

HEBREW CHRISTIANS

"WHY ARE THEY CONVERTING TO CHRISTIANITY?", an article heading in the Histadrut daily "DAVAR" (29.4.82) inquires. Based on the translation of a lengthy letter by a Russian-born Jewess to "NOVY AMERIKANITZ" ("THE NEW AMERICAN"), a New York Russian-language newspaper "which describes itself as a Jewish weekly," the letter by Yalina Mandel is quoted as an indication of "the recent spreading of Soviet-Jewish conversions to Christianity in two countries." Translation follows (originally published in Russian in New York on 16.2.82).

"Soviet Jews of my generation (between 25-30) grew up during the period of the Khrushchev thaw when the complete bankruptcy of Communist ideology was revealed to everyone. The older generation still had ideals connected to the 1917 Revolution or to the patriotic revival during World War 2. The post-war generation, however, found itself caught in a spiritual vacuum. Those who were not involved in the human-rights movement, which served for many as a sublimation of their need for spiritual life, were swept into an atmosphere of dead-end cynicism. It was in this vacuum that a spiritual revival began in Russia which could not be anything but religious. Man began to long for God, and was drawn to Him--but to which God? It would seem obvious that a Jew longing for God should naturally turn to the God of his fathers, but this only seemed so.

"Young Jews in Moscow and in Leningrad had never heard anything about Judaism from their parents. The parents themselves knew nothing whatever about the subject. Books about the Jewish religion in the Russian language are not available in the USSR; on the other hand, the philosophical religious books of Berdayev, Bulgakov, Shostov and others are almost obligatory reading for the intelligent person there. The word "Talmud" is however frightening, and it's used as a synonym for tedious and coercive study. The Bible is impossible to obtain except in the Pravo-Slavic version. Therefore, the tendency is first of all to read the New Testament, whose concepts are encountered in the writings of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and others--works which are soaked with Christianity, the Crucifixion and other Christian terminology. These concepts are familiar to us from our daily life, while terms such as the Exodus from Egypt, the Holy Temple and the phylacteries are unheard of. The young people's knowledge has been shaped and influenced by the vast resources of Western culture, which is also saturated with a Christian spirit. Unknown to them is the fact that Christian civilization owes its origin and very existence to Judaism.

"Christianity in Russia, therefore, lies before you; just stretch out your hand. The way to Judaism, however, is long and tortuous. In Moscow there is one synagogue for the entire city, and its location is not known. In the Municipal Information Bureau they will not answer your question about it should you inquire. Churches--good ones and bad ones--are to be found in every area. You pass by them, you peep in; there are beautiful icons in golden frames, the pleasant aroma of oil lamps, and such beautiful singing. The people, quite often, are likeable and pleasant, the priest an imposing figure in his sparkling Christian mantle, attracts you!

"And the Synagogue? One must travel the length of the whole city to get there, and there's nothing to see; no icons, no images, bare wooden benches, a motley crowd of old people buzzing about in their funny hats. They don't even kneel down and cross themselves (in Soviet films we learn that only thus does one pray to God). The old men mutter something in Yiddish or in Hebrew, which is even less understandable. While they look into some kind of book whose pages are falling apart. All this is incomprehensible and unattractive. The beauty which is to be found deep within Judaism is beyond the grasp of someone who is not grounded in it. One must always be in subjection; there are even special dietary regulations. In order to understand its greatness, one must be inwardly prepared for it, and not many are able to do so.

"Once, during Passover, we invited a friend of ours, a Jewish-Christian, to a synagogue in Moscow. He was a regular visitor at the Church, and this was the first visit he had ever made to a synagogue. The man had become alienated to the faith of his fathers without even trying to understand why he was alienated. The convert Aksionov-Meirson has also written that it was only after he had accepted Christianity that he began to learn something about Judaism.

"Of course this is very sad and apparently unavoidable in the abnormal country from which we came. Also understandable is the reason why Russian Jews continue to convert to Christianity, even after they have left Russia. They leave it in complete

ignorance of Jewish topics and loaded with Russian culture. Add to that the absolute helplessness of those lovely American Jews confronting these problems, the yearning of Russian Jews for their mother tongue and a Russian atmosphere, and you will understand the fact that the Pravo-slavic Church in general and the church of Father Michael Bermov in particular appear to them as a friendly and familiar island in a strange and hostile world.

