

Jewish Life as Sacrament
Paper Presented to the 2005 Hashivenu Forum by Kay Silberling
February, 2005
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“For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the earth to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of? (Deuteronomy 4:32)”

From ages past, the sages of Israel have called the people of Israel to the task of collective memory. This collective memory in our tradition has taken a decidedly concrete and material character because it involves history—the redemptive history of Israel. The communities of the *Brit Chadashah* built upon this notion of collective memory and developed an even more comprehensive concept upon its foundation—the concept of sacrament. Interestingly, no such identical concept has emerged in the Jewish world. To be sure, collective memory does play a role in our Jewish tradition that mirrors the role of sacrament in Christian tradition. However, sacrament involves a unique composite of themes which have developed within Christian tradition that are unlike any one concept that has developed *as a whole* in Jewish tradition.

Nevertheless, the Christian notion of sacrament gets its impetus from the Hebrew Bible and, moreover, it demonstrates many parallels with conceptual and liturgical models that developed in post-biblical, rabbinic Judaism.

For our purposes, I will concentrate on two elements of sacrament that are pertinent to us as Messianic Jews. The first is the notion that the people of God function as sacrament; the second is the notion that the performance of *mitzvot* is a sacramental act. Once we understand how sacrament functions for the Christian world, we will see that both categories—the people of God and *mitzvot*—can truly be regarded as sacramental categories for us.

Because of its strong association with Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianities, the idea of sacrament has not been on the radar for most Messianic theologians. For the most part, we

have pursued theological questions that have been made urgent to us either by our rabbinic tradition or by evangelical tradition, and, as a result of those attachments, we have largely ignored the concept of sacrament.

It turns out, however, that the theme of sacrament is deeply pertinent to Messianic theology. Not only our liturgy, but our ethics, our eschatology, our understanding of Messiah, and, most importantly, our self-definition can and should be deeply shaped by this concept as we take a fresh look at it through the matrix of our Jewish experience. Sacrament is a term that we can use. We can use it to interpret the significance of the people of Israel in our redemptive task on earth and to interpret the meaning of our *mitzvot*, our divine command in history to actualize God's redemptive realm in the present.

The Latin term *sacramentum* is a translation of the Greek, *mysterion*. Tertullian was the first to use it in the late second century C.E. The term, *mysterion*, in turn, translates the Persian Aramaic word, *raz*, used often in Daniel to refer to Daniel's ability to understand and interpret dreams (2:18, 19, 27, *et passim*). Building on Mark 4:11, where Yeshua says to his disciples, "To you has been given the *mysterion* of the realm of God," Tertullian argued that those to whom is given this *mysterion* are held in trust by God. So Tertullian, drawing from Daniel, read *mysterion* as the state of being set apart, of being one who holds a trust or a repository of God's actualized presence. Also, in his discussion of sacraments, Tertullian did not limit the number to seven as we find in later church tradition.¹ That came about a thousand years later after a wide variety of lists were proposed by various church thinkers. Tertullian, however, limited the notion to this idea of a repository of trust, given to a people set apart, which indicated that God was present.

¹ Although Tertullian did propose two liturgical sacraments: eucharist and baptism.

In this paper, I want to move us away from the deeply-ingrained reaction that the word, “sacrament,” may elicit in us. Henceforth, I will prefer Tertullian’s term, *mysterion*, and will draw upon his more broadly-conceived definition as I discuss this concept. At the end of this paper, I will suggest for discussion several Hebrew or Hebrew-based terms to consider for our adoption to use as a technical term to signify this notion within our own emerging tradition.

The concept of *mysterion* that we find in Christian tradition draws deeply from the wellspring of the Hebrew Bible. Already, in the Psalms, we can find a confluence of liturgy and cult. The Psalms record ancient recitations of God’s saving acts in Israel’s history, recitations that were performed in connection with the palpable and visible pageants that were carried out in tabernacle and temple, especially during feast days and *moadim*. In the Psalms we see a liturgy developing that finds its full expression in the concrete invocations by the temple priests of God’s saving presence.

Accompanying a long history of associating cult with liturgical recitations of God’s gracious acts is the centrality of the theme of embodiment. The concept of embodiment shows up in several ways in the biblical tradition: 1) in the notion that God’s presence in the cosmos is revealed in and through a people. Lev. 26:11 states, “I will put my *mishkan* [my dwelling] in the midst of you;”² 2) in the notion that the past is actuated in the assembled presence of the people acting liturgically. So God says to the Israelites on the eve of the first Passover, “This day shall be for you a memorial (*l’zikaron*) and you shall celebrate it as a feast to HaShem for all your generations. You are to celebrate it as a perpetual ordinance” (Exod. 12:14). Also, in Israel’s ultimate declaration of its collective memory, God commands the Israelites to make an offering upon entering the land and to declare, “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down

² See also Num 14:14; Deut 1:42.

into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number [notice the preposition and the adjective—*he* went down, singular, *few* in number, plural]; and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous” (Deut. 26:5-6).

Both of these conceptual streams—embodiment [the many embodied in the one; God embodied in Israel] and memory [actuated in the cultic activity of the people]—are deeply rooted in biblical and post-biblical Jewish tradition. But they come out of a wider narrative, the narrative that God worked in history past, and that that past brings significance to God’s working in history present. History, itself, in this embodied narrative, becomes sanctified as an element of God’s divine redemptive plan. Redemption occurs *in* history, not *outside* of it. In order to understand *mysterion*, we must understand the centrality of history, memory, and embodiment.

To be sure, it is not just past history that occupies a place in the sphere of the sacred. Future history as well is sacralized by history past. The biblical tradition sees past events of history as signifying—pointing to, but also representing and illustrating—the future Messianic Age. Sha’ul understood this when he wrote, “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death [past] until he comes [future]” (1 Cor. 11:26). Such liturgical rehearsals of the future coming of Messiah anchor the present in history past and the future in history present.

