

MISHKAN

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“THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREEDS”

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The Rule of Faith

Editorial

According to *Facts & Myths About the Messianic Congregations in Israel* (Mishkan 30-31) only 19 of 81 Israeli congregations had a statement of faith, a few others responded that they “not yet” had such a creed. Others expressed that “the Bible is our statement” and did not see the need for a creedal statement. Both the existing creeds and the opinion that we don’t need anything outside the Bible need to be evaluated in light of biblical, Christian and Jewish history and tradition.

The people of God were never without a statement of faith. “YHWH is the God of Israel, Israel is the people of YHWH” is a basic confession from the beginning of the biblical tradition (see Hos 1:9; Deut 26:17-18). The Hebrew Bible includes other creedal confessions as well. The Book of Ezra shows us a Judean community with a defined faith and a recognized body of scriptures. Without this post-exilic community and their reflection on “Who are we? What is our faith? Which writings do we recognize as authoritative?” there wouldn’t have been a Bible in-the-making.

The New Testament includes early creeds from the pre-Pauline period, i.e. from the first two decades after Jesus’ resurrection. Israelites in the “Jesus camp” saw the need thus to confess their faith in the God of Israel and his saving act through his Messiah. Both before and after the collection of the New Testament writings, baptism was accompanied by a confession of faith by the baptismal candidate.

The early church soon saw the need for elaborating its faith to guard the central doctrine of God, Messiah and salvation. Without a formulated rule of faith, churches and believers could easily be thwarted into a gnosticizing belief in the divine essence with a little Jesus-flavor sprinkled on top – as is demonstrated in the articles on the Gospel of Thomas and Shlomo Kalo in this issue. One may “accept the Bible” and interpret it symbolically and allegorically but miles apart from its literal meaning and mainstream interpretation, as is shown both by early Gnostic and by later Kabbalist tradition. For the early church the confession was never conceived as dry dogmatics but as a needed defense of biblical faith and a hymnic praise of the living God.

What about creeds in the Jewish tradition? In post-biblical times there was never a Jewish synod which acknowledged a statement of faith. But the people of Israel had its unifying creeds, first and foremost the Shema. While the Shema, in its original Deuteronomic setting, perhaps should be interpreted as admonition, not confession (Hear O Israel, YHWH is our God, YHWH alone!),

it functions as a basic Israelite confession as early as the Hasmonean period. Later on, the Amidah broadens this daily Jewish confession. With the loss of the Temple as a unifying symbol one sensed a growing need to define what is inside and what is outside Jewish faith and the Amidah was formulated as a standard Jewish confession and prayer. Soon *Birkat Haminim* was added to exclude sectarianism such as the Jewish Jesus-movement.

What is the primary authority? Scripture or Tradition? Both church and Judaism struggled with this question. When late fourth century rabbis designated Mishnah as (oral) Torah they equated tradition and Scripture as the Catholic church did later. But Judaism was still not monolithic nor rabbinic-only. When Karaism arose in the eighth century as a Jewish "protestant" Bible-alone-movement, it took centuries before there was a consensus that Karaism was outside the fold. Peter Schäfer has argued that the "mishnaic" tractate *Avot* was edited only when the synagogue started to define itself in anti-Karaite terms. *Avot* defends the rabbis of the Mishnah as the proper "Mosaic" line, against an unnamed opposition that dares to raise its head. The earliest prayer books of the ninth and 10th centuries, the Siddurs of Avram and Saadya Gaon, were published to teach the people of Israel: This is how rabbinic Jews should pray and not as the Karaites say.

Having defined Jewish Christians and Karaites as outside the fold, rabbinic Judaism developed a remarkable tolerance towards new Jewish philosophies and views. Moses Maimonides himself used Aristotelian philosophy as he contextualized Judaism for his time and culture. The Kabbala introduced Gnostic concepts which soon became remarkably "kosher" in broad Jewish circles. Early Shabbateanism was controversial but after Shabbatai Zvi's conversion to Islam tens of thousands of Jews found faith in the apostate and hidden Messiah a legitimate Jewish way of faith. With the advent of Hasidism in the 18th century entered the theology of the rebbe, a mediator between the human and the divine that Judaism had not seen since the early Jewish Jesus-movement. But this time, after a fiery struggle against the mitnagdim of Eastern Europe, the teaching of the mediator became kosher.

The daily confession of the Shema and Amidah was supplemented when the "Ani maamin" of Maimonides was introduced into the prayer books. Since then the Jewish confession has been clear: God is not only "echad" (one); he is "yachid" (unique) and cannot take bodily form; only to him shall we pray. I have difficulty seeing how Messianic Jews who advocate using the Siddur as it can recite this confession which in its literal meaning has a clear anti-Christological sense. They need to relate more seriously to the role of the Siddur and the Amidah as they came into being: a norm of how Jews who follow the rabbinic tradition should pray, distancing themselves from the Jewish sectarians.

If we return to the survey of creeds in the Messianic movements in *Facts & Myths* we see that three congregations included in their creedal statement a positive reference to the Nicene and Apostolic Creeds. The majority of the existing creeds were evangelical ones, formulated in the land, some of them influenced by these two classical ecumenical creeds.

Two observations may be noted. First, those who see the need for a creed want to formulate a new one according to the needs of the Israeli/Jewish setting as well as the personal views of the founder(s). One senses a conscious or unconscious skepticism towards the classical creeds of the Christian church, which may be considered gentile, churchy, or influenced by Greek philosophy of the early Christian centuries. Here there is a difference vis-à-vis the more classically-oriented creeds elaborated by Hebrew Christians in the period between the two world wars. Some of the Messianic creeds are remarkably detailed in their view of the end-time – so detailed that many believers might feel excluded and reticent to join. Elaborate end-time scenarios in creeds may build unnecessary and divisive walls in the body of the Messiah.

Second, there exists a widespread notion that creeds are superfluous, that the Bible is enough. This opinion is not new in radical Protestantism. For the present editor, the “Bible-alone” model is naive and extremely difficult to defend both systematically and in light of church history. Movements on the periphery of the Christian church such as Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses also subscribe to this model. The Bible-alone model may leave congregations and believers easy prey to enthusiastic teachers. If one knows where to locate oneself within the development of Christian and Jewish tradition, it is easier not to be blown here and there by every wind of teaching. In 1987 a court of Messianic leaders was set up to decide whether the Christology and view of God of a certain pastor should be viewed as “kosher” in the Messianic movement (see *Facts & Myths*, p. 112f). The court decided to use the Bible only, not the ecumenical creeds, for this litmus test. What does this decision communicate of the Messianic movement’s relation to the central tradition of the Christian church?

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed represents a contextualization of the biblical message. It uses fourth century Greek concepts to express biblical faith. Consequently the “Bible-alone” advocates may discard it as a gentile document.

But they need to consider that the Nicene creed is the creed that unites all the main churches in the world. The Messianic movement would be in serious danger of evolving into a sect without communion with the Christian church at large if it does not relate itself consciously to Nicene faith. It is a shallow excuse that there exist other churches within radical Protestantism subscribing to the Bible-alone option. If one holds that Messianic congregations and believers have the same biblical faith as gentile Christian brothers, one should declare:

We are in agreement with the Nicene rule of faith; although they may prefer to formulate another contextualized creed which takes seriously the encounter with the Jewish or Israeli setting. If one cannot do that, is the claim of being united with the Church universal merely lip-service? A lip-service which may establish Messianic Jews as good post-modernists to whom feelings of belonging are more important than relation to foundational documents. On the other hand, if the Jewish setting is not reflected in worship – including creeds – Messianic congregations will be a foreign transplant in the land.

There exists a widespread credal confession in the Messianic movement. Many (most?) congregations recite the Shema. Fine – it is a biblical and Jewish confession. But why stop there, omitting confession of Jesus the Messiah as Lord? If a Jewish guest who does not share such belief is present, he would at least be met by clear and honest communication. The New Testament confession knows that the God of Israel is One. It knows that the Son is subordinate to the Father. But it also knows that one day every tongue shall proclaim that Jesus the Messiah is Lord, Kyrios and Adonai!

Torleif Elgvin

From Jesus to the “Rule of Faith” – A Brief Historical Sketch

Rainer Riesner

In the time of Jesus every pious Jew recited the *Shema Yisrael* twice daily, in the morning when he awoke and in the evening when he went to bed. Palestinian sources like Josephus (*Antiquitates Judaicae* 4:212), the Community Rule of Qumran (1QS 10:1-3.9-14), and the Gospel of Luke (Luke 10:26-27) testify to this custom. It was also followed in the diaspora as can be seen in the Letter of Pseudo-Aristeas (*Aristeas* 160) and in Philo of Alexandria (*De Specalibus Legibus* 4:141). Probably by then the recitation included Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:41. But we need not decide this question. In any case the beginning of Deuteronomy 6:4 was included: “Hear Yisrael, the Lord is God, the Lord alone.” According to the later rabbis, this verse was not prayed but “read,” i.e., recited. The technical term was *kʿriʿat shemaʿ* – the “recitation of the Shema” (*j Berakhot* 1:9 [3c]; *b Baba Qamma* 92b). It is interesting to note that this Hebrew phraseology is echoed in the Lukan special tradition (Luke 10:26). Reciting the Shema was to take “the yoke of the kingdom of heaven” upon one’s shoulders.¹ Immediately after the confession of the one and only God follows the commandment “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:5). Every Jew reciting the Shema was reminded of his duty to keep the precepts of the Torah (*j Berakhot* 1:9.29 [3c]). The exceptional importance of the Shema can be seen in the moving rabbinic tradition about the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva. When they tore off his flesh with iron combs he recited the Shema. Even when he breathed out his soul he lengthened the word *ehad* “alone” to confess in front of his Roman executioners the God of Israel as the only god (*b Berakhot* 61b).

In early Hasidic circles the custom of praying three times a day evolved (Dan 6:11), and in New Testament times this was already a widely-held practice (Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30).² In the morning and in the evening the recitation of the

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¹ Cf. H.L. Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* I (München: C. H. Beck, 5th ed. 1969 [1926]), 176-177.

² Cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns* (Berlin – New York: De Gruyter, 1977).

Shema and a prayer (*tefilah*) were combined; at 3 p.m., the time of the sacrifice in the Temple, there was only a prayer. In the years before 70 AD there existed no fixed rules for these prayers. At the end of the century under the patriarch Gamaliel II a set of 18 benedictions was redacted, later called the *Shemoneh Esreh*. Today known as the *Amidah*, because it is recited while standing, this prayer is part of every synagogue service. Before 70 AD at least the first three and the last three benedictions were known and also probably used in the three prayer times, mainly by Pharisaic circles. The first three benedictions have a confessional character. God is praised as the only God (*3rd Benediction*), who created heaven and earth (*1st Benediction*) and will raise the dead (*2nd Benediction*). This could have been understood as directed against the Sadducees denying resurrection, against Jewish Gnostics denying God's creation of the material world, and against Jewish Christians thought to believe in two gods (di-theism). A later benediction confesses the hope in redemption through the Messiah from the House of David (*14th Benediction*). The even later *12th Benediction*, the so-called *birkat ha-minim*, explicitly excludes several kinds of heretics, e.g., those denying the resurrection of the dead. We will see both Jewish possibilities – the recitation of a holy tradition as a confession and prayer as a confession – when we look at Jesus and early Jewish Christianity.

Pre-Easter Disciple's Prayer and Messianic Confession

We can be fairly certain that in the morning and in the evening Jesus and his disciples recited the Shema.³ This was a biblical commandment, repeated twice in the Book of Deuteronomy (6:6-7, 11:19-20), and observed by all Jews including the separatist Essenes, as we have seen. Luke shows us Peter and John, two of Jesus' first pre-Easter disciples and later leaders of the Jerusalem church, obeying the three prayer times (Acts 3:1; 10:1, 30). This makes us think that this was already the custom when they followed Jesus. The interesting question is, what did they pray? From the old Hebraizing Lukan special tradition⁴ we learn that one day the disciples asked Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). Jesus gave his disciples the prayer known to us as the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4). It was not told as a mere example but "taught" (*didaskhein*) as a formula. This also becomes clear when we note why the disciples asked for a prayer. By this prayer they wished to differ from the disciples of John the Baptist and because of this they needed an authoritative formula delivered to them by their teacher. Indeed the beginning

³ Cf. J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1967); J. Heinemann, "The Background of Jesus' Prayer in the Jewish Liturgical Tradition," in J.J. Petuchowski - M. Brocke, *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy* (1978).

⁴ Cf. R. Riesner, "Luke's Special Tradition and the Question of a Hebrew Gospel Source," *Mishkan* 20 (1994), 44-52.

of the Lord's Prayer marks a difference. Whereas John proclaimed God as the stern judge (Matt 3:9-10; Luke 3:8-9), Jesus addressed him as loving father (*abba*). From Jerome we learn that the Jewish Christian Nazarenes preserved the Hebrew/Aramaic original of the difficult Greek expression *epiousios* (Luke 11:3).⁵ It was the word *mahar*, meaning "tomorrow." The disciples were allowed to pray to receive the eschatological bread (*artos epiousios*) already today. That means the eschatological gifts are not merely in the future but can be obtained in the present. So the Lord's prayer confesses the belief that God's Kingdom will not only come soon, but is coming now for the followers of Jesus. That the Kingdom of God is not merely imminent but breaks in was the characteristic difference between the preaching of Jesus and the expectation of John and his disciples. That the disciples of Jesus said the Lord's prayer at the three Jewish prayer times is confirmed by the fact that the early Syro-Palestinian churches had established this at the turn of the first century. The precept of three prayer times belongs to the oldest traditions in the so-called "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," a catechism finally redacted in the first half of the second century (*Didache* 8:3).⁶

Mark gives us an accurate historical picture in his Gospel, where Peter's Messianic confession near Caesarea Philippi marks a turning point in the career of Jesus. In the beginning of his ministry he proclaimed the establishment of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). How the Kingdom of God could start without the presence of the Davidic Messiah king remained a secret. After his call to repentance in Galilee was rebuffed, Jesus, like the prophet Isaiah 700 years earlier (Isa 8:16), retreated within an inner circle of disciples. To them he revealed "the mystery of the Kingdom" (Mark 4:11). As the speaker of the Twelve, Peter confessed Jesus to be the longed-for Messiah (Mark 8:27-30). But Jesus had to teach the disciples that he, as the Son of Man, will not reign immediately but must first suffer because he is also the Servant of the Lord (Mark 10:45 cf. Isa 53). Only at the trial in front of the Sanhedrin did Jesus confess openly and in public to being the Messiah: "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven'" (Mark 14:62). In his answer to the High Priest Jesus combined two Messianic prophecies, the coming of the Son of Man (Dan 7:13) and the coronation of the Davidic King Messiah (Ps 110:1). To proclaim himself to be the future judge of the highest Jewish court was thought to be blasphemy, and so Jesus was condemned (Mark 14:63-64). A pseudo-messiah was the same as a pseudo-prophet (Mark 14:66) and so the same measures had to be taken against him: "You shall purge the evil from your midst!" (Deut 13:5). The inscription

⁵ Commentary to Matthew 6,11 cf. *Tractatus de Psalmo CXXXV* (A. F. J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992], 86-87).

⁶ Cf. P.F. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 23-46.

(*titulus*) on the cross in Roman juridical language confirms the Messianic self-confession of Jesus: He claimed to be the “King of the Jews” (Mark 15:26).

Prayer in the Early Jerusalem Community

From this brief sketch we may understand why in a rather short time after the resurrection of Jesus the early Jerusalem community developed a rich variety of Christological expressions.⁷ That Jesus is the promised Messiah was never disputed. He had claimed to be the eschatological king of Israel and God had accepted this claim by raising him from the dead (Acts 1:22-24, 3:14-15, 4:10, 5:30-31, 10:39-40). *Yeshua ha-mashiah* or *Iesous Christos* – this combination of a very common Jewish name with the royal title was in itself a provocative confession in the shortest form. Indeed, when some years later in Antioch the Roman authorities searched for a name including both Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus they coined the Latin term *Christiani* or *Christianoi* in Greek (Acts 11:26).⁸ Probably the Hebrew designation *notzrim*, in Greek *Nazoraioi* (Acts 24:5), means nearly the same, that is Jewish people believing that Jesus is the Davidic branch (*netzer*) promised by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 11:1; cf. Matt 2:23). In the expectation of contemporary mainstream Judaism the Messiah was awaited as a man adopted by God as the eschatological king (cf. Ps 2:7). When Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, even he apparently thought of him as merely a human being. Otherwise it would be incomprehensible that he would react so harshly toward Jesus’ prediction of his passion (Mark 8:31-33). But not much time passed before it became clear that the members of the Jerusalem community perceived the person of Jesus their messiah in a very unconventional way.

An outsider visiting the gatherings of the community in the center on the South-Western hill of Jerusalem, today called Mount Zion,⁹ or in one of the other house churches would have been very perplexed. They might be astonished at hearing the prayers in unknown tongues, but they would be even more perplexed by the words they understood. The community called in prayer “that the Lord may come.” After some time it would become clear to the outsider that it was not God being invoked but the recently crucified pseudo-prophet Jesus of Nazareth! Now the visitor had two options. He could leave the room as soon as possible, in order not to be guilty of witnessing blasphemy, and surely many opted for this solution. But others apparently pondered this extraordinary claim, because the Jerusalem community won more members.

⁷ Cf. R. Riesner, “Christology in the Early Jerusalem Community,” *Mishkan* 24 (1996), 6-17.

⁸ Cf. R. Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 110-114.

⁹ Cf. B. Pixner, “Church of the Apostles on Mount Zion,” *Mishkan* 13 (1990), 27-42.

These were not half-paganized Jews from the Diaspora, but included many pious Jews coming from a Pharisaic or even Essene-Hasidic background (Acts 15:5, 6:7). The scene I have described cannot be found in the Acts of the Apostles but is a reconstruction from a remark made by Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians. At the end of this letter, after some greetings (1 Cor. 16:19-21), Paul apparently makes a transition to the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians are to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (1 Cor 16:20), a gesture that later on preceded the eucharist. Then the apostle cites a short Aramaic prayer: *maranatha*, "our Lord come!" (1 Cor 16:22). With this remark, Paul gives us a precious glimpse of the liturgy of the early Jewish Christian communities in Jerusalem and Judea.

But how could pious Jews start to pray to a crucified man?¹⁰ We should not deny that in the early Jerusalem community there was a strong activity of God's spirit inspiring men and women to new insights. Nevertheless, there are traditional and historical bridges connecting the belief in a superhuman messiah with the Old Testament, Early Judaism and the pre-Easter Jesus.¹¹ Especially interesting are the consequences of Jesus' claim in front of the Sanhedrin to be the Exalted One of Psalm 110. In the light of early Jewish concepts of exaltation this self-confession may have contributed greatly to a high Christology (cf. Acts 2:32),¹² even to the belief that Jesus was godlike¹³ (cf. Phil 2:6-11). We can probably not overestimate the role of worship and prayer in the development of Christology¹⁴; in many cases worship preceded theological reflection. The influence of the Jewish prayer tradition on the development of early Christian confession and theology is a fascinating subject. Only recently the liturgical scholar S. Verhelst has made a good case that a diaconical prayer, still in use in the Greek Orthodox Church, reflects rather

¹⁰ Cf. D. A. Hagner, "Paul's Christology and Jewish Monotheism," in M. Shuster - R. Muller, *Perspectives on Christology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 28ff; O. Skarsaune, *Incarnation - Myth or Fact?* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991); R. Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1998).

¹¹ Cf. now especially W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1998).

¹² Cf. M. Hengel, "'Sit at my Right Hand!'," in *Studies in Early Christology* (London: SCM Press, 1995), 119-226.

¹³ Cf. D.L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus: A Philological-Historical Study in the Key Jewish Themes Impacting Mark 14:61-64* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1998).

¹⁴ Cf. R.T. France, "The Worship of Jesus: A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?," in H.H. Rowdon, *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (Leicester: Intervarsity, 1982), 17-36; M. Hengel, "The Song about Christ in Earliest Worship," in *Studies in Early Christology*, 227-292.

closely some traits of the *Shemoneh Esreh*, the “Eighteen Benedictions.”¹⁵ Apparently in the fourth century the liturgy of the Byzantine church in Jerusalem was deeply influenced by the liturgical tradition of Jewish Christians.¹⁶ At the end of this century, under the rather tolerant episcopate of John II of Jerusalem (387-415), their last remnant in the holy city was absorbed into the gentile church.¹⁷ In the Eastern churches the creeds are part of the liturgy in worship. The Greek words for confessing and confession ([*ex*]homologeîn, *homologia*) have their background in the Hebrew expression *hoda*, “to praise” (cf. Matt 11:25; Phil 2:11; Heb 13:15 etc.).¹⁸ The Christological article of the Nicene creed of 325 AD can be understood as a paraphrase of John 1:1-18, where some scholars find traces of an early Jewish Christian hymn, possibly even in Hebrew.¹⁹ In the Western churches the earliest confessions had another life-setting. But as we will see, these also have their roots in early Jewish Christianity.

An Early Jerusalem Confession in Paul

At the beginning of his crucial chapter on the resurrection of Jesus the apostle Paul starts with a reminder to the Corinthians of their basic faith:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the good news (euaggelion) that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which you also stand, through which you also are being saved, if you hold firmly to the formulation (tini logo) through which I proclaimed the gospel to you – unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed down (paredoken) to you as one of the first (pieces [en tois protois]) what I in turn had received (parelabon): that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Kephaz, then to the Twelve ... (1 Cor 15:1-5)

The apostle did not only underline the importance of his message but also stressed that his gospel is in accordance with the tradition he himself received. Paul, the former pupil of Gamaliel I (Acts 22:3), here made use of Jewish tradition terminology. The Greek words *paradidonai* and *paralambanein* (1 Cor 15:3) are equivalents to the Hebrew terms *masar* and *qibbel*, known to us

¹⁵ “La ‘Kéryxie Catholique’ de la liturgie de Jérusalem et le Shemoneh ‘Esreh,” *Questions Liturgiques* 81 (2000), 5-47.

¹⁶ Cf. S. Verhelst, “Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana, chapitre 1, et la liturgie chrétienne,” *Liber Annuus* 47 (1997), 129-138.

¹⁷ Cf. M. de Esbroeck, “Jean II de Jérusalem et les cultes de S. Étienne, de la Sainte-Sion et de la Croix,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 102 (1984), 99-133; B. Pixner, “Nazoreans on Mount Zion (Jerusalem),” in S.C. Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien dans tous ses états* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 289-316..

¹⁸ Cf. O. Michel, “homologeo ktl.,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

¹⁹ Cf. H. Gese, “Der Johannesprolog,” in *Zur Biblischen Theologie* (München: C. Kaiser, 3rd ed. 1989), 152-201.

from the Mishna (*m Abot* 1:1). The same terminology is used when Paul cites the Eucharistic Words of Jesus (1 Cor 11:23-24) in a form closely resembling the Lukan special tradition (Luke 22:19-20). All this shows that already at a very early stage there were not only rumors about Jesus but that there existed a fixed tradition about him.²⁰

The beginning of the tradition (in 1 Cor 15) received by Paul is clear, but its end is disputed by scholars.²¹ Most think that the original tradition ended with verse 5, although another old tradition might be enshrined in vss. 6-7. For our purpose it is enough to state that the received tradition included at least 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5. For us three other questions are more important: Where did the tradition originate, how old is it and what was its life-setting? The first two questions are closely connected. In my view all the evidence points to the tradition originating in the earliest Jerusalem community. If Paul wanted to stress the conformity of his gospel with the preaching of the Jerusalem apostles (1 Cor 15:9), he had to cite a tradition received from them. The latest possible date for receiving the tradition was his visit to Jerusalem around the year 45 when he met the "pillar apostles": James (the brother of the Lord), Kephias, and John (Gal 2:1-10). But it is even probable that the original form of the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5, which centers around the person of Peter (Kephias), was formulated before this apostle had to leave Jerusalem around 41/42 AD during the persecution by Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-17).²² A Jerusalem origin is corroborated by the poetic form and the Semitic language of the tradition. It is formed in a kind of *parallelismus membrorum*, a Jewish style of elevated speech. *Kepha* is an Aramaic word and the allusion to Isaiah 53:12 in verse 3b seems to follow the Hebrew text-form we know from Qumran (1QIs^{a/b}).²³ It is possible that an early Jerusalem confession was enlarged to a statement of apostolic unity when Paul met "the pillars." Then it would have made sense to include an appearance of Jesus in Galilee (1 Cor 15:6a; cf. Matt 28:16ff.), one before

²⁰ Cf. as a standard work B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans - Livonia: Dove, 1998); and as a short summary my articles "Teacher," in J.B. Green - S. McKnight - I.H. Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove - Leicester: Intervarsity, 1992), 807-811, and "Tradition," in T.D. Alexander - B.S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester - Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2000), 822-826.

²¹ Cf. G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 722-732.

²² Cf. R. Riesner, "Chronologie und Theologie bei Paulus," *Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie* 10 (1996), 110-120.

²³ Cf. H. Patsch, "Zum alttestamentlichen Hintergrund von Römer 4,25 und I. Petrus 2,24," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 60 (1969), 273-279.

James (1 Cor 16:7b; cf. Acts 1:3ff), and the concluding one before Paul (1 Cor 15:8).

What can we say about the life-setting of the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5? Paul himself gives us an important clue. He taught the tradition when he founded the community and the first Corinthians came to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1-2). The tradition belonged to the *protā* (1 Cor 15:3a), that is to the first and most important teachings Paul delivered to his hearers. Thus the life-setting was the teaching either leading up to or following baptism. We have other hints that Paul, as is not unexpected for a former Jewish scribe, in his primary teaching used formed traditions that could easily be memorized (cf. 2 Tim 2:8). In a context of baptism, Paul is able to write that the Roman Christians, like other believers, were “delivered to the form of teaching (*paredothete typon didaches*)” (Rom 6:17). But was baptismal instruction already the life-setting of the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5 in the Jerusalem community of 30-50 AD? The form and content of the formula point in this direction. We noticed the parallelism that could help new believers to remember the tradition. Further, the formula is concentrated on the sheer basics of a very early form of faith. It included the confession of Jesus as the Messiah, his sacrificial death, the resurrection from the tomb on the third day, and all this in accordance with the Scriptures. But since Paul speaks of “the first things” (*protā*) in the plural, it is possible that he cited only the pertinent part of the confession. The pre-Pauline tradition in Philippians 2:6-11 goes from the incarnation through passion and death to exaltation.

Early Baptismal Instruction and Confession

The so-called Western text (here mainly represented by the old Latin and Syriac translations) has an interesting addition to the story about the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37). This addition is clearly not a part of the original text, but is attested to as early as the second half of the second century by Irenaeus of Lyons (*Adversus Haereses* 3:12:8). When the Ethiopian wished to be baptized the evangelist Philip asked him: “Do you believe with all your heart?” The allusion of the question to the Shema (Deut. 6:5) seems obvious. Then the Ethiopian answered with a short confession: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!” Some of the longer additions in the Western text (e.g., Luke 6:4; John 7:53 – 8:11) have a certain Semitic flavor²⁴ and seem to go back to the tradition of the Jewish Christian community of Jerusalem at the turn of the first century.²⁵ Thus the addition of the Ethiopian’s Christological confession in the

²⁴ Cf. M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 3rd ed. 1967), 277-280.

²⁵ Cf. R. Riesner, “Adolf Schlatter und die Judenchristen Jerusalems,” in K. Bockmühl, *Die Aktualität der Theologie Adolf Schlatters* (Gießen: Brunnen, 1988), 34-70 (53-54).

Western text to Acts 8:37 may give us a rare glimpse of the baptismal practice of early Jewish Christianity.

But already Paul might hint at a type of baptismal confession also in language reminiscent of the Shema. In Romans 10:8b-10 he writes:

That [referring to Deut 30:14] is the word of faith that we (the apostles, cf. Rom 10:15) proclaim; because if you confess (homologeïn) with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses [homologeïn] with the mouth and so is saved.

It is interesting to note that according to the Mishna the majority of the rabbis decided that the Shema had to be read aloud, so "that your ear can hear what went out of your mouth" (*m Berakhot* 2:3). Later on the apostle cites Joel 3:5: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13). Baptism was first in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 10:48 cf. Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 1:13). When Ananias offered to baptize Paul he asked him "to call on the name (of Jesus)" (Acts 22:16). The prayer to Jesus in connection with baptism could serve as a kind of basic confession. Perhaps we find an allusion to a baptismal confession used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:6, a verse widely held to rest on pre-Pauline tradition: "There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." In this case the reference to the Shema is undeniable, demonstrating how the early believers wished to hold to the Jewish belief in the one and only God. Nevertheless, from the way Jesus Christ is named in close parallel to God the Father, one may assume that pious Jews saw here a kind of di-theism.

