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**READERS' NOTE:** SELECTIONS is a monthly abstract of Israeli newspaper and Jewish Diaspora news and comments relating to Evangelical Christian interests. The material abstracted is not necessarily unbiased, nor does SELECTIONS endorse the accuracy or views of the material printed.

**"THE LAST TEMPTATION": CENSORS OVERRULED BY HIGH COURT**

**HIGH COURT RULING PUBLISHED:** The Court's judgment was given by the president, Justice Meir Shamgar, with Justices Aharon Barak, Shlomo Lewin, Eliezer Goldberg, and Yaacov Maltz, sitting as the High Court of Justice, with judgment given on 15 June 1989. In his judgment, Meir Shamgar reviewed the background to the film, noting the "clear intention of the author and producer to introduce human characteristics in the personality of Jesus as against the accepted conception of believers in the Christian faith. At the same time, the film is dominated by a deeply Christian theme (such as) the miracles..." He also noted the objection to the film because of "a section showing a kind of hallucination, an erotic scene (which) depicts the reflections of Jesus on an alternative form of living to being the victim of crucifixion."

The Censorship Board believed that the screening of the film, which deals with the very foundations of Christianity, will be deeply offensive to the religious feelings and faith of the Christian community. The Court, however, found that the principle of freedom of speech (and) of artistic creativity was the basis of the court's inquiry. It was agreed that freedom of speech cannot be absolute, and "public order" was a factor to be considered, but "only a serious, significant extreme impairment of public order would justify the restriction of free speech." Citing U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who had ruled that "to justify suppression of free speech there must be reasonable ground to fear that serious evil will result if free speech is practised (and) that the danger apprehended is imminent." The Court had therefore adopted the rule that only a "near certainty" that free speech would endanger state security or public order would justify restricting it.

In the particular case of the film, there was no such justification, even on the ground of serious offence to religious sentiment, which might be grounds for banning. Inasmuch as the Christian world is pluralistic, it was completely illogical that the film should be banned in Israel while it was being widely screened in Christian countries like Italy, Spain, Germany and France. All the other justices added supporting arguments to Justice Shamgar's ruling. (JERUSALEM POST 26 JUL 89)

Several local weeklies and a few national journals carried additional reviews of the film following its release. All but one were negative. (See also SELECTIONS No. 175, p. 4)

**"WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH": MESSIANICS IN ISRAEL:** "They say we're eccentrics. Now, tell me, did I sound like one to you?" The inquirer was Joseph Shulam, 48, a traditional Sabbath-observing Jew, chairman of "Netiv-ya," a non-profit society in Jerusalem. The community of "Messianic Jews" is out of the ordinary in Israeli society. If there is anything which is alien to the world view of a Jew, it is that Jesus is Israel's Messiah. Among these believers are physicians, nurses and lawyers for whom the Messianic faith is true Judaism.

Last May the Hotel Laromme in Jerusalem was requested by the Jerusalem rabbinate to cancel the lecture of Shulam about Judaism and Jesus, and threatened to revoke the hotel's kosher license. Although the hotel

complied, Shulam insisted on holding his lecture nearby at Liberty Bell Park, and surprisingly, among his listeners were religious Jews. Shulam then appealed for the return of Yeshua to His natural place in Judaism.

Zvika Sedan, a teacher at a Messianic school in Jaffa, dislikes rabbinical pressure. "The resistance of normative Judaism to Messianic Judaism is very great... It's now a struggle of life and death; it's no longer a marginal issue," he says. In Emmanuel House in Jaffa, a few steps from the Lutheran Church, and a few more steps away from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Gush Dan congregation is located.