The Hebrew Bible, then, is, in itself, a repository of God’s gracious presence actualized and made real in and through a people set apart in history, a history laden with theological meaning and significance. Sanctification of the people, actualized memory of a trust held in deposit, embodied truth, and sacralized history—this is the *mysterion* which Tertullian describes.³

³ Essential to this *mysterion* is the concept of collective memory as well. Collective memory has profoundly shaped Jewish thought to the present day. In the biblical narrative, the notion of “memorial,” from the Hebrew word, *zikaron*, contains much more than a mere recalling of past events. It is generally connected to cultic events occurring on feast days or *moadim*. As such, it includes the giving of thanks, the rehearsing of God’s saving acts in history, and the anticipation of the consummation of history in a redeemed future. It would be more accurate to understand the word *zikaron* as meaning an act that simultaneously points backward to God’s covenant faithfulness

What the Jewish world has bequeathed to the Christian world is the notion that God operates in history through a people. Throughout time, this people has called upon God to remember and to intervene in history and has called upon its own members to remember God's saving acts.⁴ What the Christian world has, until the present time, refused to hear is that the people through whom God has chosen to make known salvation history is the people of Israel, defined as a people with a particular collective memory and corporate experience. It is often sacramental thinking on the part of Christians that leads them to discover this central concept in the Bible's story. So Terrence Toland, a Christian theologian, can write that the sacraments "are

and, at the same time, forward to God's covenant consummation. As such, past, present, and future become fused in the memorial itself. This causes the people to experience these events in cultic, liturgical time, which is timeless and cyclical. Yosef Yerushalmi, in his important work, *Zakhar: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, has noted that the verb *zakhar* and its cognates appear in the Bible at least 169 times (Yerushalmi, 5). He writes, "Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people" (Ibid., 9).

The Christian fathers carried forward these notions of actualized, ritualized memory into the institution of sacraments, the *kultmysterium* of the early church (A term coined by Odo Casel, in O. Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship* [Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962]). The two earliest ritualized memorial acts in the communities that followed Yeshua were those of eucharist and baptism. Like the liturgical events in the ancient temple, in which the priests invoked God's saving acts in history, so early church thinkers saw these two rituals—eucharist and baptism—as invoking God's saving acts through Yeshua while, at the same time, actualizing them in the present. Sha'ul himself, working within this Jewish conceptual field, developed this idea with respect to baptism. By undergoing baptism, the initiate participates in Yeshua's own death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). Sha'ul clearly understood the ancient Israelite notion of embedding the participant into redemptive history by means of the cult.

Luke records Yeshua himself employing this theme of collective memory in Luke's narration of the Last Supper where Yeshua says, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this as a memorial (*anamnēsin*) for me" (Luke 22:19). This term, *anamnēsis*, is the Greek word used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *zikaron* and its declensions. Indeed, some have argued that the Hebrew word, *zikaron*, does not stand behind the Greek, *anamnēsis*, but the scholarly consensus is to equate the two words. See Paul Bradshaw, "Anamnesis in Modern Eucharistic Debate," *Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism*, Editor Michael A. Signer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 73. Despite popular Protestant assumptions, the term *anamnēsis*, when applied to the eucharist, is not understood in classical Catholic theology as a repetition of Yeshua's sacrifice but rather as an actualization of the event in the life of the participant only in liturgical time. Nevertheless, even this conceptualization was too much for the Protestant reformers. So, for instance, Luther rejected the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the presence of "Christ" in the eucharist, in favor of the idea that mystical union with "Christ" only occurs at the moment of the liturgical act but does not continue afterward. Zwingli, on the other hand, argued that the eucharist was merely a symbolic act of bringing to memory past events with no notion of any sense of cultic participation. Calvin attempted to moderate between Luther's notion of sharing in Christ's omnipresent body and Zwingli's symbol by arguing that Messiah's saving power, not his body and blood, was what was present in the elements themselves (Michael Schmaus discusses the various Protestant responses to the notion of eucharist in *Dogma 5: The Church as Sacrament* [Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1984], 88). But what Yeshua, Sha'ul, and even Origen understood better than Augustine, Luther, Calvin, or Zwingli, was the significance of embodied participation in Israel's history—past, present, and future—through cultic remembrance, or *anamnēsis*. It is to this early conceptual world that I return.

⁴ See Brevard Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 68.

an important avenue for people to receive revelation, since God reveals Godself through history. This history,” he adds, “is first the history of Israel.”⁵ While we might add, “first... *and foremost...* the history of Israel,” we can be encouraged that Toland has discovered this *mysterion* by reflecting on the concept of *sacramentum*. Stanley Hauerwas, a name much more familiar to most of us, writes as well:

The church decisively rejected Marcion’s attempt to create a pure Christianity free of the people of Israel because the church saw clearly that Jesus is no mere idea, but the resurrected Jesus is the fleshly embodiment of Israel. To forget Israel would be nothing less than to lose the body and blood of our savior’s life made present to us through Resurrection and Ascension.⁶

It is ironic, but not surprising, that it is among those Protestants who are thinking sacramentally that an understanding is emerging about Israel’s ongoing redemptive role in history—a people who hold in trust God’s presence and God’s redemptive purposes in history.

Because of a lack of time, I will list very briefly several other notions that are implied in the term *mysterion* or *sacramentum*. These include, besides memory: 1) mystery or secret (Hebrew, *sod* or *raz*);⁷ 2) conduit of grace;⁸ 3) signifier (Hebrew: *oht*, “sign”);⁹ 4) sacrifice;¹⁰ 5) mystical

⁵ Terrence Toland, “Christian Sacrament: Sign and Experience,” *Readings in Sacramental Theology*, Editor Stephen C. Sullivan (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 23.

⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, “Embodied Memory,” *Journal for Preachers* 19 (1996):22.

⁷ See, for example, Psalm 25:14; 55:15; 83:4; Prov. 11:13; 15:22; 20:19; Jer. 6:11. The term, *sod*, as used in the Bible, often means to take counsel in the sense of confidential speech; it also implies a gathering or assembly. *Raz*, as previously discussed, is associated with the interpretation of otherwise unknowable phenomena.

⁸ Theologians have emphasized the quality of grace-conferring that adheres to the *mysterion*. However, at least one Protestant scholar has warned of the distortion that occurs when the aspect of imparting grace becomes highly individualized. In that transaction, notes Scott Bader-Saye, “It [the sacrament] has been not only de-Judaized but de-politicized” (Scott Bader-Saye, “Post-Holocaust Hermeneutics: Scripture, Sacrament, and the Jewish Body of Christ,” *Cross Currents* 50 no4 [Wint 2000/2001]: 468). He adds, “By abstracting the Eucharist from the context of Passover and Exodus, we have left behind the politics of liberation and community formation that were central to the Last Supper. Further, by ignoring the Jewishness of the eucharistic body, we have dissociated the practice from God’s election and covenant with the flesh of Israel. So, as often as we partake of this non-Jewish body of Christ at the table, we become trained to see a non-Jewish Jesus in the Gospels. We thus fail ‘to become Jews with the Jews [citing Karl Barth] and fail to understand rightly the biblical witness” (Ibid.).

