

Accounting for Judaism in the Study of American Messianic Judaism

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved November 2015 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2015

ABSTRACT

Since its modern renaissance in the mid-1970s, the Messianic Jewish movement in America has grown from a handful of house churches to a network of hundreds of synagogues and congregations. Mainline American Judaism has unanimously rejected the argument that Jews who believe in Jesus continue to be members of the Jewish community or that their religion is a form of contemporary Judaism. Scholars have accounted for Messianic Judaism as a new religious movement but no consensus has formed on whether to classify Messianic Jewish religion as a sectarian form of Protestant Christianity or American Judaism.

This dissertation uses a polythetic approach to defining Judaism and a comparative approach to studying religions in order to make sense of Hashivenu, a newly emergent community of Messianic Jews, and the claim that their religion is “truly” Judaism and not Christianity. It addresses the question of how scholars of religion can account for Messianic Judaism in the mapping of American religion without succumbing to essentialist definitions of Judaism that religious communities use to set boundaries and differentiate themselves from competing groups.

Following the lead set by Bruce Lincoln on defining religion in four domains and Michael Satlow on defining Judaism through the use of conceptual maps, research on Messianic Judaism suggests that individual beliefs about whether Jesus is or is not the Messiah or part of a Trinitarian theology are less important to the academic classificatory project than is the authorizing religious discourse of the New Testament to which all Messianic Jews, including the Hashivenu group, appeal for creating community, legitimating practice, and constructing a Messianic Jewish worldview. Since Messianic Judaism properly contributes simultaneously to maps of both Judaism and Christianity, Hashivenu’s prescriptive approach to creating Judaism out of characteristics from two historically competitive, even antithetical religious traditions

challenges scholars to contend with the limitations of defining Judaism and Christianity within the parameters of an unpopular but still regnant World Religions discourse predicated on the presumption that the two religions have long ago permanently parted ways.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Modern Messianic Judaism

By the late 1960s America was deeply enmeshed in a cultural revolution, one in which young people were rejecting the suspect civil religion of their fathers in favor of renewed spiritualities, many of them Americanized versions of Hindu and Buddhist traditions imported from the “East.”¹ Not so exotic, but equally disconcerting for many well-assimilated and liberally religious Jewish families, was the success of Jews for Jesus (JFJ), a Protestant Christian evangelistic missionary outreach that targeted displaced Jewish youth for salvation through Jesus.² Jews for Jesus began in 1970 in San Francisco, California under the bold, some would say brazen, leadership of Martin Mayer “Moishe” Rosen, a Jewish convert to Christianity and conventional but disaffected Hebrew Christian missionary affiliated with the American Board of Missions to the Jews.³ It quickly grew over the space of a decade from a small group of dedicated followers who counseled and instructed young people in a family-style setting, to a multimillion dollar evangelistic machine that aggressively, and with savvy, marketed Jesus as the Jewish messiah to an astonished and often hostile Jewish community.⁴

Protestant missions targeting the Jews has been a part of American religious history since at least 1816 when the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst

¹ Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, Second Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 104–111.

² B. Z. Sobel, *Hebrew Christianity; The Thirteenth Tribe* (New York: Wiley, 1974).

³ Jim Congdon, ed., *Jews and the Gospel at the End of History: A Tribute to Moishe Rosen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009).

⁴ Juliene G. Lipson, *Jews for Jesus: An Anthropological Study*, AMS Studies in Anthropology 5 (New York: AMS Press, 1990); Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880 - 2000* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 200–09.

the Jews met in Boston to encourage Gentiles to take the task of Jewish evangelism seriously.⁵ The objective then as now remains unchanged. Hannah Adams, an early 19th century American “Compiler of the History of the Jews,” hoped to persuade an apathetic American church that Christians should labor to “bring this long neglected people to a cordial acknowledgement of the grand tenet, in which all Christians unite, that “Jesus Christ is the Messiah” and in so doing they can redeem much lost time, cancel out past injuries and fulfill their “countless obligations” to the Jews of the Christian New Testament “who evangelized the world.”⁶ Rosen’s Jews for Jesus and other contemporary evangelical missions to the Jews organizations have faithfully and continually worked on fulfilling this original missionizing agenda. Jewish community leaders were incensed that converted Jews would spearhead the missionary activity among their own people. As a result, Jewish religious institutions disowned Messianic Jews and crafted official as well as popular responses that drew clear boundaries between Christianity, the religion of the majority, and Judaism. Given the objective of Christian missionary efforts, Jewish counterclaims have argued that a Jew who accepts the missionaries’ claims that Jesus Christ is the Messiah leaves Judaism and enters Christianity.⁷

Whether modern Christianized Jews think of themselves as Hebrew Christians, completed Jews, or Messianic Jews, mainstream Jewish institutions have considered all

⁵ Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 2.

⁶ Hannah Adams, “Concise Account of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews” (Boston: John Eliot, 1816).

⁷ See, for example: William A. Matson, “Jewish Ministers Aroused: Convinced of the Effectiveness of Christian Missions,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1893, *New York Times* (1857-1922), ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1851-2007); Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, *Judaism and Christianity: The Differences* (New York: The Jewish Book Club, 1943); Aryeh Kaplan, Berel Wein, and Pinchas Stolper, *The Real Messiah? A Jewish Response to Missionaries* (New York: National Conference of Synagogue Youth, 1985).

of them Christians and apostates to the Jewish religion. CCAR Responsa 68 (September 1983) explains Reform Judaism's position this way:

It is not the individual who defines whether she is Jewish but the group. For us in the Jewish community anyone who claims that Jesus is their savior is no longer a Jew and is an apostate. Through that belief she has placed herself outside the Jewish community. Whether she cares to define herself as a Christian or as a "fulfilled Jew," "Messianic Jew," or any other designation is irrelevant; to us she is clearly a Christian. . . . We should, therefore, consider a "completed Jew" as an apostate. . . . Such individuals should not be accorded membership in the congregation or treated in any way which makes them appear as if they were affiliated with the Jewish community, for that poses a clear danger to the Jewish community and also to its relationships with the general community.⁸

Conservative Rabbi Jonathan Waxman expresses much the same sentiment on The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's website: "Hebrew Christian, Jewish Christian, Jew for Jesus, Messianic Jew, Fulfilled Jew. The name may have changed over the course of time, but all of the names reflect the same phenomenon: one who asserts that s/he is straddling the theological fence between Judaism and Christianity, but in

⁸ "68. Status of a 'Completed Jew' in the Jewish Community," Central Conference of American Rabbis, accessed October 30, 2015, <https://ccarnet.org/responsa/carr-109-112/>. On October 23, 2012, the Conservative Committee on Jewish Law and Standards approved an official *Teshuva* (response) on the status of the Messianic Jew that parallels that of their Reform colleagues. According to YD 268:12.2012a, Messianic Jews are Christians, and have gone from Jew to apostate Jews; they are no longer Jews "except for matters of personal status" and no longer entitled to the "rights and privileges of Judaism;" Messianic Jewish organizations are considered Christian, not Jewish sects. Rabbis Kassel Abelson and Reuven Hammer, "The Status of 'Messianic Jews'," Rabbinical Assembly, accessed October 31, 2015, <http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/abelson-hammer-messianic-jews.pdf>.

truth is firmly on the Christian side.”⁹ The wording may have changed over the last hundred plus years, but the message remains constant. In no uncertain terms, as far as the main institutions of modern American Judaism are concerned, to be Christian is to not be a Jew and to be a Jew is, at the very least, not to be a Christian.¹⁰

However, from the earliest days of missions to the Jews in America, Protestant evangelical missionaries insisted that just the opposite was true. From their perspective, a Jew who converted to Christianity remained a Jew, by which they meant a member of a divinely favored (if spiritually blind) people, a nation descended from Abraham but dispersed in all the nations of the world.¹¹ What the converted Jew lost was his religious identification with Judaism, not his Israelite patrimony. What a Jewish convert gained by acknowledging that Jesus was his Messiah was personal salvation and the fulfillment of his God-given destiny as a member of the flesh-and-blood people of God, of Israel, “God’s own chosen people.”¹²

⁹ Rabbi Jonathan Waxman, “Messianic Jews are Not Jews,” The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, accessed February 27, 2015, <http://www.uscj.org/JewishLivingandLearning/SocialAction/SocialJustice/CurrentIssues/ReligiousIssues/JewishValues/MessianicJewsAreNotJews.aspx>.

¹⁰ The Orthodox position is more nuanced, and if pushed to the corner, Reform and Conservative rabbis would generally agree that if a person is a matrilineal Jew or a convert according to Orthodox rabbinic halakhah, he remains a Jew even though he may have converted to another religion; the converted Jew technically becomes an apostate but does not lose his inherent Jewish identity. In a Q and A by Zalman Nelson posted on the Chabad website in 2014, Jewish law states that such a person “remains not only a Jew, but ‘Israel’—the entirety of the Jewish people in a single individual.” See, Zalman Nelson, “Is a Jew Who Converts Still Jewish?” Chabad.org, accessed February 27, 2015, http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1269075/jewish/Is-a-Jew-Who-Converts-Still-Jewish.htm. In Reform Judaism, a Christian Jew is an apostate, but this classification is tantamount to losing any meaningful association with the Jewish community.

¹¹ Adams, “Concise Account of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews.”

¹² “Report of the First Lutheran Conference on Mission Among Israel,” Meeting minutes (Chicago: Chicago Local Committee on Mission Among Israel, 1901).

The Jewish proselyte could overcome the religious stigma attached to being a Jew by confessing faith in Christianity's savior and entering the church, but the Jew did not and often could not erase the intrinsic, exoticized aura of his Jewishness, for better or for worse. Jews who converted often did not or could not fully assimilate into the evangelical church culture, which remained highly skeptical that Jews could become true Christians. Protestant dispensationalist theology, however, gave those Jews who did not assimilate a possible location in the church's salvation history and organized them under the rubric of Hebrew Christianity, a classification that persisted in the United States, though not unchallenged, into the 1970s when the old name was effectively replaced by a new one: Messianic Jew/Judaism.¹³ Hebrew Christians were Jews who had entered the evangelical Christian fold but who continued to identify as members of the Jewish people. Some converted Jews were sent to seminaries and ordained in order to labor in the field of Christian missions to the Jews.¹⁴

For a number of reasons, from a surge in ethnic awareness in America to the military success of Israel's army in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, being visibly, culturally Jewish rather than conforming to Anglo-Protestant culture became a source of pride for younger Jews who were converting to Christianity through the efforts of lay and professional missionaries alike.¹⁵ Instead of following in their Hebrew Christian predecessors' footsteps and acculturating, if not assimilating, to the dominant Gentile culture of the Christian church, many of these new converts began to demand to be

¹³ "Minutes of the First Hebrew Christian Conference of the United States Held at Mountain Lake Park, Md." (Pittsburgh: G. Burgum, printer, 1903); Sobel, *Hebrew Christianity; The Thirteenth Tribe*, 175–226.

¹⁴ Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 22–23.

¹⁵ Patricia A. Power, "Blurring the Boundaries: American Messianic Jews and Gentiles," *Novo Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15, no. 1 (August 2011): 69–91.

recognized as fully Jewish by the Jewish as well as the Christian communities from which they had emerged. Paul Lieberman, a Jew by birth who converted to Christianity in 1971 after reading the New Testament and a booklet of “more than 300 Messianic prophecies from the Old Testament,” explains that emotionally charged time in his 1976 book, *The Fig Tree Blossoms*:

After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, pride in Jewishness was accelerated. . . .

It was only natural that new Jewish believers sought stronger identification as Jews. They no longer wanted to be known as a special kind of Christian; they wanted to be described as a type of Jew. They no longer wanted their heritage to be a footnote. Such Jews wanted their belief in the Messiah to label them as a type of Jew, a true Jew, a biblical Jew, a Jew who believes in the Messiah—a Messianic Jew.¹⁶

Much of the momentum for the spread of this new Messianic Jewish identity was provided by Christian prophecy teachers who were reading the newly established state of Israel and the return of Jews to the Holy Land as prophetic signs of the times indicating that the eschaton and Jesus’s second coming was at hand. In this scenario, believing Jews who retained their Jewish identities were cast in a leading role as necessary predecessors to the consummation of the church’s salvation history. Historian David Rausch explains that the momentous events in Israel had quite an effect on prophetically-minded Gentile Christians as well as on the older Hebrew Christian imagination:

Among Hebrew Christians, the Israeli victory was seen as God’s faithfulness toward his chosen people, the Jews. Even among

¹⁶ Paul Liberman, *The Fig Tree Blossoms : Messianic Judaism Emerges* (Harrison, AR: Fountain Press, 1976), 70; David A. Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity* (New York: Mellen Press, 1982), 71–83.

prophetically minded Fundamentalist-Evangelicals, the ‘last days’ appeared to be upon the Church. God was going to raise up his 144,000 Jewish evangelists to bring the Gospel message to the whole world. The Gentile was to be soon phased out, as the Jew took over his rightful place of esteem in prophetic events. Shire Lindsay, the Gentile daughter of a Pentecostal evangelist was so caught up in the events that she converted to Judaism in Boston and moved to Israel in 1970. The rabbis in Boston later annulled her conversion. . . . Other Gentiles would follow her lead in converting to Judaism in order to evangelize more effectively among the Jewish community.¹⁷

By the mid-1980s, the Messianic Jewish congregational movement was in full bloom, having sprouted dozens of Messianic groups throughout the U.S. These were most often led by Pastors/Messianic rabbis, congregational leaders who had been trained in evangelical seminaries,¹⁸ presumably with some emphasis on Jewish evangelism.¹⁹ None of these messianic leaders had been ordained through a mainstream

¹⁷ Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 73.

¹⁸ Michael H. Schiffman, *Return from Exile: The Re-Emergence of the Messianic Congregational Movement*, 2nd ed. (Bay Terrace, NY: Teshuva Publishing Company, 1991).

¹⁹ The term, Jewish Evangelism, is taken from Christian missions’ discourse and means the targeted effort to reach Jews with the Gospel of Jesus’ Messianism and divinity. The Chernoff family from Cincinnati is an exemplar of the multigenerational evolution from Hebrew Christian to Messianic Jew. The elder Martin Chernoff had been a Hebrew Christian missionary for decades when his son, Joel, then nineteen and influenced by the energy of the Jesus movement was “turned on” to the Bible and his faith and began street evangelizing. Martin’s father, an Orthodox Jewish immigrant, is reported to have made a death bed confession of his secret faith in Jesus, making Joel the third generation Hebrew Christian cum Messianic Jewish minister in the family. The Chernoffs were on the cusp of the transition from Hebrew Christianity to Messianic Judaism. The family has headed up a flagship congregation for one of the Messianic umbrella organizations, Congregation Beth Yeshua in Philadelphia, since the mid-1970s. See, Ron Cantor, “Martin Chernoff: The Father of 20th Century Messianic Judaism,” *Standing with Israel* in Charisma Magazine’s online blog, August 2, 2013,

American Jewish institution, and none of the synagogues were affiliated with either an existing Jewish movement or denomination.²⁰ Understandably, without exception, established Jewish leaders and organizations considered these Messianic congregations claiming to represent Judaism were Christian churches in disguise. Most newly minted Messianic Jews seem to have thought less about being representatives of institutional Christianity than about being personal witnesses of Christian truths, and it was not long before the younger cohort began to work out a corporate identity other than Hebrew Christianity.

Although the official mission of newly forming Messianic Jewish congregations was tightly bound to Jewish evangelism, many communities had chosen to be entirely independent of any financial or political affiliation with Christian missions boards or Protestant denominations. Most Messianic Jewish leaders did not pursue the aggressive strategy that marked the Jews for Jesus approach to Messianic relations with the non-Messianic Jewish establishment, preferring to adopt an indigenous church model of missionary outreach like that outlined by James Hutchens in his doctoral dissertation, “The Case for Messianic Judaism,” from Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth in 1974: “We are recommending neither warmed over Orthodox Judaism, nor Rabbinic Judaism with a dash of Jesus,” Hutchens writes. “Rather, the essence of this option is what ethno theologians would call a movement

<http://www.charismamag.com/blogs/standing-with-israel/18351-martin-chernoff-the-father-of-20th-century-messianic-judaism>, and Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 73–75.

²⁰ Schiffman, *Return from Exile: The Re-Emergence of the Messianic Congregational Movement*. Schiffman conducted a survey of thirty representative Messianic congregations in the United States, which shows 47% of the congregational leaders with an M.Div. and 33% with Bible College degrees. Of the six largest congregations, four leaders had M.Div. degrees or the equivalent and two were Bible College graduates. The theological orientation of these leaders ranges across the evangelical Protestant spectrum from Charismatic to Non-Charismatic (orientation in worship style) and from Dispensationalism to Covenant (Reformed, Calvinist).

toward indigeneity,” where as a result of missionary efforts, a church is produced that shares in the national life of the people among whom it is planted, one that can be self-governing, self-supporting and capable of reproducing itself.²¹

Classifying Jews as an indigenous people and Messianic congregations as indigenous works was a novel strategy for Christian missions to the Jews. The objective was to naturalize Jesus and Christian doctrines in a Jewish context. In order for Jewish missions to succeed, Jews would have to think of Jesus as their own messiah rather than a foreign Christ, and their religious practices would have to reflect their own cultural needs and patterns rather than being imposed from the outside. Christianity has never offered this option to Jews, writes Hutchens. Hutchens thought that indigenizing Jesus would be an exceedingly difficult prospect. For Jesus “to become indigenized within Jewish society,” he wrote, “for the dominant features of his person and teaching to be authentically *native*, is no minor undertaking. Yet this is precisely what must be done.”²² Hutchens presumed that Jewish converts, those for whom he thought Jewish cultural forms were native, must plant and nurture his new indigenous church. Hutchens’ work was instrumental in selling the idea of an indigenous model of missions work among the Jews to the evangelical church and in inspiring Messianic Jewish leaders to take up the challenge of making it happen.²³ Leaders and congregants in Messianic communities

²¹ James M. Hutchens, “A Case for Messianic Judaism” (Dissertation, Doctor of Missiology, Fuller Theological Seminary, The School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth, 1974), 229–230.

²² *Ibid.*, 231–32. Hutchens, a Gentile by birth, claims to have been converted to Judaism by an Orthodox rabbi, so that in his dissertation he can write, on p. 233, in the first person as a “Jew who believes in Jesus and believes that Judaism is a living and viable faith.”

²³ See also, Phillip E. Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1974); Phillip E. Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Yeshiva* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), 15; John R. Stone, “Messianic Judaism: A Redefinition of the Boundary between Christian and Jew?,” *Social Scientific Study of Religion* 3 (1991): 244–45; Daniel C. Juster, *Jewish*

observed the holidays, including Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Passover, Chanukah, Purim and Sukkot; they met on Friday evening or Saturday morning, lit Shabbat candles, wore yarmulkes and prayer shawls, said traditional prayers and made *kiddush*. They appropriated these and other elements of Jewish practice drawn from rabbinic religious culture, which they resignified, when possible, with Christian meaning.²⁴

Mainstream American Judaism was neither impressed with nor interested in these subtle shifts in strategy, appearance, or self-understanding among Messianic Jews. In their most generous assessment, Messianic Jews were converts to Christianity who deluded themselves by thinking they were still Jews for any practical purposes. Generally speaking, Messianic Jews were lambasted for broadcasting their “deceptive” and “fraudulent” claims that one could simultaneously be a Jew and believe in Jesus, and for their misappropriation of Jewish symbols and rituals.²⁵ The evangelical Protestant missions community out of which the Messianic Jewish movement had grown was ambivalent. On the one hand they were discomforted by the notion that Jewish believers in Jesus were incorporating and validating more and more material from post-Biblical Judaism, including distinctly rabbinic practices, into their lifestyle and worship, and separating themselves communally and conceptually from their Gentile co-religionists. On the other hand, they were happy to see a vibrant expression of Jewish faith in Jesus, which they interpreted as proof that the controversial notion of evangelical missions to

Roots : A Foundation of Biblical Theology, 3rd ed. (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1995), Appendix III, Fuller Theological Seminary Release, 295–97.

²⁴ Schiffman, *Return from Exile: The Re-Emergence of the Messianic Congregational Movement*, 133–38; Daniel C. Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*, 1st ed. (Rockville, MD: Davar Publishing Co., 1986), 191–246, 259–287.

²⁵ Sobel, *Hebrew Christianity; The Thirteenth Tribe*; Kaplan, Wein, and Stolper, *The Real Messiah?*; Stone, “Messianic Judaism: A Redefinition of the Boundary between Christian and Jew?,” 245–46.

the Jews was not in vain, and/or that their own ideas about the role of Jews in the end-time countdown to the millennial kingdom were proving valid.²⁶

Messianic Jews, for their part, were beginning to see themselves as a people caught between two competitive institutional religions, connected ethnically to the Jewish people, and in part to its religious way of life, and confessionally to the Christian church. They began to explore the possibility that they *alone* should and could define who they were and what their role should be with respect to their fellow Jews and Christians, as well as how to situate themselves conceptually and institutionally in the American religious landscape. David Stern's *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, first published in 1988, became the go-to volume for authenticating and articulating a specifically Jewish ideology and program for the Messianic movement. Stern was moved to write his *Manifesto* because he felt that Messianic Judaism was being "acknowledged as a social, ideological, and theological force to be reckoned with" and therefore the time had come "to put forth before the various publics — Gentile Christians, traditional and secular Jews, Messianic Jews and 'the rest of the world' (non-Christian Gentiles) a comprehensive picture" of his vision for Messianic Judaism, specifically to replace what he called "the bogeyman images" the movement had acquired in the public domain.²⁷

The *Manifesto* offers "elements of ideology, theology and program in a call to action" for the hundred thousand or so Messianic Jews Stern described as "struggling to create a movement from scratch."²⁸ The manifesto was the first in a series of publications

²⁶ This is clearly reflected in two papers presented to the Lausanne Committee on Jewish Evangelism in 1985. The pro-Messianic congregational position was written by Richard Nichol, Messianic rabbi of Ruach Israel in Boston, while Richard Currie, representing the viewpoint of a Jewish mission, argued that the church had no need to endorse a separate Messianic Jewish congregational movement.

²⁷ David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, 2nd Edition (Gaithersburg, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1991), 8–10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–9.

Stern brought to market for Messianic Jews: he published a Jewish New Testament in 1989, a Jewish New Testament commentary in 1992, and a “complete” Jewish Bible in 1998. All of these are still widely used by Messianics, both Jewish and non-Jewish.²⁹ If James Hutchens and Phillip Goble were the missions-trained, Gentile progenitors of indigenous Messianic Judaism, Stern is its ideological and theological Jewish grandfather.

By the mid-1970s, Messianic Jews felt confident enough to proclaim the rebirth of an authentically Jewish religion, Messianic Judaism, a Jewish religion that believed in Jesus (Yeshua in the new Messianic terminology). New books began to appear, and as the decades passed editions of earlier works on the rise of the Messianic Jewish movement were bearing more confident titles: “Messianic Judaism” appeared in print as early as 1976 in Paul Liberman’s *The Fig Tree Blossoms: Messianic Judaism Emerges*; Dan Juster, a Hebrew Christian and Presbyterian pastor of the first Hebrew Christian church in America to “Messianize” in the 1970s (from First Hebrew Christian Church to Adat HaTikvah, Chicago) published a first edition of *Jewish Roots: a Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism* in 1986; Michael Schiffman’s 1987 research published in 1990 as *Return from Exile: The Re-emergence of the Messianic*

²⁹ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament: A Translation of the New Testament That Expresses Its Jewishness* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1989); David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992); David H. Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B’rit Hadashah (New Testament)* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998). The Jewish New Testament (JNT) was an attempt to make “various needed cultural corrections to the standard ‘Gentile’ versions” available for missionary outreach among Jews. For example, the JNT substituted Pesach for Passover, “tzitzit” for fringes, and used common Hebrew or Yiddish terms and names for their English equivalents where possible (Yeshua for Jesus, Ya’akov for James, e.g.). The Complete Jewish Bible appended the 1917 Jewish Publication Society translation of the Tanakh to the JNT. See, John J. Parsons, “The Jewish New Testament and the Meaning of ‘under the law’,” at Hebrew4Christians.com, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Articles/JNT/jnt.html>.

Congregational Movement was revised and published in 1992 under a new title, *Return of the Remnant: the Rebirth of Messianic Judaism*. By the mid-1990s, the number of Messianic congregations at any given time was estimated to be somewhere in the neighborhood of 200-250 in North America, with the majority in the United States.³⁰ Scholars both inside and outside the affected Jewish, Messianic Jewish and Christian communities had begun to take notice, publishing studies that tried to make sense out of Messianic Jewish claims to be both Jewish and Christian.³¹

The years between the Messianic congregational explosion and the end of the twentieth century were tumultuous for the movement. A serious fissure developed over just how much Judaizing was enough in the Messianic Jewish movement, and what this turn toward contextualizing the Christian message for Jews meant for the mixed multitude in the pews. Then as now ethnically non-Jews (Gentiles in Messianic terminology) formed the majority in most, if not all, Messianic Jewish congregations.

³⁰ Jeffrey S. Wasserman, *Messianic Jewish Congregations : Who Sold This Business to the Gentiles?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 73. Dan Juster assumed the leadership of the Presbyterian First Hebrew Christian Church in 1972 and within a few years had changed the name to Adat Ha Tikvah, moved the weekend service to Shabbat on Saturday, and steered it towards Messianic Judaism.” See, Paul Spinard’s December 13, 2014 blog entry, “Whither Messianic Judaism,” at <https://medium.com/@pspinrad/whither-messianic-judaism-1da1219008a8>. Tellingly, Juster published a revised, second edition in the same year, removing the words, “Messianic Judaism” from the title and revising the text to rectify what he came to believe was an overly enthusiastic embrace of some elements of rabbinic Judaism. The net effect is democratize his Messianic theology, making it applicable to all members of the church and not only Messianic Jews.

³¹ Rachael I. E. Kohn, “Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism on the Church-Sect Continuum” (PhD Dissertation, McMaster University, 1985); Stuart L. Charmé, “Heretics, Infidels and Apostates: Menace, Problem or Symptom,” *Judaism* 36, no. 1 (1987): 17–33; Lipson, *Jews for Jesus: An Anthropological Study*; Stone, “Messianic Judaism: A Redefinition of the Boundary between Christian and Jew?”; Shoshanah Feher, *Passing over Easter : Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998); Carol A. Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism : A Rabbi’s Journey through Religious Change in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (London; New York: Continuum, 2000); Devra Jaffe, “Straddling the Boundary: Messianic Judaism and the Construction of Culture” (MA Thesis, Rice University, 2000).

Many non-Jewish Christians were drawn to Jewish-style worship and teachings by the rediscovery of Christianity's "Jewish roots," while others were motivated to participate by a sincere love for the Jewish people and Israel that had in large part been borne out of a prophetic reading of the Bible. This potential fracture has not healed, and, if anything, is more threatening to the overall integrity of the movement than before.

American Messianic Jews began by reclaiming a connection to their collective Jewish heritage and by asserting, as Jews, their continued, personal, ethnic connection to the Jewish people. For a segment of the Messianic Jewish movement, this has since evolved into a reconceptualization and reclassification of their public religious identity as well. In 1999, Mark Kinzer, a messianic Jewish congregational leader from Ann Arbor, Michigan, delivered a paper at the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) Theology Forum in which he argued that the movement's new term of self-designation—Messianic Judaism rather than Hebrew Christianity—reflected an intentional inversion of the basic elements in the name.³² "Judaism" became the genus and "Messianic" the species in Kinzer's taxonomy of religion. The decision to use Judaism rather than Christianity, he argued, implies that Messianic Jews are claiming a meaningful relationship not only to the Jewish people but also to its entire religious faith and way of life as it has developed throughout history. "Messianic Judaism," he writes, means that "our movement is fundamentally among Jews and for Jews." Reflecting the alarming reality that the Messianic Jewish movement had, between the mid-1970s and the end of the 1990s, become a majority Gentile movement, Kinzer adds that Messianic Judaism "may include non-Jews with a supportive role to play," but its purpose should not be to

³² The UMJC was founded in 1979 by a group of Messianic Jewish leaders as the first umbrella organization specifically for Messianic Jewish congregations.

foster a “Torah-revival among Gentile Christians.” “A Messianic Judaism without Jews,” he writes, “is no Judaism at all.”³³

That same year, Kinzer presented his expanded vision for a truly Jewish Messianic Judaism to the Hashivenu Forum, an avant-garde think tank of Messianic Jewish leaders who had begun to meet periodically to work out a mission statement and a set of core values that would define this new Judaism. According to Mark Kinzer, Hashivenu was formed in 1997-98 by five leaders from the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC). A year later, the first Hashivenu Forum—an invitation only venue for presenting papers on Hashivenu’s core values and direction for the Messianic Jewish movement.³⁴ By August 1999, Hashivenu.org appears on the Internet advertising a new Messianic Jewish Theology Institute (MJTI) set to open in the fall of 2000 in partnership with Fuller Theological Seminary. *Hashivenu* is a term taken from the traditional Hebrew liturgy concluding the Torah service: *Hashivenu Adonai elekha v’nashuvah. Chadesh yameinu k’kedem*,” and means, “Return us LORD to you and we will return. Renew our days as of old.” This is consonant with Hashivenu ideology, which looks backward to a time depicted in the New Testament when responding to Jesus and his disciples was understood as a Jewish response to a divine call, and forward to an affirmation of their intention to return to an “authentic” Jewish life today in anticipation of Israel’s final messianic redemption. They refer to this as a “mature Messianic Judaism,” an authentic expression of Jewish life in continuity with Jewish tradition.³⁵

³³ Mark S. Kinzer, “Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism,” in *Israel’s Messiah and the People of God*, ed. Jennifer M. Rosner (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010). Originally published in 2000 as *The Nature of Messianic Judaism*, the essay appears in Rosner’s edited volume of Kinzer’s work dating from 1982 to 2009.

³⁴ David J Rudolph and Joel Willitts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), chap. 11.is the c

³⁵ “We Cry Hashivenu,” *Hashivenu.org*, 2012, <http://www.hashivenu.org>.

In 2005, Kinzer published a book with the provocative title, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, in which he defends his position that the Movement's religion is Judaism, not Christianity. He also advocates that Messianic Judaism shift its perspective and behavior toward non-Messianic Jews from active evangelism to an "inner mission" of witness that openly embraces the Jewish people and rabbinic Judaism, its religious tradition.³⁶ His book has created a stir in the Messianic community and increased the ideological distance between those in the missions culture who understand the sole purpose of Messianic Judaism to be open and visible evangelism based on the belief that Jews cannot be saved apart from a personal confession of faith in Jesus, and Kinzer's proponents who agree with him that Messianic Judaism is a branch of Judaism, that Messianic Jews are the holy lump that leavens the whole of faithful Jews, and that Messianic Judaism should play the role of mediator between the Jewish people and the Christian church.³⁷ With the publication of Kinzer's book and the public face of Hashivenu, the advocates for a postmissionary form of Messianic engagement with the Jewish people have made the meaning of Judaism an issue for their own movement as well as for scholars who study religion/s in America.

Messianic Judaism: A Problem of Classification and Definition

At first glance it might seem that the claims made in defense of one position or the other about whether Messianic Jews are really Jews, or whether their religion is

³⁶ Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 14.

³⁷ Stan Telchin, *Messianic Judaism Is Not Christianity: A Loving Call to Unity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2004); Rich Robinson, "Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People -- Longer Version," *Jews for Jesus*, November 10, 2005, http://www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/havurah/08_04/kinzer; Michael L. Brown, "Is a Post-Missionary, Truly Messianic Judaism Possible?," in *Lausanne Conference on Jewish Evangelism, N.A.* (San Antonio, 2007); Charles Van Engen, "Response to Mark S. Kinzer's Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People" (Hashivenu Forum 8, Pasadena, 2006).

“really” Judaism are simply truth claims whose disposition is best left to the respective religious communities to determine for their own purposes. However, there is more at stake in this contest than settling a number of truth claims. The less obvious but equally important issues that Messianic Jews and Messianic Judaism raise rest on the particular value Americans place on their right to personal and religious self-determination; in this case, to say “I am a Jew” and to claim certain benefits as well as rights from the “being” that this declaration affirms. One of those benefits, inherent in the American way of life and the separation of church from state, is the right to choose one’s religious affiliation. In this case, a self-proclaimed Jew who believes in Jesus can choose to call her religion Judaism, and a group of self-proclaimed Messianic Jews can institutionalize that choice in a characteristically American fashion. There is no state to intervene on behalf of the mainstream’s interests because the government is prohibited from doing “anything that implies the preeminence or superior legitimacy of one church over another” where “church” is the dynamic equivalent of a legitimate American denomination of either Judaism, Catholicism or Protestantism.³⁸

The religious freedom Messianic Jews have to self-identify with Judaism despite mainstream American Judaism’s denunciation of their claims necessarily complicates what should be an objective, academic definition of Judaism. How can such a definition do justice to both the defenders and the challengers of the status quo? Although the denominational organizations of American Judaism can effectively anathematize and use the mechanism of Jewish law to exclude Messianic Jews from full participation in their communities, scholars, particularly those who have affinities with the Jewish community and Judaism, have a more difficult time peremptorily excluding Messianic Jewish

³⁸ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew : An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 85–86.

religion from the taxon of Judaism without resorting to the first-order, normative definitions that Jewish religious leaders can employ.

In 1987, Stuart Charmé, then associate professor of religion at Rutgers University, attempted to avoid explaining Judaism's exclusion of Messianic Jews in normative terms by appealing to the witness of history, but in the end felt it necessary to resort to defining historical Judaism in normative terms:

They [Messianic Jews] insist that Biblical Judaism was *displaced* by rabbinic Judaism, and that the latter is not 'true' Judaism . . . [but this] is a gross distortion, historically as well as theologically. When rabbinic Judaism, on which modern Judaism rests, is characterized as 'un-Jewish' or as a human invention of the Pharisees that is lacking in religious authority, one has redefined Judaism in an unjustifiably bizarre way. . . . Their claim that belief in Jesus does not require giving up anything Jewish, makes sense *only* if one first disregards as 'un-Jewish' the rabbinic interpretation of the Bible and ignores almost all of Jewish history and religious development since the first century.³⁹

Messianic Judaism's claim to be a legitimate successor of biblical, Jewish religion is dismissed as a gross distortion, while the contributions of rabbinic Judaism are held up as necessary to a valid definition of the same.

Much the same problem plagued Michael Satlow's more recent attempt to account for the study of Judaism in the academic study of religion, and much the same solution presented itself. Although Satlow initially includes outsider groups like Messianic Jews in his broadly construed polythetic definition of Judaism conceding, "from a non-normative perspective, they have every right to call themselves 'Israel,'" this

³⁹ Charmé, "Heretics, Infidels and Apostates: Menace, Problem or Symptom," 26.

inclusion is qualified by an exclusion from the Jewish community because of Messianics' apparent rejection of the post-biblical, rabbinic tradition. The only contemporary examples of Judaism that qualify as normative in Satlow's study are those groups who participate in the same rabbinic conversation as other Jewish communities. "The boundaries of tradition might be broad," Satlow writes, "but they do exist."⁴⁰

Even though Satlow admits there may be some structural similarities between the Christian Messianism of groups like Jews for Jesus and other kinds of messianic Judaism, like the Lubavitcher Hasidim for example, he quips, "Jesus is not the Rebbe."⁴¹ Why one messianic figure should legitimate a messianic form of Judaism and another is dismissed out of hand as outside the boundaries of convention in an academic definition of Judaism is not immediately clear.⁴² The polythetic, second-order definition of Judaism falls prey to the power of first-order definitions that preclude belief in Jesus and the weight of history in which the legacy of rabbinic Judaism triumphed over its challengers.⁴³ Jewish Studies scholars are hard pressed to include Messianic Jews in their definitional concept of Judaism when they have so clearly been excluded by the body politic of American Judaism, but justifying their exclusion on objective, academic

⁴⁰ Michael L. Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 15.

⁴¹Ibid., 54.

⁴² Satlow recounts the psychological baggage that accompanies the symbol of Jesus for many Jews, and implies this is why the Jewish community does not accept Messianic Jewish religion as part of Judaism. Unfortunately, he does not take the analysis further than this admission that the two types of messianism are comparable. On the topic of whether Christian messianism is axiomatically a differential characteristic separating Judaism from Christianity see, Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Messianism between Judaism and Christianity," in *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism*, ed. Michael L. Morgan and Steven Weitzman (Indiana University Press, 2015), 23–62.

⁴³ Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 15, 54.

terms is noticeably problematic. Outsider groups may be enumerated but they hardly figure in the definitional project.

Reconstructionist Rabbi Carol-Harris Shapiro, who published her in-depth ethnographic study of a prominent Messianic congregation in the late 1990s, asked a somewhat different question. Given the fractured state of American Judaism and heated internal disagreements in Judaism at large over “Who is a Jew?” she wondered whether it was even possible to draw a map that excluded Messianic Jews and their Judaism while still including the diverse mainstream.⁴⁴ Writing from a more post-modern perspective, Harris-Shapiro concludes that there is “really no way to judge . . . when change becomes leave taking, when Messianic Jews become Christians, when the border stops and a new country begins. The American Jewish inclusiveness in self-definition, the desire to retain both religious and secular Jews, conflicts with the need to exclude Jews who adopt Christian beliefs as ‘other’.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, her open-ended conclusion was only one of two conclusions that she was compelled to write. Balancing out this academic voice was that of the Reconstructionist rabbi who understands that a Jewish community with no definitional boundaries, and hence no way to say who is in and who is out, is at risk of losing the next generation. There is a qualitative difference between academic and religious purposes for drawing boundaries around religious identities.

As a rabbi, I seek some way of intelligently drawing the boundaries of Judaism and Jewishness, to respond to the challenge that Messianic Judaism represents to the Jewish community. What Messianic Judaism teaches me as a rabbi is the importance of clarity and consensus for the

⁴⁴ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 168.

⁴⁵ Carol A. Harris-Shapiro, “Syncretism or Struggle: The Case of Messianic Judaism” (PhD Dissertation, Temple University, 1992), 360–61.

future survival of Judaism, the need to know who we are as well as who we are not.⁴⁶

Harris-Shapiro is right to recognize that the question of what to make of Messianic Jews and their religion, both as an academic and as a rabbi, is a definitional or taxonomic problem, not one likely to be resolved by engaging in a theological spitting match over whether a Jew can believe in Jesus and remain a Jew. Obviously in America that is not only possible, but that is the opinion of a sizeable percentage of Jews polled for the most recent Pew Report on the state of American Judaism. When asked if believing that Jesus was the messiah was compatible with being Jewish: 34% said, “yes,” 60% said, “no,” leaving 6% undecided. This must be a painful statistic for the Jewish mainstream given that it has been reinforcing its institutional position vociferously and in no uncertain terms throughout the 40-plus year history of the Messianic Jewish movement.⁴⁷ What this statistic does not tell us, interestingly, is whether those polled would classify Messianic Jewish religion as a kind of Judaism.

The categorical difference between a social group (the Jewish community) and a religion (Judaism) is often ignored in the common American understanding of Judaism as an ethnic religion, and this complicates attempts to account for groups of individuals who are ethnically Jewish but who identify with a different religion, or for groups who claim their religion is Judaism but whose members are not Jews according to the definitional framework of institutional Judaism.⁴⁸ Sorting out what elements of the

⁴⁶ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 187.

⁴⁷ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 2008), 14.

⁴⁸ JuBus, Jews who self-identify with Buddhist philosophy and/or practice, are a familiar, but not the only, example of this blurring between Jewish ethnicity and what falls under the heading of Jewish religion. Tablet Magazine recently ran a story on the Judaism of Jewitches, a group of Jews that describes “tapping into Canaanite/pagan

American Jewish experience properly belong in the category of religion and what is best classified as ethnic culture is a tricky business. As Nathan Glazer pointed out, community and religion are not the same class of things,⁴⁹ but without Messianic Jews to force the issue to the surface in such a dramatic way, it has been virtually a moot point. Messianic Judaism, especially as Hashivenu leaders are configuring it, claims to speak from within Judaism as part of the Jewish people and thus threatens to undo the singular voice that the mainstream American Jewish community has enjoyed to construct its own ethno-religious identity in the midst of a society whose dominant religious discourse has been that of Christianity.⁵⁰

Of course, marginal religious groups in America attract the attention of more than just the defenders and challengers of orthodoxy on the ground; scholars of religion

roots,” combining NeoPaganism with Judaism to create new liturgy and ritual. Merissa Nathan Gerson, “Finding the Magic in Shemini Atzeret,” October 2, 2015, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/193762/magic-in-shemini-atzeret>.

⁴⁹ Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*, The Chicago History of American Civilization (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 3–4. Interestingly, Glazer points to the “Jewish Christians” of the mid-20th century, that is the Hebrew Christians of his day, as a case in point demonstrating this categorical distinction. Glazer explains that they are “individuals of the Jewish nation and the Christian religion.” Glazer is one of the few scholars writing about Judaism to claim the Hebrew Christians as part of the Jewish nation despite their religious apostasy. Reaching farther back into antiquity, Seth Schwartz also included Jews with Christian beliefs as part of the Jewish people, noting that Christians were a Jewish sectarian group at least until it became impossible or meaningless to maintain simultaneous membership in both societies. Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9, 49. Steve Mason elaborates on this theme by noting that before Christianity morphed into a new entity of its own, Christian and Judean were incommensurable not antithetical identities, “rather like being a Russian or a Rotarian, a Brazilian or a Bridge player,” a point that Kinzer makes in his claim that Jews today need not stop being Jews to accept Christian beliefs about Jesus. Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38, no. 4 (2007): 512, doi:10.1163/156851507X193108.

⁵⁰ In antiquity, Christians created Judaism, along with Paganism and other “isms” as foils for their own hybrid identity. It wasn’t until the Enlightenment that certain Jews disaffected with the hegemony of traditional rabbis and the rabbinic tradition claimed Judaism as their own religion and defined it for their own purposes. Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 512.

find the rise, development, and stabilization or demise of new religious movements a worthy topic of study from a variety of social scientific perspectives. In the case of contemporary Messianic Jews, anthropologists and sociologists have tried to understand how these individuals can meaningfully combine what have historically become two antithetical religious identities into a coherent whole, and where, in the existing classificatory systems designed to make sense of new forms of religion and novel religious groups, something like Messianic Judaism belongs. Unfortunately, the same essentialist definitions of Judaism that mainstream Jewish communities are using to anathematize the anomalous Messianic “other” are what almost invariably uphold the taxonomic structures academics are using to make sense of the landscape. Measured against these essentialist standards, Messianic Jewish religion perpetually oscillates somewhere between two ostensibly bounded, antithetical religions, never quite normal, always threatening to destabilize the status quo. It emerges as a contaminant to the existing binary classification system, albeit one that has mustered a good deal of power by its attempt to synthesize two religious identities that “should” remain separate.⁵¹ It is this normalizing judgment of difference and a classificatory distaste for the anomalous that hampers understanding and explaining what Messianic Judaism can contribute to the discourse on religion/s, especially as it concerns critiquing the entrenched paradigm of World Religions where a particularistic Judaism characterized by its universal ethics and prophetic spirit is implicitly presented as the foundation of its universalist offspring, Christianity.⁵²

⁵¹ Feher, *Passing over Easter*, 31–32; Pauline Kollontai, “Messianic Jews and Jewish Identity,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 3, no. 2 (July 2004): 195–205, doi:10.1080/1472588042000225857; Faydra Shapiro, “Jesus for Jews: The Unique Problem of Messianic Judaism,” *Journal of Religion & Society* 14 (2012): 1–17.

⁵² Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 295–303.

Reflecting this disposition to conceptualize religions in binary terms, past studies of this movement have taken for granted that, broadly speaking, Messianic Judaism is either best understood as a form of evangelical, usually Charismatic Protestantism, a node somewhere on the spectrum between parachurch organization (Jews for Jesus, e.g.) and sectarian movement, or a hybrid, synthetic formulation of Christianity and Judaism.⁵³ Messianic Jews and their non-Jewish supporters, however, have consistently claimed that their religion is Judaism, though not all groups in the movement necessarily were defining Judaism in similar terms, and notwithstanding their belief that Jesus is part of a Trinitarian godhead. They generally resist the label “Christian” and insist, critically for their ideological purposes, that Messianic Jews have not converted to another religion.⁵⁴

It may be clear why scholars and religious specialists alike who rely on essentialist definitions of Christianity where belief in Jesus is the *sine qua non*, would type this group as Christian rather than Jewish, but this leaves scholars in the unenviable position of ignoring Messianic Jews the right to self-define and classifying them against their will so to speak. Scholars with a social scientific approach to typing religious groups that privileges the historical community’s self-identification may concede that Messianic Jews who consider themselves part of “Israel,” a religious appellation applied to the Jewish people throughout history, belong in the ethno-religion of Judaism along with

⁵³ Kohn, “Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism on the Church-Sect Continuum”; Francine K. Samuelson, “Messianic Judaism: Church, Denomination, Sect, or Cult?,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 161–86; Shapiro, “Jesus for Jews: The Unique Problem of Messianic Judaism.”

⁵⁴ Messianic Jews force us to make a technical distinction between a proselyte and a convert; converts embrace a new set of beliefs while proselytes move from one community of reference to another, forsaking old identifications in place of something new. To be a proselyte requires a change in membership, to convert only a change in belief. What Messianic Jews are claiming is that conversion to Christian beliefs does not necessarily have to make a Jew a proselyte to Christianity.

their fellow Jews, but then have trouble accounting theoretically for their wholesale rejection by the rest of the Jewish community. In both cases, scholars end up at odds with the evidence on the ground, either invalidating Messianic claims about their own religious identity, or unable to explain the mainstream Jewish appeal to theology rather than ethnicity in determining the contours of its communities.

If those who are attempting to analyze this phenomenon begin by accepting, as fact, that Christianity and Judaism are incompatible religions that produce incompatible identities, they will end up capitulating to the power of these first-order definitions. Rather than gaining a deeper understanding of how the movement can claim to be creating a kind of Judaism, or what kind of Judaism it is creating, the scholar will end up victimized by—to borrow an apt phrase from Bruce Lincoln—the tyranny of taxonomic discourse. The scholar’s work becomes a mechanism for reifying the binary classification between the two religions and recoding the same socio-religious hierarchies that it seeks to objectify and study.⁵⁵ The problem is exacerbated when the study is conducted by scholars who are also institutional representatives of one of these religious communities. Under the circumstances, they can hardly be expected to be entirely disinterested parties, no matter how excellent their scholarship or how openly self-aware they are of potential bias.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 131, 137. On the inherent problems with the construction of discrete religions, especially Judaism and Christianity as religions in the World Religions discourse, see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*; Robert Segal, “The Invention of World Religions: The Critics,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 111–13, doi:10.1163/157006808X283525; Catherine Bell, “Extracting the Paradigm—Ouch!,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 114–24, doi:10.1163/157006808X283534.

⁵⁶ Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*; Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*; Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*.

Analyses of Messianic Judaism that (must) assume the essential otherness of Judaism and Christianity can easily collapse into description followed by a recitation of first-order objections: boundary violations, heresy, missionizing, historical animosity, apostasy, or something like Satlow’s presumptive disclaimer—that Jesus is [of course] not the Rebbe. The mainstream Jewish institutions’ categorical exclusion of Messianic Jews is usually empathetically explained as a function of Judaism’s need to define itself, or at least sharpen its Jewish identity by contrasting it with identities it is not—most easily and most commonly, Christianity.⁵⁷ This is not to disagree with the premise that boundary blurring groups are in fact potentially destabilizing to the established order of things,⁵⁸ or that mustering religious rhetoric is a way to protect the boundaries, but rather to acknowledge that the taxonomy that separates these two religions into separate containers—a system that is constructed and maintained by the same religious and academic institutions that see Messianic Judaism as a categorical violation of this system—is part of the equation rather than a standard against which the anomalous and the mainstream can be measured. How is one to escape this tyranny of first order explanations other than to find a slightly higher viewpoint from which to map the landscape?

Clarifying the Polythetic Approach to Defining Judaism

Studying Messianic Judaism and its relationship to the mainstream should necessarily be an exercise in classification and comparison before it becomes one of definition and interpretation, but these preliminary steps to defining have been largely

⁵⁷ Feher, *Passing over Easter*, 31; Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 2; Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 55.

⁵⁸ Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, 3–12. Daniel Boyarin makes a same observation about ancient groups of Jewish Christians who served as dangerous “border-blurring” reagents for the creators and keepers of rabbinic orthodoxy. Daniel Boyarin, “Justin Martyr Invents Judaism,” *Church History* 70, no. 3 (September 2001): 459–60.

overlooked before jumping into the definitional project. Unlike trying to define Judaism in antiquity, where the term itself is anachronistic and the academic project of definition is clearly done for heuristic purposes,⁵⁹ today Judaism exists in the pages of the phone book, on the Internet, in newspapers, as well as in the theologian's and sociologist's toolkit. It is also a term that Jews themselves use as subjects of religious discourse and not just as objects in the scholar's line of sight. In light of this fact, it makes sense to treat attempts to define Judaism after the nineteenth century differently from that of Judaism in antiquity. In antiquity it made sense to begin with artifacts and evidence of characteristics that differentiated Jews from other ethnic groups, draw a boundary around them and call the aggregate evidence of cultural formation Judaism. Today, especially in the United States where communal religious identity is a function of some kind of institutional process, scholars can avoid the quagmire of potential essentialism by including all groups who publically express their religious identify as a form of Judaism as members in the taxon of [American] Judaism. To do otherwise would be to enter into the conversation that belongs to religious groups over who is or is not authentically Judaism (a type of first-order definition of religion) rather than how different groups fit on the metaphorical map of American Judaism (a function of second-order definitions in the academic study of religion).⁶⁰

As for the project of understanding and mapping Messianic Judaism, it is critical to move beyond the presumptive binaries of ethnicity (Jewish/not Jewish) and belief (Christian/not Christian) as differential criteria that fuel the first-order arguments of authenticity. A well formulated polythetic definition of Judaism can be flexible enough to

⁵⁹ Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism."

