

# **UPDATE ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF LCJE CONSITUENCY INTEREST**

**Presented by Susan Perlman  
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This report covers the time period of March 1993 through March of 1994. Between these dates, over 730 newspaper articles were published and more than 75 radio interviews done on topics related to Jewish evangelism. I've chosen to highlight several categories where multiple articles were published. They are titled:

The Schneerson Phenomena,  
Messianic Congregation News,  
Evangelism in the CIS  
The Schindler Plan,  
Countering Missionary Work  
Jewish Evangelism potpourri

### 1. The Schneerson Phenomena

Schneerson made our media list last year as well. The bulk of the 1994 media on him has been in past month, however a full page ad did appear in the January 29 edition of the Jerusalem Post International. In large type it proclaimed **"The Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson is the King Moshiach. Now is the time to accept his kingship!"** There was a Bat Yam address at the bottom of the ad.

The more recent articles include a piece by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency which appeared in numerous Jewish newspapers around mid March. It begins, **"As Lubavitch Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson lies unconscious in a Manhattan intensive care unit following a stroke last week, some Lubavitch leaders are viewing his illness, along with the recent shooting of Chasidic students on the Brooklyn Bridge as a sign that redemption is near."**

Pamela Druckerman of JTA continued, **"...Neil Gillman, an associate professor of philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and longtime observer of the Lubavitch movement, predicted the rebbe's death could be justified along the same theological lines that propelled him into potential Messiah status, without rupturing the movement."**

**"They will quickly conclude that the generation wasn't ready, that they weren't good enough,"** Gillman said, referring to the Jewish belief that there is a potential messiah in every generation who will be revealed if and when the world is ready.

**"But for the Lubavitchers—who have invested tremendously in a version of history that many say points to Schneerson as the Messiah—there is a determination to hold onto that vision."**

This view that Schneerson is Messiah has been put forth in more definitive way by his associate Shmuel Buttman in his weekly column in New York's Jewish Press, Buttman quotes from the Talmud to make his case: "The Rebbe, whose predictions have invariably been realized, has promised that our generation is the last in exile and will be the first of the Messianic era forecast by our Prophets. Even a cursory glance through the signs our Sages give (Sotah 49b, Sanhedrin 97a, etc.) for the time immediately before the revelation of the *Moshiach*, confirms that we are there. And examination of the signs Rambam gives (Hilchos Melachim 11:4) to determine who is qualified to be Moshiach points to the one person in this generation who, infinitely more than any other, has been responsible for "impelling the Jewish people to follow the Torah way."

Most recently, the New York papers have made it clear that Schneerson is "brain dead." At the same time, they are reporting that in Israel,

**"60 Knesset Members have put their names to a statement in which they refer to the Lubavitcher Rebbe as the Messiah King.**

**The MKs—who include Labour's Dalia Itzik, Gedaliya Gal, and Yossi Katz, and the former Likud Knesset Speaker, Dov Shilansky—signed the statement to coincide with the rebbe's 92nd birthday."**

A lengthy feature article in Moment Magazine a year ago speculated on "What happens if the Rebbe dies?" The article was made possible by a grant from the Religious News Service according to a blurb at the end of the piece. It gives a rather comprehensive biography of Schneerson, and has a side bar on "Messiah in Jewish History" which is included in your media clipping pack.

Now that the rabbi's death is imminent, explanations are already appearing in Jewish publications. The Forward, has an article entitled "Awaiting the Messiah at Kfar Chabad which concludes, "The Rebbe will die, but Kfar Chabad will cope. It has already prepared its alibi. Jewish lore tells how once, as the sun was setting on a Sabbath eve, the holy Ari, the great 17th century Kabbalist, invited his disciples to walk with him from Safed to Jerusalem, a distance of over a hundred miles, to greet the Messiah. The disciples agreed, but asked for time to prepare. 'Alas, ' said the Ari, 'if we had set out at once, the Messiah would have come, but because our faith was not strong enough, he no longer will arrive."

There will no doubt be a flurry of articles at the time of Shneerson's official death and those of us involved in Jewish evangelism should be alert to the media possibilities. At the very least, an avalanche of letters to the editor should be encouraged to get the gospel out.

