

# MESSIANIC JEWS AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

## Restoring an Historical Voice to the Contemporary Discussion

David J. Rudolph

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Jesus-believing Jews were of great import to Paul but not to later catholic theologians. As a student of the New Testament and a Messianic Jew,<sup>1</sup> I have a natural interest in my field's inherited tendency to overlook Messianic Jews. Often I come across books and articles that assume the non-existence of Messianic Jews or reflect disregard for how a particu-

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1. Messianic Jews, by historical definition, are Jesus-believing Jews who embrace Jewish identity and Jewish communal life as a matter of covenant responsibility (see n. 113). The twentieth century Messianic movement arose out of a milieu in which "Hebrew Christians" viewed their Jewishness primarily as a matter of ethnicity. Pioneer "Messianic Jews" (such as Joseph Rabinowitz, Mark Levy, and Paul Levertoff) rejected this orientation and maintained that their Jewishness was primarily a matter of covenant faithfulness. They argued that Messianic synagogues needed to be established so that Jesus-believing Jews could live out their covenant obligations in a Jewish community context. Recent socio-historical studies of Messianic Jews include: Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (New York: Cassell, 2000); Carol Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism: A Rabbi's Journey Through Religious Change in America* (Boston: Beacon, 1999); Shoshanah Feher, *Passing Over Easter: Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1998); Shoshanah Feher, "Managing Strain, Contradictions, and Fluidity: Messianic Judaism and the Negotiation of a Religio-Ethnic Identity," in *Contemporary American Religion: An Ethnographic Reader* (eds. Penny E. Becker and Nancy L. Eiesland; Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 1997), pp. 25-50; Gershon Nerel, "Messianic Jews in Eretz Israel, 1917-1967: Trends and Changes in Shaping Self Identity" (Hebrew; Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1995); Ruth I. Fleischer, "The Emergence of Distinctively Jewish Faith in Jesus, 1925-1993" (Ph.D. diss., King's College, University of London, 1995); Bruce Stokes, "Messianic Judaism: Ethnicity in Revitalization" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside, 1994); Carol Harris-Shapiro, "Syncretism or Struggle: The Case of Messianic Judaism" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1992); John R. Stone, "Messianic Judaism: a redefinition of the boundary between Christian and Jew," *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 3 (1991), pp. 237-52.

lar reading of a text, if translated into practice, would impact a twenty-first century Messianic synagogue.<sup>2</sup> Having said this, I have also observed that awareness of Messianic Judaism is increasing in the guild, a happening facilitated by extensive repudiation of supersessionism and recognition that Christianity was initially a sect of Jews in the matrix of pluriform Second Temple Judaism.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this study is to address the query, "Should there be a place for the Messianic Jewish perspective in Christian theology?" I will begin by noting select examples of how Messianic Jews today are treated as an excluded middle in many theological venues, and then turn to recent signs of change and the growing theological case that is being made for viewing Messianic Jews as fundamental to the church's identity. For the purpose of this essay, I sometimes write in the first-person to communicate the incontrovertible reality of my existence and perspective as a Messianic Jew.

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## OVERLOOKING MESSIANIC JEWS IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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A current example of Messianic Jews being overlooked in Christian theology occurs in Robert Jenson's article "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism" (2003).<sup>4</sup> After a compelling treatment of Christianity's need for a non-supersessionist theological interpretation of Judaism, Jenson goes on to make four statements that formulate his position on Jesus-believing Jews: First, he asserts that Jesus-believing Jews should be welcomed by the church as "gifts of God."<sup>5</sup> Second, he notes that "identifiable Jewishness does not long survive within the gentile-dominated church ... the church as it is will not provide it ... Jews within it constantly tend to vanish from sight as Jews."<sup>6</sup> Third, he argues that "Torah-obedience" is a divine means of ensuring Jewish continuity (a statement that few Christian theologians have dared to make).<sup>7</sup> Fourth, he reasons that the traditional (non-Messianic) synagogue is thereby God's vehicle of preserving the Jewish people. Jenson concludes:

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2. There are over 300 Messianic synagogues around the world; most are affiliated with the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC), the International Association of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS) and the International Messianic Jewish Alliance (IMJA).

3. James C. Paget, "Jewish Christianity," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism III* (eds. William Horbury et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 731-75; Alan E. Segal, "Jewish Christianity," in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (eds. Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata; Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 326-48.

4. Robert W. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: People of God* (eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 1-13.

5. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," p. 9.

6. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," pp. 9-10.

7. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," pp. 9-11.

Can there be a present body of the risen Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, in which the lineage of Abraham and Sarah so vanishes into a congregation of gentiles as it does in the church? My final – and perhaps most radical – suggestion to Christian theology (*not*, let me say again, to Jewish self understanding) is that, so long as the time of detour lasts, the embodiment of the risen Christ is whole only in the form of the church and an identifiable community of Abraham and Sarah’s descendants. The church and the synagogue are together and only together the present availability to the world of the risen Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Jenson’s first, second and third assertions are correct in my view. And the ecclesiological presupposition behind his fourth—that the church is a body of Jews and Gentiles—is in accord with the breadth of Paul’s portrayal of the church.<sup>9</sup> But Jenson must assume the non-existence of hundreds of Messianic synagogues around the world to arrive at the theologoumenon that non-Messianic synagogues are God’s only authorized way to preserve the Jewish people. I am a second-generation Messianic Jew, reared in a Messianic synagogue, and my children are third-generation Messianic Jews. Why doesn’t Jenson raise the Messianic Jewish option as a means of preserving the Jewish people within the church?<sup>10</sup> As Michael Wyschogrod recognizes, the church shirks its responsibility when it views assimilation of Jesus-believing Jews as unavoidable—“If it is God’s will that the Jewish people continue to exist as long as the world exists, then the church must preserve the identity of the Jewish people within the church and cannot depend on Jews who refuse to enter the church.”<sup>11</sup>

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8. Jenson, “Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism,” p. 13.

9. The textual basis for this will be discussed below.

10. Demographic and sociological studies suggest that Messianic synagogues contribute to Jewish continuity. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) asked, “Is being Jewish very important in your life?” According to the findings, 100% of all Messianic Jews interviewed said “Yes” to the survey question. This was higher than any other Jewish group interviewed, including Orthodox (77%), Conservative (58%) and Reform (40%). See Sergio DellaPergola, “New Data on Demography and Identification Among Jews in the U.S.,” *Jewish Intermarriage In Its Social Context* (ed. Paul Ritterband; New York: The Jewish Outreach Institute & The Center for Jewish Studies, 1991), pp. 84-86. The results of the 1990 NJPS have been confirmed by additional studies. Sociologist Shoshanah Feher concludes that, in Messianic synagogues, “congregants show a distinctive trend toward increased Jewishness: Those who grew up Jewish now value their heritage more fully.... In terms of ethnicity, they are more culturally Jewish and more proud of their Jewish heritage than many mainstream Jews” (Feher, *Passing Over Easter*, pp. 140-42). Reconstructionist rabbi Carol Harris-Shapiro, who studied the Messianic movement for ten years, concludes, “Until now, according to Jewish communal expectations, the amount of ritual indicates the strength of Jewish identity. Quantifiable Jewish ritual had dominated sociological research on Jewish continuity; what Jews do has classified them as ‘more’ or ‘less’ Jewish, more or less in touch with the ‘golden thread’ that binds Jews to their ancestors and to each other (S. Cohen 1988; Goldscheider 1986).... If ritual is the sole measure of Jewishness, the Messianic believers I knew in the congregation would score favorably.... If *doing* Jewish is *being* Jewish, ironically, Messianic Jews are more Jewish than many born Jews” (Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, p. 186).

11. Michael Wyschogrod, “Response to the Respondents,” *Modern Theology* 11:2 (April 1995), p. 233.

By furthermore identifying the traditional synagogue, and not the Messianic synagogue, with the Jewish wing of the body of Messiah, Jenson unwittingly engages in a novel form of replacement theology whereby traditional Jews replace Messianic Jews. Jews who do not believe in Jesus serve as the remnant of Israel, not Messianic Jews (contra Romans 11). Here Jenson departs from the many Pauline passages that identify the body of Messiah with *Jesus-believing Jews* and Gentiles.<sup>12</sup> Jenson's inattention to Messianic Jews and Messianic synagogues reflects systematic theology's traditional inattention to Jesus-believing Jews in its discussion of ecclesiology.

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Such unawareness of Messianic Jews is not unique; it is evident throughout the field of New Testament scholarship. Over the past twenty years there has been a veritable explosion of theological forums designed to facilitate exchange between Jewish and Christian scholars who share overlapping interests in the New Testament as Jewish literature. In these hundreds of colloquia, like the one in which Jenson's article appears, one rarely hears Messianic Jewish voices. Messianic Jews are the natural bridge between the synagogue and church but they have been largely absent from the dialogue. Consider, for example, the Paulist Press series "Studies in Judaism and Christianity: Exploration of Issues in the Contemporary Dialogue Between Christians and Jews." Among the many fine books published in this series, not one includes an essay by a Messianic Jew or a treatment of contemporary Messianic Judaism. Many of the articles allude to the "death of the church of the circumcision"<sup>13</sup> and the negative dejudaizing effect this had on the church's reading of the New Testament. But only a single author, Wyschogrod, raises the corollary argument that a revitalized Messianic Jewish community in the twenty-

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12. By qualifying his suggestion as "radical," Jenson acknowledges that his view is controversial and uncertain. He underscores this in the closing words of a 1999 lecture delivered at the Center of Theological Inquiry on the same topic: "I have given lectures where I was more sure of my positions...we have to say *why* God has maintained both the synagogue and the church, and the reasons must be propositions of specifically Christian theology. Perhaps my attempts to discern such reasons fail. Let their failure inspire others to do better" (Robert W. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Doctrine of Israel," *Reflections* 3 [1999]. Cited 29 August 2003. Online: <http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/jenson1.htm>). The comment "I have given lectures where I was more sure of my positions" is edited out of a second published version of the lecture in Robert W. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Doctrine of Israel," *Pro Ecclesia* 9:1 (Winter 2000), p. 56.

