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ISRAEL SELECTIONS

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SELECTIONS NO. 141

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"FLYING CHURCHES": The Israeli Ministries of Transport and Tourism have rejected demands by ultra-orthodox anti-missionary elements to cancel permits granted to an American airline "Lord's" which they charge with being a front for missionary activity among Jews. Named in Hebrew "Adon Olam" ("Lord of the World"), the company specializes in flying Jewish and Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land, and is headed by Harry Marshall, said to be a Christian "penitent." The ministries concerned have rejected the ultra-orthodox appeals and have countered that, "from past experience it can be determined almost certainly that the fears about mission activity are groundless." (VARIOUS PAPERS 20-29 Jun 68 - See also SELECTIONS No. 140, Page 1)

"MISSIONARY" SOLDIER: The missionary Ari Sorko-ram of Ramat Hasharon has volunteered to guide overseas volunteers in Israel at military bases, according to a complaint submitted to the Minister of Defence by the anti-mission society Yad L'Ahim. They also demand that the man be suspended from all active service in the Reserves, and charge that he and his wife once concealed an army deserter in their home.

Sorko-ram became well-known following a damage suit he instituted against the head of the Ramat Hasharon council, Moshe Verbin, for calling him a "missionary" at a council meeting. While on reserve duty, he also wrote a diary describing his evangelistic activities among the soldiers, which was distributed among supporters of "Maoz," an organization headed by Ari and his wife Shira, who is the daughter of the Jewish mission leader, Gordon Lindsay. They once appealed for help to establish a yeshiva (Jewish religious seminary) in Ramat Hasharon, but it did not work out. (HATSOFEH 2 Jul 86, YETAID NEEMAN 4 Jul 86)

MISSIONARY PROPAGANDA: It seems that the apathy of the general public towards missionaries only encourages them. Tel-Aviv has always been a focal point for their activity. They stuff letter-boxes with letters and literature, and recently have been working in business neighbourhoods, especially on Sabbath evenings. The material is modernistic, very colourful and attractive. Their campaign borders on the insolent as they insert their "spiritual material" on Sabbath eve for the worshippers to "discover" in the morning. But why complain about missionaries when the Tel-Aviv municipality, for example, chooses St. Peter's church in Jaffa for evening shows? Well, at least there is one organization battling the missionaries and exposing their nefarious designs! (HATSOFEH 2 Jul 86)

MISSIONARY CASSETTES: The Christian Mission has also latched on to the flowering of hassidic music in recent years. Their emissaries have decided to combine hassidic melodies with songs preaching Jesus. A cassette which has fallen into the hands of Yad L'Ahim (labeled "SOS ASIS") is part of the anti-mission society's collection displayed alongside Russian-language cassettes and Jewish-looking tracts. (EREV SHABAT 20 Jun 86)

MISSION ARIEL: The town of Ariel (West Bank), a normally quiet place, has been making headlines because of missionaries hunting pure Jewish souls in that town. The citizens are furious because no one paid any attention to them before, but now they are "news" because of the missionaries. The police, however, do not want to intervene in such matters; that is the work of the anti-mission society, and they (the police) are out of the picture! (SHEARIM 21 May 86)

THE "MESSIAH" FROM GALTRONICS: We met Danny Yahav, manager of Galtronics, in his office. While waiting for him to decide whether to

meet us or not, we peeked into the waiting room library, loaded with a variety of Christian literature from pocket-size books of the Gospel of John, the right-hand man of Jesus the Nazarene, to copies of the New Testament in a wide variety of languages. When he finally received us, Mr. Yahav had harsh complaints to make of the press. "Why are you always lying?" he asked, and then began to outline his ideology of life: "I am a Zionist Jew, but believe that the Messiah has already come, and He is Jesus. I am a Messianic Jew." Clearly he sees everyone as an object to persuade.

What is the connection between his faith and worldview and the plant? "This is a private plant and we can do what we want," he insists. I suggest that they are trying to convert people, to which he replies: "That is a vulgar lie; I compel no one to take part in our morning prayers." "Why all the Christian literature if there is no interest in conversion of people? Why not put good literature in the waiting room?" I ask. "I think it is good literature," he replies.

At the Galtronics plant some 30 workers are employed in the production of antennas for Motorola intercom systems. Recently several local employees were dismissed, and one of them, Yehezkiel, complained of a lack of social benefits. When he set up a works committee, the management threatened to close the plant. While claiming that no religious influence had been exerted on him, he charged that persons with "weak character" had been pressured. One had been sent to a mission overseas, another had allegedly been detained at a prayer session when she wanted to leave the room. He was discharged two weeks ago because the manager told him he was stirring up the workers, and also that he was disabled.