On the Way to the "Rule of Faith"

By the last third of the first century baptism was administered "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). In the *Apostolic Tradition* (according to the majority opinion written around the year 215 by Hippolytos of Rome) we read the following three questions the catechumen was asked before baptism:

Do you believe in God, the almighty father? ... Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, born by the Spirit from the virgin Mary and crucified under Pontius Pilate and died and was buried and raised from the dead on the third day and gone to heaven and is seated to the right of God, the father, and will come to judge the living and the dead? ... Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy church and the resurrection of the flesh?" (Traditio Apostolica 21)²⁶

²⁶ A reconstruction of the Greek and Latin text can be found in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, 3rd ed. 1972), 102-103: On the literary problems of Hippolytos' work, cf. W. Kinzig – C. Marksches – M. Vinzent, *Tauffragen und Bekenntnis*.

One might think that the Jewish Christian communities of first-century Eretz Yisrael were far removed from a Roman writer 100 years later. That thought may be misleading. Hippolytos was apparently familiar with the traditions of Jewish Christians from an Essene-Hasidic background.²⁷ Especially the institution of a three-year catechumenate and the form of the baptismal rite (*Traditio Apostolica* 16-23) have a strong Essene flavor when compared with the Community Rule from Qumran (1QS; cf. Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 3:137-138).²⁸ This similarity ultimately points to some of Hippolytos' traditions as originating in the Jewish Christian communities of Judea and Jerusalem. We find already in the *Epistula Apostolorum* a trinitarian confession (chapters 3 and 5). This anti-Gnostic apocryphon is commonly dated around 150 AD and located in Asia Minor, but an earlier date—around 120 AD—and even a provenance of Syria/Palestine cannot be excluded.²⁹ Some scholars defend a Jewish Christian origin,³⁰ and at least some influence of Jewish Christian traditions seems obvious. That Jewish Christians could formulate a trinitarian confession should not surprise us, since the first generation Jewish Christian Paul was on the way to trinitarian formulas (1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:13 cf. Eph 4:4-6).

The content of the baptismal questions of Hippolytos is very close to the great Western confession we know as the "Apostle's Creed." Of course, it is only a later legend that each one of the 12 apostles contributed one article to this creed. But if the word "apostolic" is understood as meaning apostolic content we are not so far from the truth. If we look at the christological part of the early Roman baptismal confession (*Romanum*) from around the year 200, as witnessed by Marcellus of Ancyra (*Fragment* 121 [GCS 14:212]), we note many allusions to the New Testament. Especially close are texts like 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5, Philippians 2:5-11, Romans 1:1-4, Colossians 1:12-20, 2 Timothy 2:8, and John 1:1-18, which are all surely or very probably traditional and early.³¹ We may suppose that different traditional formulas from different places were gradually combined into longer summaries of faith. So we find a rather fixed

Studien zur sogenannten Traditio Apostolica, zu den Interrogationes de fide und zum Römischen Glaubensbekenntnis (Berlin - New York: W. de Gruyter, 1998).

²⁷ Cf. R. Riesner, *Essener und Urgemeinde in Jerusalem: Neue Funde und Quellen* (Gießen: Brunnen, 1998) 100, 106, 109.

²⁸ Cf. W. Nauck, *Die Tradition und der Charakter des ersten Johannesbriefes* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1957), 167-173.

²⁹ Cf. J.N. Pérès, *L'Épître des Apôtres et le Testament de notre Seigneur et notre Sauveur Jésus-Christ* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994), 20-23.

³⁰ Cf. C.D.G. Müller, in W. Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen I: Evangelien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 5th ed. 1987), 206-207.

³¹ On pre-formulated traditions in the New Testament writings, see now E.E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999).

set of elements but not in the same detail and order. Between the apostolic period and the first trinitarian confessions of the second century we find—around 110 AD—the Christological summaries of Ignatius of Antioch combining Pauline and Johannine traditions in a striking way (*Trallians* 9; *Ephesians* 7,2). If we compare the trinitarian confessions in Hippolytos and the *Romanum* with those in Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* 1:10,1-2) and Tertullian (*Adversus Praxeam* 2) at the turn of the second century we should be astonished by their similarity despite the great distance between Rome, Asia Minor and North Africa. Tertullian was the first to use the expression “rule of faith” (*regula fidei*) for such confessions. This unity is all the more astonishing because at this early time there existed no supreme church authority; even the bishop of Rome lacked it. Neither can one early comprehensive creed be postulated as the source of these multiple confessions. Even the *Romanum* served only as a catalyst in the pre-Nicene west. The unity came about through the close contact between distant communities exchanging a multiplicity of shorter or longer traditional formulas, some of them going back to apostolic times.³² On the way to the formal creeds of the Byzantine Imperial church in the fourth century, longer christological confessions were integrated into the trinitarian structure.

Going back to the second century, we can see a summary of the Christian faith in Justin, who was born in Neapolis in Palestine around 100 and died around 165 as a martyr in Rome.³³ In origin and time he was close to the flourishing Jewish Christian communities of Eretz Yisrael before the Bar Kochba revolt (132-135). Jewish Christian influence may be seen in the following statement of faith:

We revere the God of the Christians, the one (God), whom we hold as the original maker and creator of all the creation, the visible and the invisible; and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant of God, who was announced by the prophets as the future herald of salvation for mankind and teacher of good teachings; and I confess a prophetic power. (Acts of Justin 2)

We note that Jesus is explicitly called the “Servant of the Lord.” This was an important concept for Jesus (Mark 10:45, 14:23-24), in apostolic Christianity (1 Cor 15:3b; Phil 2:7; 1 Tim 2:5-6), and in the Eucharistic prayers of the Jewish Christian community of Jerusalem (*Didache* 9:2-3, 10:2-3), but it was lost in the later confessions. The “herald of salvation” points to prophecies such as Isaiah 52:7 and 61:1ff which stand behind the great New Testament word *euaggelion*. The epiphany of Jesus was in accordance with the Scriptures and so the Holy Spirit is confessed as a spirit of prophecy (cf. *Apology* 1:13). The reference to the scriptures and the prophets so dear to the old Jerusalem

³² For a short but very good overview, see in R.P.C. Hanson, “Creed and Confession of Faith”, *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* I (Cambridge: J.Clarke, 1992), 206-208.

³³ Cf. O. Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987).

confession in 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5 was still present in Irenaeus and Tertullian, but then was lost in the later creedal tradition. An astonishing exception to this rule is a reference to the prophets made in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed of 381. Another prominent element of the New Testament confessional traditions (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8), the Eucharistic prayers of the Didache (*Didache* 9:2) and Ignatius (*Trallians* 9), was already lost in Irenaeus, namely the Davidic descent of Jesus. If the great Eastern and Western creeds had preserved this element, the gentile Christians could not have so easily forgotten that Jesus was born a Jew, a fact stressed in a pre-Pauline (baptismal?) confession (Gal 4:4-5).

It would have sounded very good in Jewish ears when Justin confessed Jesus as a “teacher of many good teachings.” Of course, ethical matters were included in this teaching. According to Justin, every catechumen had to vow that after baptism he would live in accordance with the divine precepts (*Apology* 1:61). This is confirmed by Hippolytos (*Traditio Apostolica* 40), as early as the letter of Pliny the Younger to the emperor Traian (*Epistulae* 10:96), and even the Pastoral Epistles may hint at it (1 Tim 6:12-14; see below). This vow is reminiscent of the commitment made by new members of the Essene community in Qumran (1QS 5:7-11; cf. Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 3:139-142). Possibly under such influence Tertullian called baptism an oath (*sacramentum*) in opposition to the oath of loyalty to Caesar (*De Idolatria* 19:1-2).³⁴ Already Ephesians 5:8-11 with its strong dualism of light and darkness shows a certain influence of Essene-Hasidic thinking on early Christian paraenesis in connection with baptism.³⁵ Behind the Matthean “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt 5-7) and Luke’s “Sermon on the Plain” (Luke 6) lies an early Jewish Christian ethical catechism. Another example for the very important role of ethics in baptismal teaching is the Didache with its many archaic (Jewish Christian) traditions such as the instruction on “the Two Ways” (*Didache* 1:1; cf. *Barnabas* 18ff; *Testament Asher* 1:3ff; 1QS 3:18ff).³⁶

We will close this very brief historical sketch with a look at the communities in Eastern Syria where Jewish Christian influence was especially strong. For a long time Christians in this region remained outside the influence of the Imperial Byzantine church. Because of this some think that Eastern Syria had its own very distinct confessional tradition.³⁷ As an example homilies of Aphraates (from 337-345) are cited:

³⁴ Cf. W. Rordorf, “Tertullians Beurteilung des Soldatenstandes,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969), 105-141 (134-136).

³⁵ Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Zürich - Neukirchen/Vluyn: Benziger - Neukirchner, 1982), 227.

³⁶ Cf. still the magisterial work of J.P. Audet, *La Didachè: Instructions des Apôtres* (Paris: Lecoffre - J. Gabalda, 1958).

³⁷ A. Adam, “Apostolikum,” *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* I (3rd Ed., Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1956), 510-513 (511).

For this is faith: When a man shall believe in God, the Lord of all, that made the heavens and the earth and the seas and all that is in them, who made Adam in His image, who gave the Law to Moses, who sent of His Spirit in the prophets, who sent His Messiah in the world; and that man should believe in the beginning of life in the dead, and believe also in the mystery of baptism: This is the faith of the church of God. And that a man should separate himself from observing hours and Sabbaths and months and seasons ... (Homilies 1:19 [transl. F.C. Burkitt])

From the context it is obvious that Aphraates reacted to Judaism and (Jewish-Christian?) Gnostics. He did not cite a comprehensive creed but only referred to some traditional formula pertinent to his polemic and added some personal theological accentuation. From the works of the church father and other contemporary writings R.H. Conolly tried to show that the Eastern Syrian confessional tradition was not so distant from the "Rule of Faith."³⁸ The work of Conolly seems still worthy of consideration.³⁹ In the Syriac tradition we meet the confession to Jesus' Davidic descent (Aphraates, *Homilies* 23; Codex Sinaiticus Syrus) and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament prophets (*Homilies* 1:19).

Confessions in Persecution, Apologetics, and Confusion

Let us recall the Talmudic story about the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiba as mentioned above: The sage died with the basic Jewish confession on his lips: "Hear Yisrael, the Lord is God, the Lord alone!" (Deut 6:4). This "death-setting" of confession is known also in the New Testament. The first example for such a confessor is Jesus himself as we read in the First Epistle to Timothy:

Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession (homologia) in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession (homologia), I charge you to keep the commandments without spot or blame, until the manifestation (epiphaneia) of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he (God) will bring about at the right time – he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who has alone immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen! (1 Tim 6:12-16)

We may note some important points. There is still a strong confession of the one and only God of Yisrael (1 Tim 6:15-16). He is praised in language similar to that in the Second Book of Maccabees (2 Macc 12:15, 13:4) and the Johannine

³⁸ "The Early Syrian Creed," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 7 (1906), 202-223.

³⁹ Syrian is not included in A.B. Ritter, "Galubensbekenntnisse V: Alte Kirche," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* XIII (Berlin – New York: W.de Gruyter, 1984), 399-412. In other respects, too, he sometimes seems to prefer a rather minimalistic reading of the evidence.

literature (Rev 17:14; John 1:18). Nevertheless, Jesus in his passion is paralleled to God the Creator (1 Tim 6:13a). For the first time the confession to the suffering Christ is connected with the historical memory of Pontius Pilate, his pagan judge. This was from now on a very stable element in the credal tradition (see already Ignatius, *Trallians* 9). It can be compared to the chronological element “on the third day” (1 Cor 15:4), already prominent in Jesus’ announcements of his passion and resurrection (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34), and later in Hippolytos (*Traditio Apostolica* 21), in a creed of an assembly of presbyters in Smyrna around 200,⁴⁰ and in the great Eastern and Western Byzantine creeds.

The early believers knew already from the words of Jesus how important it was to hold to the confession to him: “Everyone who confesses (*homologeïn*) me before others, the Son of Man will confess him before the angels of God ... Those who are ashamed (*epaischynthenai*) of me and my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels” (Luke 12:8, 9:26). Paul alludes to this tradition when he wrote in the context of an early Jewish Christian confession called “Gospel” (Rom 1:1-4) “I am not ashamed (*epaischynthenai*) of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation for everyone ...” (Rom 1:16). The same Synoptic language is echoed in the Johannine tradition (Rev 3:5; John 1:20). The Letter to the Hebrews was addressed to an endangered community of Jewish Christians, possibly of Essene-Hasidic origin. In view of Jesus’ passion the believers are admonished, “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession (*homologia*)” (Hebrews 4:16). The First Letter of Peter may have been written in the same Neronian persecution, where we read: “But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear and do not be intimidated, but in your heart [cf. Deut 6:5] sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense (*apologia*) to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:14-15). Here the confession is part of apologetics in front of persecutors. The same is true for the works of Justin Martyr.

Timothy made his “good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim 6:12) either when he was baptized or when he was ordained to ministry, but as P.H. Towner writes: “The two ceremonies would have been similar in tone, each including a confession of faith, a charge and a vow of commitment.”⁴¹ An important part of this ministry was to keep the apostolic tradition intact. Whenever the Pastoral Epistles were written, they reflect the transition from the apostolic to the post-apostolic period. In order to preserve

⁴⁰ H. Lietzmann, *Kleine Texte* 17/18 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 4th ed. 1935).

⁴¹ 1-2 *Timothy and Titus* (Downers Grove - Leicester: Intervarsity, 1994), 113.

the gospel it was necessary that they become tradition. This was not completely new, as we see it already in the undisputed Pauline letter (1 Cor 15:1ff.). The pastorals are full of traditional formula,⁴² but only one example will be cited. It is introduced by confessional language including the typical participial style: "Great is the mystery (*mysterion*)⁴³ of piety that is to be confessed (*homologoumenos*): He (Christ) was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed throughout the world, taken up in glory" (1 Tim 3:15). Then follows a warning against false teachings. Here we see the confessions as a "bulwark of truth" (cf. 1 Tim 3:14) against heresies. This is a strong element in the Johannine literature in the face of Pharisaism (John 12:42; cf. 9:22) and Christian docetism (1 John 2:23, 4:2-3; 2 John 7). As we have seen in connection with *Birkat Ha-Minim*, this excluding function of confession was not unknown to Judaism either.

Ethical Judaism versus Doctrinal Christianity

There is a popular and widespread belief that goes as follows: Jesus was a Palestinian teacher of Jewish moral reform. Only Paul, the syncretistic Diaspora Jew, made him a god and created a speculative doctrine of redemption. Since Paul Christianity has been doctrinal, whereas Judaism has remained ethical (like Jesus). This picture has some truth when liberal Judaism and historic Christianity are compared. It is not true in a comparison of liberal Judaism and liberal Christianity, because both are moralistic. Orthodox Judaism is not only ethical but has its confession, the 13 articles of Maimonides.⁴⁴ This statement of faith is included in most traditional prayer books as the *Ani Ma'amin* prayer. Thus orthodox Judaism and historic Christianity are both ethical and doctrinal, although there are differences in accentuation. Doctrine is more important in Christianity because of the belief that the Messiah has already come and has brought about redemption. Contemporary Messianic communities should not shy away from giving themselves statements of faith. We should remember that in the 19th century Carl Paul Caspari was a pioneer in the research of early creedal formulas.⁴⁵ Confessions are not an invention of gentile Christianity, they are part of the original and rich Jewish Christian heritage. Moreover, Messianic communities are entitled to include in their confessions early elements that were lost in the later creedal tradition. These elements include the

⁴² Cf. *ibid.* 26-28.

⁴³ Where the Western church speaks of *dogma*, the Eastern church uses the word *mysterion*.

⁴⁴ Cf. D. Cohn-Sherbok, *The Jewish Messiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 181-182.

⁴⁵ Alte und neue Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel (Christiania 1966-75 [Brussels 1964]).

reference to Jesus' Davidic descent and to his fulfillment of prophecy, especially in his roles as the Servant of God and the Messianic teacher of Wisdom.

The Making of the Creeds

Oskar Skarsaune*

Some evangelical Christians and some Jewish Believers think the creeds—the “Apostolic” and the “Nicene”—are superfluous, maybe even misleading or harmful. Why add something to Scripture? Aren't the creeds part of that Church tradition which men have added to Scripture, and which they tend to regard as even more authoritative than Scripture? If so—let's do away with them!

In this article I am going to argue that a closer acquaintance with the historical origin of the creeds may bring even a staunch supporter of the Bible-only position—such as myself—to a greater appreciation of their meaning and function.

Confessing and Baptism

In the apostolic period, when a person requested to be baptized, we have good reason to believe that he/she was asked: Do you believe Jesus to be the Messiah/the Son of God? We have indications of this in the so-called “Western” text of Acts 8:36f (see the notes in any modern Bible). In the beginning, almost all baptismal candidates were Jewish or converts to Judaism, and faith in Jesus was all that was asked for. When the baptizand had confessed his/her faith in Jesus as the Messiah/the Son of God, and following this confession had been baptized, he or she were said to have been baptized “in(to) the Name of the Lord/Messiah Jesus” (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; cp. also 1 Cor 1:13,15; 6:11).⁴⁶

When the preaching of the gospel was taken to the gentiles, biblical monotheism could no longer be taken for granted among the baptismal candidates. It was not enough to ascertain that they believed Jesus to be Lord/Messiah; one also had to be sure they believed in the one God of the Bible, God the Father, and that they knew the plan of salvation that he had revealed and effected by his Spirit. Accordingly, when Jesus sends his disciples

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⁴⁶ The most recent treatment of this formula is Lars Hartmann, ‘Into the name of the Lord Jesus,’ in the same author, *‘Into the Name of the Lord Jesus’: Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1997), 37-50.

to preach and teach and baptize among the gentiles, he bids them to baptize "into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).

Modern believers are accustomed to thinking that the only natural way to put this command into practice is to use a baptismal formula like "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." But most of the early evidence seems to indicate that this formula was not used during the first centuries (it is first documented in the Syriac Church, and there only, from the third century AD).⁴⁷ Instead, three questions were put to the baptizand, to be answered by "Yes, I believe!": "Do you believe in God The Father?" "Do you believe in His Son Jesus (the Messiah/Lord)?" "Do you believe in The Holy Spirit?" When these questions had been put and answered, the candidate was baptized right away, nothing more was said, and in this way he or she had been "baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."⁴⁸

Before we continue to investigate how and why these three baptismal questions of faith developed into the later creeds, I want to draw out one important point here. What we have seen already explains the basic function and meaning of a creed. The creed is, at the most fundamental level, the personal confession of faith by the individual believer, pronounced for the first time at the very point of entering the faith community at baptism. The confession of faith is the personal "Yes!" of each and every believer, the "Yes!" with which each one responds to the message of the gospel, the basic teaching of Scripture. There is therefore no competition, no rivalry, between Scripture and creed. *God* speaks in Scripture, *the believer* speaks in the creed. In the creed, the believer says yes to what God has said in Scripture. The creed is the believer's affirmative response to what God has said in the gospel. The creed is nothing like a "second source" of revelation alongside Scripture, it is only an answer, a response to scriptural revelation.

How and why did the originally very simple baptismal questions develop into the later declaratory creeds? One may discern at least two reasons. First, there was the need to "sum up" (in the questions of faith) the most important points which were taught to the baptismal candidates during their

⁴⁷ See E.C. Whitaker, "The History of the Baptismal Formula," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16 (1965), 1-12; and the same author, "The Baptismal Formula in the Syrian Rite," *The Church Quarterly Review* (1960), 346-52.

⁴⁸ The classic treatment of the origin and development of these "baptismal questions of faith" is John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (3. ed. London: Longman 1972), 40-49. But see also, with new points of view, Wolfram Kinzig, "... natum et passum etc.' Zur Geschichte der Tauffragen in der lateinischen Kirche bis zu Luther," in W. Kinzig; Chr. Marksches; M. Vinzent, *Tauffragen und Bekenntnis. Studien zur sogenannten Traditio Apostolica, zu den Interrogationes de fide und zum Römischen Glaubensbekenntnis* (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 74), Berlin/New York: de Gruyter 1999), 75-183.

catechumenate. Jesus being the Messiah—what, exactly, did that mean? In order to confess Jesus as the Messiah or Lord in a meaningful and unambiguous way, a few explanatory words were added to the second question of faith. Second, there were heretical notions around concerning the Father as well as the Son. Some thought that the God from whom Jesus came, and whose Son he was, was not the God of the Hebrew Bible, but a higher God having nothing to do with creation, the Bible, and the people of Israel. Others, for similar reasons, thought that God's Son had never clothed himself with a truly material body, nor had he really suffered death on a cross. Modern scholars call those who held these notions Gnostics. Gnostic teaching was quite widespread in antiquity. At baptism it was important to be sure that the candidate really confessed Jesus as the Messiah and Lord announced by the Bible, and not as an emissary from the God of the Gnostics.

It is easy to see how these questions could require some slight expansion of the baptismal questions. In the first question, it would be right on target to emphasize that God the Father was the creator of the world. In the second question, it would be opportune to emphasize the reality of Jesus' humanity, his real suffering and his bodily resurrection.

The first writer to give us direct testimony to this process of gradual expansion is Tertullian, AD 211: "We are thrice immersed, while we answer interrogations rather more extensive than our Lord has prescribed in the gospel [i.e. Matt 28:19]" (De corona ch. 3).⁴⁹ Two things emerge quite clearly from this brief remark: (1) Tertullian took Matthew 28:19 to mean that one should baptize people asking them whether they believed in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and (2) that in his time one or more of these three questions had been expanded to include more than the simple "Do you believe in the Father/the Son/the Holy Spirit?"

Some 50-60 years earlier than Tertullian, there is evidence in Justin Martyr to indicate that in his time the questions of faith may have had the following format:

Do you believe in the Father and Lord God of the universe?
Do you believe in Jesus Christ our Saviour,
who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?
Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, who spoke by the prophets?⁵⁰

Almost contemporaneous with Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome has the following to say about the baptismal rite:

⁴⁹ This and other of Tertullian's references to the rites of baptism are conveniently assembled in E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: S.P.C.K. 1970), 7-10.

⁵⁰ Cp. Justin's *First Apology* 61:10ff, and Kelly's comments in *Creeds*, 72-73.

And he goes down to the water. Let him who baptizes [the presbyter] lay hand on him saying thus:

Do you believe in God Father Almighty?

And he who is being baptized shall say:

I believe.

Let him forthwith baptize him once, having his hand laid upon his head. After this let him say:

Do you believe in the Messiah Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose the third day living from the dead, and ascended into the heavens, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?

And when he says:

I believe,

let him baptize him the second time.

And again let him say:

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit in the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the flesh?

And he who is baptized shall say:

I believe,

and so let him baptize him the third time.⁵¹

As one can easily observe, we have here already the core of the Apostolic Creed in the format of three questions. The transition from questions to declaratory creed, in which the candidate made the questions his/her own statement by prefixing "I believe," probably happened during the third century, at least in Rome. It may have been caused by the need for the candidates, prior to baptism, to state publicly their faith as a solemn "summing up" of what they had learned during their period as catechumens.⁵² This "Old Roman Creed" in declaratory form is attested by the eastern bishop Marcellus of Ancyra in AD 340. He quotes it in Greek, and most scholars think, by studying carefully his Greek version with old Latin versions of the same text, that the Greek is original and the Latin a translation. This means the original Creed would have been composed at a time when most Christians in Rome had Greek as their primary language. This leads us to a probable date between Hippolytus' questions ca. AD 210 and the dominance of Latin among Roman Christian authors in the latter half of the same century. In other words: The Old

⁵¹ Quoted according to Whitaker's *Documents*, 5f.

⁵² This Roman custom is affirmed quite explicitly at a somewhat later date (around AD 400) by Augustine (*Confessions* VIII.2.4f) and Rufinus (*Commentary on the Creed*, ch. 3). Some scholars think that it was only in this declaratory form that the second article of the creed got this amount of expansion, and that the second question in Hippolytus is a later interpolation in his text. I remain unconvinced by the arguments for this view, but in any case, it would only modify, not change basically the picture of the development of the creed I have been giving here. See for this alternative view. Kinzig/Markschies/Vinzent, *Tauffragen* (full ref. note 3 above).

Roman Creed probably was fixed in its wording some time during the period ca 210-250 AD.

In the Western Church, all local communities took over and slightly modified this Roman creed; it is therefore to be considered the “mother” of all later creeds in the West. In the period of Charlemagne (768-814) the local creed of Gaul (which we can trace back to around AD 500) was authorized as the normative form to be used by all and it gradually supplanted all other versions. It is this creed we now know as “The Apostolic Creed.”

Confessing Jesus as the Messiah: Apostolic Creed, Second Article

Having seen how there is a direct line of development from Matthew 28:19 till the three articles of the Apostolic Creed, it remains for us to study the contents of the creed a little more fully. The focus will be on the second article, since faith in Jesus the Son of God was the central core of the baptismal confession from the very beginning.

The substantial expansion in the second article is *a story about Jesus* which begins with his birth from the Virgin, focuses heavily on his passion, death, resurrection, and heavenly enthronement, and ends with his return at the end of days. This type of Jesus story is much older than its imbedding in the second article of the creed. When we trace the history of this type of “summary” of the Jesus story, we discover that it seems to have had a quite specific *Sitz im Leben* (“setting-in-life”), viz. the elementary *teaching about Jesus as the Messiah proclaimed by the prophets of the Hebrew Bible*. In other words: In this type of summary, the “proof from prophecy” is always implied, and often explicitly referred to. And Jesus is portrayed as the Messiah announced by the prophets. We have here a Messianic Christology.

Instead of arguing this point in great detail, I will just present in chronological order some of the texts I consider milestones along this trajectory:

*What I received I passed on to you at the first, that
Christ died for our sins
according to the Scriptures,
that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day
according to the Scriptures,
and that he appeared ... (1 Cor 15:3-5)⁵³*

We, unrolling the books of the prophets ~~which~~ we possess, who name Jesus Christ, partly in parables, partly in enigmas, partly expressly and in so many words, find [predicted in them]

His coming

⁵³ NIV translation with alternative footnote reading in v. 3.

and death,
and cross,
and all the rest...
and his resurrection
and assumption to heaven...

We have believed in God in consequence of what is written [in the Scriptures] respecting Him [Jesus the Messiah]... For we know that God enjoined these things, and we say nothing apart from the Scriptures (Preaching of Peter, ca AD 125).⁵⁴

In the books of the prophets we found Jesus our Messiah foretold as

coming,
born of a virgin,
reaching manhood, and healing every disease ...
and being hated, and unrecognized, and crucified,
and dying,
and rising again, and ascending into heaven, being called and [really] being the

Son of God...

All this was prophesied before he appeared...

(Justin, 1. Apol. 31:7f; ca AD 150).⁵⁵

The Church ... has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith:

(1)[She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are in them;

(2) and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation;

(3) and in the Holy Spirit,

who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations [of God] and the [two] comings [of the Messiah]:

the birth from a virgin,

the passion,

and the resurrection from the dead,

and the ascension into heaven...

and his future coming from heaven in the glory of the Father...

to raise up anew all flesh...

and execute just judgment...

(Irenaeus, Against Heresies I:10:1; ca AD 190).⁵⁶

The common feature of these summaries leaps to the eye: In his historical career, Jesus *fulfilled the Messianic prophecies*. He *began* to fulfil them – if such an expression is allowed – at the point when he entered history and was born of

⁵⁴ This writing was apparently an early second century imitation of the canonical book of Acts, probably focusing more on missionary speeches by Peter. It has not been preserved in its entirety, but some fragments, among them the one given here, are contained in quotations from the book in Clement of Alexandria. Translation according to *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. II, 510.

⁵⁵ Translation according to *Ante-Nicene Fathers* I, 173, slightly altered.

⁵⁶ Translation according to *ANFI*, 330, slightly altered.

Mary. Therefore the virgin birth from Mary is often the starting-point in summaries like this. (There is no mention of the Son of God existing with God before he became man, or even being with God before the creation of the world and from eternity.)

In this type of summary the focus is not on the nature, the essence of the Messiah's person, but on the Messianic *task*, which was predicted in the prophets and fulfilled by Jesus from the moment he entered history. The emphasis in this type of summary—and therefore in the Old Roman Creed, second article, is on the Messiah's work, his function, rather than on the nature of his person as such. The second article of the baptismal confession of the Western (Latin) Church is thus a strikingly "Jewish" confession of a Messiah with markedly "Jewish" characteristics.⁵⁷

Confessing Jesus as the Incarnate Word of God: Nicene Creed, Second Article.