⁹ Michael Wyschogrod writes of “the sign that is Israel” (Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham’s Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, Editor R. Kendall Soulen [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004]: 224). Augustine argued that signs are “those things that are used to indicate something else” (*City of God*, I.2). However, this signification not only points to another but calls for a profound identification between the signifier and the signified. Thus by signifying God’s presence, sacramental theologians argue that the signifier actualizes God’s presence as well. Graham Hughes argues that the worship event, as signifier, must have three characteristics: a) it must make

union: Let me comment briefly on this characteristic. The concept of mystical union builds on the idea of corporate embodiment discussed above. Adam represents humanity; Jacob is Israel; the wandering Aramean is few in number. The *Brit Chadashah* develops this notion of corporate embodiment in the idea of Yeshua embodying Israel. The church fathers elaborated on this idea liturgically. Inherent in the notion of mystical union, one of the characteristics of *mysterion*, is the notion of Messiah as present in the body of the church.

However, church tradition, in highlighting mystical union with “Christ,” has done so at the expense of mystical union with Israel. They have presented Israel in salvation history as mere precursor to “Christ” as God’s true saving presence in history. In doing so, they have actually de-historicized redemption rather than conceiving it as occurring within history. They disembody the history of redemption from the people commissioned to be its bearer, and, in so doing, church tradition has removed Messiah himself from history. As a result, Christians struggle with categories for understanding God’s continuing redemptive work in the historical present. “Jesus” as experienced in the Christian sacraments has exhausted the potential for God’s redemptive work in history present except as he is experienced through the liturgical sacrament of eucharist. The cultic event of remembering “Jesus” as sign and as cause becomes cyclical as it is cast in liturgical time—salvation history no more moves forward; it moves in a circle according to the liturgical life of the church.

rational sense; b) it must be apprehended through multiple sensory channels; 3) it must make theistic sense. See *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (New York: Cambridge, 2003): 31.

¹⁰ The theme of sacrifice is especially controversial because of the Protestant charge that Catholics teach that Messiah is sacrificed repeatedly through the celebration of the eucharist. Ideas about sacrifice, however, while not observable in the earliest strata of the *Brit Chadashah*, do undergo clear development in Hebrews, Ephesians, and Colossians. Moreover, they have strong parallels in the rabbinic tradition of the *Akedah*. There we see a clear correlation between the covenant with Abraham and the *Akedah*. On this, see Lawrence A. Hoffman, “Does God Remember? A Liturgical Theology of Memory,” in Signer, 51. As a sign, or signifier, of the death of the Messiah—a sign that makes presently real that saving event—the eucharistic *mysterion* also became understood as a sacrifice in itself. This notion has been largely rejected in Protestantism. It is deeply problematic, but nevertheless, it holds interesting implications for Messianic Jews as we reflect on Israel’s history which has involved such great sacrifice and suffering on the part of the people.

The people of Israel, however, continue to live *in history* and thus can take no part in this cultic, de-historicized mythic event as the church has portrayed it. By demanding an exclusive place in history for “Christ’s” mystical body, Christian tradition has removed the mystical body of Israel from its history. A Messianic theology must comprehend mystical union, but it must be a mystical union not only with Yeshua, but also with Israel as a whole.¹¹

Continuing with the list of the various characteristics of sacrament, it also includes: 6) anticipation, guarantee, and seal;¹² 7) effectiveness;¹³ 8) bridging time and space;¹⁴ 9) concreteness.¹⁵

¹¹ Sha’ul understood this and argued for the non-Jewish believers in Yeshua to participate in Israel *through* Messiah, not to use Messiah as an avenue *around* Israel and its redemptive role in history. So Sha’ul writes that Messiah’s death was “in order that in Messiah Yeshua the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles” (Gal. 3:14). What Christian theology has missed is that Yeshua so completely identified himself with Israel in his incarnation (*Immanuel*—“God with us”) that he himself has become a signifier of the signifier, Israel. It is Israel that is given the task of carrying out God’s revelation of salvation. Messiah’s death and resurrection must be understood within that salvation history, not outside of it. This is not to say that Christian theologians have no place for God working in present history. They understand “Christ” working through the church as part of the ongoing sacramental role of the church itself. However, such an idea precludes the possibility of salvation history being comprehended through the sign/cause of the people Israel and thus sets up their liturgical cycle for perennial anti-Jewishness, something that has been demonstrated over the centuries.

¹² Before Augustine, the notion of *mysterion* implied participation in a community set apart for full redemption. After him, however, the symbol of *mysterion* and its referent, the people, became disconnected (Schmaus, 27). The earliest notions of *mysterion* were primarily eschatological and anticipatory rather than mystical, developing as they did within a deeply historicized understanding of redemption. As such, even the mystical elements were apprehended as occurring within history. By re-appropriating Israel’s history as a theological category, Messianic Jews have an opportunity to act out liturgically this future hope as integrative with our anthropology.

¹³ The characteristic of effectiveness is crucial to the idea of *mysterion*. This notion also harks back to the Bible. Josephus recognized this characteristic of effectiveness in liturgical acts when he described Samuel anointing David with oil: after being anointed, “the Divine Power departed from Saul and removed to David who, upon this removal of the Divine Spirit to him, began to prophecy (*Ant.* VI, 8.2). Augustine developed this notion of effectiveness in response to the urgent concerns of his own time, in which the effectiveness of the sacraments was being challenged because of the character of those dispensing them. It was largely this profound emphasis on effectiveness inherent in the sacrament itself against which Protestants revolted. A Messianic theology of *mysterion* can appropriate the notion of effectiveness as it relates to the effecting of the saving works of God in history through *mitzvot* and obedience to God. Thus our liturgical acts can never be divorced from our acting out in history as God’s embodied people.

¹⁴ One of the most significant elements of the concept of *mysterion* is the capacity to enter liturgical time and thus to bridge both time and space—connecting not only to sacred time but to sacred space as well. Lawrence Hoffman notes, “The righteous acts of the forefathers may also be ahistorical. What appeared before as God’s remembering something in the historical past can actually be God’s drawing upon a current dividend, let us say, that has accrued over time, but is very much present. Indeed, to anticipate: *liturgy’s function, rabbinically speaking, is to make present a dramatic enactment of those things past and present to which God is expected to attend* [emphasis his]. In [*Seder Rav Avram*, A97, in the liturgy surrounding the reading of the Torah]...the worshiper mentions the thirteen

Finally, and most significantly for my discussion here, the notion of *mysterion* or *sacramentum* includes the idea that: 10) the people of God, in themselves, function sacramentally. All of these characteristics—sign, signifier, memorial, mystery, concrete conduit of God’s grace, guarantee—apply to Israel. The people of God is the effective, visible presence of the risen and exalted Messiah—the *Jewish* Messiah—Israel’s Messiah—on this earth.