David Lazarus, an American Messianic, ten years in Israel, is replacing the pastor who is leaving, but he refuses to be interviewed; he claims that the writing about Messianics is slanted. On the Sabbath, their day of worship, he is the leader. He chooses his words carefully, knows how to inspire the believers who worship with upraised hands, weeping, ... even the men. After the Shema ("HEAR O ISRAEL") in the accepted Jewish formula, he adds: "We are one body, all of us, by the covenant and the blood of Yeshua the Messiah." With guitar in his hand, beside the flutist, violinist, and the accompanying vocalists, they send forth melodies of the same style as Carlebach ("the dancing hassidic rabbi").

Joseph Shulam admits that the Messianic Jewish congregation in Jerusalem is slumbering; no new members, hardly any evangelizing: "We haven't devoted enough effort to winning souls in Israel, and I'm sorry about that. We're working hard on research and study with great reverence in order not to mislead the people in Israel, and out of the present reality we'll bring forth the true Yeshua."

Shulam is considered to be one of the veterans of the Israeli community. Born in Bulgaria, he grew up in Jerusalem. He encountered Christianity first in school when he was asked to define it. "I read the New Testament, but I didn't see it as something Christian. I didn't find any priests, any monks, any Christmas or Pope, not even a bishop. I thought to myself, either Christianity deviated from the New Testament or the two had no connection. The things that I learned from the words of Yeshua spoke to me as a Jew and as an Israeli. I didn't find such things in the youth movement of "HASHOMER HATZAIR" (left-wing Zionist movement), and neither in school nor in the synagogue which I attended every holiday."

At 16 he decided to convert to Christianity, and on the day he was baptized he was thrown out of his home, and went wandering about the streets of Jerusalem. A missionary friend financed a trip to America where he completed his high school studies. He returned to Israel upon learning that his mother had been injured in a work accident. Later a friend persuaded him to study in the Diaspora Yeshiva, where they tried to persuade him to forsake Christianity. He was convinced when he discovered Messianic Judaism within the yeshiva, and was strengthened in it by a Messianic rabbi teaching there. He also met with the Chief Rabbi of Bulgarian Jewry, Daniel Zion, who he claims was a Messianic Jew. Zvika Sedan also claims there are rabbis in Meah Shearim, some of them in senior positions, who accept Yeshua as Messiah. (YAD L'AHIM, the anti-mission society, states that it's difficult to relate to such a claim, that they know of no such cases, but the matter is being checked.)

Four years in the yeshiva taught Shulam that "the problem of Christianity is that it hasn't learned to understand the New Testament from the Jewish historical framework in which it was written. The important thing is that the Christians should know that they have distorted Yeshua and turned him into an idol." Shulam is married to a Messianic Christian woman. Despite their traditional Jewish lifestyle, keeping

kosher and observing the Jewish festivals, she cannot convert to Judaism because no one will convert her. Shulam is unhappy that his children are formally regarded as Christians although they feel Jewish.

Salim Munayer, 33, is an Arab, formerly a Christian but now a Messianic. He and his wife are part of a Jewish congregation because there are few Messianic Arabs in the area. He is a New Testament lecturer in Jaffa and also at the Bible College in Bethlehem. The Jaffa school is closing down, but another school will be set up. (YAD L'AHIM claims it will be called a yeshiva; a Jewish religious school.)

"As an Arab boy in a Jewish class you learn about the Jews, about the Holocaust, and you look at it from the side as a Christian. You also learn about the Arabs and hear they are enemies, and again you are standing on the side. I am a minority in Israeli society and within Arab society." In his late teens Salim began to study history, philosophy, religions. "I wasn't satisfied with Christianity, nor with Judaism and not with Islam. I began to study the Messianic faith." When the Yom Kippur war broke out, he volunteered to help in the hospital, where he met wounded Syrian and Egyptian soldiers about his age. "I asked myself, is this our future as human beings, is the alternative facing me, to become a part of this machinery of peoples fighting one another?" After becoming involved in Bible study organized by a group of Jews and Arabs in his aunt's home, where they spoke about the Messianic faith, he decided that this was his way.

