

**Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Christ**  
**Am-Israel as the founding principle of a Messianic ecclesiology**  
**Fr. Antoine Levy, OP (Paris, June 2011)**

After spending more than 20 years of my life in a religious Order, I am convinced that the number of temptations I am able to resist is dramatically limited. Jewish folklore and sentimentalism rank among these few. Given the conference theme, one could expect from Jewish disciples of Christ - call them Messianic Jews in the broad sense of the word - emphatic protestations of love and commitment in relationship to the living heritage of Israel. That will not be the thrust of this presentation. The point is that, coming from such believers, such demonstrations of Jewish sensitivity, no matter how sincere, serve an obvious purpose; namely, to persuade fellow Jews that they will not be led to sacrifice the components of a fully Jewish identity by becoming disciples of Yeshua. To my mind, however, such attempts are doomed from the start. If faith in Yeshua implies an objective threat to the sense of being part of Am-Israel, the most touching expressions of affection towards Israel will not be able to dissipate the basic fear that Messianic ideas inspire. Accordingly, I will not take the theme of the conference as an opportunity to reach out to Jewish “non-believers”, if I may use Messianic terminology. I will rather seize this opportunity to pose a question to us, the self-proclaimed “believers”. Indeed, this question is nothing short of fundamental from my point of view. A rigorous formulation of it could be: under what conditions does becoming a Jewish believer not bring with itself the disintegration of Jewish life? It is obvious that this question bears on the very purpose of what we are trying to do here together, as we ponder the viability of a Jewish approach to the message of Yeshua. If becoming a Jewish believer is incompatible with the survival of Israel, what is the point in being a Jewish

believer? Accordingly, if there is a way in which the existence of Jewish believers, far from threatening the existence of Israel, is capable of fostering it, this must be the collective form that Jewish belief in Yeshua should take in order to remain genuine. In this sense, asking in what way Jewish so-called “believers” belong to Am-Israel raises the issue of the foundation of an authentically Messianic ecclesiology.

I will start this presentation by pointing out what this notion of belonging to Am-Israel implies for Jewish believers from an ecclesiological point of view. Thence I will proceed to show why the so-called Messianic movement, in the broad sense of the term, is not, and should not, be called a Church. In the third part of my presentation, I will argue that the Messianic movement is nonetheless constitutive of the Church, understood in a very definite sense. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will try to formulate the basic task of the Messianic movement as it emerges from this ecclesiological sketch.

## **I. Belonging and ecclesiology**

In English, the verb “to belong” is used to indicate the fact of being an organic or institutional part of the whole, just as in all other languages. However, one finds in English an additional meaning of the term which, as far as I know, is quite unique: belonging as indicating a subjective attitude towards a place, a group or a whole. I belong there, to the arrondissement of Paris where I was born: not that I any longer have a formal or objective connection with it, but because this area is still alive in my memory and my heart - I know that it would be a disaster for me if it were to be even partly destroyed for some reason or other. The first meaning, the objective register of belonging, connotes a passive attitude, as stating a mere state-of-affairs, e.g., this leg belongs to this chair, this man belongs to the

postal administration, whereas the second, the subjective one, has an active dimension: St Germain-des-Prés is where I belong and I feel committed to the preservation of this area.

When one reflects on the Jewish condition, one cannot avoid these two clearly distinct meanings of “belonging”. Karl Marx was a Jew according to the first meaning, but not to the second: he could not deny that he was an offshoot of the Jewish nation, but he did not feel more committed to the welfare of this nation, about which he wrote more rather nasty things, than to any other oppressed group of people. Conversely, there are persons who say that they have the feeling of belonging to the Jewish nation, although they do not belong to it objectively. Nevertheless, distinct though they are, these two meanings are intimately connected. It does not cross the mind of most non-Jews to ask themselves whether they belong, in a subjective sense, to the Jewish nation. Meanwhile, one cannot be Jewish in an objective sense without having to face, at one moment or another, the issue about being Jewish in this subjective sense. Am I or am I not actively committed to the welfare of the Jewish nation? Do I take this nation as my people, my home or not? This is a matter of free choice for someone who is objectively born a Jew. As we know well, one can answer positively in a variety of ways: by fighting anti-Semitism, becoming a citizen of Israel, helping the land to develop, keeping kosher, studying Torah, and sometimes by doing all these things together.

