

THE VANUNU AFFAIR (Continued) (See also SELECTIONS No. 145-146)

Mordecai Vanunu, the Israeli technician suspected of selling information about Israel's nuclear capability to the SUNDAY TIMES of London, and a recent convert to Christianity, has petitioned the Jerusalem District Court to invalidate his solitary confinement in prison pending trial, to permit him a visit by an Anglican clergyman, and to allow his girlfriend, Judy Zimmet, an "unencumbered" visit to the prison. He has rejected the "security safeguards" which the authorities required before any such visits would be considered.

"I converted to Christianity in Sydney, Australia, and lived within a Christian community for four months," Vanunu wrote in his petition. "I need spiritual encouragement and support, and I am interested in maintaining a religious life during my confinement, for which purpose I require a spiritual guide," he continued. The authorities have countered that Vanunu is a high security risk who passed classified information which might harm State security to unauthorized persons, and the law permits his isolation from other prisoners and outsiders. Nevertheless the authorities are willing to consider a visit by a clergyman, provided the person is cleared for security.

"It would be inconceivable, for example, to permit someone like Capucci (a Greek Catholic priest convicted of gun-running for the PLO some years ago, and eventually deported from Israel) to make a visit," the State Attorney remarked in court. "Capucci isn't an Anglican," Vanunu's attorney retorted. The State Attorney noted that Vanunu had become a "devout Christian," but they could not permit just any clergyman to visit him. Meanwhile, local Anglican sources have reportedly been less than enthusiastic about contact with Vanunu. An unnamed source close to the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East with headquarters in East Jerusalem stressed that they had no proof of Vanunu's conversion, and that "we have no connection with this man."

Rev. Michael Bullman of the Israel Trust of the Anglican Church (ITAC) stated that he knew of no request for a clerical visit to Vanunu, but the church would respond to such request according to its "terms." Rev. Claude Duvernoy, a staunch French Presbyterian supporter of Israel, expressed doubts about Vanunu's conversion, but would be willing to visit him. Vanunu also claimed to be in touch by mail with the Christian congregation where he was converted in Australia, and they would be willing to dispatch a clergyman to minister to him.

In his response to the prisoner's petitions, District Court Judge Zvi Cohen rejected Vanunu's requests to be removed from solitary confinement, to meet with his girlfriend, and to be permitted a clergy visit, on the basis of his past abuse of privileges and State security. Security sources, however, have indicated a willingness to permit a clergyman to visit Vanunu in his cell, provided the visitor is first cleared by them. (COMPILED FROM VARIOUS PAPERS BETWEEN 29 JAN 87 to 6 FEB 87)

BENJAMIN BRENNER: Under the heading "WHO ARE YOU, BENNY?" the regional weekly "YEDIOT HAGALIL" (23 JAN 87) published a full-page profile of Benjamin Brenner, the head gardener at the Scottish Hospice in Tiberias. Born in 1933 in Switzerland, Brenner was deeply affected by the Holocaust and the spiritual questions it raised for him. At 15 a brother introduced him to the Messianic Jewish movement, in which he found an "escape to reality," as he relates it. In the Messianic movement he found answers to the Holocaust and to the establishment of Israel in fulfillment of biblical prophecy. He had the feeling that he

was unwanted by Jews, and Christians were not especially enthusiastic about him.

He decided to study agriculture, and his parents, who were prosperous Jewish business people who led a secular lifestyle with some traditional observances, encouraged him to settle in Israel in the hope that he would be "cured" of his "religious bug." At the age of 20 he arrived in Israel, joining first a secular kibbutz. When his beliefs were known, strong pressures were exerted on him to abandon them. There were those who told him: "Believe in Buddha, in Marx, in Mohammed; only not in Jesus."

After two years in the kibbutz he was recruited for military service, where he made contact with a religious nucleus, "Bnei Akiva," who at first were tolerant of his beliefs and respected his devotion, but eventually they turned away from him and abused him. When he returned to his kibbutz following military service still clinging to his faith, it was decided that he be sent to an Orthodox Jewish seminary to "cure" him. This only fortified him in his faith, and upon his ejection from the "yeshiva" and returning to the kibbutz, he was asked to leave permanently several months later. Several Christian friends in Haifa helped him readjust to life outside the kibbutz, and eventually he found work at the Scottish Hospice, where he remains to this day.

