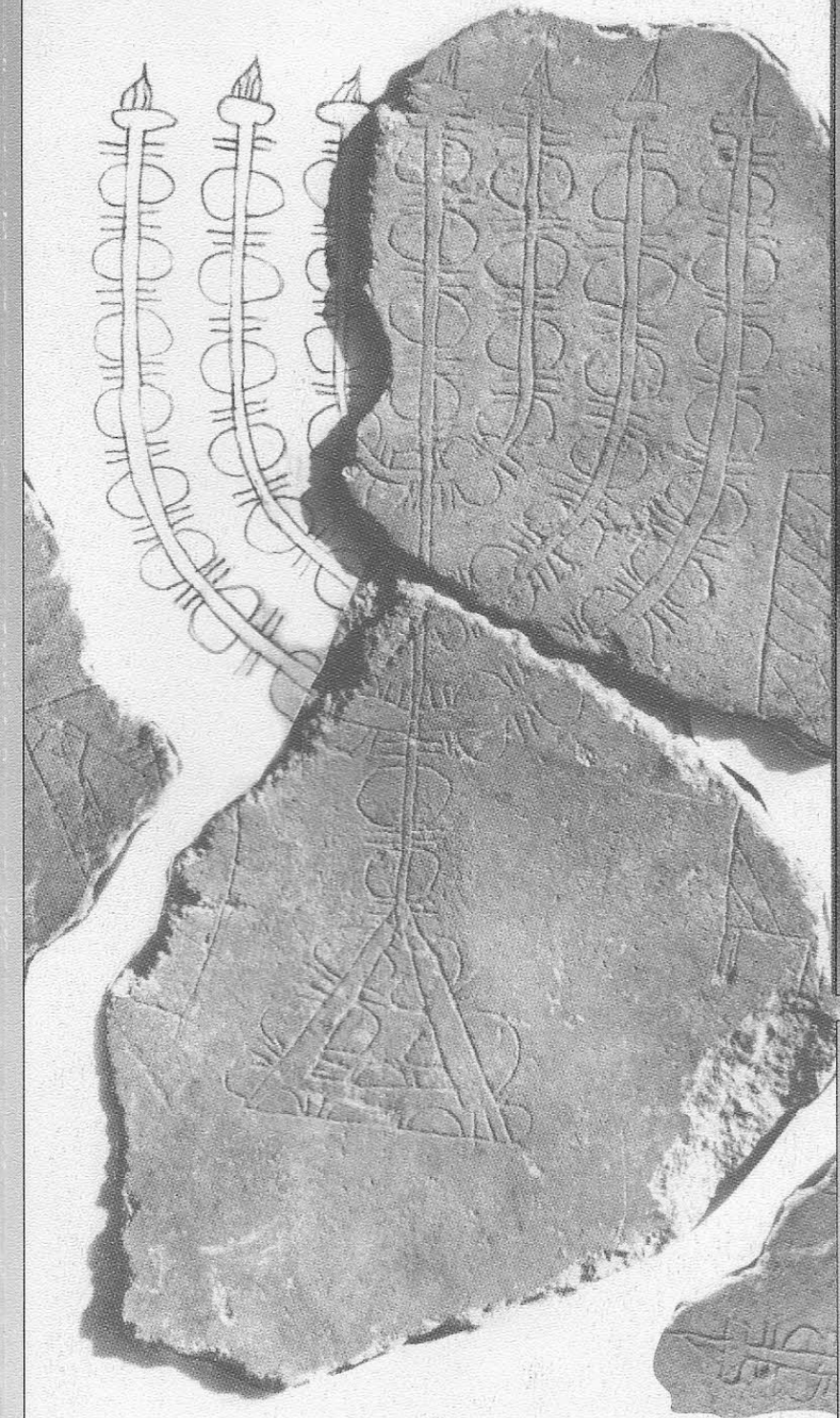


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"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us
and we beheld His glory,
glory as of the only begotten from the Father,
full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)



Creeds among Jewish Believers in Yeshua between the World Wars

Gershon Nerel

Synagogue and Church formulated their beliefs and traditions by dissimilarly referring to the same basic Hebraic Truth ('Hebraica veritas').¹ Yet their distinct Canons and scriptural interpretations resulted in the creation of two Bibles, focusing upon separate doctrines. Thus, Synagogue and Church, either by viewing themselves as mother and daughter religions, or even as two sister faiths, still shape their self-identities by confronting the other's convictions.²

In a nutshell, it is the faith in Yeshua, the incarnated Son of God, that fuels the ongoing polarization between Jews and Christians. Not surprisingly, therefore, when contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua (=JBY) reintroduced a Jewish pattern to combine Old and New Testaments, they were automatically viewed by both Synagogue and Church as a presumptuous, provocative and revolutionary group. However, these JBY have insistently declared that they uphold their Jewish identity, are fully loyal to their nation, and represent an authentic Hebraic Truth. Consequently, modern 'Hebrew Christians,' 'Christian Jews' and 'Jewish Christians' still continue to challenge both Church and Synagogue, frequently being accused by both of bordering on esotericism and anachronism.³

In order to understand and classify the principles of faith among modern JBY, one should not necessarily look for traditional paradigms of creeds as they

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¹ See Ora Limor, "Christian Tradition - Jewish Authority," in *Cathedra* (For the History of Eretz Israel and Its Yishuv, in Hebrew), vol. 80, 1996, pp. 31-62.

² For example, see recently: Israel Jacob Yuval, "Two Nations in Your Womb" - *Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv 2000, especially 34-45 and passim (in Hebrew).

³ Cf. Simon Claude Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien* (Essais historiques), Cerf/Patrimoines, Paris 1998, 30-41

developed within the churches.⁴ Since contemporary JBY regard themselves as the direct heirs of the early Jewish disciples of Yeshua, they took for themselves the liberty to express their theology independently of the historic churches. Namely, they decided which new terms to use, and in which order and length to shape their credos. Therefore, we need to clarify from the outset, that it would be both a methodological and historical mistake to try and categorize the basic beliefs of modern JBY simply and solely along the creedal patterns of Protestantism or Catholicism.