## 2. Messianic Congregation News

Feature articles and human interest pieces have regularly been done on a variety of messianic congregations across the country. I'd like to profile a few of them.

A local Louisville, Kentucky newspaper called *Neighborhoods*, did a feature article on Louisville Messianic Fellowship in October of 93. Rick Mathley, spokesman for the fellowship, is a gentile who according to the reporter, **"follows the Jewish faith but considers Jesus the Messiah."** The article gives a little history of the messianic Jewish movement, quotes the local Rabbi who says, **"Messianic Jews skipped over 2,000 years during which Judaism and Christianity developed in different directions. The distinction between us is very large."** The messianic fellowship meeting time and phone number appears at the end of the article.

The Indianapolis News did a story on Jeff Adler and Charam Yeshua. A photograph of Jeff wearing a kippah has the blurb under it, **"Jeff Adler, rabbi for Charam Yeshua studied at a Protestant seminary."** The testimony of Adrienne Grechsky, who started the congregation in her living room, is quite animated. Again, a rabbi is set in juxtaposition to the believers. Jonathan Stein, senior rabbi of Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation called them, **"deceptive, dishonest people."** The reporter attended a Saturday service of about 70 people and recounts the event. One of my favorite quotes in the article is from Grechsky, who talks about her background growing up in New Jersey, where her parents were leaders in synagogue, **"My mother's worst regret is not that I believe in Jesus, but that I vote republican."** She gives a very upbeat and encouraging testimony of how she came to faith in Jesus.

The November '93 Jewish Journal of San Antonio posed the question, **"Who put the Mess in Messianic?"** Marion Bernstein writes about messianic congregations in the San Antonio area who have advertised high holiday services: **"We've always been told that if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck and looks like a duck, it's a duck. And in this case, it may walk and talk like a synagogue, but it's not one. Not by a long shot."**

She then gives a list of reasons why and says that messianic Jews are coopting the word, "messianic." **"I don't want the word messianic to become a synonym for Christian."**

One final congregational article I want to mention appeared in the Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph on March 26 of this year in the front of their Lifestyle section. It is entitled, **"Shalom and Praise Jesus. Christ is messiah to messianic Jews."** There are some well put statements by Rick Trimble, congregational leader of Kehilat Aha'arit Yisrael as well as the standard refutation by the local rabbi. Religion editor Steve Rabi also has a side bar in which he gives a short history of the messianic movement.

He also has a sidebar with paragraph descriptions of Jews for Jesus, Jewish Voice Broadcasts, Chosen People Ministries, The Christian Jew Foundation, Messianic Times and umbrella groups UMJC, MJA and FMC. Somehow they managed to omit LCJE from this list altogether. The color photo which accompanied the article has two members of the congregation reading from the Torah scroll with tallit and kippah.

### **3. Evangelism in the CIS**

No doubt the increased missionary activity in the CIS has had its accompanying press. a JTA release last May on the Jews for Jesus activities in Odessa made its way into most Jewish newspapers abroad. The article questions **"Why Jews for Jesus has targeted Odessa"** but is convinced that it is **"one of the missionary group's top priorities."**

The work of Jonathan Bernis in St. Petersburg last May was reported in the U.S. press. **"St. Petersburg last month hosted its first messianic music festival attracting more than 13,000 persons for three nights of concerts."** Detroit Jewish News, June 18, 1993.

As is often the case, Jews for Jesus gets credit and blame for various missionary activities. The World Jewish Congresses, Dateline World Jewry said in its July 93 edition, **"Organized efforts are under way to counter attempts by Jews for Jesus to do missionary work in Russian cities, especially in St. Petersburg. Presenting themselves as rabbis, the Jews for Jesus wear prayer shawls during public meetings, and are often mistaken for Orthodox Jews by Russian Jews who have little or no knowledge of Judaism."**

A September 93 feature article in a Moscow daily paper presented an interview with Avi Snyder: **“A little man with an aristocrat beard and a bruise under the left eye opened the door. It was a missionary, Avi Snyder...”** The reporter went on to describe the boldness of these Jewish missionaries who were getting punched in the streets of Moscow for their faith. Photographs in the article show young exuberant Jewish believers joyfully proclaiming the Messiah.

