A Profile on Jewish Missions in the U.S.A.

by Dr. Daniel Fuchs

Survey of Jewish Missions in the United States By Dr. Daniel Fuchs

The first recorded Christian-Jewish relations of Colonial America were a result of the Portuguese Inquistion. In September 1654 23 Sephardic Jews arrived in New Amsterdam. They were sure they would be well-received, after all they had helped the Dutch defend Brazil from the Portuguese. They were terribly disappointed. Peter Stuyvesant, the Dutch director general protested strongly to the Dutch West India. Company against the settlement of a "deceitful race" who professed "an abominable religion" at the feet of Mammon." Fortunately, Puritanism was making the Old Testament an open book and Stuyvesant was overruled. However, the Jews were not permitted to build a synagogue until after the British took over New Amsterdam in 1664.

The rise of Puritanism had an enormous effect on the history of missions to the Jews. It divides the Middle Ages from our times.
"Instead of maintaining, as the old Church did, that the Jewish people is utterly rejected by God, it was now recognized that Israel had still a great future."

Jakob Jocz, The Jewish People and Jesus Christ, p. 221.

The Encyclopedia Judaica expresses it:

"No Christian community in history identified more with the Israelites of the Bible than did the first generations of settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who believed their own lives to be a literal reenactment of the biblical drama of the chosen people: they were the children of Israel; the American continent

was the promised land; the kings of England were the pharaohs of Egypt; the Indians were the natives of Canaan or, alternatively, the Ten Lost Tribes; the pact of Plymouth Rock was God's holy covenant; and the ordinances by which they lived were His divine law. Since they viewed themselves as the persecuted victims of the sinful Christian establishment of the Old World, the Puritans also had a natural sympathy for the Jews of their own time, at least in the abstract. The Puritan leader Cotton Mather repeatedly referred to the Jews in his prayer for their conversion as God's "Beloved People," and the lasting influence of this attitude no doubt accounts in large measure for the striking philo-Semitism that prevailed in American life and letters long after Puritanism as such had ceased to be a vital force."

Vol. 15, pp. 1568, 1569.

Increase Mather was also intensely interested in "the conversion of the Jews." He had much influence on Judah Monis who had been a rabbi both in Jamaica and New York.

"He appears in the Boston area in 1720, and on March 27, 1722
was publicly baptized in the College Hall at Cambridge, at which
time the Reverend Benjamin Colman delivered A Discourse ...
Before the Baptism of R. Judah Monis, to which were added
Three Discourses, Written by Mr. Monis himself. The Truth,
The Whole Truth, Nothing But the Truth. One of which was
delivered by him at his Baptism (Boston, 1722). Monis'
essays are an apology and defense of his new faith, and in
support of the doctrine of the Trinity drawn from "the Old

Testament, and with the Authority of the Cabalistical Rabbies,
Ancient and Modern."

Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 12, p. 257.

The cause of Jewish Missions in America had an auspicious beginning. It was initiated by one of the founders of Yale University (Cotton Mather) and a president of Harvard (Increase Mather). Its first fruit was a Rabbi whose testimony is still honored by both Jewish and Christian communities.

The number of Jews in the U.S.A. by the time of the Revolution has been estimated at perhaps 2000 with no more than 2500 in 1790.

Shirley Moses Berne was a Jewish Christian, a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Her recent death is a loss to the cause of Jewish Christianity. In her class on Systematic Theology she submitted a thesis entitled "Missionary Theology and the Jewish People." She wrote:

"The 19th or Great Century of Christian Missions to the Jews in the U.S.: The story of the American Jews is interwoven with the growth of religious freedom in America, of Judaism as it developed in this context, of the dominant Christian Church and how it interpreted its mission, and of the resultant trends toward marriage, assimilation and conversion. Socialogically and psychologically, Allen Gutman summarized it in his study of conversions to Christianity as portrayed in American fiction, 'Come they did, only to discover that acceptance in the new world undid them as persecution in the old had not. Many became Christians. Many more became

converts to the American Way, to the religion of Americanism.'

Or as Maurice Kretzer expressed it, 'The easier it is to be a

Jew, the easier it is to cease being one.'" (p. 10)

The great problem of Jewish Missions in the U.S.A. during the 19th century and until our present generation is that when Jews accept the Lord they think they cease being a Jew.