In this paper, I have argued that God works through visible, material means. The most significant, visible agent of God’s creative, redemptive work has been the people of God’s covenant. All of our liturgical acts—circumcision, Passover, Yom Kippur, eucharist [*s’udat Ha-Adon, b’rakha*], baptism, *mikveh*—all of these are only given concrete reality when they are celebrated in the midst of God’s people. Here is where we as Messianic Jews differ significantly from Christians. The Christian world has largely ignored that this people who are called to be a sign and a depository of the spirit of God sent by Yeshua is the people Israel. The prophet Ezekiel writes:

attributes, while wrapped in a *tallit* (the way God appeared to Moses), thus drawing God’s attention to the covenant of the attributes which will not return to God after we invoke them here without achieving their atoning affect (*sic*). Now we draw God’s attention to those attributes in a different way, reminding God of the divine essence itself: mercy, or indeed love, compassion, or even (as I said above) grace; rabbinic Hebrew (I repeat) does not differentiate these terms lexically” (52-53). As Messianic Jews, we draw from Jewish tradition the importance of “standing again at Sinai” as not just a shared memory but as an entering into past time and space along with all of Israel.

¹⁵ This entails the notion that God’s graciousness and loving kindness operate in the material realm. Corporeality, embodiment, and materiality are central to biblical anthropology and cosmology. Circumcision, Passover, and Sinai are all material signifiers of God’s saving action. The early followers of Yeshua understood and carried forward this concept that salvation occurs in the realm of the material. It is through the water of baptism that the believer receives the *ruach kodesh*; it is through the sharing of the covenant meal—ingesting real bread and real wine—that the community actualizes and participates in the future, Messianic Age and in the real, saving events of Messiah Yeshua. Popular, Evangelical Protestantism, on the other hand, has tended to neglect the notion of sacred presence in the midst of the tangible and the visible. They have distorted Luther’s idea of *Sola Scriptura* and have embraced an Enlightenment and rationalistic disdain for the significance of materiality. As such, they have highlighted the disembodied word, evidenced by the inordinate importance they give to the sermon at the expense of the liturgical rehearsal of God’s salvation through material symbols and liturgical acts. This is not to say that Messianic Jews should adopt the classical Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation in our own liturgies. Yet we can acknowledge that, within the *Brit Chadashah*, Yeshua’s presence, while not necessarily ontological presence in the wine and bread, is nevertheless a “dynamic and salvific presence” that is crucial to the actualization of God’s salvation history (Schmaus, 62). By highlighting the significance of materiality, Messianic Jews not only can challenge the Christian church to remember that they are partaking of *Jewish* body and blood, but also that the materiality of that Jewish substance is deeply significant for salvation.

As a pleasing odor I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations (Ezek 20:41).

Christian sacramentality finds only in the church this depository of God's saving acts.

Contrast the biblical story which clearly claims that Israel is given the task to signify and to call to remember the mighty saving acts of God. Sha'ul understood this and argued that the non-Jewish believers are to be joined to this Jewish sacramental people, not to confiscate this element of sacramentality from the people of Israel.

These traditional *Christian* notions that we have discussed, which gain meaning from the Hebrew Bible, find parallels in post-biblical, *rabbinic* Jewish tradition as well. Our Jewish sages also have noted the visible nature of God's saving activities, and while a term as comprehensive as *mysterion* or *sacramentum* has not developed in Jewish tradition—the closest that I have found is the term *zikaron*¹⁶—nevertheless, every one of the elements listed above takes pride of place in how our sages have described Israel's identity, purpose, task, and liturgical reality.¹⁷

¹⁶ See footnote 3 above.

¹⁷ For instance, the Talmud, citing Zech. 3:8, argues that the High Priest is a *sign* (*mofet*, lit. "sign," "wonder") because, it states, "the expression 'sign' cannot but refer to a prophet, as it is stated, 'And he [the prophet] give thee a sign or a wonder' [Deut. 13:2]" (BT.*Horayot* 13a). The fire that consumes the altar is a token of God's *grace* (2 Macc. 2:10; *Pirke deRabbi Eliezar* 47, 190b; *Tanhuma B*, III, 60; *Vayikra Rabbah* 20.4; BT *Yoma* 21b; BT *Baba Batra* 147a). BT *Megillah* (18a) shows that sages understood that proclamations involving the root word associated with *memorial*, *zakhar*, were required to be carried out corporately as liturgical acts by the people of Israel. Yosef Yerushalmi notes how this recognition of memorial, *zikaron*, as liturgical mandate gets carried through the medieval period in the penitential prayers, the *slichot*, which emerged as a response to the Crusades, and the *Memorbücher* (memorial books) that were read aloud in Ashkenazic synagogues to memorialize those who were martyred in the pogroms and other persecutions (Yerushalmi, 45). Add to these memorials, which became liturgical realities for our tradition, "Second Purims," in which local Jewish communities in Europe commemorated deliverance from some local persecution; fast-days, in which catastrophes from which Jewish communities were not delivered were memorialized; and, finally the post-[Spanish]exilic rise of *Kabbalah* as a new way to interpret Israel's actions in broad-brush strokes as mythical realities actualized in the present (Yerushalmi, 62-74). Gershom Scholem has argued that this mystical characteristic of Kabbalah is not present in classical Judaism and thus marvels at Judaism's vitality despite its absence (Scholem, 118-157). However, it is this very impulse which recognizes the salvific power of materiality that has maintained the pulse and lifeblood of Israel from ancient times. It is not the magic and conjuration that Scholem describes but the realization that God's presence in salvation history involves *corporeality* and is effectuated through God's people. Finally, Jewish tradition understands that liturgical expressions *bridge time and space*. We all are familiar with the Mishnaic adage: "In each and every generation let each person regard himself (*sic*) as though he had emerged from Egypt (M. *Pesachim* 10.5). Time and again, the Talmud describes a

Since these concepts occur both in biblical and in post-biblical traditions, both Jewish and Christian, I support this effort to work together to develop a Messianic theology of *mysterion*.

