

“The Unique Place of Gentiles in  
Messianic Jewish Congregational Life”

Dr. Richard C. Nichol

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ABSTRACT:

Despite dramatic differences in theological outlook, leaders of many modern Messianic Jewish congregations share a common conviction that discerning the proper roles for non-Jewish believers in our congregations is a vitally important enterprise. In this paper we will explore the issue both theologically and practically.

Part I will explore two rather different approaches to the overall Messianic Jewish congregational enterprise which can be found in the Diaspora. Two ecclesiological models emerge, each with differing starting points and implications for non-Jewish involvement in maturing Messianic Judaism. We will refer to these as the Bilateral Approach (BA) and the Missiological Approach (MA). Understanding, comparing and contrasting these will enable us to build wisely in the decades to come.

Part 2 will catalogue the practical strategies which flow from these theological investments. Because BA and MA oriented leaders share many of the same concerns, many of these practical tips, suggestions and stories will likely resonate broadly among us. Because of some profound differences in our opinions about the very nature of Messianic Judaism, others likely will not seem entirely applicable.

By holding up a mirror to these models of communal formation my hope is that we can see and feel the deeper contours of contemporary Messianic Judaism, and thereby

learn how we may love the people entrusted to our care with greater wisdom and foresight.

## INTRODUCTION

While on vacation this past summer my wife and I purchased a three DVD set of TV commercials dating from the 1950's to the present. Some of these old ads we had never seen. But, we had real fun when an old ad played which we remembered from our childhoods. Here is one which brought a nostalgic smile to our faces...

“Certs is a breath mint. Certs is a candy mint. You're both right. Certs is two...two...two mints in one!”

It can be argued that Messianic Jewish congregations by their very nature are “two...two...two faiths in one!” With breath/candy mints the identity issues are thoroughly benign. But, among us, the fact that we claim to remain faithful members of the household of Israel, while simultaneously asserting continuity with the historic community of believers in the Risen One, has very special challenges. And because we lay and professional Messianic Jewish leaders seek to bring other men, women, boys and girls into our spheres, we feel acute responsibility for coming to mature and responsible conclusions about how to relate to these trusting souls.

But, to the topic at hand...

God in His providence has brought non-Jews into our congregations. Should they be there? Should they all be there? How do we instill a healthy sense of spiritual identity among these good folks, most especially for their children's sake? As we seek to be helpful to the non-Jews attracted to our communities, how do we honor and respect the legitimate sensibilities of the larger Jewish community – a world to which most

Messianic Jewish leaders claim allegiance? How do we help non Jewish participants in our communities maintain a positive mindset to the historic Church, guarding their possible future re-entry into the worlds of their childhood memories should they choose to leave our assemblies? To put the matter in broad theological terms, how do we fulfill our callings as those who take seriously both the particularity of our calling as Jews and the universalism of the Gospel message when it comes to non-Jews in our midst? This challenge is not ours alone!

Largely because of the dramatic rise in intermarriage rates and the general blurring of religious and cultural boundaries in Western society, more non-Jews are showing up at traditional synagogues, particularly among the more liberal branches of Judaism. This has become a topic of discussion. For example, the Reconstructionist Movement had assigned a task force to determine appropriate behavior in synagogue life for unconverted non-Jews. The Summary of Opportunities and Boundaries Report<sup>1</sup> offers specific recommendations to member synagogues regarding who may make a Torah aliyah, who may become a member, who may lead a worship service and other matters. The point here is that we Messianic Jews are not the only Jewish leaders struggling with the issue.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> JRF Taskforce Report

<sup>2</sup> The Jewish community is talking about outreach and this necessarily relates to non-Jewish participation. In the Spring 2006 edition of the CCAR Journal, Reform leader Eric Yoffie argues strongly for open-armed acceptance of non-Jewish spouses within a framework of strong Jewish particularity. He notes, “If we have learned anything at all over the past twenty-five years, it is this: you do not draw people in by erasing boundaries and eliminating distinctions. If there are no clearly defined distinctions between our Jewish values and the values of the world around us, then what reason would serious people – Jews or non-Jews – have to cast their fate with ours? We have learned that intermarried couples are not attracted by minimalism or watered down Judaism.” Might there be lessons here for Messianic Jewish leaders?

Nor is the challenge we face really new. Dr. Jeff Seif has provided our Borough Park family with a detailed analysis of Gentile Christian's shared worship with early Jewish believers in the early centuries of our era. Though we have little documentation, we can easily imagine that discussions akin to those we find in the Book of Acts chapters 15 and 21 continued long after the passing of James, Paul and Peter.

In more recent times papers and position statements have been offered. In 1987 Larry Rich contributed a paper at the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) entitled, "The Role of The Gentile in a Jewish Congregation." As Chairman of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations Theology Committee, I authored a position paper on Gentile conversion to Messianic Judaism which was adopted by the Union's delegates and can be viewed on the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) website.<sup>3</sup> More recently, the members of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) have endorsed a number of specific policies specifying some of the appropriate boundaries of participation by non-Jewish members and attendees in our member synagogues. It seems that wherever Jews who embrace Yeshua have gathered, the issue of non-Jewish participation has been in the air! But differing theological outlooks and cultural connections have resulted in different approaches.

## PART I – A TALE OF TWO THEOLOGIES:

In the Diaspora we discern two overarching visions of the nature of the Messianic congregation. Two ecclesiological models emerge, each with differing starting points and therefore, differing implications for non-Jewish involvement in maturing Messianic Judaism. We will refer to these as the Bilateral Approach (BA) and the Missiological

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<sup>3</sup> I have long since changed my position in this matter and in 1994 produced a booklet entitled, "The Case for Conversion; Welcoming Non-Jews Into Messianic Jewish Space."

Approach (MA). It is important that we understand some of the underpinnings of each approach for at least three reasons.

First, the likely future of the Messianic Jewish enterprise will be controlled in part by which of these stances our movement adopts. Practical out workings inevitably follow theology – and of course, theology is then influenced (sometimes too much!) by the “on the ground” realities facing a religious community. But, we can say with confidence that the conclusions Messianic Jewish leaders reach in answer to the questions surrounding gentile participation will have profound effects in the future. The cement is already hardening so that now really is the time to take stock.

Second, theologies have collective psychological meaning beyond the actual words on paper found in doctrinal statements, position papers, etc. BA and MA orientations create overarching value systems which are communicated powerfully in myriad ways in our interactions with one another and with congregants. These systems are powerful! We must be willing to present our presuppositions, our methodologies and our conclusions for sympathetic, honest peer review if we are to have hope that we deserve God’s smile on our efforts.

Third, though I strongly favor one of the models presented below I submit that we have much to learn from one another. No single theological system can embody all the important truths which must govern successful endeavors for Heaven’s sake. As leaders we are mandated by HaShem to love truth so much that we are willing to live with dynamic tension, paradox, complexity, nuance, mystery and even uncertainty. More difficult still, we are mandated to be willing to change when new compelling data is presented by those who view the situation differently than we.

However, before diving in, some qualifiers are in order:

First. Among Diaspora Messianic Jewish congregations the two models, BA and MA, can be identified. However, as in the case of people holding to differing political philosophies, most fall along a continuum, a spectrum of belief and practice where some sensibilities may align with “the other side” more than the declared party. Pro life Northern Democrats. Gay rights-supporting Republicans. You get the picture. To bring the matter into our sphere, BA oriented congregations tend to gravitate more to a traditional Jewish than an Evangelical Christian starting point. As a BA practitioner, this is my orientation at Congregation Ruach Israel. However, at our synagogue intentional outreach is becoming more and more important as the years go by. We want to win Jews to Yeshua and we spend a lot of time thinking about how to do this effectively. In this sense we tend in a more MA direction. Similarly, we do a great injustice to MA oriented congregations and missions if we imagine that these are unconcerned with Jewish life. Some leaders may be far too unconcerned in my view. But others really care.<sup>4</sup>

Second, despite real differences, some quite pronounced with far-reaching implications, adherents of missions oriented communities and bilaterally oriented ones have a great deal in common. *Many of us have put everything on the line for the sake of the risen Messiah and his kingdom.*

A parallel from American history: Thomas Jefferson had a vision for ideal American life which epitomized the virtues of the hard working, land owning farmer. He distrusted the

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<sup>4</sup> Two examples: A childhood friend and I became followers of Yeshua in 1971. Harry resisted wearing a talit in his worship not because he lacked respect for his Jewish upbringing or life, but because, as he explained to me, he had such great respect for a tradition he felt he could no longer honestly claim as his own. A newer Messianic Jewish friend and colleague in Boston clearly aligns with a more missions orientation professionally. But, he clearly has deep Jewish sensibilities as reflected in sermons he has brought in our synagogue and with the high regard he expresses regarding Jewish religious life.

Yankee businessman, seeing only corruption and conspicuous consumption as the sad end of a society dominated by their alleged values. Another founding father, Alexander Hamilton saw things differently. His view stressed the importance of amassing capital if the new republic was to have any future at all. A national bank, a thriving business community... these were keys to the future viability of the United States in his view. These men argued, even argued vigorously. But both signed that Declaration of Independence, putting each of their lives, fortunes and sacred honor on the line.

Third, many Messianic leaders would have trouble identifying completely with either of the models we will be discussing. They will see themselves as favorable to aspects of each and will not want to feel “pigeon-holed” by those claiming neatly drawn categories. Let’s be clear that in most any human endeavor, people accept ideas along a spectrum. Very few are die-hard exponents of plans and agendas that leave no room for others. Those who claim to live and breathe with such consistency, we suspect, are a bit out of touch with how they actually live! Of course, without the willingness to generalize, there can be no progress toward truth. We must generalize if we are to learn anything. So, as we discuss these theological models and their implications for Gentile participation, just relax with the possible overstatements as we examine ourselves and our place in the ecclesiological sun! Now let us consider these two different views of the very nature of a Messianic Jewish congregation and their implications for non-Jewish participation.

## THE HEART OF BILATERAL ECCLESIOLOGY

Mark Kinzer has written a book  
Weaving for us no ordinary look  
At the deeper artistry of our Echad  
One people, yet two, in the heart of God.

Long before the publication of Post Missionary Messianic Judaism by Dr. Mark Kinzer, I knew that claiming connection to the Jewish world had to be deeper than the merely cosmetic. Even as a fairly young believer, I intuited that wearing kippot, saying “Yeshua” instead of “Jesus,” etc. required some level of justification beyond mere comfort and familiarity. Some kind of theological rationale was necessary if I were to live a bit differently than believers in my world at Ithaca College and later at the Biblical Theological Seminary. Early on, I settled on a simple idea which today still has relevance, though in a more sophisticated form: *“Jesus was Jewish. If being Jewish was good enough for him, it’s good enough for me”*<sup>5</sup> As the years rolled by I began to see the incompleteness of my apologetic. Jesus was then and we live now. Almost two thousand years of Jewish and Christian history and identity formation had occurred. I needed deeper reasons for laying claim to time-honored Jewish identity markers. This came in the form of another argument, this one the fruit of the wise reflection of missiologists at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA.

