

# **Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, Three Years Later: Reflections on a Conversation Just Begun**

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I have been asked to speak this evening about *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*, a book published in 2005 that sums up the vision guiding my life in its first half-century. I dedicated the book to my first spiritual mentor, an extraordinary Jewish Yeshua-believer named Haskell Stone (may he be remembered for blessing). Haskell had come of age in the 1950's, and told me on a number of occasions of a man of the previous generation who had been his model. That man's name was Moses Gitlin. In the late 1970's I became personally acquainted with the daughter of Moses Gitlin, a contemporary of Haskell's and a remarkable figure in her own right.

Vera had lived in Jerusalem for many years, and had regularly attended services in the congregation in which I am now speaking. Vera told me of the gifted pastor who preached here and whom she considered an esteemed friend, and gave me a signed copy of one of his books -- *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*. I read the book's lengthy introduction with fascination, impressed with Robert Lindsey's creative insight and scholarly competence. I remember thinking to myself, "I would love to meet this man, and hear him speak."

Unfortunately, I was never able to realize that wish. However, the opportunity to be here tonight and deliver a lecture in a series that honors his memory is the next best thing. I can conceive of no better way of beginning such a lecture than by expressing gratitude

for the dedicated servants of God in the previous century upon whose shoulders we all stand.

As already noted, I have been asked to speak about *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (*PMJ*), and the discussion it has sparked.<sup>1</sup> This verb seems especially appropriate, as the conversation has at times been volatile. Gratefully, the light generated has sometimes been commensurate to the heat.

The volume received immediate attention in the Messianic Jewish congregational movement and in the world of Christian missions to the Jews. Within a year of its publication the scholarly journals associated with those two communities, *Kesher* and *Mishkan*, had printed fourteen responses to *PMJ*, with rejoinders by the author. Discussion has continued unabated in these communities since that time. Reviews of the book have also appeared in Christian and academic circles, and more are on the way. To this point, no review or response has been printed in a mainstream Jewish publication (though the book has been noticed, as we will see later).

Some readers have found *PMJ* deeply disturbing. One of the earliest reviews called it "profoundly defective" and "unbiblical" (Robinson 2005). Another asserted that "If Mr. Kinzer's platform were to be adopted, the biblical faith of Jesus would be destroyed among both Jews and Gentiles" (Maoz). An evangelical biblical scholar characterized my ecclesiological proposal as "apartheid" (Schnabel). An evangelical missionary, with better humor, suggested that this ecclesiology, "if embraced by a significant segment of the Church, should give evangelicals a few sleepless nights" (Daniels). A friendly reviewer commented that "many Christians might view Kinzer's proposal as being just

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<sup>1</sup> At the end of this paper I have attached a chronological bibliography of all published material directly related to *PMJ*. In order to simplify the format of this paper, I will not replicate this information in footnote form.

short of theologically bizarre" (Neuhaus). A less friendly reviewer argued that "the path to postmissionary Messianic Judaism is the path to the negation of the true Messianic faith" (Brown). Apparently this last author decided that he had not expressed himself with sufficient clarity or force, and so he added: "I am, therefore, afraid that postmissionary Messianic Judaism will prove to be the beginning of the road to apostasy for many Jewish (and even Gentile) believers, the beginning of the road to spiritual confusion for many more, and, generally speaking, the beginning of the road to the shriveling up and dying up of true 'Messianic Judaism' for many congregations" (Brown). Perhaps responses of this sort are to be expected when a book is widely regarded as "challenging" (Daniels), "bold" (Schebera), and "audacious" (Yocum).

Thankfully, this is not the entire story. Critics and fans of *PMJ* alike have found the book "fascinating" (Maoz; Neuhaus), "engaging" (Maoz), "sophisticated" (Robinson 2006; Brown), "nuanced" (Brown; Soulen), "lucid" (Soulen), and "well-written" (Maoz; Cohen; Garner). Beyond being a good read (at least in comparison to volumes of the same genre), critics and fans alike have also recognized *PMJ* to be "groundbreaking" (Harvey; Harink), "seminal" (Harvey), "important" (Maoz; Soulen), "required reading" (Robinson 2006), and a "watershed volume" (Brown). David Stern sees *PMJ* as an "ecclesiological breakthrough," and suggests that I may be "the Copernicus of ecclesiology." (Given some of the responses to the book, I feel more like Galileo than Copernicus!)

In this paper I would like to reflect upon the conversation that has been launched by *PMJ*, addressing some of the questions that have been raised about the book and expressing hopes for future directions that the conversation might take. Before I do this,

however, I would like to summarize the argument of *PMJ*, and identify a crucial element in its structure that has gone largely unnoticed.