When we turn to the other main creed of the Old Church, the Nicene Creed, many scholars would say that we enter a completely different world of thought. If we are right in claiming the Old Roman creed as a basically Jewish confession of Jesus as the Messiah, can we say the same about the Nicene Creed? If not, is the explanation that the Nicene Creed is more Hellenistic than Jewish?

The creed now recited in Churches all around the world as the "Nicene" creed is really a later modification of the original creed of the council of Nicaea (AD 325). The original runs like this:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
begotten from the Father, onlybegotten,

that is, from the substance of the Father,

God from God,

light from light,

true God from true God,

begotten, not made,

of one substance with the Father,

through whom [the Son] all things came into being,

⁵⁷ This is not to say that the Roman community, or Roman theologians, in the middle of the third century were unfamiliar, if not to say had no knowledge, with the "high" Christology of a Divine and pre-existent Son of God. This high Christology is easily documented in Roman authors right from the beginning of the second century. It is all the more striking that the Roman community should choose to stick to this "Jewish" Messianology in its baptismal confession.

things in heaven and things on earth,
 Who - because of us men and because of our salvation - came down and became
 incarnate,
 becoming man,
 suffered,
 and rose again on the third day,
 ascended to the heavens,
 will come to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸

This creed was probably made in the following way: The “drafting committee” took as textual basis a typical *eastern* baptismal creed – possibly the one of Jerusalem! – and only inserted in it the four lines that are italicized in the quotation above. These lines are the only “controversial” statements in the creed, apart from them there is nothing special about it. But even without these lines, we easily observe that this creed is very different from the Old Roman creed we studied above.⁵⁹ The following synopsis displays the differences:

2nd article, Nicaea

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
 the Son of God,
 begotten from the Father,
 onlybegotten,
 God from God,
 light from light,
 through whom (the Son)
 all things came into being, things
 in heaven and things on earth,
 Who - because of us men and
 because of our salvation -
 came down and became incarnate,
 becoming man,
 suffered,

2nd article, Old Roman

And in Messiah Jesus,
 God’s only Son,
 our Lord

 Who was born of the
 Holy Spirit
 and the Virgin Mary,

 was crucified under

⁵⁸ Translation according to Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 215f. In the creed as formulated at Nicaea, there was also appended, at the end, the following clause (cp. Gal 1:8f): “But as for those who say, ‘There was when He was not, and before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing,’ or who assert that the Son of God is of a different being or substance, or is subject to alteration and change - these the Catholic and Apostolic Church condemns” (Kelly, 216).

⁵⁹ For analyses of the origin and meaning of the creed from Nicaea, cf. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, chs. VII and VIII; Oskar Skarsaune, “A Neglected Detail in the Creed of Nicaea (325),” *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987): 34-54; Richard P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), ch. 6 (= pp. 152-178).

and rose again
on the third day,
ascended to the heavens,

will come to judge
the living and the dead.

Pontius Pilate,
was buried
arose from the dead
on the third day
ascended into heaven
and sits at the
Father's right hand
from whence
He will come to judge
the living and the dead.

Some differences in format and style leap to the eye: The longest passage in the eastern type of creed concerns the being of the Son with God before the world was created. Then there is a weighty statement that he *participated in creating the world*. In the Old Roman creed there is nothing that corresponds to this. The statements about the Son's human birth are also different: the Old Roman Creed states, in a simple, narrative fashion, that he was born of the Holy Spirit and Mary. This is the same way of telling the story as we have in Matthew and Luke. The eastern creed expresses the same fact much more "theologically," basically the same way as in John: the Son became flesh, was incarnate,⁶⁰ became man. Up to this point, the eastern creed has been much more extensive than the Western (Roman), but now the picture changes. In the eastern creed the entire life-story of Jesus, including his suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial, is condensed into the one word "suffered." Notice also that in the eastern creed the session at God's right hand—which we interpreted as the statement about the exalted Jesus' *Messianic reign*—is left out.

To conclude: While the Old Roman creed portrays Jesus as the Messiah doing the task predicted by the prophets; the eastern creed portrays him as a divine being becoming incarnate, as the mediator of creation who himself became man, suffered for his own creatures, and was then exalted. While the Roman creed is oriented "horizontally" along the time axis—prophetic promises, fulfilment—the eastern creed is oriented "vertically": the one who was with God and created the world with him "came down," suffered, rose again, shall finally descend once more as the final judge.

Nicene Christology—Hellenistic?

Jewish scholars in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times, have almost unanimously claimed that the idea that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God is *unjewish*, and a product of the transplantation of Christianity from a Jewish milieu to a gentile-Hellenistic milieu. Liberal Christian scholars in modern

⁶⁰ In Latin, the Son's coming "in the flesh" is *in carne* - from which derives *incarnatus* and "incarnation" in English.

times have said much the same thing, as e.g. the great historian of dogma, Adolf von Harnack. His saying has become famous: "The Christological dogma ... is a product of the spirit of Hellenism on the soil of the Gospel."⁶¹

Harnack himself knew well that there is no way of holding the eastern creed to be basically Greek and un-Jewish, and at the same time hold John the evangelist, or for that matter Paul, to be un-Greek and Jewish in their Christology. Therefore, according to many critical scholars, the process of "hellenizing" Christianity must have begun very early, already in Paul, and seems to have reached a first climax in John 1:1-18 (the so-called "Joannine prologue").

But does this view stand up to scrutiny? If we could ask the Church Fathers themselves what *they* thought was the background of the Christology of the eastern creed, they would no doubt have answered: This creed is *biblical* through and through, not only in substance, but also in wording. And by "biblical" they would have meant: Every word and clause in the creed can be substantiated from the *Old Testament*, not only from the New. Now, in their Old Testament they sometimes included the so-called Apocrypha, and did so in this case. But there is no question of the Jewishness of the Apocrypha; they belong to "mainstream" Judaism of the two last centuries BC.

I will argue that the Church Fathers were quite simply right in this claim for biblical foundation of their Christology. The Christology of the eastern creeds is certainly *other* than the Messianic confession of the Roman Creed, but that does not automatically imply that it is less rooted in Jewish tradition. Let us try to trace these roots

Nicene Christology: Wisdom Incarnate

Let us first make a survey of the New Testament passages that are most similar to the first part of the Christological statement of the Nicene creed.

For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Cor 8:6).

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born prior to all creation; for by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, ... all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.... (Col 1:15-17).

⁶¹ Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte I* (5. ed. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1931), 20: "Das Dogma ist in seiner Conception und in seiner Ausbau ein Werk des griechischen Geistes auf dem Boden des Evangeliums." After Harnack, almost every scholar writing on the subject of Old Church dogma in general, and Christology in particular, has had to take issue with this thesis.

But in these last days he has spoken to us by the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word (Heb 1:2f).

The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation (Rev 3:14).

In the beginning was the Word [Greek: Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life... (John 1:1-4).

This list shows us that the "Johannine prologue" is not an isolated and singular text in the New Testament, as far as Christology is concerned. John has Paul and the author of Hebrews to support him in what he says of the Word in John 1. Maybe we should add two more supporters, if Revelation is written by another John than the evangelist, and Paul is quoting a pre-Pauline hymn in Colossians 1:15ff (as many scholars think).

It is easy to see what is common to all these passages about the pre-existent Son of God: The common feature is the saying that he assisted God at the creation of the world; that God created *through him* or *by him*. Let us call this the idea of *mediatorship in creation*. The Son or the Word is God's *mediator* in creating the world.

This helps us to pose the right question when we ask for the Jewish roots of this Christology. Scholars have often searched in general for ideas of pre-existence in Judaism, and found many and diverse answers as to what could qualify as "background" of Christology. But if we ask more precisely: Which thing or person—which "X"—is playing an important role in Judaism in sayings like "God created the world through X", then the answer is obvious and easy to find in the extant sources: In Jewish writings of the second temple period there is one such X, and one only: *the Wisdom of God*.

Here is a sample of such sayings:

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth (Prov 3:19).

[Wisdom speaking:] When God assigned to the sea its limit, ... when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him like a master workman (Prov 8:29f).

Wisdom is an initiate in the knowledge of God and an associate in His works (Wisdom of Solomon, 8:4).

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By your Wisdom you formed man... (Wisdom of Solomon, 9:2)

It may seem surprising at first that God's Wisdom, which is not a person, should be such an important model for God's Son, who is certainly a person. But here we should notice two things: (1) This background makes it easier to

understand that in the Johannine prologue the Son is *also* identified with something that is seemingly not a person—the Word. It is interesting to notice that in *Wisdom of Solomon* (one of the apocryphal books), God’s Wisdom is also identified with God’s word (*Logos*). (2) In several texts in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, God’s Wisdom is in fact described—or “behaves”—*as if* it were a person. Scholars have for a long time wrestled with the problem of how to explain this phenomenon properly. Some think it should be described as nothing more than a “poetic personification” of an aspect of God, while others think that this does not do full justice to the texts which identify God’s Wisdom with something that is to a certain extent exterior to God. Foremost among these identifications is the one which identifies God’s Wisdom with the Torah—on this more in a moment. Some scholars have therefore come to the conclusion that Wisdom in these texts is an aspect of God which has at the same time a kind of quasi-personal existence outside him, and they call this a “hypostatization”⁶² of one of God’s attributes

Before we go on in exploring this idea further, let us see to what extent this Wisdom concept may clarify the *terminology* used in the Christological texts representing this Wisdom Christology.

(1) In Hebrews the Son of God is said to be a radiance (Greek: *apaugasma*) of God’s glory and an imprint/image (Greek: *charakter*) of his being. This is a free quotation, actually, of *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:26, which says of Wisdom: She is a radiance (*apaugasma*) of the eternal Light, an undistorted mirror of God’s energy, and an image (*eikon*) of God’s goodness.

(2) In *Colossians* 1:15 the Son is said to be, like Wisdom, the *image (eikon)* of the invisible God, and then “the first-born (*proto-tokos*) prior to all things created.” In *Proverbs* 8:22 the Hebrew text may well be translated: “In the beginning, before his works, the Lord begat me,” and further: “*Before* he made the earth and the deep places, before water came forth from the sources ... before the world (*pro aionos*)... he *begat* me” (*Prov* 8:24-26 Septuagint; the Hebrew has the same point, but partly different objects).

(3) The most striking parallel is yet to be mentioned. It comes in a Wisdom text not yet quoted, viz. the self-praise of Wisdom in *Sirach* 24. This text also has the idea of Wisdom being present with God when he created the world—but then an important idea is added: Wisdom began to seek a place to *dwell on earth* (“become incarnate”, we could perhaps say), but found none, until “the Creator of all things ... chose the place for my tent (*ten skenen mou*). He said:

⁶² The Greek word *hypostasis* is taken from Christian terminology, in which it became the word to describe the three persons of the Trinity. It is interesting to notice that when scholars tried to find an appropriate term for the unique position of Wisdom - being an aspect of the one God and at the same time somehow external to him - they had to turn to Trinitarian terminology!

*pitch your tent*⁶³ (*kataskenoson*) in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance. ... *In the holy tent* I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion" (Sirach 24:8-10). As is well known, it is exactly the same terminology which is applied to the Word's incarnation in John 1:14, which literally says: "The Word became flesh and *pitched his tent* (*eskenosen*) among us." The Sirach background makes clear why the metaphor of *tent* is used in John 1:14—it is the Glory and Name of God *dwelling in the Tabernacle/Temple* which explains the tent imagery. This also makes it easier to understand why *seeing the glory* plays such a great role in the Johannine prologue: the glory and the cloud of glory were intimately associated with the holy tent and its successor, the temple.

Taken together, this leads us to the following conclusion: The Christology of the New Testament passages (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15ff; Heb 1:2f; Rev 3:14; John 1:1-18) we have surveyed is a Jewish "Wisdom Christology." Jesus did not only possess wisdom, was not only a wise man, he was himself God's Wisdom in person, he was Wisdom incarnate, the Word made flesh. This is a Christology *other* than the Messianic, but no less Jewish, and not necessarily later in time.⁶⁴

A Jewish Parallel: "Torah-logy"

In Sirach 24, Wisdom is identified with another important object in God's plan of creation: the Law of Moses, the Torah. "All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob" (v. 23). This identification of Torah and Wisdom became stock in trade with the rabbis, and is universal in rabbinic literature.⁶⁵

In the rabbinic writings we find an interesting midrashic reading in which the two sayings about creation in Genesis 1:1 and Proverbs 8:22 are combined, and referred to the Torah. In Proverbs 8:22ff the Rabbis read that Wisdom was begotten as "Beginning" *before* the rest of creation; this made them read Gen 1:1 in the following manner: "By (means of) 'Beginning' = Wisdom, God created the heavens and the earth." In the Targums (Yerushalmi and Neofiti) we find this exegesis in an interesting double translation of *bereshit*: "*mileqadim bechokmah bara elohim...*": "In the beginning, by Wisdom, God created..." And in *Midrash Rabba* on Genesis 1.1 we find the further identification of Wisdom and Torah spelled out in a magnificent story of creation:

⁶³ I have chosen a quite literal translation in order to make the point more clear.

⁶⁴ On the relationship between this "high" Christology and Jewish monotheism in Antiquity, see my two articles "Is Christianity Monotheistic? Patristic Perspectives on a Jewish/Christian Debate," in Elizabeth A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica XXIX: Historica, Theologica et Philosophica, Critica et Philologica* (Leuven: Peeters 1997), 340-363; "Altkirchliche Christologie - jüdisch/unjüdisch?," *Evangelische Theologie* 59 (1999), 267-285.

⁶⁵ See the material gathered in Strack/Billerbeck II, 353ff.

The Torah declares: 'I was the working tool of the Holy One, blessed be He' [cf. Prov 8:29: "I was with him as a master worker" (Hebrew: 'amon)]. In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, "By 'The Beginning' God created" [Gen 1:1], 'The Beginning' referring to the Torah, as in the verse, "The Lord made me The Beginning of His way" [Prov 8:22].

Basically the same midrash is preserved in Philo,⁶⁶ and Rabbi Akiva seems to hint at it when he says: "Beloved are Israel, for to them was given the precious instrument; still greater was the love, in that it was made known to them that to them was given *the precious instrument by which the world was created*" (M Aboth 3:14).⁶⁷ The position accorded to the Wisdom-Torah in such texts as these prompted the rabbis to call the Torah "God's daughter" (TB Sanhedrin 101a; Lev Rab 20:10 etc.).⁶⁸

The fact that mainstream Judaism came to identify God's Wisdom, his assistant at the creation of the world, with the Torah, while believers in Jesus identified it with Jesus the incarnate Word/Wisdom, explains why Jesus came to play much the same functional role in Christian belief as the Torah does in Jewish belief.

The Nicene Precisions — What Do They Mean?

When a man *makes* something, that something is not of the same nature as its maker, precisely because it is made. An artist can make a perfect statue of himself, but it is not of the same nature as the artist, it is not of the same, living stuff as the artist and does not share *his* kind of life. On the other hand, when the artist *begets* a son, the son may not be his exact copy, but he is definitely of the same *nature*, the same stuff as his father. He shares *his* kind of life. He is "from his Father's being," "of the same essence" as his Father.

⁶⁶ De opificio mundi (On the making of the world), 17-20.

⁶⁷ Very likely, the "instrumental" reading of *be-reshit*, equating *reshit* with Wisdom/Torah, was already known to the author of Revelation, because when he calls Jesus "the *arche* (beginning) of God's creation," he may be alluding to Gen 1:1 Greek: "By *arche* God created ..."

⁶⁸ Both Wisdom and Torah are female words in Hebrew; Wisdom is female in Greek, too. This may be sufficient reason why the *term* Wisdom never won any monopoly among believers in Jesus as the term for the pre-existent Son of God; although it was extensively used as a Christological title by the Church Fathers. But when the Jewish texts already contained the masculine *Logos* as an equivalent to Wisdom, it is no wonder that believers in Jesus preferred this word - the more so, since God's *Logos* evoked not only the idea of God's *creative plan* - as Wisdom did - but also his *creative word* of Gen 1:3ff and Ps 33:6.

The very simple point of Nicene Christology is that the last, not the first, analogy is the right one when it comes to finding the right way to express the relationship between the Father and the Son. *We* are *made* by God, therefore different from Him in nature, not sharing His kind of life. But the Son is *begotten* by God, therefore of the same nature, sharing God's kind of divine life.

If we take a new look at the creed of Nicaea, we observe that the inserted clauses stress only this point. Apart from the inserted clauses, the creed is a simple paraphrase of biblical sayings about Jesus=Wisdom. When it says, for example, that the pre-existent Logos is "light from light," this is a shortened expression for what is said in Wisdom 7:26 (and repeated in Hebrews 1:3): Wisdom is "a radiance of the eternal Light." And when the Nicene creed says that the Son is born from the Father "before the ages," that is an encapsulated short version of Proverbs 8:22ff (e.g. "from the primeval times before the earth's existence," v. 23).

In the Wisdom texts (Old Testament, Apocrypha, and New Testament), the Church Fathers from the very beginning found several metaphors describing the relationship between God and his Wisdom. These they transferred to Christology. The Father is to the Wisdom/Son as the root is to the tree (cp. Prov 3:18; Sirach 24:12ff); as the light is to its radiance (Wisdom 7:26)—a variant of this metaphor: as the sun is to its ray (cf. Sirach 24:32); and as the source is to the river (cf. Baruch 3:12, God the fountain of Wisdom; Sirach 24:25ff, Wisdom an overflowing Paradise river).

Tertullian uses all these metaphors to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son (esp. in *Against Praxeas* chs. 5-8), and once says that "the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) teaches" these metaphors (*A.P.* 8:5)—no doubt a reference to the Wisdom metaphors in Scripture.

In these metaphors, the church fathers recognized the same basic *unity of nature* as in the birth metaphor: God and his Wisdom, The Father and the Son, were "of the same stuff," as the water is the same in the fountain and the river, etc. To explain the metaphors by a concept, Tertullian used the word "substance": the same substance is in the fountain and in the river, and so it is with the Father and the Son:

There is no division of substance, but merely an extension, as when a light is kindled from a light. ...[Thus Christ is] Spirit of Spirit, and God of God... (Apology, 21.12f).

Thus, the concept of substance and the Wisdom metaphors explain each other mutually. When Tertullian wants to elucidate the meaning of the metaphors, he uses the concept of substance; when he wants to make clear the meaning of the concept, he uses the metaphors.

What happened before the council of Nicaea, was that a presbyter in Alexandria, Arius, totally rejected every notion of a common nature of the Father and the Son. The Son was *made*, and therefore of a different nature. He was a creature, although in a category by himself (Arius, too, believed that the

rest of creation had been created through the Son). But he firmly rejected any notion that the Son's being was an extension of the Father's. He therefore also rejected all the Wisdom metaphors traditionally used in pre-Nicene Christology, as in the following letter to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria (ca AD 320):

[The Son is] a perfect creature of God ... an offspring ... but not as Valentinus said, that the offspring of the Father was an emanation;⁶⁹ nor as Mani taught that the offspring was a part of the Father, consubstantial [homousios]... nor as Hieracas (said:) of one torch from another, or as a lamp divided into two...⁷⁰

Adolf von Harnack, himself by no means an admirer of orthodoxy, had the following to say about Arius' doctrine:

Arianism is a new teaching in the Church. ... It is not new only because it contended so sharply and publicly that the Logos was created ..., but it is new because it explicitly denies every substantive connection between the Logos and the Father. The old images which were nearly as old in the Church as the Logos doctrine itself, the spring and the brook, the sun and the light, the original picture and its reflection, are here cast away. But that signifies nothing less than that the Christian doctrine of the Logos and God's Son is discarded. All that remains, are the old names.⁷¹

In light of this, the meaning of the inserted clauses in the creed of Nicaea becomes plain. They are not intended to introduce a new, revolutionary interpretation of the old Eastern Creed; on the contrary, they are intended as safeguards around the old meaning of the creed.

Certainly the Fathers at Nicaea did not "Hellenize" Christology by this creed. The very idea of the real God becoming incarnate, and even suffering, was as offensive to Hellenists as to anyone else. In Nicaea the Church confessed that the Son, of one being with the Father, had indeed suffered. And there was no way of softening this by explaining that the divine nature in the Son was of a less divine or semi-divine character. In Christ, God suffered. That was as offensive to Hellenists as to anybody, but the Fathers at Nicaea understood this to be the doctrine of Scripture.

⁶⁹ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 5ff, had used precisely this term to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son: just as the river is an emanation from the spring, so the Son from the Father. Tertullian was aware that the Gnostics (Valentinus) had used this term, but was confident that it was nevertheless useful to express orthodox doctrine. Arius, of course, was out³⁶ to discredit the word by attaching it to a well-known heretic.

⁷⁰ This metaphor, making the "light from light" concrete, was in fact one of the favorite metaphors of the pre-Nicene fathers, beginning with Justin.

⁷¹ *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* II (5. ed. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1931), 221, my translation.

In a televised interview on Norwegian Television (April 1978) Pinchas Lapidé said the following:

I used to think that becoming incarnate was impossible to God. But recently I have come to the conclusion that it is unjewish to say that this is something the God of the Bible cannot do, that he cannot come that close. I have had second thoughts about the incarnation...

Creeds and Judaism

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum*

Jewish writers often pride themselves on the fact that, unlike Christianity, Judaism does not have doctrinal creeds. The implication is that on one hand there is a point of superiority for Judaism, but on the other hand, Judaism has no need for such creeds. The following is one example:⁷²

The term "dogma" which is well defined in Christianity has as such no place in Judaism. In Judaism the need for a profession of belief did not arise and rabbinic synods saw no necessity for drawing up concise formulas expressing Jewish beliefs. Theologically speaking, every Jew is born into God's covenant with the people of Israel, and membership in the community does not depend on credal affirmations of a formal character. Jewish beliefs are voiced in the form of prayer and in the twice-daily recital of the Shema.

But the fact is Judaism in the course of its history has had specific credal type statements which clearly spell out what is the essence of Judaism, and whenever a statement comes out stating what Judaism or Jewishness is not, that too is a credal statement. True, Judaism does not have such detailed creeds as the history of Christianity developed; nevertheless they are there. Sometimes they are very simplistic. For example, when a Jewish leader makes a declaration that "you cannot be Jewish and believe in Jesus," he is making a formulated credal statement. In the negative, the credal statement simply means: "Jewishness is not believing in Jesus." To make blanket statements that Judaism does not have dogmas or creeds is simply not true unless these things have been defined strictly on the basis of detail rather than content.

Over the preceding two centuries, when traditional Judaism ceased to be the only Judaism and started receiving competition from Conservative Judaism, Reform Judaism, Humanistic Judaism, etc., statements had to be issued as to what constitutes "authentic Judaism" and what does not.

Probably one of the earliest examples of a dogmatic credal statement is to be found in the Mishnah in Sanhedrin 10:1 which began to limit the previous dogma that "all Israel has a share in the age to come." The Mishnah now declares that among those excluded from the "all Israel" in the age to come

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⁷² "Articles of Faith," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 3:654.

include those who deny the resurrection of the dead, those who deny that the Torah came from Moses, and those who are Epicurean. This may not be a detailed creed but it is certainly a creedal statement and a dogma by any definition of the term.

No doubt the most famous of the creedal statements of Judaism are the Thirteen Principles of Moses Maimonides, whose principles will be discussed below. However, there are formulations set out prior to Maimonides' that are worth mentioning.

From Philo to Maimonides

Philo, living in the 1st century CE, tried to define Judaism in the context of the Hellenistic world. He concluded that there are eight essential principles which included: the existence of God; the unity of God; the providence of God; the creation of the world; the unity of the world; the existence of the incorporeal; the revelation of the Torah; and, the eternity of the Torah. As soon as one proclaims that a certain religious faith has "essential principles" one is defining the dogmas of that religion. Furthermore, to spell the principle out in a statement will turn that statement into a creedal declaration.

Also prior to Maimonides, Rabbi Hananel ben Hushiel laid out four principles about Judaism which were believed: God, the prophets, the age to come, and the coming of the Messiah.

An early non-orthodox form of Judaism was Karaite Judaism, which began in the 8th century. In the middle 12th century, Rabbi Judah Hadassi listed 10 articles (*ishurim*) that would constitute the Judaism he represented: the unity and wisdom of God; his eternity and unlikeness to any other being; God is the creator of the world; Moses and all the prophets were sent by God; the Torah was given through Moses and it is true; the Jews are obligated to study the Hebrew language in order to fully understand the Torah; the Temple in Jerusalem was chosen by God as the eternal dwelling place of His glory; there will be a resurrection of the dead; there will be a Divine judgment; and, God will mete out both reward and punishment.

Other examples of various doctrinal, creedal, dogmatic formulations could be given from all periods of Jewish history but limitations of the article will not permit this. The information is readily available in the studies of the history of Judaism.

Maimonides and the Thirteen Articles of Faith

The most famous of the creedal statements of Judaism remains Maimonides' thirteen articles or principles of faith. One interesting observation is that Maimonides set down these Thirteen Principles in his commentary on the Mishnah. Furthermore, they were given as an introduction to his commentary

on Sanhedrin 10, which was referred to earlier. It appears that Maimonides found the statement of Sanhedrin 10:1 inadequate to clearly define the principles of Judaism, at least in his day, and thus formulated the Thirteen Principles which have continued to this day as the foundations of Orthodox Judaism. In other words, if one wanted to provide a concise statement on what the essence of Orthodox Judaism is, one would be hard pressed to find something better than the principles of Maimonides. Furthermore, it is usually deviations from these Thirteen Principles, as in the case of Reform Judaism, that would distinguish the two Judaisms from each other. Just as differences in theological issues have brought about the various divisions within Christianity, the same has to be said for Judaism if it is at all honest, though Judaism is not as fragmented as Christianity. It is true that all Jews make up the covenant community of Israel regardless of what they believe. But that is not the same as saying that Orthodox Judaism accepts as authentic the other brands of Judaism. Furthermore, to this present day, Orthodox Judaism does not recognize the conversions of gentiles into any other Judaism than Orthodox Judaism. Hence, from the perspective of Orthodox Jewish law, converts to any form other than Orthodox Judaism are not Jews. Furthermore, to be fair, it should be stated that although different dogmas divide different denominations within Christianity, it is generally recognized among all of these various divisions that all those who believe in Jesus as Savior still constitute the born again community.

Maimonides referred to these thirteen formulations as *ikkarim* which carries the basic meaning of "principles." He also referred to them as *yesodot* which has the meaning of "foundations."

In fact, on the basis of these Thirteen Principles or foundations, Maimonides himself distinguishes between two classes of Jews who are not in conformity with these Thirteen Principles. The first group he refers to as "sinners of Israel." This group does not deny the truth of these Thirteen Principles, however, they are guilty of violating them. Therefore these are not excluded from the Jewish community nor are they excluded from the age to come. They may have violated these principles but they have not denied these principles. The second category are those who have denied one of these principles. In this case, such individual has excluded himself from the community and therefore is called a *min* (heretic), and an Epicurean, borrowing from the term used by the Mishnah.

The fact that Maimonides had a creedal statement, in which one is either included or excluded from the Jewish community, clearly invests these Thirteen Principles with "the character of dogma." If this is the criteria of Orthodoxy, and if the affirmation keeps one within the Jewish community in the world to come, and denial leads to exclusion from the Jewish community in the age to come, it ends up being the same type of a criteria as the Westminster confession. According to Maimonides, those in the last group will include Jews who have converted to Christianity for one reason or another. One can only

wonder what Maimonides would say to those who adhere to Conservative Judaism, Reform Judaism, Humanistic Judaism, etc., who obviously reject some, many, or even all of these principles.

Each of these Thirteen Principles is introduced with the same phrase: I believe with perfect faith that.... Obviously these are not to be produced as merely statements of fact but something one believes in. They are clearly a statement of faith.

The *first* affirmation focuses on the existence of God, a God who is perfect and who is the cause and creator of all other beings in existence.

The *second* affirmation focuses on the oneness of God and that unity of God is like the unity of no other. It should be noted here that Maimonides did not choose to use the word found in the Shema, *Echad*, but rather *Yachid*. The Rambam was well versed in classical Hebrew and surely would have recognized that the word *echad* is ambiguous as to the nature of oneness and did not always carry the concept of an absolute oneness and there are examples where it clearly means a compound oneness (Gen 2:25). Furthermore, sometimes the word did not have a numerical emphasis but an emphasis on uniqueness and therefore carried the meaning of only or alone. Therefore the word *echad* by itself did not negate a plurality in the godhead. Thus to eliminate the ambiguity or any possibility of a plurality or trinity in the godhead, he chose to use *yachid* which conveys an absolute oneness.

The *third* affirmation rejects God as having any corporeality and therefore he cannot be expressed in real bodily forms. On the contrary, all of the anthropomorphisms found in reference to God in Scripture must be understood strictly in a metaphorical or an illustrative sense. The implication is that God, for that very reason, would never become a man with flesh and bone. It was one thing to appear that way as an anthropomorphism; it was quite another for God to actually take on bodily form. Though he does not come out and actually say it, the logic would require the conclusion that God *cannot* become a man and so there is something that God cannot do.