Bearing these considerations in mind, let us try to define to what extent a Jewish Messianic believer – let us call him or her a JMB, without defining more precisely his or her denominational affiliation - belongs to Am-Israel. Of course, from his or her point of view, a JMB belongs to Israel in both senses of the term. This person is: 1 - objectively a Jew, 2 – subjectively committed to the survival of

Am-Israel. From the point of view of traditional *Halakha*, however, things are slightly more complicated. I believe that few authorities would deny that a JMB remains a Jew. One can be a very bad Jew, a *mumar* or a *kofer* who prides himself in not caring about the commandments or even an apostate, *apikoros* or *minim*— but one could not be such if one were not a Jew. However, this does not imply that a Jewish believer is still viewed by the religious authorities as a member of the Jewish community, even a virtual one. Indeed, an apostate has turned his way from the ways of the community, so that the community, according to these authorities, should turn its way from him or her. Accordingly, a JMB is seen as an objective member of Am-Israel on an individual level but not on a social one. In other words, it is not enough to be a Jew in an objective sense, by being born a Jew, and in a subjective sense, as caring about the spiritual welfare of the community, to belong to Am- Israel as a community. In order to secure these ties, what needs to be established, at least from a Jewish religious point of view, is that the ways on which an individual wants to lead the community stand in conformity with the Torah transmitted from one generation to the other since Moshe Rabbeinu received it. Admittedly, the misplaced fervor of the *minim* puts this faithfulness at risk as effectively as the defiant indifference of the *mumar*. This rejection is, of course, painful to a JMB, who understands his or her dedication to the welfare of Israel as an integral part of his or her religious calling. The question, however, has an objective dimension in legal terms: to what extent should a JMB be identified with the *minim* or any heretical sect of this kind? True, Jewish religion is not the Catholic Church – it has no infallible authority at its head, no *magisterium* in the strict sense of the word. There are, notwithstanding, matters of doctrine that experts on the Torah have the duty to examine together in the name of the community. The alleged

faithfulness of Jewish Messianism to the Torah is obviously one of them. When Rambam (Maimonides) defines the heresy of the Nazarenes, he puts it into a category with that of the Muslims, who claim that “the Lord has given a new dispensation instead of the old, and that he has abolished the Law, though it was originally divine” (Sanh. 90-103, Maimonides/Yad, Teshubah, iii. 6-8). This stands in sharp contrast to the belief of Messianic Jews who claim that the intent of Yeshua was to bring the understanding of the Torah to its perfection, according to Matthew 5, 11: “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill”. Looking at the matter from a purely doctrinal vantage point, it is difficult to understand why those, in the Lubavitch movement, who profess that the late Rabbi Shneerson is the Messiah of Israel are not excommunicated or ostracized in the way Jewish Messianic believers are. The life of the Nation can accommodate itself to the existence of a multiplicity of more or less sectarian movements in its midst and it actually always has. However, I would argue that the difference of treatment between Messianic Lubavitchs and Messianic “Yeshouists” has an obvious explanation, which has little to do with doctrine: the Lubavitch organization is not seen as concretely threatening the conditions that ensure the continuity of a collective Jewish existence. In actual fact, the idea that the message of Yeshua would compromise this existence probably goes as far back as the statement that Kaiphe, the high priest, made before the Sanhedrin: “it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish” (Joh 11:50 NAS). In some sort of definite manner, the organization founded by the disciples of Yeshua, this entity which soon started to be called the Church, gave credence to Kaiphe’s warning. The more the Church of Christ grew and expanded, due to the absorption of Gentiles, the more S. Paul’s principle of