### **The Role of Jewish Covenantal Obligation in the Argument of *PMJ***

As most readers recognize, *PMJ* is a book about ecclesiology. It attempts to rethink the relationship between the Christian Church and the Jewish people, and in the process it posits a new way of conceptualizing the Church's communal framework which I call "bilateral ecclesiology." In this framework the *ekklesia* consists of a united community that is essentially twofold, containing a Jewish sub-community that links it to the national life and history of the people of Israel, and a multinational sub-community that extends Israel's heritage among the peoples of the earth without annulling their distinctive cultural identities. Thus, the bilateral constitution of the *ekklesia* enables it to fulfill a universal vocation while maintaining solidarity with Israel.

Furthermore, *PMJ* argues that this solidarity involves an acknowledgement that the Jewish people remains a community in covenant with God, and that its corporate resistance to Yeshua-faith has not undermined this covenant nor vitiated the authority of its tradition and its teachers. Going further, *PMJ* contends that Yeshua himself dwells not only with the Christian Church but also with the Jewish people, and that his presence is manifest in Jewish life whenever Jews remain faithful to the covenant. Therefore, the Jewish wing of the *ekklesia* can participate in the life of the wider Jewish community and adhere to Jewish tradition without jeopardizing fidelity to the Messiah whose name it explicitly and unashamedly confesses.

Readers have applauded or attacked these conclusions, and the evidence and reasoning summoned in *PMJ* to support them. However, few readers have noted the core of *PMJ*'s

argument and the recurring role this core plays throughout the book. I am referring to Chapter 2 of *PMJ*, entitled "The New Testament and Jewish Practice."

In that chapter I examine how the Apostolic Writings deal with a set of Jewish practices rooted in the Torah which by the first-century had become crucial markers of Jewish identity: circumcision, Shabbat and holiday observance, and *kashrut*. I reach the following conclusion:

Our survey of the New Testament teaching on Jewish practice (for Jews) has produced a surprising result. We have good grounds for upholding the view that the New Testament as a whole treats Jewish practice as obligatory for Jews. (95)

I do not assert here merely "that Messianic Jews lived Torah observant lives during the New Testament period" (Glaser, 31). Instead, I contend that the Apostolic Writings consider such observance to be an obligatory expression of Jewish covenantal fidelity rooted in theological conviction rather than prudential judgment.<sup>2</sup>

The final sentences of Chapter 2 demonstrate how I view the importance of this proposition:

This conclusion has profound theological implications. In many ways, the remainder of this book is an attempt to reflect on those implications and on their significance for the church and for the Jewish people. (96)

The discovery of an enduring requirement for a basic level of Torah observance for Yeshua-believing Jews is interesting and important in itself, and stands as a foundational principle of much of the Messianic Jewish congregational movement in the Diaspora. Many readers have noted *PMJ's* emphasis on this point, and have interacted with it critically or appreciatively. However, few have grasped the integral position it holds

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<sup>2</sup> I elaborate on this point in my *Keshet* response to Glaser, 58-62. Like Glaser, Robinson (2006) sees my argument as based on the example of the apostolic lifestyle. My *Mishkan* response to him is also relevant here: "It is not the apostolic observance of the Torah that is decisive, but the apostles' evident conviction that this observance is a matter of obedience to a divine commandment."

within the structure of the argument of *PMJ*. What does the requirement of Jewish practice have to do with a bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel that affirms not only Israel's Torah but also its religious tradition? What is the relationship between chapter 2 and the expansive and controversial conclusions of the rest of the book? To answer these questions, let us review the basic outlines of the argument of *PMJ* (as contained in chapters 2-7), with an eye on the role played by the conclusions reached in chapter 2.

Chapter 3, "The New Testament and the Jewish People," takes up the question of the spiritual status of the Jewish people as a whole. The introduction to the chapter explains the implications of Chapter 2 for this question:

We concluded in our previous chapter that the New Testament considers Jewish practice normative for Jews who believe in Yeshua, though not for Yeshua-believing Gentiles. We also noted the intimate connection between such practice and Jewish national identity. Given this connection, the obligation of Jewish practice for Jews (and not for Gentiles) implies that the New Testament regards the Jewish people as recipients of a particular calling and as servants with a distinctive role and mission in the divine purpose. (97)

Yet, it might still be possible that only Yeshua-believing Jews carry on this "distinctive role and mission," and that the rest of the Jewish people are cut off from Israel's spiritual heritage. The introduction to Chapter 3 considers this possibility, and then points out

...the formidable theological problems raised by this hypothesis. Since a body of Yeshua-believing Jews faithfully devoted to Jewish practice ceased to exist at some point in the first millennium, this hypothesis leads to the disturbing conclusion that the Jewish people as a whole expired at that point. Is this theologically tenable? If Jewish practice is important to God, then the Jewish people are important to God. Did he permit this people to perish? (98)

Thus, the only conclusion that makes sense is that "Jews who have not believed in Yeshua but who have loyally sustained a continual Jewish communal presence in the world through hours of deepest darkness are heirs of God's covenant with Israel" (98)

This is only the introduction to Chapter 3. The remainder of the chapter consists of an exegetical study of the actual teaching of the Apostolic Writings on this question. The logical implications of Chapter 2 determine the thesis to be tested, and support that thesis, but they cannot conclusively substantiate the thesis apart from a direct interpretive engagement with the text. As we will see, this is the method followed throughout *PMJ*. I formulate a thesis based largely on the implications of Chapter 2, and then test that thesis by seeing whether it enables us to make good sense of the relevant scriptural texts.

