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MISHKAN

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Attempts to Establish a "Messianic Jewish Church" in Eretz-Israel

Gershon Nerel

The Jew cannot, by the Missionary distinction imposed by Christ, be incorporated into any Gentile form of Christianity; there will always be the Jew and the Gentile in the Communion of the Catholic Church, as well as the Latin, the Greek and the Anglican, and all other branches of the True Vine, which are several. And when he sees his Promise in Christ, he will mould into his national liturgy, acts, rites, and ceremonies which are his and not ours, which if he may not force them upon us, we may not prohibit to him. Does not the Church teach both the Old and the New Testament?

By these words, Popham Blyth, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, expressed in the beginning of our century his conclusions regarding the feasibility of establishing a "Church of the Hebrews."¹

Such ideas about reviving a national Messianic Jewish Church were not only the personal views of Bishop Blyth in Jerusalem. During the previous and present centuries both gentile and Jewish believers in Yeshua (JBY) expressed a desire to establish autonomous entities of modern Jewish disciples of Yeshua.²

At the same time, however, other non-Jewish believers also argued that the Hebrew church should remain under the close oversight of the existing gentile churches as, for example, the Maronites relate to the western church and the Greek and Armenian Catholics to the Latin Church. In their opinion Jewish

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¹ G.F. Popham Blyth, "The Revival of the Church of the Hebrews", *Church and Synagogue*, vol. 4, 1902, pp. 1-3. Cf. idem, *The Jews and Their Claim in 1897*, Jerusalem, Epiphany, 1897, esp. pp. 1&4.

² Carl Schwartz, "Hebrew Christian Alliance", *The Scattered Nation*, vol. 1, 1866, pp. 125-126, 163-164; C.J. Ball, "A Hebrew Christian Church", *Church and Synagogue*, vol. 3, 1901, pp. 45-51; G.H. Box, "A Hebrew Christian Liturgy", *ibid*, pp. 52-61; "A Hebrew Christian Church", *Bible Lands*, vol. 6, 1921, pp. 127-128.

believers must still remain in full communion with the established gentile churches — acknowledging the authority of a primate or a historical church.³

Arguments concerning this issue did not stop until our times, although it seems that one common view prevailed, namely that particularly in the land of Israel an indigenous "Jewish church," or a corporate Messianic Jewish Body, would create an ongoing challenge to the universal church.⁴ However, throughout the world Messianic Jews made attempts towards creating their independent organizational frameworks, and to constantly develop their own hermeneutics and modes of worship.⁵

Various Grouping Forms — One Principle

Messianic Jews did not necessarily perceive the idea of forming for themselves a "church" as a replica of the traditional churches. Even the word "church" was often bypassed by them. They looked for unique organizational frameworks where they could easily express their specific characteristics, like observing Sabbath-Saturday, celebrating Passover and the other biblical feasts, as well as practicing circumcision. These efforts stemmed from a desire for a new organism in which they could feel completely at home and fully identify with. Thus, for example, instead of using the word "church," they used other terms to define their grouping structures, as follows: "brotherhood," "union," "alliance," "association,"⁶ "guild"⁷ and also "Christian synagogue."⁸

Under these designations Messianic Jews frequently started to develop their new institutions, emphasizing that they rely only upon biblical authority instead

³ H. Heathcote, "The Church and the Spiritual Needs of Enquiring Jews and Hebrew Christians", *Church and Synagogue*, vol. 4, 1902, pp. 48-49.

⁴ Gustav H. Dalman, "A Jewish Christian Church", *Church and Synagogue*, vol. 3, 1901, pp. 108- 109; Harry L. Ellison, "The Church and the Hebrew Christian", in: G. Heddenquist, ed., *The Church and the Jewish People* (London 1954), pp. 143-167.

⁵ Gershon Nerel, *Messianic Jews in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967): Trends and Changes in Shaping Self Identity*, Ph.D. dissertation, [Hebrew, unpublished](The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996), esp. pp. 29-45.

⁶ An American believer in Yeshua claimed and also tried to prove that the American Hebrew Christians were the first ones who established brotherhoods, unions and alliances. Namely, this view is against the common thought that the American Hebrew Christians only imitated in this respect their brethren in England. See: Louis Meyer, "Hebrew Christian Brotherhoods, Unions and Alliances of the Past and Present", *The Glory of Israel*, vol 1, 1903, pp. 199-203; 230-232; 250-252.

