

UPDATE ON
MEDIA COVERAGE OF
THE MESSIANIC JEWISH MOVEMENT

Presented by Susan Perlman to the
Eighth North American Coordinating Committee Meeting
of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism

February 27-28, 1991

This report covers the time period of April 1990 and February 1991. I've included with this report a list of U.S. & Canadian Jewish newspapers, both national and local in scope. The categories I've chosen to use in this report are similar but not exact to my previous reports.

The Feature Article

This is an article which profiles an individual or group somewhat in depth.

Baltimore: Exploring the Appeal of Messianic Judaism, Baltimore Jewish Times, 3/23/90

This was a cover story for the Baltimore Jewish Times. The subhead of the article was quite provocative: "Their numbers are growing. They are not hysterical evangelists. They are the people next door." The article goes on to profile some of these Jewish believers in the Rosh Pina Messianic Congregation as well as its spiritual leader, Marvin Morrison. Each of the people interviewed is cast in a sympathetic light. The only counterpoint is some quotes from Jews for Judaism director, Mark Powers and former director, Larry Levey. Powers overstates our numbers and our effectiveness, I imagine to give more reason for people to get behind his organization.

Also of note were the excellent letters to the editor and wire service follow up to the feature article. Enclosed in your packet are six letters to the editor which appeared in the Baltimore Jewish Times the week of April 6th. The article was also picked up by Religious News Service under the banner, "Messianic Jews Profiled in Major American Jewish Weekly." RNS feeds most major secular daily papers who don't have a religion editor of their own. It also services Jewish and Christian publications.

Albuquerque: Messianic Movement Joins Two Religions, Albuquerque Journal, 12/29/90

This article profiles Adat Yeshua, a messianic congregation headed up by Russell Resnik. He gives the rationale for messianic congregations, but most importantly he gives a very clear gospel presentation: "We accept Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah." He said, "Messianic Jews believe in the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as the infallible and authoritative Word of God...We also believe that the

God of Israel took on human form and lived among men as Yeshua, or Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah. And we believe that Yeshua offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, and rose from the dead, to become the only means of salvation for fallen humanity." The article concludes with a phone number of Adat Yeshua for anyone who wants more information. Also included is a full page photograph of Resnik, who is very handsome, very Jewish looking in tallit and hold the Torah scrolls.

National: *The Jewish Way to Love Jesus*, Moody Monthly, November 1990

An article which should be familiar to most of you was the cover story for Moody Monthly in November. The writer, a free-lancer seemed to put together a hodge podge of material from many of the Jewish missions as well a couple at Willowcreek, the Stuckis, Betsy Ramsay in Jerusalem, Robert Miller in Rome, Georgia and short sidebar by Louis Goldberg on the Jewishness of 1st century believers. She includes so many different aspects of Jewish ministry that it is hard to find cohesion in the article. It is a good example of overkill in a feature article.

Articles That Are Triggered By Events

Beresford Decision

In response to the Israel Supreme Court ruling regarding who is a Jew under the Law of Return, the MJAA paid for a full page advertisement in the international edition of the Jerusalem Post. It was a well done polemic and triggered several other articles that dealt with the issue including an RNS report, a Chicago Tribune article and an open letter in the June 30th edition of the Jerusalem Post from a hostile Canadian Jew who said of the Supreme Court decision, "It rightly denies Pseudo-Jews alias Crypto-Christians; ie. former Jews who have adopted the Christian faith, the rights, benefits and privileges of immigrants."

Bart Simpson episode

In response to a law suit threat from the owners of the Bart Simpson copyright, the 9 year old Jewish believer who authored a broadside using the Bart Simpson character made it into a number of

newspapers, trade magazines and tv news shows. The pamphlet included statements like, "Don't Have A Cow Man Because We're Telling You That Jesus Is Messiah." The media had a hey day with this one — imagine a big corporation like 20th Century Fox taking on 9 year old Benjamin Wertheim!

