What was of most concern to Achad Haam, however, was the increasingly prevalent attitude which he defined as “negating the negativism towards the Son of God” according to which Jesus was no longer an antithesis to everything Jewish.¹⁶³ The situation was very serious, he felt, because the younger generation was not only rejecting traditional Jewish thought but was also adopting moderate views towards Jesus. This combination could not but lead the “people of God” to Nazareth – the very aim of the Christian mission to the Jewish people. Christian missionaries did not simply wish to convert Jews to Christianity. They wanted to convince them that “Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son of God, is the glory of Israel for ever.”¹⁶⁴ If this line of thinking continued to spread, warned Achad Haam, the Christian missionaries would live to see their dream come true and observe “good Jews who are blocking their ears to their fathers’ blood, which cries out to them from the past, and without conscience will step over the bodies of generations past until they arrive at the mercy seat of the ‘Son of God’ where a ‘trembling’ will take hold of them.”¹⁶⁵

Although Achad Haam clearly understood that as atheists the “young” hated both the Father and the Son, he yet feared that in breaking free from the past and creating a spiritual void by canceling the negativism towards Jesus, they will, even unwittingly, be sucked in towards Nazareth. It is thus evident that for Achad Haam, Jesus totally contradicts Jewish existence. He was unconvinced that any reconciliation between Jews and Jesus could be achieved because contrary to what Brenner thought, an “a-religious” Jesus does not exist. And as a religious figure, Jesus would never cease to represent the source of much Jewish suffering. Judaism’s continued existence was a powerful testimony in and of itself that the Jewish negation of Jesus must not cease. To welcome Jesus was to turn one’s back on the Jewish history which had been determined by divine power. Anybody who thus wished to reach out to him could only do so at the expense of desecrating the memory of the Jewish martyrs.¹⁶⁶ In plain words, therefore, Achad Haam maintained in his article the old argument that faith in Jesus – the Son of God – contradicts the divine will and as such, contradicts Jewish nationalism, which is the modern manifestation of this divine power.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 409.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Achad Haam, “To Mr. B. Ledijinsky, Odessa, 14.12.1910,” in Arie Simon, ed., *Igrot Achad Haam*, Vol. 4 (1906-1911), Dvir: Tel Aviv, 1958, p. 323. Jewish martyriology as justification for Jewish existence was raised also by Klausner, “Cherut Veapikorsut”; B”Ch., “Haleumiut Vehadat (2),” in *Hed Hazman*, Vol. 42 (afternoon addition), 3.3.1911.

The Unwelcome Prophet

Achad Haam's position forced those who were suspected of siding with Brenner to take a clear stand on the matter. A month after Achad Haam's article was published, Joseph Vitkin, although without directly referring to Achad Haam, clearly stated his position on the matter: The Old Testament is the manifestation of the *Shechina* (Holy Spirit) within the Jewish people. The New Testament is the sign of its departure. Likewise, Jeremiah is a prophet who, despite his suffering, affirms life while the ascetic from Nazareth denies life out of short-sightedness and wretched ignorance.¹⁶⁷ From the other side, Joseph Aharonovitch, *Hapoel Hatzair's* ideologist, attacked Achad Haam for falsely attributing to the "young" a "tendency toward Christianity." The devotion of "Israel's young to our national labor, which they have shown in action more than once, is beyond all doubt, so that no libel in the world has the power to [...] bring their name into disrepute."¹⁶⁸ Aharonovitch went even further when he accused Achad Haam of using Brenner's view of Jesus to wage his own battle against the young workers, whereas in truth their loyalty to the Jewish people needed no demonstration. Likewise, in a very sarcastic tone, R. Benjamin (Joshua Reder-Feldman), a renowned literary critic, wondered about the coincidence of the appearance of "Tora Metzion" while the workers were still burying their dead from the last Arab attack,¹⁶⁹ thereby pointing to their sacrificial loyalty over against that of Achad Haam who was living comfortably in England. Some of the same anger was expressed in a letter which the "Hebrew Workers' Club" in Jaffa sent to Achad Haam in which the former apologized for being unable to participate in a party in the latter's honor because he had "insulted Israel's young, in accusing them of baseless charges [of tendency toward Christianity]. For this insult we cannot forgive him."¹⁷⁰

The "young" and their supporters were in fact only reluctantly drawn into the debate concerning Jesus. Indeed, the fact that Brenner's article initially went unchallenged led people like Achad Haam and newspapers like *Hacherut* to interpret this silence as an indifference to, if not outright acceptance of, Brenner's views. Only after being challenged, the majority did their best to disassociate themselves from Brenner's views although, it must be emphasized, not from Brenner himself. In this respect, the Odessa council's attempt to oust Brenner from the newspaper was squashed by the workers' angry outcry and Brenner continued to enjoy the support of many people, not the least of them being Ben Gurion and R. Benjamin. Significantly, it was Achad Haam, Brenner's most vociferous opponent,⁶² who suffered most from the "Event."

¹⁶⁷ J. Vitkin, "Sinaa Vehaaratza Atzmit," *Hapoel Hatzair*, Vols. 14-15, 9.5.1911, p. 10.

¹⁶⁸ J. Aharonovitch, "Mechol Stanim," *Hapoel Hatzair*, Vol. 19, 14.7.1911, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ R. Benjamin, "Hem," *Haor*, Vol. 17, 31.10.1911, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ R., "Hed Yafu," *Haor*, Vol. 29, 16.11.1911, p. 2.

Thus while Brenner was rehabilitated and was even invited to be a teacher at "*Gimnasia Hertzeliyah*," Achad Haam's conduct and views led many to distance themselves from him and his reputation never returned to its former status.¹⁷¹

The minority who dared to side with Brenner did so only after making clear that they do not share his views. Thus while Ben Gurion sharply criticized Achad Haam for changing his position on the relationship between religion and nationality, he did so only after he had declared: "Brenner has sinned."¹⁷² In effect, not a single person was openly willing to wholeheartedly adopt Brenner's views about the New Testament and Jesus.

The one clear outcome of the debate was thus that, despite the large measure of personal respect and standing which Brenner retained, his views on Jesus and the New Testament were unanimously dismissed. As "free" as the Zionists claimed to be, they could not accept Brenner's invitation to welcome the Nazarene. Unlike Brenner, they were not ready to ignore the insistence of the Jewish past that Jesus and Judaism had nothing in common. Moderate and liberal as their thinking had become, they continued to see in Jesus a threat to Jewish identity. Thus at the conclusion of the debate, "The Brenner Event" demonstrated, particularly through the bitterness expressed toward Achad Haam's accusation of "leaning toward Christianity," that Jesus, in addition to traditional reasons, was now shunned for the sake of the newly emerged Jewish nationalism.

¹⁷¹ N. Govrin, *Brenner Affair*, 121, 129.

¹⁷² D. Ben Gurion, "Bamidron," *Haachdut*, Vol. 17, 17.2.1911, p. 1.

Jesus in Israel at the Turn of the Millennium

Lisa Loden*

The year at the threshold of the third millennium has been a time of much interest in the person of Jesus. It is, after all, the birth of Jesus that gives any meaning to the concept of millennium.

...interest in the historical Jesus has intensified with the onset of the new millennium. Books, articles, conferences and TV programs on the subject have proliferated. Within a recent 365 day period, the New York Times mentioned Jesus in 733 articles (an average of 2 articles per day). The library of Congress lists 17,000 biographies of Jesus (the runner up is Lenin, with 9,000), and the number is growing daily." (Eretz Magazine, January-February 2000, p. 14).

Although this statement relates to the United States, there have been a plethora of newspaper articles published in Israel that have dealt explicitly with the person of Jesus. A number of books about Jesus have also appeared in Israel's bookstores and have been reviewed in the press. Out of print books about Jesus have been reprinted and there has been much discussion concerning the ignorance of Israelis about the person and message of Jesus.

This article will take a look at what Jews in Israel are saying today about Jesus. It will first deal with the books that have appeared in Hebrew and then will give an overview of the many feature articles and opinions that have been expressed about Jesus in the Israeli press. Some initial conclusions will then be drawn from the materials discussed. The sources for this article are reports and articles taken from the Hebrew and English press during the time period from December 1999 through October 2000. All translations from the Hebrew press were made by the writer of this article. Note that when quotations are taken from articles published in English, they have been left as originally published.

Books and Book Reviews about Jesus in Hebrew

The Israeli press has reported the appearance of no less than eight books about Jesus that have either been published or re-issued in the past year. Some of the books have received wide publicity⁶⁴ while others have only briefly been mentioned.

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That Man

"*That Man*", *Jews Talk about Jesus*, edited by Avigdor Shaanan, is the book that has engendered the most media coverage. There have been at least seven reviews of the book in both the secular and the religious press during the period from December 1999 until May 2000. National as well as local papers have reviewed it. See also review of the book in this issue of *Mishkan*.

Yehuda Koren, a reporter for the major circulation Tel Aviv daily newspaper *Yediot Akhronot*, interviewed Professor Shaanan following the publication of his book. Professor Shaanan is quoted as saying "You cannot escape the image of the one who has left such an impression without erasing or canceling the last 2000 years. It is difficult to imagine the process of world history without him." (*Yediot Akhronot*, 24/12/99).

One of the reviews of "*That Man*", *Jews Talk About Jesus* laments the paucity of contemporary authors included in Shaanan's book, namely poets and women. The author, Menachem Ben proceeds to ask,

Where are the Israeli poets? Where is Yona Wallach? Where is Benjamin Sivili? And where is Gabriella Elisha? Where is Smadar Hertzfeld? And where is Shaz? These all have truly and with inner passion related to Jesus more than the stale rabbis who are quoted here. (Iton Tel Aviv, 11/02/00)

A poet whose writings about Jesus did not appear in Shaanan's book is Uri Tzvi Greenberg, a prominent Zionist poet. Shaanan relates that Greenberg's wife refused to allow Shaanan to include her late husband's poetry about Jesus without the inclusion of another piece that expressed an antagonistic view of Christianity. Since "*That Man*" was exclusively concerned with writings about Jesus, Shaanan was forced to leave out Greenberg's poem. The article in *Yediot Akhronot* however does quote from the poem, "Great Terror and the Moon":

Great are his longings for the land of Israel. He will return to the land of Israel in the tallit that was on his shoulders as he stood to be crucified. He will go up to the appointed time, at the end of the world, at the end of generations, as the candlestick of the offering, and the diadem of David's son on his holy head.

Professor Shaanan feels that it is important for Jews to write about and understand Jesus today. He expresses sadness that today, in his view, Jesus is largely neglected by Israeli authors.

Among prose writers of the last fifty years, only a few have written about Jesus. In poetry he is mentioned by Tuvia Rivner, Natan Zach, Hanoach Levin, and David Avidan. It is not only the Orthodox who refrain from dealing with him, it is also the writers born in Israel who did not grow up on western culture. Jesus is distant from and uninteresting to them. I don't see that it is a challenge to write about him. Jesus is not even a 'red flag' to wrap oneself in, in order to make someone angry. Today Jesus lives on the academic campus and to my great sorrow, only researchers are dealing with him. (Yediot Akhronot 24/12/99)

In the Footsteps of Jesus

Two books were published bearing the same title, *In the Footsteps of Jesus*. Although carrying the same name, the content of the books was widely divergent. Aharon Liran's book does not deal with the person of Jesus per se, but is a history of the divisions within Christianity and the various Christian expressions in Israel today. He sees, in the Christian presence in Israel, a continuation of the life and legacy of Jesus.

The second book *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, was authored by Israel Kanohel and published by Shoken. This book is reviewed by Avraham Burg, Chairman of the Israeli Knesset, as being a piece of "historical detective work attempting to investigate the theological, spiritual, mystical roots of the Messiah in whose image the Christian consciousness of Jesus was formed." (*Ha'Aretz*, 29/03/00). Although scholarly in terms of its extensive research and footnotes, the book is written in a style and with language that makes it accessible to the layman.