13. Vincent Martin, *A House Divided: The Parting of the Ways between Synagogue and Church* (New York: Paulist, 1995), p. 162. The concept of a "church of the circumcision" was present in early Christian thought, "In the mosaic of the Church of St. Sabina in Rome, made under Pope Celestine (422-432), at the sides of the great historical inscription there are two female figures, the 'Ecclesia ex circumcissione' on the left and the 'Ecclesia ex gentibus' on the right. Each has a book in her hand. Over the former is St. Peter, in the act of receiving the law from God's hand; over the latter is St. Paul" (Bellarmino Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians* [Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1971], p. 1).

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first century, and the church's embrace of it, can help return Christian theology to its Jewish roots.<sup>14</sup> This pattern of overlooking Messianic Jews is repeated in almost all recent works that identify themselves as post-Holocaust readings of the New Testament.<sup>15</sup> Though the Messianic Jewish reading of the New Testament is itself a post-Holocaust phenomenon,<sup>16</sup> Messianic Jewish theologians, for various reasons, have not been invited to make contributions to these volumes.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to overlooking Messianic Jews, some New Testament studies inadvertently patronize them. A classic example is the history of research on Romans 14. A large number of commentators interpret the spiritually "weak" in this passage to be Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles who maintain Jewish dietary and calendar distinctions. "'Weak' is a pejorative term applied to *Christians deficient in their faith*, and the 'weaknesses of the weak' were the result of their failure to realize the full measure of their freedom in Christ from the practices of the Law, as contrasted with the 'strong,' who along with Paul, have learned to 'trust God completely and without qualification.'"<sup>18</sup> Jewish life motivated by covenant responsibility is thus portrayed as a sign of spiritual immaturity.

I do not deny that the passage can be interpreted in this way. But given that Paul's main point is that Jesus-believers should not "look down on" or "judge" or "put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another" (14:3-4, 10, 13), there is reason to question this interpretation.<sup>19</sup>

14. Michael Wyschogrod, "A Jewish View of Christianity," in *Toward a Theological Encounter: Jewish Understandings of Christianity* (ed. Leon Klenicki; New York: Paulist, 1991), pp. 118-19.

15. E.g. Tod Linafelt, ed., *A Shadow of Glory: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz, eds., *Jesus, Judaism & Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville and London: WJK, 2002).

16. "After Auschwitz, the Jews, even Christian Jews, cannot forget that they are Jews" (Jacques B. Doukhan, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002], 83ff.).

17. Why are Messianic Jewish theologians not invited to make contributions to these works? Is it due to an assumption that Messianic Jewish theologians do not exist? Or does it reflect a lack of initiative on the part of editors to find them? Or, dare I say, is there concern at times that Jewish (non-Messianic) contributors may choose not to be involved in a project if there is Messianic Jewish participation? Such a concern may not be unwarranted. There is a "standard operating procedure" in many Jewish-Christian dialogue circles that Messianic Jews are *persona non grata* (Mitch L. Glaser, "Authentic Dialogue Between Messianic and Non-Messianic Jews... A Miracle Could Happen Here!" *Mishkan* 36 [2002], p. 88). This is justified (so it is argued) on the grounds that to give Messianic Jews a seat at the dialogue table is to legitimize Messianic Judaism. Probably all three factors are involved.

18. The summary is from Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 88. Nanos' last quote is from James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38b; Dallas: Word, 1988), p. 798.

19. See Nanos' discussion of "Luther's trap" (Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, pp. 91-94).

Is not “weak” condescending language? Would this not have been a stumbling block to the very people Paul was standing up for? Surely, there is something we are missing here. Was Paul really saying that indifference to the covenant was a sign of spiritual strength and mindfulness of covenant responsibilities was a sign of spiritual weakness? Would this not have encouraged Jews to abandon their Jewishness and stop circumcising their children?<sup>20</sup> (*contra* Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 7:18—*me epispastho*—a metonymy for “do not cease being Jewish”).<sup>21</sup> And would this not have led to a church of *all* Gentiles and no Jews, a monstrosity that Paul never envisioned?

Returning to the subject at hand, the classic reading labels the entire Messianic Jewish community as spiritually immature. The damage to relationship done by such a caricature necessitates that alternative interpretations be carefully weighed, evaluated and exhausted before the traditional reading is accepted. But this does not often occur. Until recently, alternative interpretations of Romans 14 have received little attention. Currently, relatively few scholars are interacting with the readings proposed by Campbell, Tomson and Nanos.<sup>22</sup> This lack of concern with patronizing Messianic Jews unfortunately conveys the impression that Christian theology is oblivious to the Messianic Jewish community. As with the church’s legacy of anti-Jewish readings of the New Testament in general, interpretations of Romans 14 often overlook how theology can impact living communities of Messianic Jews today.

James Dunn’s “New Perspective on Paul” is another example of how contemporary Christian theology can be at variance with Messianic Jewish perdurance. Dunn has made a seminal contribution to Pauline

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20. Barclay concurs, “For it seems to me that while, *on the surface* and *in the short term*, Paul protects the Law-observant Christians, in the long term and at a deeper level he seriously undermines their social and cultural integrity” (John M. G. Barclay, “Do we undermine the Law? A Study of Romans 14.1-15:6,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* [ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], pp. 306ff.). Originally published in 1996 by J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). See also John M. G. Barclay, “Neither Jew nor Greek: Multiculturalism and the New Perspective on Paul,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 212.

21. “First let us note that the images of ‘foreskin’ and ‘circumcision’ are metonymies for being gentile or Jewish, and that in Antiquity, which knew of no ‘secularized Jews,’ this either meant being non-Jewish or an observant Jew” (Peter J. Tomson, “Paul’s Jewish Background in View of His Law Teaching in 1 Cor 7,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, pp. 267-69).

22. William S. Campbell, “‘All God’s Beloved in Rome!’ Jewish Roots and Christian Identity,” in *Celebrating Romans: Template for Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 76-77; Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), pp. 236-44; Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, pp. 85-165. For one of the few critical responses to Nanos’ reading of Romans 14, see Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Why the ‘Weak’ at Rome Cannot be Non-Christian Jews,” *CBQ* 62 (2000), pp. 64-82. Nanos’ 37 page rejoinder from July 14, 2000 is published online. Cited 21 December 2004. Online: <http://mywebpages.comcast.net/nanosmd/projects.html>.

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studies through his many writings that emphasize the Jewishness of early Christian thought. My purpose in challenging Dunn's perspective on Jesus-believing Jews is not to call into question his overall Jewish portrait of Paul and the early church, a view with which I largely agree, but merely to point out how even careful scholarship emphasizing the Second Temple Jewish *Sitz im Leben* of the New Testament can lead to practical theology that compromises the existence of Messianic Jews.

Dunn's 1983 article "The New Perspective on Paul"<sup>23</sup> and his 1985 follow-up "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14)"<sup>24</sup> lay out his thesis that Israel's boundary markers of identity (e.g., circumcision, calendar and dietary distinctions) were eliminated in the New Covenant so that an outward "distinction" no longer exists between Jew and Gentile in the people of God.<sup>25</sup> In a series of later articles, Dunn argues that Jewishness no longer has a God-ordained external, ritual dimension to it. All of Jewish life and identity is now internal.<sup>26</sup> Dunn concedes that Paul's "teaching undermined the social and cultural integrity of the observant Jewish believer"<sup>27</sup> but he does not address the implication of this: that Paul's teaching leads to the non-existence of an identifiable Jewish wing of the church. If being a Jew "loses any significance,"<sup>28</sup> and the boundary marker between Jew and Gentile is erased, will not pressure to assimilate gain the upper hand and the church become all Gentile? Either Dunn has no problem with an all-Gentile church or he holds the optimistic view, common in New Testament studies today, that an "indifferent" and "optional" approach to Jewish life is sufficient to preserve Jews within the church. I would suggest, however, on historical

23. James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL* 65 (1983), pp. 95-122. Reprinted with an Additional Note in James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: WJK, 1990), pp. 183-214.

24. James D. G. Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14)," *NTS* 31 (1985), pp. 523-42. Reprinted with an Additional Note in Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, pp. 215-41.

25. James D. G. Dunn, "Neither Circumcision nor Uncircumcision, but. . . (Gal 5.2-12; 6.12-16; cf. 1 Cor 7.17-20)," in *La Foi Agissant par L'amour (Galates 4,12 - 6,16)* (Rome: Benedictina, 1996), p. 109; Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 238.

26. "'Jew' as an ethnic identifier, as a term signifying distinctiveness from other nations, was no longer relevant; in contrast, the positive identification signified by 'Jew' was nothing observable by others but indicated primarily a relationship with God" (James D. G. Dunn, "Who Did Paul Think He Was? A Study of Jewish-Christian Identity," *NTS* 45 [1999], pp. 181-82).

27. James D. G. Dunn, "In Search of Common Ground," in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, pp. 325-26. Cf. Dunn, "Neither Circumcision nor Uncircumcision," p. 118. To be fair, a noticeable shift in emphasis may be detected in Dunn's recent writings on Jewish Christian identity. For example, in 1999, Dunn speaks of Jewish distinctiveness as "no longer relevant" for Paul (Dunn, "Who Did Paul Think He Was?" pp. 181-82). In 2002, circumcision and Jewish distinctiveness "were of less importance" in Paul's "priorities" than circumcision of the heart (James D. G. Dunn, "The Jew Paul and His Meaning for Israel," in *A Shadow of Glory*, p. 209; see n. 40).