The nineteenth century witnessed an extraordinary development of missions to the Jews. The first charter for a mission to the Jews was granted by New York State to the American Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews in 1820. This mission was led by Joseph Samuel C. Frey who initially came to the United States in 1816 after the London Jews Society had been organized as an Anglican Mission. The Protestant Episcopal Church began a work in 1842.

In 1845 the Baptist Society for the Evangelization of the Jews was formed. Frey edited their paper. The outstanding worker was G. R. Lederer who together with John Neander led a Hebrew Christian Seder in New York when Samuel I. J. Schereschewsky accepted the Lord. Schereschewsky is one of the giants of Jewish Christianity. "Many other missions to the Jews'were started.

"led in many cases by Jewish Christian ministers and missionaries. The rollcall includes such men - and in a number of cases their wives also served as missionaries - as Angel, Alman, Amsden, Bernheim, Berger, Bernstein, Cohn, Dushaw,

Finkelstein, the Freshmans, Frey, Herschell, Jaeger, Landsman, Lederer, Marcusohn, Meyer, Neander, Newman, Neuhaus, Rosevally, Ruben, Steinthal, Schapiro, Steinhardt, Strauss, Wallfish. Where full records of the lives of these men are available they show a remarkable similarity. All experienced a striking encounter with Christ in their personal lives, sometimes through reading the New Testament, sometimes through knowing Christians. Despite rejection, abuse and persecution from their fellow Jews - in many cases their own families - they sought to bring the Gospel to their people.

"Some of these men received the support of the denominations, as in the case of Neander, Steinthal, Strauss, under the auspices of the Foreign Board of the Presbyterian Church, but many labored almost alone, perhaps with the help of a few individual Christians. There were also Jewish Christians who went abroad as missionaries, as in the case of Samuel Schereschewsky, Bishop of Shanghai, and Isador Lowenthal, missionary to Afghanistan." Berne, Ibid, p. 12.

Not all of the missionaries were Jewish. Heading the "Righteous Gentiles" of the era was W. E. Blackstone, founder of the Chicago Hebrew Mission now American Messianic Fellowship. He is the "W. E. B." author of the book, "Jesus Is Coming." He is famous because he left copies of his book and New Testaments in the Caves of Petra. Because he was a missionary to the Jews his part in the founding of modern Zionism has not been publicized.

When Herzl was planning to visit the Czar of Russia to initiate the homeland for the Jews, Blackstone personally persuaded President Benjamin Harrison to intercede on behalf of the Jews. He sent marked copies of the Scriptures to Herzl underscoring God's promise of the Land to Israel. This marked Tenach and correspondence are in the Herzl museum in Jerusalem.

In 1902 A. E. Thompson published a book entitled "A Century of Jewish Missions" of which we append several pages of the appendix.

Observations:

During the years of Jewish immigration the Main Line denominations supported Jewish Missions - Baptist, Presbyterian,
Reformed, Evangelical Lutheran, Lutheran, Methodist (also
New York City Mission Society).

Totals: 80 missionaries, annual income \$54,950.

Thompson details missionary methods both in Europe and America.

"The equipment of a large station is quite elaborate. The staff usually consists of one or more missionaries, either Gentile or Jews, who must understand Hebrew and the languages spoken by the Jewish community; assistants who spend much time in house to house visitation; colporteurs; Bible women who work among the Jewesses; teachers for the schools; and physicians, dispensers and nurses. The

departments of work embrace preaching in the chapel or mission halls; street preaching; house to house visitation; distribution of literature by colporteurs and in the Book Depot; itineration to the surrounding places; educational work including Day Boarding and Sunday Schools, sewing classes and Mother's meetings.

Thompson, Ibid, p. 81.

Between 1900 and 1914 Jewish immigration averaged above 90,000 a year, another 350,000 arrived before the immigration quotas were imposed in 1924. Eighty percent of the Jews came from East Europe, those were more Orthodox than Reformed Jews. But most Jews were unaffiliated- they far outnumbered the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed. There was a flight from Judaism. Ethical Culture, theosophy, spiritualism, socialism, agnosticism, Christian Science, Jewish Science - it seemed as if Judaism itself was dying.