Kanohel is the head of the department of Biblical Studies at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. He posits that Jesus was not the original suffering Messiah but that a Messianic leader arose in the year 4 B.C.E. in the Qumran sect and that this Messianic leader was the predecessor of Jesus. Kanohel writes as a scholar who himself has worked on the Dead Sea Scrolls. According to Kanohel's interpretation of Dead Sea Scroll fragments, this man was a highly charismatic leader of the Qumran sect who identified himself as the human Messiah and as God. This is the first time, in a Jewish context, that the two concepts of divinity and a suffering humanity are intertwined. This leader was Menachem the Essene.

By saying that "The suffering Messiah was born at Qumran," Kanohel is making a new and highly significant point: there was an original Messiah who was "Jewish," and in whose image all subsequent Messiahs – Jewish and Christian – were formed. In the reviewer's mind, this hypothesis provides the previously missing Jewish background for understanding the appearance of Jesus.

Avraham Burg concludes his lengthy book review with a comparison between the times of Jesus and the present, both are characterized by a search for truth and meaning. He sees many parallels between that time and this.

The person who seeks meaning is today found all in every place in the world. ... The satisfied, the wealthy, those of the west who are financially settled, search for meaning for themselves in a post materialistic age, beyond money, property, investments and more trips abroad. The poor who have nothing, who can only lose their hunger, search for salvation that is beyond them, beyond the depressing darkness of this world. And those in the middle, who are not truly rich or truly poor are influenced by the attraction of spiritual extremes that like a storm wind envelop the reality of the West in general and Israeli Jewishness in particular.

An atmosphere like this is a Messianic atmosphere. An overflowing of hope for ideal times, for the king, a ruler, the ideal. These are days of tension and waiting for the coming of the

Messiah, the wonderful Savior ... It was this way 2000 years ago and it is like this today. It was like this for Jesus and for the Messiahs of the present, for Paul who invented Jesus, and for Dr. Israel Kanoel who has revealed the historical original who preceded him. (Ha'Aretz, 29/03/00)

Burg embraces and uses Kanoel's hypothesis to effectively eradicate the significance of Jesus. Jesus, for him and others who accept this hypothesis, is just another in a series of Messiah figures.

Descent from the Cross

Another book that has recently appeared on the Israeli market is by Benjamin Shvili. *Descent from the Cross*, published by Shoken, 2000, is Shvili's second prose work, having previously published several volumes of poetry. In contrast to most of the other books about Jesus, this work is by a popular author outside of academic circles. Shvili's book is the story of his search for God. This search takes Shvili to the many churches of Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia and is steeped in Christian imagery. It is highly personal and appeals to a wide popular audience.

The writer is searching for God ... through the son of God, Yeshua the Notzri. If we seriously look at Christianity as does Shvili ... we can say that the imprint of the son of God opens the door to the Father. Perhaps Shvili believes that for a moment we will succeed ... in releasing the son and the father from the clutches of the authorities and of men who imprisoned them in their temples, crucified the son and banished the father to heavenly regions ... (Yoram Meltzar, Ma'Ariv, 6/10/00)

What is interesting about Shvili's book is his use of Jesus as a metaphor for the ultimate meaning of life. The historical Jesus is not the Jesus that Shvili encounters. Shvili's Jesus is still on the cross.

The book opens with the words of Jesus, who appoints the author to be his messenger and burdens him with a task. . . . The author is required to remove the Messiah from the cross and restore him to the people from which he was cut off, and through this to turn him into the bringer of joy, which can be gained through the dance. Dance is symbolic of release, the releasing of the crucified one and the release of the messenger, for he too is bearing his cross on his shoulders. And so at the end of the author's journey, he is able to come to self-realization on the deck of the ferry bringing him to the shores of Israel. He breaks into a Greek dance and feels like a crucified man trying to fly like a bird. Jesus too is in the midst of this joy, playing a bazooki. (Haya Hoffman, Yediot Akhronot, 25/8/00)

Of all the books that have in one way or another related to the person of Jesus, perhaps this book of Shvili's will prove to have the most influence on the general public. Certainly it will be the most widely read. Shvili is a secular Israeli, writing as a post-modernist. It is noteworthy that for Shvili, the concepts of classical Christianity are not only tolerated, but embraced and used to capacity in his personal quest for the meaning of life. Perhaps in this way the

formerly forbidden specter of Jesus will make its way into the popular consciousness.

Other Books

The other books about Jesus that have been reported on in the Hebrew press have received much less attention than the three just mentioned. Among them are *Jesus, The Crucified Jew as a Rebel Against Rome*, Yehuda Adler, Hadar, 1997, Berlin, 1999. Adler says, "In my book I describe the historical Jesus, as the New Testament reflects his personality, as a Jew who kept the commandments and as a rebel against Rome." (*MB, Magazine of the Association of Central European Immigrants*, March April, 2000)

In 1999, Joseph Klausner's now classic work, *Yeshe Ha'Notzri* was reissued in Hebrew. This work was originally published in 1925 in Hebrew but has since gone out of print.

Due to the conspiracy of silence surrounding the figure of Jesus in this country, few original works have been written about him in Hebrew. But even if there were more, Klausner's biography would stand out. The book has not lost its lucidity over the years ... Yeshe Ha'Notzri is relevant because it bears a message: Klausner shows that Jesus was born a Jew and remained faithful to his Jewishness all his life. (Benny Meir, Ha'Aretz, 11/02/00)

Klausner's work was groundbreaking in its day and has done much to reinstate Jesus as a good Jew, at least in Jewish academic circles. That this work has been reissued is significant and could do much to aid in the process of restoration of Jesus to the Jewish people in the present. Klausner himself writes, "The whole story rings true. If we quibble, it is only over the details. The human weakness and suffering of this solitary man, submerged in the depths of misery, leaves a powerful and lasting impression on anyone with compassion, be he a believer or a non-believer." (Quoted by Meir, *Ha'Aretz*, 11/02/00)

Feature Articles

A number of lengthy feature articles that treat the life and teachings of Jesus in some depth have appeared in the Israeli press. What is remarkable is that, without exception, these articles range from being unbiased in their approach to being very sympathetic. It would appear that there is an honest desire to understand Jesus, and by extension, the phenomena of Christianity. That the articles have appeared in virtually all of the secular press is also noteworthy. Many of the articles also quote lengthy passages from the New Testament words of Jesus. Major articles of this type have appeared in *Nekuda*, May 2000; *Ha'Aretz*, 31/12/99; *Talul*, December 1999; *Erez*, January/February, 2000; and in *Passover* and *Papal* supplements of the major Hebrew and English daily papers, *Ha'Aretz*, *Ma'Ariv*, *Yediot Akhronot*, *Jerusalem Post*.

Jesus and the Galilee

An interesting article, "Bread upon the Waters," by Ari Shavit, appeared in the Papal Pilgrimage Supplement of *Ha'Aretz*, 21/03/00. Shavit shows a thorough familiarity with the New Testament and his article focuses on the importance of the Sea of Galilee for the ministry and message of Jesus.

... it can be said that, without the Sea of Galilee, there is no New Testament. ... that very same element in the geography of the Galilee basin that was so difficult for ancient Judaism to embrace, was perfectly suited to the new theology that the son of Nazareth brought to its shores. A theology that sought to replace commandments with compassion, laws with love. A theology that exchanged a belief in a distant, vague End-of-Days for a present, utterly tangible messianism. A messianism that touches the sick and heals them. That speaks to the poor and uplifts them. That descends in a boat to the lake. And then ascends in a boat from the lake. That spreads large fishing nets. And calms storms. And walks on water. (Ari Shavit, Ha'Aretz, English Edition, 21/03/00)

Shavit's article is filled with a sense of longing for who Jesus is and what he brought to his followers. Although himself a non-believer, Shavit seems to yearn for the person of Jesus and to want to believe in him.

It is extremely difficult to find any substantive cross-reference for the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Nonetheless, this unproved, unhistorical, unscientific story has, in the course of the past 1,970 years become one of the formative stories of western civilization. One of the cornerstones of human consciousness, and those messianic expectations of a period of deep crisis, on the eve of destruction, have, to a certain extent, fulfilled themselves: They have drawn from these waters the belief in a Son of God who wanders through the Galilee and descends to the Sea of Galilee, bearing the grace of heaven that he bequeaths to the poor, the hungry and the stricken. To all man.

So that these messianic expectations have had a profound impact, for better and worse, on all that transpired on five different continents over the past two millennia. So that it is impossible to imagine what they would have been like if so many had not been convinced for so long that these events really did take place on these shores. At Magdala and Tabgha, at Capernaum and Bethsaida. And in the lake between them. On whose water, a wintery ray of light now wanders. Touching the faces of those who descend to pray by the water. To find by that water some of that grace, that compassion, that kindness. (Ari Shavit, Ha'Aretz, English Edition, 21/03/00)

The Name

"Jesus, A Bad Name," is the headline⁶⁹ of an article that appeared in *Ma'Ariv*, 30/12/99. Journalist Haim Hanegbi, on the occasion of the millennium, begins his article with a quotation from the sermon on the mount, the beatitudes. He writes about the name of *Yeshu* and points out that in that form it was a curse. For the remainder of the article, Hanegbi uses the name *Yeshua*.

Whether we want it or not, that man, always cloaked in mysterious questions, which will never be deciphered, is alive with us today; and he causes hearts to pound ... In Israel Yeshua is punished. In the schools there is no teaching about him, or about his beliefs, or about his disciples, or about the developments of Christianity. We are punished. (Haim Hanegbi, Ma'Ariv, 30/12/99)

Jesus in the Schools

A further aspect of Israel's ambivalent relationship with Jesus has come into the press with a number of articles that deal with the general ignorance of the Israeli public, and with the Israeli educational system's lack of teaching about Jesus and Christianity.

In an article with the headline, "Who is Jesus, What Israeli Students Learn about Christianity," (*Ha'Aretz*, 24/03/00) journalist Tom Segev researches the content of Israeli textbooks on the subject of Christianity. He discovers a dearth of material about both Jesus himself and the teachings of Christianity. Only in the sixth and seventh grades is the subject of Christianity studied and the emphasis is largely on the period of the Middle Ages. References to Jesus seem to be only in regards to his trial and there is no consensus in the textbooks as to who condemned him. Most of the texts, however, say that the Roman authorities were responsible.

Orna Coussin wrote an in depth report on the same subject, her article is entitled "It's time for Israelis to learn Jesus was Jewish." It appeared as a feature article in *Ha'Aretz*, English Edition, 23/12/99. She reports that only once in the entire 12 years of schooling is the Israeli student taught anything at all about Jesus. In the religious system it is even worse and the majority of teachers will not even mention the name of Jesus to the students.

Coussin quotes a number of prominent Israeli educators who speak out about Jesus. Professor Michael Harsegor who has a weekly radio program, History Hour, on the Army Radio station, says,

Jesus was the most famous Jew in the world, and students must know why he was famous and why he was a Jew ... Jesus said several times that nothing in the law (Torah) must be changed ... They (the students) are ignorant because the schools are still afraid that any study of Jesus is connected to missionary activity. (Ha'Aretz, English Edition, 23/12/99)

Similarly, Guy G. Stroumza, Chairman of the Center for Study of Christianity at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem says,

Jesus was a good Jew. There were a few things that the rabbinical establishment at the time didn't like, but he wasn't an especially great revolutionary either. However, he was a uniquely interesting and important figure in western culture, a key figure in the land of Israel in the 1st century, at a time of political ferment ... There is no doubt that it is necessary to study the New Testament. (Ha'Aretz, English Edition, 23/12/99)

Nimrod Aloni, a teacher at the Seminar Hakibbutzim attempts to teach that Jesus, "the figure of a wonderful individual, the main point of whose teaching

was love and charity and pity and solidarity and all the beautiful things, was exploited by the religious establishment, the Christian church, the Crusades and the Inquisition..." (Ha'Aretz, English Edition, 23/12/99)

There is a degree of consensus among all of the educators quoted in this article: Jesus should be taught in the Israeli school system. According to Eyal Naveh, author of a recently published history of the 20th century,

Ignoring Jesus is part of the tendency to concentrate only on ourselves, as if we had sprung up outside a universal context. In the case of Jesus, this is especially absurd, because Jesus is linked to our development. I hope that things will change, and that the system will realize that history is not just a collection of facts, but is about substantial issues that shape our world. The connection between Judaism and Christianity is definitely one of the issues that shapes our world. (Ha'Aretz, English Edition, 23/12/99)

Conclusion

Two important events have influenced Israeli thought about Jesus in the last year. Both the advent of the new millennium and the historic visit of the Pope have had significant and probably lasting influence on the consciousness of Israel in regards to Jesus and Christianity.