communion between Jews and non-Jews was interpreted as incompatible with the preservation or adaptation of an idiosyncratic Jewish lifestyle within Christian communities. In the course of history, the Mission towards Jews has gone hand in hand with a standing invitation to join one or more structures which abolished the principle of Jewish existence by dissolving it *de facto* in a non-Jewish element. It is understandable that the community of Israel reacted by severing the ties of Jewish converts with itself. In fact, to the extent that their conversion was sincere, Jewish converts were the first to loath the continued existence of Israel as a distinct community, holding it, as did their fellow Christians, to be the blasphemous remnant of a bygone and forsaken age. True, the attitude of traditional Churches has changed, especially after the Shoah. Recent years have witnessed the development of pro-Jewish movements and societies in these allegedly conservative environments. Considering Jewish Messianism from a broad, non-denominational point of view, one could contend that there are a number of Messianic Jews in traditional Churches, meaning people who claim that the recognition of Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel should not entail the disintegration of the community of Israel within their Church affiliation. However, the most passionate defenders of the Jewish cause in traditional Churches would be uncomfortable with the idea that Jews should build a life of faith and worship of their own, distinct from that of their fellow Gentiles. This position is perceived as opposed to the basic principle of the Gospel, as expounded by Paul. However, how could one ever guarantee the preservation of a Jewish identity in the midst of traditional Churches without the existence of a Jewish community anchored in a specific life of worship?

Speaking of Jewish Messianism in a strictly denominational sense, one comes across a very different situation, at least apparently. A JMB belongs to a

community that places Jewish values at the core of its faith in Yeshua and life of worship. At any rate, the Messianic approach shares with traditional Judaism the basic conviction that the continued existence of the community of Israel is the result of God's will and quite perplexing providence. But what about the objective ability of the Messianic movement to preserve Jewish identity and elaborate a distinctly Jewish way of following Christ? Is Messianic theology truly capable of conceiving a structure that would secure the continuity of Jewish existence? If this shows itself to be impossible, we will at least be certain that those rabbis who denounce the Messianic movement as an ultimate trap destined to disintegrate the community of Israel, while professing the utmost love for it, have a point. Admitting that a movement based on love for the Jewish tradition does not have the objective means of securing the continued existence of the community of Israel is tantamount to accepting that, in the most favorable turn of events, it will achieve the contrary of its aim, that is, that it will provoke the destruction of Israel instead of creating the conditions for its renewal. And so, what does Messianic ecclesiology have to offer? Answering this question will provide the matter of my second point.

## **2. Not a Church - the intrinsic challenge of Messianic ecclesiology**

As the age-old French saying goes, a cherry-tree will never produce plums. I do not know whether it is difficult to grow a plum-tree; I have never tried. What I know is that it is impossible if it is a cherry-tree. Likewise, one can dedicate all one's natural energies and spiritual skills to the building of a Church which would radically dismiss the anti-Semitic elements present in other Church traditions and place the concern for the community of Israel at the center of its own

life. Praiseworthy though such an effort might be, it is hardly disputable that little durable result will come out of it if there is, in the very idea of Church, something which is incompatible with the continuity of Israel's existence.

What is a Church, indeed? I hope that nobody will object if I define it as a gathering of people united by an identical faith in the person that a long tradition designates under the name of Jesus-Christ. The belief that this particular person was a Jew according to the flesh and that the message he propagated was primarily directed at his fellow Jews are constitutive elements of this faith. However, one does not need to be a Jew to take in such beliefs. Otherwise, Jesus would not have publicly praised the Roman centurion who came begging for his help when he commented: "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." (Luc, 7. 9). Founding the Church on this faith is certainly the right thing to do; but then, it excludes the possibility of founding a Jewish Church, since Jews and Gentiles share this faith alike. Of course, in open societies, nothing can prevent someone from launching a new organization with an abundance of Jewish customs and calling it a Church. The problem is that it will not be a Jewish Church, as long as it allows non-Jews to adopt these Jewish customs. External signs of attachment to Jewish customs and religious tradition will not do. If Jewishness is truly an ontological reality in the eyes of God, ten million non-Jewish Israel fans or biblical scholars will never make a *minian*, the minimal quorum required to form a Jewish community. The other option; namely that of rejecting non-Jews, would entail the acknowledgment that this Church is not a real Church. Indeed, if a Church is based on the identity of faith, how could people with the same faith be dismissed on behalf of a criterion which has nothing to do with faith; namely, ethnicity? The fact that one can define the content of this faith at will does not modify the basic problem. Of course, coming



to either the correct or erroneous consciousness that true faith is ignored by the existing Church organizations is always a good reason to launch a new one. Nevertheless, since this idiosyncratic faith is still about faith, it does not provide the means of founding a Church that will dismiss people confessing the same faith. Consequently, if a Church is a Church, that is, a communion of Jews and Gentiles united by the same faith, it becomes much more difficult to see how the idiosyncratic existence of the Jewish nation could be preserved in its midst.