There were a significant number of articles on Russian ministry outside of the CIS, but most of those fall in the category of anti-missionary activity inasmuch as the articles center on opposition to work among Russians in places like Brighton Beach, Rogers Park or Fairfax. Which brings us to our fourth category:

#### **4. Countering Missionary Work**

Tovia Singer of Jews for Judaism, is the most often quoted anti-missionary irregardless of what segment of the Jewish population is being “missionized.” The Fall 93 issue of Viewpoint has a five page article by Singer on **“Some mistaken notions we have about missionaries.”** Singer says that **“Fifteen years ago sixteen messianic congregations existed in this country. Today, more than 160 actively attract and recruit Jews...”** This article is filled with profiles on the different messianic ministries from Singer’s perspective.

To give you a little taste of that, here is what he has to say about the Lausanne Movement: **“With the year 2000 in sight, the fundamentalist Christian community, with foresight and vision, held two critical conferences a little more than a quarter of a century ago. One was held in Switzerland and the other in Thailand. The main question that was asked in those two symposiums were: Why has the Church been so unsuccessful in their past efforts to convert the Jews, and what new technique can be employed to attract masses of new converts by the turn of the century?”** I’m sure that the planners of Lausanne and Pattaya would agree with Rabbi Singer as to the purpose of those two conferences.

Another anti-missionary feature article was in The Jewish Homemaker, March ‘93, entitled **“Yad L’Achim, their brother’s keeper.”** The article extols the work of Rabbi Sholom Ber Lifschitz and profiles Jewish people who were ensnared by missionaries and cultists and then won back.

According to the article, Yad L'Achim regularly monitors the activities of 3,000 missionaries. I didn't know we had 3,000 missionaries! Maybe we could get their list. One of their crowning achievements according to this article is in **"providing crucial information to the high court of Israel"** regarding the Beresfords which led to their loss of citizenship. The Jewish Homemaker is a magazine put out by Agudath Israel.

An October 93 article in the Jewish Press points out the perceptivity of Yad L'Achim as well. **"Yad L'Achim uncovers missionary-PLO collaboration. 'Yad L'Achim activists in Russia have uncovered a big missionary organization who came to Russia from the U.S. for the express purpose of spreading the New Testament among the ignorant among Russian Jewry. The most shocking element of the case is that the PLO is aiding and abetting this crime in their newspaper.'"**

Another item of interest with regard to anti-missionary activity involves the Jewish Community Relations Council's Task Force on Missionaries and Cults. In a March 11 article in the Jewish Press, it says, **"The Passover holiday provides a time for missionary groups to reach out deceptively to those vulnerable individuals by inviting them to free messianic Jewish seders which, although appearing to be authentically Jewish, are actually Christian in ideology and ceremony."** The JCRC is offering an alternative seder for all who fit this category.

One final item on the JCRC is the absence of much anti-missionary activity in the past year that involves the pressuring of establishments to rent to Jewish missions for events. This would seem to have a direct relationship to the JCRC lawsuit with Jews for Jesus in which they had to pay costs for inconveniencing Jews for Jesus through the Stevensville affair.

I brought up the subject of defections with last year's report. I'd like to keep this under the category of counter-missionary work as well. The Winter 93 edition of Reform Judaism included a lengthy article entitled **"Inside Jews for Jesus"** in which Ellen Kamentsky was featured. A side bar on other Christian groups to avoid included Ahavat Zion messianic synagogue and other messianic congregations. The writer notes that **"One third of the messianic synagogues in the United States were created by the Assemblies of God, the denomination of former TV preachers Jimmy Swaggert and Jim Bakker."**

Sherri Ross Gordon who wrote the highly biased article has had parts of it excerpted in major Jewish papers such as The Post and Opinion, The Washington Jewish News and the Palm Beach Jewish Journal.

### 5. The Schindler Plan,

While anti-missionary groups step up their campaigns, one rabbi, Alexander Schindler, has been making the case for Jews to actively pursue converts. Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, is launching a five million dollar fund raising campaign to finance outreach activities. The 850 Reform congregations in the U.S. and Canada are being encouraged to open their classes to outsiders

Schindler was quoted in a sermon at the 62nd assembly of the UAHC that, **"Jews historically did missionize to others but their efforts ended when the societies in which they lived began prosecuting them for their efforts."** He was also quoted as saying, **"If we have no mission, people suspect we have no message."**

An interesting flurry of response has made its way onto the pages of much Jewish publications in response to Schindler's plan, which, he introduced about 15 years ago as well.