These professors saw that (historic Christianity) has been severely damaged by a mission enterprise which did not adequately appreciate the cultures of targeted people groups. Why should not Congolese believers use their traditional drums in worship? Why should they feel they have to dress like white English Anglicans to express their worship? By implication, I could act Jewishly because “Jewish” was my culture.

But again, after more years of reflection, this rationale no longer seemed to bear the weight of a consistent rationale for serious Jewish life for Jewish believers. First, Jewish religious symbols such as a Torah scroll, or talit were sacred symbols sustained by the

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<sup>5</sup> Early on, I published my experience of turning to Jesus in the Ithaca College newspaper. The following issue a traditional Jewish student – another student in the Music School – published his outrage at my claims that Jesus was for Jews. I wrote again appealing to Jesus’ Jewishness as adequate justification for my own. Now, some forty years later I can see the limits of my argument.

blood of Jewish martyrs. Comparing such “cultural” elements to the more mundane aspects like dress, housing styles, a preference for bagels over baklava – seemed superficial. Second, features of Jewish religious life are expressions of biblical ideas, fruits of the reflection of a chosen people. Somehow the specifics of Korean or Eskimo or French culture, even religious culture, seemed to fit in a different, less weighty category.

Another sensibility, very much related to the above, had informed my inner world as a believer, though in a muted voice during the early years of my sojourn with Yeshua. It is the voice of concern about the very survival of the Jewish people. Alan Dershowitz expresses the current reality facing the Jewish people in the Western World:

The problem is easily defined: the Jewish presence in America is shrinking so quickly from assimilation, intermarriage and low birthrates that American Jewish life as we know it may cease to exist by the third quarter of the twenty-first century. (Dershowitz 169)

I remember the electrifying TV images of the Six Day War in June of 1967. Israel seemed an inch away from annihilation when all those Arab armies attacked. Though not pointing to an external attack threatening Jewish survival, Dr. Dershowitz’s comments have some of that resonance.

Enter Mark Kinzer along with other friends, Stuart Dauermann, Michael Schiffman, Paul Saal and others. Mark has articulated a theologically based rationale for Jewish life in Messiah Yeshua that speaks to the issues raised above and speaks directly to our subject of gentile participation in Messianic Jewish assemblies.

Here are the basic axioms of BA as contoured by Mark and extended by others. As we shall see the implications for how non-Jews relate to Messianic Jewish congregations are far-reaching:

God is the God of history and his presence in history continues with the Jewish people – the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – to the present day. Kinzer writes:

The historical narrative embodied in scripture has a unique revelatory status. Nevertheless, its validity is called into question if the Lord of history to which it bears witness withdraws from history when the narrative ends. (Kinzer, Post Missionary 39)

This important observation translates into a view of Messianic Judaism which is necessarily tied to the ongoing Jewish story and not merely to snapshots of God's dealing with Israel in the biblical period. God has been actively present in the Jewish experience through the Talmudic period, the Middle Ages, the modern era and until this very day. Kinzer infers that despite the community's color blindness to Yeshua, its liturgical development, ethics, and modes of self-preservation; imperfectly but meaningfully reflect the divine will: This is because Yeshua, the greater Joseph, has always and will always reside even among his unsuspecting brothers and sisters. He explains:

Jews who have not believed in Yeshua but who have loyally sustained a continual communal Jewish presence in the world through hours of deepest darkness are heirs of God's covenant with Israel. (98)

It is important to point out that Dr. Kinzer is not referring here to the eternal destinies of individual Jewish people, but to the ongoing vitality of God's relationship with the corporate body of the sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.<sup>6</sup>

Kinzer, reflecting on the New Testament text finds this strong sense of Jewish identification reflected in the teachings and example of Yeshua and in the teaching and examples of his earliest Jewish followers:

Yeshua and his followers were born and reared within a Jewish world where such practices (i.e., circumcision, Sabbath observance and holiday observance and dietary laws), commanded in the Torah, were presumed rather than disputed. Fierce disputes arose over *how* these commandments were to be interpreted and applied – but not over whether they were to be interpreted or applied. (Post Missionary, 50)

Summarizing the picture in the New Testament he concludes:

We concluded in our previous chapter that the New Testament considers Jewish practice normative for Jews who believe in Yeshua, though not for Yeshua-believing Gentiles. (53)

Jewish practice for Jewish believers remained normative (though the particulars hotly debated) because God is faithful to his covenant with the Jewish people. Even the sin and blindness of segments of the community cannot rob us of God's covenant faithfulness. Commenting on a passage of Scripture that has provided much ammunition for the supercessionist impulse in the Church, Kinzer writes:

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<sup>6</sup> In his audio taped series, "Gen Eden and Gehena" Dr. Kinzer discusses the strands of biblical teaching on heaven, hell and implications for us today. Clearly, he is no universalist!

The second text to be considered has a more tragic history. It contains the words of the Jerusalem crowd after calling for Yeshua's execution: "His blood be on us and our children" (Matthew 27:25). As we noted in chapter 1, most past Christian commentators saw the crowd, representing the Jewish people as a whole, as uttering an effective self-imposed curse that explained – and justified- the history of Jewish exile and suffering. This verse was thus the linchpin in charging the Jewish people with deicide – the murder of God. If this interpretation is accepted, then our hypothesis regarding Matthew's view of the Jewish people as a whole is refuted. God may still take special concern for the Jewish people, but only for the purpose of meeting out special punishment for their uniquely abhorrent crime.

However, most contemporary exegetes rightly reject this anti-Jewish reading of Matthew 27:25. They recognize the crowd that utters these words represents, not all Jews everywhere, but only the Jews of Jerusalem or of the land of Israel; and that "our children" refers, not to all their descendants forever, but only to the next generation, which would experience the catastrophe of the war with Rome in 66-70 CE. Matthew and his initial audience were Jews and they still identified with the Jewish people as a whole. However, like Jeremiah or Ezekiel in their own time, they also believed that the suffering of Jerusalem was divine judgment, related to Jerusalem's failure to respond properly to God's appointed messengers. (107)

Reflecting on the above a picture begins to emerge. If the God of history is still vitally involved in the life of his *segullah* – this precious, chosen people, the Jews...if the New Testament picture of assumed expectations of Jewish believers supports ongoing participation in Jewish life...if, even the rejection of Yeshua by the majority of communal leaders and a (possibly) hand-picked crowd does not obviate his love for his chosen nation...then we modern Messianic Jews should give careful consideration to the practical outworking of God's providential presence among our people. This would include a consideration of boundary markers. You can't have "a people" without them!

A key extension to Israel's enfleshed reality and the Messianic Jew's participation in that reality is the role of Torah, the commandments of God, mediated by Moses and given to the Jewish people as a means whereby the "goy Kadosh" – the holy people – are nurtured and sustained through the centuries. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the meaning of this important commitment of the BA perspective. However, it is interesting to note that Jewish Church leaders and scholars from around the world are beginning to see the importance of Torah as an identity maker even for Jewish believers who identify with the historic churches – Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. See Appendix 1 for the complete text of the July 3, 1012 statement by the Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah.

Digging more deeply into the very nature of the Jewish experience we see an important observation with far reaching implications for our subject of Gentile participation in Messianic Jewish congregations. It is an observation which, on the one hand is entirely obvious, while on the other obscured in its implications by its sheer familiarity. Often, the best hiding places are in plain sight! It is an idea that lies at the heart of bilateral thinking and can be called, "Israel as an enfleshed reality." Michael Wyschogrod, an Orthodox Jew and philosopher in his work Body of Faith has inspired Kinzer, R. Kendall Soulen and others. He comments on this all-important idea:

The election of the people of Israel as the people of God constitutes the sanctification of a natural family. God could have chosen a spiritual criterion: the election of all those who have faith or who obey his commandments. The liberal mind would find such an election far more congenial. But God did not choose this path. He chose the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There are of course, religious and ethical demands made of the elect. When they do not live up to these demands, they are punished. But the essential belonging to the people of election is derived from descent from the Patriarchs. The election of Israel is therefore a corporeal election. One result of this is

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that the Jew cannot resign his election. Were elections based on faith or ethics, a change in belief or conduct would terminate the election and the responsibilities connected with it. But because the election of Israel is of the flesh, a Jew remains in the service of God no matter what he believes or does. The Jewish body as well as the Jewish soul is therefore holy, a truth that was well understood by those enemies of God who knew that they had to murder the Jewish body along with the teachings of Israel" (Wyschogrod xv).

Israel, the Jewish people, are first and foremost a physical family. Culture, religion and language surely have functioned as important areas of commonality through the centuries, but having Jewish flesh – Jewish lineage – is the communal super glue which binds the Jewish people together. So strong is this bond that according to Wyschogrod's informed understanding of traditional Halakhah, a Jew cannot escape from being a Jew! (So, the next time a Jewish family member tells you that as a believer in Yeshua, you're not Jewish anymore, just quote Michael Wyschograd to her!).

The physicality of Jewish identity has at times enraged the nations who have turned that body into a punching bag, but even Jewish believers can miss the implications of Wyschogrod's simple but profound observation. Why? Because we tend to define ourselves in terms of faith commitment, beliefs, religious commitments and culture rather than as physical family. We almost instinctively gravitate to Romans 2: 28:

"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, not by the written code.

Of course, in context this passage in no way challenges the principle of the primal physicality of Jewish identity, but has a different rhetorical purpose in Paul's letter to the Romans."<sup>7</sup> However, our Messianic Jewish world, influenced by long Church tradition, has lived with a cloud of self-doubt in this matter. Making it even more difficult to sport an "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and I wear the same genes" T-shirt is the sad reality of racism. The Nazi perversion of the importance of physicality as a critical binding agent of peoplehood, along with the memory of American slavery and countless other examples of abuse, has inordinately put us on the defensive. But the substructure of BA – the bilateral model of congregational development – is necessarily influenced by Wyschogrod's observation. With it comes an element of particularity that necessarily translates into heartfelt attitudes and specific beliefs regarding the role of non-Jews in our synagogues.

In recent years God's has raised up a growing body of Christian theologians who seem to "get it" regarding the importance of Jewish particularity for the sake of the entire world's future. R. Kendall Soulen is one of these. Advocates of the BA orientation to Messianic Judaism find ourselves inspired by his words:

Human beings can say no to their "supernatural" identities as Jews and as Gentiles, and in this way can close themselves to God's consummating work. In the extreme case this can take shape as the effort to eradicate Israel's body. But short of this, the fact of

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<sup>7</sup> In truth, this verse is not diminishing the central importance of transgenerational physical family membership in the Jewish people. Paul knows well that his people are the physical seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Rather his rhetoric is similar to that of John the Immerser who emphasized that without "walking the walk" of covenant faithfulness to God, an individual's Jewish pedigree will not count for much.. Quoting Kinzer, "physical descent from the patriarchs, and matriarchs, (Romans 9:8), the covenantal sign of circumcision (Romans 2: 25-29), and the possession and knowledge of the Torah (Romans 2: 17-24) are all privileges of enormous value, but they cannot guarantee the inheritance of the life of the world to come." (Kinzer, Israel's Messiah 39)

Jewish and Gentile identity cannot be effaced. The *ineluctable character of these dimensions of human identity* (emphasis mine) attests to the depth and resolution of God's consummating engagement with creation. As the Redeemer, of Israel God acts in fidelity not only to Israel, but to the totality of the human family's created and covenantal identity. (Soulen 154-155)

"Two...two...two people's in one."

