

A Look at
**THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT
IN ISRAEL TODAY**

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| A Word from the Editor | 3 |
| Conversions to Judaism in Israel Kai Kjær-Hansen | 4 |
| Evangelism in Israel, 1979-2005 David H. Stern | 6 |
| Messianic Institutions for Theological Training in Israel Ray Pritz | 17 |
| A Look at Leadership in Israel's Messianic Community Lisa Loden | 25 |
| Messianic Music in Modern Israel David Loden | 32 |
| Continuing on the Road of Reconciliation Brittany Browning | 39 |
| Nostra Aetate: Between Hebrew Catholics and Messianic Jews Gershon Nerel | 47 |
| Scotland's First Missionary to the Jewish People John S. Ross | 59 |
| Looking Back John Fieldsend | 66 |
| Book Review | 70 |
| News From the Israeli Scene | 72 |

*"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)*



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Nostra Aetate: Between Hebrew Catholics and Messianic Jews

THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL



By Gershon NereI

October 2005 marked the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* ("In our time"), the renowned Roman Catholic *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, a leading statement of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Forty years later, a variety of solemn events took place in order to re-evaluate the legacy and the impact of *Nostra Aetate*. One of these occasions was an international colloquium organized jointly by the *John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies* at Bologna, Italy, and the Department of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.¹ At this conference, just as with the other worldwide events in commemoration of Vatican II, the agenda ignored a significantly relevant Jewish aspect. Namely, the pertinence of *Nostra Aetate* to modern Jewish believers in Yeshua.

Paragraph III of the "Jewish Section" (IV) of *Nostra Aetate* reads as follows:

"She [the Church] also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's mainstay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people."²

However, while the Catholic Church does remember the primitive Jewish disciples of Yeshua, today the question arises regarding the relation of the church to modern Jews who originate from Jewish families and firmly maintain Jewish identity, yet at the same time also accept Yeshua as the Messiah and the Son of God. In other words, while Jewish believers in Yeshua (= *JB*) nowadays belong to both Jewry and the *ekklesia*, the universal body of believers in Yeshua, the following topics need special assessment:

¹ The theme of this conference, 30 October – 1 November 2005, was "*Nostra Aetate*: Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Catholic Relations." The chief organizers were Yosef Lamdan, former Israeli Ambassador to the Vatican, Prof. Gedalyahu G. Stroumsa, Head of the Center for the Study of Christianity at the Hebrew University, and Prof. Alberto Melloni, of Bologna. See www.csc.huji.ac.il and www.fscire.it.

² *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter 4, paragraph 3, at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council.

1. Today, does the church consider JBY as an integral part of Judaism and Israel?
2. While the church promotes her official dialogue with Orthodox Judaism, is she also willing to communicate openly and formally with Jews who believe in Yeshua, i.e. groups which are rejected and banned by Orthodox Judaism?
3. What are the implications of the theological differentiation between Hebrew Catholics, on the one hand, and Messianic Jews on the other?

In this paper I wish to present a preliminary introduction to the above mentioned issues.

The Church Faces Several Judaisms

Paragraph V of the "Jewish Section" of *Nostra Aetate* (IV) reads as follows:

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is so great, the Council wishes to foster and commend mutual understanding and esteem. This will be the fruit above all, of biblical and theological studies and of brotherly dialogues.³

Nostra Aetate talks about brotherly dialogue with the Jews (*Judaeis*), but the document avoids the term Judaism. In reality, the church still faces several Judaisms today. A major spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is the belief in the Messiah. Yet with regard to this issue one observes the existence of several messianisms within the Jewish world.⁴ Therefore, the church is challenged by the different modern messianic Jewish movements, which re-introduce and reshape the historic debates between the messianic faiths of Judaism and Christianity.⁵

Two contemporary groups of Jewish Messiah-believers are of particular interest in our context: first, the Hebrew Catholics, who aim toward their canonical recognition as a Hebraic branch within the Latin Church,⁶ and second, the Messianic Jews, who attempt to become a fifth branch within Jewry, alongside Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Secular Jews.⁷

As the Catholic Church officially converses with Jewry – her "Jewish

3 *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter 4, paragraph 5. Latin text at www.ewtn.com/library/councils/v2noslat.htm.

