

# MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

ISSUE 32/2000

*Jerusalem*



# Contents

<b>Reactions to <i>Facts &amp; Myths</i></b>	
Editorial .....	1
<b>Answers from the Authors</b>	
Kai Kjær-Hansen, Bodil F. Skjøtt.....	5
<b><i>Facts &amp; Myths: A Selective Evaluation</i></b>	
Lisa Loden .....	10
<b><i>Facts &amp; Myths: Review of Reviews</i></b>	
David Smith.....	16
<b>End Time Speculation in Light of the New Millennium</b>	
Mitch Glaser .....	23
<b>Eschatology and Jewish Evangelism</b>	
Arnold Fruchtenbaum.....	34
<b>Eschatology and Jewish Evangelism</b>	
Joseph Shulam .....	47
<b>The Sin Nature and <i>Yetzer Har'a</i></b>	
Louis Goldberg.....	52
<b>Rome in Jerusalem: The Pope, the Jews and the Gospel in Israel</b>	
Gershon Nerel .....	67
<b>Statement from the LCJE NY '99 Conference .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Book Reviews and Books Received .....</b>	<b>85</b>

“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)

MISHKAN is a semi-annual journal dedicated to biblical and theological thinking on issues related to Jewish Evangelism, Hebrew-Christian/Messianic-Jewish identity and Jewish-Christian relations. MISHKAN is published by the United Christian Council in Israel in cooperation with the Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies assisted by the Finnish Evangelical-Lutheran Mission, the Baptist Convention in Israel, Patmos International (Finland) and various other contributors.

MISHKAN's editorial policy is openly evangelical, committed to the New Testament proclamation that the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus (Yeshua) the Messiah is "to the Jew first." MISHKAN is a forum for discussion, and articles included do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or publishers.

General Editor:

Kai Kjær-Hansen (Ph.D., Lund), International Coordinator of Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE), Denmark

Associate Editors:

Akiva Cohen, Academic Dean, Israel College of the Bible, Jerusalem, Israel

Torleif Elgvin (Ph.D., Hebrew University), Associate Professor,  
Lutheran Theological Seminary, Oslo, Norway

Ray A. Pritz (Ph.D., Hebrew University),  
United Bible Societies/Caspari Center, Jerusalem

Tsvi Sadan, Editor of *Kivun*, Jerusalem, Israel

Bodil F. Skjøtt, Caspari Center/Danish Israel Mission, Denmark (Editorial Secretary)

Linguistic Editor:

David A. Smith, Coordinator of Publications, The Baptist Convention in Israel

Editorial Board:

Michael L. Brown (Ph.D., N Y University), Brownsville Revival School of Ministry,  
Pensacola, Florida, USA

John Fischer (Ph.D., University of South Florida; Th.D., California Graduate School  
of Theology), Menorah Ministries, Palm Harbor, California, USA

Arthur Glasser, Fuller School of World Mission, Pasadena, California, USA

Charles Kopp, Chairman, United Christian Council in Israel

Ole Chr. M. Kvarme, Bishop, Borg Stift, Norway

Torkild Masvie, Director, Caspari Center, Jerusalem, Israel

Gershon Nerel (Ph.D., Hebrew University), International Messianic Jewish Alliance

John Ross, General Secretary, Christian Witness to Israel (CWI), Kent, U.K.

Byron L. Spradlin, Jews for Jesus/Artists in Christian Testimony, USA.

Copyrights:

In all cases the copyright remains with the publisher.

MISHKAN

P.O. Box 116, Jerusalem 91000, Israel

Phone: 972-2-6256095 or 972-2-6233926; Fax: 972-2-6251933

Email: [Mishkan@Caspari.com](mailto:Mishkan@Caspari.com)

# Rome in Jerusalem: The Pope, the Jews and the Gospel in Israel

Gershon Nerel\*

“SALVE PONTIFEX - WELCOME,” with this headline, both in Latin and in Hebrew, the Israeli daily *Maariv* congratulated Pope John Paul II on his arrival for a historic visit in the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup> During the six intensive days of the visit, hundreds of thousands of Israelis, especially through the media, were largely exposed to the name of Yeshua (Jesus) and his message. Many spoke about the dawning of a new era in the long history of Jewish-Christian relations. As a matter of fact, weeks and months before the actual visit, numerous TV and radio programs, alongside journalistic publications,<sup>2</sup> curiously dealt with various themes relating to Christianity. Thus for a long period of time the pope and Christianity appeared on the Israeli public agenda. The visibility and the general interest that were aroused concerning large and small groups of believers in Yeshua seem to be unprecedented.

## Preparations in Israel

Long-time citizens in Jerusalem, well experienced with the non-stop visits of famous dignitaries in their hometown, could hardly remember any other guest in their city welcomed with so many decorations and cleaning. For example, several months before the visit, many roads in the capital city were repaired. The lampblack on special buildings, like the monumental “Terra Santa,” near the official residence of the Prime Minister, was completely removed. Suddenly,

---

\* Gershon Nerel is the Israel Secretary for the International Messianic Jewish Alliance. He has his Ph.D. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> *Maariv*, 21 March 2000, the front page. The pope arrived on Tuesday, the feast of Purim. On this day, the solid daily *Ha'aretz* even issued a special full-size supplement, entitled *A Journey Searching for Roots*, which included more than 20 articles on the pope, the Vatican and Christianity in general (Hebrew). Another popular daily, *Yediot Aharonot*, announced that day that “The Pope Comes to the state of the Jews” - only in a secondary heading.