Jesus is being talked about, written about, and discussed in Israel more than he has ever been. The so-called "conspiracy of silence" surrounding him is being shattered, both in academic and in popular circles. It has taken much longer for the popular consciousness to be penetrated by Jesus than for those involved in academic research to recognize the centrality of Jesus in the western world.

Popular journalism can be a key to open the Israeli mind, closed and insulated as it has been against Jesus. As reports about books, and articles that deal directly with Jesus proliferate in the popular media, the sealed consciousness of the average Israeli can be breached. As many of the articles eloquently express, Jesus remains a compelling figure when once he is entertained.

An Interaction with a New Book on Modern Jewish Believers in Yeshua

Gershon Nerel¹

August 2000 a new book was released on the modern history of two movements: the missions and Jewish believers in Yeshua.¹⁷³

With this remarkable magnum opus, Yaakov Ariel establishes a unique prototype in the modern historiography of Jewish Christian encounter. From a panoramic perspective, Ariel vividly tells the sensitive story of “Jewish conversion to Christianity” – primarily in America but also in the land of Israel – in particular during the 20th century. This is a well-documented and balanced book, examining theological teachings, symbols and social interconnections, from both Christian and Jewish conventional standpoints. Following the evangelization initiatives, Ariel describes the effects of these activities among Jewish believers in Yeshua (JBY), then portrays the reactions of mainstream Judaism, reform and orthodox.

Here Ariel depicts a stimulant phenomenon that can no longer be viewed as episodic or inconsiderable. With the professional tools of a historian, a sociologist and a theologian, Ariel provides his extensive observations concerning modern JBY. Therefore this book is a rich, solid and updated mine of information on issues that are of special interest to Jews and Christians alike.¹⁷⁴

Ariel skillfully demonstrates that alongside the unilateral targeting of Jews by the missionary organizations, there also existed a bilateral track: the ongoing process of mutual exchange of ideas between Jews and Christians. While gentile Christians were evangelizing the chosen people, usually with respect and far from using the Church traditional teachings of contempt, they themselves were also influenced by Jewish ways of thinking and practices.

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1 *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1800-2000*, Yaakov Ariel; The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 2000. Pp. 367.

¹⁷⁴ For additional comparisons, see, for example, Mitchell Glaser, “A Survey of the History of Missions to the Jews in New York City 1900-1930,” in: *Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism Bulletin*, no. 38 (Nov. 1994), pp. 12-27.

Thus, for example, both sides became more aware and cautious about ancient prejudices relating to the other group. Hence, Ariel de facto introduces an original post-polemic approach into the study of modern Jewish Christian encounter.

A Post-Polemical Era

In this study on Messianic values and Messianic groups, Ariel focuses on the fundamentalist Protestant understanding of Israel's election, and Israel's place in a divine plan formulating humanity's history of salvation. The salient thread of scarlet throughout Ariel's presentation is the dispensationalist theology, that so deeply shaped Protestant policy to systematically evangelize the Jews. Conservative American Protestantism, following earlier German Pietism and Anglican Puritanism, was heavily motivated by a premillennialist understanding of the course of human history and the special role of Israel in it. For such evangelical groups, the Jews were the historical Israel, *the* chosen people, predestined to perform a dominant role in the great events of the end times (pp. 10; 81; 164; 253).

Expectations about fulfilled prophecy concerning the Jews returning to the land of their forefathers, and eventually accepting Yeshua as their promised King Messiah, played a significant role within the missionary circles. From cover to cover, Ariel insistently reminds his reader about this hermeneutical leitmotif. Throughout the entire book the reader is compelled to realize how powerfully the eschatological interpretations influenced the fundamentalist streams. Consequently, basic theological issues like who is verus Israel (true Israel), as well as Jewish and gentile believers who have to share a common biblical heritage, are presented here from a non-polemical perspective.

It is striking that Ariel's post-polemic scholarly approach actually correlates with the fresh historical assessments of Prof. Israel Jacob Yuval from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Namely, that following the *Shoah* (Holocaust) and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, a new era dawned in the reciprocal understanding and perceptions among Jews and Christians. According to Yuval, the restoration of the Jews to their homeland about half a century ago, indicating the end of their compulsory exilic status, revolutionized the classical Christian polemics against the Jews and Judaism. That is to say that in recent generations the grounds for Christian theologians' traditional anti-Jewish polemics came to an end.¹⁷⁵

However, alongside these post-exilic and post-polemic arguments, we should remind ourselves that the roots of such new theological perceptions

¹⁷⁵ See recently Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv 2000, especially pp. 12-13; 16-18; 28-39; 301- 305 (in Hebrew).

among Christians are to be placed earlier than half a century or even two centuries ago. The starting point actually goes back to the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation in the period between the 16th-18th centuries.

The Impact of the Bible

When Protestants started to focus upon the role of Israel within their premillennialist exegesis, they already visualized the eschatological meta-history as a factual reality. Thus several centuries *before* the Jews returned to their land, in the eyes of conservative Protestants the biblical meta-history of Israel's messianic future already stood as a realistic setting.

In other words, the preoccupation of Protestants with the vernacular Bible is *the* key to understanding the urge to evangelize the Jews. Thus, for example, the new Bible translations, the establishment of Bible societies, and in particular the use of Bible portions in evangelism with a literal interpretation of biblical prophecy, all greatly contributed to energize the missions movement to the Jews (see pp. 75; 134-135; 304). "Broadly, in Catholicism the emphasis has been laid on the Church and on the Bible as understood within the Church, while in Protestantism the stress has fallen on the Bible and on the Church as created and recreated by the Word of God enshrined in Scripture."¹⁷⁶

The Imminent Return of the Messiah

In the historic disputations between Christians and Jews, the theologians mainly focused on past events, often dealing with the theme of Israel's rejection and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. In the modern post-polemic era, however, one discovers that Christian theologians highly focus on eschatological events. Ariel rightly demonstrates that when the Protestant missionaries eagerly attempted to evangelize the Jews, they had in their minds, as well as in their daily talks, the special place of the Jews in the millennial messianic age (pp. 17-18; 34).

Throughout his book, Ariel succeeds to highlight the following motto: because American Protestants expected the soon second coming of Yeshua, prior to the establishment of his millennial kingdom from Jerusalem (Revelation 20), they also anticipated the national restoration and the spiritual conversion of the Jewish people. The rise of territorial Zionism in the Land of Israel, for example, was interpreted by the missionaries as a clear "sign of the times" (Matthew 16:3), indicating that the eschatological drama was beginning to unfold (pp. 13; 51; 140; 214).

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¹⁷⁶ Eric Fenn, "The Bible and the Missionary," in: S.L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (The West from the Reformation to the Present Day), Cambridge 1963, pp. 383-384.

Interestingly, today ecumenical Catholicism develops its own pattern of post-polemic attitude. Following *Nostra aetate*, Catholics increasingly disseminate the teaching of Israel's unique role in end times events. Leading theologians of the Roman church now officially highlight the eschatological role of the Jewish people, especially vis-a-vis the second coming of Yeshua. Thus, for example, the Latin church talks about the mystery of the Jewish people within the eschatological finality.

Today Catholic prelates openly refer to contemporary Jews as the continuation of biblical Israel, "according to their Election." In other words, now we also see Catholics who revise the traditional replacement theology of the church. In connection with Yeshua's second coming, Catholics produce a new dispensational vocabulary, with eschatological terms like "Israel's plenitude of redemption," and the end-time newness of all Israel "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11: 25).

Thus, while the Catholic Church emphasizes interfaith dialogue, it also reaffirms its role to witness (not "missionize" in the sense of assimilation) about the Good News especially to the Jews. At the same time, however, Catholics equally stress that the Jews must, even after their acceptance of Yeshua, keep their Jewish identity in a unique form.¹⁷⁷ Thus, for example, Hebrew Catholics feel free to announce that the divine plan of salvation has entered the phase of the apostasy of the gentiles.¹⁷⁸

Such developments within the Catholic Church are most surprising, especially when compared to the Protestant milieu. In his book, Ariel is systematically analyzing the growing division between the liberal 'modernists' and the conservative 'fundamentalists' in American Protestantism. Thus, it is ironic that when more Protestant liberals demand to abandon the evangelization of the Jews (pp. 132-133; 184-185; 239), it is the Catholic conservative "ecumenicals" who endorse an agenda of witnessing about Yeshua to the Jews. Upon their imminent eschatology, these Catholics now fully support the unique and enduring identity of JBY without asking for their assimilation.

A Post-Apologetic Era

As a matter of principle, Ariel does accept as authentic and reliable the different kinds of narratives originating from *within* the movement of JBY. For example, in contrast to many traditionalist historians, Ariel does not doubt the intrinsic

¹⁷⁷ Jean-Miguel Garrigues, "Antijudaïsme et théologie d'Israël," in: *Radici dell'antigiudaismo in ambiente Cristiano*, Atti e Documenti no. 8, Vatican 2000, pp. 321-335.

¹⁷⁸ *The Hebrew Catholic*, Publication of the Association of Hebrew Catholics, no. 72, Fall 2000 - Jubilee Year, p. 2. See also 'News and Notes' and other articles there, especially pp. 3-9.

truth and the usefulness of biographical accounts written by JBY (pp. 167-168). Similarly, Ariel also does not question the reliability of the information he gathered through many personal interviews, reports, tracts and books produced by JBY. Generally Ariel views all these primary sources as genuine and valid historic material.

However in some exceptional places in his book, even when dealing with trustworthy texts and documents, Ariel still sticks to the biased opinion that writings of JBY have to be defined as "apologetic." This happens also in cases in which the author knows personally the trustworthiness of his sources, as well as the accuracy of various texts and documents. Namely, just because some information is presented by JBY, including scholarly material, Ariel still remains suspicious and "warns" his readers that a specific source "takes an apologetic line" (pp. 247-249; 316; 324). Thus, when the author of the book exposes certain data as "apologetic," he indirectly says that he personally does not fully agree with the views expressed in that "apologetic data."

In our computer and internet generation, it is especially evident that any social or political "propaganda" or commercial advertising bombardment, are simply "apologetics" for some cause, purpose or product. Individuals as well as corporations openly develop their marketing skills. Indeed, in almost every area in our lives we observe someone using techniques of (mass) salesmanship, as they are "selling" something abstract or physical (see pp. 101; 205; 215).

Ariel himself offers an example of this "marketing." After he decided to publish his own *Edut* (testimony) about his personal experiences in Syria, as a young Israeli Prisoner of War in 1973-1974, there is no justification to define his painful memoir accounts as an apologetic narrative of a veteran soldier.¹⁷⁹

Therefore, in an era of "no more polemics and no more apologetics," the real legitimate reservations should focus on the issue of ethics.¹⁸⁰ Unfortunately, it is a historical fact that occasionally unethical methods were employed by missionaries, and Ariel does relate this in his book (pp. 69-70; 234). Yet, of course, integrity and morality are most significant issues in every sphere (in the field of scholarly work, for example), and not only in missions. In sum, unconventional opinions or theses that dare to oppose mainstream views should not be too hastily labeled as "apologetic."

Jewish Yeshua-Believers in the Land of Israel

Large parts in Ariel's book deal with the history of JBY in Mandatory Palestine and in the State of Israel. American missions quite naturally were interested to

¹⁷⁹ Yaakov Ariel, *The Road to Damascus: A Story of a Prisoner*, Sifriat Poalim, Tel Aviv 1999, p. 91 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, David Brickner, "An Ethical War: The Struggle for Integrity in Jewish Evangelism in North America," in *Mishkan*, no. 19 (1993), pp. 14-20.

extend their activities to the major arena of the eschatological drama: *Eretz-Israel*, the biblical land of Israel. Old missionary organizations, like the *Chicago Hebrew Mission*, which in 1953 changed its name to *American Messianic Fellowship*, and the *Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA)*, played significant roles in Jewish evangelism in the land of the Bible (pp. 24-25; 116-117; 141-143). New organizations like *Jews for Jesus* and *Ariel Ministries* are also an interesting part of that mosaic.

