

MESSIANIC JEWS

COUNCIL CHIEF SETTLES SLANDER SUIT: Moshe Verbin, head of the Ramat Hasharon Council, has undertaken in the Tel Aviv court to publish a clarification in the journal Tsomet Hasharon, according to which he has not accused the "Messianic Jews" Ari and Shira Sorko-ram of giving monetary enticement to children to change their religion, nor does he accuse them of this now. The Sorko-rams have therefore agreed to drop their suit in the amount of NIS 10,000 against Verbin for slandering them at a local council meeting 2 1/2 years ago, which dealt with missionary and cult activity in the area. Nevertheless, it was agreed that Verbin could publish that he dislikes their activities and that the Messianic Jews have removed themselves from the Jewish Community.

According to the compromise settlement between the parties, Verbin has undertaken to declare at the outset that Ari and Shira Sorko-ram are Messianic Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah of Israel, and that they regard themselves as Jews in every way, faithful to Israel's Torah and commandments, and they have a right to cling to their belief and to work to promulgate it within the framework of the law. (TSOMET HASHARON 5 JUN 87)

HIGH COURT TO INTERIOR MINISTRY: "WHY ARE MESSIANIC JEWS NOT JEWS?" The High Court of Justice heard Yosef Ben-Menashe, attorney for Jerry and Shirley Beresford of Hod Hasharon, in his petition on their behalf against the Interior Ministry concerning their immigrant rights under the Law of Return. Joshua Cahana, Director of the Population Registry, represented the Interior Ministry in the hearing, arguing that because they were Messianic Jews, the Law of Return did not apply to them.

The three justices, after hearing the arguments, instructed the Interior Ministry to present reasons within 45 days why the couple should not be granted immigrant rights. Their attorney argued that the two were born Jews who had not changed their religion notwithstanding their belief in Jesus. (TSOMET HASHARON 5 JUN 87) See also SELECTIONS No. 152, page 2 "JEWS FOR JESUS"

"APOSTATES" AND "ENEMIES OF ISRAEL": Two Ultra-Orthodox weeklies (EREV SHABAT AND JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS 5 JUN 87) published "exposés" attacking Messianic Jews in the context of several recent affairs involving the Sorko-rams of Ramat Hasharon, Simha Pearlmutter of Ir Ovot, David Loden of the Asaf congregation in Netanya, and the Fodors of Hod Hasharon.

EREV SHABAT published a photograph of a Hebrew-language Messianic tract ("MILHEMET AHIM" - "Civil War") captioned by the newspaper: "The Messianics threaten civil war in the wake of the debate over the international (peace) conference." (The tract itself refers to the struggle between militant Orthodox Jewish activists and militant secular peace activists. TRANSL.) A transcript of a "Diary of an Israeli Soldier on Reserve Duty" dated May 1983 was reproduced by both papers, which allegedly contains evidence of missionary activity by Ari Sorko-ram during his reserve duty in Lebanon.

EREV SHABAT published three "sketches" on David Loden, Yakov Damkane and Baruch Maoz, the first two with their photographs, under the heading "NOT NICE TO KNOW." Both journals warned against the prospect of Messianic Jews being accepted as another trend in Judaism, and called on readers to fight against this, also by legislative means.

MESSIANIC JEWS - A LIBERAL VIEW: Schalom Ben-Chorin, writing in ISRAEL NACHRICHTEN, the Israeli German-language journal (19 JUN 87) discussed

the modern movement of Jewish believers in Jesus from a biblical, historical and contemporary perspective. He noted the several distinctives within the movement -- "Judenchristen," Hebrew-Christians, Jews for Jesus, Messianic Jews. He referred to the present situation in Israel, and cited the Hebrew Messianic periodical "BESHUV" and its editors, (Benhayim and Zamir), also furnishing the publication address for interested inquirers.

If the issue centered only on the identity of Messiah, there would be no real problem. Rabbi Akiva's proclamation of Bar Kochba as Messiah, rejected by Judaism, did not affect the rabbi's status in Judaism. The core of the problem is with the apostolic creed which portrays Jesus as "true God and true man." Nevertheless, the pluralism of modern Jewry, with its agnostics and atheists alongside various believers, gives no right to reject Messianic Jews for their beliefs. The writer concludes with a note to his readers to refer further questions to the Israel Secretary of the Messianic Jews (sic!), Menahem Benhayim, POB 7329, Jerusalem.

STATUS: Pressure from Messianic Jews to be accorded full rights under the Law of Return should not surprise anyone. It is part and parcel of their "normalizing process," their ongoing campaign to make belief in Jesus acceptable to Jews ... What is surprising is the muddled thinking of their lawyer, Mr. Ben-Menashe ... True, if Messianic Jews are halachically (by religious law) Jewish, then we cannot deny their Jewish status ... but there are other considerations apart from Jewish status.