The thing is that communion in faith produces a people of its own kind. This has not merely to do with the existence of a common superstructure or a hierarchy. What makes a series of individuals into a single people are distinct bonds – a common language or ethnicity for example - that separate them from other people. Faith in Jesus-Christ is such a bond. It is stronger than ethnicity and language; it radically separates those who are united by it from all those who are foreign to it. The faith of Israel, resting on faithfulness to the Torah given to Moses, was, and still is, a bond of this kind - a people-generating bond. As such, however, it is an immediate opposite to the bond associated with the notion of Church. The faith of Israel is about the unity of a distinct people, a chosen *ethnos*, not about the unity of all the peoples on earth. Indeed, that faith in Yeshua is to be shared by all the nations of the earth is the founding event of the Church, the Pentecost of a new era that stands described in the *Acts of the Apostles*, c.2. On the contrary, if Am-Israel has managed to survive as a biological people, maintaining its unity while being surrounded by non-Jews inclined either to absorb or to dissolve it, it was due to the conviction that its faith, was the only right one, while all other options, including faith in Jesus-Christ, led to idolatry. The duty of Jews was to form a fence around the Torah given to Moses. Accordingly, claiming, as JMBs do, that the faith of Jews and non-Jews that became

real, Israel-loving disciples of Yeshua coincides with the authentic faith of Israel, implies that this fence no longer has a purpose. If the inside is discovered to be identical with the outside, why not let the outside come inside? How could the dike that protected Israel, insuring the inner regeneration of this small and scattered people generation after generation, not be swept away by the friendly inflow of Gentile masses?

Messianic theology often blames traditional Churches for the absence of Jewish element in her midst, attributing it to some quintessential anti-Semitism. However, the dissolution of the Jewish component in the body formed by traditional Churches, the Judeo-Christian layer, is historically prior to the emergence of anti-Jewish Church legislation (Council of Elvira, 306) and this dissolution is a natural consequence of the principle of communion between Jews and Gentiles: if there is only one Jew for 10 Gentiles living in one collective body, how could the Jewish element not be swept away after three generations of friendly coexistence and intermarriage? It is hardly surprising that anti-Judaism should emerge after the disintegration of the Judeo-Christian component, since the only Jews left, after three or four generations, were those who opposed faith in Yeshua as Israel's Messiah. Thus, the absence of Jewish element in traditional Churches should not be blamed on a quintessential anti-Semitism, but on that of a very natural philo-Semitism resulting in massive cases of intermarriage.

If what I say is true, it points, in my opinion, to some lethal inner contradiction within denominational Messianic congregations. The fact is that I do not see how these congregations, according to their present structure, could avoid undergoing the course of events that has affected the very traditional Churches that they reject. If Jews and non-Jews are members of these congregations on an equal footing,

which is the consequence of their sharing the same faith, how could Jews avoid being outnumbered by non-Jews and eventually become extinct, from an ethnical point of view, after a few generations? If anything, it is the desire to avoid such disintegration of the Jewish dimension, as a counter-weight to the anti-Semitic aspects of traditional Churches, that warrants the existence of specifically *Messianic* congregations. But if the Messianic movement is promised the same fate as traditional Churches, does it not prove that anti-Semitism is not to be held responsible for the disintegration of the Jewish element in traditional Churches? And if traditional Churches are not quintessentially anti-Semitic, what is the point of creating a Messianic Church as an alternative to them?

Let me sum up the point I want to make. The only hope of the Messianic movement to be treated as integral to the life of Am-Israel rests on the assurance that it does not threaten this very life. But how could the Messianic movement provide such an assurance if the very principle of its organization abolishes the *raison d'être* of Am-Israel as a separate entity?

