

MESSIANIC JEWS TO HIGH COURT IN ISRAEL: GOVERNMENT CASE HEARD

Shirley and Jerry Beresford, new immigrants from Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia), have petitioned the Israeli High Court of Justice against the government's refusal to issue them an official New Immigrant certificate because of their declaration that they believe in Jesus and are "Messianic Jews." (A photo of the couple accompanied the report in DAVAR 5 FEB 88)

On the same date HAARETZ and the JERUSALEM POST published reports of their petition as well as a supplementary petition by Ari (Richard) Sorko-ram against the Ministry of Defence to require the latter ministry to restore him to his Reserve unit from which he was discharged, allegedly because of his Messianic Jewish faith. The two petitions (writes HA'ARETZ reporter Ron Kislev) are the result of the same "morass," which is becoming more "intolerable" because of the failure to separate religion and state. The attorney appearing in both cases is Yosef Ben-Menashe, who has been disturbing the tranquility of the Israeli religious establishment for some 30 years.

The court must now decide whether a person born to a Jewish mother, loyal to the State of Israel, who serves in the Defence Forces (IDF), pays his taxes, celebrates Jewish festivals, observes the Torah commandments and tradition, and feels himself to be Jewish, but nevertheless believes in Jesus as the Messiah and has not been baptized into Christianity, remains a Jew according to Israeli law in general, and the Law of Return in particular. In preparation for the hearing, a Dahaf public opinion poll submitted this question to 1,139 Jewish Israelis and found that 78% replied affirmatively. These findings were presented to the High Court by attorney Ben-Menashe.

Yehoshua Kahana, head of the Interior Ministry's population registry, has demurred. He regards Messianic Jews as more dangerous than Reform Jewish converts who "at least want to be Jews" (although the rabbinate does not recognize them as such, but the High Court has required the Interior Ministry to recognize them as Jews under the Law of Return), "while these people (the Messianic Jews) are Christians pretending to be Jews."

According to past rulings of the High Court and the Knesset, "every Jew has the right to come to Israel as a new immigrant," but a Jew who has converted to Christianity may not enter under this law. State Attorney Uzi Fogelman has argued that the Beresfords, and the Ramat Hasharon Messianic Jewish Community to which they belong, have missionary intentions, and that a Jewish fraternal organization to which they had belonged in Zimbabwe had expelled them (for their Messianic beliefs).

The couple apparently have denied belief in the Trinity, but the State Attorney argues that they accept the divinity of Jesus. He also cited the view of Hebrew University professors Zvi Werblovsky and David Flussèr, who seem to believe that Messianic Jews are really Christians. The couple also deny belonging to the Christian sect JEWS FOR JESUS, and contend that the Messianic Jewish movement is not connected to any church.

The second case to be adjudicated, that of Ari (Richard) Sorko-ram, involves an Israeli citizen who served in a combat unit in Lebanon and later in a unit handling overseas volunteers. He was considered a very successful member of his unit, and was therefore quite surprised when he was notified in September 1986 that he was being transferred to another unit. He learned from the newspapers in January 1987 that he

had been transferred because of "missionary activity." This resulted in a parliamentary question which elicited a reply from the Defence Minister that complaints by volunteers had been filed against Sorko-ram. While he does not deny that he is a "Messianic Jew," he does deny that he engaged in missionary activity while on duty. He also has learned that the "complaints" against him were based on defamatory statements made by YAD L'AHIM, the Ultra-Orthodox extremist organization, without any clarification permitted him.

Sorko-ram is a psychologist by profession with a master's degree, but in practice he is a movie actor. At 46, he has already acted in over 80 films. He is a child of Jewish immigrants to the USA from Russia and India, raised in an Orthodox Jewish home, studied in a yeshiva (religious seminary), in Hebrew Union College and at the University of Judaism; at 25 he was sheriff of Los Angeles, and from there entered the film industry. During this period he became a "Messianic Jew" and settled in Israel, and has become the leader of the Ramat Hasharon Messianic Jewish congregation, which numbers about 100 persons.

Except for their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, they have, in his words, no common link to Christianity. A visit to their congregation reveals no Christian symbolism, and it resembles more a Reform or Conservative synagogue. Sorko-ram claims there are 30-40 congregations like his with about 2,000 registered members, and double that number of believers afraid to identify publicly. In America, he claims, there are at least 100,000 "Messianic Jews," and they live in harmony with Reform, Conservative and even Orthodox Jews. He has also set up an organization called MAOZ, designed to encourage aliya (immigration to Israel) of "Messianic Jews." (See also SELECTIONS 153, p. 2)