When we think of the descriptive "bilateral," images easily come to mind: the sides of an isosceles triangle or the human body with two lungs, two ears, two arms and two legs...a seesaw in the playground. Even Yeshua's body stretched out on the cross can be imagined bilaterally. Two equally balanced sides, bound to each other and together forming the whole, is the basic idea of the word "bilateral."

The word "ecclesiology" in its broadest definition is the study of the Church – its structure and composition, Bilateral ecclesiology then, is an understanding of the nature of the Church – the community of Yeshua – which proposes a two-sided structure, its Jewish and non-Jewish expressions. Speaking of the bond between the historic Church and Synagogue, Kinzer sees a truly organic connection as well as uniqueness:

It is time to challenge the notion that Christianity and Judaism are two separate religions. We should heed the advice offered by Karl Barth a half-century ago: "The Church must live with the Synagogue, not as fools say in their hearts, as with another religion or confession, but as with the root from which it sprung. Some Christian thinkers are beginning to catch up with Barth. Thus, Richard John Neuhaus writes, "It is misleading, I believe, to speak of two peoples of God or two covenants, never mind to speak of two religions." (Kinzer, Post Missionary 21)

The two peoples of God are actually one people, yet differentiated from each other. The idea of BA is that this shared life and differentiation should be expressed as the very core of Messianic Judaism's self-definition and communal formation.<sup>8</sup> I have coined a phrase which seeks to capture the organic connection between these two faiths:

*"Christianity is acculturated messianism for the nations:"*

**Christianity** - the faith in Jesus held by millions of people throughout the centuries.

Predominantly it has been made up by the non-Jewish peoples of the world, though a continual flow of Jews have been counted among the faithful.

**Acculturated** - expressing their worship in the variegated forms of Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, French, Italian, Eskimo, Pentecostal, Mennonite, etc.

**Messianism** - Jesus is the great shepherd and hope for those who love him. - a faith rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and issuing forth from the people of Israel...

**For the nations** - Mexican, Native American, German, Eskimo; the peoples of the world, united with, but distinct from Israel.<sup>9</sup>

So, paraphrasing the 60's commercial, "You're both right. Self-identified Messianic Jews and the Gentile Church represent two, two, two communities in one!" Borrowing Kinzer's terminology the church is a differentiated reality: "one ecclesia expressed as two ecclesai."

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<sup>8</sup> I like to refer to "Israel and the nations" as "the irreducible dyad of human existence." This seems to me to be the basic biblical paradigm.

<sup>9</sup> Are Messianic Jews Christians by this definition? In the strictest sense, if the word "Christian" is used in its barest, most literal meaning of "messianist," then we Messianic Jews could own the term. Given the fact that in historical, contemporary and common usage, the term miscommunicates because it leaves little room for the bilateral nature of our faith. Every community must decide when it is worth it to reclaim a commonly misused term and when energies can be better spent creating new ones. The emotional baggage attendant to the use of "Christian" for Jewish believers is simply too great to overcome.

Though practitioners of BA have not stated a comprehensive evaluation of the Christian Church, some general convictions have emerged:

The Christian church is no second-rate community. Despite its weaknesses (anti Semitic tendencies, participation in religious wars and support for darker aspects of colonialism, etc.) it retains its holiness by virtue of Yeshua's living presence. This positive view of the church has profound implications for how Messianic Jewish leaders should view Gentile visitors, especially those who claim to have had bad experiences in their churches. See below.

The Church is not merely an invisible body of the truly saved<sup>10</sup>, but, like Israel, is a visible body of baptized believers. This understanding creates a more positive appreciation for the historic Christian bodies such as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions.<sup>11</sup> By analogy, the people of Israel are not "an invisible body," but a transgenerational, on-the-ground reality.

Though BA oriented Messianic Jews are developing an ever-greater appreciation for the larger Church, special appreciation should be reserved for the Evangelical Christian Church, sometimes referred to as the Free Church. Because of its atomistic governmental structure conducive to experimentation with Jewish-style congregations,

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<sup>10</sup> No doubt there is an invisible body of the truly redeemed. But, our ability to know exactly who belongs in this category is very limited.

<sup>11</sup> The concept was insisted upon during the [Protestant reformation](#) as a way of distinguishing between the "visible" **Roman Catholic Church**, which according to the Reformers was corrupt, and those within it who truly believe, as well as true believers within their own denominations. **John Calvin** described the church invisible as "that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit... [it] includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world." (*Institutes* 4.1.7)

its premillennial commitments leaving important space for the nation of Israel and its practical support and help, the Evangelical community has been and continues to be absolutely essential to the development of maturing Messianic Judaism.

God's ultimate purposes for our world (no more war, cancer or pain, all of creation brought forward into the joyful state promised long ago) will come about through Jewish people and the nations, joined together in Yeshua. "In that day the Lord will be one and his name one!" The consummation of God's overarching plan for planet Earth will come about as both Israel and the nations embrace their roles in what R.K. Soulen calls "an economy of mutual blessing." Borrowing C.S. Lewis eschatological image, I like to think of it as a great dance - with partners!

We can now distill some of the key features of BA Messianic Judaism and Messianic Jewish congregations from the discussion above. Again, we must consider these broader issues if our discussion of the role of Gentiles in our midst is to be credible and coherent.

#### THE MESSIANIC JEWISH CONGREGATION AS A LITTLE PIECE OF ISRAEL

The BA congregation is a unique kind of synagogue and not a culturally attuned church. This principle is axiomatic because it speaks to the very nature of Messianic Judaism, and by implication, means that it must be made up primarily of Jews!

Though its self-identification is primarily Jewish, Yeshua takes his place as central to the Messianic Jewish experience. Kinzer insists that...

Messianic Judaism involves more than the subtle tweaking of an existing form of Jewish life and thought – adding a few elements required by faith in Yeshua and subtracting a few elements incompatible with that faith. Instead, the Judaism we have inherited – and

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continue to practice – is entirely bathed in the bright light of Yeshua’s revelation.  
(Israel’s Messiah xiv)

We are glad that Kinzer is so forthright on this point.

Messianic Jewish congregations must also live out their profound spiritual connection with believers on “the other side of the isosceles triangle.” That is the living reality of unity of believers must find concrete expression.<sup>12</sup>

The divine-human partnership assumes that Jews have a covenantal responsibility to assure the future of the Jewish people. Though among the various Jewish denominations specific answers to questions about how to best ensure that “Am Yisrael” truly will “chai,” all agree that every Jew must do her part. Among bilateral practitioners, the role of kashrut, holy day observance and Shabbat are seen as important factors in the equation.<sup>13</sup> However, these are not enjoined upon non-Jews, even those in the Messianic Jewish synagogue. The expectation that they will support the community’s values in these areas has much to do with creating communal cohesion, but is not a function of a Torah-mandated covenantal commitment which Gentiles bear.

Boaz Michael, the Director of First Fruits of Zion paints a somewhat similar picture in his most recent book, *Tent of David - Healing the Vision of the Messianic Gentile*:

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<sup>12</sup> Congregation Ruach Israel expresses this unity by having jointly built a building in Needham, MA with a Mennonite Church. The arrangement has been rich in mutual blessing these twenty years. Our synagogue also sponsors a yearly Pastors Day – an Oneg Shabbat dedicated to the honor of our guests from among Boston’s clergy who have become friends of our synagogue over the years.

<sup>13</sup> Kinzer notes: “The abolition of the dietary laws is in effect an abolition of the Jewish people itself.”

First Fruits of Zion teaches a distinction between the obligations of a Jewish believer and the obligations of a Gentile believer. Not all the commandments that apply to Jews equally apply to Gentiles. This means that Gentile believers who have not taken on those commandments of the Torah that do not pertain to them specifically as Gentiles are not wallowing in sin or rebelling against God. They might be missing out on the disciplines and godly intentions of these commandments, which bring great structure and blessing to one's life—but they are not living in defiance and rebellion towards God. Gentile Christians are not, in fact, obligated to all of the commandments in the same way that the Jewish people are. The apostles chose not to obligate the Gentile believers to certain “sign” commandments and specific markers of Jewish identity which were enjoined specifically upon the physical nation of Israel, the Jewish people: circumcision, Shabbat, festivals, mezuzah, tefillin, tzitzit, kashrut, and the Levitical functions. While Gentile believers should be encouraged to participate in most of these mitzvot on some level, it is not on a level of a Jewish person's responsibility for covenantal fidelity. Besides, these aspects of Torah can really only be kept properly within the context of a Jewish community and culture.(Michael 116-117)

These helpful thoughts represent a shift in thinking among the FFOZ leadership from an earlier view which did seem to mandate Torah observance for non-Jewish believers. Boaz and his team deserve much credit for being willing to lose much financial support and esteem among their core constituency for the sake of Torah's demand for honesty and integrity. Their example can inspire us all irrespective of our convictions on the particulars of FFOZ's theology.

Gentile believers, including the vast majority who attend our congregations, do not become Jews when they trust Yeshua. When they enter the “deep Jewish space” of a Messianic Jewish congregation, they should have a supportive role. as we will discuss below.<sup>i</sup>

Though a Messianic Jewish congregation will in the vast majority of cases have non-Jewish participants, the numbers should be relatively small.

It may sound shocking at first, but the truth is that an activity which may rightly be viewed as a sin in the church, can be a mitzvah – a truly good deed - in the synagogue, including a Messianic Jewish synagogue. Of course, we are not talking about theft,

adultery or idolatry. These are just sinful, period. However, when it comes to distinctions between Jews and Gentiles in their respective roles in the assembly, the situation will be different. In a church to demand that a particular group of people may not come forward to read a passage of Scripture publically, would certainly seem improper.<sup>14</sup> Or to suggest that members of a particular ethnic group might find a more appropriate home in another congregation, sounds like the kind of racism practiced in many white congregations in the South until the 1960's.. But, for a synagogue to create internal boundaries for the sake of a God-given mandate to remain a unique, holy people could actually be a mitzvah, even an act of real self-sacrifice for the sake of Heaven.<sup>15</sup>

We are touching here on the very nerve center of the issue that confronts Messianic Jewish leaders today. Each of us is asked by the very nature of our being Jews who follow the Jewish Messiah: “Are our assemblies primarily synagogues – little pieces of Israel, expressions of a uniquely called and covenanted people? Or, are our assemblies primarily churches, that is Jewishly oriented expressions of the multi-ethnic community of Messiah?”<sup>16</sup> The answer we give has everything to do with how we envision the role of non-Jews in our midst.

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<sup>14</sup> Actually the distinction between the Christian assembly and the Jewish is not quite as dramatic as suggested here. Churches make internal distinctions rooted in revelation, too. For example many would not allow a woman pastor to serve the assembly. Conversely, every Messianic Jewish congregation I know of has meaningful roles for non-Jewish members, even those congregations which strongly identify with the bilateral approach.