28. James D. G. Dunn, "Paul: Apostate or Apostle of Israel?" *ZNW* 89 (1998), p. 267.

and sociological grounds, that the latter approach is only a transitional means of arriving at a church devoid of Jews.<sup>29</sup> Daniel Boyarin, who follows Dunn's New Perspective reading of Paul, agrees that the end result of this position is a wholly Gentile church:

While Paul's impulse toward the founding of a non-differentiated, non-hierarchical humanity was laudable in my opinion, many of its effects in terms of actual lives were not. In terms of ethnicity, his system required that all human cultural specificities—first and foremost, that of the Jews—be eradicated, whether or not the people in question were willing. Moreover, since of course, there is no such thing as cultural un specificity, merging of all people into one common culture means ultimately (as it has meant in the history of European cultural imperialism) merging all people into the dominant culture.<sup>30</sup>

Boyarin goes on to qualify his statement and concludes that Paul did not intend for Jews to remain Jewish:

It is important that this claim not be misunderstood. I am not suggesting, of course, that Paul literally called for cultural uniformity in the sense that he demanded that people speak alike, dress alike, and eat alike. Indeed, one could argue—and it has been argued—that Paul's declarations that observances of the Law are adiaphora, matters of indifference, represent rather a cultural 'tolerance.' His argument is precisely *against* those who think that what one eats is of significance. It is, however, this very tolerance that deprives difference of the right to be different, dissolving all others into a single essence in which matters of cultural practice are irrelevant and only faith in Christ is significant. Thus for a Pharisee of Paul's day or a religious Jew of today, to be told that it is a matter of *indifference* whether Jews circumcise their sons or not, and therefore that there is no *difference* between Jews and gentiles hardly feels like regard for Jewish difference. Here differences persist, it seems, between many Jewish and Christian readers of Paul...that "Paul believed that the Gospel gave him the freedom to be flexible in his keeping of Jewish food laws" (Campbell 1992, iii)—a claim with which I agree entirely—for me thoroughly undermines any argument that Paul intended Jews to remain Jewish.<sup>31</sup>

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29. E.g. more than 400,000 Jews became Christians between the early nineteenth century and World War II but less than one percent of their descendants are self-identified Jews today. See Mitch L. Glaser, "A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe 1900-1950" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998), pp. 159-61; Philip Cohen, *The Hebrew Christian and His National Continuity* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1909), p. 37; Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 49-51; Rachel L. E. Kohn, "Ethnic Judaism and the Messianic Movement," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 29 (1987), p. 89. With rare exception, even the children of "Hebrew Christian" leaders assimilated into Gentile Christianity and did not raise Hebrew Christian children. Those who argue for the theoretical possibility of Jewish Christian continuity without external boundary markers of identity typically offer no socio-historical evidence to support their case.

30. Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 8

31. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, pp. 9-10; cf. pp. 32, 290 n. 10.



Because self-identified "Jewish" New Testament scholars have a personal stake in Jewish survival, they are more sensitized to readings that anticipate Jewish obliteration in the church.

Dunn's New Perspective reading, if followed through, can only be regarded as an indirect form of supersessionism since it results in the assimilation of all Jesus-believing Jews into Gentile Christian culture, leading to the non-existence of Jews in the church.

Boyarin's observation that "differences persist, it seems, between many Jewish and Christian readers of Paul" over this issue can be extended to the field of New Testament studies. Because self-identified "Jewish" New Testament scholars have a personal stake in Jewish survival, they are more sensitized to readings that anticipate Jewish obliteration in the church.<sup>32</sup> Positively stated, Jewish scholars (among whom I include Messianic Jews) are naturally interested in the question of whether Paul's teachings, when translated into practice, result in Jewish continuity. Boyarin's concern with Paul's supposed "indifference to Jewish difference" is thus unapologetically informed by his being an "actively practicing (post)modern rabbinic Jew."<sup>33</sup> Not a few New Testament scholars, by contrast, are vaccinated against a *Pador vador*<sup>34</sup> mindset by supersessionist Christian paradigms and therefore typically think only in terms of the feasibility of Paul's teachings for one generation of Jesus-believing Jews. This makes it difficult to see that erasure of Israel's boundary markers of identity inevitably results in the erasure of Messianic Jews from the church.<sup>35</sup> If we recognize with Jenson that Torah-obedience "alone can and does hold the lineage of Abraham and Sarah together,"<sup>36</sup> then Dunn's New Perspective reading, if followed through, can only be regarded as an indirect form of supersessionism since it results in the assimilation of all Jesus-believing Jews into Gentile Christian culture, leading to the non-existence of Jews in the church.<sup>37</sup>

Though Dunn continues to stand by his New Perspective reading of Paul, the existence of a viable twenty-first century Messianic Jewish

32. E.g. Wyschogrod's reflection, "In short, if all Jews had followed the advice of the church, there would no longer be any Jews in the world today" (Michael Wyschogrod, "Christianity and Mosaic Law," *Pro Ecclesia* 2:4 [1993], p. 458).

33. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, p. 4.

34. Hebrew for "from generation to generation." See Psalm 79:13.

35. Wright's New Perspective reading exhibits the same problem but is a more direct form of economic supersessionism, "Paul explicitly and consciously transfers blessings from Israel according to the flesh to the Messiah, and thence to the church...Gal. 2-4 argues precisely that the worldwide believing church is the true family of Abraham, and that those who remain as 'Israel according to the flesh' are in fact the theological descendants of Hagar and Ishmael, with no title to the promises" (N. T. Wright, "The Messiah and the People of God: A Study in Pauline Theology with Particular Reference to the Argument of the Epistle to the Romans" [D. Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1980], p. 193; cf. pp. 135-40, 194-97). See also N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 150, 155, 163-64, 230, 237, 250. For a critique of Wright's position on Israel and Jewish continuity, see Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp. 153-61; Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), pp. 153-84; Scott Bader-Saye, *Church and Israel After Christendom: The Politics of Election* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999), 95-97.

36. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," p. 9.

37. "Thus the price Dunn pays to render Paul more explicable is ethnic Israel itself" (Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, p. 341 n. 157).

community has caused Dunn to reflect more deeply on the theological implications of a contemporary Jewish wing of the church. As early as 1991, Dunn acknowledges that it is an issue of relevance to New Testament studies:

*The parting of the ways was more between mainstream Christianity and Jewish Christianity than simply between Christianity as a single whole and rabbinic Judaism.* Whether Jewish Christianity could or should have been retained within the spectrum of catholic Christianity is an important question which it may now be impossible to answer. Within two or three centuries it had ceased to be important anyway, once the Jewish Christian sects withered and died, presumably by absorption into rabbinic Judaism on the one side, and into catholic Christianity on the other, or just by the slow death of failure to regenerate. But it is a question which we need to address now with renewed seriousness in the light of the current phenomena of messianic Jews (Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah) in North America and Israel.<sup>38</sup>

*Should Messianic Jews exist today? If so, should there be a place for the Messianic Jewish perspective in Christian theology?*

Should Messianic Jews exist today? If so, should there be a place for the Messianic Jewish perspective in Christian theology? A growing number of theologians since the end of the twentieth century have begun to echo these questions raised by Dunn. We now turn to the evidence for this.

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#### GROWING CONSCIOUSNESS OF MESSIANIC JEWS IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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The "Symposium on 'Jewish-Christians and the Torah,'" in the April 1995 issue of *Modern Theology*, was a groundbreaking discussion between Jewish and Christian theologians. The issue opens with the publication of an edited letter by Wyschogrod, an Orthodox Jew, to a "Jewish Christian" friend, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger.<sup>39</sup> A response follows by three Jews and three Christians, one of whom is a Jewish convert to Christianity. The convert, Ellen Charry, does not identify as a "Messianic Jew" but maintains that Judaism and Christianity are mutually exclusive religions. An epilogue follows by Jewish theologian Peter Ochs. Wyschogrod then offers a "Response to the Respondents." Notably, no Messianic Jews were invited to participate in the symposium and Charry was in no position to represent Messianic Jews due to her theologically motivated relinquishment of Jewish identity.<sup>40</sup> Ironically, Wyschogrod was the only participant in the symposium who

*The convert, Ellen Charry, does not identify as a "Messianic Jew" but maintains that Judaism and Christianity are mutually exclusive religions.*

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38. James D. G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991), pp. 239-40.

39. Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (ed. R. Kendall Soulen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 202

40. "It should be stated in fairness, however, that a prominent Jewish Christian had been challenged to be part of the debate; but, unfortunately, he chose not to do so. High establishment figures are usually not the best candidates for such exploratory ventures; bureaucratic involvement tends to impose political restrictions" (Isaac C. Rottenberg,

*Many would agree that it is valuable, even proper, when discussing a religious or ethnic group at a symposium to include a scholar of that group in the conversation.*

defended the existence of contemporary Messianic Jews, and his case rested in part on the basis of New Testament ecclesiology.<sup>41</sup> We will return to Wyschogrod's position below.

Many would agree that it is valuable, even proper, when discussing a religious or ethnic group at a symposium to include a scholar of that group in the conversation. The field of New Testament studies does this when it purposefully seeks to include mainstream Jewish scholars in conversations on Judaism and Christian origins. We may now be witnessing the beginnings of a similar development with regard to Messianic Jewish scholars, or at least scholars of Messianic Judaism, at conferences on ancient Jewish Christians and Jewish Christianity.

In July 1998, a colloquium on Jewish Christians in antiquity was held in Jerusalem, the papers of which were later published in *Le Judéo-Christianisme Dans Tous Ses États*.<sup>42</sup> The colloquium is noteworthy because the organizers included a paper on "Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews" by Gershon Nerel. The conference organizers thus sought to incorporate into the breadth of historical and theological discussion a Messianic Jewish perspective. But more than that, they invited a Messianic Jewish scholar to make the contribution. Nerel received his Ph.D. from Hebrew University and served as Israel Secretary for the International Messianic Jewish Alliance from 1993-2001.