⁶⁰ For an explanation of the difference between second-order academic constructs and first-order constructs of religion/s, see, James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22–24.

account for this hotly contested self-designation without, on the one hand, peremptorily excluding it—that is lumping it exclusively with evangelical Protestant Christianity, or on the other hand, uncritically normalizing it. The academic question is not whether Hashivenu’s Judaism is a real or valid Judaism, but rather what it brings to the polythetic definition of Judaism and therefore into the mix of elements out of which different varieties of Judaism are born, thrive (or not) and replicate for future generations.

Since polythetic definitions based on the notion of family resemblance rather than essence move away from this either/or dichotomy towards defining religion/s in terms of clusters of characteristics, it seem a more useful approach to the problem at hand. J. Z. Smith’s explanation of family resemblance within a class of religion can help make sense of borderline cases like Messianic Judaism where

[A] class is defined as consisting of a set of properties, each individual member of the class to possess “a large (but unspecified) number” of these properties, with each property to be possessed by a “large number of individuals in the class, but no single property to be possessed by every member of the class.⁶¹

If Judaism is the broadest class then each group identifying its religion as Judaism (or where Judaism is an etic rather than emic label, where scholars decide Judaism is an appropriate label), is a member of the class. To narrow the scope appropriately for this dissertation, if American Judaism is the class, then Conservative, Reform, Reconstruction, Lubavitcher Hasidic and Modern Orthodox Judaisms are the most obvious candidates. All these groups are represented by similar institutions in the

⁶¹ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Fences and Neighbors: Some Contours of Early Judaism,” in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 4.

American religious landscape. Dynastic communities of Hasidim would still be members of the larger class of Judaism, of course, but are not structurally similar enough to make meaningful comparisons across all domains. Hashivenu Messianic Jews, who are deliberately creating their Judaism on the same institutional template as the other members of American Judaism, would be a better fit.

If Judaism is the broadest possible class of religion under discussion, it would contain a large population and, as Smith explains, it would then be possible to arrange its members “according to the properties they possessed in common in such a way that each individual would most closely resemble its nearest neighbor and least closely resemble its farthest. The probability would be high that the individuals at either extreme would scarcely resemble one another, that is, they may have none of the properties of the set in common.”⁶² Since this narrowly focused class of American Judaism does not contain an excessively large population, it can be expected that most groups will bear a close resemblance to one another, and that all will have at least some of the properties of the set in common. Nevertheless, it is still possible that a self-identifying member will have few or none of the properties of the set in common with a group at the far end of Smith’s imaginary spectrum. Given the unique American situation where religious affiliation is declining and individuals are crafting their own religious identities using characteristics from multiple classes of religion, I would suggest that a qualifying group may share a significant number of characteristics with another class of religion altogether without forfeiting its place in [American] Judaism. In other words, if we agree that a group’s self identification as Judaism is what earns them membership in the class, then they cannot be excluded on the basis of one or more non-Judaic characteristics they may carry with them into that religion’s polythetic definition. As

⁶² Ibid.

Smith notes, there will always be borderline cases in a polythetic system of classification. These cases should be welcomed as a stimulus to further research rather than explained away or avoided.⁶³

There is a substantial conceptual and phenomenological overlap between Christianity and Judaism that the guardians of orthodoxy on both sides have sorted out and managed in a way that permits representatives of both to co-exist on equal footing in contemporary America. Nevertheless, as religious systems, the two are intertwined in such a way that contemporary Messianic Judaism becomes a prime example of how this overlap looks in the real world of discrete religious communities and how destabilizing its presence can be to the status quo. In a polythetic approach, Messianic Judaism is not inherently anomalous or oxymoronic (these are value-laden terms that arise out of binary classifications) but a socially and discursively constructed phenomenon that is more or less expected on a polythetic map with no fixed, immutable borders between religious classes. Hashivenu Messianic Jews are creating their Judaism by using discursive elements that have been part of a shared heritage between Jewish and Christian religious communities for millennia, which, given the nature of a polythetic rather than essentialist definition is perfectly permissible. Characteristics can appear essential to one generation of Judaic groups only to be declared heretical in another socio-historical context. In a polythetic definition the heretical can theoretically again become normative under new conditions. This flexibility provides a mechanism for controlled change over time so that Judaism appears to have an essential nature and a history of its own when in fact what counts as Judaism on the ground is subject to change without a loss of authenticity.

⁶³ Ibid.

Using a polythetic, non-essentialist approach to defining and comparing religion/s as advocated by a number of scholars from different disciplinary perspectives— J. Z. Smith, Bruce Lincoln, William Paden and Guy Stroumsa, e.g.— means granting permission for religious groups to share significant characteristics and symbols across historic traditions. But granting Messianic Judaism a view through a Jewish lens also minimizes, even reverses the presumptively differential nature of some of its Christian characteristics; a point that Messianic Jewish missionaries have unsuccessfully tried to make to the mainstream Jewish community acknowledge, but which scholars of Jewish-Christian relations already understand. When Messianic Judaism is read as Judaism then Jesus becomes Yeshua, a Jewish messianic figure rather than a Gentile outsider. When a Jew accepts claims about Yeshua’s messiahship, even his divinity, Messianic discourse produces a particular kind of Messianic Jew rather than a proselyte to Christianity.

I’ve elected to focus on Hashivenu rather than the dominant mainstream of Messianic Jewish religion because only Hashivenu privileges Jewish ethnicity as a religious value and claims that rabbinic tradition, which informs and structures all other members I have placed in the class of American Judaism, a legitimate, at least partly authoritative, and necessary characteristic of its Judaism. This significant commonality between the anathematized outsider and the representative mainstream makes comparison feasible and analysis potentially fruitful for understanding the way very different Judaisms can be created out of a common set of characteristic symbols.

Of course, Messianic Judaism in all of its manifestations brings with it some unique and potentially problematic elements. In definitional terms, Hashivenu will share a small but significant set of characteristics with Protestant Christianity that are not found in any other member of the class of American Judaism, such as a ritual baptism or

immersion signifying identification with Yeshua, whom they believe to be Israel's messiah, and a ritual sharing of bread and wine that commemorates the last meal Yeshua is portrayed as celebrating with his (all Jewish) disciples prior to his execution. Because messianic figures and messianism in general arise out of a Jewish matrix, and ritual blessings and immersions are symbols that appear in normative Jewish discourse, even these quintessentially "Christian" characteristics could theoretically be resignified, incorporated into a Judaic worldview (as Neusner would call it), and become part of a newly created Judaism of Hashivenu's making. This does not mean, of course, that any other movement of American Judaism will find this worldview convincing or authentic.

Like all other members of the class of American Judaism Hashivenu's Judaism is built on a set of differential characteristics that have been necessary if not sufficient to isolate rabbinic Judaism from its neighbors on the religious map from late antiquity to the present: Israel, Torah, God, Covenant, Halakhah (rabbinic legal codes), the Siddur (rabbinically fixed prayer), and Messiah. Although Christianity shared Israel, God, Covenant, liturgical worship and Messiah with Judaism, it rejected rabbinic halakhah, obligatory observance of the Mosaic covenant, and the scriptural status and authority of the rabbis' Oral Torah. Rabbinic Judaism, which the church defined for itself as the antithesis of Christianity was characterized as much by what the Church had rejected from an emergent Rabbinism (the weight of Jewish law) and the messianic and Christological claims it held the rabbis accountable for not accepting as by what the rabbis had actually rejected. Hashivenu's deliberate choice to embrace rabbinic characteristics and to pattern its congregational and private religious practices after those of its map mates means that much of what is characteristic of Hashivenu Judaism is intentionally similar and not so interesting in comparison. In the following chapters I have chosen to focus on the source of those characteristics that are unavoidably different

from other contemporary forms of Judaism: the New Testament scriptures or Apostolic Writings in Hashivenu discourse.

Of all the elements that Hashivenu shares with Christianity, the canonical texts of the New Testament are the most difficult to extricate from their historic Christian setting and transport meaningfully into contemporary Judaism since they have never been part of any institutional form of Judaism and have only enjoyed authoritative status in Christianity. More so than identifying Yeshua as Israel's Messiah, or holding a Trinitarian theology of the godhead, the canonical status that Hashivenu grants to the New Testament mitigates the effectiveness of its efforts to transition from being a traditional missions outreach of evangelical Christianity to becoming a species of Judaism whose worldview resonates with that of its current Judaic map mates. But without the New Testament to authorize their messianic faith, temper their engagement with the rabbinic tradition, and legitimate their self-assigned marginal status vis-à-vis the Jewish community, Hashivenu Judaism would be meaningless. Only in the New Testament do Jesus and his Jewish disciples become exemplars for Messianic Jewish identity and only in its pages does Israel seem to expand conceptually to include non-Jews who do not join the Jewish Israel through circumcision. Its *raison d'être* derives entirely from the scriptural witness of the Christian New Testament.

If Hashivenu's Messianic Judaism necessarily lies on the scholar's map of American Judaism, then by extension the New Testament, or Apostolic Writings in Messianic discourse, can be classified as a sectarian text critical to the integrity of the group's Jewish identity and self-understanding. This situation is roughly analogous to the relationship between the early Latter Day Saints movement and the Christian mainstream, where the Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price, rather than the New Testament, gave the subsequent Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints its primary

identity and set it apart from all other self-identifying Christian groups. Unlike the LDS situation, however, Hashivenu's Apostolic Writings are not a unique and newly discovered set of ancient texts but the identical corpus of texts that the Christian church fathers selected as their own defining documents; texts that Christians used to set themselves apart from the Jewish community and to create their own religious worldview and way of life. Accepting the authority of these canonical texts, which defined the boundaries and purpose of the *ekklesia* and not the Jewish people (except in an eschatological sense perhaps), makes it difficult if not impossible for Hashivenu to craft a contemporaneously commensurate Jewish religious worldview that does not ultimately collapse the distinction between a multinational *ekklesia* and an otherwise Jewish Israel.

The ultimate source of conflict between Messianic and mainstream Judaism is not a particular belief, but the worldview in which that belief makes sense; one in which either the church or the Jewish people, but not both, are cast as the center of world making activity. The differential characteristic that will keep Messianic Judaism at the periphery of Judaism and more central to Christianity on the American religious landscape, and complicate its goal of creating a replicable, enduring Messianic Jewish identity independent of the Christian church is the authoritative, religious discourse of the canonical New Testament/Apostolic Writings to which they subscribe.

The chapters that follow are loosely organized around Bruce Lincoln's four-domain definition of anything that qualifies as a religion—religious discourse, community, practice, and institution.⁶⁴ This definition foregrounds religious discourse and includes institution so that it provides a way to differentiate between individual religious preferences and religion as an ideological construct whose goal is to effect some

⁶⁴ Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5–8.

kind of social change. By mapping Hashivenu Messianic Jewish religion in discrete but interlocking domains, we can see how certain critical elements or characteristics like Torah, Israel, *halakhah*, prayer/liturgy, and institutional containers for power like rabbinic leadership, the synagogue, and the seminary, are instrumental in the negotiation for legitimacy between margin and mainstream.

It would be impossible to explain Hashivenu and the postmissionary Messianic Jewish paradigm without providing context. Hashivenu is the product of internal forces driving the Messianic Jewish movement either to articulate and institutionalize its own ideological platform, communities, and practices under the label of Messianic Judaism or to continue as an arm of the evangelical churches who support organized and targeted outreach into the Jewish community. At stake is whether Messianic Judaism will simply replicate and promote a Protestant missionary agenda of winning lost Jewish souls to the Christian savior or whether it will become a Jewish religion that integrates its messianic beliefs into an internally consistent, Jewish worldview. Therefore, each chapter contains a short historical section that focuses on a different aspect of the Messianic Jewish movement's development and Hashivenu's appearance, beginning with the way early Christian missionaries with different agendas for Christian Jews defined Judaism for their own purposes and culminating in a synthesis of Hashivenu's emerging worldview.

Michael Satlow points out that concern about definition and boundary setting is more than just an exercise in academic intellectualism. In the classroom we are charged with introducing Judaism (and other so called World Religions) to undergraduate students semester after semester, and as Jacob Neusner points out, there is no consensus on how to approach our particular topic. Most often Judaism is taught as a function of Jewish history; religion is collapsed into peoplehood and the religion part of the story is heavily weighted toward the Biblical and Rabbinic periods. When we come to

contemporary Judaism, it is a fractured picture, a story of denominations, modernism, liberalism, a recalcitrant but growing Orthodox minority pitted against a flexible, adaptive, but declining Reform to Conservative majority. It becomes a story of competing Jewish ideologies with a nod to the role of distinctive rituals and institutions that keep the Jewish community together. But despite the diversity and even fractiousness, it remains axiomatic that Jews belong to Judaism not Christianity and that Christianity and Judaism are essentially different religions.

The difficulty with this explanation of Judaism in the classroom is that it ignores reality. When a student recently wrote in her site visit paper that Christians kept the Sabbath, ate kosher food, and attended synagogue and another student reported back that she had visited a Jewish synagogue where they spoke in tongues and read from the New Testament, I couldn't automatically correct their "errors" and say that they had mixed up Christianity and Judaism, I had to take into account that certain groups they would understand as Christians by belief would be practicing what my materials classify as Judaism, and some synagogues they might visit would be engaged in Christian worship. Given our current paradigm for understanding and explaining historic religions, I could have tried to explain that Messianic Jews were really evangelical Christians not part of Judaism or that Christians did not attend real synagogues but this would be impossible to do without invoking terms linked to polemical arguments. My maps, if not my materials, have to make better sense out of what my students encounter.

What will hopefully emerge from this project in addition to a more nuanced history of Messianic Judaism is a better understanding of how and why Messianic Jews are rethinking the way their religion is classified and perceived in the American religious landscape, and a way to treat marginal-to-the-mainstream groups without resorting to pejorative terms like anomalous, hybrid, or heretical. This approach to studying

Messianic Judaism as a kind of Judaism comparable to other kinds of American Judaism embodies J. Z. Smith's admonition that comparison, which "remains *the* method of scholarship . . . beyond question," rise above the postulation of tautological difference (i.e., that Messianic Jews are different because they believe in Jesus), to the methodical manipulation of difference, a playing across the gap in the service of some useful end.⁶⁵ In this case, the useful end is a better understanding of the phenomenon called Messianic Judaism and its potential to survive as a form of Judaism or a new religious movement, and a rethinking of the kinds of Judaism that Americans have produced.

Sources

My research relies heavily on a small number of primary texts by key authors in the contemporary Messianic Jewish movement, produced between 1976 and 2012, all of whom are writing with the express purpose of explaining what Messianic Judaism is and is not, or what it should and should not be, and how it should configure itself to be successful. They are sectarian writings with ideological purpose. There are also a handful of academic studies of Messianic Judaism completed between 1990 and 2000. I have deliberately chosen not to use personal interviews or correspondence, other than for the purpose of clarifying facts or data that were unclear, in an effort to privilege the unmediated information that has been recorded in intra-Messianic discourse.⁶⁶ It is premature to undertake an ethnographic study a select congregation since Hashivenu

⁶⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion : From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 35.

⁶⁶ By unmediated I mean that the information I am using has been exchanged between and interpreted by Messianic Jews without the mediating presence of an independent researcher. Since several solid ethnographic studies of blended (i.e., Jew and Gentile together) Messianic congregations have already been published, and it is still too early in the process to conduct more of the same kinds of studies among congregations that are being influenced by the new Hashivenu paradigm, there didn't seem to me to be much to gain by interviewing either participants or the new leadership at this point. Access to the internal dialogue that appears in these primary texts, I think, compensates adequately for not having new ethnographic material to work with.

Judaism is an emerging discourse taking place at the elitist level among select theologians and Messianic rabbis for now. While some of these leaders and thinkers do have congregations, and some congregations are experimenting with the practices proposed in the Hashivenu literature, there is no consensus yet on exactly how to implement the new paradigm, and no institution empowered to disseminate the group's ideas in an authoritative way. This is a study of ideas and practices promoted by a group of Jews who are intentionally creating Judaism for themselves out of two inherited traditions that have so far been treated and accepted as mutually exclusive. I treat it academically as a presumptive member in the class of American Judaism for now.

The basic set of primary sources includes two foundational “insider” dissertations from Fuller Theological Seminary’s School of World Missions, a small number of classic works from different stages in the development of Messianic Judaism, papers presented at the two major forums for the American Messianic Jewish movement: the Borough Park Symposium sponsored by Chosen People Ministries (traditional, missionary, Jewish/Christian) and the Hashivenu Forum (Postmissionary, Jewish), and a handful of papers presented by Hashivenu spokesmen to international organizations engaged in promoting Jewish evangelism and/or a distinctive Jewish community within the catholic church (small “c”). There are also a number of important texts that have reacted to Kinzer’s strategies, which are useful in pinpointing exactly what characteristics set Hashivenu and the postmissionary paradigm apart from the broader Messianic Jewish movement, and two scholarly Messianic Jewish journals, *Keshet* and *Mishkan*, the latter reflects the interests of the missions establishment and the former is a publication from the Messianic Jewish congregational movement.⁶⁷ What I am looking for in these sources

⁶⁷ Dissertations: Hutchens, “A Case for Messianic Judaism”; Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*. Primary works produced by leaders inside the Messianic Jewish Movement: David Chernoff, *Messianic Judaism: Questions & Answers* (Havertown, PA: MMI Publishing Co., 1990); “Editorial,” *The Messianic Jew*:

Organ of the Messianic Jewish Movement 1, no. 1 (December 1910): 1–2; Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Yeshiva*; Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*; Daniel C. Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Rockville, MD: Davar Publishing Co., 1986); Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*; Liberman, *The Fig Tree Blossoms*; “Minutes of the First Hebrew Christian Conference of the United States Held at Mountain Lake Park, Md.”; Rudolph and Willitts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*; Schiffman, *Return from Exile: The Re-Emergence of the Messianic Congregational Movement*; Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*; Ernst F. Stroeter and Arno C. Gaebelein, “Christian Judaism,” *Our Hope: A Monthly Devoted to the Study of Prophecy and to Christian Judaism*, July 1894; Telchin, *Messianic Judaism Is Not Christianity*; Wasserman, *Messianic Jewish Congregations*. Borough Park papers: Baruch Maoz, “The Role of Torah and of Jewish Tradition in the Messianic Jewish Community,” in *Borough Park Symposium on Messianic Judaism* (La Guardia Airport Hotel, New York, 2012); Richard C. Nichol, “The Messianic Jewish Congregation - a UMJC Perspective,” in *The North American Coordinating Meeting of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism* (Dallas, TX, 1985), 1–19. Hashivenu Forum papers: Stuart Dauermann, “Select Aspects of My Hermeneutical Journey: A Hashivenu Forum Presentation,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 3 (Pasadena, 2001); Stuart Dauermann, “Making Israel’s Story Our Own: Toward a Messianic Jewish Canonical Narrative,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 4, 2002; Stuart Dauermann, “Seeds, Weeds, and Walking the High Wire: The Role of the Remnant—Embodying Israel’s Destiny,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 8 (Pasadena, 2006); Stuart Dauermann, “Toward Redefining Messianic Jewish Engagement With the Wider Jewish World: Reflections on Mark Kinzer’s ‘Post Missionary Messianic Judaism,’” in *Hashivenu Forum* 8, 2006; Gavriel Gefen, “Postcongregational Messianic Judaism: A Call for an ‘Insider’ Expression of Messianic Judaism,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 10 (Yeshua and Jewish Life: Residing at the Center, Standing at the Margins, Pasadena, 2008), 1–25; Jonathan Kaplan, “A Divine Tapestry: Reading the Siddur, Reading Redemption, Reading Yeshua,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 6 (Pasadena, 2004); Carl Kinbar, “Communal Aspects of the Besorah,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 6 (Pasadena, 2004); Carl Kinbar, “Israel, Interpretation and Knowledge of God: Engaging the Jewish Conversation,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 12 (Los Angeles, 2010); Kinzer, “Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism”; Mark S. Kinzer, “Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species: A Theological Investigation of the Nature of Messianic Judaism,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 2 (Pasadena, 1999); Mark S. Kinzer, “Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 3 (Pasadena, 2001); Mark S. Kinzer, “Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century: A Biblical Defense of ‘Oral Torah,’” in *Hashivenu Forum* 5 (Pasadena, 2003); Mark S. Kinzer, “Prayer in Yeshua, Prayer in Israel: The Shema in Messianic Perspective,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 10 (Pasadena, 2008); Mark S. Kinzer, “Finding Our Way Through Nicaea: The Deity of Yeshua, Bilateral Ecclesiology, and Redemptive Encounter with the Living God,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 12 (Los Angeles, 2010); Mark S. Kinzer, “Messianic Jewish Community: Standing and Serving as a Priestly Remnant,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 13 (Agoura Hills, CA, 2011); Mark S. Kinzer, “Praying the Amidah as an Extension of the Eucharist,” in *Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah* (Oslo, 2013); Russell Resnik, “Hesed and Hospitality: Embracing Our Place on the Margins,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 10 (Pasadena, 2008), 1–33; Paul L. Saal, “Hashivenu Form III: Re-Imagining of the Canonical Text,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 3 (Pasadena, 2001); Paul L. Saal, “Messianic Jewish Communities by Design: Open Doors and Reserved Seating,” in *Hashivenu Forum* 14 (Beverly Hills, 2012); Michael H. Schiffman, “Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st

is the way each employs the rhetoric of religion to construct/deconstruct Messianic/Judaism and, specifically in Hashivenu contributions, the way its spokesmen use religious discourse to attempt to reconfigure Messianic religion as Judaism, not Christianity.⁶⁸ In addition to these primary sources there is a set of secondary histories, ethnographic studies, sociological and theological studies that can be used to

Century: A Historical Perspective on ‘Oral Torah,’” in *Hashivenu Forum* 5 (Pasadena, 2003), 1–20. Additional papers by Hashivenu spokesmen: Mark S. Kinzer, “Jewish Disciples of Yeshua & the Healing of the Two-Fold Tradition: Eight Theses,” in *Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah* (Helsinki, 2014); Mark S. Kinzer, “Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, Three Years Later: Reflections on a Conversation Just Begun,” in *The 2008 Lindsey Lectures* (Narkis Street Congregation, Jerusalem, Israel, 2008); Kinzer, “Praying the Amidah as an Extension of the Eucharist”; Mark S. Kinzer, “The Torah & Jews in the Christian Church—Covenantal Calling & Pragmatic Practice,” in *Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah* (Berlin, 2012); Mark S. Kinzer and Matthew Levering, “Messianic Gentiles & Messianic Jews,” *First Things*, January 2009, 43–49; Nichol, “Messianic Jews Congregation - UMJC Perspective”; Richard C. Nichol, “The Case for Conversion: Welcoming Non-Jews into Messianic Jewish Space,” *Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council*, n.d., <http://ourrabbis.org/main/articles/on-conversion-mainmenu-32>; Russ Resnik, “Defining Messianic Judaism - A Commentary,” *Kesher*, no. 17 (Spring 2004), <http://www.kesherjournal.com/Issue-17/Defining-Messianic-Judaism-A-Commentary>; Russ Resnik, *Introducing Messianic Judaism: UMJC Welcoming Messiah Home* (Albuquerque, NM: Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, 2010). Responses to *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*: Michael L. Brown, “The Place of Rabbinic Tradition in Messianic Judaism” (UMJC Conference Theology Forum, unk., 1988); Brown, “Is a Post-Missionary, Truly Messianic Judaism Possible?”; William Currie, “A Jewish Mission’s Response to Messianic Judaism,” in *The North American Coordinating Meeting of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism* (Dallas, TX: Unpublished, 1985), 1–16; Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes, U.K.; Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009); Tim Hegg, “A Review Article of Stuart Dauermann, Son of David: Healing the Vision of the Messianic Jewish Movement (Wipf & Stock, 2010),” *Torah Resource Institute*, April 2013; Robinson, “Postmissionary Messianic Judaism”; Isaac C. Rottenberg, “Postmissionary Messianic Judaism? Observations on the Mark Kinzer Thesis,” *Restore! : Restoring the Biblical Hebrew Heritage to the Christian Believer*. 9, no. 3 (2006): 10–13; Van Engen, “Response to Mark S. Kinzer’s Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People.”

⁶⁸ See, Laurent Pernot, “The Rhetoric of Religion,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 1–12. Pernot provides a concise explanation of the approach to treating religious discourse as rhetoric rather than theology in the study of religion/s. Many of the characteristics that are part and parcel of Messianic religious discourse are normatively understood in theological terms. They can also be understood as discrete elements of religious rhetoric, which makes them useful analytical terms as well.

contextualize the primary source material and to highlight discursive changes that have taken place over time in the movement as a whole. These sources reveal the influence of taxonomic norms on scholarly analysis—those presumptions about what constitutes the boundaries that enclose and define discrete religions.

Organization

Chapter 2 explores the different ways Judaism has been defined in modern Christian missions to the Jews discourse, and how the term Messianic Judaism, as used by proponents and outsiders has shifted in meaning from its earliest appearance at the turn of the twentieth century to its present use in Hashivenu discourse. Because the term *Judaism* was used by Zionists and liberal Jewish reformers from the late 1800s to refer to a Jewish way of life detached from the religious authority of traditional rabbis and their rabbinic texts, missionaries were able to employ the term to serve opposing purposes, either positively as a way for Hebrew Christians and/or Messianic Jews to maintain a continuous Jewish identity that did not conflict with Christian religious commitments, or negatively as a religious system that was inherently and immutably antithetical to Christianity. Hashivenu stands in line with the earliest missionary efforts to define Judaism in terms of the Jewish people’s national customs, though it differs from the previous position by sanctifying Jewish practice and treating rabbinic Judaism as a legitimate expression of Israel’s covenantal way of life, its “national holiness.”

Chapter 3 traces the articulation and development of Hashivenu discourse as it proceeds out of the rift between traditional evangelical missions to the Jews and the modern Messianic Jewish movement. It specifically focuses on the Hashivenu argument that its religion is Judaism and that, therefore, Messianic Jews are as obligated as non-Messianic Jews to observe the terms of the Mosaic covenant and to give credit to the Rabbis, who are the authoritative carriers of Jewish halakhic tradition. For Messianic

Judaism to legitimate its claim to be Judaism, according to Kinzer, it must accept the rabbinic tradition as its own heritage and reject the conventional argument that rabbinic religion is antithetical to the gospel message of Yeshua's messiahship. In order to make this a credible argument to his Messianic Jewish audience, Kinzer inverts the traditional Christian hermeneutic of reading the Old Testament in light of the New as a proof text for Christian claims about Jesus' messiahship and the end of the Mosaic covenant. Kinzer must read the New Testament as a renewal rather than abrogation of physical Israel's covenantal relationship with God, and find authorization in that Scripture to establish separate communal and organizational structures for Jesus-believing Jews who will practice Messianic Judaism and Gentile Christians who remain in Christ-worshipping Christian churches. Regardless of how the parts of Kinzer's bi-lateral *ekklesia* are placed in relationship to one another, Messianic Judaism is a Judaism that takes its model for community and creates its worldview from the Apostolic Writings or New Testament canon rather than rabbinic tradition.

Chapter 4 looks at the way Hashivenu's Messianic Jews are conceptualizing and constructing their religious communities to carve out "Jewish space" in what have become largely Gentile congregations with only a small percentage of Jewish believers. Kinzer would like these communities to resemble mainstream Jewish synagogues and religious congregations that meet Jewish needs rather than missionary outreaches designed to attract and foster Jewish proselytes to Christianity. He would also like for Messianic Jews to find their primary social location in the wider Jewish world rather than the church where it is understandably difficult to maintain and sustain a viable Jewish lifestyle with its rituals, lifecycle events and alternative religious calendar. This proves easier said than done, as the strongest social bonds Hashivenu Jews have are with other Messianic Jews, whether they are affiliated with a traditional missions

organization or with a Hashivenu community. This may signal a real communal identity that neither the Hashivenu group nor the Jewish Christian missionaries are yet able to solidify and institutionalize to everyone's satisfaction, or it may be that Hashivenu Jews simply have too few like-minded members to relinquish their intimate relationships with the missions community.

In order to effect a credible transition from Christianity to Judaism, Kinzer and the Hashivenu leadership must fashion a new worldview for Messianic Jews, a workable, coherent framework that will allow Messianic Jews to relate socially and religiously with the rest of the Jewish world from a non-missionizing, non-adversarial posture and still conform with the demands of their perceived spiritual role as a Jewish remnant within the Christian *ekklesia*. Full membership in the Church naturally conflicts with full membership in the rabbinically imagined community of Israel since the Church constructed itself and Rabbinic Judaism as mutually exclusive containers for religious identity and communal membership. The leaders of contemporary American Judaism concur with the church's historical position, which leaves Messianic Jews with little option but to create a new worldview in which Jewish ethnicity, Christian faith, and rabbinic practice derive their ultimate meaning from a Messianic Jewish center. This is precisely what Kinzer attempts to achieve by splitting the metaphysical church into Jewish and Gentile spheres *and* claiming that the Jewish core of the *ekklesia* legitimates the Gentile church's claims to be part of God's chosen people. As the true remnant of Israel, Kinzer claims that Torah observant Messianic Jews can legitimately represent the Jewish people in the *ekklesia* (i.e., catholic church or Body of Messiah), while serving as a contingent of priests on behalf of that people, sanctifying it, and mediating for it before the God of Israel's covenant.

Despite the seeming novelty of their worldview, Hashivenu's Messianic Judaism is held together by a common discourse grounded in the transcendent authority of the New Testament scriptures and a selective reconstruction of its views on the nature of the *ekklesia*. On the one hand Messianic Jewish reliance on the canonical texts of the New Testament for meaning and purpose reinforces the ties of affinity that bind them to other Christian communities, whatever their ethnic makeup, while it estranges them from all other forms of American Judaism. The meta-community that contains both Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians in Kinzer's worldview is the *ekklesia* not rabbinic Israel or the Jewish people. What is different from normative Christian ecclesiology is the privileged position of Jewish ethnicity within the *ekklesia*, a difference that is not likely to bring Messianic Jewish groups any closer to acceptance within the Jewish communities' notion of Am Yisrael.

On the other hand, the common practices that would help bind Messianic Jews into a community—halakhic Torah observance and a traditional, if modified, rabbinic liturgy—are paradigmatic of contemporary rabbinic Judaism and antithetical to evangelical Protestantism. Can conformity with Jewish practice generate sufficient affinity with the wider Jewish world to overcome the estrangement created by unorthodox Messianic beliefs? This remains to be seen. Hashivenu Judaism is still a prescriptive rather than a descriptive label and its social organizations are in their infancy. At present, they must still convince enough believers in Jesus that the Jewish in Messianic Jewish needs to be expressed through a religiously observant lifestyle in solidarity with the Jewish community and in conversation with rabbinic Judaism before they can hope to engender a coherent postmissionary Messianic Jewish community that can survive outside the protective shell of evangelical Protestantism and on the periphery of American Judaism.

Chapter 5 attempts to contribute to the project of defining Judaism polythetically by beginning to identify the characteristic elements of Hashivenu or Postmissionary Messianic Judaism. Hashivenu fits nicely on all three of Michael Satlow's conceptual maps: Israel as a self-defining group of Jews, textual tradition, and practice, and it constructs meaning around a traditional core of Judaic symbols. Mapping Hashivenu's Judaism reveals the tension between a polythetic, second-order definition of religion in which Judaism is represented by various historical religious communities that share a stronger or weaker family resemblance, and first-order definitions of Judaism that exclude or anathematize difference when it is threatening to the status quo. Necessary inclusion in the former may conflict with justifiable exclusion from the latter. Hashivenu is, in good part, an ideological movement whose aim is to overcome this disconnect by conforming as much as possible to the normative model of contemporary Judaism as an ethno-religion of praxis while it works out a systematic theology to make sense of its membership in the catholic ekklesia and a symbolic vocabulary that has yielded mutually exclusive worldviews.

The conclusion addresses the question of what Hashivenu Messianic Judaism contributes to the academic project of defining Judaism. On one hand, Hashivenu's elitist attempts to create a new Judaism provide scholars with a chance to see how a new religious discourse evolves, beginning with a problem that needs solving to formulating a potential solution and then modeling and promoting that solution to a larger audience in the hopes of persuading potential members to join. Hashivenu's attempt to forge a new Jewish religious identity out of characteristics from two historically distinct religions shows how symbols, rituals, practices, texts and discourse work to create a sustainable religious system, and what problems the work of combining identities presents when novel ideas move from paper to real life practice.

On the other hand, giving Hashivenu Messianic Judaism a place on the academic's polythetic map of Judaism raises questions about the relationship between individual characteristics and their contextual setting that could not be asked if this marginal group were ignored or written out of the definitional project. For example, Hashivenu Messianic Jews accept the New Testament as part of their canon of Scriptures, but they refer to these texts as the Apostolic Writings. This avoids having to refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament; a label that implies it has been superseded by the New. Messianic Jews do not wish to subordinate the Hebrew Bible to the complete authority of the Christian canonical tradition because they would lose the power of the Hebrew narrative that puts a physical people, Israel, at the center of God's redemptive plan, and they would concede the church's authority to determine how Messianic Jews should practice their religious life. How will Messianic Jews read the Apostolic Writings differently than the Christian church reads the New Testament? Thus far, even Hashivenu has not tampered with the canonical form of the New Testament, but they must read it against the grain if they wish to authorize their own vision of a Jewish church whose primary social affinity is with the non-Christian Jewish world. What texts will they emphasize and why? Can they convert the Gentile church's New Testament into a set of Jewish texts that can be interpreted and applied as part of the Jewish people's literary heritage? If Messianic Judaism is eliminated from consideration in a scholarly study of Judaism, the chance to see how these kinds of issues are resolved and to what effect for the academic study of Judaism is lost.

The most significant contribution this study of Hashivenu Messianic Judaism makes to the larger project of definition, however, is to validate the polythetic approach and to punctuate the point that an academic definition is most useful when it is not constrained by the need to conform its findings to a first-order definition that reflects the

what the mainstream represents as true and authentic Judaism. The purpose of an academic, second-order, polythetic definition is not to adjudicate religious authenticity or to reify social boundaries, but to determine the range of possibilities that the taxon Judaism offers to groups of self-identifying Jews for creating a meaningful religious world in which to dwell.

Chapter 2: The Meaning of “Judaism” in Messianic Jewish Discourse

Overview

This chapter is a study of the different ways Judaism has been defined in Protestant Christian missions to the Jews discourse, and how the term Messianic Judaism, as used by proponents and outsiders, has shifted in meaning from its earliest appearance at the end of the 19th century to its present use in Hashivenu Messianic Jewish discourse. Because the term “Judaism” was used by Zionists and liberal Jewish reformers in the late 1800s to refer to a Jewish way of life detached from the religious authority of traditional rabbis and their rabbinic texts, and by scholars involved in the scientific study of Judaism to describe the religion of the traditional Talmudic rabbis, missionaries were able to employ the term to serve opposing purposes—either positively as a way for Hebrew Christians to maintain a continuous Jewish “national” identity that did not conflict with Christian religious commitments, or negatively as a religious system that was inherently and immutably antithetical to Christianity.¹

To different ends, early Euro-American Protestant missionaries to the Jews attached numerous modifiers to “Judaism” to either increase or decrease Christian affinity depending on their ideological persuasion. Everyone agreed that Talmudic or Rabbinic Judaism represented a competing religious system that was clearly anathema for Hebrew Christians, but Mosaic, Biblical, fulfilled, true, and even “Christian” Judaisms, culturally shifted terms that could be contrasted to the rabbinic “other” and employed as near synonyms for evangelical Christianity, could arguably neutralize these dangerous practices by bringing them under the authoritative domain of Protestant theology where they could be resignified with Christian meaning.

¹ On the early Christian definition of Judaism as a “true -ism” opposed to Christianity, see, Steve Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing,” n.d., 471–76.

I contend that the Hebrew Christian should observe the Jewish Feasts. . . .

I, however, would suggest that those old forms should be infused with new ideas, and thus the “Seder” Celebration should be combined with the Lord’s Supper; “Shevuoth” with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; Chanukah with Christmas, etc. The Sabbath, too, should be observed, as is done by our unconverted orthodox brethren, and Torah-reading [sic] combined with Gospel-reading. . . . I do not, however, advocate keeping the law with all its Rabbinical exaggerations, but only those observances which even the most liberal and cultured Jew considers essential if he is to keep in touch with his historical and national traditions.²

Philip Cohen, a Hebrew Christian missionary of the Dutch Reform Church and early advocate of the Messianic Jewish approach to evangelizing the Jews explains that Hebrew Christians who want to develop a national consciousness among their fellow Jewish believers have to strive to create a national atmosphere first by strictly observing the national feasts and by adhering to the rite of circumcision. “Dr. Herzl felt this,” writes Cohen, “when he said: ‘There can be no Zionism without a return to Judaism. . . . Dr. Herzl called it ‘Judaism’. We call it ‘Hebraism’; in either case representing our national atmosphere” without which, Cohen contends, it would be impossible to identify themselves with the nation, its historical unity, and its national cause.³

² Waldmann, Dr. A., “The Evil and Its Remedy,” *The Messianic Jew: Organ of the Jewish Messianic Movement*, December 1910, 8–9. In the first paragraph of his article Waldman describes himself as a layman and a lawyer, unconnected with Jewish missions. Nevertheless, he offers his views on Hebrew Christianity and on the problem with cultured Jews who, “inaccessible with the Christian Gospel” because they have dispensed with their “Mosaic beliefs” are perhaps open to Hebrew Christianity inasmuch as he sees it as strengthening rather than weakening the Jewish nation.

³ Philip Cohen, “Ways and Means,” *The Messianic Jew: Organ of the Jewish Messianic Movement* 1, no. 1 (December 1910): 9–14.

After a brief but failed attempt by a handful of independent Gentile and Jewish Protestant missionaries in the first decade of the twentieth century to convince their peers that Jewish converts to Christian faith in America could and should be allowed to maintain practices like Shabbat observance, the festal calendar, and circumcision as elements consistent with their national heritage, the argument for developing a distinctively Messianic or Christian Judaism, was abandoned. Up until the mid-1970s, the reigning paradigm in America for Jewish converts who wished to maintain a “racial” (but not religious or national in the Zionist sense) connection with other Jews, notwithstanding their new communal identity as part of the Christian church, was Hebrew Christianity.⁴ Judaism and Christianity, meanwhile, continued to define and occupy separate intellectual and eventually official spaces in the developing academic study of religion/s, with Hebrew Christianity, as indicated by its surviving title, taking up residence in the latter rather than the former.

This was the status quo for the next sixty years, until a new generation of young, American Jewish converts to evangelical Christianity and some of their older mentors, both Jew and Gentile, challenged the entrenched ideas and power structure, arguing again for a stronger identification with their now ethnically imagined rather than racially defined Jewish heritage. From the mid-1970s to the turn of the twenty-first century, Hebrew Christianity was gradually replaced by a supposedly new religious idea called Messianic Judaism. Although historical accounts of this period point to a significant shift in meaning on the ground between Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism, this was more a cultural than theological change. The transition, however, was investigated by

⁴ Racial language was a normative idiom used by modern Jews and non-Jews to mark group difference in the modern, pre-WWII period. “Hebrew” was considered by many to be a more genteel term than “Jew,” which often carried the stereotypical connotation of a Jew as poor, religious, ‘foreign’ and uneducated in the modern way of thinking.

researchers, proponents, participants, and opponents under the rubric of a Messianic Jewish movement. Despite the apparent taxonomic change in genus from Christianity to Judaism that began to appear in Messianic Jewish discourse at that time, most researchers and participants understood that it was part of Protestant Christianity, not American Judaism.

As an individual moniker, Hebrew Christian was dropped in favor of Messianic Jew, partly as an attempt to meet the needs of younger Jewish converts to evangelical Protestantism who wanted to be identified with their heritage (Hebrew was not a relevant term in modern American discourse) and who did not want to assimilate into the Gentile church culture, and partly as a strategic move to make the point that at least in the missions world, Jews who embraced faith in Jesus did not have to stop being Jews. Since the movement was directly connected to the existing missions to the Jews community, “Christian” was replaced by the ostensibly less objectionable term, “Messianic” (its linguistic if not conceptual equivalent) as were a whole host of other culturally objectionable words in the missions’ lexicon so as to soften boundary crossing for Jewish converts to Christian faith. As used positively by missionaries, however, the “Judaism” in Messianic Judaism still connoted true, *biblical Judaism* that had been fulfilled or completed in Christianity and which was engaged in a spiritual battle for the souls and minds of lost Jews oppressed by or disconnected from their religion because of centuries of *rabbinic legalism* and opposition to the Christian message.

Beginning with a paper presented to the Theology Forum of the UMJC in 1999, however, the ground began to shift under the newly constructed edifice of Messianic Judaism. Mark Kinzer, now a prominent Messianic Jewish theologian and UMJC ordained Messianic rabbi in Ann Arbor, Michigan, then proposed that the Messianic Jewish movement should take the new name of its religion seriously. Building on the

original intentions of the forerunners of the movement when they voted to change the name of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America to the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, Messianic Jews should now step up to the plate and consider the tantalizing prospect that the religion they created can (and should to Kinzer’s way of thinking) be a form of Judaism, a “real Judaism,” and not merely a circumlocution for a kind of Christianity practiced by Christian Jews. Echoing taxonomic language taken from the scientific study of religion, Kinzer asserted that Judaism was truly the genus of their religion, and Messianic the differentiating species.⁵

If, in its first but abortive iteration Messianic Judaism was imagined as Christian faith infused with non-competing Jewish national customs, Kinzer superseded this tentative coupling by sanctifying these and other “national customs” and calling them divine obligations that all Jews were compelled to observe if they were to be true to the terms of Israel’s holy covenant—a covenant that is revealed in the Christian Old Testament and presumed to be still effective in the New Testament scriptures—whether or not a Jew also holds evangelical Christian beliefs about Yeshua (the Messianic term that replaced “Jesus,” another potentially off putting term for non-believing Jews).

Kinzer’s definition of Messianic Judaism includes rather than anathematizes rabbinic tradition, so it is clearly at odds with the conventional meaning of that term in the prevailing Protestant missions to the Jews’ discourse with which he is in conversation. The idea is radical but has been persuasive enough to acquire a new paradigmatic name among Messianics: Postmissionary Messianic Judaism (PMJ).⁶ But,

⁵ Kinzer, “Genus”; Kinzer, “Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism.”

⁶ I use the label, Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, to describe Kinzer’s approach to Messianic Jewish religion relative to the evangelical Christian community from which he wishes to distance himself and the Messianic Jewish movement in general. While the evangelical missions community sees the rest of the Jewish world as outsiders to Christian faith and considers Jews a target population for open evangelism, “Postmissionary” Messianic Jews propose to carry their witness of faith with them into

to what extent and in what way is Kinzer's Judaism comparable to that of other mainstream Judaisms? By calling this kind of Messianic Judaism into existence, what elements does Kinzer introduce into the cluster of characteristics that make up the scholar's conceptual map of American Judaism, and how has the meaning of elements shared by Christian and Jewish religious groups been modified in order to make Messianic Judaism a cohesive system of thought and practice, or to facilitate the construction of Messianic Jewish communities and institutions that will be able to embody and reproduce it for future generations?

This discursive history of the term "Messianic Judaism" begins with the presumption that "Judaism" is a socially and rhetorically constructed concept rather than an analytical academic category representing any real historic religion, and that any modifiers attached to it are attempts to own or to secure a position of power relative to the mainstream that effectively does own the term. According to Michael Satlow, Judaism has no history apart from its construction in the history of ideas.⁷ However, it does have a discursive history that is far from placid or intellectually aloof from the social and political realities that have employed the term for their own purposes. From its inception, representatives of Protestant evangelical missions to the Jews were in a position, by virtue of being affiliated with the Protestant Christian majority in England, Germany, and the United States, to dictate the terms under which Jewish scholars and theologians could use the academy to define and study Judaism "scientifically" as well as to nurture a scholarly community of Christian Hebraists who doubled as experts in

the Jewish community as practicing Jews. When Kinzer and those who follow his lead present themselves publically as a kind of Judaism, then I prefer to use the term "Hashivenu" or "Hashivenu Messianic Judaism." Both PMJ and Hashivenu refer ultimately to the same core group of individuals and their ideological platform for creating Messianic Judaism.

⁷ Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 7.

Jewish studies and Christian theology. In the case of men like Franz Delitzsch, a Lutheran theologian and Hebraist, these much-lauded scholars actively promoted the agenda of missionary work among the Jews at the same time they defended Jews and Talmudic Judaism against the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Europe.⁸ It was impossible to produce a scholarly definition of Judaism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century that was not intrinsically entangled in the theological interests of both liberally educated Christians and Jews.⁹ Today, the study of Messianic Judaism is no less complicated by the same conflicting interests and contestations for power that marked the earlier days of the intersection between missions to the Jews and the academic study of Judaism.

The Messianic Jew and Judaism: A Brief Appearance

In 1910, Volume 1, No. 1 of *The Messianic Jew: Organ of the Jewish Messianic Movement*, co-edited by two Protestant Hebrew Christians and published in Johannesburg, South Africa under the auspices of the Dutch Reformed Church there, declared its three-fold platform for establishing “WITHIN Israel a true and genuine Christ-loving Jewish Christian Synagogue.” The publication claimed to represent a group of “patriotic” Christian Jews operating outside the institutional control of any of the existing “Jewish Missionary Societies” and not under obligation to any denomination of “the Gentile Christian Church.”¹⁰ The editorial pledges to elaborate on the “full meaning” of the “Messianic Jew” in future issues, but it is doubtful that there was ever a second issue produced. Nevertheless, *The Messianic Jew* happened to appear

⁸ Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, *Studies in European Judaism*, v. 10 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2005), 122–36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 109–158.

¹⁰ “The Messianic Jew.”

strategically at the same time a World Missions conference was taking place in Edinburgh, and, as a result it came to the attention of a Hebrew Christian missionary, David Baron, who published his scathing denunciation of the Messianic Jewish platform in the October, 1911 issue of *The Scattered Nation*.¹¹

The issues underlying the conflict between those in the missions to the Jews community, represented so aptly here by David Baron, and the incipient independence of an externally organized and nationally conscious Hebrew Christian movement represented by the seven contributors (Jew and Gentile) in this one issue of *The Messianic Jew*, have a renewed resonance in the contemporary debate between proponents of PMJ and the missions to the Jews mainstream in the Messianic Jewish movement. On page 20 of *The Messianic Jew*, the Reverend J. N. Martins, Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Johannesburg makes a plea for “Hebrew Christianity or Christian Judaism,” by which he means to grant these Jewish Christians the right to establish their own “Church or Synagogue,” where they would perform the requisite ordinances of Christianity, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, but where they would also be free to maintain a link to the Jewish nation by observing the rite of circumcision and (at a minimum) the festal calendar. Martins’ concern was driven by his religious conviction that the Jews were to return to the Holy Land as a nation, in unbelief, before the consummation of Christian salvation history when “all Israel would be saved.” How would this eventuality be possible if Jews could not recognize Christ as a Jewish messiah, or if Jewish converts were assimilated into the Gentile Christian church, abandoning their “national customs and institutions” and renegeing on their obligation to evangelize their own people?

¹¹ Raymond Lillevik, *Apostates, Hybrids, or True Jews?: Jewish Christians and Jewish Identity in Eastern Europe, 1860-1914* (Cambridge, UK: James Clark & Co, 2014), 129; David Baron, “*Messianic Judaism*”; or *Judaizing Christianity* (Chicago: American Messianic Fellowship, 1911).

Evangelical missionaries were convinced that traditional Judaism, which had preserved the Jews thus far in history, was imploding under the twin assaults of rationalism and emancipation, and would soon dissolve into nothingness. Zionism, or nationalist Judaism, unfortunately in the missionaries' estimation, had officially rejected a religious connection, and would likewise fail were it not for its (unrecognized by the secular Zionists) prophetic role as a herald of the end times.¹² In either case, men like Martins saw Christianity as the only viable religious option available to the Jew. Unfortunately, the churches were encouraging assimilation and had little concern, let alone a working plan, for preserving the Jewish nation in its midst. If hypothetically, Martins argues,

[e]ach year a hundred thousand or more Jews were brought into the Gentile Christian Denominations; then within a few years, there would not be left any distinctive mark of a Jewish nation, since the mass of Jews would have been absorbed amongst the Gentile nations. In the face of this, we may well ask, what would then become of the many prophecies concerning the Jews? Has God then spared Israel as a people upon this earth for no purpose?¹³

The Dutch Reformed Synod in South Africa had already approved a law allowing Hebrew Christians to maintain their distinctive Jewish nationality, having been convinced that the success of their missionary work among the Jews depended on

¹² Ernst F. Stroeter, "An Urgent Call to Hebrew Christians," *The Messianic Jew: Organ of the Jewish Messianic Movement* 1, no. 1 (December 1910): 5. This is not to say that as the Zionist ideology strengthened it did not acquire a religious character, or that Zionism didn't have a greater appeal to the religious Orthodox Jews than the Reform Jew, but to say that Zionism intended to be a historical return to national consciousness and Jewish culture rather than religion per se.

¹³ Rev. J. N. Martins, "A Plea for Hebrew Christianity or Christian Judaism," *The Messianic Jew: Organ of the Messianic Jewish Movement* 1, no. 1 (December 1910): 20–21.

preserving this divinely elected nation and in revealing Christ to them as a fellow Jew. It is by embracing the Zionists' nationalistic rather than religious use of the word Judaism, that Martins and other Christian missionaries who accepted this argument could equate the term Hebrew Christianity with Christian Judaism.¹⁴

In fact, a supposedly synonymous term, Messianic Judaism, had already appeared in an earlier missionary publication, Ernst F. Stroeter's *Our Hope*, which from March to July in 1895 carried the subtitle, "A Monthly Devoted to the Study of Prophecy and to Messianic Judaism."¹⁵ In a pre-1895 edition, Stroeter tried to explain that Christian Judaism was neither an oxymoron nor a nineteenth-century invention, but a way of representing the fact that Jesus was both a son of Abraham (a Jew) and a son of David (the Christ/Messiah).