<sup>2</sup> So far, over 600 items were collected from the Israeli press in Hebrew and in English only.

this gray looking building now shined with white Jerusalem stones. The ancient Via Dolorosa, in the Old City, was largely refurbished.<sup>3</sup>

Both in western and eastern Jerusalem, the streets were covered with uncounted yellow-white flags of the Vatican. These flags, with the two-keys symbol of the Holy See, were bountifully placed on every corner, long before the guest arrived. Fresh colorful flowers were planted near central highways in the capital. The itinerary of the pope in Jerusalem was published in the newspapers well in advance, and the citizens were kindly requested not to leave their cars alongside the roads.<sup>4</sup> *Operation Old Friend* was the police code given for all the security arrangements.

An atmosphere of solemnity and excitement prevailed not only in Jerusalem, but in all places in Israel and the Palestinian Authority where the pope's visit was expected. Nazareth, Tabgha near the Sea of Galilee and Bethlehem were also decorated with flags and posters. Jews and Arabs, Christians and Moslems, welcomed the pope to Israel as a messenger of good will and peacemaker. No doubt, in particular the Jewish world was strongly stimulated to face now the Church and its representatives, as well as the Gospel, from a fresh perspective.

### The Grand Jubilee and the Holy Year

The itinerary of the pope to the Holy Land was not merely a personal pilgrimage. It was carried out as a major link within the chain of the "*Jubilaenum AD 2000*" – the Great Jubilee. The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 began on Christmas Eve 1999, with the opening of the "holy door" in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican,<sup>5</sup> with celebrations planned for Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and the opening of the "holy door" in other patriarchal basilicas of Rome. The closing of the Jubilee Year is scheduled for the day of the Epiphany of the Messiah, January 6, 2001.

November 29, 1999, John Paul II promulgated a special document,<sup>6</sup> in which he emphasized the distinctive ecumenical character of this Jubilee. The ecumenical character of the Jubilee focused on concrete journeys to the believers of the different churches, and closer encounters with all *Children of Abraham* – Jews and Moslems. The formal logo of the *Jubilaenum*, with five doves in its center, includes the inscription "Christ Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow."

<sup>3</sup> Tamar Hausman, "A Renovated Via Dolorosa Debuts Today," *The Jerusalem Post*, 15 March 1999.

<sup>4</sup> *Maariv*, Friday 17 March 2000, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> The "Holy Door" (Porta Sancta) is normally sealed with brickwork, except during the "Holy Year." See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, eds. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 658 (=ODCC).

<sup>6</sup> "'Incarnationis Mysterium,' Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000," See *Bulletin Associated Christian Press*, no. 404 Jerusalem (January-February 1999), p. 2.

The first Church Jubilee or Holy Year in history was celebrated in 1300, during the pontificate of Boniface VIII. During this year the pope granted a special Indulgence (Remission of Sins) to all those who visited Rome on certain conditions. Originally the Jubilee was to be celebrated every 100 years, yet Clement VI, in 1343, changed the cycle to a period of every 50 years. Eventually in 1470 the period settled on 25 years, the regular interval that has been kept since.<sup>7</sup> From the outset, a visit to Rome was a chief condition for receiving *plenary indulgence*.

For the Holy Year AD 2000, the pope introduced a novelty: pious pilgrimages were not limited merely to the four traditional basilicas in Rome, but Jubilee Indulgences could also be gained in the Holy Land. In other words, if visits are made to the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, or the basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem or the basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth – the pilgrim, after worthily celebrating sacramental confession, can receive the gift of the plenary indulgence.<sup>8</sup>

### Church Reconciliation with the People of the Covenant

Sunday, March 12, 2000, about a week before his arrival to Jerusalem, the modern sovereign capital of Israel, John Paul II officially asked forgiveness for the many past sins of the Catholic Church, including its treatment of the Jews. In Rome, on the Catholic Church's "Day of Forgiveness" for the 2000 Holy Year, the pope said, "We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours [the Jews] to suffer, and asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."<sup>9</sup>

In recent official declarations relating to the Jews, the Holy See increasingly mentions the term "People of the Covenant." By using this term, and sometimes even saying the "Blessed People of the Covenant,"<sup>10</sup> the Church de facto approves that the divine covenant with the Jewish people is eternal. While for two millennia the Church had seen itself as the inheritor of the real Judaic tradition (*Verus Israel*), and as the New Israel, now the pontiff repeats a positive theological position: i.e. that the Jews are neither rejected nor forgotten by God.

<sup>7</sup> See ODCC, p. 661. A Holy Year was last celebrated in 1975.

<sup>8</sup> "Conditions for Gaining the Jubilee Indulgence," in *Bulletin Associated Christian Press*, no. 404, Jerusalem 1999, p. 3. See also "The Jubilee of the Year 2000 - Tertio Millennio Adveniente," in *Bulletin Dei Verbum*, Catholic Biblical Federation, no. 35, 2/1995, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Henry, Danna Harman and Haim Shapiro, "The Pope Begs Forgiveness for Church's Sins," *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 March 2000, p. 1. As a matter of fact, since his pontificate began in 1978, John Paul II systematically highlighted his policy of reconciliation with all monotheistic religions, and in particular he endeavored to get closer to the Jews, both on personal and on theological levels.