Jack Wertheimer, a professor at JTS does not approve of Schindler's plan. He says, **"Jews may pay dearly for Reform's proselytizing. Many Christian missionizing groups exist in this country—and they would be more than eager to proselytize among Jews. They have not unleashed their full arsenal of weapons because it is considered foul play in American society for a majority religion to pick on minority religions. Until now, Jews have been able to argue missionary activities on the grounds that the battle is one-sided. But Reform's new outreach undercuts that argument. At the least, it justifies Christian outreach to 'unsynagogued Jews'—that is, almost two thirds of U.S. Jews."**

A provocative article in the January 94 issue of Sh'ma by Hayim Perelmutter on Judaism's missionary tradition was sparked by Schindler's missionizing plan. Says Perelmutter who is the rabbi emeritus of Isaiah Israel Congregation and professor of Jewish Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, says, **"Mission is central to Judaism and to its development. The very fact that rabbinic Judaism saw Abraham not only as the first Jew, but as the first missionary, is indicative of this."**



Included in your clipping packet are a number of letters to the editor on this very subject, of missionary activity by Jews. One example by a Redwood City, California Jew says, **"Our religion is something wonderful. America and the world needs God's message now more than ever. God revealed himself to us( Hebrews) and told us to spread his message. I think it is about time that we started doing just that."**

## **6. Jewish Evangelism Potpourri**

A few odd items for which I do not have a specific category include a February '94 blurb in the Washington Jewish Week which lamented that in the religion events for that week, the only Purim event listed is **"the one to be held by Jews for Jesus at an Episcopalian Church."**

The February 9th edition of the National Jewish Post and Opinion included Rabbi Elliot Gertel's review of the film, "Shadowlands," the story of C.S. Lewis and Joy Davidman Gresham, and points out that Davidman is an "apostate." **"The tragedy of Joy Davidman Gresham's death is the tragedy of her having become literature's and drama's most celebrated Jewish apostate."**

Another item appeared in the March 25th Jewish Press saying that a significant archeological find was made in the Jericho area by Vendyl Jones. According to the Press, Jones has found the site of the Tabernacle. However this is located within the autonomous Palestinian region and therefore they have given Jones three months to finish his work and cover up the site.

Testimonies of Jewish believers is always an encouragement. Leslie Wright's story is in the March '93 edition of Today's Christian Woman. Michael Brown's testimony appears in the April '94 edition of Decision Magazine. Born again commentator, Peggy Wehmeyer, though not raised a Jew has a Jewish background and says in a February '94 Jewish Week interview, **"I consider myself a Jew and a Christian. I embrace the entire Old Testament. I certainly don't disavow my Judaism."**

A feature article in the Des Moines Register is entitled, **"A Look at Jesus Through the Eyes of a Rabbi."** It recounted a rabbi's sermon at Christmas time on the topic, "Was Jesus a Nice Jewish Boy." Rabbi Stephen Fink says that there is no dispute over Jesus's Jewishness but says, **"what is problematic is whether or not Jesus was nice."**

He went on to say, “Nice Jewish boys do not try to overturn the established order. Fink said Jewish leaders turned Jesus over to the Romans to avoid disorder and revolution. ‘It is better,’ they reasoned. ‘for one Jewish revolutionary to die by Roman hands than for thousands of Jews to be killed by Roman swords...’ At that time, they had no idea that the death of this one Galilean Jew would turn the world upside down.”

There was a time when a rabbi would not put such a statement in print to the secular public. To me, this is a hopeful sign.

Even more hopeful is the caliber of interviews that are being heard around the world which lift up Jesus from our perspective. I’d like to close with the playing of an audio tape. This was a live interview on Easter Sunday morning, broadcast throughout Britain on BBC Radio Four. The interviewees were Richard Harvey, UK director of Jews for Jesus, and Richard Harris, the Bishop of Oxford and president of the executive committee of the Council of Christians and Jews in Britain. The commentator is Allison Hillyard. The interview speaks for itself: (tape is played)