⁷ The full name under consideration was "The Jewish Christian Guild of the Messiah". See: "An Autocephalous Hebrew Church", *Bible Lands*, vol. 6, #88, 1921, p. 128.

⁸ An outstanding attempt to establish a Hebrew Christian Synagogue (Beith Haknesset Edat Hameshihit, [sic]) was in Toronto, Canada, by Shabbetai Benjamin Rohold, in 1913-1919. See: Jacob Gartenhaus, *Famous Hebrew Christians* (Chattanooga 1979), pp. 155-156.

of the hellenistic or Roman Christian theologies which still remain the foundations of the historic churches. Therefore such corporations became for JBY the substitutions or synonyms for a normative "church." Often they also had to speak about a 'National Jewish Church, in order to avoid misunderstandings.⁹ Although these grouping forms reflect a large variety of expressions of exclusiveness, nowhere did Messianic Jews want to totally separate themselves from the universal body of Messiah. The central idea for them, however, both past and present, was not to allow their gentilization and assimilation within Christendom — as happened for many centuries. Basically what many Jewish and gentile believers wanted was to establish particular entities which would build a new structure upon the model of the Jerusalem Jewish community of the first century. While focusing on the situation in Israel, it should be remembered that such attempts which took place in the Jewish Diaspora also influenced those who lived here and vice versa. No wonder, therefore, that JBY often referred to such views on a broad international level.

"The Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association"

The proposition to form "The Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association" was earnestly expressed in an address delivered by Canon Hastings Kelk at a general gathering of JBY held August 12, 1898, at Kelk's house.¹⁰ Following this proposition Hebrew Christians convened August 19, 1898 at the residence of I. Th. Altaresky and unanimously adopted a constitution and by-laws.¹¹ However, it should also be mentioned that already in the years 1890-1891 there existed in Jerusalem a "Hebrew Christian Prayer Union," which preceded the established "Assembly."¹²

"The Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association" had more than 50 members on its list. The patron of the association was B. Heilpern, the president was Dr. Morris J. Franklin from America, while the secretary and treasurer was L. Zeckhausen. The association, "with the object of promoting the moral, intellectual and social culture of its members, and of inculcating the exercise of mutual sympathy, assistance and protection," was closely linked to Christ Church in Jerusalem.¹³

⁹ Alexander Waldman, "The Hebrew Christians and a National Church', *Hebrew Christian Record*, No. 2, July 1910, pp. 26-28.

¹⁰ Hastings Kelk represented the "London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews" and acted as superintendent of 'Christ Church' in Jerusalem.

¹¹ Constitution and By-Laws of the "Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association", Jerusalem, printed at the L.J.S. House of Industry, 1899, p.1.

¹² "Jerusalem Notes", *The Jewish Intelligence*, vol. 7, 1891, p. 21.

¹³ "Hebrew Christians of Jerusalem", *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, vol. 16, 1900, p. 20, with a photograph of the members.

The original constitution of the "Association" included the following words:

*(being) objects of attacks for both the Jew-hating antisemites and the Christ-hating Jews, being patronized by neither and boy-cotted by both, we therefore deem this a proper time and Jerusalem as the most appropriate place for all Hebrew Christians who should be of one heart and of one soul, and who ought to be cemented and united by the two-fold bonds of the Old and New Covenants, to cast off their swaddling clothes and assert their manhood, and take their places in the ranks of the Christian hosts, not as drones but as most active and leading witnesses, as their primitive Hebrew Christian brethren did, whom the Lord declared to be His Witnesses, from the beginning.*¹⁴

It should be noted, however, that the original text of the constitution was significantly revised in its 1901 version, where the sentences which had connotations to the autonomous tendencies or leading status of JBY were erased. Probably this was done under the pressure of the institutional church which sponsored them. Anyhow, the latest evidence for this "Assembly" is found in 1904. Its patron, B. Heilpern, sent that year a letter of appeal to Europe to raise funds for buying a piece of land to build a dozen houses on it for the poor members of the association and thus form a Hebrew Christian colony.¹⁵ Yet the needed money was not found, the houses and the colony were not realized and eventually the community disbanded.