In the sermon that Munayer preached on the Sabbath before a congregation of some 100 believers, he touched on the political situation in Israel. "In recent weeks I've decided to listen rather than speak, and I hear that in the Bethlehem College they are saying that if they're given the chance, they (the settlers) will kill us, they will drive us out." Afterwards, he adds: "I am not willing to die for land."

Zvika Sedan says: "Our people are standing before a crossroads. On the one hand, "PEACE NOW" speaks of its ideals, but for peace they are willing to sacrifice their state. Secular Judaism has lost its faith in the justice of its way." At 34, Sedan has a good kibbutz background behind him, and served in an elite military unit. "The Messianic faith changed my outlook. Before, I satisfied my needs out of egoism, now my neighbour is also important to me. It affects my relations between the sexes, between me and the State, between me and the military."

Sedan's way to faith began with the Yom Kippur War and developed over a period of nine years. The war opened his eyes to something in human nature which seemed pointless, the futility of mass killing and the rot in human society. He sought answers in travel and experimenting with Eastern religions, but it was a chance meeting with a Messianic Jew who spoke to him about sin, faith, Yeshua, atonement and sacrifice which fascinated him. "The transformation came about through an inner revelation. God is alive, and he simply revealed to me that Yeshua is the Messiah." Despite social and family criticism, he has continued in his faith. He also criticizes rabbinic Judaism because something is "fundamentally" wrong with it. "The secular movement did not come from thin air; it is a cry, a protest."

Gideon Shmuel, 32, is a success story sociologically, a drug addict for 13 years who has remained clean and is working. After meeting John and Judy Pex in Sinai, he heard about God. They tried to persuade him to abandon drugs, but he would hear nothing of it. Nevertheless, he continued in touch with them, and during a period of trouble they took him into their home and he began to study the Scriptures with them. He met other Jewish friends who had become Messianic Jews, and decided to try to go off drugs with the help of Messianic friends, who were with him 24 hours a day in shifts ... and he succeeded, "but I'm sure that

God did it," he says. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 12 JUL 89, Sara Laniado) Also photographs of Gideon Shmuel, Avihai Arviv, doing street evangelism, with Yaakov Damkane and Avihai Arviv carrying a placard.

#### CHRISTIANS IN ISRAEL

**BAPTIST CHURCH BEING REBUILT:** The Baptist Church on Narkis Street will be standing once again within a few months following a period of seven years since it was torched. The fire, which destroyed the chapel, also damaged the adjacent building, and the reconstruction is estimated at about one million dollars, from the gifts of private persons around the world. The new church will not be different from the former one, the Baptists say, and it may be that at a later stage the adjacent building will also be rebuilt. The church members, regarded as friends of Israel, will be guarding the new edifice against extremists who are liable to attack it again. (HASHAVUA BA'IR JERUSALEM 21.7.89)

**YMCA SUMMER CAMP:** A whole range of attractive activities is being offered at the summer camp of the Young Men's Christian Association, which is active in the centre of Jerusalem: computers, English, karate, table tennis, and what not. "And what else will your child receive?" the promotion literature asks, and the answer is: "Breakfast and Lunch (Kosher)." We were curious to know what a Christian organization, in whose building is housed a well-known unkosher restaurant, is doing offering kosher meals to children. We inquired by telephone, as follows:

Q. The ad speaks of kosher food; whose certification?

A. In the morning we provide a roll and a drink, no problem. In the afternoon they get a roll with humous or something like that. You have nothing to worry about. We even have children from ultra-orthodox families. (YOM SHISHI 30 JUN 89)

**GERMAN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN TOUR OF THE HOLY LAND:** The German-language ISRAEL NACHRICHTEN (7 JUL 89) published a feature article about a study tour of German Evangelical Christians who met with Jews and Arabs during a two-week study tour of the Holy Land.