The *fourth* affirmation is the eternity of God; He has neither a beginning nor an end.

The *fifth* affirmation requires that this God alone is to be worshipped and obeyed. It denies that there is any need for intermediaries whatsoever, therefore the Jew is able to approach this God directly and this God can directly and freely respond to the person's request. This obviously negates the New Testament teaching that the Messiah is the mediator between God and man. It denies that there can be *two powers (or three) in Heaven*. Therefore to worship the Son or the Holy Spirit would render the worshipper an idolater.

The *sixth* affirmation affirms the validity of prophecy and therefore affirms the validity of the prophets of Israel.

The *seventh* affirmation declares that of all the prophets, Moses was the unique prophet and he is unsurpassed by any other prophet who came after him.

The *eighth* affirmation affirms that the Torah was given by God to Moses. To Maimonides, the Torah did not merely include the 613 commandments of Moses but would have also included the oral law.

The *ninth* affirmation goes on to teach that the Torah of Moses will never be superseded, canceled, abolished, nor will it ever be replaced by another divine law, nor can anything be added to the Torah or taken away from it.

The *tenth* affirmation affirms the omniscience of God who therefore knows the actions of all humanity.

The *eleventh* affirmation teaches that God will reward those who fulfill the commandments of the Torah but also punish those who transgress the Torah.

The *twelfth* affirmation is the coming of the Messiah, and that no matter how long he chooses to delay his coming, the Jew is to wait for him.

The *thirteenth* affirmation is the resurrection of the dead, which in the Mishnah had already distinguished Pharisaic Judaism from Sadducean Judaism. The Encyclopedia Judaica makes the following observations about the Thirteen Principles:

Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles" became the prototype of a succession of formulations of the Jewish creed which first merely varied in the number, order, and the articles of belief selected, but which eventually (in the 15th century) introduced methodological criteria for determining whether a certain belief could be regarded as fundamental. The discussion was at no time purely academic. It was stimulated to the controversy over the allegorical interpretations of traditional beliefs according to Aristotelian doctrine, and it focused on such articles of faith as creatio ex nihilo, individual providence, etc. The formulation of ikkarim was designed to accentuate the vital beliefs of Judaism and to strengthen Orthodoxy. It was also meant to define the position of the Jewish faith vis-à-vis Christianity.⁷³

A close examination of Maimonides' thought reveals that his principles are far more in the nature of direct response to the particular challenges that Judaism had to face in his day than conclusions arrived at by abstract investigation into the main ideas of Judaism.⁷⁴ So much for Judaism not having dogmas or creedal statements!

Just as many of the creeds of Christianity were responses to specific doctrinal issues arising in the community, it is also true that Judaistic creedal statements are equally a response to new issues that come up in a specific time.

Spinoza and Mendelssohn

⁷³ Ibid, 3:656.

⁷⁴ "Judaism," ibid, 3:385.

As history continued and there began to be deviations from traditional Orthodoxy, there were also deviations from these fundamentals. Among the deviations from the 17th century were those of Spinoza. He reduced the principles to only seven in number: the existence of God; the unity of God; the omnipresence of God; the omnipotence of God; the obligation of man to worship him in obedience; the necessity of repentance in obedience; and the forgiveness of those sinners who do exercise true repentance.

One who is often considered the pioneer of modern Judaism is Moses Mendelssohn. He reduced the principles of the Jewish religion to three: God is the author and ruler of all things and he is both one and simple; God is omniscient, therefore he knows all things, therefore he will reward the good and punish the evil either by natural or supernatural means; and God has made known his laws through Moses to the children of Israel.

Normative Judaism

In modern-day Judaism (20th and 21st centuries), there has been wide spread discussion as to what constitutes "normative Judaism." When Judaism was essentially only traditional Orthodox Judaism it was easy to think in terms of what constitutes normative Judaism. But the majority of Jews no longer hold to what used to be considered normative Judaism and now must redefine what would constitute normative Judaism.

Obviously for Orthodox Judaism there is no other normative Judaism than Orthodoxy:

Jewish thinkers who hold that an essence of Judaism can be perceived tend to speak of "normative Judaism," with the implication that at the heart of the Jewish faith there is a hard, imperishable core, to be externally preserved, together with numerous peripheral ideas, expressed to be sure by great Jewish thinkers in different ages but not really essential to the faith, which could be dismissed if necessary as deviations.⁷⁵

Such a concept, though it works for Orthodoxy, simply does not work for other brands of Judaism which will deny these very principles. Since Orthodox Judaism rejects all other Judaism as being normative, how then do the other branches define normative Judaism for themselves? At this point things get less stable and less clear.

Both Conservative Judaism and Reform Judaism say that the two religions of Christianity and Islam are "incompatible with Judaism and that no Jew can consistently embrace them while remaining an adherent of Judaism."⁷⁶ But that only defines Judaism by what it is not, rather than what it is, so what would constitute normative Judaism for these? The best answer they have come up with is that the essence of Judaism that would be the normative Judaism is the

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 3:387.

affirmation of three ideas: God, the Torah, and the people of Israel. Thus, concerning the existence of God, while one does not need to affirm belief in the existence of God in order to remain within Judaism, if one does affirm the existence of God he must affirm his oneness and any denial of the oneness of God will put one outside normative Judaism. Nor can Judaism be separated from the concept of the people of Israel. The third issue is the affirmation of the Torah, “even though the interpretations of what is meant by Torah differ widely.”⁷⁷ Therefore, what constitutes normative Judaism would be

*belief in God, God’s revelation of the Torah to Israel, and Israel as the people which lives by the Torah in obedience to God. The interpretation of these ideas has varied from age to age, but the ideas themselves have remained constant.*⁷⁸

It is that very last phrase that allows both Conservative and Reform Judaism to claim to be part of normative Judaism while denying the claims of Orthodox Judaism.

Conservative Judaism differentiates itself in that while Reform Judaism stresses the idea of God, Orthodox Judaism stresses the idea of Torah, Conservative Judaism stresses the idea of Israel. Therefore “an important plank in the Conservative platform is the unity of the Jewish people amid its diversity.”⁷⁹

The term “Traditional Judaism” is now used to apply to both Orthodox Judaism and Conservative Judaism and to distinguish both from Reform Judaism. Meanwhile, Orthodox Judaism distinguishes itself from Conservative Judaism by using the term “Torah-true Judaism” while they are trying to find ways to delineate their Judaism from the other Judaisms. This confusion is the result of new Judaisms that no longer affirm the thirteen articles of Maimonides but still wish to claim to be part of Israel, part of Judaism, and somehow fight against those that would disenfranchise them from Judaism. In Reform Judaism it is hard to produce articles of faith when faith is only one thing.

The paradoxical observation to be made here is that Messianic Jews can affirm a great deal more of the thirteen articles of faith than either Conservative or Reform Judaism can and certainly a lot more than Humanistic Judaism. Yet these other Judaisms are not considered disenfranchised from the Jewish people whereas Messianic Jews are. That is the nature of a system that defines itself more by what it is not than what it is.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 3:396.

The Coptic Gospel of Thomas and Early Christian Creeds

Aage Pilgaard*

In the New Testament, the Christian creed is expressed in a variety of formulas. If by “creed” we understand human confession to the gospel, we find two important expressions of the Christian creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 and Romans 1:3-4. The first concentrates on Jesus’ saving significance, the second on Jesus’ position as incarnated and resurrected.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 we read:⁸⁰

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Two things are important in this creed: First, that what happened to Jesus in the Easter-event was in accordance with Israel’s holy scriptures. In other words, it is the fulfillment of God’s promises, the climax of his salvation history. Second, that what happened to Jesus happened for the salvation of mankind.

In Romans 1:3-4 we read:

The gospel regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

This creed deals with Jesus’ position in a way that also confirms the view-point of salvation history: As man, Jesus was born as a descendant of David; that is he was the fulfillment of the promise of salvation given to David and attested to by the Holy Scriptures. By his resurrection he was enthroned as the one he always had been: the Son of God. Although these two formulas do not occur in the New Testament Gospels they express a confession of Jesus which plays a basic role in the structure and perspective of the Gospels. They all tell the story of Jesus as a story about God fulfilling his promises to his people and they all structure the story of Jesus in such a way that his death and resurrection are the climax. The story makes it clear that these climatic events

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⁸⁰ Quoted from *New International Version*, 1984.

provide the hermeneutic key to the understanding of the Jesus-story as a whole. But what about the Gospel of Thomas?

The Discovery of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas

In 1945 Egyptian fellaheen discovered 13 leather-bound papyrus codices at Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt, all written in Coptic.⁸¹ One of these (Codex II) contained the now famous Gospel of Thomas. The writing has been dated to about the middle of the fourth century CE. Some 50 years earlier (1897 and 1903), Grenfell and Hunt had discovered three papyrus fragments in Greek, containing sayings of Jesus.⁸² It was, however, unclear to which writing these fragments belonged. By comparing the Coptic Gospel of Thomas with the papyrus fragments it could be confirmed that they were parts of a Greek Gospel of Thomas. The Greek papyrus fragments can, with reasonable certainty, be dated to the first half of the second century CE so there is a rather great span of years between the Greek and the Coptic versions of the Gospel of Thomas. Experts in the field of Thomas Gospel research have shown that the Greek writing to which the papyrus fragments belonged is a copy of the original document and not the one (although also a copy) used by the translator of the gospel into Coptic. That a gospel connected with the name of Thomas had once existed was well known as it is mentioned as a heretical writing by some third century theologians (e.g. Hippolytus, Origen); the sensational thing about the finding was that a copy of this gospel in Coptic had survived hundreds of years.

The Literary Character of the Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Thomas consists of 114 sayings of Jesus, in most cases without any clear connection, though some have a catchword-connection and others a thematic connection. Many of the sayings include no indication of their context (e.g. 1-5, 7-11, 14-17, 25-36 etc.), others are presented as Jesus' answers to questions from his disciples or as short dialogues (e.g. 6, 13, 18, 20-22, 24, 37, 43, 51-53, 60-61). A good number of the sayings are aphorisms, proverbs and parables. In comparison with the New Testament Gospels, it is remarkable that in the Gospel of Thomas these sayings are not embedded in any narrative framework. The Gospel of Thomas tells no Jesus-story whatsoever. We hear nothing about his birth, his baptism by John, his itinerant activity as preacher, teacher, and healer, his death and resurrection. In order to understand this it is important to note that the "Gospel of Thomas" is not the original title of the writing. In the Coptic manuscript it is added at the end by the scribe who made the copy. Because it contains only sayings of Jesus it has been compared with

⁸¹ Published in *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices 1-12* (Leiden, 1972-1984).

⁸² *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. I and IV (London, 1898ff).

writings such as *the Book of Proverbs*, *the Wisdom of Ben Sirah*, and *the Wisdom of Solomon*, and characterized as a collection of wisdom-sayings.⁸³ There is a decisive difference, however, between these writings and the Gospel of Thomas: the latter communicates secret wisdom. This character of the writing is indicated in the heading, "These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and (which) Didymos Judas Thomas wrote."⁸⁴

This heading qualifies the writing as a collection of "secret words" spoken by "the living Jesus" so characterizing it as "wisdom-sayings" is insufficient and misses the central point: the wisdom in these sayings is hidden.⁸⁵ of the words as "secret" may seem strange, because about half of the sayings have parallels in the New Testament Gospels⁸⁶ where these sayings are not generally secret. The more important issue is this hermeneutic transformation of sayings of Jesus from not-secret to secret sayings. In this transformation we find the hermeneutic key to the understanding of the sayings: they are words which contain a hidden meaning. What is this hidden meaning? This is never explicitly explained. Why? Because the author presupposes that his readers are familiar with the hidden meaning.

The Secret Meaning of the Sayings of Jesus

With this common presupposition in mind, the secret message seems rather clear. In sayings 1-3 we read:

And he said: He who finds the explanation of these words will not taste death. (1)

Jesus said: He who seeks must not stop seeking until he finds; and when he finds, he will be bewildered; and if he is bewildered, he will marvel, and he will be king over the All. (2)

Jesus said: If those who lead you say to you, Lo, the kingdom is in heaven, then the birds of heaven will precede you; if they say to you, it is in the sea, then the fish will precede you. But the kingdom is within you and outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known; and you will know that you are the sons of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty, and you are poverty. (3)

The saying stresses the importance of understanding the words presented in the book; it is a question of life or death. Finding the explanation of those words is equal to escaping death. The secret meaning of the sayings is a secret concerning true existence, that is the secret of eternal life outside the realm of

⁸³ E.g., H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels* (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1990), 80.

⁸⁴ The English translation is from B.M. Metzger in K. Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 9. ed., 1976).

⁸⁵ Cf. the critique by N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1997), 442 note 83.

⁸⁶ See the list in C.A. Evans, R.L. Webb, R.A. Wiebe, *Nag Hammadi Texts and the Bible* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1993), 88-144.

death. It is this meaning which saying 2 urges the reader to seek until he finds it. In saying 3 the meaning to be sought and found is called "the kingdom" but to find the kingdom is to know oneself then one is also known by God and is a son of God. To know oneself can in this connection hardly mean anything else but to know one's true self and the divine origin of this self.

If we consider these first three sayings as programmatic for the understanding of the secret meaning in Jesus' words then it is obvious that the book invites its readers to seek and find a way to salvation. This way leads to the secret meanings of Jesus' sayings. This secrecy discloses a man's true nature as divine and salvation is the recognition of one's divine self.

If we look at the end of the book, we read in saying 113:

His disciples said to him: On what day does the kingdom come? Jesus said: It does not come when one expects (it). They will not say, Lo, here! Or Lo, there! But the Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.

In saying 3 we learned that the kingdom is both within you and without you. In saying 113 we read that the kingdom is spread out upon the earth. When a kingdom which is within men can be said to be spread out upon the earth, the meaning must be that the kingdom is hidden within people living upon the earth, namely in their true divine self. So one could say that sayings 1-3 and 113 function as a framework around the whole book. The problem for the author of the book is that men do not comprehend their divine origin (113); therefore he invites them to seek it and find it in the hidden meaning of Jesus' words (1-3).

This means that the way to salvation is seeking recognition (*gnosis*) and salvation is recognition of one's true self. This understanding of salvation can be classified as basically gnostic. Who then is the Jesus who presents these secret sayings?

Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas

In the Gospel of Thomas we hear nothing about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection but Jesus is introduced as "the living Jesus"; the same predicate is used about God who is "the living Father" (sayings 3, 50). So it seems reasonable to suggest that "the living Jesus" is the Jesus outside the realm of death. In the New Testament we never find the expression "the living Jesus," but in Acts 1:3 Luke informs us that Jesus, after he had suffered, presented himself to his disciples, proved he was alive, appeared to them during 40 days and spoke of the kingdom of God. In⁴⁸ the Apocalypse of John (1:17-18) Jesus presents himself as the first and the last and the living one. So, perhaps the terms "living/alive" have their origin in a tradition about the resurrected Jesus as teacher but this context has disappeared in the Gospel of Thomas because it

is focused on Jesus as the one whose life is eternal as the heavenly Father is eternal. This interpretation seems confirmed by further sayings. In 37 we read:

His disciples said: On what day will you be revealed to us and on what day will we see you? Jesus said: When you undress without being ashamed, and you take your clothing (and) lay them under your feet as little children (and) tread on them, then you will behold (?) the son of the Living One and you will have no fear.

What is interesting in this saying is that the revelation of Jesus is not something to do with Jesus (contrast Mark 9:2-8) but with his disciples. To take off one's clothes is a metaphor for recognizing one's true self. So, what Jesus says is that when his disciples come to the true recognition of their divine self they will also recognize who Jesus really is: "the son of the Living One," i.e., of God and therefore in the sphere of eternal life.

The same understanding is expressed in saying 59: "Jesus said: Look upon the Living One as long as you live, that you may not die and seek to see him and be unable to see."

To look upon the Living One is to seek the true meaning of Jesus' words, i.e., their disclosure of man's true divine nature. To die means to lose the opportunity to find one's true self (cf. saying 24).

Therefore in saying 92, Jesus exhorts: "Seek and you will find. But those things about which you asked me during those days, I did not tell you on that day. Now I am willing to tell them, and you do not inquire about them."

In this saying we have a distinction between "then" and "now": What Jesus was asked "then" but did not answer he is "now" willing to answer but he is not asked. There can be no doubt that question and answer concern true existence. The saying is an invitation to the reader: In this book you will find the secret meaning of Jesus' words, i.e., their disclosure of true life.

In saying 52, in a short dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, we learn about the relationship between Jesus and the Old Testament prophets:

His disciples said to him: "Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel and all of them spoke concerning [lit. in] you" He said to them: "You have forsaken the Living One who is in your presence and have spoken about the dead." In this saying Jesus' disciples represent the traditional early Christian point of view that the Old Testament prophets all prophesied about Jesus, or, if we translate "in," have prophesied in the pre-existent Christ. In the Gospel of Thomas we do not find a negative estimation of those prophets (cf. saying 88), so in his answer Jesus does not explicitly reject this understanding but points out that it is of no relevance: the prophets are dead. What is important is to recognize Jesus as the Living One and that means the One who discloses man's true divine nature. This disclosure Jesus gives to those who are worthy. "Jesus said: I tell my mysteries [to him who is worthy of my] mysteries" (62a).

To be worthy is to seek the hidden truth behind Jesus' words concerning man's divine origin. To find this truth is to be at the same level as Jesus:

Jesus said to his disciples: "Make me a comparison; tell me what I am like." Simon Peter said to him: "You are like a righteous angel." Matthew said to him: "You are like a man who is a wise philosopher." Thomas said to him: "Master, my mouth will not at all be capable of saying what you are like." Jesus said: "I am not your master, because you drank (and) became drunken from the bubbling spring which I have measured out." And he took him (and) went aside (and) spoke three words to him. Now when Thomas came (back) to his companions, they asked him: "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the words that he said to me, you will take up stones (and) cast (them) at me, and a fire will come forth from the stones (and) will burn you up." (13)

In this interesting scene Peter and Matthew represent wrong understandings of Jesus, while Thomas gives the proper answer: Jesus cannot be compared to anything else; he is unique. But this true understanding is only possible because Thomas has come to a true understanding of himself. This point is stressed by Jesus' rejection of Thomas' addressing him as "master." To have recognized who Jesus is, is to have recognized who one's self is—namely of the same divine essence as Jesus—and then the relationship between Jesus and his disciple is no longer a relationship between master and servant. Still there seems to be a deeper level of secrecy which is contained in the three words Jesus spoke privately to Thomas. These words would seem so blasphemous to the other disciples that if Thomas told them they would stone him. It is not easy to determine what is meant by the three words but it seems likely that they have to do with Jesus' divine essence understood from a Gnostic perspective.

The History of the Jesus-tradition behind the Gospel of Thomas

In the Gospel of Thomas it is Thomas who is the authority behind its Jesus-tradition. Most scholars are inclined to locate its origin somewhere in Syria. Several factors support this location. 1) The role Thomas and Jacob play in the Gospel of Thomas is in accordance with these two apostles' role as authorities in early Eastern Christian tradition. 2) The naming of Thomas as Didymos Judas Thomas is known in the Syrian translation of John 11:16. 3) There are similarities between the Gospel of Thomas and writings originating from Syrian Christian tradition, such as the Odes of Solomon, the Acts of Thomas, and Manichean writings. 4) Ascetic tendencies in the Gospel of Thomas (celibacy, androgyny) correspond with tendencies in Eastern tradition. 5) Marcion, who grew up in the Eastern Christian tradition, seems to have known the Gospel of Thomas.

Søren Giversen, the Danish Nag-Hammadi scholar, thinks it is to trace the Gospel of Thomas even further back in the history of early Christianity. Relying on the (highly disputed) information in Eusebius that the Christian community left Jerusalem and settled in Pella (in Eastern Jordan) during the Jewish-Roman war (66-70 CE) he finds it likely that the Jesus-tradition behind the Gospel of

Thomas stems from this community from where it moved east.⁸⁷ Should Giversen be right it would mean that the Jesus-tradition behind the Gospel of Thomas can be traced as far back as the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem. This would mean that the question of the relationship between the New Testament Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas must be seen in a different light from that which was common in the first period of Thomas Gospel research when the general opinion was that the Gospel of Thomas presupposed the New Testament Gospels.

Although parallels can be found to Markan material, Q material, material which is unique to Matthew, and material which is unique to Luke, the now dominant Thomas Gospel research tends to reject the possibility that the author of the Gospel of Thomas had known and used the Synoptic Gospels.⁸⁸ The possibility cannot be denied that the Gospel of Thomas may have preserved Synoptic sayings of Jesus independent of the Synoptic Gospels and even some original sayings which are not transmitted in the Synoptic Gospels. However, that an independent collection of Jesus' sayings can be found behind the Coptic Gospel of Thomas is unlikely. In regard to both form and content the Coptic Gospel of Thomas is the result of a tendentious redaction of the Jesus-tradition, in which both the limitation to sayings material and the redaction of this material show that Jesus' role here is fundamentally different from his role according to the New Testament. His role, as saying 1 clearly shows, is to be a manifestation of eternal non-material life and through his teaching to lead people to the recognition of their true selves as non-material, eternal, and divine entities and therefore outside the realm of death.

Is the Gospel of Thomas really Gnostic?

Against the estimation of the Gospel of Thomas as gnostic it is often pointed out that in this gospel we do not find a gnostic myth or even elements thereof. In my opinion this fact is by no means sufficient reason for claiming that the Gospel of Thomas is not gnostic. First, that we do not find a gnostic myth or elements of one is due to the genre to which the Gospel of Thomas belongs; it is a collection of sayings. But further – and more important indeed – by analyzing this collection of sayings we are able to reconstruct the context in which the

⁸⁷ S. Giversen, *Thomas-evangeliet* (København: Gyldendal, 1990), 12-14.

⁸⁸ Two scholars have played an important role in this development within modern gospel research: H. Koester and J.M. Robinson. As early as in 1971 they published a collection of articles entitled: *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress). For a discussion of the Jesus-tradition on its way from Q to the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, see J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper/Edinbrugh: T.& T Clark, 1991); B.L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993). Both Crossan and Mack are prominent members of the American Jesus Seminar.

community behind this gospel finds itself: that of a situation characterized by a fundamental anthropological split in their existence. The only means to overcome this split is by recognition (*gnosis*). This recognition discloses that the split is due to their true divine and eternal self being trapped in a material existence. In this recognition lies the redemption of the divine self from its captivity in the material world. Jesus is the giver of this recognition, and to that degree he can be called a redeemer, but only so far. In that respect N.T. Wright is correct when he characterizes the story behind the Thomas community as “the non-historical story of Gnosticism” and goes on to say that “it is far more likely that the book represents a radical translation, and indeed subversion, of first-century Christianity into a quite different sort of religion, than that it represents the original of which the longer gospels are distortions.”⁸⁹

It is important to distinguish between the book as a whole and the individual sayings of which it is a collection. Many of the sayings are not gnostic when read by themselves. It is the setting in which they are now placed which shows that they are to be understood as gnostic. So the question is whether it is possible to reconstruct an earlier stage of the Gospel of Thomas, at which it was not gnostic, that could be seen as a parallel to Q.

The Problem of Isolating Forms (Genres)

One of the fundamental problems with much modern Q research is the strategy of isolating smaller units of Jesus-tradition and the consequences of this procedure. First, we are in a situation in which the Gospel of Thomas plays a very important role when deciding between earlier and later traditions in Q; because the Gospel of Thomas is non-apocalyptic, the earliest edition of Q must also have been non-apocalyptic.⁹⁰ Second, modern Q scholars seem to think that the reconstructed earliest edition of Q can be seen as representative of the theology of the community behind this document as a whole, instead of seeing a collection of sayings as a response to one among several needs within the early church, e.g., a need for ethical teaching. It is because of this understanding that the absence of a passion-story in Q can be taken as proof that Jesus’ death and resurrection played no role in the community behind Q. When one considers that Jesus grew up and had his mission among a people whose holy scriptures exhibit a wealth of forms and genres, is it then historically probable that he should have restricted his preaching and teaching almost totally to the wisdom genre? Would Jesus have made such extensive use of the Kingdom of God metaphor only as a designation³² for man’s recognizing his true self, completely ignoring its allusions to God as eschatologically manifesting his

⁸⁹ N.T. Wright (1997), 443.

⁹⁰ See the critique of Koester and Kloppenborg in C.M. Tuckett, *Q and the History of Early Christianity* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1996), 65-82.

kingly rule over his people and his created world in Isaiah? This seems unlikely.

The Importance of the Gospel of Thomas

The importance of the Gospel of Thomas is not that it contributes to a better understanding of the historical Jesus or of one branch within the earliest Christian community, but that it sheds light upon a development within early Christianity in a gnostic direction. In the Gospel of Thomas we can observe how the clothing of Jesus in gnostic dress goes together with a stripping of his Old Testament-Jewish context. So the creed in the Gospel of Thomas has lost the Pauline—and indeed the New Testament—foundation in salvation history. According to the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus is not the son of God and the promised son of David, nor the mediator of vicarious redemption. Instead he is the revealer of the hidden truth concerning man's divine self.⁹¹ This is the central creed in the Gospel of Thomas, and it is irreconcilable with the basic creed behind the New Testament. Consequently, the Gospel of Thomas is not a gospel in the New Testament sense, neither formally nor substantially.

⁹¹ T. Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1999) seeks to avoid a gnostic interpretation by presenting an existentialistic reading of the Gospel of Thomas - without convincing me.

Know Yourself Always – About Shlomo Kalo and His Writings

Kai Kjær-Hansen

In this issue's article on "The Coptic Gospel of Thomas and Early Christian Creeds," Aage Pilgaard brings an analysis of the Gospel of Thomas and compares it with the New Testament Gospels and main Pauline creedal statements. About half of the 114 sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas have parallels in the New Testament. This does not mean that half of the Gospel of Thomas should be accepted and the other half rejected; either we should accept all or reject all. The 114 sayings all appear in the same context and it is this context which gives them meaning. Using saying 3 in the Gospel of Thomas, Pilgaard shows that to find "the kingdom" is to know oneself, "to know one's true self and the divine origin of this self." According to Pilgaard's summary, the creed in the Gospel of Thomas has no foundation in New Testament salvation history: "Jesus is not the mediator of vicarious redemption."

Today, interest in the Gospel of Thomas is not limited to scholarly circles. In recent decades, non-theologians around the world have also taken an interest in the book. This is related to the renewed interest in spiritual matters at the "dawn of" the third millennium, and fits beautifully with the new ideology labeled *New Ageism*. In Jewish evangelism we have not taken this issue seriously enough – neither in Israel nor worldwide. However, groups within the Christian Church have seen this challenge and tried to map out New Ageism in order to be better equipped to bring the gospel to those who are drawn to this ideology.

In this article, we shall focus on one book written by the Israeli-Jewish author Shlomo Kalo. We shall begin with a poem and consider it in isolation from its context – similar to the way many people read the Gospel of Thomas.

A Poem from *The Day Is Coming*

The poem is found half way into Kalo's book *The Day Is Coming*.⁹² It is the second of two in the book (pp. 72-73); the first is about Zacchaeus.

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The introduction to the poem is as follows: "In Jericho He met that blind beggar (Luke, XVIII, 35-43) who entreated Him earnestly to open his eyes" (p. 72). References to the main character in the poem are capitalized: He and Him. This is done all through the book. Only in this poem and perhaps one more time is Jesus mentioned by name in the book—although it is clear from the many references to the New Testament that the main character is Jesus. Later on it says, "... He offered them His salvation. He called Himself 'Jesus,' meaning 'salvation'..." (p. 75). In the poem the "He" is identified as Jesus:

*Jesus the Anointed
Set out upon His way,
And He came to the gates of Jericho,
In the noon-time of the day.*

*Blind men there surrounded Him,
In a mighty, heaving throng,
And among them there was one,
Who to see did dearly long.*

*"Son of David" he cried,
"Have mercy on me!
I can no longer bear the darkness,
Open my eyes, that I may see!"*

*Jesus the Anointed,
Before the man did stand,
And on the beggar's sightless eyes,
He laid His healing hand.*

*Like a sudden flash of lightning,
That pierces the sky,
The blind man looked, and lo, behold -
Beheld the face of the Most High.*

*"Son of David!" cried the beggar,
As his voice with awe did quake,
"All my life I have dreamed only,
Now at last I am awake!"*

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Jesus the Anointed,

⁹² Shlomo Kalo, *The Day Is Coming*, (Jaffa: D.A.T. Publications, 1997); quotes are taken from this version - Original Hebrew edition: *Ve'Hineh Hu Bah*, (Jaffa: D.A.T. Publications, January 1997).

