

# ARE JEWS BRIBED TO CONVERT TO CHRISTIANITY?

## JERUSALEM WEEKLY SENDS REPORTER DISGUISED AS UNEMPLOYED INQUIRER

Yaron Avitov, reporter for "KAWL HA'IR" in Jerusalem (19.7.85), was sent to check out the persistent rumours of missionary aid to the unemployed and assistance to emigrate from Israel in exchange for conversion to Christianity, notwithstanding the Israeli law against bribery for conversion. The 1½ page story with a pen and ink drawing of a church interior was headlined: "SUPPORT ME OR I CONVERT TO CHRISTIANITY", and was written in a rather jaundiced cynical style.

The first station of the disguised journalist was Christ Church inside the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem. He offered himself as a candidate for monastic orders to a "priest named Leonard who looked like a Gush Emunim (militant Jewish Orthodox nationalist) preacher. The burden of his message was that there was no need to convert to Christianity, that it was worthwhile remaining a Jew and believe in the Messiah, and thus become a better Jew".

The Messianic Assembly on Prophets Street, Jerusalem, was the next stop for the journalist. Attending a Wednesday evening Bible Study, he reports that there were 22 participants, mostly Anglo-Saxon in origin, "looking like strange water fowl who had been immersed". They also sang verses from Psalms set to music. One of the topics of the lesson was taken from John, chapter 6, and dealt with the feeding of 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fishes. "After an hour of the love of Jesus, spiced with Judaism, I understood the principle: that if I want to convert to Christianity, I have to remain a Jew".

The next stop was the Anglican School where he met Ann who at first he thought was a nun, but after a brief conversation (during which she expressed no apparent interest in his employment situation) she returned with her husband. Ann began to speak to him about Jesus and to quote the New Testament. "I envy you your being a Jew", her husband interjected, "one of the chosen people". Before leaving them, the reporter (disguised as inquirer) granted permission to Ann to pray for him.

The final mission stop was Emmanuel Church on Rehov Ber-Hoffman in Jaffa, apparently on the advice of Ann five days earlier. By chance Ann was there also, on the eve of a flight back to the U.K. She received him warmly and introduced him to "Yaacov", a leader in the Messianic community, who told him with much enthusiasm how the Lord had delivered him from a desperate situation as a result of drug-taking. "Yaacov" had been hospitalized and given up by the psychiatrist treating him as a lost cause, but an experience with Jesus completely transformed him. (The reporter commented to the readers that "transformation caused by a turning to religion in similar variations I have heard dozens of times in the past. Yaacov's tale is no different essentially from those paraded out with such ballyhoo by the Orthodox penitents movement".) Claiming he needed a flat near the congregation in order to absorb the atmosphere better, the reporter noted that "Yaacov" was cautious but not suspicious, and suggested that he not act too hastily; gave him some literature and offered to help him learn more about Messianic faith. The journalist closes the article wryly: "Maybe I'll try the Jewish mission of Rabbi Albaz (a leader in the penitents movement). I hear they're less cautious and offer more".

In a separate unsigned accompanying article headed: "THE MISSION AS A MYTH", a brief survey is presented of anti-mission claims dating from 1975 to the present of alleged bribery and of the campaign against missions and the Messianic Jews in Israel. Moshe Porush of YAD L'AHIM claims that the "Mission" is more cautious today, especially in Jerusalem, but that bribery continues but it is difficult to prove, since the beneficiaries will not report it, and many are allegedly sent out of the country by the missionaries. He admitted that people come to his organization with stories of missionary offers of bribes, but he suspects that they tell these tales in order to obtain material aid from established Jewish agencies.

## "BETTER AN ATHEIST"

A Jewish radical, responding to pressure from an Orthodox Jewish hassidic "evangelist" trying to win him to a traditional Jewish life, responded: "I am an atheist, and my secular humanistic values are far superior to this emotional outpouring you've lavished on me, without logic, order or love of humanity. But



you should be happy that I am an atheist, because if I believed in God I would long since have converted to Christianity". The hassid turned pale and asked: "Why Christianity?" I replied, "Very simple. If I should adopt a religion, I prefer a universal faith which has spread to all continents, taken to it's heart many and variegated peoples and races, penetrated a wide spectrum of cultures. It isn't the racist, nationalist, xenophobic religion you are offering me". With a tremor in his voice, his eyes downcast, the "evangelist" countered: "You know, I prefer that you remain an atheist; only don't convert to Christianity!" (KAWL HA'IR 26.7.85 Haim Baram)

