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From the Coordinator

“An invasion of their field . . .”

The London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, popularly referred to as The London Jews Society (LJS), was founded on February 15, 1809. But the “foundation stone” for this society was actually laid 200 years ago, on August 4, 1808, with the founding of an association named *The London Society for the purpose of visiting and relieving the sick and distressed, and instructing the ignorant, especially such as are of the Jewish nation.*

This association with a long name was to have a short life, however. When W. T. Gidney, LJS’s historian for the first 100 years, writes about this, he describes it as “a wrong beginning” because they did not consider the “Apostolic arrangement, that some should go to the ‘the Circumcision,’ and others to ‘the Uncircumcision.’” In February 1809, a new beginning was made with the founding of LJS. But alas, these initial problems were not just about theology, missiology, and strategy – they were also about human beings, which means they were also about competition! For in the intervening months the Church Missionary Society (CMS, formed in 1799) had objected to the founding of the new society with the long name, because it, in Gidney’s words, was “an invasion of their field.”

The way I see it, one does not necessarily enter a collision course with the “Apostolic arrangement” with mission societies that direct their efforts to both Jews and Gentiles. But one does enter a collision course with the scriptural call to mission if Jews are not included in the mission.

And then we can smile a little that the society with the long name was to have so short a life because it was considered “an invasion” of CMS’s field. Or we can use the words positively, in a self-critical way, to remind ourselves that *all* mission is carried on by *human beings*, who are imperfect; that it *is* possible to see new initiatives as competition to existing initiatives, and that all mission activities require money, friends, and fundraising. It goes without saying that this is also the case with Jewish evangelism.

May LCJE as a network see new initiatives not as negative invasion, but as positive inspiration!

Kai Kjær-Hansen

The cover of the previous LCJE Bulletin was printed as issue 91, February 2008. Actually, it was issue 92, May 2008. Sorry for the mistake!

What More Do We Need – Or What Can We Afford to Lose?

By Bodil F. Skjøtt, Danish Israel Mission

Recently I went to see Inge Becker on the occasion of her birthday. I had not met her before, but back in the 60s she worked at the office of the Danish Israel Mission, and now she was turning 100. I found her resting on her bed, her hearing aid turned off and her teeth on the table next to her. She is almost blind, so glasses no longer help. But when she smelled the flowers I brought her and she understood that I was connected with the Danish Israel Mission, her face lit up and she said, "Thank you, and thank you Jesus."

Parts of Inge's life story resemble that of many other Danish Jewish people, in that her parents came from Russia around 1900. The father, Leopold Aschkenasi, was born in 1881 into an orthodox family. In an early age he heard the gospel. He reacted to it with strong opposition, was challenged to read the New Testament himself, and as a result was thrown out of his room by his Jewish landlord. Having lived in several places, he and his wife ended up in Copenhagen, where he met Philemon Petri, a Jewish believer, and later came to faith and was baptized in 1907. Only years later, and after their divorce, his wife – Inge's mother – and Inge and her two younger sisters were all baptized.



Inge's childhood included summer camps organized by the Danish Israel Mission. As a young woman she had a broken engagement, because she wasn't good enough for her fiancé's family. During WW2 she escaped to Sweden together with the rest of the Danish Jewish community. Back in Denmark, she helped her mother run a clothing store in Copenhagen, and her last working years were at the office of the Danish Israel Mission.

I know all this not because Inge told me when I visited with her, but because I have read about it. I tried to have her tell me her story, but either she no longer remembers or she has lost the words she needs to tell it. All I got when I asked was a smile and "Sorry, I can't remember," or "I'm not sure."

But when I asked if we should pray she was not uncertain, and did not have

to look for the words. They were all there: "Dear Lord Jesus, thank you, send us your blessings, give us your peace, and keep us in your good hands."

And then she told me she was tired, thanked me for the visit, and said that she would keep me no longer.

My visit and our conversation had been very short. She lacked the words to communicate and she was hard of hearing. She had just a few things in her room. When the social workers moved her, they did not think it was necessary to bring her things along, not even her Bible. Why bother when she no longer reads? As I walked out the door I thought to myself: She does not have much of anything. No sight, no hearing, no strength. But she has one thing: She still has what it takes to keep her connection and conversation with God going. The words of prayer were still there. What more do we need when we turn 100? And what can we afford to lose, even if we are younger than 100, as long as we have what it takes to stay connected with him who always seeks to keep the conversation going?

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A Look at the Response to *The Gospel and the Jewish People – An Evangelical Statement*

By Susan Perlman, Jews for Jesus



In the last issue of the LCJE Bulletin we included the statement published by the World Evangelical Alliance in the March 28th New York Times. Here are some reactions to the statement.

LCJE members – including our LCJE president, Dr. Tuvya Zaretsky, and the late Dr. Murdo MacLeod – took part in the Willowbank Consultation on the Gospel and the Jewish People in 1989. This consultation was chaired by Dr. Vernon Grounds and included a blue ribbon panel of theologians, including Dr. J. I. Packer and Dr. Walter Kaiser. They produced a watershed document that advocated, in irenic terms, the need of a gospel witness to Jewish people. It can be accessed in full on our LCJE website. The document was widely reported on at the time, and served as a blow to those who thought evangelicals would buckle on this issue. Christianity Today reflected on the

media attention in an October 8, 1990, article:

When thousands of evangelical pastors, theologians, teachers, and other Christian leaders gathered at Lausanne II in Manila last year, the outcome was a significant theological declaration, the Manila Manifesto. Lausanne II's highly professional press office issued daily releases about developments during the ten days of meetings.

Just months before, a small group of 15 evangelical scholars met in Willowbank, Bermuda, under the sponsorship of the World Evangelical Fellowship, to draft a two-page, theological document on the appropriateness of Christians evangelizing Jews. The gathering did not enjoy the services of a full-time press office.

Guess which group got more press coverage?

But here we are, nearly two decades later, and there are other evangelical voices which seem to be either putting forth two-covenant theology, replacement theology, wider hope theology, anonymous Christian theology, or variations on the above, or just seem to lack discernment on how a marginalization of Jewish evangelism has implications for the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.

Some well-known pastors and Christian influencers are quick to endorse those who stand opposed to Jewish evangelism or to not endorse those who do engage in effectively reaching Jews with the gospel. Some do so because they are flattered by the attention rabbis bestow on them. Others think that standing with those who believe in Jewish evangelism might jeopardize their friendship with these rabbis. Either way, Jewish evangelism is hurt and evangelism of the nations is weakened. As articulated in LOP 60, "If Jesus is not the Messiah for the Jewish people, then neither is He the Christ for the nations."

That is why the current, briefer document, signed by other well-known pastors and Christian influencers, was so needed at this time. The statement appeared in the three leading Christian magazines in the U.S. – Christianity Today, Charisma, and World Magazine – last May. It appeared in The New York Times on March 28, and in The Washington Post on June 26.

The first response came in the form of a press release from the Anti-Defamation League calling the statement "offensive" and "insulting." Abraham Foxman, national director of the

Anti-Defamation League, who makes a living at articulating how offended and insulted he is by most things Christian, also said that he found it “especially odious” that the signers of the statement “defend the duplicitous proselytizing of Jews by groups such as Jews for Jesus and so-called ‘Messianic Jews.’” He also said that the statement contradicted the sentiments of Billy Graham, whom he quoted as having said in 2000, “I have never targeted Jews.” Foxman’s intemperate remarks were fodder for some spirited articles that followed.

An Op-Ed piece by Ethan Felson titled “Evangelical ad was wrong” appeared a day later in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. This is the Jewish counterpart to the Associated Press or Reuters, and is tapped into by most Jewish weekly publications. A few choice comments: “The ad denies that it is deceptive for Jewish converts to Christianity to identify as Jewish. We disagree. While there is much that we debate in our wonderfully diverse Jewish community, there is no ‘wiggle room’ on this matter.” And, “It is in my opinion, theologically arrogant to prescribe how another faith community should define itself.”

Not to be outdone, Shmuley Boteach, writing in The Jerusalem Post, said, “A serious blow was dealt to the Jewish-evangelical alliance with the publication in the March 28 New York Times of a full-page ad by the World Evangelical Alliance representing hundreds of evangelical churches, organizations, and leaders, some being among the most prominent in the country affirming their intention to proselytize Jews.” He went on to say, “The Jewish community must respectfully but forcefully respond to our Christian brothers and sisters as to why proselytizing Jews is a bad idea.” He even went so far as to say that Jesus would want the evangelization of Jews to cease.

*This is not about
competing religions.
It's about an
invitation to Christ.*

I think it is fair to say that Jewish community leaders recognized the importance of this statement and reacted accordingly. How the Christian community reacted was as important. After all, the statement was drafted and signed to get the word out to Christians in the pew, to encourage them in their witness to Jews and to curb the theological drift they are hearing all too often from their own pulpits.