<sup>15</sup> The price Jews have paid for seeking to remain a unique people has been steep. Jewish particularity has occasioned unspeakable violence against the Jewish people for centuries: “Those Jews...they don't mix with others...Who do they think they are?”

<sup>16</sup> Some may argue that there is a third way: “We are neither a church, nor a synagogue, but a Messianic congregation.” On the surface this may seem plausible insofar that our congregations are something of a new and different thing on the religious scene. However, at root level the actual contours of our assemblies fit the dyadic model of “little piece of Israel” or “little piece of the world wide community of

We have looked at the bilateral approach (BA) to Messianic Judaism. We will now turn our attention to what I will call the Missions Approach (MA) to building congregations with a Jewish ethos and with Messiah Yeshua at center stage.

## THE MESSIANIC JEWISH CONGREGATION AS A JEWISHLY-SENSITIVE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

Our subject is the role of non-Jews in Messianic Jewish congregations. However, lest we settle for a superficial treatment which merely catalogues a list of practical strategies disconnected from any theoretical framework, we must seek to understand the deeper structures which undergird the Messianic Jewish enterprise. Only when we understand the basic paradigms will we be able to develop a responsible outlook regarding those from among the nations whom we welcome into our congregational midst.

It should first be noted that the Christian Missions to the Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to idea that Jewish believers should have the freedom to create their own communities. Mitch Glaser comments:

It is a mistake to think that Messianic congregations are a new idea and that traditional missions did not start Messianic congregations. For example, CMJ (also known as the London Jews Society, LJS) established a large mission station and center in Warsaw...The congregation outside of Bucharest led by Isaac Feinstein, who served with the Norwegian Israelite Mission, is well known by students of the period....

Glaser notes the motivations for starting such congregations:

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Messiah with a Jewish ethos.” Neither in Scripture nor in past history can we discern such a third form of communal identity.

The congregations addressed a number of concerns. First, it was understood that congregations were to be an effective means of evangelism. Secondly, they were created as a source of fellowship for Jewish believers, especially those uncomfortable in attending an Evangelical church. (Cohn-Sherbok, *Voices* 172)

A touching expression of the support for the concept of Jewish believing communities or congregations comes from the Rev T. Lindhagen offered at the International Jewish Missionary Conference in Stockholm in 1911:

It cannot be denied that up to now the relation of Jewish Christians to their people has been far from altogether satisfactory. The reproaches which have been leveled against them are unfortunately only too well grounded (!) It is quite true that there are Jewish Christians and missionaries to the Jews who make an altogether vicious use of Paul's words to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek"...It is equally true that the Gentile Church has helped to estrange Jewish Christians from their own people by calling them "proselytes." In this case a thorough-going change in policy and practice is necessary...That the ideal of an autonomous Jewish Christian Church is closely connected with these aspirations regarding the right attitude of Hebrew Christians to their people is self-evident. (Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* 25)

We can't help but appreciate this gentleman's sensitivity to the profoundly difficult situation Jewish believers in Yeshua faced in his era; I look forward to meeting him one day. The fact that some of the Jewish believers used biblical passages to bludgeon others of their countrymen speaks to one of the sad social realities sometimes evident in marginalized communities. Reverend Lindhagen suggests that forming "Messianic Jewish" communities will help undo the negative effects of their outsider status.

As we continue to survey the MA motivational mix for starting Jewishly-oriented congregations – later called “Messianic” or “Messianic Jewish” – we discern a strong tendency toward the pragmatic. Such congregations are helpful to Jewish believers; are a cost effective means of outreach for Jewish missions;<sup>17</sup> and are a more effective means of outreach to Jews than Evangelical Churches.

Some voices moved beyond the pragmatic to what I will call the “quasi covenantal,” a sense that Jewish life was important in God’s plan for this Jewish believers. Lichtenstein and Rabinowitz are two examples. Some early practitioners actually lived quite “kosher” lifestyles, perhaps more so than some who identify with a bilateral approach to modern Messianic Judaism. But the underlying theology speaks to the differing orientations we see even today. Joseph Cohn, son of the famed Leopold Cohn, founder of the American Board of Missions to the Jews, wrote about his father’s Jewish practice and its motivation:

He followed the method introduced by Paul, “To the Jew I become as a Jew.” Pork he would not touch and it was not allowed in our home at any time...The Mosaic law was adhered to...For all of this he was continually attacked, even by certain Jews who had already had accepted Christ. The reason for my father’s dietetic asceticism was not that he felt himself to be under the law of Moses, but by this method he was able to win Jews to Christ who could not have been won otherwise. (Cohn-Sherbok, Messianic Judaism 40-41)

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<sup>17</sup> “In the 1930s a new development came about. Presbyterian missionaries initiated the establishment of a number of Hebrew Christian congregations under their auspices. The director...considered it more economical to create independent Jewish congregations that served as centers for evangelism and raised funds on their own. (Ariel 221)

One wonders if Rabbi Cohn's motivations were truly quite so utilitarian. His passion and consistency seems to suggest a deep reservoir of love for Jewish life. But, the social and theological climate of the day likely would mute one's ability to express to speak or even think too much about other possibilities.

The pragmatic, helpful, fair-minded, aesthetic, utilitarian and musicological seem to inform the deeper ethos of MA, the Missions Approach to Messianic congregational development. Arnold Fruchtenbaum seems "to say it all" in his defense of the idea of Messianic Jewish congregations:

"If the question is asked, "Are Messianic congregations a biblical necessity or requirement?" then the answer has to be no. The Bible does not require uniquely Jewish congregations for Messianic Jews any more than it requires other ethnic churches, such as black churches, Latino churches, Chinese churches or others.

If the question is asked differently, "Is it biblically permissible to have Messianic congregations?" Then the answer is yes. Jewish believers have the right to set up uniquely Jewish congregations that reflect the Jewish culture and style of music, worship, teaching and so on just as black, Latino and Chinese churches would reflect their particular style of worship and culture. (Goldberg and Gundry 111-112)

Arnold Fruchtenbaum is being characteristically generous-spirited in his remarks. "Let people live. Let them be themselves." His theological outlook is typical of modern missiologists who lament the sad cultural imperialism of an earlier time which demanded white shirts and ties of sub tropical converts to Christianity during Sunday

morning services.<sup>18</sup> But notice: Messianic life is simply a Jewish expression of ethnicity, no more covenantally mandated than the any other expression.<sup>19</sup>

A fair characterization of Fruchtenbum's theology recognizes that at one point he does go beyond the pragmatic to the covenantal. As a classic Dispensationalist, he has a strong commitment to the ongoing importance of the Jewish people especially as our existence impacts the eschatological plan of God for Planet Earth. Though very resistant to the idea that the Torah of Moses contains the blueprint for Israel's national life for Yeshua-believing Jews, he does retain one explicit command – circumcision. He states:

“It is my conviction that Hebrew Christians should have their sons circumcised on the eight day.” However, he explains that this command remains in force because it had been given to Abraham long before Moses. A second value issuing from the Abrahamic covenant is his commitment to the Land of Israel as the God-given homeland of the Jewish people. (Fruchtenbaum 29)

In his Everything You Need to Know to Grow a Messianic Yeshiva by pioneer thinker Phil Goble we find a similar theological orientation with its pragmatic focus:

In 1974 I began to see that many churches were not willing to change the routine of their style of ministry in order to reach the Jewish neighborhoods where God had placed

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<sup>18</sup> For a fuller discussion of the modern openness to the cultures of the world among modern missiologists see Understanding Church Growth by Donald A McGavran.

<sup>19</sup> Of course, this is a very incomplete picture of my friend Arnold's theology. His classical Dispensationalism sees much more in the Jewish experience than one's preference for blintzes over baklava, but the fact remains. Congregations which bear his theological stamp would have a very different self-understanding than bilaterally oriented ones.

them. I saw that new congregations needed to be planted, messianic synagogues, in those areas. I have never advocated putting Jews under the law, but if a Jewish community like Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is on its way to eternal death (under the law) and a church in that area insists on worshipping in the style of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, something must be done. A new congregation – one that will identify its hymnology, liturgy, architecture and worshipping style – must become as if it were under the law to win those who are under the law (I Cor. 9:20). (Goble xi)

Summarizing the above, we can see that the Missions Approach to Messianic congregational formation stresses: 1. concern for the well being of Jewish believers or, in the case of Goble's comments, deep concern for the eternal souls of Jewish non-believers. 2. a pragmatic, needs-based approach to the enterprise when limited resources are considered. 3. a view of Jewish life which, unlike the bilateral view, sees Jewish law, custom and tradition in terms similar to its view of the culture of any other people group.

## ONE BODY IN MESSIAH

One further aspect of the overall character of MA needs to be considered before we more directly into the subject of Gentile involvement in Messianic Judaism. Characteristic of MA is its aversion to making distinctions between Jewish and Gentile believers. This reticence, which is deeply rooted in the Christian psyche generally, finds expression over and over again in the literature about Jewish believing identity and practice, both from Christian and Jewish believers. A few examples will suffice:

William Varner, former dean of the Institute of Biblical Studies with Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry writes:

It has sometimes been charged that Messianic Judaism is rebuilding the dividing wall of hostility. Actually, no one can rebuild the wall. It is done away with forever. My concern, however, is that Messianic Judaism by its concern with laws that have no continuing spiritual relevance for either Jews or Gentiles, is creating an appearance that the wall still separates us. (Goldberg and Gundry 20)

Eliezer Maass, in his practical Survival Guide for the New Jewish Believer, speaks to the issue very directly:

With the advent of Israel's Messiah, the law of Moses was put to an end...No longer are we (believers generally) burdened by the weight of dietary laws and endless regulations of every kind...We believe that the Law of Moses as a rule of life has been fulfilled in the Messiah and therefore, believers, whether Jewish or non-Jewish are no longer under its obligation or condemnation. However, both Jewish and non-Jewish believers have the freedom in Messiah to maintain those aspects of the Law of Moses and Jewish cultural identity that do not violate Scripture (Maass 89, 173)

This widespread conviction will have titanic implications for the role of Gentiles in Messianic Jewish congregations. It arises out of the matrix of this traditional Christian understanding of Jewish particularity, the role of Torah and the very nature of the relationship of Jews and non-Jews in Messiah. However, we note that unlike the prevailing view in the Church for many centuries, Fruchtenbaum, Varner, Maass and other practitioners do allow and often encourage Jewish practices, not for covenantal reasons, but for evangelistic purposes or as sincere accommodations to the needs of Jewish people who may desire to live in familiar cultural territory.

To reinforce the point, even a cursory Google search of the phrase "Messianic congregations, Jews and Gentiles" reveals the extent to which the idea that Messianic congregations are by nature and purpose, a home where believers, Jewish or not, come

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to fellowship and learn the Bible from a Jewish perspective. As noted at the beginning of this paper, the categories we have chosen to tease out the two basic approaches to Gentile participation are the Bilateral and Missions approaches. Undoubtedly, many congregations surveyed on the web will most often not see themselves as sprouting from either of these in any direct sense and would likely find aspects of either or both orientations with which to agree. However, the theologically attuned observer can discern genuine patterns of thought and practice which translate very definitely into differing mentalities, approaches, and desired outcomes for both Jews and non-Jews in their midst.