Credos Produced by New Associations

A major characteristic of the modern movement of JBY in the last two centuries is the establishment of their own organizational entities. Jewish Yeshua-believers used various designations to name their new organizations: These include "Union," "Alliance," "Assembly," "Fellowship," "Congregation" and even "Church." Respectively, almost each and every such organization was founded upon a set of principles of faith, brief or long. As a matter of fact, every such legally incorporated entity formulated its own credo, fundamentally expressing the unity between the Old and New Testaments from a national Jewish perspective.

It was particularly between the Two World Wars (1915-1939), that for the first time the modern movement of JBY reached a worldwide visibility and vocality. During this period, the common designations for Jewish believers in Yeshua were *Hebrew Christians* in English, or *Judenchristen*, in German. Only in Hebrew and in Yiddish one could also find the usage of another appellation: *Yehudi Meshihi*, Messianic Jew. The variations of this nomenclature automatically revealed the doctrinal orientation of those who used this epithet – either Jewish or gentile believers in Yeshua.⁵

In Eretz-Israel, the Land of Israel, the times between the World Wars were also the major part of the British Mandate in the Holy Land. Here one witnessed the monumental revival of the Hebrew language alongside the Zionist revolution. These developments also forced JBY in the land to review and to carve out their theological/doctrinal terms in the Hebrew language.⁶

It was in Europe and America between the World Wars that JBY slowly started to think about changing the focus of their identity – and their doctrinal terminology – from *Hebrew* to *Jew*. At the same time, JBY gradually stopped fluctuating like a pendulum between two other theological terms – *Christos*

⁴ See John H. Leith, ed., *Credos of the Churches* (A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present), Anchor Books, Louisville 1982.

⁵ See, for example, Abram Poljak, *The Cross in the Star of David*, London 1938.

⁶ William M. Christie, "The Language Question in Palestine," in: *The Hebrew Christian*, vol. 2, July 1929, 67-69 (=THC).

(Christ) and *Mashiach* (Messiah). They focused on the Hebraic terms *Messiah* and *Messianic*.

The Doctrinal Basis of the "Hebrew Christian Alliance of America" (HCAA)

Mark John Levy and Shabbetai Benjamin Rohold were the two forces behind the formation of the *Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA)*, formally established in New York City, in April 1915. Gentile Christians immediately reacted by raising arguments against the theological justification for maintaining a separate organization with strong Jewish distinctiveness.⁷ To this, the response of the Alliance leaders was that the HCAA was neither a church nor a denomination that was rebelling against its mother church or denomination. Since the young HCAA faced strong criticism for "establishing a wall of partition between Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua," its leaders made it very clear that only Scripture was the basic doctrinal foundation for its members.⁸

Article no. X within the "Bylaws of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America – 1915" deals with the theme "Doctrinal Basis of the HCAA." Chapter A of this statement affirms the full belief in "the deity of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, his virgin birth, his vicarious atonement for our sins, his resurrection, his ascension and his session at the right hand of God."⁹ It is obvious that these are not disguised words, yet it is also evident that there is no reference at all to any historical creed in this modern text. Although the Christological issue is highlighted in very general expressions, one cannot avoid observing the intentional refraining from mentioning the Trinity or the inner relationship within the Godhead.

Chapter B of the doctrinal basis of the HCAA states that "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God," thus simply quoting from the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to Timothy.¹⁰ This statement declares, therefore, that JBY accept the canonical Holy Scriptures comprising the Old and the New Testaments as a "fait accompli," having no intentions to abandon their Hebraic heritage. This short declaration meant that they held no claims questioning the validity of the accepted Canon, thus de facto disregarding the alleged canonical authority of the Apocrypha. In other words, "Scripture" for them meant only the Old and New Testaments, without the Apocrypha to the Old Testament or the ancient

⁷ Cf. Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000*, Chapel Hill and London, 2000, 44-54.

⁸ Robert I. Winer, *The Calling* (The History of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, 1915-1990), Wynnewood, Pennsylvania 1990, 9-19.

⁹ Robert I. Winer, *The Calling*, 99.

¹⁰ 2 Tim 3: 16. Winer in his book mistakenly mentions the First Epistle to Timothy.

Apocryphal New Testament. Needless to say, any other "modern Apocrypha," like Mormonism, was totally rejected by them.¹¹

Chapter C of this doctrinal basis of the HCAA proclaims that the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament point to Yeshua.¹² Here once again the Hebraic roots are emphasized. Namely, that JBY find their Jewish Messiah in the authentic Hebrew Scripture, and not within a Hellenistic world that talks about Christos.

The doctrinal basis for the HCAA concludes with the following words: "No person shall be admitted into membership of the Alliance holding views in opposition to those outlined under this article. Nor shall any member of the Alliance embracing and teaching such views after having been admitted to membership, be allowed to remain as a member of the Alliance."¹³ These words left no room for doubts, so that all members of the HCAA had to fully stick to elementary principles of faith. As far as it is known, no member of the American Alliance was requested to leave because of violating its declared orthodoxy.

Other basic theological principles of the HCAA were scattered throughout its organ, "The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly." From this magazine, one can learn that the American Hebrew Christian "creed" was not purely a theology or merely a set of theological formulas. It was rather a combination of several aspects, mainly theology, history and nationality. Thus, various references to history, and to historical developments within the universal Body of Messiah, frequently appeared in their writings. For example, in an open letter to "The Churches of the Gentiles," published in 1923, it was stated as follows:

Hebrew-Christianity is the romance and miracle of history. Originally it became the MOTHER which brought forth the Gentile Church still expanding to the uttermost parts of the earth. But MODERN Hebrew-Christianity is, in the turn of affairs, a CHILD of this Church. This was clearly foreseen by that Hebrew-Christian Apostle, St. Paul, when he told the Gentiles that through THEIR mercy, WE also should obtain mercy. We testify that we have become partakers of that mercy. You have made us acquainted with our own Messiah, and we are your debtors... We - a part of the Remnant according to the Election of Grace - are still in our own Olive Tree. We have never been cut off.¹⁴

Through such texts, JBY highlighted their Jewish roots, reminding the gentiles about their unique status, not only in the remote past but also in their own times. Key terms like the Remnant and Election reappear in many of their documents. And while they naturally accepted baptism as a clear commandment of Yeshua, contemporary JBY constantly argued that the water

¹¹ Cf. Gershon Nerel, "The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers," in: *Messianic Jewish Life*, vol. 73, October-December 2000, 16-19.