It was especially encouraging to see the full text of the statement in the Church Times, a major Anglican newspaper in the UK. Joel Edwards, general secretary of the UK Evangelical Alliance, an umbrella body for most evangelicals in the country, said, “Christians recognize their spiritual ancestry and pedigree, rooted in Judaism. That accounts for our value and respect for the Jewish people. But at the same time, we believe the Christian faith, and its historic commitment to share Christ is in no way incompatible with, and in fact is driven by, our deep respect for our Jewish brothers and sisters. This is not about competing religions. It’s about an invitation to Christ, which may or may not be received or accepted.” When the British Board of Deputies was asked by the Church Times to comment, it declined to do so. I’m glad our American Jewish leaders don’t look across the pond for guidance in this area.

The issue also produced some good articles in Christianity Today thanks to one of its editors, Stan Guthrie, who wrote an opinion piece, followed by an online dialogue with a Chicago-area rabbi and a dialogue on National Public Radio. Charisma magazine mentioned the statement in its news briefs, The Christian Post did a write up online, and WEA director Geoff Tunnicliffe – the sponsor/endorser of the statement – went on record with the following statement:

Increasingly Jewish evangelism is being marginalized and even dismissed as irrelevant, inappropriate, unethical, or deceptive by some segments of the Church. . . . It is our hope that it will be received in the spirit it is intended by the non-evangelicals who see it. Namely, that it is a statement of friendship and profound respect for the Jewish people.

I'd like to close with an especially gratifying opinion piece in The Jewish Week, by Rabbi Gary M. Bretton-Granatoor. After briefly summarizing the statement, he directs his comments to his "Jewish co-religionists":

In sum, our Evangelical friends state with clarity that they believe in the Messiahship of Jesus and that they believe it is incumbent upon them to share this "good news" with their Jewish friends. They acknowledge that deception or coercion in evangelism is wrong, but they think that using missionaries who were born Jewish and who continue to insist that they are Jewish is legitimate. They believe that their faith and commitment to Scripture compels them to carry forth this mission.

He goes on to say this: "They have every right to believe this and they have every right to make this a priority. I, for one, am glad that they choose to do so, openly and without deception or coercion. The question is not what they do – but what do we do and how do we react . . . It is time to have confidence in ourselves. If we are concerned about the impact of the missionaries, it should only be because we have not done a good enough job to educate our people."

As a movement, we need to be grateful that we have so many Christian leaders from different denominations, in different parts of the world, and in different spheres of Christian ministry, who publicly identify with the cause of Christ among our people. It is especially heartwarming to have had Doug Birdsall, leader of our parent body, LCWE, put his name to this document. To all these brothers and sisters, we are most appreciative.

*Susan Perlman
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Reflections on a Month in Israel

By Mitch Glaser, Chosen People Ministries

Introduction

If there's one thing that everybody agrees on, it is that the Messianic movement has grown exponentially in the last 10 or 15 years. No matter what difficulties Israeli believers are facing, there is no question that the growth of this dynamic movement is the key challenge.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Messianic movement in Israel is alive and well. And I do mean well – although many of the Israeli believers feel overwhelmed by the growth



and feel they should be further along in developing this movement. But from an outsider's perspective, and coming from one who has been involved in the

development of the Messianic movement and Jewish missions community in the United States for more than 35 years, I think that the Israelis have done a wonderful job of "coping" with the growth of the last few years.

I am grateful that the editors of the LCJE bulletin asked me to share my reflections based on my last 6 weeks in Israel. At first I thought that my perspective would be quite superficial, because I do not live or minister regularly in the land – but under-

standing that I am an outsider looking in, I hope you will find some value in what I write.

The Character of the Messianic Community

Numbers

The estimated number of believers I continually hear from leaders in the Land is between 10,000 and 15,000. Is this accurate? We cannot really tell, as there has not been a scientific survey determining the number of believers in Israel.

What is even more important than the numbers is trying to understand the character and makeup of the congregations. There is no doubt that the immigration of more than 1 million Russian Jewish people to Israel has made a significant impact on the number and nature of the body of Messiah in Israel.

Except for a few congregations, most of the Messianic works in Israel have grown dramatically because of the influx of Russian Jews and Gentiles who are already believers, and because of the Russian Jews who have come to faith in the Land.

I believe the first wave of ingathering is over, and that the hard work of discipleship and growth is ahead. We have definitely seen an increase in the number of Sabras coming to faith – particularly in congregations like Shemen Sasson in Jerusalem and

in the work of the Sorko Rams in Tel Aviv, as well as through the various ministries of Peniel in Tiberias.

I am sure I have missed a number of the congregations where many Sabras – especially Israeli young people – are coming to know Yeshua. But in general, the dynamism of the last 10-15 years has primarily been among Russian Jews, although this is certainly now beginning to spill over to many young Israelis who are searching.

Theology

The Messianic movement in Israel is a reflection of the worldwide Messianic Jewish movement. In Israel we have Messianic Jews who were more traditionally Jewish, less traditional, Calvinistic, Arminian, Charismatic, Brethren, Baptist, and Lutheran – representatives of a whole range of theological positions.

This is not to say that there is not a growing sense of unity within this diversity of theological positions. I would say that unity, despite differences in theological positions, is common. Israeli believers are more inclusive of a wide range of theological positions – more than in North America, because there are fewer believers in Israel. There do not seem to be sharp divisions over some of the theological issues that divide believers in other countries.

But that doesn't mean that all is "wonderful" in Israel. There have been recent challenges to what most believers would consider "core doctrines." Issues such as the deity of Yeshua and the triune nature of God, the role as well as the authority of Rabbinic Judaism and therefore the authority of Scripture, are being debated by some, but the mainstream body does not even enter the debates. There have been a number of encounters among leaders in Israel where individuals and groups are seeking clarification on these various core doctrines.

Jewishness

There is no doubt in my mind that the "hottest issue" among believers in Israel today is only "quasi-theological." In many ways, the controversy that is growing – and sometimes boiling over – is about Jewish identity and how it is understood and expressed in the Messiah.

Certainly, there are theological elements to these issues, such as "are we obligated to keep the Torah?" And again, "what is the authority of rabbinic tradition in the way we live our lives?" I will not downplay the importance of these issues as theological matters. But, in my hours upon hours of conversations with Israeli believers and leaders, it seemed clear to me that some Messianic Jews are in the

process of shifting from a nationalistic identity to a more “religious Jewish” identity. And some are very much against this trend!



I believe that many within the body of the Messiah and Israel are beginning to work through these issues, whereas in the past these types of things have been relegated as “Diaspora Messianic Jewish issues.”

The U.S.-based Hashivenu group had a small consultation in Israel this summer, and their presence engendered quite a bit of discussion on these matters. However, I do not believe the Hashivenu group provoked these issues. These discussions have been going on for some time, and the role of the Jewish religion in a more traditional sense is something that many believers are trying to figure out.

National Identity

Many within the Messianic movement in Israel have been content to find their Jewish identity in Israeli nationalism. It is interesting for an outsider to see that whether or not Israeli Messianic Jews take a more traditional Jewish view of observance and lifestyle or not, Israeli nationalism is still at the core of their identities. It is also at the core of their testimony.

I have heard time after time the argument that goes like this, “We are Israelis, we serve in the army, we pay our taxes, we care about our nation, and therefore we are Jews. Even if we believe in Jesus as the Messiah we should be recognized as Jews.”

The above seems to be a consistent argument throughout the Messianic movement in Israel, irrespective of how this is manifested in the life of faith.

Ministries

There is now a vast array of ministries operating in Israel. Beth Sar Shalom – Chosen People Ministries – conducts a network of activities from congregational planting and leadership training to benevolence work and much more. Certainly, many Jewish missions from Jews for Jesus, CMJ, CWI, Caspari and various other wonderful ministries based in Scandinavia, CCC, IFES, the Pavilion, Israel College of the Bible, and

many others are active and growing in Israel. I cannot scientifically say that Israel now has more different types of ministries than ever before, but if I were to make a guess I would say that this is true.

What is particularly exciting to me is to see the number of indigenous Israel-based ministries that have been developing. Israelis have developed ministries to unwed mothers, drug addicts, and prostitutes, as well as soup kitchens, Messianic schools, and so much more. Jewish mission agencies, non-Jewish mission agencies, and churches across the globe are doing many wonderful things in Israel, and many have the vision for making their ministries more Israeli. This is so exciting to me, but nothing is more thrilling than to see the ministries that Israelis themselves have developed.