With Chapter 4, "Bilateral Ecclesiology in Solidarity with Israel," we reach the heart of *PMJ*, both physically (the chapter begins on page 151 of a 310 page book) and theologically. In this chapter I make the case for the ecclesiological vision that is the main point of *PMJ*. As in Chapter 3, the introduction to the chapter formulates its thesis by drawing out the implications of Chapter 2:

Jewish practice is inherently corporate in nature. Circumcision is a social rite, performed by a trained official within the community. Sabbath observance requires social support and communal expression. The dietary laws require kosher meat processing and a network of related families following similar food customs. The practical need for communal support reinforces the underlying meaning of all Jewish practice, which is to be an effective sign marking Israel as a people set apart for God

At the same time, the New Testament also emphasizes the importance of Gentiles becoming part of the *ekklesia* without becoming Jews...

Only one structural arrangement would allow for distinctive Jewish communal life within the context of a transnational community of Jews and Gentiles: the one *ekklesia* must consist of two corporate subcommunities... Thus the first implications of chapters 2 and 3 is that the *ekklesia* is bilateral – one reality subsisting in two forms.

Given...that faithful Jewish practice requires extensive communal support, a second implication arises out of the first: the Jewish branch of the twofold *ekklesia* must identify with the Jewish people as a whole and participate actively in its communal life. (152)

After articulating the thesis in its introduction, Chapter 4 proceeds to test this thesis by examining the relevant texts in the Apostolic Writings. As in Chapter 3, the biblical material confirms a thesis derived initially from the conclusions of Chapter 2.

Chapter 5, "The Christian No to Israel: Christian Supersessionism and Jewish Practice," tells the sad story of the birth and development of Christian Supersessionism from Ignatius of Antioch to Thomas Aquinas. The recounting of such a narrative has become commonplace in the post-holocaust world of Christian theology and ecumenical relations. However, the focus of this telling differs from most others. *PMJ* does not aim to document anew the contempt for Jews and Judaism cultivated by the Christian Church, or the Christian claim that the Church and Christianity have replaced Israel and Judaism. Instead, *PMJ* describes how contempt and supersessionism took the form of rejecting Jewish practice for Jewish Yeshua-believers and delegitimizing the Jewish *ekklesia* whose life embodied such practice. Scholars rarely take note of this form of contempt and supersessionism because they rarely acknowledge the Apostolic teaching regarding Jewish practice. Once we recognize the latter, the former becomes especially significant. What was thought to be obligatory by the Apostles is now condemned as mortal sin! Thus, the Christian "No" to Israel (as expressed in the prohibition of ecclesial Jewish practice) entails a partial Christian "No" to the Apostles, and to the Messiah of Israel who commissioned them.

This sets the stage for the most radical and controversial chapter of *PMJ*. Having looked at the historical Christian "No" to Israel, we now examine the historical Jewish "No" to Yeshua. The underlying premise of both Chapters 6 and 7 is that Jewish practice requires a living tradition of communal application, and that any twenty-first century

version of the Jewish *ekklesia* must recognize Jewish tradition as having some measure of authority.

One cannot build a contemporary Judaism exclusively on either the Bible or modern (or postmodern) sensibility. Without some connection to the historical experience of the Jewish people, Judaism evaporates into thin air. (215)

But this raises the question, how can Yeshua-believers treat as in any sense authoritative a tradition that said No to Yeshua? This is a formidable challenge. Nevertheless, we will see that the conclusions of Chapter 2 that made the question necessary also play a crucial role in answering it.

As a community, the Jewish people of the first century did not accept the messianic claims of Yeshua. This lack of a communal "Yes" has a theological significance of its own. However, it does not constitute an emphatic "No." Most Jews of the first century likely had little awareness of those claims, and little opportunity to respond to them. By the time the name of Jesus was widely known among the Jewish people, the message he proclaimed and entrusted to his Apostles – in relation to the Jewish people – had been turned upside down.

As seen in chapters 2, 3, and 4, the message of Yeshua came to the first generation of Jewish hearers as a proclamation of how the God of Israel had acted and was acting in Yeshua for the redemption of Israel and the world... As seen in chapter 5, the message about Yeshua that came to Jews in the second century was radically different. It spoke of how Israel's covenant and way of life had been annulled in the Messiah, and it claimed that Jewish identity and practice were of no value or even prohibited. Any Jew who was loyal to the covenant would conclude that such a message could not possibly come from the God of Israel. To reject such a purported Messiah would be an act of fidelity to God rather than infidelity! (224)

Moreover, by the Middle-Ages ostensibly Christian societies sometimes demanded that the Jews in their midst convert to Christianity (and abandon Jewish practice and identity), with the only alternatives to conversion being death or exile. In such a situation, who was

living out the Good News? The Christians who made such a perverse demand? The Jews who converted at the edge of a knife? Or those Jews who sacrificed their lives to remain faithful to the covenant? When set in the context of the enduring obligation of Jewish practice and identity, as taught by the Apostles, we are compelled to accept the paradox that these Jewish martyrs were epitomizing the gospel at the very moment they were purportedly rejecting it!