¹² Robert I. Winer, *The Calling*, 99.

¹³ *The Calling*, 100

¹⁴ "The Hebrew Christian Alliance to 'The Churches of the Gentiles,'" in: *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*, vol. 7, January 1923, 2 (=THCAQ).

of baptism has not washed away their racial origin or their national status as Jews, and they still remain as a part of Israel.¹⁵

After accepting the New Testament as the word of God, and believing in Yeshua's divinity and messianic role, JBY only rarely, and seldom in writing, dealt with delicate christological issues that so often bothered the historical churches. Rather, members of the HCAA were preoccupied with the problem of assimilation within the churches. Therefore, they frequently emphasized that they were no longer allowed to disappear in the melting pot of gentile Christendom. Furthermore, they even stated that in the hour of Jacob's travail, they would know how to identify themselves with their suffering brethren, "and go through the furnace with them."¹⁶

The Doctrinal Foundation of the "International Hebrew Christian Alliance" (IHCA)

In September 1925, the same persons that founded the "Hebrew Christian Alliance of America" were also behind the establishment of the "International Hebrew Christian Alliance" (=IHCA), yet now they labored jointly with their European brethren, especially in Great Britain.¹⁷ At the first international conference of JBY, held at the Wilson Memorial Hall in Islington, London, Dr. Max Reich from America¹⁸ presented a paper on "The Doctrinal Basis of the Hebrew Christian Alliance," and stated as follows:

The New Testament, as much as the Old, must be recognized as part of the Sacred Literature of Israel... Hebrew Christians have no desire to set up a creed separate from the faith of the historic and Universal Church. There is no more sound and orthodox group of believers in the whole of Christendom than Hebrew Christians. It is a comfort to know that, whereas there is a tendency to depart from the ancient moorings among Gentile Churches, destructive heresies, denying the very foundations of our spiritual felicity, finding increasing credence, a standard is being raised up in the Jewish remnant according to the election of grace. Christ is the Alpha and Omega, our Beginning and End.¹⁹

The doctrinal model that Max Reich wanted to portray related to the basic beliefs of the primitive Jewish evangelists and apostles of the first Jerusalem Church - as they appear in the canonical Old and New Testaments. Reich spoke most enthusiastically about the early disciples of Yeshua, especially those in the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷ Since Shabbetai Benjamin Rohold returned to Palestine in 1921, settled in Haifa and worked from there as a missionary, at the international Hebrew Christian conference in London he represented the JBY of Eretz-Israel.

¹⁸ Max I. Reich was the President of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America, and the editor of its organ, *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*.

¹⁹ In: *Report of the First International Hebrew Christian Conference*, London and Edinburgh 1926, 79-80 (=Report).

Gospels and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and highlighted the personal relationship they had with the Jewish Messiah.

In his talk at the London conference, Max Reich underlined the belief that Yeshua was both a sinless Man and the Son of God. In his words: "Yeshua is Lord of the universe and king of Israel, who will victoriously restore Israel and the earth." According to Reich, all these details constituted together the doctrinal basis of the modern Hebrew Christians, "now forming themselves into an international alliance." He then concluded, "We desire to stand where our fathers stood."²⁰

However, when contemporary JBY were looking back to the early centuries, examining the beliefs of the Primitive Church, they also acknowledged the deep doctrinal differences that existed between the Ebionites and the Nazarenes. It was especially Mark John Levy from America, who at the London conference referred to the Nazarene model of the pre-Nicaea Council in A.D. 325. About the sound theology of the Nazarenes, Levy mentioned that they were "loyal Hebrew Christians who accepted Christ as the Messiah and relied solely on His supernatural birth, holy life, sacrificial death and resurrection as their only hope of eternal salvation."²¹ In other words, while the IHCA de facto attempted to adopt a basic creed that was intended to reflect the authentic Nazarene prototype, it consciously rejected the so-called Ebionite frame of reference.²²

At the London conference, Levy also reminded his listeners about the historical fact that since the Council of Nicaea in the fourth century, the Church had done "a great injustice to Judah." Namely, the Church separated Jewish Christians compulsorily from their own people, by teaching them that it is scripturally wrong for Hebrew Christians to observe the national and social customs of Israel. The Church, Levy explained, demanded for centuries that Jewish Christians conform to gentile sectarian dogmas as the price of full Christian fellowship.²³

Privately Levy shared his view that Hebrew Christians should observe the Torah according to the teaching of Yeshua. As for associations, including the new IHCA, Levy said that they should declare their national and social freedom in the Gospel, aiming to fulfill a unique task – that Hebrew Christian alliances are to revive the Hebrew National Branch of the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."²⁴

²⁰ Report, 82.

²¹ Report, 53.

²² Cf. Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "Pritz, Nazarene Jewish Christianity," in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 82, January-April 1992, 573-574.

²³ Report, 51

²⁴ Report, 52. This is actually a repetition of the early Church motto: "Una, sancta, catholica et apostolica ecclesia."

Following these views and upon the principle of national plurality within the universal body of believers in Yeshua, the IHCA lifted high the banner of Jewish particular identity in Messiah Yeshua – particular but not separatist. The goal behind this standpoint was to make a public declaration that the gentilizing of Jewish Christians is both unwise and unscriptural, that JBY refuse to be gentilized and that this phenomenon must be stopped.

