

MESSIANIC JEWS

BNEI BRAK: A congregation of Messianic Jews who believe in Jesus the Nazarene is active in the Pardes Katz neighbourhood of Bnei Brak. Comprising five families, the majority immigrants from the Soviet Union, the congregation numbers about 30 persons. The congregation, which was formed about two years ago, conducts prayer services but does not engage in missionary activity. One of the congregation members, a soldier in the Regular Army, noted: "I got excited about Christianity when a friend gave me the New Testament while I was studying at a (Jewish) religious high school." He added, "We do not engage in any missionary activity." (MAARIV 10 SEP 87)

JERUSALEM: "ISRAEL NACHRICHTEN": (21 Aug. 87), the German-language Israeli newspaper published an article by M. G. Perl headed: "WITH THE MESSIANIC JEWS: SABBATH ... IN CHURCH." The article was a critical description of a Sabbath worship service in the Israel Messianic Assembly on Prophets Street in downtown Jerusalem, comparing it to a Protestant service. The impression was that the majority of the members were "Anglo-American" Jewish immigrants with many tourists and temporary residents increasing the number of worshippers. He criticized the Hebrew Scripture reading in the Book of Ruth for its faultiness, and briefly described the sermon about "the Messianic Ego," the celebration of the Lord's Supper, hymn-singing, and the priestly benediction at the close.

"JEWS FOR JESUS": JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS (14 AUG 87) published a description of the demonstration by representatives of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of New York "in a unified protest against the Hebrew Christian group" Jews for Jesus by the 59-member organization (See SELECTIONS 154, p. 4-5, "JFJ SUMMER CAMPAIGN") "Today we stand as a united community to make the distinction that Jews for Jesus and other Hebrew-Christian organizations are not part of our Jewish family. We will not, and we cannot, tolerate this perversion of authentic Judaism," said Michael S. Miller, Exec. Direc. of JCRC.

The Hebrew-language periodical of New York (OUR ISRAEL) published a report of a confrontation between Rabbi Spivak, a militant anti-missionary leader, and a group of JFJ campaigners at the Grand Central Station underground in which the latter allegedly refused to engage him in debate but called on the police to remove the rabbi. The police refused to act when the rabbi convinced them that he was not conducting a demonstration but was a private citizen responding to the "distorted information" being distributed by the JFJ group. He charged that their tracts proclaimed that the victims of the Holocaust in Auschwitz "were burnt in the fire of Gehenom (Hell) because of their refusal to believe in Jesus as Messiah." After a consultation among themselves, the JFJ group left the scene, which was witnessed by reporters and TV cameras.

The JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS (31.8.87) carried a letter by Natan Baum of Rehovot describing a confrontation between the writer and "two young men wearing Jews for Jesus T-shirts and distributing missionary pamphlets to passersby." Claiming that they were both Christian and Jewish, they produced a JERUSALEM POST clipping in which an ADL spokesman (Anti-Defamation League of the Bnei Brit) was quoted as stating that "Jews for Jesus are legitimate!" The writer concludes: "How does the ADL feel about its statements being used as ammunition in the arsenal of the missionaries?" (JERUSALEM TIMES/PRESS 14 AUG 87)

"MISSION ACCOMPLISHED": In a full 1-1/2 page feature article with photo of JFJ tract distributor, the JERUSALEM POST Magazine (28.8.87) writer David Rosenberg reported on the activities in New York "of what is said to be the fourth largest stream in American Jewry." The article begins with a description of a prayer group which meets Sunday mornings in East Manhattan led by Reverend Jan of Kehilat Y'shua, "one of scores of congregations of Messianic Hebrews, Jewish Christians, Jewish believers or half a dozen other names for people popularly known as Jews for Jesus." One anti-missionary claims they make up the fourth largest movement in American Jewry, behind Reform but ahead of Reconstruction. Numbers vary between 40-250,000, "but no one knows how many" there really are.

