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#3-4/2019 | Årgang: 73

- 01 Reidar Hvalvik:  
Leder
- 05 Knut Alfsvåg:  
«For jøde først»:  
Om kristen misjon til jøder og hedninger
- 16 Rolf Kjøde:  
«... at dei må bli frelste», eller treng dei det?  
Norsk teologi om jødemisjon i global kontekst
- 31 Rolf Gunnar Heitmann:  
Er det legitimt å drive misjon blant jøder?  
Om endringene i de tyske protestantiske  
kirkene etter 2. verdenskrig
- 40 Hilde Brekke Møller:  
Den jødiske Jesus og spørsmålet om  
antisemittisme i tysk jødemisjon
- 50 Raymond Lillevik:  
Jødekristen identitet som ambivalens i  
israelsmisjonene i Norge, Sverige og  
Danmark 1890–1914
- 62 David Serner:  
Den messianske bevegelse i Israel  
– et forsigtigt blik
- 69 Richard Harvey:  
Messianic Jewish Theology:  
A Preliminary Typology
- 84 Bokrevy  
Andreas Johansson:  
Messiansk identitet og misjon  
blant det jødiske folk

# Messianic Jewish Theology: A Preliminary Typology

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## Abstract

**This article proposes an eight-fold typology of Messianic Jewish theologies.**

It reviews previous studies and makes proposals for the development of Messianic Jewish Theology. It characterises the views of reflective practitioners within the movement of Messianic Judaism by summarising their views on God, Torah and Israel in the light of the Jewish and Christian theologies that have influenced their development.

*Keywords/Søkeord* : Messianic Judaism – Typology Messianic Jewish Theology – Torah – Christology – Israel

## Introduction

Messianic Jewish Theology (hence MJT) is a theology constructed in dialogue with Judaism and Christianity, refined in discussion between reflective practitioners engaged with Messianic Judaism, and developed into a new theological tradition based on the twin epistemic priorities of the continuing election of Israel and the Messiahship of Jesus. As with Jewish theologies in general, MJT focuses on the traditional organising categories of God, Torah and Israel, which are further expanded to include the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Yeshua, the role of Torah in theory and in practice, and the nature and destiny of Israel (the Jewish people). In my doctoral thesis, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*<sup>1</sup> I attempted to “map” the contours and varieties of theological understandings within the modern Messianic Jewish movement on these topics, and proposed an eight-fold typology of theologies, different theological streams within a developing and flowing theological tradition.

Messianic Jewish Theology is an emerging theology. Reform Jewish theologian Byron Sherwin’s categories of authenticity, coherence, contemporaneity and communal acceptance that ‘characterise a valid Jewish theology,’ are applicable to it and serve as guidelines for its development.<sup>2</sup> The *authenticity* of MJT is evident in that whilst it draws from both Jewish and Christian theological traditions, it is in the process of articulating its own position. It is beginning to speak with its own ‘inner voice’. Its claim to authenticity will only be recognised as it responds effectively to the louder voices of the two larger theological traditions amongst which it clamours for a hearing. By finding and articulating its own authentic ‘theological voice’ it will challenge the boundary lines that have traditionally separated Judaism from Christianity.

The *coherence* of MJT around the two epistemic priorities of the Messiahship of Jesus and the election of Israel (the Jewish people) has yet to be stated systematically and comprehensively. These two key affirmations, if held together in creative tension, provide fruitful ground for the elaboration of a coherent theology. The methodological issues to be addressed pose a considerable challenge to such a project. Questions of the nature of the sources, norms, methods, content and results of such a systematic MJT await the production of a comprehensive work at a level that has thus far been beyond any one individual within the Messianic movement. Since 2009 a number of attempts have been made to organise the theological discussions within the Messianic Jewish world, such as the Borough Park Symposium and a number of journals and books published by single and multiple authors on the subjects germane to MJT.<sup>3</sup>

The *contemporaneity* of MJT is also a concern. The writings of the formative period in the 1970s and 1980s are not as relevant in the new millennium, when they expressed the thinking of those pioneering the movement. The post-formative positions proposed by Mark Kinzer and the Hashivenu<sup>4</sup> group have yet to gain general support. The issues that concern the contemporary Jewish community and its Messianic contingent are as pressing as ever. Jewish identity, the survival of the Jewish people, the question of Israel and the coming of the Messiah are issues that MJT must address appropriately, constructively and persuasively in a contemporary context.

The *communal acceptance* of MJT is vital, as the growth and maturity of the Messianic movement is dependent on its acceptance of MJT in the light of changing needs and contexts. For MJT to be accepted by the Messianic community and the wider Jewish and Christian communities with which it interacts, it must provide answers that are satisfying, relevant and applicable to future generations. With such concerns for authenticity, coherence, contemporaneity and communal acceptance in view, the present state of MJT is now examined through a characterisation of the various theological streams within the Messianic movement.

## A Typology of Messianic Jewish Theologies

At present there is no consensus or unitary theology of Messianic Judaism. Here we propose a typology to describe the plurality of MJT. Previous studies have observed different strands within the Messianic movement, and these are briefly discussed.