At this point, some of my critics cry "foul!"

...the Jewish rejection of the church's message was a "hidden participation in the obedience of Yeshua." Creative, yes; but surely we are forgiven if we see a theological sleight-of-hand in that argument...in calling a no a yes, some fundamental aspect of the biblical message has been turned upside down! (Robinson 2006)

So, no is yes and judgment is blessing and absence is presence and hardening is redemptive. Are we actually supposed to embrace this? (Brown)

I think that it is no coincidence that the loudest objections to my reasoning in these chapters come from authors who do not accept my conclusions in chapter 2. If one does not see Jewish practice and identity as obligatory for Jews according to the Apostolic teaching, then my argument in chapter 6 will appear hollow. In fact, if those conclusions are false, my argument in chapter 6 *is* hollow! However, if chapter 2 points us in the right direction, then the paradox of chapter 6 is no "theological sleight-of-hand" but rather a bracing challenge to sclerotic missiological and ecclesiological paradigms. As elsewhere in *PMJ*, much stands or falls on the credibility of chapter 2.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 6 argues that the apparent Jewish "No" to Yeshua does not detract from the value and authority of a Jewish tradition that plays an essential role in sustaining Jewish practice through the centuries. Chapter 7, "Jewish Tradition and the Biblical Test,"

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<sup>3</sup> Even in the case of chapter 6, which builds upon a theological interpretation of history, I seek to find at least implicit biblical corroboration. The biblical support comes from my reading of Romans 8-11 (129-37).

continues the argument of Chapter 6 by proposing an understanding of that tradition and of the Apostolic Writings that renders them compatible. Both chapters depend on the conclusions of chapter 2, as no tradition of legal interpretation and application is required if Jewish practice is optional rather than normative.

While the message of *PMJ* goes far beyond the obligatory nature of Torah-based Jewish practice and identity for Jewish Yeshua-believers, one cannot underestimate the centrality of this proposition for the argument of the book as a whole. It is far more important as the basis for reaching other conclusions than as a conclusion in its own right.

### **The Discussion that Has Ensued**

The discussion that has followed the publication of *PMJ* indirectly highlights the crucial role played in its argument by chapter 2. Most in the Messianic Jewish congregational movement in the Diaspora agree that some form of Torah-based Jewish practice is a covenantal responsibility for Jewish Yeshua-believers. As a result, bilateral ecclesiology makes sense to them, and they find little that is objectionable in the first 212 pages of *PMJ* (chapters 1-5). Controversy only arises when I argue for the legitimate authority of Jewish tradition (chapters 6-7) and the practical imperative of postmissionary witness (chapters 8-9). As one major leader in the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America told me, "If only you had ended the book after chapter 5!"

In contrast, most in the sphere of Christian missions find *PMJ* troubling from beginning to end. They do not see the arguments or conclusions of chapter 2 as compelling, and therefore bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel has no resonance for them. Some of the missionaries have approved of Messianic Jewish congregations, but usually as an

expedient missiological option rather than an essential ecclesiological imperative.<sup>4</sup>

Church membership for Jewish Yeshua-believers is seen as equally viable. The overriding goal is still to bring "unsaved" individual Jews to faith in Christ and membership in the church.

At the same time, missionary respondents to *PMJ* have acknowledged the importance of the issues that the book raises, and have shown a willingness to engage those issues in a constructive way:

What does it mean to be *Jewish* – not only of what promises are the Jewish people the recipients, but what if any covenantal *obligations* devolve on them by virtue of their being Jews? Kinzer is right to raise the question...

In what way can it be claimed that the Jewish people remain a distinct people, if there is not some way in which that distinctiveness can be lived out and passed on to future generations?...

Granted that the Jewish people are still a *people* and not just a collection of individual Jews, how can or should that corporate expression of peoplehood be realized? (Robinson 2006, 9)

I know that Kinzer's book will challenge Messianic Jews like myself to rethink our understanding of who we are as Jews in the Messiah Yeshua. In addition, those of us who work in Jewish missions also need to reflect on our relationship to the Jewish community... Kinzer is right to remind Messianic Jews to see themselves as part of the Jewish community and behave accordingly... The Jewish missions community needs to start thinking as insiders rather than outsiders, and I believe this will empower our ministries to our people. (Glaser, 34, 35, 36)

Certainly, there are many topics that he [Kinzer] has put on the table in a clear and reasoned way that demand our attention, most specifically, the question of the problem of assimilation for Jewish believers and the proposed solution of a strict bilateral ecclesiology. (Brown, 1-2)