Congregations

Some say there are between 120 and 140 Messianic congregations in Israel. Some would want to define Messianic differently, and would argue that there are many Hebrew-speaking congregations that are not Jewish in character. Again, this is part of the internal debate within the Land over identity issues.

There might be more than this, but some of them might be Russian or Ethiopian language congregations, and thus “off the radar screen” of the

mainstream Messianic movement in Israel.

Most congregations have less than 100 congregants, but there are a sizable number that have grown larger than this. I fear naming names because I will probably leave many congregations out! Another interesting trend that seems apparent to me after spending time in Israel is the desire of most of the indigenous congregations to use Hebrew as their language of worship and proclamation. The trend is actually of going in this direction, and though for some congregations might take another generation to change from one language or another to Hebrew, it is clear that these changes are ahead.

Children's Work

There are many different youth groups sponsored by congregations throughout Israel. There are youth retreats, training programs for young people before and after they go into the army, and so much more. Almost all of these programs are created by Israelis, led by Israelis, and held for the benefit of Israelis. Because I have been there during the summer I've had a good sense of the wonderful children's camps that have had quite an impact in Israel over the last few decades. These camps have multiplied. They are held at the Finnish school, the Baptist village, and in other spots, and are strik-

ingly successful. I heard this summer that more than 50 children accepted the Lord at the Baptist village. BSS sent 37 Russian speaking young people to Germany to be part of a German Russian evangelistic summer camp. A few of these kids came to faith as well.

There is no doubt that the camping programs which have taken place over the years have produced tremendous fruit in the lives of many Israeli young people, and that some of these same people are leading the new children's summer camps today in Israel.

Publishing

There is quite a bit to say about the various publishing ministries in Israel at this time. Yanetz Press as well as HaGefen are two of the better-known publishers of Messianic books and materials in Israel. But there are others as well. Books are being published in Hebrew, Russian, and other languages, and are being used to strengthen the local body. Once again, what is most exciting to me is that the Israeli publishers are going far beyond simply translating and utilizing books by Christian or Messianic authors from other countries, and that new resources written by Israelis are being published in Israel today. HaGefen has already completed three out of four volumes of the Tanach in modern Hebrew. The designs of

these volumes for younger children are beautiful. Local congregations are also developing websites and printing excellent evangelistic materials in Hebrew, written for Israelis by Israelis.

I see indigenous publishing and the production of materials within Israel to be an area of growth worthy of prayer, nurture, investment, and cultivation.

Education

There are programs designed to disciple young people before and after the army. There are also programs to help disciple and educate young adults. BSS has offered a number of seminars on everything from evangelism to worship and youth leadership at the Messianic Center in Jerusalem. These classes have been attended by a number of Israelis. The Caspari Center offers training for Sabbath school teachers and young leaders, and a small seminary has begun among some of the Russian congregations, sponsored by a Reformed group in the United States.

Israel College of the Bible is the premier source of biblical, theological, and practical ministry training in Israel. Wayne Hilsden and the brothers and sisters at King of Kings congregation started this fine institution, now led by Erez Soref. The school has gone through a number of transitions; it now offers a Bachelor's degree in Bible as well as a Master's degree in coun-

seling. We're hoping that these degrees will be accredited so that students can go on to Hebrew University in order to earn advanced degrees.

In the near future, a cooperative educational and training program, developed by CPM and Israel College of the Bible in cooperation with BSS, will bring "top-flight" scholars to Israel, offering advanced training seminars for Israeli leadership. Six seminars are being planned for next year.

Benevolence

The Israeli government has become more open to the benevolence ministries of Messianic Jews. The MJA has done an incredible job of opening doors, as have Barry and Batya Segal and a number of others. The Nehemiah fund, the work of Joel Rosenberg and others, has also been used to develop these ministries. And I am sure I missed a few others!

There are also a variety of new local benevolence ministries that have begun doing good work such as helping wounded soldiers, providing power tools for Messianic believers starting small businesses, etc. Ministries among single mothers, as well as a number of drug rehabilitation programs, have begun indigenously as well.

Already today there is a group trying to form a rescue mission in Tel Aviv. Calvary Chapel Tel Aviv

has done a tremendous amount of work in feeding individuals on the streets of Tel Aviv.

There's no doubt that "giving a cup of water in the name of Yeshua" to Israelis who are not yet believers is going to have a powerful, profound testimony. The ministry of benevolence will provide significant ministry opportunities in the future.

Evangelism

A national evangelism committee has existed for many years among the more indigenous Hebrew-speaking congregations. This committee has helped oversee the development of outreach activities at the New Age festivals in Israel as well as being involved in a number of different outreach campaigns. Ya'akov Damkani has been involved in more direct street evangelism for many years, and continues to do so out of a wonderful new facility in Tel Aviv. Jews for Jesus continues to engage in street evangelism as well as minister through the Israeli media.

What I did notice regarding evangelism is that the whole notion of this enterprise is being indigenized as well. Many of the strategies and tactics used in Israel in the past have been mission generated – mostly from outside – rather than congregational based and generated from within the Israeli Messianic community. In effect, insiders and outsiders do evangelism differ-

ently. Israel now has a critical mass of believers, which allows for a more insider approach to evangelism.

After all, the way in which most local congregations evangelize is more personal, lifestyle and congregationally based. This seems to be the trend in Israel as the congregations grow. It's not that Israeli believers do not want to stand for the Lord or hand out tracts or use the media or more overt types of public proclamation, but there simply seems to be more of a local congregation mentality about the nature of evangelism.

Most believers in Israel would prefer doing evangelism through their local congregations. In fact, the ministries and opportunities of the local congregations and personal witnessing to friends, families, co-workers etc. are viewed as the main tools of evangelism in Israel.

The Challenges of the Messianic Community

The Messianic movement in Israel today faces many different challenges. Allow me to list a few of these and to briefly comment on them in the hope that those reading this article will bring these issues before the Lord in prayer.

Growth

The movement in Israel is growing and becoming more and more Israeli. This means that resources will need to be developed

locally – leaders trained and all that is necessary to continue and nurture a growing movement will have to be developed. The problem today is that the growth of the Messianic movement is challenging the ability of the leaders to keep pace. The growth of the movement is outstripping the number of leaders available to nurture the movement. In this, our Israeli brothers and sisters need our prayers and wisdom from God, and some help from those outside the country. However, the kind of help that the Israeli leaders need to handle a growing movement might not be what concerned outsiders want or are able to provide.

We must make sure that we ask how we can help our Israeli brothers and sisters, and avoid developing programs that might cause more work than help. I have received the impression that those outside of Israel are appreciated, needed, and welcomed, but let's make sure we offer and provide the right thing.

Leadership

Without belaboring the point, the greatest need among Israelis is for godly, trained leaders who are able to spend time mentoring and discipling the ever-increasing number of the believers within Israel. Since the need is immediate, the way in which this can be solved is not simply by sending non-

Hebrew speaking leaders to Israel or even sending money. I believe there should be some serious discussions held between those outside the Land who love the Lord and the Jewish people and want to help the growing body in Israel. In all probability, certain types of leadership training programs should be brought into Israel to help train leaders.

Marginalization

The Israeli Messianic community is still marginalized within Israeli society, although this is changing. We're grateful for the work of Calev Meyers and the Jerusalem Center for Justice. This group has done a good job of advocating for the rights of Messianic Jews who have been marginalized by the legal and political systems in Israel.

But there is still a great deal of educational and vocational marginalization to overcome. One of the reasons for this is that believers – even if they are Sabras – are still not acceptable within Israeli society. This impacts the jobs that are available to Messianic Jews – although this is changing. We now have a few Messianic Jewish lawyers and CPAs and others who studied for more professional positions. We must encourage Israeli young people who love the Lord to get educated and work in key areas of Israeli society. This is a long road, but the

right road to decreasing marginalization.

It's also possible that some of the marginalization is because so many Jewish



believers are Russian and somewhat older. Many of these are educated immigrants, but they need to know Hebrew well enough to pass various types of boards and qualification exams. So we might have many doctors, engineers, attorneys, and professors among the Russian Jewish believers, but unfortunately they are still somewhat marginalized because of their language.

Again, we see this changing because these very well-educated and bright parents are raising children who have a desire to not only serve the Lord, but also to be successful members of Israeli society. These young people are learning Hebrew, getting good jobs, and making contributions in many different ways – including

financially – to the work of the Lord in Israel.

I believe that when it comes to marginalization the future is bright – although we still need to continue to encourage our young people to obtain a good education and work towards training for better jobs. We also need to encourage and support our Israeli brothers and sisters to keep fighting for their political and legal rights, and to battle the more institutional efforts of Israeli society to marginalize Jewish believers.

Persecution

In some ways these are the best of times and the worst of times. The number of Messianic Jews has grown, but the level and intensity of persecution of Messianic Jews has grown as well.