David Stern described a series of future options for Messianic Jews, based on 'ideal types' of Messianic Judaism and Hebrew Christianity.<sup>5</sup> His options are 'Ultimate Messianic Jew' (UMJ), 'Ultimate Hebrew Christian' (UHC), and a range of more limited possibilities within these two main categories; 'Ultimately Jewish but Limited Messianic possibilities' (UJLM); 'Ultimate Hebrew Christianity of Today' (UHCT); 'Present Limit of Hebrew Christianity' (PLHC); 'Present Limit of Messianic Judaism' (PLMJ). He poses the question 'if you are a Messianic Jew, in which direction are you headed?' The discussion is unsatisfactory, limited as it was by the then incipient nature of the Messianic Movement and its lack of theological development at the time. Stern's grid constructs a dualistic and antithetical relationship between 'Hebrew Christianity' and 'Messianic Judaism'. As one of the leaders of Messianic Judaism in the 1970s, he is at pains to distance Messianic Judaism from Hebrew Christianity, and his use of the metaphor of parent and child oversimplifies the questions and polarises the alternatives, without articulating the nature of the theological questions involved.

Mark Kinzer distinguishes between 'Missionary' and 'Postmissionary' Messianic Judaism.<sup>6</sup> 'Missionary Messianic Judaism' developed from Hebrew Christianity and the Jewish Missions. It was formulated by individuals like Joseph Rabinowitz and organisations such as 'Jews for Jesus'. It was then expressed in the 1970s and 1980s by the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) and the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC). Kinzer articulates five principles that Postmissionary Messianic Judaism affirms, and assesses to what degree they are held by others.<sup>7</sup> These are: Israel's irrevocable election and covenant; the normative force of basic Jewish practice (Torah observance); the validity of rabbinic tradition; 'a bilateral ecclesiology' that accepts the continuing position of the Jewish people as the people of God in partnership with the *ecclesia* of the nations; and national solidarity with Israel. This enables Kinzer to distinguish between the new 'Postmissionary' paradigm he proposes, and other previous forms.

Both Stern and Kinzer use dualist conceptual schemes, of Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism (Stern) and more recently of 'Missionary' and 'Postmissionary' Messianic Judaism (Kinzer). Stern's aim is to argue for 'Messianic Judaism' over against 'Hebrew Christianity', and Kinzer favours 'Postmissionary Messianic Judaism' against 'Missionary Messianic Judaism.' Both oversimplify the complexity of MJT for their own purposes, and without further detailing of the considerable theological variation found within MJT. Therefore a new typology is needed.

### Eight Types of Messianic Jewish Theology

The present typology is more tentative and less dualist than those of Stern and Kinzer, tracing developing 'streams' rather than clearly defined 'schools' of theology within Messianic Judaism. The groupings are somewhat arbitrary and there are some overlaps, but leading voices are identified that speak representatively for each stream. The methods, criteria and assumptions used are characterised; the structure and organisation of their thought; their key concerns and emphases; the influences and the resources they draw from in Jewish and Christian theology; the degree to which they are reflective and self-aware of the process of theologising; the contexts and constituencies to which they are linked; and the possible future for their thought.

The views of each stream on the nature of God, the Messiah, the Torah in theory and

in practice and the future of Israel will be summarised where they have been addressed. The types of MJT begin with those closest to the Protestant Evangelicalism from which the Messianic movement has emerged, at the one end of the spectrum, to those who locate their core identity within 'Jewish social space' and Jewish religious and theological norms.

#### *Type 1 – Jewish Christianity, Christocentric and Reformed (Maoz)*

This type of MJT may be characterised as Christian proclamation, with limited cultural and linguistic translation into a Jewish frame of reference. Baruch Maoz identifies himself as an ethno-cultural 'Jewish' Christian in dialogue with those in the Messianic movement who advocate a return to a religious 'Judaism'.<sup>8</sup> Maoz works with the presuppositions of Reformed Protestantism and is highly critical of Rabbinic Judaism. His theology is shaped to correct what he sees as the error of Messianic Judaism of compromise on Christian essentials by acceptance of Rabbinic Judaism.

Maoz's doctrine of God reflects Christian orthodoxy with little engagement with Jewish theological concerns. His Christology is expressed in the Creeds, and expounded as Reformed Dogmatics. The Law is fulfilled in Christ, with Jewish observance permitted only when in conformity with New Testament practice. The key theological concern is the elevation of Jesus as Messiah, the uniqueness of his saving work, and the challenge to Rabbinic Judaism that this poses. Judaism and Jewish identity cannot be allowed to diminish the authority of Christ as revealed in Scripture. The hermeneutical system is that of the Protestant Reformation and Conservative Evangelicalism.

Maoz has a strong political loyalty to the State of Israel, but justifies this on the grounds of national and cultural identity. He is critical of Premillennialism and studiously agnostic on eschatology. Maoz's thought, with its Christian Reformed theological emphasis, its non-charismatic and anti-rabbinic attitude, appeals to those with a focus on Scripture as interpreted through the Reformation tradition. Within the land of Israel such views are popular with those disaffected with the more superficial elements of the Messianic movement and unimpressed with more engaged forms of Torah-observance. The challenge for Maoz's approach will be to develop an appropriate, coherent doctrine of Israel, and a theology of culture that does not artificially separate an ethno-cultural 'Jewishness' from religious 'Judaism'. Maoz's arbitrary distinction between the two is problematic, and has not met with general acceptance.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Type 2 – Dispensationalist Hebrew Christianity (Fruchtenbaum)*

Arnold Fruchtenbaum is the leading theologian in this group, whose expression of Jewishness and Jewish identity are defined within the parameters of Dispensationalism.<sup>10</sup> The shape of Fruchtenbaum's theology is determined by a systematic and programmatic application of Dispensationalist teaching and method to existential questions of Jewish identity and faith in Jesus.