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<sup>4</sup> Thus, in a recent issue of *The Chosen People* (Volume XIV, Issue 5, June 2008), Mitch Glaser writes: "My wife and I have attended churches for most of our lives, and our daughters – who identify as Messianic Jews – were raised going to churches. Chosen People Ministries intentionally plants Messianic congregations because we believe that Jewish people should have a choice. Messianic congregations are culturally comfortable places where Jewish people can worship the Lord and bring their non-believing Jewish family and friends... Certainly many Jewish people will go to a church and find the Lord, but not every Jewish person who is open to the Gospel will feel comfortable in a church. So we plant Messianic congregations to give those Jewish people who prefer the comfort of a more 'Jewish' environment the opportunity to hear the Gospel, be saved and then to grow in grace as part of Jesus-focused Jewish community" (3).

Robinson, Glaser, and Brown all recognize that Messianic Jews are responsible to live as Jews, participate in the life of the Jewish people, and transmit Jewish life to their children and grandchildren. My question to them is this: Can we fulfill such a responsibility apart from a bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel?

While the missionaries and the messianics disagree over chapters 1-5, many come into alignment in their resistance to chapters 6-9. The two concerns raised by Messianic Jews – over the legitimate authority of Jewish tradition and the practical imperative of postmissionary witness – appear again in the missionary response, though with a heightened tendency to caricature my position.

...in the midst of 300 pages of often nuanced and sophisticated arguments, it is somewhat shocking to arrive at two of the book's main conclusions: first, that Jewish believers should embrace Orthodox Judaism; and second, that our witness of Yeshua to our own people should henceforth "be rendered in a postmissionary mode." These suggestions are outrageous and must be categorically rejected. (Brown)

Let me attempt to clarify my views on these two points. First of all, *PMJ* never advocates the embrace of "Orthodox Judaism." It does argue that no modern or postmodern form of Judaism can bypass rabbinic tradition. At the beginning of chapter 6 I quote and agree with the words of Peter Ochs:

...there is, in one sense, no other Judaism for Jews than that which comes by way of Rabbinic Judaism, or the Judaism of *Mishnah*, Talmud, synagogue, prayer book, and Torah study that emerged after, in spite of, and in response to the loss of the Second Temple. All of the new Judaisms that have appeared since have appeared from out of and in terms of this Rabbinic Judaism. (215)

At the end of chapter 7 I contend that this must also be true of the "new Judaism" that is emerging in the movement of which I am part:

Like every tradition transmitted and nurtured by human communities, including the Christian tradition, rabbinic Judaism is imperfect and requires continual renewal, development, and contextual reapplication. Nevertheless, it is *rabbinic*

*Judaism* that is being renewed, developed, and contextually reapplied. We cannot affirm the election and way of life of the Jewish people without likewise affirming the tradition that has sustained them both. (260)

I have enormous respect for Orthodox Judaism, but I make no claims to be an Orthodox Jew, nor am I working to form an Orthodox version of Messianic Judaism. I do seek to live as an *observant* Jew, and I aim to foster an expression of Messianic Judaism that learns from the full breadth of Jewish tradition. Nevertheless, Messianic Judaism will always provide its own distinctive interpretation of Judaism, centered in the teaching, example, and redemptive work of Messiah Yeshua. In this way it seeks to renew, develop, and contextually reapply the rabbinic Judaism that is the common heritage of the Jewish people as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

The second concern voiced in both the Messianic Jewish congregational movement and in the missionary world relates to the soteriological and missiological implications of *PMJ*. Raising a question regarding the basis of salvation, Mitch Glaser writes, "I would challenge the author to offer a more explicit explanation of his views on this very important matter" (32-33). I attempted to do so in a paper on "Final Destinies" delivered at the Borough Park Symposium last October.<sup>6</sup> However, the main concern in this area has not been theological but practical: does *PMJ* foster a mentality that undermines active and effective witness to Yeshua among the Jewish people? I sought to address that concern in a lecture last July entitled "Yeshua, The Glory of God and the Glory of Israel: Motives for Postmissionary Messianic Jewish Outreach."<sup>7</sup> To be postmissionary is not to transcend the Good News, but to understand its message as the realization rather than the

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<sup>5</sup> To understand some particulars of the form of Messianic Judaism I advocate, see the *Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council Standards of Observance* (May 2007), available at [www.ourrabbis.org](http://www.ourrabbis.org).

<sup>6</sup> Now published in *Kesher*. See the attached chronological bibliography for details.

<sup>7</sup> A recording of this message is available online. See the bibliography for details.

nullification of the Jewish people's communal identity and destiny. *To be postmissionary is always to think of individual Jews and their future in relation to the Jewish people as a whole and its future.* Postmissionary witness to Yeshua involves a new orientation to Jewish corporate life, history, and religious tradition, but it remains witness to Yeshua. And, I would argue, a witness that is passionate, powerful, and persuasive.