In my view, there is no way out of this quandary as long as we think that the problem lies with Am-Israel. As I see it, the source of the problem lies rather in the organization plan that the Messianic movement carts along. It has to do with the way the Messianic movement understands itself, that is, as a distinct Church, on the model of Evangelical or free Churches. Of course, the reasons why the Messianic movement had to evolve out of the evangelical world are perfectly understandable. No traditional Church would ever have granted it the freedom of independence it utterly needed in the beginning. However, it might be high time that the Messianic movement left behind the ecclesiological matrix from where it originates. What I would like to show now is that the movement has no other option if it wants to solve

the ecclesiological quandary that I just described - that is, if it wants to have a real future.

### **3. Integral to the Church: Am-Israel and the foundation of a Messianic ecclesiology**

The Jewish nation is not a Church. True, though, Am-Israel is essentially connected with the founding principle of the Church, which is faith, as I emphasized earlier. However, the connection does not function in the same way for the Church and Am-Israel. In the case of the Church, it is the existence of a specific faith which brings about a people, a new Nation. In the case of Am-Israel, it is the existence of a specific people which shapes the substance of its faith. The existence of the Jewish nation is in itself the main object of the Jewish faith, since it rests on the belief that God, the one creator of the Universe, is the one who has willed it and created it to be unique among all the peoples and nations of the earth. God does not exist because Jews started to believe in him. On the contrary, Jews started to exist because God had, at some point, believed in them, creating a nation that ought to be different from all the other nations. If a Jew is a Jew, he is someone who believes that the reason why Jews still exist is that, in spite of everything, God still believes in them. This explains why Jewish religious movements do not see the purpose of carrying out mission work beyond the boundaries of Judaism. Jewish faith has no relevance once disconnected from the existence of the Jewish nation and deprived of responsibility for its spiritual welfare.

What, then, if Messianic Judaism ceased to conceive itself on the model of a church, open to anyone that shares its faith, but on the model of a Jewish religious movement, whose mission scope does not extend beyond the boundaries of the Jewish nation? Like any other Jewish movement organized by Jews for the sake of

Jews, its aim would be to recapitulate in itself the totality of the Jewish nation and not the totality of mankind, unlike the pattern of Christian Churches. Such a solution would, of course, render void the suspicion that the Messianic movement threatened the continued existence of the Jewish nation. The risk of disintegrating the Jewish dimension of the movement by creating an entity open to non-Jews would itself disintegrate.

But what about criticism on the side of Christians? What about those who would object that such a movement is unfaithful to Paul's principle of communion between Jews and non-Jews?

At this point, I believe we need to stretch our intellectual abilities and reassess what we have in mind when we speak about the Church. Historically, the way Paul's principle of communion was applied in the Church became purely local at a very early stage of history. Each segment of the Universal Church absorbed Jews and non-Jews equally, so as to create a situation of quasi perfect homogeneity at the level of the Universal Church. As I said before, this homogeneity was acquired at the price of the disintegration of an idiosyncratic Jewish entity within the Body of Christ. What, then, if this idiosyncratic Jewish entity underwent a renewal? If it was granted existence and recognition as such within the universal Church? With Paul, I believe that the universal Church is, according to its essence, a communion between Jews and Gentiles, a communion to which all Gentiles as well as the totality of Israel are called. However, communion cannot be real when one of the partners is swallowed up by the other, as it happened in the course of history between Jews and Gentiles. In order to take place, communion implies the existence of two self-sustaining partners, something which cannot happen without the universal Church being endowed with an independent Jewish entity. Does this integration within the wider

Church mean that this Jewish entity will be given the form of a minor or particular church, one among so many? If this were to be the case, this Jewish entity would no longer be a Jewish entity. As emphasized earlier, the founding principle of a Church is faith, which transcends the distinction between Jews and non-Jews, so that a Jewish Church is a *contradictio in adjecto*.