In 1930 John Stuart Conning estimated that there were 20,000 Jewish Christians connected with the various Christian churches. But,"like his brethren according to the flesh" the Hebrew Christian also was losing his cultural identity. It was a direct result of the Jewish Mission arm of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. that the first Hebrew Christian Church was organized in 1934 under David Bronstein, Sr., in Chicago.

The years prior to World War II were crisis days for Protestantism. There was antiSemitism on both sides. We all know about the fundamentalism bias of W. B. Riley and Gerald Winrod, but Liberals were also guilty. "The Christian Century" rejected evidence that the Nazis were slaughtering European Jews and charged American Jews with "hyphenated citizenship" and "pro-Zionism" (new anti-Semitic code words) because they tried to arouse America to action. Rabbi Stephen Wise personally delivered concrete evidence of what was going on to Dr. Morrison, editor of "The Christian Century". It was dismissed as "Jewish propaganda and fabrication."

Between the two extremes of a rabid feudamentalism (pun intentional) and an apostacising Liberalism, a faithful remnant of God's people opened their hearts and their homes in the U.S.A. This was especially true of the Mennonites and the Brethren in Christ. (I expect to write a history of the American Board of Missions to the Jews in the near future. A.B.M.J. worked with both these denominations in this ministry.

Over 30 families were rescued - other missions did the same.)

It was during this period that several smaller independent missions opened.

It was after World War II, after the whole world saw the evidence of Auschwitz, particularly after the State of Israel was founded, that Ecumenism raised its "beautiful" head. Then Jewish missions became a dirty word among many mainline denominations which ceased their Jewish mission work. "Christendom" showed its "brotherhood to the Jews" by forsaking The Great Commission.

This attitude reached its climax at the Second Assembly of the

World Council of Churches at Evanston, Ill., in 1954. The theme of the conference was "Christ, the Hope of the World." A proposal was made to include a special reference concerning an evangelical witness to the Jews in the message to the churches. Charles P. Taft, who was a lay delegate of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S., objected strongly to the reference. "Insisting that his views had no political implications, he said the reference would make for bad interfaith relations. The special reference to the Jews was deleted by a vote of 195 to 150."

Will Herberg, 'Protestant, Catholic and Jew'in American Sociology, p. 245.

In other words, the theme became "Christ the Hope of the World"

except to the Jews.

Will Herberg observed that the vote against Jewish evangelism at Evanston was motivated by the anti-Jewish stance of the Coptic and Orthodox churches in both the Middle East and Africa.

"In Europe, an omission of such reference to the Jews would very likely have been regarded as an outcropping of anti-Semitic prejudices, reminiscent of the Nazi exclusion of the Jews from the scope of the church; in the United States, to include such references was felt by even earnest Christians to be somehow insulting to the Jews and an impairment of interfaith relations."

Ibid, p. 245.

However, we should not construe this anti-Jewish evangelisation policy of the World Council of Churches to be the policy of individual churches of many main-line churches. There are churches in many of the main-line denominations, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran,

Episcopal, etc., who strongly support Jewish missions. We, independent Jewish missions, are thankful.

We can't even generalize about the larger denominations. A notable exception is the Southern Baptist Convention. In April 1972, W. B. Mitchell of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention wrote that there were "15,000 to 20,000 Hebrew Christians in Southern Baptist churches."

Berne, Ibid, p. 15.

There are many evangelical denominations that actively support missions to the Jews. Some, such as the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Conservative Baptist, Grace Brethren, and Assembly of God, maintain their own missions to the Jews; others generously support various independent Jewish missions.

Other denominations changed their focus. For instance, the
Christian Reformed Church which once had missions to the Jews
in Chicago and in Paterson, N.J., has abandoned institutional
Jewish evangelism and it now encourages local churches to participate
in parish evangelism. This method has been successful in many areas.

During the 1950's and 60's many of the Jewish missions began quiet ministries on college campuses. It was a fruitful labor, but because the believers joined local churches there are no accurate numbers about Jewish students who accepted the Lord. We know many did and they are still around. The Jewish leaders mostly

ignored or scorned us. There were some polemics in the Jewish Press, a few scholarly rebuttals, to most of the Jewish people Jewish missions were either non-existent or ineffective. Around 1970 Lysle Murphy of Kansas City asked a rabbi friend of his who was also from Kansas City to address the Fellowship of Christian Testimonies to the Jews which met at Nyack College expressing the attitude of the Jewish community to the missionaries to the Jews. The Rabbi told us that the Jewish people enjoyed our antics - we were so ineffective!