4 See, for example, Seffi Rachlevsky, *Messiah's Donkey* (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Ahronot/Hemed, 1998; Hebrew).

5 See David Berger, "The Rebbe King Messiah," *The Scandal of Indifference and the Threat to Israel's Faith* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2005; expanded and updated Hebrew edition).

6 See recently, for example, David Moss, "Jewish Identity Within the Church," *The Hebrew Catholic*, vol. 81 (Winter-Spring 2005), 34.

7 Cf. J. Neusner, W. Scott Green, E. S. Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), ix-xiii. See also Gershon Nerel, "Qumran, Messianic Jews, and Modern Self-Identity," *Mishkan*, 44 (2005), 52-59.

mother," and not merely her "elder brother" – she actually discovers today a revolutionized Jewish religion. The chapter on the Jews (IV) in the *Nostra Aetate* "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" begins with the following statement:

As the Council searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond which spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to the offspring of Abraham.

While searching into the mystery of the church, Roman Catholicism also explores the mystery of Israel. This bilateral search into the mysteries of both the church and Israel compels Rome to face the modern movements of Jewish Yeshua-believers as well.

The Church and Contemporary Jewish Yeshua-Believers

The Catholic Church, according to the "Jewish chapter" (IV) of *Nostra Aetate*, awaits the future day "known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord with a single voice";⁸ namely, the church believes that the Jews too will accept Yeshua. Nowadays, in fact, the numbers of Jewish groups that believe in Yeshua are constantly growing.⁹ Therefore, while the Roman Church fosters her ecumenical relations of respect and collaboration with normative Judaism, which is, by her own definition, a "non-Christian religion," she is increasingly challenged by those modern Yeshua-Jews who do believe openly in Yeshua as "the way, the truth, and the life."¹⁰

Messianic Yeshua-Jews not only come from Judaism, but also remain within Judaism and actually represent a new stream of Judaism. For the Roman Church, this reality provokes the theological *status quo* which existed for centuries, when JBY had no corporate sovereignty. Unlike the Protestant/Reform groups and some eastern denominations, contemporary Jewish Yeshua-believers cannot be accused by the church of having a schismatic history. JBY are the root and the source of the church, as *Nostra Aetate* affirms. JBY not only belong spiritually to the people of the New Covenant, but also physically to the authentic stock of Abraham.

Both Hebrew Catholics and Messianic Jews accept the scriptural canon of the Old and New Testaments as a fait accompli, with no attempts to canonize new texts of their own. They give full credit to the church for shaping and preserving the canon of the New Testament.

8 *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter 4, paragraph 4.

9 Larry Derfner and Ksenia Svetlova, "Messianic Jews in Israel Claim to Number 10,000," *The Jerusalem Post* (April 28, 2005), 1.

10 John 14:6. *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter 2, "The Different non-Christian Religions."

Hebrew Catholics Inside the Church Establishment

Unlike Messianic Jews, Hebrew Catholics are integrally incorporated into the Latin ecclesiastical establishment. The church smoothly absorbs the groupings of the various associations of Hebrew Catholics. In the State of Israel, for example, in October 2005 the church celebrated the 50th anniversary of its local Hebrew speaking community organized under the Society of St. James. Actually, during a short period of twenty months (Nov. 2003–June 2005), they even had, by pontifical initiative, the late bishop Jean-Baptist Gourion as a prelate of their own. However, through the lens of *Nostra Aetate*, even Hebrew Catholics who live in Israel and normally use colloquial Hebrew in their liturgy cannot belong to Judaism, since Judaism is a non-Christian religion. Within such parameters, Hebrew Catholics are simply treated by the church as converts – converts to a historic system of another established religion.¹¹ Consequently, the church avoids their appellation as *Jewish Catholics*, and instead uses the term *Hebrew Catholics*.¹²

However, while *Nostra Aetate* speaks categorically about Judaism as a “non-Christian religion,” in 1973 the French Episcopal Commission issued a new “Jewish Declaration” of its own, which states as follows:

... it is not possible to regard the Jewish ‘religion’ simply as one among the religions that presently exist on this earth.¹³