*Then on His way did go,
As a gentle, balmy evening,
Came down on Jericho.*

*In the crowds about the city walls,
Some were glad with mirth and glee,
But of those who in their hearts were blind,
Not one desired to see.*

The poem is moving and beautiful. It is not difficult to imagine someone setting it to a nice Messianic tune, and that it could find its way into Messianic Jewish worship. And the message—out of context—is that Jesus is the Anointed, that He can help restore our sight and open our eyes to the spiritual reality, but that sadly so many do not desire to see!

Who is Shlomo Kalo?

On book covers,⁹³ on the publisher's website,⁹⁴ and in Amazon's presentation of the author,⁹⁵ Shlomo Kalo is introduced as follows:

Shlomo Kalo was born in 1928, in Sofia, Bulgaria. Aged 12, Kalo joined an anti-Fascist underground in Bulgaria. Aged 15, under Nazi occupation, he was imprisoned in a concentration camp in Somovit. Aged 18, he won a prize in a poetry competition and went to Prague, where he studied medicine and worked as a freelance journalist. Before immigrating to Israel, aged 21, he was sent to Holomotz to train as a pilot. In 1958 he was awarded M.Sc. in microbiology by the Tel Aviv Univ. For 26 years and until his retirement in 1988 he worked as the director of medical laboratories.

The perfect turnabout in his life which occurred in the first week of 1969, is reflected, among others, in his writings. More than 40 titles of his were published in Israel, some of which were translated into English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. His writings include: contemplative literature, fiction, belles-lettres, juvenile, a new genre – "The Documented Story," and spiritual guidance.

When asked to express an opinion regarding Kalo, journalist Yimna Seltzer said:⁹⁶

A few months ago I received a book as a present. It was Shlomo Kalo's "The Elect." I read this masterpiece just as slowly as I could, hoping I would never finish it.

⁹³ See Shlomo Kalo, *The Dollar and the Gun*, (Jaffa, D.A.T. Publications 1999).

⁹⁴ www.y-dat.co.il

⁹⁵ www.amazon.com

⁹⁶ The whole article with the title "The Only Love" (Hadashotovot, 13 April 1996) can be found on www.y-dat.co.il

The book which is based on the Biblical Book of Daniel deals with love: The love of a human being to another human being, of a man to a woman and mainly, the love of God which is Love. The truth that Kalo describes touches the soul, fills up the heart and sheds light upon the meaning of existence, along with sorrow for those who have not been acquainted with it yet.

In this period of a military and political whirl and days of confusion and perplexity, I asked Shlomo Kalo to clear things up from his unconventional point of view.

Seltzer asks Kalo the following question: "Who are you, Shlomo Kalo?" Kalo answers by saying: "An answer to this question you will find in 'D.A.T.' books."

Seltzer also asks why Kalo usually refuses to give interviews to the media. Kalo responds:

Rather than elevate those who are in need of it, and present to them true challenges for which they yearn so much, the media missed its purpose, and focused on a cheap stirring up of passions, and "scoop" chasing. There is no point in being interviewed by such a press.

In Seltzer's article with its 35 questions and answers, the name of Jesus is never mentioned. However, the conclusion of a smaller than pocket size book⁹⁷ titled *Mount of Happiness, Matthew 5, 6, 7* reveals that Kalo's "perfect turnabout" has to do with Jesus:

D.A.T. publications publishes all the writings of Shlomo Kalo, including the exceptional title: 'The Day Is Coming' which deals directly with Jesus Christ, is highly esteemed around the world and has been translated into many languages. The above also applies to: 'The King Whose Name Is Love' 'Moments Of Truth' and more.

We have here a Jewish, Israeli author, who not only writes about Jesus, but about *Jesus Christ* - and regards this Jesus Christ as God (see below).

Kalo differs from most non-believing Jews who write about Jesus in that he claims that he has met Jesus in one way or another. He writes in the language of revelation. Several of his books are dated not with a single date but two – an indication that they have been written under some kind of inspiration which occurred in the period between the two dates.

The following letter, dated February 8, 2001, was included in an order of Kalo's books received from the publisher:

As you requested, enclosed find the two books and an invoice.

When we talked I forgot to offer you Chesed Mufla (Amazing Grace), an audio CD, containing a beautiful, powerful and uplifting performance of songs written by Shlomo Kalo. The Singer is Rivka Zohar-Kalo, the best Israeli lady singer ever. The first song is the famous 'Amazing Grace' translated into Hebrew by Kalo. The others are original. All of them were

⁹⁷ Shlomo Kalo, *Mount of Happiness, Mathew 5, 6, 7*, (Jaffa, D.A.T. Publications), 96.

performed on national radio or TV. Clients who do not speak Hebrew and bought this CD were very, very deeply moved. I recommend it to you wholeheartedly.

I would be very grateful to you if you could contact me either by phone or by email as written hereunder. I hope through speaking with you to learn of potential readers of Kalo's titles among Christians who live in Israel and Christian institutes here, as well as Christian publishers in your country.

I trust that as a believing Christian you see the great importance of these books emerging from within the Jewish people and hope that you would like them to be distributed successfully.

Thank you in advance.

*With God's Blessing
Yigal Miller,
Co-Publisher*

The letter is well written and is similar to what some of us involved in Jewish evangelism might write if someone approached us about our material: "We have more to offer." It is worth noticing that the importance of these books is linked to the fact that they are *emerging from within the Jewish people*. Therefore: *I trust as a believing Christian you see the great importance of these books* ...

Here is a Jew who has written about Jesus not out of historical or academic interest, but because he has experienced something he wants to share with others – or should we say, preach to others?

Opinions about Kalo differ within the Messianic movement in Israel. In a short article in the Messianic magazine *Kivun* from 1997, Boaz Fastman asks the question: *Shlomo Kalo—Wolf or Lamb?* With reference to Matthew 7:15 he answers that Kalo is a wolf in sheep's clothing.⁹⁸ Fastman writes that a representative of Kalo has contacted several leaders of Messianic congregations, asking if they would be willing to recommend his book *Ve'Hinei Hu Bah*. Gershon Nerel sees Kalo as a person who "believes in syncretism." Concerning the relationship between Kalo and Messianic congregations, Nerel says,

*Kalo also disseminates his blended teaching among Messianic Jewish congregations in Israel. Unfortunately, Kalo even succeeded in convincing some prominent local leaders that he is an exclusive disciple of Yeshua and of the Canonical Scriptures.*⁹⁹

So how are we to evaluate Shlomo Kalo? In the following, we shall look at examples from the book *The Day Is Coming*.

⁹⁸ Boaz Fastman, "Shlomo Kalo - Wolf or Lamb?" in *Kivun*, vol. 5, 1997, p. 2 and 4.

⁹⁹ Gershon Nerel, "The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers", in *Messianic Jewish Life*, vol. LXXIII, no.4, 2000, p. 19.

The Day Is Coming

The book begins with the statement “God who is love ...” (p. 9) and with reference to 1 Corinthians 13. About this God it is said: “God became man and descended among us as one of us, and our eyes beheld Him and many, many knew Him not, and turned their backs on Him” (p. 10). Under the chapter heading “Salvation is from the Jews (John IV, 22),” it says by way of introduction: “He was born among them. He was one of them. He adhered to their Scriptures, and everything that these ancient Scriptures commanded, which to this very day they aspire to uphold, was done to Him...” (p. 13) After this, His circumcision and “Bar-Mitzvah” are mentioned with reference to the New Testament.

And further on, “‘God-who-is-love,’ who was clad in flesh and became as one of us, God, devoid of name and of form, who for our sake put on a form and called Himself by a name and descended among us, addressed and spoke to His people in their own language...” (p. 15).

Then more is said about Jesus with reference to the Gospels. It is done without mentioning his name but with constant reference to the Gospels, and the main character is called God. Again a few examples:

And God goes down to an ancient valley, known as the “Valley of Jordan” and stands before John the Baptist. And he, seeing Him from afar, cries out to the host of his followers in a great voice: “This is the Lamb of God, who bears the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

After mentioning that John refused to baptize Jesus, it says:

But God repeats His request with greater vigor and demands of the man kneeling at his feet to rise and do as he is bidden. For this is the essence of His mission: that men shall see God as one of themselves, and He shall not raise himself above them but on the contrary, abase himself before them, so they shall draw near to Him and believe in him, and be saved. And John the Baptist, his lean body wrapped in camel’s hair, stands and obeys the explicit command of his God. His trembling hand is laid on the illumined head, and he blesses, and baptizes. From this movement onward, all partition is removed from between God and mankind, between creator and created, and unity of the spirit become real and whole: man being an inseparable part of God, God being love (pp. 24-25).

With this “explanation” of what salvation is, one begins to realize what the author is driving at. He not only says that “God is love.” He can turn the sentence around and say, “Love, which is God.” (p. 52). Because of the biblical “wrapping” given to the words, one has to read very carefully in order to realize this. A good example is: “God clothed Himself in flesh and descended among those clothed in flesh, and He bore their suffering, and knew their affliction and the bitterness of their pain, as theirs so was His ...” (p. 74).

Explaining the second request in the Lord's Prayer ("May your kingdom come"), Kalo writes, "... His 'kingdom' shall light up your heart and you shall awaken, by His grace, to see and to know yourself as an inseparable part of Him, while you are still here, in the flesh" (p. 108). This also explains why so much importance is attached to the Jesus-word: "The Kingdom of God is in your midst (Luke, XVII, 21), from all time and to eternity, Amen" (p. 110).

In the conclusion, Kalo describes the crucifixion of Jesus:

He did not balance the heavy cross on His little finger. He remained steadfast in His mission. God-man. God of love. In godlike fashion He bore all the shame of mankind, the full weight of human pain and oppression and bitter misery. He did not spare Himself (p. 138).

In the last chapter entitled "My God, My God ..." Kalo writes:

The question may be asked – what makes the crucifixion of God so unique? The answer to this question is simple and unequivocal: His isolation. Total isolation, from all angles and perspectives. Absolute isolation ... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" With these words from the Holy Scriptures, God takes leave of the flesh, to become again what He was, is and ever shall be: Love, Freedom, the Infinite – as Reality. From whom all emanates, in whose hands is all. All is His and all is in Him (pp. 151-155).

The book ends in the following way:

'Salvation is from the Jews' (John, IV, 22) is the statement of God Himself, in person. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' - until the day when the children return to their land, until the day when those who reject God will return to Him with joy and with love in their hearts.

And that day is coming, is coming soon.

27.08.96 - 23.09.96

Zurich, Switzerland" (p. 157)

What is it all about?

Kalo's book is all about Jesus—a Jewish Jesus who is called God and clad in flesh, as the message is clad in biblical language. Perhaps the best way to describe it is to call it a modern Jewish version of the Gospel of Thomas. This is, to a certain extent, confirmed by the fact that Kalo is responsible for a Hebrew translation of the Gospel of Thomas.¹⁰⁰

For example, the death of Jesus and the *bodily* resurrection seem to have no significance for Kalo – contrary to what it had for the apostle Paul. In the Gospel of Thomas, the role of Jesus is basically different from the one we know from the writings of the New Testament. According to the Gospel of Thomas and, as far as I can see, also to Kalo,⁶⁰ the role of Jesus is to lead people to a recognition of their true being through his words. Kalo can write a continued story about Jesus – contrary to the Gospel of Thomas, which is made up of

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Gershon Nerel, "The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers", 19.

individual sayings. But this does not change the message of Kalo, which is: Know yourself.

Kalo's writings are published by D.A.T. Publications. In Hebrew D.A.T. simply means knowledge. But in the letterhead of the publisher, the initials are explained: *Da' Atzmecha Tamid*, meaning *Know yourself always*. This reinforces the message: You have the divine within you! Christ gives you this secret saving knowledge. He came into the world. However, it does not seem that this is the divine Christ who died, but rather a Jesus who left the body before the crucifixion—something which can be found in Christian Gnosticism from the second and third centuries. There is nothing about the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus – nor is there anything about our future *bodily* resurrection. Furthermore, Kalo seems to be related to the Gnostics from the second and third centuries, who also legitimized themselves as people who had the full knowledge of faith, something they can claim because of direct divine revelation and because of a secretly kept tradition.

How different is the message preached by the Jewish believer Paul. A reference to First Corinthians chapter 15 should suffice here.

A Comparison

The writings of Kalo may have only little influence on Israeli society, but the fact that his book *The Day Is Coming* can be purchased in a New Age bookstore in Jerusalem reveals that the book is considered consistent with the rest of the store's stock. The following is an example of how some of Kalo's thought can easily be made to fit the beliefs of the Jewish New Age movement. Using kabalistic principles, people reinterpret the traditional Jewish understanding of the Messiah and reach conclusions similar to those found in Kalo's writings.

The example is from a new English-language journal published in Israel. The first issue is dated Oct./Nov. 2000.¹⁰¹ It is presented as "the two-monthly Magazine on Art, Healing and Spirituality in Israel" (p. 2). In an article titled "Messianic Madness - thoughts on redemption" (pp. 8-11) David Friedman writes about the worries many people had concerning Messianic Madness when we entered the year 2000. He says, "Now I'm not against people believing in the Messiah. As an observant Jew, I believe it to be an important tenant of faith. But is there an understanding of the Messiah in Judaism that is grounded and healthy? Are all messianic visions fanatical and exclusive member-only affairs?" Friedman responds to his own question:

The kabalistic writings of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto present Messiah not as one enlightened being who will lead us into salvation, but as a higher, Messianic consciousness that gradually pervades humanity more and more as we evolve and learn (p. 8-9).

¹⁰¹ *The Twelfth House*, ed. Malka Lasarow, Jerusalem 2000.

For Friedman, “Messiah is the Divine Inspiration. Ruach Hakodesh, a higher consciousness, wise, compassionate and revering of life, that we humans are gradually realizing more and more” (p. 9).

Messiah is not one fantastic event that happens in only one moment of time ... but one great evolutionary learning-process that is constantly in every moment of time. In this way, every moment of time is a fantastic event! There is no crystal-clear blast of trumpets that will herald this great event to everyone all at once. It is up to us to see the current Messianic Spirit as they flow through each and every moment of time! (p. 10).

For Reflection

The examples from Kalo can be used to reflect on several issues:

1) The reading of Kalo’s book raises the question for preachers of finding the focal point in the gospel: Should that point be found in what happened *outside* of us, that is in Jesus, his life, his death and resurrection, or should it be found in what happened *in* us? Let us not deny that something happens in us when we receive the gospel, but if the *emphasis* is here, then the balance is changed compared to the New Testament. Personal happiness is secondary to the salvation which is given because of what Jesus has done. We need to ask ourselves if we always keep this balance.

2) Kalo’s books show that just because the author is Jewish and talks about Jesus, we cannot conclude that he gives a true picture of the Jewish Jesus. This seems like a trivial observation. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to note.

3) Perhaps Kalo’s book is more dangerous than academic Jewish books about Jesus. His books are so close to the gospel and at the same time very far away from the Jesus of the gospels.

4) I am convinced that we who are involved in Jewish evangelism have not been sufficiently aware of the influence which this new Gnosticism—dressed in both New Testament and New Age garments and vocabulary, together with Eastern religions, have on Jews today. Perhaps other Christians and their evangelism could be of help to us here. That is, if we who are involved in Jewish evangelism will let them.

*Jesus the Anointed
Set out upon His way,
And He came to the gates of Jericho,
In the noon-time of the day.*

Or is it to Goa he comes?

Creeds among Jewish Believers in Yeshua between the World Wars

Gershon Nerel*

Synagogue and Church formulated their beliefs and traditions by dissimilarly referring to the same basic Hebraic Truth ('Hebraica veritas').¹⁰² Yet their distinct Canons and scriptural interpretations resulted in the creation of two Bibles, focusing upon separate doctrines. Thus, Synagogue and Church, either by viewing themselves as mother and daughter religions, or even as two sister faiths, still shape their self-identities by confronting the other's convictions.¹⁰³

In a nutshell, it is the faith in Yeshua, the incarnated Son of God, that fuels the ongoing polarization between Jews and Christians. Not surprisingly, therefore, when contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua (=JBY) reintroduced a Jewish pattern to combine Old and New Testaments, they were automatically viewed by both Synagogue and Church as a presumptuous, provocative and revolutionary group. However, these JBY have insistently declared that they uphold their Jewish identity, are fully loyal to their nation, and represent an authentic Hebraic Truth. Consequently, modern 'Hebrew Christians,' 'Christian Jews' and 'Jewish Christians' still continue to challenge both Church and Synagogue, frequently being accused by both of bordering on esotericism and anachronism.¹⁰⁴

In order to understand and classify the principles of faith among modern JBY, one should not necessarily look for traditional paradigms of creeds as they

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¹⁰² See Ora Limor, "Christian Tradition - Jewish Authority," in *Cathedra* (For the History of Eretz Israel and Its Yishuv, in Hebrew), vol. 80, 1996, pp. 31-62.

¹⁰³ For example, see recently: Israel Jacob Yuval, "Two Nations in Your Womb" - *Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv 2000, especially 34-45 and passim (in Hebrew).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Simon Claude Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien* (Essais historiques), Cerf/Patrimoines, Paris 1998, 30-41

developed within the churches.¹⁰⁵ Since contemporary JBY regard themselves as the direct heirs of the early Jewish disciples of Yeshua, they took for themselves the liberty to express their theology independently of the historic churches. Namely, they decided which new terms to use, and in which order and length to shape their credos. Therefore, we need to clarify from the outset, that it would be both a methodological and historical mistake to try and categorize the basic beliefs of modern JBY simply and solely along the creedal patterns of Protestantism or Catholicism.

Credos Produced by New Associations

A major characteristic of the modern movement of JBY in the last two centuries is the establishment of their own organizational entities. Jewish Yeshua-believers used various designations to name their new organizations: These include "Union," "Alliance," "Assembly," "Fellowship," "Congregation" and even "Church." Respectively, almost each and every such organization was founded upon a set of principles of faith, brief or long. As a matter of fact, every such legally incorporated entity formulated its own credo, fundamentally expressing the unity between the Old and New Testaments from a national Jewish perspective.

It was particularly between the Two World Wars (1915-1939), that for the first time the modern movement of JBY reached a worldwide visibility and vocation. During this period, the common designations for Jewish believers in Yeshua were *Hebrew Christians* in English, or *Judenchristen*, in German. Only in Hebrew and in Yiddish one could also find the usage of another appellation: *Yehudi Meshihi*, Messianic Jew. The variations of this nomenclature automatically revealed the doctrinal orientation of those who used this epithet – either Jewish or gentile believers in Yeshua.¹⁰⁶

In Eretz-Israel, the Land of Israel, the times between the World Wars were also the major part of the British Mandate in the Holy Land. Here one witnessed the monumental revival of the Hebrew language alongside the Zionist revolution. These developments also forced JBY in the land to review and to carve out their theological/doctrinal terms in the Hebrew language.¹⁰⁷

It was in Europe and America between the World Wars that JBY slowly started to think about changing the focus of their identity – and their doctrinal terminology – from *Hebrew* to *Jew*. At the same time, JBY gradually stopped fluctuating like a pendulum between two other theological terms – *Christos*

¹⁰⁵ See John H. Leith, ed., *Credos of the Churches* (A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present), Anchor Books, Louisville 1982.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Abram Poljak, *The Cross in the Star of David*, London 1938.

¹⁰⁷ William M. Christie, "The Language Question in Palestine," in: *The Hebrew Christian*, vol. 2, July 1929, 67-69 (=THC).

(Christ) and *Mashiach* (Messiah). They focused on the Hebraic terms *Messiah* and *Messianic*.

The Doctrinal Basis of the “Hebrew Christian Alliance of America” (HCAA)

Mark John Levy and Shabbetai Benjamin Rohold were the two forces behind the formation of the *Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA)*, formally established in New York City, in April 1915. Gentile Christians immediately reacted by raising arguments against the theological justification for maintaining a separate organization with strong Jewish distinctiveness.¹⁰⁸ To this, the response of the Alliance leaders was that the HCAA was neither a church nor a denomination that was rebelling against its mother church or denomination. Since the young HCAA faced strong criticism for “establishing a wall of partition between Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua,” its leaders made it very clear that only Scripture was the basic doctrinal foundation for its members.¹⁰⁹

Article no. X within the “Bylaws of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America – 1915” deals with the theme “Doctrinal Basis of the HCAA.” Chapter A of this statement affirms the full belief in “the deity of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, his virgin birth, his vicarious atonement for our sins, his resurrection, his ascension and his session at the right hand of God.”¹¹⁰ It is obvious that these are not disguised words, yet it is also evident that there is no reference at all to any historical creed in this modern text. Although the Christological issue is highlighted in very general expressions, one cannot avoid observing the intentional refraining from mentioning the Trinity or the inner relationship within the Godhead.

Chapter B of the doctrinal basis of the HCAA states that “all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God,” thus simply quoting from the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to Timothy.¹¹¹ This statement declares, therefore, that JBY accept the canonical Holy Scriptures comprising the Old and the New Testaments as a “fait accompli,” having no intentions to abandon their Hebraic heritage. This short declaration meant that they held no claims questioning the validity of the accepted Canon, thus de facto disregarding the alleged canonical authority of the Apocrypha. In other words, “Scripture” for them meant only the Old and New Testaments, without the Apocrypha to the Old Testament or the ancient

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000*, Chapel Hill and London, 2000, 44-54.

¹⁰⁹ Robert I. Winer, *The Calling* (The History of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, 1915-1990), Wynnewood, Pennsylvania 1990, 9-19.

¹¹⁰ Robert I. Winer, *The Calling*, 99.

¹¹¹ 2 Tim 3: 16. Winer in his book mistakenly mentions the First Epistle to Timothy.

Apocryphal New Testament. Needless to say, any other “modern Apocrypha,” like Mormonism, was totally rejected by them.¹¹²

Chapter C of this doctrinal basis of the HCAA proclaims that the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament point to Yeshua.¹¹³ Here once again the Hebrew roots are emphasized. Namely, that JBY find their Jewish Messiah in the authentic Hebrew Scripture, and not within a Hellenistic world that talks about Christos.

The doctrinal basis for the HCAA concludes with the following words: “No person shall be admitted into membership of the Alliance holding views in opposition to those outlined under this article. Nor shall any member of the Alliance embracing and teaching such views after having been admitted to membership, be allowed to remain as a member of the Alliance.”¹¹⁴ These words left no room for doubts, so that all members of the HCAA had to fully stick to elementary principles of faith. As far as it is known, no member of the American Alliance was requested to leave because of violating its declared orthodoxy.

Other basic theological principles of the HCAA were scattered throughout its organ, “The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly.” From this magazine, one can learn that the American Hebrew Christian “creed” was not purely a theology or merely a set of theological formulas. It was rather a combination of several aspects, mainly theology, history and nationality. Thus, various references to history, and to historical developments within the universal Body of Messiah, frequently appeared in their writings. For example, in an open letter to “The Churches of the Gentiles,” published in 1923, it was stated as follows:

*Hebrew-Christianity is the romance and miracle of history. Originally it became the MOTHER which brought forth the Gentile Church still expanding to the uttermost parts of the earth. But MODERN Hebrew-Christianity is, in the turn of affairs, a CHILD of this Church. This was clearly foreseen by that Hebrew-Christian Apostle, St. Paul, when he told the Gentiles that through THEIR mercy, WE also should obtain mercy. We testify that we have become partakers of that mercy. You have made us acquainted with our own Messiah, and we are your debtors... We – a part of the Remnant according to the Election of Grace – are still in our own Olive Tree. We have never been cut off.*¹¹⁵

Through such texts, JBY highlighted their Jewish roots, reminding the gentiles about their unique status, not only in the remote past but also in their own times. Key terms like the Remnant and Election reappear in many of their

¹¹² Cf. Gershon Nerel, “The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers,” in: *Messianic Jewish Life*, vol. 73, October- December 2000, 16-19.

¹¹³ Robert I. Winer, *The Calling*, 99.

¹¹⁴ *The Calling*, 100

¹¹⁵ “The Hebrew Christian Alliance to ‘The Churches of the Gentiles,’” in: *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*, vol. 7, January 1923, 2 (=THCAQ).

documents. And while they naturally accepted baptism as a clear commandment of Yeshua, contemporary JBY constantly argued that the water of baptism has not washed away their racial origin or their national status as Jews, and they still remain as a part of Israel.¹¹⁶

After accepting the New Testament as the word of God, and believing in Yeshua's divinity and messianic role, JBY only rarely, and seldom in writing, dealt with delicate christological issues that so often bothered the historical churches. Rather, members of the HCAA were preoccupied with the problem of assimilation within the churches. Therefore, they frequently emphasized that they were no longer allowed to disappear in the melting pot of gentile Christendom. Furthermore, they even stated that in the hour of Jacob's travail, they would know how to identify themselves with their suffering brethren, "and go through the furnace with them."¹¹⁷

The Doctrinal Foundation of the "International Hebrew Christian Alliance" (IHCA)

In September 1925, the same persons that founded the "Hebrew Christian Alliance of America" were also behind the establishment of the "International Hebrew Christian Alliance" (=IHCA), yet now they labored jointly with their European brethren, especially in Great Britain.¹¹⁸ At the first international conference of JBY, held at the Wilson Memorial Hall in Islington, London, Dr. Max Reich from America¹¹⁹ presented a paper on "The Doctrinal Basis of the Hebrew Christian Alliance," and stated as follows:

*The New Testament, as much as the Old, must be recognized as part of the Sacred Literature of Israel... Hebrew Christians have no desire to set up a creed separate from the faith of the historic and Universal Church. There is no more sound and orthodox group of believers in the whole of Christendom than Hebrew Christians. It is a comfort to know that, whereas there is a tendency to depart from the ancient moorings among Gentile Churches, destructive heresies, denying the very foundations of our spiritual felicity, finding increasing credence, a standard is being raised up in the Jewish remnant according to the election of grace. Christ is the Alpha and Omega, our Beginning and End.*¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Since Shabbetai Benjamin Rohold returned to Palestine in 1921, settled in Haifa and worked from there as a missionary, at the international Hebrew Christian conference in London he represented the JBY of Eretz-Israel.

¹¹⁹ Max I. Reich was the President of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America, and the editor of its organ, *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*.

¹²⁰ In: *Report of the First International Hebrew Christian Conference*, London and Edinburgh 1926, 79-80 (=Report).

The doctrinal model that Max Reich wanted to portray related to the basic beliefs of the primitive Jewish evangelists and apostles of the first Jerusalem Church – as they appear in the canonical Old and New Testaments. Reich spoke most enthusiastically about the early disciples of Yeshua, especially those in the Gospels and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and highlighted the personal relationship they had with the Jewish Messiah.

In his talk at the London conference, Max Reich underlined the belief that Yeshua was both a sinless Man and the Son of God. In his words: “Yeshua is Lord of the universe and king of Israel, who will victoriously restore Israel and the earth.” According to Reich, all these details constituted together the doctrinal basis of the modern Hebrew Christians, “now forming themselves into an international alliance.” He then concluded, “We desire to stand where our fathers stood.”¹²¹

However, when contemporary JBY were looking back to the early centuries, examining the beliefs of the Primitive Church, they also acknowledged the deep doctrinal differences that existed between the Ebionites and the Nazarenes. It was especially Mark John Levy from America, who at the London conference referred to the Nazarene model of the pre-Nicaea Council in A.D. 325. About the sound theology of the Nazarenes, Levy mentioned that they were “loyal Hebrew Christians who accepted Christ as the Messiah and relied solely on His supernatural birth, holy life, sacrificial death and resurrection as their only hope of eternal salvation.”¹²² In other words, while the IHCA de facto attempted to adopt a basic creed that was intended to reflect the authentic Nazarene prototype, it consciously rejected the so-called Ebionite frame of reference.¹²³

At the London conference, Levy also reminded his listeners about the historical fact that since the Council of Nicaea in the fourth century, the Church had done “a great injustice to Judah.” Namely, the Church separated Jewish Christians compulsorily from their own people, by teaching them that it is scripturally wrong for Hebrew Christians to observe the national and social customs of Israel. The Church, Levy explained, demanded for centuries that Jewish Christians conform to gentile sectarian dogmas as the price of full Christian fellowship.¹²⁴

Privately Levy shared his view that Hebrew Christians should observe the Torah according to the teaching of Yeshua. As for associations, including the new IHCA, Levy said that they should declare their national and social freedom in the Gospel, aiming to fulfill a unique task – that Hebrew Christian

¹²¹ *Report*, 82.

¹²² *Report*, 53.

¹²³ Cf. Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, “Pritz, Nazarene Jewish Christianity,” in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 82, January-April 1992, 573-574.

