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Names used about Jesus-believers - then, in Acts, and now

By Kai Kjar-Hansen

Introduction

For the person who wants to find out what names or designations were used about the first persons to believe in Jesus, the New Testament offers a varied and rich material. In this paper I shall restrict myself to the Acts of the Apostles, and even from this book I shall take only a few examples. Each name might become the object of a separate scholarly examination - and this is exactly what has already happened. But what interests me here is

- * to outline some fundamental principles
- * to reflect on the relation between names in use then and now
- * to stimulate further reflection on the names used today about Jews who believe in Jesus - I am under no illusion as to the possibility of reaching consensus on this issue (see to this appendix).

The matter is not without importance. The self-designation of a group or an individual is a signal of one's position. It is a signal of proximity as well as distance. The question is: closeness to whom? and distance to whom?

The issue of designations/self-designations must also be put in a historic perspective. It is naive to believe - excuse me! - that it is possible to copy practices in the New Testament just like that. There are almost two thousand years of history between the first Jesus-believing Jews and us.

We all know that it is not so easy to find the right word, whether it is in one's own language or in a foreign language. It is not just a question of using a dictionary. The meaning of a given word is defined by the contexts in which it appears or - put differently: words function in semantic fields. It is the same with names. My starting-point is that one ought not to base decisive doctrines of theology on semantics. And: just as it is impossible to describe oneself exhaustively in a slogan, so it is also impossible to include everything in a self-designation. Furthermore, there is no safe-guard against words and names changing meanings in the course of time. Today, many countries have copyright rules, but there are designations which cannot be copyrighted, those which are very general, for example Jews and Christians. Fortunately.

Sometimes it has been argued that the original Jesus-movement began as a Jewish kat (sect) but ended as a dat (religion). Historically speaking, it is correct that by others the Jesus-movement was regarded as a Jewish sect or party (cf. e.g. 24.14) but it is hard for me to imagine that Jesus-believing Jews are so

minimalistic that they are content, today, to be regarded as just another party among Jewish parties and movements. Or am I mistaken? Historically speaking, it is also correct that a religion, Christianity, emerged in the trail of the first Jesus-movement. Theologically speaking, it must be emphasized that behind the new thing which occurred with Jesus of Nazareth and his followers, the Nazarenes, was the God of Israel. (I am not going to deal with the designation Nazarenes here, see Acts 24.5; confer the name used about Jesus in Acts 3.6; 4.10; 26.9). Jewish sect or religion: it is not a new God who reveals himself in Jesus, but the God of Israel who reveals himself in a new way; with Jesus the new covenant has come about and with Jesus the Kingdom of God is at hand - the Kingdom into which all are invited, Jews as well as Gentiles. It is the last days, the days of the Messianic age, which the first Jesus-believers experienced. And we together with them.

The first Jesus-believing Jews seem to have been more busy proclaiming Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven than thinking of names, and to them the Jesus-movement was the true faith for Jews and also the true faith for Gentiles. But of course there were names used about them. They were Jews but something set them off from other Jews.

No biblical injunctions as to names

Before we turn our attention to the New Testament to see what the first people who believed in Jesus were called, it is important to ascertain if the New Testament contains injunctions about names and designations. To the best of my conviction, nothing of that kind has been prescribed. But there do exist descriptions of what people called themselves and also what they were called by others. If this observation is correct, it gives us the liberty to observe and also to learn from the descriptions found in the New Testament, but it also allows us to embark on creative thinking with liberty to choose what serves the cause best. Today. It is important to reflect on this. If I am right, it would be wise to exercise some caution and abstain from claiming that one's self-designation is more biblical than the those of the others.

Let a few examples from the christology serve as illustrations of what I am trying to say. As will be shown below, there is a certain connection between some christological designations, that is designations attached to Jesus, and the self-designations of "the Christians", that is designations attached to the followers of Jesus.

According to Matthew (1.20-21), the angel of the Lord commanded Joseph to call Mary's child . . . well, what is he going to be called? Yehoshua/Joshua? Yeshua/Jesus? It is not up to Joseph to choose as he pleases. I believe that the angel of the Lord spoke Hebrew, and the research I have done has convinced me that it was not Yehoshua, but Yeshua. It is also not up to us to choose to give Yeshua another name if we please. But I/we are free to choose whether we want to say "Jesus" or "Yeshua" when we speak English or another language; we are also free to let the situation decide when to choose the name form

Yeshua and when the name form Jesus. The important thing is that the name form does not conceal the person's identity. And no matter what we choose, we can never be certain that we shall be fully understood. There is no denying that the Greek New Testament does not hebraicize the name: Jesus is called Iesous in Greek. To push matters to extremes: on the basis of the New Testament, it is easier to argue against the usage of Yeshua in a "diaspora language" today than to endorse it. For there is no "Yeshua" in the Greek text of the New Testament. However, I think it would be ridiculous to use Scripture in this way.

