

UPDATE ON
MEDIA COVERAGE OF
THE MESSIANIC JEWISH MOVEMENT

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

March 23-25, 1992

This report covers the time period of April 1991 through February 1992.

I'd like to begin with some overall impressions on the coverage of our movement over that time. First of all, the North American coverage has been less about our movement and more about the traditional American Jewish community and how it views itself. We have the mainline branches of Judaism doing studies and publishing their reflections as well as the ultra-orthodox making their pronouncements. Where there has been flurry of news on the movement, it has involved a particular personality or group of people in one city or a particular conference.

As we increase our awareness of LCJE as an international network, and our Jewish people as global, not regional, I will be including more by way of international news items. World events particularly the changes in the Soviet Union/Commonwealth of Independent States have shaped the coverage our movement this past year. And new developments in Britain are of note as well.

Articles That Are Triggered By Events

Christmas

Every year there are some articles which will come out on the Christmas/Chanukkah dilemma. A well rounded piece on the subject was done in The Jewish Week-American Examiner, Nov.29-Dec.5, 1991, entitled "Christmas trees pose the annual December Dilemma" and is included with the clipping packet. What is significant are the number of books that are now out to help Jewish parents cope with Christmas. Titles such as, "Raising Jewish Children in a Contemporary World by Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben, "Toby Belfer Never Had a Christmas Tree" by Cloris Teles Pusher and "Between Two Worlds: Choices for Grown Children of Jewish-Christian Parents" by Leslie Goodman-Malamuth and Robin Margolis are just a few.

Conferences

The Zeist conference of LCJE was the subject of several articles in foreign language newspapers. Here in the States, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, carried a story which was picked up in dozens of Jewish newspapers. While the article allowed us to say who we are, they also quoted James Rudin of the American Jewish Committee who warns the readers of the "globalization of these Hebrew Christian groups." He also takes a cheap shot and says that our stand against anti-Semitism "is nothing more than sophistry" and "While their mouthings about anti-Semitism sound good, it is really a cover for their true intention, which is the

spiritual extinction of Judaism.” Leon Klenicki of ADL comments that in light of Jewish Christian dialogue progress our LCJE attitude toward Jews goes back to the Middle Ages.

Within the Christian press, the LCJE conference received some note, depending on the initiative of the participants. For example in the LCMS publication's November '91 issue, a prominent article was entitled, "Kohut, Perling attend world meeting on Jewish Evangelism in Zeist" Included in the article was a quote by our esteemed International Coordinator and an announcement of this very meeting we are now taking part in.

The only other conference on our movement that received some press this year was the annual meeting of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations in Bloomington, Minnesota. The American Jewish World did a piece entitled, "Messiah Complex" in which they psychoanalyzed the conference and its participants.

The Feature Article

Next, I want to look at a few feature articles which are more in depth profiles of either a group or an individual.

Detroit: No Longer on the Fringe: The Jewish News: 7/5/91

This was a cover story for the Detroit Jewish News. The subhead of the article read "They have advanced academic degrees, high paying jobs, Hebrew School and good Jewish background. Now they have Jesus."

The article goes on to profile some of the 40 worshippers at Congregation Sh'ma Yisrael as well as its spiritual leader, Loren Jacobs. The people interviewed are basically cast in a sympathetic light. Says the writer "The crazies are not here." The only counterpoint is some quotes from local Jews for Judaism director, Ronald Shreiber, Rabbi Alon Tolwin of Aish Torah and Rabbi David Nelson who calls Messianic Jews "religious transvestites."

B'nai Noach Movement B'nai Noah: Bible believers neither Christian nor Jewish Jerusalem Post International, February 22, 1992

This article interviews David Davis, spiritual leader of Emmanuel Congregation in Athens, TN which is touted as the first registered B'nai Noach congregation in the world. The article begins with the question, "How does a fundamentalist Southern Baptist minister from the buckle of the US Bible Belt come to the realization that

Jesus is not a deity, abandon Christianity and take up Tora faith? There was also a three part series on this movement done in the Jewish Press between May and June of '91. It was written by Dr. James Tabor who is a professor of Christian Origins and Ancient Judaism at the U. of N.Caroline's Dept. of Religious Studies and is an active supporter of this movement.