Toward that end, I offer two suggestions. The first is that we develop a theological anthropology that rightly understands the People of the Covenant—the people of Israel—as embodying this sacramental reality. Such an anthropology will take into account several essential axioms: first, that history is not merely the linear record of events past; it is a primary repository of theological meaning. As such, the Bible not only communicates past meaning but, in a timeless manner, conveys paradigms and models for future behavior. These paradigms and models, however, must be interpreted, and that interpretive, hermeneutical task is our responsibility. They also must be acted out by a people. Sacred time requires a people to sanctify it. The second axiom is that this future behavior—indeed future history itself—can be accessed and interpreted as *mysterion* through the traditional custodians of sacred meaning: myth, ritual, and liturgy. These also only have meaning in the context of the people gathered together. Yosef Yerushalmi states it well:

The historical events of the biblical period remain unique and irreversible. Psychologically, however, those events are *experienced*, cyclically, repetitively, and to that extent at least, atemporally. Nor were all Jewish holidays historically based to begin with. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are, at their core, numinous annual rites of repentance and atonement... Biblically, the Sabbath may have one rationale in Creation and another in the Exodus. Along the way it came to be experienced as a day beyond the bounds of historical time.¹⁸

In other words, while concrete history is central to Jewish experience, redemption requires Jewish people appropriating and actualizing that history through ritual, liturgy, and myth. These various categories are not mutually exclusive. Hopefully, once we comprehend the significance

zikaron being proclaimed with the blast of the shofar, drawing on the future, eschatological role played by the trumpet blast in biblical tradition.

¹⁸ Yerushalmi, 42.

of these categories, we, as Messianic Jews, will embrace unapologetically the elements of *mysterion* in Israel's sacred history.

This leads me to the third axiom, which is that memory, because it embraces materiality and signification, allows us as a people to advance mythical time in seeking our own role in history even as we experience it.¹⁹ Lawrence Hoffman, in an important essay on Jewish memory, demonstrates how the root *z.kh.r.* should be translated as “pointer” or signifier rather than memorial because of the way it functions syntactically, grammatically, and liturgically. He finds four of these signifiers in the Hebrew Bible. They were used, he argues, by ancient Israelites “to map their cultural universe.”²⁰ The four signifiers are:

1. ourselves [in the act of worship] (*zikhronenu*);
2. Jerusalem (*zikhron yerushalayim irkha*);
3. the messiah (*zikhron mashiach ben david*); and
4. the sound of the shofar (*zikhron teruah*).²¹

These allusions mark four points that we might argue comprise the *mysterion* of ancient Israel: holy people, holy place, Messiah, and eschaton.

Based on the above axioms, a consistent and comprehensive Messianic theological anthropology—a theology of the nature of the people of God—will be grounded in the above four signifiers: holy people, holy place, Messiah, and eschaton.

At this point, I shall take up the third signifier, Messiah, in order to demonstrate its link with the first—holy people. As mentioned above, corporate personality is foundational to the

¹⁹ Jewish memory itself is a sign, an indicator. Jewish collective memory conveys meaning—it points to something beyond itself. As Messianic Jews, we have strong precedent for recognizing memory as a major vehicle for transmitting God's redemptive work through Yeshua and, empowered by the Spirit, through God's people. In this time when multi-media hype has replaced reading as a primary avenue for information-gathering, we need to rediscover the liturgical role of memory, to rehearse for us past events, to teach us about those events, and, ultimately, to enable us to enter into and to perpetuate those events through mythic time and space. Jewish collective memory is seriously eroding in our time. This is an urgent task.

²⁰ Hoffman, 56-57.

²¹ Ibid., 57.

anthropological understanding of the ancient Israelites and of Jewish tradition in general. Therefore, it is important that we, as Messianic Jews, ground our own theological self-understanding in the notion of corporate personality as it is embodied in Yeshua. Our anthropology must state as its central proposition that Yeshua, crucified and exalted Son of God, incorporates and embodies Israel in God's salvation history. By the same token, we must impress upon ourselves that Israel—*all* Israel—through its continued presence in history, embodies Yeshua.

Corporate personality is a well-known characteristic of biblical thinking in general and of Jewish thinking in particular. Jewish tradition identifies *Adam*, the primordial human, as a sign of grace. So the Jerusalem Talmud states,

The grace and lovingkindness of God revealed themselves particularly in [God's] taking one spoonful of dust from the spot where in time to come the altar would stand, saying, "I shall take *adam* from the place of atonement that he may endure" (YT *Nazir* 56b; BR 14.8).

The *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac, is deeply paradigmatic for Jewish self-understanding, and particularly for Messianic self-understanding, as it is a leitmotif that speaks clearly to the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua as it relates to God's covenant faithfulness to Abraham's children of promise. This paradigmatic figure also speaks to the self-understanding of the people of Israel in our own historical experience during the Common Era.

So much is written about Jacob as paradigm, corporately embodying Israel, that I can scarcely scratch the surface in this paper. The Book of Jubilees, fragments of which were found in Qumran, has Abraham saying to Rebekah,

My daughter, watch over my son Jacob, for he shall be *in my stead* on the earth [emphasis mine] and for a blessing in the midst of the children of humanity and for the glory of the whole seed of Shem (Jub. 19.17).

Jacob, for this ancient tradition which predates the *Brit Chadashah*, comprehends the seed of Abraham just as Yeshua comprehends and embodies Abraham's seed in Gal. 3:16, where Sha'ul

writes, “Not, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many but as of one, ‘And to your seed,’ which is Messiah.” Other titles ascribed to Jacob are “first-born son,” “angel of God,” “ruling spirit,” “first-born of every creature.”²²

Why should a man, presented so inauspiciously in the Bible, rise to such exalted heights? Daniel Boyarin refers to Jacob as “a hypostasized second God.”²³ He recognizes that Jewish tradition, in exalting Jacob to be the embodiment of Israel, is exalting him to a status that defies the attribute of mere, temporal humanness. Jacob is Israel—Jacob is the patriarch upon whose head the name Israel is bestowed. It is because he embodies the people of Israel that later Jewish tradition, much of it predating the time of Yeshua, exalted him to such heights, even beyond Abraham.

No treatment of the nature of Messiah Yeshua would be complete without incorporating this theology of embodiment of the people in the exalted individual. So Matthew 2:15 cites Hosea 11:1, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” which, in that context, clearly refers to the people of Israel.