#### PERMIT FOR BAPTIST CHURCH:

The District Planning Committee intends to approve the reconstruction of the Narkis street Baptist Church despite some neighbourhood opposition, but it will be much smaller than the plans originally submitted, and more like the size of the chapel destroyed by unknown arsonists in October 1982. (KAWL HA'IR 5 Jul 1985) Meanwhile, a resolution supporting the right for the church to rebuild on its original location has been passed by Jlm Mayor Teddy Kollek's ONE JERUALEM faction, the majority party on the city council. Proposals to have the church built on an alternate site have so far been rejected by church authorities in Israel and the USA. (JERUSALEM POST 5 Jul 85)

#### BOOK BURNING:

A flurry of news items and feature articles followed a report that a military rabbi had burned copies of the New Testament found in a library on a military base. Several articles attacking the "narrow mindedness" and bigotry behind the act and demanding punishment for the perpetrator were published. An article by the Chief Librarian of "Haychal Shlomo" (The Office of the Chief Rabbinate), Jacob Kokel, taking exception to the burning but defending opposition to having New Testaments in military libraries, was published in MAARIV (1 Jul 85).

The writer characterized the New Testament as "the starting point and hot-house of anti-Jewish hatred in the Western world...and saturated with hatred for the Jews". He also characterized the N.T. as "misanthropic" and recommends its removal from "every library based on humane principles". The Hebrew daily "HADASHOT" reported (3 Jul 85) that a Knesset committee discussed the book burning, and M.K. Yossi Sarid stated to the Chief of Staff that he has written evidence of the N.T. book burning by a military chaplain, to which Chief of Staff Moshe Levy replied: "Unfortunately, there was an incident of book burning, and I'm investigating what steps were taken against the chaplain".

**VATICAN DOCUMENT:** On the 20th anniversary of the issuance of the famous "Schema" document by the Second Vatican Council, which called for a rapprochement between Jews and Catholics, an end to theological antisemitism and the charge of deicide, a third document (following the Guidelines in 1975 for implementing the earlier statement) was promulgated by the Vatican, entitled: "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews & Judaism in Preaching & Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church". The document has received a mixed reception in the Israeli press.

Reviewing the entire period, Joseph Friedlander in "HATSOFEH", the National Religious Party organ (8 Jul 85) cautiously assesses the developments in a positive light. Writing from Rome, Hulda Libernoma of HAARETZ (14.7.85) and Lisa Palmieri Billing of the JLM POST (26.7.85) both underscore the positive elements in the new document, which they see, despite legitimate criticism of shortcomings, as part of the general process of rapprochement between Christianity and Judaism and the Jews, with possible advantages for Israel. Editorial writers for HAARETZ & JLM POST (27.6.85) both expressed disappointment at the alleged "retreat" by the Vatican from a more liberal position. Geoffrey Wigoder, of the Israel Jewish Council for Interreligious Consultations, outlined the objections from a Jewish perspective: The document's rejection of the "two-covenant theology", the interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the New, noting Israel's statehood but as not necessarily having theological significance, and its scanty reference to the Holocaust and Christian antisemitism through the ages.

#### DIASPORA JEWS AND THE MISSIONARY PROBLEM:

JFJ: "OUR ISRAEL" of New York (10 May 85), under the heading "JEWS FOR JESUS", "exposes" the "Ahavat Zion" synagogue of Beverly Hills in Los Angeles and some 40 other Messianic synagogues in the USA which have been targeted by the Jewish establishment in their campaign against JEWS FOR JESUS



which is allegedly masterminding the Messianic movement. "To say that you are a Jew and at the same time to believe in Jesus is as if to say you can make pork kosher", says Rabbi Kravitz, a Habad hassid, and one of the leaders in the battle against JEWS FOR JESUS. "These people disguise themselves in order to appeal to Jews whom they wish to convince to change their religion", he warns. A recent declaration accusing Christian missionaries of deceit and disguise was signed by some 30 Jewish leaders of all streams, one of the rare occasions when Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews united in a common purpose. It should be noted that there are also Christian leaders who repudiate the JFJ tactics and the latter's claim that they are only another stream of Judaism.