APPEAL TO STOP MESSIANIC PUBLIC NOTICES IN HAIFA: The chairman of the United Orthodox Jewish Front in Haifa, Rabbi Moshe Blitental, in a letter to Haifa Mayor Arye Goral, has protested against the use of public billboards by the sect of the "Messianic Jews." He charged that this "missionary sect" is seeking to "attract, to entice and to trap in their net naive people, those who are of weak character or struck by misfortune." He argued that it was within the authority of the mayor to prevent such notices from appearing on municipal billboards which are from people "publicly working against the religion of the Jewish people." (Various papers 8-10 FEB 88)

"JEWS FOR JESUS": In a bitter parliamentary exchange between right-wing Tehiya M.K. Geula Cohen and left-wing M.K. Ron Cohen, Geula Cohen retorted to his accusation that she was a fanatic, saying: "You are an apostate. Just as there are 'JEWS FOR JESUS' so there are 'Zionists for Arafat,' like you!" (HADASHOT 21 JAN 88)

"MESSIANIC JEWS": In an interview of the radical Orthodox Jewish professor Isaiah Leibowitz (HADASHOT 15 JAN 88), he called for a division of the land of Israel between Jews and Arabs. "I am sure that the Messianic Jews led by Gush Emunim (Jewish Orthodox militants) will then leave Israel, and some of them will even convert to Christianity. They will find refuge in that Messiah (i.e. Jesus of Nazareth)!"

THE MISSIONARIES

"MISSIONARY LETTER BOMBS": The wave of letter bombs from Turkey which was discovered several weeks ago has led to the exposure of a new wave of "missionary letter bombs," sent from overseas to various addresses in Israel. The warning issued by the postal authorities has resulted in some of the "booby-trapped letters" reaching YAD L'AHIM, which has added to its black list of "Gospel promoters" dozens of new addresses, including a women's organization by the name of "Aglow." Its centre is in Washington and its "ambadress" in Moshav Aminadav in the Judean hills is Hannah Amit.

The most original of "the letter bombs" was received by the Baruch family in Kiryat Ata. It contained "Secrets of the Pope" in a Hebrew edition, describing papal control over the U.S. Federal Government, the mafia and the labour unions. "We are interested in material of this type," the anti-missionary society activists stated. "Don't discard it; send it to us." (EREV SHABBAT 29 JAN 88; HAMODIYA 31 JAN 88; SHEARIM 3 FEB 88)

DESCENDANT OF LEADING BRITISH JEWISH ZIONIST A CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY:

The descendant of the British-Jewish Lord Melchett, founder of the settlement Tel Mond in the Sharon, is a Christian missionary, by the name of William Austin, from Edinburgh, Scotland. He was the guest of Moshe and Orah Zaituni in Kfar Saba during Hannuka, with his wife Dolly. They joined in the holiday celebration, but he explained that only when everyone is a Christian will Messiah come. Their hosts, traditional Jews, seemed shocked.

Austin's great-uncle, Alfred Mond, who was knighted for his political service, was raised in an assimilated Jewish family. He became interested in Zionism late in life as a result of contact with Haim Weizmann, the pioneer Russian Jewish Zionist. Austin and his wife, although reared as Christians, experienced a miraculous deliverance from a near-fatal accident, and they have dedicated themselves to spreading their faith.

The Austins do not feel alienated from their Jewish roots, recognize their debt to Israel for the Old Testament, and promote prayer for the release of Soviet Jews from the USSR. At the same time, they firmly believe that the Christian faith will spread to every part of the world and bring redemption. "The ideal of all of us has to be the coming of Jesus the Messiah," he declares. (TSOMET HASHARON, HERZLIYA 1 JAN 88)

NEW LATIN PATRIARCH BORN IN NAZARETH: Articles about Michel Asa'ad Sabah, the new Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, and the first Palestinian to hold the post, have appeared in the Israeli press. The JERUSALEM POST INT'L EDITION (9 JAN 88) carried a full-page article and feature story about the patriarch, and the response of Nazareth folk, as well as Israeli and West Bank comment. The patriarch, born in Nazareth 54 years ago, speaks Arabic, Hebrew, English, Italian and French, and has served as director-general of the Jerusalem Patriarchate school system. "The first apostles were also local people," he commented to a reporter; "Jesus taught and preached the Gospel in the Holy Land, and I follow his teachings and lessons."

In an interview the new patriarch gave to the weekly Jerusalem supplement of HADASHOT (22 JAN 88), he remarked, "The appointment took me by surprise, but it testifies to the fact that the church here has matured and can be managed by a local cleric. It is a part of the process within the Catholic Church worldwide, to grant peripheral churches local leadership."

The patriarch is spiritual head of some 10,000 Latin Catholics in Jerusalem and 65,000 throughout Israel, West Bank, Jordan and Cypress, the large majority of whom are Arabs. "My job is to work for peace with all men of good will," he replied in answer to a question about the political situation. His concluding remark was an expression of concern lest "the churches in the Holy Land become mausoleums emptied of people."