²² Jubilees also depicts Jacob, in his status as Israel embodied, as God’s first-born son: “And may the Lord God be a father to you and you the first-born son and to the people always” (19.29).

In the biblical story Jacob is a weak and unremarkable figure. Rachel “sells” Jacob to Leah for an evening of lovemaking in return for a fertility aid. When Leah instructs Jacob that he is to sleep with her, he passively obeys. He is merely a sexual pawn to them (Gen. 30). Most of his actions in life show him to be a fraudulent trickster or a passive victim. The tradition picks up on this incongruity. *Breishit Rabbah* describes him as “bent and weeping” (Cited in Neshama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit [Genesis]* [Jerusalem: WZO Dept. for Torah Education and Culture, 1981]: 265.). Yet Origen quotes *The Prayer of Joseph*, an ancient Jewish text that is no longer extant, as follows: “I am Jacob and Israel, I am angel of God, a ruling spirit ... called Jacob by men and Israel by God; a man seeing God because I am the first-born of every creature whom he caused to live” (*in Joanem* 2.31). *Breishit Rabbah* 43.2 states that Abraham was saved through the merits of Jacob, thus presenting Jacob as superior even to Abraham. For *Breishit Rabbah* 76.5 *et passim*, the Jordan River is dried up for Jacob’s merit—Jacob, who was chosen among all the other patriarchs. In *Sh’mot Rabbah* 17.3, God saw the blood on the doorposts and protected those within for the merit of Jacob and Isaac. Jacob suffers on Israel’s behalf: “When Israel suffers or commits a sin it is Jacob who feels it more than the other patriarchs” (Cited in Ginzberg, 255, n. 35, citing Tehillim 14, 114; PR 41, 174b). Jacob also is associated with Elijah in Jewish tradition, giving him a role to play in the eschaton (Ibid.). In the prophetic tradition of the Bible, idealization of Jacob reaches its peak in the Servant Songs of Isaiah. In Isaiah 49:3, God says, “You are my servant Israel, in whom I will show my glory.” Yet two verses later, the Servant speaks and proclaims that God has formed him in order “to bring Jacob back to him... that Israel might be gathered to him” (49:5). The Servant both *is* Israel and *redeems* Israel.

²³ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2004): 138.

Yeshua's birth story is laden with ritual meaning. In the Temptation narrative, Yeshua succeeds in the wilderness where Israel fails. Thus Yeshua, in his life, takes up Israel's failure and redeems it on her behalf. At his baptism, the voice from heaven states, "You are my beloved son" (Mark 1:11, par.). At his transfiguration, the voice calls him "My chosen son" (Luke 9:35, par.). The crucifixion story also contains myriads of references to themes of embodied suffering and atonement in the Bible. Virtually all the major turning points in Yeshua's life develop themes that comprise the traditions surrounding corporate personality: Yeshua takes on himself the suffering of Israel, the fate of Israel, the very life of Israel. Yet the tradition exalts Yeshua beyond the exalted patriarchs—beyond Jacob, beyond Abraham. John's gospel presents the highest christology: "Amen, amen I say to you, before Abraham existed, I am."²⁴

This brings us back full circle to the earliest Christian conceptions of *sacramentum*: the incarnation of God in the human flesh of "Jesus" is the only thing, for the church fathers, that can make real the *mysterion* of the liturgy. In Israel's story, on the other hand, God's incarnation in the midst of the carnal and human flesh of Israel only confirms that we have to do with a God who desires to enter into history and to do so through Israel. The incarnation of Yeshua must be seen in this light. The election of Israel does not merely anticipate the mystery of the incarnation as Christians claim; rather, the incarnation is constitutive of that election; that is, Israel's election

²⁴ Just as we experience the mythic presence of all Israel in our liturgical proclamations and acts, so, as Messianic Jews, we experience the mythic (that is salvific/dynamic) presence of Yeshua in our midst. Just as Yeshua signifies and actualizes God in history, so we signify and actualize Yeshua—God incarnate—in our midst. Conversely—and this is where we differ from Christian sacramental theologians—Yeshua also signifies and actualizes Israel in history, and thus, in our own liturgical enactments of Israel's corporate task on earth, we also recall and rehearse God's actualization of Yeshua's life, death, and resurrection in Israel. Gerhard Lohfink apprehended this when he stated, "The election of Israel is like an anticipation of the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God in this people" (Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God*, Trans. Linda M. Maloney [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999], 37). This idea of exalted figure embodying Israel has enjoyed an extremely long life span in Jewish tradition. Moshe Idel, in his book *Messianic Mystics*, discusses one medieval Jewish mystic who wrote, "Enoch is Metatron." Idel adds, "The first name out of the seventy names of Metatron is Yaho'el whose secret is Ben [Son!]." (85; cited in Boyarin, 138). Boyarin comments on the significance of finding such a "'dangerously' Christian-sounding text" (Ibid.). Boyarin also discusses Metatron, who is called "the Youth" (*noar*) in some texts (Ibid., 141). Compare the title that Yeshua used of himself, "Son of Man."

is an essential, constituent element of incarnation as presented in the *Brit Chadashah*. I cannot overestimate the importance of this distinction.

As part of a program of understanding the *Brit Chadashah* in light of its Jewish worldview, Scott Bader-Saye has argued that Christians are sorely in need of “re-Judaizing the Eucharist as an act of hermeneutical truth-telling.”²⁵ We need to go even farther. It is not only the eucharist that we Messianic Jews need to re-Judaize unapologetically; it is, in fact, our complete understanding of the *mysterion* of Yeshua, as God incarnate, embodying Israel within salvation history.

What are the implications of such an anthropology that sees us as active and vital agents of salvation in history embodied in Yeshua and embodying Yeshua in Jewish flesh in the present? For one, it causes us to see ourselves not as isolated individuals but in our intersubjectivity of relating to one another as a collective “we.”²⁶ Such a view will cause us to oppose the sin of individuality which so deeply infects contemporary evangelicalism. José Ignacio González Faus understands how essential this corporate anthropology is in identifying our task as the people of God. He points out the semiotic role of God’s people both in being the image of God and in pointing to the image of God. Then he adds,

To the extent that they falsify the person [that is, by denying this semiotic role], all forms of individualism will fail to realize the community, and, to the extent that they falsify the community, all forms of collectivism will fail to realize persons.²⁷

For González Faus, this corporate anthropology implies a task in history that denotes deep responsibility not just in how we behave as individuals but in how we structure our institutions and social hierarchies.²⁸

²⁵ Bader-Saye, 468.