"EMES": JEWISH WEEK of N.Y.C. (22.2.85) published a report of the work of Rabbi Yaacov Spivak, executive director of Educational Media Exposition Society ("Emes"-Truth), a six-year-old group of 1,000 members that distributes audio-visual materials, publishes a newsletter, sponsors radio programs and holds demonstrations against missionary groups. "We are an activist organization for people who are basically peaceful", he says. He estimates that 50,000 to 100,000 U.S. Jews belong to cults and missionary groups, and they are working to bring Jews out of Hebrew Christian groups. A staff member is Larry Levey, a former Hebrew Christian. They have approached some 100 Hebrew Christians and claim that 24 have left their groups and an equal number are wavering. "We do not kidnap, we do not do anything illegal", he says. "We show them that the warmth they thought existed only in "Jews for Jesus" exists in Judaism".

A month later (22.3.85) a report on "two bogus Passover Seders" to be conducted by local messianic organizations was published. They were sponsored by BETH SAR SHALOM and JEWS FOR JESUS. There follows a paragraph about Hebrew Christian assertions "that the acceptance of Jesus as the messiah is consistent with Judaism...but according to Julius Berman of the N.Y. Task Force on Missions & Cults, each of these sacred acts (of Judaism) is given a new Christological meaning that distorts its original and true significance. The three matzot on the Seder plate are said to represent the Trinity and the broken afikomen the crucified Jesus".

FORMER CANTERBURY ARCHBISHOP: JEWISH CHRONICLE of London (24.5.85) headed a brief article "EVANGELISM DEFENDED", reporting that the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Coggan, had stated that "evangelism is so often misinterpreted as meaning proselytism. I understand it more in terms of sharing with other friends - in this case Jews - something which is precious to me as a Christian". He added: "All too often in history; the attitude of so-called Christians towards Jews has been totally un-Christian".

#### ULTRA-ORTHODOX ANTI CULT WORK:

JEWISH PRESS of Brooklyn, NY (31.5.85) reported that the Agudath Israel adult outreach network has embarked on a far-reaching double-pronged summer campaign to provide positive Jewish experience and education for the unaffiliated as well as coordinating efforts to combat cults and missionaries. The institute of Jewish Studies inaugurated the campaign with an evening entitled "DO YOU FEEL LOST IN THE SYNAGOGUE?" which was geared to giving newcomers an ability to follow the synagogue service. Free courses in Hebrew, Kashrut, and anti-mission literature distribution are part of the program.

#### MISSIONARY PROBLEM IN MANCHESTER:

(7 Jun 85) THE JEWISH GAZETTE of Manchester (U.K.) published a report about a Jewish Council meeting responding to tracting and house calls by missionaries. The council of Christians & Jews would be asked to try to stop missionary activity.

#### JEWISH COMMUNITY IN BELFAST NORTH IRELAND REVIVING:

"EREV SHABAT" the ultra-orthodox weekly, in a full-page feature article (21.6.85) reported on the Jewish community in Belfast being revived by an Israeli rabbinic couple despatched by former Israel P.M. Shamir. In addition to their encouragement of Orthodox Jewish practices, Rabbi & Mrs. Granvitz have dealt forcefully with Gentile women and pro-Israel Christians who, they claim, have tried to infiltrate the Jewish community on the pretext of interest in Judaism and support for Israel. "I detest these Gentile lovers of Israel who are the most dangerous missionaries; whose love is only missionary", he stated.



**LONDON MISSIONARY MEETING CANCELED:**

THE JEWISH CHRONICLE of London (28.6.85) and HAMODIYA (ultra-orthodox Hebrew daily, 12 Jul 85) reported the cancellation of a missionary meeting sponsored by local Baptists in the Hackney area of London, which was advertised in a local paper using a Hassidic slogan "MESSIAH NOW". The meeting, scheduled at a municipal library, was canceled by the Hackney Council following an outcry by Jewish leaders and a Jewish Councilman who also writes for an ultra-orthodox journal in England, "JEWISH TRIBUNE".