An interesting example of the leveling of the playing field among Jewish and non-Jewish believers in congregations which gravitate to the MA outlook is the wording of the website of Baruch Ha Shem, a large assembly in Dallas, Texas. Its leader is my very good friend Marty Waldman. In the section entitled Welcome Mat we read:

*Baruch HaShem* (BHS) is a growing Messianic community which meets in North Dallas. As a congregation, BHS is dedicated to the Great Commission of *Yeshua* (Jesus) as expressed in the Good News of *Mattityahu* 28:18-20, as well as Romans 1:16, which states: "For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God's powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who keeps on trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile." Consequently, BHS membership includes many Jewish believers and also people from a wide range of other cultural and religious backgrounds. Nevertheless, the Congregation is *echad* (one) in the L-RD, and remains united by the power of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) and by the simple belief that *Yeshua* is the Messiah of Israel and thus King over all the nations. He is the center and focal point of our faith. (Baruch ha Shem Website home page)

With such an all-embracing, universal message and its warm and gifted leader, it is no wonder that Baruch haShem is a very large and well-funded congregation with a sizable majority of non-Jewish participants.

We are now ready to consider in some detail the roles of Gentiles in Messianic congregations as seen through the grid established thus far. We will find great areas of commonality and an equally great number of significant differences.

## PART 2 – GENTILES IN OUR MESSIANIC JEWISH MIDST: HOW SHALL THEY THEN LIVE?

In light of the previous discussion let us consider practical means whereby Gentiles may attain the place we believe they are destined to in our congregations. However, we must not gloss over the areas of theological distinction covered above if our discussion of practical strategies is to have more than mere surface resonance or dissonance among us. The fact is, leaders of both kinds of congregations worry about the viability of the other!

- BA leaders wonder about the integrity of using Jewish symbols, holy day observance etc. if Jews have no covenantal obligation to live as Jews.
- MA leaders wonder if the strong identification with Jewish norms, particularly liturgy will dull passion for the Risen One in the long run.
- BA leaders wonder about the legitimacy of Messianic Jewish congregations which have a strong majority of Gentiles.
- MA leaders wonder about the drift of those who lean towards traditional Judaism and the demonstrable loss of passion for Yeshua among new Jewish believers.
- BA leaders wonder about the ability of MA congregations to speak meaningfully to the Jewish world.

- MA leaders wonder about BA leaders' tendency to elevate Jewish texts aside from the Bible.

We must also keep in mind the great areas of commonality among leaders who represent these orientations:

- Both see non-Jewish believers as “co-heirs with the saints,” people who are loved by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with an intensity revealed most clearly at Messiah’s incarnation, death and resurrection.
- Both agree MJ congregations will have at least some non-Jewish presence and that these people need to be treated with the love and respect they deserve.
- Though for different reasons, both agree that MJ congregations are important: There are thousands of churches, but only a few places where we Jews can be ourselves.
- Both would like to see more Jewish people in the pews of our congregations.
- Both see intermarried people as an important constituency.
- Messianic congregations because of their organic connection with the larger family of Yeshua, should embrace some of its universally held faith commitments. These include the full deity and full humanity of Yeshua, the canon of Scripture, including the New Testament and participation in the Tevilah (immersion) and Ha Zikkaron (The Lord’s Supper, Communion). Such practices are more easily embraced in the synagogue when some non-Jews are present because they are more comfortable and familiar with such concepts.
- Both desire to see the entire Jewish world embrace Yeshua our Messiah.

A SHARED CONCERN: WHY SO MANY GENTILES?

Another commonality between differing kinds of Messianic Jewish congregations is the fact that, although most leaders would like to see significantly more Jews than non-Jews in the pews, historical, cultural and demographic factors make this difficult. Some of these are:

- The total number of Jews in the world today is dwarfed by the number of non-Jews. Currently, the worldwide Jewish population is 13.3 million with 46 % of these living in the North America. In 2011 the world population was estimated at 7 billion. Thus, the worldwide Jewish population is a mere .2 % of that total. Thus, any aggregation of people which appeals to both Jews and Gentiles, especially those which open its doors equally to both, will tend to have more non Jewish participants. Of course, local demographic realities may alter this result. This is a powerful reason for planting Messianic Jewish congregations in Jewish population centers.
- Evangelical Christians, among Christian groupings, are the most interested in Messianic Jewish things.<sup>20</sup> Evangelicals in the United States numbered, according the Website of Political Research Associates, 102 million souls in

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<sup>20</sup> Why are these Evangelicals so interested in us? First, there is a mystique about the Jews because we are the people of the Book. Second, many Evangelicals yearn for a sense of the transcendence of God which often is absent from their churches, which tend to place a great deal of emphasis on God's immanence. Third – and related to point one, Evangelicals often see involvement in our congregations as a way to “get back to the primitive church. Though largely a naïve belief, this has a powerful appeal for many, especially those who have seen the seedier side of their own communities. They imagine that we are the “pure” followers of Christ whom they long to emulate. Fourth, a kind of “covenant envy” has lurked in the collective psyche of the Church generally for centuries. Often this has resulted in the kind of reaction formation resulting in hostile action. For evangelicals, this can translate into a desire to get close to Jewish believers. Finally, it is much easier for Christians to cross the great religious divide and to attend a Messianic Jewish assembly than for a Jewish person to do so. Yeshua remains a difficult pill for our people to swallow in light of the realities of history.

2007. The number of Jewish believers in Messianic assemblies could be placed very generously at 25,000 (50 people in 500 congregations). Thus, congregations with no fire wall seeking to sustain a Jewish majority will have a very difficult time indeed!

- Christians go to church much more regularly than Jews go to synagogue. This translates into more regular attendance in our congregations by Gentiles who are used to the idea of attending services regularly.
- Non-Jewish members are often in a better financial position to help build a local congregation than Jewish members. Though this is clearly not the case generally in America when comparing income levels of Jews and non-Jews, the particular subset of Jews attracted to our congregations often do not come from the stable home environments conducive to financial success. Gravitation to marginal religious movements often begins with other areas of marginalization. We may chafe at this observation – who doesn't want to be viewed as living among "the winners?" But we must remember Messiah's agenda. He has a very special place in his heart for the outsiders, so much so that he became one himself! One subtle but ultimately powerful result of this economic reality is that Messianic leaders are understandably reluctant to disenfranchise well-heeled and generous Christian members of the congregation by allowing the place to become "too Jewish" and thereby losing the support of these good folks. This can be especially true when a congregation has a large mortgage or responsibilities to multiple paid staff.<sup>21</sup>

Rabbi Tony Eaton, the spiritual leader of Congregation Simchat Yisrael in West Haven, CT expresses the demographic problem in these terms: "The problem is not too many

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<sup>21</sup> This insight is the product of personal observation and discussion only. It is not statistically verifiable and certainly does not reflect the inner motivations of any particular leader.

gentiles, but too few Jews.” In other words, the emphasis of the Messianic leader in solving the problem of an ever-diminishing proportion of Jewish people in Messianic Jewish congregations should be outreach (keruv) among our people. I appreciate AND agree with Rabbi Tony’s desire for more outreach. However, I sense that the solution will also require serious rethinking of our approach to gentile participation.

So much for theological abstraction, historical reflection and collective psychological analysis! It’s time to get practical. Because I know it best, let me tell you about the synagogue I’ve been privileged to serve for the past three decades. Congregation Ruach Israel, located in Needham, MA, a near-Western suburb of Boston, has been in existence since 1978. I have spent much energy seeking to build a bilaterally oriented synagogue, starting long before Mark Kinzer’s introduction of the term (though I am profoundly grateful to Mark for clarifying and articulating the theological underpinnings of things I could only intuit in earlier years).

#### CASE STUDY: CONGREGATION RUACH ISRAEL

Congregation Ruach Israel had its humble beginnings in 1979 in Boston, MA. For the past 21 years the synagogue’s home has been in Needham, MA, a near-Western suburb with a population of 29,000. The growing Jewish community represents roughly one third of that total. Ruach Israel’s formal membership is 44 family units. In four of these families, neither husband nor wife is Jewish.<sup>22</sup> The congregation is led by a nine member Board of Directors at the center of which is an Executive Committee composed of Senior Rabbi, President and Vice President. All Board members, as well as our

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<sup>22</sup> The Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council’s definition of “Who is a Jew” forms the basis for this statistic.

Rabbinical Team (Senior Rabbi plus two others who have UMJC Smichah) and our three member Cantorial Team – are all Jewish.<sup>23</sup>

The four key agendas of the congregation are:

- Outreach (keruv) to other Jews so they may make teshuvah and put their trust in Yeshua
- Liturgical integrity
- Healing prayer, so that Israel may experience the powerful, supernatural intrusion of Olam Ha Baah among us through the Risen One
- Children's education. A full one third of the congregation are children and teens.

Over the years we have sought to work out our bilateral approach to non-Jewish participation in our synagogue. Here are some of the values and strategies that have guided us:

**Gently guide Gentile visitors** - I as the Senior Rabbi try to discourage non-Jewish visitors from viewing Ruach Israel as a likely next spiritual home. A typical conversation best had after the first or second visit can go something like this:

Visitor: Rabbi I just loved your service. I sense that you are the true church. I've been looking for a place with the kind of spiritual purity I see here. How can I become part?

Rabbi Rich: Well, I'm so glad you enjoyed the service, and I hope you'll feel free to visit again sometime, but I must tell you that Ruach is a synagogue and not a church.

Visitor: Oh.

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<sup>23</sup> Aside from the rabbinical staff, the Bylaws of the congregation do not demand that all the governmental roles are filled by Jewish people, but that "the composition of the Board shall be predominantly Jewish."

Rabbi Rich: We really are a home mostly for Jewish people and intermarried families. There are so many churches in Boston, but very, very few places Jewish people can be ourselves as we follow the Messiah. I'm sure you can understand our thinking here.

Visitor: Oh yes. I understand.

Rabbi Rich: Now here's a thought. When you come visit us again sometime, think about bringing a Jewish friend with you.

Visitor: Yes, I have a friend I think might like to come.

Rabbi Rich: Great! Meanwhile, can you join us for lunch in the Function Hall?

**Produce a pamphlet.** Here is a reality I have seen over and over again: Jews come late to services, but church visitors show up early or on time. We have a pamphlet describing our service and which defines the major symbols and defining moments in the liturgy. It also lets visitors know about our unique calling:

Congregation Ruach Israel especially welcomes Jewish people and interfaith couples and their families to join our community. Ours is a synagogue and not a church. This can seem a bit confusing at first because we share with the Christian community a belief in Yeshua. But, as an expression of Jewish life, we are a synagogue. (A church, by definition, is a multi-ethnic community of believers and is therefore, different from a synagogue). Our synagogue has a deep appreciation for the Church in its many denominations. We share a sense of spiritual brotherhood in Yeshua. In fact, we see the unity of church and synagogue as central to God's plan for our world. But, we are a synagogue, not a church.