Christianity is synonymic with Messianity. Messiah means in the Hebrew tongue precisely what Christos means in the Greek, i.e.: the Anointed. To preach Christ Jesus, or Jesus the Christ, is equivalent to preaching that Jesus is the Messiah, that in Him all the Messianic prophecies given to the people of Israel have found and will find their complete and unfulfillment.¹⁶

In 1895 when the "Messianic Judaism" tag to Stroeter's *Our Hope* was being used, Judaism had already been redefined in Zionist discourse as a nationalistic and cultural

¹⁴ See, Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 55–60. Prior to March, 1895 the subtitle to *Our Hope* used the term, Christian Judaism, indicating that the two terms, Messianic and Christian were already being used interchangeably. With the second volume, the *Our Hope* subtitle was revised to read, "A Christian Monthly Devoted to the Study of Prophecy and Organ of the Hope of Israel Movement," an apparent exercise in disambiguation.

¹⁵ On the history of Stroeter's "Hope of Israel" Mission, see, Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 9–21.

¹⁶ Stroeter and Gaebelien, "Christian Judaism," 8–9.

rather than religious identity and was thus able to be appropriated by Stroeter, at least for a few months, in good conscience, as a way of baptizing this non-religious term into Christian discourse.

To the extent that a return to the Holy Land was part of the nineteenth century Dispensationalist's prophetic narrative, pro-Messianic Judaism missionaries thought that missionaries to the Jews should do what they could to facilitate an unbroken nationalist connection between its Jewish converts and the rest of the Jewish people who were being mustered by the Zionist cause. And, at least some Jewish nationalists in America were eager to encourage Christian support for a Jewish settlement in Palestine. According to one article in Stroeter's *Our Hope*, a certain Dr. Minz, editor of the Jewish Recorder in New York, is quoted as saying "it would be true philanthropy if American (Gentile) Christian lovers of Zion would interest themselves in the colonization of Palestine by starting a fund for this purpose."¹⁷ Stroeter and other missionaries who saw this return as critical to the unfolding of Christian salvation history interpreted this turn to Jewish secular nationalism positively, convinced by Scripture that their return to their own land "in unbelief" would be followed by "their spiritual regeneration." Hebrew Christian missionaries were thus engaged in the same project of cultivating a nationalist sentiment in Christian Jews as the pro-Zionists were in wider Jewish world, but with entirely ulterior motivations.

The prophetically imagined re-entry of Jews into a historical frame of Christian reference negated the Jews' previous exile from salvation history in pre-modern Christian discourse, and allowed a new crop of Christian Hebraists and missionaries to imagine all aspects of a now historicized Judaism, and especially the new secular Zionist interpretation, as stages in the progressive unfolding of Christianity. As Amnon Raz-

¹⁷ Arno C. Gaebelien, "Jewish Societies for the Colonization of Palestine," *Our Hope*, July 1894.

Krakotzkin explains, in both Christian and Zionist thought, the “end of history” is conceived as a Jewish return, to the Gospel and Christianity for the theologians and to secularized history or national consciousness and the land for Zionists. Jewish history as an autonomous field of study was, Raz-Krakotzkin writes, “first suggested by Protestant theologians who hoped for the conclusion of that history through the conversion of the Jews” and so secular Jewish nationalist and Christian evangelical ideologies were destined to cross paths on the historical journey to Palestine where both groups were able to conceive of a de-rabbinized Judaism that met their needs and promoted their individual agendas.

Indeed, the idea of the Jews’ return to their land, in the Christian-millenarian context, was generally bound up with the hope of their conversion to Christianity, a hope that was of course rejected in Zionist thought. Yet . . . the Zionist idea of “return” was also associated with the transformation of the Jews and their integration into the Western world. The secularization of this idea and the formation of the image of the “new Jew” manifested the possibility of such a return without the need for conversion. But it was the secularization of a Protestant, not a Jewish, ideal. What was depicted as the authentic Jewish tradition followed the notion of authenticity in Christian theology. Zionist consciousness created the image of the “new” Jew who represented the ancient Jew and who had cast off the supposedly false yoke of rabbinic tradition—without converting but with a full adoption of the Western historical perspective.¹⁸

¹⁸ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile, History, and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory: Some Reflections on the Zionist Notion of History and Return,” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 3, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 54.

Nevertheless, on the ground, the Zionist's Judaism, or self-understanding as Jews, could take on religious overtones when threatened by the presence of traditional Protestant missionary activity in the Yishuv. The war against the missionaries' educational activity in particular was deflected from the missionary institutions themselves that were backed by powerful European benefactors. Instead the conflict "became part of an ongoing Zionist struggle for hegemony within the Jewish communities of Palestine" pitting the Zionist Hebraists against the non-nationalist residents of the old Orthodox community who were sending some of the children (girls in particular) to the missionary schools. When the Zionists interpreted this Orthodox opportunism as a "pathological lack of national consciousness," the war against the missionary schools was framed in religious terms, calling their work, *avodah zarah* (idolatry). Clearly, when Christian missions were perceived as an assimilationist enterprise and a threat to Jewish self-determination, the Zionist's "national Judaism" saw itself as a competitor to Christian faith, not its complement.¹⁹

What missions to the Jews desperately needed if they were to read the signs of the times and act accordingly (and to avoid charges of assimilation and conversion), argued the writers of *The Messianic Jew*, was to instill a sense of obligation in those of Jewish extraction who had lost touch with their heritage and taken up residence in Gentile Christian churches to reconnect with their national heritage and take responsibility for enlarging the Kingdom among their brethren.

It is truly deplorable that Jewish Christians, who should constitute the 'True Israel of God,' have allowed themselves to become detached from their own people and have, by complacently accommodating themselves

¹⁹ Arieh Bruce Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew : The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 217–223.

within the sphere of Gentile Christendom, neglected and ignored the very things which should have been most precious to them.”²⁰

Zionist leaders may not realize, Turkish and other statesmen may never recognize, that they are but carrying out God’s wonderful purposes with His chosen nation. . . . The question is not of individual salvation, but of national judgment for national unbelief, and of national deliverance out of it. . . . it is your special prerogative to bear witness to your people and His people ... according to the flesh ... *You alone can and must uphold His claim upon your nation. . . . Be what you are—the “remnant” (of Israel) saved according to the election of grace.*” A remnant is that which *remains*, retaining the essential features of the whole . . . Do not allow yourselves to be Gentilized. Do not be “proselytes,” for you are not. . . . Stand fast . . . be not entangled with the yoke of bondage, *i.e.*, of Gentile Christian proselytism. *Be Israelites indeed! Be the faithful remnant!*²¹

In 1911, responding to this novel agenda of wedding Christian faith to Judaism, Dr. David Baron, a British Hebrew Christian missionary with the Mildmay Mission to the Jews and editor of *The Scattered Nation: Quarterly Record of the Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel*,²² forewent his mission’s policy of avoiding controversy in order to define the Missions position on the issue of Judaizing Christianity, an issue where the “cause of Christ among Israel and the spiritual welfare of those of our Jewish people whose eyes have been opened recognise in Jesus of Nazareth the true Messiah and Son of

²⁰ “The Messianic Jew.”

²¹ Stroeter, “The Messianic Jew,” 6–8.

²² Michael R. Darby, *The Emergence of the Hebrew Christian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Numen Book Series : Studies in the History of Religions, v. 128 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2010), 233–34.

God” was vitally affected. The whole idea of a Messianic Jewish movement was misguided, Baron, argued. The movement, in his estimation was not a movement toward “recognising our Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah” but an agitation by a few misguided Hebrew Christians and their “well-meaning excellent Gentile Christian friends” who apparently didn’t understand the dispensational teachings of the church regarding Israel and the plan of salvation.²³

Baron’s denunciation of what he called “Judaizing Christianity” is important because it brings to the forefront the single element most responsible for making any clear boundary between religious constructs of Judaism and evangelical Christianity impossible for Baron to sustain under the assault from “Messianic Jews” without resorting to the condemnatory language of prevarication, apostasy, and heresy. *The Messianic Jew’s* call for Hebrew Christians to make common cause with their Jewish brethren in a national movement to resettle the Holy Land represents a clear threat for Baron to the superiority of Christianity and its spiritualization of the Mosaic laws over Orthodox Judaism and its pious observance of those same laws in the context of an unfolding national restoration to Palestine.

For Baron, exporting faith in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah to the “Talmudic Jew” without requiring the Jew to change his erroneous view of religion is completely unacceptable to him. If the religious Jew need not renounce his religious conviction that the laws of the Moses are still in full force and effect for Israel when he professes to

²³ Baron, “*Messianic Judaism*”; or *Judaizing Christianity*, 1. Baron read the formation of The Chovovei Zion Association with its agenda of nationalizing and colonizing Palestine and its neighboring territories by the Jews as a sign of the times, a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy about the regathering of “the scattered nation,” and a signal that the solution to the enigma of the Jew was on the horizon. In 1890 he delivered a sermon on the Jewish Problem and its Solution, which was eventually printed and published in the United States in 1891. David Baron, *The Jewish Problem: Its Solution. Or, Israel’s Present and Future*, Fifth (London: Morgan & Scott, Ltd., n.d.), <https://ia601405.us.archive.org/20/items/jewishproblem00baroiala/jewishproblem00baroiala.pdf>.

believe in Christ, then Hebrew Christians who have been brought to faith under the presumption that observance of these laws is effectively forbidden to the converted Jew might be convinced to abandon Christianity and fall back into the Jewish world and its Judaism. The practice of Jewish observance, then, functions as a taboo in Baron and in subsequent Hebrew Christian Missions to the Jews discourse. For Jews, Christian conversion was at that time a rite of passage with both positive and negative aspects. First, he had to be convinced that all aspects of rabbinic Jewish religious practice (ritual observance) its texts (the Talmudic tradition), and its institution (the rabbis), were part of a profane life from which he must separate in order to be permitted into the sacred community of the Christian church with its sacred practices (communion and baptism), its texts (the Old and New Testaments), and its institutions (pastors, teachers, and priests). The negative aspect of this ritual renunciation ironically serves a positive function—it was “the condition of access to the positive cult” of Christian life, to echo Durkheim, evidenced then by the rite of Christian baptism. “Precisely because of the [perceptual] abyss which separates sacred things from their profane counterparts, the individual cannot enter into relations with the first without ridding himself of the second.”²⁴ For Baron a Jew cannot be a Christian until he is rid of his rabbinic Jewishness, faith in Jesus notwithstanding, and that Jewishness is defined in terms of ritual observance of Jewish law.

The underlying problem for Baron and Protestant missions to the Jews is that both the Talmudic Jew and the Hebrew Christian believe that the laws of Moses are sacred. They are not profane, that is, they are not the cultural or natural product of the Jewish people, but divinely revealed commandments whose ongoing authority for Jews

²⁴ Robert Alun Jones, *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*, Masters of Social Theory, v. 2 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986), 115–155. Posted to the University of Chicago website, accessed May 27, 2014, <http://durkheim.uchicago.edu/Summaries/forms.html#pgfld=7912>.

cannot be ignored. Each religious society, dispensationalist evangelical Protestant and rabbinic Jewish, has a historically developed and distinctive discourse to account for these laws and their transcendent claims on the religious (Rabbinic) or believing (Christian) Jew. Jews adopted and sanctified medieval rabbinic discourse that elevated and structured the continued practice and performance of these laws (the *mitzvot*) to a divine obligation for all Israel (and no one else), forming a portable, sacred community that was remarkably viable and effective at preserving Jewish difference and meaning without serious assault up to the 19th century in Europe. Christians, who were almost exclusively non-Jews by the fourth century CE at the latest, had, nearly *ab initio*, rejected any obligation to observe the Jews' civil and ritual laws that were based in the Torah and also the oral tradition/s of its elders, and by the fourth century and afterwards, rabbinic views in particular. Unable to jettison the shared text that ultimately authorized these religious practices, however, the church interpreted the problematic ordinances and commandments as “symbols and types” of a higher spiritual reality revealed to them in the New Testament and sacralized for them as part of an orthodox Christology.

That the law and its “observances” were not the national product of Israel is attested by the continual apostasy of the people from this very law, and disregard alike of its moral and ceremonial observances, of which the prophets and psalmists are the witnesses.

Then apart from the ethical character of the law, its divinely appointed rites and ceremonies were so many types and symbols setting form great spiritual realities, which were to find their fulfillment in the Messiah and in the “new covenant” which would be established by Him.”²⁵

²⁵ Baron, “*Messianic Judaism*”; or *Judaizing Christianity*, 10.

The turn of the century Messianic Jew who wanted to participate in both the discourse of Christian faith and the discourse and practices of Jewish nationalism without sacrificing his status in either respective society placed himself on the margin of Christian orthodoxy and became a potentially dangerous pollutant to Protestant Christianity—the “structure of ideas” that had taken shape in the shadows of medieval rabbinic Judaism. As Baron explains,

Jewish history is peculiar and unique . . . and the so-called Jewish “national” observances are altogether unlike the customs of any other nation. The peculiarity of the Jewish people consists in the fact that God called and chose it to be the medium of His self-revelation on the earth. . . . And the holy law with its ceremonial observances were not the natural product and development of the history of the people . . . but were *divinely revealed* to Israel. . . . The Jewish observances . . . have their chief significance in their *religious* character, and their practice by a Hebrew Christian, who professes to be a son of the new covenant, is nothing else than the attempt to build up again that which is “done away in Christ.”

Rather than working toward the ultimate triumph of Christianity over Talmudic Judaism, which in the missionaries’ imagination was finally in its death throes, the Messianic Jew could be perceived aiding and abetting the rival religion by inoculating it with Christian faith. The power of Jewish observance to create any kind of spiritual unity between converted and unconverted Jews outside the doctrinal constraints imposed on Hebrew Christians already integrated into the church is so potentially destabilizing for Baron that any such observance on the part of Hebrew Christians must be treated as a contaminant to true faith. He categorizes their efforts at creating an independent

Hebrew Church that retains circumcision, the feasts, and Jewish liturgy as no more than Judaism, “that unbearable yoke laid on the neck of our people by the Rabbis” with the name of Jesus smuggled in “now and then . . . into those prayers.”²⁶

Rabbinic Judaism is typically derogated in Baron’s writings, as it is across the board in Missions to the Jews discourse of this era, as “the Christ-rejecting synagogue,” a religion of “now empty forms and ceremonies,” a “sad religious development of the Jews” and, ironically (given the partial success of integrating Christian faith with orthodox observance among some European Jews) but necessarily for the maintenance of a clear boundary and sharply defined border between the church and the synagogue, a “Christless Israel.” But Baron reserves his most scornful language for the potentially contaminating Messianic Jew who threatens to create a bridge that could facilitate the crossing of other Jewish Christians out of Christian orthodoxy and back to the profane world of Judaism.

For Baron, the Messianic *Jew* is a Judaizer, a prevaricator, a danger, a stumbling block and someone who sows confusion and chaos, while the Hebrew Christian is a true believer who is content to live out the truth of his faith in the church. The Judaizer wants to make common cause with non-believing, Christ-rejecting Jews, to be part of national Israel, to be a Jew through circumcision, and to make a claim to the land of Palestine alongside the Zionists. But by contrast, the Hebrew *Christian* is circumcised in the heart, content with a heavenly citizenship; he enjoys a new (and better) “nationality” in pleasant union with the Gentile, part of the new Israel of God during this time of fleshly Israel’s national discontinuity. The Judaizer will find his righteousness in the law, and, ultimately Baron fears, his Jewish identity will necessarily and ultimately derive from the law and its rite of circumcision and not faith in Christ.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

Perhaps Baron believes that the Jew will naturally return to Judaism like the proverbial fish returns to water. Or, perhaps his fear about the ultimate triumph of law over faith for the converted Jew, sublimated and expressed in the language of theological orthodoxy, hints at an unconscious affirmation of European stereotyping of the Jews as people who were unable to become modern citizens of the nations in which they lived while clinging to any remnant of Jewish practice or notion of Jewish national identity. Baron seems to imply that a Jew can only become a Christian, a “true Jew,” when he is no longer a Jew “according to the flesh.” The Messianic Jew, however, threatens to undermine the entire Christian construction of the “truly” converted Jew and by extension a completely irredeemable rabbinic Judaism with his coupling of sacred faith and profane religious practice.

By 1911, Messianic Judaism had been relegated to the status of a pejorative term in Protestant missions to the Jews discourse implying a forbidden comingling of Christianity and a retrograde Rabbinism; a slippery slope on the way to apostasy. By 1917, a fledgling Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA) had unanimously rejected a resolution proposed to it by the Episcopalian pastor and pro-Messianic Jewish Hebrew Christian, Mark John Levy, to align itself officially with his “patriotic” program of national observance. On behalf of Hebrew Christians, Levy had argued “for absolute freedom and not for compulsion . . . to admit their male children into the covenant of Abraham, and to observe any other of the rites and ceremonies of their fathers, not done away with by Christ and his Apostles or the primitive Church.” In response, the HCAA vowed to “have none of it,” reiterating Baron’s implicit marking of the border between Christianity and Judaism by placing the ritual observance of Jewish law on one side and a vow to “know nothing save Jesus only” on the other. Messianic Judaism was effectively anathematized and dismissed as something neither fish nor fowl, an “amalgam between

a minimum of Christian Truth and Rabbinical rites and customs, . . . a religious hybrid . . . doomed to barrenness.”²⁷ And, for the next sixty years or so of missions to the Jews discourse, this term disappears from sight. When it surfaces again, it finds a more hospitable environment in Protestant missions that now includes the possibility of establishing and supporting Messianic Judaism under the rubric of “indigenous” missions to the Jews.

Two world wars, the Holocaust, and the successful integration of American Reform and Conservative Judaisms into the religious landscape in the US helped to move the mainline Protestant denominations away from targeted missionary work among the Jewish community and toward interfaith dialogue. This evangelism vacuum, so to speak, was waiting to be filled by the independent Messianic Jewish missionaries who mostly came to faith after the decisive Israeli military victory over its Arab enemies in the 1968 Six Day War. This event acted as a fulcrum on which the Protestant dispensationalist fascination with biblical prophecy now rotated, with renewed vigor, toward the Jews as harbingers of the impending apocalypse and Second Coming of Christ. Young Jews who were being converted to faith in Jesus were by and large coming out of secular and liberal Jewish backgrounds into what they understood as a “personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” If the mainline Protestant establishment would not conscience traditional proselytism, then recasting the Jews as an indigenous population and these new Messianic Jewish believers as insiders charged with introducing a Jewish Jesus to their own people might be a missiologically acceptable workaround.

²⁷ Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 32–38.

The Messianic Jewish Congregational Movement: re-emergence of Messianic Judaism.

In 1974, two dissertations were completed at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth, each promoting something called Messianic Judaism. In May of that year, James Hutchens' dissertation, *A Case for Messianic Judaism*, made the argument for recasting missions to the Jews as an indigenous project, by which he meant that the Jews (the targeted ethnic population) could be considered an indigenous population (akin to Native Americans, e.g.), and that Jewish missionaries who were already acting as leaders of a new, grassroots Messianic Jewish congregational movement, could be considered "natives" rather than outsiders in this indigenous setting.²⁸ That same year, Phillip E. Goble published his Fuller dissertation under the title, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*.²⁹ Both Goble and Hutchens were responding to the radical ethnicization of Hebrew Christianity that was becoming visible to the Protestant Missions establishment as early as 1970 when Moishe Rosen, a missionary with the Jewish Missions of America, first established Jews for Jesus in San Francisco. During the counterculture revolution and religious revival that was taking place at the time, it was more fashionable for teens to be antiestablishment, hippy, "Jesus Freaks" than to follow in their parents' footsteps, and Jews for Jesus capitalized on this by collecting stray Jewish kids and turning them into ethnically marked, aggressive street evangelists in high density Jewish population centers.³⁰

For Hutchens, the viability of an organization like Jews for Jesus marked a shift in the cultural landscape of American Jewish-Christian identity formation. Rosen's

²⁸ Hutchens, "A Case for Messianic Judaism."

²⁹ Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*.

³⁰ Lipson, *Jews for Jesus: An Anthropological Study*, 14–20.

successful reception in the evangelical Christian mainstream proved that Jews could (and did) believe in Jesus while being culturally and ethnically identifiable as Jews. “Many had thought the *Jews for Jesus* movement to be simply a fad, a kind of illegitimate child of the passing *religios demincia* of a counter-culture that would eventually assimilate with some condescending and distinctively Christian institution,” Hutchens wrote,³¹ but, at least in part, the many have been proven wrong. JFJ is one of the largest and most enduring Messianic Jewish organizations devoted to missionary outreach to the Jews and to educating the church on its Jewish roots.³² Impressively outstripping its meager beginnings in 1970, Jews for Jesus reported approximately \$21,000,000.00 in revenue for 2013 and listed just under \$21,000,000.00 in net assets, with seventy-five percent of its income dedicated to evangelism and other “direct activities.”³³ In another sense, however, the many critics of JFJ were correct. The group did not remain at the forefront of the Messianic Jewish movement that it helped inspire. Rosen had always considered himself and his organization to be “part of mainstream theology,” a missionary outreach of Hebrew Christianity, and today, JFJ demonstrates a certain empathy for those involved in Messianic Judaism, but does not claim a place for itself in that discourse. It has, instead, elected to portray itself as a Christian organization aligned with the traditional, evangelical goals and methods of the historic Protestant

³¹ Hutchens, “A Case for Messianic Judaism,” 7–10; Lipson, *Jews for Jesus: An Anthropological Study*.

³² On the history and mapping of denominational and Hebrew Christian missions to the Jews institutions, see Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*. By Messianic Jewish missions to the Jews, I mean those organizations and works that were either independently established or transformed from existing Protestant missions organizations by self-described Messianic Jews beginning in the mid-1970s.

³³ <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/files/pdf/2011-JFJ-Audited-Financial-Statement.pdf>; <http://www.ecfa.org/MemberProfile.aspx?ID=8537>, accessed November 28, 2014. Lipson reports that the Jews for Jesus board approved an annual budget of \$350,000 in the spring of 1974; by 1986 the budget had increased to \$7 million. Lipson, *Jews for Jesus: An Anthropological Study*, 83, 169.

missions to the Jews community. Jews for Jesus was not the major force shaping the Messianic Judaism that Hutchens and Goble envisioned in 1974; but it did till the soil for the seeds of change that were being planted by a handful of men and women in the Messianic Jewish congregational movement taking shape during the last quarter of the 1970s.

The Messianic Jewish movement is rightfully a descriptor for the swift rise of independent, grassroots communities of Jews who had come to Jesus during the religious revival of the 1960s and 1970s and their more mature mentors: Beth Messiah in Cincinnati (1970) was the first independent, evangelical Messianic Jewish congregation in the U.S.;³⁴ the Presbyterian's Chicago First Hebrew Christian Church was transformed into a Messianic Jewish congregation, Adat HaTikvah, under Dan Juster (1972); Phillip Goble and Ray Gannon moved Gannon's Assemblies of God home bible study to Encino where they turned it into the messianic Temple Beth Emmanuel (1973); and Manny Brotman began his leadership role in another startup congregation, Beth Messiah, in the Washington, D.C. area (1973). By the time of its annual Messiah Conference in 1973, the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America was being pressured to drop the "Hebrew Christian" from its name and adopt "Messianic Jewish" in its place, a change that was eventually approved in 1975, a year after the two Fuller dissertations were completed.³⁵

In his dissertation, Hutchens offered to give a definitive shape and name to this new movement, while Goble hoped to bring the potentially chaotic movement together into theological and practical conformity by providing it with a complete set of documents ranging from commitment statements to a liturgical order of service for planting and growing Messianic Synagogues. Hutchens's work was never published, but

³⁴ Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 80–82.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 75–77.

it was fairly influential in the early decades of the congregational movement; Goble published his dissertation after helping Gannon convert his bible study group into a prototypical messianic synagogue. When *Everything You Need to Know to Grow a Messianic Synagogue* was published in 1974, it was the only working manual available for new startup congregations who wanted to organize and practice along Messianic Jewish lines.³⁶

Hutchens proposed his scholarly invention, Messianic Judaism, as a solution to the problem that the Jewish believer in Jesus was experiencing because of his inability to “get into one camp or the other.” Mainstream Judaism simply catalogued the Hebrew Christian with Christianity regardless of his cultural Jewishness or claims that believing in Jesus was consistent with an ongoing Jewish identity, while the contemporary evangelical Missions to the Jews establishment, according to Hutchens, asserted that Jewish Christians had no right to continue identifying culturally or religiously with Judaism and the Jewish community. What was needed, Hutchens opined, “is some agency, organization, or label that will serve as a catalyst for all that a Jewish believer holds important. . . . For want of a better term,” he explained, “I am suggesting Messianic Judaism as the possible catalytic agent. The Jew who endorses Messianic Judaism is a Messianic Jew.”³⁷

Hutchens arrived at this label by a process of elimination: Hebrew Christian was too aligned with Gentile Christianity to convey the ethnic revitalization apparent to him

³⁶ Goble and missionary-pastor, Ray Gannon together co-founded one of the oldest Messianic Jewish synagogues in America in southern California. In 1973 when it operated under the auspices of the Assemblies of God, it was known as Beth Emmanuel. In 1978 the denomination revoked its lease and the now independent congregation changed its name to Ahavat Zion. Stuart Dauermann, a principal organizer of Hashivenu, led Ahavat Zion from 1991 to 2011. See the Foreword by Reverend Ray Gannon in Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*, ix–x.

³⁷ Hutchens, “A Case for Messianic Judaism,” 199.

among the new crop of Christian Jews; “fulfilled Jew,” smacked of religious exceptionalism; *Jewish Christian*, *Jewish believer*, and *Jew for Jesus* were not inappropriate but they failed to make the close association with Judaism and Jews that he proposed as integral to the movement. Hutchens envisioned Messianic Judaism as part of the American mainstream of religious Jewish options: “It is recognizable Judaism” but unapologetically messianic (committed to Jesus).” Although some Messianic Jews were ready to offer their religion as an alternative to Orthodox, Reform, Conservative or Reconstructionist Judaism, Hutchens understood that this was premature; Messianic Judaism was then (and still is today) a movement, not a denomination—it remains in critical need of leadership endorsed by a majority consensus in its constituency. Still, Hutchens likened its dilemma to that of the other American denominations, which also struggled to overcome entrenched prejudices to take form, grow and sustain growth.

But what was Hutchens’ Messianic Judaism? In its broadest sense he saw it as “the form of Judaism that acknowledges Jesus as Messiah.”³⁸ Of course, this is a gross over-simplification that fails to acknowledge the potentially divisive theological, social, and practical consequences of that acknowledgement. But to Hutchens, acknowledging that Jesus was Israel’s messiah necessarily implied that all of the forms and symbols of traditional Judaism that Messianic Jews would incorporate into their religious lives would also be transformed by virtue of their relocation and reinterpretation in Christian discourse. Messianic Jews, like many Hebrew Christians before them, refuse to accept the label of convert, preferring to refer to themselves as “completed” or fulfilled Jews instead. Messianic Judaism, beginning with Hutchens and Goble and extending through Hashivenu, is best understood as the process of re-describing, re-interpreting, and re-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 200–201.

signifying certain forms, symbols, practices, and mythic narratives pertaining to Jewish peoplehood—elements that have historically been associated with traditional Judaism—through the prism of evangelical Protestant Christian theology in such a way as to support the contention that Jews and Judaism are the root upon which the Christian church is built, a root which it reserves the right to define according to its own needs through effective use of discourse.

One classic example of this Christianizing project in the service of Missions to the Jews is the approach to evangelism that relies on presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament “Messianic prophecies”: first, a suffering, dying and resurrected Messiah is read into select verses from the Hebrew Bible, and then the New Testament synoptic gospels’ account of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection is presented as the fulfillment of these Christian prophecies.³⁹ Franz Delitzsch’s 1880 book, *Messianic Prophecies*, is an exhaustive exploration and historicization of this ancient exegetical activity. What is particularly interesting for the study of contemporary Messianic Judaism is Delitzsch’s admission that the “Old Testament” alone cannot provide indisputable proof for all that Christians claim about Jesus Christ and his fulfillment of these alleged messianic prophecies:

There is no Old Testament passage in which [Mashiach] indisputably indicates the future king with eschatological exclusiveness. The name *Χριστός* is the translation of [Mashiach] but it is not really coextensive, for in the designation of Jesus as the Christ the idea of king is relieved of its one-sidedness. The ideas of the superhuman deity and of the prophet of the kingdom of heaven, and of the priest by reason of the sacrifice of himself, are combined in this name with the idea of the royal dignity.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

With it is united the representation of one triply anointed to a threefold office. . . .

But besides this, since the idea of the future God-man at first comes to view only in occasional glimpses, the Man of Salvation does not yet occupy a central position in Old Testament faith. . . . But . . . as the New Testament fulfillment shows, it is God in Christ, who, starting from Israel, secures for the human race and offers to it the highest spiritual blessings. Even the prophecies of the final and essential salvation, which are silent respecting the Messiah, are Christological when viewed in their historic fulfillment.⁴⁰

Missions to the Jews discourse and Hutchens's Messianic Judaism may share the Hebrew word "Mashiach" and even the Anglicized term, Messiah, with traditional Biblical and post-Biblical Jewish discourse, but the meaning has been radically reimagined by Christian Hebraist scholars who read into it truths constructed by a post-Biblical exegetical tradition that relies on the ultimate authority of the New Testament scriptures. This process has been repeated multiple times in the course of creating a contemporary Messianic Judaism that retains the outward elements of traditional Judaism but interprets them according to the inward "truths" of Christian theology. The results of this process, whether it is a new Messianic liturgy, lists of Messianic prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, booklets on the "true" meaning of Israel's feasts, or staging a Messianic Passover demonstration, are the visible tools of Messianic evangelism, while the means of arriving at these ends remains opaque to the potential Jewish convert who is, theoretically at least, unlikely to be sophisticated enough in the art of biblical exegesis,

⁴⁰ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies: Lectures*, trans. Samuel Ives Curtiss (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880), 1–3.

Jewish or Christian, to inquire further as to how the “old” forms inevitably reveal the “new” meaning.

In the late twentieth century renaissance of Messianic Jewish missions to the Jews, it is clear that basic Protestant Christian theological ‘truths’ have not been significantly altered to create Messianic Judaism. What Hutchens and Goble were challenging was the necessity of cultural reconditioning: Jewish converts to Jesus faith should not be assimilated or acculturated to Christian forms of worship or cultural practice. The list of “Gentile” cultural elements that Hutchens claims Christianity has been imposing on the Messianic Jew/Hebrew Christian, all of which are tantamount to the believing Jew being required to “reject the distinctives of his biblical Judaism,” included everything from the form of worship to local dietary practices. “We would underscore the intolerance of this *Christian* cultural chauvinism. The Jew who believes in Jesus . . . may only observe those feasts and festivals of the Jewish calendar that the Christian fellowship of which he is a part chooses to observe. In no time at all, no trace of his Jewishness is left. His conversion has been total. His assimilation complete.”⁴¹ By the time Hutchens is penning his dissertation, Herzl’s Zionism, the horrors of Nazi genocide, and the British occupation of Palestine have paved the road for a U.N. chartered nation state called Israel. What John Mark Levy so adroitly categorized and tried to sell to the Missions community as the national customs of Israel in 1905, Hutchens now presents to his peers as elements of cultural identity. What appears to have changed in the ensuing decades is that the specter of rising Jewish nationalist feelings among Messianic Jews was more threatening to the stability of Jewish-Gentile parity in the evangelical missions

⁴¹ Hutchens, “A Case for Messianic Judaism,” 35. Generally, Biblical Judaism in missions discourse refers to the purported Judaism of the Old Testament, whose legal requirements Jesus fulfills but whose cultural forms persist as potentially neutral national customs to aid missionaries in establishing “indigenous” Jewish churches.

community and the Messianic Jewish movement than the potential risk of sanctioning some modicum of properly signified Mosaic religious observance.

Messianic Jews, Jews for Jesus, Hebrew Christians, etc., cannot afford to create a *Jewish nationalism* at the expense of separation and isolation from those with a like commitment to Jesus. Nationalism, in all its forms, is a group loyalty that can get out of hand. . . .

On the other hand, a Jewish believer should not so immerse himself in the cultural expressions of Gentile Christianity that his Jewishness is obliterated and he becomes for all intents and purposes a *goy*.⁴²

Hutchens argues that maintaining one's Jewishness after confessing Christ is merely a matter of retaining cultural distinctiveness: keeping the Sabbath and a kosher kitchen, hanging a mezuzah, lighting a menorah, even participating in the life of the synagogue or temple. Permitting Jewish Christians to express their cultural difference becomes a measure of the church's ability to embrace the contemporary values of multicultural pluralism. Phillip Goble concurs. His definition of Messianic Judaism is likewise simplistic and self-serving, but also clearly manifests the supersessionist ideology that underlies the missionary establishment's programmatic redefinition of Judaism. He blurs the boundaries between "Judaism" and "Christianity," and then makes Christianity and Messianic Judaism synonymic terms only to invert the taxonomic labels. Messianic Judaism becomes the all-inclusive term for the true, biblical Jewish religion, which unlike its rabbinic other is capable of culturally accommodating its dominant Gentile constituency. The universal church, Goble concludes, is nothing other than the "world-wide" culturally adaptable "Messianic Synagogue of Yeshua":

⁴² *Ibid.*, 39.

Many people, including some followers of Yeshua (Jesus' Hebrew name), like to see a sharp distinction between Judaism and Christianity.

However, the distinction is not so clear. In fact, if by "Judaism" we mean the true Messianic, Biblical religion of Israel, then the religion that is usually called "Christianity" could really be labeled "Judaism." In reality "Christianity" is true, culturally all-inclusive Messianic Judaism. . . .

Messianic Judaism, when it accommodates itself culturally to Gentiles, is properly called Christianity. However, Messianic Judaism needs no other name when it orients itself ethnically to the very people from whom it originated, the Jews.⁴³

Everything You Need to Know to Grow a Messianic Synagogue attempts to help the missions community retain control of the Messianic Jewish movement, hoping to conform the newly forming congregations to sound evangelical doctrine and purpose by producing and disseminating the documents, forms, prayers, and other organizational tools the Messianic Jewish congregational movement will surely need if it survives to maturation.⁴⁴

⁴³ Hutchens' vision of a bifurcated Messianic Judaism that accommodates Gentiles as Christianity and Jews as Judaism is a preview of Mark Kinzer's more sophisticated ecclesiology that splits the church into Jewish and Gentile wings.

⁴⁴ Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*. Goble's loose leaf book includes a Synagogue Membership Application that begins with a declaration of faith ("I, _____, trusting Yeshua as my kaporrhah (sic) and personal Messiah and the divine Son of God ..."); a Member's Manual with a full liturgy for "A Lord's Seder Service" ("we who are spiritual Jews are commanded to retell and relive what happened for us on Passover in the death of our Lord Yeshua, who commands us, in our own Haggadah or 'declaration,' 'Do this in remembrance of me.'"); instructions for prayer and donating money; a full order of service for Shabbat, "A Messianic Erev Shabbat Service," in English and Hebrew with the Amidah and other elements of traditional Jewish Shabbat liturgy, an Appendix containing a variety of witnessing tools, including scripted "Phone Minister" presentations used to invite guests to an "evening Torah study" and to overcome any objections they might raise to the solicitation, a "Sample Friendly Letter of Warning to Gospel Rejectors" and a "Hebrew Pronunciation Key."

Hutchens sidesteps the question of whether Rabbinic Judaism has actually been replaced by Christianity, but avers that “the Judaism of the Old Testament as distinct from Rabbinic Judaism,” has not, and this is his model for creating Messianic Judaism, a vehicle for securing “cultural and religious freedom for Jews . . . a viable alternative to Gentile Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism.”⁴⁵ Messianic Judaism for Hutchens is the “inevitable Judaism” of the future, combining a Judaized Christianity for Gentiles with a Jesus-believing Judaism for Jews. It will include (eventually) a new Temple with a reinstated sacrificial system, observance of the distinctively Jewish feasts and festivals “of the Old Testament,” ritual immersion (baptism) for identification and cleansing, and the “so-called ‘Lord’s Supper’”(Eucharist) ostensibly instituted by Jesus at a Passover meal.⁴⁶ In his mind’s eye, Messianic Judaism is destined to become nothing less than the single universal heir to the legacies of both historical Judaism and Christianity.

Goble is less grandiose and more pragmatic, defining, explaining, teaching, discipling, organizing, constraining unhealthy growth, and keeping the focus of new congregations on the work of evangelizing the Jews with the new tools of a public Messianic Jewish liturgy and home Torah study that he is developing. In short, so long as the Messianic Synagogue is open to all Christians, Jew and non-Jew, requires only baptism (*mikvah*) and communion (“the Passover covenant meal of the Lord’s Supper”) and does not require Gentiles to circumcise their sons in order to become “proselytes to Messianic Judaism,” grounds its teaching in the “Holy Jewish Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation,” is dedicated to the exposition of the Gospel, then, in Goble’s words, “a Messianic Synagogue is free to be what it is . . . a Jewish synagogue” where every Jewish

⁴⁵ Hutchens, “A Case for Messianic Judaism,” 37–39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 201–226.

ceremony “will be acknowledged and pleasing in God’s sight if done in the name of the One in whom all the Jewish ceremonies are fulfilled.”⁴⁷

In 1974 there were still hardliners like the early twentieth century David Baron who held that Jewish believers should sever all connections to the Jewish community and Judaism because the “Mosaic tradition with its Rabbinical embellishments is obsolete and has been replaced by the New Testament motif of grace under Jesus.”⁴⁸ Sometime after 1963, the American Missions Fellowship in Chicago issued a reprint of Baron’s 1911 diatribe against Messianic Judaism, perhaps ironically reintroducing the current proponents to the previous players and issues in the process.⁴⁹ In 1975, the same year that the HCAA voted to change its name to the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, AMF’s then President, William Currie, publically denounced “Messianic Judaism” in language borrowed from Baron, and from this point forward, Hutchens’s “catalyzing” label begins to appear in primary, non-academic publications like Paul Liberman’s 1976 aptly subtitled book, *The Fig Tree Blossoms: Messianic Judaism Emerges*. Unleashed from the intellectual constraints of the scholar’s study, Messianic Judaism began to take shape in the distinctively American crucible of religious freedom, voluntarism and public debate.

Liberman was the first self-described Messianic Jew to tell the story of Messianic Judaism’s beginnings “in clear, uncomplicated language,” and à la Hutchens, sets out to bring together “many current thoughts of the thousands of Messianic Jews throughout

⁴⁷ Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*, 7–8.

⁴⁸ Hutchens, “A Case for Messianic Judaism,” 36.

⁴⁹ Prior to 1963, American Messianic Fellowship was known as The Chicago Hebrew Mission, founded in 1887 as the Chicago Committee for Hebrew Christian Work to “undertake Gospel work among the Jews of Chicago.” <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/546.htm> accessed April 9, 2014. Baron, “*Messianic Judaism*”; or *Judaizing Christianity*.

the nation,” into a single volume.⁵⁰ It is valuable for the scholar as a primary source and as evidence of how scholarship is translated into the vernacular of a religious group. *The Fig Tree Blossoms* includes what must have been the accepted tenets of Messianic Judaism in the minds of the early proponents. First, that the Word of God—the Old Testament and the New Covenant—are divinely inspired and together convey a single message (Yeshua is the Old Testament Messiah), and this message forms the basis for the Messianic Jew’s beliefs. Second, that a Jew who accepts a Jewish Jesus does not become a Gentile but a completed Jew. Most telling, from a social and psychological perspective, however, is Liberman’s attempt to distance Messianic Judaism from Christian criticism that it is becoming a “cult seeking to separate itself from the body of believers in the Messiah” and to justify it as a way for Jews who believe in the Messiah to graft an historically foreign faith onto their Jewish selves: “It is a way,” the young Liberman poignantly writes, “of reconciling belief in the Messiah while continuing to be a Jew.”⁵¹ By the time of the MJAA’s annual Messiah Conference in 1980, Liberman will have reduced the difference between Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism to the issue of congregational worship, not doctrines or tenets of faith.⁵² The outward signs of Messianic Judaism that differentiated its members and their congregations from those of Hebrew Christianity were typically ones that it shared with non-Messianic Jews and

⁵⁰ Liberman, *The Fig Tree Blossoms*, sec. Preface. The theological centerpiece of Liberman’s book are two chapters on the classic theme of how Jesus fulfilled OT prophecies about the Messiah. This evangelistic tool is sandwiched between a short overview and a summary of Arnold Fruchtenbaum’s “Early Messianic Jewish” (1st century) History, an explanation of how Messianic Jews believe prophecy is continuing to unfold in Israel and among Jews who are finding Jesus as the Messiah, and a chapter on the necessary distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the church. There is also a short chapter on “The Higher Meaning of the Jewish Holidays” provided by the New Testament.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11–12, 18, 2.

⁵² Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 120.

Judaism: marking public discourse as Jewish by using Hebrew, incorporating Jewish ritual practices like lighting menorahs and Shabbat candles into congregational life, installing Arks and filling them with Torah scrolls, wearing yarmulkes and prayer shawls, blowing shofars, adopting Jewish liturgical forms and so forth. All of this outward demonstration of affinity with Jews and Judaism was tied to the Messianic Jew's belief that he had been divinely called, as a member of the Abrahamic covenant, to remain a Jew and to "observe God's pattern of Jews being preserved."⁵³ In 20th century America it was rabbinic tradition that provided the elements necessary to create a visible connection to Jewish continuity in a religious setting.

At the institutional level in 1976, there was already a movement within the newly renamed MJAA to form a congregational umbrella organization. The MJAA, predictably, refused to set up a congregational arm, but by 1978 a group of leaders managed to put together an independent Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) with approximately twenty-five congregations signing on. Meanwhile, Goble and Gannon, both Gentile Christians, had turned Temple Beth Emmanuel over to a new *Jewish* Messianic leader. The congregation incorporated independently under the name Ahavat Zion Synagogue in 1978, and, as already noted, two years later was cut loose by the Assemblies of God following complaints about its "doctrinal purity" and "mode of worship." Ahavat Zion had evidently become unrecognizable as a missionary outreach to the Jewish community or as an appropriate congregation for a converted Jew. Without gentile influence, according to church historian, David Rausch, "they had become 'traditional' Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah."⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 106–09.

By the mid-1980s, it was clear that the Messianic Jewish congregational movement was gaining momentum under the UMJCs leadership and it was invited to explain its agenda before representatives of the International Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism (LCWE). Richard C. Nichol, representing the UMJC and his home congregation of Ruach Israel, addressed the mini-consultation on Jewish evangelism (LCJE), in April 1985, arguing that the UMJC considered “the local Messianic Jewish congregation . . . the focal point of Jewish evangelism . . . [as well as] national/cultural expression” for Jewish Jesus believers. Nichol also defended the movement’s “borrowing of some of [rabbinic Judaism’s] worship forms, symbols and values” as “rooted in Apostolic example” and motivated by love of their Jewish heritage and their desire to live as a Jewish remnant in “what may be the end of this age.”⁵⁵ To the question of whether borrowing these practices and then “infusing them with New Testament theological significance wasn’t tantamount to perversion, Nichols offered a mixed response; some practices, like celebrating Yom Kippur, e.g., he reflected, might require a major revision in theological content, but others, like honoring Shabbat—practices tied directly to Biblical commandments—presented no theological problem at all. The follow up question that would require a more thoughtful discussion among Messianic Jews in the years to come concerned how much of the rabbinic content of those practices could be justified given the supreme authority of the New Testament.

The 1985 profile Nichols provides of Ruach Israel shows that at least in the UMJC congregations, Messianic Judaism had managed to reconcile rabbinic form with

⁵⁵ Nichol, “Messianic Jews Congregation - UMJC Perspective,” 7–8. The LCJE was begun in 1980 under the auspices of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism (LCWE), an international, interdenominational evangelical movement whose goal at formation was to evangelize the world by the year 2000. Billy Graham was the LCWE’s Honorary Chairman. The LCJE maintains a website that includes a link to digital archives of late nineteenth and early twentieth century documents relating to the history of Hebrew/Messianic Christianity: <http://www.lcje.net>.

Christian theology and a smattering of Jewish Israeli culture in its worship services. An “Erev Shabbat” service at Ruach Israel could include candle lighting, the Priestly Blessing, recitation of the Sh’ma, the Mourner’s Kaddish, Kiddush (for wine) and HaMotzi (for bread) along with readings from the New Testament, a sermon, “free-flowing song times” and Israeli folk dancing. According to Nichol, Ruach Israel cooperated with other “Jewish outreaches” in the Boston area—by which he meant evangelical missions organizations like Jews for Jesus and the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ)—and with local churches, holding Passover Seder demonstrations and teaching the church about its Jewish roots. When asked about the impact of his Messianic congregation on the Jewish community in Boston, Nichols admitted that so far, “the rabbinic community has ignored us.” Whatever the Messianic transformation was accomplishing thus far, it couldn’t be measured in terms of successful outreach to the unsaved Jew, a serious shortcoming in the eyes of the Missions establishment given the relative success of its other Jewish outreaches.⁵⁶

In response to Nichol, William Currie charged that Messianic Jewish congregations were too busy trying to “make Biblical Christianity attractive by cloaking it with familiar terms of old religious persuasions and traditions of the elders” rather than using the “God-given approach” of traditional missions, one that Currie calls “antipodal to the Jewish religion.”⁵⁷ Ironically, siding with its Orthodox Jewish opponents, Currie, the missions representative, accuses the Messianic Jewish congregational movement of deceptive and unethical behavior, attempting as Baron did in 1911 to reify a boundary between evangelical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism that Messianic were dangerously blurring. For Currie, what is at stake is the very essence of Jewish conversion to

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 14–18.

⁵⁷ Currie, “Messianic Jews Congregation - UMJC Perspective,” 5.

Christian faith; unless there is an impermeable wall of separation that divides Judaism from Christianity, he fears that Jewish believers may be lured back to the relative purity of the traditional synagogue by the “distorted” forms they experience in Messianic congregations. By now, Messianic Judaism wore different faces depending on the interpretive community trying to make sense of it. While Orthodox Jews categorized Messianic Judaism as a deceptive form of Christianity promulgated by apostate Jews, Missions to the Jews representatives like Currie read it as a corrupted form of Judaism practiced, perhaps for the right purposes, by naïve Jewish converts and misguided Gentile advocates. Nichol, speaking for Messianic Jews and the UMJC, agrees that Messianic Judaism is part of Christianity, but tries to justify its use of rabbinic forms to the Missions establishment as simply an attempt to retain identification with their Jewish heritage.

Messianic Judaism has not developed, by any stretch of the imagination, into a monolithic institution dedicated to the erasure of collective Jewish identity through proselytism and assimilation as the mainstream Jewish community prophesied it would, but neither has it been wholly innocent of its accusation that it is “essentially” Christianity deliberately dressed up to look like Judaism;⁵⁸ a charge apparently levied against it by representatives from the Protestant missions community as well. From 1974 onward, Hutchens and Goble had provided the only methodical approach for developing

⁵⁸ Gerald Segal’s 1999 article on the Jews for Judaism website is an excellent example of the Jewish community’s attempt at disambiguation. Segal answers the question of whether Messianic Judaism is a form of Judaism with a clear and decisive “no” and reifying the boundaries between all of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. Christianity is Christianity because of its belief in “Jesus Christ: Son of God, God incarnate.” Judaism is Jewish because it rests on Israel’s covenantal relationship with God expressed through God’s instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai, both Written and Oral.” <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/counter-missionary/messianic-judaism-hebrew-christianity/is-the-christian-movement-called-qmessianic-judaismq-a-form-of-judaism/>, 2015.

the Messianic Jewish movement into a more structured framework—something called Messianic Judaism—tempered from within by voices from the more conservative side. Until the late 1990s when Mark Kinzer began to re-ignite the flames of disagreement over what Messianic Judaism stood for and what its role should be in the work of evangelizing the Jew, the disparaging rhetoric of those like Baron and Currie had largely disappeared in favor of a tacit agreement to disagree over methodology while agreeing on purpose.

Despite its initial reluctance to organize, the MJAA finally responded to the UMJC's success in planting congregations, and in the spring of 1986, it created its own congregational fellowship, The International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS). Today, the UMJC and IAMCS represent the overwhelming majority of Messianic Jewish congregations in the United States; the UMJC is older but smaller in size, continuing to evolve in its positive attitude toward and embrace of rabbinic Jewish tradition, while the IAMCS maintains a more conservative, evangelical missions approach. Illustrative of the shifting position within the UMJC are the changes that have been made to its definition of Messianic Judaism. Although most Messianic Jews, the UMJC's 1998 website explains, refrain from calling themselves Christians, its definition of Messianic Judaism at that time made it clear that it was pre-eminently a doctrinal position presented and expressed in a specific, justifiably Jewish cultural context:

MESSIANIC JUDAISM is the belief that Yeshua is the redeemer spoken of in the Tenach [O.T.]. That He is the Messiah for whom our Jewish people all over the world, and throughout history have been waiting for. There is much "alien" culture that surrounds Gentile Christianity, which makes it unpalatable to most Jewish people. Jews will nearly always reject the

Gentile Jesus as being the Messiah, but will much more readily accept the Jewish Yeshua as being their Messiah.⁵⁹

This statement reflects the way Hutchens' ideas about indigeneity have been absorbed by the UMJC leadership and the rhetorical changes that are taking place to conform Messianic Judaism to that missions' model. Christianity is associated with Gentiles, and Jesus has become the less alienating Jewish Yeshua. The language that follows the definition affirmed the notion that many or most Messianic Jews followed select patterns of Jewish observance (circumcision, festivals, Biblical kashrut) that were either justified as Biblical ordinances for Jews according to the Abrahamic covenant, or cultural practices that were considered part of being Jewish. Individual salvation was guaranteed by faith in the "blood atonement by Yeshua," but Jewishness was necessarily made manifest in Jewish bodies, dressed in Jewish garments, performing Jewish acts because Biblical ordinances remained in force for Messianic Jews.