"I would like to point out another interesting fact: As an outsider looking at many of my friends who have converted to Christianity, I notice a distinctive phenomenon--almost all the Jews who have converted aspire to be priests or religious specialists. Their souls have just opened to God, and immediately those Jewish characteristics have been aroused, the desire to study--they aren't satisfied with mere visits to the Church and fulfilling its commandments.

"Inasmuch as the new stream of churchgoers in Moscow comes mainly, to my sorrow, from the Jewish community, it is likely that the face of the Pravoslav Russian Church will soon be quite changed--unless a war is declared against the Judaization of the Church. And the only way to grapple with the dropouts among our brothers and sisters is by means of intensive Jewish education here where we have the full possibility to do so."

MISSIONARIES

A review of the bi-monthly magazine of the Israel Tourist Office ("KARDOM") for tourist guides notes an "interesting article by Samuel Avitzur (which) tells the history of the original Bikur Holim Hospital (in Jerusalem) established to compete with an English missionary hospital which showed too much success in ministering to the 'physical and spiritual health of Jerusalem's misfortunates'--Jews, Moslems and Christians. The founders of Bikur Holim acquired the house of a very interesting English missionary Jonathan Nicolsohn, who lived in Jerusalem for over 30 years and died and was buried there in 1856. Nicolsohn did not make too many converts, but he was well thought of by all sections of the population due to his pleasant personality and the material assistance he provided in times of need." (JERUSALEM POST: 7.5.82)

"THIS WEEK IN NETANYA" (26.2.82) Bright notices affixed to bulletin boards and on storefront windows in town, appealing to young people to join the Christian religion, aroused the indignation of religious circles in town. "I'm convinced beyond any doubt that Jewish young people have already joined the missionary sect labouring in Netanya; and in order to prevent further deterioration, we shall begin a campaign to prove that this activity is illegal," an ultra-orthodox young Jew told the correspondent of the newspaper. This young man and his companions, who had come across these notices, quickly removed them, and they went on patrols around the streets of town late into the night in order to discover who had posted them, but failed to turn up anyone.

"SWASTIKAS IN JERUSALEM" (JEWISH CHRONICLE, LONDON; 19.3.82) The Jerusalem correspondent reported the defacement of the walls of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem by Jewish ultra-nationalists, with swastikas and offensive slogans. Mayor Teddy Kollek sent the municipal workmen to clean the walls and stated that great harm was done to the State of Israel by "extremists who have no place in a free and sane society." Rabbi Meir Kahane's extreme "Koch" nationalist group has accused members of the Embassy of being "disguised missionaries" who seek to convert Jews.

"AMERICAN ACTIVISTS INTENSIFY CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE MISSION" ("H AMODIYA" 11/5/82) The U.S. Branch of the "PEILIM" (ACTIVISTS) has decided to intensify its activity for the registration of students in ultra-orthodox schools and seminaries as well as to intensify its war against the Mission, which recently has begun to strike new roots in Jerusalem and other towns. This has been decided by the organization's leadership meeting in Jerusalem...The renewed expansion of mission activity was reported especially in the new neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. In view of this, it was decided to expand the war on the Mission, and to find suitable ways to do this...

"SPECIAL INVESTIGATION" THE MISSION IS BROADCASTING FROM METULLA WITH ONE-MILLION WATT POWER. THE HIGHEST-POWERED TV STATION IN THE WESTERN WORLD LOCATED TEN METERS FROM THE GOOD FENCE OPERATED BY PEOPLE RESIDING IN ISRAEL...THE CHARACTER OF THE STATION AND IDENTITY OF ITS OPERATORS STIRS SECURITY & OTHER QUESTIONS." (YOMAN HASHAVUA:27.4.82)

A two-page investigative article with photographs of George Otis and the "STAR OF HOPE" Broadcasting mobile unit, Major Haddad and project leader Church Pollak, appeared in this weekly magazine, a summary and excerpts from which follow:

George Otis's TV station STAR OF HOPE is about to be transferred to the "700 Club", owners of the CBN, the largest Christian broadcasting network in the U.S.A. The "High Adventure Church" of George Otis at present has a radio station located between Metulla and Harjayun and a TV station in colour, with offices at the Cedars Hotel in Metulla, while the studios and operating equipment are in a well-equipped mobile broadcasting unit beside the Good Fence in Metulla, 70 meters from the Israeli border.