Another example: Jesus' self-designation, par excellence, was the Son of man. That is the way it is, according to the gospels, although critical scholars seriously question it. The interesting thing is that if we ignore Stephen's use of the term (Acts 7.57), then the name, the Son of man, does not occur in the New Testament outside the gospels. (The content of the designation, the Son of man, is expressed in other ways in the epistles of the New Testament, but this is not the place to go into that.) The Son of man is not a name that is much used in evangelistic work among Jews as well as non-Jews - if used at all. So: in spite of the fact that the Son of man is Jesus' self-designation, it is not a designation that we use very often when we want to explain who Jesus is. Quite daring, when you come think about it. Yet, it may be argued that the name is already in retreat in the New Testament outside the gospels.

Or the opposite: The designation "Saviour" is found in the New Testament, but rather rarely (the verb "to save" is frequent, however). In the New Testament Saviour is used relatively seldom about Jesus - and about God. Today it is the opposite: we use it very frequently in evangelistic work among Jews as well as non-Jews.

And I see no major problem in these matters. But when this is the situation in christology, then how much more when it comes to "Christian" self-designations. I know I ought to say: When this is the situation in Messiahology, then how much more when it comes to "Messianic Jewish" self-designations!!!

In the New Testament I see no commands or injunctions about names or designations for Jesus-believers. Therefore, it is my contention that there is liberty today to choose one's own name.

The designations: "disciples", "brothers" and "believers"

1. Disciples

The term "disciple", which is found approximately 30 times in Acts, is, together with the term "brothers", one of the most frequently used descriptions of Jesus-believers. In Acts, Luke calls the twelve disciples of Jesus apostles (after the death of Judas, Matthias was included in the group of the twelve, Acts 1.26), in two places Paul and Barnabas are called apostles (Acts 14.4,14). The authority is with the twelve in Jerusalem.

In itself the designation "disciple" does not say much. It is far too general for that. Teachers with their disciples were well-known among both Jews and Gentiles. The crucial thing is of whom one

is a disciple. The person of whom one is a disciple defines the nature of the discipleship. With a few exceptions, when we meet the term "disciple" in Acts we are think of these as being "disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9.1), the Lord here being identical with Jesus. In Acts it is the crucified and risen and exalted Lord, with all that is included in this designation (Kyrios), who defines the discipleship.

Without describing the nature of the discipleship, it may, however, be noted that it is used about both Jesus-believing Jews and Jesus-believing Gentiles (6.1-2,7; 9.10,19 / 13.52; 14.21,22). In Antioch there were disciples and the context makes it clear that no distinction is made between people of Jewish or Gentile descent (Acts 11.19-26). These disciples are called "Christians" (cf. below).

Also the apostle Paul had disciples, on one occasion they helped him to escape from Damascus (Acts 9.25). The word for "disciple" is the same, and we need not here enter a discussion of the difference between being a disciple of Paul and a disciple of Jesus.

2. Brothers

The term brother/brothers(brethren) is in itself worth a thorough study. The following will have to suffice now, nevertheless: The term is used in a way which is only appropriate for Jesus-believing Jews, namely to indicate a connection with the Jewish covenant people. This is, for example, evident in the speeches and forms of address in Acts (e.g. Acts 3.17; 7.2; 22.1; 23.1). In these instances Jesus-believing Jews address other Jews, i.e. people of the same lineage and the same people. Up to the Apostolic Council in Acts 15, the term "brothers" is used about those who are Jews by birth or by virtue of conversion. Jewish Jesus-believers also use the term "brothers" among themselves (Acts 15.15-16), but in this case the "brothers" do not only belong to the same people - the Jewish people - they also belong to the same faith, namely faith in Jesus. Reckoning from the letter which was sent from the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem to the Gentile Christians, Jesus-believing non-Jews are included in the designation "brothers". In the letter, the apostles refer to themselves as "your brothers" and the addressees are referred to as "all our brothers of Gentile birth" (Acts 15.23). After the Apostolic Council, Jesus-believing non-Jews are included in the term "brothers" (cf. e.g. Acts 15.36,40; 18.18) - while Paul continues to address non-Jesus-believing Jews as "brothers" (e.g. 22.1; 23.1). This does not mean that there is no longer a difference between Jesus-believing non-Jews and Jesus-believing Jews - this is exactly what the Apostolic Council implies - but the existing differences do not cancel the unity of faith between the two parties - i.e. the closeness between them.