What is so threatening about what happened in Ariel to the son of a missionary family a number of months ago is that the group who did it are probably religious Jews – although the police have not confirmed this – and they are evidently army-trained, which is clear from the way they used explosives. We do know that the constant persecution of Messianic Jews in the Negev towns and the burning of New Testaments in the small town of Or Yehuda are signs of increasing levels of persecution.

We will probably see more persecution, and it might be of a more intense



and destructive character. The believers in Israel are prayerfully concerned about these events. Some are angry, and many thought we had made more progress as a community and were surprised that something as severe as what happened in Ariel actually took place.

Israeli believers simply do not know at what level they might be targeted or where they might be attacked. There has been a police task force assigned to find the perpetrators of the bombing in Ariel, but many believers feel that these investigations have been intentionally stalled.

Unity

There is a group of leaders in Israel who have met on a regular basis to pray and worship together. The group is called "Sitting at the feet of Jesus." When it started it was primarily Israeli Jewish, but now includes some Arab

believers as well. This little group has been a wonderful force for unity within the body of the Messiah.

However, we do not want to paint an overly rosy picture of the situation. There are some significant and profound theological challenges to our unity, and some related to our Jewish identity. The question of the role of the Jewish religion in the life of Messianic Jews is the core of controversy between key leaders in the Land of Israel. There are also very different views as to what the involvement of Arab believers should be in Messianic Jewish fellowships.

These are difficult challenges, and yet leader after leader that I met was desirous of unity. I see great maturity among the leaders and a growing humility as well. But the challenges are very deep because they involve scriptural convictions and national values. We need to pray that those differences that can be resolved will be, and those which cannot will be handled in a way that preserves the unity of the body.

There has been quite a bit of media coverage of believers these days. There have been TV specials and articles in major newspapers. Some of these are positive and some negative, but there is no doubt that Messianic Jews in Israel are becoming more high profile. One of the concerns the leaders in

Israel have is that because of the higher profile of believers, it is important to present a unified front. Unity is now essential to the corporate testimony of the body of Messiah in Israel.

My feeling is that the Israeli Messianic movement is young, and that over time, godly men and women will work out some of the issues being discussed. After all, unity in the deepest sense is found in the person of Yeshua Messiah and not in creed. But it's going to take some time to work these things through. Historically, this is always true of growing movements.

An Israeli Expression of Faith

One final word on something that I think is critical to the future of the Messianic movement in Israel. Whether or not a congregation or individual is seeking to relate more deeply to traditional Judaism or to a more secular and Zionist Israeli society, there exists a deep desire among Israeli Messianic believers to have a more national and indigenous Israeli expression of faith.

I think the clearest expression of Israeli Messianic faith is found in the worship music now being written and sung in Israel. One of the joys of going from congregation to congregation was hearing the contemporary Hebrew worship music that is being developed in Israel.

Israelis believers are eager to develop music and worship that affirms their identity as Israeli believers, and not simply Jewish believers living in Israel.

The sometimes confusing line between what is Israeli and what is Jewish makes the development of an indigenous Israeli faith a challenge. My hope is that this expression will be pluralist in nature, and that believers will give one another the room to explore and develop a truly indigenous identity as Israeli Messianic Jews. This is going to take a great deal of dialogue between those who tenaciously hold positions diametrically opposed to one another on identity and religious expression issues.

Ultimately, there needs to be a willingness to respect one another while protecting the essentials. If this is

done, I believe that many different forms of Israeli Messianic identity will develop and thrive.

Conclusion

We are living in days of dynamic growth and change within the body of Messianic believers in Israel. The "body" is young – less than 60 years old! The believers live in the midst of brethren who vehemently oppose their beliefs. Israeli believers are facing the same types of Jewish identity questions as non-Messianic believers. More attention – both good and bad – is being given to the Messianic Jews of Israel. This movement is being noticed. But much needs to be done to strengthen this evident work of God in these last days. It is important for the Jewish missions community, Messianic Jews, and Gentiles who love the Jewish people to encourage this movement along. Challenges exist on every front, but it is clear from Scripture that the best days are yet to come (Romans 11:11-15, 25-28).

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Outside Influences on Judaism: What Is Authentically Jewish?

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In this paper, I am not going to offer any ground-breaking facts. But I want to lay to rest two ideas that many of us in Messianic circles have heard. The first idea is that somehow first-century Jewish culture – the culture in which Jesus lived – represents an ideal to which we should return. This idea can be expressed in the mistaken notion that the church became hopelessly paganized after the first few centuries and that therefore we are returning to something “pure” and “more Jewish” when we speak of first-century Jewish culture. The same idea can be expressed as the idea that the first-century Jewish lifestyle was that of Jesus and the apostles, so we are being more “authentic” to follow it (and them). This idea is “restorationism” in Jewish garb, similar to attempts among some churches to idealize “New Testament Christianity” – or as one author put it, bypassing the last 2,000 years of Jewish tradition in order to return to the first century.

The other idea I want to lay to rest, or at least challenge, is that the primary or chief vehicle of Jewish survival has been rabbinic Judaism, and that therefore there must be something of God’s providence in Talmudic Judaism that we should not ignore. This idea informs part of Mark Kinzer’s *PostMissionary Messianic Judaism* project.

My contention – though it is really not my contention but a commonplace of scholarship – is that Judaism and Jewish culture have been influenced from the get-go by a variety of non-Jewish (pagan and, later on, Christian and Islamic) influences. Sometimes these influences have been in areas not readily identified as “theological”: what is called “material culture,” including architecture, music, food, fashion, and so on. In other cases, the influences have helped shape theology and religious practice, expression and doctrine. At the end of the day, what emerges is that Jesus and the apostles lived in a society heavily influenced by Hellenism, while rabbinic Judaism has imbibed influences ranging from Aristotelian philosophy to Sufism. Simply put, there is no “pure” Jewish culture – and there has never been. This has implications not only for not putting first-century Judaism on a pedestal, but for current practice and theology in the Messianic movement.

The Influence of Hellenistic (Greco-Roman) Culture of the 4th-1st Centuries BCE

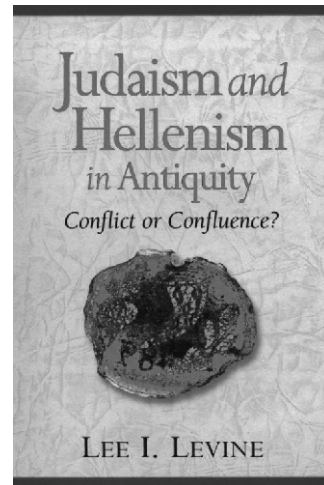
The subject of Hellenistic influence on Judaism has engaged a long roster of Jewish and non-Jewish scholars in the last century or so. You may recognize names such as Elias Bickerman, Saul Lieberman, E. R. Goodenough, Morton Smith, S. Stein, Boaz Cohen, Victor Tcherikover, Martin Hengel, David Daube – the list goes on and on. Some of them were maximizers, finding influences of Hellenism everywhere. Others were minimizers, and found it hardly at all. It is our good fortune that we now have a recent book by Lee Levine to summarize and give us a balanced picture of state-of-the-art research.¹

It is worth hearing Levine’s nuanced comments on Hellenism and Hellenization, because what he says applies also to the study of earlier and later influences on Judaism, not just those of the 4th-1st c. BCE. In fact, I will quote liberally from Levine because it is a handy reference. If you are interested, you can follow up easily enough from his footnotes.

[An assumption which scholars have made in the past] is that Hellenism was a given phenomenon, to be either affirmed or denied; it either existed or did not exist within a society. Judaea was considered either Hellenized or not, with very few more subtle distinctions being made. Thus, in the debate that was vigorously pursued throughout the 1970s and 1980s over the question of Hellenization in pre-Hasmonean Palestine, several clearly demarcated opinions emerged. On the one side were those who advocated a significant degree of outside influence (E. Bickerman, M. Hengel, and J. Goldstein); on the other were those who minimized such influence on Jewish society (V. Tcherikover, followed by S. Sandmel, F. Millar, L. Feldman, M. Stern, and M. D. Herr). According to this latter view, whatever influence existed was confined to a small elite within Jewish society.²

And:

Having recognized the existence of outside influences and their uneven impact, it is necessary to make additional assessments and distinctions in an attempt to capture the complexity of the Hellenization process. First is the degree of influence in any one particular area. Are we speaking of heavy impact, whereby large doses of Hellenistic culture were absorbed into Jewish society or parts thereof, thus creating varieties of syncretism? Hengel's priestly Hellenizers are a case in point. Or perhaps what took place was a kind of synthesis or symbiosis, whereby outside influences were comfortably integrated into a framework without any revolutionary upheavals, as was the case with the Hasmoneans and other moderate Hellenizers, according to Bickerman. Finally, many influences were clearly external and remained quite superficial, in essence merely lending a Greek label to an already existent phenomenon in Jewish society. For example, Tcherikover imagined the Jerusalem *polis* to have functioned in this way (see below, chapter II). Nevertheless, it should be clear that all three types of contact might occur simultaneously, not only within different strata of society but also with regard to different people within the same stratum. Some Jews were undoubtedly more receptive to foreign models than others. Thus, it would be quite arbitrary and misleading to define the encounter of the Greek and Jewish worlds in terms of only one of the above options.³



Levine goes on to speak about an older model of cultural influences, whereby outside influence was granted in the case of material culture – food, architecture, that sort of thing, which was considered the “shell” – but not so readily in the religious sphere, the so-called “kernel.” That, he says, is hardly an absolute distinction. Then he goes on to speak of different degrees and kinds of influence among different social classes, geographical areas, rural vs. urban settings, across time, etc.