Fruchtenbaum's God is the God of Protestant Evangelicalism, articulated in the mode of Revised Dispensationalism, with little room for speculative thought or contextualisation.<sup>11</sup> There is no use for rabbinic or Jewish tradition unless it confirms and illustrates biblical revelation as reflected through a dispensationalist hermeneutic. Orthodox Christology is viewed through a conservative evangelical lens. There are some attempts at translation into Jewish cultural contexts, but a literal rather than dynamic equivalence is sought. The Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled in the Messiah, and the Torah seen as the Dispensation of the Mosaic Law has come to an end. Practice of those national and cultural Jewish elements that do not go against the NT is permitted, but the rabbinic re-interpretation of the Torah and its claims to authority are false.

Fruchtenbaum's concern is an effective rooting of Gospel proclamation within a Jewish context, and with a strong eschatological agenda of Dispensationalism, which looks forward with certainty to the imminent return of Christ, the Rapture, Tribulation and Millennial kingdom. This is the focus and centre of his system.

With this clearly defined theological base, hermeneutical method and eschatological scheme, Fruchtenbaum's articulate exposition appeals to those looking for a clear theological system. The combination of political support for Israel and a strong eschatological emphasis will continue to influence the Messianic movement. However, it also contains the weaknesses of Dispensationalism: its hermeneutical methods; its 19<sup>th</sup> century amalgam of rationalism, romanticism and historical consciousness; and the problem of Israel and the Church as two peoples of God. These will not gain acceptance with the majority of Messianic Jews, and they will look for alternatives.

### *Type 3 – Israeli National and Restorationist (Nerel)*

Gershon Nerel's theology is observable in his historical studies of Jewish believers in the early church, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His theological system is implicit rather than explicit in his narrative of the histories of Jewish believers in Yeshua (JBYs). He has yet to produce a systematic exposition of his theology. Nevertheless he is representative of many Israeli Messianic Jews, who express their proximity to Christianity in solid creedal affirmations, and practice a form of Messianic Judaism which is Hebrew-speaking, rooted in modern Israeli society and culture, but with little regard for Rabbinic orthodoxy as a religious system. Culturally, ethnically and nationally, like the majority of secular Israelis, they identify with Israel and its aspirations as a State, serving in the army, living in kibbutz and moshav, and putting their children through the Israeli school system.

The heart of Nerel's theology is the eschatological significance not just of the modern Zionist movement and the return to the Land, but also the re-establishment of Jewish believers in Jesus in Israel to renew the original apostolic church of Peter and James. For Nerel this has significant implications for the shape and unity of the church, challenging it to repent of supersessionism and anti-Judaism. JBYs bear a special 'eschatological spiritual authority'. This challenges Israel to recognise the imminent return of her Messiah, and calls Jewish people world-wide to make *Aliyah*, in preparation for the end times. In the light of anti-Semitism and supersessionism, Nerel's Messianic Judaism is a powerful prophetic call to Israel and the nations to see what God is doing today. His theological system is not concerned with *minutiae* of doctrinal formulas, but with a clear pragmatic involvement in a Restorationist programme. The fact that Messianic Judaism does not have twenty centuries of tradition to look to is a distinct advantage as it develops its theology. The very fact that *congregations of JBY lack a two-millennia tradition* [italics his] helps them to easily find the bridge between themselves and the first-century model of JBY as portrayed in the New Testament.<sup>12</sup>

There exists a clear resemblance between the messianic movement of Jewish believers in Jesus and the modern Zionist movement. Basically, both movements highlight the idea of bridging a historical gap between modern times and biblical times. Namely, they consciously reject allegations that they maintain anachronistic approaches. On the contrary, contemporary Jewish Jesus-believers and mainstream Zionists raise the opposite argument that they still possess a natural right to bypass the last two millennia and directly relate to the pre-exilic period in Israel's history.<sup>13</sup>

Nerel's theological method and shape blends the independent evangelical stream of the previous generation of Messianic Jews who made *Aliyah* in the 1950s with the establishment of the State of Israel and the Zionist movement, combining Jewish political action and Christian eschatology. His eschatology is premillennial, but he

avoids the systematisation of Dispensationalism. His realised eschatology stresses the significance of the re-emergence of Messianic Jews in the Land. This could become an important factor in the future, as the Messianic movement grows in Israel, and takes on greater political and prophetic relevance.

#### *Type 4 – New Testament Halacha, Charismatic and Evangelical (Juster, Stern)*

The most popular type of MJT found within the Messianic Movement is that of David Stern and Daniel Juster, who advocate 'New Testament *halacha*' within a Jewish expression of faith that is evangelical and charismatic.<sup>14</sup> It is the dominant influence within the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) and integrates belief in Jesus as Messiah with Jewish tradition. It expresses Christian orthodoxy within a Jewish cultural and religious matrix, seeing a prophetic and restorative role for Messianic Judaism in the renewal of both Judaism and Christianity. Its theological system is an eclectic combination of evangelical innovation and traditional Jewish observance.

Belief in God and the Trinity follows Christian orthodoxy, but this is translated into Jewish forms of thought and expression. Nicene Christology is recontextualised and expressed in Jewish terms. The doctrine of the Incarnation is expressed apologetically and in dynamically equivalent Jewish terms. The Torah is re-defined in the light of Yeshua, and the Oral Torah is critically evaluated in the light of the New Testament. The Messianic Movement belongs to the movement of restoration of the whole Church, and is part of Israel. Historic Premillennialist eschatology brings urgent expectation of what God is doing in the Land and among the people of Israel.

Salvation is only by faith in Yeshua. Yet Israel is still the people of God, and her future salvation is assured. Until this happens evangelistic witness is imperative, but must be done in ways that are culturally sensitive, showing how the Messianic movement is part of the Jewish community, not separate from it or outside it. Scripture is the supreme authority, but must be interpreted and applied contextually, following the 'Fuller School of World Mission' approach developed by Glasser, Goble and Hutchens. The Oral Torah can help understand and interpret NT *halacha*. The Torah to be observed is that of Yeshua and his followers, with some appropriate adjustments for today.