When he is asked whether he is Jewish or Christian or halfway, he replies: "From an ethnic standpoint I am Jewish, from a religious standpoint I am without religion." For him religion deals with externals, but he is a man of faith who prays when he feels the need, sometimes attending church services, sometimes the Messianic Jewish congregation of Tiberias; but he still cannot forgive the institutional church for its betrayal of his people during the Nazi period and the silence of the Pope. Existential questions still trouble him, but he knows that life in this world is temporary, and his hope is in the life to come. (END SUMMARY)

"JEWS FOR JESUS . . . IN RAMAT HASHARON": The regional weekly SHABAT SHARON (19 DEC 86) published a three-page investigative piece on the Messianic congregation of Ramat Hasharon with photographs of its leader Ari Sorko-ram, of the congregational home, and of Sylvia Vickers, a former BBC correspondent (and YAD L'AHIM supporter), who has been fighting the congregation. Eli Toral and the staff of the paper, after an investigation of the charges and countercharges, refused to take a stand on whether the group is a missionary sect (which its leaders deny) or "merely goodhearted, upright citizens living according to their faith."

Since their adversaries base their charges on rumours and second-hand testimonies, the editors write, and the Sorko-rams have never had criminal charges filed against them, it seems to boil down to the fact that they may be receiving considerable financial support from the U.S.A. (which they themselves deny) and that they believe in Jesus (which they claim to hold to as loyal Jews and not as Christians). One would have to be "drugged" to interpret the fact of financial support from the U.S.A. as a "defect," as if the rest of Israel isn't "fed" by U.S. financial support! The investigation of the sect was prompted by the expulsion of a child of one of the members from an Orthodox Jewish kindergarten and his removal to a State school. (See SELECTIONS No. 145, p. 6: "Jesus at the Kindergarten")

"THE MESSIANIC SECTS": The ultra-Orthodox daily HAMODIYA (6 FEB 87) published an update on the Ministry of Education's seven-year investigation of cults and "messianic sects" operating in Israel. The writer claims that now the kibbutz movement cooperates with the

Orthodox YAD L'AHIM anti-missioners in exposing the "messianic" and "idolatrous" sects; but some "arrogant" leftists are trying to stigmatize the "penitents" movement (convincing secularist Jews to become ultra-Orthodox Jews) as cultish. The writer concludes that the only remedy to this "plague" is a return to "the eternal sources" of Judaism.

MISSION SUNDRIES

HAZOR: Two German-speaking youths roaming about this Galilean settlement with copies of "Living Water" (a special Hebrew edition of Matthew's Gospel) in recent weeks were removed by a police vehicle from town and warned not to return. A resident also complained that they had tried to induce him to convert. (KAWL EMEK HAGALIL, UPPER NAZARETH, 12 DEC 86)

YAVNE: A protest vigil by an anti-mission group was held outside the home of Knesset Member Meir Chitrit several hours before his departure for Provo, Utah, a Mormon centre, to sign a twinning agreement between Yavne and Provo. (SHEARIM 14 JAN 87)

TEL-AVIV: Dr. Gisela Finger, a missionary doctor in the Bat Galim area of Haifa, recently moved her service to the Tel-Aviv area at the Country Club hotel. Because of the exposure by YAD L'AHIM she had been obliged to leave Herzliya. She has recently announced that she is thinking of retiring from her "medical" ministry to devote herself to a more spiritual ministry . . . among Jews, of course! (SHEARIM 21 JAN 87)

