

# THE CASPARI CENTER MEDIA REVIEW

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Attas Kai Kjær-Hansen

Jerusalem, July 31 1996

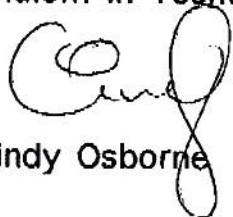
Dear Subscribers,

A subject which has been attracting much media attention lately is that of civil marriage (or the lack thereof) in Israel. While none of the articles written pertain directly to Christians (and therefore are not included in this review), it is nonetheless an issue which will affect local believers. Since the establishment of the state, the only authority which can legally marry citizens of Israel is the orthodox rabbinate. Because of the mass immigration from the CIS and the proliferation of mixed marriages, many citizens are not considered Jewish by the rabbis and are therefore classified as halachically "unfit to marry." The only options available to these people are to go abroad for a civil marriage or to simply not get married, which will create yet another generation of those who are "unfit to marry."

As anyone can see, Israel desperately needs to provide alternatives for the many non-, half-, and secular Jews who for whatever reason cannot or will not be married by the rabbinate. The main objection raised by the orthodox is that if civil marriage is institutionalized it will be impossible to know who is a genetically and ritually pure Jew, and so they will run the risk of marrying the wrong person and eventually the whole nation might be contaminated.

It seems to me that those who consider a prospective mate's bloodline to be of supreme importance could simply refuse to marry anyone who could not prove the purity of their Jewish heritage. This would maintain a ritually clean Jewish community without infringing on the basic civil rights of those who do not fulfill or agree with the orthodox criteria. This same approach of "live and let live" might settle the controversy over non-orthodox conversions as well... but that's a whole new can of worms, and I'm not going to open it.

Shalom in Yeshua,



Cindy Osborne

## FIGHTING MISSIONARIES IN ISRAEL TODAY

Yated Ne'eman English Edition, July 12 1996, by M. Shapiro

"Times have changed. Missionaries today ... no longer dress in cloaked habits, and they no longer lurk in the shadows waiting to kidnap a Jewish child.... No, today's missionary in Israel has to be a little more sophisticated than that...."

Thus begins a three page expose of "missionary activity" in Israel, complete with photos of offending centers for such activity. The article speaks mostly of the tactics of Messianic Jewish evangelists, who delude their "victims" into believing that they can believe in Jesus and still remain Jewish. This, they say, is possible due to the spiritual emptiness and lack of Jewish education of most secular Israelis. "Sabra" (Israeli born) evangelists are cited as being the "most dangerous" and largely responsible for the growing number of Messianic Jewish congregations in Israel. (Editor's note: Praise God!) Mossad Maccabi, an anti-missionary organization, is quoted as estimating that 20,000 Israelis practice a religion other than Judaism. (No mention is made, however, of the thousands who practice various New Age and Eastern religions...)

The activities of the anti-missionaries are also chronicled, including the following incident: "...a ... reverend operating in Israel was scheduled to baptize 30 Jews on the shores of Lake Kinneret. The information was circulated to ... anti-missionary organizations, and each began to draw a plan of attack. On the appointed day, the honorable reverend experienced some untimely engine trouble..." (Coincidence? I doubt it....) In any case, when the reverend finally arrived the harassment continued with someone video-taping the participants without permission, and others engaging them in philosophical conversation and persuading them to cancel their planned baptism. The article also boasts of the anti-missionaries' success in driving potential theater-goers away from performances of the opera "David and Bathsheba." And, of course, the usual complaint against the legal authorities is repeated: that enforcement is lax (or non-existent) due to political expediencies and the desire to please foreign governments. The attorney general is said to have stated that he has no intention of enforcing the existing anti-missionary laws, so that "...even if a missionary is videotaped as he stands by the door of a church offering money to anyone who will enter, legal action will not be brought against him" (Yated Ne'eman). Not a likely scenario, even without the threat of prosecution.

## SAVE MY CHILDREN!

Yom L'Yom, June 19 1996, by S. Amrani & Y. Ohion; also July 18 1996

This article starts off with the story of a man whose estranged wife, a convert to Judaism, returned to Christianity and left Israel with their children, who are considered Jewish. The main problem presented by this article is not which parent is fit to raise the children (according to social workers the mother is), but the fact that the mother would raise them as Christians. According to Israeli law, it is illegal to influence a minor to change his or her religion - even your own child, unless both parents give their written consent. This law, and others like it, are the main focus of the article, which decries the lack of enforcement on the part of the authorities. For example, while everyone knows that it is illegal to offer material incentives to induce someone to convert, it is almost impossible to prove because the law prescribes an almost equal fine for accepting an incentive! Thus reporting such an event would lead to self-incrimination. In the history of the state, no one has ever been prosecuted for breaking the laws against evangelism, in part because the police have a standing order not to investigate or press charges without the consent of the Attorney General.