Messianic Judaism is different from any other movement ... Jewish Communists, for example, have their own media and Knesset members ... but do not uphold the ideal of converting all other Jews to Communism. Messianic Jews do want to convert other Jews to Christianity. Evangelism is an integral and indivisible part of their ideology. (cf. Matthew 28:19; Romans 1:16) ...

If Messianic Jews are born of Jewish mothers or are converted according to halacha, then their status is unimpeachable. Nonetheless, it is unacceptable that the Law of Return be used (or abused) to allow Messianic Jews to enter Israel and enjoy full citizenship rights, including the right to erode the communal integrity of Israeli society. Rabbi Arye Forta (JEWISH CHRONICLE, LONDON, ENGLAND 12 JUN 87)

BROTHER ELI FRIEDMAN: Some time ago Kol Haifa published a sympathetic article about the monk, Brother Eli Friedman, who insists on being called by his Hebrew name on the basis of his belonging to Judaism and the State of Israel despite his conversion to Christianity. The article focused mainly on his poetry but ignored other aspects of his Christianity.

During a social discussion about the man in the wake of the article, we sought the motives for his conversion in the generation of the Holocaust ... and the participants presented portions of his talks which were heard during the masses he celebrates in the converts' church in Haifa. According to these testimonies, "Brother Eli" believes that the Holocaust was part of a process of destroying the Jewish people, believers in the Old Covenant, which refuse to accept its nullification and to continue into the New Covenant, thus delaying the redemption of the world and the coming of the Lord Messiah Yeshua. (The writer then cites Y. Liebowitz who in his book Judaism and the State of Israel alleges that the "silence" of Pius XII during the Holocaust was based on the same theory that Brother Eli proclaims and that of other devout Christians who were reared on genocidal sermons against the people "who delay the coming of the beloved Lord.") Meir Goldberg, Haifa (KOL HAIFA 12 JUN 87)

"PRIVATE OPINION": A German Catholic prelate who was a long-time advocate of the beatification of Edith Stein, caused a stir in Jewish circles by declaring that the Jewish Catholic nun murdered in Auschwitz during World War II died for the unbelief of the Jewish people. A protest made by the Central Jewish Council of West Germany to Catholic authorities evoked a response from the German Bishops Conference. It declared that Dr. Jacob Schlafke, the prelate who had made the pronouncement, did so entirely in a private capacity, and did not represent the official position of the Catholic Church. (ISRAEL NACHRICHTEN 26 MAY 87; See also SELECTIONS 152, P. 2, EDITH STEIN...)

ISRAELI FLAG CONTROVERSY: In 1912 the first Danish missionary arrived in Haifa. On the 75th anniversary of this event the Danish Mission Society invited a thousand guests from around the world, with the guest of honour being Denmark's Queen Margaret II. When the Arab guests noticed the flag of Israel displayed, they announced that they would leave unless the flag was removed. Avraham Eliezer, representing the Messianic Jewish community of Israel, protested, and the controversial flag remained aloft beside that of Denmark and the Queen. The Christian Arabs took this as an insult and left. (Eliyahu Zhavi, Copenhagen; HADASHOT 25 JUL 87)

CHRISTIANS, SOVIET JEWS, AND "APOSTATES": The Vienna branch of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem recently opened a center for Russian Jews. Sister Eeva Huber, a Finnish Christian missionary assigned to Vienna, "has begun a faith work to meet some of the material, mental and spiritual needs of these unfortunate people," according to the ICEJ May-June Newsletter ... As we glanced through this startling newsletter, we came across a familiar name - Esther Dorflinger - who is closely associated with the ICEJ, and is working together with sister Eeva Huber. Esther Dorflinger is a Jerusalem resident, very active in the Meshumadim ("apostates") movement, "JEWS FOR JESUS." (JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS 26 JUN 87)

TALE OF TWO VILLAGES: The JERUSALEM POST (INT'L EDITION 27 JUN 87) published feature articles about the Greek-Catholic Upper Galilee villages of Ikrit and Biram in the wake of renewed debate over the return of the villagers to their home. (The villagers were told to leave "temporarily" during Israel's War of Independence by security forces, but despite court rulings in their favour they have never been permitted to return.)

"It is true that we were not treated properly, but as a Christian I believe in forgiveness. Without forgiveness and love, there is no hope. I have never given up the hope that one day we will return to our home," Musa Taumeh, a Christian Arab born in Ikrit, stated. "The Jews were 2,000 years in the Diaspora before they returned to the Land of Israel. We are somewhat better off; we still live in our own country, although we are refugees from our homes. I go back to the village at least once a fortnight to visit the church and look at the land. I dream of going back, and with God's help, one day I will."