**"JEWS FOR JESUS" VERSUS JEWISH ESTABLISHMENT:**

The U.S. organization "JEWS FOR JESUS", which operates mainly among Jewish youth, has filed suit against the Jewish Council for Community Relations on the grounds that Council leaders have damaged the civic rights and freedom of speech of JFJ. This was in the wake of a notice promulgated by the Council to rabbis, synagogues, churches and public meeting halls in Long Island, N.Y., which prevented the JFJ organization from holding a Passover Seder. (HAARETZ: 26.7.85)

**"BETRAYAL OF CHRISTIANITY":**

On the 25th anniversary of the capture of Adolph Eichman, "chief engineer of the Holocaust", the JERUSALEM POST (24.5.85) published an interview with Gideon Hausner, the prosecutor of Eichmann in Jerusalem. One of the great lessons of the Holocaust, Hausner said, "was that Christianity - one of whose basic tenets is the Judaic reverence for human life - in Europe collapsed". Only a handful of Christians fought actively for the highest Christian human ideals, he notes, adding that a much larger minority of Christians betrayed and abandoned their Christianity. But the greatest betrayal of Christianity was by the silent majority...who betrayed the highest ideals of Christianity by keeping silent. Nevertheless, he believes that Christianity can recover from its "defeat" during the Holocaust, "but it will be a long and difficult process. Let us hope that they succeed".

YAD VASHEM, the Holocaust memorial complex in Jerusalem, has statistics that show that only some 5,000 Christians in Nazi-Occupied Europe saved Jews. These Righteous Gentiles stand out like beacons of humanity. (From article on conference of Righteous Gentiles in Washington, Report by Eli Pfefferkorn, JLM POST 20.2.85)

**DIASPORA JEWISH PRESS ON ISRAEL:**

THE MISSION: "DAS YIDDISCHE WORT" (New York, N.Y. Shevat 5745) published an "Exposé" under the heading "CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN ISRAEL DO NOT GROW WEARY: DOZENS OF GROUPS COMPETE IN APOSTACY ACTIONS". The article, based on the YAD L'AHIM anti-mission bulletin, refers to the campaign against the reconstruction of the J'Im Baptist Church, J.W. "evangelism", PROJECT KIBBUTZ, and the Rehovot "Grace & Truth" congregation led by Baruch Maoz. "MISSIONARIES FLOOD ISRAEL", the L.A. HERITAGE reported briefly (2 Jan 85) in connection with "at least 36 kibbutzim in northern Israel (which) have become the focal point of missionary activity associated with the fundamentalist Christian Right in the U.S. sponsored by Oral Roberts University, PROJECT KIBBUTZ..."

MORE ABOUT THE MISSION: "DEMOS AGAINST CONVERT", the SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH TIMES OF Johannesburg (4. Jan 85) reported concerning the demonstrations "against an Israeli Christian minister Baruch Maoz, a convert from Judaism, who set up a place of worship near the Orthodox quarter". "DER YID" of New York City (22.2.85) published a lengthy "exposé" of "missionary apostacy" based on YAD L'AHIM sources, dealing with missionary literature, missionary "agents", "fantastic" missionary funds, Jewish "apostates" and missionary guidelines. THE JEWISH WEEK of N.Y.C. (8 Mar 85) published a report of an address by Yoel Ben-Avraham (a convert to Judaism) to the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York's Task Force on Missionaries & Cults. Ben-Avraham charged that the problem in Israel was being "hushed up" because of fear of "the detrimental effect it would have on Jewish youth movements" in America. He spoke of Messianic Jews, Scientology, T.M., the Mormons.

REHOVOT: THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH TIMES of Darlinghurst (14.3.85) reported that Israeli Consul-General Alex Ganor has responded to an organized campaign of complaints to his office regarding an incident at Rehovot late last year. The campaign was said to be directed by Christian Witness to Israel (CWI) with



membership in Israel and Australia. Mr. Ganor has responded, saying that "the police (have done) their best to keep the situation under control. Israel takes all necessary steps to ensure that everyone can practice their beliefs with no hindrance". "DER YID" of New York (23.3.85) published a passionate appeal against the alleged Israeli government "line" of tolerance towards missionaries, citing Rev. Jerry Fallwell's appeal for greater religious freedom, his reception by the P.M. and other Gov't leaders, the use of Christian volunteers, and "the problems for Jewish youth" intermarrying with Gentiles.

THE KNESSET & MISSION: DAS YIDDISHE WORT (ADAR-NISAN 5745) discussed Knesset activities relating to missions; citing M.K. Shaki, (who claimed that hundreds of Jews have "apostacized" under the influence of Christian missions this year), Police Minister Bar-Lev (who stated that the police can only act on formal complaints of bribery, but no such complaints exist), and Shulamit Aloni, "the sadly famous antireligious M.K. who stated that "the only missionaries that I know are the Rabbis and Jewish religious elements who conduct a missionary campaign among our children and youth, using government money".