With the term "brother" we are approaching a special field of tension for Jesus-believing Jews: they have "brothers" among Jews because they belong to the same people, and they have "brothers" among non-Jews because they belong to the same faith.

If we had focused on the use of the word "Jew" in Acts, we should have seen the same tension. Paul, who has come to faith in Jesus, says, in his speech of defence in Jerusalem in front of the people: "I am a Jew" (Acts 22.3). He does not say: "I used to be a

Jew." The defence in Acts 22.1-21 is an excellent example of the field of tension I referred to. There is closeness to the Jewish people and "the God of our fathers" (2.14) and, simultaneously, distance. Closeness and distance depend on the relation to the Way, to the Jesus that Paul met on his way to Damascus. By the Jew Jesus Paul was sent "far away to the Gentiles" (22.21): They were to become his close brothers in the faith.

Who are most to be considered brothers? Jews who do not believe in Jesus? Or non-Jews who believe in Jesus? What is important to signal in this field of tension?

3. Believers

When "believers" are mentioned in Acts (2.44; cf. 4.32; 18.27; 19.18), the context makes it clear that what is meant is Jesus-believers, even if it is also possible to use the term about others, of course. The important thing is towards whom the faith is directed. When the term "believers" is used it is not, of course, implied that other people do not have a belief, but it is implied that these people do not have a true belief, so to speak, namely belief in Jesus. This marks a distance to other "believing" Jews. In Jerusalem, James says to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed ..." (Acts 21.20). This is a daring way to put it. Of course they believed in the God of Israel before they believed in Jesus. But through faith in Jesus, those who used to be believers have now become believers! Something similar holds true for the Gentiles; they also believed in something before, but through faith in Jesus they have now become believers (Acts 21.25). So, the designation "believers" includes people of Jewish as well as of Gentile descent. These two groups are the true believers. This unity in faith in Jesus does not exclude the use of the following expressions: "the believers from among the circumcised" (Acts 10.45), or "some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees" (Acts 15.5), or Timothy being "the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer", which probably means that Timothy's mother was a Jesus-believer.

Today there are many examples of the usage of the term "believers" in "internal" communication in the congregation; the context makes it clear what is meant. It is also used in "external" communication among Christians: Are you a believer? That is, are you a believing Christian or a Christian in name only? When the movement of Jesus-believing Jews grows and gradually comes to comprise several generations, you will also have to grapple with the problem of "Messianic" in name only - but perhaps you already are familiar with it? Adjectives cannot be avoided when we try to define what is meant by "Christian". Jews who do not believe in Jesus have the same problem. Some are, for example, observant, others are not or are not as observant as the truly observant think they should be. And what, by the way, does "truly observant" mean?

So, faith in Jesus unites Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles. The term "believers" is used about both of these groups. This also marks a distance to others - both Jews and Gentiles. But again, the "new" faith is not faith in a new God but in the God of Israel.

The designations "the holy ones", "those who belong to the Way" and "Christians"

The next three designations that I want to focus on have this in common: they are used about Jesus and about the "believers". Perhaps it is possible to take one further step: the designation used about Jesus can be related to a designation for God in the so-called Old Testament. If you like: theological titles (i.e. titles used about God in the Old Testament) are found as christological titles (i.e. in the New Testament they are transferred to Jesus), and from here the titles are transferred to "believers".

I am going to deal with the "the saints" ("the holy ones"), "the Way" and "Christians".

1. The holy ones - the Holy One

According to Scripture, God is the Holy One, and his people is meant to be the holy people (Lev 11.44).

In Acts, Jesus is "thy [God's] Holy One" (2.27; 13.35), "thy [God's] holy servant Jesus" (4.27; cf. 4.30) and "the Holy One" (3.14). When "thy" is used, it is either in a quotation from Psalms, applied on Jesus, or in a prayer to God.