Several facts about personalities and the situation in Palestine and later Israel need to be rectified. First, Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir did not immigrate to Palestine (p. 99). Ben-Meir was born in Jerusalem in 1905, and in 1927 went to Chicago to study at Moody Bible Institute. After three years, on February 28, 1930, Ben-Meir returned to "dear old Palestine" and settled in Haifa.¹⁸¹ Second, during the 1930s and 1940s Haim Haimoff (Bar-David) was in Jerusalem a local staff evangelist with C&MA for more than a decade. This was before Haimoff became a missionary for the *American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ)* and then the *American Association for Jewish Evangelism (AAJE)* (pp. 117-118; 148). Third, not all missionaries in Israel were paid an American salary (p. 148).¹⁸²

Fourth, contrary to what Ariel says (p. 141), Hyman Jacobs, the representative of the Chicago Hebrew Mission in Mandatory Palestine in the 1920s, *did* want to establish an independent congregation of JBY in Jerusalem. Thus on November 22, 1925 Jacobs and his friend Dr. Arne Jonsen founded in Jerusalem a Hebrew-speaking congregation of "*Yehudim Meshihiim*" (Messianic Jews). It was the mission headquarters in Chicago that firmly opposed Jacobs. He was accused of practicing "too Judaistic" characteristics in a newly founded congregation between the years 1925-1929. As a matter of fact, Jacobs had to face the Mission's accusations that he was a "Judaizer," bordering on heresy.

Eventually Jacobs was forced to "repent" and to abandon the congregation that originally had been so important for him. Thus Jacobs subjected himself to the Mission's agenda. De facto Jacob's Manifesto *Nationality and Religion (1927)* was attacked and rejected by the *Chicago Hebrew Mission*. Jacobs ended his career in Palestine as an itinerant missionary.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, *Personal Diary*, unpublished manuscript (In Gershon Nerel's collection).

¹⁸² Interview with the late Haim Joseph Haimoff, Ramat-Gan, December 1986, and with his widow Rachel (Shelly), in July 1994. See also Gershon Nerel, "Rachel Bar-David: Mother of a Modern Israeli Messianic Jewish 'Tribe'," in: *The Messianic Jew and Hebrew Christian*, vol. 67 (1994), pp. 66-70.

¹⁸³ See Gershon Nerel, "The Formation and Dissolution of a 'Messianic Jewish' (Hebrew Christian) Community in Jerusalem in the 1920s," in: *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies, The World Union of Jewish Studies/ Hebrew University, Jerusalem 2000* (Forthcoming).

“Messianic Judaism” - A Product of the Diaspora, for the Diaspora

The shaping of the American Messianic Jewish movement is a weighty part of Ariel's book. Step by step the reader discovers how older generations of Hebrew Christians turned to be a young and energetic Messianic Jewish movement. The author shows how Messianic Judaism remained the offspring of the missionary movement, “and the ties would never be broken” (p. 223).

A most significant observation that Ariel makes about the American Messianic Jewish community is described as follows: “In sharp contrast to the demographics of American synagogues, the Messianic communities consist mostly of persons of the baby boom and baby buster generations and Generation X - those who have come of age in the 1960s and later. It lacks older generations” (p. 248).

In addition to this observation, we should also mention that the current leadership in the American Messianic Jewish movement gained its higher education in missionary or denominational institutions. The basic theological reasoning of this leadership is rooted in the Diaspora, surrounded and influenced by traditional Church dogmatics.

It is no secret that American Messianic Jewish communities lack the influence and experience of older generations of JBY. Practically, the American scene lacks the substantial background and insights of senior theologians that lived in the decades prior to the 1960s and 1970s. The sharp separation from the old guard of Hebrew Christians was too premature. The way that the current leadership develops Messianic Judaism in America actually serves to safeguard the Jewish identity of Jewish believers in Yeshua in the Diaspora.

The tools for that survival in the Diaspora are the rabbinical traditions and rites. Thus, their substantial goal is to perpetuate the existence of JBY in the *Golah* - the Jewish dispersion. A major outcome of this situation is that in reality the message of Messianic Judaism replaces the message of the Kingdom of God, and even comes instead of the teachings of Yeshua himself.

One cannot avoid making comparisons with the situation of JBY in the state of Israel. In Israel JBY are struggling differently with issues such as “who is/who is not a Jew.” The theoretical and practical expressions of Judaism in Israel are constantly shifting. Unlike in America, for example, cooking and eating East-European food are non-issues. Furthermore, also the designation “Messianic Jew” in a Hebrew-speaking milieu is more and more inaccurate, because the followers of other “Messiahs,” like the *Lubavitcher*, are by definition also Messianic Jews. Thus Israeli JBY now attempt to introduce a direct Hebrew nomenclature like “*Yehudim Hassidei Yeshua*” - Jewish followers, or disciples, of Yeshua. Such an appellation leaves no room for misunderstandings. Davidic folk dance is also a non-issue in Israel.

In contrast to the situation in America (pp. 226; 233), JBY in Israel don't call their brethren teachers or elders rabbis, and their schools are not *yeshivot*.

Unlike in the Diaspora, most Israeli JBY express their Jewishness without observing rabbinical traditions. Practically, to be an Israeli Jew one has to be an integral part of the local society. Israeli JBY serve in the IDF and their children attend Israeli public schools, so they daily share their lives within the Jewish society. It is obvious especially in the state of Israel that observing rabbinical traditions does not mean that one practices authentic Judaism.

Most Israelis are secular Jews.¹⁸⁴ An Israeli Jewish believer in Yeshua simply lives in the land and follows the Old and New Testaments. Of course the *Torah* is and remains significant for JBY, but it is the real centrality of Yeshua that makes the difference. Meanwhile some American JBY still think that it is enough to obtain a certificate of Israeli citizenship or to own a flat in the land, while de facto they continue to live and raise their children in America.

Summary

The second page of this book informs the reader that large parts of Ariel's research have already appeared, in a different form, in other scholarly journals. Indeed, Ariel is a prolific and original historian, who publishes many and groundbreaking articles that deal directly and indirectly with the theme of the present synthesis. It is obvious that Ariel's pioneer and systematic contributions on various aspects have now reached substantial fruition.

I would recommend that within the future editions of this book, which most probably will follow, the index part will be completed, updated and enlarged. Ariel's valuable text deserves a comprehensive index. Major entries like "autobiography," "Americanization," "Cross," "Haggada," and "Judaizer," to mention only few, should appear in the book's index. Other entries that are already listed, like "End Times" and "Charismatics," again to mention only few, are incomplete. In next editions the reader will benefit if provided in the index with most variations of key-terms.

As Ariel's study deals extensively also with JBY in Israel, it seems to me that the sub-title of the book is misleading. Perhaps in the next editions of the book, the sub-title should rather say American Missions to the Jews. Thus *prima facie* the reader would not expect to find only a discussion about the situation in America.

This timely book will undoubtedly capture a central place in every serious discussion and bibliography dealing with the modern movement of Jewish Yeshua-believers. I would strongly recommend that as soon as possible Ariel's book will be translated also into other languages – including Hebrew.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, Yedidyah Yitzhaki, *Principles of Jewish Secularity {With an Uncovered Head}*, Haifa University Press/ Zmora-Bitan 2000 (in Hebrew), especially pp. 174-175.

Book Reviews

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to his White Mother. James McBride. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.

Turbulent Souls: A Catholic Son's Return to his Jewish Family. Stephen J. Dubner. New York: William Morrow & Co. , 1998.

Menahem Benhayim

The young authors of these two memoirs were the grandchildren of two strikingly nonconformist "yiddishe mommas." Born into East European immigrant families in the same year, 1921, they had been cut off from their Jewish families, an excision consummated by the rite of *shiva*, the seven-day mourning period for dead kinfolk and for "apostates."

One of the women, Ruth (Shilsky) McBride, had thoroughly integrated into the New York black community, a bold move in the 1940s for a Jewish girl raised in the still-segregated American south. It begins with the sad tale of her youth as the daughter of a corrupt immigrant rabbi wedded to a crippled Jewish immigrant who suffered his abuse alongside their children, recalled against a background of hypocritical religion. "I started to become a Christian, and the Jew in me began to die," she notes when reluctantly agreeing to record her past for her journalist son.

She had raised 12 children in the course of successive marriages to two black husbands, and hammered into their heads, with the passion of traditional Jewish mothers, the importance of education; each of them earned a university degree in a wide range of professions. At the same time, she was actively involved in African-American churches. McBride writes in his acknowledgments: "My mother and I would like to thank the Lord Jesus Christ for his love and faithfulness," affirming their evangelical faith.

The second "yiddishe momma," Florence (Veronica) Greenglass Dubner, was raised in Brooklyn, New York during the same period. Florence was studying ballet under the tutelage of a domineering Roman Catholic convert from Russian orthodoxy. Attracted to the church, Florence met another Jewish seeker, Solly ("Shloime") Dubner who not long after followed her to the baptismal font. Raised by a very unemancipated father who simply could not cope with the New World his children strove to embrace, Solly wanted to be like Hank Greenberg, the famed Jewish baseball star, to write for newspapers, to play a saxophone, or to sing the popular Yiddish tear-jerker, "Mein Yiddishe Momma," in a nightclub, fantasizing his beloved mother aglow with pride. His visions clashed with his father's desire for his son to be a Torah-true Jew.

Upon returning home after military service in the South Pacific during World War II, he found his father sitting in the dark, sobbing, his shirt torn, as Solly's rosary beads lay on the floor. "You're not a Jew any more; you're not my son any more," he declared grief-stricken in Yiddish. But Solly had for some time stopped thinking of himself as a Jew during the process of conversion. His baptismal name became Paul, and Florence became Veronica. After their marriage, they retained the family name Dubner, but the eight children they reared lived in an atmosphere of total devotion to the Catholic Church, acknowledging, when asked, that they had been Jews but were now Catholics.

Solly-Paul suffered intermittently from bouts of depression which finally yielded to a Charismatic renewal healing service, but only about a year later he succumbed to a stroke and died peacefully while a nun at his bedside recited the "Hail Mary." Only 10 years old at the time, author Stephen could not accept the assurance of his mother and her friends that "Dad was with God in Heaven now." By the time he went off to university, little was left of Stephen's childhood faith apart from a belief in God, which had become quite nominal. Moving to New York City, he began to encounter Jews of all sorts, and even collaborated with a Habad hassid on a book of the Lubavitcher rebbe's teachings while editing the New York Times magazine section. Increasingly drawn to Judaism and Jewish life, he decided to reclaim his Jewish relatives. He enlisted his mother for a "family reclamation project" and began to visit the synagogue and practice traditional Judaism; his ties with his still devout Jewish Catholic mother became strained. Ironically, it was New York's Cardinal John O'Connor who helped effect a reconciliation based on Vatican II and Pope John Paul's teachings about the continued validity of Judaism, and the "informed conscience" which could allow mother and son to live in peace with their respective faiths.

These are stories worth telling, and are told well, yet not without reflecting a profound sadness at what they tell us of both the Church and the Synagogue. Both mothers had accepted the verdict of excommunication by the Synagogue and, tacitly, of the Church, that they were no longer Jews, and transmitted this sense to their offspring. While the McBride family saga was complicated by the crossing of racial lines in a racist society, the Dubner story is complicated by the rejection of all forms of Christian faith by the author and several of his siblings.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church has made giant strides in reversing longstanding antagonism toward Jewish life and faith and even permitted a Hebrew Catholic movement to emerge. The evangelical world has also shown a willingness to accept an incipient Nazarene gospel which embraces Yeshua and Jewish identity, but tends to maintain classical negative attitudes towards Judaism.