The major groups are generously funded, and JFJ official Susan Perlman says they spend some \$7 million annually with a paid staff of 104, while the Board of Missionaries (ABMJ) claims a staff of about 100. "Hebrew-Christian doctrine takes the most popular components of traditional Judaism and twists them to make acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah their obvious and logical conclusion," Rosenberg writes.

Rosenberg cites a Jewish Believers Survey conducted by JFJ which belies the stereotype of the Hebrew Christian as a youth with emotional problems, uneducated Jewishly. "The stereotype, by most accounts, isn't entirely accurate," he notes. Arnold Markowitz, who runs the Cult Hotline and Clinic of the Jewish Family Board in N.Y. and has been working with cultists and Hebrew Christians for seven years, doesn't question the accuracy of the JFJ survey which refutes the stereotyped image of the Hebrew Christian, but claims it didn't ask the right questions. He claims that people attracted to this movement "have a harder time managing their anger and rage, and have a hostile dependency on their families," which is resolved on the grander plane of a theological encounter. Much of the blame for Jewish vulnerability to cults and Hebrew Christians lies in the failure of the Jewish community to provide the spirituality many Jews are seeking.

"NO STEREOTYPE": In a response to the feature article "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED," Menahem Benhayim, Secretary for Israel of the International Association of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem, wrote in a published letter on 7 SEP 87: "David Rosenberg is to be commended for at least trying to present the views of Jewish believers in Yeshua. As a Jew who has lived in a Diaspora culture, he presumably knows how unloved minorities become stereotyped. I myself grew up as an Orthodox Jew in a secularist Jewish environment, so I have had experience with anti-Orthodox prejudice within a mainstream Jewish community. Rosenberg is right: 'The stereotype, by most accounts, isn't entirely accurate.' Is stereotype ever, whether of Orthodox Jews or secularists or Christians ... or Messianic Jews?"

"THE LORD SPEAKS!!": In a notice published in MAARIV (9 AUG) and YEDIOT AKHRONOT (13 AUG), Benjamin Brenner of Tiberias writes about unbelief in the authority of the Scriptures in our age, "free love," AIDS, faith in science to annul the judgments of God, and concludes with a call to true repentance and acceptance of Holy Scripture as authoritative.

HIGH COURT TO RULE ON MESSIANIC JEWS: In a feature article by Bezalel Amikam of AL, HANTSHMAR (7 Sep 87) the plight of Shirley and Gary Beresford of Zimbabwe, would-be Jewish immigrants to Israel whose claim under the Law of Return is being contested by the Interior Ministry, is described against the background of the worldwide movement of "Jews for Jesus." (See SELECTIONS No. 153, page 1 "HIGH COURT ...")

The Ministry argues that they converted to membership in a Christian sect, the Messianic Jews, in 1985, according to the testimony of Mrs. Shirley Beresford's son by a former marriage. He claims they tried to convince him to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, and to read the New Testament. Emissaries of the Jewish Agency in South Africa investigated the charge and found the Beresfords to be active in the Christian movement, and rejected their application to be immigrants under the Law of Return.

The Beresfords observe the Shabbat and Jewish festivals, the kosher laws, and are quoted as saying: "We do not accept the doctrine of the Trinity, which is a Christian theological concept which is not recognized by our Messianic Jewish faith." Counsel for the Interior Ministry argues that they have voluntarily converted to another religion whose principles are contrary to Judaism, and are therefore not entitled to immigrant rights. The High court will shortly be called upon to decide the issue.

BOB DYLAN: Alan Ginsburg, a close personal friend, said of Dylan: "Everybody sees Dylan as a Messiah figure, but he's too smart to let them crucify him." In 1979 it looked like Dylan was drawing close, in his album "Slow Train Coming", to the destiny of the Crucified One. Dylan related that he had a revelation in which his room almost moved by the power and clear presence of Jesus. "Many people believe that Jesus always appears when you're in a dreadful state, in despair or about to die, but with me it was different; I was content. A friend began to talk to me about Him and I said I was open to listen. I visited a church of born-again people, and said that I was willing to accept Him and He did appear to me."