The future of this stream within the movement is bright, as it occupies the middle ground between Jewish and Christian spheres of influence. It has found popular expression in many Messianic congregations, especially in the USA, combining a vibrant charismatic expression of faith with a 'Torah positive' attitude to Jewish tradition. However, its theological integrity and authenticity has yet to be made explicit, and the tension between tradition and innovation reconciled. The pioneering statements made by Juster and Stern in the formative period of the 1970s and 1980s have yet to be consolidated. It remains to be seen how the combination of charismatic evangelicalism and 'New Covenant Torah observance' will be accepted by the next generation in Israel and the USA.

#### *Type 5 – Traditional Judaism and the Messiah (Schiffman, Fischer, Berkowitz)*

Several independent thinkers can be situated between Stern and Juster on one side and Kinzer and Hashivenu on the other. They cannot be easily aligned, as their thinking has not fully emerged and it is difficult to locate their contribution precisely. Nevertheless in the USA John Fischer and Michael Schiffman and in Israel Ariel Berkowitz, David Freedman and Arie Powlinson bring perspectives which are both 'Torah positive' and appreciative of Rabbinic tradition without the full affirmation given them by Kinzer and the Hashivenu group.<sup>15</sup> The systematisation of their views is incomplete, and their theological reflection has yet to be abstracted. They practice a

halachic orthopraxy informed by faith in Jesus. It is possible that new streams of MJT may emerge more fully from this as yet disparate group. Whilst they remain close to Jewish orthodoxy their doctrine of Revelation does not see rabbinic tradition as the inspired, God-given means for the preservation of the Jewish people (as does Kinzer), but their observance of rabbinic *halacha* is stronger than that of Juster and Stern.

Powlinson brings a new spirituality to his thinking, and Freedman and Berkowitz bring a new orientation to the Torah making it available, in principle if not in practice, to the Nations.<sup>16</sup> Fischer approaches Torah from his own orthodox Jewish background, but with the eyes of a New Testament follower of Yeshua. This group have maintained orthodox Christian beliefs, whilst interacting with Jewish traditional views and objections, on the nature of God, the Messiah, and the Torah. Their eschatology is premillennial. Their observance of Torah follows orthodoxy, whilst allowing for re-statement where appropriate. Scripture is read in the light of rabbinic tradition, but is still supreme as authoritative revelation. The emerging shape of this theology is not clear, but could result in 'Messianic Hasidism' with a possibly more orthodox Jewish expression.

#### *Type 6 – 'Postmissionary Messianic Judaism' (Kinzer, Nichol, Sadan)*

Mark Kinzer's 'Postmissionary Messianic Judaism' presents the potential for a programmatic theological system. Combating supersessionist readings of scripture to argue for the ongoing election of Israel and the legitimacy of a Torah-observant Messianic Judaism, Kinzer employs postliberal<sup>17</sup> and postcritical Jewish and Christian theological resources. His understanding of the revelation of God through the Scriptures and Jewish tradition acknowledges the significance of the Jewish and Christian faith communities through which such revelation is mediated. Ecclesiology and soteriology cohere around his bi-lateral understanding (reflecting Karl Barth) of the community of God made up of both 'unbelieving' Israel, and the Church, with Jesus present in both, visible to the *ekklesia* but only partially recognised by Israel. This 'mature Messianic Judaism' is summarised by the Hashivenu statement of purpose:

Our goal is a mature Messianic Judaism. We seek an authentic expression of Jewish life maintaining substantial continuity with Jewish tradition. However, Messianic Judaism is energized by the belief that Yeshua of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, the fullness of Torah. Mature Messianic Judaism is not simply Judaism plus Yeshua, but is instead an integrated following of Yeshua through traditional Jewish forms and the modern day practice of Judaism in and through Yeshua.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that Kinzer's influences and assumptions place him outside the mainstream of Protestant Evangelicalism, especially the conservative variety often found within previous forms of Messianic Judaism. His view of the authority and inspiration of Scripture is tempered by respect for Jewish traditions of interpretation, and the influence of critical and postcritical biblical scholarship, and postliberal theology.

Kinzer advocates solidarity with the Jewish community.<sup>19</sup> He encourages sympathetic identification with the religious and cultural concerns of Judaism, as found in the North American context. The primary location of identity is 'within the Jewish community' in order that Messianic Jews will 'have Jewish grandchildren'. One purpose is to refute the accusation of assimilation that is levelled at Jewish believers in Jesus by the Jewish community.

'Postmissionary Messianic Judaism' arises as one way of negotiating the tension between proclamation of Jesus as Messiah, and the preservation of Jewish belief, practice and identity. Such concerns reflect the challenges facing the Messianic movement worldwide as it grows in theological, spiritual, communal and personal maturity. Kinzer's response is a Messianic Judaism that echoes Conservative Judaism in its



liturgy and practice, and integrates belief in Yeshua in the context of loyalties and identity to 'Jewish space.'

Kinzer sees Jesus as divine, but within a Judaism not inhospitable to the possibility of the divinity and incarnation of the Son of God. The historic Christian formulations of the Trinity are inadequate in Jewish contexts because they are steeped in Hellenism. New postcritical formulations are required that emerge from Jewish tradition and are recognised as possible understandings of the nature of God. The Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity are both inspired, and to be interpreted within a non-supersessionist appreciation of the canonical and communal contexts in which they arose.