The article also describes the Messianic Jews and their activities, and lists addresses of various congregations in the country. They are accused of wearing "normal" clothes instead of priests' robes, in order to hide their true identity, joining the army in order to prove that they are real Israelis, and volunteering in service organizations in order to evangelize. In the last section, people are warned against trying to fight the missionaries themselves, because of the danger of getting caught in their web. Instead they are encouraged to donate money to the anti-missionary societies, and to support enforcement of existing laws.

The follow-up article includes a few more details about the child custody case mentioned above, most notably that the Israeli High Court of Justice struck down the rabbinical court's order that the mother be prevented from leaving the country. The article goes on to call for donations to a fund to help the father appeal the court's decision.

### INVESTIGATION OF MISSIONARIES ORDERED

Ha'Tzofe, July 19, by Y.M. Yosef; Ha'Modia, July 21 1996

The Attorney General has ordered an investigation of Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram and Scott Wilson, the organizers and main speaker at last April's Messianic Youth Conference (see "The Soul Hunters" in the May 15 1996 edition of the Media Review or in Mishkan #24). The decision to investigate the missionary activities of the suspects was taken following an appeal to the AG by Yad L'Achim, based on the article "The Soul Hunters" in the daily Yediot Aharonot. According to the article, the Sorko-Rams and Wilson took advantage of the emotional hardships of attending youth, and offered material incentives to convince them to convert. If convicted they face a jail sentence.

Editor's note: In an interview soon after publication of the aforementioned article, the Sorko-Rams said that no minors attended the conference without written permission from their parents, and that the vast majority were from believing families. I'll keep you posted on this case.

### THE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS' CRUSADE

Ha'Modia, Yated Ne'eman English Edition, The Jerusalem Post, June 28; Yated Ne'eman, July 15; Ha'Tzofe, July 17 1996

With varying degrees of objectivity (or hysteria) these three feature articles tell of the Southern Baptist Convention's statement in support of Jewish evangelism. Ha'Modia's story includes a description of missionaries who are obviously Jehovah's Witnesses, not Baptists, and testimonies of Jews who narrowly escaped the wiles of Christian evangelists. The article in Yated Ne'eman warns against the threat to uneducated Jews, especially since, as the article states, the Baptists plan to adopt the methods of Jews for Jesus and cloak the Christian message in Jewish symbolism.

The Jerusalem Post, in the most balanced article of the three, includes a lengthy interview with Tom Hocutt, the administrator of the Baptist Convention in Israel. He is allowed to present his views clearly, saying for example that evangelism is simply sharing what we believe with the people around us. In contrast, Clarence Wagner of Bridges for Peace rejects the idea of Jewish evangelism. However, both he and Tom Hocutt affirm that the recent statement is simply a reiteration of what the Baptists have always believed, not a new anti-semitic trend.

The Jerusalem Post also ran some opinion pieces, originally published in the USA, about the Baptist declaration:

### IT'S OFFENSIVE, IGNOBLE AND UGLY

The Jerusalem Post, July 19 1996, by Leonard Garment (orig. in the New York Times)

This piece takes the historical tack in reaction to the Baptist declaration, citing the many times that Jews have suffered for their religion. The author's main concern is that the evangelistic attitude hides a contempt for the Jewish religion and people, holding them to be inferior because of their lack of belief in Jesus. This in turn may evolve into outright hatred, persecution and forced conversion of the Jewish people, as has happened in the past.

## **JEW'S NEED NOT FEAR CONVERSION EFFORTS**

The Jerusalem Post, July 28 1996, by Alan Dershowitz (United Feature Syndicate, Inc.)

This writer's response to the Baptist's declared desire to convert him was "go ahead and try." He feels that, if anything, the push for Jewish evangelism may be healthy for a Jewish community whose main problems are lethargy and secular assimilation. As long as there is strict separation between church and state, as in the American constitution, Jews have nothing to fear from free competition in the market-place of ideas, and may in fact gain some impetus to keep their traditions alive.