<sup>10</sup> Menahem Gantz, "After 2000 Years: Pope Asked Forgiveness," *Maariv*, 13 March 2000, p. 3 (Hebrew).

Thus the pope acknowledges the Jewish people in their own homeland, and rectifies the historic Replacement Theology. In other words, the Jews are no longer viewed by the Church as a cursed people, or doomed to be a witness for an exilic and wandering nation.<sup>11</sup> This is a fundamental revolution in Catholic thought – reaching its symbolic peak in Jerusalem – following and developing since the *Nostra Aetate* statement, issued by the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

During his visit at the Jerusalem Wailing Wall, John Paul II personally placed a note between the huge stones. This short but significant papal missive, asking for forgiveness from the Jews – now in their own most sacred place – again ended by the appellation “the people of the Covenant.”<sup>12</sup> However, at the same time one may raise the question: which covenant? The answer is found in one of the pope's books, in which he talks about “the people of God of the Old Testament.” In his book John Paul II also clarifies his theology:

*The Church can forget neither that it received the revelation of the Old Testament through that people with whom God, in his ineffable mercy, made the Ancient Covenant; nor can the Church forget that it draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.*<sup>13</sup>

As these words speak for themselves, we should also remember another significant nomenclature that the pontiff frequently and openly uses for the Jews; namely “Our Senior Brethren.”<sup>14</sup> Such an appellation, alongside “People of the Covenant,” again and again manifests that the Church now adopts a new terminology towards the Jewish people. Thus a new theological agenda is set for the Church. At the same time, however, while the Church is coming so near to the Jews, it is also examined by the Jews with suspicion and criticism, namely that this approach gets “too close” to them, ultimately serving the eschatological ends of Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

### Openness to the Name and Words of Yeshua

Toward and during the pontifical visit, many Israelis discovered the correct name of Yeshua. Through the local media, this pilgrimage was instrumental in airing to the Israelis the accurate articulation for the Hebrew name of Jesus:

<sup>11</sup> See Yair Sheleg, “Forgiveness for Two Millennia,” in *Ha'aretz*, Friday, 3 March 2000, p. B6 (Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup> Lorenzo Cremonesi, “John Paul II had Messages for Christians as well as Jews,” *Ha'aretz*, English Edition, 27 March 2000, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Edited by Vittorio Messori, Knopf (New York: 1995), pp. 95-96.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Lefkovitz Dallal, “From Crucifers to Elder Brothers,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 March 2000, p. B4; Amos Nevo, “You, the Jews, You Are Our Elder Brother,” *Yediot Aharonot* (Hamusaf), Friday 17 March 2000, p. 7 (Hebrew).

<sup>15</sup> Lorenzo Cremonesi, “The Hug of the Roman Bear,” *Ha'aretz*, Friday 31 March 2000, p. B12 (Hebrew).

*Yeshua*.<sup>16</sup> It is well known that within mainstream Judaism, instead of *Yeshua*, the distorted term *Yeshu* is almost regularly used. Furthermore, there are many here, even among the younger generation, who still use the abbreviated nomenclature *Yeshu* for purposely blaspheming his name and his memory. In other words, there still exists in Israel a mystical and prejudicial fear to use the truthful name of *Yeshua*.

It is also a fact that only in the Hebrew language the name *Yeshua* has a literal meaning, "God saves" or "salvation." Unfortunately the enemies of *Yeshua* still endeavor to hide this meaning. However, even those Jews who claim to be neutral, and thus merely refer to *Yeshu* as a historic name, continue to use this meaningless abridgement *Yeshu*.<sup>17</sup> Although in all the historic Hebrew and Aramaic versions of the New Testament one reads *Yeshua*, today besides Jewish believers in *Yeshua*, only few Israelis are willing to use his name properly. Some would even refuse to mention at all his name, and solely use the designation *Oto Haish* – "That Man."<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, within academic circles, especially among secular Jews, more and more people realize that the appellation *Yeshua* should be used.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, for example, several months before the pontiff's arrival, Yaron London, one of the most appreciated publicists in the country, interviewed on the national TV (Channel 2) a panel of well known historians on the theme of the New Testament and Christianity in Israel.<sup>20</sup> After a lively discussion, London lifted up in his hand a copy of the New Testament, faced his listeners and challenged them to read and search into this Jewish book, and to openly study about *Yeshua* – as an integral part of the Jewish heritage.

When the pope delivered his central message in a Friday mass at Korazim, near the Sea of Galilee,<sup>21</sup> the basic teaching of the Sermon on the Mount was fully translated into Hebrew and transmitted on TV and radio. The name of *Yeshua* was freely mentioned there. As the pope called the 100,000 participants to follow the message of the Beatitudes, also many Israelis were challenged to

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Yoseph Elgazi, "All They Want is to Baptize in the Jordan," *Ha'aretz*, Friday, 18 February 2000, p. B7 (Hebrew).