Moreover, recently the Capuchin theologian Raniero Cantalamessa, who is the preacher of the Pontifical Household, asserted as follows:

For us Christians, Judaism is not ‘another religion,’ but rather an integral part of our own religion. We worship the same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who for us is also the God of Jesus Christ.¹⁴

Thus, four decades later the Catholic Church elegantly re-interprets and rectifies *Nostra Aetate*. Rome acknowledges that Israel and the Jews, and not just Judaism as a religion, have a unique and separate status among world religions. In other words, unlike with Hinduism, Buddhism, and

11 See, for example, Elias Friedman, OCD, *Jewish Identity* (New York: Miriam Press, 1987), 73–135; 207–208; 212.

12 Cf. Gershon Nerel, “Bishop Jean-Baptiste Gurion and Two Modern Yeshua-Movements,” *Mishkan*, 40 (2004), 57–63. An updated Hebrew version of this article, after the death of Bishop Gourion in June 2005, appeared in *Ariel*, 173 (2005), 77–80.

13 Friedman, 199. Cf. Marcel J. Dubois, *L’Exil et la Demeure* (Jerusalem, 1984), 149–158.

14 “Appropriate Attitude Toward the Jewish People,” Father Cantalamessa Comments on Sunday’s Gospel, in *Zenit News Agency – The World Seen from Rome*, Rome (Sept. 30, 2005; Code: ZE05093001).

even Islam, it is only with and through Israel and the Jews that the church shares a brotherly chosen patrimony – past, present and future.¹⁵

Messianic Jews Outside the Church Establishment

Unlike Hebrew Catholics, Messianic Jews are not registered members of the historic churches, although practically they are not far from the Protestant-Evangelical world. Usually, Messianic Jews stress their organizational independence as well as their unique theological hermeneutics. Consequently, they refuse to be called converts to the religion of Christianity. Their self-definition as Jews “completed” or “fulfilled” in Messiah Yeshua signals that they are not converted to any non-Jewish religion.

With *Nostra Aetate*’s categorical definition of Judaism as a “non-Christian religion,” the church still struggles with the difficulty of Messianic Jews who regard themselves as an integral part of the Jewish national heritage or religion, while at the same time also believing in Messiah Yeshua. For the absolutist church, the modern phenomenon of Messianic Jews is both an enigma and a dilemma. Even when some Catholic theologians are willing to regard Messianic Jews as a kind of prophetic beginning, the church per se is reluctant to express her clear voice on this topic, except for dealing with Messianic Jews “behind the curtain.”

A major Catholic argument against Messianic Jews is that they lack uninterrupted historic continuity, like all Protestants. Namely, they exist without a sacred tradition, without an authoritative hierarchy, and without Apostolic Succession. Thus, the Catholic Church rejects the option of recognizing Messianic Jews as a legitimate Jewish-Christian church or a modern *Kehila of the Circumcision*. Needless to say, at least for the time being, the concepts of Christian (Messianic) Judaism or, alternately, Jewish Christianity, are de facto viewed by the Catholic Church as religious syncretism.

From an ecclesiological point of view, the Roman Church regards Messianic Jews, with their Messianic Judaism, as an individualistic and outsider “Christian-Jewish Religion.” Yet while Rome is willing to consider Messianic Jews as Protestants of Hebraic descent, she formally insists that they are unqualified to partake in a Catholic Communion service.

As the church consciously calls her members to return to Jewish/Hebraic roots, she also finds the Messianic Jews. The unique contribution of Messianic Jews is to heal the schism between gentiles and Jews within the People of God. Clearly, the co-existence of Jews and gentiles within the *ekklesia*, the universal body of believers, is not just a matter of co-existence between two religions, Judaism and Christianity. Only the sover-

15 See also, for example, Jean-Miguel Garrigues, “Dans quelle mesure un Juif croyant en Jesus Christ demeure-t-il Juif?,” *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 81 (2006), forthcoming.

eign restoration of JBY into the organic body of all disciples of Yeshua, as it was with the primitive church, will heal the church.¹⁶

All in all, Messianic Jews stress that they are not only a new prophetic phenomenon, but that they also have a fresh prophetic and divine authority in spiritual matters. In other words, that God is able to work today even beyond the historic churches and their traditions.¹⁷ For the readers and followers of *Nostra Aetate*, this is a unique challenge.