Torah is observed in the light of Orthodox and Conservative *halacha*, with some modifications. Jewish believers thus integrate Messianic beliefs within traditional synagogal life, and witness to the Messiah through the presence of a community within the Jewish community rather than through overt appeal to individuals from without.

Kinzer's approach is the most theologically creative proposal to have emerged within Messianic Judaism in recent years, but it remains to be seen how much communal acceptance it will receive. It builds on North American Conservative Judaism in its method and expression, and departs significantly from the evangelical foundations to which much of Messianic Judaism still adheres. Its theological articulation, whilst profound, may not find popular appeal.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Type 7 – Rabbinic Halacha in the Light of the NT (Shulam)*

Joseph Shulam expresses an Israeli form of Messianic Judaism using the resources of Orthodox Judaism. Shulam makes the call to 'do Messianic Jewish *halacha*' and to cut the 'umbilical cord' that connects Messianic Judaism to Christian denominations. He reads the Scriptures within the controlling hermeneutical framework of the Jewish tradition. His aim is to teach the church the Jewish roots of its faith by a series of commentaries on the Jewish sources of the New Testament writings.<sup>21</sup>

The project is incomplete, and it is not clear how such a theology will be formulated. Shulam's main concern is to clear away the preliminary barriers of twenty centuries of non-Jewish reading of the scriptures. His call for Messianic *halacha* is in reaction to the 'Gentilisation' of Messianic Judaism. Whilst he advocates a return to *halacha*, it is not clear in what form this will emerge. However, his is a genuine and Israeli-based expression of a Jewish orthodoxy linked to orthodox Christian beliefs about Jesus. His perspective is one that should be recognised within the spectrum of MJT, and it is possible that others will follow in his emphases.<sup>22</sup>

Shulam disassociates himself from mainstream (and 'Gentilised') Christianity, situating himself within Jewish social and religious space. He combines Messianic Judaism with mystical traditions in Judaism that lead to affirmations of his faith. Rabbinic, and even mystical traditions are part of the revelatory process, and to be held in balance with scripture. Shulam's theological system is based on a midrashic approach to scripture, a reading of the New Testament influenced by David Flusser, and some expression of the Jewish mystical tradition (Kabbalah) factored in to his overall approach.

#### *Type 8 – Messianic Rabbinic Orthodoxy (Brandt)*

Elazar Brandt advocates a form of Messianic Judaism that is close to Rabbinic orthodoxy, but is a minority position within the Messianic movement. He is convinced that Messianic Jews must:

make every effort to remain committed to the 4 pillars of Jewish existence that have always held us together – G-d<sup>23</sup>, land, people and Torah. History repeatedly shows that groups who have abandoned any of these commitments have quickly disappeared from the scene.<sup>24</sup>

His advocacy of Torah observance is so strong that: 'I dare say that it is less dangerous to follow the wrong messiah than to follow the wrong Torah.'<sup>25</sup>

The authority of Torah, which for him is interpreted through rabbinic tradition, influences his Christology:

The rightful Messiah will come to Jerusalem where his throne will be established and where he will rule Israel and the nations with justice according to the Torah. There is no such thing as a Messiah who does not keep Torah and teach his people to do so. If Yeshua does not do and teach Torah, then he is not the Messiah – not for Israel, and not for anybody else.<sup>26</sup>

This leads him to oppose all forms of supersessionism. 'There is no such thing as a Messiah who is not the Messiah of Israel. A Messiah who rejects Israel and chooses another people group is not the Messiah promised in the Bible.'<sup>27</sup>

Messianic Jews have no special status among their people as the 'faithful remnant' of Romans 9-11, but rather take their stand within the faithful found within all Israel. They cannot claim special status as the 'remnant' because of their belief in Yeshua, as this would disenfranchise others who do not believe in him.

Jews who claim to follow Yeshua and to know and do his Torah more perfectly than other Jews, and on such a basis claim to be the 'true Israel', or the 'true remnant of Israel', or other such language, are no less in the replacement camp than Christians who believe G-d has rejected Israel and chosen them instead.<sup>28</sup>

Brandt's soteriology includes all Israel:

The 'Israel' who today walks the streets of Jerusalem and the cities throughout the land, and the Jews who are identifiable outside of the land, are the Israel that G-d is going to see through to redemption. He staked his name on this by an oath. This includes Haredis and secular, Conservative and Reform as well as Zionist and uncommitted. 'All Israel shall be saved,' said Paul. If G-d does not keep this promise, then he is not G-d. He said so Himself.<sup>29</sup>

Brandt's hermeneutics call for a return to halachic orthodoxy. To Brandt this means abandoning a 'spiritualising and fantasising' approach to the Bible, and returning to 'literal interpretation and obedience'. Jews who believe in Yeshua remain Jews. They are called to repent, not by being 'sorry for personal sins', but by returning to the covenant, and remaining 'faithful to our G-d, land, people and Torah'. As regards the witness of Messianic Jews to their people:

Our best testimony to our own people will be if we can show that we are doing this because we met Yeshua. Instead, we have been doing our best to show that we have broken our covenant with the four pillars [God, Land, People and Torah] since we have met Yeshua. What reason is there today or in the past for our people to see us otherwise?<sup>30</sup>

This type is at the far end of the continuum, and expresses a tendency to move back into Judaism at the expense of Christian affirmations and distinctives. Brandt is more comfortable within Jewish Orthodoxy, and there are some Haredim who come to believe in Jesus remain in their communities, practicing as 'secret believers', invisible to outsiders, as part of an 'insider movement.'