The born-again movement celebrated his full repentance; he forsook his secular repertoire and adopted Gospel music, and in 1980 he brought out the album "SAVED," and the born-again movement saw that Dylan was the best thing that happened to Christianity since the Emperor Constantine was baptized in 312. He began to move with preachers of healing and divine light and spoke about the approaching apocalypse in Armageddon, about the kingdom of Satan and the sin of homosexuality. The liberal Left was really worried about this important reinforcement for Christian fundamentalism of the Moral Majority from such an unexpected source. It was around 1984 that Christian providence passed him by. It was a temporary "trip" which was exhausted, at least with respect to his missionary propaganda, although religion was always a strong issue with him. He kept an open Bible on a wooden stand in his home in Woodstock ...

(Excerpts from a 2-page article in the Jerusalem weekly KAWL HA'IR 14 AUG 87 about Robert Zimmerman alias Bob Dylan, the son of Jewish merchants in a small town in Minnesota, in anticipation of his heralded arrival for a concert in Jerusalem.)

MORDECAI VANUNU: An interview with Avigdor Feldman, defence attorney for the accused nuclear technician, included some remarks about Vanunu's conversion to Christianity. Feldman has been disappointed, like his client, with the stand taken by men of the caliber of (the radical Orthodox) Professor Isaiah Liebowitz: "It seems to me that Liebowitz has taken hold of the issue of conversion to Christianity as an excuse for keeping his distance; it really doesn't befit him." (KAWL HA'IR 21 AUG 87)

The AUSTRALIAN JEWISH TIMES of Darlinghurst NSW in a news article (clipping undated) headlined a story about the Rev. John McKnight, "VANUNU'S CONFIDANT LASHES OUT AT ISRAEL." The Anglican minister accused Israel of "destroying Christian culture," of not being a democracy and of prohibiting many religions from practising. "A lot of people are unhappy about the treatment that all people in Israel

experience, the lack of human rights, the persecution, the suffering that is going on and the lack of ability for there to be any open discussion about the matter," he is quoted as saying. Jeremy Jones of the local Jewish Board of Deputies described McKnight's comments as "outrageous." When a listener phoned in to the radio station to say that when he was in Israel he had observed "a very healthy press, pro-Government and anti-Government, a press that raised issues," McKnight replied that "many Christians fail to see the real living church" in Israel.

Mordecai Vanunu has met in prison in Ashkelon with the Anglican priest Gilbert Sinden at least five times, including once for the celebration of Holy Communion. The 60-year-old priest has sent a letter of thanks to the prison director for the courteous attitude shown him. The matter came out in a court hearing in which defence attorney Feldman asked, on behalf of Vanunu, for improvement of his prison conditions, including the privilege of the minister to enter his cell rather than, as at present, having to communicate with him behind a partition. The prosecuting attorney argued against the granting of additional privileges in view of Vanunu's continued violations of discipline.

Asher Vanunu, brother of the accused, expressed reservations about the whole matter, stating: "There is no need to blow it up. Mordecai needs the priest mainly to break his prison isolation. If he were free, I don't think he would need all this." Meanwhile, the priest, who serves at St. George Anglican Church in East Jerusalem, has refused to respond to press inquiries beyond stating that Vanunu maintains close contact with the church. (MAARIV/YEDIOT AKHRONOT 10 SEP 87)

"THE MISSION"

CONVERSION REQUEST CRITICIZED: An IDF major told an Israeli soldier, the son of a Jewish father and a Danish mother (by Jewish law he is therefore reckoned a Gentile) that he would have to convert to Judaism if he wished to participate in an officers course. When the soldier refused and his family complained about the demand to M.K. Ram Cohen of the Citizens Rights Movement, the matter was raised with Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin. A prompt investigation was ordered by the Chief of Staff. Within a few days the soldier was restored to the course and the Major informed that he had overstepped his authority and that no such condition could be made.