A "Second Jerusalem Council"

The *Nostra Aetate* declaration is instrumental in the facilitation of the attempts of some Catholics and Messianic Jews to convene a "Second Jerusalem Council." Daniel Juster, a Messianic Jew, and Peter Hocken, a Roman Catholic, write in this respect as follows:

For the greater part of Christian history, the Christian Church did not allow for any specifically Jewish component, within which Jewish believers in Jesus could retain a Jewish identity. For this reason, the Messianic Jews see themselves as a 'resurrection from the dead' in the words of Romans 11:15 ... The *Toward Jerusalem Council II* initiative (TJCII) is a direct consequence of the rise of the modern Messianic Jewish movement, for the vision of TJCII is the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile within the one Body of Christ-Messiah.¹⁸

Today, some Messianic Jews and charismatic Catholics are looking together at the feasibility of organizing a "Second Jerusalem Council," following the model of Acts 15. They share the common vision of full mutual recognition and acceptance. Yet the "resurrection from the dead" of JBY does not take place within a vacuum. The history of church and synagogue, past and recent, has much to say. It is particularly in Eretz Israel, the land of Israel, that one discovers today a dual emergence of the local "mother church" – namely Palestinian Christians – on the one hand, and JBY on the other. The question of who represents the genuine mother church in the land is not an academic query. Messianic Jews claim that they are the historic and authentic continuation of the first *Kehila*, i.e. the first entity/congregation of Jewish Yeshua-believers in the early centuries as described in the New Testament; there is also the Palestinian

16 Cf. Gershon Nerel, "Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews," in Simon C. Mimouni and F. Stanley Jones, eds., *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 399–425.

17 See, for example, Arye Powlison, "Restoring Ecclesiastical Authority Via Messianic Judaism," in *Kesher*, vol. 10 (Winter 2000), 20–37.

18 Daniel Juster and Peter Hocken, *The Messianic Jewish Movement – An Introduction, Toward Jerusalem Council II*, Ventura, California (2004), 5. See also www.TJCII.org.

claim that Arab Christians are the heirs of the mother church in the land.¹⁹ The impact of these competing claims is only beginning.

The Vatican, as an established institution, currently ignores the delicate issue of "who represents the authentic mother church" in the promised land. Meanwhile, individual Catholics, like Peter Hocken, can clearly observe that "the reappearance of a distinctively Jewish Christianity is itself a sign of the coming fulfilment of Paul's affirmation that 'all Israel will be saved,'" and that "Messianic Judaism represents the first time, since the early Christian generations, that Jews are able to accept Jesus as Messiah without abandoning or diminishing their Jewishness."²⁰

"Canonical" Supersession

On the formal level, there is no doubt that *Nostra Aetate* revolutionized the historic relations between Catholics and Jews, yet concepts of theological supersession still survive within the linguistic relationship of the church toward Jews. The use of certain vocabulary continues to shape theological interpretations concerning Israel, referring, for example, to Jewry, Judaism, the Jewish State, and especially the Jewish Bible. This topic becomes salient within another important Catholic document, promulgated in 2002. The statement *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*²¹ is a direct continuation of *Nostra Aetate*, and can only be read as such. Within the context of the relations between the church and modern JBY, the definition and exegesis of the biblical canon is of fundamental significance, particularly with regard to nomenclature that relates differently to the "Jewish Bible" and the "Christian Bible."²²

From a Messianic Jewish perspective, one can find terminological supersessionism in talk about the "Hebrew/Jewish Bible"²³ on the one hand, and the gentile (Christian) Bible²⁴ – as if only "for the Goyim," the non-Jews – on the other hand. For example, it is not uncommon for mainstream Jews to speak about "their own Bible" as opposed to the "Bible of the gentiles." Yet for Messianic Jews, who do believe in the New Testament, this book is no less Jewish Scripture than the Old Testament,

19 Gershon Nerel, "Spiritual Intifada of Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews," in Fred Wright, ed., *Israel: His People, His Land, His Story* (Eastbourne, East Sussex, 2005), 207–208.