As for the Christian response to *PMJ*, the most important question revolves around the unity of the bilateral *ekklesia*.

At the same time, Kinzer's vision of the church as a community of reconciliation between those who remain genuinely different left me with some lingering questions about how Kinzer would deal with the more traditional but nevertheless wholly justified ecclesial concern to express messianic peace through visible unity. (Soulen, *Pro Ecclesia*, 106)

This creates perplexing ecclesiological questions. Are there then two churches, one for Jews and another for Gentiles? (Neuhaus)

It is not clear, for example, how this approach (which is not just an idea, but a reality embodied in a number of Messianic Jewish congregations) can hold that, by his Cross, Christ has united Jews and gentiles in one body (cf. Eph 2:11-22). It sometimes seems as though Christ has two bodies – two churches – neither of which has a universal saving mission. With that, the sense in which Christ himself has a single saving purpose for all ceases to be apparent. (Marshall, 125)

*PMJ* does assert the unity of the bilateral *ekklesia*. Employing the language of Karl Barth, chapter 4 states: "We therefore have a bilateral community: it is both 'indissolubly one' and 'ineffaceably two'" (175). However, the chapter also cites with approval the words of David Noel Freedman, who describes a "two-house theory of Christianity" that divided Jews and Gentiles into "two classes, equal but separate" (178). In retrospect, I see Freedman's language as problematic. While the two wings of the bilateral *ekklesia* must remain distinct, they cannot be "separate."

My Christian interlocutors are therefore justified in their concerns. We must affirm and guard the unity of the *ekklesia* at the same time as we preserve its essential two-fold nature. How is this to be accomplished? I did not intend in *PMJ* to propose a particular governmental or structural arrangement for the bilateral *ekklesia*. Instead, I attempted to define the communal and relational reality that any such arrangement must foster. The discussion about ecclesial structure is yet to take place. It should be set in a dialogue between Christian and Messianic Jewish leaders who accept and embrace the need for both unity and bilateral differentiation.

Future discussion about the practical structure of a bilateral *ekklesia* would benefit from a consideration of the wisdom of the Catholic tradition. In the Protestant world, new communities and movements tend to generate new denominations. In contrast, Catholicism has a long history of incorporating new communities and movements into its institutional life without fragmentation. We see this especially in the formation of religious orders and their integration into the wider life of the church. More relevant to our situation, however, is the Catholic approach to diverse rites (such as the Byzantine, Ukrainian, or Syriac). Catholicism has found a way to accommodate the particularities of various theological, liturgical, and devotional traditions within its ranks. It has the capacity to do so in part because its ecclesial structures transcend the local congregation. If the local congregation is the exclusive bearer of ecclesial identity and life, then it is difficult to conceive of a bilateral ecclesiology that will establish the level of unity required by the Good News.

A second insight deriving from Catholicism concerns the centrality of the Lord's Supper / Eucharist (which my own community calls *HaZikkaron*). It seems clear from the

Apostolic Writings that one of the crucial functions of this ritual is to be an expression and instrument of unity (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-32). It is also clear that the Apostles viewed the partaking of food at the same table (in contexts which likely included a eucharistic dimension) as a primary sign of the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in one community (Galatians 2:11-14). Thus, any adequate structural and communal embodiment of bilateral ecclesiology will need to provide contexts where members of the Jewish and Gentile wings of the one *ekklesia* can gather together to celebrate *HaZikkaron* as one two-fold body.

Christian readers of *PMJ* have also commented on the broader theological issues it raises in the areas of Christology and Pneumatology. Thus, Peter Hocken writes:

An important section in Kinzer's book treats the total and permanent identification of Yeshua with his own people and of Yeshua as "one-man Israel." Kinzer makes this a key plank – I think rightly – in his advocacy of the theological and covenantal significance of rabbinic Judaism, but he does not use this to provide a christological foundation for his Messianic Jewish ecclesiology. If a biblically-based ecclesiology is based on the missions of the Son and the Spirit, a messianic and non-supersessionist understanding of the church will be based on the crucified and risen Messiah of Israel, whose glorified humanity, through which the Holy Spirit is poured out, always remains Israelite-Jewish and becomes the instrument by which the Gentile believers are grafted into the transformed commonwealth of Israel. (52)

John Yocum puts the emphasis on Pneumatology:

A troubling absence from the book is mention of the gift of the Holy Spirit as constitutive of the body of Christ, and what this might mean for our understanding of the status of the people of Israel. Kinzer mounts a 'Christological test' for the validity of rabbinic Judaism, and concludes that the tradition of the Talmud and Mishnah pass that test. I would not suggest that there is such a thing as a 'pneumatological test,' since normally the presence of the Holy Spirit is tested by reference to Christ rather than vice versa; but, is not the presence of Christ possible in different modes, and is the confession of Yeshua as Messiah not intrinsically connected to his vivifying, illuminating, empowering presence through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Certainly the New Testament indicates that in some way Christ was present and active already in the history of Israel prior to the incarnation, but not in the mode in which He is present to those who

receive the gift of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection. Is it only recognition of the intimate presence of the one *already* present in their midst that is at issue in the acceptance of Yeshua as Messiah?