Hebrew Christian Congregation in Jerusalem

Between the years 1925-1929 there was another attempt to establish an independent Messianic Jewish congregation in Jerusalem called "Kehilat Ivrim Meshihiim Biyerushalayim" (Congregation of Messianic Hebrews in Jerusalem). The founders of this congregation were two Jews, Hyman Jacobs and Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, and a Norwegian Lutheran missionary, Dr. Arne Jonsen. However, in 1927 Ben-Meir left the congregation for theological studies in "Moody Bible Institute" in Chicago.¹⁶

Jonsen and Jacobs who remained in Jerusalem published a statement of principles to serve as an enlarged creed or manifesto. This proclaimed their aspirations to restore the original and national entity of JBY as described in the New Testament.¹⁷ By this they expressed strong awareness of their need to

¹⁴ "Constitution and By-Laws of the 'Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Association'", p. 2.

¹⁵ Letter of B. Heilpern, dated March 23, 1904, sent from Jerusalem "To the Secretaries, Society's House, 16 Lincoln's Inn-Fields, London", with additional special recommendations of the British and American Consuls. Oxford, Bodleian Library, dep. C.M.J., d. 58/1-19 (Miscellaneous Papers, no. 247).

¹⁶ Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, *From Jerusalem to Jerusalem*, [=FJJ] Autobiographical Sketches (Jerusalem, 1977 (ms.)), p.65.

¹⁷ Kurt Hjemdal, "Arne Jonsen - A Pioneer in Israel", *Mishkan*, 20 (1994), pp. 39-40.

observe the Jewish national customs and Holy Days originating in the Old Testament, particularly circumcision, the Sabbath and Passover.¹⁸

There were heavy pressures exerted on Jacobs and Jonsen from their gentile Mission Boards overseas. The supporters of Jonsen in Oslo and the board of the "Chicago Hebrew Mission" in the USA that supported Jacobs compelled them to keep Sunday and the Sabbath as two days for divine worship. The Sabbath was not to remain the single day for their weekly worship. Theological pressure was also put upon the leadership of this congregation, and they were accused of being "Judaizers" who experimented at keeping only the Sabbath Day or stressing the observance of Jewish festivals according to the Jewish calendar.¹⁹

Pressures of this kind, followed also by financial and personal inducements, finally blocked any possibility for such a revolutionary congregation; the idea came to be regarded as "reactionary." Both Jonsen and Jacobs were obliged to face investigators who came to Palestine to learn first-hand about their "Judaizing" tendencies. At last Jonsen had to leave the country and Jacobs became an itinerant evangelist in Palestine. Therefore, this attempt to form an independent Messianic Jewish congregation, alongside the model of the primitive Jewish church, did not survive more than four years.²⁰

The Palestine Hebrew Christian Alliance

After its inception in 1925 in London, the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (IHCA) was involved for many years in endeavors to establish a church of JBY, and particularly in Israel. "It is possible," Shabbetai Rohold stated during the inauguration conference in London, "for a Hebrew Christian Church to exist in Palestine without opposition"²¹ In fact already in 1921 there was an attempt by Hyman Jacobs to organize a Hebrew Christian Alliance in Jaffa with a few members.²² However, only four years later, we read in 1925 about Shabbetai Rohold who acted as the president of 'The Palestine Hebrew Christian Alliance,²³ and as such he also became the vice-president of the IHCA.

The two central occupations of Rohold as President of the "Palestine Alliance"

¹⁸ Hyman Jacobs, *Religion and Nationality* (Jerusalem, August 1927).

¹⁹ Joseph Flacks, "Report", *Jewish Era*, vol. 39, #4, 1929, p. 124.

²⁰ Gershon Nerel, "The Formation and Dissolution of a 'Messianic Jewish' (Hebrew Christian) Community in Jerusalem in the 1920's", in *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem 1997, (forthcoming).

²¹ Report of the First International Hebrew Christian Conference, Held at Islington, London, 5th-12th September 1925, p.119. Cf. pp 52-59.

²² Hyman Jacobs, "Letters from Palestine", *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*, (American), vol. 5, 1921, pp. 131-133. Cf. Robert I. Winer, *The Calling, The History of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America* (Wynnewood, Pennsylvania 1990), p. 118.

²³ *The Hebrew Christian* (=HC), vol. 1, #3, October 1928, pp. 132; 150-152.

were the intensive relief work and teaching.²⁴ Rohold particularly rendered assistance to the IMJA in connection with the taking over by the IMJA of the large Jerusalem property called "Abraham's Vineyard."²⁵ Yet when Rohold died in 1931 while visiting in Egypt, the work of the local Alliance in Palestine had to be reviewed.