Gulf Crisis

The present situation in the Persian Gulf has brought forth much speculation of an eschatological nature — interestingly enough from the Lubavitcher rebbe himself. Articles in the Jerusalem Post and on the Jewish Telegraphic Agency wire read, "Rebbe says Gulf crisis foretells arrival of messiah." I quote,. "Schneerson said the Midrash tells of a great agitation that will involve many nations and culminate in an earth shaking confrontation in the Persian Gulf." The JTA release went on to say that the cataclysm will "herald the coming of the Messiah, who will stand on the roof of the Temple and announce to Israel, 'The time of your redemption is come.'"

Another interesting article on this subject was in the November 30 edition of the Jewish Chronicle out of London. Schneerson was profiled in a full page article entitled, "Is the Messiah coming soon?" He is quoted there as saying, "For over 1,900 years the Jews have shouted 'ad mosai?' ('until when?'). The previous Rebbe declared that all that was needed to prepare for the Moshiach's coming was to 'polish the buttons.' That preparation has now been completed."

In the February 2, 1991 edition of the Northern California Jewish Bulletin, another Lubavitcher rabbi, Manis Friedman, says that the Persian Gulf war will end by Purim and the Messiah will come soon after.

The best article by far on the subject was in the September 7, 1990 edition of the Wall Street Journal. In it the followers of Schneerson are actually quoted as saying that their rebbe "is a potential candidate for the Messiah." Lubavitcher administrator, Yossi Raichik, says, "Every generation has a candidate. And in this generation, he's definitely the best one."

Anti-Semitism

An interesting incident which sparked some media occurred this past December in Skokie. Rocks were thrown through the store front window of the Jews for Jesus center. This was one of a number of anti-Semitic acts that had taken place in Skokie in a short span of time. Four synagogues and a Hebrew seminary had also been vandalized. Now the local chapter of the Anti Defamation League was in a quandary. They were uncomfortable about the vandalism on the Jews for Jesus facility being linked with their "authentically Jewish" institutions which had been attacked.

However, in the Skokie Life, a photo appeared of the broken window boarded up and the words clearly written on the boards, "This broken window is evidence that it can happen again — Kristallnacht 1990."

Moskowitz, in response to a question from the reporter as to who he thought did the vandalism, says, "All I know is they don't like Jews. I've learned that people who don't like Jews generally don't like Jesus either, and that makes sense because Jesus is a Jew."

Jewish Scare Tactics

Articles that have particularly utilized what I call "Jewish scare tactics" are ones that have had to do with the Soviet Jewish immigrants to the West. The most telling article appeared in the June 1990 issue of B'nai B'rith's, The Jewish Monthly.

National: Preying on the Exodus-Christian missionaries target Soviet Jews, The Jewish Monthly, 6/1/90

This article by Alan Sege starts out with the account of a Russian Jewish family sponsored by a well to do Southern Baptist developer who shunts the Jewish agency worker who comes to the airport to greet this family aside. Then a short time later the wife gets baptized in the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville. The writer attributes unethical motivation to all those Jewish ministries he sees as working among Soviet Jewish immigrants. He uses terms like "easy targets" to describe missionary efforts among Soviet Jews. And he refers to trips by Sid Roth, UMJC, Dallas based Ma'oz and others to the Soviet Union as "proselytizing junkets."

Boston: In Brookline: Messianic Group Sets Sights for Soviet Jews.
The Jewish Advocate, 7/5/90

This article starts off by telling about the ministry of Beth El Shaddai among Russian and then uses scare tactics about the efforts of the different groups to reach Soviet Jews: "The newly arriving Russian community is so vulnerable because they are culturally disoriented." or "missionaries are infiltrating Jewish resettlement programs, English as a Second Language classes and Big Brother programs."

Most of the highly charged language is coming from Jews for Judaism anti-missionary spokesmen, Mark Powers and Michael Skobac and the Israeli anti-missionary group Yad L'achim. In a July 27, 1990 article in the B'nai B'rith Messenger, it is reported, "Missionaries who describe themselves as 'Messianic Jews' are reportedly offering free furniture and other forms of assistance in an attempt to attract new Soviet Jewish immigrants."