<sup>17</sup> Israeli historians like Joseph Klausner and David Flusser hypothetically argue, *ex silentio*, that during the Second Temple period it was the vernacular Galilean dialect that pronounced *Yeshu* and not *Yeshua*. Cf. Joseph Klausner, *Yeshu Hanotzri* (Jesus of Nazareth), vol. 2 (Ramat-Gan: Massada, 1969), p. 7 note 1 (Hebrew).

<sup>18</sup> See recently Avigdor Shinan, ed., *Oto Haish*, (Jesus through Jewish Eyes) (Tel-Aviv: 1999), esp. p. 257 (Hebrew).

<sup>19</sup> Zvi Sadan, "Maran or Maranatha," in *Kivun*, vol. 18, March-April 2000, pp. 2-3 (Hebrew).

<sup>20</sup> Broadcasted on 25 December 1999. Among the interviewed were Prof. Doron Mendeles from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dr. Aviad Kleinberg from the Tel-Aviv University and Dr. Ray Pritz from the Jerusalem Caspari Center.

<sup>21</sup> See also "Korazim - Mount of the Beatitudes," (Peter Returns to the Land of Jesus), Information Sheet of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, 24 March 2000.



stop ignoring the words of their Galilean rabbi. Interestingly, in his opening remarks, when welcoming the various local Christian communities, John Paul also mentioned the Hebrew-speaking Catholics of Israel,<sup>22</sup> and later he also referred to the first disciples, who obviously were Jewish. To many Israelis, as well as to many gentiles, still it comes as a great surprise that the early Christians were Jewish, part and parcel of the Jewish milieu.

### The Symbol of the Cross

The many photographs and films that spotlighted the pope's visit also gave ample space showing the sign of the cross. This was so, for example, when demonstrating the episcopal cross hanging on the pontiff's neck, as well as with the presence of many crosses on Christian buildings and sites. Also those pilgrims that accompanied John Paul II, noticeably manifested numerous crosses and symbols of the crucifix.<sup>23</sup>

The most salient symbol of the cross, with a tangible figure of the humiliated and crucified Messiah, was exhibited on the top of the pope's formal pastoral staff. This appeared everywhere. Nobody could ignore it, yet nobody really protested against showing the cross with a crucifix.

In Israel, where some people still turn their faces and look the other direction when they approach anything with a cross, this was something special. In a country where there are debates whether pupils and soldiers should even enter a church building or visit a monastery, this was very special. For a country where small children in the elementary schools are still taught in their math classes to omit the pedestal from the standard plus sign (+), because otherwise it resembles the Christian cross, the normal manifestation of the papal and other crosses was something very remarkable. It was in particular unique when John Paul completed his visit at the Jerusalem Wailing Wall. Before leaving the area, he faced the stones and slightly marked with his trembling right hand, as he usually does, the sign of the cross. This was quite naturally accepted, and none accused him of sacrilege at a Jewish shrine.

To this Holy Land, where the Crusaders of the Middle Ages, under the auspices of the papacy, de facto identified the sign of the cross with that of the sword, and the cross actually represented might and cruelty, now came this pontiff with a spirit of humility and appeasement. Unlike the medieval times and the deeds of the Inquisition, now the sign of the cross no longer symbolizes a threat or death to the Jewish people. The Jews, living now in their homeland and sovereign State, feel secure and confident also to face the symbol of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Haim Shapiro, "At Korazim, Pope Preaches Humility," *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 March 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Lili Galili, "Between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the Message of John Paul II will not Remain Solely Religious," in *Ha'aretz*, Tuesday, 21 March 2000, p. A2 (Hebrew). Cf. "The Papal Pilgrimage," *Time Magazine*, 3 April 2000, p. 35.

cross. Thus, for example, many signs of the cross now openly appear on large ads within local newspapers, announcing a new exhibition on the theme of "Israel the Cradle of Christianity" at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (from March 27 to October 21, 2000).<sup>24</sup>

### Scholarly Study of Christianity

Precisely two weeks before the pope's visit, on Tuesday, March 7, 2000, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem solemnly inaugurated a new department, the "Center for the Study of Christianity." The enthusiastic initiator behind this move was the Center's current Director, Gedalyahu Guy Stroumsa. The guest lecturer at the dedication ceremony was Johannes Beutler, a Jesuit scholar from the *Pontificia Universita Gregoriana* in Rome.<sup>25</sup> In a new brochure released for this occasion, the heads of this Center admit that until now "at the Hebrew University Christianity has been studied and researched less intensively than Judaism and Islam."<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, with the foundation of this new Center a great progression is made to practically improve and enlarge the study of Christianity in Israel. Members of the faculty at the university already maintain close scholarly relationships with prominent Catholic institutions within Jerusalem, like the *Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise*, the *Franciscan Studium Biblicum*, the *Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research* and the *Ratisbonne Pontifical Institute of Jewish Studies*.<sup>27</sup>

One cannot overestimate the significance of the establishment of this Center, so closely linked to the pontiff's visit. Indeed, as Stroumsa said in his opening remarks, "Within this Center one finds a unique combination between leading researchers and the location of the Hebrew University in the city of Jerusalem, where Christianity was born." The scholarly links of this university, being the flagship of Jewish studies, with a number of excellent private and ecclesiastical Catholic institutions in Jerusalem, actually reflect a reality of mutual interest, while both sides benefit from this dialogue.