The Galtronics plant is experiencing serious financial difficulties and has been unable to make wage payments in time. If the anti-mission society will not force the plant out, or make it change its character, or the municipality will not be able to restrict it, then it will be economic considerations which will liquidate the affair.

U.S. AMBASSADOR INTERVENES: In an unprecedented move, U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Pickering, complained to Israel Kaysar, General-Secretary of the Histadrut Labour Federation, of discrimination against the Galtronics plant in Tiberias by Joseph Cohen of the local Histadrut.

Cohen claims that he had appealed without result to the management not to pressure the employees in religious matters, which had led to unceasing disputes with the Labour Council. The ambassador claims that the investors in the plant are pro-Israel Americans, and religious issues should not be allowed to disturb the operation of the plant. Moshe Shlav (SHEAR: 5 Jun 86 - See also SELECTIONS No. 139, page 1 "CAMPAIGN AGAINST GALTRONICS")

YAVNIEL: The Galilean settlement of Yavniel is again in the news, this time in connection with missionaries. The last time, a few months ago, it was in connection with the fierce opposition of secularist Jews to the presence of a hassidic spiritual centre composed of U.S. Orthodox Jewish immigrants. Now a group of Messianic Jews has come in to fill the vacuum, and those citizens who mounted the barricades against the Orthodox Jews are not lifting a finger against the "Messianics," and some are even encouraging them to settle down.

Dr. Moshe Avrahamson, the veterinarian who led the fight against the hassidim, explained why he feels no threat from the Messianic Jews: "The hassidim don't work, and they are anti-Zionist, while these Christian fellows do no one harm. One of them, for example, the carpenter Greenberg, is a fine fellow, quiet, and causes no trouble. It's the local rabbi who stirs up all this tumult about the

missionaries. Don't worry about our souls. It will work out fine, the people of Israel live!" he concludes with no little pathos.

Avraham Maimon, a 30-year-old shepherd, admits that he brought the Messianic Jews into the settlement, "and anyone who tries to do them harm will have to deal with me!" He thinks they are excellent people, and none of them have tried to convert Jews to Christianity; he knows them from his reserve duty in the military for 14 years. "They promised not to establish a mission, and if they break their promise, I will personally burn their house down," he says. He is optimistic that the Gentile wives of some of the Messianics will finally convert to Judaism. Meanwhile, a significant amount of the property of the settlement has been sold to the Messianics. (EREV SHABAT 23 May 86)

THE FACTS ABOUT JESUS AND HIS APOSTLES: In response to Hadassah Arbel's article (See SELECTIONS No. 140, page 7, "JESUS IN TIBET"): It is a melange of nonsense based on mysticism(?) and so-called "facts" apparently concocted in her imagination. I reacted to her foolish article, not as a Christian believer, but as a professional student of Christianity, an atheist, but one who believes in the principle: "Let the righteous live by his faith." Arbel was upset by Christian missionary literature, but they have as much right as the ultra-orthodox Jews of "Habad" and the like to publish their ideas.

Regarding the "facts" Ms. Arbel presented: Only Matthew and John among the Gospel writers were apostles, the other two were by Luke and Mark (and Paul wrote no Gospel). Paul was not one of the 12 apostles, but a disciple of Rabbi Gamaliel and a persecutor of the disciples of Jesus until several years later he had a vision on the road to Damascus . . . One could go on and on to demonstrate the frightful ignorance of Ms. Arbel . . . What a pity that such an article was published. Rami Dagani (KAWL HAEMEK 25 May 86)

CHRISTIAN FOSTER PARENTS OF JEWISH CHILD: A six-year-old Jewish child whose parents were divorced, the father remarried to a Christian woman, has been placed in the care of a Christian minister and his wife living in Tel-Aviv. The child's mother, Ruth Schneider, following her divorce from Steve Schneider, turned their son over to her ex-husband because of her illness. Later he agreed to return the child to the care of his ex-wife and her parents so that the boy would have a Jewish upbringing. When this proved unsatisfactory because of the ex-wife's illness, Schneider took the boy back with him and moved to Sweden with his second wife.

Recently, he informed his ex-wife and her parents that he was returning the child to Israel to the care of a Christian couple, Joseph and Gila Hodek, who feel called to minister to the child. Now the mother and grandparents want the child back, and have appealed to the High Court of Justice for custody. A temporary order has been issued by Judge Menahem Alon to the foster parents to reply within 15 days why they should not return the child to its mother and grandparents. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 25 Jun 86)

MYSTERY SECT AND DISPUTED CHILD: Robert Falk, in a defending action against his wife's appeal to the Israel High Court to restore their six-year-old son to her custody, has asked the court to deny her petition on the grounds that she is involved with a mystical Christian sect which has caused the boy nightmares about being burnt in hell. "The sect which my wife joined is antisemitic, believes the Jews are accursed and cannot enter heaven unless they convert to Christianity," he related.