²⁶ See the excellent article by José Ignacio González Faus, “Anthropology: The Person and the Community,” *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Editors Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, English Translation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993): 497-521.

²⁷ González Faus, 519.

After that very detailed account of my first suggestion, which was that we develop a new theological anthropology, I offer my second: We need to develop a new theological ethics that recognizes the *mitzvot* as theological *mysteria* and to incorporate them as such in our understanding of New Covenant living.²⁹

In Luke 22:20, Yeshua recalls the new covenant promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Implicit in this covenant is that Torah is now inscribed on Jewish flesh. A Torah inscribed on Jewish flesh can only be actualized, then, through Jewish flesh; that is, Jewish actions and Jewish behavior. To be sure, these Jewish actions are often liturgical acts, but they cannot be limited to liturgical reality alone. If we only proclaim Yeshua's redemptive work liturgically and do not carry it out in our flesh then the liturgical act loses its efficacy. God reveals Godself through the materiality, the physicality of food, blood, pottery, dishes, and bodily effluences. Therefore we need to firmly and insistently cast off the well-meaning but misguided appeals of Christians to disregard the physicality of the *mitzvot* as *mysterion*. Ancient liturgical treatments of becoming a *Bar Mitzvah* have been argued to have a sacramental, or semi-sacramental character.³⁰ In fact, the Mishnah itself is often described as being a great "secret" revealed to Israel.³¹ BT *Shabbat* 88a tells a story which implies that to fulfill *mitzvot* is a mystery, a secret (*raz*) which the Ministering Angels have revealed to Israel. BT *Kiddushin* 35a makes a direct correlation between Torah and the notions of "sign" and "memorial." Even

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Our most daunting and urgent task in this regard is to disentangle ourselves from a de-Judaized and distorted reading of Sha'ul's treatments of faith, works, promise, and law in his epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. Many of us have begun that journey and have developed a new and comprehensive hermeneutical approach to Sha'ul's letters. Perhaps more than any other, this task is an urgent one for us today. As part of this endeavor, we must reflect on the implications for ethics of this new hermeneutic.

³⁰ See Ginzberg, 248, n. 318.

³¹ Cited in Ginzberg, 1125; Cf. the Greek notion of *mysterion*. See YT *Peah* 2, 17a, PR 5, 14b, Tan B I, 88; II, 116-117; Tan *Vayera* 5; *Ki Tissa* 34; ShR 47.1; BR 14.10.

the prayer that we all know so well from the *Sh'ma*, “and you shall bind them [tefillin] as a sign (*l'oh*t) on your hand” (Deut. 6:8), recalls this greater significance carried by the *mitzvah* itself.

By recovering the characteristic of *mysterion*—memorial, sign, mystery—in all of these narratives, we, as Messianic Jews may find fresh approaches to develop a Yeshua-empowered Torah lifestyle. It raises *mitzvot* to a level of theological necessity. A notion of the theological necessity of *mitzvot* that is not derived from fundamentalist, pseudo-Orthodox perspectives, has been lacking for us. However, in developing this notion, we have a big hurdle to overcome. That hurdle is our overly individualized anthropology as discussed above. This individualized anthropology is what has generated the Christian concept of Torah, which is that it is a means of individual righteousness. But, as Sha'ul stated clearly in Galatians 2:15-16, such a notion has never defined Torah in biblical tradition. Lohfink gets it right again when he writes, “The Torah is not aimed at righteous individuals; its aim is to produce a righteous society... meant to prevent the existence of classes of poor and enslaved people in Israel.”³² It is only if we ignore this corporate understanding of Torah that we can conclude that it is not pertinent to or necessary for the daily life of the Messianic believer. God is present in the midst of Israel when the people of Israel *collectively* are actuating Torah in their communities. This is truly “sacramental” work.

Moreover, Sha'ul also shows us that God's purposes for Israel include ultimate vindication—in history. Richard B. Hays has shown how Sha'ul, when using the terms “justification” and “righteousness” in Romans, clearly draws on the biblical concepts of the vindication of the people of Israel and ultimately of God. Jeremiah proclaims, “HaShem has brought about our vindication (*tzidkoteinu*). Come and let us tell in Zion about the work of HaShem, our God” (51:10). Israel's vindication is a material act; it comes about when “no

³² Lohfink, 83.

longer shall they teach one another or say to each other, ‘Know HaShem,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ says HaShem” (Jer. 31:34). It comes about when Israel—and now we define that as an Israel empowered through and embodied by the risen Messiah—demonstrates, in the sight of the nations, the Torah that is inscribed on the very flesh of its people. This theme of vindication is crucial to my claim of the exigency of *mitzvot*, and it is integrally bound to the corporeality of the people of Israel. Ignacio Ellacuría notes:

It was ingenious of the early church, especially of Paul, to conceive of the church in bodily terms. We shall not go into the rich biblical and dogmatic bibliography on this concept of the church as a body, and as the body of Christ. We shall only point out what this truth of the corporeality of the church, and its bodily nature with respect to Christ, means for the historicization of salvation. Briefly, the historical corporeality of the church implies that the reality and the action of Jesus Christ are embodied in the church, so that the church will incorporate Jesus Christ in the reality of history.³³

What Ellacuría has apprehended is that corporeality, by its very nature, connotes activity in history. This theme of corporeality, which was so central to the entire scriptural tradition, firmly fixes salvation within the realm of physical time and space as opposed to a mystical and disembodied future. Ellacuría adds,

Seen theologically, *being embodied* corresponds to the Word, which “took flesh” so that it could be seen and touched, so that it could intervene in a fully historical way in the action of humanity. As St. Irenaeus said, if Christ is Savior by his divine condition, he is salvation by his flesh, by his historical incarnation, by being embodied among humanity.”³⁴

I have already discussed how it is not only important that Messiah is embodied by Israel in salvation history. He also embodies Israel because it is Israel’s task to participate in salvation

³³ Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Church of the Poor, Historical Sacrament of Liberation,” in Ellacuría, 1993: 545.