By 2005, however, the UMJC was envisioning Messianic Judaism as a Jewish congregational movement seeking to "fulfill Israel's covenantal responsibility embodied in the Torah within a New Covenant context":

The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) envisions Messianic Judaism as a movement of Jewish congregations and groups committed to Yeshua the Messiah that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, and renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant. . . .

⁵⁹ Congregation Roeh Israel of Denver Colorado, "What is Messianic Judaism?" http://www.umjc.org_documents_whatmj.htm, captured May 25, 1998 by archive.org, accessed April 16, 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/19980525134118/http://www.umjc.org/documents/whatmj.htm>.

Messianic Jewish groups must be fully part of the Jewish people, sharing its history and its covenantal responsibility as a people chosen by God. At the same time, faith in Yeshua also has a crucial communal dimension. This faith unites the Messianic Jewish community and the Christian Church, which is the assembly of the faithful from the nations who are joined to Israel through the Messiah.⁶⁰

In less than ten years, the center of gravity had shifted from Christian faith expressed in Jewish cultural forms to a Jewish religious commitment lived out in the context of the church's New Covenant writings. Jewish attempts to clarify the differences between Judaism and Christianity in terms of covenant and Torah have again been compromised. The UMJC lists covenantal responsibility and a life rooted in Torah as criteria for defining Messianic Judaism. Instead of justifying their decision to live what they considered a Jewish lifestyle based on the Old Testament commandments, the new Messianic Judaism looks to the Torah, the Tanakh and the New Covenant scriptures as sacred authorities, and to rabbinic Jewish tradition as a communally sanctioned model for devout living. Between 1998 and 2005, and in direct response to the intellectual contributions made by the movement's new and provocative theologian, Mark Kinzer and the Hashivenu think tank, the UMJC's definition of Messianic Judaism transitioned from a movement within evangelical Christianity, dependent on the Missions establishment for its *raison d'être* (evangelistic outreach to the Jews) to an independent Jewish community and a new kind of contemporary Judaism linked by a common faith in Jesus/Yeshua to the "Christian Church." This definition, however, is prescriptive not descriptive of actual Messianic Jewish congregations in the Union.

⁶⁰ "Defining Messianic Judaism," *UMJC.org*, 2005, <http://umjc.org/faith-and-values/defining-messianic-judaism>.

Messianic Judaism in Scholarship

Just prior to this formative period, two historical accounts and two major ethnographic studies were published on the topic of Messianic Judaism, each attempting to explain this new phenomenon on the American religious landscape. Two rabbis, a Christian theologian and a young Jewish scholar publishing her recent PhD all contributed the definition of Messianic Judaism and to locating it in the power politics of religious boundary setting. These published works not only contributed to the scholarly discussion on American Judaism, Jewish identity, and new religious movements, but they were instrumental in helping some forward-thinking leaders within the Messianic Jewish movement make the transition described above, both directly and indirectly.

The first book-length treatment was David A. Rausch's, *Messianic Judaism: Its History, Theology and Polity*, published in 1982. Rausch's history is an empathetic telling of the transition from Hebrew Christianity to Messianic Judaism, which he describes as a complex, controversial new religious movement of Jewish Christians who are attempting to "explode the ancient walls" that Christianity and Judaism have erected toward each other—to prove that the two are not incompatible.⁶¹ Messianic Jews, Rausch writes, are caught in the middle, accused of Judaizing Christianity by Christians and committing idolatry by believing in the deity of Jesus by Jews. Why this movement of Jewish Christians should be labeled Judaism and not Christianity, Rausch does not say; but like Baron and Currie, he acknowledges the possibility that the Messianic Jew's increased identification with Jewish practices might end in a slide "back into Judaism itself," so it is clear that he sees a critical, taxonomic difference between Messianic

⁶¹ According to the UMJC's by-laws at the time, a Messianic Jew is defined in evangelical Protestant terms as "a Jewish person who has returned to God by repenting and receiving Messiah Yeshua as his or her personal savior"; at least ten such Messianic Jews were required for a congregation to join the UMJC in 1979. See, Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 198, FN 4.

religion and normative Judaism, despite the common label. Still, he is seemingly moved by the Messianic Jews' desire to avoid assimilation into typical Christianity, saving his vitriol for those "unscrupulous [but unnamed] charlatans who really care little for Jewish heritage, but want to use the congregations as a secret tool of 'indigenous missions' or to accomplish their own ends."⁶²

In reading about Rausch's encounter with these early Messianic Jews, it is obvious that he feels he is witness to a special movement of Jews who are returning to some purer form of Jewish Christianity; so much so that he actually takes it upon himself to warn the Jewish community, "as a people who have been denied their rights for centuries at a time," not to "persecute" the Messianic Jew lest an unwise reaction perpetrated "in ignorance" lead to a "whirlwind of later discrimination and antipathy from other [unspecified] quarters." This warning appears back to back with patronizing praise for two Jewish intellectuals who advocate what Rausch calls the "sensible approach" of treating the Jew interested in Christianity with love and respect.⁶³ If nothing else, this type of rhetoric underscores the attraction and responsibility Christians like Rausch feel toward Messianic Jews and their new religion. Like seedlings in a gardener's hothouse, Rausch hoped to protect Messianic Jews and the new Jesus-affirming Judaism they were creating from the hostile elements of mainstream Judaism and the self-seeking goals of missions to the Jews. Rausch's book, to my knowledge, is the first public, scholarly work on Messianic Judaism to present the movement as a direct challenge to the boundary-setting activities of both the normative Jewish and the evangelical Christian missions to the Jews communities. Although he admits that

⁶² Ibid., 110–11. Rausch was affiliated with Ashland Theological Seminary, a "broadly evangelical" institution, as an associate professor of Christian History. "History," *Ashland Theological Seminary*, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://seminary.ashland.edu/about/quick-facts/#history>.

⁶³ Ibid., 246–47.

Messianic Jews are located somewhere in between the two communities, he doesn't appear to find anything oxymoronic or anomalous about the marriage of evangelical faith with Jewish religious practices, at least for Christians who identify themselves as Jews by ethnicity. This normalizing judgment necessarily contributes to change by emboldening those whose positions he favors and by providing reliable evidence for use in defending that position.

Between 1998 and 2000s, three new scholarly books were published on this topic, two ethnographic studies: *Messianic Judaism: a Rabbi's Journey through Religious Change in America* by Reconstructionist rabbi Carol Harris-Shapiro, and *Passing Over Easter: Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism*, by Shoshanah Feher, and a combined historical and phenomenological account by Reform Rabbi and Professor of Judaism, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, entitled, simply, *Messianic Judaism*. All three authors are Jewish, and each refers to the movement as Messianic Judaism, but while the two ethnographers qualify their usage of the term by refusing to concede a portion of the mainstream Judaism's institutional territory to the Messianic Jews, the third by Cohn-Sherbok offers Messianic Judaism a seat at the pluralist's table of contemporary Judaism.⁶⁴

Harris-Shapiro began her research intrigued by the "paradoxical identity" that Messianic Jews have created out of two historically antithetical and mutually exclusive identities. Citing the modern American Jewish dilemma of internal pluralism, she sees the rejection of Messianic Jews, who admit they are Christians by faith, on the part of the

⁶⁴ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*; Feher, *Passing over Easter*; Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*. Both of the ethnographic studies are preceded by PhD Dissertations: Harris-Shapiro, "Syncretism or Struggle: The Case of Messianic Judaism"; Shoshanah Feher, "Passing over Easter: Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1995).

mainstream as a necessary strategy to maintain group cohesion and integrity, and to reinforce an “ineradicable distinction between Christianity and Judaism.”⁶⁵

For the liberal Judaism that Harris-Shapiro represents in her rabbinic self,⁶⁶ Messianic Judaism belongs on the Christian side of the dividing line, along with other kinds of Judaisms, like Mosaic and Biblical, that have been referred to in missions to the Jews discourse, less threatening labels because the ethnic factor that plays heavily in the consensual definition of modern Judaism and in the construction of contemporary Messianic Judaism was either missing or inconsequential. These pre-Christian, pre-rabbinic Judaisms were a neutral “other” that could be easily differentiated from medieval and modern rabbinic Judaism or Christianity, unlike the hybridized Messianic, or disparaging “fulfilled” Judaisms with their emphasis on Jewish ethnicity and the ad hoc appropriation of rabbinic practices. Messianic Judaism, which already shares a common sacred text (the Hebrew Bible) with other Judaisms, is not so clearly “other” when it adds ethnicity and practice to its uniquely Christian faith—the two elements most critical to differentiating modern, religiously liberal Judaism from its liberal Christian “other.” For Harris-Shapiro, the problem of how to categorize Messianic Jews and their Judaism is complicated by the fact that as Jews, the Messianic *others* “have a biological basis for belonging” to the Jewish community.

Given her definition of American Judaism as a function of the individual Jew’s imagination and practice, Harris-Shapiro finds it nearly impossible, logically, to exclude them and their religion from the greater whole despite her personal reticence to include them. Perhaps this accounts for her reference to the Messianic Jewish movement as a

⁶⁵ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 1–17.

⁶⁶ Quoting Laura Levitt, Harris-Shapiro defines “liberal Judaism” as religious Jewish communities (with religious in scare quotes) committed to certain liberal principles, including the social contract, a faith in rationality, and commitment to some kind of universal discourse. *Ibid.*, 190, FN 3.

“heretical group” (inclusive), albeit one that has expertly manipulated their partial inclusion in order to “leach Christianity into the Jewish home and synagogue under the name ‘Judaism’” (qualified exclusion).⁶⁷ In the end, Harris-Shapiro deconstructs the complete “otherness” of the Messianic Jew and his religious heresy but relegates Messianic Judaism to the role of a foil that challenges normative Judaism to clarify the core content of its own identity in order to set the criteria for determining its future boundaries. This partial legitimation is balanced by a clearer reluctance, as a rabbi in the American Jewish community, to lend official credibility to Messianic Judaism’s claim of “practicing and believing Judaism.” “My use of the term,” she writes, “is simply for clarity’s sake; I refer to the group with the same nomenclature it refers to itself. On my part, this does not imply any recognition of Messianic Judaism as ‘real Judaism’.”⁶⁸

Feher uses the label “Messianic Judaism” because it has by now become “the official name of the organized Messianic Jewish movement.” But, what Feher’s work reveals is that by 1995, at the end of her study, despite the characterization of the movement as Jewish and “Judaism,” the ethnic balance was shifting from a decisively Jewish majority (given the movement’s broad definition of who qualified as a Jew for these purposes) in the mid-1970s to 50% Gentile/50% Jew. Feher differentiates between them as needed by sorting the collective “Messianic Believers” into subgroups of Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles. This rather inconvenient truth belies the public face that Messianic Judaism wishes to present as a Jewish movement for Jewish believers. Moreover, this ratio is, by today’s measure, quite conservative as Gentiles are now the clear majority in most of the movement, perhaps making up as much as 70-80%

⁶⁷ Ibid., 166; Harris-Shapiro, “Syncretism or Struggle: The Case of Messianic Judaism,” 361–62. See also, Charmé, “Heretics, Infidels and Apostates: Menace, Problem or Symptom.”

⁶⁸ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 190, FN 1.

of the typical MJAA/IAMCS congregation's membership. By referring to this blended type of congregational reality—Jew and Gentile—as a kind of Jewish Christianity,⁶⁹ Feher's Messianic Judaism is semiotically capable of producing Jewish Christians who may have no ethnic connection whatsoever to the wider Jewish world. And, indeed, some whom Feher categorizes as Messianic Gentiles do consider themselves spiritual Jews in a Messianic Jewish movement. Nevertheless, Feher's study concentrates most of her analytical efforts on the implications for the Jewish community posed by the Jewish portion of the larger movement rather than on the ironically anomalous status of the Gentile in a movement intent on creating a Jewish identity.

Feher's definition of Messianic Judaism fluctuates between it being a "subgroup" of American Judaism that has added "another spiritual identity, that of Christianity," to placing it "alongside other Evangelical groups" as a new religious movement that arose within Christianity but that is struggling to create something unique out of a mixed Jewish-Christian toolkit.⁷⁰ Feher's Messianic Judaism presents as a curious religious hybridity: a religion defined by faith wedded to a religion defined by ethnicity, but one in which the ethnic composition is fluid while the religious faith remains constant. Perhaps a better description would be to see Feher's Messianic Judaism in the late 1990s as a fluid mixture of ethnic groups (Jewish and Gentile) suspended in the religious medium of a rabbinically suffused Evangelical Christianity.⁷¹

Dan Cohn-Sherbok's 2000 contribution to the definition of Messianic Judaism resolves the question of where this new religious movement belongs in the taxonomy of

⁶⁹ Feher, *Passing over Easter*, 43.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 22, 137.

⁷¹ For a definition of hybridity as a heuristic device for studying cultural interaction, see, Ien Ang, "Together-in-Difference: Beyond Diaspora, into Hybridity," *Asian Studies Review* 27, no. 2 (June 2003): 141–54.

American religion, at least for the unnamed pluralists whose viewpoint (we are to surmise?) he represents. Although the book is almost entirely descriptive, offering little to no analytical insight on the phenomenon of Messianic Judaism, it does record the only clear endorsement of the movement's right to be called Judaism, and for its congregational movement to be included in the "pluralist menorah" of contemporary American Judaism.

According to Cohn-Sherbok, Judaism today consists of various conceptions or models of Jewishness, and Messianic Judaism represents one way among many of being Jewish. In his chapter, "Models of Messianic Judaism," he attempts to account for the mutual Orthodox and non-Orthodox denunciation and exclusion of Messianic Jews from the Jewish community and from Judaism. Where there is a clear theological understanding of Judaism's boundaries, as there among the groups that constitute Orthodox Judaism, Cohn-Sherbok finds it easy to understand their exclusion of Messianic Jewish religion; but where there is no such clarity, and Judaism is equated with multiple, often conflicting definitions of Jewishness, as is the case in the non-Orthodox segments of American Judaism, the exclusion seems arbitrary and even hypocritical.

At least tacitly, the book endorses the inclusive, pluralist model: "Given the multi-dimensional character of modern Jewish life, they [the book's unnamed pluralists] contend that Messianic Judaism should be regarded as one among many interpretations of the Jewish faith."⁷² Pluralists, and one assumes Cohn-Sherbok includes himself in this category, dismiss the relevance of theology as well as any Orthodox claims to being the historical carriers of authentic Judaism, treating them as one more piece of fractured post-Enlightenment Judaism. On the pluralist's menorah then, Messianic Judaism is but

⁷² Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 210–11.

one of seven “distinctly different Judaisms” that each offer a unique “pathway through the Jewish heritage.” The metaphorical branches on the menorah—Hasidism, and Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Humanistic, and Messianic Judaisms—are depicted as converging at the base. Although Cohn-Sherbok does not plainly identify what this metaphorical base represents, it can only be a common biologically and not religiously determined Jewishness since his menorah contains at least two historically antithetical religious faiths, to use his language of reference, each of which constitutes its religious membership in completely different ways. Orthodox Judaism defines Israel through the terms of rabbinic religious law—either one is part of Israel based on matrilineal descent, or becomes part of Israel through the ritual process of conversion. Membership in Messianic Judaism, in all of its varieties, is ultimately a function of personal belief and public confession regardless of biological descent. To make matters even more confusing, not all of the branches on Cohn-Sherbok’s menorah would arise from the same root or share the same basic commonality that his model implies; in other words, his Judaism would have to make room for unconverted Gentiles who believe in Jesus, or those converted by Messianic rabbis outside the auspices of the mainstream Jewish community who want to be identified as part of a religiously, not biologically defined Israel and Messianic Judaism.

Cohn-Sherbok cites Harris-Shapiro’s and Feher’s studies positively as examples of an emerging pluralist attitude toward Judaism and the inevitability of treating Messianic Judaism as an authentic denomination rather than an outlier or heresy.

No longer are the Jews a community with a shared pattern of belief and practice, and it is therefore illogical to rule out new expressions of Judaism given the pluriform nature of the contemporary Jewish community. To depict Messianic Judaism as demonic and dangerous

suggests that the Jewish community shares a common set of religious values from which Messianic Jews have distanced themselves. But this is patently not the case.⁷³

The fact that all institutional forms of Judaism, from liberal and secular humanist to ultra Orthodox, have consistently excluded Messianic Jews from their communal religious life would seem to say that there is a shared set of values holding these forms of Judaism together and that Messianic Jews, for whatever reason, stand outside the boundaries of those values. Neither the Orthodox half of the Jewish community nor the postmissionary Messianic Jewish faction of the Messianic movement Cohn-Sherbok wishes to enfranchise would concede his point that Judaism should be defined by its least common denominator—in this case, by ethnic composition rather than some shared religious values.

An Emergent Paradigm: Hashivenu and PMJ

All of these scholars have been positively reviewed and embraced by advocates for Messianic Judaism; their works are commonly referenced in Messianic journals and indexed in their digital archives. The critiques of the movement and the suggestions for further discussion that these scholars have rendered in their studies have been taken to heart, and the contours of Messianic Judaism have been shaped accordingly by those to whom the opinions and critiques of Jewish scholars matter. Proponents of a maturing Messianic Judaism are encouraged by and in need of endorsement by respectable, credentialed representatives of modern Judaism in order to continue to legitimate their claims to authenticity and to counter accusations that they are Christian missionaries in disguise whose intent it is to turn Jews into *goyim* or to otherwise diminish the Jewish people and its religious life.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 212–13.

Harris-Shapiro's influence on the movement, to my knowledge, remains indirect; but both Cohn-Sherbok and Feher have taken at least some active steps to help Messianic Jews refine their image and define who and what they represent as part of Judaism. In the summer of 2000, Cohn-Sherbok participated as a featured speaker at the UMJC's annual conference. He began his address to the attendees by remarking, "I am your friend!" and then followed this up by acting as the general editor of a 2001 volume of essays by some of the leading voices in the Messianic Jewish movement.⁷⁴ "In his foreword to this book, *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement*, Messianic Jew and then President of Messianic Jewish Communications, Barry Rubin, took Cohn-Sherbok's positive attitude toward the movement as tantamount to finally being "seen as M.O.T.s, ("Members of the Tribe"—Jews) by a respected spiritual leader of our people," a new experience indeed for the reportedly thousand attendees at the conference.⁷⁵ Cohn-Sherbok, who lives in Wales, evidently admitted to Rubin that "far away from the religious controversy in the U.S. . . . [h]e had nothing to lose by telling the truth."⁷⁶

In the introduction to *Voices*, Cohn-Sherbok explains that his interest in Messianic Judaism was sparked in part by the way its leaders were grappling with the meaning of tradition and their engagement with some of the "central religious issues" of Judaism—the definition of "a Jew," the role of halakhah, and issues of conversion—not the kinds of questions with which, he claims, other forms of Judaism were concerning themselves. *Voices* is Cohn-Sherbok's contribution to the challenge of shaping Messianic

⁷⁴ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Voices of Messianic Judaism : Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement* (Baltimore: Lederer Books : Distributed by Messianic Jewish Resources International, 2001), vii.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Judaism for a successful future. Like Rausch before him, Cohn-Sherbok points a finger at the Jewish community, admonishing them not to dismiss Messianic Jews, but to “reflect on the seriousness of this quest to revitalize Jewish life in a post-Holocaust age.”⁷⁷

Shoshanah Feher, one of two outsiders asked to contribute to Cohn-Sherbok’s *Voices*, wrote a chapter entitled “Challenges to Messianic Judaism” in which she listed a few potential problems she observed during her ethnographic study of a congregation on the West Coast. In positive, and enthusiastic language, Feher encourages Messianic leaders to address and resolve those issues in order “... to pave the way to a stronger future” so that the movement “will continue to bloom—and maintain its blossoms and fruits—into the 21st century.”⁷⁸

Voices also contains an essay by insider Mark Kinzer, then the Executive Director of the Messianic Jewish Theology Institute (MJTI), adjunct assistant professor of Jewish Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, and spiritual leader of a messianic fellowship, Congregation Zera Avraham, in Ann Arbor, Michigan.⁷⁹ This essay is, to my knowledge, the first one of Kinzer’s writings on Messianic Jewish theology to be published publicly for a Messianic Jewish readership. His two previous papers on the future of the Messianic Jewish movement were presented privately, one to the UMJC Theology Committee in 1999, and the second to the Hashivenu Forum later that same year. These two papers were the beginning of a watershed in the movement, heralding what would

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, ix–xx.

⁷⁸ Shoshanah Feher, “Challenges to Messianic Judaism,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement* (Baltimore: Lederer Books: a division of Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2001), 221–28.

⁷⁹ Mark S. Kinzer, “Scripture and Tradition,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement* (Baltimore: Lederer Books: a division of Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2001), 29–38.

become a decisive shift in ideology from the regnant Missions to the Jews paradigm to PMJ, a controversial new definition of Messianic religion.

1999 was a pivotal year for those in the Messianic Jewish movement who were hoping to stabilize it and move it toward institutionalization and increased ideological independence from evangelical Protestantism and Missions to the Jews establishment. In his 1999 papers, Mark Kinzer proposed to transition Messianic Jews from their moorings in the Protestant Missions to the Jews culture to a place of their own making within the wider Jewish world and its religious landscape, a place from which they could exploit their unique vantage point, viewing both historic Christianity and rabbinic Judaism as parent traditions due their proper respect but not their complete allegiance. Kinzer's Messianic Judaism was to stand in historical continuity with the Jewish people and its religious tradition as well as with the multi-national church that he argues was founded by the first century Jewish apostles of Jesus, but it would be tasked with crafting its own historical narrative and explicating his own world view, articulating its own theological positions and developing its own religious practices. This is more than merely religious syncretism; it is an attempt to create a new center of power and articulation out of the elements present in the overlapping religious discourses of historical Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, one that necessarily entails a new hierarchy of values and social ordering and revisioned relationship between center and periphery in both the Christian church and the Jewish people. 1999 was also the year that Kinzer and a handful of like-minded Messianic Jews formed Hashivenu, a Messianic Jewish think tank and leadership forum for those who were interested in pursuing a future for the Movement that took its direction from Kinzer's developing paradigm for creating a mature Messianic Judaism. The original Hashivenu mission statement clearly points to a new,

independent orientation for Messianic Judaism whereby Messianic Jews will chart their own path through both their Jewish and Christian heritages:

Our goal is a mature Messianic Judaism. We seek an authentic expression of Jewish life maintaining substantial continuity with Jewish tradition. . . . 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. Messianic Judaism will only attain maturity when it has established communal institutions, which are capable of expressing its ideals and transmitting them effectively to ourselves, to our children, and to a skeptical world.⁸⁰

Hashivenu's Judaism is a path of rediscovery, reconnecting to what they perceive was always the path of their Jewish ancestors and their religion: "Avodah (liturgical worship), Torah (study of sacred texts), and Gemilut Chasidim (deeds of lovingkindness)."⁸¹ As in 1999, so too on the present website, the terms are transliterated and translated into English for the benefit, one presumes, for an audience unfamiliar with the meaning of the common Hebrew terms for these rabbinic pillars of Judaism. Of course, the same type of exercise in familiarization is common in mainstream Jewish discourse as well—most lay members of non-Orthodox communities are functionally illiterate in Rabbinic Hebrew and would benefit from this linguistic re-description. What is more significant for my purposes is the fact that by translating into English, the author of this Hashivenu web page has reduced or clarified the semantic range of each of these

⁸⁰ <http://web.archive.org/web/19991013070645/http://hashivenu.org>. The same mission statement appears on the current Hashivenu website: <http://hashivenu.org>. Accessed 4/25/15.

⁸¹ "We Cry Hashivenu."

terms in Jewish discourse and presented them as elements of the new, mature Messianic Judaism that can be compared with other forms of Judaism: liturgical worship, the study of sacred texts, and deeds of loving-kindness. Of these, liturgical worship and textual study are the most significant. These elements ironically bring Messianic Judaism into greater conformity with contemporary forms of rabbinic Judaism at the same time that their specific content isolates Messianic Judaism from all other Judaisms and keeps it firmly within the circle of elements that normatively makes up the core of Protestant Christianity.

Messianic Jewish liturgy is taken directly from the rabbinic Siddurs used by all forms of contemporary Judaism, but it is augmented and altered to conform to orthodox Christian beliefs about Jesus (Christology) and to cover the rudimentary but requisite rituals of membership in the Christian church (Baptism and the Eucharist). The canon of Messianic Judaism's sacred scriptures, at this point in time, is confined to the texts that comprise the Hebrew Bible and those that are contained in the Christian New Testament. All practices and all beliefs, whatever their origin in Jewish tradition, must pass the litmus test of the New Testament's supreme authority before they can be incorporated and legitimated as part of the new, mature Messianic Judaism.

What contributes toward the progressive, systematic, Judaizing of Messianic Judaism despite the need to retain certain core elements of Protestant Christianity is the interpretive and cultural weight given to Jewish tradition in the study of these sacred Scriptures and in the public persona that Messianic Judaism presents in print, on the web and in its institutions. Messianic Judaism not only continues to look and read more like normative Judaism, but to the extent that it is shaped by Kinzer's program of maturation, which includes looking to Jewish philosophers, theologians, and rabbis for a

means of reconnecting to the Jewish conversation, its leaders are beginning to think and act from a Jewish rather than Christian center of meaning.

In *Voices*, Kinzer contributes an essay that defends the role of tradition in shaping how Messianic Jews read their sacred texts. Because the Messianic Jewish movement was born within a conservative, evangelical Protestant matrix where tradition was eschewed in favor of pure Biblicism, Kinzer first has to make a *prima facie* case for the value of *any* tradition, Jewish or Christian, before he can hope to normalize the use of rabbinic tradition in Messianic Judaism. For Kinzer, openly endorsing the respective traditions of *both* the church and the rabbis is a way of opening the door for introducing Jesus-believing Jews to the riches of their ancestral tradition unmediated by the church and legitimated by divine preservation. “In Messianic Jewish context,” Kinzer writes, “tradition represents the understanding of Scripture preserved through the generations among the communities—Jewish and Christian—within which Scripture itself has been preserved. . . . Respecting tradition and learning from it, is a way of recognizing that we have ‘predecessors,’ that we are part of a community with a history.”⁸² Since it is a given that modern Hebrew Christians and Messianic Jews have already been incorporated into the church and its history, this reclamation of tradition is most heavily weighted toward reconnecting with the history of the Jewish people, finding a place within its ongoing narrative where they can occupy space and make meaning as Jews within the historic paradigm of Judaism.

One of the most significant obstacles to legitimating Messianic Judaism is its lack of historical continuity. The early Jewish apostles and followers of Jesus disappeared from sight, or in Kinzer’s words, their community “became extinct” within 500 years of Jesus’s life and death, leaving today’s Messianic Jews without a continuous interpretive

⁸² Kinzer, “Scripture and Tradition,” 30.

tradition of Jesus-faith that they can claim as their own. Kinzer's proposed solution to this problem requires extracting what he calls the core message or imperishable truth from each of the existing traditions—the irrevocable election of Israel and its life of Torah of Judaism and the Christological claims of Christianity—and reconnecting them to re/create or complete what he believes would have or could have been the more perfect tradition for a Jewishly centered Jesus-faith had the contingencies of history not divided one community from the other.⁸³

At the center of this reimagined interpretive tradition now stands the “one elect ethno-covenantal community of Israel, Messianic Jews” who have received the “text of the *Torah*” from the Jewish people as they have kept it and interpreted it throughout their history and who have also received the “Apostolic Writings” from the “multi-ethnic people” he believes have been joined to Israel by virtue of their faith in a Jewish messiah. Just as the “Messianic community” (the church) was entrusted with the New Testament, so the Jewish people were entrusted with the Torah and thus it is incumbent on today's Messianic Jew to enter into both conversations and bring reconciliation to these two estranged interpretive communities.⁸⁴ Kinzer's definition of Messianic Judaism is neither that of the early Missions to the Jews establishment—a Mosaic or biblical Judaism shorn of any interpretive traditions of men—nor is it that of the earlier proponents of Messianic Judaism who felt obligated to negotiate with the Protestant establishment for permission to retain certain elements of their national identity after coming to faith in Jesus. This is a new, autonomous interpretive community in the process of creating its own space in the American religious landscape, one that wants to connect positively to both traditions but claims not to be bound by the authority of

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

either. And, it is not just an interpretive community of theologians isolated from the reality of congregational life, but a group of thinkers intent on institutionalizing a new social reality based on this reconfiguration of traditionally Jewish and Christian elements and claiming transcendental purpose for it. “Messianic Judaism,” Kinzer implies, is not simply a theological proposition or a way of relating to both Jewish and Christian traditions, it is “a divinely sanctioned social and religious reality.”

Although he demurs from offering a full defense of this claim for Messianic Judaism in 1999,⁸⁵ by 2005 he is more confident, and the visible result is a fully developed theological discourse, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*. In *PMJ*, Kinzer develops his earlier propositions, systematically sorting and rearranging the parts he has inherited: Christianity is a religion representing the historical development of Jesus-believing Gentiles; its physical communities, or churches, are the social location of choice for non-Jewish believers in Jesus, or Christians. Judaism is the divinely sanctioned religious way of life of Israel, the product of a covenant between the God of the Bible and the historic Jewish people;⁸⁶ it is a religion of Jews for Jews and its physical communities or congregations are the social locations of choice for Jesus-believing Jews. Messianic Judaism, which represents Jewish space in the religious landscape, cannot, therefore, be a denomination or sect of Christianity in his taxonomy (that is space reserved for the nations who believe in the Jewish messiah); it is necessarily then a species of Judaism. Like Feher, Kinzer defines historical Judaism in terms of ethnicity, but he also creates an ethnic Christianity in its image, or to put it in binary terms, Judaism/Jews,

⁸⁵ Kinzer, “Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism,” 15.

⁸⁶ Exactly how the Jewish people is to be defined in Messianic Judaism is not so clear in *PMJ*; the God of the Bible, however, is implicitly the Trinitarian godhead of Christian theology.

Christianity/Gentiles. This new ordering of the parts reinforces Jewish identity for the minority of Messianic Jews in the larger Messianic movement while it effectively circumscribes, contains, and relegates the non-Jewish majority to a place outside the boundaries of Kinzer's Messianic Judaism. Where Feher pondered whether Messianic Judaism represented a subdivision of ethnically defined American Judaism with a new spiritual or religious identity grafted in, Kinzer affirms the religious definition of Judaism. The word may not point directly to the "faith-content of the Jewish religion," he writes, but alongside its obvious references in modernity to ethnic makeup and way of life it does point to the religious faith of the Jewish people, which faith is expressed primarily in the performance of its divinely sanctioned praxis. When he uses the term "Christianity" in this comparative context it functions as a pointer to what he believes to be the true and substantive theological *content* of that religious faith: the Christological and Messianic claims made by the church in its sacred texts and teaching tradition about the person and work of the New Testament Jesus.⁸⁷

Kinzer's Messianic Judaism is different from the earlier 1970s version propounded by Goble and Hutchens, both of whom overtly served the interests of the evangelical missionary agenda. This difference is marked by a new modifier that has been prefixed to the 1970s term and serves as part of the title of his 2005 book: Kinzer's Judaism is not only Messianic, but also "Postmissionary." Since for Kinzer, Messianic Judaism is a true Judaism, not a culturally contextualized Christianity for presenting the gospel to the Jewish people, Messianic Jews should think of themselves as members of the Jewish people not evangelical missionaries, and their Messianic congregations are not sites for indigenous missions but Jewish space and true Jewish communities. Not surprisingly, this definition of Messianic Judaism has elicited a strong reaction from the

⁸⁷ Kinzer, "Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism," 17.

missions to the Jews community, Jew and non-Jew alike. With Kinzer's *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, the early fears of the Hebrew Christian and Missions to the Jews communities may have been realized, but in a slightly different configuration than they could have anticipated at the time. Postmissionary Messianic Jews have not tumbled down a slippery slope into apostasy from Christianity and into the mire of Talmudic Judaism; they are making a Judaism of their own imagining, one that weds a religion of faith defining doctrine to a religion of faithful practice.

Summary

The early twentieth century American Hebrew Christian movement, as an arm of evangelical Protestant missionary outreach to the Jews, initially rejected any move toward what was then called Messianic Judaism; that is, the desire of some European Messianic Jews and their non-Jewish supporters in missions of combining Jewish national customs like circumcision, observing Sabbath and the festal calendar with their Christianity in order to maintain a national continuity with the Jewish people as an effective strategy for attracting Jews. Siding with voices from the missions to the Jews community in Europe and America, the HCAA agreed that these practices were not neutral or secular-nationalist but religious, part of the antithetical Talmudic religion that they had left behind at conversion. To return to those practices was tantamount to apostasy, to denying that Christianity was a better religion than the Judaism that had denied Christ and the Rabbis who had refused to allow the Jewish people to accept him as their Messiah and savior. "Messianic Judaism" was a pejorative term for the HCAA and their missionary partners, an impossible oxymoron in which they would have "no part, whatsoever."

But in the mid-twentieth century, a new group of Jewish Christians reversed that decision and, leaving the anathemas of their Hebrew Christian predecessors behind,

embraced the idea of expressing the Jewish half of their ethno-religious identity by incorporating an ad hoc mixture of rabbinic traditions, Hebrew liturgy, and general Yiddishkeit into their religious and personal lives. They rejected the label, Hebrew Christian in favor of “Messianic Jew” and somewhere around the mid 1970s the term Messianic Judaism became part of Messianic Jewish discourse as a way to describe the collective religious lives of these new Messianic Jews and the grass roots congregational movement they started. When the American Messianic Jewish congregational movement blossomed between the mid 1970s and the late 1990s in America “Judaism” acquired a third meaning in Missions to the Jews that tracked with a similar meaning in Jewish and social scientific discourse on ethnicity and culture. Judaism became synonymous with all of Jewish culture, as the Jewish people had produced it throughout their history so that the term covered a multitude of possible ideologies and movements, only some of which were religious. Rabbinic practices, customs, rituals, liturgy, and traditions could now be legitimately appropriated by Messianic Jews as part of their cultural heritage, stripped of any conflicting theological or religious meaning. This reclassification made it possible for Messianic Jews to normalize the use of elements from their Jewish heritage both in the service of the Missions to the Jews agenda as cultural packaging of Christian faith for the Jewish community and as a way of distinguishing themselves from their non-Jewish co-religionists.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, some Messianic Jews were moving beyond this cultural contextualization and began to imagine and give voice to a new kind of Judaism that once again acknowledged the inherently religious meaning of the rabbinic forms it had borrowed. This latest conceptualization of “Judaism” by Christian theologians and leaders like Mark Kinzer and the Hashivenu forum, Messianic Judaism with a postmissionary agenda, deliberately differentiates the Hashivenu version

from its Hebrew Christian and even later Messianic predecessors by positioning its members *within* the wider Jewish world and its religious life and by bringing into that world both its Christian beliefs and a “greater Israel” comprised of its non-Jewish faith partners. Whether the wider Jewish world will embrace all of this and agree to add Kinzer’s Messianic Judaism to Cohn-Sherbok’s pluralist menorah of Judaism remains to be seen.

Chapter 3: Postmissionary Messianic Judaism and Textual Tradition

Overview

From its inception, the Messianic Jewish movement has attempted to destabilize the normative and academic taxonomies that keep these two religions and their respective communal identities in separate territories on the maps of world religions and religion in America.¹ Second-order scholarly definitions of Judaism and Christianity have generally followed their first-order constructions in which the most salient border markers have been ethnicity (Jew/Gentile), non belief/belief in the divinity of Jesus (Trinitarianism) and the observance/non-observance of halakhah derived from Talmudic law.² These broad distinctions and the boundaries they created have been accepted and respected by academia and religious institutions alike, Christians believed in Jesus and Jews did not, Jews lived under Mosaic law and Christians did not. Judaism was an ethnic religion for Jews while Christianity was a universal religion whose members came from any and all ethnic backgrounds. These presumptive norms not only inform first-order definitions of Judaism and Christianity, but they also track with those

¹ For a working taxonomy of American religious traditions based on self-identification, see The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2008,” 5. For a discussion on the academic construction of a taxonomy of World Religions in Religious Studies, see, Jonathan Z. Smith, “A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 89, no. 4 (October 1996): 394–401. On the problematic construction and comparison of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as “well-delimited entities,” see Guy G. Stroumsa, “The History of Religions as a Subversive Discipline: Comparing Judaism, Christianity and Islam,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe*, ed. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Brill Academic Publishers, 2011), 152–156.

² Weiss-Rosmarin, *Judaism and Christianity: The Differences*; Glazer, *American Judaism*, 3–6, 53–54, ; Kaplan, Wein, and Stolper, *The Real Messiah?*; Michael A. Fishbane, *Judaism : Revelation and Traditions*, 1st edition (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 61, 83–85, 125–28; Jacob Neusner, *The Systemic Analysis of Judaism*, vol. 137, Brown Judaic Studies (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 89–112; Lipson, *Jews for Jesus: An Anthropological Study*, 61–66; Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 1–10; Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism : A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 366–67; Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 112.

undergirding the prevalent world religions discourse, “a core cohesive element behind an industry of textbooks, reference works, and courses that present their subject matter within the rough parameters of the discourse.”³

But ostensibly syncretic or hybrid religious groups like the 1970s street evangelists, Jews for Jesus—Jews who had accepted the tenets of Protestant Christology while claiming an intrinsic ethnic connection to the wider Jewish community and to the Judaism of the Bible—provoked visible and decisive responses from Jewish apologists and boundary keepers, engaged social scientific scholarship, and unwittingly began the wholesale transportation of forbidden rabbinic practices into Protestant territory. As participants in evangelical missionary outreach to the Jews, they have been responsible for simultaneously blurring the boundaries between Jewish and Christian identities and revealing the proverbial line in the sand that religious institutions have been forced to draw to keep Jews and Christians in their respective social and theological locations.⁴ The early success of Jews for Jesus as an independent missions community of Jews targeting Jews for evangelistic outreach also inspired a grassroots congregational movement of “Messianic Jews” who began to claim that it was the destiny of their movement—Messianic Judaism—to live out the fact that it is simultaneously “100% Messianic and 100% Jewish,” rejecting the ‘either-or’ demanded by many Christians and Jews.⁵ This kind of religious boundary blurring and the subsequent boundary-setting and maintenance work on the part of Jewish religious institutions made it more

³ Lee Wiles, “Mormonism and the World Religions Discourse: Contesting the Boundaries of Comparative Religion’s Prevailing Taxonomy,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 27, no. 1 (February 9, 2015): 1–2, doi:10.1163/15700682-12341265.

⁴ Kaplan, Wein, and Stolper, *The Real Messiah?*, 12–15; Ceil Rosen, *Christ in the Passover: Why Is This Night Different?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978).

⁵ Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, 4. Stern treats the term Messianic Judaism as an ideology at the core of the Messianic Jewish congregational movement rather than a new religion.

problematic for scholars of religion to account for these new “Messianic Jews” and their religious movement without succumbing to first-order definitions of Judaism and Christianity that were being enforced on the ground. It wasn’t until Mark Kinzer’s work began to appear in Messianic Jewish circles that this problematic dual-identification of Jew and Christian led to a call to take sides. Kinzer asked Messianic Jews to shift their primary social affinity and religious identity from the Protestant church and its Gentile culture to the wider Jewish world where it would be easier to live a ritually structured Jewish life.⁶

Christian missions to the Jews might accept a cultural shift toward Jewish practice, but not a religious relocation that could minimize the distance between Christian Jews and Jews who needed the salvation that Messianic Jews were spiritually brokering. Hashivenu feels strongly that the Messianic Jewish movement will not survive as a Jewish movement without attaching itself religiously and socially to the Jewish community. The primary motivation for this reconstruction of Messianic Jewish social and religious identity is to resist the forces of cultural assimilation that lead to a loss of meaningful Jewish identity in evangelical Protestantism and to mitigate the potential loss of religious meaning that being a remnant of believing Jews on the cusp of the anticipated second coming of Jesus once provided for the rapid growth of the Messianic Jewish movement from the 1970s to the 1990s. If Messianic Jews do not make this move and immerse themselves fully in the corporate life of Judaism and the Jewish people, Kinzer warns, “. . . they will eventually either assimilate to the Gentile majority in the *ekklesia* . . . or become a fossilized and irrelevant sect . . . their identification as Jews will be meaningless and their claim to practice Judaism will be fraudulent.”⁷

⁶ Kinzer, “Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism,” 14–26; Kinzer, “Genus.”

⁷ Kinzer, “Genus,” 23–24.

Like other forms of contemporary Judaism in America, Kinzer and others in Hashivenu are concerned that without a strong ideological core that provides a compelling reason to privilege Jewish identity, Jews will assimilate to the majority culture, either the dominant Gentile Protestantism of the church for Messianic Jews or the broader secular culture for modern American Jews. As the leaders of Jewish religious institutions struggle to find or define an ideological core for each of their respective movements, Kinzer and Hashivenu have also elected define their distinctive reason for being. Like the Orthodox communities, they rely on the power of religious discourse to create a coherent community and to script a set of practices that will define them over and against the majority culture, but unlike all other Jewish communities Messianic Jews appeal not only to the Hebrew Bible, which they share with other Jews, but to the canonical New Testament, which is a product of the Christian church. Like most modern forms of Judaism, but antithetical to the ideology of all Protestant Christian institutions, Kinzer is positively oriented toward and utilizes rabbinic tradition as a standard pattern for organizing Messianic Jewish practice. This does not mean, however, that Kinzer has an orthodox view of the Talmud as a divinely revealed body of truth on a par with the rest of canonical Scripture.

It is critical to Kinzer's platform for maturing the Messianic Jewish movement that both their spiritual brothers and sisters in Christianity and non-Messianic Jews recognize Messianic Jews and their religion as Judaism. Non-messianic Jewish acceptance would negate the charge of apostasy leveled at them by institutional Judaism, legitimate Messianic Jews as members in good standing of the Jewish people, and validate their perceived mission to be an "ecclesial bridge joining Israel and the Gentiles,"⁸ while Christian acceptance would insure that Messianic Jews were given

⁸ Ibid., 19. The idea of Messianic Jews as an ecclesial bridge and the church as a bilateral or two-winged ekklesia comprised of Jews and Gentiles are not new theological

separate conceptual and social space within the *ekklesia* (Kinzer's chosen theological term of choice describing the Christian church as a conceptual reality distinct from the historic religion called Christianity)⁹ where they would be free from the encroachment of Gentile Christians and their non-Jewish cultural practices. "Our congregations should be Jewish entities," Kinzer argues, "and not examples of the unity of Jew and Gentile in Messiah," countering the prevailing evangelical Christian attitude that the free expression of shared faith ranks higher than preserving ethnic distinctives in any corporate worship setting. This contestation over the proper way to structure or manage Jew-Gentile relationships in the Messianic Jewish movement becomes a site of identity formation, conceptually, if not always physically, separating Messianic *Judaism* from evangelical *Christianity* in the evolution of PMJ discourse.¹⁰

In order to achieve this shift in religious location, Kinzer must draw sharp distinctions between Judaism and Christianity, so that Messianic Jews are positioned within the ethno-religion of Judaism and non-Jews are properly situated within a universalizing, salvation-oriented Christianity. All Christians, Messianic Jews included, are members of an overarching *ekklesia*, or church, but only Messianic Jews should be members of the Jewish people and Judaism. This leaves Christianity as a religion for

concepts; rather Kinzer borrows heavily from post-Holocaust theologian, Peter von der Osten-Sacken, who argued that to remain a legitimate successor of the first century church, Christianity must accept that it needs Jewish Christians for its own legitimacy, and that Christian Jews must be permitted to continue identifying with their own Jewish people. Peter von der Osten-Sacken, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Theological Foundations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

⁹ Kinzer, "Priestly Remnant," 32. Kinzer's "priestly remnant" belongs in both communities as he defines them: the Christian church—but not Christianity—and the Jewish people and Judaism, its divinely ordained way of life.

¹⁰ Nichol, "Messianic Jews Congregation - UMJC Perspective"; Kinzer, "Priestly Remnant"; Richard C. Nichol, "The Unique Place of Gentiles in Messianic Jewish Congregational Life," in *Borough Park Symposium* (New York, 2012), 1–59; Saal, "Messianic Jewish Communities by Design: Open Doors and Reserved Seating."

Gentile believers, a religion that is one of two ethnically-determined wings in the *ekklesia*. Kinzer refers to the Christian church as an “eschatological multinational expansion of Israel.”¹¹ He also refers to Christianity as the *ekklesia* of the uncircumcision in contrast to Messianic Judaism, the *ekklesia* of the circumcision. The former description as a multinational extension of Israel relativizes Gentiles to a dominant Jewish core, while the latter mitigates the Gentiles’ subordinate position by equalizing the roles of Jew and non-Jew in a new, bilaterally structured *ecclesiology*. Jew and non-Jew meet as equals in the imagined *ekklesia* of shared faith and salvation, but should be separated by ethnicity, covenant, and practice in the worldly experience of congregational life. Christian faith has to be disconnected from Christianity so that it can be disconnected and transported into Judaism, while Judaism must be seen as a logical extension of Jewish peoplehood into which Christian faith can be transplanted. In this way the transition for Messianic Jews from Christianity to Judaism seems natural, and the rightness of this process appears self-evident.

Even though Kinzer’s solution is to propose that the two entities, Christianity and Judaism are qualitatively different species of religion so that being a member of both communities is perfectly plausible without any substantial loss of meaning, Messianic Judaism is a Judaism that exists only under the aegis of Jesus (Yeshua) and his metaphysical *ekklesia*. Messianic Jews can look to Christian theology for the substance of their faith at the same time that they live out their lives according to the precepts of Judaism, which Kinzer defines as the Jewish people’s national holiness.¹² This schema for reconceptualizing and reorganizing the Messianic Jewish movement and for locating its congregational movement under the rubric of Judaism may help solve the dilemma of

¹¹ Kinzer, “Priestly Remnant,” 12–15; Kinzer, “Genus,” 30.

¹² Kinzer, “Genus,” 2–5, 33.

how to mature the Messianic Jewish movement and retain a meaningful Jewish identity, at least as Kinzer problematizes the current situation in the movement. However, his definition of Judaism and the implicit inclusion of Messianic Jewish congregations under the auspices of contemporary American Jewish religion complicate the problem of accounting for the meaning of Judaism in the academic study of religion in general and American Jewish religion in particular.

As Michael Satlow points out, despite the larger debate in academia over whether religion is a natural phenomenon that can be studied scientifically or a second-order category created by scholars for their own purposes, less theoretical attention has been paid to the problem of defining individual religions or religious traditions.¹³ Professional academic organizations and university departments presume that Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism can be studied as discrete religions, quantified and explained by professionally trained scholars dedicated to studying and specializing in one or another of these world religions. Judaism, for instance, has been notoriously difficult to define objectively without resorting to essentialist and normative assumptions that fuel the boundary-making processes on the ground among religious professionals and their religious institutions. The term Judaism is used to describe every thing from the atheistic position of Jewish Humanism, the secular nationalist movement called Zionism, the anti-authoritarian Reform movement, to the Torah true religion of the Ultra-Orthodox sectarians and the dynastic Hasidism of the Eastern European enclaves on America's East Coast, and therefore one cannot assume a classic definition

¹³ Michael L. Satlow, "Defining Judaism: Accounting for 'Religions' in the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 4 (October 11, 2006): 838–39, doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfl003.

centered on Torah, Israel, and God.¹⁴ However, it is a truism that Judaism cannot be stretched to include groups who profess belief in Jesus. Juxtaposing Christian belief with Judaism in the landscape of American religion with its homogenizing Protestant form helps make Judaism conveniently easy to define. Judaism is not Christianity because Jews don't believe in Jesus. This tidy truism may explain why the leadership of American Judaism rejects Messianic Jews, but it does not help scholars account for religious innovators like Kinzer and Hashivenu who agree with this dichotomy and place themselves on the supposedly impossible side of the divide.

In *Creating Judaism*, Michael Satlow suggests a model for defining Judaism based on Jonathan Z. Smith's notion of polythetic classification using three conceptual maps: Israel, discursive tradition, and practice. Two of these maps, practice and self-identification as Israel account for diversity in Satlow's schema of Judaism, while the third, discursive tradition, becomes the glue that holds all this internal diversity together into something recognizable as a single religious tradition. A discursive tradition in Satlow's definition is "not a set of beliefs or texts but a discourse . . . an ongoing, evolving conversation that rests upon a set of shared, if changing, assumptions articulated primarily in texts that communities find 'authoritative,' however they define that term."¹⁵

For almost all of American Judaism, according to Satlow, this definitive discourse of tradition is the literary legacy of the Talmudic rabbis. Rabbinic discourse is so critical to Satlow's polythetic definition of Judaism that it forms an exclusionary boundary. Those groups that accept and form their communities around its precepts and

¹⁴ Glazer, *American Judaism*; Fishbane, *Judaism*; Jacob Neusner, *The Way of Torah : An Introduction to Judaism* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2004); Sarna, *American Judaism*.

¹⁵ Satlow, "Defining Judaism," 850.

conceptual categories, and who engage its texts as religious texts with some measure of authority, are normative and those who do not lie outside the conversation on these texts that creates a single Judaism.¹⁶ Beliefs can and do vary between communities, Satlow notes, but by “sharing certain conceptual categories (for example God, Torah, and Israel) most Jewish communities find themselves in the same conversation.”¹⁷ This is despite the fact that “any Jewish community or individual that self-identifies as ‘Jewish,’ or part of Israel,” belongs on the polythetic map, whether other Jews accept or do not accept the community as Jewish. “Israel,” Satlow argues, must be the starting point of any nonnormative, nonessentialist understanding of Judaism. “Communities become ‘Jewish’ first and foremost because they say they are.”¹⁸

Michael Satlow’s polythetic definition helps to make sense out of unity in internal Jewish diversity, but it falters under the challenge presented by groups like Messianic Jews who are rejected by the communal consensus of mainstream Jewish religious institutions and who, nevertheless, consider themselves part of the Jewish people and its religious life. They make it onto his map of Judaism by virtue of their self-identification but then effectively fall off, beyond the bounds of what Satlow calls Am Israel—those self-identifying Jews and Jewish groups that that collectively embody and create Judaism—when they fail to engage in the common conversation centered on the rabbinic tradition that forms his golden thread of continuity and mutual recognition.