But something was happening all over the college campuses in the United States. There was turbulence everywhere. The boys on campus graduated to Viet Nam - there was a social and religious upheaval so startling that a new phrase "generation gap" was coined to describe it. The kids on campus were alienated. Drinking, hard drugs became campus norms. On these campuses there were missionaries to the Jews and local pastors as well as several student evangelistic organizations such as Campus Crusade. To us older people it seemed that suddenly all over the country a sort of counterrevolution arose. All over there were young students who became known as "Jesus People", sometimes known as "Jesus Freaks," they looked awfully sinful, they even had beards and long hair. The establishment was shocked but we needed to be. In many areas they lived in "communes." I visited one on the Berkeley Campus with Moishe Rosen and found very strict discipline. They all loved the Lord, studied the Scriptures, tried to live their lives biblically. (While we were in BerkeleyI observed a 17 year old "elder" discipline an erring brother!) I don't know what's happened to the Jesus People. I imagine

that many have organized congregations, probably some Messianic.

I also guess you may find some to be vestrymen in some very formal Episcopalian church. It has been estimated 20 to 40 percent of the Jesus People were Jewish and suddenly the modern Jewish Christian movement became visible, vocal and effective. On June 12, 1972

Time magazine described the Jewish Christians:

"...Whether pamphleteering on the West Coast or professing their beliefs at a Reform temple in suburban New Jersey, the young Jewish Christians are increasingly conspicuous. Their number, while modest compared with the Jesus movement as a whole, is unprecedented among U.S. Jews. U.C.L.A. campus Rabbi Shlomo Cunin estimates that young Jews are converting to Christianity at the rate of 6000 or 7000 a year. California Jewish Christian evangelist, Abe Schneider, says he has noted more converts in the past nine months than in the previous 23 years combined.

"Though Jewish Christians come from all ages and backgrounds, they are predominantly young spiritual refugees from secularized Jewish homes, liberal synagogues, the drug culture or radical politics. Their most controversial claim is that they are still Jews even though they now accept Jesus as the Messiah promised by the biblical prophets. Many reject the label "convert" and sometimes even "Christian", preferring to call themselves "Messianic" or "completed Jews."

Pp. 66, 67.

Shortly after this, the rabbicalled me up. His nephew had accepted the Lord and was studying at Nyack College! The rabbis no longer ignore us. They organized a "Committee on the Cults and Missionaries." They attend our meetings, read everything we publish, hold seminars on "How to Answer the Missionaries."

The cause of Jewish missions in the U.S.A. is dynamic and strong. I believe that more Jews are being won today to the Lord Jesus Christ than at any time since Apostolic days. It's very difficult to get accurate statistics but by updating, comparing, and correcting several lists I can list minimum figures of 48 agencies, 325 workers in 25 locations in the U.S.A. The Lord is blessing abundantly.

One of the reasons is a subtle change in the modern emphasis in Jewish missions. The old missions were centers; the message was "Come!" This is certainly a biblical method and it was and still is effective. The new emphasis seems to to be on "Go" - that, too, is biblical and it seems to me that one of the reasons more Jews are won is because we more and more go out on the highways and campuses.

Another reason is the quality of the rising generation of missionaries to the Jews. I mentioned earlier the list of Jewish missionary leaders of the nineteenth century. Heroes they were but as you read their biographies most of them were trained either in Rabbinics, or linguistics, or both.

Page 14.

Today, while we do not have many Talmudic scholars, many missions have on their staffs graduates of theological seminaries, others who have training in music, philosophy, communications, etc. there have been nation-wide television programs, a Broadway theatrical production has been produced, musical teams from missions to the Jews travel the country and are enthusiastically received.

The cause of Jewish missions has been blessed by God in the United States. One of the most visible blessings has been the emergence of the Jewish Christian congregations. Last year Karl Pruter published a 192 page book, "Jewish Christians in the United States." At last the Jewish community no longer ignores us - everything we have written and done has been listed. He says,

"In the U.S. today, there are over 100 congregations which preach the gospel of Jesus Christ while preserving the Jewish cultural heritage. Although the growth rate has decreased since the 1960s, there is no indication that the number of Jewish converts per year is declining. Yet Jews have been, in many ways, like immigrants; as the various groups have become "Americanized," the old neighborhoods have broken up and the younger generations have lost their languages and cultures. Several centuries of discrimination against Jews, specifically, have resulted in separate Jewish and gentile cultural patterns. Subsequently many Jews do not feel at home, and in some cases not welcome, in many gentile congregations. . . .