Who is George Otis who describes himself as "a messenger of God" and "God's sales agent"? Otis says "Fifteen years ago God spoke to me and I was born again." In order to sell the word of God to the masses, Otis set up a corporation by the name of "Mission Adventure," which turned out to be an excellent business, including a travel company for bringing pilgrims to Israel. As a result, Otis developed connections with the country's leaders. During the Yom Kippur War Otis used a press pass to join the Israel Defence Forces on the Golan Heights, and subsequently produced a book called "THE SPIRIT OF HAGAR," which sold several hundred thousand copies in the U.S.A. In it he developed the thesis of the continual war between the sons of Hagar (the Ishmaelites) and the Jews and Christians.

After the Yom Kippur War the government of Israel was looking for friends, and Otis-- a sworn friend of Israel--was reckoned a good property for propaganda. He became an interviewer on a personal program with a very strong Christian emphasis. In 1977 Otis and his mission got their first foothold on the northern border, with Otis linking up with Major Haddad. The Govt of Israel, representing itself as the defender of the Christians in South Lebanon, was happy to allow Otis to work for it in providing medical (and spiritual) assistance to Haddad's men.

In September 1979 the VOICE OF HOPE began to broadcast (according to Otis at Haddad's request,) and Israel helped bring in the equipment to operate it. Otis brought with him a small team of volunteers from the USA, all experienced radio personnel, all of them "born again" and all of them sworn anti-Communists. The radio station began broadcasting music and Christian "commercials" aimed at the South Lebanese, and news, with Haddad speaking whenever he wanted to...and causing friction between Otis's mission and the State Department in Washington.

In a story published recently in the widely-distributed monthly of the "born-again" groups, "CHARISMA," Otis states: "What I wanted was more than to bring hope to South Lebanon. I saw in the very fact of broadcasting the word of God from the region of Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, an important step in fulfillment of prophecy." And "prophecy" for Otis means bringing Christianity to the Jews.

(There follows a description of the setting up of the TV station "STAR OF HOPE" and its transfer to CBN, and related developments. The reporter then continues:) The only advertisements have a religious tone, concealed in most of the broadcasts, and religious items of one minute every hour, all broadcast being in English only. Questions are raised: Why does the station not broadcast in Arabic and French, the languages of the Lebanese? Why such powerful transmitters? Chuck Pollak, project leader of Otis in Israel, age 29, has been living in Metulla for three years, and apparently is either fluent in speaking or understanding Hebrew although he refuses to acknowledge this.

No less astonishing is a sentence appearing in a press notice issued by them: "We are asking CBN to take upon themselves the TV operation...We believe God is asking us to do this because time is short." Why the rush? It's hard to assume that Otis is convinced that the Messiah is soon to arrive riding on an up-to-date station. Israel will soon be flooded with CBN programs which Otis has received free of charge.

Otis, in the "CHARISMA" article, stated that he had broken the credibility gap and that the Israelis were now ready to trust in the Nazarene, and they were permitting him to set up radio and TV stations that would flood Israel with the Christian Gospel...True, the CBN is a pro-Israel network; but it's also anti-Communist, and there's no doubt that its broadcast from the "backyard" of Israel will not be

pleasing to the palate of many Israelis even as the declared intention of the "ADVENTURE CHURCH" to bring Christianity to Jews will be a provocation to many other Israelis. It would therefore be fitting that certain quarters in the Israeli Govt. pay heed to the development of the broadcasting kingdom of Otis--and especially to developments behind the scene. (Emmanuel Dudai)