The parents of McBride and Dubner were willing to take bold, even heroic steps in defying the conventional wisdom of their generation in matters of race

and faith. Can their children in a more tolerant atmosphere integrate their Jewishness with faith in the Jewish Jesus as many from both Catholic and Evangelical backgrounds are striving to do? These two books are well worth reading and studying for all who are concerned for the full renewal of a genuine Jewish New Covenant movement involved in the encounter with both Church and Synagogue.

"That Man," Jews Talk About Jesus (Jesus Through Jewish Eyes). Avigdor Shaanan (ed.) [Hebrew]. Tel-Aviv: Yediot akhronot, Sifrei hemed, 1999.¹⁸⁵

Menahem Benhayim

"There was a man in Israel whose name was Yeshua. His life span was brief, about thirty-five years in all, but his image, his life story, his followers and the religion built around him and his gospel have left an ineradicable impression on world history during the past two thousand years." With these words professor Shaanan introduces his subject in a Hebrew anthology which aims to present a diversified perspective of 35 Jewish writings on the subject of "that man" (an orthodox Jewish form of evading the original Hebrew name of Jesus).

The contributors span antiquity (Josephus and Talmud), the medieval polemicists and the protest fables of "Toldot Yeshu," and modern Jewish writers. Some are serious emancipated historians like Graetz, Dubnow, Klausner and Flusser, while others are bitter polemical writers echoing the Christian "teaching of contempt" with a Jewish equivalent directed against Jesus and Christianity. Also included are modern Israeli novelists creating imaginative portraits of the Jewish Jesus, often sympathetic but occasionally reflecting the dark shadows of the medieval past as well as the Holocaust of their generation.

Shaanan provides an introductory article, blending passages from the New Testament and modern theories about the formation of the Gospels; and also short vignettes about the 35 writers he has selected for his anthology.

Is the result a balanced work? Not really! While reading it, I must confess to more than a little exasperation at what I perceived to be the clear bias of Shaanan towards including the most negative writings extant. Granted, the church's regrettable presentation of Jesus and Christian faith have often supplied the main threat to the religious, ethnic and sometimes physical

¹⁸⁵ Mishkan does not normally carry review of books in Hebrew. An exception was made with this book for this issue on the Jewish reclamation of Jesus.

survival of the Jewish people. Yet some Jewish voices continue to recognize the positive aspects of Yeshua beyond the misuse of his name and alleged teaching to defame Jews and Judaism.

Shaanan does include brief comments from the philosopher-physician Maimonides and the poet Yehuda HaLevy who, while denying Yeshua's Messiahship, affirm his role in the messianic destiny of the nations. Still, Shaanan makes no mention of Jacob Emden, the well-known 17th century rabbinic leader who lived before the civil emancipation of the Jews and wrote a remarkably positive circular letter to the Jewish communities of East Europe ("the Four Lands") about the life and work of Yeshua as well as the apostle Paul; not a word is included by Shaanan.

On the other hand, he includes two obscure East European Jews (Efraim Deinard and Yehuda Eisenstein) who settled in the U.S. and encountered enlightened Christians within a non-persecuting, and often friendly Christian society; (one of them is at a loss to explain to himself how such men can be believing Christians); yet they pour out all the venom of their anguished spirits on the Christ who supposedly never existed, creating hideous caricatures of selected verses from the Gospels and demolishing them.

There is not a word from the great Yiddish writer Sholem Asch, author of "The Nazarene," the English Jewish scholar of the Gospels, Claude Montefiore, Martin Buber ("Jesus...my great brother"), among many other Jewish writers and thinkers who pioneered in the recovery of the Jewish Jesus and the Jewish New Testament sources, some of which were indeed the target of poison pen attacks by the likes of Deinard.

In his introduction Professor Shaanan also refers to the phenomenon of "Jews for Jesus" (synonymous to him for all modern Jews seeking to revive the ancient Nazarene movement, which is certainly not the intent of the fundamentalist JFJ). They are accused of trying to "turn the clock of history backward without rhyme or reason" (a charge, ironically, made until recently against Zionism, and against the revival of Hebrew as the national vernacular.

With such an attitude, one cannot expect that modern Hebrew works, or translation from other languages to Hebrew, by Messianic Jews or their predecessors (Edersheim, Kac, Baron, Rabinowitz etc.) would be included. Nevertheless, the editor does make mention on the last page for "suggested further reading" the work of the Hebrew Christian scholar Jacob Jocz, " The Jewish People and Jesus Christ."

For Hebrew-reading believers this is a work which can make for hard reading; but for those who seek insight into what some Jews have written about Yeshua this may be a worthwhile, if painful, exercise. It will disprove once again the ironic response of the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, a proponent of Dual Covenant theology, (who is also absent from this collection) to the question "What do Jews think of Jesus?" (They don't!").

As someone has wisely remarked about Caesar: "Men do not continue to burn for or against Julius Caesar, but they continue to burn for or against Jesus Christ!" Whether or not Shaanan intended it, his book demonstrates again how relevant Yeshua remains for Jews as for the nations at the beginning of this 21st century.

Jesus. David Flusser, in collaboration with R. Steven Notley. Revised Edition. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press and the Hebrew University, 1997. Pp. 297. ISBN 965-223-978-X.

Craig A. Evans

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The focus of David Flusser's newly revised *Jesus* (the original edition appeared in German in 1968 and in English in 1969) touches many aspects of Jesus research and Gospel interpretation. In the preface Flusser explains that the new edition includes "fresh insights drawn from both rabbinic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls" (p. 13), a claim that will receive special attention in this review.

Before turning to Flusser's use of the Scrolls and recent archaeological finds, it will be helpful to review his assumptions and methods. In chap. 1 ("The Sources") Flusser states his view of the literary relationship of the synoptic gospels. He believes that "Luke preserves . . . the original tradition," and that "Matthew, when independent of Mark, frequently preserves the earlier sources of the life of Jesus that lie behind Luke's Gospel. Hence, Luke and Matthew together provide the most authentic portrayal of Jesus' life and teachings" (pp. 21-22). Flusser's solution of the synoptic problem is unconventional by the standards of all gospel scholars. Most scholars believe Mark is the earliest gospel and that Matthew and Luke, independently of one another, made use of Mark and another body of materials, the so-called *Quelle* (or "Q"). The view of Flusser and his collaborators (see *Mishkan* no 17-18) that Luke preserves the earliest gospel tradition and retains primitive, Semitic traditions is a scholarly curiosity.

The implications of Flusser's synoptic hypothesis are seen in a variety of ways in his work. The assumption of putative Hebrew sources underlying Luke and Matthew (according to Flusser, Hebrew, not Aramaic, is the language in which Jesus customarily taught) sometimes leads Flusser to propose underlying mistranslations or misunderstandings. Getting "behind" the Greek Gospels to their Hebrew sources, he thinks, often solves historical, cultural, and exegetical conundra. In most cases, however, these efforts are unconvincing

and unnecessary. The reader needs to know that this thinking lies behind the frequent appeals to rabbinic literature and proposed retroversions into Hebrew.

An example: In chap. 11 ("Death") Flusser contends that Mark invented the night session of the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53-65), as well as the court's condemnation of Jesus (pp. 146-47). He reaches this conclusion because of the Matthean story of Joseph of Arimathea, who buried Jesus in his tomb (Matt 27:57-61; cf. John 19:38-42), and the Johannine story of Nicodemus, who speaks in Jesus' defense (John 7:50-52; cf. 3:1-9; 19:39). Because these two members of the Sanhedrin were friendly to Jesus, Flusser believes this casts doubt on the Markan story of the Sanhedrin's verdict against Jesus. Instead, Jesus was held overnight by Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas and then was delivered to a Temple committee for a brief inquiry. Flusser comes to this conclusion because of tension with mishnaic tradition and because of Lukan priority.

There are a number of problems here. Many gospel scholars suspect that apologetics are at work with respect to the stories of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. But Flusser takes all of this very seriously and tries to trace the history of Nicodemus in rabbinic and other sources. Even if we accept Flusser's point about the friendly Joseph and Nicodemus, that still does not necessarily discount Mark's nocturnal proceedings. Indeed, Flusser himself suspects that Caiaphas called together only those who would support his plans to do away with Jesus. I think Flusser has attached too much technical significance to the word "sanhedrin" (or "council"), as well as too much credence to later mishnaic traditions. Surely Mark does not mean to imply a formal convening of the full body of the Sanhedrin. He probably has in mind only some members, who, as Flusser sensibly suggests, were in essential agreement with the ruling priests.

Let us now turn to Flusser's use of the Dead Sea Scrolls. With the exception of 4Q521 Messianic Apocalypse, which was published in 1991, the Scrolls taken into account by Flusser have been available for twenty to thirty (or more) years. In chap. 3 ("Baptism") Flusser makes judicious use of the Community Rule in discussing the importance of Isa 40:3 for the Essenes and John the Baptist. He suspects John had been a member of the Essenes, then had broken away to preach to the public (pp. 37-38). Flusser has entered the realm of speculation here, but most would agree that it is reasonable speculation.

Flusser accepts the tradition that at his baptism Jesus heard a heavenly voice, probably quoting Isa 42:1 (pp. 40-41). It was at this time that Jesus recognized his calling and began his ministry. Commenting on Jesus' relationship to John, Flusser discusses the former's response to the question of the latter (Matt 11:2-6 = Luke 7:18-23). In a footnote (p. 49 n. 22) Flusser cites 4Q521 and the allusions to Isa 26:19; 35:5; and 61:1 that this Qumran text has in common with Jesus' reply to John. Apart from mentioning that cleansing of lepers is the only unparalleled element, Flusser has nothing else to say about

this remarkable text and the importance it has for clarifying significant aspects of Jesus' self-understanding. With one exception, important studies on the subject are not mentioned. On p. 50 Flusser mentions Jesus' appeal to Isa 61:1-2 (cf. Luke 4:18-21) but says nothing about 4Q521. Of related interest, in chap. 6 ("Ethics") Flusser cites the Community Rule and the Damascus Document, commenting on the separatism of the Essenes, including their hatred of outsiders. Here Flusser refers to the phrase "poor in spirit," but again only in passing mentions 4Q521 (p. 95 n. 8).

In chap. 7 ("Kingdom of Heaven") Flusser comes to the heart of Jesus' message. Here Flusser is obviously not current. He states, "Because there were clear similarities between the rabbinic idea of the kingdom and that of Jesus, we may assume that Jesus developed their idea. This concept did not appear among the Essenes" (p. 106). The first part of this statement is not controversial, for Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God has close affinities to the announcement of the kingdom in the targums of Isaiah and Zechariah. These affinities with the Aramaic paraphrasing, which reflects interpretive emphases in the synagogue, are probably consistent with rabbinic ideas. The second part of Flusser's statement, however, is problematic. The plethora of references to God's kingdom in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* contradicts Flusser's claim that this "concept did not appear among the Essenes." As these texts have been known since 1986, Flusser's failure to make use of them is hard to explain.

We encounter similar problems in chap. 8 ("The Son"). Here we find no mention of 4Q246 Aramaic Apocalypse (often called "the Son of God text"), parts of which were first published in 1974, and then fully and critically in 1993. The importance of this text for study of Jewish messianism and its implications for the emergence of Christian interpretation of Jesus are widely recognized among gospel scholars. Flusser's failure to discuss this text is accordingly quite strange. Also other pertinent texts are neglected. Flusser says nothing about 1Qsa (Messianic Rule), which may contain an allusion to Ps 2:7, nothing about 4Q174 Florilegium, which interprets 2 Sam 7:14 messianically ("he shall be my son"), and nothing about 4Q369 Prayer of Enosh, which speaks of a "first-born son" who appears to have been instructed "in eternal light." 1Qsa and 4Q174 were published decades ago, while the text of 4Q369 became available in 1992 and 1995 (the messianic interpretation of this text has been recently challenged by Kugel, the above designations may refer to the people of Israel).

Ignoring these important texts from Qumran, Flusser instead speaks of the late and probably spurious rabbinic tradition in which we are told that a heavenly voice addressed Hanina ben Dosa as "my son" (*b. Taan.* 24b). The Hanina tradition is not irrelevant, but surely it is secondary in importance to other sources. Flusser, moreover, does not discuss 2 Sam 7:13-14 or Ps 2:7, traditions echoed in Luke 1:32-35 (and 4Q246), which contribute in essential

ways to the idea of the Messiah as the “son of God.” (Flusser mentions Ps 2:7 only in n. 24 on p. 24, in reference to his discussion of the “son of man.”)