Thus in 1930-1931, after returning to Palestine from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Moshe Ben-Meir and his colleague Hyman Jacobs occupied themselves with fresh attempts to found a large territorial organization of JBY. They too had great hopes to crystallize such an entity through cooperation with the IHCA which seriously considered establishing a Hebrew Christian Church.²⁶ The main motivator for this was Sir Leon Levison, born in Safed and first President of the IHCA.²⁷ However, after Levison's death in 1935, the IHCA drastically withdrew from its official policy to form a global Hebrew Christian church under its wings.

Yet in Israel the situation was different. In July 1931 the first regional grouping founded by Messianic Jews was named "The First Hebrew Christian Bible Conference" (In Hebrew: "Kinus Rishon LyYehudim Meshichiyim"). Morris Sigel who lived in Damascus was elected president and Miss Asseo from Safed was the treasurer.²⁸ In principle, their theological goal was to achieve an interdenominational fellowship without any kind of subordination to the traditional churches and mission organizations in Palestine.

Among their proclaimed aims the principal ones should be mentioned:

To unite Messianic Jews in Palestine and Syria; to establish and support urban branches; to witness corporately both to Synagogue and Church concerning the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope in Jesus; to introduce Jewish thought to Gentile Christians and the Gospel to Jews; to cooperate with the IHCA.

They consciously bypassed any controversial issues like baptism before admission and the definition of the concept of the trinity in order to provide a wide common ground for as many as possible to join their "Fellowship."²⁹

²⁴ W.M. Christie, "The Mount Carmel Bible School and the International Hebrew Christian Alliance", *HC*, vol. 3, #1, April 1930, pp. 21-23.

²⁵ "Palestine", *HC*, vol. 2, #2, July 1929, pp.46; 50.

²⁶ Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission; Proposed Principles of Faith for the Suggested Hebrew Christian Church; Proposed Constitution for the Suggested Hebrew Christian Church, n.d. (probably 1931/2).

²⁷ Leon Levison, "A Hebrew Christian Church", *HC*, vol. 5, #4, 1933, pp. 168-170 Cf. *ibid*, p.111. E. Bendor Samuel, "Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission", *HC*, vol.7, 1934, pp. 144-145.

²⁸ Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, pp. 101-103.

²⁹ See in my dissertation, pp. 90-94. The official registration of "The Hebrew Christian Fellowship of Palestine" was published in the Palestine Bulletin, dated 27 June 1932, File no. 2896/66.

The Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine and the Near East

In 1933 the "Fellowship" changed its official title and adopted a new name: "The Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine and the Near East" Now Jacobs left Ben-Meir who continued to work together with Morris Sigel. Ben Meir and Sigel wanted to cover not only Palestine but the whole Middle-East, including Lebanon and Trans-Jordan. Haifa — and not Jerusalem — remained the center for the Messianic Jewish community.

The requirements for admission to the "Fellowship/Alliance" were as follows:

Expression in public of faith in Messiah Jesus as personal Savior and Lord; belief in the divinity of Messiah Jesus; belief in his sacrificial death and resurrection; acceptance of the Old and New Testaments as the word of God and as the rule for their faith and lives.³⁰

However, no specific historical creed was mentioned as a stipulation for membership in that organization. The reason for that was the desire to present the broadest theological spectrum as a possible doctrinal basis in order to permit maximal membership by avoiding doctrinal confrontation on very problematic issues.

Again, it should be noted that especially during the 1920's and 1930's it was impossible to totally separate between a "Hebrew Christian Alliance" and a "Hebrew Christian Church."³¹ Most likely it was precisely for this reason that not every Messianic Jew in Mandatory Palestine wanted to join or remain a member of the local Alliance. Thus, for example, Hayim Haimoff³² refused to officially join the Alliance, and Solomon Ostrovsky³³ decided to withdraw from membership because he believed that "[what] a Hebrew Christian church such as the H.C.A. (Hebrew Christian Alliance) propagates is both in principle and constitution opposed to the spirit and teaching of Holy Scripture"³⁴

In his autobiography, Moshe Ben-Meir mentions a new factor which caused a significant change in the character of the "Palestine Alliance," namely the coming of the German refugees. Ben Meir wrote:

³⁰ Constitution and Bye-Laws of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine and the Near East, dated 7 November 1933.

³¹ See Paul Levertoff, "The Possibility of a Hebrew-Christian Church", *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*, vol.7, 1924, pp.132-136. Cf. Moses Klerekoper, "Should There be a Hebrew-Christian Church?", *ibid.*, vol. 19, #4, 1935, pp. 12-13.