¹²⁴ *Report*, 51

alliances are to revive the Hebrew National Branch of the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.”¹²⁵

Following these views and upon the principle of national plurality within the universal body of believers in Yeshua, the IHCA lifted high the banner of Jewish particular identity in Messiah Yeshua – particular but not separatist. The goal behind this standpoint was to make a public declaration that the gentilizing of Jewish Christians is both unwise and unscriptural, that JBY refuse to be gentilized and that this phenomenon must be stopped.

Another paper on the doctrinal basis of the IHCA was presented at the London conference by I.E. Davidson, from the United Kingdom. Davidson made it clear that the Bible is an infallible book, approached as the Word of God, a spiritual book that can only be spiritually discerned. Following the Apostle Saul/Paul, Davidson stated that both Old and New Testaments make one unit of Scripture, holding plenary inspiration and possessing full divine authority.¹²⁶ Davidson’s beliefs were endorsed, so that in this respect the IHCA followed an elementary principle that was already fully expressed in the creed of the HCAA.

Although the concept of the Trinity was mentioned several times in the doctrinal discussions at the London conference, it did not come to the surface in the final “creed” of the IHCA. However, it is most interesting to observe how this theme was dealt with. For example, Davidson’s explanation about the Trinitarian principle was as follows:

The opening words of the Book of Genesis declare the Triune God, plurality in Name, and unity in Person...Plural expressions of the Personality of Godhead abound throughout Scripture. But in the scale of progression, of Divine revelation, the Triune Godhead comes clearer and more prominently into view. Moses declares in Deuteronomy vi that he was definitely commanded to teach this doctrine, and a formula is given: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, is one Lord.’ Israel is given here to understand that his God is Triune, and is, moreover, commanded to worship Him in a Triune form – ‘with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might.’ God is to be worshipped with body, soul, and spirit. The triune human being respond to the triune God.¹²⁷

At the same presentation, mention was made of Yeshua as the *Logos*, the incarnated Word that came in search of man, destined to reconcile man to God. During the sessions on doctrinal matters, numerous Old Testament prophecies were mentioned, highlighting the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic prophecies, promised both for past and future times.¹²⁸ From that angle in the London conference, the eschatological dimension also received a significant exposure.

¹²⁵ *Report*, 52. This is actually a repetition of the early Church motto: “Una, sancta, catholica et apostolica ecclesia.”

¹²⁶ *Report*, 85.

¹²⁷ *Report*, 87-88.

¹²⁸ *Report*, 89-91.

All expressed the hope that when Yeshua will stand triumphantly on the Mount of Olives, Israel will at last recognize and honor him, and accept him as their savior.¹²⁹

De facto, the entire *Report of the First International Hebrew Christian Conference* was the Alliance's unofficial credo. Within this doctrinal platform, the topic of Yeshua's return received a notable place. His Second Coming to reign in great glory was a certain hope in the Alliance's unofficial, yet systematic, credo. As witnessing Hebrew Christians, members of the conference particularly affirmed their strong belief in the soon appearance of the Bridegroom. They wanted to openly join the "Advent Testimony," emphasizing that they did not question this truth, and therefore clearly stated that Yeshua did not delay his Second Coming. This hope they wanted especially to share with the people of Israel "flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone."¹³⁰

However, the final and formal 'creed' of the IMJA did not remain a long theological treatise. The Constitution and Bye-Laws of the IHCA incorporated in its preamble merely a brief statement of faith, titled "Declaration of Freedom," which says as follows:

*The International Hebrew Christian Alliance shall look to God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, one God, and to Him alone, as its Divine Head. Receiving the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, it will make them its supreme rule of Faith and Life, and will at all times rely on the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.*¹³¹

Article 8, section 2, of this Constitution went into some more theological and practical details. According to this paragraph, applicants for membership must

*1) have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior; 2) believe in the atonement which He wrought on the Cross of Calvary; 3) believe in His deity and resurrection; 4) believe in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God; 5) have made public confession of their faith; 6) declare their adherence to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the supreme rule of faith and life; 7) lead a life to the glory of God.*¹³²

¹²⁹ *Report*, 94; 111-112.

¹³⁰ *Report*, pp. 175-179. Cf. Samuel Schor, "The Second Coming of Our Lord" (Paper Read at the Second International Hebrew Christian Conference, Hamburg 1928), in *THC*, vol. 1, October 1928, 153-156.

¹³¹ *Constitution and Bye-Laws of The International Hebrew Christian Alliance*, n.d., p. 1. The first booklet containing the Constitution was published in London in the early 1930s - without specifically mentioning the place and the date of publication. More than half a century later, in the revised Constitution of 1992, following the Toronto Conference, some cosmetic changes were officially introduced into the Alliance 'creed,' like using the Hebraic terminology *Tanach* for the Old Testament, and *Brit Hadashah* for the New Testament. This Constitution of 1992 also brought into the text the appellations *Yeshua* and *Messianic Jew*.

¹³² The original text of the *Constitution and Bye-Laws of the IHCA*, (1930s), 5-6.

Although baptism in water is not mentioned here, one can easily understand that the wording “public confession” refers also to baptism.¹³³

The official modern “International Jewish Christian Creed” only in a general way related to the historical creeds of the churches. However, it was broad and fundamentally sufficient to form a consensus for a doctrinal framework. This creed placed Yeshua’s deity and Scripture in its center, leaving out denominational doctrines and theological nuances. Since 1925, only one case is recorded in which people were forced to leave the International Alliance for not abiding by its articles of faith. The one who found a shut door was Hugh J. Schonfield, formerly a leading member of the IHCA, who even served as General Secretary of the Alliance, and later authored the famous book *The History of Jewish Christianity*.

Schonfield was regarded heretical because he rejected the virgin birth of Yeshua and his full deity as the Son of God. At the fifth international conference of the IHCA, held in Budapest in 1937, Schonfield formally appealed against his removal.¹³⁴ Yet, after some investigation was done by two committees, all delegates were to rise one by one to affirm each and every article of faith in the Constitution. The only exception was the Schonfield couple. So it was evident that Schonfield and his wife still did not change their heterodox views, and they were eventually excluded from membership in the Alliance.¹³⁵

A Proposed Creed for a Hebrew Christian Church

The third international conference of the IHCA, held at High Leigh, England, in July 1931, appointed a commission to consider the advisability of forming a Hebrew Christian Church. While Rev. Elijah Bendor Samuel of Great Britain was the chairman of the commission, the real force behind this activity was Sir Leon Levison, the first President of the IHCA.¹³⁶ Members of the commission consisted of Hebrew Christians who belonged to the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church and independent believers. Their work was completed after a year and three months, and in November 1932 they

¹³³ The revised Constitution of 1992 had some substantial changes within this section of the IMJ(HC)A “creed.” Especially we should note the omission of “believe in His deity” as it appears in the original text. Plus, instead of the wording “Lead a life to the glory of God,” as originally stated, the 1992 edition says “Endeavor to lead a life to the glory of God.”

¹³⁴ Harcourt Samuel, “The Budapest Conference,” in: *THC*, vol. 10, April 1937-January 1938, 104-105.

¹³⁵ See also, for example, Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew – The Life of Leon Levison (1881-1936)*, Edinburgh 1989, 279-283; 294. Later, in 1965, Hugh Schonfield published his infamous book *The Passover Plot*.

¹³⁶ See Leon Levison, “The Hebrew Christian Church,” in: *THC*, vol. vol. 5, July 1932, 52.

published a booklet which had three titles: "*Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission*"; "*Proposed Principles of Faith for the Suggested Hebrew Christian Church*"; "*Proposed Constitution for the Hebrew Christian Church.*"¹³⁷

The proposed principles of faith for the suggested Hebrew Christian Church contained 11 articles and a preamble, as follows:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul and all thy might, and thy neighbor as thyself.

I BELIEVE in God, the Source of all being, the Covenant God, the Holy One of Israel, our Heavenly Father.

I BELIEVE that God who spake at sundry times and diverse manners in time past to the fathers through the prophets promised to redeem the world from sin and death in and through His Anointed, Who would be a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel.

I BELIEVE that in the fullness of time God fulfilled His promise and sent forth His Son, His eternal Word, Jesus, the Messiah, who was born by the power of the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary, who was of the family of David, so that in Him the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

I BELIEVE that Jesus the Messiah is in very truth the Shekinah,¹³⁸ the brightness of the Father's glory, the very impress of His Person, that He was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and that by His Life, Death on the Cross and glorious Resurrection, He has accomplished our Reconciliation with the Father.

I BELIEVE that the Father sealed all that the Son was, did, and taught, by raising Him through the Holy Spirit from the dead, and that the Risen and Glorified Lord appeared to many and communed with them, and then Ascended to be our Mediator with the Father and to reign with Him, One God.

I BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, was sent to be with us, to give us assurance of the forgiveness of sin and to lead us into the fullness of truth and the more abundant life.

I BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit, Who beareth witness with our Spirits that we are the sons of God, will quicken us in the resurrection when we shall be clothed with the body which it shall please the Father to give us.

¹³⁷ Published in Luton, n.d. A copy of this report is in the private archive of Gershon Nerel.

¹³⁸ The word *Shekinah* ("dwelling") is not found in the Old Testament. For some comparisons see David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, Magnes, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 103, 307, 517-519.

I BELIEVE that the Church of the Messiah is the family of God in Heaven and on Earth, the Sanctuary of the redeemed in which God dwells and of which the Messiah Jesus is the only Head.

I BELIEVE that the Old and New Testaments as written are the divinely inspired records of God's revelation to Israel and the World, and are the only rule of faith and life.

I BELIEVE that it is the Will of God, Who has graciously brought us into the new Covenant that we should strive to be His witnesses, making the teaching and life of the Messiah our standard and example, till He comes again to reign in power and glory.

I BELIEVE that the Church visible maintains unbroken continuity with the Church in Heaven by partaking of the same blessed Sacraments of Baptism and of Holy Communion and by confessing the same Father, Son and Holy Spirit, One Godhead.¹³⁹

In their introductory words, members of the commission admitted that in drawing up these eleven articles of faith, they were mainly guided by the principle of keeping close to Synagogal worship, and the polity of the Apostolic Church. The composers of this creed sought to emphasize the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and the special aspect of their doctrines "as based upon Hebrew Christianity." In its recommended Constitution, the commission also acknowledged that it worked out a Presbyterian-Episcopal polity, because a majority believed that these two systems come nearer to the Apostolic Church.¹⁴⁰

The use of the theological term "Shekinah" in this credo deserves a special attention.¹⁴¹ In Jewish traditional literature, particularly in the *Aggadah* (narration), *Shekinah* is one of the appellations for God, marking God's presence and revelation in the world. Thus, for example, the terms "Ziv (Light) and Kanfei (Wings) of the Shekinah" are of common use. However, it is particularly in Kabbalah, the Jewish mysticism, and its basic book the *Zohar*, that the symbolism of the *Shekinah* is mostly developed. In Kabbalistic vocabulary the *Shekinah* represents the feminine element within the "Ten Sefirot" (Spheres), through which God rules the world.¹⁴² Therefore, with such mystical and feminine references about *Shekinah* found in Kabbalistic literature, one needs to

¹³⁹ *Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission* (1932), pp. 5-6. The proposed Articles of Faith for the Hebrew Christian Church were also published in America in *THCAQ*, vol. 18, June 1933, 30-31.

¹⁴⁰ Elijah Bendor Samuel, "Articles of Faith and Constitution," in: *Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission*, 4.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Tsvi Nassi (Hirsch Printz), *Haraz Deshlosa* (The Mystery of the Trinity), Reprinted by Yanetz, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 8-9; 29-31; 49 (in Hebrew). See also "Shekinah" in: *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London 1974, 1269.

¹⁴² See, for instance, "Shekinah" in: *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, vol. 31, cols. 864-866 (in Hebrew).

seriously question whether the authors of this creed were fully aware of the occult connotations within Jewish Kabbalah.¹⁴³

On the issue of baptism, the commission left the question of infant baptism an open one for parents to act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It recommended that the different modes of baptism extant in the various branches of the Christian Church be allowed. While the commission was ready to make allowances for those who were already in some branch of the Church which did not practice immersion, it strongly recommended that in the Hebrew Christian Church immersion should be demanded. The reason that was given for demanding immersion was that "it was unquestionably practiced in the early (Jewish) Church."¹⁴⁴

Baptism, either by immersion, effusion, or sprinkling, was especially mentioned in the proposed Constitution for the suggested Hebrew Christian Church. It was required that all baptisms should take place in public, and only in special circumstances should they be allowed in a private house. At the same place, it was stated that "baptism shall be into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴⁵ From this passage on baptism, one may comprehend that in reality there was some reluctance among JBY to be formally baptized into traditional denominations and in church buildings.

The placing of the "*Shema Israel*" ('Hear, O Israel') at the head of these Articles of Faith for the proposed Hebrew Christian Church had a clear purpose: to serve as a visible means that represents a special link to the primitive Apostolic Church. Sir Leon Levison openly declared that he wanted to interconnect the noble past of the Mother Church with the organization he directed, and thus to enlarge and enrich the modern Hebrew Christian Church.¹⁴⁶ In other words, although everyone knew that for long centuries no physical Apostolic Succession of JBY was in existence, still many Jewish Yeshua-believers in the 20th century tried to use their distinctive creed as a conceptual bridge between themselves and their early Jewish ancestors.¹⁴⁷ Altogether, the tendency towards using Jewish phrases – like "Shekinah," "the Covenant God," "the Holy One of Israel," was meant to become an integral part of this bridging scheme.

¹⁴³ See, for example, Yehuda Liebes, "Christian Influences in the Zohar," in: *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 2 (1), 1982/3, 43-74 (in Hebrew).

¹⁴⁴ *Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ *Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission*, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Leon Levison, "A Hebrew Christian Church," in: *THC*, vol. 5, January 1933, 168-169. Here also the Articles of Faith were published on page 170. See also Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew*, 349-350.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Gershon Nerel, "Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews," in: Simon Claude Mimouni, ed., *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états*, (Actes du colloque de Jérusalem 1998), Paris 2001, 399-425.

Sir Leon Levison exhausted his numerous contacts with various Church dignitaries, especially within the Anglican Church, in order to get their recognition for the new Hebrew Christian Church and its particular creed. Levison made serious efforts to submit the tentatively drawn Articles of Faith to the heads of all the churches in Great Britain for criticism and advice. Ultimately Levison planned to refer this creed to the next international Hebrew Christian Conference, that it would be finally adopted, as he hoped, "along with the Niceum Creed."¹⁴⁸ Probably Levison was willing to mention the compatibility with the Nicæan Creed merely to get the support of the clergy within the historic churches.

Yet eventually the proposed model creed and constitution that became the "baby" of Sir Leon were rejected, both by the institutional churches (de facto)¹⁴⁹ and by the IHCA (de jure). After Leon Levison died in 1936, and Nazi racism prevailed in Germany, the opponents of a separate Hebrew Christian Church with its "private" Creed only increased. Thus, for example, Arnold Frank, President of the Hebrew Christian Alliance in Germany and Vice-President of the IHCA, feared that such steps would invite more anti-Semitism and accusations of becoming a sect. Frank especially feared the accusation from anti-Nazi circles that the Jewish believers in Yeshua wished to create an exclusive, anti-Aryan and an ultra nationalistic Jewish church.¹⁵⁰

The fifth international conference of the IHCA, that took place in Budapest in 1937 without Leon, reached the resolution "That this Conference requests its Executive to take no further steps for the founding of a Hebrew Christian Church."¹⁵¹ The practical implication of this resolution was that local alliances of JBY were directed to look at the doctrinal basis of the IHCA as their creedal foundation. Namely, without establishing a denominational church of its own, now the Constitution of the IHCA itself became the doctrinal platform for the 18 affiliated alliances. Yet, when the Second World War broke out in 1939, the communications between the Headquarters in London and alliances on the Continent were broken. Most European alliances on the Continent disappeared during the Nazi persecutions.

The Creed of the "Jewish Christian Community" (JCC)

¹⁴⁸ Letter of Leon Levison to E.M. Bickersteth, 11th November 1932. Private correspondence, in: *St. Antony's College, Oxford, Middle East Library, Private Papers*, box J.EM, XVIII/E. 75

¹⁴⁹ A typical understatement appeared in the "Episcopal Notes," in: *The Anglican Church Magazine*, vol. 12 (n.s.), November 1932, p. 2235.

¹⁵⁰ Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew*, 267-272.

¹⁵¹ Harcourt Samuel, "The History of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance," in: *Mishkan*, vol. 14, 1991, 76.

In 1937 Abram Poljak founded the “Jewish Christian Union,” which mainly spread in Switzerland, Poland, Romania, the Baltic States and England. This Union was an international association of Jewish and gentile Christians who wanted to establish the Jewish Christian movement as a branch of the universal Body of Christ. Since January 1939, the name was changed to the Jewish Christian Community, and its organ, with the same name, was published in England. Two other key figures in this movement were Agnes S. Waldstein and Baron Albert von Springer.¹⁵²

From the outset, Abram Poljak emphasized that the future of Jewish Christian communities had to remain “communities,” and not develop into a “church.” Often Poljak spoke about a unique “Jewish Christianity” that ought to be and remain a *movement* and not to become an established national organization, “a state within a state.”¹⁵³ On the other hand, however, in the late 1930s Poljak anticipated that in the near future Jewish Christian communities would arise in Palestine and elsewhere, and thus, the Jewish People would get their church.

At the same time, Poljak and his friends formulated independently their own creed, under the heading “Our Belief.” This credo included Ten Articles of Faith, as follows:

1. *The Bible, i.e. the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God.*
2. *Jesus of Nazareth was Spirit from the Spirit of God (The ‘Son of God’). He died for our sins on Calvary, has Risen from the dead and Ascended in to Heaven from whence He will come again.*
3. *There is only One Church, the Body of Christ.*
4. *Israel, the Jewish people, was, is and remains chosen by God for the carrying out of a spiritual task.*
5. *God does not want those Jews who believe in Christ, to merge into the nations of their abode.*
6. *Christian Jews are to be witnesses of Christ in the midst of their Jewish people.*
7. *Therefore, in Palestine and all the countries where Jews live in masses and have a national life of their own, there ought to come into existence Jewish Christian communities.*
8. *In Christ there are “neither Jews nor Greeks.” The Jewish Christian communities must not know any racial discrimination, nor any other earthly divisions.*
9. *The Jewish Christian communities are therefore open to Non-Jews with full rights and duties. Non-Jews who excel by special gifts of the Holy Spirit, may become leaders of the Jewish Christian communities.*
10. *For its development and well-being the Jewish Christian community needs the prayers of Gentile Christendom.”¹⁵⁴*

¹⁵² See, for example, Abram Poljak, *Die Jüdische Kirche*, Bern 1946.

¹⁵³ Abram Poljak, “Our Future Communities,” in: *The Jewish Christian Community*, Nos. 6/7, June-July 1939, 2.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Our Belief’, in: “The Jewish Christian Community,” *ibid.*, 1.

Like most JBY of his times, Poljak too underlined the fact that spiritually and theologically there is no difference at all between Jewish and gentile believers in Yeshua. In the same breath, Poljak also stressed that there remains a Jewish distinctiveness in the Messiah. In other words, that normally there exists a *functional* particularity between Israel, the chosen people, and the other nations. Obviously, this functional differentiation had nothing to do with racial superiority or inferiority. Thus, for example, Poljak also declared that “whatever might be good for the Gentile Christians, it is not good for Jewish Christians. Israel must not be like the nations of the earth.”¹⁵⁵

It should be noted, however, that the Jewish Christian communities under the leadership of Poljak, Waldstein and Springer were not exclusively Jewish. Thus, unlike the Constitution of the IHCA, which admitted non-Jewish members *only* as associate-members, and with no official positions in its governing committees, the JCC did formally accept non-Jewish believers as full members. This “personnel” difference between the IHCA and the JCC was a clear outcome of their respective creeds.¹⁵⁶

After the Second World War the JCC continued to develop and expand in Europe and Palestine.¹⁵⁷ It was only after Poljak died in 1963, and was buried in Möttlingen, Germany, that this movement gradually minimized its activities, as there was no younger generation to follow the founders. In Israel they have completely disappeared.

A Hebrew Christian Creed in Poland

In the spring of 1939, half a year before Nazi Germany invaded Poland, the Hebrew Christian community in Warsaw published its own Articles of Faith. This credo was originally formulated in the Hebrew language, and contained thirteen articles. Apparently, this statement of faith adopted the structural framework of the Rabbinical Thirteen Articles of Faith, composed by the *Rambam*, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204). Maimonides was a prolific writer and his theology is summed up in his famous Thirteen Articles of Faith that is still accepted within mainstream Jewry until today.¹⁵⁸

A free translation from the Hebrew of these Articles of Faith is as follows:

1. *I believe in complete faith in JHWH the God of Israel, the God of love and salvation; the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Creator of everything visible and invisible. He is one God*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Cf. *idem*, *Die Judenchristliche Gemeinde*, Wien 1937, esp. 13-14.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Abram Poljak, *Judenchristentum*, Thun 1941, esp. 17-26.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, Abram Poljak, “Doctrine,” in: *Jerusalem*, vol. 2, November 1946, 3-4.

¹⁵⁸ See “Maimonides, Moses,” in: *The New Jewish Encyclopaedia*, New York 1962, 301-303.

and father, everything comes from Him, by Him and towards Him; He is above all, He is everything and He is within everything, and for Him be the glory forever, Amen.

2. *I believe in complete faith that God, may His name be blessed, is Spirit, and that the true worshipers must bow before their Father in Heaven in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.¹⁵⁹*
3. *I believe in complete faith in the Messiah Yeshua our Lord, the single and beloved Son of His Father in Heaven, raised by God to become Redeemer for Israel, according to the promises to our patriarchs, uttered by His holy prophets. He who descended from Heaven for us human beings and for our salvation, and became the Son of Man. He was formed from the Holy Spirit; born from the Virgin Mary, from the seed of David, anointed by God in the Holy Spirit and in might. Like us, He endured everything, yet without sin. He glorified His Father in Heaven. He proclaimed His name and His will to human beings, walked on earth, performing mercy with all Sons of Israel. He suffered great shame because of sinners and was tortured to death, until His death of crucifixion, the righteous for the wicked. Therefore God uplifted Him to the utmost, and on the third day following His death and burial, raised Him from the dead and made Him publicly seen by His disciples, and seated Him at His right side on high. And from there He will come again in glory, to prepare His Kingdom in order to restore everything and to judge the living and the dead. And He is King over the House of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom has no end, Amen.*
4. *I believe in complete faith that our Lord Yeshua the Messiah is the image of the concealed God, the brightness of His glory, the image of His substance. He was prior to everything, the power and wisdom of God. In Him dwells the plenitude of divinity, and in Him are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The one that looks at Him sees our Father in Heaven. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one will come to the Father but through Him.*
5. *I believe in complete faith that God firstly presented Yeshua the Messiah for us, and sent Him to bless and to save His people from all their sins. And although our forefathers rebelled and sinned against Him, God did not forsake His people but raised Yeshua to be Prince and Savior, to provide repentance and forgiveness of sins to everyone that wholeheartedly believes in the name of Yeshua Hamashiach (Messiah).*
6. *I believe in complete faith that by God's determinate council and foreknowledge our ancestors rebelled against Yeshua, the King of Israel and her glory, so that in their sin, salvation will come to the Gentiles to bring them, through the Messiah, nearer to God and to His salvation. So that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God. Indeed, when the fullness of the gentiles will come to the Kingdom of Heaven, then all Israel will be redeemed in eternal salvation and JHWH will reign upon the entire earth.¹⁶⁰*
7. *I believe in complete faith that the Messiah, through sacrificing Himself on the Cross, atoned for the sins of the whole world. He abolished the commandments and ordinances of the Torah (Torat hamitzvot vehahukot), a source of enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles, and*

¹⁵⁹ Based upon the Gospel of John 4:23.

¹⁶⁰ Based upon Rom 11: 25-26.

*destroyed the dividing fence and reconciled both of them to God. He created the two into one new man, and made peace between them. And there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, since all are one in the Messiah Yeshua.*¹⁶¹

8. *I believe in complete faith that the Messiah is the end of the Torah for justification, for everyone who believes in Him. And that through faith in the Messiah everyone will be justified before God, without the deeds of the Torah, because from the deeds of the Torah no flesh will be justified nor perfected.*¹⁶²
9. *I believe in complete faith that in the Messiah Yeshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value, but the new creation and the faith that acts through love.*¹⁶³ *Since the love of the pure heart is the purpose of the entire Torah and its true fulfillment. And whoever is in the Messiah is a new creature and is created for a life of holiness and good works.*
10. *I believe in complete faith in the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who will eternally dwell among the believers, and will sanctify and lead them into full truth.*
11. *I believe in complete faith that God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets, and that in the latter days He spoke to us by His Son Yeshua Hamashiach – both these are the words of the Living God.*
12. *I believe in complete faith that the Holy Scriptures which are now in our hands were written by the Holy Spirit. These Scriptures are prepared to impart us with the knowledge of salvation through faith in the Messiah Yeshua, and for instructing us in righteousness, so that we may be complete and ready to do every good work.*¹⁶⁴
13. *I believe in complete faith in one Holy and Universal (Clalit) Church, the community of Saints, that is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets and Yeshua Hamashiach is her Cornerstone. I confess in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, waiting for the resurrection of the dead and for the life in the world that is to come (Olan Haba), Amen.*¹⁶⁵

Although this credo included various elements of other Christian creeds, there is no doubt that the anonymous author of this statement wanted to highlight the centrality of the Jewish people within the divine history of salvation. Jacob Jocz, the last editor of the bi-monthly *Der Weg*, the Yiddish

¹⁶¹ See Gal 3:28.

¹⁶² Based upon Rom 3:28 and 10: 4. 79

¹⁶³ Based upon Gal 5:6.

¹⁶⁴ Based upon 2 Tim 3:16-17.

¹⁶⁵ "Ikarei Emunatenu Hakedosha" (The Principles of Our Holy Faith), in: *Der Weg* ('The Way,' in Yiddish), vol. 13, March-April 1939, 6. Although most of the articles in *Der Weg* were written in Yiddish, it also regularly published material in Hebrew.

organ of the Warsaw Hebrew Christian Community who published this creed, was most probably involved in the shaping of this text. Jocz worked closely with the British "Church Missions to the Jews" (CMJ), which also published *Der Weg* for the congregation in Warsaw. Jocz was also familiar with the creed of the IHCA. The Hebraic form of this text, with terms like "God of Israel," "Redeemer of Israel" "House of Jacob" and "*Olam Haba*" reflects a unique contribution alongside the other Hebrew Christian creeds of the same era.

Another interesting point is that although this *Hebrew Christian Thirteen Articles of Faith* was written in a community that was strongly influenced by the Anglican Church through the "Church's Mission to the Jews," it chose to adopt an independent credo which wasn't strictly Anglican. One could expect, for example, that the JBY in Warsaw would have been somehow requested to follow the Hebrew Anglican Creed, with its 39 Articles of Faith that was published in the 19th century in London.¹⁶⁶ Practically however, this did not happen.

Eventually, as the Second World War broke out with Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939, the last issue of *Der Weg* was printed in August, 1939, never to be renewed. Jocz managed to escape to England, and the Warsaw Hebrew Christian congregation was scattered. Not a few were exterminated during the Holocaust. The congregation's original creed survived only on the yellowing papers of *Der Weg*.

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to examine five central creeds that were produced within various circles of Jewish Yeshua-believers in the *Golah*, the Jewish Diaspora, in America and in Europe between the Two World Wars. From this study it became clear that even though JBY were a tiny minority within the gentile churches, surrounded by a strong non-Jewish environment, they always tried to introduce into their creeds some Jewish characteristics. As a matter of national identity, it was important for them to highlight - through the creeds - at least some aspects of their Jewishness.

At the same time, however, in each case that was examined we observed that JBY adopted some parts of the creeds that had long before been shaped by the majority churches embracing them. In other words, the organizational emancipation of contemporary JBY was also accompanied by certain doctrinal emancipation. This doctrinal emancipation focused on introducing Hebraic phraseology and certain Jewish appeal⁸⁰ into their creeds. This did not happen only within the creed that was originally written in Hebrew, namely the one produced in Warsaw, Poland. Also the other four creeds, originally written in

¹⁶⁶ See *Seder Hatefila Kefi Minhag Kehilat Hamashiah shel Medinat England Veirland* (Liturgy of the Church of England and Ireland), in Hebrew, London 1840, esp. 276-290

English, attempted to introduce Hebraic terminology. Thus, interestingly, all five credos that were written in the Diaspora, and composed either in English or in Hebrew, tried to present their faith, as much as possible, from a Jewish perspective.