If you are not Jewish we want you to know we are pleased you chose to visit our Shabbat or other service today. If you are a member of a local church we hope your visit will enhance your appreciation of the Jewish roots of your Christian faith. If you are not Jewish and are unaffiliated, we encourage you to find a church which can become your spiritual home. Just as all Jews need a synagogue in which to learn and grow, so all gentile believers need a local home with familiar heritage and culture in which to grow.

As visitors sit, waiting for the service to start, they can get just a subtle taste for how we view our visitors, the majority of whom come from local churches. To soften the message about our unique calling and to make the service easier to follow, the pamphlet continues with brief explanations of the morning's flow.

**Manage visitor cards** – Simply stated, Jewish visitors and intermarried families get my best pastoral attention. I am less likely to follow up with people visiting from local churches. However, we will put visitors from local churches on our general e-mail list if they so desire.

**Cultivate Hebrew-rich services** – Our Shabbat and holy day services are roughly half in Hebrew, half in English. Of course our principle reason for using so much of the mother tongue is that the Hebrew language binds the Jewish people together perhaps more deeply than any other single cultural dynamic. Hebrew ties us to our people, creating a cohesion that reaches through the many centuries of our shared experience. But, a useful bi-product of having Hebrew-rich services is that they are not so easily accessible to the Evangelical Christian visitor who is used to total accessibility. The meta communication here is that “this synagogue is deep Jewish space – a place where Jews gather.”<sup>24</sup>

**Make keruv (outreach) intentional** – Our strategies for keruv always are geared for Jewish seekers and intermarried folks whom we hope to interest in creating Messianic Jewish homes. For example our Outreach Committee is geared almost entirely to the many intermarried families in the Boston area. It is these people we have in mind to interest in our congregation. A constant refrain in the synagogue should be “we are here

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<sup>24</sup> A complication, of course, is that a Hebrew-rich service can be off-putting to some Jews, not just to gentile visitors.

for Jewish and intermarried families.” This core value must gradually seep into the collective consciousness of the assembly.

**Develop Jewish leadership** – A value which seems quite obvious in a bilaterally oriented congregation is that the leaders of a synagogue must be Jewish! Rabbis, Cantors, synagogue presidents should be Jewish.<sup>25</sup> Here, theology plays a big role in creating this reality on the ground. As mentioned in Part I of this paper, the bilateral outlook demands that our congregations are little pieces of Israel – expressions first and foremost of Jewish peoplehood, though rooted in Messiah Yeshua. Thus, the energy and sacrifice necessary to guide a congregation to seek Jewish majorities, to install Jewish leaders, etc. comes from the deep reservoirs of spiritual conviction, not primarily from pragmatic considerations. Though subtle, it is hard to overstate the importance of this dynamic as we leaders seek to shape the future of Messianic Judaism. This point deserves further exploration.

Any Messianic Jewish leader who has reflected on the things which “make people tick” knows that one of the most powerful forces in the human experience is the acceptance/rejection dynamic. People yearn for acceptance by those they look up to, the people they love and admire. When they feel accepted, they are responsive to others, just as God’s love in Messiah, when felt deeply, moves us all to love him back and to respond to his demands on our lives. Conversely, feelings of rejection are very difficult to accommodate. Ask any congregational leader and he or she will tell you that much of the pain in his or her ministry has come from people who have acted poorly toward them because of their irrational feelings of being rejected (misunderstood, not valued, unappreciated) by their pastor or rabbi. Surely this is not the only source of pain

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<sup>25</sup> At Ruach Israel, we would be sure to have Jewish Senior and Associate Rabbis and Cantors, both lay and professional. . Currently our Board also is entirely Jewish. However, there may at times be the need to place a non-Jewish person on the Synagogue Board since our by-laws do not prohibit such.

suffered by ministers and pulpit rabbis, but it is a major one. And sometimes, the congregant is right. She has been rejected unfairly by God's representative.

The challenge we face as Messianic Jewish leaders is that Jewish particularity – the uniqueness of the Jewish people and our obligation as leaders among Am Yisrael to uphold that uniqueness – demands that we cannot accept everyone into our synagogues equally. This can and will produce resentment among some people towards us. How could it not? They at times will feel rejected and unappreciated. How could it be otherwise, even despite our very best efforts to honor and love them? Further, as sensitive spiritual souls yearning to please our heavenly Abba, we leaders feel an opposite impulse – to uphold the universality of the Gospel and its call to all the men, women, boys and girls so they may become enfolded in the welcoming embrace of Messiah Yeshua.

So, lying within our hearts and minds are two opposite impulses, both worthy, both essential. The particularity of the call of the Jewish people to live as God's segullah, his precious possession from among the people groups of the world, stretches one of our arms to the right, and the universality of Yeshua's message stretches in cruciform fashion to the opposite pole. We are thus, crucified with Messiah as the bearers of a conundrum which proves almost beyond our ability to bear. Yet, we can make progress by embracing our co-crucifixion with Messiah and then thinking dialectically about a possible resolution.

Clearly, dialectical approaches to life's questions can be misapplied. We think of the false dichotomy between Peter and Paul imagined by some 19<sup>th</sup> century biblical scholars as a good example. Paul and his gospel of grace allegedly conflicted with Peter's Jewish, Torah-friendly message. Along comes John, with his gospel of love and the tension of thesis and antithesis was resolved in the new synthesis: the gospel of love – the true gospel. Actually, there really was no true dialectic between Peter and

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Paul as the best modern scholarship demonstrates, but the appeal to love as starting place for resolving the kind of true dialectic we Messianic Jewish leaders face is most worthy. More on the ways of love a bit later in our discussion.

We can legitimately think about the resolution of truly opposite impulses (universalism and particularism) if we allow ourselves to “be stretched between the polarities” as Messiah was stretched out on the cross, allowing ourselves to die while embracing the complexity of our calling. We imagine the tension on his attenuated limbs to be roughly equal. So, too we must feel the pulling in both directions. I suggest that the pragmatism of many Messianic Jewish congregations tends to pull too much to the side of the universal and not enough to the demands of the particular call of the Jewish people.. I would criticize some Messianic Jewish synagogues as having an overdeveloped sense of particularism which functionally removes them from all life in the larger community of Yeshua.<sup>26</sup>

I suggest the best resolution to date is the bilateral model of Messianic Jewish congregational development along with a clear understanding of exactly what it means to truly love the non-Jewish people in our midst.

## LOVING GENTILES IN OUR MIDST

We begin with the clear awareness that gentile believers are not the pagans of antiquity, but brothers and sisters in Messiah who deserve our deepest respect and love. With this clearly in mind we are in a position to ask the question, “how shall we love these people who come among us?”

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<sup>26</sup> Two spiritual pathologies converge in some of these groups: an over-idealization of the Jewish experience characterized by stereotypic Chasidic dress (and often, a Gentile leader!) and an irrational disdain for the Christian Church.

We mentioned earlier that at Ruach Israel we resist seeking members from among Gentile visitors. Can we appeal to a love motivation for such “exclusion?” We surely can. Let’s talk about children. When the (hypothetical) Bob and Sally O’Hara show up to services with their three children in tow and enthusiastically proclaim they loved what they find in our service, that they have finally found the true faith and they may want to become part of our community, we are less enthusiastic. . We have found that often these parents are not thinking about the long-term effects of the identity confusion they bequeath to the children when they rip them out of Awana Club and Boys Brigade, Sunday School and church so they can become part of “the Jewish church.” The negative spiritual effects of this move may not be not very pronounced among 3-10 year olds, but, eventually little Cindy O’Hara will become a teenager and as we all know, issues related to fitting in, feeling normal, not being an outsider, become important at that age. So we ask, is it really loving for the Messianic Jewish leader to put out the welcome mat to the O’Hara family? I would suggest that in most cases the answer is an emphatic “no.” Are there exceptions to the above? Of course there may be. Such is the nature of the infinite variations we find in the human relational mix. We will consider some “exceptions” below. But, the general principle stands. It is usually not loving to bring children into an already identity-challenged community, thereby compounding their own confusion, potentially leaving them in a spiritual no-man’s land instead of celebrating and reinforcing their God given identity as people who should attend church.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> It can be argued that the same reasoning would keep Messianic Jews from inviting their own children into our “marginalized space.” The key difference here is that God’s covenantal calling to all Jewish people is that “dor l’dor” – from generation to generation – we are obligated to bring our children into the fullness of the covenant. For us, this includes Yeshua! From a bilateral perspective non-Jews have no such obligation. They do have a similar obligation: Messiah taught all his followers, “blessed are you

But how shall we love the non-Jews already in our midst? I know of no worthy congregation that does not have at least a small number of non-Jews in attendance. This is true of mainstream synagogues as well as Messianic congregations. Below are some principles and examples that may prove helpful:

**Discern the Difference** – Our experience as leaders as well as the testimony of history from Ruth the Moabitess to the present, demonstrates that some non-Jews should and must be among us. We know who these folks are:

- They don't demand to wear a talit or make a Torah aliyah, but are just happy to serve in the community and feel profoundly grateful to do so.<sup>28</sup>
- They appreciate the church. Their presence in the Messianic Jewish congregation is not primarily a reaction-formation to the bad pastor or bad Sunday school teacher of their childhood. Rather, they appreciate the historic

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when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me..." (Mt. 5:11). There is a marginality which encompasses the gentile followers of Messiah, too.

<sup>28</sup> In our synagogue two wonderful examples come to mind: Dave N. had been with us for twenty five or so years and served as our Cantor. It was a time of less theological maturity when we failed to see the incongruity of a Gentile Cantor! He willingly gave up donning a talit when it became clear to us and to him that this was inappropriate. His comment about the congregation made without any sense of bitterness or regret was, "The baby has grown up," meaning that Ruach Israel was at the point of moving into her calling as a true synagogue.

John and Carol M., an older couple of strong Italian background came to me many years ago and announced they felt it was time for them to relinquish their formal membership in the synagogue because this was a home for Jews. However, they wanted to continue giving generously financially and to serve the synagogue. They are among our most faithful couples, serving in multiple capacities.

community of Yeshua, understand that churches are the God-ordained home for most believers, but just have felt often for decades, the strong undertow of the Ruach, drawing them into Jewish space. They spend no time trying to get their friends in the churches to “quit those paganized, apostate assemblies and join the messianics, the true believers!” Encouraging such people has a very positive effect on our relationship with local churches. Pastors are very understandably wary of believers in their churches who begin speaking to others about the deficiencies of the church and the “better way of the Messianic Jews who get it right,” vis a vis Christmas, Easter, Torah, etc. etc.” We Messianic Jewish leaders in no way want to dignify or endorse such trite nonsense. Healthy non-Jewish believers who attach themselves to our congregations should ideally love and appreciate their Christian upbringing.