In chap. 9 (“Son of Man”) Flusser rightly directs our attention to Daniel 7, eschewing the unnecessary skepticism of much modern criticism. However, he is caught in a bind in trying to explain why the Hebrew-speaking Jesus would make use of an Aramaic epithet drawn from an Aramaic book in the Bible. His solution, based on the reference to Abel as the “son of Adam” who sits on a throne and will come in judgment according to the *Testament of Abraham*, is convoluted and unconvincing.

Flusser also appeals to 11QMelchizedek. It must be acknowledged that the mysterious figure Melchizedek in this difficult, fragmentary text may shed light on the christology of the author of Hebrews, but it is not clear that it is relevant for understanding the historical Jesus. It is true that Jesus is said to have alluded to Ps 110:1 (and Dan 7:13) in his reply to Caiaphas (cf. Mark 14:61-62), but priestly or Melchizedekian ideas cannot be said to be in view. Flusser rightly suspects that Jesus did see himself as the eschatological son of man.

Finally, regarding what Flusser says about messianism and the factors leading up to Jesus’ death (chaps. 8, 9, and 11), it is odd that he makes no mention of 4Q285, one of the war scroll texts. This composition vividly attests the expectation of a militant Messiah. The prophetic hope of a “branch of David” who would defeat the Kittim (i.e. the Romans) and even slay their leader (probably the Roman Emperor) potentially clarifies Pontius Pilate’s decision to crucify Jesus as “king of the Jews” (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26). Jesus’ ethical teachings do not easily account for what happened in Jerusalem that fateful Passover. But if the Messiah’s role in the proclaimed kingdom of God is anything approximating what was expected in 4Q285, then Pilate’s action (and the actions of the Jewish leaders also) is entirely understandable. Proclamation of the kingdom of God, seen through the lens of war scroll texts, could easily have been perceived by Roman authorities as a declaration of holy war.

There are other Scrolls that were published decades ago that one might have expected to appear in Flusser’s book. One thinks of 1QSb (Rule of Benections) and 4Q252 (a Genesis commentary), both of which interpret Jacob’s blessing on Judah in a messianic sense. One also thinks of 4QpesherIsa^a, which interprets (as does 4Q285) Isa 10:34–11:5 in a messianic sense. Texts published in 1991 that could have been taken into consideration include 4Q215Work of Righteousness, that anticipates an era of righteousness when “the earth will be full of knowledge and praise of God,” 4Q251, a halakic text that has a direct bearing on the dispute concerning work on the⁸⁷sabbath (cf. Luke 14:5), 4Q390Pseudo-Moses, a text whose criticisms of the Temple establishment might clarify Jesus’ complaints in the Temple precincts (Mark 11–12), 4Q491, which contains a canticle that may describe the heavenly ascent of a mystic (cf. Luke 10:18; Mark 14:62), 4Q525, a wisdom text that contains beatitudes and warnings about the

angelic leader Mastema and his demonic allies (cf. Luke 10:19), 4Q554, a New Jerusalem text mentioning the antagonistic people of the Kittim and a kingdom, 4Q458, an eschatological text that speaks of the destruction of the uncircumcised and the appearance of “one anointed with the oil of the kingdom.”

Finally, we may consider two of Flusser’s “Supplementary Studies.” In chap. 13 Flusser discusses the importance of the “House of David” inscription found on an ossuary (see A. Kloner, *Qadmoniot* 19-20 [1972] 108-9). The inscribed words read *vlby dvd*, which probably mean, “This ossuary belongs to the house of David.” At issue is whether or not early Christianity’s belief that Jesus is a descendant of David could be literally true. Flusser refers to *m. Taan.* 4:5, which speaks of wood brought to the Temple “by the sons of David, of the tribe of Judah.” This tradition, says Flusser, “indicates that the genealogical tradition was well preserved among the Jews at that time” (p. 185). Flusser concludes that the ossuary inscription does indeed refer to the “House of David” (and not to the house of someone named *Dod*). “Thus it becomes difficult to deny the existence of Davidic families in the last century of the Jerusalem Temple” (p. 186). Flusser’s point is well taken. The matter-of-fact manner in which Paul refers to Jesus as “the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom 1:3) suggests that Jesus’ Davidic descent was widely known and not a point of contention. Evidently for Paul, this fact in itself was not of major importance, either to exploit or to defend.

In chap. 15 Flusser discusses the more controversial “Joseph bar Caiaphas” inscription. On an ornate first-century CE ossuary found in 1991 in Jerusalem, two inscriptions read ‘Yehoseph bar Qapha’ and ‘Yehoseph bar Qaiapha’. This ossuary contained the bones of a sixty-year-old man (and those of two infants, a toddler, a young boy, and a woman) and could be the ossuary of Caiaphas the High Priest, to whom Josephus refers as Joseph Caiaphas. A second ossuary in the tomb bears the name Qapha. The inscriptions have generated a measure of excitement, with the New Testament Caiaphas identification regarded as sure. The Israel Museum displays the ossuary as indeed that of the former High Priest. Flusser declares that “Caiaphas is the most prominent Jewish personality of the Second Temple period whose ossuary and remains have been discovered” (p. 195). However, the identification of these inscriptions as referring to Caiaphas the High Priest has been called into question by Horbury (“The ‘Caiaphas’ Ossuaries and Joseph Caiaphas,” *PEQ* 126 [1994] 32-48) and therefore should not be assumed without further ado.

It is only fair to conclude this review⁸⁸ by mentioning features of *Jesus* where in my judgment Flusser is persuasive. In chap. 12 (“Epilogue”) he concludes that Jesus’ messianic self-consciousness is probable. In chap. 10 (“Jerusalem”) Flusser concludes that Jesus spoke of a new Temple, and in doing so hinted that he was the Messiah (as in all probability would have been inferred from a

passage like Zech 6:12, which in the Targum is explicitly messianic). At the Last Supper, which is a Passover meal, Jesus hints at his impending martyrdom, "This is my body," and tells his disciples that he expects to eat his next Passover lamb and drink his next cup of wine in the world to come (not the "kingdom of God," as in the Gospels). And finally, in chap. 11 ("Death") Flusser believes that Jesus' affirmation of the messianic question put to him by the High Priest resulted in his being handed over to the Romans and crucified as "king of the Jews." Flusser's version of the events and dynamics of Jesus before Pilate and the latter's motivations is plausible and certainly preferable to the overly skeptical, even agnostic suggestions offered in some scholarly circles. Flusser further believes that Pilate did extend the Passover pardon offer and that the ruling priests did incite a handpicked crowd to cry for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Although it is disappointing that Flusser's *Jesus* is not more current, especially with regard to the recently published Scrolls and the lively scholarly discussion concerned with them, the book is not without points of interest and insight. It is also refreshing - though sometimes frustrating - to read a book whose author is not bound by critical orthodoxy or theological dogmas, be they Christian or Jewish.

Messianic Judaism. Rabbi Carol Harris-Shapiro (Reconstructionist Judaism). Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.

Arthur Glasser

How is one to preview a book that represents just about the first effort of an accredited rabbi to produce in detail an evenhanded description of Messianic Judaism. The difficulty is compounded when that rabbi follows it with a pointed critique in which she utilizes the presuppositions of her particular form of liberal Judaism – in her case reconstructionism. This occurs as Messianic Judaism is already regarded as fraudulent and Messianic Jews are denied all associations within the Jewish community.

Rabbi Harris-Shapiro defines Judaism as a "civilization," not as a supernaturally revealed religious faith, and accords the Hebrew Scriptures only the function of "casting a vote, but not a veto," because they are neither divinely inspired nor authoritative to any segment within liberal Judaism.

Even so, I found the book both illuminating and distressing. I read it twice, to make sure I missed nothing before attempting this review! What initially awakened my personal interest came through learning of an experience that Harris-Shapiro had when she was only eight years old. A painful rift then

overtook her family when a favorite, much older cousin became a follower of Jesus through the witness of Jews for Jesus. Happily, their personal relationship continued intact in the years that followed even though the ostracized cousin persevered in her Messianic faith.

At present Harris-Shapiro is serving a Reconstructionist congregation and teaching in the Department of Religion at Temple University. She appears to have been drawn to Reconstructionist Judaism not only because of its commitment to theological liberalism but particularly because of its conservative practice of forming distinctly Jewish synagogues with patterns of worships and daily life that carefully reflect liberal Judaism's long-standing visible commitment to Jewish tradition in multi-ethnic America. But first, let us examine her rather thorough description of this particular "charismatic" Messianic congregation without forgetting that the basic elements she will later stress in her evaluation will reflect in varying ways the dominant elements of reconstructionism.

In the opening chapter Harris-Shapiro describes the lengthy process she went through seeking permission from the leaders of a nearby Messianic congregation (400+ members) to study all aspects of its corporate life as well as the varied "religious" experiences of its members. Once gained, she entered fully through the many doors its members graciously opened to her, and remained in close contact over a considerable period. What she found "compelling" was "the language of certainty used about God, His workings in the world, even his desires for individuals" (p.6). She could not but "admire the central role God played in the life of the community, the unabashed ability of members to invoke God in everyday conversations, and the warmth and delight they took in worship, prayer and bible study. The most fervent of them saw God's presence and care shining through even the most mundane daily events" (p. 12).

Inevitably, as a rabbi she was impressed with their "trenchant critiques of the American Jewish community" (p. 13). But all that she observed was so "Jewish" that she became increasingly puzzled over the American Jewish community's total refusal to grant these Messianic Jews either favorable hearing or the minimal semblance of Jewish identity. All other Jewish people were acceptable to them, whether religious or not. She found these Jews upholding the claims of Jesus as Messiah along with the integrity and authority of the Hebrew Bible as the word of God, but it began to trouble her when they shared with her their distress to be told that they were no longer Jews, and hence were completely ostracized from Jewish society. This hostility did not make sense. At the same time she was frightened at their success in winning Jews to their faith (p. 12), and had to grant that "Messianic Jews have uncovered the confusion within the coherent Jewish identity professed by American Jews" (p. 17).

In essence, the second chapter has a familiar ring. Those whose academic role is to mentor or evaluate doctoral dissertations are always concerned to learn not only the proposed research subject, but its relationship to previously recorded investigations of the same general subject. Hence this chapter briefly reviews the history of Jewish people in their response to the personal claims of Jesus over the centuries. This overview is quite fair. It opens with the observation that “organized Jewish Christianity had all but disappeared by the 7th century” (p. 18), and provides the key elements in its growth, problems and eventual eclipse. Jewish Christianity only appeared sporadically throughout the Middle Ages despite the hostility of state churches, but reappeared after the Protestant Reformation. Late in the 19th century and from then onward, the evangelistic concern of the evangelical Protestant resulted in the formation of missions to evangelize Jewish people. Popular in this ministry was their instruction on the second coming of Jesus and on the certainty of the return of the Jewish people to their homeland (p. 19). Over the years not a few came to faith.

The third chapter is devoted to detailed interviews with a variety of Messianic Jews. Probing questions regarded the spiritual experiences that precipitated their coming to faith in Yeshua and the problems they encountered along the way to spiritual maturity. Some came to initial faith through reflection on “the problems of mankind, the sinful nature of people, and the need for atonement” (p. 44). These concerns drew them to Messianic congregations where they explored “Christian beliefs in ways not foreign to Jews” (p. 45). Characteristic was the confession of one who stated that she “always believed that Christians had three gods and the Jews had one,” but when the “one God of Shema (Deut 6:4) was explained as a complex unity, suggesting the Trinity, she suddenly understood” (p. 45).

Apparently, few Messianic Jews had any real acquaintance beforehand with the Hebrew Bible, but when they studied it, many matters were clarified. “Jeremiah's mention of a new covenant made sense” (p. 45) and provoked the growing awareness of “a connection between Judaism and Christianity” that grew through Bible study. One added that she discovered “a sense of cohesion and continuity between the two” (p. 51). Common was the judgment that “nobody at Hebrew school seemed to know God.” Later, as teenagers they “sensed the absence” of God (p.50). Actually, Harris-Shapiro states that “before salvation, most Messianic believers told me, life was empty and meaningless. Their religious upbringing failed to fill them with God” (p. 52).