CHRISTIANS PRO-ISRAEL

AFFORESTATION: A forest of 10,000 trees has been dedicated near Zippori by the Jewish National Fund to the circle of Israel--Germany Friends. The group believes in the destiny of the people of Israel in the Land of Israel, and supports the State unreservedly. Also taking part in the ceremony were representatives of the Christian Embassy, set up as a protest against the erosion of Israel's position in the world. They seek to emphasize that there are many Christians who support Israel. (DAVAR: 9.5.82)

RETARDATES: An agreement to operate the first hostel for retardates in the minorities' community has been concluded in Kfar Kana in Galilee with the Christian organization "Donriona". The Welfare Dept. built the hostel with the help of the Society of Friends of Israel in Sweden. When it is completed, it will be able to absorb some 200 persons. (HAARETZ: 3.5.82)

NES AMIM: The opening of the new Nes Amim Guest House was reported in news articles in the JERUSALEM POST (24.5) and ISRAEL NACHRICHTEN (24.5.)

FR. PAX: A feature article in "NEWSVIEW JERUSALEM" (13.4.82) deals with Father Pax, the German-born Jerusalem priest who has authored the best-selling book "IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS." The article is headed "JERUSALEM'S FATHER PAX OBSERVES PESAH & EASTER"

GERMAN PHILO-SEMITES: A two-part feature article in "LETZTE NAYIS" (Yiddish)(29. 3.82) under the headings "A CHRISTIAN WITH A JEWISH SOUL: CHRISTIANS WHO LOVE THE JEWS AND THE BIBLE, KEEP THE SABBATH AND KASHRUT..." describes the life and background of German volunteers living in Migdal of Galilee (SEE "SELECTIONS" 101 p.3 GERMAN VOLUNTEERS)

CHRISTIAN TOURISM: Wholesale Tours International, largest Christian tour operator in North America, recently welcomed its half-millionth client, Pastor G.D. Peters, and a group of 200 pilgrims, at a special reception given by the Tourism Ministry. (JERUSALEM POST. 1.4.82)

FRENCH CHRISTIAN ZIONIST: Gilbert Hermetes, aged 62, gave up his trade of barbering in order to head "CHRISTIAN ZIONISM", a movement working in France, USA & Britain, to combat antisemitism and to preach support for Israel. In a feature article (YEDIAOT AKHRONOT 13.4.82) Noah Klieger leads with the remark: "The ways of man are no less marvelous than the ways of the Almighty." Gilbert is described as a completely non-political person; and, although "born a Christian, was not exactly an active believer in the Church." Now he has become one of the most active, energetic and dedicated--even zealous--of Christians on behalf of Judaism, Israel and Zionism.

Actually, he has no inclination to convert to Judaism; on the contrary, Gilbert is a Christian "penitent", something he traces back to his discovery of Judaism, Israel and Zionism. "When I saw the truth, when I sensed that until then, there had been no content to my life because I had not known about the 'Chosen People' and their problems, I understood that in order to help this people I must draw near to faith."

Gilbert has been for some time the head of the movement founded in 1926 in the USA, England and France, and he admits that for many years their activities were very modest and barely known; but since 1970, when he dedicated himself full-time to his ministry, the "Christian Zionists" (as the members of the movement are called), have become a factor to contend with. They organize lectures in French-speaking lands (France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg), appear on radio & TV, distribute literature, respond to antisemitic and anti-Israel articles--everything, of course, in coordination with the Israel Embassy in Paris."

Although they number only some 300 members in France, Gilbert is quite proud of their dedication and impact out of all proportion to their numbers. The movement was heavily-influenced by a 19th-century preacher, Charles T. Russel, who claimed that the future of the world was dependent upon the return of the people of Israel to their homeland. "I explain the mission of the people of Israel, the covenant with the Almighty, the importance of the State, its problems, and the need to help Israel, whereby we help ourselves as well, securing our own future," Gilbert states. Various activities of the movement are described: Informational, public appearances, media impact, organizing Israel "weeks", etc. "We raise all the funds needed for these activities from the contributions of our members only... Either you have ideals and you believe in your mission or you don't; and you are willing to do everything for the sake of your aims," he states with clear satisfaction.