An example might help us to solve this apparent dilemma. Take the coexistence of men and women in the Church. The communion between men and women, a communion that is based on their distinctive charisma, is as essential and integral to the Universal Church, as the communion between Jews and Gentiles. However, neither the “party of men” nor “the party of women” forms a particular Church. Eventually, there can be Church movements representing men and women respectively, since a number of issues deal with the definition of their respective places within the Body that they constitute together. Of course, the idea of a movement representing men sounds slightly odd, since the general impression is that the position of men is already overwhelming within Church organizations. But is not the case with Jews precisely similar? Is it not the overwhelming presence of non-Jews in Church organizations that would justify the foundation of a Jewish movement to counterbalance it? Being Jewish does not mean upholding a faith which lies outside the faith of the Church; it means having a relationship to God which is ontologically different from that of the Gentiles. Like the interaction between men and women, the interaction between Jews and Gentiles pertains to the spiritual dynamism of the whole Church. However, as in the gatherings of men and women respectively, the respective gatherings of Jews and Gentiles do not constitute the Universal Church in the way the collection of local and particular Church entities do. This distinction Jews/Gentiles, as well as the distinction

Men/Women, embraces and pervades local congregations and Church organizations. True, the fact that men and women experience a new form of communion in Christ entails that they no longer lead a separate life of worship. The depth of the spiritual unity they are able to reach in Christ is the crown of their biological union. However, there is no reason why communion between Jews and Gentiles should be other than spiritual, since it is here, at this level, that it bears fruit in Christ. Accordingly, I see no reason that would prevent Jews from developing a distinct life of worship within the Universal Church.

One can of course ask what I mean by universal Church. Is it the Catholic Church of which I am a member? Then, as will be objected, I need to deal with the Orthodox and the Evangelical concept of Church universality, and especially of the authority and commandment structure that go with it. If there were such thing as a unique concept of the universal Church, the body of Christ would not be split into a wide variety of Church denominations. However, being myself a Catholic, I believe that this Body subsists invisibly beyond the doctrinal divisions of the disciples of Christ. Moreover, as a Catholic, I believe it is the duty of all the members of this invisible Body to recover a visible form of unity. Refraining from dwelling on the degrees of participation of the extant Church organizations in this Body, I speak about the universal Church in reference to this invisible Body. Nothing can prevent Evangelical and Catholic women from joining together in order to articulate a feminine voice within the Body of Christ. Is there no place on earth for a Jewish equivalent?

I claim that there is no other place for this Jewish Messianic voice than Am-Israel. Israel is not a Church, but a people. That there is a majority in this people to reject the Messianic idea, at least for the time being, is not relevant to the issue. What matters is that those who hold fast to the Messianic idea will understand themselves as part of this people. They are truly its avant-garde, being dedicated to the fulfillment of its calling. Accordingly, wherever they are, whatever their Church affiliation be, I believe that Messianic Jews should gather and build a home within Am-Israel, a home for themselves as well as for their fellow Jews who would be willing to join. This time, calling Jews to join the Church, the Body of Christ, would not imply short-term disintegration through fusion. On the contrary, it would mean building a self-standing entity that would remain distinct from its Gentile counterpart, on an equal footing with it, in order to be in spiritual interaction with it. Pithily put, for the first time in history, mission work among Jews would not be oriented towards assimilation with Gentiles, but towards Jewish autonomy. After all, could not such a movement be viewed by non-Messianic Jews as simply one more Jewish sect, the existence of which the community of Israel should tolerate in its midst, since it is both difficult to establish that its doctrine is in error and that its form of organization is a threat to the existence of the community? By way of conclusion, I would like to add a few words about the framework and purpose of this very special Jewish sect.

### **Conclusion: the Messianic idea and the calling of Am-Israel**

In the considerations above, I have tried to explain why a *Jewish* Messianic movement, in the broad sense of the word, should view itself as a movement directed towards Am-Israel, despite the fact that the quasi-totality of