Although they were married in a Jewish religious ceremony in California, she has become completely committed to an extremist Christian sect, and for this reason he took the child away from her

and moved to Israel in December 1984. Meanwhile, a temporary order has been issued by the court, asking the husband to show cause why their child should not be returned to the mother's custody. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 25 Nov 85)

ANOTHER SECT: A Haifa resident has appealed to the Minister of the Interior, Rabbi Peretz, to act urgently to restore his allegedly unstable daughter to him by ordering her removal from the Andra Marga mystical sect. He charged that the sect preaches violence and exploits the weakness of sick persons like his daughter. One of the sect leaders has been expelled from the country but succeeded in returning under another name. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 17 Jun 86)

"THE PRAYER AGAINST THE HERETICS": In a recent pamphlet issued by the ministry of Education dealing with the subject of Hebrew liturgy in the public schools, Dr. Shlomo Kodesh explained the purpose of teaching the "birkat minim" (malediction against the heretics). "We have a tragic account to settle with Christianity . . . concerning the terrible wrong perpetrated against us because of the abysmal hatred Christianity demonstrated for its source, the mother religion of Judaism. The teacher will explain to intelligent students in a suitable style the essence of the so-called ideology which Christianity tried to cultivate by means of evil decrees, slanders, false accusations and hostility against the Jewish people, their religion and their leaders."

Reacting to the pamphlet, Professor David Flusser of Jerusalem, who has published two papers on the subject of this "malediction," stated: "This prayer existed before the rise of Christianity. There is a proper place to teach about the persecution of the Jews, that is during the study of Medieval history. Actually at the time under consideration by the pamphlet, 'the abysmal hatred' referred to did not exist." A spokesman for the Ministry of Education told the newspaper that those responsible for the pamphlet found no fault with it. The Minister of Education also gave the pamphlet his warm blessing. (DAVAR 22 Apr 86)

"HOLY WATER": Orthodox Jewish councilmen in the Haifa municipality contested the request by a Roman Catholic nursing orphanage to be exempt from water taxes. They charged that it was a Christian mission caring for some 70 retarded, deformed and abandoned Jewish children. The Orthodox objection infuriated Likud councilman Willy Katz who demanded it be defeated. The council majority agreed to grant the exemption. (KOLBO HAIFA 2 May 86)

RELIGIOUS SITES PRESERVED: The Jerusalem planning commission has approved a list of some one hundred historic and architectural sites to be preserved. The list includes Christian sites built in modern times, some adjacent to Jewish Orthodox sites, which has distressed some of the ultra-orthodox who would prefer Christian churches at some distance from them. This list has to be finally approved by a district commission. (KAWL HA'IR 16 May 86)

THEOLOGICAL FRATERNITY: The 20th anniversary of the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity, located in Jerusalem, was observed in May. The fraternity, formed by a group of churchmen and theologians living in Israel, promotes theological fraternity to help the Christian church understand itself in the contemporary context and to deepen relationships with Jews, Judaism and Israel. (CHRISTIAN COMMENT/OIKOUMENIKOS JERUSALEM POST 30 May 86)

ISRAELI DOMINICAN MONK: Fr. Marcel Dubois, a Dominican monk and Israeli citizen, and head of the Philosophy Department at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was interviewed by Yehudit Orein (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 2 May 86) in the wake of the Pope's historic visit to a Rome

synagogue. Dubois expressed confidence that the Vatican would recognize the State of Israel once a settlement of the Palestinian issue was achieved.

Pressed by the interviewer on theological matters, and the inevitability of Christian evangelism to Jews if, as Christianity alleges and the New Testament confirms, the Gospel light is for the Jews first, he distinguished between mission and grace. "The orthodox Jews have said 'no' (to Jesus), the Messianic Jews 'Yes,' and there are all kinds of intermediate forms, but I cannot judge anyone," he commented. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 2 May 86)

U.S. FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE JEWS: The I.D.F. journal (BAMAHENEH 29 Apr 86) published a feature article by Ruthi Leviav on U.S. "fundamentalists" which indirectly linked them to antisemitic extremists. While conceding that top electronic preachers like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson were strongly pro-Israel and supported the campaign for Soviet Jewry, the writer stressed their "illiberal" ideas on homosexuality, abortion, school prayer, and other "Christian" values which she felt were part of a scheme to Christianize America, and threatened minority groups. "This trip of returning to Christianity is far from being a passing craze, but involves 50 million Americans" she writes. "This is White Christian America, free of eccentrics, and its finest hour is come."