The boundaries of tradition might be broad, but they do exist. Messianic Jews and Black Hebrews have, from a non-normative perspective, every right to call themselves “Israel,” but through their rejection of the

¹⁶ Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 9.

¹⁷ Satlow, “Defining Judaism,” 849.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

postbiblical Jewish literature they have largely ceased to engage in the same conversation as other Jewish communities. Similarly, secular and humanistic Jews, with their rejection of God, puts them outside the limits of the conversation as defined by the tradition.¹⁹

Unfortunately, I fail to see how Satlow avoids falling into the trap of creating an essentially essentialist, if not circular, definition. In order to count, a contemporary group's Judaism must include this one feature, participation in a shared discursive tradition that begins with the Hebrew Bible and culminates in the rabbinic textual tradition. Contemporary Judaism is defined by a greater or lesser degree of engagement with the rabbinic tradition, as that conversation is defined by the tradition. If this is the tie that binds Jewish communities into a single religion called Judaism, then Judaism is virtually synonymous with the rabbinic tradition. Those who accept it as normative, interpret it, and apply it belong, while the contributions that could be made to a broader, polythetic definition by taking into account voices that are marginal to the mainstream are lost. Given the weight of this map in his polythetic definition, "outside the conversation" seems to be tantamount to "outside Judaism" proper in any meaningful sense of the word, but perhaps this is the perception because not all of the maps are well enough developed to compare marginal groups to the (arguably) rabbinic mainstream. Or, perhaps asking what unifies diverse groups claiming the same name is a different kind of question from how to map diversity and define Judaism.

As for the exclusion of Messianic Jews, either Satlow was not familiar with Kinzer and the Hashivenu movement or he had not included them in his research. Hashivenu's public, *prima facie* embrace of rabbinic tradition coupled with its systematic engagement with rabbinic practice and their self-definition as Israel are enough, in my

¹⁹ Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 15.

estimation, to recall Messianic Judaism from beyond the pale of Satlow's definition at least to the margins of the mainstream Jewish center, conventionally speaking. Another look at what they contribute to the conversation on defining Judaism polythetically is warranted. Using this model rather than an essentialist definition, it is fair to say that Mark Kinzer and the Hashivenu group are creating their own Judaism, a religious expression that is a "refraction of historical experience, texts, and traditional practices through its own uniquely situated conceptual lens."²⁰ The academic question is not whether their Judaism is a real or valid Judaism, but (a) what it brings with it into a polythetic definition of Judaism and therefore into the mix of elements out of which different varieties of Judaism are born, thrive (or not) and replicate for future generations, and (b) how to account for its integration or failure to integrate with other kinds of Judaism with which it shares conceptual and social space on the map of American religion.

Thus far the Hashivenu group's trajectory from its origins in the HCAA culture to its present status has not been fully documented, nor have its claims to be another form of contemporary Judaism been given serious consideration in the scholarship on the Messianic Jewish movement. Dan Cohn-Sherbok offered Messianic Judaism a place on his pluralist menorah of American Jewish denominations, but the research for his 2000 book on Messianic Judaism does not cite either of Kinzer's 1999 papers or take note of the Hashivenu Forum's work. In the preface to her book, Carol Harris-Shapiro makes mention of Stuart Dauermann, then the spiritual leader of Ahavat Zion Messianic Synagogue in Beverly Hills, as a representative of some in the Messianic Jewish movement who are desirous of forming a "closer relationship between normative and Messianic Judaism" and of maturing the Messianic Jewish movement. However, she

²⁰ Ibid., 290.

doesn't refer specifically to Hashivenu or Kinzer's work because her research predates its public appearance.²¹ In his 2013 book, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews*, Yaakov Ariel allots a page to describing Hashivenu, referring to it as a small "group of Messianic Jewish intellectuals who promote a more independent Jewish Christian culture and thought" and who, surprisingly in his estimation, "have not been rejected or treated like pariahs" by the mainstream of the Messianic Jewish movement. Ariel does not explain why he finds this situation surprising. Although he refers to the group as an avant-garde of the Messianic Jewish movement at large, he uncritically treats all of the movement as part of evangelical Christianity.²²

Kinzer and his intellectual work have been noted, explained, and then effectively dismissed by important participants in the post-Holocaust interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews. David Novak and Matthew Levering, representing Judaism and Catholicism respectively, both agree that Kinzer's bid to bridge the theological gap between the two religions by claiming to represent Christian faith and Jewish religion fails to be faithful to either. They both agree, each for his own reasons, that Kinzer represents Christianity and that his new Messianic Jewish theology belongs to the realm of intra-Christian dialogue.²³

In this chapter I explore the way Kinzer, as Hashivenu's primary theological voice, is attempting to justify his claim that Messianic religion is Judaism in part by

²¹ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, viii.

²² Yaakov Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews*, The Goldstein-Goren Series in American Jewish History (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 241–42.

²³ Matthew Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom: Engagements with the Theology of David Novak* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010); Kinzer and Levering, "Messianic Gentiles & Messianic Jews"; David Novak, "When Jews Are Christians," in *The Chosen People in an Almost Chosen Nation: Jews and Judaism in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 92–102.

reorienting the Messianic Jewish worldview from the church as a new people of God that replaced the Jews in the divine economy of redemption and salvation to Israel, a biological family, chosen by God to be his covenant partners. This reorientation can only take place if Kinzer can harmonize classical church tradition anchored in the Old and New Testament scriptures with post-Biblical Jewish tradition and its dual Torah, Written and Oral. That is, to be successful in creating Judaism and leaving Christianity, Kinzer must create a new discursive tradition that engages both the rabbis and the historical church. Satlow argues that to engage in the rabbinic tradition as one's own heritage is to enter the communal conversation that unites disparate Jewish groups into a single religion called Judaism. The question this hypothesis raises is whether by entering this common conversation and engaging in the practices it enjoins on the Jewish people, Messianic groups like Hashivenu can overcome the Jewish community's univocal rejection of Messianic Judaism and Messianic Jews as part of the Jewish people. More broadly speaking, what is the relationship between textual tradition and communal enfranchisement, between an elitist discursive practice and the production of social reality? This is the question that I explore in this chapter on the role of text and tradition in Hashivenu discourse and in the following chapter on creating coherent community in Messianic Judaism.

I begin here with an historical introduction to Hashivenu and its vision for Messianic Judaism as it initially appeared in 1999 with Mark Kinzer's first papers and as its thinkers and leaders have continued to refine their own self-understanding, positioning the think tank at the leading edge of change in the Messianic Jewish movement over the past fifteen years. Hashivenu's explicit trajectory toward a location in Judaism is accompanied by a simultaneous distancing from Christianity. The remainder of the chapter explains how Hashivenu's postmissionary messianic Jewish discourse is

creating a new path for its own members and for those Jewish Christians who are still sitting in church pews rather than Messianic synagogues, a path that moves from evangelical Protestantism primarily by navigating its way through conflicting historic textual traditions and creating a new Judaism in the Messianic Jewish image.²⁴

Fixing the Play—Choosing Judaism, Redefining Christianity

Previous studies of the Messianic Jewish movement in America have explained convincingly why an earlier generation of young Jewish believers in Jesus was so highly motivated from the 1970s to the 1990s to forefront their cultural identity as American Jews over their religious affiliation and spiritual affinity for the Christian church.²⁵ However, that explanation does not help us understand the current move at the more Jewish end of the Messianic spectrum to be categorized within the genus of Judaism and not Christianity. As Mark Kinzer, now a messianic rabbi and primary theologian for Hashivenu and Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, prescriptively explained in 1999:

(1) Our genus of self-definition is Judaism, rather than Christianity. . . .

(2) As a form of Judaism, we are oriented toward the Jewish people, and

are not a Torah-revival for Gentiles. . . . (3) We acknowledge the

legitimacy of other forms of Judaism and our dependence on them.²⁶

Notably, this is a new, pluralistic attitude toward Judaism and a reversal of the traditional position taken by evangelical Protestantism and its modern Missions to the Jews, which have consistently claimed to be the completion of Biblical Judaism and the antithesis of rabbinic Judaism. Hashivenu's motivation to become collectively more

²⁴ Satlow, "Defining Judaism," 839.

²⁵ Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*; Feher, *Passing over Easter*; Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*.

²⁶ Kinzer, "Genus," 1. By "other forms of Judaism" Kinzer means those built on the Rabbinic tradition.

Jewish cannot be wholly reduced to a missionary or proselytizing strategy as might have been the case with Jews for Jesus or other American Protestant missions organizations that envisioned Messianic congregations as vehicles for presenting the Christian message in indigenous Jewish cultural forms in order to evangelize and incorporate new Jewish believers into Christianity.²⁷ The provocative title of Kinzer's 2005 theological treatise on his new paradigm, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*, is evidence of a decisive turn from the old to the new, an almost organic development in a movement that from its inception was marked by opposing opinions about how it should be configured politically and socially, and what its relationship should be to the wider Jewish world.

In the mid-1970s it was common to think of Messianic Jews and Messianic Judaism as a reconfiguration of the religious landscape prior to the expected second coming of Jesus, and the idea that Messianic Jewish religion was its own brand of biblical, though not rabbinic, Judaism surfaced.²⁸ From 1970 to 1975, the number of

²⁷ Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*; Hutchens, "A Case for Messianic Judaism"; Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Yeshiva*. The Catholic church has effectively modeled this approach of enculturation and indigenization, choosing to separate the gospel message or Christian faith from its cultural expressions. While anthropologists might call this syncretism, the Church accepts the process as normative so long as the 'truth' of the Christian message is not distorted. See, European Association of Social Anthropologists, *Syncretism/anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, ed. Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 11.

²⁸ An alternative way of understanding the phenomenon of Jewish believers in Jesus, according to Shoshanah Feher, is to read their blended identity as one "possible response of assimilated Jews, who have infused their 'secular' Jewish identity with a new religious doctrine that happens to be Christian." This interpretation presumes that the secular and religious identities of American Jews can be easily separated, a point that needs to be argued rather than assumed. By considering the appropriation of Christian beliefs as happenstance, this explanation obscures the unique and complex history of power between the church and the Jews that riddles a blended Jewish-Christian identity with a tension not present in JuBu's, those who blend their Jewish background with Buddhist practices. Kohn, "Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism on the Church-Sect Continuum"; Feher, *Passing over Easter*, 149. Dr. Michael Schiffman's 1987 congregational survey, on the contrary, shows that only six out of the thirty-three

Messianic Jewish congregations exploded. *The Fig Tree Blossoms: Messianic Judaism Emerges*, written by Paul Liberman, a new convert, is an enthusiastic embrace of Jewish congregational life in the context of Christian faith that proposes Messianic Judaism as a logical fourth division of Judaism. Though by design Messianic congregations were to be “Jewish space,” Liberman presciently speculates that Gentiles might want to be associated with this new Messianic Judaism in some way. By the late 1990s, the movement had, in fact, come to be dominated by non-Jews who were mostly either disgruntled with the purported paganized Christianity in the churches or simply in search of what they considered to be a more authentic form of their Christian faith. Others were sincerely interested in promoting and supporting the evangelistic efforts of these indigenous Jewish churches. But in the 1970s, it was easier for Liberman to see a renewed Judaism with Jesus at its center becoming the primary expression of Jesus faith and Christianity its Gentile offshoot. In this inverted taxonomy, it would be the Gentiles, not the Jews, who would become “converts” to true Judaism when they accepted the Jewish savior, while Jews who came to faith were simply restored to their rightful place as the head of the church.²⁹

Liberman is careful to distinguish his vision of Messianic Judaism from rabbinic religion; however, any adopted rabbinic practices and customs were explained in terms drawn from American socio-cultural and missions’ discourse. In the post-melting pot, multicultural society of the late 1960s and 1970s, Jewish ethnicity had a history of being read in terms of religious affiliation; Judaism in all of its denominational expressions continued to provide secularly acceptable containers for Jewish particularity. Liberal or

Messianic Jewish congregational leaders who responded were raised in a “secular” Jewish home. Schiffman, *Return from Exile: The Re-Emergence of the Messianic Congregational Movement*, 124.

²⁹ Liberman, *The Fig Tree Blossoms*, 86, 73, 104–05, 109–110.

modern Jews could adopt, modify, and reclassify the same rabbinic practices that the Orthodox observed as religious obligations incumbent on the particular people called Israel, as cultural expressions of a common, natural religion for the Jewish people based on reason rather than revelation (or some combination thereof).³⁰ This approach to classifying rabbinic practice served the early Messianic Jewish congregational movement by providing them with a presumably authentic but deconsecrated form of Jewish practice that could become a container for Christian religious content and meaning.

Even though the denominational labels and religious discourses that differentiated Orthodox Jews from their modern counterparts were far from congruous, both communities were directly informed by a reverence for a shared rabbinic tradition. The Messianic Judaism that was emerging during the 1970s, however, was tightly controlled by a religious discourse that lay far outside the boundaries of the liberal modern to Ultra Orthodox Jewish sphere and, more problematically, was the controlling discourse for a rival religion, fundamentalist evangelical Protestantism. This crucial overlap with Christianity was evidenced by the requisite evangelical “Statement of Faith” that appeared, in one form or another, in Messianic Jewish publications and eventually on their websites. Despite outward appearances and its deep desire to be accepted by the Jewish community, the Messianic Jewish congregation was socially isolated from the rest of Judaism because of its evangelistic goals as well as its heretical beliefs. The only larger community in which Messianic Jewish congregations could find validation and a broader social location was the Protestant church.

A few key figures in the Protestant establishment who had first helped legitimate and organize the Messianic Jewish movement took a cautionary look at the early

³⁰ Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism Transformation and Renewal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10419592>.

Messianic Jewish euphoria and felt the need to clarify the movement's intended trajectory, to reiterate the movement's *raison d'être*, and to make certain that Messianic "Judaism" stayed within the bounds of Protestant Christian orthodoxy and the missionary agenda it was designed to serve. After Liberman's book was published in 1976, Hutchens responded with an article now claiming that the term "Messianic Judaism" was a misnomer, at least in an institutional sense. "No such entity exists," he argued, and as such "it cannot be seriously considered as a 'fourth branch' of Judaism." The Messianic synagogue's purpose, Hutchens claimed, was always to function as a missionary outreach to non-believing Jews and as a place for Messianic Jews to express their cultural uniqueness.³¹ As its creator, it seems Hutchens was feeling responsible for Messianic Judaism's problematic conceptualization as a real Judaism by those Messianic Jews his discourse had empowered, and he was trying to effect at least a partial deconstruction in order to return control to the missions organizations he claims "have best articulated the distinctives of the movement"³²

By 1981, two years after the left of center Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) was established, Goble published a second book, *How to Grow a Messianic Yeshiva*, designed to correct a serious misunderstanding of his previous book, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*. The new book was meant to encourage Messianic leaders to become *like* Talmudic Jews for the sake of proselytism,

³¹ James M. Hutchens, "Messianic Judaism: A Progress Report," *Missiology: An International Review* 5, no. 3 (July 1, 1977): 287, doi:10.1177/009182967700500304.

³² *Ibid.*, 287, 297. For Hutchens Jews for Jesus represents the ideological center of the Messianic Jewish movement, with the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) a notch to the left—these are the "Messianists" as he calls them—and American Board of Missions to the Jews lies a notch to the right—the traditionalists who "would not want to be considered a part of the Messianic Jewish movement" according to Hutchens's analysis. The first congregational umbrella organization, the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC), had not yet formed when Hutchens published this article in 1977.

but not to *become* Talmudic Jews “under the law.”³³ In Goble’s estimation, some Messianic Jews had forgotten their purpose and had begun preaching *as rabbis*, forgetting that the rabbinization of their worship services and the presentation of the Christian gospel was merely to provide a cultural context that would be recognizable to American Jews who had been shaped by rabbinic tradition. The goal of Goble’s yeshiva project was to inculcate a “spiritual Jewish” identity into non-Jewish Christians and to conscript Jewish believers into a stage play where they act like Orthodox Jews in order to win those “under the Law” to freedom in the Christian gospel. Goble attempts to justify the Messianic Jew’s role as a holy actor and to explain the difference between being a rabbinic Jew and acting like one for a higher purpose:

When an actor becomes *like* someone else in order to persuade an audience, it is not a sham. When a believer in the Messiah becomes like a Jew to win a Jew to the Messiah, it is not a hoax. If it is an act done in sincere love, it is an act of truth. An actor knows when he is “doing the truth” on stage. He does not literally *become* the part . . . he becomes *like* the part. . . . When Jewish ministers and congregants don’t understand the difference between becoming *like* an orthodox Jew and *becoming* an Orthodox Jew, they make a serious mistake.³⁴

Evidently this distinction between being and pretending to be was blurred in Messianic congregations where the discovery of Christianity’s “Jewish roots” made it difficult for Gentiles in the movement to differentiate between acting like a Jew (the “other” of missions discourse) and participating in Jewish practice as a believer. The Passover Seder demonstration pioneered by Jews for Jesus was a case in point. In 1978

³³ Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Yeshiva*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

Moody Bible Institute published a booklet for Jews for Jesus entitled *Christ in the Passover*, which ostensibly explained each element in the traditional Passover Seder in terms of its Christian significance. By recoding this quintessential Jewish home celebration and presenting it in non-Messianic, Christian churches as a “sermonic demonstration showing the accouterments and items used,” missionaries like Jews for Jesus could model the difference between performance and ritual participation for their Christian audience.³⁵

For Messianic Jews who fostered a stronger personal identification with the Jewish people than the Gentile church, the line between being and acting was more difficult to maintain so that some Messianic Jewish leaders intentionally adopted the title of “rabbi” rather than “pastor” to differentiate themselves from their Christian church counterparts, not as an evangelistic strategy but as part of their religious identity.³⁶ Messianic Jews understood themselves to be heirs of anything Jewish by their perceived common descent from the patriarchs. This included the symbols, narratives, practices, and language of a presumptively antithetical rabbinic Judaism, and therefore Messianic Jews felt it was natural, not acting, for them to celebrate or observe the Biblical Jewish holidays in traditionally Jewish ways, as the rabbis and the Jewish people had preserved and transmitted the practices associated with them. The fact that new meaning can be assigned to these practices or that the rabbinic texts that authorize their observance need not be invoked to authenticate them as Jewish is part of the strength of Jewish tradition, as Michael Satlow explains:

³⁵ Rosen, *Christ in the Passover*. The fact that there was no rabbinic Passover Seder in the first century of the common era when Jesus would have held a “Last Supper” with his disciples is beside the point as the purpose of infusing the ritual with messianic significance is to serve as a proselytizing tool for Christians to use with their non-believing Jewish friends who would be familiar with the elements of the Seder but unaware of its supposed fulfillment in Christian doctrine.

³⁶ Telchin, *Messianic Judaism Is Not Christianity*, 61.

Many Jewish practices have survived their first attested explanations; they have persisted (in differing forms, to be sure) even while the meanings assigned to them have changed. . . . [T]he very reason that many religious practices have persisted is precisely because they are underdetermined. That they have no inherent meanings is actually a strength; they exist in a dynamic intertextual world in which Jews are able [to] link them to other practices, symbols, and texts to create transient and historically contingent meanings.³⁷

Given this understanding of how Jewish practices can act as independent carriers of tradition, it should not be surprising that Messianic Jews can read new “Messianic” meaning into them and adapt them for their own peculiar place in history, linking them with faith in someone they consider to be a Jewish Messiah and the scriptures that support that belief.³⁸ Whether Messianic Jewish adaptation and re-creation of Jewish tradition is authentic or disingenuous is a value judgment that should be made on the ground where Messianic Jews have to negotiate their right to create and transmit new Jewish traditions with the rest of the Jewish world rather than in the scholar’s study.

In response to the MJAA’s refusal in 1978 to organize the newly forming Messianic synagogues, advocates for an independent congregational movement solicited support and were able to form their own umbrella organization (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations), with most of the known Messianic congregations signing on for

³⁷ Satlow, “Defining Judaism,” 852–53.

³⁸ Two examples of elaborate Messianic Jewish Passover Haggadot can be found at the Jewish Voice and First Fruits of Zion websites: *Messianic Passover Haggadah: Your Complete Passover Guide* (Phoenix, AZ: Jewish Voice Ministries International, 2008); Aaron Eby, trans., *Vine of David Passover Haggadah* (Marshfield, MS: Vine of David, 2010), <http://ffoz.com/vine-of-david-haggadah.html>.

membership.³⁹ The MJAA did not relent until 1984 when it formed its own organization, the International Association of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), which essentially serves as its pastoral arm. It should be noted that the new association's name does not include the word "Jewish," and is indicative of the position the MJAA has taken on blended congregations—Jews and non-Jews sharing equally in membership roles and leadership positions, all attesting to the Pauline ideal of unity in the church.⁴⁰ The two umbrella organizations were emblematic of the crosscurrents running below the surface of the movement once it had begun the process of self-determination and institutional independence. The rift between the UMJC and the MJAA lasted for fifteen years before reconciliation was effected in 1994.⁴¹ Today the IAMCS has approximately 100 affiliated congregations in the United States while the UMJC lists sixty-six members. Messianic congregations generally are sorted into one or the other with virtually no overlapping membership.⁴² The more conservative, evangelical, and ethnically blended

³⁹ Samuelson, "Messianic Judaism: Church, Denomination, Sect, or Cult?," 165; Stanley M. Burgess and Ed M. Van der Maas, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Rev. and expanded ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2002), 872–74.

⁴⁰ Ephesians 2:14, "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups [Jews and Gentiles] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (NIV). This verse in one rendition or another is often quoted by the centrists in the Messianic Jewish movement to support the ideal situation of blended communities and to moderate the more radical Messianic Jewish attempts to separate themselves from the non-Jewish church body, which generally leads to accusations of re-building this "wall of partition" that Jesus supposedly broke down.

⁴¹ Rich Robinson, Naomi Rose Rothstein, and Jews for Jesus, *The Messianic Movement: A Field Guide for Evangelical Christians* (San Francisco, CA: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 2005), 52–53. See also, Peter Hocken, "The Rise of 'Messianic Judaism,'" *Baruch HaShem Synagogue*, April 15, 1977, <http://baruchhashemsynagogue.org/?p=286>.

⁴² "Messianic Judaism," *MJAARoi: Messianic Jewish Alliance of America ... for the Restoration of Israel*, accessed May 26, 2013, http://www.mjaa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=n_messianic_movement_messianic_judaism; "UMJC: Congregations," *UMJC: איחוד וחיוך*, 2014, http://www.umjc.org/?page_id=1578.

groups (Jew and non-Jew) tend to be in the IAMCS wing, while the UMJC, under the influence of the Hashivenu platform has been moving inexorably left of this mainstream center, portending a possible break between the ideologically conservative traditionalists and the religiously Jewish wing of the movement.⁴³

The dance between embracing desirable elements of the rabbinic tradition and distancing Messianic Jews from any reliance on rabbinic Jewish religion becomes evident as early as 1986 with Dan Juster's attempt to create an acceptable, foundational, theological framework for the Messianic Jewish movement. The first edition of *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism* found much that could be culled from the rabbis and employed in the service of Messianic religion. That same year, however, a second edition appeared sporting a new preface and altered content specifically distancing Juster's theology from the religion of the rabbis and re-emphasizing the role of Jesus/Yeshua in messianic congregational life. The first edition evidenced what Juster called too positive an appreciation for the "classical Judaism" of the rabbis. Between the first edition and the second, Juster had reflectively concluded that Rabbinic Judaism was "a more severe departure from Biblical faith" than he had realized. "Overall Messianic expression should be a full bodied expression of the New Covenant faith. It should be clearly apparent that we are not Rabbinic Jews," Juster admonished, echoing the concerns Phillip Goble had expressed back in 1981.⁴⁴ David

⁴³ Gabriela M. Reason, "Competing Trends in Messianic Judaism: The Debate Over Evangelicalism," *Kesher Journal*, no. 17 (Spring 2004). Although Reason correctly analyzed the competing trends in the movement, she was taken to task by leaders on both sides for equating the UMJC with Hashivenu and Kinzer's program. Hashivenu members are members of the UMJC but they do not, by any means, represent the whole.

⁴⁴ Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*; Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology*. It is telling that the title of the second and subsequent editions universalize the audience for *Jewish Roots* by omitting any specific reference to "Messianic Judaism" that might imply his theology was aiming to create a new, sectarian division in the evangelical church. Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Yeshiva*.

Chernoff, Messianic rabbi of a flagship congregation in Philadelphia, affirmed Juster's conclusion adding that the difference between Rabbinic and Messianic Judaism was where each system looked for its religious authority: rabbinic religion relies on the "many new laws, rules, and traditions" embodied in the Talmud and other rabbinic writings that Satlow would identify as the communal conversation unifying Judaism, while Messianic Judaism relies "totally on the Scriptures." "Our faith," explains Chernoff, "is the Judaism of the Bible and is centered around the Messiah and the worldwide salvation he brings. . . . [He] has fulfilled us as Jewish believers and therefore has fulfilled our Judaism," implying that Messianic Jews have no need to engage in a conversation centered on the textual tradition of the rabbis.⁴⁵

At the same time that Juster and Chernoff were attempting to distance the Messianic Jewish movement from the rabbis, Dr. David Stern was at work incorporating them by means of his *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, a classic work of early Messianic theology that was first published in 1988 and subsequently republished in 2007 with a new title, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past*.⁴⁶ At the newly established Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE), Richard Nichol, representing the UMJC, was also making his case for a Messianic Jewish congregational movement that oriented itself positively to rabbinic Judaism (while keeping Jesus/Yeshua central to their Jewish lives and maintaining a primary identity with fellow

⁴⁵ Chernoff, *Messianic Judaism: Questions & Answers*, 2. Of course, this simplistic contrast between an extra-biblical tradition and no tradition, just Scripture, obscures the fact that Protestantism is heir to its own post-biblical interpretive tradition. Kinzer will develop this point later at the Hashivenu Forums in 2001 and 2003 and will argue it more fully before a broader Christian audience in 2005 with the release of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*. Kinzer, "Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition"; Kinzer, "Oral Torah."

⁴⁶ Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*; David H Stern, *Messianic Judaism : A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007).

Christians).⁴⁷ Stern's *Manifesto* contains an implicit taxonomy that categorizes participants in the Messianic movement into Gentile believers and Messianic Jews, thereby requiring him to define who qualifies as a Jew (and who does not) in this religious discourse. Juster allowed Gentiles equal standing in the movement as spiritual if not ethnic Jews, but Stern re-labels them "Messianic Gentiles," thus reinforcing the ethnic or biological determination of who is a Jew. Stern also makes a point contra Juster that Messianic Judaism is an ethno-religion like other forms of Judaism, which can be contrasted with a Christianity that reckons full membership by spiritual status (saved/not saved) not biology or ethnic origins.

However, this does not mean that Stern uncritically or even normatively appropriates the rabbis and their authority. For Stern, rabbinic Judaism is one trajectory of Jewish faith and practice, and Messianic Judaism, as the successor to the original New Testament church, is another. He sees them as competitive systems, though not necessarily antithetical, each concerned with delivering an authentic interpretation of Torah and determining the will of God for Israel (and by extension for the church, all people), or, in Jewish terms, determining halakhah for their respective communities. Stern's *Manifesto* sets the stage for Mark Kinzer's forthcoming PMJ paradigm, which posits an even more intimate connection to rabbinic tradition than Stern is willing to foster. Both Stern and Kinzer decry Goble's approach to Messianic Judaism; each states unequivocally that Messianic life, whether individually or communally expressed, is not an act but a sincere expression of their faith as Jews and believers in Jesus/Yeshua. Stern writes: "Only the congregations whose members are seriously trying to express the

⁴⁷ The Consultation on Jewish Evangelism was established in 1980 at the Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelism in Thailand. It considers itself the benchmark organization for Jewish missions and publishes *Mishkan*, a scholarly journal for Messianic Judaism. Bruce J. Lieske, "Something Old, Something New: The Messianic Congregational Movement," *Christian Research Journal* 22, no. 1 (1999); Nichol, "The Unique Place of Gentiles in Messianic Jewish Congregational Life," 1–19.

Jewishness which is in fact theirs will be able to weather . . . criticism . . . because they are doing something real, not acting in a show.”⁴⁸ In an early 1982 essay, Kinzer explains his own deeply personal commitment to living an authentically Jewish life as a Christian believer:

I am a Jew, and I want to live as a Jew, even if I am the only Jew in a city and have no hopes of persuading some of my brothers regarding the messiahship of Yeshua. The Scriptures, worship, language, and destiny of Israel, and above all the God and Messiah of Israel are all part of my inheritance as a son of Abraham, and I have laid claim to that inheritance, for the God of Israel has laid claim to me.⁴⁹

By 2003, Kinzer had added the Oral Torah and rabbinic tradition (though not the Orthodox claims for the Oral Torah’s equal status with the Written Torah) to the list of elements in the Jewish inheritance to which he was laying claim. Kinzer had to begin by convincing Messianic Jews that they needed to plug into and then refine Judaism’s oral tradition in order to legitimate Messianic Judaism.

The Talmud has been instrumental in interpreting and applying the Written Torah to Jewish life throughout the history of the Jewish people, but more importantly, it connects the dots between the Hebrew Bible, the Mishnah, and the multitude of Jewish communities that have accepted the cumulative tradition as their own across space and time. The Oral Torah, however modern and traditional Jewish communities relate to it today in terms of authority or revelatory status, connects contemporary rabbinic Judaism with the Israelite religion of the Hebrew Bible. It provides today’s

⁴⁸ Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, 169.

⁴⁹ Mark S. Kinzer, *Israel’s Messiah and the People of God : A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity*, ed. Jennifer M. Rosner (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 13.

rabbinic Jews with a religious history that begins in the sacred text of the Written Torah and continues on through the subsequent work of rabbinical scholars and sages in the Mishnah, Midrashim, Gemara and subsequent codifications of Jewish law that make up the rabbinic oral tradition. Unlike rabbinic Jews, Messianic Jews do not have a continuous history or tradition by which they can connect their modern messianic Jewish movement with its ancient counterpart—the Jewish disciples of Jesus who spread the story of his messiahship in the pages of the Christian New Testament.

We do not know in any detail how the early Jewish Yeshua movement kept Shabbat, *kashrut*, or the laws of family purity. However, even if we did, we would still not have the living memory of an ongoing community's attempt through the changing circumstances of the past twenty centuries to live out the Torah and pass it on to their children. . . . Given the divinely appointed role of community in establishing and confirming the legitimate successors to Moses, we cannot ignore Rabbinic tradition. . . . In their role as halakhic authorities, interpreting and applying the Torah to ever-changing circumstances, they continued the work of Moses in Israel. . . . It is not inconsistent for us to respect the authority of the Rabbinic tradition while rejecting its judgment concerning Yeshua.⁵⁰

Not all Messianic Jews are as convinced as Kinzer that the rabbinic tradition should have a place of any authority in the Messianic Jewish community given their theological inheritance—*sola scriptura*, yes; rabbinical religion, no. Michael Schiffman deftly summed up the Hashivenu position by quipping: “Better Yeshua’s authority than all the Rabbis, but better the Rabbis [sic] authority than our own.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Kinzer, “Oral Torah,” 1, 32–34.

⁵¹ Schiffman, “Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century: A Historical Perspective on ‘Oral Torah.’”

Kinzer had not at this stage in the process of developing his theology commented on the question of whether halakhah derived through the rabbinic process but outside the auspices of Messianic Jewish institutions should be binding on Messianic Jews, but it is clear that he sees the needs to connect with other Jewish communities on the basis of a shared respect for the halakhic process and its Talmudic core if his Judaism is to resonate with the rest of the Jewish world. Even though he does speak positively about rabbinic authority for Messianic Jews, it is clear that any rabbinic interpretation of the scriptures or application of the laws of Torah would have to pass through the fire of the Apostolic Writings' canonical authority to be binding in PMJ.⁵²

In the period between 1990 and 1999 outside scholarly interest in the movement gave Messianic Jews at the left end of the movement some reason to hope that the normative Jewish community might actually acknowledge them—that they might even be accepted as “members of the tribe.” Mostly these works were read by insiders as well as by the Jewish establishment as empathetic or at least objectively neutral. It was during this period, when a small number of Jewish rabbis and scholars were expressing an open-minded interest in the Messianic Jewish movement, that Mark Kinzer's ideas begin to appear in writing in the UMJC and Hashivenu.

With the publication of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* in 2005, Kinzer appears in print as a new, major theological voice in the UMJC community following the pioneering work of his predecessors in the movement, Juster and Stern. Kinzer's work is more closely related to Stern's than Juster's. Stern was the first theologian to see the Messianic Judaism as a religion defined primarily by its Jewish character and by the congregational movement that the young Messianic Jews of the 1970s had founded.

⁵² Kinzer does think that Messianic Jews have delegated authority to “bind and loose,” or to enact binding halakhic decisions for the community, but the broader Messianic Jewish community is far from acknowledging that any legal strictures, Biblical, Rabbinic, or Messianic Jewish, are applicable to Jewish believers in Yeshua.

Juster, a Jew by birth but a Reformed Protestant theologian by training had consistently maintained a more traditional evangelical Christian approach, foregrounding faith rather than ethnicity in his theology, and advocating that Messianic congregations remain primarily vehicles for presenting the Christian gospel in a Jewish context.⁵³

Kinzer moves beyond Stern, however, by defining Messianic Judaism as more than just a label for the ideology that formed out of the late 20th century congregational movement (Stern), or to argue that Jewish believers should have their own congregations or churches where they could express their Jewishness and contextualize the Christian gospel for a Jewish audience (Juster). For Kinzer, Messianic Judaism is a true Judaism, a religion of and for Jews where Gentiles are the ethnic if not religious “others” who have to adapt, acculturate, and even convert if they are to enjoy full membership or status in its congregations. His theology has invoked a small but consistent, committed and articulate following that has come together under the rubric of Hashivenu. The most prominent voices charting the course for this subgroup of the Messianic Jewish movement, in addition to Mark Kinzer, are Paul Saal, Carl Kinbar, and Stuart Dauermann, all of whom are messianic rabbis ordained by the UMJC. The main organizations disseminating the particulars of the new PMJ platform are Hashivenu, its flagship think tank that hosts an annual leadership forum where scholarly papers are presented on critical topics; the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC), whose members, as of 2015, represent ten Messianic Jewish congregations across the United States;⁵⁴ and the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute (MJTI), an online graduate

⁵³ Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*, 270–274.

⁵⁴ Ahavat Zion, Beverly Hills; Beit HaShofar, Seattle; Ohr Chadash, Palm Harbor, FL; Or HaKhodesh, Houston; Ruach Israel, Needham, MA; Sha’arei Shalom, Cape Coral, FL; Shuvah Yisrael, West Hartford, CT; Simchat Yisrael, West Haven, CT; Tikvat Israel, Richmond, VA; and Zera Avraham, Ann Arbor, MI. See, <http://ourrabbis.org/main/members/member-list>, accessed October 9, 2015.

studies program with a curriculum in place to train candidates for the Messianic rabbinate. Congregations whose leaders embrace the new PMJ paradigm tend to be members of the UMJC rather than the more conservative and ethnically blended MJAA/IAMCS, but the overall membership of the UMJC has had a mixed reaction to PMJ's theology and program for change. Not everyone is on board with Kinzer and his vision for Messianic Judaism.

Navigating Texts and Adapting Tradition

Given Satlow's claim that textual tradition is the glue holding disparate forms of contemporary Judaism together into a unified whole, one might expect that advocates for PMJ, would feel compelled to ground its religious discourse in the basic core of sacred texts on which all forms of contemporary rabbinic Judaism appear to be centered: the Mishnah and its Gemara (i.e., the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds), the medieval code of Jewish law known as the Shulchan Arukh and its glosses, various Midrashic works, and the tripartite Tanakh: The Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings.⁵⁵ What we find instead in PMJ discourse from 1999-2012, however, is a consistent appeal to the Protestant canon of scriptures to justify the ultimately social goals that lie at the heart of PMJ's message. There is little to no direct engagement with the rabbinic texts as support for Messianic Jewish community or practice per se in the

⁵⁵ Discourse here refers to "an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object," in this case Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, "into being." See, Bruce J. Lieske, "Something Old, Something New: The Messianic Congregational Movement," *Christian Research Journal* 22, no. 1 (1999); Richard C. Nichol, "The Messianic Jewish Congregation - a UMJC Perspective," in *The North American Coordinating Meeting of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism* (Dallas, TX: Unpublished, 1985), 1-19. By religious discourse, I refer to discourse that is grounded in texts believed to contain transcendent truths about the way the world is, and which appeals to the transcendent authority of those texts. See, Lincoln, *Terrors*, 5-6.

majority of papers submitted to Hashivenu,⁵⁶ and nothing to suggest that the Talmud is part of the Messianic Jewish canon.

On the surface, it might seem that dropping Messianic Jewish religion from the scholar's map of Judaism for sharing too much textually or discursively with Christianity and too little with their fellow Jews could be justified on this basis alone. But this conclusion would be a premature judgment if not a flawed approach for two reasons. First, the impact of this apparently crucial disjunction may be offset by the fact that most American Jews identify with the rabbinic tradition but reject the idea that they are religiously bound by the authority of the Talmud or its derivative codes of law. PMJ, and much of mainstream Judaism share similar attitudes about the undisputed scriptural status of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) but accord a less than scriptural status to the rabbinic corpus. Only the Orthodox communities, and perhaps officially Conservative Judaism (though not most Conservative Jews) would argue that the texts of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah constitute a normative canon for Judaism—one that is authoritative for faith and practice—while most religious forms of American Judaism would treat these texts as formative, that is, canonical in the sense that they are “taught, read, transmitted and interpreted” within the Jewish community and that this formative canon provides Jews with a common vocabulary that helps create and sustain a common religious identity.”⁵⁷ PMJ is only beginning to make use of this rabbinic textual

⁵⁶ There are two notable exceptions to this observation: Carl Kinbar's 2010 paper on Shir haShirim Rabbah that encourages Messianic Jews to engage the midrashic tradition on its own terms a means of entering the communal Jewish conversation, and Jonathan Kaplan's paper on Messianic Jewish liturgy. Kinbar, “Engaging the Jewish Conversation”; Kaplan, “A Divine Tapestry: Reading the Siddur, Reading Redemption, Reading Yeshua.”

⁵⁷ Benjamin D. Sommer, ed., *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 17; Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.

repository as a way to engage in the common conversation of other religious Jewish groups in America and to craft a common religious identity with other Jews, but it is fair to say Hashivenu treats at least some of the Oral Torah as part of its formative canon. This embrace of the rabbinic corpus as in anyway canonical marks a significant departure, or rather a complete reversal from evangelical Protestantism and places Messianic Judaism closer to mainstream Judaism in this respect than Christianity.

Second, the fact that PMJ shares the New Testament with Christianity does not ipso facto disqualify it from a place in a polythetic definition of Judaism;⁵⁸ rather, it raises the question of how they read this set of shared texts—do they read them primarily as Christians or as Jews? If their interpretive lens is pre-eminently Jewish then these texts, which have already been accepted by scholars as products of a first century, post-Second Temple Jewish culture, cannot automatically be assigned exclusively to the domain of Christianity. A postmissionary Messianic Jewish reading of these texts brings them potentially into the domain of Judaism once again. PMJ discourse claims that the New Testament scriptures are “authoritative for faith and practice,” but their critical reading of them allows for a radically different, particularist interpretation of what those texts authorize in terms of practice for Messianic Jews than a conventional, universalist

⁵⁸ Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 1–18. According to Smith, a polythetic definition of Judaism results in mapping the religion as a “shifting cluster of characteristics that vary over time.” Because there are no essential or unique characteristics to Judaism in this polythetic approach, it won’t matter if characteristics from Judaism are found to be “equally characteristic” of other, neighboring religions on a conceptual map. Likewise, it would not matter, theoretically speaking, whether Messianic Judaism is the only Judaism to share a significant element or even more than one element with Christianity or Islam or Buddhism. Perhaps one weakness of the polythetic approach to defining religions is its expansive nature. It is not designed to exclude a group from a particular taxon when the group claims to belong to it. The best you can achieve in the way of controlling the boundaries around the religions you construct is to point out how near or far a particular, self-identifying historical community lies from the groups whose clusters of characteristics define the mainstream at any given time or place. The more characteristics a group shares with a neighboring religious mainstream, the weaker its connection would likely be to the community to which it claims to belong.

Christian reading. That said, there does seem to be a qualitative difference between reading the texts of the New Testament individually as Jewish texts laying a foundation for Messianic Jewish faith and practice, and reading these same texts as a canonical whole. So far, it appears that they are still treated as part of the Christian canon of scriptures, which means that there is a strong structural relationship between Christian discourse, Christian community, and Christian institution undergirding Hashivenu's Judaism.

Despite this movement toward a Jewish hermeneutic of what has been an exclusively Christian canon of sacred texts, to date the intended audience for most of the written work that attempts to promote the PMJ platform has been fellow Christians rather than the Jewish community at large or its religious leadership. The earliest texts articulating Kinzer's program for "maturing" the Messianic Jewish movement and creating a truly Jewish Messianic Judaism were written for an elite, internal audience: first the UMJC Theology Committee and then the Hashivenu Forum. The fully developed theological argument for this program as it appeared in Kinzer's 2005 *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* expanded the potential readership to include the Jewish community but was admittedly and intentionally addressed to "the Christian world."

I would have preferred to address this book to the Jewish community—explaining the new form of Messianic Judaism that is gradually emerging, and providing reasons for why we deserve a place within Jewish communal life. However, upon consideration I determined that the Jewish community needs to hear something else first: it needs to hear postmissionary Messianic Jews addressing the church and fulfilling the obligation they own to be theirs—of representing and defending the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition before the multinational ekklesia.

The Jewish community needs to know that what postmissionary Messianic Jews say to them is borne out by what they say and do in their relationship with the Christian church.⁵⁹

As of 2012, PMJ discourse was still focused on this “inward legitimation,” crafting a tradition of creed and practice that will be acceptable to its own adherents and the Christian church at large. Nevertheless, it appears that Messianic Jews, who have been quite vocal about their self-identification as Jews and who model a cultural affinity for Judaism, seem to have acquired some measure of outward acceptance in the American Jewish world despite their heterodox beliefs about Jesus and the Trinity.⁶⁰

The Inverted Canon: Reading the New Testament in Light of the Old

Because Messianic Jews as a whole continue to self-identify as Jews despite their wholesale rejection by the normative Jewish community, they can imagine that the religious reality they create by differentiating themselves from non-Jews in the church, and more or less systematically adopting rabbinic practices, is a type of Judaism—Judaism defined by ethnicity and practice rather than by beliefs or doctrines, or arguably, the authorizing discourse of the rabbinic tradition. PMJ religion may be closer to Judaism than it is to Protestant Christianity when it is defined in terms of practice and ethnic constituency, but in the domain of religious discourse, it remains fundamentally nestled in a Christian frame of reference. Given the history of the Messianic Jewish movement and its close relationship to evangelical Protestantism, it should come as no

⁵⁹ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 25.

⁶⁰ Titus Hjelm, “Tradition as Legitimation in New Religious Movements,” in *Historicizing “Tradition” in the Study of Religion*, ed. Steven Engler and Gregory P. Grieve, vol. 43, Religion and Society (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2005), 109. On the question of whether Jewish belief in Jesus as Messiah is compatible with Jewish identity in American, 34% of the Jewish respondents (not a poll of institutional voices but of individual Jews) in a recent Pew Research survey responded, “yes.” See, Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 2013), 13.

surprise that the most authoritative texts for Kinzer and the Hashivenu Forum thinkers have been those comprising the dual canon of the Protestant Bible, usually referred to as the Old and the New Testaments. The question this raises in light of PMJ's position that it is neither Christianity nor simply "Biblical Judaism" is how a Protestant Bible can be used to authorize a Judaism that could take its place alongside mainstream denominations of Judaism whose discourses are invariably oriented to a "more or less bounded" set of rabbinic texts and the extensive interpretive tradition surrounding them and which excludes the New Testament writings.⁶¹

Kinzer approaches this problem—the absence of rabbinic authorizing and the presence of Christian canon—in two ways. First, he inverts the traditional hermeneutical relationship between the Old and New Testaments so that the New must be read through the lens of the Old in order to privilege Jewish continuity and require Jewish observance of the Torah into the church era. Second, he abandons the Protestant axiom of *sola scriptura* on which the Messianic Jewish movement cut its theological teeth so that Messianic Jews can construct their own interpretive tradition out of what they have inherited from the Rabbis and from the Christian church. This will allow them to engage in the Jewish conversation on shared Jewish texts while they assume a critical stance toward Christian tradition, especially its anti-Jewish bias and negative evaluation of rabbinic religion. PMJ discourse is in the process of disconnecting itself from a primary engagement with the rigidity of evangelical Protestant theology and its Missions to the Jews projects and connecting with other contemporary discourses like Jewish-Christian interfaith dialogue, post-Holocaust Jewish and Catholic theologies, historical-critical scholarship on the Bible, and the study of the early history of Judaism and Christianity

⁶¹ Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 8–14.

where they will have more intellectual and religious freedom to reimagine and create their own religious identity.

Kinzer's first sustained argument in support of Messianic Judaism as a "true" Judaism was framed as a question of taxonomy and presented to a committee of theologians in the UMJC in 1999. When Hebrew Christianity became Messianic Judaism in the mid 1970s, he argued, the name change was more than a cosmetic refitting of a pre-existing social reality; by inverting the two elements of the compound name of their movement, "Judaism" became the genus and "Messianic" the species. This change, Kinzer wants to persuade his audience, implies a new emphasis on the relationship between Messianic Jews and the Jewish people and between Messianic religion and Judaism. "'Judaism' turns attention first to *the Jewish people*, and designates the religious faith and way of life of those people by invoking *their name*."⁶² In contrast to Hebrew Christianity, which implies that Jewish believers are one ethnic community among many in the Christian religion, Messianic Judaism privileges an ethnocentric religious identity (Judaism) with a descriptive modifier (Messianic).

The fact that there are or have been other kinds of messianic Jewish religious communities allows Kinzer to normalize the Christian belief that Jesus was/is the ultimate fulfillment of Jewish messianic expectation as another kind of Judaism: "Ours is the Judaism that believes the Messiah has come, and that his name is Yeshua of Nazareth."⁶³ Some of today's Chabad messianists have echoed a similar declaration on behalf of their seventh Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994): "Long live our Master, our Teacher, and Rebbe, King Messiah forever and ever" (*Yechi adonenu morenu verabbenu Melech haMashiach le'olam va'ed*). Whether it is the

⁶² Kinzer, "Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism," 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 19.

Lubavitcher's rebbe or the modern Messianic Jews' Messiah, the idea that Judaism today should embrace anything more concrete than an abstracted notion of a messiah or a messianic redemption risks being labeled heresy by the non-messianist majority of Jewish elites.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Chabad messianism opens the door to a soft comparison, at least in certain areas of messianic theology, with Kinzer's PMJ and makes it more difficult to dismiss the idea of a messiah who dies and yet is still the messiah as inconceivable within a native form of Judaism.

Unlike all other forms of Judaism, however, including the Lubavitcher's messianic communities, PMJ's religious discourse requires a canonical relationship with the New Testament writings to validate its purpose and system of thought. PMJ claims to give "unique authority" not only to the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh* in PMJ's religious discourse) but also to the New Testament (usually called *Brit Hadashah* or new covenant), subordinating "all other authorities to their all-encompassing, overruling, and ultimate scrutiny."⁶⁵ The use of the Jewish term, *Tanakh*, rather than Bible or Old Testament is deliberate; it does more than just retitle the first part of the Christian canon with a Jewish term, however. The Hebrew Bible is a tripartite canon that, under rabbinic influence, grants the Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses, a functionally higher level of authority than the other two sections, whereas the Christian Old Testament is arranged so as to prepare the reader for its prophetic fulfillment in the New Testament

⁶⁴ David Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (London; Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008); David Singer, "The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Heresy Hunter," *Orthodoxy Today*, no. 133 (May 2003): 42–49; Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch*, 1st paperback edition (New York: Schocken Books, 2003); M. Avrum Ehrlich, *The Messiah of Brooklyn: Understanding Lubavitch Hasidism Past and Present* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2004); Menachem Friedman, "Habad as Messianic Fundamentalism: From Local Particularism to Universal Jewish Mission," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 328–60.

⁶⁵ Kinzer, "Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism," 22.

revelation of Jesus Christ. The inference to be drawn from Kinzer's use of Tanakh is that he will, like other Judaisms, privilege the Torah but somehow preserve the sanctity of his Christian texts and maintain the primacy of faith in Jesus/Yeshua implied in the label Messianic Judaism.