There is no doubt that the establishment of this new "Center for the Study of Christianity" in Jerusalem acknowledges the lacuna that had existed for too long a period within Israeli academic circles. The ongoing scholarly contacts between Israeli University experts and the Vatican Archives, as well as the famous pontifical Museum, have now reached a formalized status. This was seen, for example, when prior to his visit in Israel, the pope officially invited to

<sup>24</sup> *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 24 March 2000, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> As indicated on the formal invitation to the ceremony, issued by the President of the University, the topic of the lecture was "The Meaning of the 'Jews' for the Readers of John."

<sup>26</sup> The new brochure of the Center, column 1.

<sup>27</sup> The new brochure of the Center, column 2.

the Vatican two leading researchers from the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology. During this visit Yizhar Hirschfeld presented to the pope a unique gift – replicas of two ancient coins, bearing the name of Jesus, discovered in excavations near Tiberias during this year.<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, this Center, with such relations and with further planned projects, was founded only this year as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Namely, it took almost a century until the first Hebrew National University in the land of Israel could benefit from a stabilized self-confidence and deal openly with Christianity, Jewry's daughter religion.

This feeling of security was manifested during the dedication ceremony, clearly expressed through the congratulations of the President and the Rector of the University. From their words it was obvious that only now, the university – largely representing the entire nation's identity – at last feels safe in the Jewish homeland. The present Israeli younger generation knows that the national Jewish survival is secure, and that they no longer need to feel threatened by Christianity. Thus, while currently Israelis are politically negotiating with former enemy Yasser Arafat within a peace process, at the same time they naturally also approach Christians as equals. Here and now the long historic feelings of superiority/inferiority seem to be taken away from the delicate Judeo-Christian relationships.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, within contemporary Israeli perspective, and especially at the scholarly level, there is a growing sense that the traditional concept of a "Jewish problem" is no longer relevant. In other words, these two events, the institutionalization of a "Center for the Study of Christianity," which is the first of its kind in Israel,<sup>30</sup> and the positive pontifical visit, indicate the end of the "War of Two Millennia."<sup>31</sup>

### **"Jesus the Palestinian?"**

John Paul II, like many other pilgrims from Catholic and Protestant churches, came to the Promised Land to acknowledge the biblical and Jewish roots of

---

<sup>28</sup> Some of these coins, belonging to the Moslem period in the land, more than a thousand years ago, also bear the inscription "Jesus - King Messiah." It is planned that two of the original coins will be loaned to the Vatican Museum for a temporary exhibition. See "Pope Meets with University Researchers," in *Akademia* (supplement of *Ha'aretz*), vol. 9, March 2000, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> See Tom Segev, "Who is Jesus (What Israeli Pupils Learn About Christianity)," in *Ha'aretz*, Friday, 24 March 2000, p. B12 (Hebrew).

<sup>30</sup> See also "First Center for the Study of Christianity Inaugurated at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem," in *Index Yerushalayim*, 16 March 2000 (Hebrew); *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 March 2000 (with photograph).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Assa Kasher, "The End of the War of 2000 Years," in *Maariv* (Musaf), Friday, 24 March 2000, p. 4 (Hebrew).

Christianity. Marcel Dubois, a professor and Dominican priest living in Jerusalem,<sup>32</sup> expressed this as follows:

*The pope is returning to the authentic source of Christianity, and also to the spirit of the New Testament, by accepting that the Old Testament prepared the world for the New Testament. The attitude toward Yeshua the Messiah [Jesus Christ] in the Catholic Church has changed. We received our faith from Israel because we read the messages of the Jewish prophets in church.*<sup>33</sup>

In other words, the pope now again admits that the New Testament, written by Jews and originating from the Old Testament, is de facto a Jewish groundwork. Therefore, as it was so clearly manifested throughout the pontiff's visit in the land of the Bible, the top Catholic leadership is even happy to "share" Yeshua's Jewishness.

Yet, while within many churches today, especially in the West, there is a growing tendency to stop overlooking the Jewishness of Yeshua, an influential group of Arab Palestinian Christians raise opposite populist banners, namely those of "Jesus the Palestinian" and "Mary the Palestinian." As Israeli Jews are just beginning to make their peace with the historic Jewish Yeshua, the Palestinian Authority, and no less the Palestinian Latin Patriarch, Michel Sabah, are propagating the mythical figure of "Jesus the first Palestinian." This mainly comes as a political argument, in order to sustain the Palestinian ties to the land, and particularly to strengthen their claims to Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically, some Israelis, such as the well-known author Amos Oz, when ignoring the Palestinian national identification with the Messiah born in Bethlehem, now openly express their frustration that for the Israelis, Yeshua still remains a too remote curiosity, if not an outright taboo. Oz even claims that through the "political Palestinization of Jesus," not only the Palestinians but actually all Arabs want to recruit the full support of the pope and the Church for their cause. Moreover, Oz also explains that such Palestinian propaganda portrays the modern Jew again as the common enemy of both Christianity and Islam. In other words, Oz sees in such a development another ugly phase of modern anti-Semitism.<sup>35</sup>

As a matter of fact, it was already many years before the visit of John Paul II in Israel, that some Palestinian Christians endeavored, even with a certain

---

<sup>32</sup> Marcel Dubois is professor of philosophy and religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 1996 he was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize.