A similar colloquium was held in November 2001 entitled "The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature" sponsored by the Institutum Iudaicum, Belgium. Relevant to our discussion is that the colloquium organizers included a paper on the Messianic Jewish movement by Dan Cohn-Sherbok,<sup>43</sup> a Reform rabbi and professor of Judaism at the University of Wales and author of *Messianic Judaism* (2000). The paper presented a Messianic Jewish perspective on a number of issues relevant to Christian theology. In the Preface to the conference

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"Torah and Kerygma: Fulfillment as Validation of the Law," pp. 22-23. Cited 18 August 2003. Online: <http://www.members.aol.com/revicr/Table.htm>). The symposium organizers, of course, could have asked someone else.

41. Wyschogrod does not condone Messianic Judaism. He argues that Christian theologians should defend Messianic Jewish existence based on New Testament texts and the reasonable implications of post-supersessionist Christian theology. From the standpoint of Orthodox Judaism, he regards Messianic Jews as fellow Jews but not "good Jews." They are apostates but should be treated with respect. See Michael Wyschogrod, "Letter to a Friend," *Modern Theology* 11:2 (April 1995), p. 167; Wyschogrod, "Response to the Respondents," pp. 230-31; David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod, *Jews and "Jewish Christianity"* (New York: Ktav, 1978).

42. Simon Mimouni and F. Stanley Jones, eds., *Le Judéo-Christianisme Dans Tous Ses États*. Lectio Divina Hors Série. Actes Du Colloque de Jérusalem 6-10 Juillet 1998 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001).

43. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "Modern Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism," in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (eds. Peter Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), pp. 287-98.

volume, the organizers note that the “presence of Jewish Christians or Messianic Jews in our midst is to be welcomed as an important fact both theologically and historically, but that in our post-Shoah era, more than ever, relations between Jews and Christians must be based on mutual respect and abstention from mission and active proselytism.”<sup>44</sup>

There have been other recent colloquiums and projects that have served to bridge the gap in theology between ancient and modern Jesus-believing Jews.<sup>45</sup> For example, a number of distinguished New Testament scholars have contributed to the forthcoming multivolume work *The History of Jewish Believers in Jesus from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Oskar Skarsaune.<sup>46</sup> Skarsaune has close ties to the Messianic community in Israel and has invited Messianic Jewish contribution to the project.<sup>47</sup> The work is notable in part because it offers a reassessment of the commonly held view that “Jewish Christianity” vanished in late antiquity. An increasing number of scholars are now raising an historical counter-narrative, which maintains that identifiable Jesus-believing Jews continued to exist through the centuries, but that Christian and Jewish historians on the whole ignored their presence to perpetuate the myth of a definitive “Parting of the Ways.”<sup>48</sup>

Outside of the “ancient Jewish Christian” colloquium context, overtures have been made to include Messianic Jews in the Jewish-Christian conversation. In the closing line of his “Response to the Respondents” in *Modern Theology*, Wyschogrod makes the following appeal, “One final word: my letter is ultimately most relevant for Jewish Chris-

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44. Peter Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry, “Preface,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, p. VI.

45. E.g. Stanley N. Gundry and Louis Goldberg, eds., *How Jewish is Christianity: 2 Views on the Messianic Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) and Mark Kinzer’s forthcoming work on Messianic Jewish theology by Brazos Press.

46. For an outline of volume one, see online: <http://www.caspari.com/jbj/vol1.html>. Cited 16 September 2003.

47. Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), p. 445.

48. This is the thesis of Daniel Boyarin’s book *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). John Gager suggests that “all too often we have become the victims not so much of our expertise but rather of history’s winners, those who not only sought to erase the voices of the losers from our records but who also rewrote the surviving records in such a way that these others – in our case Jewish Christians of every stripe – were made to appear either as a tiny minority, or as an evanescent trace on our historical map, or as a deviation from the straight line that moves from Jesus to the position of the winners – in short, as a despicable heresy... To be blunt, it was very much in the interest of triumphant Christian elites – theological as well as ecclesiastical – to stress separation and to create the image of a definitive ‘Parting of the Ways’” (John G. Gager, “Did Jewish Christians See the Rise of Islam?” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* [eds. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], pp. 361-72). The theological counterpart of this alternative narrative is Paul’s stance that God is faithful to preserve a Jesus-believing remnant of Israel (Rom 11:1-16).

Noting the wording  
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tians. It is their reply that I await most."<sup>49</sup> (The present essay constitutes my reply to Wyschogrod; I look forward to his response). Similarly, in *Who Was Jesus? A Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, edited by Paul Copan and Craig Evans, contemporary Messianic Jews are one of the discussion topics between Jewish New Testament scholar Peter Zaas and Christian theologian William Craig. The editors comment in the Preface, "We hope that this book will encourage further friendly dialogue between Jews and Christians—and even (dare we say!) Christians who happen to be Jewish."<sup>50</sup> Along these lines, *The Princeton Theological Review* in 2001 invited Carl Kinbar, a Messianic Jewish theologian, to offer a reply to Ellen Charry's article "The Other Side of the Story," a synopsis of the Jewish perspective on Jewish-Christian dialogue.<sup>51</sup> Kinbar's response, "Missing Factors in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," addresses Charry's support for the sixth statement in *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*, which contends that "humanly irreconcilable differences between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture." Noting the wording "Jews and Christians," Kinbar calls into question the absence of Messianic Jews in the Jewish-Christian conversation.<sup>52</sup>

Kinbar goes on to  
address the  
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circles.

The problem with this passage is that there are only two parties at the table — Jews and Christians, self-defined as mutually exclusive groups. From the perspective only of these two groups, the statement makes some sense. However, it turns out that there is another party, one who is not invited to the table, one whose very existence is a commentary on, and challenge to, the dialogue. That uninvited group is Messianic Judaism, a movement of over 200 synagogues in the United States alone, congregations of Jews and like-minded Gentile believers worshipping together. Simply put, Messianic Judaism embraces Jesus as Messiah while also retaining adherence to Torah and Jewish tradition. The existence of this movement is the most crucial missing factor in the Jewish-Christian dialogue.<sup>53</sup>

Kinbar goes on to address the underlying reason why Messianic Jews are typically excluded from ecumenical dialogue circles:

49. Wyschogrod, "Response to the Respondents," p. 241.

50. Paul Copan and Craig A. Evans, *Who Was Jesus? A Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Louisville: WJK, 2001), p. viii.

51. Ellen T. Charry, "The Other Side of the Story," *The Princeton Theological Review* 8:2&3 (April 2001), pp. 24-29.

52. Wolfhart Pannenberg also takes up the "excluded middle" status of Messianic Jews in thesis six of *Dabru Emet*, "The 'messianic Jews' intend to remain Jews while professing Jesus to be the Messiah. Sooner or later Christian-Jewish dialogue will have to take notice of this fact...The communities of 'messianic Jews' in their own way give testimony to the next thesis that the new 'relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice'" (Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Symposium on Dabru Emet," *Pro Ecclesia* 9:1 [Winter 2002], p. 9). Barry Cytron responds to Pannenberg's comment on pp. 16-17.

53. Carl Kinbar, "Missing Factors in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *The Princeton Theological Review* 8:2&3 (April 2001), pp. 32-33.

Why is Messianic Judaism not part of the Jewish-Christian dialogue?...When we are at the table the dichotomy of "Jesus or Torah" is exposed as false. The other parties must either interact with our claims or walk away. The very existence of Messianic Judaism says that both the Jewish community and the church erred long ago in defining themselves in opposition to one another... In a democratic State where anything and everything is on the table for discussion, why this call for silence, embraced by so many Christians and Jews? Again, I believe that the root of the matter is that, as Dr. Charry states, "On both sides of the argument, self-definition is at stake." This is also why Messianic believers are not invited to the table. Our very presence declares that this forbidden dialogue is not dead and will not die. Our very presence challenges both Jew and Christian to take another look at their presuppositions.<sup>54</sup>

*The very existence of Messianic Judaism says that both the Jewish community and the church erred long ago in defining themselves in opposition to one another.*

Charry's rejoinder offers little interaction with Kinbar's arguments.<sup>55</sup> She maintains her view that "the religion attributed to Jesus by the Gospels overturns 'nearly every Jewish belief and practice' ... Christians do not worship a Jewish messiah—they worship the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God Incarnate."<sup>56</sup> From Charry's vantage point, of radical discontinuity, Messianic Jews are open to the charge of being a "duplicitous *tertium quid* that has neither Jewish nor Christian theological integrity no matter how sincere its adherents may be."<sup>57</sup>

Despite such rebuff, it would appear that recognition of Messianic Jews is slowly growing in the New Testament studies community as evidenced by the above colloquiums and projects on Jewish Christianity, as well as invitations to include Messianic Jews in Jewish-Christian dialogue. As Arthur Glasser noted over a decade ago in "Messianic Jews, Dialogue, and the Future," placed between Novak's and Wyschogrod's essays in *Christians and Jews Together*, "Here is a growing movement that can no longer be disregarded."<sup>58</sup> David Noel Freedman takes this observation a step further by asserting that Messianic Jews are of immense benefit to Jewish-Christian dialogue. In his "Es-

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54. Kinbar, "Missing Factors in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," pp. 33, 35-36. That nascent Catholic Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism perceived the same threat to self-identity is argued in John G. Gager, "Jews, Christians and the Dangerous Ones in Between," in *Interpretation of Religion* (eds. Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein; Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 254-55.

55. Ellen T. Charry, "Response to Carl Kinbar," *The Princeton Theological Review* 8:2&3 (April 2001), pp. 38-39.

56. Charry, "Response to Carl Kinbar," p. 38.

57. Charry, "Response to Carl Kinbar," p. 39. Wyschogrod ("Response to the Respondents," p. 235) notes, "Charry's understanding of Christianity requires the disappearance of the Jewish people. I do not think that is true Christian teaching." An historical and theological case for Messianic Judaism will be propounded in part three of this essay.