**PROTEST CHILDREN'S FILM WITH CHRISTIAN THEME:** "There is nothing in the children's TV film which has to do with preaching to convert to Christianity; it has to do with the portrayal of a different culture in a positive light. Films produced around the world give Israeli children an opportunity to learn about other cultures." This is the argument of the Minister of Education, Yitzhak Navon, in reply to a parliamentary question by Rabbi Menahem Porush concerning a film which deals with an orphaned child who is adopted by a family and educated into Christianity. The minister added that there is a team which regularly reviews foreign films, about 2,000 per year, and chooses some 600. "I rely on their judgment and see no reason for taking any action in this case." Despite further criticism by the rabbi, Minister Navon stood by his reply. (HAMODIYA 12 JUN 89, 27 JUL 89)

#### SECTS

**"INSTANT SECT":** The ultra-orthodox weekly EREV SHABAT (17 MAR 89) warned that "the mystical sects were once again on the map (with) a novel apostacy method of instant sect." The victim is invited for an "intellectual, spiritual weekend, and then with murderous speed and a fundamental brainwashing lasting from several hours to five days, the victim is left exhausted while cancerous apostacy is gnawing within him at full speed." Following the report of the Knesset committee on sects headed by M. K. Taasa-Glaser four years ago, which exposed the activities of well-known sect organizations like Hare Krishna, Guru Maharishi, T. M., Emin, EST, the mystical sects went underground. What with the failure of the authorities to take proper action in the wake of the report, their activities are once more evident.

As a result of this "consent by silence", it is also understandable why the sect of the "Messianic Jews" do not shrink from seeking legal remedy by appealing to the High Court of Justice to be recognized as Jews under the Law of Return. They wish to be regarded as the fourth stream in Judaism following the Orthodox, the Conservative and Reform. As is known, the Messianic Jews believe in the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

**"THE FLAME (PHYSICAL IMMORTALITY):** Some 200 Israelis are members of a novel sect called "FLAME", with meetings in Tel-Aviv and Haifa. The sect, also known as "PHYSICAL IMMORTALITY" and "THE GROUP", was founded in 1971 in Arizona, U.S.A., by Paul and Brandin Brown and Jim Stairwell. It teaches that one can have physical immortality and eternal life by "melting" into the "group". Brown has written: "Death is not a natural thing, and there is no logical reason that we should rot in old age. Eternal life is the natural condition, but mankind surrendered it." In Israel the group is composed mainly of "yuppies" (young professionals); lawyers, journalists, businessmen, a judge, artists. They meet at least once a week for mutual exposure sessions and ego banishment. In the U.S. and in Israel they are categorized as a sect. (JERUSALEM, weekly supplement 24 MAR 89)

**GHANA BANS SECTS: WHY NOT ISRAEL?** The State radio of Ghana has announced that four religious groups, among them two organizations with U.S. missionaries, were given deportation orders. The two U.S. groups are the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses, who were charged with "undermining the sovereignty of Ghana and disturbing public order" by their activities. A law has been enacted requiring all the sects to register with the Interior Ministry of the West African state, to submit their constitutions and their audited annual financial statements. Out of a population of 13 million, 42.8% of Nigerians are Christians, 12% Muslims, 32.2% adhere to traditional religions and 7% are unclassified. It is not known how many belong to the banned sects. (HAARETZ 16 JUN 89)

Knesset Member Rabbi Menahem Porush has appealed to the Knesset Speaker to place on the Knesset agenda an investigation of the activities of the Mormon and J. W. sects in the light of the report that Ghana has deported their missionaries and banned sect activities in the country. This has occurred in other countries, he charged, because of the dangers to the foundations of the state. (HAMODIYA 27 JUN 89)

**JONES AND THE SEVEN LAWS OF NOAH:** The ultra-orthodox weekly EREV SHABBAT (21 JUL 89) published a full-page feature article by Avigdor Askin about V. Jones, a former Christian clergyman, a man "who believes in the Seven Laws of the Sons of Noah." Two of Jones' four children have formally converted to Judaism and one of them has become a supporter of the extremist rabbi Meir Kahana. Jones himself has been advised by his friends not to convert so that he can be more effective among Christian Fundamentalists preaching support for Israel and observance of the so-called Noachide commandments by Gentiles. Jones has organized over 50 groups to promote these aims among U.S. Fundamentalists. Jones teaches that it is forbidden to convert Jews to Christianity, and he himself rejects the authority of the New Testament, but accepts Jesus as a way for the Gentiles only, while rejecting any belief in the supernatural aspect of Jesus' life and ministry.