<sup>33</sup> Marcel Dubois, "An Interview," in *Israel Today*, (News About Israel), vol. 16, April 2000, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Michael S. Arnold, "Palestinians for Jesus?," *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 March 2000, pp. B3-B4; Yossi Klein Halevi, "Pilgrimage into the Lion's Den," in *The Jerusalem Report*, 27 March 2000, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> Amos Oz, "The Vicar of Jesus Comes to Jerusalem," in *Yediot Aharonot*, (Hamusaf Leshabat), Friday, 17 March 2000, pp. 4-5.

success, to create a "Palestinian Jesus." Regardless of historical truth, such Christians, with the Anglican Canon Naim Ateek as one of their major spokesmen,<sup>36</sup> seek to support Palestinian nationalism through a distorted Liberation Theology. Over and over again they give the inaccurate impression that first-century "Palestinians" are identical with contemporary Palestinians. Such misleading ideas are phrased, for instance, as follows:

*Jesus Christ's resurrection took place in Jerusalem. Therefore, the first witnesses to the resurrection were Palestinians. The Church was born in Palestine as the early disciples and followers of Jesus were Palestinians. The Palestinian Christians of today are the descendants of those early Christians ... Palestinian Christians of today are the present generation of that great cloud of witnesses to Jesus who came before them, and who will, God willing, come after them until Christ comes again. They and their ancestors have maintained a living witness to Jesus and his resurrection from the beginning of the Church, and they should see themselves dynamically continuing such a witness in the land ...<sup>37</sup>*

Yet against any such semantic gymnastics, which seem to appear simple or easy in English, others simply point to the original meaning of "Palestinian" geographical nomenclature, which definitely sounds differently in Hebrew. Namely, in Hebrew, *Eretz-Israel*, the land of Israel, by all means does not bear the same connotation as Palestine, much less Arab or Moslem Palestine. Thus, for example, in the Gospel of Matthew we read twice about "the land of Israel" - as Joseph was told in a dream in Egypt to take Yeshua and return to the land of Israel (2:19-21).

### Which Authentic Church?

The synchronized Palestinian de-Judaization of Yeshua, particularly highlighted during the pope's visit in Bethlehem, has also another dimension. As the Palestinian Christians argue that "Palestine is the Fifth Gospel,"<sup>38</sup> and that "an Arab Christian community has existed in this land since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2),"<sup>39</sup> they de facto assume the position of the first indigenous church in the Holy Land.<sup>40</sup> Such notions were also expressed by Riah Abu El-Assal,<sup>41</sup> the

<sup>36</sup> In 1976, Canon Ateek was the first native-born leader to serve as Chairman of the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI). See Christian Comment/Oikoumenikos, "Evangelicals in Israel," in *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 November 1976.

<sup>37</sup> Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996, Sixth Printing [1989]), p. 113.

<sup>38</sup> Naim S. Ateek, p. 114.

<sup>39</sup> Bishara Awad, "West Bank Squeezed by Warring Majorities," in *Christianity Today*, 16 November 1998, p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> See Mitri Raheb, *I Am A Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), esp. pp. vii-viii, 3-14.

<sup>41</sup> Riah Abu El-Assal, "The Identity of the Palestinian Christian in Israel," in Naim S. Ateek, Marc H. Ellis and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Faith and the Intifada: Palestinian Christian Voices* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1992), pp. 77-80.

present Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, and by Elias Chacour,<sup>42</sup> a Galilean Greek Catholic (Melkite) priest. Furthermore, not all the Palestinian Christians consider themselves a minority in the Land; they see themselves as an integral part of the entire Arab population, which is mostly of the faith of Islam.<sup>43</sup> This, as a matter of fact, also coincides with some odd Palestinian efforts to discover their national roots in the land among the ancient **Canaanites**.

Here we observe a newly shaped oriental Replacement Theology. It is especially the Palestinian intelligentsia in this land that crystallizes the emotional impression that Palestinians are the modern sons and daughters of the first Jerusalem Church, allegedly representing and following the model of the "authentic church." Thus the Palestinian Christians attempt to establish a dual ownership of the mother church of the Holy Land, alongside contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua.

Yet it is no secret that Messianic Jews almost unilaterally refer to themselves as *the* genuine followers of the first-century Nazarenes.<sup>44</sup> For Messianic Jews, misnomers like "Jesus the Palestinian" and the "Palestinian Church of Pentecost" are far from even being anachronisms,<sup>45</sup> they are a total historic mistake.<sup>46</sup>

Messianic Jews value the rebirth of the State of Israel, recently also recognized officially by John Paul II, as well as the restoration of their own modern movement, as a prophetic development. Therefore Messianic Jews interpret both these events in connection with Ezekiel's vision (chapter 37) regarding the physical resurgence of Israel, the "dry bones" in the valley – ultimately leading to its spiritual rebirth. Contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua see themselves as the remnant that follows the footsteps of Jewish Yeshua, as well as following the footprints of their first-century national and spiritual forefathers.<sup>47</sup>

Within this context, we might also mention that the pope also displayed special sensitivity to the Jews when he occasionally called this place *terra*

<sup>42</sup> Elias Chacour, "A Palestinian Christian Challenge to the West," in *Faith and Intifada*, pp. 85-88.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Prior, "From the Chair," in *Living Stones*, vol. 12, Summer 1995, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> See Menachem Benhayim, "Book Review: Nazarene Jewish Christianity," in *Messianic Jewish Life*, vol. 73, April 2000, p. 31; cf. also Shoshanah Feher, *Passing Over Easter: Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism*, Walnut Creek 1998, pp. 112-113.