Seasonal Articles

Easter/ Passover and Christmas/Hannukah tend to be times when we can get some coverage in the secular press because religion writers are always looking for another angle on the holidays — and we are certainly that. The sample I've selected came out over the Christmas holidays.

Chicago: Christians, Jews can share the joy, Chicago Tribune, 2/21/90

Michael Hirsley writes a religion column for the Chicago Tribune. He used his column at Christmastime to extensively quote from Rabbi Arnold Rachlis, who is president of the Chicago Board of Rabbis. Rachlis speaks about the Christmas and Hannukah observances and gives his assessment of how Jews view Jesus and how Jews view Messianic Jews who call Jesus, Messiah. Rachlis says, "Christianity is a wonderful religion, full of love and ethics. But Messianic Jews do an injustice to both Judaism and Christianity when they claim a person can stand in both communities simultaneously."

A Look Internationally

With the Decade of Evangelism launched by the Anglican Church, it is not surprising that we are seeing some parallels in the Jewish community of Britain to what happened in the Jewish community here when Key '73 was launched. A New York Times article back then (12/3/72) had the header, *Christians Evangelizing Alarms Jewish Leaders*. It went on to warn that the efforts of Christians could jeopardize the pluralistic ideals of America and that minority people's like Jews would not be "tolerated."

A significant article that came out in the London Times on February 5, 1991 was entitled, "Evangelical Missions to Jews a threat to minorities, bishop says." It goes on to give the viewpoint of the Bishop of Liverpool which is, "Our repentance from the terrible things Christians have done including our own, should include renouncing the deliberate targeting of Jewish people for evangelism." It also quotes the anti-missionary maven of Britain, Shmuel Arkush, who says, "The Jews invented the Messiah. We have the patent on him."

The letters to the editor that were printed on February 13th, were superb. One was written by the director of the Church's Ministry Among the Jews, Jos Drummond. The other was by Moishe Rosen. It seems like the issue of Jewish evangelism again becomes the watershed for those who count themselves as evangelistic in conviction and practice.

Conclusion

Approximately 420 articles have been published on our movement in the secular press since my last report and another 30 articles in the Christian media. Media still stands as a major vehicle for the gospel message to be heard by our Jewish people.

Most reporters for secular publications, in a desire to give a balanced representation, tend to bend over backwards in favor of the anti-missionary viewpoint. However, oftentimes they do not feel a need for any sort of balance when the comments are from a rabbi. When the Chicago Tribune columnist interviewed Rabbi Rachlis, he felt no

compulsion to call up a Messianic Jew and get his or her opinion on the matter.

A few more reflections on the scope of media coverage in the year ahead.

Anti-missionary groups are hungry for press coverage. Expect them to aggressively pursue it. The anti-missionary opposition are recognizing its value more and more. They are initiating a lot of the interviews and in some cases co-opting interviews that were intended to profile messianic Jews.

As anti-Semitism goes on the increase, many in the Christian community will back off in the press on affirming anything that speaks positively about Jewish evangelism. The view that "we Christians don't have to cause the Jews any more grief" will fall on receptive ears.

People like Eckstein are continuing to make an impact on evangelicals. Some of the publications known to be in the evangelical camp are publishing articles by Christian writers that just don't go far enough when it comes to the uniqueness of Christ. A recent article in Evangelical Action, the NAE publication, is a case in point. This of course has direct bearing on how the Christian reader views the necessity for Jewish evangelism.

Some bright spots on the horizon is the broader participation in the media arena of various segments of our movement. The full page position paper that the MJA got into the Jerusalem Post will continue to bear fruit for the gospel. Zev Isaacs new publication, The Messianic Times, is an attempt to cover our movement in a more comprehensive way than ever before. Christian magazines are seeing that articles about Jews and Jewish evangelism are of interest to their readers and this will help instruct and motivate Christians who care about Jews knowing the Savior.

Let's make the most out of the media opportunities before us!