The Israeli representative of the movement is one Moshe Tsanua, a Jew from Herzliya. Gilbert has himself visited Israel seven times, touring the country, photographing

and preparing lectures. He explains that he tells the world that, for the sake of the Muslims themselves, Israel's future is important. "Zionism has arisen in order to fulfil the Almighty's will and the vision of the prophets, and we must all work for the redemption."

CHRISTIANS VS. SINAI WITHDRAWAL: (YEDIOT AKHRONOT: 21.4.82) The Beth Shalom Society, numbering a quarter-million Christian Evangelicals in the USA, Europe and South Africa, all sworn supporters of Israel, have submitted a petition to Prime Minister Begin expressing their opposition to the Sinai withdrawal. Wim Malg o, head of the Christian pro-Israel society, will try to persuade the militants in the Yamit bunkers not to carry out their suicide threats. (YEDIOT: 20.4.82) The Atzmona settlers, formerly located in Sinai, are about to resettle in a paramilitary settlement "B'dolah" near Rafiah. The movement has promised to initiate a fund to raise money throughout the USA for the new settlement. (DAVAR: 15.5.82)

CHRISTIANS IN ISRAEL

AFRICAN ENTERPRISE: "CHRISTIAN COMMENT/OIKOUMENIKOS" (JERUSALEM POST: 14.5.82), under the heading of "AFRICAN VIEW", provides a summary of the visit of the African Evangelical team led by Bishop Festo Kivengere and Michael Cassidy for ten days of conferences, rallies and meetings throughout Israel and the West Bank. The campaign was a response to the invitation of Protestant and Evangelical churches here.

BURIAL SOCIETY: A group of women from the Uval-Gad neighbourhood in Askelon have been seeking a burial place for a woman whom the Jewish burial society refuses to bury in the local Jewish cemetery on the grounds that she is non-Jewish. The neighbours claim that Mrs. Felicia Sternfeld, a Polish woman married to a Jew (now deceased), living in Israel some 32 years, behaved in all respects like a Jewish woman, lighting Sabbath candles and observing the Festivals. The burial society has remained unconvinced, and the neighbours have been searching for a Christian cemetery in which to inter the deceased woman. (AL HAMISHMAR: 25.4.82)

FAITH AND OIL: Health Minister Eliezer Shustak recently commented on a woman who approached him and others about a dream she has had concerning oil in Israel, based on the blessing of Moses to Ahar (Deut.33:24). Energy Minister Berman remarked that a Bible-believing Christian now in Israel has been exploring for oil on the basis of the same text. "The difference is," Berman commented, "that the Christian is searching for oil at his own expense, while the woman is proposing that we search for the oil at our own expense." (DAVAR: 12.5.82)

SECTS & ISRAEL

A. MORMON MUSICIANS: Very complimentary musical reviews were published in "YEDIOT AKHRONOT" (13.5) and "MAARIV" (16.5) of the Mormon students choir which performed at the Tel-Aviv Spring Festival, ^{with the reviews} accompanied by comments on their religious motivation and background. "HAARETZ" (25.5) reported that the Osmonds, U.S. pop-music celebrities, members of the Mormon church, were guests of the Israel Tourist Ministry. They are investigating the possibility of making a film about Israel. They also committed themselves to raise funds for the planting of a forest here under the auspices of the Jewish National Fund.

B. MAKUYA SECT: The pro-Israel Japanese sect of Makuya has been granted, at their request, Associated Membership status in the World Zionist movement. (JERUSALEM POST: 18.5.82; HAARETZ: 19.5.82)

SUNDRY ITEMS

A. THE SECOND COMING: DAVAR (30.4.82) reports with some irony on the full-page advertisements published in weekend newspapers throughout the world about the soon-coming of Jesus...not the same Jesus of Nazareth of the New Testament, but "a modern man, troubled by modern problems," who since July 1977 has headed an unidentified group of people.

B. SATANISM: HAARETZ (19.5) reports on an A.B.C.-TV program satirizing Christian revival movements. The satire portrays Satan as the object of praise and worship in place of God, making "sick the well."