## **PREPARE FOR THE MISSIONARY ASSAULT**

Ma'ariv, July 21, by A. Bender; Ha'Tzofe, July 17 1996

In addition to the Baptist declaration, the Jewish community is "under attack" by other evangelical Christians who believe that 94% of all Jews must accept Christ by the year 2000 in order for redemption to come. Chosen People Ministries, operating out of N. Carolina in the USA, has published a book entitled "How to present the Messiah to your Jewish friends." This free guide includes an explanation of the need for Jewish evangelism, general information about Jews, and practical tips such as alternatives to words which are likely to cause an immediate negative reaction in Jewish listeners. It also details ways to earn a Jewish person's trust (showing an interest in Judaism and Israel, for example) before presenting him with the gospel.

In response, the head of the World Jewish Congress warned that this trend would hurt interfaith relations in Israel and the diaspora, and called it "opportunistic and cynical abuse by the religious right of world Jewry's identity crisis and assimilation problems."

## **THE MISSION HAS NO AMULETS**

Kol Ha'Ir, June 21 1996, by E. Shai

...But it does have songs, a pastor named Cohen, warmth, and acceptance. Thus reads the subtitle of an article describing a visit to a worship service at the King of Kings congregation in Jerusalem. The write-up, accompanied by a photo of people worshipping, is fairly accurate, but seems a bit sarcastic. For instance, the service is continually referred to as a "show" controlled by the various "key persons" on stage, the drummer is said to have a strained relationship with the art of photography, and at the sound of the last trump members of the congregation will "fly into the air without even getting dizzy...".

The writer details each stage of the service, from worship to sermon to announcements and prayer, and even gives the time and place for anyone interested. The article concludes with the opinions of S. Golding (of the Institute of Biblical Polemics) and the Lev L'Achim anti-missionary organization, both of whom denounce King of Kings as a dangerous missionary group. The administration of King of Kings apparently did not give their reaction to the article before it went to the press.

## **YAD L'ACHIM TO BATTLE THE "KEREN ACHVA MESHICHIT" WHICH IS HOLDING A MISSIONARY CONFERENCE AT YAD HA'SHMONA**

Yom Ha'Shishi, June 28 1996

Yad L'Achim, an anti-missionary organization, declared a public war against the "Keren Achva Meshichit" (Messianic Brotherhood Fund). This declaration was triggered by the Fund's planned youth conference, which Yad L'Achim says is designed to lure unsuspecting soldiers and young people into a missionary trap. The anti-missionaries threatened to hold a large demonstration at the entrance to Yad Ha'Shmona and at a meeting place for those needing transportation from Jerusalem in order to discourage people from attending.

Editor's note: according to a resident of Yad Ha'Shmona, the protest never materialized.

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## WOMEN REQUIRED TO WEAR "MODESTY COVERINGS" IN THE WESTERN WALL PLAZA

Yedi'ot Aharonot, July 14 1996, by I. Eichner

Women are now being given special garments to wear over their own clothes in the outer plaza of the Western Wall, and not only in the prayer area as was previously the custom. Even women who are simply passing through the plaza are required to cover their shoulders and legs, as it is considered a holy place by the local rabbi.

In another development, tour guides have complained that Christian tourists have been harassed by orthodox Jews who demanded that they remove their crosses at the Wall. The administrator of the holy places has promised that such attacks will be stopped.

## CHRISTIANS ARE NO. 1 FOR DONATING ORGANS

The Jerusalem Post, June 30 1996

In the Post's weekly health column, it is reported that 75% of Israeli Christians are willing to donate organs for transplant, while only 40% of Jews are willing to do the same, because they mistakenly believe that it is against Jewish law. In the same column there is a write-up about the day center for cancer patients, donated by a Dutch Christian organization, which was mentioned in the last edition of the media review.

## NEWSPAPERS USED IN THIS EDITION:

Yated Ne'eman: English language religious/political weekly, published in Jerusalem. Very hostile to believers.

Yom L'Yom: Jerusalem religious/political weekly. Less interested in believers than other orthodox papers.

Ha'Modia: Jerusalem religious daily. Very hostile to believers.

Ha'Tzofe: Tel-Aviv religious/political daily. Hostile to believers.

The Jerusalem Post: National English language daily, published in Jerusalem. Tends to the religious right, but careful and relatively fair towards believers (has a large Christian readership). Friendly towards right-wing political Christianity.

Yated Ne'eman: National religious/political daily published in Bnei Brak. Very hostile to believers.

Ma'ariv: National daily, published in Tel-Aviv. Politically tends to the right, mostly objective towards believers (depends on the reporter).

Kol Ha'Ir: Jerusalem leftist weekly. Pro-Palestinian, anti-religious, objective towards believers.

Yom Ha'Shishi: Jerusalem religious weekly. Hostile to believers.

Yedi'ot Aharonot: National daily published in Tel-Aviv. Attitude to believers depends on the reporter.