58. Arthur F. Glasser, "Messianic Jews, Dialogue, and the Future," in *Christians and Jews Together: Voices from the Conversation* (eds. Donald G. Dawe and Aurelia T. Fule; Louisville: Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, Presbyterian Church USA, 1991), p. 107. See Arthur F. Glasser, "Messianic Jews — What they represent," *Themelios* 16:2 (1991), p. 14.

*Freedman suggests that Messianic Jews, like Jesus-believing Jews of antiquity, are well placed to serve as natural conduits between church and synagogue.*

say on Jewish Christianity," Freedman suggests that Messianic Jews, like Jesus-believing Jews of antiquity, are well placed to serve as natural conduits between church and synagogue.<sup>59</sup>

...the Jewish Christians were able to have active and effective relations with Gentile Christians and at the same time retain operating status in the non-Christian Jewish community. Thus a link was forged, however tenuous, between Christianity and Judaism and it persisted as long as the Jewish Christian community continued to exist. This halfway house with conduits to both sides, could serve as meeting place and mediator, communication center and symbol of the continuity to which both enterprises belonged...A modern Jewish Christianity might serve again to demonstrate that Christianity and Judaism are not only compatible but inevitably belong together. It might also serve as a bridge across a chasm of hostility, a meeting place for ancient enemies. And it might act as an inspiration for all those of both camps who seek that better way of life and faith promised by both Christianity and Judaism.<sup>60</sup>

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### SHOULD THERE BE A PLACE FOR THE MESSIANIC JEWISH PERSPECTIVE IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY?

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*The trend to include Messianic Jews in the conversation has been concomitant with a growing case for viewing Messianic Jews and the Messianic Jewish perspective as fundamental to the church's identity.*

The trend to include Messianic Jews in the conversation has been concomitant with a growing case for viewing Messianic Jews and the Messianic Jewish perspective as fundamental to the church's identity. A number of recent studies on Israel and the church have pointed Christian theology in this direction. For example, the posthumous publication of *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) by John Howard Yoder, edited by Michael Cartwright and Peter Ochs, represents one of the boldest statements to date by a Christian theologian in support of Messianic Jewish existence and its ecclesiological significance.<sup>61</sup> A professor of theology at Notre Dame, Yoder was active in Jewish-Christian dialogue and maintained a connection to the Israeli Messianic Jewish community through the Mennonite church.<sup>62</sup> In *The Jewish-Christian*

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59. Dunn likewise notes that Messianic Jews "offer fresh bridging possibilities, since the Jew/Christian spectrum is more complete now than at any time since the early decades (when Jewish Christianity was a vital option)" (Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, p. 250).

60. David Noel Freedman, "An Essay on Jewish Christianity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 6:1 (1969), p. 86. For a response to Freedman's article, see Robert Hann, "The Undivided Way: The Early Jewish Christians as a Model for Ecumenical Encounter," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 14:2 (Spring 1977), pp. 233-48. Following Freedman, Hans Küng sees potential theological benefits of a modern-day Jewish Christianity, "Thus, we find in Jewish-Christian theology a critical corrective measure against a Christology that is vulnerable to the danger of docetism and to spiritualization" (Hans Küng, "Jewish Christianity and Its Significance for Ecumenism Today," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* [eds. Astrid B. Beck, Andrew H. Bartelt, Paul R. Raabe et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], p. 592).

61. John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (eds. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

62. Michael G. Cartwright, "Appendix B: Mennonite Missions in Israel and the Peace

*Schism Revisited*, Yoder utilizes Messianic Jewish terminology to stress the Jewishness of the early church. He refers to the early Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles as “Messianic Jews” and “Messianic Gentiles.”<sup>63</sup> Their places of worship were “Messianic synagogues,” their community a “new Messianic movement” and their faith and life “Messianic Judaism”:<sup>64</sup> “This ‘pauline’ stream should be called ‘messianic’ Judaism, and it continued to survive as a stream *within* Jewry for centuries.”<sup>65</sup> The shift in terminology is not unique to Yoder.<sup>66</sup> Douglas Harink refers to early Jesus-believers as “Messianic Jews” and “Messianic Gentiles,”<sup>67</sup> and W. D. Davies describes early Christianity as a “particular form of messianic Judaism.”<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, Yoder employs Messianic Jewish terms more frequently and appears to use them intentionally to form a bridge between Messianic Jews of antiquity and today.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the most important contribution of Yoder to the case for Messianic Judaism is the critical reading of history that he brings to bear on the Jewish-Christian schism. Those who reject the legitimacy of modern-day Messianic Jews (while affirming the Jewishness of Jesus, Paul and the Nazarene sect) typically do so by appeal to “intervening history” as a testimony of divine will or authoritative community decision-making.<sup>70</sup> The argument goes like this: Jesus-believing Jews existed in the first century, but we now live in the twenty-first century. Judaism and Christianity are now separate and distinct religions by destiny. We cannot turn back the wheels of history. Yoder challenges this fatalistic outlook on several counts. To begin with, it is an uncritical reading of history:

*Yoder employs Messianic Jewish terms more frequently and appears to use them intentionally to form a bridge between Messianic Jews of antiquity and today.*

*Those who reject the legitimacy of modern-day Messianic Jews (while affirming the Jewishness of Jesus, Paul and the Nazarene sect) typically do so by appeal to “intervening history” as a testimony of divine will.*

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making of Mennonite Central Committee Palestine (1949-2002): Two Contexts for Locating John Howard Yoder’s Theological Dialogue with Judaism,” in Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, pp. 251-68. Yoder appears to have supported the work of Messianic synagogues in Israel provided they welcomed Messianic Gentiles (Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, p. 149; Cartwright, “Appendix B: Mennonite Missions in Israel,” pp. 255-57).

63. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, pp. 33, 54, 58, 60, 65, 69, 97, 106, 153.

64. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, pp. 32, 34, 59, 95, 97, 151-52, 155.

65. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, p. 32.

66. See Willis Barnstone, *The New Covenant: The Four Gospels and Apocalypse* (New York: Riverhead, 2002). Also Gager, “Did Jewish Christians See the Rise of Islam?” p. 371 (“Of course, we cannot speak of these early Jesus-believers as Jewish Christians; they were just – I hesitate to use this term, but it is fitting – first-century messianic Jews”).

67. Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals*, pp. 221-24.

68. W. D. Davies, “Introduction: An Odyssey in New Testament Interpretation,” in *Christian Engagements with Judaism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), pp. 11-12. First published as “My Odyssey in New Testament Interpretation,” *Bible Review* 5:3 (June 1989), pp. 10-18.

69. Cf. Richard Bauckham, “James for Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians,” in *James: Wisdom of James, disciple of Jesus the sage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 141, 149; see also p. 20.

70. E.g. Helen Fry, “Messianic Judaism: A Theological Response,” *Epworth Review* 43:2 (May 1996), p. 103.



*As with Israel's legacy of idol worship in the pre-exilic period, historical development does not always reflect the will of God (from a canonical perspective).*

The historical development of the first three centuries of our era ended with the presence, in many of the same places, of two separate, mutually exclusive systems (intellectual, cultural, social) called "Jews" and "Christians." Therefore the standard account claims that this mutual exclusiveness must be assumed to have been inevitable, i.e. logically imperative, even when and where the actors in the story which led to that outcome did not know that yet. Studying history is then the process of showing how what had to happen did happen. The "had to" is an intellectual construct *ex eventu*. The historian demonstrates his expertise by making that necessity evident.<sup>71</sup>

For Yoder, an objective understanding of the Jewish-Christian schism requires setting aside the "had to" and allowing for the possibility that "it did not have to be." As with Israel's legacy of idol worship in the pre-exilic period, historical development does not always reflect the will of God (from a canonical perspective). A critical reading of history will allow for the "defectibility of the Church of the past" and bear in mind that "divine providence" readings of church history are sustained, in part, because they validate Christian self-definition and mainstream ecclesiastical authority:<sup>72</sup>

There was never a single event by that name [the Jewish-Christian schism]. After it had conclusively taken place, it seemed to everyone to be utterly natural that it should have come to pass. Yet there was a space of at least fifty years—twice that in most respects, during which it had not happened, was not inevitable or clearly probable—and was not chosen by everyone, not even by everyone who finally was going to have to accept it. We do violence to the depth and density of the story if, knowing with the wisdom of later centuries that it came out as it did, we box the actors of the first century into our wisdom about their children's fate in the second. We thereby refuse to honour the dignity and drama of their struggle, and the open-endedness of their questioning and the variety of paths available to them until one answer, not necessarily the best one, not necessarily one anyone wanted, was imposed on them... If God's purpose might have been to offer a different future from the one which actually came to be, then we do not do total justice to God's intent in the story by reading it as if the outcome he did not want but which did happen, had to happen.<sup>73</sup>

*Yoder suggests that the church and synagogue were unfaithful to God in permitting the Jewish-Christian schism.*

Building on this thesis, which is informed by Yoder's Mennonite background, Yoder suggests that the church and synagogue were unfaithful to God in permitting the Jewish-Christian schism.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, no legitimate basis exists to uphold a status quo that excludes Messianic Jews and views Messianic Jewish demise as irreversible.<sup>75</sup> The "im-

71. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, p. 31.

72. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, p. 137.

73. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, pp. 43-44, 47.

74. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, pp. 45, 137-39.

75. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, pp. 45, 55ff.

possible possibility"<sup>76</sup> is possible. How can one know God's will here? Yoder argues that the first century community of Jesus-believing Jews set a historical and theological precedent for future generations:

During this half century (*at least*) the fact is undisputed. Therefore it is also theologically undeniable, that it was possible that a person could at the same time be a fully faithful Jew and a believer in Jesus of Nazareth as the Anointed One. What happened *historically* cannot be excluded *theologically*. If it cannot on historical grounds be excluded for then, it cannot on theological grounds be forbidden for tomorrow.<sup>77</sup>

Yoder concludes that Christian theology should view Messianic Jews as the ancient and modern link between the church and the Jewish people, and reject the classic ecclesiological model (from the patristic period) that depicts Messianic Jews as an excluded middle:

We have learned that instead of thinking of "Christianity" and "Judaism" as systems, existing primordially in a "normative" form, and instead of thinking of "Christians" and "Jews" in the early centuries as separate bodies existing over against each other, we must think of two initially largely overlapping circles. The circle "Church" and the circle "Jewry" overlapped for generations, in the persons whom we may call either messianic Jews or Jewish Christians, who for over a century at least stood in fellowship with both wider circles. They were not split apart from one another by Jesus' being honoured as Messiah, not by anyone's keeping nor not keeping the law. The split which was ultimately to push the circles apart began, we saw, not in the first century but in the second. It began not as a cleft between the two larger circles but as a schism within each of the communities. People like the "apologetic father" Justin began splitting the Church over the issue of respect for Jewish culture, and some rabbis began pushing out the *nozzrim* who wanted to stay in their synagogues. "Justin's wedge" is dated about 150; the "rabbis' wedge" returned the insult at least a generation later.<sup>78</sup>

Yoder stresses that "Justin's wedge" is dated to *c.* 150 C.E. (more than two generations after the death of Paul). We may add that the first attested explicit statements by church leaders that Jesus-believing Jews are not Christians because they practice Judaism are dated to the fourth and early fifth centuries.<sup>79</sup> Jerome writes to Augustine in 404 C.E.:

*Yoder concludes that Christian theology should view Messianic Jews as the ancient and modern link between the church and the Jewish people.*

*The first attested explicit statements by church leaders that Jesus-believing Jews are not Christians because they practice Judaism are dated to the fourth and early fifth centuries.*

76. Paul M. van Buren, *Discerning the Way* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 63-64.

77. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, p. 53.

78. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, p. 69. For an excellent discussion of the so-called "parting of the ways," see Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam H. Becker, "Traditional Models and New Directions," in *The Ways that Never Parted*, pp. 1-24; Paula Fredriksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways'? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City," in *The Ways that Never Parted*, pp. 36-63; Martin Goodman, "Modeling the 'Parting of the Ways,'" in *The Ways that Never Parted*, pp. 119-29; cf. Philip S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: the parting of the ways A.D. 70 to 135* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 2ff. Originally published in 1992 by J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Also Boyarin, *Border Lines*.

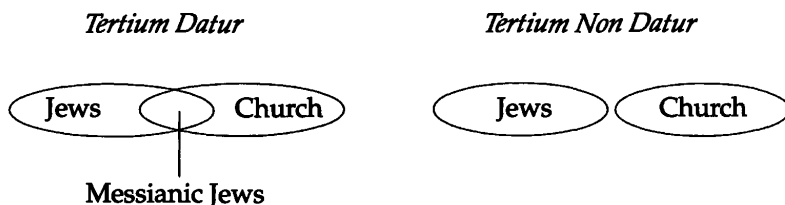
79. E.g. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 29.7.5. A number of regional and ecumenical councils, beginning with the Council of Elvira in *c.* 305 C.E., made it impracticable for Jews to remain

“...since they want to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither Jews nor Christians” (*Ep.* 112.13).<sup>80</sup> Yoder’s *tertium datur* (third possibility)<sup>81</sup> model vis-à-vis Jerome’s *tertium non datur* (no third possibility) model may be illustrated as follows.

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THE CHURCH’S RELATIONSHIP TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE:  
Ecclesiological Models of John Howard Yoder and Jerome

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A *tertium datur* view of Messianic Jews is not unique to Yoder. Peter von der Osten-Sacken includes a chapter on Messianic Jews in his book *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*.<sup>82</sup> In it, he stresses the *tertium datur* nature of Messianic Jewish identity, “They are the ecclesiological bridge joining Israel and the Gentiles, the lack of which is unimaginable. And they have the specific task of witnessing to and emphasizing, in the light of the gospel especially, the indissoluble bond between the two.”<sup>83</sup> For Osten-Sacken, Messianic Jews are a vital testimony of God’s faithfulness to Israel and the church. The remnant is not the end of Israel’s role in God’s plan but is the guarantee of Israel’s “eschatological beginning” (Rom 11:1-2, 16).<sup>84</sup> Messianic Jews and “all Israel” are “inex-

*For Osten-Sacken, Messianic Jews are a vital testimony of God’s faithfulness to Israel and the church.*

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Jewish in the church. The Second Council of Nicea (787 C.E.) was the first ecumenical council to explicitly ban Jesus-believing Jews who practiced Judaism from the church. See canon 8. As an example of the “excluded middle” mindset of the period, consider a seventh century Visigothic profession of faith for Jewish converts, “I do here and now renounce every rite and observance of the Jewish religion, detesting all its most solemn ceremonies and tenets that in formerly days I kept and held. In future I will practise no rite or celebration connected with it, nor any custom of my past error, promising neither to seek it out nor to perform it” (Of Erwig, *Leg. Vis.* 12.3.14). Translation from James Parkes, “Appendix Three: Professions of Faith Extracted from Jews on Baptism,” in *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), p. 395.

80. A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), p. 201. Jerome acknowledges in the same text that contemporary Jesus-believing Jews who practice Judaism are numerous and widespread, “Until now a heresy is to be found in all parts of the East where Jews have their synagogues...”

81. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, pp. 46, 51, 63.

82. Peter von der Osten-Sacken, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Theological Foundations* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 101-17. Translated from *Grundzüge einer Theologie im christlich-jüdischen Gespräch* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1982).

83. Osten-Sacken, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, p. 105.

84. Osten-Sacken, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, pp. 106-07.

trically linked."<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Messianic Jews are a sign of God's faithfulness to the church since a "purely gentile church, existing for itself and out of itself, without a Jewish Christian section, would quite simply be not conceivable, let alone theologically tenable ... it would be an utterly heretical body."<sup>86</sup>

Isaac Rottenberg addresses the ecclesiological significance of Messianic Jews in a little known work entitled *Jewish Christians in an Age of Christian-Jewish Dialogue*.<sup>87</sup> Countering Paul van Buren's argument that "Only one Jew is essential to the church and that is the Jew Jesus,"<sup>88</sup> Rottenberg points out that "Jewish-Gentile unity belongs to the *esse* [being], not just the *bene esse* [well-being] of the church."<sup>89</sup> Markus Barth concurs, "The church is the bride of Christ only when it is the church of Jews and Gentiles ... the existence, building, and growth of the church are identified with the common existence, structure, and growth of Jews and Gentiles."<sup>90</sup> R. Kendall Soulen has built a formidable case for such ecclesiological variegation in his book *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, a treatise that has been well received in post-liberal circles and beyond.<sup>91</sup>

Traditionally, the church has understood itself as a spiritual fellowship in which the carnal distinction between Jew and Gentile no longer applies. The church has declared itself a third and final "race" that transcends and replaces the difference between Israel and the nations... The proper therapy for this misunderstanding is a recovery of the church's basic character as a table fellowship of those who are—and remain—different. The distinction between Jew and Gentile, being intrinsic to God's work as the Consummator of creation, is not erased but realized in a new way in the sphere of the church. The church concerns the Jew

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85. Osten-Sacken, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, p. 108.

86. Osten-Sacken, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, p. 108.

87. Isaac C. Rottenberg, *Jewish Christians in an Age of Christian-Jewish Dialogue*. A collection of essays published in June 1995 "by the family and friends of the author in honor of his 70th birthday for distribution among circles engaged in Christian-Jewish dialogue." See also Isaac C. Rottenberg, "Those Troublesome Messianic Jews," in *The Chosen People in an Almost Chosen Nation: Jews and Judaism in America* (ed. Richard J. Neuhaus; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 103-16. Originally published in *First Things* 28 (1992), pp. 26-32 and submitted with the title "Messianic Jews: a Missing Link in Christian-Jewish Dialogue?"

88. Van Buren, *Discerning the Way*, p. 155.

89. Rottenberg, *Jewish Christians in an Age of Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, p. 99.

90. Markus Barth, *Israel and the Church: Contributions for a Dialogue Vital for Peace* (Richmond: John Knox, 1969), pp. 90-91. "Eph 2:15 proclaims that the people of God is different from a syncretistic mixture of Jewish and Gentile elements. The members of the church are not so equalized, leveled down, or straightjacketed in a uniform as to form a *tertium genus* that would be different from both Jews and Gentiles" (Markus Barth, *Ephesians I* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974], p. 310).

91. Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 193 n. 29; Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals*, pp. 204-05.