All the above leads us to an important point, namely that “influences” vary in degree, importance, nature, and so on. Thus even to say that the church was “influenced” by paganism is to say nothing of note unless we talk about how, where, and when – in liturgy? in conception of God’s being? in architecture?

Furthermore, what is important to note is that to say there was cultural influence is not the same thing as saying there was assimilation, that is, loss of Jewish identity.

A conceptual mistake made frequently in the past equates Hellenization and assimilation. To assume a degree of Hellenization has often been construed as the Jews’ loss of national or religious identity in favor of something else. *Such a phenomenon, well known in later Jewish history and especially in modern times, was rare in antiquity, at*

least according to the sources at our disposal. There are very few cases of Jews abandoning their ethnic and religious identity in order to integrate into the larger Greco-Roman society. Whether the disappearance of many Jewish communities in later antiquity was due to assimilation, migration, persecution, or some other calamity is difficult to assess. In addressing the issue of Hellenization below, we will be dealing with various forms of acculturation, i.e., the adoption of foreign ideas, mores, and institutions and their adaptation in one form or another to a Jewish setting. As noted, this process affected practically all circles of Jewish society – sometimes more, sometimes less. It is well-nigh impossible to find any one group, whether political, social, or religious, that was not influenced in some measure by outside factors.⁴ (bold added)

Let me now mention some of the specific areas in which scholars have found Hellenistic influence. As implied above, some of these areas are in material culture, others are more “religious.” A listing of these many areas, loosely arranged on a spectrum from less to more “religious,” would include:

1. *Coins.* In the Persian and early Hellenistic periods (before the age of Herod), coins featured symbols from the outside culture: “the Athenian owl, the Ptolemaic eagle, various human figures, including Ptolemy and his wife, Berenike, an unidentified warrior, a Persian king, a winged deity, perhaps several high priests (Yadua, Yohanan), and a local governor.”⁵ In Hasmonean times, coins were minted with Greek inscriptions. Notably, in distinction from both earlier and later times, the Hasmoneans did not depict humans or animals on their coins.
2. *Burial monuments and graves.* These frequently utilized Greco-Roman architectural motifs.
3. *Names.* The second generation of Hasmoneans began adopting Greek names.
4. *Commerce.* We find imported wine from Rhodes, for example.⁶
5. *Languages.* Aramaic ranks first in usage, followed by not Hebrew but Greek – even in Jerusalem.
6. *Governmental practice.* The assumption of kingship by the Hasmoneans Aristobulus and Alexander Jannaeus as well as the rule of a queen, Salome Alexander, have been traced to Hellenistic models.
7. *Urban life.* The conversion of Jerusalem *by the Jewish High Priest* into a Hellenistic city about 175 BCE is quite significant. “Jason’s move constituted a bold step in the city’s adaptation to the wider world, a process which would be interrupted – but only temporarily – by the persecutions of Antiochus IV and the resultant Maccabean revolt.”⁷

An important side note here: we often picture the revolt of the Maccabees as a reaction of “pure” Jews vs. “Hellenized” Jews. However, the Maccabees and their successors the Hasmoneans *were as greatly Hellenized as the “Hellenized” Jews:*

It has been contended that this revolt [of the Maccabees] came in protest to the process of Hellenization in Judaea, but this was patently not the case. The Maccabees revolted in response to the persecutions imposed by the king and, according to Bickerman and others at least, at the instigation of radical Jewish Hellenizers. The fact is that the Hasmoneans themselves quickly adopted Hellenistic mores; they instituted holidays celebrating military victories (Nicanor Day on the 13th of Adar), as did the Greeks, and signed treaties with Rome and forged close alliances with the upper strata of Jerusalem society. The latter’s Hellenized proclivities – like those of the Hasmoneans themselves (see below) – are attested by names such as Alexander, Diodorus, Apollonius, Eupolemus, Antiochus, Numenius, Jason, Antipater, and Aeneas.⁸

As part of urban life, of note are the entertainment venues. In Herodian times, Jerusalem contained a theater (for music and drama), an amphitheater (for gladiatorial combat), and a hippodrome (for chariot racing).

8. *Literature.* Contemporary writings have been suggested to reflect Hellenistic genres and ideas.

So far, it may seem that most, if not all, of this list is more “shell” than “kernel.” But then we get to more specifically “religious” customs and institutions:

It has long been assumed, especially in nonacademic circles, that the one area of Jewish life unaffected by Greco-Roman culture was that of religion. Such an assertion is both true and false. If one understands religion in its narrow sense of worshiping pagan gods, erecting shrines, and participating in pagan cults, then the statement is undoubtedly correct. If, however, we understand religion as a broad area of cultural life that includes diverse forms of worship, beliefs, practices in both the home and community, artistic expression, literary activity, and more, then the above claim is patently false. In many areas that could be considered religious, most Jews, and the rabbis as well, incorporated patterns of behavior, ideas, values, and other religious models whose origins lay outside the Jewish framework. The metaphor of the shell versus the kernel is often invoked in this regard. The shell refers to social, political, and economic manifestations as being more open to influence; the kernel to Judaism, its beliefs and practices, as remaining largely unadulterated and unaffected. Taken as an absolute distinction, such a bifurcation is inaccurate and misleading. It can only be of value if we are speaking about degrees of influence.⁹

So, in the “religious” area we find:

9. *The first fruits (bikkurim) ceremonies of Second Temple Judaism contain elements modeled on pagan culture.*

Moreover, certain religious customs that appear to have crystallized during the Second Temple period are remarkably similar to those of pagan temples and clearly have their origins in the outside world. A most striking example is the ceremony of bringing the first fruits (*bikkurim*) to Jerusalem. According to the Mishnah, these ceremonies involved a festive procession into the city with the decorated horns of animals, particularly oxen.¹⁰

10. *The Sukkot celebrations (which Jesus attended in John 7) likewise contain Greco-Roman elements.*

Another example of a celebration that evolved in the later Second Temple period is the Simhat Bet Hasho'evah (water-drawing celebration) held during the Sukkot holiday. These celebrations lasted for several days and were characterized by all-night festivities that included singing and dancing, juggling and acrobatics, mass processions (often with torches), and carrying items such as willow branches and water libations. All of these activities have striking parallels in contemporary pagan holiday celebrations; clearly some sort of borrowing took place here.¹¹

11. *The hermeneutical rules – rule of biblical interpretation – used in rabbinic Judaism, such as Hillel's seven rules, likely trace back to Greco-Roman models.*

Thus, it is very possible that this area of midrashic activity among Pharisees began to develop significantly and dramatically only in Hillel's time with the aid of well-defined Greek hermeneutical rules that not only widened the parameters of such inquiry but also, by their very crystallization, motivated others to work in a similar fashion. If this be granted, then Hillel himself may well have been associated with such an innovation, and in all probability he appropriated both the methodology and terminology, heretofore unknown among Jews.¹²

12. *The ketubah, which was acknowledged as an innovation by the rabbis, and may have derived from Hellenistic Egyptian models.*¹³

13. *The Passover seder, which likely derived from a Greco-Roman institution known as the symposium.*

Based on this literature, S. Stein has suggested that the main elements of the seder ritual as incorporated in the *Haggadah* were borrowed from these symposia: questions about food at the outset of the evening; the types of food eaten before the meal (greens, apples and nuts mixed with wine); a cup of wine to initiate the evening, followed by others; a description of those in attendance at a particular symposium; a midrash referring to a classical text, around which much of the discussion focused; and concluding hymns of praise to the god or king to whom the evening was dedicated. The custom of reclining while eating is another practice at the seder that is clearly of Greco-Roman origin.¹⁴