20 Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame* (Guildford, Surrey, 1994), 146; Cf. Idem, *God's Masterplan* (London, 2003), 101–103.

21 See *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, The Pontifical Biblical Commission, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (2002). On the Internet: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html.

22 See, for example, Lawrence Boadt, "The Role of Scripture in Catholic-Jewish Relations," in Eugene J. Fisher, A. James Rudin, Marc H. Tanenbaum, eds., *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 89–108; and also Michael J. Cook, "The Bible and Catholic-Jewish Relations," *Ibid.*, 109–124.

23 *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, 50, 55, 57.

24 *Ibid.*, 13.

so that the New Testament is not a "gentile" book but a Jewish one. This is true since JBY do not consider themselves "converted from Judaism," as the document *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* says.²⁵ Rather, as "completed Jews in the Messiah," JBY find their brethren on both the Jewish "side" and the gentile "side," and obviously they do not talk about two separate Bibles. When JBY talk about the Jewish Bible, they mean the one Holy Scripture – from Genesis to Revelation.

When the Catholic statement *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* mentions "Israelites" and "Israel," it refers predominantly to biblical times, almost completely ignoring the Jews of today. Theologically, this document bypasses modern Israelis, modern JBY, and the modern Jewish state. The church still has a theological difficulty, even a theological fixation, with the renaissance of the Jewish state of Israel, especially when she says:

Christian faith recognises the fulfilment, in Christ, of the Scriptures and the hopes of Israel, but it does not understand this fulfilment as a literal one. ... It would be wrong to consider the prophecies of the Old Testament as some kind of photographic anticipation of future events.²⁶

Only One Jewish Bible

The modern restoration of Jewish sovereignty among both mainstream Jewry and JBY de facto provokes and even undermines the traditional "Israelology" of the historic churches. Thus, for example, while the church talks about the Pauline theology of "end of the Torah [Law]" (Rom 10: 4),²⁷ JBY talk about their Jewish identity through the Torah (e. g. circumcision, calendar) – yet certainly without getting salvation in the Torah. As for Jerusalem, JBY believe that Israel's ancient/modern capital city is not only symbolic and heavenly.²⁸ For Messianic Jews, physical sovereignty in Jewish Jerusalem and in the land promised to the Jews has a unique significance according to biblical prophecies regarding Israel's restoration in the end times (Luke 21:24).

Many Messianic Jews would prefer to see another title for this Catholic document, namely, *The People of God and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Jewish Bible*. In other words, in the perception of JBY, the entire Bible is Jewish and was composed by Jews, including the New Testament. This is in line with their full identification and integration within the Jewish/Israeli world, as a simple matter of physical and natural continuity. Therefore,

25 Ibid., 80.

26 Ibid., 48.

27 Ibid., 100.

28 Ibid., 111–112.

JBY point to the continuous chain between biblical and contemporary Israel, also manifest in the Jewish land and Jewish state.

Unlike certain churches today, JBY make no distinction between the (biblical) Jewish people and modern Israel. "Israel" in the church document *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* refers only (or mainly) to biblical Israel, while ignoring modern Israel. The historically loaded concept of "Verus Israel," the true Israel, still needs a new and clear definition. Modern Messianic Jewish thinking has the unique tools – perceptual, linguistic, and exegetical – to meet this need.²⁹

While Messianic Jews talk about the Jewish Bible, comprising Old and New Testaments, they do not talk about a "Christian Bible." Therefore, the canonical, complete Jewish Bible from Genesis to Revelation is the fundamental basis for their full theological authority. Although they do not possess their own apostolic succession with a tradition of many centuries, JBY strongly rely upon canonical authority. More than semantically, the revived *ecclesia ex circumcissione* today cannot accept the current definition of the historic *ecclesia ex gentibus* that the biblical canon is just a Christian Bible.