In Acts, the Jesus-believers are the holy ones. (The close connection between the titles of God and Jesus, on the one hand, and the Jesus-believers, on the other hand, is, unfortunately, obscured by the English translations. King James and Revised Standard Version have "saints" but in some modern translations, Good News Bible, for example, it is even more blurred: "your people" (9.13), "God's people" (9.32; 26.10), "the believers" (9.41) - where is the holiness? And perhaps it is also not quite transparent that the word sanctify simply means "to make holy".)

When Ananias is in prayer to God he says: "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem" (9.13). This is a reference to Jesus-believing Jews, as is the case in 9.32,41; cf. 26.10. Closely connected to the term "the holy ones" is the term "those who are sanctified" (Acts 20.32; 26.18). Jesus-believing non-Jews are included here. The two quoted passages are found in Paul's mouth, and if we add that he uses "saints" about the congregation in Corinth (e.g. 1 Cor 1.2; 2 Cor 1.1), it becomes clear that the term is used about Jesus-believing Jews as well as non-Jews.

As an internal self-designation, it is a very meaningful one: the holy ones are holy because of the Holy One, Jesus. It is a holiness which has been granted. It is especially noteworthy that Paul uses this term about the congregation in Corinth, the congregation which had caused him so much trouble and which he had shed so many tears over (2 Cor 2.4).

As a self-designation it is used by, for example, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons). The reason why the term is in a relatively weak position today is presumably due to the way it is used by the "outsiders" about the "believers". When outsiders use it, it is often done to mark a distance, and with a

a derogatory implication: hypocrisy, shame, false piety. And to give this reflection: a self-critical reflection: sadly enough, they are often right.

2. *Those who belong to the Way*
"Those who belong to the Way" is a self-designation, and in the minds of "believers" today the Way is associated with him who is the Way, namely Jesus (Jn 14.6). In Acts Luke does not use this christological title about Jesus explicitly, but the linguistic and theological lines backward to the Old Testament are clear enough. "The ways of life" (Acts 2.28) is an Old Testament quotation. Luke also uses "the way of the Lord" and the parallel "the way of God" (Acts 18.25,26). In Wilhelm Michaelis' words concerning the figurative use in the Old Testament: "The ways which men walk can be called the ways of the Lord because they are ways which He has commanded ... The way of the Lord is the walk which God requires of man" (in: Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. V, p. 51).

What the apostles proclaimed, according to Acts, was the "way of salvation" (16.17). Also the congregation in Qumran would speak about "choosing the way". Here, as in Acts, it is an indication of the faith and attitude to life of the involved. And again the questions crops up: who do you believe in?

Some argue that the term in Acts does not just indicate a belief, a doctrine, an attitude to life, or a way of salvation: the particularly interesting thing is that it is a description of a group, a sociological term, if you like.

In Acts the term is first found in Luke's description of the purpose of Saul's journey to Damascus, namely to bring "any belonging to the Way" bound to Jerusalem (9.2). From the context it is clear that it refers to Jews belonging to the Jesus-movement. In Ephesus some Jews speak evil of the Way (19.9). Nothing in the context suggests that the term should be reserved for Jesus-believing Jews. On the contrary, immediately afterwards it is said explicitly that in Asia "both Jews and Greeks" heard the word of the Lord (19.10). Paul says that he persecuted this Way (19.23; cf. 22.4). The Roman governor Felix has an accurate knowledge of the Way (24.22). In his defence before Felix, Paul says: "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they [the Jews] call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers ... (24.14).

Today it is used as a self-designation by some groups of Jesus-believing Jews. I do not believe it has a chance as a collective designation for all Jesus-believing Jews. But it might serve to arouse people's curiosity: What way are you talking about?

3. Christian - Christ

Let us for a moment forget all about Christian history and all the negative things which the word "Christian" holds for a Jew. Let us also, now, skip the linguistic relation between the Hebrew Mashiach and the Greek Christos. This is familiar to most, I think.

In the New Testament the word Christian is found in three places:

1. In Acts 11.26 it is said that it was in Antioch the

disciples were for the first time called Christians (christianoi).

2. In Acts 26.28 it is found on the lips of the Jewish King Agrippa II.

3. 1 Pet 4.16 it is said that if one suffers as a Christian, he should not be ashamed but under that name glorify God.

I am going to concentrate on Acts 11.26, and to my mind, the essential thing is to deal with the question whether all Jesus-believing Jews in the congregation in Antioch are included in this designation. In the scholarly discussion, this is - I think - taken for granted. But to cut a long and actually very interesting story short, it may be said that there are two main views in the discussion about the origin of the name.