³² About Hayim Haimoff see: Gershon Nerel, "Rachel Bar-David: Mother of a Modern Israeli Messianic Jewish Tribe", *The Messianic Jew (=HC)*, vol. 67, 1994, pp. 66-70.

³³ Gershon Nerel, "Solomon Ostrovsky: A Pioneer and 'Watchman' in Eretz Israel", *The Messianic Jew (=HC)*, vol. 69, 1996, pp. 5-8.

³⁴ Private letter of Solomon Ostrovsky to Ben-Meir, dated 12 March 1935. Probably because of that Ostrovsky never published anything in *The Hebrew Christian*, the quarterly organ of the IMJA, and instead initiated his independent magazine, "Hatzophe," in Hebrew.

Hebrew Christians who were running away from Germany in the second half of the 1930's, were helped by the IHCA and also sent to Palestine ... They joined the local Alliance. It was logical. They became a majority, and they germanised the Alliance. German became the official language. Germans were elected into office. Fritz Plotke was elected as Secretary instead of me. Hugo Loewenstein became President... The tragedy was that most of these refugees did not plan to settle in Palestine. Those who did not die left as soon as they were able.³⁵

The issue which Ben-Meir raised in this case reflects the constant struggle within Israeli society, namely the difficulty of absorbing the masses of new immigrants on the one hand, and the influence of the newcomers upon the veterans on the other. Could we today, for example, make any comparisons or learn lessons regarding the joining of American JBY into the present "Israeli Alliance of Messianic Jews" etc.? Or, are we supporting enough JBY from Ethiopia and from Russia?

Still, the Hebrew Christian Alliance of Palestine, whatever designation it had, may be credited for the responsibility it undertook to consistently organize annual meetings for JBY. These believers were scattered in various churches in the big cities of the country, and in the Alliance conferences they could join together for fellowship and encouragement. The Annual conferences were convened in various places: Jerusalem, Ein Karem (then not included in Jerusalem), the "Karmel Heim" in Haifa and in Tiberias. Such consequent conferences³⁶ were held almost uninterruptedly until the birth of the State of Israel. The last president of the "Palestine Alliance" was F.J. Plotke.³⁷

Jewish Christian Community and the Jerusalem Fellowship

Abram Poljak (also used the name Avraham Ben Shraga as pseudonym), Albert Springer, Agnes Waldstein and Pauline Rose were another group among Messianic Jewish circles in Mandatory Palestine who thought and labored towards establishing a Messianic Jewish Church.³⁸ Following his vision, Poljak endeavored to launch a unique world movement of JBY that would be crystallized into a Jewish Church. "Not because I am against the nations," wrote Poljak, "but because I am for the Jews, and know that the Jewish people will listen only to a voice that comes from its own people. The Jewish national Church will be the only one with which the Jews will agree to discuss matters"³⁹

³⁵ Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir, pp. 103-106.

³⁶ *Living Waters From Jerusalem*, ed. C.A. Gabriel, passim.

³⁷ "Among Our Alliances: Palestine", *HC*, vol. 19, #3, 1946, p.44.

³⁸ Abram Poljak, *Die Juedische Kirche* (Verlag der Judenchristlichen Gemeinde, Koeniz-Bern 1946).

³⁹ Abram Poljak, *The Cross in the Star of David* (London 1938), pp.38-39.

After founding in 1935 "The Jewish Christian Union" in Jerusalem, aiming at a worldwide Jewish church, Poljak soon worked simultaneously in Palestine and in Europe. What he initially wanted was to establish Jewish Christian communities, which ought to remain "communities" and not develop into a "church." According to Poljak the Jewish people's church is not to become an outward unit, a unit of organization, but a unit of the Spirit. "Jewish Christianity," he wrote, "ought to be and remain a movement and not to become an established national organization, a state within the state."⁴⁰

The Sabbath liturgy was pivotal in the Jewish Christian communities which were established in Jerusalem⁴¹ and in Haifa.⁴² The Sabbath service always started on Friday evening with lighting the traditional Sabbath candles — dedicated to the light of the Messiah. The Sabbath was welcomed according to prayers taken from the synagogue Prayer Book. This was followed by prayers for the government of Israel and the peace of Jerusalem. The service closed with the Aaronic blessing.⁴³

In September 1947 Ben-Meir and Poljak published "Hashofar" (The Trumpet) in Hebrew, which was to serve as the organ of the Jewish Christian Community in Israel. The main work was done by Ben-Meir as Poljak knew no Hebrew. Yet only one issue appeared, in which they often used the Hebrew term "Edah," meaning more than a regular community or local congregation.⁴⁴ However, instead of focusing on a special Israeli Messianic Jewish identity, shaped by the modern Hebrew language, Poljak and his followers ended up in English and German-speaking countries where they promulgated the idea of reciprocal coexistence between Jews and Christians through regular dialogue between them. Although Poljak emphasized the need to institutionalize the liturgy of the Jerusalem community, eventually this liturgical framework declined, together with Poljak's movement, after his death in 1963.