Frank Eiklor Counter-Missionizing Watchdogs Say Eiklor Has Hidden Agenda: The Jewish Advocate, June 7, 1991, July 7-12, 1991

A series of articles centering on Frank Eiklor, founder of Shalom International in Costa Mesa, CA and Shalom Ministries in Salem, Mass came out this past June and July. Michael Skobac, then on the staff of Jews for Judaism put out what he called an expose on Eiklor saying that his program to combat anti-Semitism and support Israel was only on the surface and that he had a hidden agenda to see all Jews converted to Christianity. This was followed by letters to the editor including a rather lengthy one from Rabbi Yechiel Ekstein who rejects Skobac's charges and says that Eiklor is one of the Jews best friends and admonished the Jewish Advocate for "giving a prominent voice to a group maligning the character and motivation of such a fine man like Frank." He called Skobac's charges "groundless."

Articles That Are Triggered By Events

Last year, I shared some of the clippings on the Lubavitcher rebbe's pronouncements in relation to the Gulf War. Well things have progressed significantly since those early articles of Schneerson's messianic possibilities. .

Gulf Crisis

There have been a considerable number of articles not only in Jewish newspapers but in secular press with regard to the claims of Schneerson and his followers. An article in the Feb. 28 edition of the *No. Calif. Jewish Bulletin* this year profiles how real estate developers in Kfar Chabad, a 1000-family community between Ben Gurion Airport and Tel Aviv, are looking to expand the property and has asked Schneerson if he would like them to build a house for him there in Kfar Chabad, and the rabbi has said, "Yes."

The Chabad movement has generated a lot of press having put some full- page advertisements in the papers this past summer entitled " The Time for Your Redemption has Arrived." This has spurred a number of editorials here and overseas.

The *Canadian Jewish News* in its July 25, 1991 article entitled “‘Messiah Lives Among Us’ Lubavitch listeners told”, quotes Rabbi Immanuel Schochet saying that the Messiah probably doesn’t know himself that he’s the Messiah. “He is born of human parents, Schochet explained, “and lives a normal life.” Rabbi Schochet compared the situation to that of Moses who didn’t know his destiny until he was 80 years old. Schochet along with the others says that the signs are there that the coming of the Messiah may be imminent.

I’d like to show you some of what has made its way into the public media on Schneerson and his possibilities as candidate for Messiah. (SHOW 2 VIDEOS)

Soviet Jewish Immigration

Article on the subject of Soviet Jews and missionaries of course have “scare tactic” thrust. The Jewish Press has articles with titles like “Messianic Jewish Groups Targeting Innocent Soviet Jews” and “Preaching to the Vulnerable”. There statistics on our numbers and what we are doing is somewhat off base. And the paranoia is incredible as evidenced in the following clipping. (Read Orange County Register, Monday, December 9, 1991).

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.”

Denominational Interest

I want to briefly comment on some articles that profile Jewish believers within a denomination. Barry Seltser an Episcopal priest is featured in the Washington Diocese newspaper in November of 1991.

Quote from the Brotherhood Beacon, magazine of the Mennonites on Testimony of a Jewish Mennonite, August 1991

A Look Internationally

Last year I pointed out that 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 in the U.S. when Key '73 was launched.

The reaction has been strong over in Britain. Let me quote from the press. I also want to show you a section of a half hour program on BBC last Easter evening at prime time. Again, the issue is not one that the Jewish community will let rest.

Jewish Community Introspection

There have been a number of interesting articles on this subject of American Judaism and revival. US News and World Report did a piece in October of '91 profiling among others, a conservative Jewish congregation in Maryland which is discovering God.

Egon Mayer's survey called the 1990 National Jewish Population Study was picked up by the press in the fall and winter of '91 as being significant. Associated Press writer, George Cornell did an article which was reprinted in hundreds of papers. (Quote from it)

The Reform Judaism Magazine in its Fall of 1991 issue profiled Jews who have converted and subtitled the piece, "More than 200,000 American Jews now embrace another religion." (quote from the article)

Anti-Missionary Goings On

Some of the highlights of this past year's attacks on us are the following:

Rick Ross from Phoenix is lecturing on countering missionary activity and deprogramming. (Include some of Rick's statement)

Michael Skobac has moved from his Jews for Judaism post to heading up the U. of Toronto's Jewish Student Union..

Jews for Judaism in Baltimore is doing fundraising auctions these days. (read advert)

And Rabbi Yacov Spivak, who credits me with possibly speeding up the arrival of the Messiah, may it only be so. (Read part of clipping)

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