The first is that the term is a self-designation coined by the church in Antioch. Elias J. Bickerman advocates this view ("The name of Christians" in Harvard Theological Review 42, pp. 109-124). By this the believers give expression to their being conscious of living in the age of the Messiah: the Christians "were agents, representatives of the Messiah" (Bickerman, p. 123). This view is not the dominant one today. It must be said, however, that it is possible to find support for this with some of the church fathers.

The second view is that the term was coined by those outside of the Church as a name for followers of Christos, the Messiah. Michael J. Wilkins gives a good summary of the discussion in The Anchor Bible Dictionary. He writes:

The reason for the origin is problematic. The term Christianoi may have been coined by the Antiochian governor's staff to indicate official Roman registry. Or the use of the term may have been intended satirically by the Antiochian people to mock those who believed in Jesus as Messiah, paralleling the mockery directed toward the Augustiani, the official enthusiasts of Nero (Mattingly 1958). Or more likely, the term may have arisen generally among the populace as a slang term to indicate those who were followers of their God Christos, and who were regarded as a sort of mystery fellowship (Grundmann TDNT 10:537). The name Christos, Messiah, meant nothing to the Gentiles, sounding more like a second personal name for Jesus than a religious title.

In all three NT passages the variant Chrestianoi occurs in the uncorrected Codex Sinaiticus; remarkably persistent testimony that Gentiles often confused the term Christos with the homophone, chrestos, "kind, useful". [A homophone is a word pronounced like another word but with a different meaning or spelling.] Chrestos was a common proper name, especially for slaves, and apparently Gentiles tended to think that the disciples were followers of one called Chrestos. This is the likely reason why the Latin historian Suetonius says that Jews were expelled from Rome because of disturbances made at the instigation of one called Chrestus (Claud. 25.4). Tacitus, in one of the earliest extrabiblical testimonies to the term (ca. A.D. 115), appears to correct for his readers the common mistake among the Roman populace of A.D. 64 of confusing Chrestianoi with Christianoi (Ann. 15.44).

As a self-designation Christianos is found in Didache (12.4) (about 90 A.D.) and from Ignatius' letters (early second century). In the middle of the second century, Polycarp uses it after that it becomes commonly used.

Back to the question: are Jesus-believing Jews included in these Christianoi/Christians? David H. Stern, for example, discusses this question (Messianic Jewish Manifesto, 1988, p. 32). He says: "According to Scripture the word "Christian" does not denote Jewish believers in Yeshua at all." I dare not be so categorical. Stern argues that Greek-speaking Gentiles should have coined the word christianoi about their friends when these spoke about Christos, much as followers of Sun Myung Moon have been dubbed "Moonies". "Thus the term 'Christian' was invented by Gentiles to describe Gentiles in a Gentile environment. The New Testament tells us explicitly that 'the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch'," David Stern writes.

To my mind, the issue is rather more complicated. In Acts 11 it is said that Jesus-believing Jews whose mother tongue probably was Greek went to Antioch and spoke to the "Greeks", which in this context denotes Gentiles. They spoke "to the Greeks also" (v. 20), which means that they must have gone on speaking to Jews, some of whom presumably came to believe in Jesus. It is correct that, according to Acts, the term was first used in "a Gentile environment". In Acts 11 we read that Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch; soon after Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, he brought him to Antioch and for a full year they were the leading figures in the congregation in Antioch where they taught a large company of people. And then it is said: "And in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians" (v. 26). If we move on to Acts 13.1-3 we shall see that the congregation in Antioch, whose majority was most likely made up of Jesus-believers of Gentile birth, has a leadership which - apart from Barnabas and Saul - included people of Jewish birth. As far as I can see, there are no hints in the texts that believers of Jewish birth should not be included in the term "Christianoi/Christians". The burden of proof lies with those who deny that Paul and Barnabas, for example, and other Jews in the congregation in Antioch should be included in the term "Christian". If we accept that the first Jesus-believers were more preoccupied with the preaching of the Jew Jesus than with a discussion of names for their movement - and that irrespective of whether the name "Christian" was coined by people inside or outside the congregation - then I find it difficult to maintain the contention: "According to Scripture the word "Christian" does not denote Jewish believers in Yeshua at all."