A Milestone in 1948

When the British Mandate over Palestine came to an end in 1948, "Operation Grace" was organized as a kind of "spiritual Dunkirk" to evacuate the majority

⁴⁰ Abram Poljak, "Our Future Communities", *The Jewish Christian Community*, Nos. 6/7, June/July 1939, p. 2.

⁴¹ "Building Community in Palestine", *Jerusalem, Organ of the Jewish Christian Community and the Jerusalem Fellowship*, no. 11, August 1947, p. 7.

⁴² Abram Poljak, "Letters From Mt. Carmel", *Jerusalem* no. 20, May 1948, pp. 4-5.

⁴³ "The Liturgy of the Jerusalem Community", *Jerusalem*, nos. 44/45, May/June 1950, pp. 1-7.

⁴⁴ Published by "Patmos" Publishing House, P.O.B. 1353, Jerusalem, at "Living Waters" Press. Ben-Meir used the pseudonym Moshe Tal.

of JBY in Israel mainly to England. However, not all JBY left the country then. About a dozen remained, among them Moshe Ben- Meir, Hayim Haimoff, Shlomo Ostrovsky, Abram Poljak, and Pauline Rose.⁴⁵ A major consequence of "Operation Mercy" was that with the departure of those evacuees, a community of JBY in Israel ceased to exist, and a new situation emerged. "Operation Mercy" caused generation and tradition discontinuity, i.e. the disintegration of the local fellowships and also interruption of "group overlap." Thus, following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, another era began in the history of JBY in the Land.

Those very few who remained, reinforced by new JBY who moved into Israel through the massive *aliya* waves of the 1950's and 1960's, together formed new foundations for local believers. They worked hard to eliminate their minority status within the expatriate minorities of churches and missions in Israel. In fact, gradually they did become a self-determined ideological minority on their own. With this new status JBY also endeavored to shape their grouping structures, their liturgy and their theology.

(To be continued)

⁴⁵ See in my dissertation, pp. 114-123.

A Glimpse from the 1960s

An important scholarly contribution to the explanation of the work and position of the Christian Churches in Israel and their missionary work in the 1960s can be found in the Dane Per Østerbye's dissertation, *Church in Israel, Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia XIII [= XV]* (Vinderup, Denmark: Glerup:1970). The dissertation has been written with special reference to the Protestant Churches and communities.

Naturally Østerbye includes in his dissertation the few Messianic congregations in Israel in the 1960s. But the focal point is the work in Israel by foreign Christian churches and organizations. He also analyzes the attitude of the State of Israel towards the Christian Church and opposition and reaction whether this is organized by anti-mission movements or it is voiced in the press.

Not least interesting are the author's brief surveys of churches and organizations and their work in the Israel of that time. These are found in an appendix and a total of 43 "groups" are listed.

Østerbye envisions "that the Jews in Israel will eventually develop their own form of Christianity. This will happen whether the rest of the Church approves or not. It will happen because for the first time, Hebrew Christians in Israel will be prevented from being assimilated by other non-Jewish Christians, and because the Jewish desire for independence will prevail here too."

Østerbye compiled the bulk of the material for his dissertation during two visits to Israel in 1960 and 1964 - eighteen months in all. This was supplemented and revised during a short visit to Israel in October 1968. The period after October 1968 is therefore not covered in the book, which was first published in 1970.

In the Preface of the book the author draws attention to the fact that many "Jews and Christians in Israel and elsewhere are opposed to publicity of any kind on the Christian mission and its position in Israel. They are afraid that a book like this will not help to improve the situation. Evidently I do not share their views," says Østerbye.

This comment is in itself an important characterization of "the missions" in Israel in the 1960s. It also explains why we have chosen to print Østerbye's section "The External Problems" (pp. 71-80). This section is found in the chapter entitled "The problems of the Mission," which is introduced with "The Internal Problems" and succeeded by "The External Problems" and is concluded with "The Problems of the Christian School