CHRISTIAN PERIODICALS: YAD L'AHIM reported on two Christian periodicals which related to its activities. The first, the UCCI NEWS, reported that the missionary Caspari Centre had moved from French Hill in Jerusalem to the Finnish School because of YAD L'AHIM complaints; the second the South African CHRISTIAN ACTION FOR ISRAEL, carried a front-page photo of the anti-mission demonstration outside the Baptist Church in Jerusalem. The periodical also noted the splits in the Christian Embassy. Among the causes for which the South African organization solicits are for support of Christians living in Israel and for the distribution of New Testaments! (EREV SHABAT 2 JAN 87)

TBN: Dr. Paul Crouch, president of Trinity Broadcasting Network in California, recently met with Israeli P.M. Shamir. This is an uncompromising effort whose goal is not to provide a service to the small Christian community in Israel, but to direct programming toward the conversion of the vast majority of religiously ignorant Jews to fundamentalist Christianity. Pressure now could be applied to stop this most serious threat. (A Reader - JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS 9 JAN 87)

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION (INCLUDING HANDBILLS): In a rare decision, Judge David Hashin of a local Jerusalem court ruled that the municipality acted unlawfully when it enforced a city ordinance forbidding the distribution of handbills in public without permit. It had charged Prof. Uzi Ornan of the Hebrew University (a long-time foe of religious coercion campaigning against ultra-Orthodox violence in Jerusalem) with distributing tracts without municipal approval. Later he was also charged with violating an ordinance against littering.

The court dismissed both charges, insisting that freedom of expression takes precedence over littering and licensing ordinances. Meanwhile, the municipality announced it was dropping charges against another citizen on the basis of these ordinances. (JLM POST 15 JAN 87, KAWL HA'IR 16 JAN 87)

"BIBLICAL POLEMICS": "We are happy to announce that Dorrn Kline, Mervin Fish and Jonathan Klampas of South Africa, and Moshe Ish Tov of

the reality of God . . ." It would, therefore, be inaccurate to portray their cult-affiliation as "a radical identity transformation" since they were never "deeply involved Jews." He observed that the Jewish cult members come from those sectors of U.S. Judaism most affected by secularization of Jewish life which has resulted "in a chronic crisis of meaning in defining Jewish identity."

Stark and Bainbridge in a recently-published study, THE FUTURE OF RELIGION, point out that Jews have markedly lower levels of religious affiliation than Gentiles. Selengut concludes that it is ignorant to view cult involvement only as the result of brainwashing or coercion rather than reflecting a general crisis of Jewish identity. He appeals for "active demonstration" of what a full Jewish life entails rather than seeking anti-cult legislation which curtails free choice. (JERUSALEM TIMES/N.Y. JEWISH PRESS 12 DEC 86)

"A NEW DILEMMA": An article by Julius Berman, Chairman of the Jewish Community Relations Councils Task Force on Missionaries and Cults was published in the N.Y. JEWISH FORWARD (9 JAN 87) under the heading: "A NEW DILEMMA, MISSIONARIES AND CULTS IN ISRAEL." The Council was reported to be in contact with Israeli authorities advising them on how to cope with the "dilemma." Among the cults and missions described in the article were "Scientology," the Unification Church, TM, Hare Krishna; but "a problem to a larger degree in Israel is the missionary epidemic."

Examples cited were: Beth Shalom supported by Midnight Call Ministries, "Jews for Jesus," an "infamous group" which allegedly "snatches up" candidates for conversion at Jerusalem's Western Wall; "Project Kibbutz," but "due to the pressure exerted by American Jewish organizations, the United Kibbutz Movement has rid itself of this insidious group"; the International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem (ICEJ) "which is deeply involved in proselytization efforts despite its contention to the contrary"; Jimmy Swaggart's "World Evangelism" headed by Morris Cerullo; the Christian Broadcasting Network; and the Mormons.

"The Israeli Government is in a quandary concerning its dealings with the Evangelical movement, on the one hand supporters of the State in Congress and pumping dollars into Israel via tourist trade, yet on the other hand actively seeking to destroy the very essence of the Jewish people through theological quest for mass conversion of the Jews," Rabbi Berman sums up. Nevertheless, he remains "optimistic" that "both governmental and non-governmental agencies in Israel are meeting the challenge of cults and missionaries head on."

*** END ***

14 FEB 1987/MB

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