Another paper on the doctrinal basis of the IHCA was presented at the London conference by I.E. Davidson, from the United Kingdom. Davidson made it clear that the Bible is an infallible book, approached as the Word of God, a spiritual book that can only be spiritually discerned. Following the Apostle Saul/Paul, Davidson stated that both Old and New Testaments make one unit of Scripture, holding plenary inspiration and possessing full divine authority.²⁵ Davidson's beliefs were endorsed, so that in this respect the IHCA followed an elementary principle that was already fully expressed in the creed of the HCAA.

Although the concept of the Trinity was mentioned several times in the doctrinal discussions at the London conference, it did not come to the surface in the final "creed" of the IHCA. However, it is most interesting to observe how this theme was dealt with. For example, Davidson's explanation about the Trinitarian principle was as follows:

The opening words of the Book of Genesis declare the Triune God, plurality in Name, and unity in Person...Plural expressions of the Personality of Godhead abound throughout Scripture. But in the scale of progression, of Divine revelation, the Triune Godhead comes clearer and more prominently into view. Moses declares in Deuteronomy vi that he was definitely commanded to teach this doctrine, and a formula is given: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, is one Lord.' Israel is given here to understand that his God is Triune, and is, moreover, commanded to worship Him in a Triune form – 'with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might.' God is to be worshipped with body, soul, and spirit. The triune human being respond to the triune God.²⁶

At the same presentation, mention was made of Yeshua as the *Logos*, the incarnated Word that came in search of man, destined to reconcile man to God. During the sessions on doctrinal matters, numerous Old Testament prophecies were mentioned, highlighting the fulfillment of Israel's messianic prophecies, promised both for past and future times.²⁷ From that angle in the London conference, the eschatological dimension also received a significant exposure. All expressed the hope that when Yeshua will stand triumphantly on the Mount of Olives, Israel will at last recognize and honor him, and accept him as their savior.²⁸

²⁵ Report, 85.

²⁶ Report, 87-88.

²⁷ Report, 89-91.

²⁸ Report, 94; 111-112.

De facto, the entire *Report of the First International Hebrew Christian Conference* was the Alliance's unofficial credo. Within this doctrinal platform, the topic of Yeshua's return received a notable place. His Second Coming to reign in great glory was a certain hope in the Alliance's unofficial, yet systematic, credo. As witnessing Hebrew Christians, members of the conference particularly affirmed their strong belief in the soon appearance of the Bridegroom. They wanted to openly join the "Advent Testimony," emphasizing that they did not question this truth, and therefore clearly stated that Yeshua did not delay his Second Coming. This hope they wanted especially to share with the people of Israel "flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone."²⁹

However, the final and formal 'creed' of the IMJA did not remain a long theological treatise. The Constitution and Bye-Laws of the IHCA incorporated in its preamble merely a brief statement of faith, titled "Declaration of Freedom," which says as follows:

*The International Hebrew Christian Alliance shall look to God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, one God, and to Him alone, as its Divine Head. Receiving the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, it will make them its supreme rule of Faith and Life, and will at all times rely on the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.*³⁰

Article 8, section 2, of this Constitution went into some more theological and practical details. According to this paragraph, applicants for membership must

*1) have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior; 2) believe in the atonement which He wrought on the Cross of Calvary; 3) believe in His deity and resurrection; 4) believe in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God; 5) have made public confession of their faith; 6) declare their adherence to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the supreme rule of faith and life; 7) lead a life to the glory of God.*³¹

Although baptism in water is not mentioned here, one can easily understand that the wording "public confession" refers also to baptism.³²

²⁹ *Report*, pp. 175-179. Cf. Samuel Schor, "The Second Coming of Our Lord" (Paper Read at the Second International Hebrew Christian Conference, Hamburg 1928), in *THC*, vol. 1, October 1928, 153-156.

³⁰ *Constitution and Bye-Laws of The International Hebrew Christian Alliance*, n.d., p. 1. The first booklet containing the Constitution was published in London in the early 1930s - without specifically mentioning the place and the date of publication. More than half a century later, in the revised Constitution of 1992, following the Toronto Conference, some cosmetic changes were officially introduced into the Alliance 'creed,' like using the Hebraic terminology *Tanach* for the Old Testament, and *Brit Hadashah* for the New Testament. This Constitution of 1992 also brought into the text the appellations *Yeshua* and *Messianic Jew*.

³¹ The original text of the *Constitution and Bye-Laws of the IHCA*, (1930s), 5-6.

³² The revised Constitution of 1992 had some substantial changes within this section of the IMJ(HC)A "creed." Especially we should note the omission of "believe in His deity" as it appears in the original text. Plus, instead of the wording "Lead a life to the glory of

The official modern "International Jewish Christian Creed" only in a general way related to the historical creeds of the churches. However, it was broad and fundamentally sufficient to form a consensus for a doctrinal framework. This creed placed Yeshua's deity and Scripture in its center, leaving out denominational doctrines and theological nuances. Since 1925, only one case is recorded in which people were forced to leave the International Alliance for not abiding by its articles of faith. The one who found a shut door was Hugh J. Schonfield, formerly a leading member of the IHCA, who even served as General Secretary of the Alliance, and later authored the famous book *The History of Jewish Christianity*.

Schonfield was regarded heretical because he rejected the virgin birth of Yeshua and his full deity as the Son of God. At the fifth international conference of the IHCA, held in Budapest in 1937, Schonfield formally appealed against his removal.³³ Yet, after some investigation was done by two committees, all delegates were to rise one by one to affirm each and every article of faith in the Constitution. The only exception was the Schonfield couple. So it was evident that Schonfield and his wife still did not change their heterodox views, and they were eventually excluded from membership in the Alliance.³⁴

A Proposed Creed for a Hebrew Christian Church

The third international conference of the IHCA, held at High Leigh, England, in July 1931, appointed a commission to consider the advisability of forming a Hebrew Christian Church. While Rev. Elijah Bendor Samuel of Great Britain was the chairman of the commission, the real force behind this activity was Sir Leon Levison, the first President of the IHCA.³⁵ Members of the commission consisted of Hebrew Christians who belonged to the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church and independent believers. Their work was completed after a year and three months, and in November 1932 they published a booklet which had three titles: "*Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission*"; "*Proposed Principles of Faith for the Suggested Hebrew Christian Church*"; "*Proposed Constitution for the Hebrew Christian Church*."³⁶

God," as originally stated, the 1992 edition says "Endeavor to lead a life to the glory of God."