As a matter of principle, we also need to clarify that the most significant question about creeds is not whether they are needed, but rather if they become sacrosanct texts. Namely, whether the creeds don't prevent a real option for further discussions, comparisons and even alterations, particularly with deeper study of the Canonical Scriptures. For example, if, in reality, creeds sooner or later become dogmas, and this sacrosanctity sets the sole compass for shaping principles of faith instead of the entire Bible, then the role of creeds should be questioned.

As against the authority of the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, that is the source for all creeds, there remains the phenomenon of the very sacred creeds that have assumed an independent role for setting the doctrinal parameters of belief. Paradoxically, therefore, as Creeds are always limited texts, they can even challenge the entirety of the Bible.

This whole issue is sharpened especially when contemporary JBY endeavor to shape their own creeds, placing the Bible as their credal starting point, and not vice versa, starting with the historical creeds. In reality, modern Jewish Yeshua-believers are not merely searching for a 'Hebraic Truth,' but rather strongly aspire to represent a genuine Biblical Truth (*Biblica Veritas*), anchored in both Old and New Testaments.

Lastly, the *Diaspora* Articles of Faith of JBY between the World Wars were not the only ones that were in existence in that period. As a matter of fact, various other Articles of Faith were composed during the same period also in Eretz-Israel, the Land of Israel. However, such "Palestinian/Israeli" creeds will require a separate and concentrated investigation that will stand by itself. In a further study it would be of special interest to raise the following question: surrounded by the majority of Jewish society, in Mandatory Palestine and later in the State of Israel, did JBY form their theological creeds differently than in the Diaspora, or, even talk about non-creedal belief? This remains to be researched.

Polemics or Anti-Semitism? The New Testament and First-Century Judaism

Craig A. Evans*

Is the New Testament anti-Semitic? According to Krister Stendahl it is.¹⁶⁷ In my judgment it is not. Our divergent responses, however, are not necessarily incompatible. Depending on the context the answer could be yes or it could be no. Regrettably, as the New Testament functions in the thinking of many Christians and congregations it is anti-Semitic. The New Testament is understood to teach that in rejecting Jesus as Messiah the Jewish people have in turn been rejected by God. Thus, in the context of gentile Christianity, far removed from its Jewish roots, utterly estranged from its original ethnic and religious context, the New Testament is potentially anti-Semitic.

On the other hand, a compelling case can be made that argues that the New Testament is not anti-Semitic *in its original context*. We are faced, of course, with a problem when we speak of the New Testament “in its original context.” What is meant by this? In a certain sense such a statement is anachronistic. The “New Testament” implies a fixed and recognized canon of writings and that did not emerge until the Christian Church had become overwhelmingly gentile. If the *original context* of the New Testament canon is, say, the fourth or fifth century, when the canon as we know it reached its final form,¹⁶⁸ then it might very well be correct to speak of the presence of anti-Semitic features. Perhaps some of the books it now contains were included because of their harsh polemic directed against Jews and Judaism – at least as such polemic was understood by Christians then. Certainly many passages were interpreted in an anti-Semitic

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This paper was presented at a Society of Biblical Literature national meeting as part of a discussion of the problem of biblical polemic and how it has contributed to anti-Semitism. The nature of New Testament polemic is treated systematically in C. A. Evans and D. A. Hagner, eds., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

¹⁶⁷ In a paper read at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting in San Francisco, 1992.

¹⁶⁸ See L.M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988; rev. ed. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995).

sense. But if “original context” refers not to the collective whole (i.e., to the canon itself), but to the individual writings that make up the canon, I do not think that it is appropriate to speak of anti-Semitism. In fact, to describe the criticism and polemic in the New Testament writings as anti-Semitic is anachronistic and without regard to their social and religious context.¹⁶⁹

The Importance of Context

I believe that much of the debate concerned with New Testament polemic tends to assume that first-century Christianity is basically gentile and that the New Testament itself is largely a gentile book though perhaps dressed in Jewish garb. Seen in this light New Testament disagreement with, and criticism of, particular Jews and forms of Judaism appear anti-Judaic (i.e., opposed to Judaism as a religion), perhaps even anti-Semitic (i.e., opposed to the Jewish people). Consider the bigoted tone that the following passages have if we assume that the New Testament is a gentile book expressing criticism of Jewish people:

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father;’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt 3:7-10)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to people, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? (Matt 23:27-33)

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some of whom you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of the innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation. (Matt 23:34-36)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets ⁸³and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. (Matt 23:37-38)

¹⁶⁹ For a similar view, see J.A. Sanders, “Identity and Dialogue,” *BTB* 29 (1999), 35-44.

Jesus said to them [i.e., the “Jews”], ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him ... He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.’ (John 8:42-47)

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it. (Acts 7:51-53)

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’ And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad (Acts 13:46-48)

And when [the Jews] opposed and reviled [Paul], he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ (Acts 18:6)

So, as [the Jews] disagreed among themselves, they departed, after Paul had made one statement: ‘The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: “Go to this people, and say, You shall indeed hear but never understand” Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.’ (Acts 28:25-29)

As regards the gospel, [Israelites] are enemies of God (Rom 11:28)

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved – so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last! (1 Thes 2:14-16)

Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie – behold, I will make them come and bow⁸⁴ down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you. (Rev 3:9; cf. 2:9)

After surveying many of these passages and others like them the late Samuel Sandmel, a Jewish New Testament scholar, concluded that “the New Testament is a repository for hostility to Jews and Judaism. Many, if perhaps even most, Christians are completely free of anti-Semitism, yet Christian

Scripture is permeated by it.”¹⁷⁰ Some theologians and biblical scholars agree with Sandmel; others do not.

Jewish Polemic

Is the assessment of Sandmel and others accurate? Is the New Testament “permeated” with anti-Semitism? What is it about these passages that makes them anti-Semitic? Is it the harsh criticism that they express? Is it their dogmatic exclusivism? If we affirm either of the last two questions, we then have to explain the same dogmatic exclusivism and harsh, and at times even harsher, criticism that we encounter in the Old Testament. We may consider the following sampling:

*Ah, sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers,
sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the Lord,
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,
they are utterly estranged. (Isa 1:4)*

*For they are a rebellious people, lying sons,
sons who will not hear the instruction of the Lord;
who say to the seers, ‘See not;’
and to the prophets, ‘Prophesy not to us what is right;
speak to us smooth things,
prophesy illusions,
leave the way,
turn aside from the path,
let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel.’ (Isa 30:9-11)*

*But you, draw near hither,
sons of the sorceress,
offspring of the adulterer and the harlot.
Of whom are you making sport?
Against whom do you open your mouth wide and put out your tongue?
Are you not children of transgression, the offspring of deceit,
you who burn with lust among the oaks under every green tree;
who slay your children in the valleys,
under the clefts of the rocks? (Isa 57:3-5)*

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All the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart. (Jer 9:26)

¹⁷⁰ S. Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 160.

These prophetic oracles speak of Israelites as “sinful nation,” “offspring of evildoers,” “rebellious people,” “sons of the sorceress,” “offspring of the adulterer and the harlot,” “children of transgression,” and, “uncircumcised in heart.” This kind of language certainly approximates the language found in the New Testament: “brood of vipers,” “sons of the devil,” and, “uncircumcised in heart and ears.” One of the most offensive metaphors of prophetic criticism is the comparison of Israel to a harlot:

*How the faithful city has become a harlot
she that (once) was full of justice. (Isa 1:21)*

The Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah: ‘Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the harlot?’ (Jer 3:6)

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, ‘Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord.’ (Hos 1:2)

Sometimes the prophets reviewed Israel’s history – all of it, not just a particular generation – casting it in a very negative light:¹⁷¹

Zedekiah ... did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God ... He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel. All the leading priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful ... The Lord ... sent persistently to them by his messengers ... but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people till there was no remedy. (2 Chr 36:11-16)

From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; yet they did not listen to me, or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. (Jer 7:25-26)

For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but every one walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. (Jer 11:7-8)

Jeremiah’s prophecies express no more than what is found in the Deuteronomistic tradition:

And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: ‘You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great

¹⁷¹ For the best study of this tradition see O.H. Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten: Untersuchungen zur Überlieferung des deuteronomistischen Geschichtsbildes im Alten Testament, Spätjudentum und Urchristentum* (WMANT 23; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967).

trials which your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders; but to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.’ (Deut 29:1-3 [2-4E])

The prophetic oracles often went beyond description. Sometimes they called for, even demanded, judgment and punishment. An angry Isaiah enjoined God: “Forgive them not!” (2:9). Similarly, a bitter Jeremiah at one time pleaded with the Lord:

*Forgive not their iniquity,
nor blot out their sins from thy sight.
Let them be overthrown before thee;
deal with them in the time of thine anger. (18:23)*

According to Hosea: “She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to [Hosea], ‘Call her name Not Pitied, for I will no more have pity on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all’” (1:6). Jeremiah goes even further and says that God commanded him not to pray for his people:

As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I do not hear you. (7:16)

Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. (11:14)

Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and cereal offering, I will not accept them; but I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. (14:11-12)

After abandoning hope that Judah will repent, Jeremiah petitions God:

*Therefore deliver up their children to famine;
give them over to the power of the sword,
let their wives become childless and widowed.
May their men meet death by pestilence,
their youths be slain by the sword in battle. (18:21)*

The prophetic tradition even speaks of the rejection of Israel:

*For thou hast rejected thy people,
the house of Jacob. (Isa 2:6)*

*Hast thou utterly rejected Judah?
Does thy soul loathe Zion? (Jer 14:19)* 87

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
I reject you from being priest to me.*

*And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children. (Hos 4:6)*

*And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel,
and afflicted them, and gave them into the hand of spoilers,
until he had cast them out of his sight. (2 Kgs 17:20)*

There are no statements in the New Testament that approximate these angry expressions. Unlike Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jesus commanded his disciples to forgive (Matt 5:14-15). Unlike Jeremiah, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for their enemies (Matt 5:44). Indeed, according to Luke (23:34), Jesus prayed that those who called for his death be forgiven. Never does Jesus ask God to deliver up to death Israelites, or any people (cf. Luke 9:51-56). He warns of coming judgment and weeps because of it (Luke 19:41-44; cf. 13:34; 23:28-31). Never does Jesus nor any of the writers of the New Testament say that Israel has been rejected. Indeed, Paul proclaims the precise opposite: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!" (Rom 11:1).

Consider also the polemic of Qumran. Like Jesus and the writers of the New Testament, the men of Qumran quote, comment, and draw upon the Old Testament for their *faith* (i.e., who they are and what they believe) and for their polemic (i.e., where they disagree with others and on what basis). The author of the *Hymns of Thanksgiving* describes his enemies, the teachers and authorities of the Jerusalem establishment, in the following terms:¹⁷²

And they, they [have led] Thy people [astray]. [Prophets of falsehood] have flattered [them with their words and interpreters of deceit [have caused] them [to stray]; and they have fallen to their destruction for lack of understanding for all their works are in folly. (1QH 12:6-8 [olim 4:6-8])

And they, interpreters of falsehood and seers of deceit, devised plans of Belial against me, bartering Thy Law which Thou hast graven in my heart for flattering words (which they speak) to Thy people. And they stopped the thirsty from drinking the liquor of knowledge . . . (1QH 12:9-11 [olim 4:9-11])

As for them, they are hypocrites; the schemes are of Belial which they conceive and they seek Thee with a double heart and are not firm in Thy truth. (1QH 12:13-14 [olim 4:13-14])

This thinking is also expressed in the *Community Rule* scroll:

And let him undertake by the Covenant to be separated from all perverse men who walk in the way of wickedness. For they are not counted in His Covenant: For they have not inquired nor sought Him concerning His precepts in order to know the hidden matters in which they have guiltily strayed; and they have treated with insolence matters revealed that Wrath might rise unto judgment and vengeance be exercised by the curses of the Covenant, and solemn

¹⁷² Trans. based on A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings from Qumran* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973), 211-12, 83.

judgment be fulfilled against them unto eternal destruction, leaving no remnant. (1QS 5:10-13)

The Qumranites call their opponents “prophets of falsehood,” “seers of deceit,” and, “hypocrites” who have “devised plans of Belial [i.e., Satan]” against God’s true teacher. This polemic obviously parallels that found in the New Testament Gospels where Jesus calls Pharisees hypocrites and, according to the Fourth Gospel, sons of the Devil, who have strayed from the truth.

Apparently the people of Qumran did not wish outsiders (i.e., non-Qumranian Jews) to discover the error of their ways. They were strictly enjoined not to reveal their distinctive teachings:¹⁷³

And let him not rebuke the men of the Pit nor dispute with them; let him conceal the maxims of the Law from the midst of the men of perversity. And let him keep true knowledge and right justice for them that have chosen the Way. (1QS 9:16-18)

The people of Qumran, as had some of the classical prophets centuries earlier, prayed that their enemies might never be forgiven:¹⁷⁴

And the Levites shall curse the men of the lot of Belial, and shall speak and say: Be thou cursed in all the works of thy guilty ungodliness! May God make of thee an object of dread by the hand of all the avengers of vengeance! May He hurl extermination after thee by the hand of all the executioners of punishment! Cursed be thou, without mercy, according to the darkness of thy deeds! Be thou damned in the night of eternal fire! May God not favor thee when thou callest upon Him, and may He be without forgiveness to expiate thy sins! May he lift His angry face to revenge Himself upon thee, and may there be for thee no (word) of peace on the lips of all who cling (to the Covenant) of the Fathers! . . . (May there be) everlasting hatred for all the men of the Pit . . . (1QS 2:4-9, 21-22)

The High Priest is referred to several times as the “Wicked Priest” (cf. 1QpHab 8:8; 9:9; 11:4; 12:2, 8; 4QpIsa^c 30:3; 4QpPs^a 1-10 iv 8), perhaps also as the “Man of Lies” (cf. 1QpHab 2:1-2; 5:11) or “Preacher of Lies” (1QpHab 10:9). The teachers of the religious establishment are called the “builders of the (whitewashed) wall” (cf. CD 4:19; 8:12, 18; cf. Ezek 13:10-11). In what is probably a wordplay between *halak* (“to walk,” i.e., legal interpretation, cf. the term *halaka*) and *halaq* (“to be smooth”), some men (probably the Pharisees) are referred to as the “seekers of smooth things” (cf. 4QpIsa^c 23 ii 10; 4QpNah 1-2 ii 7; 3-4 i 7; 3-4 ii 4). Indeed, the elect of Qumran will take an active part in punishing the faithless of Israel (cf. 1QpHab 5:3-5).

The polemic in the writings of Qumran surpasses in intensity that found in the New Testament. In contrast to Qumran’s esoteric and exclusive posture the early Church proclaimed its message and invited all to join its fellowship. Never does the New Testament enjoin Christians to curse unbelievers or

¹⁷³ Ibid, 95.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 75, 96.

opponents.¹⁷⁵ 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.

The polemic in Josephus often times assumes a very harsh tone. Luke Johnson has documented how common harsh polemic is in Josephus, as well as in other Jewish texts.¹⁷⁶ Of the zealots, Josephus asks: "What have you done that is blessed by the lawgiver, what deed that he has cursed have you left undone? ... In rapine and murder you vie with one another ... the Temple has become the sink of all, and native hands have polluted those divine precincts ..." (*J.W.* 5.9.4 §400-402). Of the Sicarii, he says: "[They are] impostors and brigands" (2.8.6 §264), "slaves, the dregs of society, and the bastard scum of the nation" (5.8.5 §443-444); "they outdo each other in acts of impiety toward God and injustice to their neighbors ... oppressing the masses ... bent on tyranny ... plundering ... lawlessness and cruelty ... no word unspoken to insult, no deed untried to ruin" (7.8.1 §260-262). The polemic in Josephus directed against fellow Jews that Johnson cites outstrips anything found in the New Testament.

Even harsher polemic is found in 4 Ezra 6:55-59. The nations are like "spittle." They are "nothing," at least nothing more than a "drop from a bucket." In marked contrast, Israel is God's "first-born," "only begotten," and, "most dear." According to the *Testament of Abraham*, the gentiles "will be judged by the twelve tribes of Israel" (13:6).

Christian Polemic in Context

That genuine bigotry and racism eventually emerged within the Church sadly cannot be denied. One of the first expressions of bigotry appears in a Christian addition to the *Sibylline Oracles* (early to mid-second century):

And then Israel, intoxicated, will not perceive nor yet will she hear, afflicted with weak ears [cf. Isa 6:9-10]. But when the raging wrath of the Most High comes upon the Hebrews it will

¹⁷⁵ Paul's anathema in Gal 1:8-9 could be cited as an exception. It is not directed at outsiders, however, but at *insiders*. It is directed against Christians who insist on the observation of many elements of Jewish faith which, in Paul's way of thinking, contravene the spirit of the Gospel.

¹⁷⁶ L.T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *JBL* 108 (1989) 419-41. For discussion of Josephus, see pp. 436-37.

also take faith away from them, because they did harm to the Son of the heavenly God. Then indeed Israel, with abominable lips and poisonous spittings, will give this man blows. For food they will give him gall and for drink unmixed vinegar, impiously, smitten in breast and heart with an evil craze [cf. Deut 28:28], not seeing with their eyes, more blind than blind rats [cf. Isa 29:9-10], more terrible than poisonous creeping beasts, shackled with heavy sleep [cf. Isa 29:9-10] (1:360-371).¹⁷⁷

What places this sentiment on the path that leads to anti-Semitism is not the severity of the criticism (e.g., “abominable lips,” “poisonous spittings”), but the distinction the author makes between himself and “Israel” or “the Hebrews.” Gone is the perspective of inhouse criticism. The words of the prophets alluded to in this passage are used to bludgeon outsiders, which is untrue to the hermeneutics of inhouse criticism. This writer believes that the evil done to the Son of God was something that Israel alone did, which from the New Testament point of view is bad theology. According to New Testament theology, the human race – not Israel – put Jesus to death.

This “us against them” mentality underlies the following judgment uttered by Tertullian:

It was the merited punishment of their sins not to understand the Lord's first advent: for if they had, they would have believed, they would have obtained salvation. They themselves read how it is written of them that they are deprived of wisdom and understanding – of the use of eyes and ears [cf. Isa 6:9-10; Jer 5:21-23; Ezek 12:1-3]. As, then, under the force of their pre-judgment, they had convinced themselves from his lowly guise that Christ was no more than a man. (Apology 21.16-17)

Again the obduracy language of the prophetic tradition is invoked. The problem here is that the dynamic, in-house, prophetic criticism of Israel's classical prophets has been misapplied. In its original setting prophetic criticism is directed against one's own community. It is a challenge to assumptions that God is always on our side, or what James Sanders has called the theology of blessed assurance.¹⁷⁸ In-house prophetic criticism is not racist or bigoted. But Tertullian's (mis)use of it is. When he as a gentile Christian (“us”) applies the critical words of the prophets against Israel (“them”) he has applied a false and alien hermeneutic. The words of the prophets are now made to speak against a particular race of people, something that the prophets themselves never intended. If Tertullian had applied the words of the prophets properly, in keeping with their original intent and canonical context, he would have applied them to his own community.

In the New Testament the hermeneutic of prophetic criticism is at work. John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul challenged assumptions about election. The

¹⁷⁷ Trans. based on J.J. Collins, “The Sibylline Oracles,” in Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:343.

¹⁷⁸ See J.A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 61-73, 87-105.

Baptist warned that physical descent from Abraham was no guarantee of salvation. Jesus taught, contrary to widely-held opinion, that the poor and various social and religious outcasts would have an easier time getting into heaven than the wealthy and ostensibly pious. Paul argued that Israel's hardness toward the gospel was God's wise way to open the door to the gentiles. All of these are expressions of the hermeneutic of prophetic criticism, not racism.

Consider, for example, this hermeneutic at work in Isaiah, when he interpreted and applied the sacred tradition to the crisis of his time. He tells the scoffers of Jerusalem to hear the word of the Lord (28:14, 22), a word which has decreed destruction upon the whole land (28:22):

*For the Lord will rise up as on Mount Perazim,
he will be wrath as in the valley of Gibeon;
to do his deed – strange is his deed!
and to work his work – alien is his work! (28:21)*

Isaiah has referred to two of Israel's great victories over her enemies. "Mount Perazim" alludes to David's defeat of the Philistines (2 Sam 5:17-21). David declared that the "Lord has broken through [*Heb. paratz*] my enemies before me, like a bursting flood" (2 Sam 5:20). Therefore the place became known as Baal-Perazim, or later Mount Perazim. "Gibeon" alludes either to David's second victory over the Philistines (2 Sam 5:22-25; cf. 1 Chr 14:13-16) or to Joshua's victory over the Amorites (Josh 10:6-14). In alluding to these wonderful triumphs preserved in Israel's sacred tradition and warning that God plans to do a "strange" and "alien" deed, Isaiah is saying that God will once again be victorious on the field of battle—but Israel is his enemy! It will not be Israel's enemies who will be defeated, but Israel herself. This is a classic example of the hermeneutic of prophetic criticism. Far from finding assurance in the sacred tradition that God is obligated to bail Israel out of trouble, as no doubt Hezekiah's court prophets and counselors tried to assure the king, the prophet Isaiah finds evidence of God's sovereignty, power, and freedom.¹⁷⁹

Paul does the same thing. When he reviews the principles of divine election at work in the stories of the patriarchs (Romans 9; cf. Genesis 12-25), he concludes that a sovereign God could also summon to himself the gentiles and make of them his people, too. Moreover, if apostate Israel, utterly rejected by God and called "Not My People" (Hos 1:9) can out of God's grace be restored and once again be called "Sons of the Living God" (Hos 1:10) then why cannot God by the same principle make a people of the gentiles? He can, says Paul (Rom 9:22-26). But what of Israel who reject and oppose the Gospel? To them apply Isaiah's fateful words of obduracy (Rom 11:8; cf. Isa 29:10) and even more

¹⁷⁹ See C.A. Evans, "On Isaiah's Use of Israel's Sacred Tradition," *BZ* 30 (1986) 92-99.

shockingly David's angry words of imprecation against his enemies (Rom 11:9; cf. Ps 69:22-23; 35:8). If Romans 9-11 had been penned by a gentile I suspect many would see the passage as anti-Semitic. But the passage was written by a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil 3:5). It is no more anti-Semitic than Isaiah's interpretation of 2 Samuel 5. Paul's hermeneutic, like that of the classical prophets before him, was the hermeneutic of prophetic criticism.¹⁸⁰

Unfortunately, later generations of Christians, by this time predominantly non-Jewish, misunderstood (innocently in some instances, maliciously in others) the hermeneutic of prophetic criticism. No longer understood as challenge from within the community of faith, it was understood as condemnation of a particular people outside of the faith, the people which had rejected Jesus, his apostles, and the Church. In the light of this false hermeneutic, polemicists of the Church could cite Scripture from both Testaments as a weapon against the Jewish people.

But this was not what Jesus and the writers of the New Testament did. Theirs was the hermeneutic of prophetic criticism. As members of Israel they challenged their own people to think differently. Thousands did, and the early church had its beginning.

Conclusion

In my judgment, viewing the New Testament and the first two generations of early Christianity as anti-Semitic is hopelessly anachronistic. It is not only anachronistic in that second-through-20th century categories and definitions are imposed upon the writings of the New Testament. It is also fundamentally erroneous. Early Christians did not view themselves as belonging to a religion that was distinct from Judaism. New Testament Christianity *was* Judaism, that is, what was believed to be the true expression of Judaism.¹⁸¹ Just as Pharisees, Essenes, Sadducees, and who knows what other teachers and groups believed that their respective visions of religious faith were the true expressions of what God promised Abraham and commanded Moses, so also early Christians believed that in Jesus God had fulfilled all that the prophets had predicted and all that Moses required. Early Christianity was one Jewish sect among

¹⁸⁰ See C.A. Evans, "Paul and the Hermeneutics of 'True Prophecy': A Study of Romans 9-11," *Bib* 65 (1984) 560-70; idem, "Paul and the Prophets: Prophetic Criticism in the Epistle to the Romans," in S. Soderlund and N.T. Wright (eds.), *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 115-28.

¹⁸¹ W.D. Davies ("Paul and the People of Israel," *NTS* 24 [1978], 27) has correctly stated: "Paul was not thinking in terms of what we normally call conversion from one religion to another but of the recognition by Jews of the final or true form of their own religion." This way of thinking, I might add, was not limited to Paul but in all probability was the common understanding of the early Church.

several.¹⁸² The title of a recent collection of studies, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, addresses itself to this important dimension.¹⁸³ For this reason not only is viewing the New Testament as anti-Semitic anachronistic,¹⁸⁴ so is describing it as anti-Judaic.¹⁸⁵ To say that early Christianity opposed Judaism is to say that there was a clearly defined Judaism of the first century and that early Christians saw themselves as outside of, and separate from it. Both assumptions are erroneous. Judaism was diverse and pluralistic and early Christians viewed themselves as the righteous remnant within it (e.g., Mark 4:11-12; Rom 9:27; 11:2-5). Just as the Essenes had before him (1QS 9:18) the evangelist Luke (probably a gentile) calls his movement the “Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). And like the Essenes this self-designation may very well have been inspired by Isa 40:3, a passage of eschatological restoration: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (cf. 1QS 8:14; 9:19-20; and cf. Matt 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 1:75; 3:4-6; John 1:23). Such a self-understanding provides one more indication that the early Christian movement saw itself as a movement within – and not opposed to – Israel.

¹⁸² Significantly, Luke refers to Pharisees (Acts 15:5; 26:5), Sadducees (Acts 5:17), and Christians (Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22) as “sects” (*haireseis*). And just as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes had priests among their ranks, so too did Christians (cf. Acts 6:7). In other words, the Jesus movement’s claim to legitimacy, by virtue of the makeup of its membership, is equal to the claim of any other religious sect within Judaism.

¹⁸³ E.S. Frerichs, W.S. Green, and J. Neusner, eds., *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1987).

¹⁸⁴ S.J.D. Cohen (*From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986] 46-48) has pointed out that anti-Semitism, understood as hatred based on race alone, did not exist in antiquity.

¹⁸⁵ In one of the better essays of the collection, B. Przybylski (“The Setting of Matthean Anti-Judaism,” in P. Richardson, ed., *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity: Vol. 1: Paul and the Gospels* [SC] 2; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1986], 181-200) rightly concludes that Matthean polemic reflects “internal Jewish dispute” (p. 198). Nevertheless, he still speaks of “Matthean anti-Judaism.” I find this confusing. This would be akin to describing the polemic of one ecclesiastical faction or another as “anti-Christian.” An internal dispute should not be defined as polemic against the group as a whole. Essenes were anti-Pharisaical and the Rabbis later would express much antipathy toward Sadducees and various ruling priests and priestly families of the Herodian-Roman period. But none of this polemic—and much of it is as harsh or harsher than anything found in the New Testament—can be described as “anti-Judaic.” The New Testament contains polemic that targets particular groups. There is polemic against Sadducees, Pharisees, Christian “Judaizers,” Gentile Christians, and Gentile non-Christians. If by “anti-Judaic” one means criticism of, or opposition to, the Jewish religious leadership, which had rejected the messianists, then it is appropriate. On this important point, see D.A. Hagner, “Paul’s Quarrel with Judaism,” in Evans and Hagner, eds., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity*, 128-50, esp. 128-30.

If this is true, then why did Christianity eventually emerge as an essentially non-Jewish religious movement? The answer lies primarily in Christianity's radical views of proselytizing.¹⁸⁶ Further developing Jesus' remarkable practice of extending messianic invitations to the apparently disenfranchised (i.e., the uneducated, the rabble, tax collectors, and "sinners") the early Church all but did away with the halakhic prerequisites for proselytizing. Belief in Jesus as Israel's Messiah whom God raised from the dead and who will return in glory was all that was required. Circumcision and observation of food laws, though not relinquished without hot debate, were no longer required. Who then was a real Jew? Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews and a former Pharisee (cf. Phil 3:5-6), followed the lead of the prophetic tradition (cf. Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; 9:26; Ezek 44:9) and concluded:

For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from people but from God. (Rom 2:28-29)

Pressed to its logical conclusion anyone could become a "Jew" by confessing Jesus as Messiah and Lord. Belief in Jesus as Messiah and Savior fulfilled the requirements of the Law for Christ was the *telos* ("goal" or "end") of the Law (Rom 10:4). But Christian proselytizing stretched the parameters of Jewish self-definition too far, with the result that the messianic movement which had centered itself around Jesus (what later became "Christianity") and the other expressions of Jewish faith (what later became "Judaism") went their separate ways. Steven Katz has argued that Christianity and Judaism did not separate until after the defeat of Simon ben Kosiba in 135 C.E.¹⁸⁷ He observes that there is no evidence that there was an official anti-Christian policy before this time. Katz may be right.¹⁸⁸ The expulsion passages in the Fourth Gospel (e.g., John 9:2; 12:42; 16:2) probably reflect only a local situation, not a widespread policy.¹⁸⁹ The angry polemic that emerged in subsequent centuries became increasingly racial and ugly.