*Soulen goes on to establish a textual basis for viewing the church as a perennial body of Jews and Gentiles, and modern-day Messianic Jews as intrinsic to its definition.*

*The verdict of the first Jerusalem Council then is that the Church is to consist of two segments, united by their faith in Jesus.*

as a Jew and the Gentile as a Gentile, not only initially or for the period of a few generations but essentially and at all times.<sup>92</sup>

Soulen goes on to establish a textual basis for viewing the church as a perennial body of Jews and Gentiles, and modern-day Messianic Jews as intrinsic to its definition. He identifies Acts 15:1-10 and Galatians 2:1-10 as key passages that need to be re-engaged.<sup>93</sup> In taking this position, Soulen stands on the shoulders of Wyschogrod,<sup>94</sup> who views the apostolic decree in Acts 15, and its implications for modern-day Messianic Jews, as foundational to New Testament ecclesiology.<sup>95</sup>

From this episode [Acts 15], a clear conclusion can be drawn. The Jerusalem community harbored two parties. There were those who believed that gentile believers in Jesus had to be circumcised and accept full Torah obedience as part of their conversion to Jesus. Others in the Jerusalem community of Jesus believers believed that gentiles did not have to be circumcised but their faith in Jesus together with a version of the Noachide commandments was sufficient. *But it is clear that both parties agreed that circumcision and Torah obedience remained obligatory for Jewish Jesus believers since, if this were not the case, one could hardly debate whether circumcision and Torah obedience were obligatory for gentiles. Such a debate could only arise if both parties agreed on the lasting significance of the Mosaic Law for Jews. Where they differed was its applicability to gentiles. But both sides agreed that Jewish believers in Jesus remained obligated to circumcision and the Mosaic Law.* The verdict of the first Jerusalem Council then is that the Church is to consist of two segments, united by their faith in Jesus.<sup>96</sup>

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92. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 169-70. Notably, in Galatians 3:28, "Jew or Greek" is followed by "male and female," an allusion to the created order (Gen 1:27-28), "The phrase is awkward in both Greek and English because of the switch from the disjunctive 'neither/nor' to the conjunctive 'and.' Because of this mismatching and the fact that Paul does not normally use the words 'male' (*arsen*) and 'female' (*thelu*), it seems that the last clause constitutes a not-so-subtle allusion to God's creation of the first human beings in Genesis 1...what Paul means by 'no longer Jew or Greek' ought to be interpreted in terms of what he means by 'male and female'" (Pamela Eisenbaum, "Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?" *Cross Currents* 50 [Winter 2000-2001], pp. 519-20). See n. 97 below.

93. Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, pp. 170-71. For a fresh reading of Galatians 2:11-18 that is consistent with Soulen's thesis, see Mark D. Nanos, "The Incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11-18)," in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), pp. 282-318.

94. Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, pp. 5-12.

95. Wyschogrod's approach to New Testament theology reflects halakhic thinking and would be described by Caird as "apostolic conference." See G. B. Caird and L. D. Hurst, *New Testament Theology* (ed. L. D. Hurst; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 18-26.

96. Wyschogrod, "Letter to a Friend," pp. 170-71; cf. Wyschogrod, "A Jewish View of Christianity," pp. 118-19. Wyschogrod's reading of Acts 15 is held by Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, pp. 166-238; Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, pp. 177-86, 273-74; Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 475; Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 16, 43, 54-61. Tomson and Bauckham take up the historical reliability of the apostolic decree.

Acknowledging that his view conflicts with the traditional (erasure) reading of Galatians 3:28 (“There is no longer Jew or Greek”),<sup>97</sup> Wyschogrod questions whether the practical implications of this reading (i.e. a church without Jews and ultimately a world without Jews) would have been acceptable to Paul,<sup>98</sup> especially given texts like Romans 11:29 — “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”<sup>99</sup> For Wyschogrod, a non-supersessionist “alternative theology” is required.<sup>100</sup> Contemporary Messianic Jews are not simply an *ethne* in the multiethnic church. Different from American or Japanese identity, Jewish identity is covenantal (as well as national-ethnic)<sup>101</sup> — Jews are part of a “nation chosen by God to stand in covenant relationship with him ... a theologically significant fact.”<sup>102</sup> Gentile Christians are grafted into a Jewish olive tree and not the reverse (Rom 11:17-24).

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But how can Messianic Jews remain faithful to the covenant of their fathers in an overwhelmingly Gentile church? For Wyschogrod, the answer is found in Messianic synagogues that promote “sustained Jewish Torah observance” (consistent with the Jerusalem model in Acts 15; 21:20-26).<sup>103</sup> Is this conceivable in the modern church? Can Christian theology support it? The answer is “yes” if Christian theology repudiates supersessionism in toto.<sup>104</sup> If the “gifts and the calling of God are

97. On Galatians 3:28, Wyschogrod notes that “in the same verse Paul also says that in Christ there is no ‘slave or free, male and female’ and yet he finds it possible to write elsewhere (Eph. 6:5-9) that slaves should be obedient to their masters and (1 Cor. 15:34) that women should not speak in the synagogue. It seems that the creation of ‘one body’ in Christ does not exclude different roles for Jews and Gentiles” (Wyschogrod, “Response to the Respondents,” p. 234; cf. Wyschogrod, “Letter to a Friend,” pp. 168-69). For Wyschogrod, Paul is making an ultimate/penultimate distinction (Michael Wyschogrod, “The Law, Jews and Gentiles,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 21:4 [November 1969], pp. 414-15). An in-depth discussion of Gal 3:28 and related texts (e.g. 1 Cor 7:19; 10:32; 12:13; Gal 5:6; 6:15) is beyond the scope of this essay. For a reassessment of the traditional reading, see Eisenbaum, “Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?” pp. 506-24 (published online: [www.crosscurrents.org/eisenbaum.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/eisenbaum.htm)); Caroline E. Johnson Hodge, “‘If Sons, Then Heirs’: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in Paul’s Letters” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2002), 201ff; Troy W. Martin, “The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14) and the Situational Antitheses in Galatians 3:28,” *JBL* 122:1 (2003), pp. 111-25; William S. Campbell, *Paul’s Gospel in an Intercultural Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 98-110; Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, pp. 270-74. Also my forthcoming dissertation “A Jew to the Jews: Accommodation and Messianism in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23” (University of Cambridge).

98. Wyschogrod, “Letter to a Friend,” pp. 168-69.

99. Wyschogrod, “Letter to a Friend,” pp. 167, 169.

100. Wyschogrod, “Letter to a Friend,” p. 169.

101. Michael Wyschogrod, “Jewish Survival in the Context of Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Christians and Jews Together*, p. 124.

102. Wyschogrod, “Letter to a Friend,” pp. 166-67.

103. Wyschogrod, “Response to the Respondents,” pp. 236-37, 239.

104. A caveat should be added here. George Lindbeck insightfully observes that Jesus-believing Gentiles, in Paul’s thought, participate in a kind of non-supersessionist “Israelhood” or “commonwealth of Israel” (see Eph 2:12). Gentile engrafting into the

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irrevocable," they are irrevocable for *all Jews*, including Messianic Jews.<sup>105</sup> A genuine post-supersessionist church would affirm the irrevocable calling of Messianic Jews to live as Messianic Jews and raise their children as Messianic Jews.<sup>106</sup> Messianic synagogues, of the kind Wyschogrod advocates, are necessary because of the communal nature of Jewish life.<sup>107</sup> If this reasoning can be sustained, it is inconsistent for the church to renounce supersessionism and affirm Israel's irrevocable calling, but not support Messianic Jews and Messianic synagogues:

For Wyschogrod, the acid test of the church's theological posture toward Israel's election is the church's conduct toward Jews in its own midst, that is, toward Jews who have been baptized. For it is here that the church demonstrates in an ultimate way whether it understands itself in light of God's eternal covenant with the seed of Abraham. If the church acknowledges the abiding reality of Israel's corporeal election, it will naturally expect baptized Jews to maintain faithfully their Jewish identity. But if the church truly believes that it has superseded God's covenant with Israel, it will prohibit or discourage Jews from preserving their identity as Jews and members of the Jewish people. In short, the problem of supersessionism turns on the church's capacity to acknowledge the abiding religious significance of Israel's corporeal election and hence the abiding religious significance of the distinction between Gentile and Jew.<sup>108</sup>

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Romans 11 Jewish olive tree does not supplant the tree but sustains it. See George Lindbeck, "What of the Future? A Christian Response," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (eds. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs et al.; Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), pp. 357-66; George Lindbeck, "The Church as Israel: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," in *Jews and Christians*, pp. 78-94.

105. David Novak concedes that, according to Orthodox Judaism, Messianic Jews remain elect and part of the covenant, "The important thing to remember when dealing with the issue of the Jewish Christians is that according to normative Judaism, they are still Jews. Jewish status is defined by the divine election of Israel and his descendants... Since Jews are elected by God, there is absolutely nothing any Jew can do to remove himself or herself from the Covenant. The rule concerning individual apostates is based on a Talmudic judgment about the Jewish people as a whole: 'Even when it has sinned, Israel is still Israel' (Sanhedrin 44a). No one who accepts the authority of normative Judaism can rule that Jewish Christians are not Jews" (David Novak, "When Jews are Christians," in *The Chosen People in an Almost Chosen Nation*, p. 97). Originally published in *First Things* 17 (November 1991), pp. 42-46. Cf. David Novak, *The election of Israel: The idea of the chosen people* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 198-99, 235-40; Wyschogrod, "Letter to a Friend," pp. 167-68; Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, p. 192. See also Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People of Israel* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), p. xv; cf. pp. 57-58, 174-77, 184; Bader-Saye, *Church and Israel After Christendom*, pp. 32-33.

106. See Bruce D. Marshall, "Christ and the cultures: the Jewish people and Christian theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (ed. Colin E. Gunton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 82, 91-93.

107. Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism* (Rockville: Davar, 1986), p. 153.

108. Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, p. 11. See Wyschogrod, "Jewish Survival in the Context of Jewish-Christian Dialogue," pp. 124-25; Michael Wyschogrod, "Israel, the Church, and Election," in *Brothers in Hope* (ed. John M. Oesterreicher; New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 83.

Positively stated, Christian approbation of Israel's election should be accompanied by approbation of Messianic Jews in the church. Markus Bockmuehl presses this point in his response to the Vatican document *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2002).<sup>109</sup>

Finally, there is one further biblical and theological *desideratum* which, although neglected here, is both patently obvious from the New Testament and yet crucial for any further substantive progress in Christian-Jewish understanding. This is the recognition and constructive acceptance, however painful for both sides, of the existence of Jewish Christians ... Jewish believers in Jesus who remain faithful to their Jewish identity are in a distinctive position to attest, cement and protect both what is shared and what is distinctive in this unique relationship. Indeed, a theologically articulate recognition of their existence would furnish powerful proof of the Commission's reminder that Jesus' Messiahship genuinely confirms, and does not subvert, Israel's place as the elect "people of the covenant" to whom "the Lord is faithful" ...<sup>110</sup>

Returning to Jenson, it is ultimately because he upholds Israel's irrevocable calling (and rejects supersessionism) that he can say the "body of the risen Jew," Jesus the Messiah, must have "an identifiable community of Abraham and Sarah's descendants" within it.<sup>111</sup> Jenson's reluctance to take the next step and acknowledge the Messianic Jewish community as this "identifiable community" is perhaps due to his lack of sustained engagement with the Messianic movement. But for me, as one reared in the movement, having witnessed its growth over the past thirty years, being fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses, it is not difficult to see that it has all the marks of this "identifiable community." Far from being "organizations set up by Christian churches for the specific purpose of establishing a mission to the Jews,"<sup>112</sup> the *raison d'être* of Messianic synagogues is not missiological. Rather, Messianic

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109. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002).