Later in 1999, Kinzer presented a related paper at the first Hashivenu Forum in southern California. In this paper he referred to the two sets of Scriptures comprising the dual canon of Messianic Judaism as the Apostolic Writings and the Hebrew Scriptures. "Apostolic Writings" are yet another way to overcome the negative connotations of the 'new' testament or 'new' covenant language in Messianic terminology. As Derek Leman later explained in his 2011 blog, *Messianic Jewish Musings*,

Let me say that the prophets of Israel [when referring to a new covenant] were not talking about a collection of books which included four accounts of Messiah's life, some letters by apostles, and a book of apocalyptic vision. . . . The name that is becoming common coinage is the Apostolic Writings. . . . there is a great advantage for us to shift our thinking about the gospels, epistles, and Revelation if we consider them writings of the apostles of Yeshua.⁶⁶

The nomenclature he uses to replace the normative New Testament/Old Testament of Christian discourse is a way of rhetorically disconnecting the two collections of texts and severing the implicit hierarchical relationship they have in the

⁶⁶ Derek Leman, "New Testament = Apostolic Writings ... Class Coming," *Messianic Jewish Musings*, October 26, 2011, <http://www.messianicjudaism.me/musings/2011/10/26/new-testament-apostolic-writings-class-coming/>. Leman is a Gentile convert to Hashivenu-style Messianic Judaism, and is a prolific blogger responsible for disseminating and explaining the Hashivenu vision to a wider, lay readership. Subsequent to his official conversion, Leman was ordained by the UMJC and up until August 2015 (<http://www.derekleman.com/bio/>), he was the leader of a blended Messianic congregation in the Hashivenu family called Tikvat David (The Hope of David) near Atlanta, Georgia.

Protestant canon. Each collection can then be conceptualized and interpreted independently before being reconnected by a new interpretive scheme that serves the larger purposes of the PMJ platform. In the re-visioned Messianic Jewish canon, the primary, ethnically neutral, categories of believer and unbeliever (saved/unsaved) that dominate the taxonomy of Protestant discourse are displaced by the Judaic categories of Jews/Gentiles. These categories appear in the New Testament but have shifted meaning in Christian supersessionist discourse as Jews disappeared from the churches and became the Christian “other.” Non-Jewish believers came to think of themselves as the New Israel,” carriers of Christian tradition, and “the Gentiles” became a way of referring to the unconverted masses or heathen nations that remained steeped in idolatry. As a normative model for restructuring power in a reconfigured, bilateral *ekklesia* today, Kinzer would like the original model of the church, one where ethnicity mattered, where Jews enjoyed a privileged position in relationship to their messiah and his messianic message, and where non-Jewish believers in a Jewish messiah were connected to Israel through their mediation.

Although the texts in Kinzer’s canon are identical to those in the Protestant Bible, Kinzer reads them through a different interpretive lens, one that foregrounds the early Jewish character of the first century church and the particularist rather than universalist nature of the gospel message. He uses the witness of his dual canon to authorize this inversion of the contemporary status quo, beginning with his claim that the church was (and should be) cognizant of Jewish difference, a difference that is not merely a function of ethnicity but of revelatory truth:

According to both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Apostolic Writings, all people are divided into two categories: Jews and Gentiles. This is true for the world as a whole, and it is also true for the *ekklesia*.⁶⁷

Then he reinforces this fundamental distinction between Jews and non-Jews by capitalizing on the pre-existing covenantal relationship that a *Jewish* Israel had with the God of the New Testament church before the early Jewish believers invited Gentiles to share in Israel's messianic redemption, and by linking today's Messianic Jews with both the early Jewish believers and the contemporary Jewish world.

For the early non-Jewish believers ... this relationship with Israel through Yeshua was also mediated by the Jewish followers of Yeshua who carried his message to them and made their incorporation into eschatological Israel a human reality.⁶⁸

This privilege of ethnic identity is then extended to the current situation in which Messianic Jews are physically outnumbered by non-Jewish Christians in their own congregational movement.

To overcome the centuries of non-Jewish hegemony in the church, Kinzer appeals to the Pentateuchal narrative of Israel's election as a people whose history of a covenantal relationship with God, marked by a particular way of life, antedates the Gentiles' entry point into this sacred history.

As part of the Jewish people, "the beginnings of our being in the Way" were not in "Jesus Christ" but in Abraham. All the more so have we reason to trust that the God who called our father Abraham, established us as a people, and showed his faithfulness to us through centuries

⁶⁷ Kinzer, "Genus," 23.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

marked by our unfaithfulness, has not ceased to work His will among us
in our long years of exile.⁶⁹

The rhetorical gulf between Jews and Gentiles, even those who share a common faith in Jesus is vast and unbridgeable in this remarkable passage. God established “us” (and not “them”); God called “us,” God was faithful to “us” in “our” unfaithfulness, and He continues to work in “us” despite “our exile.”

Not only does this rhetoric aim to persuade his elite Messianic Jewish audience that their primary affinity should be with the historic Jewish people, but it simultaneously “others” non-Jewish Christians, creating a hierarchical order of ethnic difference for the church. It is, on the surface, a repudiation of Christian supersessionism, but because Messianic Jews are also differentiated from non-Messianic Jews, claiming to be both “saved and chosen,”⁷⁰ this self-described believing remnant of the Jewish people sees itself as standing in for the whole, resulting in a kind of soft supersessionism. The basic thrust of supersessionist theology remains in force since the church still conceives of itself as Israel. But if the church will accept Messianic Judaism and Messianic Jews as normative members of the greater ekklesia, Kinzer, argues, it can counter the charge that the Gentile church has replaced ethnic Israel as God’s chosen people. Instead of being replaced by Gentiles in the divine economy of salvation, Messianic Jews actually incorporate believing Gentiles into an eschatologically imagined, expanded commonwealth of Israel. Gentiles do not become Jews in this new ecclesiology (lest the church lapse into supersessionism), rather they allow, even encourage Messianic Jews to “be” Jews by identifying with the wider Jewish world and participating in its historic religious tradition.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁰ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 166.

This strategy not only works to make Jewish identity meaningful in the church by elevating ethnic difference among those who share faith in Jesus/Yeshua to a status with transcendent meaning, but it can also relativize the importance of messianic faith for the Jewish believer, whose primary and most visceral connection to the God of the Jewish Bible has now been drawn in ancestral and covenantal rather than confessional terms. As Mark Kinzer notes,

It is fitting that Messianic Jews, like other Jews, consider identification with the Jewish people throughout its history and commitment to its welfare as the bedrock of their social identity. Though this could make Yeshua peripheral to the Messianic Jew, it need not do so. If we are truly *Messianic Jews*, then our love for our people, our reading of its history, our interpretation of its sacred texts, and our participation in its sacred rites will all be conducted in, with, and through that Messianic seed of Abraham and David, who summed up in his person all that Israel can and should be.⁷¹

As PMJ discourse develops and gains a following, this potential for relativizing Christian faith is being compensated for by repeated efforts to affirm the centrality of Yeshua to Messianic Judaism.⁷² What is not quite so apparent is what difference the difference of faith in Jesus makes in practice or community formation in the PMJ model. Clearly in

⁷¹ Kinzer, “Genus,” 14.

⁷² Kinzer, “Oral Torah,” 34; Kinzer, “Shema in Messianic Perspective”; Kinzer, “Finding Our Way Through Nicaea: The Deity of Yeshua, Bilateral Ecclesiology, and Redemptive Encounter with the Living God”; Kinzer, *Israel’s Messiah and the People of God*; Kinzer, “The Torah & Jews in the Christian Church.” There is also an audio recording of Kinzer speaking at a UMJC conference in 2007/2008 on what he means by postmissionary messianic Judaism and its commitment to “bearing witness to Yeshua” within Israel, “Kinzer at UMJC Conference by Rabbi Dr. Mark Kinzer,” https://archive.org/details/KinzerAtUmjcConference_35, uploaded by Sean Emslie June 18, 2008.

evangelical Protestantism, a high Christology leads to the critically important practices of preaching the gospel message and active evangelism, especially among groups involved in missions to the Jews, whose primary purpose was to convert Jews to Christian faith.⁷³ But it is not clear exactly what personal Messianic Jewish beliefs about Jesus will contribute to living a Torah observant lifestyle in harmony with the rabbinic tradition other than the claim that Messianics are empowered to do so in some special way that non-Messianic Jews are not. Given the tiny percentage of congregations that are currently on board with the MJRC's halakhic program, it would seem that this claim of spiritual empowerment has minimal persuasive power for recruiting non-Messianic Christian Jews to a spirit filled rabbinic lifestyle.

There is a clear danger expressed by the voices of Hashivenu that if the Messianic Jewish movement fails to articulate a clear sense of its purpose or the value of maintaining a distinctive Jewish presence in the church, it will not be able to replicate itself in another generation.⁷⁴ This concern translates into the need to create an ideological platform grounded in the authority of the scriptural canon it shares with the church, but requires shedding the Protestant dispensational hermeneutic that gave the movement its identity and value in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Birthed from the Free Church movement, Messianic Judaism inherited a hermeneutical legacy of objectivism, based upon a series of operations systematically performed upon the texts of scripture and intended to

⁷³ Christian beliefs are also articulated and reinforced, of course, in the evangelical Protestant ritual practices of baptism and communion or Eucharist. Not surprisingly then, Messianic Jews incorporate these ritual practices into Messianic Judaism as *tevilat haMashiach* (the Lord's immersion) and *haZikaron or Zichron Mashiach* (Remembrance). Both rites, Hashivenu thinkers would argue, are inherently Jewish in character and Messianic Jews should conduct them in a way that expresses that character in their congregational life.

⁷⁴ Personal message from Messianic Rabbi Carl Kinbar (September, 2014).

produce foundational and unassailable truth ... [but] it ignored the broader range of history and tradition ... Suffice it to say that unless Messianic Judaism develops new and creative ways of approaching the texts to derive current application and meaning for proclamation and practice, it will fail to remain credible, viable and compelling for present adherents and the potential next generation of believers.⁷⁵

What Messianic Judaism needs is a tradition of its own that specifies both the nature of the Messianic Jewish self, and establishes the value of that self in its two communities of reference.⁷⁶ Hashivenu argues that this value must transcend the missionary role Messianic Jews had been assigned by the church, and Hashivenu leaders are pinning their hopes on reconnecting to the ancient and sacred Jewish identity that is constructed in the Pentateuchal narrative of Israel's origins. Christianity shares the Pentateuch with Judaism, which makes this a logical bridge on which to cross over from a church-centered theology to an Israel-centered theology. History, however, works against efforts to posit the value of a continuing, visible Jewish presence in the church, testifying as it does to the early loss of Jewish influence and the concomitant exponential growth of the church as a non-Jewish institution.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Hashivenu discourse is resolved to view this reversal as a tragedy rather than a success and to envision a return to the original relationship and distribution of power between Messianic Jew and Messianic Gentile. As it was for the first community of Jewish-Gentile believers, so it should be for

⁷⁵ Saal, "Re-Imagining the Canonical Text," 1–2.

⁷⁶ Steven Engler and Gregory P. Grieve, eds., *Historicizing "Tradition" in the Study of Religion*, vol. 43, Religion and Society (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2005), 8.

⁷⁷ William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1995), 153–54; John Goodrich Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes towards Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 112–15.

the church today; that is, if it is serious about undoing its supersessionist interpretation of Christian Scriptures. Kinzer argues that visible, recognizable Jewish members, living out the mandate of Israel's covenant with God, constitute living proof that the church has not usurped the place assigned to Israel in this narrative of messianic redemption.

Israel is the Jewish people, and the [first century] Jewish wing of the *ekklesia* is the renewed portion of Israel that mediates the promises of God to its Gentile wing ... Messianic Judaism is the “ecclesiological bridge joining Israel and the Gentiles.” The loss of a clear Jewish presence in the *ekklesia* obscured its relationship to genealogical Israel, and opened the door for supercessionist [sic] theology. We may therefore draw an important conclusion: *the nature of the ekklesia not only allows for Messianic Judaism—it requires it.*

As those ethnically and genealogically part of elect Israel, Messianic Jews have a unique position within the *ekklesia*, and Messianic Judaism—their way of life and faith in continuity with their ancestral tradition—also has a unique position within the *ekklesia*. Without Messianic Jews and Messianic Judaism, the *ekklesia* is not truly and fully itself. Without Israel there is no *ekklesia*.⁷⁸

In addition to providing PMJs with an ancient pedigree that begins with Abraham and continues through the return from Babylonian captivity, the Pentateuch prescribes a distinctive way of life for Israel that will work to distinguish it from that of the surrounding nations. This way of life is ultimately derived from the commandments and laws that the Pentateuch records as having come down to Israel directly from the finger of God through the instrumentality of Judaism's most honored prophet and

⁷⁸ Kinzer, “Genus,” 16, 19–20, 23, 24.

teacher, Moses. The Torah, Kinzer argues, expresses the uniqueness of Israel as a nation and a people through the outworking of its covenantal obligations.

Israel is a *holy* nation. Judaism is its *national* holiness. This way of national holiness is expressed in the Torah. Israel first receives the charge to be a holy nation at Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6), as part of the covenant established there . . . The instruction given to Israel in the subsequent chapters of the Torah provides concrete detail in how this way of national holiness is to be lived. Throughout Jewish history . . . there has been agreement on one fact: without Torah, there is no Judaism. As Jacob Neusner has written, “Submission to the authority of the Torah of Moses at Sinai marks all Judaisms as Judaic and excludes all other religions as not-Judaic.”

To be part of a people means embracing its history and tradition as one’s own. Israel does not consist only of all Jews alive today, but of all Jews who have ever lived. . . . We claim a place among this holy nation and a role in its priestly mission in the world. This is what we mean when we refer to our movement as a species of Judaism.⁷⁹

Each set of Scriptures in the Messianic Jewish canon, Hebrew Bible and New Testament, however, attests to only one of PMJ’s two central truths. The Hebrew Scriptures establish the irrevocable covenant God made with Israel and, by extension in PMJ discourse, with contemporary Messianic Jews, while the primary message of the New Testament, according to Kinzer’s necessarily selective reading, is the affirmation of orthodox Christology—the “person and work of Jesus Christ.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3–4, 5.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9–10.

As Messianic Jews, we affirm two truths as central to our faith and identity: (1) God’s irrevocable covenant with the Jewish people, embodied and guarded by the Torah, and (2) God’s reconciling and revealing work for Israel and the nations in Messiah Yeshua.⁸¹

Unfortunately for PMJ, as Kinzer admits, the Hebrew Bible as it has been interpreted through the rabbinic tradition does not support Christian claims about Jesus as a divine messiah or savior (nor does it support enlarging Israel’s tent by incorporating unconverted Gentiles!). The Christian New Testament, at best ambivalent about a continuing obligation for Jews who believe in Jesus to observe the laws of the Mosaic covenant, has a post-apostolic Christian tradition that notoriously denied the ongoing election of ethnic Israel. Herein lies the dilemma for Kinzer, Hashivenu, and PMJ theology. “Without the affirmation of both Messianic Judaism is meaningless,”⁸² and Messianic Jews are only partial fits in either of the two interpretive communities to which they are able to relate.

In his two 1999 papers Kinzer deals primarily with the difficulties presented from the Christian side, while the question of how and if Messianic Jews will be able to function as part of the wider Jewish world and mainstream Judaism remains unaddressed. Possibly he felt Christian acceptance of his bi-lateral ecclesiology would be the more difficult war of the two to win. More likely this is the most natural place to begin if the goal is to retain a place at the Christian table while becoming conversant enough with the canon of Jewish texts and the standards of Jewish observance to be able to participate in the communal life of religious Jews with any kind of credibility. Since the vast majority of Jewish believers who are the key to PMJs success in the long run are

⁸¹ Ibid., 23.

⁸² Ibid., 10.

currently sitting in church pews and not in Messianic congregations, if Kinzer hopes to sell his program, he will need to cultivate rather than cut off goodwill with the evangelical churches that brought Messianic Judaism into existence.

Once he has made the argument that the church needs its Jewish core, Kinzer needs to create the differential content that will keep this Jewish core distinct from its non-Jewish other. He defines this core in terms of sustained religious practice. If these Jews must live *as Jews* in light of their ancestral covenant, i.e., observe the laws of the Torah, then the traditional Protestant interpretation of the New Testament, which precludes such a possibility for Christians—Jew or Gentile—must be rethought to bring it into conformity with Kinzer’s definition of Messianic Judaism as a “divinely sanctioned social and religious reality.”⁸³ Once this internal legitimation of the new paradigm is successfully implanted in Messianic Jewish discourse, it then will be possible to work on the problem of fitting Messianic Christology into a hospitable Jewish theological framework.⁸⁴ In short, Paul’s vision of an ideal Christian community where ethnicity, gender, and social status were subordinated to the unity of faith offered by a risen, deified Messiah became the normative paradigm for the Christian church.⁸⁵ Kinzer argues that Paul’s approach is mistaken and incapable of adjusting to a historical reality in which Jesus did not come as promised and that such a model eventually led to a church that separated itself entirely from the Jewish people and the synagogue, contra Paul’s overarching intentions.

⁸³ Kinzer, “Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism,” 15.

⁸⁴ For later attempts to work toward this goal, see Kinzer, “Finding Our Way Through Nicaea: The Deity of Yeshua, Bilateral Ecclesiology, and Redemptive Encounter with the Living God”; Kinbar, “Engaging the Jewish Conversation.”

⁸⁵ Kinzer will tease out those passages in Paul’s writings that seem to deconstruct this idealistic vision and privilege them over the those that were used to support the church’s project of de-Judaizing Christianity.

The Pauline model makes sense in light of his expectation that this age was drawing to a close. He was not planning for a multi-generational community. . . . [W]e dare not imitate his pastoral strategy if we want to build a Messianic Judaism that will survive beyond a single generation.⁸⁶

Rather than taking Pauline social doctrine as absolute truth (like the evangelical Protestantism from which he is separating) Kinzer approaches the text of the New Testament from a modern, historical-critical perspective.⁸⁷ The text of Scripture is open to multiple interpretations, with respect to praxis at least, while Christian tradition is contingent on and conditioned by the historical circumstances of a given Christian community. Speaking of the Jews who found themselves part of Pauline congregations, Kinzer explains:

That Jews within those communities were required to make compromises in their daily Jewish practice for the sake of the Gentile brothers and sisters was not a universal law of the *ekklēsia* but a consequence of the particular character of these congregations: they were Gentile communities founded by the Apostle to the Gentiles.⁸⁸

The implication Kinzer draws from this alternative reading of Paul in defense of his position that Messianic Jews are obligated to live Jewish lives is that the New Testament supports two distinct communities with distinct leadership structures. This interpretation of Paul grounds Kinzer's vision of a renewed and reformed ecclesiology, as he argues in his 2005 book, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*, written to the Christian church at large.

⁸⁶ Kinzer, "Genus," 26.

⁸⁷ Kinzer, "Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition."

⁸⁸ Kinzer, "Genus," 27.

The one *ekklesia* of Messiah Yeshua is not made up of individual Jews and Gentiles, mixed together in an undifferentiated stew, but of two distinct corporate entities joined in an indissoluble bond of love and mutual commitment.

The fundamental biblical model for relationships between Jews and Gentiles in the *ekklesia* is the corporate bond connecting the Jerusalem (and its Jewish satellites) to the Pauline communities of the diaspora.

This bond established an essential link between the Gentile congregations and the people of Israel *as a whole* [italics added].⁸⁹

In the post-Biblical period, however, this fundamental model was not or could not be sustained for a few outlying sects or splinter groups that managed to maintain a Jewish orientation towards the messianic faith they now shared with a predominantly non-Jewish church. Kinzer argues that the inevitable outcome of any Jewish group that becomes alienated from the larger Jewish community is marginality and eventual demise; in particular, he argues that,

The rupture with emergent Rabbinic Judaism spelled the doom for any form of Messianic Judaism, for no Jewish group can survive for long as an ostracized sect, cut off from the life of the Jewish people as a whole. Even if these Yeshua-adhering congregations had preserved a mutually supportive relationship with the Gentile *ekklesia*, it would not have been enough to compensate for the break with the larger Jewish world.⁹⁰

History, specifically Jewish-Christian history, is another source of sacred truth upon which Kinzer and his emergent postmissionary paradigm must rely if they are to

⁸⁹ Ibid., 28, 30.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 31.

produce an authentic Messianic Jewish tradition, a canonical narrative of their own that can effectively combine Christian beliefs anchored in the New Testament with a Jewish religious life authorized by the Torah of Moses. Kinzer hopes to persuade fellow Messianic Jewish thinkers and leaders to take Jewish-Christian history seriously as another source of transcendent truth alongside the canonical Scriptures. “Though the canon has been closed,” Kinzer writes, “God . . . has not retired, but is still in the business of speaking and acting in and through history.”⁹¹ This is standard fare for Judaism but a radical departure from *sola scriptura* for Jewish converts to evangelicalism.

We have two troubling texts before us, not one: the text of scripture, and the text of history. If we believe that God speaks through the former, then its message will lead us to conclude that He also speaks through the latter.⁹²

We certainly need to read the text of history in the light of the text of the Bible. As we seek to understand these events, and what God would say to us through them, we must bring to the task minds steeped in biblical wisdom . . . What we learn from history must then be brought to bear on our reading of Scripture.⁹³

Kinzer is attempting to justify a Messianic Jewish turn toward rabbinic Judaism and the wider (non-Messianic) Jewish world to an interpretive community that relies exclusively on the authority of the Christian Bible. Therefore, he needs to tease out the tensions between the Pauline vision of a religious community comprised of Jewish and Gentile members in which Jewish ethnicity is subordinated to the overall spiritual unity

⁹¹ Ibid., 5–6.

⁹² Ibid., 6.

⁹³ Ibid., 7.

of the group (the normative Missions to the Jews model), and the church in Luke-Acts, which is portrayed as an observant Jewish community struggling to accommodate Paul's Gentiles within their halakhic framework (the evolving Hashivenu model). It is here that Kinzer appeals to the sacred text of history to resolve the conflict: "Our reading of the text of history will help us decide which biblical texts should be privileged over others, and how to interpret the biblical message as a whole."⁹⁴ "As a whole" means that the conflicting messages about Jews and Gentiles, law and grace, mixed communities and separate ecclesial structures must be resolved with the higher and more ancient truth of Jewish particularity in mind. The election of Israel, the divine covenant with this chosen people, and this people's ongoing relationship with God and Torah should determine how and to what extent the New Testament scriptures can be applied to the current Messianic Jewish experience. In other words, the correct reading of Christian scriptures today is through the lens of Jewish history and the Hebrew Bible. According to Kinzer, what a Messianic Jewish reading of Jewish history demonstrates is that rabbinic Judaism, and not the church has preserved the Jewish people and its divinely ordained way of life rooted in the covenant at Sinai.

[Since] the New Testament as a canonical whole assumes that a distinctive Jewish communal presence is important for the outworking of the divine purpose in the world . . . [and] there has been no continuous communal presence of such a body [in the church] . . . This means that

⁹⁴ Ibid., 7–8. Other Hashivenu thinkers agree with the move away from the standard evangelical hermeneutic, which does not ask Jewish questions of the Christian canon, towards one that meets the Messianic Jewish communal need. "Our job . . . is . . . to develop a method of adjudicating between competing plausible interpretations." Saal, "Re-Imagining the Canonical Text," 23–24; Dauermann, "My Hermeneutical Journey," 15.

the wider Jewish community, consisting mainly of non-Yeshua-believing Jews, must play an essential positive role in God’s purpose for the world.⁹⁵ The New Testament affirms the irrevocable covenant with Israel and likewise affirms Jewish practice—rooted in Torah—as a sign of that enduring covenant and as a means of preserving Israel’s distinct covenantal existence in the world. In other words, the New Testament affirms the validity of what we would today call Judaism. A particular type of Judaism emerged in the early centuries of the common era—rabbinic Judaism . . . and only this particular expression of Judaism—succeeded in preserving both the Jewish people and its covenantal way of life. Its crucial role in what is evidently a divinely appointed task points to its inherent value. . . . If one denies the legitimacy of historical Judaism, one in effect asserts that the divine purpose for the Jewish people found in the New Testament has been definitively thwarted.⁹⁶

This seemingly necessary validation of rabbinic Judaism, however, is highly problematic because history also shows that over time, the church constructed Rabbinic Judaism as the very antithesis of Christianity. The proverbial line is drawn in the sand between the Messianic Jews aligned with the conservative evangelical wing of the Christian church, for whom *sola scriptura* means that the Bible speaks with a single voice of absolute truth, and those who are inclined to agree with Kinzer, willing to look for a place on the map of America’s religious landscape somewhere in Jewish territory.

Kinzer’s most vocal critic to date has been Dr. Michael Brown, a prominent Messianic Jew and Christian apologist who is staunchly supportive of traditional

⁹⁵ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 149.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

approaches to evangelistic outreach to the Jewish community. In 1988 Brown wrote a scathing denunciation of what was then only the beginning of a fashionable repurposing of rabbinic traditions in Messianic congregational life. In a paper Brown presented that year to theologians in the UMJC, a decade before Kinzer's *Judaism as Genus*, he pointed out the dangers posed by this Messianic dallying with rabbinic traditions.

I was warned by the Spirit of God that “the whole Jewish temptation is in the soul realm. It will *fascinate, stimulate, complicate, suffocate.*” . . . I have seen many dear believers fall into this trap. Pretty soon the believer finds himself spiritually stifled . . . witnessing less to Jewish souls . . . and praising Yeshua less and less [italics in the original].⁹⁷

I believe that the Word of God is our Guide, that the Spirit of God is our Teacher, and that we have a huge task set before us: the salvation of our people Israel and our personal faithfulness to God's call. Rabbinic tradition can only get in the way of fulfilling that call. . . . it is not time for us to bring Rabbinism into the Body, nor is it time for us to seek reentry into the traditional camp. Rather, as we go to Yeshua “outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore” (Hebrews 13:13) *it is time for the synagogue to come to us* [italics in the original].⁹⁸

Brown's argument to the UMJC theologians is fortified by the use of religious rhetoric and the appeal to a direct, personal revelation from God. He quotes extensively from the New Testament in support of his point that Rabbinic Judaism is not only antithetical to Christianity but a dangerous “other” that must be avoided at all costs. Ironically, it was members of the American rabbinic Jewish community that first labeled the early

⁹⁷ Brown, “The Place of Rabbinic Judaism,” 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

Messianic Jewish movement a threatening and dangerous “other,” a cult whose purpose was to seduce the unknowledgeable and unsuspecting Jew into converting to a foreign religion. The mutual suspicion between these two religious communities, evangelical missions to the Jews and mainstream American Judaism, also ironically is now playing out as in internecine religious argument *among* Messianic Jews with opposing ideological commitments and religiously defined purposes for the future of the Jewish people.

The Rabbis and Oral Torah: Tradition but not Scripture

Because the Protestant canon includes all of the individual texts that make up the Jewish Bible, Jews (and Gentiles) who accept the canonicity of the Protestant canon are incorporating by reference a sacred view of rabbinic Judaism’s oldest scriptures as well. Therefore, Judaism and Christianity do share some of the same Scriptures, but their respective religious communities do not share either a common canon or a common interpretive tradition; even those Scriptures that they do share are arranged and ranked differently in the respective canons. These differences both complicate and fructify the Messianic Jewish community’s struggle to carve out a unique place for its members in Jewish territory without jeopardizing its connection to the Christian church. On the one hand the shared Scriptures enable Messianic Jews to connect to both Jewish and Protestant myths of origin—saved as individual Christians but chosen as part of the Jewish people. On the other hand the fact that Jewish and Christian traditions have created and developed in mutually exclusive religious communities leaves PMJ unable to bridge the gap between the two groups without sacrificing the pragmatic implications of one or the other of its two core truths.

To choose the church as a primary social locus is to live among the saved, which means continuing to be ostracized from the synagogue and alienated from the normative

communal life of the Jewish people, a position articulated passionately and with a sense of righteous pride by Dr. Brown in 1988. To choose Judaism requires living communally as a Jew among other Jews, a choice that will be interpreted by evangelicals as refusing to identify fully with the truth of the Christian gospel, and failing to exhort other Jews to accept a place “outside the camp” as proof of their faith. This message has not changed appreciably since David Baron’s denunciation of Messianic Judaism at the turn of the 20th century. PMJ’s ideology requires that Messianic Jews choose Judaism and a primary identification with the Jewish people, but it cannot, with theological integrity, afford to be seen as severing its ties to the Christian community or marginalizing belief in Jesus/Yeshua in exchange for acceptance by the gatekeepers of American Judaism.

In traditional or Rabbinic Judaism the canon, to use an admittedly Christian category of classification, comprises both the Oral Torah and the Written Torah. The Oral is inconceivable without the Written, and the Written is incomplete without the Oral. Both are considered the product of divine revelation and are equally sacred, although they may perform different functions for the life of the community. In modern Judaic movements, both the Oral and the Written halves of the rabbinic canon have been subjected to the same historical-critical apparatus that Kinzer proposes for interpreting the New Testament texts, and depending on which denomination or movement within American Judaism is interrogated on the sacred status of this tradition, they may be considered inspired or revealed, authoritative and binding, or not binding and simply revered. In any case, with the exception of perhaps John Rayner’s call for a post-rabbinic Progressive Judaism,⁹⁹ the rabbis’ Oral Torah informs almost all areas of religious Jewish life, from practice and ethics to the festive calendar and the rituals associated with life cycle events to the boundaries of community. Within the Messianic Jewish

⁹⁹ John D. Rayner, “Post-Rabbinic Judaism,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 30, no. 2 (1997): 96–108.

movement in America, at least up to the emergence of PMJ, Messianic leaders have consistently rejected the authority and divine inspiration of any post-biblical rabbinic texts as well as the rabbinic interpretation of their shared biblical Scriptures, despite an ad hoc borrowing of its forms, symbols, and language. PMJ discourse, however, signals an abrupt shift in this negative assessment and distancing from Rabbinic Judaism.

While from our perspective the failure of the Jewish people to accept Yeshua as Messiah adds a tragic dimension to Jewish history, it is nonetheless true that our people could not have chosen better, given this failure, than to recognize the halakhic authority of the Rabbinic movement. . . . If with Michael Wyschogrod, we understand the Oral Torah to be “that part of the law carried in the Jewish people,” then we are compelled to see the Rabbis of the Talmud and their successors as its official custodians.¹⁰⁰

In his rehabilitation of rabbinic Judaism’s legacy in the church Kinzer falls well short of incorporating Talmudic texts into the Protestant canon; however he does affirm the legitimacy and authority of the rabbis in matters of halakhah (Jewish law), and selectively appeals to portions of the Talmud as well as to the work of contemporary Jewish theologians as he tries to arrive at a workable compromise between PMJ’s two inherited traditions. Like other modern types of Judaism, Kinzer dismisses the “naïve” claim of Orthodox Judaism that the Oral Torah is a record of divine revelation or that its hermeneutical principles (Heb. *middot*) are sacrosanct:

I would not advocate the view that the teaching now found in the vast Rabbinic corpus was revealed to Moses at Sinai . . . the naïve version of the doctrine has little grounding in the tradition itself. . . . Anyone who has

¹⁰⁰ Kinzer, “Oral Torah,” 33.

ever read the Talmud recognizes the absurdity of the notion that in its totality it embodies the words of God to Moses on Sinai. . . . We may safely reject such a doctrine as ridiculous. However, when we do so we are not rejecting the Rabbinic understanding of the Oral Torah.¹⁰¹

Kinzer does seem to accept, again in line with more sophisticated understandings of an oral tradition, its “essential nature as the flexible, contingent application of the Written Torah to new situations.”¹⁰² Biblical law, Kinzer argues, is rooted in divine revelation, “but it must be administered, interpreted, and applied by human authorities” whose authority is derivative and legitimated by “being chosen by the covenant people.”¹⁰³ The primary function of the Rabbi’s Oral Torah for PMJ is held out to be pragmatic rather than theological, that is, it should help but not necessarily determine how Messianic Jews live out the legal requirements of the Sinai covenant. Since in Kinzer’s argument Judaism is a religion of ethnicity and praxis, but not a religion that is concerned with setting the requirements for individual salvation, it should not overlap with Christianity’s dominion over that element of faith. Kinzer’s Messianic Judaism takes what he sees as the core truths of both traditions—faith in the Messiah and his salvific work and an obligation to live an observant Jewish life—and puts them into proper relationship with one another. Personal faith energizes religious obligation, and

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 1, 12–13. Of course the traditional rabbinic understanding of the Oral Torah and its levels of what might be classified as Scriptural authority is much more complex than Kinzer makes it out to be. On the nature of Oral Torah and especially the distinction between *d’oraita* (from Sinai) and *de’rabbanan* (from the Rabbis’ own exegetical undertakings) see, Louis Jacobs, “Halakhah,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Benjamin De Vries, Michael Berenbaum, and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 251–58..

¹⁰² Kinzer, “Oral Torah,” 18.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 19. Kinzer would agree with the Orthodox Jewish position that authority to legislate and judge the Jewish community is conferred on those who rise up and are accepted as judges or sages in their respective generations by the Jewish community.

religious obligation structures personal faith. As I understand his argument, the rabbinic legal tradition or Oral Torah is rejected as Scripture (divinely revealed at Sinai) but understood as inspired; its human development is by divine design. It is authoritative insofar as it informs practice and perhaps ethics, except where it might conflict with doctrinal or practical instructions in the New Testament (a higher authority and level of inspiration).

At this point Kinzer is again compelled to seek out justification or permission for Messianic Jews to adopt some version of this rabbinic concept of Oral Torah for themselves from their Apostolic Writings. After a lengthy discursive analysis of selected texts from the Gospels (*besorot* in Messianic terminology)¹⁰⁴ that he uses to support Jesus's positive orientation to post-biblical traditions, and after arguing that it is the divine prerogative of the Jewish people (the covenant people as opposed to the grafted-in Gentiles) to legitimate and confirm their religious leaders, Kinzer concludes that Messianic Jews cannot ignore rabbinic tradition even if that tradition rejects the gospels' witness about Jesus. Furthermore, Messianic Jews have received a measure of halakhic authority from Jesus—authority that devolves from the superior messianic authority of Jesus rather than the rabbinic institutional process.

Taking my conclusion as a premise, one could develop an Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist Messianic approach to Jewish tradition. . . . However, we cannot expect to engage in such a discussion fruitfully if we do not begin where all other modern Judaisms begin—with explicit acknowledgement of the validity of Rabbinic tradition . . . for all

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, the Chabad messianists published a small book with selected portions of the late Rebbe's discourses on Moshiach (messiah) called *Besoras Hageulah*, The Announcement of Redemption). Now, a prominent web-based Christian organization dedicated to the Jewish roots of Christianity, Hebrew4Christians.com, uses the same terminology *Besorat Hageulah* (The Good News of Redemption) to refer to five books in the New Testament: the four Gospels plus the Book of Acts.

practical interpretation and application of the Written Torah to contemporary Jewish life.¹⁰⁵

Entering the Jewish conversation

Postmissionary Messianic Jews are painfully aware, however, that they are not partners in the greater Jewish conversation that centers on rabbinic tradition and its role in contemporary Jewish life. This is the very conversation that Michael Satlow argues holds a diverse set of Jewish communities together into a unified collective religious world that scholars could justifiably label Judaism. “Textual tradition,” writes Satlow, “is just barely powerful enough to hold together the diversity of Judaism” and the discursive conversation that this textual tradition defines, that is the organic development of an interpretive tradition, links different communities who consider the same or similar books as sacred together.¹⁰⁶

As early as 2001, Kinzer agreed with Satlow’s understanding of Jewish tradition and argued forcefully that Messianic Jews, if they were to practice an authentic Judaism, had to join this communal conversation.

The Jewish reader is never alone with the text, but is always surrounded by the great Jewish commentators of the past and present, just as the text itself is surrounded by their words. . . . We sit and listen as they discuss and argue with one another, and then we are obliged and privileged to join the conversation.¹⁰⁷

In 2001, it might have seemed that the greatest obstacle to this privileged position at the table was the reluctance of fellow Messianic Jews to venture out from the shackles of

¹⁰⁵ Kinzer, “Oral Torah,” 34.

¹⁰⁶ Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Kinzer, “Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition,” 1. In this passage, Kinzer is referring specifically to Jewish commentary on the Written Torah.

their Protestant presuppositions and embrace the idea of an oral interpretive tradition (of any kind). Eight years later Russell Resnik, Executive Director of the UMJC understood that Messianic Jews were going to experience life on the margins of the Jewish community, even when their efforts were aimed at acts of *hesed* or participating in communal worship, let alone in biblical interpretation.¹⁰⁸ Carl Kinbar, Messianic rabbi and founding member of Hashivenu, lamented two years later that he found it more do-able to be involved in the Jewish community in certain limited relationships than to participate in Jewish conversation about the textual tradition. “As a rule, we are not welcome in that conversation [sic] as Messianic Jews, even on the basic levels of learning. But we must listen to the conversation and begin to grasp it before we can *actively* participate in it [italics in the original].”¹⁰⁹

Since the doors of Jewish learning are closed to Messianic Jews, Kinbar advocates for developing an internal Messianic Jewish engagement with Jewish texts, by which he means that Messianics should begin to learn in their own circles “just like every other Jewish movement” and then connect more fully when they are better prepared and the doors crack open slightly.¹¹⁰ This appears to be what is happening at least among those who are following Kinzer’s theology and the Hashivenu vision. In 2001 the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute (MJTI) website advertised two diploma programs, one in the area of leadership and the other in Messianic Jewish Theology. The Institute was a partnership with Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California and

¹⁰⁸ Resnik, “Hesed and Hospitality,” 2.

¹⁰⁹ Kinbar, “Engaging the Jewish Conversation,” 1–2.

¹¹⁰ Kinbar, “Engaging the Jewish Conversation.”

offered graduate-level classes for Messianic Jewish leaders.¹¹¹ Today MJTI offers distance and face-to-face learning with individual courses, certificates as well as structured programs of study in Jewish studies, cantorial arts, and rabbinic training, all from a distinctively Messianic Jewish approach that combines “Jewish religious thought and practice” with the “mission and teaching of Yeshua the Messiah.” At MJTI the Apostolic Writings (New Testament) are read as “Jewish writings essential for interpreting the history of Jewish life, thought and practice,” and are “rightly interpreted in the light of that history.” According MJTI’s program objectives for its Master of Jewish Studies program, students will study “classic Jewish writings in their original languages, to understand their historical context and relevance to Jewish faith and practice,” as well as how to engage them as part of their Messianic Jewish heritage.¹¹² Apart from a course on the Apostolic Writings and one on Jewish-Christian relations, there are no classes in Christian studies or systematic Christian theology in the 2015-16 Course Schedule.¹¹³

Summary

Having enjoyed some measure of success as a new religious movement within evangelical Protestantism, leaders of a now “maturing” Messianic Judaism are ready to reify conceptual and social boundaries between Messianic Judaism and evangelical Protestant Christianity in order to distance Messianic Jews and Messianic Judaism from the powerful reach of Gentile Christianity and align themselves with the wider Jewish

¹¹¹ “Messianic Jewish Theological Institute,” revised May 29, 2001, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20011203212614/http://www.mjti.org/domains/mjti/default.htm>.

¹¹² <http://www.mjti.org/programs/master-of-jewish-studies/program-objectives>, accessed June 2, 2015; <http://twenties.umjc.org/educate/mjti/>, accessed June 2, 2015. MJTI’s Master of Jewish Studies program was established in 2005. MJTI does not ordain rabbis, but its rabbinical program of study prepares students for ordination by the UMJC.

¹¹³ <http://www.mjti.org/schedule>, accessed June 2, 2015.

world and rabbinic Judaism. They believe reifying boundaries will allow them to occupy and control a uniquely “Jewish space” within the Christian community that at the same time functions as an authentic kind of contemporary Judaism. Here they will have the freedom to shape that space in conversation with rabbinic tradition and what they perceive to be their own Jewish cultural heritage in order to pass on to the next generation of Messianic Jews a meaningful Jewish identity, in sync with the wider Jewish world rather than the evangelical church and Missions to the Jews.

To be successful, PMJ must persuade those on the inside that this new approach does not conflict with the core values or message of the New Testament. This inside legitimation is more critical to Messianic religious integrity than going outside to secure a similar kind of legitimation from the wider Jewish world because their target audience of other Christian Jews who are currently sitting in church pews rather than Messianic *Jewish* congregations are the largest potential source of new members for the movement. Without their participation, Postmissionary Messianic Judaism will almost certainly be unable to grow and support the kinds of institutions it needs to become a viable Judaism in this generation.

Because of the antipathy that Protestant evangelical Christian tradition has held for post-biblical rabbinic Judaism, PMJs have to convince the Messianic and Jewish Christian communities to abandon the *sola scriptura* approach to interpreting the New Testament in favor a modern historical-critical reading that leaves room to validate the development of rabbinic Judaism and to privilege the narrative of Israelite/Jewish particularism in the Hebrew Bible over the blended Jew-Gentile Pauline model of church building in the New Testament. Kinzer effectively inverts and transforms Christian scriptures, Old Testament and New Testament, into a dual Messianic Jewish canon where the Apostolic Writings (New Testament) become a divine witness to a Messianic

Jewish way of life rooted in covenantal observance of the Mosaic law from its source in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) to its extension and interpretation in the rabbinic tradition.

From this vantage point Kinzer has argued that the rabbis and their halakhic system, in the absence of any continued Messianic Jewish presence in the church after the first or second century CE and despite the Talmudic rejection of Jesus and the Christian gospel, were the Jewish people's best (and divinely foreseen) alternative. PMJ's shift to a modern interpretive framework for understanding how religious traditions and their Scriptural canons develop, Christian and Jewish alike, places them in a similar position vis-à-vis the rabbinic tradition as their modern Jewish counterparts in the non-Orthodox world. PMJ's discourse can now rely on the work of prominent Jewish scholars and theologians for an indigenous definition of Judaism that is based on a presumptively Jewish group's positive attitude toward the authority of the Mosaic Torah. If so, then it would be perfectly legitimate to conclude that Messianic Jewish religion, insofar as it upholds the sanctity of the Jewish people as God's elect, and the authority of the Torah of Moses to regulate Jewish life, including that of Messianic Jews, is a type of Judaism.

To extend his interpretive community to include religious non-Messianic Jews, however, Kinzer would have to transform the Jewish community's reading of the New Testament writings into sacred Jewish history; something which thus far the Jewish community as a whole has not been convinced to do. Adding the Apostolic Writings to the Jewish canon however, makes Hashivenu's Judaism somewhat analogous to that of the Lubavitcher messianists who have posthumously culled messianic nuggets from the late Rebbe's teaching and created their own sectarian scripture in addition to the Rebbe's

Tanya,¹¹⁴ which has more or less been accepted as a legitimate contribution to the rabbinic tradition.

Intellectually, Jewish scholars may agree with the consensus of scholars in early Christianity and Judaism that Jesus and his disciples, even Paul, were probably “observant” Jews by some set of standards in the Jewish world of the time, but this history, to the extent that it is recognized as Jewish, remains a secular and not a religious history. Only if a majority of self-identifying Jewish communities were to accept these texts as religiously Jewish, whether sectarian or canonical, and their stories as part of sacred Jewish history, would Kinzer’s PMJ discourse become part of the larger Judaic conversation that Satlow describes and that Kinzer and the Hashivenu group wish to join. The same kind of requirement for communal acceptance would hold true for the messianic teachings that the Lubavitcher messianists have declared to be the voice of their messiah. To the extent either of these two groups focus their identity and practice on messianic claims and distinctives, they can expect to be marginalized from the mainstream of American Jewish religion; where they subordinate the messianic message to the overall well being of the Jewish people or to living an observant or ethical Jewish life they will be less threatening to, though not entirely welcome as part of, the status quo. The Lubavitchers seem to have overcome the potential stigma of sectarianism by the extraordinary service the Rebbe and his followers have performed on behalf of the entire Jewish people and Judaism. Messianic Jews try to participate in community wide programs and activities where possible, but as a religious movement they have nothing like the Lubavitchers’ fruit to offset their marginalization.

¹¹⁴ The Tanya is the foundational work of philosophy and mysticism of the Chabad Hasidic movement. It was authored by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-182), the founder of the Lubavitcher community.

Short of mainstreaming the Apostolic Writings, PMJ will have to be content to invert the hierarchy of authoritative texts from a primary dependence on the New Testament, even interpreted critically, to a primary identification with non-Messianic Jewish history and the rabbinic tradition within in its own discourse in order to normalize its identification with other forms of contemporary Judaism. Valorizing the divine hand in Jewish history and abandoning *sola scriptura* in favor of a modern critical approach to sacred texts may create affinity with some contemporary post-Holocaust Jewish and Christian theologians, but doing so estranges Hashivenu Messianic Jews from their peers in the evangelical missions culture without necessarily bringing them any closer to a place of acceptance in the broader Jewish world of American Judaism.

In light of PMJ's openness and desire to be part of a common conversation centered on the Jewish textual tradition, Satlow's critique of Messianic Jews as a whole needs rethinking. In retrospect, it is clear that engaging with a common (but fluid) set of canonical texts is insufficient to bring an apostatized group like Messianic Jews, even the Hashivenu subgroup, into the communal conversation on those texts, and so the responsibility for their continued marginalization cannot entirely be laid at the Messianic Jewish doorstep. For religious discourse to be able to unify disparate groups it must be more than just a shared conversation on a set of common texts; it must be able to define the outside limits of its canon, the boundaries of the interpretive community, mediate acceptable difference and regulate its practice, all of these functions require some institutional organization, formal or semi-formal that bears responsibility for the entire process.¹⁴⁵ In other words, there is an element of power that has to be exercised from the center to keep undesirable groups from moving into this mutually shared religious

¹⁴⁵ Lincoln, *Terrors*, 7–8.

domain and therefore having a voice in shaping the discourse to which they are admitted. In American Judaism this center has not always been well defined, but the claims and activities of Messianic Judaism have activated a process of coalescence and boundary setting to keep Messianic (Christian) discourse outside. All denominations and movements of Judaism in America have joined together to exclude Messianic Jews and their Christian message.

Hashivenu's new postmissionary Messianic Judaism has not and probably cannot shift the centering authority of its religious discourse from the New Testament canon nor completely jettison the interpretive tradition/s of the church without losing its theological *raison d'être*. It would be impossible to self-identify as a believing Jewish remnant that mediates between Christians and Jews without the scriptural support of the New Testament or the disreputable supersessionism of the church's theological past, which they believe they are so uniquely poised to remedy. It is this unique set of scriptures and its religious claims, which only Messianic Jews and Gentiles accept as the ultimate source of transcendent truth, and through which they must filter any new beliefs or social practices they accept as part of their identity, that separates them from all other mainstream forms of American Judaism. Difference would not in and of itself be problematic, but without a broader acceptance of these scriptures as sacred texts within the normative Jewish community, the same communal consensus that Kinzer values and defends when it comes to the rabbinic tradition works against him, censoring his own attempts to normalize his developing Messianic Jewish tradition.

On the ground, religious institutions have every right to make these sorts of exclusionary rules as part of the process of creating and maintaining their religious communities and legitimating, conserving, and reproducing their own version of Judaism for future generations. For scholars of religion, however, the elements that

mainstream versions of American Judaism exclude are the building blocks of a new kind of Messianic Judaism, and therefore, they automatically become part of the polythetic definition of Judaism we are creating. Postmissionary Messianic Jewish discourse contributes a new set of sacred writings, which it calls the Apostolic Writings. These scriptures also belong to Christianity, albeit under a different name—the New Testament. A polythetic Judaism that includes Hashivenu Messianics gains a Jewish community with a dual canon of Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) and Apostolic Writings, a canon that is similar to but no longer identical with the Christian Old and New Testaments. With the Apostolic Writings comes Jesus/Yeshua, an admittedly Jewish historical figure who in these writings acquires an exalted character and messianic role in Israel’s sacred narrative and an expanded conceptualization of Israel as comprised of sectarian messianic Jews and Gentiles.

Whether and how PMJ will interpret these Apostolic Writings differently in their new Jewish setting, how it goes about integrating them into the larger rabbinic tradition and vice-versa, or how it will make use of them to shape Messianic Jewish practice—liturgical, halakhic, and ethical—remains to be seen. Whether the theologians, visionaries, and leaders of Postmissionary Messianic Judaism will be successful at this enterprise of creating their own Judaism and overcoming the stigma attached to the heterodox beliefs that arise out of their Apostolic Writings in the larger Jewish community, however, would seem to depend a good deal on whether the Jewish community is convinced by the “postmissionary” posture and practice of Postmissionary Messianic Judaism.

Chapter 4: Creating Coherent Messianic Jewish Community

Introduction

Writing in Rudolph and Willets, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: its Ecclesial Context*, Kinzer describes Hashivenu's vision for the Messianic Jewish movement as "an explicit attempt to distinguish Messianic Judaism from evangelical Protestantism and to emphasize its relationship with the rest of Judaism. . . . Never before," he writes, has "a group of Messianic Jewish leaders sought to differentiate their movement so definitively from evangelicalism and to identify it so radically as a branch of Judaism."¹ In this chapter I look at the way Kinzer and the Hashivenu group, under the rubric what has become known as Postmissionary Messianic Judaism (PMJ), attempt to effect this differentiation, as well as the reasons why they think doing so will help to create a cohesive Messianic Jewish community. This new strategy of repositioning Messianic Jews within Judaism while preserving the distinction between Christianity and Judaism replaces the previous Messianic Jewish strategy of "blurring boundaries" between the normative, mutually exclusive religious definitions of Christian and Jew and Christianity and Judaism.

Even though Kinzer and the Hashivenu group would like to make a clear distinction between Christianity as a religion for Gentile believers in Jesus, and Messianic Judaism as a religious identity for Jewish believers in Yeshua, the overlapping characteristics in Messianic Jewish religion call for an academic definition of Christianity and Judaism as interconnected systems of practice and discourse that, when concretized in historical configurations, tend to be built on at least a partially shared set of familial characteristics. This elemental overlap can, under the right set of circumstances, contribute to the destabilization of the discursive and social boundaries that define

¹ Rudolph and Willitts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*, chap. 11.

specific instances of Christianity from Judaism and “generate a new dynamic between them” with “fresh patterns of interaction,” such as what is taking place in the forty-plus year old Messianic Jewish movement. Guy Stroumsa argues that interesting and meaningful comparisons between religious groups can be made, but that this requires avoiding essentialist definitions with static lists of religious identities and instead focusing on “those moments when [religious structures] are destabilized, rather than crystallized.” The goal in these cases should be to “search for the mechanisms of transformation and to focus on these analytically rich moments” of transformation.²

An incipient religious community like Hashivenu postmissionary messianic Judaism provides just such an opportunity for study, and focusing on its strategies for achieving its primary communal objectives can illuminate the mechanism for transformation that a group uses to shift from one socio-religious location to another on the comparative map. From a close reading of papers and publications, websites and videos, presentations, blogs, and other items of public discourse for Messianic Judaism in general, and Hashivenu (PMJ) in specific, I explore Mark Kinzer’s strategy for constructing Messianic Judaism as a Jewish community within Judaism; a Judaism he describes as empowered by belief in Yeshua as Israel’s Messiah.