Rabbi Hayim Pardess, chief of the Tel-Aviv rabbinic court, interviewed about the incident, expressed surprise inasmuch as there are many non-Jews serving in the IDF, and the British Christian Orde Wingate helped to organize the IDF. It might, however, be that this Gentile was a missionary or a devout Christian who would influence his Jewish comrades to convert to Christianity, in which case it would be necessary to dismiss him. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 9 SEPT; HAARETZ/JLM POST 10 SEP 87)

JERUSALEM: In an attempt to attract innocent passersby, Christchurch in the Old City near the Jaffa Gate, has set up signs in Hebrew inviting Jews to visit the church in order to see and hear "why there are Hebrew inscriptions and Jewish symbols in the church." Residents of the Jewish Quarter have sounded the alarm at what they see as serious missionary activity, and are going to appeal to the Ministry of Religious Affairs to intercede with the Christian clergy to prevent this activity. (HAMODIYA 28 AUG 87)

TEL-AVIV: Last weekend a number of young people were distributing in downtown Tel-Aviv heretical pamphlets sponsored by one of the missionary organizations active in town by name of "Messianic Jews." Our correspondent reports that one may meet these young people in a number of Tel-Aviv centres from time to time, as well as missionaries of the

Hari Krishna sect dancing in the streets of the city and distributing pamphlets to passersby. (SHEARIM 26 AUG 87; with a photo of the tract "WHEN THE MESSIAH COMES"; also DAVAR 28 AUG 87)

PETAH TIKVA: Recently a religious soldier was approached by a young man who engaged him in a conversation about his beliefs, to whom he innocently gave his name and address. Soon after a New Testament and various religious-looking pamphlets began to arrive from P.O. boxes in Jerusalem and Rishon LeZion. Please make your children aware of the purpose of missionaries and encourage them to avoid speaking with them. (JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS 28 AUG 87)

BEERSHEVA: A mob of Ultra-Orthodox Jews gathered opposite the home of a local missionary, and the following day he received a phone call that an explosive had been placed in his house. The police were called in and after searching the area found nothing. (MAARIV 12 JUL 87)

SECTS

JEHOVAH WITNESSES: A survey of the JW movement, its millenarian roots in 19th century America, its leadership over the years, its ideology, and religious and other opposition to the movement, was published in KAWL HA'IR TEL-AVIV (3 JUL 87). The writer Eli Shai was generally sympathetic to the believers but skeptical about their beliefs.

MORMONS: The Brigham Young Institute extension on Mt. Scopus is due to open this autumn and some 80 students have already arrived. Ultra-Orthodox opponents are still seeking to delay approval of the lease between the Israel Land Authority and BYU pending the formal undertaking of the Mormon-sponsored university that it will not engage in missionary activities, nor permit students or staff to do so. David Galbraith, BYU director, has announced that anyone doing so will be immediately returned to the USA. Meanwhile, Ultra-Orthodox groups are planning massive demonstrations around university opening time. (HADASHOT 23 JUL 87)

SHIBANANDA: An attempt to organize a sectarian pilgrimage under the guise of an Israel-India tour was foiled when most of the Israelis who had enrolled canceled out upon learning that the "tour" was part of a worldwide homage to the centenary of the founder of the sect, Swami Shibananda. (HATSOFEH 19 JUL 87)

EMIN: Activists of the Emin sect have begun to work on various campuses, including the Orthodox Bar Ilan University, to the dismay of students. The sect has opened a new centre in Tel-Aviv. (HATSOFEH 19 AUG 87)

NEW AGE: Rabbi Dobin in his feature JEWISH ACTION LINE (JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS 28 AUG 87) replied to a query of a concerned mother in Seattle WA about the New Age Movement. "You should try to get your son out of this group as quickly as possible," he advises. He charges the movement with engaging in spiritism, mind control, fleecing its victims financially, and causing psychological damage.