Luke's ambiguous portrait of the Pharisees, an item of scholarly debate, is probably best explained against this scenario. On the one hand, the Pharisees

¹⁸⁶ It is often thought that high christology (i.e., regarding Jesus as God incarnate) was principally responsible for Christianity's break from Judaism. This was probably a factor. But the earliest sources indicate that the real cause of the rift was over the role of Torah.

¹⁸⁷ S.T. Katz, "The Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.," *JBL* 103 (1984), 43-76.

¹⁸⁸ See also the important collection of studies on this theme in J.D.G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Partings of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (WUNT 66; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1993).

¹⁸⁹ Pace J.L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (2nd ed., Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

are treated favorably because they believe in the resurrection and therefore are sympathetic to the Easter proclamation (Acts 23:6-9). But, on the other hand, the Pharisees have strict halakhot for proselytizing and therefore they are portrayed, both in the Gospel of Luke and in the Book of Acts, as opponents of Jesus and the early Church. They grumble when Jesus associates too freely with tax collectors and sinners (e.g., Luke 7:36-50; 15:1-2). They later object when gentiles are admitted into the community without being compelled to submit to circumcision (Acts 15:1, 5).

In the first century the requirements for proselytizing were an open question. What constituted a real Jew? He who had the faith of Abraham (cf. Romans 4)? Or he who was a physical descendant of Abraham? What made Abraham chosen in God's sight? His faith (cf. Gen 15:6), which is the line of interpretation taken by Paul, or his merits, which is the line of interpretation taken by some Jewish interpreters (cf. *T. Naph.* 8:3-9:5; *Ps.-Philo, Bib. Ant.* 6:1-18; *Jub.* 12:12-14; *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 11:28)?

It is against these questions that the writings of the New Testament should be read. And when it is read from this perspective, the anachronistic assumption that its polemic is anti-Semitic or anti-Judaic will rightly be abandoned. But will many Christians read the New Testament from this perspective? It is precarious to assume that many people will interpret Scripture (whether the Old Testament or the New) in context. Thus, there is a need for a modern translation that translates more than words alone, but translates *context* as well.

Pros and Cons

On the Use of the Siddur in Messianic Jewish Congregations

Mishkan asked two leaders within the Messianic community in Israel to briefly relate to the following question: Why should Messianic congregations in Israel use the Siddur – the Jewish prayer book – or elements from it, in their worship service? Or why should they not?

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Elazar Brandt Writes

In his Mishneh Torah (Hilkhot Tefilah chapter 1), Rabbi Moses Maimonides offers a concise and compelling explanation for the use of organized, or liturgical prayer. Prayer is a positive commandment in the Torah. We must pray daily. But the Torah does not prescribe what to pray, when or how much to pray. Before the Babylonian exile, Israelites used to pray as much or as little as they were inclined, according to their desire and ability. After the return from captivity, Ezra and the leaders found us in a more complicated situation. Most Jews no longer spoke Hebrew and our religious education had been disrupted. We did not know how or what to pray. So they composed relatively simple Hebrew prayers which summarized the basic needs of the Jewish community. The core group of prayers consists of 18 benedictions which are recited standing and facing Jerusalem, preferably with a minyan of at least ten Jewish men. These benedictions offer praise to the G-d of our fathers, various petitions of the community, and they conclude with praise and thanksgiving. They ordained that these 18 benedictions be recited at the times of the morning, afternoon, and evening sacrifices. In this way, all Israel, wherever we are, can join together in prayer to our common G-d, focused on our common destiny, and in our ancestral language.

Around this core other prayer compositions collected, such as the recital of the Shema in the morning and evening, the Kaddish, and over the centuries, a complete library of poems, songs, psalms, benedictions and recitations. The main elements of the Siddur, or arranged prayers, were already in place and well established during the Second Temple period, before the time of Yeshua. He, his disciples, and the early messianic community knew and used these

prayers and composed others similar to them. To this day, Jewish people in Israel and in every corner of the world pray these same prayers, in Hebrew, with little variation. The Siddur is one of our great success stories and it may indeed take some of the credit for our continued existence as a distinct people.

Our national library of prayer has been on the lips of Jewish saints, scholars and sinners, heroes and victims, in times of great prosperity and joy and in times of desperation and hopelessness. They give expression to the Jewish soul as ancient songs of praise and cries for help leap from the tongues of Jews facing the victories and challenges of each new time and place in which we find ourselves. Countless Jews have gone to their deaths uttering these ancient words of faith rather than forsake our national hope and melt into the majority cultures around them. We have almost learned that, come what may, we Jews are in this world together. The Siddur enshrines the collective voice of our people's worship and prayer in all times and places, for all occasions.

I have written on the development of the Siddur and its relationship to the Bible in a previous edition of *Mishkan*¹⁹⁰ and will not repeat that information here. I will focus rather on the reasons why I believe the use of the Siddur is imperative for Messianic Jews.

The Torah contains many commands which carry the penalty of excision if violated.

"The soul that does (or does not do) such and such shall be cut off from his people." Possibly much of the time this ought to read, "The soul that does [certain sins] is cutting himself off from his people." While Maimonides rightly points out that the Torah does not dictate what or how much we must pray, nevertheless, 25 centuries after the return from the Babylonian exile, our sociologists are finding that indeed, those Jewish souls who choose to deviate from the basic, established Jewish practices, customs, and laws do cut themselves off from their people. It takes only three generations to finish the job—completely and permanently.

So why use the Siddur in Messianic worship? Can we not pray in our own words? Of course we can. Can we not compose our own prayers, songs, and liturgy? Sure we can. I maintain, however, that it is our great privilege, as the first waves of Jews who embrace Yeshua, to stand fast among the chorus of Jewish voices which have cried out to G-d together in all times and places. By choosing to remain within the fold we shall find ourselves and our children and grandchildren carrying the torch of heritage and destiny with our people until such time as Yeshua returns to embrace all of us together.

It is worth noting that the point of using the Siddur is so that we may be able to pray with the rest of the Jewish people. That means using a standard Siddur. Trying to write our own Siddur defeats the purpose, as the desire to do so comes from a form of replacement theology. We want to "follow the Bible,"

¹⁹⁰ *Mishkan* issue 25, 2/1996, 15-27.

or our understanding of it, instead of allowing our faith to give life to the forms we have inherited. Certainly we may add our own liturgical compositions, songs, or free prayer in appropriate ways. However, the choice of praying from the Siddur is an affirmation of our belief that G-d has purposed to preserve the Jewish people against all historical odds and therefore that he has had some hand in the development and preservation of our laws and customs.

Recently I led a Passover Seder for a group of 15 Messianic people. We had at least 10 different versions of the hagaddah, a couple of which were Messianic. During the Seder we found that those who had the Messianic hagaddot were unable to follow the service because those hagaddot agreed neither among themselves nor with the standard hagaddah. The various editions of the standard hagaddah posed no problem, other than having to correlate the different page numbers. Indeed, by trying to recreate Judaism in our own image, Messianic Jews are in danger of cutting ourselves off from the very people we claim to belong to, leaving our descendants in a state of confusion.

If we hope to have any future as a Messianic movement we must find it within ourselves to do our homework and learn how to pray and to live as Jews according to the Torah and Jewish tradition. Only then will we be able to give authentically Jewish expression to our faith in Yeshua as Messiah. Anything else ends up as a form of Christianity with Jewish decorations and becomes a highway to assimilation. If we believe that G-d has a purpose for the continued existence of Israel, then we owe it to Him, to ourselves, and to our children to be responsible citizens.

Meno Kalisher Writes

In order to answer the question regarding the appropriateness of Messianic congregations adopting elements from the Siddur or even the Siddur as a prayer book, one needs to look at the following four questions:

- (1) What is included in the Siddur?
- (2) What is behind the desire to adopt elements from the Siddur into Messianic congregations?
- (3) Is the Siddur necessary in addition to the word of God?
- (4) What is the purpose of a congregation?

1. What is included in the Siddur?

The Siddur is considered the prayer book of rabbinic Judaism. It includes a collection of psalms, quotations from the Tanach, prayers composed by rabbis for special occasions, instructions for the three daily prayers, and general instructions for holy days and for daily life according to rabbinic Jewish teaching.

On the surface it all sounds innocent. The painful truth is revealed when one examines the content of the Siddur more carefully. While the Tanach passages quoted in the Siddur are the pure word of God, this is not the case regarding the other elements of the Siddur.

For example one of the prayers includes a request that God remove all hope from those (sectarians) who believe in Yeshua! Some of the prayers conflict with the truth as presented in the Word of God. The Siddur quotes sayings of the prophets which are not written in the Tanach but are the product of human thought.

The understanding of man's salvation through Yeshua the Messiah is not acceptable in the Siddur; on the contrary, many of its parts are heretical for believers in Yeshua!

2. What is behind the desire to adopt elements from the Siddur

The desire to adopt the Siddur, or parts of it, is rooted, in my opinion, in the desire to portray the body of Messiah as something Jewish and not as part of Christianity.

During the past 1800 years many crimes were committed by people who claimed to believe in Yeshua. In the name of the Christian religion many of our fellow Jews were beaten, tortured, and killed.

It is possible that adopting elements from the Siddur is intended to show our people that we are a part of Judaism, of the Jewish people, and not of the gentiles.

More than once I have come across believers whose outward rabbinic Jewish appearance was nothing more than an attempt to conceal Yeshua who is so hated by many within the Jewish people. In their opinion, adopting elements of the Siddur (in addition to Torah commandments which are no longer valid) will make it easier for our fellow Jews to be with us. Later on, slowly, we will be able to present Yeshua. To me this is dishonest and once the "decoration" (Jewish elements from the Siddur) attracts non-believers to the congregation, we can no longer hide the cross but will have to show them the full Gospel of Yeshua. Such a testimony may present believers as dishonest and ashamed of their faith.

We must remember that people come to Yeshua through a sincere search for God's salvation, through recognition that they are sinners in need of the atonement that only El-Shadai can provide by His blood. Tradition is not the stumbling block – Yeshua and the cross are the stumbling block. Therefore, let us take hold of Yeshua and not tradition!¹⁰⁰

These groups claim that they are interested in keeping a rabbinic Jewish identity as part of the testimony they want to present to non-believers or to the weak believers among them. I fear that they use these arguments to conceal

their own spiritual weakness. The Scriptures are the complete word of God and we are not in need of any addition or correction.

Is it conceivable to bring into the congregation a book that contains heretical ideas? Is it conceivable to say to the congregation: "Read pages 10-30 and ignore the heresy on the other pages"? Should we present in the congregation anything which could divert our focus from the Word of God and from the purpose for which we were redeemed by the blood of Yeshua? I wish I were mistaken, but in a number of instances I have realized that this issue covers a greater problem – denial of the deity of Yeshua.

For some believers a sense of national belonging to the People of Israel, to the Jewish People, is extremely important. This group adopts Jewish elements in order to show off their Jewish Israeli nationalism. In many cases those who so fervently seek to adopt rabbinic elements are not "in love" with the apostle Paul. Some of them do not even accept his epistles as the Word of God. Is this because the apostle Paul tears down the branch of national pride to which they cling? Paul teaches that the gentile and the Jew are saved by grace (Eph 2), that the Jew has no advantage over the gentile in the Body of Messiah (Gal 3:26-29), and that we are no longer under the yoke of the law (Gal 3:23-25). National pride is still pride, and pride is sin! (Prov 16:18)

It is not easy to be Messianic. The Word of God teaches us to sacrifice our whole being for the Lord. Nothing attracts seekers except Yeshua the Messiah (Rom 12:1-2) and we must therefore remove all pride from ourselves and become like Him (Phil 2:3-11) and adhere to His word (2 Tim 1:13-14). Regrettably, we are living in a time when people seek sympathy and encouragement from other people rather than from God. Yeshua warned us that we will be hated by our own people – just as he was. Woe to us if we "buy" sympathy among our people at the price of compromising the Word of God.

3. Is the Siddur necessary in addition to the Word of God?

The Word of God teaches us that sanctified truth is found only in the Word of God. God commands us in his word not to turn to the right nor to the left from his guidance. He instructed Joshua the son of Nun with these words so that he would be blessed (Josh 1:7-9).

In Leviticus 10, God slays Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, because they offered a strange fire before him. This means that they added or excluded something from the clear and holy instructions which God gave them concerning their service in the Tabernacle.

The apostle Paul, towards the end of his life, while he was in prison, sent a letter to Timothy in which he asked him to guard that which is most valuable – the purity of the Word of God! "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Messiah Yeshua. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in

us” (2 Tim 1:13-14). Later the apostle Paul further encourages Timothy to keep the purity of God’s word *which is able to make him complete*, even at the price of being persecuted by those who are opposed to his faith (2 Tim 3:10-17; 1 Tim 6:20-21).

The Psalms and other quotations from the Tanach are, in my opinion, the only pure thing in the Siddur; therefore there is no place for the Siddur in the congregation of Yeshua. Even if the Siddur contained only a collection of prayers and Psalms, bringing it in might push aside the Tanach as a whole. The fact is that many religious Jews view the Siddur as containing all the knowledge they need to acquire about God and think that the rest of the Tanach is not necessary!

4. What is the purpose of the congregation?

The congregation exists to preach the gospel of the atonement for sin which God gave us in Yeshua the Messiah—El-Shadai! The congregation is commanded to bring this message to every person on the face of the earth (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). The purpose of the congregation is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, to edify the body of Messiah, “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Messiah” (Eph 4:12-13).

Besides the Psalms and the other quotations from the Tanach there is nothing in the Siddur that can help the congregation fulfill its purpose!

Conclusion

The congregation must be occupied with the purpose for which it was founded. That is to preach the gospel to a world without faith – and the people of Israel are included in this harsh definition (Matt 28, Acts 1). Furthermore the congregation should teach new believers in Yeshua the complete Word of God until we reach perfect unity in Yeshua. Anything that distracts us from our main objective is false, forbidden, and leads to sin! (Eph 4).

In my opinion there is no place or reason to adopt elements from the Siddur, or the Siddur in its entirety, in the congregation. The word of God is complete and we do not need anything in addition to it. The Siddur includes, among other things, heretical teaching and we must keep such teaching away from the souls with which Yeshua has entrusted us.

Book Review

Messianic Jewish Congregations: A Comparison and Critique of Contemporary North American and Israeli Expressions. Jeffrey S. Wasserman.

Submitted to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy. UMI Dissertation Services, 1997. Pp vii + 275.

Hilary Le Cornu

Wasserman defines his field research as an attempt to “probe the function of Messianic congregations as culturally indigenous expressions of the Messianic Jewish faith” (p. 13). His particular focus lay in examining how these congregations function in fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism.

Fellowship is defined in terms of “How do the members relate to one another? How do they individually and corporately relate to the larger Christian community, the unbelieving community, and the Jewish community.”

Discipleship pertains to provision of “an environment for personal spiritual development and growth ... How satisfying has this experience been from the perspective of the members and leaders?”

Evangelism is evaluated according to the effectiveness of outreach to the Jewish community, “is this cultural approach working from an evangelistic standpoint?” (ibid).

The dissertation is divided into three sections. The Introduction sets the background, current state of scholarship, and methodology employed. Chapters 2 and 3 give a brief overview of the history and identity of Messianic Judaism, and Chapters 4 and 5 compare the American and Israeli expressions of Messianic Judaism from the 1960s onwards.

Wasserman’s sources derive primarily from personal interviews with Messianic leaders and congregants both in the United States and in Israel, surveys sent to American Messianic congregations, and Messianic Jewish literature also pertaining mostly to the latter.

The results are disappointing – in both academic and substantive terms. The language, style, and argument are all very loose and leave a great deal to be desired. At times, Wasserman betrays clear signs of ignorance and naivete.

In a rather typical example, he thus maintains that one of the “foundational principles” of first century messianic Jewish faith – Peter and James’ original leadership – is the “basis on which modern Messianic Jews assert their independence from the Pauline-led church, which would later be represented in Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant confessions” (pp. 35-36). Despite the fact that this assertion is quite basic to his thesis, he later admits

that “the reemergence of Messianic Jewish congregations in the late twentieth century North America [*sic*] ... is an outgrowth of evangelical Protestantism” (p. 112).

Likewise, he can baldly state: “The issue of Jewish identity is settled in Israel” (p. 230) when people living in the country are very aware of how heated a subject this remains. Such a facile statement reflects Wasserman’s apparent lack of familiarity with his subject – even in the context of contrasting the Israeli situation, where “a Jew is just about anyone,” with American Messianic Jews’ struggle to be accepted by the Jewish community.

A similar “artlessness” is reflected in Wasserman’s definitions, essential to any work dealing with identity issues. Wasserman’s basic working definition of “Jewishness” runs: “‘Messianic’ congregations are comprised of those who place their faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah of Israel. They are Jewish in that they identify themselves with the first century Jewish Church before it was superseded by Hellenistic and Roman Christianity” (p. 1). A thesis which proposes to compare and critique different expressions of Messianic Judaism is surely required to provide more accurate and penetrating definitions than these!

Another example arises out of a discussion of “extremists in the American Messianic movement.” As part of the list of such extremists – itself a strange assessment – Wasserman includes those who refuse “to use vowels in names of God ... out of ‘respect for the Jewish tradition’” (p. 236). While Wasserman explains that the English linguistic habit of using G-d is very recent, he then completely spoils the effect with the elaboration that “Although vowels are not found in the Hebrew of the covenant name “Yhvh,” they are used for other divine names like ‘El’ and ‘Elohim’” (p. 236 n.7)!

Perhaps most strikingly, Wasserman seems to suffer from the same ambiguous attitude and behavior in relating discipleship to evangelism as does much of Messianic Judaism at large. Both his own comments and those of the people whom he interviewed convey in this regard a distinct confusion between striving towards an “indigenous” cultural expression of Jewish identity as an act of personal “spirituality” and adopting such a lifestyle as an effective form of outreach.

Here, Wasserman does succeed in putting a finger on several of the most serious challenges facing Messianic Judaism. Thus he clearly points out the superficial “veneer” of Jewishness which characterizes most Messianic Jewish congregations, both in America and in Israel, and represents at best a “misappropriation” and at worst a “~~mis~~use” of authentic Jewish practice. In this respect, his findings wholeheartedly concur with Joseph Shulam’s graphic comment, “Jews see this stuff [Messianic Jewish worship- and life-styles] and they can smell the bacon!” (p. 243).

Wasserman correctly comments that this situation should be a cause of concern for Messianic leaders responsible for their congregants' spiritual growth. As he further indicates, it also raises questions regarding target groups who do not define themselves according to any traditional Jewish religious framework. Similarly, the "guilt" which the practice of Messianic Jewish "orthodoxy" at times hopes to create in the mainstream Jewish community "seems to confuse the legitimate need for Jewish forms of faith expression among Jewish believers with the need for a gospel hearing for non-believers. Furthermore, evangelistic method based on religious guilt seems unadvisable [sic]" (p. 242).

Although Wasserman's work neither presents fresh material nor deals with his subject in an imaginative or sufficiently well-rounded academic style, those interested in gathering scholarly literature on Messianic Judaism may wish to add this dissertation to their library.

From the Israeli Media

Lisa Loden*

During the past few months, a new book by Eyal Meggid, *Eternal Life*, has been the recipient of much press coverage. No less than eight articles, including lengthy book reviews and interviews with the author, have appeared in every sector of the Israeli press. Secular and religious papers, daily and weekly papers, local and national papers have all covered the publication of this novel. From the amount of coverage and its widespread nature one could think that a long awaited important document had finally been published instead of just a novel, geared for an average secular readership.

The secular and religious press have covered the publication in equal measure. Usually books for the secular public do not engender widespread response from the religious sector. The perspectives from which the papers review *Eternal Life* differ from one another. The secular press focuses on the more titillating aspects of the book and reduces the religious/spiritual dimension to a secondary level. The religious press perceives the religious message of the book as central and integral to the novel's purpose and development. This is evident from the fact that the Hebrew language, ultra-orthodox, national religious daily paper featured a full page article with two-centimeter headlines – *Beware: A Missionary Pamphlet Disguised as an Israeli Novel.* (HaTzofeh, 02/03/01)

The Religious Press's View

Since the novel's 40-something Sepharadi protagonist travels to Cuba and converts to Christianity it is not surprising that the ultra-orthodox press should see this novel as a threat to the Jewish religious establishment. What is surprising is the amount of coverage and detail they give to express their fears.

Young Israeli men or women searching for a meaningful existence that they haven't received from their uprooted secular education and who are weighing a trip to India could easily be taken captive by the beautiful descriptions of churches, Christian ceremonies, the exalted meaning of the crucifixion, and peace of soul that comes through baptism and confession; to the end that they may say to themselves – why travel so far when the spirituality we are looking for is right here, under our noses, on the Via Dolorosa, in the churches of the Old City

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of Jerusalem or in Stella Maris in Haifa. (Meggid doesn't even write a single sentence about the murderousness, violence, and consistency of the church in acting against Jews for the entire 2000 years of its existence. He speaks only of the love, compassion, light and grace that are in the church.) (HaTzofeh, 02/03/01)¹⁹¹

Even though in the end of the novel, the hero is hospitalized in a mental institution and his "conversion to Christianity" is presented as an aberration due to early family issues, the religious press sees this as a literary device and maintains that the true purpose of the book is missionary. The reviewer, Naomi Gotkind, points to the fact that only five or six pages are used to describe the alleged "mental illness" of the hero and hundreds of pages glowingly describe the beauties of Christian theology and practice.

It would be acceptable perhaps if it were not for the hundreds of pages that proceeded the unconvincing end, this "deus ex machina," in which Eyal Meggid enthusiastically and at length describes the Christian world view according to the version of the Jewish-Christian cults (Jews for Jesus, Jehovah Witnesses) ... The descriptions of the "revelation" of Hanoch Hazan, the book's hero, are so filled with poetic intensity, verbal seduction, description and passion, and the author invests so much of his heart in them and literary wholeheartedness, and so many pages, that the ending about Hazan's mental illness doesn't succeed in making one forget them. (HaTzofeh, 02/03/01)

In another article which appeared in the same daily Hebrew religious paper (HaTzofeh, 14/03/01), Akiva Tzimmerman, takes care to identify the literary roots from which Eyal Meggid drew nourishment for his embrace of Christianity. Tzimmerman points to Eyal Meggid's father, Aaron Meggid, who himself is a respected Israeli literary figure, as well as to the author Pinchas Sadeh and other "Jews who expressed esteem or fondness for Christianity, not just towards Jesus who was a Jew but also for the Christianity of Paul." Tzimmerman, not surprisingly, agrees with Gotkind and commends her for her warning against the missionary message of *Eternal Life*.

Responding to the question about the amount of attention given to *Eternal Life* by the religious press, Naomi Gotkind concludes with these words:

Tell me, why should we deal with this book at all, why write about it? Maybe to ignore it would be better. Not in this case, not when we are speaking about a writer from a literary family, who also is already famous, and who belongs to the heart of the Israeli literary experience and not when the publisher is large and strong and is enthusiastically promoting this book. (HaTzofeh 02/03/01)

The View of the Secular Press

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The attitude of the secular press towards *Eternal Life* differs greatly from that of the religious press. One of the mass circulation Hebrew daily papers heartily recommends the book as a "wild weekend with *Eternal Life*." The reviewer

¹⁹¹ All translations from the Hebrew press into English are by Lisa Loden.

presents the book in terms of an escape, a journey to an exotic clime, both physically and spiritually, as much of the book is set in steamy Cuba and the forbidden world of Christianity mixed with sex. Following a selective overview of the plot, the review concludes with: "You must not miss this journey" (*Yediot Achronot*, 15/03/01).

The more thoughtful major Hebrew daily paper, *HaAretz*, (24/04/01) devotes a half page article to *Eternal Life*. The reviewer, Meron Isaakson, sees the book as giving voice to an authentic human spiritual quest. Isaakson expresses his own reaction to the book thus:

The confused spiritual state of the protagonist, Hanoch Hazan, influenced me in the way that only well written literature can. His emotional upheaval penetrated my consciousness and did not leave me through the whole course of the reading.

Throughout the review, Isaakson expresses his own difficulties with the presentation of Christianity as a "legitimate alternative way for the secular Israeli to find his redemption." He questions whether the hero, Hanoch Hazan, is worthy of the spiritual depths the author wishes to impart to him and whether the embrace of Christianity effects change in Hazan's relationships. Isaakson also draws attention to the parallel spiritual search of Hazan's son, the relationship between the two and the counterpoint in the son's move toward Orthodox Judaism as expressed by his love for a religiously-observant girl.

Isaakson finds the Christian message unconvincing and unappealing but is honest enough to say that this is most likely caused by his own personal blocks.

Interviews with the Author

In light of the interest caused by the publication of *Eternal Life*, both the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem weekly supplements to the major dailies carried lengthy interviews (three and a half pages with photographs) with Eyal Meggid. (*Iton Tel Aviv*, 02/03/01, *Iton Jerusalem*, 02/03/01). Meggid answered questions about his own religious views as well as his political stance.

When asked, "Why Christianity?" Meggid answers:

Because in Christianity I found what I didn't find in Judaism – my personal God. In Judaism, there is a problem in finding your personal God, that is to say, a God of flesh and blood who you can turn to. Jesus, in contrast to this, is human and is equal to God. This mediation between man and God, is the truest thing for secular Jews who are in search of meaning. It is a much more Jewish solution than an ashram in India.

Meggid views Christianity as a viable option for Jewish people and sees no contradiction between Jewishness as an ethnic identity and believing in Jesus as faith identity. The message Meggid wanted to convey in *Eternal Life* is:

I am not trying to convince the Jewish people to convert to Christianity, but we have no choice but to weigh that possibility. Christianity is a part of the Jewish heritage. We have to examine that option because it is always there in our subconscious minds and we are trying to

deny it. This denial is unhealthy, it is a serious rejection. I truly believe that Christianity is flesh of our flesh but we have a psychological block. ... I wanted to convey this message. For the Israeli, the secular Jew, who is really looking for his faith, the Messiah is more available than he imagines.

The most recent interview with Eyal Meggid to appear in the Israeli press was in the April edition of the Jerusalem-based monthly news magazine, "Israel Today." Although this is a Christian publication it is sold on the public newsstands throughout Israel and is published in both German and English. This interview was devoted almost entirely to matters of faith in Jesus and the Jewishness of the gospel. Meggid candidly answered questions about his own personal faith.

It's precisely because I feel secure in my Jewish and Israeli roots that I'm able to search for my personal faith somewhere else – in Christianity. Jesus is my address of faith, and He can be the same for other Jews as well In my novel I try to erase the past 2000 years of Jewish-Christian division ... I want to bring back the link between Christianity and Judaism because Christianity developed from Judaism ... Bearing in mind its anti-Semitic history, I describe the conversion experience as more of a transformation. During the time of the Second Temple, Christianity was an option for Jews within Judaism. After faith in Jesus spread beyond Israel's borders to the nations, believing in Jesus was not considered Jewish anymore ... For me Jesus is the path to God, the key to understanding God. ... Jesus is the gate to God. ... As a Jew, I don't need to convert to Christianity because faith in Jesus is a part of Judaism.

It would appear from this interview that Meggid considers himself to be a Messianic Jew in the same way that most Messianic Jews today also identify themselves.

Conclusion

Both the secular and religious population realize that *Eternal Life* is an important book. Novels are much more widely read than scholarly tomes and interesting, well-written literature will always have an audience.

It would seem that Eyal Meggid in *Eternal Life* communicates his message clearly. Whether that message is embraced or rejected, the very fact of the book's publication is a significant event in the history of Israeli, Hebrew literature. While it remains to be seen whether or not Meggid is indeed a Messianic Jew, that is not the important question here. *Eternal Life* will surely introduce a wide secular Israeli audience to a very sympathetic picture of Christianity and to faith in Jesus as a viable option for today's Israeli and secular Jew.

**Jewish Evangelism in Europe in the Third Millennium
Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE)
Seventh European Conference
15 - 18 March 2001**

Statement

We, the 55 participants of the 7th European Conference of LCJE, came together from 10 countries at Abbaye de la Bussière-sur-Ouche (near Dijon) in France on 15-18 March 2001 to discuss and exchange information about Jewish evangelism in Europe in the third millennium. As Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus the Messiah, we reaffirm our commitment to communicate the gospel, which according to Paul is "to the Jews first" (Rom 1:16).

We have been encouraged to hear about the work of the Holy Spirit among the Jewish people in different countries and we praise God for His mercy upon His people.

We considered "The Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People" from 29 April 1989 and we call upon the Christian churches in Europe to reconsider their commission to preach the gospel in the light of this declaration.

Abbaye de la Bussière-sur-Ouche, March 18, 2001

On behalf of the participants,

Hartmut Renz
European Coordinator of LCJE