14. *Synagogue art*. This ranged from traditional Jewish motifs, such as the menorah, to the rather startling and widespread use of the zodiac. It is not clear if in these cases the zodiac represents just an artistic decorative motif or reflects some underlying theological idea.¹⁵

15. *Synagogue liturgy*. Some suggest that communal prayer, and specific prayers such as the *Shema* and the *Amidah* (what could be more Jewish than those?), were influenced by Hellenistic models.¹⁶

Note that the nature of the influence is different in several of the previous examples:

There can be little doubt that influences from the outside were crucial in these developments: as the main source of inspiration (the *ketubah*), as a helpful stimulus and organizing factor for an activity already current among Jewish sects (hermeneutical rules), or as a new framework for a traditional Jewish practice that was being dramatically transformed by cataclysmic changes within Jewish society (the seder).¹⁷

The cultural borrowing was not to the exclusion of Judaism; again we are not talking about assimilation but a “rearrangement,” perhaps, of Jewish identity:

Side by side with the large swimming pool and the Doric-style pavilion in the most sophisticated Hellenistic aristocratic taste, we find a series of ritual baths (*miqva’ot*), reflecting the Hasmoneans’ priestly obligation to maintain their ritual purity.¹⁸

Crucially, at this early period we learn that adoption of outside culture helped Jewish survival. This cannot be stressed strongly enough:

Thus, far from stifling Hellenistic influence, Hasmonean rule was actually catalytic. To maintain diplomatic relations, support a bureaucracy, and develop a military force, Greek language and ways had to be learned. As Bickerman has aptly remarked with regard to Hellenistic native rulers who took over in the wake of the Seleucid collapse: “Cosmopolitanism was the price of independence.”¹⁹

Let me sum up so far. Jewish life, religious or not, was influenced in various degrees by Hellenistic, Greco-Roman culture. Granted, the examples so far do not seem to impinge on the foundations of Jewish faith – that there is one God, and that his Torah should be followed. We have not even touched on things such as theology proper: the person of God, the messianic hope, and so on, and how Hellenistic influence may have affected those notions or later ones such as the idea of an oral law.

But we have seen enough to ask questions such as these: Is the *seder* authentically Jewish? Is the *Amidah* prayer? For that matter, is Second Temple Judaism authentically Jewish? One cannot simply say that Second Temple Judaism is not “Old Testament Judaism,” which never existed in any “pure,” standardized, authoritative form either. To be sure, the Torah was the standard, but the cultural forms it was expressed in were never purely uniform. The culture of Moses’ day was not that of Solomon’s. Culture is complex. There is no ground for ascribing a kind of “purity” to first-century Judaism to which we would do well to return. If we learn anything, it is that Jesus and the apostles were part and parcel of their era. If there are a shell and a kernel to be had, it would be better to think of the kernel as the transcultural biblical/gospel message and the shell as its expression.

The Influence of Greek Philosophy in the Middle Ages CE

I have spent so much time on Hellenism because it has been the most widely and most accessibly discussed, meaning that we can find readable treatments of the subject in any number of places. Once we get to Greek philosophy and the middle ages, discussions tend to the more esoteric. But they are important nonetheless, and, in fact, touch critically on ideas such as the nature of God himself.

So it seems we can't get away from the Greeks. Maimonides believed that Greek philosophy and the Hebrew Bible could be harmonized; his discussion of the nature of God relies heavily upon Aristotelian thinking in interaction with the system of Islamic philosophy called *Kalam*, which latter he rejected:

Maimonides sought to bridge [earlier] interpretations with his assertion that the unity of God is unique. . . . Maimonides suggested that the intrinsic unity of God should be conceived as radically different in character from the unity of a species that is composed of discrete members, or from the unity of an organism that is made up of interrelated yet relatively distinct elements.²⁰

The present-day Orthodox Jewish view of God's unity owes more to Aristotle than most Jews realize. It is worlds apart from the conceptions of the divine that we find in the first century CE. So is it "authentically Jewish"? Was Maimonides authentically Jewish? – for as is well known, he was the subject of controversy in his lifetime.

Islamic Influences (approximately 950-1150 CE)

It is unfortunate that an important book on this subject – *Islamic Influences on Jewish Worship*, by Naphtali Wieder, published in 1947 – is only available in Hebrew. However, an English-language article on the book, by Shalom Goldman of Emory University, appeared in 1999.²¹

Goldman's article gives a brief but positive appraisal. At one time, scholarly consensus postulated Jewish (and Christian) influence on Islam; in recent times the influence has been seen to go in the other direction also. Wieder's discussion concerns nine rituals associated with prayer, such as ablutions before praying, the direction the congregation must face, and so on. While Maimonides recommended changes in liturgy in reaction against Islam, his son Abraham found value in adopting certain Islamic practices.

As is well known, the culture of Islam played a huge role in the development of medieval Jewish life, especially during the "Golden Age of Spanish Jewry." Contact with the Muslim world encouraged Jewish exploration in mathematics, medicine, and astronomy. Moreover, Arabic, not Hebrew or Aramaic, became the language of the common people, and also of many great medieval Jewish philosophers and grammarians.

In the literature of philosophy and even of theology one may say without hesitation that the influence flowed from Islam to Judaism and not the other way around. The notion of a theology, of a formulation of religious belief in the form of philosophical principles, was alien to the Jews of Biblical and Talmudic times.²²

In other words, not only the content of Jewish theology, such as the nature of God's unity, was altered under outside influence, but the way theology was done – how Jews thought about theology – was affected by currents in the Islamic world.

Here we might mention that Sufism, a branch of Islam, shows points of influence or at least contact with medieval Judaism and kabbalah.²³

Influences from Christianity

In the Byzantine period (from around Nicaea, 324 CE, to the Islamic conquest)

Elements of the synagogue liturgy – such as the *piyyutim*, which first arose in Jewish worship in the 4th-5th century CE – seem to have been adopted from Christian practice of the Byzantine period. (On the other hand, the centrality of Torah reading and study appears to have moved from synagogue to church).²⁴

There are several powerful arguments for assuming Jewish adoption and adaptation of such an outside model: this liturgical form appeared in the synagogue context soon after its introduction into the church; the Hebrew terms have exact equivalents in Greek (*piyyut* deriving from *poema* or *poesis*, and *paytan* [piyyut composer] from *poetes*); similar stylistic principles appear in both Hebrew and Greek versions; and this new practice was one of many instances of Jewish borrowing of church architectural, artistic, and even epigraphical forms.²⁵

In the Medieval period

Some ground-breaking has been done in this period by Israeli scholar Israel J. Yuval.²⁶ At the outset he tells us one of his presuppositions:

There follows another basic assumption of this book: that whenever we find a similarity between Judaism and Christianity, and we do not have grounds to suggest a shared heritage, we may assume that it is indicative of the influence of the Christian milieu on the Jews, and not vice versa, unless it may be proved that the Jewish sources are more ancient. The reason for this assumption is quite simple: minority cultures tend to adopt the agenda of the majority culture.²⁷

Not everything we identify today as “Christian” was necessarily understood as such by medieval people. The “Christian” language of ritual and ceremony of the majority culture may have been considered by the minority culture as a neutral and universal language that might be “Judaized” and subsequently incorporated into Jewish ritual.²⁸

In the case of Christianity, the influence may be “negative,” that is, Judaism developed in conscious opposition to Christian ideas. Take the idea of the Oral Law. It is not clear to me whether any Hellenistic influence was at work in the development of this idea, but clearly Christianity influenced Judaism here: “The Oral Torah,” writes Yuval, “is, in the deepest sense, a Jewish answer to the Christian Torah, the New Testament.”²⁹ That at least, is the view of a later midrash:

This is the explanation of the following passage from *Midrash Tanhuma (Ki Tisa, sec. 34)*: “The Holy One blessed be He said to the nations [i.e., the Christians]: ‘You say that you are My sons? Know, that only he with whom my *mysterion* is to be found is my son. And what is that? This is the Mishnah, that was given verbally.’” Bergman noted that the term *mysterion* is intended to refute Paul’s argument that the Christian gospel is the mystery (Eph 6:19). See M. Bergman, “The Scales are not ‘Even’” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 53 (1984): 289-92, esp. 291 n. 14a.³⁰

Whether that was an after-the-fact explanation or not, undoubtedly Judaism here developed in a negative dialectic with Christianity.