Hocken and Yocum pose questions of cardinal importance. If the ecclesiology I propose has merit, it must be rooted in the fundamental realities of who God is and what God has done, is doing, and will do. It will also shed new light on our understanding of these realities. Thus, I accept the friendly critique of Hocken and Yocum, and approve of the direction to which they point. In fact, I am hoping that my next book will be devoted to the topic of Christology, bilateral ecclesiology, and the God of Israel.

But this leads us to the final section of this paper.

### **The Future of the Discussion**

To conclude this paper, I would like to express my hopes for the future of this conversation. I will focus less on response to *PMJ* as a book, and more on the discussion of the substantive issues the book raises. I will do so by distinguishing five spheres of conversation: (1) the Messianic Jewish congregational movement in the Diaspora; (2) the Messianic Jewish congregational movement in the Land; (3) those involved with Christian missions to the Jews; (4) the Christian Church; and (5) the mainstream Jewish community.

Within the Messianic Jewish congregational movement in the Diaspora, I hope for further discussion about our relation to the missions, to evangelical Christianity, and to the Jewish community and its religious tradition. I argue in *PMJ* that, though Messianic Judaism originated in Christian missions to the Jews, it points beyond that world (though not beyond "mission" *per se*). In contrast with the world of Christian missions, Messianic Judaism has accepted the covenantal responsibility of Torah-based Jewish practice, and

has identified itself as a distinctive Yeshua-centered form of Judaism. In this way it has taken a step away from viewing itself as merely a subset of evangelical Protestantism.

However, I think that the difficulty many Messianic Jews have in appreciating chapters 6 and 7 of *PMJ* reflects the need for serious consideration of the consequences of what we have already accepted as true. Is it possible to practice a substantive Torah-based Jewish way of life without drawing extensively on Jewish religious tradition? And is it possible to draw extensively on Jewish religious tradition without having a Christologically-grounded affirmation of the community that carried and produced this tradition, and of the tradition itself? In the long term, is it possible to accept the conclusions of *PMJ's* chapter 2 without also embracing positions resembling those in chapters 6 and 7?

Bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel summons the Messianic Jewish congregational movement to take a step towards the Jewish world and a step away from its evangelical matrix. Only by being distinct from evangelicalism, and connected to Judaism, can such a Messianic Judaism fulfill its vocation as an ecclesiological bridge enabling the Church to discover its identity in relationship to Israel and enabling the Jewish people to encounter its Messiah as it has never done before.

Within the Messianic Jewish congregational movement in the Land of Israel, I hope for the emergence of serious theological discussion in general. To this point the Israeli Messianic Jewish community has had few trained scholars and little interest in theological discourse. I see signs of change in this regard, and anticipate that new insights will arise from a knowledgeable and theologically conscious Messianic Jewish community in the Land.

In particular, I hope for serious theological discussion among Israeli Messianic Jews concerning the nature, significance, and obligations of Jewish covenantal identity. In the past, Israeli Messianic Jews have often thought of their Diaspora cousins as psychologically insecure members of the house of Jacob who lean on Torah-based Jewish practice – and the tradition that embodies such practice – as a crutch to sustain an untenable identity in exile. In contrast, as Israelis they have no such issues – they speak Hebrew, live in the land promised to our ancestors, and participate as citizens in a Jewish state.

Of course, this attitude reflected the views of secular Israeli society as a whole regarding Zionism and Diaspora Judaism. However, the discussion of Jewish identity in twenty-first century Israel has shifted dramatically. Numerous factors have contributed to this shift, including the failure of the secular Zionist ideology and ethos; the resurgence of orthodoxy in its various forms; the presence of hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens who are technically Gentiles of Jewish descent; the vast numbers of Israelis living at least part of their lives in the Diaspora, and experiencing Diaspora Judaism firsthand; and the Arab challenge to Israel's status as a Jewish state. Suddenly, Jewish identity in the Land seems almost as insecure as Jewish identity in the Diaspora. To provide mooring for this identity, many Israelis are recognizing the need to recover a connection to the Jewish past. It is not enough to trace our roots to King David, the Maccabees, and the Zealots. We cannot leap from 70 C.E. to 1900 or 1948, as though the eighteen intervening centuries were a historical anomaly of no consequence.

A few Israeli Messianic Jews have reached similar conclusions. They have found that it is not enough to trace their roots to the Jewish disciples of Yeshua in the Acts of the

Apostles. Jewish life did not end with the destruction of the Temple in 70 or with the demise of the Jerusalem Yeshua-believing community that congregated there, and it was not reborn out of thin air with the emergence of the Zionist or Hebrew Christian movements. *Jewish life extends as a continuous and unbroken line, and Jewish identity depends upon our capacity to make every section of that line a resource for our stage in the journey.* I would hope for an increase in the number of Israeli Messianic Jews who reach this conclusion, and for the development of a vibrant and fruitful conversation among them that will enrich both the Israeli Messianic movement, and their cousins abroad.