OLD WINE: DER YID NYC (3 May 85) under the heading "HOW THE MISSIONARIES TRAP JEWISH SOULS IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL", republished a story from an Israeli Yiddish journal about an incident which allegedly took place twenty-two years ago [5723 (1963)] when a Jewish orphan committed by an uncle to a Christian orphanage was rescued and restored to an ultra-orthodox environment in Meah Shearim of Jerusalem. "OUR ISRAEL" (Hebrew-language journal in NYC) published a brief article about Scientology and its growth in Israel, alleging that 20% of Beersheba Teachers are involved in the sect and some 2,500 attended a sect conference in Beersheba recently. (7 Jun 85)

#### ANTI-MORMON CAMPAIGN IN HIGH GEAR:

An additional 170 clippings in Hebrew, English, German and Yiddish from Israeli and Jewish Diaspora media (including 16 radio & TV broadcast transcripts) between 10 May 85 and 4 August 85 were gathered on the subject of the Brigham Young university of Utah's planned extension on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem and the campaign led by Orthodox Jewish anti-mission opponents of the Mormon-sponsored project. (SEE SELECTIONS No. 132, page 1).

In a half-hour TV debate on the subject MK Mordecai Warshuvsky of the Centrist "Shinui" party and Raffi Devra, official spokesman for the Jerusalem Municipality, were ranged against MK Dov Shilansky of the "Herut" party and Pirha Lesner of YAD L'AHIM, the anti-mission society. MK Shilansky appealed to the Mormons to drop the project in view of the history of Christian antisemitism, and made reference to negative personal experiences during the Holocaust with Roman Catholic clergy in Lithuania. His colleague, Pirha Lessner, stressed the aggressive character of Mormon missionary activity and claimed that "thousands" in Israel had converted to Christianity. MK Warshuvsky denied that there was any serious danger to Jews from missionaries, that the Mormons had promised not to engage in missionary activity in Israel, and that Israeli guarantees of freedom of religion for all required tolerance towards all Christian groups. Municipal Spokesman Raffi Davra denied that the municipality had been in any way influenced by Mormon contributions to the Jerusalem Foundation; that they were planning an installation which would be a credit to the international character of the Holy city, and that it was made clear to them from the outset that they were not to engage in missionary activity.

An attack by unknown vandals was made on a Mormon church in East Jerusalem, windows smashed and the chapel flooded, it was reported on 8th July. The extremist Kahana group announced that they intended to take over the church. Police have begun investigating.

A few reports indicated that mainstream Christians do not regard Mormons as co-religionists or as part of the Christian faith. An American-Jewish professor of sociology, Dr. William Helmreich of New York's City College, in a letter to Israeli P.M. Peres opposing the Mormon project, pointed out their heretical belief, which "differs from all other Christian beliefs who, like Jews, believe in monotheism; they regard other Christians as apostates". (JEWISH PRESS 28.6.85) Several Diaspora reports noted that Catholics had made some private representations against the project "because they do not regard Mormons as Christians".

A press conference was organized in Jerusalem by an ecumenical group of Christians, including the UCCI General-Secy Chas. Kopp, the rector of the Anglican Christ Church, an Arab Roman Catholic diocesan priest, a representative of the



Greek orthodox patriarchate, and several Evangelicals, including a U.S. cult expert who has written on Mormonism. The cult was roundly condemned as non-Christian, polytheistic, and indeed hostile to the Christian religion. Surprise was expressed at the swiftness with which the Mormon project was approved by the municipality in view of the long delays involved in obtaining a permit for the rebuilding of the burnt-out Baptist chapel in West Jerusalem. Christian Affairs adviser to the Mayor, Naomi Teasdale, responded that no objections had been offered at the time the project was advertised for public hearings while the Baptist reconstruction encountered local opposition at an early stage of planning. She vigorously denied that Mormon generosity to the Jerusalem Foundation had in any way influenced the municipality's decision. One of the Mormons attending the press conference was quoted in DAVAR (10 Jul 85) as saying that "we do not belong to that kind of Christianity which burnt Jews at the stake during the (Spanish) Inquisition". In a subsequent Letter to the Editor of the JERUSALEM POST (18.7.85) Rev. Chas. Kopp, Gen. Secy of the UCCI, denied a news item that stated he had hinted or suggested "that a bribe was involved in the city's granting of a permit for the Mormon project. I was one of several speakers who gathered to dissociate the Christian community from Mormon doctrines...and we were not there to oppose the building of the BYU extension campus".

