

ABSTRACTS

OF THE PAPERS PRESENTED FOR DISCUSSION AT THE
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ON

THE DYNAMICS OF ANTISEMITISM IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

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preceding the birth of that country, and in the early years of independence. But matters changed in the late 1960s–1970s.

Influenced by Third-World outlooks on the Israeli-Arab conflict, many in the liberal camp developed a negative, critical attitude toward Israel with liberal churches and organizations often condemning its actions. Liberal attacks have been, at times, so vicious that Jewish (and some non-Jewish) observers have wondered if anti-Zionism did not come to serve as an outlet for covert antisemitism. Unlike overt antisemitism, which became unacceptable in polite western Christian circles, attacks on Israel did not involve guilt or embarrassment. In their heart of hearts, many liberal Christians had still found it difficult to accept an independent Jewish state as a legitimate entity.

Conservative attitudes have been just as ambivalent and complicated. Motivated by a biblical Messianic understanding of the Jewish people and their role in history, conservatives have warmly supported the State of Israel. But pro-Zionist sentiments did not always guarantee the disappearance of prejudices against Jews, and while liberal churches amended their theology, the conservatives did not. Missionary efforts at converting Jews intensified, and the conservative view, which looked upon Jews as spiritually and morally depraved, persisted. In their view, only the acceptance of Jesus as their Savior would bring about Jewish individual and national redemption.

Gershon Nerej

“Verus Israel”?: Jewish Believers in Jesus — A Challenge for the Church

Since the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel, the modern movement of Jewish believers in Jesus (=JBJ) presents a special challenge to western Christendom. Unlike the historical paradigm of Jewish converts who gradually assimilated into gentile Christian society, many contemporary JBJ insist on preserving and expressing their Jewish identity. As a matter of fact, they are found both within Protestant and Catholic circles. However, while JBJ view themselves as the direct successors of the first-century Jewish disciples of Jesus (Yeshua), for not a few within the official Church they seem merely an anachronism.

When JBJ emphasize attachment to their own Jewish heritage and Hebraic national characteristics, they face accusations that they are practicing a “double loyalty.” This is particularly true while they struggle to form autonomous congregations and unique worship services. The Church accuses JBJ of not being exclusively loyal to her traditions, and of retaining partial loyalty to the Synagogue. Such accusations lead to a situation in which the Church has very little confidence in JBJ. Furthermore, through such allegations of dual loyalty, the church de facto expresses her fear that JBJ are creating an intolerable category of “a Church within a Church.” this actually parallels the political antisemitic slogan of “a State within a State,”

often made about Diaspora Jewish communities. In other words, establishing a particularistic “national Hebrew church” is seen as subverting the universal nature of the historic churches.

In practice, only individual JBJ are fully accepted into the established churches, such as Cardinal Lustiger, and the Carmelite monk, Elias Friedman on the Catholic side, and Dr. Jakob Jocz and Bishop Hugh Montefiore on the Protestant side. As a corporate and self-governing body, JBJ are not recognized as part and parcel of the ecclesiastical establishment. Therefore, among certain Christians they are presented as a marginal, schismatic, and even heretical movement.

There is also a negative reaction to the exegesis of many JBJ and their Christian friends that the “times of the Gentiles” are coming to an end, and that Jewish followers of Jesus will assume spiritual leadership in the world. The Church views such exegesis as a real threat to its own status and authority. For example, the slightest chance that there would again arise a Jewish Church is seen as a concrete “Jewish threat,” which undermines the existing prestige and legitimacy of the non-Jewish traditions of the churches. It is especially the Church liturgy which is challenged by JBJ who stress their observance of Jewish Holy Days and feasts, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath instead of Sunday, and celebrating Passover instead of Easter according to the Hebrew calendar. In fact, JBJ also challenge the Church for maintaining pagan traditions like having decorated Christmas trees and colored Easter eggs.

JBJ also negate one of the fundamental principles of the Church, namely, its ancient self-definition as THE “True Israel” (*Verus Israel*). They take the liberty to openly criticize the “Replacement Theology” of the Church, meaning that gentile Christianity replaces physical Israel and receives all her blessings; therefore, no unique spiritual role and future is left for the Jewish nation. As a result, JBJ strongly argue that the gentile Church committed a “theological usurpation” and disinherited the Jews from their spiritual and irrevocable patrimony.

In reaction, the Church presents modern JBJ as those who impose “Judaistic” and “obsolete” elements on the “free Gospel of Christ.” Spokespersons of the Church claim that JBJ are reviving and introducing old “Judaizing” policies into the cosmopolitan body of believers in Jesus. Furthermore, representatives of the churches also accuse JBJ of practicing the “irrelevant Judaizing custom of circumcision” for their children.

Another aspect of “Jewish arrogance,” according to Church dignitaries, relates to attempts by JBJ to rephrase theological terms by using biblical words in Hebrew, such as Messiah for Christ; *Kehila* for Church, *Yeshua* for Jesus, etc. Thus, JBJ are aiming at a genuine Hebraic expression of their beliefs. At the same time, they also emphasize their resistance to being “gentilized” by various customs that characterize the gentile churches. Thus,

for example, on the one hand Messianic Jews avoid credal declarations, the use of crosses and clerical garb, while on the other hand, Hebrew Catholics elaborate a new Hebrew Catholic calendar where they incorporate the commemoration of the Latin Rite and Jewish liturgical years.

In response to such alleged "Judaizing," the Church decries JBJ as a nationalistic group that polarizes the *modus vivendi* within the Christian world. It demands that JBJ not separate themselves in any way from the established gentile Churches, but rather integrate themselves into them. Thus we observe the reappearance of an anti-Jewish slogan, "Judaizers of the Church," which serves as an alarmist catchword causing *de facto* the delegitimization of Jewish believers in Jesus who plead for an independent Jewish identity. We should also note that the Church, in its ecumenical and interfaith dialogue with the mainstream Jewish communities, is constantly under pressure to disavow JBJ as a legitimate expression of faith.

The mutual recriminations of "Judaizers" versus "Gentilizers" clearly reflect the existence of tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus. Such tensions become acute in two situations: first, when both sides interpret Holy Scripture differently, especially with regard to fulfillment of biblical prophecy concerning the restoration of the Jewish nation to their homeland; and second, when gentile Christians show signs of worry that JBJ plan to regain theological hegemony over the gentiles, as it was in the first century, and is mirrored in the New Testament.

JBJ denounce and reject the doctrine that "the Church is the true Israel," and insist that theologically the Jews as a people still remain the Elect Nation in a divine plan. Therefore, they do not merely present a challenge to their adversaries, but allegedly become a "menace" to the Church. Thus the Church also relates from another perspective to the "Jewish Question," declaring that "*Judenchristen*," "Hebrew/Jewish Christians," or "Messianic Jews" create a "dangerous religious tendency within the Church.

An independent and authoritative Jewish Church, in the place of the ancient See of Ya'akov (James), the brother of Jesus, is perceived by many gentile Christians as a probably diminution of their prerogatives. All in all, it seems that such developments might eventually affect both the Holy Land, with its Arab-Palestinian Christians, as well as the global Christian community.

Wolfgang Benz

Denial of the Holocaust in the Growing Distance to the Historic Event: Is There a Chance of Defense?

The memory of the Holocaust for the victims as well as for the majority of perpetrators is a source of mourning, shame, and guilt. There are many reasons why the genocide is denied and the historical facts belittled: one motive is defensiveness as a form of self-protection. In order to resist the