DAMAGE AT BIRAM CHURCH: Unknown persons broke into the church at Biram in Western Galilee, destroyed furnishings and ritual objects, it was reported by Edward Gerais, a former settler of the village. He received an anonymous phone call claiming the act was the work of the Kahana group "Kach," and a warning against a return of the uprooted

villagers to Biram. Attorney Abu-Vardi, who represents the villagers in their struggle to return, stated that several months ago VACH graffiti had been scrawled at the church. He charged that since former cabinet minister Moshe Arens had submitted his plan for their restoration, nothing had happened. "It was only a vote-catching scheme," he claimed. (HADASHOT 3 FEB 83)

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS ON ISRAELI-ARAB CONFLICT: A group of Christian theologians in Jerusalem spoke out against the pro-Palestinian statement issued by heads of churches on the occasion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The statement, distributed to worshippers at St. George's Anglican Cathedral, spoke of the "grievous suffering of our people on the West Bank and Gaza Strip." The statement had been unsigned because some heads of major churches refused to sign, although their representatives had helped draft it.

The counter-statement, representing Catholic and Protestant clergy active in Christian-Jewish dialogue, protested what it claimed was the conversion of the Week of Prayer into a "week of partisan political action." The statement referred to the "spiritual struggle to bridge the rift between the two peoples in this Land," and denied that it sought to represent either side, but wished to take part "in the process of reconciliation between both peoples," which, "despite the tension, has proved fruitful time and again."

Meanwhile, the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI), an evangelical group which "represents a diverse constituency of Arabs, Jews and expatriates," expressed its belief in the "peaceful and cooperative resolution of the tragic and perplexing problems which face all who live in this land." The UCCI statement also called for prayer on behalf of "all in the land, for their justice, security and peace, for the government and all in positions of responsibility or influence, for divine wisdom." (JERUSALEM POST 29 JAN 83)

LUTHERAN BISHOP OF BERLIN: Dr. Martin Kruse, Lutheran Bishop of Berlin and chairman of the Council of Bishops of the German Evangelical Church, during a visit to Jerusalem, came to take part in the World Week of Christian Unity. He claimed that the controversial statement issued in that context was not radical, but modest and interested in a more peaceful solution, and that it had won the approval of the Middle East Council of Churches.

Dr. Kruse also noted Lutheran concern over the emigration of local Christians from Jerusalem since the Israeli occupation, "because they had no hope; we want them to stay as a sign of life and peace between Jew, Christian and Moslem." He acknowledged that Israel has cared for the holy places of Christendom and he was in contact with the Jerusalem municipality over the restoration of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension. (JERUSALEM POST 5 FEB 83)

LATIN AMERICAN CHRISTIANS EXPRESS SOLIDARITY: A Christian group numbering 240 Evangelicals from nine Latin American countries arrived in Israel to demonstrate their support for Israel during the present crisis. They had originally planned to arrive for the 40th anniversary of Israeli independence but came earlier because "they regarded it as God's will to come now." (JERUSALEM POST 5 FEB 83)

INTERFAITH MEETING IN SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIANS: Some 40 Israeli Arab religious leaders, including Christians, Moslems, Druze and three Reform rabbis (plus one Orthodox rabbi who sent a message of support), met in Nazareth to express their solidarity with the Palestinians and to make recommendations for a resolution of the conflict. When Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom addressed the gathering, he stressed that violence on both sides is not the solution, and violence supported by theology is

even more dangerous, which "we can see on both sides." (JERUSALEM POST 5 FEB 83)

CHRISTIAN SUPPORT FOR JEWISH RESETTLEMENT IN MOSLEM QUARTER: Ateret Cohanim is a little-known Israeli religious school promoting Jewish settlement in the Arab quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem in anticipation of the rebuilding of the Temple and Messiah's coming. Sources close to the school say that, in addition to contributions from American Jews, wealthy U.S. Christian Evangelicals who view Jewish return to Zion as the prelude of the Second Coming of Christ, have also made contributions. (NY TIMES 1 OCT 87)

PRO-ISRAEL "FIXATION": Dr. Yariv Ben-Eliezer, a mass media expert, in an interview given to HADASHOT (21 JAN 83) charged Israeli information services with failure to properly evaluate target groups in the U.S.A. Among others, he referred to a group of major importance, "religiously-oriented, usually Protestants with a pro-Israel fixation, because they think we maintain their holy places better than Jordan did."