The ultra-orthodox HAMODIYA (10 Jul 85) also published a report on the ecumenical press conference and the disassociation of the Mormons from Christian faith. KAWL HA'IR of Jerusalem published a full objective report about the press conference (12 Jul 85). THE JERUSALEM POST (21.7.85) under the lead "FEARS OF BOGEYS" denounced "the witch hunters (who) have made the Mormons their bogey. And ironically they have Christian allies (who) have jumped on the anti-Mormon bandwagon. Not eschewing missionizing in Israel themselves, they have simply imported a theological conflict that does not belong here". The writer charged that the religious establishment in Israel, "going from strength to strength would stir up groundless fears about missionary activity", which it labeled "paranoiac" and "irrational". Leftist feature writer Yaakov Rabi of AL HAMISHMAR (19.7.85) also denounced the campaign against Mormons and all other missionaries as "shame and a reproach" on the sovereign Jewish state. "It is reasonable to assume that the Mormons or any other Christian Church in the world dreaming of converting Jews have nowadays not the slightest chance of obtaining their wish", he concludes.

During July a series of mass demonstrations and protest vigils were organized in Jerusalem and Ashdod by opponents of the Mormon university. Held during the mourning period of the Hebrew month of Av, when devout Jews commemorate the destruction of the Temple in ancient times, the purpose was to dramatize the threat of "apostasy" the Mormon University is said to pose in contemporary Jewish life. The two Israeli Chief Rabbis and the Orthodox press pushed for maximum participation. Several Mormon leaders were said to have been present to gauge the opposition to the project, and expressed surprise at the mounting campaign against it. Meanwhile, several Orthodox Jewish leaders met with Mormon representatives from Israel and Utah in an attempt to resolve the issue, but both sides remained firm in their stands. Orthodox Jews claimed that they had been misled by the application for the building permit which did not specifically mention the Mormon religion but the Brigham Young University, a name which did not signify anything special to them. This, they claim, was the reason that no objections were raised by them during the 60-day period allowed for contesting construction permits.

In a radio interview the head of YAD L'AHIM, Moshe Porush, disclosed that one of the heads of the Mormon sect in Israel was a Jew named Daniel Rona, a Jerusalemite, which made the issue extremely relevant to all Jews. Local Mormon leaders continued in statements to officials and in letters to editors to deny that they would engage in missionary activity. Support for the Mormons came from liberal and left-wing quarters on the grounds of freedom and in opposition to what they termed the Diaspora mentality of the opponents of the project. Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, who has remained steadfast in his support of the project, was the target of abuse heaped on him at a rabbinic convention he addressed in Jerusalem. One of the Orthodox parties in the Jerusalem coalition led by Mayor Kollek decided to withdraw from the coalition because of the mayor's refusal to back down from the project. A former student at BYU University in Utah denied that any pressure had been put on him while attending the university as did a member of a Jewish genealogical society who reported a cordial non-missionizing atmosphere



in dealings with the Mormons. Nevertheless, contradictory reports were provided by other Jews, including a former convert to Mormonism, who described Mormon persuasiveness in Utah.

At the time of this writing, it was reported that a top Mormon official had arrived in Israel to work out a legal commitment which would allay Israeli fears, it was hoped, of the university extension on Mt. Scopus serving as a missionary center for Mormonism.

#### ARI SORKO-RAM AND THE MESSIANIC JEWS:

A two-page feature article with photographs of Ari Sorko-ram of Ramat Sharon appeared in HOTAM the weekend supplement of AL HAMISHMAR (12 Jul 85), providing biographical material about Sorko-ram, his present activities and conflicts with Orthodox Jewish militants over his alleged missionary activities. The son of an Indian father and Russian-Jewish mother, Sorko-ram was reared mainly in a private military boarding school, and his Jewish origins concealed from him until he was a teen-ager. He came to faith in Yeshua at age 16, almost 30 years ago, but concealed his faith because of identity problems which he Claims were resolved upon discovery of a Messianic Jewish congregation about 20 years ago in California. Sorko-ram has had a colourful and variegated career life in sports, teaching English, criminology (which led to a post as sheriff of Los Angeles County) film work in Hollywood and Israel (which he still engages in), and promoting liya (immigration) to Israel as well as serving a local Messianic center which he founded in Ramat HaSharon. Ari's wife Shira is a convert to Judaism, also involved in film work and in his other activities. He settled in Israel in 1977.