Within the community of Christian missions to the Jews, I would hope for a willingness to pursue ecclesiological questions, and to see them as important in their own right and not only as subordinate matters related to missiology and soteriology. As should be clear from *PMJ*, I see Jewish communal identity as an ecclesial reality that is fundamental to the life and mission of the Christian Church. Some of the responses to *PMJ* from those in the missionary community have acknowledged the importance of these questions, and have summoned their colleagues to address them. To my knowledge this has not yet occurred, but the conversation has just begun.

In particular, I am eager to hear discussion among the missionaries concerning the importance of sustaining cross-generational Jewish life for their converts. Is it important that the grandchildren of Jewish believers in Yeshua also identify and live as Jews? If so, have traditional missionary methods and models facilitated this goal, or hindered it? If bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel is not an option, how can this goal be achieved? Engagement with such issues will require that missionaries set aside atomistic

approaches to ecclesiology, missiology, and soteriology, and think in more communal terms. In the process, they may discover neglected truths in a Bible that took shape in a world unfamiliar with modern Western individualism.

Within the Christian Church, I hope to see a growing awareness of the importance of Messianic Judaism for Christian identity and for opening new vistas on the Church's relationship to the Jewish people as a whole. Already, this has begun to happen. I have been personally involved in one noteworthy project that shows great potential, and that illustrates what could develop on a broader scale. In the Fall of 2000 a small group of Messianic Jews and Roman Catholics were called together by Father (now Cardinal) Charles Cottier, the Theologian of the Papal Household, to begin a conversation. The meeting was not a formal dialogue sponsored by the Vatican, but a private initiative of Cardinal Cottier and some other prominent Catholic officials. We have met each year since 2000, and we have learned much from one another. Catholic participants have shown great appreciation for the spiritual significance of the Messianic Jewish movement, and sincere openness to the challenging message we bring. If such encounters are possible between leaders at the highest level of the Catholic Church and Messianic Jews, may we not hope for similar relationships and conversations to develop with others in the Christian world?

Ultimately, these conversations must lead to discussion of the importance of preserving the Jewish life and identity of Jewish Yeshua-believers. Christian leaders must face this issue as much as Christian missionaries to the Jews. Even when pastors and denominations do not engage in organized and deliberate evangelistic outreach to Jews, their churches attract Jewish souls who have lost or never had an attachment to Jewish

communal life. What responsibility do Christian leaders have to encourage such people to continue to live as Jews? What responsibility do they have to assist them in doing so?

These are questions that Christians have never asked before. If the perspectives advanced in *PMJ* have any traction, they will be asked now.

Finally, within the wider Jewish world, I hope to see recognition that this conversation is taking place among Messianic Jews, missionaries, and Christian leaders. It has already received some attention. Thus, in an article published by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, a respected Jewish journalist surveyed the Messianic Jewish scene, and wrote the following:

Over the past two years, some Messianic leaders have questioned whether their movement is too aligned with evangelicals. The opening volley came in 2005 when theologian Mark Kinzer published a book called "Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism," arguing that accepting Christ does not release a Jew from certain religious obligations such as keeping kosher and observing Shabbat. Kinzer...believes that Messianic congregations have an obligation to preserve those practices — not as a form of "contextualized" Christianity but rather as what he calls an authentic Judaism. "God's covenant with Israel necessitates a certain way of life," he says. "It's not an option. Any message that alienates Jews from Judaism is not the Gospel. You haven't saved a Jewish soul."

In similar vein, the Jewish Daily Forward described segments of the Messianic Jewish world that advocated a closer connection to the larger Jewish community:

A touchstone for the group has become a book, "Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement With the Jewish People," authored by Mark Kinzer in 2005. Kinzer has been considerably less well received in such overtly Christian missionizing quarters as the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, which was founded by Christian evangelical leaders in 1980.

While these articles show that *PMJ* has not gone entirely unnoticed within the wider Jewish world, very few members of that community have any inkling of the discussion that is taking place among us. I expect that to change in the coming years.

I am not anticipating that the wider Jewish community will open its arms in enthusiastic embrace of *PMJ* and the form of Judaism it advocates. However, I do believe that *PMJ* provides a platform for an unprecedented development – a genuine dialogue between Messianic and mainstream Jews. We will not compromise our convictions about Yeshua as Israel's Messiah – and I do not expect that they will compromise their convictions that we are gravely misguided on this point. Nevertheless, enough commonality exists for a conversation to begin. May it begin soon.

I am gratified that most of my readers agree that *PMJ* is a significant book. One of my most formidable critics (Michael Brown) has called it a "watershed volume." If Michael Brown is correct, the coming years will advance the overall conversation far beyond where it stands at present. I will be delighted if that is the case, even if my book is not remembered as the place where the streams began to flow in another direction.

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