There are three socially oriented goals put forth in postmissionary messianic Jewish discourse. First, the proposition to connect Messianic Jews (but not Messianic Gentiles) with Torah observant Judaism so that the lifecycle rites, ritual practices, and sacred calendar that organize and structure mainstream Jewish life syncs the Messianic Jewish community with the rest of the Jewish world. Second, Kinzer calls for Messianic Jews to shift their primary affective connection from the evangelical Christian church to the Jewish people and the wider Jewish world, which includes Israel as well as the

² Stroumsa, “The History of Religions as a Subversive Discipline,” 157.

American Jewish community, in order to ensure that the “Jewish” in a Messianic Jewish identity can be perpetuated to another generation. Finally, Kinzer refocuses the role of Messianic Jewish community from being a missionary outreach of the Gentile church toward unsaved Jews to a proleptic community that models what he believes will be the Jewish people’s destiny eschatologically according to the Messianic Jewish scriptures—the New Testament or Apostolic Writings and the Jewish Tanakh. Kinzer expands on the movement’s existing trope of Messianic Jews as a redeemed remnant of Israel, adding the requirement that the community should now live an authentically Jewish life of Torah obedience empowered by Messianic faith.³ These goals provide PMJ with the contours of a religious community that will align, very broadly speaking, with the precepts, practices and general tenor of rabbinic discourse that mark a community as part of American Judaism: Torah as a pattern for organizing (if not regulating) Jewish life, Israel as a synonym for the Jewish people, and the expectation of a future messianic age whose reality can be practiced, hastened, and/or expressed in the present.⁴ At the same time, these goals are inexplicable apart from the transcendent authority Messianic Jews give to the Christian New Testament. In analyzing Messianic Jewish community, both the role of legitimating, transcendent religious discourse with its repository of

³ PMJ would understand this messianic faith as the belief that Israel’s promised messiah is the Yeshua/Jesus of the New Testament. This messiah is now “in the heavens” but will be returning to earth at some point of time in the future to complete Israel’s redemption, which by extension includes the redemption of all those non-Jews who have trusted in this Jewish Messiah. Mainstream Jews, of course, would not explain their messianic expectations in these terms in part because they do not accept the authority of the New Testament writings, nor do they form any part of the rabbinic canon.

⁴ Glazer, *American Judaism*; Fishbane, *Judaism*; Commission on the Philosophy of Conservative Judaism, *Emet ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988); “A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism” (Pittsburgh: Central Conference of American Rabbis, May 1999), <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/statement-principles-reform-judaism/>; “Commentary on the Principles for Reform Judaism” (Pittsburgh: Central Conference of American Rabbis, October 27, 2004).

symbols for generating a coherent world view and that of discursive practices with potentially measurable sociological impact have to be taken into consideration.

Discursive practice and social formation

In the late 1990s, Reconstructionist Rabbi, Carol-Harris Shapiro, conducted an ethno-social study of a large Messianic congregation on the East Coast that represented the then mainstream of the Messianic Jewish movement. In her analysis she pointed out the dilemma that Messianic Jews face when trying to orient themselves to what have been mutually exclusive religious communities, each requiring primordial and exclusive identification. In the course of her interviews with members of the congregation, Harris-Shapiro posed a problem that required Messianic Jews to disclose to whom they related most intimately, the “Body of Messiah” or the “people of Israel”. When asked to complete the statement, “We are Messianic Jews, they are _____,” the interviewees had difficulty identifying who they were not. Most people, Harris-Shapiro noted, were unable to reply clearly, and were generally upset by the question. Interestingly, none of those she interviewed opposed themselves to Gentile Christians. This inability to recognize a primary distinction between Jew and Gentile, of course, marks these Messianic Jews as more embedded in a Christian world view than in a normative Jewish one.⁵ The Christian world view of these Messianic Jewish participants has taken shape in response to a particular evangelical hermeneutic that privileges the binary division of a Messianic Jewish world into those who are saved (Jewish and Gentile evangelists) and those who are not (a target population of non-Messianic Jews). Harris-Shapiro’s study raises the question of how Kinzer’s new discourse of Messianic Judaism as Judaism plans to effect a shift in the Messianic Jew’s orientational other from the church to the Jewish community.

⁵ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 85–111.

Christianity is not structured around the Jewish people and a life of Torah, but around the tenets of faith it has distilled from a long tradition of crafting a coherent and comprehensive systematic theology of the Bible, and a religious identity where ethnic origins are incidental to a universalizing Christian faith. Nevertheless, the church shares a significant of characteristics with Judaism. Christians have inherited at least a textual relationship to Torah by virtue of the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures are included in the Christian Bible, and therefore, the Mosaic laws and statutes in the Jewish Torah require a Christian explanation, even if that means proclaiming the Torah completed or no longer in force.⁶ Christianity is also quintessentially a messianic religion centered on ancient Israel's expectations for redemption and salvation so that Christianity's messiah is necessarily a messiah whose primary object of concern begins with the Jewish people (Israel), even if in Christian theology the Jews have been rejected and replaced by the church. Therefore, all Christians necessarily share significant religious concepts with Judaism, even though there is a long history of interpretation on both sides of the religious divide that allows for sharing these concepts while each religious community has assigned virtually antithetical religious meaning to them: Israel is the Jewish people/is the Church; Torah is central to Jewish life/made irrelevant by Jesus for Christians; the messiah is coming for Israel/has already come for Israel and will come again for all Christians, Jews and Gentiles, etc. Messianic Jews are understandably in a difficult position if they wish to construct a coherent communal identity given the binary nature of these differential characteristics.

⁶ One method of dealing with Old Testament images and figures in Christianity is to interpret them prophetically and typologically—each is explained as a shadow of a reality revealed in the New Testament. For examples, Jesus figures as the antitype of Moses (the deliverer), the Torah (the Law of Moses), Jacob's ladder (the mediator between God and man), the Paschal Lamb (the savior), etc. PMJ dismisses typological exegesis of the Hebrew Bible in favor of what it calls a proleptic understanding of Israel's history vis-à-vis the New Testament. The later revelations do not mute or replace the earlier realities, which remained religiously significant for Jesus and his followers.

As Harris-Shapiro has noted, Messianic Jews who are members of the mystical *ekklesia* by virtue of their confession of faith in Jesus (as well as local Christian congregations in most cases), but who continue to claim an ancestral connection to the Jewish people embody a potentially destabilizing force in the current alignment between evangelical Protestantism and modern American Judaism. What I think Kinzer hopes to do, however, is to precipitate a new kind of communal structure for Messianic Jews and non-Jewish Christians that will redefine, not blur, the boundaries between Christianity and Judaism. Moreover, by (a) shifting the emphasis and religious meaning of Messianic Jewish ethnic identity in a Protestant Christian theological framework from an incidental fact to a major premise, (b) adding the religious requirement of a Torah observant life style for Messianic Jews (but not Gentiles), and (c) removing the religious requirement to actively proselytize other Jews in favor of making common cause with the broader Jewish community, Kinzer and his associates hope not only to forge strong intra-Messianic Jewish communal ties, but to tip the taxonomic scales in their favor and legitimate the reclassification and relocation of Messianic Jews and their religious community from Christianity to Judaism. From this location, Messianic Jews can move beyond a Christian frame of reference, whether that is being labeled a missionary expedient or an indigenous church, to insiders in the Jewish community and Jewish religion.⁷

⁷ Christian missiology does have a rather controversial platform for evangelizing unreached people groups, called the “insider movement.” In this missions model, converts remain inside their pre-existing communities of origin (e.g., Muslim, Jewish) and no new parallel social structures are created for the new believers. New believers retain their socio-religious identities “while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.” Rebecca Lewis, “Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no. 1 (2009): 16–19; Gefen, “Postcongregational Messianic Judaism.” According to Gefen, this model could be applied to Messianic Jews who would then participate in small havurot (fellowships) of their own while their only institutional affiliation would be with a traditional synagogue; there is, Gefen writes, a growing number of insider Messianic

Messianic Jews have already managed to upset the tidy taxonomy of the American religious landscape by securing a place in the Pew Forum's latest report on the American Jew and Judaism. According to this report, "Messianic" is a "partly Jewish" religious identity—not mainstream, which is still defined by common consensus—but not exactly Christian or 'Jewish & Christian' either.⁸ Even more significant may be the fact that "[t]he majority of people of Jewish background and people with a Jewish affinity say that someone can be Jewish even if they believe Jesus was the messiah. As mentioned previously, three-in-ten Jews by religion (30%) and almost half of Jews of no religion (47%) believe this.⁹ Both of these findings fly in the face of the mainstream Jewish community's consistent repudiation of these distinctly Messianic Jewish claims and demonstrate that the messianic argument has so far been at least measurably if not overwhelmingly persuasive where individual rather than institutional opinion is polled.

The new Postmissionary Messianic Jewish Paradigm, however, would push the envelope even further, arguing that not only does a Jew remain a Jew with his belief in Jesus; his ethno-religious identity can become normatively Judaism and not Christianity. This could be measured by the standard factors that sociologists have historically used to gauge the salience of Jewish religious identity in the U.S. including practices like holding or attending a Passover Seder, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Shabbat candles, keeping kosher, belonging to a synagogue, and attending religious

Jews both in Israel and around the world, most of whom evidently belong to Orthodox synagogues.

⁸ Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," 65, 108.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

services on a regular basis.¹⁰ Since the new, mature, and Postmissionary Messianic Jewish congregation will mark its visible presence as part of Judaism rather than the church, through practices like these, social studies of the Jewish community (normally keyed to mainstream Jewish sensibilities) will be pressured by the rigors of academic integrity to include PMJ communities in the data, making the distinction between a Jew with Christian beliefs and a Jew with other or no beliefs less meaningful and the boundaries between the Messianic Jewish and normative Jewish communities even fuzzier. These small successes at boundary blurring between normative Judaism and a new, “true” Messianic Judaism, along with continuing pressure for acceptance will challenge the long-standing taxonomic structure that has afforded the (not-Christian) Jewish community an identity and a legitimate social location in American society keyed to its ethnically defined religion.¹¹

¹⁰ “The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population” (New York: United Jewish Communities, September 2003), 7.

¹¹ Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, 257–59; Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” 121; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2008,” 10. Although Herberg’s thesis has not been supported numerically, i.e., Jews remain a tiny minority against an overwhelming Christian majority, the American religious landscape is still largely configured in his terms: “Protestant” has been subdivided to account for a variety of subgroups, the largest of which are mainline, evangelical, and Black Protestant. Catholics and Protestants are now lumped under “Christian” in recognition of the immigrant religions that are now a significant part of the post-WWII scene, but the two Christian groups comprise a little over 75% of the self-identifying Christian category. Mormons are the only other statistically significant community, comprising 1.7% of the population. Judaism also represents 1.7% of the population, but in the 2008 Pew Report “Jewish” is listed under “Other Religions” along with Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu religions. Whether you use the current categories or Herberg’s classic triad, the net takeaway for the purposes of my argument remains the same – Jewish is categorically distinct from Christian, whether of the Catholic, Mormon or Protestant variety. Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism are now all identified as “major religious traditions in the U.S.” but it is unclear whether these systems, following Herberg’s argument, have come into their own as American religious traditions. See also, Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Religious discourse and social formation

By pushing the envelope toward Judaism, however, Kinzer has created an incipient ideological rift within the American Messianic Jewish community that belies the simplistic thinking that equates Messianic Jews and their movement with the iconic Jews for Jesus. The older, more theologically conservative evangelical groups (of which Jews for Jesus is a major force) have been founded on and remain anchored in traditional Christian Missions to the Jews. These conservatives are insistent that the essential *raison d'être* for supporting a Jewish ethnic movement in the church is forthright proselytism targeted to the Jewish community. Advocates for the postmissionary paradigm argue that the Messianic Jewish movement needs to stabilize and assume an identity of its own outside the missions culture. “I would propose,” Kinzer writes in a 2011 paper for the Hashivenu Forum, “that the primary vocation of Messianic Jewish communities today ... [is] to live within the Jewish world as witnesses to God’s enduring fidelity to Israel in Messiah Yeshua ... It means that most Messianic Jewish communities must be situated in areas of high Jewish population density, and that we must do all that is in our power to participate in the life of the wider Jewish community.”¹²

These ideological differences are in effect crystallizing the diverse, loosely organized Movement into two distinguishable communities shaped by different religious discourses—although both appeal to the transcendent authority of a shared New Testament Scripture, each selecting from that canon what suits its own goals—that prescribe different modes of practice and different social configurations: PMJ presents itself as a messianic branch of post-Biblical Judaism, while the mainstream Messianic Jewish movement remains aligned with evangelical Christianity understood as the

¹² Kinzer, “Priestly Remnant,” 23–24. See also FN

fulfillment of biblical, pre-Rabbinic Judaism.¹³ For Kinzer, the Messianic Jewish movement must mature and develop for itself and the next generation of Messianic Jews an intrinsic sense of purpose with a bounded collective identity that will be able to survive the forces of assimilation that inhere in being Jews in a Gentile Christian world, a problem that closely mirrors the situation the mainstream Jewish community has faced in adjusting to the American experience. For Messianic Jews aligned with the Christian Missions to the Jews community, a Messianic Jewish movement can only be legitimated theologically as a tool for evangelizing the unsaved Jew. While such a movement does serve to keep its Jewish members connected to each other and to their common ethnic heritage and culture, Jewishness is interpreted through an evangelical Christian theological lens and the communal dimension is a side benefit, not an objective. This attitude toward Jewish identity and its place in the life of a Christian Jew mirrors that of Messianic Judaism's Hebrew Christian predecessor.

A new discursive model for Messianic Jewish community

At present, however, those who identify as Messianic Jews are a doubly-marginalized minority group, estranged from the mainstream American Jewish community both corporately and individually because of their Christian beliefs, and relegated to the status of an ethnic subset of the Protestant church as so-called indigenous missionaries charged with evangelizing the Jewish community. In this scenario, PMJ's unfolding discourse of differentiation and maturation can be read as an attempt to overcome the disadvantages of this existing micro-social order and an

¹³ Interestingly, the notion that one Scriptural canon can produce two discrete religious communities with corresponding discourses and institutional structures is not so novel, given that historic Christianity retained and reinterpreted the entire corpus of Hebrew 'bible' for itself, which it now shares with Rabbinic Judaism. In a kind of ironic inversion, Messianic Jews want to re-describe the Greek texts of the Christians' New Testament as a natively Jewish discourse that authorizes a kind of neo-New Testament Judaism.

attempt to reconstruct it on the basis of a more favorable, and ultimately self-sustaining paradigm.¹⁴

PMJ can forgo the need for a new revelation or the rise of a charismatic leader to move from one tradition to another as the concepts, history and sacred texts that Christians share with Jews will provide them with the raw material necessary to create a new discourse connected to both traditions, and to create a religious community that can, theoretically at least, elect which religion it wishes to call home. Lincoln explains that the kind of social and taxonomic instability Messianic Jews have produced already can be exploited to effect beneficial social change:

Within any society ... there exist countertaxonomic discourses ... (inversions and others): Alternative models whereby members of subordinate strata and others marginalized under the existing social order are able to agitate for the deconstruction of that order and the reconstruction of society on a novel pattern.¹⁵

This agitation can effectively be mobilized through the power of persuasive discourse. Advocates for a paradigm shift within the Messianic Jewish community have chosen to make their appeal for disengagement from the Christian Missions to the Jews community within the parameters of Protestant theology. This choice may help them achieve PMJ's goals without severing a working relationship with the churches that have accepted and supported the Messianic Jewish movement thus far, and without jeopardizing the integrity of Messianic Jews' spiritual connection to the larger, metaphysical community of Christians. In one sense, Messianic Judaism is already an imagined community constructed and maintained by the power of Protestant theological

¹⁴ Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, 8–11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

discourse. So long as Kinzer's new theology retains a connection to orthodox doctrine, it will most likely keep the emerging postmissionary community positively connected to the rest of the American Christian world, both Catholic and Protestant denominations. However, Kinzer would also like to construct Messianic Jewish community as Judaism, a community defined by ethnicity *and* practice, which, if successful, would align PMJ with other Jewish communities that are carriers and conduits for the reproduction of rabbinically based religious practice—including nearly all forms of American Judaism.¹⁶

In short, if PMJs can persuade their fellow Christians that they can remain theologically orthodox while they embrace a traditional Jewish life of halakhic observance as a religious obligation, they would be able to count themselves as logical members of two religious communities: Christianity defined by belief in Jesus and Judaism defined by devotion to the obligations of Torah and Jewish ethnicity. If scholars use the strictly monothetic definitional framework of World Religions to type PMJ, it would be impossible to grant this group a place in both religions; however, a polythetic definition would make it perfectly feasible for PMJ to simultaneously occupy space in two constructs, depending on how and for what reason the lines are drawn around a religious tradition by those who define it. This academic ambivalence, of course, does not bear any necessary relationship to what will or should take place on the ground between PMJ and representatives of the American Jewish or Christian communities. There is no need for the two definitional projects to coincide, as the scholarly one should be objective and analytical while the local, on-the-ground objectives are necessarily biased and inherently self-serving. Academic constructs should serve some heuristic purpose; they

¹⁶ On the definition of a community of practice and a discussion of social practice in general, see Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *Dynamics of Social Practice* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012).

may or may not conform to the boundaries imagined and enforced by local religious communities.

Kinzer presents as a paradigmatic example of how a Jewish convert to Christianity reconciles faith in Jesus with an observant, Jewish life.¹⁷ With a family background in Conservative Judaism and years of experience as a member of a covenanted, liturgically-based Christian community before founding a Messianic Jewish congregation in 1993, Kinzer brings a deep respect for the constructive power of ritual and communal commitment to his vision for Messianic Judaism.¹⁸ His prototypical Messianic congregation, Zera Avraham in Ann Arbor, Michigan, exemplifies his vision of a Messianic Judaism informally connected to the Christian church while embedded in Jewish liturgical tradition and Torah observance.¹⁹ In the years since the publication of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Kinzer and other Messianic leaders like Stuart Dauermann, Paul Saal, Carl Kinbar, and Michael Schiffman, have marked out small but measured steps in an effort to implement this new post-missionary paradigm. These

¹⁷ Kinzer, *Israel's Messiah and the People of God*, 3–13. [add page numbers for first chapter].

¹⁸ Kinzer, “The Torah & Jews in the Christian Church.”

¹⁹ Zera Avraham continues to share physical space with Calvary Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor, but the two congregations are connected by more than simple space. As this bulletin attests, the members of Calvary are encouraged to attend Zera Avraham’s religious services for Shabbat, Sukkot, and the High Holidays but it is clearly held out to be an alternative religious experience to that of the church, and each congregation has its own non-intersecting roster of leaders. http://calvarya2.com/files/October_2014_newsletter_for_web.pdf. Calvary’s stated vision is to be “Christ-centered, Spirit-led, Biblically-grounded” community while Zera Avraham’s website identifies it as a “community of Jews and intermarrieds who believe that Yeshua is Israel’s promised Messiah, and who seek to live as loyal members of the Jewish people. ... We aspire to live in such a way that the wider Jewish community can recognize and honor its own mysterious bond with the resurrected Rabbi from Nazareth. We also aim to strengthen Jewish identity among those who Jewish affiliation has become tenuous, so that they, their children, and their grandchildren may fulfill their destiny as members of the covenant.” <http://www.czaa2.org>.

steps began to be visible publically with the dissemination of a 1999 paper that Kinzer presented to the UMJC Theology Committee, an expanded version of which was presented to the Hashivenu Forum later that same year. Hashivenu thinkers and select invitees have presented papers in the Forum annually from 1999 forward, many of which have been published on the Hashivenu website. In 2005, Kinzer published the watershed *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, and in May of 2006, the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) took shape in an effort to standardize Messianic Jewish practice in members' congregations. In 2009, Kinzer and Fr. Antoine Levy OP, a French Jewish Catholic priest and theologian co-founded the Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah as a way of enabling Messianic Jews and Jews in churches to foster greater communal ties.²⁰

Reconnecting Messianic Jews to a life of Torah

Broadly speaking, the old mainstream, or what Hashivenu founder, Stuart Dauermann calls the Standard Jewish Missions Paradigm, is still the governing paradigm for the Messianic Jewish movement, especially for those Messianics affiliated with the most theologically conservative Messianic Jewish umbrella organization, the International Association of Messianic Congregations. The new approach that Dauermann labels The Emerging Messianic Jewish Paradigm (TEMJP) is a substantial deviation from this normative path Messianic Jews have taken toward the non-Messianic Jewish world. TEMJP is Dauermann's attempt to distill the main planks in the Postmissionary Messianic Jewish approach to engagement with the Jewish world that Mark Kinzer has been working on since he introduced his ideas formally to the UMJC's

²⁰ Kinzer, "Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism"; Kinzer, "Genus"; Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*. See also, The Hashivenu Forum: <http://www.Hashivenu.org>, The Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council: <http://ourrabbis.org>, The Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah: <http://helsinkiconsultation.squarespace.com>

Theology Committee in July 1999.²¹ The 7-points Dauermann lists in his 2006 paper for the Hashivenu Forum can be summarized as follows:

1. Messianic Jews should be Torah-faithful because this honors God.
2. “Torah-faithful” Messianic Jews join non-Jewish Christians to “the Commonwealth of Israel” and reconnect the church to its Jewish roots.
3. The church should support these “Torah-faithful” Messianic Jews.
4. PMJs aren’t evangelists targeting a Jewish “other”; they are Jews living among Jews who carry their Christian witness with them.
5. PMJ doesn’t typecast Jews or Judaism as needy or inadequate; it validates Jesus/Yeshua as a Jewish messiah for Jewish people
6. PMJs should advance the honor of Yeshua in the Jewish community.
7. If the church endorses and supports Torah-faithful Messianic Jews, it can overcome its supersessionist past.²²

PMJ rejects the original missions objective expressed at the beginning of the congregational movement that fidelity to a Jewish lifestyle is simply a strategic move to contextualize the gospel for a particular targeted population.²³ It also moves beyond the permissive rationalization of Hebrew Christian cum Messianic Jewish theology that grants Jewish believers the individual discretion to appropriate Torah and rabbinic tradition for themselves as an extension of their ethnic identity so long as “no basic Bible

²¹ Dauermann, “Seeds, Weeds, and Walking the High Wire: The Role of the Remnant—Embodying Israel’s Destiny.”

²² Dauermann, “Messianic Jewish Engagement.”

²³ Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Synagogue*; Hutchens, “A Case for Messianic Judaism”; Goble, *Everything You Need to Grow a Messianic Yeshiva*.

doctrine or teaching of Yeshua is either broken or twisted.”²⁴ In the PMJ paradigm, fidelity to the Torah, and the need to express that way of life in concert with rabbinic tradition, as do almost all other kinds of contemporary Judaism, is an obligation for all Jews, including those who believe that Jesus was/is Israel’s Messiah.²⁵

Bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel [i.e., the PMJ platform] summons the Messianic Jewish congregational movement to take a step towards the Jewish world and a step away from its evangelical matrix. Only by being distinct from evangelicalism, and connected to Judaism, can such a Messianic Judaism fulfill its vocation as an ecclesiological bridge enabling the Church to discover its identity in relationship to Israel and enabling the Jewish people to encounter its Messiah as it has never done before.²⁶

Kinzer refers to this as the crux of his platform for maturing the Movement and as a major instrumentality for effecting the desired shift in social and religious location for the Messianic Jewish community.

The discovery of an enduring requirement for a basic level of Torah observance for Yeshua-believing Jews is interesting and important in itself, and stands as a foundational principle of much of the Messianic Jewish congregational movement in the Diaspora. . . . However, few have grasped the integral position it holds within the structure of the argument of *PMJ*. . . . While the message of *PMJ* goes far beyond the obligatory

²⁴ Louis Goldberg, ed., *How Jewish Is Christianity?: Two Views on the Messianic Movement*, 1st ed, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 140–151.

²⁵ Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*, 170–179.

²⁶ Kinzer, “Reflections,” 19.

nature of Torah-based Jewish practice and identity for Jewish Yeshua-believers, one cannot underestimate the centrality of this proposition for the argument . . . as a whole. It is far more important as the basis for reaching other conclusions than as a conclusion in its own right.²⁷

In a 2004 email exchange between Kinzer and Richard Harvey, a British Messianic Jew whose recent PhD dissertation on mapping Messianic Jewish theology was published in 2009, Kinzer explains to Harvey that leadership in the Messianic Jewish movement is divided over whether the Torah (by which he means the normative Jewish way of reading the written text of the Pentateuch) is foundational for Messianic Jewish life and if so, whether rabbinic oral tradition should play any part in how the Torah is interpreted or applied. Representing the naysayers would be missions organizations like Jews for Jesus and other conservative Hebrew Christian voices like Arnold Fruchtenbaum. Mid-spectrum voices would accept the fact that Messianic Jews have a positive relationship to the covenant as it is set out in the Written Torah but would have mixed responses to the idea of accepting an oral tradition alongside the written “Word.”

At the most positive end of the scale would be those who, like Kinzer, agree with David Stern in asserting “the necessity of serious engagement with the tradition but emphasize even more strongly the need for a distinctive Messianic halachic approach, either modern orthodox or conservative or sometimes reform.”²⁸ Kinzer, according to Harvey, “belongs to the newer generation who are developing their approach to *halacha* using Conservative and Reform perspectives,” an attitude that tracks with PMJ’s goal of creating communal ties and religious affinity with the conservative to liberal mainstream

²⁷ Kinzer, *Israel’s Messiah and the People of God*, 179, 184.

²⁸ Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*, 170.

of American Judaism. The primary means of connecting Messianic Jews to Torah in PMJ is achieved at present by adopting attitudes and standards of halakhic practice from existing movements within American Judaism rather than formulating independent halakhic positions with reference to the original rabbinic sources. This could be interpreted as a type of mimicry, although not in the classic sense of postcolonial discourse. Here copying the halakhah of mainstream Judaism is not a response to colonization but evidences the desire to conform to expected norms of Jewish practice for the sake of passing, and in order to access the power of standardized forms of practice to stabilize a religious community. PMJ rabbis have formed a semi-formal institution that has assumed responsibility for “preservation, interpretation, and dissemination” of PMJ’s defining discourse, the standardization of its Jewish practices, and advancing its communal goals.²⁹

In terms of implementation, the group of Messianic rabbis behind the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) have proposed a set of basic halakhic norms (“standards”) for the Messianic Jewish movement, which are posted on the Council’s website.³⁰ Where these standards converge with the basic issues of Jewish law that would be common to all religious forms of Judaism—Shabbat and Holiday observances, Jewish status, lifecycle events, prayer, and kashrut—the MJRC generally adopts the mainstream’s most liberal position. PMJ follows Reform Judaism with respect to patrilineal descent, concurring that there is an essential, religiously-defined, distinction in status between Jew and non-Jew in a Jewish community but rejecting the rabbinic rule that Jewish status is determined by matrilineal descent alone.

²⁹ Lincoln, *Terrors*, 7.

³⁰ <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27>, accessed June 15, 2015.

PMJ generally follows Orthodox/Conservative Judaism in Shabbat observance (i.e., setting the times when Shabbat begins and ends, when it is permissible to light candles, and reciting the traditional blessings at their appropriate times) but follow the more lenient Conservative position in other respects (“kindling fire,” e.g.). However, the MJRC standards are more permissive in situations where maintaining a liberal approach to Shabbat observance would negatively affect routine Christian practices like collecting tithes and offerings (“Offerings and *tzedakah* on Shabbat do not constitute buying and selling”), or writing and drawing during worship services or class time. When there is a conflict between Christian and normative Jewish halakhic practice, the Council either makes a halakhic determination of its own (giving an offering doesn’t fall under the forbidden category of buying and selling), proscribing cooking meals on Shabbat but not reheating (this doesn’t change the composition of the food), or, more interestingly, it can decide in favor of the “spirit of the law” rather than its halakhic prescription: “the traditional prohibition on writing and drawing places an excessive burden upon the Messianic Jewish community in our contemporary situation.”³¹

The MJRC website makes a point of noting that it is going to opt for the most lenient interpretation of halakhah possible given its foundational premises that observance is incumbent on Messianic Jews (but not Gentiles) and that the standards of observance should be respectful of the decisions that have already been made by Jewish authorities who have been accepted by the Jewish community as a whole. The idea seems to be to make Torah observance as accessible as possible to the broadest spectrum of Messianic Jews while attempting to standardize the eclectic, ad hoc practices that have passed for observance in most Messianic groups. To the extent that non-Jewish Christians agree to refrain from mimicking their Jewish co-religionists, halakhic

³¹ <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/shabbat-mainmenu-30>, 4.1.9-4.1.10, accessed June 15, 2015.

practices would serve to set Messianic Jews apart from Gentile Christians and bring Messianic Jews and Messianic Judaism into greater social and cultural conformity with the wider Jewish world.

There are, however, a number of practices that have no counterparts in the contemporary Jewish world outside of Messianic circles, ones that Messianic Jews would share only with other Christians. These practices— Baptism (Tevilat Mashiach) and Communion or Eucharist (Zichron Mashiach)—could be described as distinctive rituals in Christian communities since they function in Christian discourse to convert the non-Christian to Christianity or to transform an outsider into a member of the church. Both of these quintessentially Christian practices are treated as *Jewish* commandments (*mitzvot*) on the MJRC website.

Zichron Mashiach is a mitzvah, a commandment of the Messiah. It is not an optional act of piety but a fundamental expression of God's covenant with Israel renewed by the self-offering of Yeshua.

Tevilat Mashiach is a mitzvah, a commandment of the Messiah. It is not a rite reserved for the most dedicated followers of Yeshua or a mark of special piety. Rather it is a basic practice that marks faithful reception of the good news and entry into the community of the disciples of Yeshua.

Divine commandments are an element common to both Christianity and Judaism, but characteristically they have been called *mitzvot* only in Judaism. In Messianic Judaism the New Testament commandments of baptism (*tevilah*) and the Eucharist (*Zichron Mashiach*) appear to retain their Christian forms and functions despite the use of invented Hebrew terms to make them conform to the group's self-identification with Judaism. For instance, the ritual of remembrance (*zichron*) maintains the requisite language of institution that marks it as a Christian eucharistic/communion ritual:

... Zichron Mashiach will also include a recitation of the narrative in which Yeshua instituted the rite, including his words of institution. The narrative of institution will be taken from 1 Corinthians 11:24–26, Matthew 26:26–29, or Luke 22:19–20, or consist of a composite of these texts.³²

The elements of bread and wine represent both the body and blood of Jesus (per the language of institution drawn from the New Testament texts listed)³³ and Jesus himself in his role as the “divine Name incarnate.” Hence, any bread and wine remaining after the communion meal must be treated “with respect”³⁴ as in Christian practice, even while the rationale for doing so is superficially Judaized in Messianic discourse.

In fulfilling the role of representing Yeshua, the bread and the fruit of the vine employed in the rite should be treated with special respect. *Just as Jewish tradition ordains that books containing the divine Name be treated with special care, and not be disposed of in a profane manner, so these elements—which in the context of this rite represent for us the divine Name incarnate—should be treated with special care, and*

³² <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/zichron-mashiach>, accessed June 16, 2015.

³³ There is a wide spectrum of practice and belief in Christianity with respect to the ritual of Holy Communion/Eucharist, the nature of the transformation from ordinary bread and wine to sacred elements (some Christians admit no transformation takes place and see only symbolic value in the elements), yet all would recite some form of these words of institution in the performance of the ritual. On the elements as the “Real Presence” of divinity, see Dolores E. Dunnett, “The Eucharist: Representative Views,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32, no. 1 (March 1989): 63–71. The MJRC treatment of this Christian ritual follows the Protestant idea of communion as the “Real Presence” of Jesus in the elements rather than the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation; in either case, however, the whole ritual is foreign to any form of contemporary Judaism.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 66–67. Dunnett’s summary of the Protestant notion of “real presence” notes that, “[a]fter the communion is over, all eucharistic remains should be consumed. The material basis of this presence has a right to our respect.”

remaining portions should be consumed rather than discarded [emphasis added].³⁵

The MJRC website claims that this ritual is inherently Jewish in character, although exactly on what basis this claim is made is not clear.³⁶ There is no reliable historical evidence to show that this ritual had been institutionalized either as a memorial of Jesus' death or as the institution of a "new covenant in his blood" by any religious communities that self-identified as Jewish outside of the pages of the New Testament. Nor is it clear what makes it Jewish in a contemporary sense, even in this Messianic context, since it is shared only with other Messianic Jews and non-Jewish Christians—the express purpose of the ritual is to confirm and deepen the unity of the Christian (Messianic) church:

Zichron Mashiach expresses, confirms, and deepens the unity of the twofold body of Messiah. Therefore, while our own celebrations of this rite shall be conducted in a way that expresses its inherently Jewish character, we should look for opportunities to welcome Christian friends to share the meal with us. As appropriate situations arise, we should also respond favorably to invitations to share with our Christian friends in their own ecclesial celebrations of this rite.

The Judaization of this Church ritual is accomplished linguistically by giving it a Hebrew name and by adapting rabbinic prayers for its performance,³⁷ culturally by using kosher

³⁵ <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/zichron-mashiach>, accessed June 16, 2015.

³⁶ The idea of blood atonement (but not the ritual enactment of the New Testament's "last supper") is an element common to both late antique rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. Ra'anan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Blood and Atonement in the Pseudo-Clementines and the Story of the Ten Martyrs: The Problem of Selectivity in the Study of 'Judaism' and 'Christianity,'" *Henoah* 30, no. 2 (2008): 355–56.

³⁷ For a more nuanced understanding of how these Eucharistic prayers are incorporated into Messianic Jewish liturgy, see the list of downloadable audio and print resources that have been developed and made publically available on the Internet by

wine, challah and/or matzah for the elements, and religiously by likening the elements, in their sanctity, to Jewish texts containing the divine Name. Nothing is substantially altered in terms of religious meaning since the Zichron Mashiach remains a Christian celebration of the “real presence” of Jesus in the communion elements.

The performance of this ritual does not contribute to reinforcing Messianic Jewish ties to the Jewish community since the ritual creates social and religious boundaries defined only in terms of a common Christian belief; non-Christian Jews would be unable to participate while non-Jewish Christians would be permitted. Not only does Zichron Mashiach differentiate and isolate Messianic Jews from the rest of the wider Jewish world, the deliberate attempt to recreate it as a *Jewish* ritual paradoxically separates Messianic Jews from the greater communion of non-Jewish Christians in the church whose unity the ritual should theoretically reinforce. Christian theology idealizes the Eucharist/Communion as a ritual that functions to “join[s] all believers together in the body of Christ . . . a corporate celebration that breaks all barriers and unites all sorts of conditions of men.”³⁸ Historically, however, the Eucharist has been a source of tension and division within the church so that even in their deliberate attempt to differentiate themselves from Christianity, this quintessential Christian ritual of communion pulls Messianic Jews inexorably toward its center, whether in conformity or in tension with existing norms of its ritual performance in the historic church.

If the Eucharist is a ritual designed to demonstrate equality and to create community in the Christian church, Baptism has been the traditional ritual of entrance

Mark Kinzer at <http://www.ourrabbis.org/main/resources/zichron-mashiach>, accessed June 16, 2015, and Kinzer, “Praying the Amidah as an Extension of the Eucharist.” It is common knowledge among scholars in the field that the early Christian church borrowed from Jewish liturgy when it developed its Eucharistic rituals; Kinzer dips again into this pool for his contemporary formulation of a distinctively Messianic Jewish Eucharistic liturgy.

³⁸ Dunnett, “The Eucharist: Representative Views,” 70.

into the metaphysical church and the fellowship of the local community. Whether the potential member was sprinkled or immersed, whether she was an infant or an adult, whether the immersion was a sacrament or a symbolic act of devotion, baptism has been as much a characteristic element of Christian practice as the Eucharist. The MJRC has Judaized this practice as well to integrate it into the overall scheme of postmissionary Messianic Judaism. The Hebrew word that the MJRC is using to rename the Christian practice, *tevilah*, is taken from rabbinic discourse where it means to immerse in a body of water (*mikvah*) that meets rabbinic halakhic standards. *Tevilat Mashiach* (Messiah's Immersion), like Christian baptism, is a rite of passage marking an individual's entrance into the Messianic community that depends on having had "basic instruction in the message of the good news" and making "a commitment to Yeshua." Unlike the requirement that the mikvah conform to halakhic standards in a traditional rabbinic conversion *ceremony*, however, Messianic baptism can take place in any body of water "large enough to permit full body immersion."³⁹ The MJRC recommends the recitation of a Hebrew blessing ('al tevilat HaMashiach) adapted from the corresponding rabbinic conversion ritual, but requires the recitation of the traditional Trinitarian formula that accompanies Christian baptisms:

4.4.6 After the recitation of the mitzvah berachah and its response, the officiant will recite in Hebrew and/or in the vernacular the words, "I now immerse you [one may include here the person's Hebrew name] in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (*Hineni ani matbil otcha/otach [Hebrew name] beshem HaAv uvshem HaBen uvshem Ruach Hakodesh*).

³⁹ <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/tevilat-mashiach>, accessed June 16, 2015.

The MJRC also recommends that the baptism take place “in the presence of ten or more” baptized members—the numerical though not functional equivalent of a rabbinic quorum (*minyan*). Under extreme circumstances where ten witnesses are not possible, then at least three members, not counting the convert, should witness the baptism. The “three witnesses” would be similar to the rabbinic requirement of a *beit din* or court of three officials, but where the rabbis would be present to oversee the *tevilah* in order to insure that it conforms to halakhic standards for a valid conversion, the Messianic witnesses seem to have no requisite halakhic function. Halakhah is used as a procedural guideline, but it does not appear to have any legal force in determining the validity of a Messianic Jewish conversion/baptism. Unlike the *mikvah* for conversion in any other form of American Judaism, however, the Messianic *Tevilat Mashiach* ushers the participant into membership in the Christian *ekklesia*, not the religion of the rabbis, however liberally it might be interpreted.

Messianic Jewish baptism retains a Christian meaning: it is “a rite signifying reception into the community” that is “primarily the action of God through Yeshua by the Spirit” but it is performed in such a way that it appears to be a rabbinic as well as a New Testament commandment: “Its character as a *mitzvah* should be expressed through recitation of the *mitzvah berachah* (*‘al Tevilat HaMashiach*) by the officiant and by the response of ‘Amen’ from the one being immersed.”⁴⁰ It is unclear whether this baptismal

⁴⁰ In rabbinic Judaism, the performance of a *mitzvah* (commandment) is usually accompanied by its appropriate blessing (*berakhah*). In this Messianic ritual, the New Testament commandment is converted into a rabbinic commandment by composing a rabbinic-sounding blessing for its performance. This practice of crafting new rituals and blessings to accompany them is not unique to Messianic Judaism; modern Jewish rabbis have also found it meaningful to do the same, creating “rituals that inform, enhance and guide new life stages and situations.” See, <http://www.jewishsacredaging.com/consulting-and-workshops/>, accessed June 16, 2015, for example. What is unique to Messianic Judaism is that this creative activity is not driven by changing social values, new interpersonal experiences, or increasing longevity in a highly technological society, but by this community’s need to translate historically Christian rituals into traditional Jewish language.

rite is part of a larger conversion process designed for Gentiles who wish to be able to self-identify as Jewish within the Messianic Jewish movement, or whether it is a standalone ritual for non-Messianic Jews who wish to join the *ekklesia* and the fellowship of Messianic Jews. The whole idea of conversion to Messianic Judaism is highly controversial. The membership of the UMJC is strongly opposed (in 1985 the ratio was 9:1) to offering this option to Gentiles.⁴¹ The members of the MJRC, most if not all of whom have been ordained by the UMJC, seem to favor the idea, and in fact, have allowed a small number of conversions to date.⁴²

The MJRC's official website explains its common vision for Messianic Judaism in terms of practice "rooted in Torah, instructed by Tradition, and faithful to Messiah Yeshua." This common practice should be regulated by adopting "a common set of halakhic standards" for Messianic leaders and their congregations. These standards are arranged on the website in categories that mostly reflect common Jewish religious and cultural practices like kashrut, lifecycle events, and Shabbat observance. However, these standards also describe and treat two Christian rituals as though they were native to contemporary Judaism: baptism as a rite of passage into the Messianic Jewish community, and communion/Eucharist as a ritual of remembrance and social solidarity.

These two types of standards, Jewish and Christian, would seem to work at opposite purposes. The former could create greater affinity for the members of MJRC affiliated communities with the wider Jewish world, and would tend to align this council of Rabbis and their congregations with mainstream liberal Judaism, at least in terms of practice. The latter, however, function as boundary setting mechanisms that isolate the

⁴¹ <http://www.umjc.org/does-the-umjc-practice-conversion/>, accessed June 16, 2015.

⁴² Nichol, "The Case for Conversion." See MJRC convert, Messianic rabbi Derek Leman's story on his blog: Derek Leman, "Conversion Day," *Messianic Jewish Musings*, April 19, 2010, <http://derek4messiah.wordpress.com/2010/04/19/conversion-day/>.

MJRC's members and affiliated communities from both the wider Jewish world and the majority of non-Jewish Christian groups with whom they would otherwise have unrestricted cultural and social intercourse. The net result is to create coherent community, but in a very limited sense; only Messianic Jews who wish to submit themselves to the halakhic norms proposed by the MJRC would find this community meaningful and fulfilling. Non-Messianic Jews and non-Christian Gentiles would need to convert to Christian faith and accept the obligations of Torah observance as the MJRC has outlined them in order become full participants in the ritual life of the community. Gentile Christians wishing to be full members of a Messianic Jewish community, however, are a problematic group. Since they are already believers in Jesus, and in Kinzer's theology they are already members of an eschatological Israel, it is not clear how conversion would move them from one religious identity to another unless the meaning of Judaism is reduced to membership in an ethnically defined group.

The largest, and most readily accessible body of potential members for this new postmissionary Messianic Judaism probably consists of those Jews who have converted to Christian faith (many of whom are intermarried) but who are now sitting in church pews rather than committing to membership in Messianic Jewish congregations. To be effective at recruiting these potential members, the MJRC and advocates for PMJ will have to persuade these "assimilated" Jewish believers to see themselves first and foremost as members of the Jewish people who, by virtue of their Jewishness, are still obligated to live an observant Jewish life in order to fulfill their unique role in Israel's priestly mission to be a light to the nations.

PMJ's decision to become a halakhic movement for Christian Jews is predicated on the religious value it assigns to Jewish status, and requires a new vision for structuring their relationship with non-Jewish Christians in order to enforce the social

separation they feel is required to maintain this particularist lifestyle. The second and third planks in Dauermann's new paradigm allude to this reorientation when they claim that a remnant of "Torah-faithful" Messianic Jews form a bridge between the Christian church (the multinational extension of eschatological Israel) and Israel (national or ethnic Israel). The former has religious meaning and escapes its history of supersessionism only to the extent that it is joined to the latter by the "Torah-faithful" Messianic Jewish community, a remnant of the larger Jewish world which has been supra-naturally empowered and authorized to make this connection.

As Dauermann explains, the new paradigm envisions a proleptic Messianic Jewish community that structures its life in conformity with the reality experienced by the nascent church as it is portrayed in the New Testament—a community that incorporated Gentiles into an expanded Israel, retaining Jewish distinctiveness and excusing Gentiles from the obligations incumbent on Jews by virtue of the Mosaic covenant.

The One New Man of Ephesians ... expresses a unity of two distinct communal realities living together not in uniformity, but rather in love and mutual blessing. . . . By being joined as one ekklesia with the Torah obedient Yeshua-believers, the Church becomes part of the Commonwealth of Israel . . . and therefore celebrates all of the God-given distinctives of Israel . . . without taking on her unique Torah responsibilities.⁴³

Dauermann argues that the New Testament's stance on Torah observance for all Jews, including Messianic Jews, requires a new configuration of Christian community:

⁴³ Dauermann, "Messianic Jewish Engagement," 2.

Jewish practice is inherently corporate in nature. Circumcision is a social rite, performed by a trained official within the community. Sabbath observance requires social support and communal expression. The dietary laws require kosher meat processing and a network of related families following similar food customs. The practical need for communal support reinforces the underlying meaning of all Jewish practice, which is to be an effective sign marking Israel as a people set apart for God.

At the same time, the New Testament also emphasizes the importance of Gentiles becoming part of the ekklesia without becoming Jews . . .

Only one structural arrangement would allow for distinctive Jewish communal life within the context of a transnational community of Jews and Gentiles: the one ekklesia must consist of two corporate subcommunities . . . the Jewish branch of the twofold ekklesia must identify itself with the Jewish people as a whole and participate actively in its communal life.⁴⁴

In the postmissionary paradigm, Messianic Judaism would replace evangelicalism's quintessential practices of witnessing and preaching the gospel, which are predicated on the construction of the unsaved Jew as the "other," with the individual and communal practices associated with living an authentic, recognizably rabbinically styled Jewish life. PMJs would no longer think of non-messianic Jews as the "other" but as "us," based on a common kinship and a shared religious life with its unique set of precepts and practices shaped by rabbinic tradition and the biblical heritage. This, of course, says nothing about the great ideological gulf that would continue to separate Messianic Jews who believe that Jesus/Yeshua is Israel's Messiah and the rest of the

⁴⁴ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 152; Kinzer, *Israel's Messiah and the People of God*, 181.

Jewish world, nor does it seem to necessary for Messianic Jews to cultivate a reciprocal relationship with the Jewish mainstream in order to achieve their goals.

Harris-Shapiro noted that Messianic Jewish discourse consistently used the phrase “our people” to refer to the unsaved Jewish community. On the one hand “our people” reflected an admission of biological belonging. The Jews were in some sense not entirely other. On the other hand, the language of “our people” carried a negative connotation of blindness to spiritual truth and incompleteness apart from accepting Christian faith. Jews were both the Messianics’ in-group as well as the out-group. “The constant use of the phrase ‘our people’ is their most frequent declaration of loyalty to the community of Israel.”⁴⁵ The negative use of this phrase has virtually dropped out of postmissionary Messianic Jewish discourse. Nearly always the phrase is used to invoke nearness and belonging and to affirm a positive image of the Jewish people and its religious tradition as a whole.

When we observe *mitzvot* in general and certain *mitzvot* explicitly associated with *kedushah* in particular (such as Shabbat and *Kashrut*), we are not only identifying with our people and its history; we are also entering into a dimension of existence in which *Olam Haba* is experienced corporately as a proleptic reality.⁴⁶

I am saying that, if we are to be a Messianic Judaism, we must see the Bible in concert with the way our people view it . . . as part of the Jewish story, not simply a Jewish-style story, and not simply the story about the

⁴⁵ Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 96.

⁴⁶ Kinzer, “Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition,” 33.

the Jewish Messiah who is in reality more deeply the Savior of the World.⁴⁷

If we choose to be with our people, we need to begin to *be* our people. . . . Praying traditional prayers binds us to our people and our past in that the prayers we pray are the prayers prayed by fellow Jews for over 2000 years, and will be the prayers prayed by Jews until Yeshua returns, and perhaps, thereafter.⁴⁸

By making [the liturgical forms of the Siddur] our own, we demonstrate that the Jewish people are our people and that Jewish life is our life.⁴⁹ While from our perspective the failure of the Jewish people to accept Yeshua as Messiah adds a tragic dimension to Jewish history, it is nonetheless true that our people could not have chosen better, given this failure, than to recognize the halakhic authority of the Rabbinic movement.⁵⁰

Even in the midst of this language of rapprochement, there is still the need to create a religious space that erases the cultural barriers between Christian faith and Judaism for potential Jewish converts. The difference between what Harris-Shapiro experienced and the Hashivenu style of accommodation can be measured by the latter's need for Jewish authenticity even at the expense of the non-Jewish Christian's sensitivities.

⁴⁷ Dauermann, "Making Israel's Story Our Own," 7.

⁴⁸ Schiffman, "Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century: A Historical Perspective on 'Oral Torah,'" 20.

⁴⁹ Kinzer, "Shema in Messianic Perspective," 1.

⁵⁰ Kinzer, "Oral Torah," 33.

If Messianic Judaism is to be a real Judaism, the lifestyle of Judaism should be our lifestyle. It does not need to be Orthodox, but certainly, moving in a more traditional direction. . . . It is ours [our heritage], handed down from our ancestors. If Messianic Jews are always borrowing from the church, whatever we end up with, it will not be Jewish. . . . We need to live a 21st century Messianic Judaism. . . . We can learn from Orthodox Judaism that we need to live as Jews regardless of the surrounding culture. Even though there is a cost, it is worth any price for our children to have our heritage passed on to them. Even though some of our Gentile friends may not want to worship in a service that is ‘too Jewish,’ our Jewish people will recognize that what we do is within the boundaries of Jewish life. It will say they are on home turf.⁵¹

Paradoxically, this postmissionary approach seems to exceed even the indigenous church model of missionary outreach in its attempts to make Christian faith native to Judaism. The indigenous model accepts the equality of Jew and Gentile in the Messianic congregational experience—the blended model of Messianic Judaism, but PMJ is adamant about creating and preserving what it calls “Jewish space” in the *ekklesia*, calling for separate congregations, separate authority structures and separate communities. Torah observance becomes the touchstone for Messianic Jewish difference from the Gentile Christian as much as it becomes the means of creating affinity with the wider Jewish world. If this trend continues to grow in Hashivenu communal life, it is conceivable that Messianic Jews would complete Harris-Shapiro’s provocative statement of identity by saying “We are Messianic Jews, they are Gentile Christians” before they would oppose themselves to non-Messianic Jews.