C. CONVERT: A feature article in the JERUSALEM POST (27.5.82) describes the "long road home" of a former Anglican, later Roman Catholic priest, who converted to Judaism (the first R.C. priest to do so in 900 years), who died in New York on 5.5.82. He published an autobiography ("SO STRANGE MY PATH") in 1960, and was active in "converting Jews to Judaism." Originally named Kenneth Charles Cox, he assumed the name of Abraham Carmel upon his conversion to Judaism in 1953.

D. NEW TESTAMENT: "The words of abuse which in the New Testament are hurled against rabbis who are called hypocrites and other ugly names are not invalidated by the rehabilitation of the Pharisees. The Orthodox rabbi can be the very type which is condemned in the New Testament, and no less severely in Jewish writings, too. Israel is plagued with the lawyers and Pharisees of Matthew 23." (Quoted in a Book Review of "HAPPINESS OUTSIDE THE STATE" (By Ignaz Maybaum) appearing in the JERUSALEM POST 2.4.82)

E. "THE REVENGE OF AMOS ORION": A feature article in the JERUSALEM POST (14.5.) by Benny Morris, based on the work of the Israeli novelist Yael Lotan, who is writing a book about "The Life and Death of Amos Orion." He was one of the victims of the double "gangland" slaying in 1980 shortly after his release from prison for a crime he alleged he had never committed. Orion was raised by a Catholic woman in East Europe who took him to Israel when he was ten, at which time she revealed to him his Jewish origin. "The life and imagery of Jesus were never far from his mind, and both in large measure 'planned' and precipitated their own martyrdom, albeit for somewhat different purposes." Jesus died at the age of 33, and in 1980 Orion was 33. He was aware of the significance of his age, says Lotan. In one of his frequent letters from prison to the then Supreme Court Justice Haym Cohen (author of "THE TRIAL & DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST"), Orion wrote: "You gave Jesus Christ a new trial. Now, how about me?" Orion's killers were later apprehended and tried and convicted.

F. MISSIONARY FROM SAMOA: Rev. Faitale Talapusi is bringing "a message of hope and joy" to the godless natives of Sheffield, England. In his South Pacific island, he points out, some 80 percent of the population are practicing Christians, whereas 80 percent of Sheffield (in common with the rest of Britain) will never set foot in a church. Reversing 150 years of missionary history, the Samoan islanders are currently exporting evangelism to Africa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. (POSTSCRIPTS 21.3)

G. INTERMARRIAGE STUDY: 200 U.S. teenagers and young adults, the children of mixed marriages, are taking part in a study of Jewish-Christian intermarriage sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. The AJC thinks the study is important in view of increasing intermarriage rates and the belief that it leads to assimilation. (J. POST "POSTSCRIPTS": 10.3.82)

H. "TRUTH ABOUT JEWS": "HAARETZ" (26.4.82) reports that the Egyptian journal "El Sayassa" published an article about the Jews "proving" that both the Koran and the New Testament allegedly expose "the truth" about the Jews, and "reveal the great lie" ~~that~~ ^{about} the Jews being chosen of God. The writer attacks the Roman Catholic Church for exonerating the Jews for the Crucifixion of Jesus.

I. "NONCONFORMISM": Nonconformism, in the religious colloquy of England, means the organization of non-Establishment believers. There the Established religion is the Anglican Church (in Scotland it is the Scottish Presbyterian Church). To contrast Christianity and Judaism, may we ask if there is something parallel to this in the State of Israel? Do we have a nonconformist rabbinate? Yes, indeed...but it's not the Reform or Conservative congregations to which I refer, which are virtually "beyond the pale even of the law." Nonconformist clergy in England and Scotland, after all, are able to fulfil their duties with complete freedom...to perform the marriage rites and have them recognized by the law of the land, something which the Reformed and Conservative are unable to do in Israel. (The article then goes on to attack the "nonconformist" rabbinate for proclaiming a fast day on the day of final withdrawal from Sinai in opposition to the decision of the Government which gives the rabbinate a monopoly in religious matters in the country. This represents more than "nonconformism; it represents a new peak in clericalism and trespassing in political matters, and emphasizes once again the urgent need for separation of religion and state in Israel.) (AL H AMISHMAR: 24.3.82...Yaacov Rabi)

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