- They have high regard for the Jewish people, not as an idealized mass of eschatological mini Abrahams and Sarahs, but as the real live people they know from real history and from work and the JCC.
- They are the good-hearted Catholic or Evangelical spouses of Jewish believers who, though initially don't understand the meaning of all the Jewish emphasis, are willing to follow their husbands (yes, usually these are Gentile wives) to the Messianic Jewish congregation. At first they do it for the children or for the sake of family unity. In time some desire to identify with the Jewish people and the Jewish Messiah for even deeper reasons.

Caution: The “rules” don't cover every situation. Sometimes, the only reason for justifying a particular Gentile's participation among us is simple love flowing from our mandate to love people who may not “get it” concerning the specifics of Messianic Jewish theology or practice. These souls should be welcome to sojourn among us for no other reason than the fact that they may have attended for a long time, or because

the community senses a goodness and holiness which ennoble the community or simply because they have nowhere else to go.

**Make clear the rules** – I'll have to admit, I was nervous. The Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) had formulated and would soon jointly affirm a set of standards to be commended as norms for the non-Jews in our member congregations. I had determined to clearly articulate these at one of our brunches geared for intermarried people – one where I knew the vast majority of those present would be members of our synagogue and not visitors. After the meal I gathered the twenty or so participants in our host's living room, passed out copies of the standards and began to teach. To my delight, there were no objections to the fact that non-Jews would not be invited to the Torah scroll to read or would not be permitted to wear a talit at services, etc. The key issue was expressed by Paul, a non-Jewish spouse of one of our Jewish members. "Rabbi Rich, we don't mind the rules at all. What we need is to be clear as to exactly what they are." Right, Paul!

All too often the Messianic Jewish enterprise appears trivial because the "rules of the game" vary so widely among our congregations. The question, most often unarticulated but felt, is this: why should Jewish people take seriously a religious movement that is so ambiguous in its values and teachings? The Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) was formed to give weight to Messianic Jewish understandings, particularly in the areas of congregational life and practice. Four intersecting questions have guided our deliberations over the past decade as we have wrestled with the issues of normative practice: for our synagogues:

- What does Scripture say explicitly on a given subject?
- What does Jewish tradition reveal on the subject?
- What do the explicit teachings and example of Yeshua reveal on the subject?

- How do the realities of modern life inform our determinations?

Full members of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council with voice and vote must be ordained rabbis. Associate members need not be ordained but serve the movement as recognized lay leaders with the intellectual and spiritual gifts necessary to contribute to the dialogue.

Appendix 2 contains the MJRC determinations regarding appropriate practice for non-Jews in our midst. These were formally adopted at our May 2011 meeting in Windsor Locks, CT. The discussion will likely continue on for years to come as new situations present themselves. Our contention is that loving the non-Jews in our midst demands the kind of clarity that a group process of like-minded rabbis working together over many years can generate. The pay-off comes in the form of a plan for clear identity formation for our synagogue members, resulting in a relaxed congregational atmosphere, the result of clarity where before, there had been none. The payoff also comes from the joy we sense among those who have demonstrated they really have a “Jewish neshuma (soul)” whose need for full participation among Am Yisrael can finally be met in a communally-sanctioned fashion through the auspices of the MJRC. See below for more on this.

**Rely on the power of symbolic gesture** – At Ruach Israel as in most spiritual communities we look for ways to express love to our members, including our non-Jewish members, via small acts which demonstrate how much we appreciate them. A special poem. a song<sup>29</sup> just for them, a “member of the month” announcement, etc. When we invite all the children up to the bema for a blessing before Shabbat school, I

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<sup>29</sup> John and Carol M. are the non-Jewish couple mentioned in footnote 28 above, have been so helpful to our synagogue. I wrote new words to the song “Amore” which appears as Appendix 3.

make it a point to connect with as many kids as I can reach! I pull the little girls pony tails and rub the keppies of the little guys. This is a moment for love for all in the midst of a Torah service which in most every other respect reserves special space for Am Yisrael in our re-enactment of the Sinai experience.

**Consider The Conversion Option** – Though controversial in Messianic Jewish circles, we have found that having a mechanism whereby a very limited number of non-Jews among us can formally join the Jewish people to be helpful. It can be a tremendous act of love to formally eliminate the huge psychic burden felt by some uniquely-called non-Jews among us who feel caught in the “no man’s land” of a confused personal identity and who yearn to be counted among the Jewish people. Others in our congregations can be helped as well. Here are some examples. Though hypothetical, they represent the kinds of concerns casting a mist of confusion and anxiety on many among the people we serve:

- "I wasn't born Jewish, but at the Messianic Jewish synagogue I attend all the guys wear tallises, which makes me feel Jewish. I suppose I am, but I'm not sure. No one really talks about it much. "
- "My name is Tommy O'Hara and I'm 10 years old. Mom and dad like to take me to a Messianic Jewish church and I like to go. I think I may be Jewish now, but I'm not sure."
- "My name is Rachel Sandler and I'm Jewish. I like going to temple but I end up confused when I go. My Bat Mitzvah is coming up in May, but my Jewish friends at school say our congregation is all wrong and their parents won't let them come. They say our rabbi shouldn't have Bar Mitzvahs for kids who aren't Jewish, but they know that we do. I kind of agree, because Bat Mitzvah is really a

Jewish ceremony. But, there are more kids at our Messianic temple who aren't Jewish than kids who are. And we have Bar Mitzvahs for everyone. I don't want to act like I'm prejudiced, but it all feels weird. I'm confused about a lot of things. And I'm really sad my best friends from school won't be coming to my Bat Mitzvah."

- "I grew up in Messianic Judaism but frankly, on reflection I think it is such a hodgepodge of confusion that I can't possibly stay in such an environment. It was nice when I was a kid, but as a young adult it really makes no sense to me at all. How can I possibly stay? I don't expect any religion to be perfect. I'm surely not perfect. But, I just cannot continue to support a faith that seems so utterly ambiguous about its very nature. Is it really a Judaism? Is it a Christianity? No one seems to offer clear answers to even such obvious questions." (Nichol 6-7)

Under the right conditions offering conversion can help solve some of the challenges facing our constituencies and enhance the staying power of our movement.

**Cultivate a gentle touch** – The apostle reminds us that, “love is kind” (1Cor. 13:4). True kindness will express itself as an approach to people which is relaxed, gentle and good-natured whenever possible. Even in areas of great doctrinal import – or in areas of ecclesiology, which are so meaningful and important as our subject – kindness must rule. After all, as Messianic Jewish leaders we hold the hearts of other human beings in our hands. They deserve to be treated well and if we don't, God promises to hold us accountable. Here are some specifics:

- Wait until after the service to explain to the non-Jewish visitor donning a tallit that doing so is not the minhag (custom) of the synagogue.<sup>30</sup> If appropriate, gently touch his shoulder as you explain that the fringes of the tallit are key reminders of the Jewish people's obligation to the Torah and thus, are best not worn in our services by non-Jewish people. I have unnecessarily hurt some people's feelings by not being conscious of the timing factor.
- Be willing to meet with Gentile visitors to explain the congregation's views either during Oneg Shabbat or at some other time if you sense that such conversation will bring peace to their souls. Given the current climate among Messianic congregations, it is really not their fault if they begin with confusion in these matters.

**Learn the value of grandfathering** – for leaders who come to understand that the very nature of Messianic Judaism demands distinctions between Jews and Gentiles even within the four walls of our congregations, the transition can be difficult. As a general rule, it is best not to take privileges away that have already been offered, but to allow a transition time sometimes lasting a few years. Of the five non Jewish men accustomed to wearing a talit at our synagogue at the time we made the transition to viewing the donning of a talit as the province of Jews, we made no demands of these good men. They knew about our transition, but were free to do as they chose. One kept wearing the talit. One saw the transition as the next step in our maturation as a synagogue and though he had a prominent role among us, willingly gave up wearing his prayer shawl. Another, a man with some Jewish lineage, stopped wearing his talit and later chose to enter the conversion process. The remaining two did leave the congregation for reasons tangential to this specific change in our policy, but related to the overall development of

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<sup>30</sup> Or, wait until the next time the visitor comes. This gives the leader opportunity to ascertain if in fact the person is Jewish or not.

our congregation's bilateral outlook. The point here is that though transitions are never easy, a light touch clearly helped minimize damage to the community and was appreciated by a majority of those who were affected.

**Take away, but give back** – Robert Frost's poem is the source of the familiar phrase, "Good fences make good neighbors." An application in our context is this: once clarity comes to Messianic Jewish leadership regarding the rules guiding Gentile participation, great liberty and largesse can be expressed within those boundaries. Non-Jews can have important roles among us. Why should a qualified gentile not teach a Scripture study? Why not preach on occasion? Why not serve on a standing committee or lead an ad-hoc committee? Or, lead a musical group? *It is the ambiguity of their status that creates the up-tightness in the community and prevents the relaxed, good-natured feeling conducive to creativity and joy. Identity confusion is the curse. Clear boundaries with love embody the blessing.*

**Explain, explain, explain** – The other day I made my very first stock purchase on TDAmeritrade. It was a huge step because, though I enjoy fund-raising, I have always viewed involvement in the market with the trepidation one might feel approaching the entrance of an interesting cave, but hearing a low animal growl from within. But there was assurance and help from the lady in the customer service department. She explained what an "option" was. Other terms which undoubtedly were as clear as water in a mountain stream to her and her colleagues went from completely murky to almost clear for me as she patiently answered my many questions.

We Messianic Jewish leaders sport a rich theological vocabulary and a glossary of in-house terminology. It is an act of love to explain transitions in the congregation's outlook clearly, simply and with great patience. Had the very wealthy proprietors of TDAmeritrade expected me to penetrate their world without that lady's patient help over better than an hour, I would likely have opted for the piggy bank. It just smiles and says

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“klink” with each investment! But there can be much gain with oxen (I mean TD Ameritrade!) so, explain, explain, explain and the good people of your congregation will, for the most part, respond positively.

**Appreciate and Validate** – Looking back over thirty-plus years, I am filled with gratitude for many of the non-Jewish believers who have come among us. Ruach Israel has been enriched by such people. In fact, I would argue that without the presence of these selfless servants of the King, ours – and many other - Messianic Jewish synagogues might not have come into existence at all. These folks deserve our highest esteem and love. Once clear boundaries have been established it is fairly easy to show appreciation at every turn of the synagogue’s life. Of course, such expressions of praise and appreciation should be “equal opportunity.” Good hearted Jewish members contribute to the whole and these need to know that the rabbi thinks they are terrific, too!

**Guard their futures** – I am not referring to stock futures here, but the possible futures of Gentile members of our synagogues. We must help them cultivate love for the church while they sojourn with us. We don't want these folks to burn their bridges with their own religious roots because in time, many will feel the tug of their early childhood experiences and desire to move back into familiar territory. This can be a very healthy thing for all. Help them celebrate their re-entry to church so they can look back at their experience in the Messianic Jewish congregation as a time of growth – a wonderful God ordained step along the way. Help them return with a mandate to help their church love the Jewish people and especially the remnant of Israel.