³³ Harcourt Samuel, "The Budapest Conference," in: *THC*, vol. 10, April 1937-January 1938, 104-105.

³⁴ See also, for example, Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew - The Life of Leon Levison (1881-1936)*, Edinburgh 1989, 279-283; 294. Later, in 1965, Hugh Schonfield published his infamous book *The Passover Plot*.

³⁵ See Leon Levison, "The Hebrew Christian Church," in: *THC*, vol. vol. 5, July 1932, 52.

³⁶ Published in Luton, n.d. A copy of this report is in the private archive of Gershon Nerel.

The proposed principles of faith for the suggested Hebrew Christian Church contained 11 articles and a preamble, as follows:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul and all thy might, and thy neighbor as thyself.

I BELIEVE in God, the Source of all being, the Covenant God, the Holy One of Israel, our Heavenly Father.

I BELIEVE that God who spake at sundry times and diverse manners in time past to the fathers through the prophets promised to redeem the world from sin and death in and through His Anointed, Who would be a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel.

I BELIEVE that in the fullness of time God fulfilled His promise and sent forth His Son, His eternal Word, Jesus, the Messiah, who was born by the power of the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary, who was of the family of David, so that in Him the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

I BELIEVE that Jesus the Messiah is in very truth the Shekinah,³⁷ the brightness of the Father's glory, the very impress of His Person, that He was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and that by His Life, Death on the Cross and glorious Resurrection, He has accomplished our Reconciliation with the Father.

I BELIEVE that the Father sealed all that the Son was, did, and taught, by raising Him through the Holy Spirit from the dead, and that the Risen and Glorified Lord appeared to many and communed with them, and then Ascended to be our Mediator with the Father and to reign with Him, One God.

I BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, was sent to be with us, to give us assurance of the forgiveness of sin and to lead us into the fullness of truth and the more abundant life.

I BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit, Who beareth witness with our Spirits that we are the sons of God, will quicken us in the resurrection when we shall be clothed with the body which it shall please the Father to give us.

I BELIEVE that the Church of the Messiah is the family of God in Heaven and on Earth, the Sanctuary of the redeemed in which God dwells and of which the Messiah Jesus is the only Head.

I BELIEVE that the Old and New Testaments as written are the divinely inspired records of God's revelation to Israel and the World, and are the only rule of faith and life.

³⁷ The word *Shekinah* ("dwelling") is not found in the Old Testament. For some comparisons see David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, Magnes, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 103, 307, 517-519.

I BELIEVE that it is the Will of God, Who has graciously brought us into the new Covenant that we should strive to be His witnesses, making the teaching and life of the Messiah our standard and example, till He comes again to reign in power and glory.

I BELIEVE that the Church visible maintains unbroken continuity with the Church in Heaven by partaking of the same blessed Sacraments of Baptism and of Holy Communion and by confessing the same Father, Son and Holy Spirit, One Godhead.³⁸

In their introductory words, members of the commission admitted that in drawing up these eleven articles of faith, they were mainly guided by the principle of keeping close to Synagogal worship, and the polity of the Apostolic Church. The composers of this creed sought to emphasize the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and the special aspect of their doctrines "as based upon Hebrew Christianity." In its recommended Constitution, the commission also acknowledged that it worked out a Presbyterian-Episcopal polity, because a majority believed that these two systems come nearer to the Apostolic Church.³⁹

The use of the theological term "Shekinah" in this credo deserves a special attention.⁴⁰ In Jewish traditional literature, particularly in the *Aggadah* (narration), *Shekinah* is one of the appellations for God, marking God's presence and revelation in the world. Thus, for example, the terms "Ziv (Light) and Kanfei (Wings) of the Shekinah" are of common use. However, it is particularly in Kabbalah, the Jewish mysticism, and its basic book the *Zohar*, that the symbolism of the *Shekinah* is mostly developed. In Kabbalistic vocabulary the *Shekinah* represents the feminine element within the "Ten Sefirot" (Spheres), through which God rules the world.⁴¹ Therefore, with such mystical and feminine references about *Shekinah* found in Kabbalistic literature, one needs to seriously question whether the authors of this credo were fully aware of the occult connotations within Jewish Kabbalah.⁴²

On the issue of baptism, the commission left the question of infant baptism an open one for parents to act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It recommended that the different modes of baptism extant in the various

³⁸ *Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission* (1932), pp. 5-6. The proposed Articles of Faith for the Hebrew Christian Church were also published in America in *THCAQ*, vol. 18, June 1933, 30-31.

³⁹ Elijah Bendor Samuel, "Articles of Faith and Constitution," in: *Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission*, 4.

⁴⁰ Cf. Tsvi Nassi (Hirsch Printz), *Haraz Deshlosha* (The Mystery of the Trinity), Reprinted by Yanetz, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 8-9; 29-31; 49 (in Hebrew). See also "Shekinah" in: *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London 1974, 1269.

⁴¹ See, for instance, "Shekinah" in: *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, vol. 31, cols. 864-866 (in Hebrew).

⁴² See, for example, Yehuda Liebes, "Christian Influences in the Zohar," in: *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 2 (1), 1982/3, 43-74 (in Hebrew).

branches of the Christian Church be allowed. While the commission was ready to make allowances for those who were already in some branch of the Church which did not practice immersion, it strongly recommended that in the Hebrew Christian Church immersion should be demanded. The reason that was given for demanding immersion was that "it was unquestionably practiced in the early (Jewish) Church."⁴³

Baptism, either by immersion, effusion, or sprinkling, was especially mentioned in the proposed Constitution for the suggested Hebrew Christian Church. It was required that all baptisms should take place in public, and only in special circumstances should they be allowed in a private house. At the same place, it was stated that "baptism shall be into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴ From this passage on baptism, one may comprehend that in reality there was some reluctance among JBY to be formally baptized into traditional denominations and in church buildings.