³⁴ Ibid. In addition, Ellacuría (546) writes, “Jesus was the historical body of God, the full actualization of God among humanity, and the church must be the historical body of Christ, just as Christ was of God the Father. The continuation of the life and mission of Jesus in history, which is the task of the church, animated and unified by the Spirit of Christ, makes the church his body, his visible and operative presence. This expression, historical body should not be seen as over against the more classical mystical body...” Ellacuría (547) argues against trying to separate mystical salvific events such as baptism from historical events such as the Exodus from Egypt. They cannot be seen as isolated from each other.

history, which is ongoing and not yet consummated (see Rom 8:19-22; 13:11).³⁵ Israel is both subject *and* object of salvation.

Once we see salvation as a historicized category, then *mitzvot* become extremely important as the actualized, historical performance of God's Realm on earth. Once more, Ellacuría's words are enlightening. He recognizes that a historicized notion of God's realm must involve acts that take place in history. He calls for "a theology that begins with historical acts and seeks to lead to historical acts, and therefore it is not satisfied with being a purely interpretive reflection; it is nourished by faithful belief in the presence of God within history."³⁶

Central to this action in history is the concept of Torah, including its values. Those values are those of mercy toward the poor and the disenfranchised, concern for those who are oppressed, and setting up systems of justice for the weak.

This is where Christianity went profoundly off-course. Juan Antonio Estrada describes it well:

First came an identification between church and society in the Roman Empire, then between the church and the Byzantine and western sector of the old Empire. This changed the idea of the catholicity of the people of God; *now it was less a matter of implanting Christianity in new peoples and enabling new churches to emerge, than of incorporating other peoples into the church itself, obliging them to accept the liturgy, discipline, language and traditions of the evangelizing church. This produced an 'ecclesiastical colonization', which was definitive in colonial expansion from the sixteenth century on, and which hindered the birth of autochthonous churches and other forms of Christianity besides the Latin and Greek* [emphasis mine]. The old equivalence between nation and people of God, which prevailed in ancient Israel, now reemerged throughout Europe. [It was more than just ecclesial unity: it was] the Romanization of Western Christianity and the later Europeanization of the Christianized peoples.³⁷

³⁵ See Bradshaw, 79, who cites J. Jeremias as arguing that the purpose of the *anamnesis* is to remind God that consummation has not yet occurred: "As often as the death of the Lord is proclaimed at the Lord's Supper ... God is reminded of the unfulfilled climax of the work of salvation.... The disciples represent the initiated salvation work before God and they pray for its consummation." Bradshaw sees this notion as lying very close to what Hoffman describes as *zikaron*.

³⁶ Ellacuría, 543.

³⁷ Juan Antonio Estrada, "People of God," in Ellacuría: 610.

The church's effort at historical embodiment of *mysterion*, built as it was on sinful systems of oppression, primarily of Jews but also of other disenfranchised people, cannot, and must not, be the model for us as Messianic Jews. In their rejection of Torah, they have failed the Torah. We have the opportunity to re-historicize Torah among the body of believers in Yeshua.

Does this Torah mean the Torah of the orthodox or of the pre-modern rabbis? No. We need to commit ourselves and our future generations to constructing a *halakhah* that is deeply shaped by the *Brit Chadashah* and is informed by our rabbinic precursors as well. But we must not approach the Torah of Yeshua as the Christian world has nor, ultimately, as other members of the Jewish world have approached Torah. One primary difference should be a deep reevaluation of our structures of hierarchy in light of the Torah's central, preferential treatment of the poor and the marginalized. For the most part, our synagogues reflect a strongly hierarchical and patriarchal model, much closer to the Roman Imperial model than to the Torah-based leadership models set forth by Yeshua (Matt 20:25-28; 23:10-11; Mark 9:35; 10:43-45; Luke 22:26-27). Rather than challenging these models of authority because of their violation of the central principles of Torah, we have embraced and internalized them.

How do we identify Yeshua's embodied Israel? They are the people who suffer in history as Yeshua suffered. Mark understood this, when he wrote, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45). It is a fact of history that the strong will oppress the weak; hence, the weak, as truly embodying Yeshua in their corporate presence on earth, will invariably suffer. We Messianic Jews must privilege this preferential "option for the most excluded"³⁸ if we are truly to actualize Yeshua's Torah in history.

³⁸ González Faus. 502.

When Yeshua came, he had one message. Luke tells us that “he was going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). Today’s Protestant churches preach “Jesus,” but few preach his kingdom. They ignore the pressing proclamation that was first and foremost in Yeshua’s own calling. It is this kingdom of God, this realm of God, that is Torah. Yeshua’s preaching encompassed a passionate concern for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the silenced. This comprised the Kingdom of God—this comprised Torah—as comprehended by Yeshua. Moreover, it is only through the work of the crucified, resurrected, and exalted Messiah, now sitting at the right hand of the throne on high, that we can receive the empowerment of the *ruach kodesh* to carry out this gospel of the kingdom, which involves being the crucified people in history.³⁹ This is a *deeply* Yeshua-centered message, and we must be about proclaiming it and realizing it in our world. We are not going to learn it, however, from powerful, wealthy, and highly individualized evangelicals. We must be willing to hear new and fresh voices, primarily from among those who have suffered, those who have truly been the crucified people in history.

Yosef Yerushalmi has reminded us that the great innovations in Jewish thinking have always come about in the ruptures and caesuras of Jewish history.⁴⁰ No greater rupture exists in history for Messianic Jews than the crucifixion of Yeshua and the subsequent rejection of Yeshua’s Jewish flesh by the church. It is upon this rupture, upon the ruins of this caesura, that we are called to build a new *zikaron*—a new memorial—a memorial that will point backward, backward to Sinai, backward to the stake on which Yeshua died, but also forward to a renewal of covenant with Israel and to a new message of hope for all who wish to join the crucified people of God.

³⁹ See Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Crucified People,” in Ellacuría: 580-603.

⁴⁰ Yerushalmi, 101.

POSTSCRIPT: There are several Hebrew terms that I have mentioned above that capture all or a part of the Greek term, *mysterion* (Latin: *sacramentum*). I propose that as part of our discussion we move toward some consensus in adopting one or more of these terms in order to find a place for this notion within our own theology. Here are some terms I have come up with to begin the discussion. Please do not limit your creativity to these terms alone: 1) *Zikaron* (Memorial); 2) *Zikaron y'sodit* (Foundational Memorial; *y'sodit* shares a root with the Hebrew word, *sod*, “secret” or “mystery”); 3) *Razei olam* (Eternal Mysteries); 4) *Oht Zikronit* (Memorial Sign); 5) *Zikaron v'sod* (a hendiadys: using two words to express a noun and its modifier; which can be translated as “Memorial Mystery” or “Mysterious Memorial”).

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