## The Future of Messianic Jewish Theology

The above typology leaves many questions unanswered, but suggests several ways forward for MJT. Here we identify proposals for the development of MJT and highlight the theological concerns it needs to address.

## The Task of Messianic Jewish Theology

The methodology followed in this article has been primarily descriptive and evaluative, but has considered requirements for the development and construction of MJT. A fully detailed articulation of MJT would of necessity be far more rigorous in its engagement with the primary and secondary sources of Jewish, Christian and Messianic Jewish thought. It would need to engage directly with, for example, the Hebrew Bible, Mishnaic, Midrashic and Talmudic literature, the Codes, Responsa, mystical traditions, and contemporary Jewish thought. The Christian tradition from the Church Fathers, Scholastics, Reformation, to the Modern and Postmodern period would also need to be fully discussed. The medieval and modern Hebrew Christian tradition would also be included. Such work on the primary sources has been beyond the remit of the present undertaking. Our aim has been more modest, and has situated contemporary practitioners in the context of these traditions, examining and commenting on their own proposals. But such a treatment would be necessary for a future comprehensive statement of MJT.

There is as yet no standard work of MJT. This is a priority for the movement, and this study forms part of the prolegomena to such a contribution. Therefore proposals made for the future development of MJT must be appropriately modest at this stage. These include some proposals on method and on content.

### *Recognition of the Need for MJT*

If MJT is to develop, one important need is the production of theological works. Whilst there are significant materials from which to construct MJT, they have yet to be organised, consolidated and processed reflectively. There exists no *Dictionary of Messianic Judaism* or *Dictionary of Messianic Jewish Theology*. There is no *Encyclopaedia Judaica Messianica* at present, and no attempt has been made to compose a one-volume work of *Messianic Jewish Theology* or multi-volume *Messianic Jewish Dogmatics* or *Talmud*. Individuals or groups of Messianic Jews willing to co-operate in this activity could undertake such projects.<sup>31</sup>

The shape and structure of such projects requires further discussion. There are at present no systematic presentations of Messianic Jewish Theology, in any form. Several possible organising frameworks can be suggested for a systematic MJT. These include: a systematic/dogmatic presentation organised on the lines of Jewish and Christian systematic theologies; a dialectical theology working 'in terms of complementary polar opposites rather than in definitional and systematic categories characteristic of Western philosophy';<sup>32</sup> in a Talmudic argument or record of discussions; theology organised as biblical commentary or halachic compendium; a pedagogical primer or catechetical manual.

### *Interdependency within MJT*

MJT lacks a theological tradition, and is in the early stages of forming one. To do this its practitioners will need to interact more effectively, both affirming their own distinctives whilst engaging with one another in critical but respectful expression

of differences. At present there are few forums where such interaction takes place.<sup>33</sup> A growing interdependence needs to emerge for the successful development of a theological tradition. Whilst a universal or 'catholic MJT' is unlikely to emerge, the present need is for those already doing such theology to constructively interact with one another in the formation of a developing tradition and ongoing theological conversation. The first *Borough Park Symposium* represents such an attempt. Its guiding principles for discussion brought a wide range of Messianic Jewish participants together to encourage such an interdependency:

The purpose of the symposium is to provide a forum for members of the broader Messianic Jewish community to articulate their beliefs with an expectation that they will receive a respectful hearing, but without the expectation that agreement concerning these beliefs will be achieved. The Symposium is designed to provide an internal platform for leaders to better understand each another and the various positions held within the Messianic movement.<sup>34</sup>

### *Discussion of Methodology*

With the exceptions of Mark Kinzer, David Stern and Arnold Fruchtenbaum there has been little reflection on the methods to be employed in the construction of MJT. Yet it will be vital for the development of MJT and the growth of Messianic Judaism that discussion of such necessary prolegomena should be held, as the implicit assumptions of Messianic Jews need to be recognised and evaluated in the light of Jewish, Christian and Messianic Jewish tradition.

There are at present no agreed statements of theological method in MJT, nor proposals for hermeneutics, engagement with Jewish and Christian traditions, or the formulation of doctrine. The validity of the project of MJT has yet to be recognised and affirmed, in the light of more pressing pastoral and governantal concerns.

### **Future Topics for Consideration in Messianic Jewish Theology**

As regards the content of MJT, proposals for the development of the topics have been made. Here further topics on which important work needs to be done are identified, and the directions in which such reflection might proceed.

### *Revelation and Tradition*

Consideration needs to be given to the nature of Revelation and its relationship to Scripture, and to the dual traditions and canonical communities of Judaism and Christianity. How Revelation is mediated, and the role of Tradition in this process, needs clarification in the light of the faith communities with which Messianic Judaism is engaged.

### *Ecclesiology and Israelology*

Major discussion will also be needed on the understanding of the relationship between Israel and the Church, and the place of Messianic Jews. Mark Kinzer suggests:

I think the first issue that Messianic Jewish thought must address in order to develop at a higher level of reflection is that of ecclesiology. Before we can understand ourselves, we need to understand the Church and the Jewish people, and the relationship between them. Before we can determine our own distinctive place (as Messianic Jews) in relation to these two historic communities and traditions,

we need to assess their respective theological status -- where they stand before God and in Messiah -- and the mysterious way they are both united and divided.<sup>35</sup>

Kinzer's proposals will not appeal to the majority of Messianic Jews, as his ecclesiology holds the Jewish 'no' and the Church's 'yes' to Jesus in an uneasy tension. Messianic Jews need to assess their own significance as 'the remnant', as much as that of the Church and Israel. The criteria and methodology for such an investigation has not been addressed. The 'epistemic priority' of Israel needs to be understood in the light of the Messiahship of Yeshua, and the relationship between the church and Israel needs to be understood in a post-supersessionist way that still sees a place for Messianic Jews.<sup>36</sup> For MJT, this affirmation needs to be properly aligned with an adequate soteriology in order to correctly conceive the relationship between the Israel and the Church.