"THE MISSION"

PRISON MISSION: A medic-warder in the Asmoret prison (Kfar Yona) has succeeded in winning a prisoner for the messianic congregation in Netanya. In a letter to top prison authorities, YAD L'AHIM has called on them to discharge Rami Daniel of Kfar Yona from the service for his part in enticing the prisoner. At the same time the anti-mission society has claimed that a returning Israeli resident living in the Beersheva absorption centre has been engaging in missionary activity, and has demanded that he be instructed to cease from all such activity. (YETAID NEEMAN 10 JUN 87)

OLD AGE MISSION: According to the complaint of a Netanya resident, members of the Christian missionary sect "Kehilat Asaf" in Neve Itamar

have tried to take over her mother's bank account in the amount of NIS 50,000. The 82-year-old woman, according to her daughter, is a Jewish resident at the Yonit Nursing Home, but had grown up in a Christian atmosphere, which led to the missionaries visiting her and making various promises to her.

The daughter was startled to discover that the money had been transferred to another bank where the daughter no longer had signatory rights as previously. It was later disclosed that the transfer had been effected by a lawyer who once represented David Loden, one of the sect leaders. The attorney told HADASHOT that he had acted legally to help the old woman and that he detected no missionary plot to take over her account. Following a complaint to the police by the daughter, the attorneys for both sides were questioned. No fraud was discovered upon which to make a police investigation, and the matter was dismissed. (HADASHOT NETANYA 12 JUN 87)

YAD L'AHIM AND MISSION: An item published in DAVAR (11 MAY 87) about pressure exerted by rabbis and YAD L'AHIM activists to cancel performances in Tiberias demands special attention. Has anyone paid notice to the appearances of rabbis and "return to religion" preachers held in cinemas and rest homes, often accompanied by religious acts and music, which is missionizing? Does belief in the Jewish religion automatically eliminate the possibility that its fanatic adherents are doing nothing else but missionizing? How would Israeli Jews react if Christian or Moslem pressure were exerted to cancel Ultra-Orthodox performances?

"Surprisingly," your correspondent Shimon Weiss relates, "many responded to the pressures, and the organizers were forced to cancel the event." Yielding to pressure is a guarantee of more pressures in the future, and there is no difference between Ultra-Orthodox and criminal Mafia pressure. A democratic, tolerant and liberal society must not bow to such pressures. Naava Shmueli, Bat Yam (DAVAR 25 MAY 87)

THEFTS AT RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS: Two recent thefts from local Christian religious institutions appear to be the work of an efficient gang of safe crackers responsible for 10-15 similar crimes in the city over the past year. The most recent theft occurred on June 12th at the Anglican School on Prophets Street when thieves broke into the school offices and carried off a 500-kg safe with the equivalent of USD 8,000 in cash, according to school director John Cholton. "They knew exactly which doors to go through and where to look," he said.

A similar crime took place at the Baptist Centre on Narkis Street six weeks earlier on April 28th, when a safe holding nearly USD 12,000 in cash and checks was carted away from the premises. Both safes were found broken and empty at the same spot in the Jerusalem Forest near Givat Shaul. Last January three such thefts were carried out at Jewish religious institutions on successive Friday nights. (IN JERUSALEM 26 JUL 87)

CHANGED ATTITUDES TOWARDS JEWS: Results of a nationwide U.S. survey among Evangelicals have challenged some commonly-held assumptions, according to the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, which commissioned the poll. A sampling of 1,000 religiously conservative Christians (Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Church of Christ, Pentecostals and other Evangelicals) produced large-scale disagreement with the assertion that "God does not hear the prayer of a Jew" or that "Christians are justified in holding negative attitudes towards Jews (because of the death of Christ)."

In response to the finding that some 50% polled believed that Christians should "actively help lead Jews to accept Jesus," Rev.

Luckoff of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem remarked: "I think more Christians are beginning to accept the fact that the Jewish people should be accepted as such ... for who they are, and who they will be." Rabbi David Rosen of the Anti-Defamation League in Jerusalem pointed to the ambivalence of some Evangelicals who see Jews both "as those who didn't accept Jesus, yet remain God's chosen people." (CHRISTIAN LIFE IN ISRAEL No. 23 SPRING 87)

LUTHERAN BISHOP NAIM NASSAR: The Evangelical Lutheran Church, the second largest Protestant community in the Holy Land, numbers some 1,600 members, and is predominantly Arabic-speaking. The present bishop of the church, Right Rev. Naim Nassar, was born in a village near Nazareth, educated in Jerusalem, Beirut, Wales and West Germany, ordained in 1964, and in 1984 elected to succeed Daoud Haddad, the first indigenous Arab bishop.

In an interview in C.L.I.I. (Spring 1987 issue) he traced the development of the community from its German missionary beginning during the 19th century through its indigenization during Jordanian rule of Jerusalem in 1959, and its subsequent implementation in church schools and the bishopric. "Our aim is to help those of our people remaining here to stay in the Land, to stay in their church," he said. He looked forward to greater cooperation with other churches with whom they maintain good relations under the umbrella of the Near East Council of Churches.