They frequently asked: “Why is it that in synagogues they never pray for personal situations?” (p. 52,53). Then again, she found that some Messianics had enjoyed synagogue worship for “its feeling of at-homeness, and its social atmosphere.” Some went out of their way to speak of how they had “fulfilled expectations of Jewish loyalty presented to them by family and community, had worked for Jewish communal organizations, and attended Hebrew school

faithfully" (p. 55). None "set out to deviate from the Jewish norm presented to them as children and young adults" (p. 56). "We were loyal Jews" they say, but given "the hollowness of Jewish life, it wasn't enough - what is available in Jewish life is simply insufficient for a meaningful life with God" (p. 58). Invariably, all born-Jewish members of Messianic synagogues confessed having to cope personally with "a core ambivalence - the basic conflict between the Jewish norm of loyalty to eschew Jesus at all costs, versus the evangelical imperative to accept salvation through Jesus" (p. 56).

But when the rabbi interviewed mixed couples (Jews who had married non-Jews) she was impressed with the non-Jewish members' sense of being minority persons ("no other group in the congregation has to work harder at a *Messianic Jewish self* than these" (p. 71). The inbred Jewish fear of cultural assimilation, "the need to 'stay separate' and 'maintain Jewish identity' undercuts the value of the Messianic gentile as a '*spiritual Jewish self*'" (p. 73).

The *fourth chapter* is devoted to the complex issue of community and begins with a statement by Moishe Rosen, the Founder of Jews for Jesus. In his frequent efforts to clarify the basic issues of race and culture he often reminds Messianics of a fundamental distinction: "We are believers in Yeshua, and are Jewish. But in order to understand ourselves, let us get our priorities straight. Yeshua is first of all, above all, and most of all. The fact that we are Jews, is incidental" (p. 85). In this context, while Messianic Jews claim not to differentiate between the spiritual essence of Messianic Judaism and biblical Christianity, Harris-Shapiro found this professed commitment "all the more notable because of the fundamental Jewish distinction between Jew and non-Jew, a distinction which Messianic Judaism retains to a strong degree" (p. 88). Her awareness of this ingrained distinction runs counter to Christian theology with its contention that "the unity of all believers in Christ is a central tenet of its belief system" (p. 88). She was impressed with David Stern's breakdown of this complexity in the following fashion:

As a victim I feel negatively toward the persecutor – as a Jew I feel bitter about what the Church has done over the centuries to my people. As a Messianic I have gratitude toward the Church, despite its being a persecutor, because the Church, either directly or indirectly, has made the messiah known to me. But I am also the persecutor, for identity with the Church as a persecutor is inevitably part of the baggage that comes with joining the Messianic community. To whatever extent I may represent the Church I can be repentant on its behalf and seek the forgiveness of the Jews. But I cannot expect them, as unsaved people, to be willing to forgive me (p. 88).

Whereas many Messianics would not regard their identification with institutional Christianity as strongly as this, they all sense to some degree the pain of this association. Some find solace and identity in what the Hebrew Bible has to say about a believing "remnant" in Israel: (Isa 10:21; Jer 50:20). In this connection one Messianic Jew was quoted as follows:

As Messianic Jews we feel our isolation from the very community that we feel part of. You feel one with Messianic Jews. You feel a kinship to the Jewish nation and Jewish people, yet you realize that you're not part of it, but you want to be. We take what the Scriptures say about the remnant, for the remnant is the perfect role model for Messianic Jews, because the remnant was so different from the majority, even though they were part of it. As remnant people we feel that we are distinct, yet we are a part of the whole (p. 104).

The fifth chapter provides a measure of distillation of Jewish thought on such rubrics as "history, prophecy and memory." Harris-Shapiro discovers and records the widening gap between rabbinic Judaism with its "man-made Talmudic approach" to religious thought and the more direct Bible witness of Messianic Jews. The former has been characterized by change and adaptation over the years, whereas the latter takes the Bible at face value and seeks to be loyal to its revealed truth. Fading from the consciousness of many Jewish people today is the conviction of their historic chosenness by God and the significance of their actual and spiritual history as recorded and prophetically evaluated in the Hebrew Bible. Even their earlier enthusiastic and unconditional adoption of the rationalism of the Enlightenment is being increasingly replaced by a growing fixation on their community's uniqueness and giftedness. They see themselves as a superior though minority people, possessed with a remarkable capacity for surviving in the midst of a hostile non-Jewish world. "The very survival of the Jews through the deprivations of the Middle Ages and the horrors of the Holocaust serves as a substitute for Divine chosenness" (p. 112).

The only reality worthy of lasting devotion, service and sacrifice is increasingly found, not in their commitment to God and his will, but to their own people. As a result, since the State of Israel was established in 1948 under a reunified Jerusalem (p. 114), Messianic Jews have increasingly come to see themselves as the "spiritual Zionism." They are "rediscovering the true spiritual Judaism that mistakenly became 'the road not taken' with the advent of the Talmudic era that needlessly obfuscated the timeless truths found both in the 'Old and New Covenants'" (p. 115). It follows that "Messianic believers need a strong, healthy Israel to sustain their identity" (p. 129).

In recent decades as their numbers grew, many Messianic Jews increasingly desired to establish themselves in Israel. Since the Law of Return initially provided automatic Israeli citizenship to all Jews, not a few Messianics earlier made *aliyah*, and small but growing Messianic synagogues are currently functioning there. Whereas many Messianics in the Diaspora currently nourish the desire to follow their example, they were rebuffed as recently as December 25, 1989 when the Supreme Court of Israel capitulated to the veto power of the Orthodox and decreed that the "Law of return is a communal, not a theological arbiter of status and no longer applies to them" (p. 169). "Today Messianic Jews continue to enter covertly, while working toward a change in this law" (p. 133).

Today, when Messianics reflect on the Holocaust their focus is on biblical realities that Reform Jewish theologians totally ignore. Two such examples are the existence of Satan and his connivance with depraved human beings. Because of this biblical understanding of the larger dimensions of evil and of Satan's repeated determination to destroy all Jews, Messianics are more likely to discuss among themselves the related issue of theodicy - why God, all-powerful and all-loving, permitted Satan and the Nazis to destroy 6,000,000 Jews, but not all of them. They were deeply persuaded that God would reconstitute the State of Israel in "the last days" so that he might usher in Israel's Golden Eschatological Age. Harris-Shapiro only alludes to this pre-millennial scenario, but I feel that in her description of Messianic Jews a comment should be injected. It concerns the temptation of Messianic Jews to focus on certain eschatological themes in the Hebrew Scriptures as though the Messiah Jesus and certain writers in the New Testament did not comment on these themes (*Jesus and the Holy City* by P.W.L. Walker, Eerdmans, 1996). He spoke (30+ times) about the imminent judgment of God facing Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple in view of His forthcoming rejection and crucifixion.

Rabbi Harris-Shapiro goes into considerable detail to describe the practices, rituals and lifecycle observances of Messianic Jews - one of her dominant concerns. These range from the extremes of a "Yeshua flavored Orthodox Judaism" to the virtual departure from all "Jewishness and identity." In a Bible study she was told in actuality, "We have the complete freedom to go by Jewish traditions, Christian traditions, or neither, because they generally are not the bottom line on really how we apply the Scripture" (p. 136).

The rabbi then provides a detailed description of a typical Friday night service. Much informal socializing sets the tone. Then at eight the Messianic rabbi "calls for attention, announces the beginning of the service, and prays to God extemporaneously that His Presence be felt in the service." Ushers in the rear then close the doors, the congregation rises, and he leads in singing the Shema. "Both lines of the Shema are sung in unison" to a familiar Jewish melody. A pause and the people are asked to "turn around and greet one another," which proves to be a happy occasion that "lasts for about five minutes." Then follows an extended period of praise and worship, using traditional Hebrew songs and contemporary musical forms to express in powerful ways their Jewish-Christian consolidation. Since the word used for salvation is "Yeshua" and a frequently repeated line is "The Lord is our Yeshua," this "double entendre" allows the congregation to affirm its high Christology within the central symbolic affirmation of Jewishness - the Shema ("Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one").

Several opening prayers are intermingled, followed by the mood-heightening atmosphere of considerable traditional dancing ("about six to eight dance songs per service"). An abbreviated Eucharist in which only the celebrant

partakes is followed by specific prayer for the safety of the nation of Israel and the salvation of the Jewish people. Since all have brought their Bibles and notebooks, the gathering finally quiets down for the sermon. It is not surprising that this takes the form of a biblical exposition and lasts for about an hour. Following this, an invitation is extended to the unsaved to receive Yeshua. The meeting is followed with special prayer for those who have responded, then follows the Priestly Benediction, sung in Hebrew and English. Still the people do not immediately disperse. Some revert to socializing, others to discussing the sermon, and still others to small prayer groups. Some drift to the synagogue's gift shop. The last person might leave as late as an hour after the service formally ended, at 11:00.

Harris-Shapiro finds that Messianics follow a "pick-and-choose" approach in utilizing elements of traditional Jewish practice in worship and in following a Jewish lifestyle in everyday conduct. This includes Jewish music and dancing, the holidays, (Hanukkah rather than Christmas, Pesach [Passover] rather than Easter), distinctly Jewish holidays, and a lifecycle that begins with circumcision. They do not neglect baptism, nor bar/bat mitzvah celebrations infused with distinctly Christian meanings, nor a life style that "avoids unclean foods listed in the Bible," but they have only casual regard for rabbinic additions. They make use of such distinctly Jewish items of clothing as the *kippah* (skullcap) worn by males during services and the *tallit* (prayer shawl) worn by leaders. When it comes to language, the use of Hebrew and Yiddish words to convey basic Jewish concepts is popular. By this means they deliberately avoid all equivalent terms in gentile Christianity. Not the cross but the "tree," not the New Testament but "Brit Hahadasha," not Paul but "Rabbi Shaul." Needless to say these Jewish overtones fill an important role in making Messianic Judaism "real" to its adherents.

It is not without reason that this wide use of authentic Jewish rituals, customs, and special celebrations exposes Messianic Judaism to the particular ire of the larger Jewish community. The rabbi deems Messianic Judaism a "fake perpetrated on an ignorant Jewish population" (p. 165). She cannot keep herself from closing this chapter by stepping down from her role as an objective critic and candidly stating: "Messianic Judaism presents a notable challenge. The normative Judaism that institutional Jewry defends may itself be the illusion." Then she adds the question of questions: "Who and what is truly Jewish" (p. 165)?

The closing chapter deals with this question and comes to focus on whether or not "the saved" (i.e. Messianic Jews) can or should coexist with "the chosen" (i.e. all other Jews however they define the Jewish home and synagogue). Harris-Shapiro as a Reconstructionist rabbi begins the chapter with the quotation that "no universally recognized standard or authority exists in Judaism" With this, she dismisses the Hebrew Bible and its witness to the

Messiah, regarding it as the product of human speculation. Hence, the issue of Yeshua appears to have provoked no personal relevance, although she occasionally mentions Messianics witnessing to her and praying for her. She has nothing to say about the constant exposure to Scripture she encountered in her study of this Messianic Congregation.

What really concerns Harris-Shapiro is whether any case can be made for including Messianic Judaism within "Judaism as a civilization." As a result, such themes as the nature of God, the possibilities of personal salvation through his grace or divine condemnation through disobedience to his Law, are irrelevant. Her concern is that the Jewish people, despite the fragmentation that has left them without one agreed core value apart from the negative – their united rejection of Jesus (p. 187) – will continue to find "their authenticity as people living within the context of Jewish culture." Since this is not the objective of Messianic Jews, their commitment to evangelism means that they pose "the greatest challenge for the American Jewish community" (p. 166). In contrast, Judaism's departure from God and his Word has brought the Jewish people to their present incoherence, their "fragmentation and uncertainty."