The Sorkorams have been under heavy attack by Orthodox Jewish militants who have set their car on fire, have carried on a campaign against them in the local press and by means of posters and literature made them and their children outcast in the community. (SEE SELECTIONS 132, page RAMAT HASHARON concerning the legal action against Ramat HaSharon Council Head Verbin initiated by Sorko-ram). Ari denies that he is a missionary or a Christian, saying: "I believe in Yeshua the Messiah, and not in Jesus Christ", and the distinction provides the key to his faith. Although he rejects the authority of rabbinic Judaism and its "Oral Law", he abides by the Jewish dietary laws and prays at the neighbourhood Orthodox synagogue, "because I want to be part of Israeli society and Jewish tradition, as an act of identification", he says. He speaks very fervently about his faith in Yeshua the Messiah. He also serves in the Israeli Defence Forces in a senior rank.

The interviewer, Yael Israel, concludes that "it is difficult to decipher Sorko-ram who combines in his personality a childish innocence and ambition, capriciousness and charisma, optimism and toughness. It is hard to know how to tie up all his activities into one bundle, and one doesn't know whether his faith is "the real thing" or just another trip in his somewhat mad course of life".

In a separate article on the same page a brief summary responds to the question: "WHO ARE THE MESSIANIC JEWS"? The movement is said to be a decade old, numbering some 3,000 open believers in Israel with several dozen secret believers. They believe in the God of Israel and the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), but because of Israel's failure the Messiah was sent to make a new covenant with his people, and they believe that the books of the New Testament are a direct continuation of the Hebrew Bible, revealing a suffering and crucified Messiah who will return again as a victor to establish his kingdom on earth. They observe the Jewish festivals, but have no religious establishment, claiming that they are not a religion but a faith which is an inseparable part of Judaism. They also produce Hebrew periodicals and literature sold in several shops in Israel.

Israeli society takes exception to the Messianics, some seeing them as apostates, even though they have not officially changed their religion. They see themselves as Jews and none of them belong to any church, nor do they engage in any kind of missionary activity but are open to anyone interested in hearing about their faith. The Christian church also views them as a deviant and indigestible element. A number of extremist Jewish religious organizations such as YAD L'AHIM attack them as missionaries. They have sustained physical attacks on their property - arson, car burning, telephone threats, demonstrations, stone-throwing, public poster denunciations, and other disturbances.



# TELAVIV BOOK FAIR:

A minor storm was stirred up by the Orthodox press concerning booths rented to "sects" in connection with the annual Hebrew Book Fair observed in Tel-Aviv. One booth rented by "Maoz", connected to the Ramat HaSharon Messianic congregation headed by the Sorko-rams, drew special fire by the anti-mission society YAD L'AHIM. The Union of Publishers in Israel at first disclaimed knowledge of the nature of the books, later insisted that all books in Hebrew could be displayed and sold and were not subject to censorship, but under further pressure requested that the Messianics remove all "missionary propaganda" from their booth. In a letter to the N.R.P. organ "HATSOFEH", Benjamin Sela of the Union (1 Jul 85) claimed that he had been misinformed by the "Maoz" people, who denied they were a missionary movement. "Next year we will examine the matter from a public and legal aspect", he concluded. (The same letter was published in HAMODIYA" of Agudat Israel on 3 Jul 85).

# CHRISTIAN ZIONIST CONFERENCE:

Hundreds of Christian leaders, theologians and active supporters of Israel will gather in Basel, Switzerland, in August to reaffirm their commitment to Israel and Jews at a three-day conference at the site of the first Zionist Congress in 1897. They will come from 20 countries to discuss the biblical basis for Christian support of Israel and Soviet Jewry at the conference sponsored by the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem. (SEVERAL PAPERS 21-24.7.85)

# WORDS OF JESUS:

A book review of the work of David Bivin and Roy Blizzard "UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFICULT WORDS OF JESUS" was published in the JERUSALEM POST (27.7.85 Overseas Edition). It represents a popular version of the Jerusalem School for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels, emphasizing the Hebraic roots of the Gospels, the priority fo Luke's Gospel said to derive from a "Hebraic undertext", and offering ways to understand Jesus' teaching in its original context. "One very welcome result" (of this study), reviewer Jeffery Magnuson concludes, "is a re-awakened awareness of the Jewishness of Jesus, and the necessity of understanding the context in which he lived and taught".

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END TRANSCRIPT

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