The writer abruptly turns to extremist radical right groups who were exposed in a recent TV program for arming dispossessed midwestern farmers and who preach violent antisemitism. Other fringe groups are described, all having some "Christian" link. Although the Jewish Anti-Defamation League the writer contacted insisted that a distinction be made between Christian revivalism and antisemitism, half the article describes the "lunatic fringe" which are regarded by Jewish authorities as extremely small in number. The article concludes with a warning that, although few Americans buy the idea that Jews are children of Satan, dispossessed farmers are more open to ideas that their misfortune is caused by Jewish economic and financial influence.

ETHIOPIAN CHURCH AND JEWS: In a book review of Louis Rapoport's Redemption Song: The Story of Operation Moses, the reviewer, David S. Bedein, noted that "Rapoport is surprised constantly at the determination of Ethiopian Jewry to remain Jewish against all odds. The relationship of the Ethiopian church to Jewry is reminiscent of the European Dark Ages. Accusations of deicide and blood libel are common, and church-inspired pogroms occur in each generation. Ethiopian Christian legend maintained that once Ethiopian Jews began to return to Zion the monarchy would be in danger of collapse. And so it was." (JERUSALEM POST 21 Jun 86 Overseas Edition)

FREEDOM OF WORSHIP: A complaint made by members of "Grace and Truth Congregation," a group of the Messianic Jews active in Rehovot, was received by the "Freedom of Belief team" in Jerusalem of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. They complained of having been evicted from their chapel because of the opposition of local Jewish religious residents of Rehovot who have been harassing them because of their beliefs, and that the police have not been acting in their defence.

The Tel-Aviv branch of the association is dealing with their request for permission to open their chapel at another site. The Jerusalem branch has taken a stand on the issue, according to which this sect is entitled, like any other, to full religious freedom. This would be expressed by opening a chapel and permitting the public expression of its ideas in every legal manner on condition that their activities do not lead to the conversion or enticement of minors. The Board adopted

the following resolution: "The Association supports freedom of worship for all religious sects, and appeals for the opening of a chapel of the Messianic Jewish sect in Rehovot." (From Annual Report of A.F.C.R.I. 1985-6, page 21)

NUNS AND NURSING MOTHERS: A sympathetic feature article and interviews with members of the Order of St. Vincent de Paul appeared in the Jerusalem weekly "KAWL HA'IR" (25 Apr 86). It described the life of the nursing sisters who minister to retardates, the mentally ill, the blind and elderly infirm, some of whom are Holocaust survivors. There are even retarded children of ultra-orthodox Jewish parents among them, the Mother Superior noted, for they do not engage in missionary activity.

THE AMISH AS SEEN THROUGH ISRAELI EYES: Yaron Enosh spent five days in the Amish country of Pennsylvania. The visit was stimulated by the film, THE WITNESS, which is also set in the country of this strict Mennonite sect. The Amish retain the lifestyle of their European ancestors, without electricity, telephones, newspapers, and "are happy people." They received him with genuine hospitality and explained the culture, history, and beliefs of the Amish, a breakaway group in the 17th century Anabaptist movement. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT)

ARMENIAN ARCHBISHOP: In the wake of the murder of a supporter of the deposed Armenian Archbishop Shehah Ajmian, KAWL HA'IR of Jerusalem (12 Jun 86) interviewed the archbishop who lives in seclusion in East Jerusalem. His extensive contacts with the Israeli elite and international figures have made him a controversial figure in the Armenian community, especially for his pro-Israel stance in various forums.

DIASPORA NEWS:

NEW JERSEY: A new booklet has been published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations Called "Cults and Missionaries: Guidelines for Parents, Youth and Jewish Community Leaders." It is designed to help confront "increasing and intense pressures" from aggressive Christian proselytizing groups, and offers practical advice on how to cope with groups seeking to convert Jews. (JEWISH COMMUNITY VOICE, Cherry Hill, NJ)

INDIANA: The JEWISH POST AND OPINION (16 Nov 85) ran a lengthy two-page feature article headed "SECOND COMING: JEWS TURN TO CHRISTIANITY" by Evelyn Lauter, surveying the Chicago scene. While intermarriage (an estimated 40% of marriages involving U.S. Jews) is considered the leading cause, it is not the only motivating factor. A survey of parents, rabbis and psychologists elicited a wide range of views - from those who cut themselves off completely from the converts to those who are completely tolerant and accepting.

While many parents expressed a sense of loss and pain at the conversion of children, one mother remarked: "It's almost harder to accept the fact that my son has become an Orthodox Jew than my daughter's becoming a Catholic, which doesn't interfere with anything social. . ." While some attributed conversion to character flaws in the convert, one liberal rabbi insisted that just as Jews feel proud of converts to Judaism they must accept the fact that Jews will sincerely choose another way.

END TRANSCRIPT 7 July 86/mb

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