JUDAISM'S DEBT TO CHRISTIANITY: Rev. John Pawlikowski, ethics professor at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, in a lecture at Jerusalem's Hebrew Union College on "The Re-Judaizing of Christianity - Its Implications for Judaism," called on Jews to re-examine common Jewish views of Christianity as "false messianism" or "Judaism for the Gentiles." Dialogue cannot remain a one-way affair, he insisted, with Christians making concessions in various areas while "Jews simply applaud" but make no similar concessions. There should be a Jewish recognition of the "convenantal importance" of Christianity, a fresh look at Jesus and "his unique contribution," greater openness to interreligious prayer and exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures.

While admitting that "Christianity has failed miserably on some issues," he noted that Judaism "has had little experience" with handling power, and has shown little religious response to the crisis in Israel, and U.S. Jewish religious leaders have sounded "ambiguous" about the present unrest in Israel, he charged. The lecture was sponsored by the Israel Interfaith Association, the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity and the Israel Office of the American Jewish Committee. (JERUSALEM POST 5 FEB 83)

"THE OTHER KIBBUTZNIKS": The JERUSALEM POST Magazine carried a sympathetic feature article (5 FEB 88) on the Hutterite Anabaptists who have been living the communal life since the 16th century. A group of four Hutterites are in Israel as guests of the Kibbutz Yad Mordecai. They have been "overwhelmed" by the hospitality and friendship shown them, and have shared their experiences as religious "kibbutzniks" with their agnostic fellow-commune. "We seem to be able to inspire and encourage each other," says one of the Hutterites. "We each feel the spirit of community in each other's societies, even if we explain it differently." The article also provided an historical survey of the Hutterite movement, its persecution and emigrations, its pacifist ideology and social life.

CULT BUSTERS: The Israel Center of Jerusalem has founded an anti-cult counseling centre to help deprogram kids and rehabilitate them following their exposure to cults and missionaries. Moshe Dann heads up the work. An article in JERUSALEM TIMES/JEWISH PRESS (4 FEB 88) described several instances of "retrieval" of Jews from the hands of cults and missionaries.

RULING AGAINST TEL AVIV SECT: The Ultra-Orthodox weekly EREV SHABBAT (29 JAN 88), with no little glee, reported the ruling of a judge against a "Christian" sect (Jehovah Witnesses) for unlawful use of property in violation of municipal zoning laws. The site - Nahalat

Benjamin/Shefer intersection - has long been the scene of violent demonstrations by Ultra-Orthodox militants.

In her ruling, Judge Gadot dismissed as irrelevant the defendant's claim that the action was motivated by religious rather than zoning considerations. They were fined (NIS 150) and given a year either to find new quarters or to obtain a permit for exceptional use of the premises. The writer called upon Orthodox members of the municipality to thwart any attempt to obtain such permit.

MORMON UNIVERSITY: A week after the Hebrew University canceled plans for a tour of the Mormon Centre on Mt. Scopus, the management of the Mormon University canceled its participation in an evening discussion for representatives of the two institutions. Dr. David Galbraith, director of the Mormon University, was due to take part.

In the background of the cancelations was the request by Hebrew University student chairman Uri Ben-Hur to invite Dr. Moshe Dann, an expert on Mormonism. "In Israel we are engaged in academic activity only, and we shall agree to take part only in events related to that, and not in events which relate to Mormon missionary activity outside of Israel, which is the subject of Dr. Dann's lecture," spokesmen for the Mormons explained. (KAWL HA'IR 22 JAN 88)

ORGANS: The Jerusalem weekly IN JERUSALEM (5 FEB) reported that a \$500,000 Danish organ is being installed at the Mormon University Centre for Near Eastern Studies. At the same time, a \$300,000 renovation is planned for the YMCA-WEST organ while St. Andrew's Scottish Church has been installed recently costing \$50,000, collected from 11,000 friends of St. Andrews in Great Britain. One organist who plays often in Jerusalem, Elizabeth Roloff, relates that "the biggest audiences I have played to have not been in worship services but at public concerts attended by Israelis."

VANUNU THE CHRISTIAN: Mordecai Vanunu, the Israeli nuclear technician now in an Ashkelon prison (charged with treason and disclosing state secrets), who converted to Christianity in Australia, requested prison authorities to provide him with a Christmas tree and colored lights for the purpose of celebrating the festival in Christian style. Shimon Malka, the prison service spokesman, reported that the request was granted in line with prison policy to permit the observance of religious commandments without discrimination. It was noted that during Passover last year Vanunu refused to eat unleavened bread (Matzo) and demanded to have leavened bread. His request was granted. (KOTERET ROSHEET 16 DEC 87)

"JESUS WAS A JEW": A young woman soldier, noting that the Hannuka festival ended one day before the beginning of Christmas, wondered if she could have the intermediate day off. When she was informed that Christmas is a Christian holiday, she remarked, "OK, but Jesus was a Jew, wasn't he?" ("MA NISHMA BADAROM," Kiryat Gat 18 DEC 87)

END TRANSCRIPT
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