"At present, there are about 20,000 to 30,000 Jewish Christians, half of which are in distinctive Jewish congregations."

Pages 178, 179.

Page 15.

Mr. Pruter gives the impression that in these figures he is trying to be accurate and fair. This would be very unusual.

Finally, since a mission to the Jews is any organization which proclaims that the Lord Jesus Christ is Israel's Messiah according to the Scriptures, let us not forget the local churches who preach the Gospel to all men everywhere according to the command of Christ.

When I started with A.B.M.J. in 1937, I thought that I knew every Jewish Christian in the United States and Canada. It seemed that we were so few, but what a difference it is today! Wherever I go there are Jewish Christians! I wish that I could state that this is because of Jewish missions. It's been good to have been part of Jewish missions at this time. I wish that I could state that it has been because of the church of Christ. It has graciously and generously and prayerfully witnessed to the Jews. One thing I know, what we have seen is an act of the Holy Spirit. We have only started to see what God will do for Israel. Although "As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now received mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"

(Romans 11: 28 - 33).

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This Board reaches the Jews in connection with its general work. The figures are therefore only an approximate estimate.

APPENDIX.

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^{*} Indicates that figures are not official.
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dom of God is a trumpet call to prayer. world without thinking of the Jew is like a bird trying to fly with one wing broken." Israel's relation to the king-Franz Delitzsch said, "For the Church to evangelize the

the poor sons of Jacob? blessing may overspread the Church and extend even to earnest prayer and fasting, who can tell what waves of and the Church's obligations on Sabbath, May 4th, and urge on their people the duty of love and prayer for Israel. able to meet. We invite pastors to preach on Israel's need If the Christians of America will devote these ten days to circles of God's remembrances (Isaiah lxii. 6, 7) may be in private, in the services of the churches, and whenever May to this purpose. We suggest that prayer be offered especially that they devote the first ten days of the coming over America to unite in humble petitions to God for Israel during the remainder of this current year, and to prayer. We lovingly yet earnestly ask Christians all of dying Jewish humanity all about us we issue this appeal This is the crisis and this the call. In view of the mass

the Master urges." Prof. Taylor Lewis caused these words from the Talmud to be inscribed on the dome of that did the King's business helped the Jews," Christians of America, are you doing the King's business? on all our hearts. For the King's business requireth haste. In the book of Esther, ix. 3, R. V., it is written, "They Memorial Hall, Union College May God inscribe them "The day is short, the work is vast, the reward is great,

APPENDIX B.

STATISTICS OF SOCIETIES AT PRESENT IN EXISTENCE. IN AMERICA.

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Franz Delitzsch said, "For the Church to evangelize the world without thinking of the Jew is like a bird trying to fly with one wing broken." Israel's relation to the kingdom of God is a trumpet call to prayer.

This is the crisis and this the call. In view of the mass of dying Jewish humanity all about us we issue this appeal to prayer. We lovingly yet earnestly ask Christians all over America to unite in humble petitions to God for Israel during the remainder of this current year, and especially that they devote the first ten days of the coming May to this purpose. We suggest that prayer be offered in private, in the services of the churches, and whenever circles of God's remembrances (Isaiah Ixii. 6, 7) may be able to meet. We invite pastors to preach on Israel's need and the Church's obligations on Sabbath, May 4th, and urge on their people the duty of love and prayer for Israel. If the Christians of America will devote these ten days to blessing may overspread the Church and extend even to the poor sons of Jacob?

"The day is short, the work is vast, the reward is great, the Master urges." Prof. Taylor Lewis caused these words from the Talmud to be inscribed on the dome of Memorial Hall, Union Collège. May God inscribe them on all our hearts. For the King's business requireth haste. Christians of America, are you doing the King's business? In the book of Esther, ix. 3, R. V., it is written, "They that did the King's business helped the Jews."

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*Indicates that figures are not official.

†This Board reaches the Jews in connection with its general work. The figures are therefore only an approximate estimate.

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