The tradition and history of the past two millennia have many interpretations, and so does the biblical canon. Indeed, text and context go together. The modern Messianic Jewish movement accepts the Jewish Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation as canonized partly by the synagogue and partly by the church. JBY also shape their own Jewish identity by a contextualization process with both Jews and gentiles. Therefore, the total faith in Old and New Testaments is not a monopoly of gentile Christianity. So while the Catholic document *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* talks about two different groups, Jew and Christians who claim to be the "peoples of the book," such a parlance is irrelevant for Messianic Jews because they speak of only one truth, one Bible, and one people of God.

Consequently, because semantics and appellations are of great significance, another "titular" solution will help to define the Judeo-Christian/Messianic canon of the Bible, namely, *The Book of Covenants*. This name is already in use in Israel, both in Hebrew and in English printings of Holy Scripture. This way we avoid having a "Gentile Bible" vs. a "Jewish Bible."

Normalization between the Church and Messianic Jews

Beyond issues raised by M. Kinzer in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*,³⁰ I wish to sharpen the question that, in my view, the Holy See will have to

29 See, for example, Gershon Nerel, "Verus Israel? Jewish Believers in Jesus – A Challenge for the Church," at <http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/absdynam.html>.

30 Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

answer as a subsequent statement to *Nostra Aetate*: "What would be the right way to normalize the abnormal relationship, caused by a historical schism, between the 'daughter gentile church' and her 'resurrected mother Jewish *kehila* (church)'?" In a broader sense, would the reshaping of the theological identity of both gentile Christians and Messianic Jews enable the reunification of the "parted ways" between the "repentant daughter" and her "restored mother"?

Kinzer argues that the normalization process between the predominantly gentile church and modern JBY is not only possible, but mandatory, as both sides redefine their self-identification vis-à-vis the other. Consequently, both sides also reshape their mutual conduct. Thus, when the church openly disengages from her supersessionist theology, and JBY restore their theological status in the footsteps of the early Jewish mother *kehila* (*ekklesia*), then the entire universal body of believers in Yeshua will be engaged in a healthy theological brotherhood. Additionally, Kinzer envisions a significant outcome of the normalization process: JBY functioning as bridges between mainstream churches and normative Jews.

Following the ecumenical pattern of *Nostra Aetate*, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* depicts the divine plan for the Jewish people through irrevocable election and covenant. Consequently, modern Jews/Israelites, including JBY, need to maintain a distinctive national existence. Therefore, the church should rehabilitate St. Paul, a faithful national Messianic Jew, not just a "Christian," from any supersessionist manipulation since ancient times.³¹ Paul and other JBY taught and still teach that the church as a whole does not and cannot replace the Jewish people; instead the gentiles, grafted into the "cultivated olive tree," join Israel's election.³²

While *Nostra Aetate* refers de facto to dialogue between "divorced" Jews and Christians, Kinzer firmly promotes the principle of a distinct dual *kehila* system on the universal level – one for the *ecclesia ex circumcissione* and the other for the *ecclesia ex gentibus*. He also supports united expressions of Jewish and gentile faith in Yeshua, and insists that "a bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel affirms Israel's covenant, Torah, and religious tradition."³³ However, his strong dependence upon Jewish religious/halakhic tradition – i.e. the oral law, which is mostly unbiblical – assumes an authority that is not really scriptural.

Within such an ecclesiology, which is *one body* – symbolically one olive tree – consisting of two parts, Jews and gentiles, both sides have to avoid either judaization or gentilization of the other.

***Nostra Aetate* and Messianic Jews**

The ecumenical policy of *Nostra Aetate* explicitly speaks of "Christians and Jews," namely of two distinct religious groups, and not of Christian

31 See also John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2000), *passim*.

32 Kinzer, 97, 102.

33 Kinzer, 300.

Jews or Messianic Jews. Actually, in a supersessionist way, *Nostra Aetate* excludes any possibility of a corporate entity of Messianic Jews. When the document mentions, for example, that "the [Christian] Church is the new people of God,"³⁴ this can (though need not) be understood in a supersessionist manner. *Nostra Aetate* disregards the implications of modern JBY for ecclesiology and the church's own self-definition. Therefore, in his book Kinzer justifiably quotes the following:

If the church acknowledges the abiding reality of Israel's corporeal election, it will naturally expect baptized Jews to maintain faithfully their Jewish identity. But if the church truly believes that it has superseded God's covenant with Israel, it will prohibit or discourage Jews from preserving their identity as Jews and members of the Jewish people.³⁵