ANTICULT CAMPAIGN: The Ministry of Religious Affairs is commencing a campaign in cooperation with other government offices, including Education, to expose cults such as Hari Krishna, Scientology, Emin and others. A detailed booklet has been prepared for raising public awareness of the psychological, economical, social and religious dangers involved in adherence to various sects. These have been exposed in the parliamentary inquiry into sects headed by M.K. Miriam Taasa Glaser. A list of psychologists and rabbis has been drawn up for referrals for those who have been trapped in the sects and wish to leave them. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 19 AUG 87)

SECTARIAN SETTLEMENTS: Zion Klugman of the Ultra-Orthodox HAMODIYA (17 JUL 87) produced an exposé of settlements which have had land allocated to them by the Israeli authorities but are motivated by sectarian principles. Two are connected to T.M., one to Rudolph Steiner's anthroposophic teaching, another to the Emin sect.

CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

IDF AND CHRISTIAN SITES: The IDF spokesman categorically denied a charge by M.K. Dedi Zucker of the Citizens Rights Movement that educational tours of Christian Holy Land sites by Israeli troops had been curtailed because of a "strange" decision to rewrite history. The spokesman insisted that no such guidelines had been issued and the policy of visiting both Christian and Jewish sites continued. (HAARETZ/DAVAR/YEDIOT AKHRONOT 19 AUG 87)

ORTHODOX RABBI AND EVANGELICALS: Rabbi Yehiel Eckstein, an Orthodox American rabbi, has been conducting a one-man campaign to establish dialogue on Jewish-Christian relations with one of the most powerful religious groups in America, Evangelical (born-again) Christians. During a visit to Jerusalem the rabbi stated that "stereotypes" do an injustice to many evangelicals. "In my ten years of working with them I've found that many are reasonable people that we Jews can and should be talking to," he stated.

In Israel to advise on Christian participation in Israel's 40th anniversary celebrations, he described variations among the estimated 68 million U.S. evangelicals. He admitted that discussing missionary work is delicate because "we can't start out demanding they stop proselytizing; that means asking evangelicals to stop being evangelicals. We can say, 'Go ahead and preach, but without harassment and deception as in groups like JEWS FOR JESUS.'" He has no contact with evangelicals who missionize among Jews or with so-called Messianic Jews.

In November he will launch a daily radio show called "ASK THE RABBI," a five-minute spot on stations belonging to the "electronic church," dealing with many issues raised in his book, "WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT JEWS AND JUDAISM." Four years ago he founded the Holyland Fellowship of Christians and Jews, funded 65 percent by Jews, the balance by Christians. (JLM POST 13 AUG 87)

LEBANESE CHRISTIANS: The Ashkelon Chief Rabbi has expressed shock at the summer camps in the National Park in Ashkelon in which local Jewish children participate jointly with Lebanese Christian youth. The camps have been held for five years in cooperation with the South Lebanese authorities, the Israeli military authorities, Ashkelon mayor Eli Dayan and others. The chief rabbi declared that he had only recently learned about the activities and he would immediately work to prevent its recurrence. "Bringing people together can only involve adults, not youth. It can only lead to calamities, and we will do everything possible to prevent it." (YETAID NEEMAN 28 AUG)

PRISONER OF ZION: A Jewish ex-refusenik recently arrived from the USSR, Nadezhda Fradkova, told an interviewer that a sympathetic devout Christian nurse in a Soviet hospital refused to carry out medical orders to abuse her. "I won't help you eliminate Jewish people because they are chosen," she told the doctor. (OVERSEAS JLM POST 18 JUL 87)

END TRANSCRIPT
13 SEP 1987/mb

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