I think that "Christian" does denote Jewish believers - for example in Antioch! The term is used about Jesus-believers, Jewish as well as Gentile. There is a wonderful connection between the designations Christ and the Christians. The believer bears the name of Christ. And a Hebrew-speaking believer bears the name of Messiah.

If a Jesus-believing Jew refuses to use the name Christian because of the history of the Christian Church and its persecution of Jews in the name of Christ, then it is enough to make it clear that

this is the underlying cause. It is certainly better than to read into the biblical texts a problem belonging to the modern age. That is much to be preferred for the sake of the Bible and ourselves. If it is true that we have liberty to choose, then it is not necessary to have Scripture on our side, it is enough it is not against us! This is a good Lutheran principle. With a view to creative work with the choice of contemporary self-designations and with a view to how the term "Christian" is used in the New Testament, it is sufficient to say with Michael J. Wilkins: "There is no NT evidence that the term was commonly used as a self-designation by the early church" (The Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. I, p. 926).

Acts 26.28 and 1 Pet 4.16 - the only two other places in the New Testament where the term "Christian" occurs - will not be dealt with here. I only note that it is found on the lips of Jews: King Agrippa II and in the so-called First Letter of the Apostle Peter.

When a movement increases

When a movement grows, problems arise. People do not think alike, people have not reached the same level of understanding, people do not have the same cultural background (this was not even the case with Jews in the era of the Second Temple, and not all are prepared to, literally, share the same house, etc. This is the situation today, and this was the situation in the early church. In Acts 6 we can see that it soon became clear that there were two distinct groups in the early church:

1. Hellenists
2. Hebrews.

Lots of books and theses have been written about these two groups, and many different hypotheses have been put forward. We can be relatively certain that we have two groups of Jesus-believing Jews, each with their language. Mission to the Gentiles has not yet begun. The theories that there should be a marked theological divergence between these groups, e.g. in their view of the Temple, are mere hypotheses which are difficult to substantiate. It is a fact that it is the Hellenists who are the first to meet with opposition and persecution (Acts 6-8), and they are also the first to launch a more systematic mission to the Gentiles (Acts 11.19-26).

I am going to make just one observation: There were different groupings already at a very early time in the history of the Jesus-movement. There was some dissatisfaction among the Hellenists - no matter how these are to be defined (Acts 6). They found a solution to the problem, but still there were differences between the two groupings - at least as to the language.

The radical theology claims that there was a radical difference between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. If they are right, then Luke conceals this difference. Personally I do not find the arguments for a radical theological difference convincing.

Obviously, there were differences but it would seem that they were not of such magnitude that one group questioned the authenticity of the other group's faith.

This observation may seem insignificant. To me it is an important one. It communicates that we cannot conclude from the fact

that there are differences between us that one party is completely right and the other party has got it all wrong. The existing differences did not mean that one party consisted of "the believers" and "the holy ones", and the other party of "the non-believers" and the "non-holy ones". Both parties were believers and holy. Both parties belonged to the Way.

And let us now make a giant leap in time.

Jews for Jesus - Messianic Judaism

I am now going to throw caution to the winds and give some cues for discussion and reflection.

In my own context, in Denmark, I alternate between the terms "Messianic Jews" and "Jesus-believing Jews", or similar. In 1979 Ole Chr. Kvarme and I wrote a book about Jesus-believing Jews in Israel. The title "Messianic Jews" had a considerable influence on the terminology in Danish and Norwegian. When in Denmark I speak about "Messianic Jews" to Gentile Christians, it is up to me to show that there are differences between Messianic Jews, just as there are differences between Christians. What alienates them from other Jews is their faith in Jesus. I do not have the problem which some of you Jesus-believing Jews have among you because you are many and because you are already now divided into groups. When I write more or less scholarly articles, I do not use the term Messianic Jews about the Jesus-believing Jews of the first centuries. I use the term most commonly used in such contexts, namely Jewish Christians. To me this is a question of communication and not of theology. As editor of the LCJE Bulletin or a book published by the Caspari Center, for example, I sometimes run into problems. I could choose to force semantics to conform to my view, to insist on uniformity in terminology. I do not do that. I recognize the problem and allow the individual writers to use the terminology they prefer. In a book one has the opportunity to explain in a preface this diversity to the readers, namely that differences in semantic practice reflects diversity in unity. Others will handle this issue differently.