Consequently Kinzer argues that the problem of supersessionism turns on the church's capacity to acknowledge the "abiding religious significance of Israel's corporeal election and hence the abiding religious significance of the distinction between gentile and Jew."³⁶

However, one should again highlight the fact that when Messianic Jews maintain their Jewish identity and fully participate in the Jewish commonwealth, this does *not* mean that they belong to another religion; in *Nostra Aetate* Judaism/Jewry is, by definition, "a non-Christian religion." Torah observance (Matt 5:17), for JBY, is not a "non-Christian/Messianic religion," and therefore when Jews believe in Yeshua they do not abandon or desert one religion and enter another.

Epilogue

In our time, as the Catholic Church continues to implement the Jewish guidelines of *Nostra Aetate*, she increasingly realizes that just like Christendom, Judaism is neither monolithic nor uniform. In our time, there exist a multiplicity of Judaisms, including the Chabad messianists. But while *Nostra Aetate* is significant within the formal ecumenical dialogue between the church and the majority of Jews, on the official level contemporary Messianic Yeshua-Jews are absent from the church's approach to the Jewish people. The church should acknowledge that the time is ripe for a new, real, and wide-open encounter with JBY – and not just as another part of an inner-Christian debate. Messianic Yeshua-Jews belong uniquely to both Israel and the Messianic/Christian *ekklesia/kehila*.

34 *Nostra Aetate*, section IV, paragraph 6.

35 Kinzer, 182, quotes R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 11-12, and Michael Wyschogrod, "Letter to a Friend," *Modern Theology* 11:2, April 1995, 165-171.

36 *Ibid.*

Slowly but surely more and more Catholic theologians are coming to the conclusion that not all Messianic Jews are merely "Protestant Hebrew Christians."³⁷ As JBY avoid assimilation in order to retain their Jewish identity, they face the great challenge of forming their own genuine congregations. This challenge should focus on the State of Israel, not the diaspora. Such authentic Messianic assemblies need to be anchored in Scriptural teaching interpreted by the guidance of the Holy Spirit – *not* in rabbinic/diaspora Judaism, Protestantism, or Catholicism.

Ecumenism and dialogue between Christians and Jews is the leitmotif of *Nostra Aetate*, yet in our context one should not forget the significance of prophetic and eschatological aspects. It is imperative that all churches, not only the Catholic Church, realize that Israel and JBY are in the center of the eschatological signs of the time. Therefore, one should not just talk about Judaism and Christianity as two religions, but rather about Jews, Christ-believers, and Messianic Jews, examined in terms of space, time, and metaphysics.³⁸

In summary, different types of Christians and Jews use the same "road map" of the Bible, but they walk in different ways. The close relationship of JBY to both Israel and the universal *ekklesia* is part and parcel of their calling and their normality. One may expect that in the near future the Roman Church will officially dialogue also with modern Messianic Jews. It is hoped that long before a third Vatican council is convened, Rome will issue a new *Nostra Aetate* regarding Jews and Yeshua, in which the Jews will be liberated from the historic demand to convert to the Christianity of the churches.³⁹ Such a future document will not have to deal with the religions of Judaism, Catholicism, or Protestantism, but rather will have to elaborate on topics like biblical hermeneutics, the true Israel (*Verus Israel*), missions and witness to the Jews, Palestinian Christian supersessionism, neo-marcionism, biblical Zionism, and the second coming of Yeshua.

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Author info:

Gershon Nerel has his Ph.D. from the Hebrew University on modern Jewish believers in Yeshua. With his wife, Sara, Dr. Nerel revised the Delitzsch Hebrew translation of the NT. They live at Yad Hashmona. g-nerel@zahav.net.il

³⁷ See, for example, Kinzer, 296.

³⁸ Cf. Ora Limor, review of Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 95; Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2003), in *Zion*, vol. 70:2 (2005), 242–247 (Hebrew).

³⁹ Cf., for example, Tsvi Sadan, "Nice, But Something is Missing," in *Kivun*, vol. 47 (Sept.–Oct. 2005), 3 (Hebrew).