### *Christology and Election*

A subsequent topic that needs further investigation is the relationship between Christology and Election, both of the individual, the Church, and Israel. Mark Kinzer asks:

Is the Church's relationship to the Messiah severely compromised when its relationship to the Jewish people and tradition are hostile or tenuous? Is the Jewish people's relationship with the crucified and risen Yeshua determined definitively and negatively by its communal decision that he is not Israel's Messiah? You still presume that historical Judaism has been without Messiah Yeshua these past two thousand years. That is both a Christological and ecclesiological conclusion that is not self-evident (at least to me).<sup>37</sup>

A fuller exploration is needed of the mystery of the Israel's election, and the significance of the Messiah in the light of that election.

### *Holocaust Theology*

Whilst several Messianic Jews have written on the Holocaust,<sup>38</sup> there exists no systematic survey of their views, or a compilation of Messianic Jewish Holocaust Theology. As a key question relating to theodicy and apologetics in the light of Christian Anti-Semitism, the need for such a treatment is clear.

### *Pneumatology*

Whilst the influence of the Charismatic movement is strong in Messianic Judaism, no developed Pneumatology exists in the movement, which is divided on the question of the activity and role of the Holy Spirit. The place of liturgy, and especially Messianic Jewish Synagogal liturgy, in the light of the work of the Holy Spirit, needs further investigation. Also the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring Scripture and guiding the Church and the Jewish community in the development of an inspired and authoritative tradition needs exploration. How the Holy Spirit inspires the Jewish tradition, and how Messianic Jews claim significant prophetic inspiration and authority has also to be addressed.

### *Messianic Jewish Identity*

A deeper theological understanding of Jewish and Messianic Jewish identity is needed. How identity is constructed, and how a theology of identity is developed, are questions Messianic Jews have frequently discussed, but without organised refle-

ction. Questions of identity are directly relevant to the construction of MJT, and the issues raised by the location of identity primarily within 'Jewish space' are driven by theological as well as anthropological concerns. How Messianic Jews define their 'Jewish identity' as primary and their membership of the Body of the Messiah as secondary – a particular concern of the Hashivenu forum – will need explanation. Further theological investigation of the construction of various Messianic Jewish identities found in Israel and Diaspora is also needed. This should include the differences between older and younger generations, and between the varieties of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform expressions as they link to different forms of Christian tradition.

Study of the nature of Israel as the people of God will discuss several areas. The vexed questions of 'Who is a Jew?' and 'What shapes Jewish identity?' will need investigation in the light of historical, anthropological and theological factors. Also needing consideration are: conversion to Judaism and Messianic Judaism; intermarriage; and the nature of mission to Israel, the Church and the world.

### *Jewish-Christian Relations, Ecumenism and Inter-faith Activity*

With few exceptions, Messianic Jewish theology has not addressed the wider circles of Jewish and Christian theological reflection. Yet MJT claims to make a distinctive and significant contribution to the theological thinking of both traditions. It also raises important questions for Jewish-Christian relations. Messianic Jews will need to assess their own significance in the light of changing paradigms of practical interaction and theological engagement between Christians and Jews.

The existence of Messianic Judaism and its theological implications have yet to be recognised in Jewish-Christian dialogue, and Messianic Jews are seldom invited to contribute to such discussions.<sup>39</sup> Whether the presence of Messianic Jews is an unhelpful distraction to the work of Jewish-Christian relations, or the catalyst for a new paradigm, has yet to be seen, and MJT can make a significant contribution to such a discussion.

In terms of ecumenism within both Judaism and Christianity, MJT must address itself to the issues and concerns of ecumenical encounter at several levels, entering into dialogue with both Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism, and with the historic and new churches within Christianity.

As regards wider interfaith activity, MJT has yet to address itself to world religions and others faiths. Particularly in relation to Islam and Buddhism the movement has much to learn and contribute. Such activity is particularly relevant in the light of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the growing number of Jewish Buddhists.

### **Conclusion**

We have proposed a typology of MJT from a theological perspective by an engaged practitioner. Whilst MJT is still at an embryonic and developmental stage, there are recognisable streams within it. This gives rise to hope that the next generation will build further on such foundations.

*It is not incumbent on you to finish the task; yet, you are not free to desist from it.*<sup>40</sup>