The placing of the "Shema Israel" ('Hear, O Israel') at the head of these Articles of Faith for the proposed Hebrew Christian Church had a clear purpose: to serve as a visible means that represents a special link to the primitive Apostolic Church. Sir Leon Levison openly declared that he wanted to interconnect the noble past of the Mother Church with the organization he directed, and thus to enlarge and enrich the modern Hebrew Christian Church.⁴⁵ In other words, although everyone knew that for long centuries no physical Apostolic Succession of JBY was in existence, still many Jewish Yeshua-believers in the 20th century tried to use their distinctive creed as a conceptual bridge between themselves and their early Jewish ancestors.⁴⁶ Altogether, the tendency towards using Jewish phrases - like "Shekinah," "the Covenant God," "the Holy One of Israel," was meant to become an integral part of this bridging scheme.

Sir Leon Levison exhausted his numerous contacts with various Church dignitaries, especially within the Anglican Church, in order to get their recognition for the new Hebrew Christian Church and its particular creed. Levison made serious efforts to submit the tentatively drawn Articles of Faith to the heads of all the churches in Great Britain for criticism and advice. Ultimately Levison planned to refer this creed to the next international Hebrew Christian Conference, that it would be finally adopted, as he hoped, "along with the

⁴³ *Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission*, 5.

⁴⁴ *Report of the Hebrew Christian Church Commission*, 7.

⁴⁵ Leon Levison, "A Hebrew Christian Church," in: *THC*, vol. 5, January 1933, 168-169. Here also the Articles of Faith were published on page 170. See also Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew*, 349-350.

⁴⁶ Cf. Gershon Nerel, "Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews," in: Simon Claude Mimouni, ed., *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états*, (Actes du colloque de Jérusalem 1998), Paris 2001, 399-425.

Niceum Creed."⁴⁷ Probably Levison was willing to mention the compatibility with the Nicæan Creed merely to get the support of the clergy within the historic churches.

Yet eventually the proposed model creed and constitution that became the "baby" of Sir Leon were rejected, both by the institutional churches (de facto)⁴⁸ and by the IHCA (de jure). After Leon Levison died in 1936, and Nazi racism prevailed in Germany, the opponents of a separate Hebrew Christian Church with its "private" Creed only increased. Thus, for example, Arnold Frank, President of the Hebrew Christian Alliance in Germany and Vice-President of the IHCA, feared that such steps would invite more anti-Semitism and accusations of becoming a sect. Frank especially feared the accusation from anti-Nazi circles that the Jewish believers in Yeshua wished to create an exclusive, anti-Aryan and an ultra nationalistic Jewish church.⁴⁹

The fifth international conference of the IHCA, that took place in Budapest in 1937 without Leon, reached the resolution "That this Conference requests its Executive to take no further steps for the founding of a Hebrew Christian Church."⁵⁰ The practical implication of this resolution was that local alliances of JBY were directed to look at the doctrinal basis of the IHCA as their creedal foundation. Namely, without establishing a denominational church of its own, now the Constitution of the IHCA itself became the doctrinal platform for the 18 affiliated alliances. Yet, when the Second World War broke out in 1939, the communications between the Headquarters in London and alliances on the Continent were broken. Most European alliances on the Continent disappeared during the Nazi persecutions.

The Creed of the "Jewish Christian Community" (JCC)

In 1937 Abram Poljak founded the "Jewish Christian Union," which mainly spread in Switzerland, Poland, Romania, the Baltic States and England. This Union was an international association of Jewish and gentile Christians who wanted to establish the Jewish Christian movement as a branch of the universal Body of Christ. Since January 1939, the name was changed to the Jewish Christian Community, and its organ, with the same name, was published in

⁴⁷ Letter of Leon Levison to E.M. Bickersteth, 11th November 1932. Private correspondence, in: *St. Antony's College*, Oxford, Middle East Library, Private Papers, box J.EM, XVIII/E.

⁴⁸ A typical understatement appeared in the "Episcopal Notes," in: *The Anglican Church Magazine*, vol. 12 (n.s.), November 1932, p. 2235.

⁴⁹ Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew*, 267-272.

⁵⁰ Harcourt Samuel, "The History of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance," in: *Mishkan*, vol. 14, 1991, 76.

England. Two other key figures in this movement were Agnes S. Waldstein and Baron Albert von Springer.⁵¹

From the outset, Abram Poljak emphasized that the future of Jewish Christian communities had to remain "communities," and not develop into a "church." Often Poljak spoke about a unique "Jewish Christianity" that ought to be and remain a *movement* and not to become an established national organization, "a state within a state."⁵² On the other hand, however, in the late 1930s Poljak anticipated that in the near future Jewish Christian communities would arise in Palestine and elsewhere, and thus, the Jewish People would get their church.

At the same time, Poljak and his friends formulated independently their own creed, under the heading "Our Belief." This credo included Ten Articles of Faith, as follows:

1. *The Bible, i.e. the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God.*
2. *Jesus of Nazareth was Spirit from the Spirit of God (The 'Son of God'). He died for our sins on Calvary, has Risen from the dead and Ascended in to Heaven from whence He will come again.*
3. *There is only One Church, the Body of Christ.*
4. *Israel, the Jewish people, was, is and remains chosen by God for the carrying out of a spiritual task.*
5. *God does not want those Jews who believe in Christ, to merge into the nations of their abode.*
6. *Christian Jews are to be witnesses of Christ in the midst of their Jewish people.*
7. *Therefore, in Palestine and all the countries where Jews live in masses and have a national life of their own, there ought to come into existence Jewish Christian communities.*
8. *In Christ there are "neither Jews nor Greeks." The Jewish Christian communities must not know any racial discrimination, nor any other earthly divisions.*
9. *The Jewish Christian communities are therefore open to Non-Jews with full rights and duties. Non-Jews who excel by special gifts of the Holy Spirit, may become leaders of the Jewish Christian communities.*
10. *For its development and well-being the Jewish Christian community needs the prayers of Gentile Christendom.*⁵³

Like most JBY of his times, Poljak too underlined the fact that spiritually and theologically there is no difference at all between Jewish and gentile believers in Yeshua. In the same breath, Poljak also stressed that there remains a Jewish distinctiveness in the Messiah. In other words, that normally there exists a *functional* particularity between Israel, the chosen people, and the other nations. Obviously, this functional differentiation had nothing to do with racial

⁵¹ See, for example, Abram Poljak, *Die Jüdische Kirche*, Bern 1946.