A similar development is seen in the rituals of Passover, such as the *afikoman* and the order of elements in the seder:

In light of all this, the answer to the wise son (or the foolish son, in the Palestinian Talmud) assumes new meaning, including the quotation from *m. Pes. 10.5*: “One does not add an *afikoman* after the Passover feast.” To understand its full significance, we need to examine Melito’s use of the word *aphikomenos* (which means coming or

arriving) to describe Jesus's incarnation, his appearance on earth, and his Passion: "He who, coming from heaven to the earth." . . . Melito's remarks about Jesus's *afikoman* and his suffering on earth appear immediately after his homily on the Passover sacrifice as a symbol of Jesus, and thus presenting an entire homily on the Christological meaning of the Paschal offering, the matzah, and the bitter herbs – a parallel to Rabban Gamaliel's homily. In light of that the rule that "one does not add an *afikoman* after the Passover feast" was chosen as the answer to the wise son in order to pull out the rug from under the Christian interpretation. The confrontation of the Talmudic Sages with the Christian interpretation of the ceremonies performed at the Passover feast is consistent with another change concerning the order of the meal made in the early amoraic period. During the period of the Mishnah, the meal preceded the Haggadah, while in the amoraic period it became customary to read the Haggadah before the meal; David Daube has already suggested that this change was also intended to oppose the Christian interpretation of the holiday feast and its symbols.³¹

What we are dealing with is essentially a counter-story developed under the influence of Christianity. Yuval also believes the rabbinic Messiah ben Joseph was a counter-story to "another Messiah son of Joseph," who was Jesus. The Haggadah, according to Yuval, is a counter-story to the passion narratives. The "Great Sabbath" of Passover is a counter-story to Palm Sunday, the haftarah from Ezekiel 37, on the resurrection, answering to the resurrection narrative of Easter.³²

Yuval takes care to balance the "negative" counter-story approach with a more positive one:

Yet not every ceremony, even if it exists in a polemical environment, is necessarily polemical. Its function may be specifically to internalize the language of the opponent, as in the case of the *afikoman*, by "Judaizing" the Host. In a similar vein, Ivan Marcus has recently noted a similar phenomenon in his book about the ceremony of bringing a child to school, which included eating cookies in the shapes of the letters of the alphabet, smeared with honey. Marcus notes parallels in terms of the visual and thematic similarity between eating the letters of the Torah, the Corpus Dei in Jewish eyes, and eating the Host, the Corpus Christi for Christians.³³

One point to take away from all these examples – and Yuval spends his book discussing many more – is that what was "authentically" Jewish could be defined by what it was *not*. Namely, it was not faith in Jesus as the Messiah.³⁴ In short order, though, this identity-by-negation became positive: not only did real Jews not believe in Jesus, but a real Jewish seder gave a particular order and meaning to the various elements.

In the Modern period

From 1750 on – the age of the *Haskalah*, the Enlightenment – we see quite another trend. A variety of Jewish views emerged in this period, two of which concern us here. First, there was the wholesale adoption of Christian customs in a positive way, as an entrée point for Jews into the modern world. Second, related to that, was the advocacy of assimilation among many in Western Europe, as a way forward out of the history of persecution and into acceptance and hence survival and flourishing.

The history of Reform Judaism is well known. Especially at its beginnings in Germany in the early 19th century, it deliberately borrowed elements of worship from churches in order to adapt Judaism to modern life.

The Reformers also borrowed some of the church practices they considered most beautiful. Chief among these were the use of an organ and a 'mixed' choir [of men and women] . . . Another practice Reformers borrowed was the sermon.³⁵

As with Hellenism, the adoption of such elements did not necessarily equate to assimila-

tion. Rather, adaptation and borrowing were seen as ways to strengthen Jewish identity and the vitality of Jewish life. Nevertheless, the age of Enlightenment and Emancipation also saw clear-cut calls to assimilate, to be neither a separate nation (but rather Jews would now be citizens of whatever nation they found themselves in) nor a religion (as secularism began to dominate Western European Jewry). However, it is crucial to note that assimilation was essentially a *survival mechanism* – in this case a radical one – for all intents and purposes, ceasing to be a Jew in any meaningful sense. Ironically, Jewish survival could be assured if Jews ceased being Jews, at least visibly.

I will not pause here to speak of the many influences on the Jewish community and Judaism in the past few decades – from the emergence of JUBUs (Jewish Buddhists), Jewish New Agers, HinJews, radically ironically self-mocking Jews (think *Heeb* magazine), and so on. Ironically, all these have coincided with the re-emergence of a more self-conscious Jewish identity, now clearly identifying as Jewish but open to nearly any and all influences from the surrounding culture.

The history of Jewish self-definition and identity is a large one. My aim here is much more modest, and I summarize it with two points.

First, the idea of “authentically Jewish” is highly problematic. In the end, to paraphrase Forrest Gump – “Jewish is as Jewish does.” And the Jewish community does not need to be monolithic or of one mind for that to be true, nor has it ever been. Referring to Second Temple Judaism it is now common to speak of “Judaisms,” and the same could be said for today. One implication is that calls to “return” or “restore” the Jewishness of the gospel *in first-century terms*, though well intended, are fundamentally misguided and indeed impossible of execution. It is not only that we do not live in the first-century situation; it is that authentic Jewishness varies and has always varied, and has come to expression in the context of whatever cultures Jews have found themselves among. This, incidentally, is one reason why Mark Kinzer’s program to advocate for keeping halachah based on the communal voice of the Jewish people cannot work, for it is too one-sided – the communal voice of the Jewish people changes from era to era, geographically, across socio-economic lines, and in its content. At best we have communal voices.

There is also an implication for our worship today in the Messianic Jewish community. Here I confess to something. I have never liked Messianic congregations where I felt the worship was more akin to a standard charismatic church than to a synagogue. I have felt it was “inauthentic,” certainly nothing like the worship I was used to in Brooklyn’s Reform Jewish community. Perhaps it is inauthentic, if the congregation is largely Gentile and is trying to “act” Jewish. But what of a congregation that has a strong Jewish component in membership and leadership, but inclines to that kind of worship? Is it less “authentic” than a Reform Temple? A New Age *havurah*? I have had to re-think my attitude here. (Though I will confess, my ideal Messianic congregation would resemble the Reform Temple of my youth, complete with most of the congregation exiting during the sermon for a walk or a smoke – surely a less biblical model than a “charismatic” Messianic congregation!) We need to be careful when we speak of what is authentic and inauthentic Jewish worship, for “Jewish is as Jewish does.”

One final implication also touches on the Kinzerian project. Can it really be said that keeping halachah has been the primary vehicle to preserve the Jewish people? I am not so sure. Granted, it has been a chief vehicle of preservation for some 1,750 years of Christian church history. But not only have other “philosophies,” such as assimilation and Hellenization, acted as preservatives; even halachah has not existed in its own Jewish vacuum, but has responded to outside influences, even to the point of developing counter-stories to the gospel. If that has been the salt of preservation, it is not always the kind of salt we wish to season our food with. But more than that, halachah has developed positively, not only negatively, imbibing outside influences. Does this mean that halachah is the

preservative, or rather the adaptation to the outside culture which halachah included?

To be clear here, there is much of value in these 1,750 years of Jewish thought and culture and history to which I am attracted. I do not see, though, that it can bear the weight the Kinzerian program wishes to attach to it.

As far as it being a preservative, practically every culture, including American Protestantism, has its own “halachah,” though often unrecognized – whereas in Judaism, halachah is consciously developed and discussed. Even secular Jews have their own “halachah.” The idea of social preservation is worth exploring from that vantage point, because it may well turn out that Orthodox or Conservative halachah is one subset of a larger social category applicable whether we follow Conservative or Orthodox halachah, or whether we follow a more Reform or secular approach.

At any rate, authenticity is not the simple criterion it is often made out to be. Nor, for that matter, is the phenomenon of Jewish survival and identity.

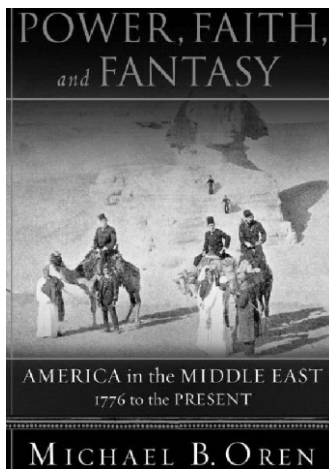
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 2. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
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 22. Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), p. 80.
 23. Daniel H. Frank, Oliver Leaman, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).
 24. *Judaism and Hellenism*, pp. 163-64.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
 26. E.g., *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*; translated from Hebrew by B. Harshav and J. Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

27. *Two Nations*, pp. 21-22.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 90 n. 140.
 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
 32. *Ibid.*, pp. 228-29.
 33. *Ibid.*, pp. 247-48.
 34. It was also polemic against the idea that the Church replaced the Jews, but my basic point remains.
 35. Eugene B. Borowitz, *Explaining Reform Judaism* (New York: Behrman House, 1985), pp. 7, 9.