Am-Israel lies presently beyond its boundaries. Jewish Messianism does not need to be a Church in order to constitute a part, and a vital part, of the Body of Christ. This claim would be completely irrelevant if Jews were incapable of seeing in the Messianic movement the accomplishment of their Jewish calling. But what does this mean concretely? Why should a member of Am-Israel join this new brand of Jewish sect? I cannot conceive of a more pressing task for a Jewish Messianic movement than to clarify what it is striving to achieve. Evangelical or charismatic piety will not do, because there is nothing specifically Jewish in it. Synagogal worship will not do either since a copy is less likely to fulfill the Jewish calling than the original version. In my view, the historic or rather *historial*, to use one of Heidegger's favorite concepts, situation of the Messianic idea is indicative of the fundamental challenge it is meant to solve. On the one hand, it is clear that a Jewish movement cannot ignore the riches of the rabbinic tradition as it has been developed over two thousand years. This tradition has kept our identity alive – it reconnects the present generation of sons of Israel to their fathers and forefathers to the time that preceded the coming of Yeshua, back to the time of Israel's patriarchs. This tradition is- we Jews. On the other hand, we cannot ignore that rabbinic tradition has consistently put the message of Yeshua aside and has developed on the basis of such a deliberate neglect. The truth is that the disciples of Yeshua need more than a form of fidelity to the religion of their forefathers. The coming of Yeshua would be deprived of purpose, if it had not aimed at inducing a radical transformation of a tradition that goes back to the Patriarchs of Israel – a transformation that would not abolish it, but that would bring it to completion. But what is this transformation exactly about? Like it or not, the only way to figure it out is to look at the tradition developed by Christian Churches over the same 2000 years. Judaism subsists in them, but in a form

which is completely new, so new, indeed, that most Jews are unable to recognize it. And still: is not Judaism present in the love for the Bible and the Old Testament? Does not Christian Orthodox liturgy tell Jews something about the past splendor of Temple worship? Has not the Catholic Church officially recognized the enduring relevance of the First Covenant with Israel? Accordingly, the Messianic movement is confronted with two realities which are equally unsatisfactory, but equally part of itself: the living tradition of Judaism, but without its transfiguration in Yeshua; the living tradition of Churches, which is Judaism transfigured in Yeshua but without Jews. Actually, this split configuration can be understood as the result of an original event, a sort of primordial clash. One could symbolize this event with the help of one the simplest diagrams used in quantum Physics; namely, the one that describes how the collision between two particles gives rise to two new particles:

Gentile-pagan traditions on the way towards God's Revelation

tr

Traditional Churches: Gentile assimilation of the Jewish tradition in Yeshua

tr

Post- Temple Judaism:  
self-closure of the Jewish tradition without Yeshua

Jews and Jewish  
tradition on the way towards the Universal

In this collision, there is one element which got lost or disintegrated so rapidly, that no observer has had enough time to perceive its existence or significance – it is the inner renewal of the Jewish life and tradition in Yeshua. I have provided earlier an explanation for this rapid disintegration. It seems to me that the purpose of the Messianic movement is to try to re-appropriate this subatomic momentum which got lost after the original collision. In order to do to that, it cannot simply adopt the elements present in the Church traditions, since they are Gentile adaptations of Judaism; nor can it simply take the elements present in the Jewish tradition, since they have evolved far from Yeshua. However, looking at the riches conveyed by the different Church traditions with the eyes of a mind familiar with Jewish tradition, one should be able to rediscover the original elements that were meant to transfigure it, so as to let a radically new mode of living the faith of Israel emerge. Take for instance the celebration of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church. It surely developed on the basis of the type of Seder that Yeshua spent with his disciples before his death. As

such, its core event is extremely close to the blessing of the second cup and the sharing of the matsa that crystalized in the rabbinic Haggada of Pessah.

You are blessed, Lord, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine

You are blessed, Lord of the universe, who creates the fruit of the

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:

vine

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ:

You are blessed, Lord of the universe, who gives growth to the bread from the earth

What is the duty of Messianism as a Jewish movement if not to win back the element present in the Eucharist so as to renew completely the rabbinic form of the Seder?

Reconnecting with the depths of the Jewish calling and defining the conditions of an authentic Jewish access to Yeshua is one and the same thing. It is certainly a daunting task, since there is no ready-made recipe, but, for the people who will agree to commit themselves, how could it be something other than a source of personal fulfillment and joy? Indeed, as we Jews follow the one narrow path of Yeshua, we have the inner certainty that we are helping Israel to become that one people, that *Am qadosh*, it has been called to be since its origin.

שלחן עורך

*The table is set. The time has come for the afikoman, the one who came, to be removed from its hidden place and offered as nourishment.*