⁵² Abram Poljak, "Our Future Communities," in: *The Jewish Christian Community*, Nos. 6/7, June-July 1939, 2.

⁵³ 'Our Belief', in: "The Jewish Christian Community," *ibid.*, 1.

superiority or inferiority. Thus, for example, Poljak also declared that "whatever might be good for the Gentile Christians, it is not good for Jewish Christians. Israel must not be like the nations of the earth."⁵⁴

It should be noted, however, that the Jewish Christian communities under the leadership of Poljak, Waldstein and Springer were not exclusively Jewish. Thus, unlike the Constitution of the IHCA, which admitted non-Jewish members *only* as associate-members, and with no official positions in its governing committees, the JCC did formally accept non-Jewish believers as full members. This "personnel" difference between the IHCA and the JCC was a clear outcome of their respective creeds.⁵⁵

After the Second World War the JCC continued to develop and expand in Europe and Palestine.⁵⁶ It was only after Poljak died in 1963, and was buried in Möttlingen, Germany, that this movement gradually minimized its activities, as there was no younger generation to follow the founders. In Israel they have completely disappeared.

A Hebrew Christian Creed in Poland

In the spring of 1939, half a year before Nazi Germany invaded Poland, the Hebrew Christian community in Warsaw published its own Articles of Faith. This credo was originally formulated in the Hebrew language, and contained thirteen articles. Apparently, this statement of faith adopted the structural framework of the Rabbinical Thirteen Articles of Faith, composed by the Rambam, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204). Maimonides was a prolific writer and his theology is summed up in his famous Thirteen Articles of Faith that is still accepted within mainstream Jewry until today.⁵⁷

A free translation from the Hebrew of these Articles of Faith is as follows:

1. *I believe in complete faith in JHWH the God of Israel, the God of love and salvation; the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Creator of everything visible and invisible. He is one God and father, everything comes from Him, by Him and towards Him; He is above all, He is everything and He is within everything, and for Him be the glory forever, Amen.*
2. *I believe in complete faith that God, may His name be blessed, is Spirit, and that the true worshipers must bow before their Father in Heaven in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Cf. idem, *Die Judenchristliche Gemeinde*, Wien 1937, esp. 13-14.

⁵⁵ Cf. Abram Poljak, *Judenchristentum*, Thun 1941, esp. 17-26.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Abram Poljak, "Doctrine," in: *Jerusalem*, vol. 2, November 1946, 3-4.

⁵⁷ See "Maimonides, Moses," in: *The New Jewish Encyclopaedia*, New York 1962, 301-303.

⁵⁸ Based upon the Gospel of John 4:23.

3. *I believe in complete faith in the Messiah Yeshua our Lord, the single and beloved Son of His Father in Heaven, raised by God to become Redeemer for Israel, according to the promises to our patriarchs, uttered by His holy prophets. He who descended from Heaven for us human beings and for our salvation, and became the Son of Man. He was formed from the Holy Spirit; born from the Virgin Mary, from the seed of David, anointed by God in the Holy Spirit and in might. Like us, He endured everything, yet without sin. He glorified His Father in Heaven. He proclaimed His name and His will to human beings, walked on earth, performing mercy with all Sons of Israel. He suffered great shame because of sinners and was tortured to death, until His death of crucifixion, the righteous for the wicked. Therefore God uplifted Him to the utmost, and on the third day following His death and burial, raised Him from the dead and made Him publicly seen by His disciples, and seated Him at His right side on high. And from there He will come again in glory, to prepare His Kingdom in order to restore everything and to judge the living and the dead. And He is King over the House of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom has no end, Amen.*
4. *I believe in complete faith that our Lord Yeshua the Messiah is the image of the concealed God, the brightness of His glory, the image of His substance. He was prior to everything, the power and wisdom of God. In Him dwells the plenitude of divinity, and in Him are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The one that looks at Him sees our Father in Heaven. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one will come to the Father but through Him.*
5. *I believe in complete faith that God firstly presented Yeshua the Messiah for us, and sent Him to bless and to save His people from all their sins. And although our forefathers rebelled and sinned against Him, God did not forsake His people but raised Yeshua to be Prince and Savior, to provide repentance and forgiveness of sins to everyone that wholeheartedly believes in the name of Yeshua Hamashiach (Messiah).*
6. *I believe in complete faith that by God's determinate council and foreknowledge our ancestors rebelled against Yeshua, the King of Israel and her glory, so that in their sin, salvation will come to the Gentiles to bring them, through the Messiah, nearer to God and to His salvation. So that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God. Indeed, when the fullness of the gentiles will come to the Kingdom of Heaven, then all Israel will be redeemed in eternal salvation and JHWH will reign upon the entire earth.⁵⁹*
7. *I believe in complete faith that the Messiah, through sacrificing Himself on the Cross, atoned for the sins of the whole world. He abolished the commandments and ordinances of the Torah (Torat hamitzvot vehahukot), a source of enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles, and destroyed the dividing fence and reconciled both of them to God. He created the two into one new man, and made peace between them. And there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, since all are one in the Messiah Yeshua.⁶⁰*

⁵⁹ Based upon Rom 11: 25-26.

⁶⁰ See Gal 3:28.