**Find a sympathetic church or two** – Particularly in the BA, but possible in the MA, it becomes very clear that most gentiles should belong to healthy churches. As noted, there are exceptions. Would it not be a good thing for the rabbi to locate a couple of churches in the area which support the Messianic Jewish idea, have a regard for Israel and the Jewish people and could make a comfortable home for the non-Jew who,

having spent some time in the Messianic Jewish congregation, is ready to move on?<sup>31</sup>

All these strategies intended to grow a healthy Messianic Jewish congregation, where a strong majority of Jewish members creates space, with real love, for others, takes courage and determination. Where do these come from?

## CONCLUSION

Not long ago, I spontaneously declared to our Board, “The one thing I dislike about my job (as Senior Rabbi) is having to protect our boundaries.” I was referring to my role as Center on the offensive line of our team...so often called upon to protect the community’s Messianic Jewish identity from patterns that will likely assure that we will lose our essence in the years to come. Some of these patterns that are clearly observable among our larger Messianic Jewish world have to do with the role of gentiles in our midst.

Being the gatekeeper is a role many of us would like to delegate (or theologize!) away. But, at what cost?

We leaders need a deeply-rooted set of convictions that arise from God's revelation so that we may be able to do the necessary “heavy lifting.” Without such convictions the social pressure to conform to the usual patterns will be too great to bear in the long term. Additionally, in a culture which values egalitarianism (“we are all winners here” says the kid’s soccer coach) it is hard to escape the nagging feeling that we as leaders are acting from unworthy motivations like prejudice, or ungodly exclusivism, when in fact, such sinful attitudes may not be the true story at all. We need sources of strength that take us to the very substructure of our callings.

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<sup>31</sup> It seems to me that every Messianic Jewish rabbi should cultivate friendships among Christian pastors and if possible, among mainstream rabbis.

It is for this reason that I find the MA, missions approach to Messianic Jewish communal formation – to be less helpful than the BA, bilateral approach. The inherent pragmatism and primary self-identification as a culturally Jewish expression of Evangelical Christian faith of the MA can make it vulnerable to a seemingly inevitable future, endlessly best by the identity confusion, non-Jewish over-participation and perpetual outsider status among Am Yisrael. This is not to say that there are no blind spots and great areas of weakness attendant to the BA enterprise. MA congregations have much to teach as well, particularly in the areas of effective outreach, passion to persuade our people to consider Yeshua, and the ways and means of funding our work. And again as Mitch Glaser has reminded us, the missions movement produced the first self-consciously Jewish Yeshua-affirming communities. However, in the area of the roles of gentiles in our midst, I contend that only bilateral ecclesiology creates “Messianic Jews with chests.” I will explain this allusion.

The phrase comes from the great C.S. Lewis and is the title of his short but penetrating analysis the trajectory of modern Western culture generally and the ways of modern education in particular. *The Abolition of Man* expresses his fear that since the end of the Medieval outlook and the rise of modernity (c. 1800) thinkers have abandoned the Tao – the time-honored moral code agreed upon by the purveyors of all the world’s great religious traditions. In doing so, they have robbed men of necessary motivations to sustain life-affirming societies. They have created men without chests. They have heads, representing thoughts about a desired future. They have stomach areas representing the appetites we all share for food, sex, etc.. But, they lack chests – the place where animal instincts and desired ends meet, rooted in truths that are passed on dor l’dor (generation to generation) “the way old birds teach young birds to fly.” It is these rock-solid truths passed down the line with real passion that enables a healthy society to resist seductive answers such as totalitarianism. The Tao is above and beyond the promises made by despots on Left or the Right. Embracing the Tao with

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strong chests is Western man's only hope in an age when the tools of psychological conditioning have a power as never before to seduce us en masse.

"Messianic Jews with chests" – the women and men with the strength to make the tough choices in our congregations regarding non-Jewish participation must be equipped with transcendent reasons for paying the inevitable price for the long-term gain. By analogy, God's revelation of both the unity and diversity of the human race – Jew and Gentile, one, *echad*, yet uniquely called - is the Tao. If we, some of us, the older birds, don't teach the young ones to fly, then what will become of Messianic Judaism in twenty-five years?

To summarize :

If Israel, God's *segullah*, is first and foremost an enfleshed reality – an aggregate of people born to Jewish parents, then Messianic Jewish leaders should as a matter of theological conviction seek to protect the Jewish community from even self-inflicted dissolution.

If we are to protect Israel in this way, then our leaders should work hard to find ways to graciously, but effectively grow and sustain Jewish majorities in our congregations, which, by our actions, suggest to the watching world that ours is Jewish space.

If, while sustaining strong Jewish majorities, we nevertheless leave room for some non-Jews in our midst (e.g. intermarried spouses, some uniquely called Gentiles), then we must develop clear boundary markers circumscribing the appropriate roles for these members of our communities. Health and joy spring from such clarity. Confusion and pain result when the game seems to have endlessly obscure or changing rules.

If clear boundary markers are important, then we need a body of leaders who are willing to do the “heavy lifting” of deciding which these should be based on a solid foundation of principles which factor in all the necessary criteria.

If we have a body of leaders to which we belong that derives through prayer, reflection and argumentation the specific standards for non-Jews in our midst, then we need winning ways to convince our members that these are holy, life-giving and good.

If we have all the above in place, with large measures of passion for Yeshua, ahavat Yisrael (love for Israel), love for the Church, effective outreach and the other elements of successful congregational development, then we can go to sleep at night with confidence that Messianic Judaism will flourish in the decades ahead. How our congregations relate to non-Jewish participants is one vital element in the equation one which requires clear thinking admixed with the heart of Messiah Yeshua, whose love and commitment extend to the “Jew first,” and through our people, to all humanity.

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## Appendix 1

Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah  
2012 Berlin Statement on Torah  
(July 3, 2012)

The third Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah met in Berlin, Germany June 29 – July 3, 2012. Building on statements formulated in the meetings of the previous two years, Jewish scholars from France, Germany, Israel, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, belonging to Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Messianic traditions, deepened their relationships and advanced in their discussion of crucial issues concerning Jewish life in the Body of Christ.

The theme of this year's consultation was "Jewish Believers in Yeshua and the Torah." Papers presented at the conference underlined the paradoxical richness and depth of Torah, and the way its fulfillment in Yeshua reinforces rather than undermines its enduring relevance. Following the conference, members of the consultation met together

and developed the following common statement:

We, the members of the Helsinki Consultation, bear living witness to the recent emergence of Jewish believers in Yeshua (Jesus) who affirm their Jewish identity and acknowledge its theological significance. We are increasingly recognizing the intrinsic connection between this identity and Torah, the dynamic reality that has shaped the life of the Jewish people throughout its historical journey. We are also increasingly challenged to understand the continuing significance of the Torah encountered in the light

of the gospel within the life of the Body of the Messiah.

The complex nature of Jewish existence reflects the multifaceted and paradoxical character of the Torah. Torah is both the historical revelation of God to Israel, and Israel's window to the eternity of God; once-for-all transmitted truth, and ever new

process of discovery; the fashioner of human institutions, and the secret of the cosmic order; the absoluteness of the Divine Word, and the relativity of its human interpretation; the vulnerable letter of the written text, and its invulnerable spirit; defining mark of Israel's singular path and destiny, and wisdom for all nations of the earth.

From an early period, many Christians have not fully grasped the Torah's paradoxical unity. They have limited its relevance to what they deemed "moral precepts" whilst rejecting the so-called "civil" and "ceremonial" practices that are foundational to Jewish life. They have frequently viewed Torah through the dualistic lens of grace and law, contrasting faith and works, and thus overlooking the Torah's enduring value.

Recent scholarship has shed new light on the Jewish context of Yeshua and the early Yeshua-movement which challenges traditional Christian understanding of the Torah and

brings renewed appreciation for its positive significance. Many now recognize that Yeshua, Sha'ul (Paul), and the other early Jewish followers of Yeshua were Torahobservant.

This historical reality carries significant theological implications.

We as Jewish believers in Yeshua acknowledge the special bond that unites us with Israel's Torah. This bond with Israel's Torah witnesses in the Church to the irrevocability of God's gifts and call to Israel (Rom 11:29). For Yeshua said, "Think not that I have come to destroy the Torah, or the prophets: I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). We believe in the continuing validity of the Torah even as it is fulfilled in Christ. Moreover, we see Christ as the incarnate Torah, the eternal wisdom of the Father in human flesh. He alone lived out the Torah in perfect form, and he calls his disciples to walk in his ways.

As Jewish believers in Yeshua we are in the process of working out the meaning and concrete implications of this bond that we collectively experience. We find ourselves in a variety of different ecclesial and Jewish communal contexts, and we hold different understandings and definitions of Torah observance. Some of us consider the observance

of mitzvot such as Shabbat, Jewish holidays, and the dietary laws as an essential component of fidelity to Torah. Yet we all understand that our attempt to live in radical discipleship to Yeshua (in conformity to teaching such as that found in the Sermon on the

Mount) is the foundational principle of Torah observance. Furthermore, we all understand our faithfulness to Israel's Torah as a commitment to promote an awareness of the Jewish roots of the Church.

In the midst of our different approaches we have experienced through our deliberations and fellowship the dynamic and unifying power of Christ as Torah. Continuing to reflect on the Torah's role in our lives, we desire to grow together as Jews and as disciples of Yeshua. We hope these insights will resonate with other Jewish believers in Yeshua, and

we invite them to join us on our journey.

Consultation Members:

Boris Balter (Russia)

Jacques Doukhan (USA)

Richard Harvey (Great Britain)

Mark Kinzer (USA)

Fr. Antoine Levy (Finland)

Lisa Loden (Israel)

Fr. David Neuhaus (Israel)

Svetlana Panich (Russia)

Vladimir Pikman (Germany)

Jennifer Rosner (USA)

Dominic Rubin (Russia)

### Appendix 3

We Love Our Carol and John!  
To the tune of “That’s Amore”

When the synagogue begs  
And you make five dozen eggs – that’s amore!

When the sound booth is hot  
And so you schvitz a lot – that’s amore

Sharing life with us Jews  
For Yeshua’s Good News – that’s amore

V’shamru et ha Shabbat,  
Though you’re obligated not – that’s amore!

Va va va va voy!  
Va va va va voy!  
Va va va va voy!  
That’s amore!

Di di di di di  
Di di di di di  
Di di di di di  
That’s amore!

Set up Oneg Shabbat  
Though the food’s not quite hot...that’s amore

Build a nice Torah stand  
The fine work of your hand – that's amore

Come the rain or the shine  
You both show up on time – that's amore!

(Slowly) So, where can we start?  
To share from our heart....

Our amore ----- for you! (bum bum!)

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<sup>i</sup> Dr. Stuart Dauermann has written a very helpful little book called "Keeping the Faith in Interfaith Relationships" (Wiph and Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon). It reflects an actual discussion between a Christian young woman, her Jewish fiancée and Stuart, sitting at a restaurant and discussing the practical out-workings of some of the issues raised to this paper. I highly recommend it for its subtle theological sophistication as well as its value as a tool for outreach among Intermarrieds.