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Book Review: *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*

By Lamar E. Cooper, Criswell College, Dallas



Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present. By Michael B. Oren. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007, xxiv + 791 pp., \$17.95, paper. (\$35 hardback)

It is most refreshing to find a historian who delights in reporting history instead of re-writing history. In addition, it is extraordinary to find a historian who is

willing to report the influence of Christianity in the early years of the founding of the United States, and the impact of the Christian faith on policies in the Middle East. In *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, Michael Oren accomplishes this in a delightfully readable style that keeps the reader's rapt attention, making it hard to put the book down. The focus of his history of America, in the author's own words, is to "present a detailed account of America's relations with the Middle East from the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth." This Oren does around three chosen themes: (1) Power, which is the pursuit of military, diplomatic, and financial exploits in the Middle east; (2) Faith, which explores the impact of America's religions, including Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish influences; and (3) Fantasy, which is the

mystique and romantic notions that have characterized the love affair of Americans with the Middle East.

Oren does an excellent job explaining that the religious and commercial fascination of many Americans with the Middle East in general, and Palestine in particular, was an integral part of the early history of the United States. Many Americans came to live in the Middle East as missionaries, entrepreneurs, governmental emissaries, and military advisors. These early pioneers fed the military, political, and economic interests in the region that have continued to the present.

The book is a wealthy documentation of primary sources on the early history of America's involvement in the Middle East. There are seventy-nine pages of endnotes covering the

twenty-eight chapters of the book. The bibliography extends another forty-eight pages with an excellent subject index of forty pages, a total of seven hundred and ninety one pages in all. There are five regional maps and thirty-two unnumbered pages of rare historical photographs. There is also an excellent eight-page chronology of people and events from 1776-2003, placed at the front of the book. It is an invaluable tool for grasping the flow of people, places, and events.

While not a quick read, Oren's work is fascinating. Readers will discover many surprising and delightful people and developments that still impact the relationships of the United States with the Middle East in the twenty-first century. The book is organized in seven parts. Part One, "Early America Encounters the Middle East" is a "who was who" of early American adventurers and founding fathers committed to developing ties with the Middle East. Part Two, "The Middle East and Antebellum America," presents foundational ties, hardships, military actions, and political and religious relationships between early America and the Middle East. Part Three, "The Civil War and Reconstruction," reveals the post Civil War impact on the Middle East, when veteran soldiers from both North and South took

jobs as advisors of Arab states to set up and organize their militaries.

Part Four, "The Age of Imperialism," recounts the encroachment of European nations, primarily France and England, to colonize and control the Middle Eastern territories. America's involvement was not colonial but highly influenced by the rise of Zionism. During this period the term "Middle East" was used for the first time. Part Five, "America, The Middle East, and the Great War," presents the impact of World War I on Middle Eastern affairs. Of special note were the Turkish genocide of 1.5 million Armenians, and the British occupation of Palestine. Zionists moved toward the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled, self-determination was established for Jordan, Syria, Persia, and Iraq, and missionary activity flourished. Part Six, "Oil, War, and Ascendancy," documents how the Middle East, in part, became a battleground in the struggle against the Axis powers. The importance of petroleum cemented relations between America and Saudi Arabia, as well as other oil-producing states aligned against the Axis. By the end of World War II, the birth of modern Israel was achieved with the blessing of the United States and President Harry S. Truman.

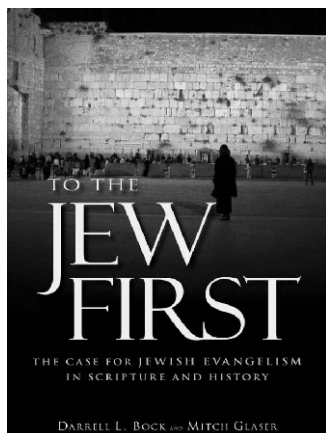
Part Seven, "In Search of Pax Americana," relates that since 1948, Israel and the United States have been allies. Every administration since Truman sought to maintain a diplomatic balance and mediate peace through three brief but major wars and numerous military incursions. As Oren succinctly puts it, "Yet, in spite of these cataclysms, the United States can be expected to pursue the traditional patterns of its Middle East involvement . . . Themes that evolved over the course of more than two centuries of America's interaction with the Middle East will continue to distinguish those ties, binding and animating them for generations" (p. 594).

Michael Oren's book is a signally important work that is a "must read" for anyone who wants more than a superficial conception of the history and complexities of the Middle East. At some points he will fast forward or backward, creating some difficulties in grasping chronology. Overall the book presents more insight into early missionary work in the Middle East than any book I have encountered. Anyone who loves the Middle East and Israel will find this book an enlightening delight.

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Book Review: *To the Jew First*

By Theresa Newell, Chairman, CMJ USA



To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, editors (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008).

For over 25 years, LCJE has provided forums – by way of national and international conferences – giving a platform for leaders in Jewish evangelism, theology, and Messianic congregational life to present and discuss papers in their fields. In the last ten years, most of those papers have appeared in downloadable format on the LCJE.net website.

In similar fashion, Chosen People Ministries sponsored two major conferences in 1999 and 2000 in two locations in the U.S.: New York City and southern Florida. This book is the fruit of these two conferences. The authors of each essay are familiar to LCJE: Walter C. Kaiser,

Jr.; Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (also the book's co-editors); Craig A. Blaising; Barry R. Leventhal; Richard L. Pratt, Jr.; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum; Arthur F. Glasser; Michael Rydelnik; and LCJE's international coordinator, Kai Kjær-Hansen, to name a few.

In an era when New Testament scholars are re-examining the topic of "Paul and the Jews," and debate swirls around "the new perspective on Paul," this book is especially timely. For example, A. Andrew Das writes at the end of his book, *Paul and the Jews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 2003):

"[Paul] adopted the aberrant position that ethnic Israel would not benefit from God's election or promises apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Should a Jew or Gentile follow Paul in his spiritual journey, a similar conversion would be necessary. But such a convert dare not proceed beyond faith in Christ to a presumptuous dismissal of ethnic Israel's place in God's plan. The apostle would excoriate any who do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah of *Israel*. 'The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable'" (Rom 11:29). (Italics are author's)

Like the Tanach, *To the Jew First* is divided into

three sections by category: Bible, Theology, and Mission. Each chapter deals with the challenges surrounding Paul's phrase "To the Jew first," from Romans 1:16. These challenges include the Church's historic misunderstanding of the phrase, the centrality of mission to the Jews in God's plan of salvation, the hermeneutics of various evangelical groups which effect their view of the Jews eschatologically, the history of modern Jewish mission and what today's mission leaders can learn from this history, and the dangers and prevalence of non-biblical theologies (such as replacement and two-covenant).

The book's title tells it all: the plan of God is that the gospel is to go "to the Jew first." As the English evangelical Charles Simeon, one of the founders of The Church's Ministry among Jewish People (CMJ) said when challenged in 1834 about his fervor for Jewish mission: "If the eight million Jews are to be as 'life from the dead' to the eight hundred million heathens, what then?" If Jewish evangelism is God's key to reaching the two billion today who have not heard the Name of Jesus, shouldn't evangelical Christians be alarmed at their neglect of this work?

The book may serve as an antidote to historic misinterpretation of Paul's phrase in Romans. The book gives opportunity to Jesus-believers, Jew or Gentile, to re-examine their hermeneutical and exegetical pre-suppositions which have ignored a primary call to Jewish mission in the Bible.

This book should be on the mandatory reading list of every evangelical theologian, biblical studies professor, pastor, and person in the pew as just such a challenge to their assumptions about the priority and urgency of taking the gospel to the Jewish people. As a worker

for 30 years with CMJ (which celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2009), I have experienced a church which has been tainted with a kind of Marcionism clothed in modern replacement and two-covenant theologies. The Bible is read as a Western book in which ethnic Israel has disappeared, even as they worship the Jew Jesus.

To the Jew First presents topics for discussion biblically, historically, and theologically which will challenge the presuppositions of many evangelical leaders. Until these leaders grasp the biblical priority of the gospel going to the Jewish people, Jewish

mission is doomed to remain a side-issue for most churches. *To the Jew First* can bring the compassionate need of the unbelieving Jewish person back on their radar screens.

Get the book – get several – read it, and begin putting copies into the hands of those who are influencing the believers you know. Order online at www.chosenpeople.com, or in the USA by phone at 800-333-4936.

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LCJE Meetings

LCJE North America

2-4 March 2009 in Phoenix
1-3 March 2010 (place to be announced later)
Contact Jim Sibley
na-director@lcje.net

LCJE CEO Conference

18-22 May 2009 in France
Contact LCJE
lcje.int@gmail.com

LCJE International

Ninth International LCJE conference is scheduled for 7-12 August 2011.

Visit LCJE's website

www.LCJE.net

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