It is far more problematic for Jesus-believing Jews among themselves when the movement increases. You will get the same problems as the Christian Church has, with several "churches", different names and different emphases. And it is not necessarily the Christian Church that inflicts this problem on the Jesus-believing Jews. I know that I am entering a minefield, but let me give you some examples, anyhow:

I am not so naive as to think that we can find a designation for Jesus-believing Jews that everybody would be happy with. And even if we did find it, we could not commit anybody in future to use it. (A man once said that "the times they are a'changing" - but so are names and designations. That guy, by the way, would know what I'm talking about. He early realized that if you want to get the message across, it is important to have a name that doesn't block the pipelines of communication. So he rid himself of the good Jewish name Robert Zimmerman and emerged as Bob Dylan.) Through the choice of name you signal something. But it is impossible to include everything in a name. A few examples:

I personally think that the name Jews for Jesus is a superb name. I shall leave it to Moishe Rosen to tell the story of how it came about - or to someone else associated with the organisation Jews for Jesus. Whether we like to admit it or not, it is, however, out of the question that "Jews for Jesus" should be used as a common name for all Jesus-believing Jews. It is now connected to a particular organisation. On the other hand, one cannot prevent parts of the Israeli press, for example, to lump all Jesus-believing Jews together under the name Yehudim lema'an Yeshu/Yeshua, a name which not all Jesus-believing Jews are happy with - not because they are not "Jews", and not because they are not "for Jesus", but because they are not attached to the organisation "Jews for Jesus". Perhaps also because some think that in the organisation Jews for Jesus they are more "Christian" than "Jewish". Of course, something similar could be said about other organisations. This problem is mentioned in The Jerusalem Report, January 26, 1995, which carries an article entitled "For the Love of Jesus" (pp. 26-31), and it is mentioned in the column "Cover Story Jewish World" - in itself an interesting place for this.

It is equally easy to say something good about the name Messianic Jews/Messianic Judaism. I have already hinted that in my own context, in Denmark, where there are hardly any Messianic Jews, it is a usable term. But I have a feeling that there are some Jesus-believing Jews who find that the term Messianic Judaism has already acquired a content which they cannot identify with.

The fact that there are Jews who are messianic but do not believe in Jesus is not something that troubles me in this connection. There are also "Christians" who with their words deny fundamental Christian truths, which does not stop me from calling myself Christian. Here I need adjectives!

So, here we are. Even though the modern Jewish Jesus-movement numerically speaking is rather weak, it has a problem with names due to different emphases and customs. And the name problem reflects different emphases of the faith. And the different emphases of the faith lead to different attitudes to other name problems, e.g. if it is right for a leader of a congregation to call himself a rabbi, if it is expedient - for the sake of the gospel - to build Messianic congregations, or if Jews who believe in Jesus - without losing their Jewish identity - can worship God in the name of Jesus in a Christian church or a Christian fellowship.

The question which it is relevant to ask in the context is - and let us for a moment ignore the freakish fringe phenomena in the movement: do the people in your group still regard the people in the other groups as God's dear children on account of what Jesus Christ/Yeshua haMashiach has done for you? I want you to see it in the light of what I said above about the relation between Hebrews and Hellenists in Acts.

If this question is answered with a yes, then the name problem, although still an important question, is nonetheless of secondary importance in relation to the answer to the basic question: Who is Jesus/Yeshua? And if we know in whom we believe, i.e. if we retain a clear New Testament christology/Messiahology and soteriology, then

the way in which we organise our congregations is a question of secondary importance. This is not to say that ecclesiology is unessential, but even if we do organise ourselves in different ways, it is, nevertheless, possible to express the unity of our faith.

Final remarks

It will appear from what I have already said that I do not, today, feel obligated to use the same designations as the New Testament uses about the first Jesus-believing Jews. In the New Testament there is no binding command about this. I have no intention of changing the name "Christian" for those of us who are non-Jews and who believe in Jesus. But I do feel an obligation to maintain that a Christian believes in the God of Israel because he, and he alone, is the living God. And I feel privileged that I have been admitted to the field where there are Jesus-believing Jews, those who like myself and other Christians have been saved by grace and through faith in Jesus. And I am willing to go very far in my respect for the justified wish on the part of Jesus-believing Jews to show their Jewishness and their Jewish identity. A Jew who believes in Jesus does not become an ex-Jew. And when it comes to names, I do not care what people call themselves - or almost do not care. As long as they are not ashamed of Jesus, the Jesus who was a Jew, but where faith in Jesus alienates Jesus-believing Jews from other Jews and where the same faith in Jesus unites Jesus-believing Jews and "Christians".