110. Markus Bockmuehl, "The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible: First Response," *Scripture Bulletin* 33:1 (2003), pp. 26-27.

111. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," p. 13; cf. pp. 2-6; Jenson, "Toward a Christian Doctrine of Israel," pp. 47ff.; Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 190-95.

112. Eugene Fischer makes this argument in "Correspondence," *First Things* 32 (April 1993), pp. 2-10, to which Rottenberg (also in "Correspondence") responds, "The idea that the Messianic Jewish movement is the creation of churches for the purpose of serving as a missionary agency strikes me as a fiction, part of a mythology that has little basis in history." In point of fact, the Messianic Jewish community is largely a grassroots movement. The vast majority of Messianic synagogues do not have historical, financial or denominational ties to Christian churches. The few that do are open to the allegations made by Fischer, and may not be properly termed "Messianic Jewish" if their *raison d'être* as congregations is to missionize. See n. 1. Also note the lack of *keruv* (outreach) language in the basic definition of "Messianic Judaism" below. *Keruv* is very important in the Messianic Jewish community but not the primary thrust. See Kay Silberling, "Messianic *Keruv*: Gathering In, Reaching Out," in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement* (ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok; Baltimore: Lederer, 2001), pp. 177-84; Stuart Dauermann, "Motivating and Mobilizing for Messianic Jewish Outreach," *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 33-71. *Keshet* is a refereed journal published by the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations.



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synagogues exist for the purpose of worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They are committed to Jewish identity and Jewish continuity on the basis of covenant, a value intrinsic to the self-definition and ethos of mainstream Messianic Judaism.<sup>113</sup>

Does this mean that Messianic Jews do not share the *besorah* (gospel) with their people? On the contrary, Messianic Jews lift up the name of Yeshua (Jesus) as Jews within the Jewish community. We do this because we believe the God of Israel “reveals himself uniquely, definitively, and decisively in the life, death, resurrection, and return of Yeshua the Messiah.” For us, Yeshua is

the incarnation of the divine WORD through whom the world was made, and of the divine GLORY through Whom GOD revealed himself to Israel and acted in their midst. He is the living Torah, expressing perfectly in his example and teaching the divine purpose for human life. Yeshua is completely human and completely divine.

As the risen Messiah and the heavenly Kohen Gadol (High Priest), Yeshua continues to mediate GOD's relationship to his people Israel, to those of the nations who have joined the greater commonwealth of Israel in him, and to all creation. GOD's plan of salvation and blessing for Israel, the nations, and the entire cosmos is fulfilled only in and through Yeshua, by virtue of his atoning death and bodily resurrection, and GOD's gift of life to both Jews and Gentiles, in this world and in the world to come, is bestowed and appropriated only in and through him (“Statement on the Identity of Yeshua,” Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, November 12, 2003).

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Yeshua called his Jewish disciples to actively bear witness to him in the Jewish world until he returned (Matt 10:5-23; cf. 5:14-16; Gal 2:7-9; Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 9:20). We consider this a *mitzvah* (commandment) (Acts 1:8; 10:42-43) and seek to observe it with respect, sensitivity and openness, always mindful of the deep wound inflicted on our people by centuries of persecution in the name of Jesus. Messianic Jews consider the Jewish community their home and Yeshua the center of the Jewish community.

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## CONCLUSION

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There should be a place for the Messianic Jewish perspective in Christian theology. For centuries, many theological questions went unasked because Messianic Jews were not there to ask them. Similarly, many supersessionist

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113. See n. 1. The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations officially defines “Messianic Judaism” as a “movement of Jewish congregations and congregation-like groupings committed to Yeshua the Messiah that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant” (UMJC Theology Committee, “Defining Messianic Judaism: Basic Statement,” p. 1). Cited 21 December 2004. Online: [http://www.umjc.org/main/docs/mj\\_def.aspx](http://www.umjc.org/main/docs/mj_def.aspx). The UMJC website also includes an “Expanded Statement.” Messianic Jewish grandchildren are the ultimate evidence of the movement’s commitment to Jewish continuity.

readings of the New Testament stood unchallenged because supersessionism conveniently eliminated the *ecclesia ex circumcissione*. Messianic Jewish existence contributes a vital perspective to Christian theology that “has for so many centuries been molded exclusively by gentile Christians.”<sup>114</sup> Contemporary Messianic Jews bring to the table practical theological insights that call into question traditional dogmas, such as the principle that Torah-obedience is antithetical to New Covenant spirituality and unity between Jew and Gentile. The Messianic synagogue is a veritable laboratory of discovery in this regard. In addition to the active contribution of Messianic Jews to scholarship,<sup>115</sup> the guild’s simple awareness of the Messianic Jewish community leads to fresh reassessments. Engagement of this kind is healthy and long overdue.

The study suggests that Christian theology has largely overlooked the existence of Messianic Jews and Messianic synagogues. The Messianic Jewish perspective is rarely sought out or heard. Christian theology typically regards covenant-keeping, Jesus-believing Jews as spiritually immature, and ecclesiological paradigms that displace Jews from the church (or the world) as normative. But there are small signs of change that suggest the beginnings of a trend toward grappling with the theological challenge that Messianic Jews embody.

Perhaps the most pivotal question is the ecclesiological one: Are Messianic Jews a *tertium datur* or *tertium non datur*? Mark Kinzer, a Messianic Jewish theologian, echoes Osten-Sacken in suggesting that Messianic Jews are the ecclesiological bridge between the church and Israel: “Without Messianic Jews and Messianic Judaism, the *ekklesia* is not truly and fully itself.”<sup>116</sup> Yoder, Barth, Soulen, Wyschogrod, Bockmuehl, Campbell, Tomson, Nanos and a host of other modern scholars concur. An all-Gentile church is an aberration, a deformity never envisioned by Jesus and his *shelichim* (apostles). Moreover, a *tertium genus* (third race) *ekklesia* is foreign to the New Testament. For Paul, Jesus-believing Jews and

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114. Osten-Sacken, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, pp. 108-09, 114.

115. Recent critical scholarship by Messianic Jews includes Seth Klayman, “Tephilat HaAdon in Mattityahu 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4,” *Kesher* 15 (Summer 2002), pp. 22-61; Andrew Sparks, “The Influence of Messianic Expectations on the Masoretic Text, Qumran Scrolls and Septuagint,” *Kesher* 15 (Summer 2002), pp. 2-21; David J. Rudolph, “Jesus and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b,” *EQ* 74:4 (2002), pp. 291-311; David J. Rudolph, “Festivals in Genesis 1:14,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 54:2 (2003), pp. 23-40. See also Hilary Le Cornu and Joseph B. Shulam, *The Jewish Roots of Acts* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Academon, 2003) and the forthcoming book by Kathryn J. S. Smith et al., eds., *Created Male and Female: A Christian Theology of Gender* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). The future of Messianic Jewish scholarship looks promising. More than fifty Messianic Jewish college students and a number of Ph.D. candidates in biblical/Jewish studies attended the 2003 Young Messianic Scholars Conference at the University of Pennsylvania. Also, the UMJC is in the process of establishing an accredited Messianic Jewish theological seminary in the United States.

116. Mark Kinzer, *The Nature of Messianic Judaism: Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species* (West Hartford, CT: Hashivenu Archives, 2001), p. 64.

Jesus-believing Gentiles together, in *'echad*-like<sup>117</sup> unity and diversity, form the body of Messiah. Israel's irrevocable calling validates and necessitates this ecclesiological model.

*By raising such critical questions about Messianic Jews, and including Messianic Jewish scholars in the conversation, Christian theology restores an historic voice to the contemporary discussion.*

Having attempted to make a reasonable case that the Messianic Jewish perspective should have a place in Christian theology, we may conclude by asking the practical question, "How can this be accomplished?" I would contend that nothing fully substitutes for the inclusion of Messianic Jewish scholars in theological forums and colloquia. Their epistemology is informed by living at the junction between church and synagogue, and by life in the Messianic synagogue. Their tangible presence in theological circles fosters a consciousness of Messianic Jews. Individually, theologians can develop broader epistemologies by contemplating how various readings and doctrines will impact twenty-first century Messianic Jews and Messianic synagogues. They can ask, "Does my treatment of Israel and Jewish Law ultimately displace, erase or patronize the Messianic Jewish community? Or does it affirm, sustain and show concern for the Jewish wing of the church?"<sup>118</sup> By raising such critical questions about Messianic Jews, and including Messianic Jewish scholars in the conversation, Christian theology restores an historic voice to the contemporary discussion.<sup>119</sup> □

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117. *'echad* is the Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:24 (translated *mian* [from the LXX] in Matt 19:5; Mark 10:8; 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31) to describe the complex oneness between man and woman in marriage.

118. Consider Paul's concern for the Jewish wing of the church articulated at the end of his letter to the Romans (15:25-32). He calls Jesus-believing Gentiles to adopt an attitude of mutual blessing and interdependence toward Jesus-believing Jews (v. 27).

119. I am grateful for valuable comments and suggestions received from Markus Bockmuehl, Mark D. Nanos, my friends at Tyndale House (Cambridge), and my colleagues in the Messianic Jewish community.