<sup>45</sup> See also Clarence H. Wagner, Jr., "The Palestinisation of Jesus," in *The Messianic Jew and Hebrew Christian*, vol. 65, June 1992, pp. 36-39.

<sup>46</sup> Menachem Benhayim, "Palestinian Liberation Theology," in *The Hebrew Christian*, vol. 63, # 3, September 1990, pp. 85-88; also idem "A Response to Naim Ateek," in *Mishkan*, issue 28/1998, pp. 90-93; cf. K.W., "Jew and Arab or Israeli and Palestinian?," in *Kivun*, vol. 18, March 2000, p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> See Gershon Nerel, "Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews," in Simon Claude Mimouni, ed., *Le Judéo-Christianisme*, Les Editions du Cerf, Patrimoines, Paris 2000 (Forthcoming).

*promessa*, the “Promised Land,” rather than the “Holy Land.” Only to the Jews is this area the “Promised Land.”<sup>48</sup> In the meantime, however, it seems that within the variety of ideological sectors in the land of Israel, both Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians will continue to exploit any theological or national vacuum for shaping their respective identities.<sup>49</sup>

### Reminiscences About a “Personal Pope”

In the Hebrew media, John Paul II was presented not only as the friend of the Jewish people in general, but also as a personal friend of Jewish persons from his childhood in Poland, prior to the Second World War. The pope was highly commended for remembering the Jewish survivors of his Polish hometown Wadowice, as well as keeping ongoing contacts with them. One of these Jews, Jersei (Yorek) Kluger was interviewed in a local newspaper as the intimate friend of “Pope Lolek,” still freely mentioning this affectionate appellation of their youth.<sup>50</sup>

Toward his visit at Yad Vashem John Paul officially asked to arrange for him a meeting with all the survivors of his hometown. This of course was granted at Yad Vashem.<sup>51</sup> At the end of the ceremony, where the pope declared that the lesson of the Holocaust is to ensure that never again will evil prevail, and denounced antisemitism, he had an emotional reunion with about 30 Holocaust survivors from his hometown Wadowice. Most of them now live in Israel.<sup>52</sup>

The media repeatedly quoted a unique testimony of Edith Tziner, another Holocaust survivor from one of the labor camps. Crying with tears she was seen on the TV screens, telling her personal story, how after the war she, a 14-year-old starving girl, was helped by a young Catholic priest who gave her a large piece of bread and a cup of tea. This young girl, who was suffering from tuberculosis and was found lying next to a camp fence the day of liberation in January 1945, was carried three kilometers on the back of this priest to the Warsaw Train Station, to join other survivors. This young priest was Karol Wojtyła, now pope John Paul II.<sup>53</sup> Simultaneously, this story of Edith, weeping and greeting the pope, was also broadcast on the radio for several programs.

<sup>48</sup> Uri Dan, “The Pope’s Promise,” in *The Jerusalem Post*, 23 March 2000.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Zvi Sadan, “Will the Two Go Together?: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Body of Messiah,” in *Kivun*, vol. 17, January 2000, pp. 8-9 (Hebrew).

<sup>50</sup> Menachem Gantz, “Yorek and Lolek: My Friend the Pope,” in *Maariv* (Sofshavua), 17 March 2000, pp. 40-42 (Hebrew).

<sup>51</sup> Ora Arif and Yossi Bar, “Childhood Friends Prepare to Encounter with ‘Pope Lolek,’” in *Yediot Aharonot*, 12 March 2000, (Hebrew).

<sup>52</sup> “Pope Honors Holocaust Victims,” in *Ha’aretz* English Edition, 24 March 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Elli Wohlgeleitner, “Hometown Survivors Greet John Paul II,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 24 March 2000, p. A4

The impact of this and other personal testimonies on the Israelis was tremendous. The simple human stories brought a sense of healing. Spontaneously people felt that now hatred and enmity are no more a part of the scene. Thus, for instance, Rosita Bergson (Epstein), an 85-year old Jewish lady who was born in Warsaw, Poland, and now lives with her daughter at the Messianic Moshav Yad-Hashmona, shared her deep feelings with her family about the pope's visit. With tears in her eyes Rosita (Rachel) told them: "Now I am released not only about my feelings towards the Germans, but also towards the Polish people; overnight the pope took away this long lasting hatred between Jews and Christians."<sup>54</sup>

There was also another interesting human aspect related to the visit. The Jewish hosts greatly appreciated the body language of this elderly man – although everyone was aware of the fact that this was a sick man, suffering from Parkinson's disease. Still, his gentle behavior, his humbleness and seriousness were often noticed. It was the practical wisdom of the elderly pope, and especially when he very carefully chose his words and statements, that left a most positive impression on the Israelis.