When it comes to the name problem we must, in my best opinion, zig-zag our way through. Be broad-minded towards each other. By the name we choose, we indicate an orientation. The more "Messianic Jews", in their choice of name and in their practice, indicate an orientation towards Judaism - and for me this is fully legitimate - the more I expect such Messianic Jews to feel obligated to emphasize the unity of faith with the non-Jews who together with them share the shame of the gospel. In spite of the repulsive history of the Christian Church towards the Jewish people.

As a Jesus-believing non-Jew I need the Jesus-believing Jews' perspective on the biblical message. And in all modesty, it is my contention that Jesus-believing Jews need Jesus-believing non-Jews. If for no other reason, then at least because they need us to fight the battle on their behalf in the Christian Church, in order that they will be regarded as more than a fad or a sectarian movement.

I can understand that Jesus-believing Jews, for the sake of their Jewish brothers, need to express their distance to the Christian Church. I bow my head before such criticism. Make it as crushing as you can. And when that is done, say an equally powerful yes to fellowship with non-Jews who believe in Jesus. I, a non-Jew, shall be disappointed if you do not communicate this closeness, which at the same time marks a distance to Jews who do not believe in Jesus.

Jesus/Yeshua unites and separates. Who does he unite? Who does he separate?

... we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the

foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor 1.23-25).

Let us together follow the Way and speak about the others as we wish them to speak about us, that is: if we do believe in him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

We - Jews as well as non-Jews - who believe in Jesus have this in common: we are fools for the sake of the gospel. Fools need each other!

Appendix to self designations

By looking through the LCJE International Networking Directory (1992) you get an overview of what Jesus-believing Jewish organizations and Messianic congregations/synagogues are called.

Here are some examples from North America. They are listed without passing any value judgement and the list is meant only to stimulate further reflection on the matter.

In each number of the newspaper *Messianic Times* there is a list of "Messianic Congregations & Organizations Directory, providing further material for the same reflection.

1. The name indicates that this is something different from a "normal" Jewish organization or congregations.

1a. In this group of examples are included names in which the word "Messianic" forms part of the name. This is done even though also Jews who do not believe in Jesus can be considered "Messianic".

Fellowship of Messianic Congregations
Jews for Jesus
Adat Ha Mashiach Messianic Congregation
Adat Y'shua Ha Adon
Mishkan Messianic Congregation
American Messianic Fellowship
Beth Messiah Congregation
Seed of Abraham Messianic Congregation
Beth Messiah
Beth Yeshua
Adat Yeshua
Kehilot Ha-Mashiah
Beth Yeshua Congregation
Congregation of Messiah Jesus.

1b. Do names in which the word "congregation" makes up part of the name indicate or hint that this is something different than a Jewish synagogue? How does the word "ministry" sound to a Jew? How does the combination of the individual words affect the total impression of the name? Is the combination an indication that this is not something only Jewish? Is the word "Messiah" in itself so much associated with "Jesus" that it points to him without mentioning it. What other words do to a Jewish audience have New Testament connotations?

Some examples to consider:

Congregation Beth Messiah
Beth Messiah Synagogue
Shepherd of Israel Congregation
Congregation Roeh Israel
Love Song to the Messiah
Good News to Israel
Congregation B'rith Hadoshah
Olive Tree Congregation
Ministry of Hope
Congregation Rosh Pina
Congregation B'nai Maccabim
El Shaddai Congregation
Ariel Ministry
Menorah Ministry
Ammi Ministry
Beth Ha Shofar

2. Is there anything in the name that indicates that this is more than a Jewish organization/ movement/ synagogue?

Observation: On p. 44 in the LCJE Directory the name Rock of Israel is found. This organization was by mistake included in the Directory and an apology was given to the director of the organization. But on pp. 48-49 there is another Rock of Israel which does qualify for being included in the LCJE Directory. And by the way: Should Rock of Israel be placed under 1b?

Examples:

Rock of Israel
Ahavat Zion Synagogue
Beth Ariel Fellowship
Kehilot Ariel
Beth Hallel
Adat Hatikvah
Light of Israel
Shalom Fellowship
Song of Israel
Beth El Shaddai
Shema Israel
Beth Tefilah
Petah Tikvah

For further reflection on this topic these names or designation could be compared with names of synagogues, both orthodox, conservative and reformed.