#### SUNDRIES

**JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR:** A review of a book authored by Geoffrey Wigoder, published by Manchester University Press, which the reviewer, David Geffen, recommends as an "incisive summary of the major trends in the dialogue process, and of the attitudes of both Christians and Jews in this important area of religious interaction." (JERUSALEM POST 14 JUL 89)

**"JESUS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE?":** Under this heading, Edward Ullendorff of Oxford, writing in the JOURNAL OF JEWISH STUDIES (Autumn 1988), describes and briefly analyzes a multilingual Jewish art calendar in Hebrew, Amharic and English for the year 5748 (1987-88) produced in Israel and entitled "ETHIOPIAN BIBLE DRAWINGS". He attributes its production to "the recent influx of Falashas (Ethiopian Jews) into Israel," and notes the Christian character of the art and some of the Amharic text. He also analyzes a booklet in Hebrew and Amharic entitled "THE MESSIAH OF ISRAEL", which has a clearly missionary intent and notes several errors and discrepancies between the Hebrew and Amharic text. "Altogether a curious missionary tract whose general drift and tendency are transparent," he concludes, and expresses sympathy for the Falasha predicament, "caught between so many conflicting and bewildering influences and pressures."

**"GOOD FOR THE JEWS": JAMES FINN, BRITISH CONSUL IN OTTOMAN JERUSALEM.** The Jerusalem weekly KAWL HA'IR (23 JUN 89) published a two-page feature article about the 19th century devout Christian consul in Jerusalem. Mrs. Finn was the daughter of Alexander McCaul, a prominent missionary among the Jews. She shared with her husband a strong interest in the Jewish people. Both the Finns were involved in Jewish communal affairs in the Holy Land and were highly regarded by the local Jewish community, promoted industry, education, agriculture and the Hebrew language, as well as extending protection of the Crown over many of the Jews. Some of his philanthropic enterprises were opposed by conservative rabbinic leaders.

Recently several chests full of documents, diaries, letters, reports and photographs from archives belonging to the Finns were brought to Israel from England, and they are housed at the Yad Ben-Zvi Institute for research of the history of the Land of Israel.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS EXCITE CHRISTIAN WORLD:** Excavations at Tel Bethsaida have uncovered a fishermen's house which has stirred the Christian world. Bethsaida has a central place in the Christian Scriptures as the place where Peter, Jesus' successor, was born. Peter founded the Catholic Church, and Jesus performed several miracles there. Details of the excavations have been reported to Pope John Paul. Other discoveries on the site (fishing implements from the 1st Century) have ended the long-time dispute among scholars concerning the location of the Christian Bethsaida. The article also notes that 60% of Israeli tourism is Christian, of which 44% visit for religious reasons, according to Tourist Minister Gideon Patt. (AL HAMISHMAR, 18 JUN 89)

**"JESUS WAS REALLY A GOOD JEW":** It has been claimed that the Antiquities Department of the Ministry of Education and Culture was delaying the deciphering and publication of some Dead Sea Scrolls because of religious sensitivities which might be offended by material in them. Col. Amir Drori, Director of the Department, has responded: "There is no basis to this claim. On the contrary, most scholars believe that the scrolls prove the antiquity of the roots of Judaism, and that Jesus was really a good Jew ... By the year 1996, publication of all the scrolls will be complete. (YEDIOT AKHRONOT, 28 JUN 89)

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