8. *I believe in complete faith that the Messiah is the end of the Torah for justification, for everyone who believes in Him. And that through faith in the Messiah everyone will be justified before God, without the deeds of the Torah, because from the deeds of the Torah no flesh will be justified nor perfected.⁶¹*
9. *I believe in complete faith that in the Messiah Yeshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value, but the new creation and the faith that acts through love.⁶² Since the love of the pure heart is the purpose of the entire Torah and its true fulfillment. And whoever is in the Messiah is a new creature and is created for a life of holiness and good works.*
10. *I believe in complete faith in the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who will eternally dwell among the believers, and will sanctify and lead them into full truth.*
11. *I believe in complete faith that God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets, and that in the latter days He spoke to us by His Son Yeshua Hamashiach – both these are the words of the Living God.*
12. *I believe in complete faith that the Holy Scriptures which are now in our hands were written by the Holy Spirit. These Scriptures are prepared to impart us with the knowledge of salvation through faith in the Messiah Yeshua, and for instructing us in righteousness, so that we may be complete and ready to do every good work.⁶³*
13. *I believe in complete faith in one Holy and Universal (Clalit) Church, the community of Saints, that is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets and Yeshua Hamashiach is her Cornerstone. I confess in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, waiting for the resurrection of the dead and for the life in the world that is to come (Olam Haba), Amen."⁶⁴*

Although this credo included various elements of other Christian creeds, there is no doubt that the anonymous author of this statement wanted to highlight the centrality of the Jewish people within the divine history of salvation. Jacob Jocz, the last editor of the bi-monthly *Der Weg*, the Yiddish organ of the Warsaw Hebrew Christian Community who published this creed, was most probably involved in the shaping of this text. Jocz worked closely with the British "Church Missions to the Jews" (CMJ), which also published *Der Weg* for the congregation in Warsaw. Jocz was also familiar with the creed of the IHCA. The Hebraic form of this text, with terms like "God of Israel," "Redeemer

⁶¹ Based upon Rom 3:28 and 10: 4.

⁶² Based upon Gal 5:6.

⁶³ Based upon 2 Tim 3:16-17.

⁶⁴ "Ikarei Emunatenu Hakedosha" (The Principles of Our Holy Faith), in: *Der Weg* ('The Way,' in Yiddish), vol. 13, March-April 1939, 6. Although most of the articles in *Der Weg* were written in Yiddish, it also regularly published material in Hebrew.

of Israel" "House of Jacob" and "Olam Haba" reflects a unique contribution alongside the other Hebrew Christian creeds of the same era.

Another interesting point is that although this *Hebrew Christian Thirteen Articles of Faith* was written in a community that was strongly influenced by the Anglican Church through the "Church's Mission to the Jews," it chose to adopt an independent credo which wasn't strictly Anglican. One could expect, for example, that the JBY in Warsaw would have been somehow requested to follow the Hebrew Anglican Creed, with its 39 Articles of Faith that was published in the 19th century in London.⁶⁵ Practically however, this did not happen.

Eventually, as the Second World War broke out with Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939, the last issue of *Der Weg* was printed in August, 1939, never to be renewed. Jocz managed to escape to England, and the Warsaw Hebrew Christian congregation was scattered. Not a few were exterminated during the Holocaust. The congregation's original creed survived only on the yellowing papers of *Der Weg*.

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to examine five central creeds that were produced within various circles of Jewish Yeshua-believers in the *Golah*, the Jewish Diaspora, in America and in Europe between the Two World Wars. From this study it became clear that even though JBY were a tiny minority within the gentile churches, surrounded by a strong non-Jewish environment, they always tried to introduce into their creeds some Jewish characteristics. As a matter of national identity, it was important for them to highlight - through the creeds - at least some aspects of their Jewishness.

At the same time, however, in each case that was examined we observed that JBY adopted some parts of the creeds that had long before been shaped by the majority churches embracing them. In other words, the organizational emancipation of contemporary JBY was also accompanied by certain doctrinal emancipation. This doctrinal emancipation focused on introducing Hebraic phraseology and certain Jewish appeal into their creeds. This did not happen only within the creed that was originally written in Hebrew, namely the one produced in Warsaw, Poland. Also the other four creeds, originally written in English, attempted to introduce Hebraic terminology. Thus, interestingly, all five credos that were written in the Diaspora, and composed either in English or in Hebrew, tried to present their faith, as much as possible, from a Jewish perspective.

As a matter of principle, we also need to clarify that the most significant question about creeds is not whether they are needed, but rather if they become

⁶⁵ See *Seder Hatefila Kefi Minhag Kehilat Hamashiah shel Medinat England Veirland* (Liturgy of the Church of England and Ireland), in Hebrew, London 1840, esp. 276-290

sacrosanct texts. Namely, whether the creeds don't prevent a real option for further discussions, comparisons and even alterations, particularly with deeper study of the Canonical Scriptures. For example, if, in reality, creeds sooner or later become dogmas, and this sacrosanctity sets the sole compass for shaping principles of faith instead of the entire Bible, then the role of creeds should be questioned.

As against the authority of the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, that is the source for all creeds, there remains the phenomenon of the very sacred creeds that have assumed an independent role for setting the doctrinal parameters of belief. Paradoxically, therefore, as Creeds are always limited texts, they can even challenge the entirety of the Bible.

This whole issue is sharpened especially when contemporary JBY endeavor to shape their own creeds, placing the Bible as their creedal starting point, and not vice versa, starting with the historical creeds. In reality, modern Jewish Yeshua-believers are not merely searching for a 'Hebraic Truth,' but rather strongly aspire to represent a genuine Biblical Truth (*Biblica Veritas*), anchored in both Old and New Testaments.

Lastly, the *Diaspora* Articles of Faith of JBY between the World Wars were not the only ones that were in existence in that period. As a matter of fact, various other Articles of Faith were composed during the same period also in Eretz-Israel, the Land of Israel. However, such "Palestinian/Israeli" creeds will require a separate and concentrated investigation that will stand by itself. In a further study it would be of special interest to raise the following question: surrounded by the majority of Jewish society, in Mandatory Palestine and later in the State of Israel, did JBY form their theological creeds differently than in the Diaspora, or, even talk about non-creedal belief? This remains to be researched.