# Noter

1. Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster/ Authentic Media, 2009). The present article is a revised version of the concluding chapter.
2. Byron L. Sherwin, *Toward a Jewish Theology: Methods, Problems and Possibilities* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 9.
3. See for example *The Borough Park Papers: Symposium I: The Gospel and the Jewish People; Symposium II: The Deity of Messiah and the Mystery of God-and Symposium III: How Jewish Should the Messianic Jewish Community Be?* (New York, Borough Park Symposium, 2012, 20130; David J. Rudolph and Joel Willetts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (USA, Zondervan 2013); *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism*, available online at <https://www.kesherjournal.com/> (accessed 10 October 2019); David J. Rudolph, "What is Messianic Judaism?", <https://www.messianicjudaism.net/> (accessed 10 October 2019).
4. <http://hashivenu.org/> (accessed 10 October 2019).
5. David Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, 234–238.
6. Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).
7. Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 293.
8. Baruch Maoz, *Judaism is not Jewish: A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement* (Fearn, UK: Mentor/Christian Focus Publications, 2003). Others include Stan Telchin, *Messianic Judaism is not Christianity: A Loving Call to Unity* (Grand Rapids: Baker/Chosen Books, 2004).
9. Richard Harvey, 'Judaism is Not Jewish [by Baruch Maoz]: A Review,' *CWI Herald* (Summer 2003), [http://www.bannerofttruth.org/pages/articles/article\\_detail.php?490](http://www.bannerofttruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?490) (accessed October 6, 2007).
10. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History and Philosophy* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1983). Others include Barry Leventhal, Louis Goldberg and Louis Lapidés.
11. For distinctions between Classical, Revised and Progressive Dispensational see Craig A. Blasing and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993; paperback edition 2000).
12. Gershon Nerel, 'Modern Assemblies of Jewish Yeshua-Believers between Church and Synagogue,' in *How Jewish is Christianity? Two Views on the Messianic Movement*, edited by Stanley N. Gundry and Louis Goldberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 106.
13. Gershon Nerel, 'Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern thought of Messianic Jews,' in *Le Judéo-Christianisme Dans Tous Ses États: Actes Du Colloque De Jérusalem 6-10 Juillet 1998*, edited by Simon C. Mimouni and F. Stanley Jones (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 399–425.
14. Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism* (Rockville: Davar Publishing, 1986). Other key practitioners are Burt Yellin, Barney Kasdan and the majority of leaders in the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) and the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC).
15. Friedman, David. *The Relationship of Yeshua and the First Century CE Messianic Jewish Community to the Mitzvot of the Mosaic Covenant*. PhD diss., California Graduate School of Theology, 1992.
16. Arye Powlison, 'Rabbinic Judaism as a Background to Scripture,' in *Tishrei* 32, no. 2 (May 2003). Under 'Yeshua and Limits of Rabbinic Authority,' <http://www.family-restorationmagazine.org/tishrei032.htm> (accessed June 7, 2007).
17. Postliberalism began as a reaction to theological liberalism. Karl Barth's reaction against Protestant liberal theology of the 19th and early 20th centuries was taken up by some of his followers in the USA to produce a new engagement with the Bible, Church tradition and contemporary culture. This sat in between the 'liberal' and 'conservative' labels. Key postliberal theologians include George Lindbeck, Hans Frei and Stanley Hauerwas, and the academic journals *First Things* and *Pro Ecclesia* are representative of postliberal thought. Postliberalism reacts against the relativism and rationalism of theological liberalism, with a more sympathetic reading of the Bible and Church tradition, but with an openness to theological ecumenism, the existence and impact of other faiths, and engagement with contemporary culture. Cf. Richard Harvey, 'Shaping the Aims and Aspirations of Jewish Believers (Review of Mark Kinzer's *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*)' *Mishkan* 48 (2006): 22–27.
18. [http://www.hashivenu.org/what\\_is.htm](http://www.hashivenu.org/what_is.htm) (accessed 17 March 2006).
19. Others in this group include Stuart Dauermann, Paul Saal, Rich Nichol, Jason Sobel, and the New England Halachic Council.
20. Kinzer's work *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic/Brazos, 2005) has been the subject of major discussions and reviews in *Mishkan* 48 (2006) (in an issue called 'Reactions to *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*') and *Kesher* 20 (Winter/Spring 2006).
21. Joseph Shulam, with Hilary Le Cornu, *A Commentary of the Jewish Roots of Romans* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 1997).

22. *Shulam's position is further complicated by repeated concerns that his Christology is not fully orthodox. Reference has been made to his written work, and not uncorroborated verbal remarks attributed to him.*
23. *Brandt follows an orthodox Jewish custom of not writing the word 'God' in full.*
24. *Elazar Brandt, e-mail message to author, February 26, 2007. This has been referred to at length to ensure accurate representation of Brandt's views, and because he has published few statements of his position on these questions.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *One notable exception to this lack is the co-operative effort edited by Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 2001).*
32. *Sherwin, *Towards a Jewish Theology*, 3.*
33. *Those forums that take place regularly are the Hashivenu Forum (Pasadena), the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) national and international conferences. Journals devoted to Messianic Judaism include *Kesher* and *Mishkan*.*
34. *David J. Rudolph, 'About the Symposium,' <http://www.chosenpeople.com/symposium> (accessed December 10, 2007). The first Borough Park Symposium (held in Borough Park, New York, October 8–10, 2007) brought together several streams of the Messianic movement. See especially David J. Rudolph, 'Guidelines for Healthy Theological Discussion. (A Paper Presented at the Borough Park Symposium on the Gospel, October 8, 2007),' <http://www.chosenpeople.com/symposium/papers/RudolphFinal.pdf>. (accessed December 10, 2007).*
35. *Mark Kinzer, e-mail to author, January 6, 2005.*
36. *Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 171–172. Marshall states: 'When it comes to deciding about truth, God's unshakeable electing love for Israel forms that conviction within the open field of possible beliefs which the faithful Jew is most unwilling to give up or reinterpret, and correlatively that with which all other belief and practice must at least be consistent in order to be held true or regarded as right.'*
37. *Mark Kinzer, e-mail to author, January 6, 2005.*
38. *Barry Leventhal, Tzvi Sadan, Arthur Katz.*
39. *Cf. David Rudolph, 'Messianic Jews and Christian Theology: Restoring an Historical Voice to the Contemporary Discussion,' *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 1 (March 2005): 65–86.*
40. *'Pirkei Avot' [Sayings of the Fathers], 2:21 in Nosson Scherman (ed.), *The Complete Artscroll Siddur* (2nd ed.; Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1986), 568.*