SPIRITUAL ROOTS: "Our sincere thanks for keeping us Catholics in Burma informed about Christians in Israel. We cannot forget our historical and spiritual roots in the people of Israel, upon which tree we have been grafted (Romans 11:17-18)" G. Thohey, Archbishop's House, Rangoon. (C.L.I.I. No. 23)

SECTARIANS

"DANGER TO DEMOCRACY": The thing that stirred the authorities to their very depth was the psychological and health aspect, the social health problems which tore apart families and led to hospitalization in mental asylums or even to suicides, and the danger to democracy, even from a secular viewpoint, that the sects represented. (From a survey of the Glaser-Taasa parliamentary report on sects published in the Ultra-Orthodox organ HAMODIYA, 27 MAR 87)

"BRAZEN IMPUDENCE" AND THE "PENITENTS": These "progressive" people asked in astonishment why this "obsession" with the sects only, and why not include the movement for (Jewish) penitents? This is a piece of brazen impudence by those who fail to understand the roots of this grave problem, this dangerous reality, which demands an official war by all the State's institutions without exception.

Actually, the committee itself did discuss the question of including groups who promote the penitents movement, and by a majority vote, as we were told by Mrs. Taasa-Glasser, it was decided that despite "certain similarities among the groups, this does not justify including the subject ("penitents") in the investigations by the committee ..." (From a feature article on the parliamentary report with a photo of a Messianic tract and anti-mission protests, appearing in "SHEARIM," organ of an Ultra-Orthodox party, 1 APR 87)

"BROTHERS AND SISTERS" IN "JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES": YIDDISCHE ZEITUNG (3 APR 87) published the second in a series on sects in Israel, a report by H. Linka on a visit to a J.W. meeting, which he attended as a journalist. The account, while not sympathetic to the sect, is surprisingly objective and unprejudiced.

DAMASCUS GATE BUS STATION: Plans by a Christian group to fund the removal of the East Jerusalem bus depot adjacent to the Garden Tomb to

a place near the Damascus Gate have been stymied by opposition from various Israeli opponents to the plan as well as a change in the leadership of the Christian group. Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek has long sought to remove the bus station because it has become inadequate to serve the increased traffic since Jerusalem's unification. Protestant pilgrims have also been unhappy about its spoiling the site of Gordon's Calvary, believed by many Protestants to be the site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Orthodox anti-missionaries have charged that it was an under-cover missionary design, while others have attacked the plan on economic and environmental grounds. Meanwhile, the scandal involving Pentecostal preacher Jim Bakker, a leader in the Protestant group, has resulted in a change of leadership and a loss of interest in the project. (VARIOUS PAPERS)

CUSTODY BATTLE: The Na'amat women's organization has launched a legal battle to grant a French Catholic man custody of three Jewish children. Their attorneys petitioned Beersheva District Court on behalf of Serge Loumetre, who is demanding that his Jewish ex-wife surrender their three children to him. The secretary-general of the organization said that they feel "a humanitarian obligation" to help the father win custody of the three Jewish children. (JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS 17 APR 87)

ROBERTSON STANDS PAT: Fundamentalist Rev. Pat Robertson, in a speech before key leaders of the Los Angeles Jewish community, spoke glowingly of Israel, but drifted into stormy waters over the issue of Jews getting into heaven without accepting Jesus Christ as their savior. When asked if it was appropriate for Christian ministers to seek to convert Jews to Christianity, he hedged by saying that he was "pleased with the return to Orthodoxy within the Jewish community," adding: "I would like to see a bold reaffirmation of your faith."

Robertson evaded a clear response when questioned about the issue of a letter he had written to JEWS FOR JUDAISM (a group which fights inroads of Christian cults like JEWS FOR JESUS into Jewish families), in which he had written that "the Bible says that the Jews will go to heaven if they keep the covenant God made with them; if they don't keep them, they have the animal sacrifice provision. The Jews today do not fulfill the covenant entirely, and they do not offer animal sacrifice."

Some rabbinical comments following the encounter ranged from attacking Robertson's ignorance of the Torah, especially the oral traditions, to his "circuitous reply." It was charged that Robertson "is avoiding stating his true position and that of the fundamentalists, which is that Jews can't get to heaven without Jesus." Rabbi Kravitz compared JEWS FOR JESUS to "kosher pork", and said that at a Sunday breakfast meeting he would be conducting, he would be accompanied by Michael Elias of L.A., a former "Hebrew Christian" who had returned to Judaism. (SOUTHWEST JEWISH PRESS, SAN DIEGO CA 27 FEB 87)

END TRANSCRIPT

7 JUL 1987/mb

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