Harris-Shapiro begins her denigration of Messianic Judaism by raising the question whether Messianic Jews should be charged with "status violation." She recognizes that "Messianic Jews born Jewish are grudgingly recognized as such under Jewish law" (p. 168). But she wonders whether the traditional charge of apostasy should be applied to them merely for their abandonment of present-day Judaism which she considers a most highly-fragmented and virtually boundary-less phenomenon. From this she proceeds to move forward and questions whether Messianic Judaism is in "religious violation" because she sees no authenticity in any Judaism that "abandons absolute monotheism." She buttresses this question by stating that "even among Jews not particularly traditional, the belief in Jesus as God seems impossible for a monotheistic faith" (p. 168). She appears either unaware or indifferent to the serious grappling of Jewish and gentile Christian scholars, who by prayer and careful study of the biblical data have come to affirm the unity of God within the Trinity. Even the Rabbi's basic text (Deut 6:4) uses the word "echad" for his oneness, not "yachid" which is confined to an exclusively numerical "one." The incarnation seems unworthy of investigation, so it is ignored.

This leads her in turn to raise the question whether Messianic Judaism represents a clever "innovation or masquerade" fashioned by Messianic Jews to "lure unsuspecting Jews to evangelical Christianity." Actually, she has to admit that within Jewry many of its ancient symbols and rituals had already been reconceptualized to support issues that are far removed from their original intent. Harris-Shapiro then asks whether Messianic Judaism should also be regarded as a traitorous "communal violation" because any adaptation of the Christian faith inevitably includes its anti-Semitic corollary. Jewish people

should not only automatically regard Christianity as “an inferior, overly emotional and superstitious religion compared with the intellectual rigors of traditional Judaism” For Jews to follow Jesus is an act of ethno-cultural suicide.

Toward the end of this surprising stream of vehemence, Harris-Shapiro changes gears and reflects on the Jewish-Christian future and reveals her fundamental concern. It is not about God’s essence not the Scripture’s authority, for her creed, as a Reconstructionist, does not hold to these realities. In this connection she states: “Belief in Jesus as Messiah is not simply a heretical Jewish belief, as it may have been in the 1st Century”; it has become the equivalent to an act of ethno-cultural suicide” (p. 177). Her all-absorbing preoccupation is “Jewish civilization” – the lasting and distinct coherence of the Jewish people. She does not find this in Jewish ritual, association or ethical conduct. In this connection she writes: “If ritual is the sole measure of Jewishness, the Messianic believers I knew in the congregation would score favorably, certainly outstripping the average Jew by religion in their attendance at the services and possibly even doing other Jewish practices.”

“If doing Jewish is being Jewish, ironically, Messianic Jews are more Jewish than many born-Jews”, says Harris-Shapiro (p. 186). She then goes on to underscore the fact that “the only shared core value within Judaism is that Jews do not believe in Jesus” and admits that this is not only a negative but an insufficient core value.” And she cannot but add that “part of the attractiveness of excluding the messianic movement is the ‘Jewish togetherness’ it engenders even in our day” (p. 187). But she quickly adds that as a rabbi concerned for the future survival of “Jewish civilization,” she senses that her people “need to know who they are as well as who they are not.” Indeed, in her judgment their present uncertainty and lack of agreement over possessing even one positive core value could mean that they might even completely disappear as a separate people within the next generation.

One cannot but be solemnized by this concern. Certainly, this is unspeakably tragic: World Jewry without one positive core value to give its members a sense of their distinctiveness and significance. One asks: Is this to be the endpoint of an ancient people, twice as old as Christianity and almost three times as old as Islam? And this, despite the great promise God made to Abraham: “I will make of you a great nation... and in you all the families of he earth shall be blessed” (Gen.12:1-3).

Books Received

Van Voorst, Robert E.

Jesus outside the New Testament. An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000; Bristol, UK: Allan Books. Pp xiv, 248. \$ 220.00.

Elliot, Mark, Adam.

The Survivors of Israel. A Reconsideration of The Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000; Bristol, UK: Allan Books. Pp xiv, 760. \$ 50.00.

What Does the Israeli Press Say?

Lisa Loden

A general observation might be made about Israeli press coverage of the subjects of Christianity, Messianic Jews and missionaries. A two-pronged approach is evident. One is in the area of current news making items or events, and the second is the regular occurrence of feature articles on Christianity, the mission and related subjects. Based on the statistics available for the past (1999-2000) year, an average of approximately one hundred articles appeared each month in the Israeli press on the subjects under discussion. This figure does not include the extra articles (over 600), dealing exclusively with the visit of the Pope, that appeared in the two and a half month period before and after his visit.

It is possible to say that in general, the Israeli press reports quite thoroughly on matters of Christian interest and affairs in the Israeli context. This is reflected by the quantity of articles that appear on any given subject. Two examples of this - both from the period April to October 2000 - are reports of a land scandal involving the Greek Orthodox patriarch and reports of the International Christian Embassy's Feast of Tabernacles celebration.

A land scandal involving the Greek Orthodox Patriarch and the Jewish National Fund was given extensive coverage in both the secular and religious press. A total of 32 articles having to do with this scandal appeared over a three-month period. There were eight press reports on the Christian Embassy's Feast of Tabernacles celebration in the first half of October and more reports are expected in the latter half of the month.

Feature articles (sometimes, quite lengthy) are a constant feature of the Israel media's relationship with Christianity and Messianic Jews. Scarcely a week passes but that one or another of the Israeli papers is without a feature article on Christianity, the Mission, anti-missionary activity or Messianic Jews.

It is possible to say that the trend regarding normal newspaper reporting of Christian events, Messianic Jews in the news, and missionary or anti-missionary activity is for the secular press to evenhandedly report these events and items as they would report other types of newsworthy event. The religious press, on the other hand, is rarely impartial in its coverage of the same events. That is if they do report on these matters at all. In the case of the Christian Embassy's Feast of Tabernacles celebration, all of the articles appeared in the secular press.

Regular Features

There are several categories that are regular features in the Israeli press. Among them are missionary and anti-missionary activity, Jewish Christian relations, status of non-Jews, Messianic Jews, Christian tourism, and Christian sites.

Missionary and anti-missionary activity

The issue of missionary and anti-missionary activity is an ongoing, constant feature in the Israeli media. On this subject, during the period from April through September 20, there have been an average of between 15 and 16 articles each month. Some of the articles report on the alleged activities of missionaries, the activity of the anti-missionaries, and confrontations between them, both on the street and in the courts of law. Depending on whether the paper reporting is a secular or a religious journal, the tone and the interpretation will vary widely.

An interesting trend can be seen in the reportage by the Israeli media. Not surprisingly, the religious press presents the "missionary" in the worst possible light. Here are a few of the recent headlines from articles that have appeared: "Missionary Criminals Enjoy Immunity," Hamodia, 11/09/00; "An Alarming Truth, Messianics Sending Missionaries to be Converted to Judaism!" Yom HaShishi, 14/07/00; "Stubborn Fight Against the Tel-Aviv Soul Hunters," Hamodia, 12/06/00. These and similar articles present the "missionary" as, at best, an enemy of the Jewish people and, at the worst, as a criminal. It should be noted that the orthodox religious elements view all Christians as missionaries. In the long term, the language used by the religious press to report on and describe Messianic Jews, Christians, and missionaries is becoming increasingly strident and harsh. Two groups, Messianic Jews and Jehovah Witnesses, are currently being highlighted as the two most active and dangerous proselytizing groups in the country.

While the rhetoric of the religious press is consistently inflammatory on the subject of Christians, missionaries, and Messianic Jews, the secular press is increasingly moderate. This can be seen both by the language used and by the events reported by the religious as opposed to the secular press. For example, the secular press does not see baptisms of Jews as noteworthy, whereas the religious press regularly reports on baptisms.

Messianic Jews

The press, secular and religious, only infrequently reports directly on issues involving or related to Messianic Jews. More often, references to Messianic Jews are found in the polemical articles appearing in the religious press. Only when

newsworthy events occur does the press normally mention Messianic Jews as such. In the period from April to October 2000 there were 32 articles that directly related to Messianic Jews. Of those 32 articles, 13 appeared in July and concerned the recent arson attack on the Netiviya Synagogue of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem.

Regarding Messianic Jews, one significant development is that, for the past year, Messianic Jews have consistently been referred to by that name, whereas in previous times they have been called Jewish Christians. This represents a small public image victory for the Messianic Jews who have labored to change this terminology. Perception of Messianic Jews as true Jews, as a part of the Jewish people and not as Christians, who are outside, different from, and inimical to the Jewish people is important for the propagation of the gospel in Israel.

Parallel to this change of terminology regarding Messianic Jews, there has been a change in the name of Jesus, from *Yeshu* in the Hebrew press to *Yeshua*. This is yet sporadic but is significant since in earlier times, the name of Jesus was consistently *Yeshu* which is an abbreviation of a curse meaning, "may his name and memory be blotted out."

Jewish Christian relations

Another ongoing, regular topic in the Israeli press is the issue of Jewish Christian relations. The secular Israeli press reports frequently on ecumenical meetings. This is especially true of meetings with Catholics. All statements made by church bodies in regards to Israel and the Jewish people are reported, commented on, and often quoted either in full or at some length.

In the period from April to the middle of October, there were a total of 56 items in the press that related broadly to the category of Jewish Christian relations. This is an average of eight articles each month. This figure does not include 10 others that are reports of Christian opinions – five articles (September 2000) on the Vatican's opinions regarding the peace process and five other articles (August 2000) on Christian opinions concerning the status of Jerusalem.

Tourism, archeology and Christian sites

In this category there have been 30 articles from April until the middle of October. Christian tourism is a mainstay of the Israeli economy and the Israeli press regularly reports on it. Another type of tourism is also a regular feature in the Israeli media. This is internal Israeli tourism. Archeological sites, Christian sites as well as convents and monasteries are seen as destinations for the Israeli tourist in his own country. Convent and monastery guesthouses are regularly reviewed and recommended.

Two leading Hebrew daily papers have carried feature articles about accommodation in convents recently (Ma'Ariv 19/04/00, *Behind Convent Walls* and Globes 27/07/00, *Nuns for a Night!*). The headline of the article in Ma'Ariv, a wide circulation Hebrew daily paper reads, "What is so attractive about convents, the bubble-like lifestyle that draws you far from the noise of the world. Long hours with the nun Regine, who once was a kosher Jew." Both articles told the story of the Jewish nun Regine. A list of Catholic hospices and guesthouses with addresses and telephone numbers was attached to one of the articles, together with a strong recommendation to the public to make use of convent facilities

In a related item, again during the Passover season, two large circulation daily papers carried the same article, one in English (Jerusalem Post, 19/04/00) and one in Hebrew (Ha'Aretz, 25/04/00) as a part of their supplement. These three and four page articles were about Jewish Greek Orthodox nuns and priests who reside in a small convent in Greece. The article was "Jewish Greek Orthodox Nuns and Priests" (Jerusalem Post, 19/04/00, Ha'Aretz, 25/04/00). The tone of the articles was exceptionally positive and open-minded and emphasized the matter of freedom of choice. Several stories are told of both nuns and priests who had been born into Jewish families in various parts of the world. A number of those interviewed (in Hebrew!) who had become Greek Orthodox had previously been new immigrants in Israel.

Articles of this sort have only recently been seen in the Israeli press. It is too soon to tell if they represent a trend to portray cloistered life as an option for Jews. In any case, these articles have been unbiased and surprisingly positive in their characterization of both the choices involved in becoming a Catholic and in convent and monastery life in general as experienced by Jews who have chosen to become Catholics.

Conclusion

It would appear that the Israeli media has an ambivalent relationship with the subjects of Christianity and Christians, missionary and anti-missionary activity, and Messianic Jews. There is much interest in what Christians think and even in exploring the theologies of Christians. Understandably, the religious press is rarely impartial when it reports on these matters. The secular press gives the impression of being far more unbiased in its coverage of the same issues.

One thing can be said with certainty, Christians and Christianity, missionary and anti-missionary activity, and Messianic Jews will remain in the consciousness and media of the Jewish nation. Historically, as groups of people or ideas become a part of the status quo, they are much harder to dismiss or marginalize.