Much respect was given to the pope's eloquence, while this was sharply contrasted with the loose tongue of Rabbi Joseph Ovadia, the former Sefardi Chief-rabbi of Israel, who is now the leader of the Shas religious/political party. During the feast of Purim, Rabbi Ovadia verbally attacked Yossi Sarid, the Israeli Minister of Education; Ovadia mindlessly used labels like *Haman* and *Amalek* against the Minister.<sup>55</sup> So the media, as well as the average person, dedicated much time comparing the speeches of two elderly religious leaders: the careless rhetoric of the former chief rabbi, as compared to the honorable eloquence of the pope.<sup>56</sup>

## Epilogue

For many in Israel, the visit of the pope appeared to be the anticlimax of the Millennium Fever, or the Y2K Millenium Syndrome, closely observed during the last months of the last century. In the month of March, 2000, Israelis still remembered the fears concerning the "invasion of Christian lunatics," expected to participate in the apocalyptic events on the threshold of the new millennium.

---

<sup>54</sup> A personal testimony told by Salo and Olga Kapusta, Yad Hashmona, 4 May 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Yoel Markus, "The Sentence of Amalek as the Sentence of a Persecutor," in *Ha'aretz*, 21 March 2000, p. B1 (Hebrew); "The Blaspheming Rabbi," *ibid*; Cf. Seffi Rachlevsky, "The Future of Amalek," in *Maariv* (Musaf Leshabat), 24 March 2000, p. 9 (Hebrew). Rachlevsky is the author of the challenging book *Messiah's Donkey* (Hebrew), where he analyzes Orthodox Jewish Messianism and exposes its attitudes towards secular Jews.

<sup>56</sup> Ron Maiberg, "The Banging of a Crack of Opportunities," in *Maariv*, Tuesday 28 March 2000, p. 8 (Hebrew); cf. Giyora Eilon, "My Little Clown, Will You Hang Me," in *Iton Yerushalayim*, Friday 24 March 2000, pp. 20-26 (Hebrew).



But now the pope, accompanied by some 50,000 young Catholic pilgrims, represented to the Israelis a different kind of Christianity. Most locals were impressed by the quiet, solid and well-organized groups of Catholic pilgrims. In general, the stability of the papacy as an institution, and the uniformity of the Catholic world, as reflected during this very carefully calculated pilgrimage, manifested a sharp contrast to the suspected "suicidal Christians,"<sup>57</sup> deported from the country by the police at the end of 1999.<sup>58</sup> Namely, this six-day visit greatly contributed to modify the stereotypic understanding among some Israelis, still thinking that almost every Christian Millennialist should be suspected of provocative activities in Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup>

Eventually, the gestures and the declarations of the pope concerning the peoples of the Middle East, and the future of the Holy Land, seemed to please every side. Bilaterally, the hosts on both the Israeli and the Palestinian camps were satisfied that the pope expressed his solidarity with their needs and problems. The pontiff's remarkable visit left both Jews and Arabs with the sense that something had changed.<sup>60</sup> However, it is especially among the Israelis that one gets the impression that the pope was not merely accepted with respect, but that many simply "fell in love" with John Paul II. Now we hear more people who say that the pope is even a "haver hadash" – our new friend.<sup>61</sup>

At last, however, it should also be noted that during his well-planned visit in Israel, the pope, as well as his prelates, "forgot" to face another challenging Jewish aspect: the Church and the contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua. He should offer not mere papal lip service towards few Hebrew-speaking Catholics, but rather the Church's comprehensive evaluation of the movement that today wants to revive the authentic Jewish branch within the universal body of believers in Yeshua.

This was the *real non-event* of John Paul's significant pilgrimage – the challenge of the modern *Church of the Circumcision* to the *Church of the Gentiles*.

<sup>57</sup> Ilana Shoal-Shaked, "Apocalypse Now," in *Yediot Aharonot, Hamusaf Lehag*, 19 September 1999, pp. 14-17 (Hebrew).

<sup>58</sup> See Boaz Gaon, "Waiting for the Messiah - The Horror of the Millennium: Believers Prepare to Hasten the Return of Jesus," in *Maariv*, (Sofshavua), 15 January 1999, pp. 14-18 (Hebrew); Tamar Gutman, "Increase of 50% Among Tourists Suffering of 'Jerusalem Syndrome' and Who Need Psychiatric Treatment," *Iton Yerushalayim*, 3 September 1999, p. 40 (Hebrew).

<sup>59</sup> Amir Ben-David, "13 Arrested Members of Christian Sects Deported Yesterday Night," in *Maariv*, Friday, 29 October 1999, p. 6 (Hebrew); Hilit Merhav and Dan Even, "I am the Messiah," in *Kol Hazman*, 12 November 1999, pp. 50-53 (Hebrew). Cf. David Rosen, "Treat the Pilgrims with Christian Charity," in *Ha'aretz*, English Edition, Monday 15 February, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Abraham Rabinovich, "Pope's Pilgrimage Ripples with Meaning," *The Jerusalem Post*, Friday 31 March 2000, p. B4.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas O'Dwyer, "Shalom, Haver Hadash," in *Ha'aretz*, English Edition, 27 March 2000, p. 3.

No doubt the independent present movement of Jewish-believers in Yeshua represents a unique challenge to all churches. Anyway, probably sooner than later even Catholic Rome will need to review its official position regarding the stimulus of this dynamic group.