⁵¹ Schiffman, “Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century: A Historical Perspective on ‘Oral Torah,’” 14, 18–19.

Pragmatically speaking, because the majority of congregations within the Messianic Jewish movement are blended, with Gentiles usually outnumbering Jews, Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians would need to agree to differentiate themselves on the basis of practice in order for Kinzer's bilateral solution to be a realistic option. Both groups would have to agree that Torah observance would be a differential characteristic of Messianic Jewish congregations, while congregations of Gentile believers would continue to follow their respective church tradition(s). Hashivenu's Core Value #2 explains that Gentiles in the movement should defer Torah observance to the Messianic Jew so that it can serve as a hedge against a two-pronged assault on Jewish distinctiveness in the *ekklesia*.

In the days before Messianic Judaism, Jews who converted were expected to assimilate into the Gentile culture of the church. Now that Messianic Jews have opened up a world of Torah and Jewish practice to non-Jewish Christians, there is, ironically, a new potential for neutralizing Jewish distinctiveness:

We in Hashivenu believe that the specific observances of the Torah serve as signs of the distinctive character and calling of the Jewish people . . . It is emphasized time and again throughout Jewish tradition that the Torah is G-d's special gift to the people of Israel: 'Blessed are You . . . who chose us from all nations and gave us Your Torah.' That is not to say that the Torah is irrelevant to Gentile Christians. . . . Nevertheless, in all its particularity, the Torah is G-d's gift of love for one particular people, the people of Israel. . . . If, in all its ordinances, the Torah addresses Gentiles as much as it does Jews, if it defines the life of the Church as much as it defines the life of the Jewish people, then what remains of Israel's unique character and calling? In the past Jews who entered the church were

compelled to surrender Jewish observance and identity and, as a result, they were assimilated and they and their children lost any sense of being Jews. If . . . Gentiles in the church are now encouraged to live just like Messianic Jews, will not the same result occur? . . . We affirm our conviction that this divine gift to Israel, the Torah . . . is not applicable in the same way to Gentiles.⁵²

In PMJ theory, there should be little overlap between the two religious communities. To the extent that Gentiles participate in Messianic Jewish congregational life, they would do so as the ethnic “others,” respectful of Jewish space and its rules for practice and membership. Kinzer’s hope, of course, is that Jewish Christians who come from Jewish backgrounds but who are presently making their home in the non-Messianic Jewish churches would elect to shift communities and ‘come home’ to Messianic Judaism where they could fulfill their continuing obligation to live visibly Jewish lives as self-identifying members of the Jewish community.

In reality, however, the overwhelming majority of Christian Jews are comfortably entrenched in those Christian pews and unlikely to be persuaded to become religiously observant Jews, marginalized by the church and rejected by the Jewish mainstream, short of a compelling appeal to conform to obligations imposed on them by the dictates of their Christian faith and accepted as such by the status quo in the evangelical church. By and large, the evangelical church and the missions to the Jews organizations have

⁵² Stuart Dauermann, “Values and Convictions of Hashivenu,” *Hashivenu.org*, n.d., http://www.hashivenu.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=6&Itemid=54. For an opposing view within the Messianic Jewish Movement and responsa, see, Tim Hegg, *Is the Torah Only for Jews? The Relationship of Jew and Non-Jew in God’s Covenant: A Response to the “Definition of Messianic Judaism” by the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations* (TorahResource, 2003); Daniel Juster and Russell Resnik, “One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community,” January 28, 2005; Tim Hegg, “One Law Movements: A Response to Russ Resnik & Daniel Juster,” *TorahResource*, May 2005.

always construed the wider Jewish community as both the spiritual and the physical “other” over and against which Messianic Judaism was to define itself. So, accepting Kinzer’s argument that Messianic Jews should begin to live observant Jewish lives as part of the wider Jewish world and leave the social world of the church, it will require a major shift in emotional, social and theological orientation toward what has been up until now a taboo society.

This proposed shift to a religious and social home among other Jews in America would also seem to require some form of external legitimation from the status quo in that community to mainstream its form of Judaism.⁵³ But, PMJ has little reason to be hopeful that the institutional gatekeepers of the outside Jewish world will sanction either them or their type of Judaism anytime soon. All forms of American Judaism have anathematized Messianic Jews, decried Messianic Judaism as a covert Christianity, and continue to lump all Messianic Jews indiscriminately with the stereotypical Jews for Jesus. External legitimation for the new paradigm will have to come from institutional Christianity and maybe a common consensus among non-elites in both religious communities for now. Nevertheless, PMJ in particular and the Messianic Jewish congregational movement in general (as represented at least by the UMJC) are determined to integrate into the Jewish community and to share “fully in the life of the

⁵³ New Religious Movements are conventionally categorized by their relationship to a “precursor tradition or traditions” from which they somehow deviate or differ enough to acquire a distinct identity. Gallagher, however, argues that given the predilection for contemporary new religious movements to borrow from a variety of sources, it shouldn’t be surprising if a group can be justifiably placed into more than one category (Messianic Jews are unhelpfully discussed as part of “Groups within the Biblical Tradition” in his book, however, eliding the difference between Jewish and Christian NRMs in favor of a broader category for comparison). Eugene V Gallagher, *The New Religious Movements Experience in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 13–32; 65–66.

wider Jewish world, living according to its national customs and taking concern for its welfare” with or without the Jewish world’s approval.⁵⁴

Two Models for Messianic Jewish Community

The difference between Kinzer’s goals for creating Jewish communal space inside the metaphysical church and that presupposed by the conservative evangelical missions to the Jews paradigm (Dauermann’s Standard Jewish Missions Paradigm) are worth comparing here to reveal not only the incipient fracture in the overall Messianic Jewish community, but also to highlight the different definitional constructs of Messianic Judaism at play.⁵⁵ To make the case for the conservative missions to the Jews view, I rely on another Messianic Jewish leader, Baruch Maoz, who now lives in Israel but who makes frequent contributions to the wider Messianic Jewish conversation in the U.S. The Messianic community in Israel is understandably different in composition and in outlook from its American parent given the cultural and religious milieu in which it exists, but Maoz provides a useful contrast to Kinzer as he responds to question of what role Torah and Jewish tradition should play in the maintenance of a unitary Messianic Jewish community.

Maoz defends the notion of a distinctive Messianic Jewish community, but he does not want to see it manifested in a religious setting designated to demonstrate the unity of the church and the common faith of believing Jew and Gentile. For Maoz the Christian church is the place where “God’s word is authoritatively preached” and where believers’ worship should follow a biblical pattern. All “conduct is organized according to scripture ... to which nothing may be added. In the context of *ecclesia*, members are

⁵⁴ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 177.

⁵⁵ Dauermann, “Messianic Jewish Engagement,” 6–10.

united by the finished work of Messiah.” Membership is based on common grace not ethnic distinctives and cultural heritage.

In the *ecclesia*, we meet other brethren to whom we have been united into one new man: Jews and Gentiles. . . . The *ecclesia* does not consist of Jews and converts to Judaism, but of Jewish and gentile sinners converted to God. . . . Any erosion of that unity is an erosion of the Gospel. . . . There is no room within the *ecclesia* for ethnic or cultural boundary markers, and we must not nullify the grace of God.⁵⁶

For Maoz, Christian community is formed and bounded by a shared faith and practice; all believers should model this unity of faith by agreeing to participate as equals in some common form of religious practice. Enjoying one’s Jewish particularity is appropriate in the larger society but not when at the expense of modeling Christian unity. Membership in the church trumps membership in the Jewish people for spiritual and religious purposes.

Maoz defends the position of Jewish Christians “who have rightly chosen to worship God in churches rather than in Messianic synagogues,⁵⁷ even though he agrees that Messianic Jews must continue to identify as Jews in continuity with Israel’s national life.

The ongoing reality of a visible remnant that believes in the Messiah and conducts itself within the context of Israel’s national life is a testimony to God’s faithfulness and a call to the nation to turn to God in Yeshua. . . . If

⁵⁶ Maoz, “The Role of Torah and Tradition,” 2–3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

following Yeshua entailed the obliteration of our national identity . . . then Yeshua is not the promised Messiah of Israel . . . he is no Messiah at all.⁵⁸

However, Maoz's call for a continued Jewish national identity should not be read as an endorsement of rabbinic practice or theology. In good Protestant form, Maoz reinforces the dichotomy between rabbinic Judaism and the Christian gospel at the same time that he retrojects responsibility for creating an impermeable, conceptual separation between the Jewish people and Christian believers onto the rabbis:

Rabbinical Judaism insists that Jews ought not to believe in Yeshua. . . .

The rabbis equate such unbelief with Jewish identity. There are few things a Jew may believe or disbelieve without being accused of denying his Jewish identity; believing in Yeshua is deemed by the rabbis to be a demarcation line between 'us'—the Jewish people—and 'them'."⁵⁹

Ergo, while Messianic Jews should create a Messianic Jewish community, this community should not be confused with the communion of the saints that takes place within the church and its congregational life. Messianic Jews should therefore steer clear of endorsing rabbinic Judaism, which Maoz seems to agree is antithetical to a religious identity based on belief in Jesus.

Predictably, Maoz's definition and understanding of Torah follows a Protestant evangelical trajectory, modified slightly by the ancestral identification Messianic Jews retain with biblical Israel. "Torah is that conglomerate of commandments God gave our forefathers at Sinai as the outline of their national covenantal duties. . . . Yeshua fulfilled the whole Torah on our behalf," including the civil, moral, and ceremonial facets of that law. "There is not an inkling [in the New Testament] of a call to celebrate the feasts,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

practice circumcision or maintain the dietary laws,” which Maoz asserts even the rabbis understood would pass away with the coming of the Messiah.⁶⁰ These practices, however, are enumerated in PMJ as injunctions for Messianic Jews in order to identify with the wider Jewish world and to live a recognizably Jewish life in continuity with Israel’s covenant responsibilities. Kinzer bases his argument for continuity with the “crucial markers of Jewish identity: circumcision, Shabbat and holiday observance, and kashrut” on the historical evidence implicit in the same Christian scriptures. “I contend that the Apostolic Writings consider such observance to be an obligatory expression of Jewish covenantal fidelity rooted in theological conviction rather than prudential judgment.”⁶¹ In other words, because the New Testament Jewish disciples of Jesus were convinced that observance was a matter of obedience to a divine commandment and not just an expedient missionary strategy, contemporary Messianic Jews who claim to be living in continuity with the heritage of biblical Israel and the Jewish people, as they believe the Jewish disciples of Jesus did, must likewise consider these observances religious and obligatory for their own sake and not simply as mimetic actions for enhancing cross-cultural communication.

For Maoz, Messianic Jews are Christians first and Jews second, and Messianic Judaism—the way of life of Messianic Jews—should not compete with their religious identification, which is wholly contained within Christianity, defined in evangelical Protestant terms by a salvific confession of faith AND right practice. Religious Judaism is rabbinic Judaism, which is antithetical to his form of Christianity. Christian Jews can live as Jews when their Jewish lifestyle is subsumed under a secular national identity where rabbinic forms are part of the common culture, as Maoz is able to do in Israel, but

⁶⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁶¹ Kinzer, “Reflections,” 5.

not when those same forms and the laws that govern them are taken as religious obligations, as Kinzer is arguing.

Both Maoz and Kinzer consider themselves Messianic Jews embedded in the Messianic Jewish movement, both locate the transcendent authority for their vision of how this movement should take shape in the same Christian scriptures, but it is clear that they are divided by the type of discourse in which each locates that vision. Maoz argues for a community shaped by traditional evangelical Protestant discourse that privileges the egalitarian nature and spiritual superiority of an ethnically blind *ekklesia*, while Kinzer advocates a return to the earliest model of a Messianic (i.e., Christian or proto-Christian) community ordered on the basis of the ancient and divinely ordained division between Israel and the nations; one he argues was preserved by the early Jewish disciples of Jesus. Where Harris-Shapiro's Messianic Jews in the 1990s were looking both to Spirit-filled Christianity and American Jews as their orientational others, it is clear from the Maoz-Kinzer divide about how Messianic Jewish community should look that Hashivenu is increasing its ideological and social distance from Christianity by forefronting the Jew/non-Jew difference that is a critical marker of Judaism.

Maoz, living and practicing his Jewish communal identity as part of the cultural majority in Israel, has a lower social and cultural threshold to cross in order to mark himself as a Jew and to be legitimated as such by the larger society. Kinzer and the members of his tiny congregation in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who still feel compelled to disclose their Messianic affiliation to non-Messianic Jewish leaders before participating in any common activities, are going to have to labor diligently to overcome the negative, stereotypical image that the American Jewish community has of Messianic Jews, as Christian missionaries, in order to garner respect let alone acceptance into the wider Jewish world here.

Although Kinzer has been criticized by fellow Christians for his embrace of Orthodox rabbinic Judaism, reflecting the tendency of evangelical Protestantism to label any move toward Jewish religious observance as a first step on the slippery slope to a Judaizing heresy, he has tried to make it clear that what he has in mind is a new model for Messianic Judaism, not a unification with American Jewish Orthodoxy. “I have enormous respect for Orthodox Judaism, but I make no claims to be an Orthodox Jew, nor am I working to form an Orthodox version of Messianic Judaism. I do seek to live as an *observant Jew*, and I am to foster an expression of Messianic Judaism that learns from the full breadth of Jewish tradition.”⁶²

Kinzer extends this individual identification with rabbinic tradition to his aspirations for the entire movement, decisively moving it away from its point of origin in Christian missions to the Jews and into the world of normative Judaism: “Messianic Judaism has accepted the covenantal responsibility of Torah-based Jewish practice, and has identified itself as a distinctive Yeshua-centered form of Judaism. In this way it has taken a step away from viewing itself as merely a subset of evangelical Protestantism . . . Only by being distinct from evangelicalism, and connected to Judaism can such a Messianic Judaism fulfill its vocation.”⁶³ In its respect for tradition and its appeal to Jews and interfaith couples, Zera Avraham might resemble a typical American Reform temple. But, there is nothing rabbinically Orthodox (and certainly not Reform) about the website’s statement of belief that “Yeshua is Israel’s promised Messiah” or the congregation’s aspiration to “live in such a way that the wider Jewish community can recognize and honor its own mysterious bond” with its resurrected “Rabbi”.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid., 14.

⁶³ Ibid., 18–19.

⁶⁴ Zera Avraham website: <http://czaa2.org>, accessed November 17, 2014.

Once Messianic Jews agree that they are going to structure their communal life around the traditional Jewish calendar and follow the strictures of an observant Jewish life, it is evident that doing so consistently is going to conflict with their ability to participate fully in the life-rhythm of a normative (especially liturgical) Christian church. In other words, the rabbinic model of Torah observance, which systematically works to differentiate and insulate Israel, the Jewish people, from the surrounding Gentile culture becomes operative in the Christian *ekklesia* separating Jews from non-Jews on the basis of practice. This, too, is visible in the arrangement between Calvary Presbyterian and Kinzer's Congregation Avraham where physical space is shared (as often occurs between new mainstream Jewish congregations and churches), but where the Messianic community is expected to order its religious life around the Jewish calendar with traditional Jewish liturgy while the Presbyterians continue their Christian worship services and church schedule.⁶⁵

However, in order for Hashivenu's interpretation of Torah observance to act as a positive tool of differentiation for Messianic Judaism on a broader scale, Christian institutions and churches will have to concede that systematic, regularized Jewish religious observance, i.e., a life of Torah, is the heritage of the ethnic Jews in their midst and not a reclamation of Jewish roots to enlarge Christian faith and practice. Theoretically, the request to set aside Jewish practices for Jewish believers should have met with little resistance given the pre-existing evangelical Protestant reluctance to embrace ritual and the fear of risking a salvation won by faith by engaging in the perceived legalism of rabbinic practice. However, in practice, there has been a theological backlash to such a suggestion *within* the Messianic movement from those

⁶⁵ Resnik, "Defining Messianic Judaism - A Commentary."

who reject the exclusivist implications of a revitalized Jewish ethnic identity in the church.

The argument/counterargument has acquired its own moniker, “One Law.” Responding to Hashivenu founder Stuart Dauermann and critiquing Kinzer’s call for a bilateral ekklesia, Messianic Jewish scholar Tim Hegg complains that this Jewish-only observance creates an unnatural stratification in the church, assigning non-Jews a second-tier identity:

Dauermann’s thesis is that a distinct Jewish identity is established through Torah obedience . . . It would appear that Dauermann constructs some kind of hierarchical schema of God’s elective activity [where] the ‘chosen people’ are the Jewish people . . . [and Gentiles] exist in a secondary category in which their covenant relationship with God is mediated through the nation of Israel. In practical ways, then, Dauermann’s ‘differentiated unity’ results in separate communities, separate congregations, and separate lifestyles for Messiah-following Jews and Christ-following Gentiles.⁶⁶

This issue remains unresolved, but there is some indication that advocates for Kinzer’s full program of filtering Jews and non-Jews into separate congregations with separate lifestyles have had to pull back the reins and consider the cost of pushing forward without a broader consensus. Even the UMJC, which is the strongest institutional ally Hashivenu has in the Messianic Jewish movement, has hedged the language on its official definition of Messianic Judaism to stress the inclusive nature of their congregational members. The 2002 “Basic Statement” reads: “Messianic Judaism is a movement of Jewish congregations and congregation-like groupings committed to

⁶⁶ Hegg, “Review of Dauermann.”

Yeshua the Messiah that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, and renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant.”⁶⁷ The 2005 “Basic Statement” adds the following language: “Messianic Jewish groups may also include those from non-Jewish backgrounds who have a confirmed call to participate fully in the life and destiny of the Jewish people. We are committed to embodying this definition in our constituent congregations and in our shared institutions”⁶⁸. The 2002 references to Messianic Judaism and Gentile Christianity in the expanded statement, which reflect Kinzer’s bilateral ekklesia fleshed out in real-time social configurations, have been changed to “Messianic Jewish community” and the “Christian Church” respectively in the 2005 revision.

Faith in Yeshua also has a crucial communal dimension. This faith unites Messianic Judaism and the Gentile Christian Church, which is the assembly of the faithful from the nations who are joined to Israel through the Messiah. Together Messianic Judaism and the Gentile Church constitute the one Body of Messiah, a community of Jews and Gentiles who in their ongoing distinction and mutual blessing anticipate the shalom of the world to come. (2002 Expanded UMJC Statement Defining Messianic Judaism)⁶⁹

Faith in Yeshua also has a crucial communal dimension. This faith unites the Messianic Jewish community and the Christian Church, which is the assembly of the faithful from the nations who are joined to Israel through the Messiah. Together the Messianic Jewish community and the Christian

⁶⁷ “Defining Messianic Judaism.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ http://www.levhashem.org/docs/Defining_Messianic_Judaism.pdf, 2002, accessed January 2, 2015.

Church constitute the *ekklesia*, the one Body of Messiah, a community of Jews and Gentiles who in their ongoing distinction and mutual blessing anticipate the shalom of the world to come. (2005 Expanded UMJC Statement Defining Messianic Judaism)⁷⁰

Of the three main precepts in the PMJ paradigm, the move toward rabbinic Judaism and Torah observance as a covenantal responsibility stands somewhere in the middle as far as the size of the waves it has made in the sea of Messianic Jewish self-understanding, eclipsed only by the problematic tendency to marginalize non-Jews in the movement and its congregations and the pregnant lapse in PMJ's commitment to openly and actively evangelizing the unsaved Jew.

The Jewish People are “us” not “them”

It is fitting that that Messianic Jews, like other Jews, consider identification with the Jewish people throughout its history and commitment to its welfare as the bedrock of their social identity.⁷¹

If the first set of precepts in the new postmissionary paradigm revolves around a positive engagement with Judaism's rabbinic tradition, the second set explains the first in terms of social identification with the Jewish people. Untangling the relationship of Messianic Jews to the wider Jewish world is a conceptual conundrum complicated by the dual nature of Jewish self-identification in America. American Jews are a minority population measured by the strength of a commonly accepted core of ethnic (socio-cultural) markers, which include religious affiliation and traditional practices.⁷² Jewish

⁷⁰ <http://www.umjc.org/core-values/defining-messianic-judaism/> , accessed January 2, 2015.

⁷¹ Kinzer, “Genus,” 14.

⁷² Many self-identifying Jews, however, either disregard religion as an important component of their Jewishness, or interpret its practices in secular/ethnic terms.

religious institutions in America, however, mark the boundaries around who is and who is not considered a Jew for communal purposes based on the norms prescribed by religious, i.e., rabbinic law, modified (or not) by exigent socially determined needs. Jewish identity has been measured and determined by a cluster of factors: religious laws, communal consensus, and sociological norms, not to mention the individual or personal “feeling” that one is Jewish whether there is any substantive basis for the feeling or not (the “Jewish soul” syndrome), or accounting for the increasing number of non-Jewish spouses of Jews who identify with Judaism but never formally convert. But quantifying American Jews institutionally or sociologically cannot measure a group’s contention that it does (or does not) identify with the Jewish people, a term that is laden with historical and religious implications that far exceed the significance of a tiny number of “real” Jews in any given diaspora community, especially when this term appears in the context of Christian theology.

Hebrew Christians from the early nineteenth century until today have claimed a continued identification with the Jewish people despite the utter rejection of that claim by the Jewish community; indeed the entire modern missions to the Jews enterprise has been constructed around the evangelical Protestant premise that Jews do not cease to be part of the Jewish people after their conversion to Christ. The perceived need to evangelize the Talmudic Jew was predicated on the belief that it was in the ultimate best interests of the Jewish people, individually and corporately, to win them to faith in Christ. This did not mean, however, that the Hebrew Christians, or even the first crop of Messianic Jews, were expected to call the unregenerate Jewish community or its synagogues “home.” Ideological affinity does not automatically lead to a desire for social identification.

The idea that Postmissionary Messianic Jews should integrate into their respective Jewish communities and labor there, shoulder to shoulder for the greater welfare of the Jewish people, bearing their witness to the truth of the Christian gospel from inside rather than outside the camp, is a novel twist in the unfolding plot of Jewish missions, but it is clearly an extension of the same program, which is ultimately to lead all Jews to accept Christian claims about the divinity and salvific ministry of the New Testament Jesus. “Postmissionary witness to Yeshua involves a new orientation to Jewish corporate life, history, and religious tradition, but it remains witness to Yeshua ... a witness that is passionate, powerful, and persuasive”;⁷³ this is a witness without the open and active evangelism that marks groups more tightly aligned with Christian Missions to the Jews. It is in this vein that one can begin to appreciate Messianic blogger and recently ordained Messianic rabbi, Derek Leman’s paradoxical assertion that his conversion from Gentile to Jew in 2010 under MJRC auspices made him “one of the tribe” but did not change his religious identity. In an online interview four years prior, Leman, a Gentile by birth, explained how he could claim to be a Christian while he was in the process of converting to Messianic Judaism:

“Converting to Judaism is a misleading expression. It gives the idea that someone like me is changing religions. That's not it at all. I am joining a people, the people of Israel. Israel has always been a people you could join. . . . That said, conversion is not for most people. There is no reason in Christ to convert. My family and I are converting because our life calling and destiny is with the Jewish people. We believe God has called us to convert.⁷⁴

⁷³ Kinzer, “Reflections,” 15.

⁷⁴ <http://judahgabriel.blogspot.com/2008/07/interview-with-messianic-rabbi-derek.html>, accessed 1/2/2015. Earlier this year Leman stepped down from his rabbinic

Following the conversion process, Leman was ordained as a Messianic rabbi and now leads Tikvat David, a blended Messianic congregation of Jews and Gentiles in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2014, Leman posted an entry to his blog, *Messianic Jewish Musings* in which he explains having come to grips with his new identity: “What I am now is Jewish by conversion,” he writes, “and Messianic by faith.”⁷⁵ Under the auspices of Hashivenu style Messianic Jewish discourse, a non-Jew like Leman can envision conversion to Judaism as a change in personal orientation toward Jewish peoplehood—from Gentile outsider to Jewish insider—without the need to sacrifice his existing religious identity as a Christian. For Leman, Judaism seems to represent the way of life of a particular people, not a religion per se.

Formerly disconnected and even antithetical elements like Jewish religious practice, Christian faith, Jewish peoplehood, New Testament discourse and Jewish-Gentile community, here are recombined to define a new religious possibility called Messianic (Christian) Judaism. Whether the new religion is viewed as a sectarian form of Judaism or a culturally contextualized form of Christianity, the portability of Christian and Jewish characteristics from one definitional construct to another underscores the inherent instability between these two religious systems.

The limen between post-New Testament instances of Christianity and Judaism has been historically visible most often through some form of practice on the part of the church that was designed to erase a significant and competing Jewish presence in the face of Christian claims to continuity with the sacred Jewish past—a particular kind of ideology that acquired the label, supersessionism. In the past, this erasure of Jewish

post for personal reasons. His name, however, still appears on the MJRC members page and he still considers himself a Jew by choice

⁷⁵ <http://www.derekleman.com/musings/my-story-of-faith/>, accessed December 29, 2014.

otherness has frequently been effected by the authoritative institutions of the church through coercive, persuasive, punishing, threatening, even violent practices. Presently however, in the wake of Western secularization and American disestablishment of religion, approaches that depend on access to state power are unavailable, and discourse, especially the Christian Mission to the Jews discourse that came to the forefront in late 19th century Europe, has taken its place. The point being that the dynamic tension keeping Jews and Judaism (whether this is defined as their national, or religious, or cultural way of life) and Christians and Christianity in separate but equal taxonomic and social containers in America is potentially most adversely affected at the site where individuals are able to cross from one community to another, and therefore from one “religion” to another. Mainstream Judaism and historic, mainstream Protestant denominations came to a mutually negotiated arrangement whereby each religious body agreed to grant the other equal status as an American religion with the exclusive right to speak for its respective community under the rubric of interfaith dialogue.⁷⁶ The perceived attack on the integrity of these negotiated boundaries is part of why the American Jewish community has in the past reacted so harshly to Jewish crossings from Judaism to Christianity and why a change in religious identity necessarily involved a change in communal identity as well. Twentieth-century Messianic Jews who refused to

⁷⁶ For an overview of the questions Messianic Jews raise in the interfaith dialogue between Jews and Christians, see, Isaac C. Rottenberg, “Those Troublesome Messianic Jews,” in *The Chosen People in an Almost Chosen Nation : Jews and Judaism in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 103–16; Novak, “When Jews Are Christians.” Novak would like the church to shore up its end of the negotiated difference between Judaism and Christianity by refusing to accept Messianic Jews’ claim to be the conciliatory bridge between the Jewish people and the church. Rottenberg, the child of a Hasidic Polish rabbi who was converted to Christianity before being murdered by the Nazis, grew up in a Christian missions culture and later became a general executive in the Reformed Churches of America. He is hesitant to dismiss the Messianic Jews’ offer out of hand, preferring to treat them carefully lest they splinter into sectarianism (vis-à-vis Protestant Christianity). For Rottenberg’s response to Kinzer’s postmissionary paradigm, see, Rottenberg, “Postmissionary Messianic Judaism? Observations on the Mark Kinzer Thesis.”

acknowledge the boundaries were understandably doubly threatening because they became complicit in this reprehensible erasure of Jewish difference, effectively negating institutional Judaism's claim to speak on behalf of a Jewish Israel to its Christian counterpart, the church. Given the lay of the inter-religious landscape in America, Messianic Jews who are still in actuality intimately involved with the evangelical Jewish missions community are inevitably going to find themselves in a no-win situation. As self-described members of the Jewish community, PMJs would be expected to take a public stance against any endorsement of Christian missionary activity directed toward Jews, but as Christians they will be expected to express solidarity with the objective if not the method of active proselytizing in the Jewish community. In these instances PMJs will have to decide whether social solidarity with a flesh-and-blood Jewish community or spiritual solidarity with a Christian theological agenda is the more compelling factor as they choose a side from which to speak as a religious group. For Messianic Jews aligned with Hashivenu, the conflict is not between belonging to Spirit-Filled Christianity or to the American Jewish community but between the agenda of Protestant Jewish Missions and being part of American Judaism.

In a Hashivenu Forum paper entitled, "Communal Aspects of the Besorah,"⁷⁷ Carl Kinbar tries to synthesize the church's mandate to evangelize the Jews with PMJ's desire to live as Jews inside the Jewish community. Kinbar tries moving the discussion away from a Protestant fixation with individual salvation toward what he calls a communal hermeneutic of Israel's redemption. Citing Abraham Heschel, Kinbar writes,

ours is not a private spirituality, the isolated relationship of one Jew — or any number of individual Jews — with God. . . . Individual life is eclipsed by the life and significance of the covenant community. . . . A version of

⁷⁷ "Besorah" is the Messianic Jewish term for the Christian gospel from the Hebrew for "good news."

the *Besorah* presented to Jews purely as individuals is inherently defective, a distorted account of God's covenant love.⁷⁸

Jews who come to faith in Jesus with this kind of individualistic message of salvation and lack of communal context, have already begun to separate from the visible Jewish community, the community that gathers self-consciously as Jews.⁷⁹ “

“Responding as members of a community,” Kinbar writes, “means that in my thinking, feeling, and decision-making, I resonate with the community,” and its norms.⁸⁰ Viewed this way, he reasons, a Christian message of redemption can be understood and internalized in a Jewish theological framework:

We, as Messianic Jews, must ‘participate *with* the [entire] Jewish people in the history of God's election and covenant' without preconditions . . . we should love our community, and every individual Jew, with a very extravagant and unconditional love. . . . Our fellow Jews need to hear that Yeshua is Messiah/Redeemer of the community, *Am Yisrael*, not only of individual Jews.⁸¹

Laying aside for the sake of argument the question of how this repositioning of the quintessential Christian doctrine of salvation through Jesus into a Jewish theological framework does or does not convert it from a characteristic of Christianity to an element in a new kind of Judaism, or whether this effectively obviates the need for a Jew to cross from one religious identity to another, this shift in thinking about Jewish salvation from

⁷⁸ Kinbar, “Communal Aspects of the *Besorah*,” 1–3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39, 37.

personal evangelism in Christian missions discourse to communal redemption in Jewish theological discourse will not be an easy transition to make for the majority of Messianic Jews. As products of the contemporary Protestant evangelical missions movement, most came to their Messianic Jewish self-understanding first as born again Christians who were then reclassified by the church as so-called fulfilled Jews, and then assigned the task of proselytizing the lost Jews of their former socio-religious world.

A case in point is the recent brouhaha over former President George W. Bush's willingness to speak at a fundraiser sponsored by a Christian proselytizing organization called Messianic Jewish Bible Institute in Dallas, Texas.⁸² Several notable American rabbis responded critically on behalf of the Jewish community to this political imprimatur of open evangelical missionizing efforts targeting Jews.⁸³ One might have expected a Messianic rabbi affiliated with Hashivenu to express some form of social solidarity with the Jewish community, or at least to craft a conciliatory message acknowledging Jewish concerns while taking the opportunity to distance their movement from the goals of MJBIBI or Jews for Jesus. Instead, in a series of Tweets, Hashivenu Messianic rabbi, Joshua Brumbach, expressed his support for the MJBIBI-Bush engagement this way: "MJBIBI may hold a different approach than I, but has every right to host Bush. Messianic Jews . . . we're here and not going away. Get used to it."⁸⁴ The

⁸² http://mjbi.org/about_us.php accessed January 5, 2015: "The vision of MJBIBI is to bring Jewish people into a personal relationship of faith with Yeshua the Messiah, knowing their acceptance will eventually mean life from the dead"

⁸³ <http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/gw-bush-fundraising-for-jewish-proselytizers-in-america-and-israel/2013/11/08/0/?print>; http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-250_162-57611955/; <http://forward.com/articles/187446/why-jews-should-not-accept-jesus-whatever-george/?p=4>; <http://www.jta.org/2013/11/19/news-opinion/united-states/for-messianics-bush-speech-was-a-moment-however-brief-of-acceptance#.UoxD-ne1rOU.twitter>

⁸⁴ Tweet, R. Joshua Brumbach @rebyosh, November 13, 2013. <https://twitter.com/rebyosh> accessed November 20, 2013.

confrontational, “we’re here” reflects Brumbach’s solidarity with other Messianic Jewish groups regardless of their ideological orientation towards open Jewish evangelism.⁸⁵ Stuart Dauermann, Hashivenu’s founder, posted a three-part Open Letter Response on his blog, “Interfaithfulness,” to Conservative Rabbi David Wolpe’s admittedly vitriolic article slamming Bush’s tacit endorsement of MJB’s missionizing agenda and Messianic Jews in general. But Dauermann’s response amounted to an extended apologia for Trinitarian theology and a defense of the Messianic Jewish position on the Jewishness of believing in Jesus/Yeshua written for an intra-Messianic Jewish audience.⁸⁶ Rather than expressing solidarity with the mainstream against proselytism targeting Jews, both Hashivenu rabbis took umbrage at the disparaging remarks made about Messianic Jews, defending the rightness of Christian theology for Jews and the legitimacy of missionary efforts to convert Jews to Christian faith.⁸⁷ What the real-time responses tell us in contrast to Kinbar and Kinzer’s best intentions is that postmissionary Messianic Judaism is in its formative stages and that the transition from evangelical Christianity to “true” Judaism is easier to envision on paper than to actuate in the crucible of Christian missionizing and Jewish resistance, where the boundaries between the two religious communities continue to be redrawn along monothetic lines.

⁸⁵ See Nov. 18- entries to *Yinon Blog* authored by Brumbach: <http://www.messianicjudaism.me/yinon/2013/11/18/bush-wolpe-and-criticism-of-messianic-jews/>

⁸⁶ <http://www.interfaithfulness.org/2013/11/14/rabbi-david-wolpes-article-on-why-jews-should-not-accept-jesus-an-open-letter-response-part-1/>

⁸⁷ Interestingly, the Executive Committee of the UMJC did critique the recent and remarkably tasteless Jews for Jesus video, “The Jew that Died For You,” which portrayed a cross-carrying Jesus on his way to death at Auschwitz. The Committee spoke as representatives of Messianic Jewish congregations “loyal both to the wider Jewish community and to Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah” and called the video “needlessly offensive.” <http://www.umjc.org/exec-statement-on-that-jew-died-for-you/> . The video has garnered nearly a million and a half hits on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/thatjewdiedforyou> since it appeared in April, 2014.

When Kinzer calls for a “bilateral ekklesia in solidarity with Israel,” this should be understood in terms of a general advocacy for Jewish causes, and ad hoc contributions to local events where Messianic Jews are accepted and able to participate. “Israel” should be understood narrowly as “the Jewish people,” the dominant element in a binary pair comprised of Israel/the Nations where the religious value attached to both identities is constructed within the domain of Christian/Messianic theology. On-the-ground solidarity with individual members of the Jewish people is greatest between Christian Jews who are part of the Messianic Jewish movement and weakest to non-existent between Jews who openly criticize or condemn the movement. Ethnic identity, or Jewish peoplehood, serves as a communal boundary marker for Messianic Jews of all varieties, but it is ironically strongest and most salient for Messianic Jews, in action, when it is shared internally with other Messianic Jews, and the most conflicted when extended across the socio-religious border into the mainstream world of American Judaism. The specific site of conflict in these border crossings becomes the evangelistic message that still serves as the prime directive for all forms of Messianic Judaism, whether it is expressed overtly and confrontationally in terms of personal outreach, or when it appears as inreach, as it does in PMJ discourse where evangelism is couched in the passive rhetoric of vocational calling.

Messianic Community as an Eschatological Community

Jewish Yeshua-followers perform a priestly service on behalf of their fellow Jews by representing them before God. As a consequence, all Israel retains its sacred status, in the hope of the day of redemption when in fullness it will acknowledge its returning Messiah.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Kinzer, “Priestly Remnant,” 16.

Despite Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok's magnanimous pluralist's offer to accept Messianic Judaism as a legitimate expression of being Jewish, Messianic Jews remain outside the camp of mainstream American Judaism.⁸⁹ The focal point of this exclusion remains belief in Jesus, which for all forms of Judaism converts the believing Jew into a Christian and an apostate. How then does a marginalized group of Jesus-Jews create a social identity for itself that it, at least, locates firmly within the censuring community? I've explored two ways thus far. First, connecting with the established Jewish conversation on Torah through the rabbinic tradition gives Messianic Jews access to the power of Jewish ritual life to create community and, potentially, to connect them to other Jews through shared religious practice. Second, participating socially as individuals and as groups in the larger Jewish world, when it is possible to do so, contributes to the Messianic Jewish goal of living a consistent and recognizably Jewish life outside the walls of the church. Since American Judaism is generally expressed and reproduced over time by a life of doing rather than believing, Jews within the Jewish world of PMJ, should they succeed in perpetuating their ideology and communal life into a future generation, may over time become an acceptable part of the fabric of Jewish life by persistence and visible presence. However, as it stands now, the official institutional word from American Judaism is still utter rejection of Messianic overtures toward public expressions of communal solidarity. The American Reform rabbinate says as much in its 1984 Responsa 66. Children of 'Messianic Jews':

Such individuals [Messianic Jews who try to affiliate with a Reform Congregation] should not be accorded membership in the congregation or treated in any way which makes them appear as if they were affiliated with the Jewish community, for that poses a clear danger to the Jewish

⁸⁹ Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*.

community and its relationships to the general community. We certainly do not want these individuals to speak for Judaism in any public forum.”⁹⁰

CCAR Responsa 150 treats marriage between a Jewish girl and “a boy who was born a Jew but now considers himself a ‘Messianic Jew’” as a mixed marriage between a Jew and an apostate who stands outside the community: “We should do everything in our power . . . to maintain a strict separation from anyone connected with this group.”⁹¹ When the Reform Conference of American Rabbis clarified its position on the communal nature of defining Jewishness, it made it clear that the prerogative for determining who is in and who is out is a *public* not a private matter, and that it is the mainstream community (or their branch of it) who makes the calls, including for whom and under what circumstances to perform a conversion to Judaism and Jewish peoplehood. This would negate the position taken by a convert to Messianic Judaism like Derek Leman, who converted under Messianic auspices in part because he believed “God called him” to do so to work among the Jewish people as a witness for Jesus/Yeshua, and in part because he and “many Jewish friends affirmed” that he had a “Jewish neshammah (sic) that destined him to join the Jewish people.”⁹²

The way Lehman professes his strong sense of affinity with the Jewish people, and the way he explains his intent to cleave to the Jewish people (paraphrased from the familiar language in the book of Ruth), sounds remarkably like any number of Gentile

⁹⁰ Central Conference of American Rabbis, *CCAR Responsa 66: Children of “Messianic Jews,”* 1984.

⁹¹ Central Conference of American Rabbis, *CCAR Responsa 150: Marriage with a “Messianic Jew,”* 1981, 67–69.

⁹² <http://www.derekleman.com/musings/discussion-my-conversion-torah-and-non-jews/> accessed 01/10/2015; <https://derek4messiah.wordpress.com/2010/04/19/conversion-day/> accessed 01/10/2015;

converts I have met or whose stories I have read in my own personal journey into modern American Judaism.⁹³ Nevertheless, it is clear that its institutional gatekeepers intend to keep Messianic Jews and any of their potential converts outside the camp, and that the persistent Messianic knocking at the mainstream gates becomes a rallying point for shoring up the defenses and reinforcing broadly construed communal boundaries.

“It is for the community,” the Conference writes, “and not for the individual . . . to answer the question ‘who is a Jew?’, for we are the Jewish *people*, a collective which bears a common historical identity. . . . An individual may regard himself or herself to be a Jew . . . And this sense of identification may be significant for that person and his family. But for *our* purposes, in deciding how *we* shall set the rules and ritual policies that govern our communal religious life, this person is not a Jew unless and until *we*, the community of Israel, can accept him or her as one of *us*” [italics in the original].⁹⁴

With one dissenting opinion, the Conference also opined that Reform congregations should not accept donations [the case in point was an offer of funds to help with costs following a synagogue fire] from any congregation affiliated with Messianic Judaism, as such donations would be inherently tainted by the group’s desire “to win legitimacy and potential converts in the Jewish community.”⁹⁵ While these Responsa are the product of American Reform Judaism, Conservative and Orthodox Judaisms share the sentiments

⁹³ Arnine Cumsky Weiss, *The Choice: Converts to Judaism Share Their Stories* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2010); Mariam Cohen, “Converts and Controversies---Becoming an American Jew” (PhD Dissertation, Arizona State University, 2013), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (1319283050).

⁹⁴ Central Conference of American Rabbis, *CCAR Responsa 5758.11: On Patrilineal Descent, Apostasy, and Synagogue Honors*, 1998.

⁹⁵ Central Conference of American Rabbis, *CCAR Responsa 5761.2: Donations to Synagogue by Messianic Jews*, 2000.

of alterity reflected in them as well. For the Israel constructed by the CCAR, Messianic Jews are utterly “othered” because of their heretical theology on the triune nature of God, which is necessarily critical to Messianic Jewish identity but relatively insignificant to modern Judaism in its reluctance to define God in anything other than broadly monotheistic language, and because all of American Judaism rejects the claim that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah.

A Messianic Jew can hardly remain Messianic and publically renounce the theological basis for his unique religious identity, while a modern Jew is not required to take any firm position on defining the nature of divinity in order to remain a member of the Jewish people. Should a Jew, however, claim that s/he believes Jesus to be the God of Israel, then that certainty converts a Jew out of the consensual definition of who is part of the Jewish community at the same time that such a confession of faith defines him or her as a Christian.⁹⁶ Rather than focusing on the content of this heretical belief in an attempt to understand why modern Jews would draw a line in the sand over a theological abstraction, it would be more useful for analysis to understand this singular belief as the most salient characteristic, historically speaking, that has created and defined Christianity over against the foundational matrix of Judaism. The Talmud and rabbinic halakhah have served the same end from the other side of the equation, further distancing Christianity and Christians from their Jewish counterparts, and permitting Jews to articulate and institutionalize their own ongoing religious and communal identity outside of Christian control, on their own terms, without the need to justify themselves or defend their positions in the court of Christian theology. Messianic Jews have therefore been perceived as unwelcome, even dangerous boundary crossers by institutional Judaism but as potent allies and a validating Jewish presence in the church

⁹⁶ Lincoln, *Terrors*, 34–35.

by their Protestant sponsors. Occasionally I still hear Jewish friends speak about Messianic Jews as a potential fifth column, waiting to infiltrate the unsuspecting synagogue and take over and claim the communal space for Christian purposes. Most of the early fear mongering that accompanied the appearance of Messianic Jewish synagogues and congregational spaces from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s has fortunately dissipated, but this has not made it any easier for Messianic Jewish groups to gain acceptance in the mainstream.

If the first two of PMJ's approaches to claiming a stake in Judaism depend on overcoming mainstream Judaism's censure of Messianic Jews through increased affinity with normative Jewish practice and engaging in common social activities and social action, the third way would obviate the need for gaining this external acceptance. Building PMJ as a proleptic, eschatological community means challenging Messianic Jews to form a set of religiously observant Jewish communities for Jewish believers in Jesus where they can live Jewish lives, socialize the next generation into Messianic Judaism, and normalize Christian beliefs as part of their definition of Judaism. In fact they would create their own kind of rabbinic-styled Judaism in the American religious landscape, complete with all four domains that Bruce Lincoln demands of anything called a religion: a religious community that coheres because of a shared discourse and shared practices, and that is represented and maintained by some type of formal or informal religious institution.⁹⁷ This quintessentially American kind of voluntarism has already contributed to the sprawling denominationalism that marks American Protestant Christianity, and in a much smaller but analogous way, American Judaism as well.⁹⁸ Whether its rabbis are invited to the community table, or whether its membership can

⁹⁷ Lincoln, *Terrors*.

⁹⁸ See Sarna, *American Judaism*; David Biale, "Book Review," *Jewish History* 19 (2005): 389–93.

take part in religious rituals and life cycle events at other Jewish synagogues, or whether any other branch on Cohn-Sherbok's pluralist menorah acknowledges PMJ's right to exist, it can function adequately if it can sell its platform to a wide enough audience and if it reaches a critical level of institutional maturity.

PMJ communities are being asked to understand their marginality to the Jewish mainstream as part and parcel of their religious vocation, which Kinzer describes as the priestly service of a holy Jewish remnant rendered on behalf of all Israel.⁹⁹ The service that this priestly remnant provides for Israel is described in terms of worship and witness. By identifying themselves with, and living in accord with the whole Jewish people, PMJs argue that they attest to the truth of their belief that Jesus/Yeshua is first and foremost a Jewish messiah before he is a Christian savior: Christian faith can be an element of Judaism as much as it is the core belief of Christianity. In the absolute, this claim is nothing new for Messianic Judaism, Hebrew Christianity, or Christian Missions to the Jews; what differs in PMJ is where and how this witness is delivered.

Missions and Hebrew Christianity saw the unsaved Jews as a target population to be evangelized and converted to Christian faith. Jews were always the religious "other" even if Hebrew Christians identified with them as "our people." Mainstream Messianic Jews express a stronger ethnic and cultural identification with the Jewish people, but maintain a religious distance from rabbinic Judaism. The Hashivenu movement adds a new layer of social identification with the Jewish people over and against the Christian church and affirms the ongoing religious legitimacy of post-Biblical Judaism with or without an express belief in Jesus as Messiah (and savior). This opens the door for PMJs to find a way to incorporate key elements of their Christian faith into their religious life, which is now going to be lived out in some measure of recognizable conformity with

⁹⁹ Kinzer, "Priestly Remnant."

rabbinic tradition and the corporate life of the Jewish community. Because PMJ is a religious movement rather than a secular or ethnic Judaism, the focus is going to remain on religious practice and the predominant form of discourse they use will be theology:

The priestly service of the Messianic Jewish community, like the priestly service of all Jews, centers on the study of the Torah and the prayer regimen of the Siddur. . . . our primary communal task is not teaching or preaching, announcing the Good News or advancing social justice. We are summoned to do all these things, but for us they must be subordinate to the explicit worship of God, and only as such do those things become for us a form of worship.¹⁰⁰

Kinzer's vision of Messianic Jewish worship centers on praying the traditional Jewish liturgy, sometimes adding uniquely Messianic content and other times simply "reading Yeshua" into the liturgy. This is possibly in part because the Siddur already has a significant amount of messianic content. It is not particularly difficult for a worshiper to add specific *Messianic* meaning to the general messianic passages without the need to alter the actual text of the prayers. In this way, non-Messianic Jews are able to participate in much of the liturgical life of the Messianic Jewish community without encountering Christian language that has been interpolated into the traditional prayers and Messianic Jews are able to read their 'truths' into the shared text.

In a paper contributed to the 2004 Hashivenu Forum, Jonathan Kaplan, a professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas and Jewish Studies scholar, offered his thoughts on how to approach using the traditional Jewish Siddur as a vehicle for Messianic Jewish worship. Because he reads the Siddur as a "multivalent document—a metaphorical tapestry" of Jewish thought and tradition about the nature of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 28.

God and God's redemptive work in Israel's history, he finds it possible to integrate Messianic beliefs into this tapestry without damaging the integrity of the Siddur itself, but notes that this must be more than merely harmonizing two religious systems.

No one contests that the theologies presented in the New Covenant about Yeshua arise out of Jewish thinking during the Second Temple period concerning the shape of redemption and the nature of the Messiah. Much of the theology presented by the Siddur about God, redemption, and the Messiah arises out of this same milieu. Though both systems of thought share common origins and work with the same topoi, it would be naïve to suggest that we can merely harmonize the two systems. Yet we are able to explore the reality of Yeshua from the horizon of Jewish thought.

Historically, this trajectory (at least in the Jewish community) has aimed to disprove Yeshua's messiahship. I proceed, rather, from the horizon of belief in Yeshua as Messiah and as such my reading of Yeshua from the horizon of the Siddur will have slightly different character. I want to ask what then does Yeshua being the Messiah mean in light of Jewish thought about redemption, particularly as expressed in the Siddur? What I pose below is by no means a final statement of the issue. Rather, I hope to present some areas for conversation which we can continue to probe how we may weave the thread of Yeshua into this divine tapestry and how this divine tapestry of redemption problematizes regnant constructions of redemption in the messianic Jewish movement.¹⁰¹

Kaplan understands that by shifting his interpretive center from Christianity to Judaism, the reader, or in this case, the prayer, of a given sacred text is engaging the text in an

¹⁰¹ Kaplan, "A Divine Tapestry: Reading the Siddur, Reading Redemption, Reading Yeshua," 31.

entirely different fashion than someone who appropriates the text and superficially Christianizes it—an imperialist practice attested to frequently in the study of ancient Jewish texts that have been adopted by the Christian church for its own use, and the standard model in Christian Missions to the Jews and early Messianic Judaism.¹⁰² What Hashivenu is doing, Kaplan explains is engaging in “liturgical theology” from an anthropological horizon, “approaching theology from the horizon of one’s own community and its shared religious and cultural values.”¹⁰³

We are concerned with articulating our understanding of Yeshua’s identity and mission from the broader horizon of Jewish perspectives on redemption. Engaging in liturgical theology is inherently anthropological because it views the lived praxis of the community as the arena within which and out of which to construct and retell the community’s narrative of theological identity, particularly its understanding of redemption.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² The most common form of Messianic Jewish Christianizing consisted of adding “in the name of Yeshua haMashiach” or similar language to the conclusion of standard Hebrew prayers, or to add the words Yeshua HaMashiach where it seemed appropriate to proclaim Christian truth in the context of Jewish prayer. For example, in the standard blessing for laying Tefillin, one Messianic siddur reads: “Blessed art Thou, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with his commandments and in the blood of Y’shua the Messiah, and commanded us to put on Tephillim.” Joseph R. Applegate, *The Messianic Prayer Book—Shabbat & Festival—for Chavurah Nephesh Chayee* (Chavurah Nephesh Chayee, 2000), 58–59. By contrast, John Fischer’s popular *Siddur for Messianic Jews* contains the standard blessing in Hebrew without any Messianic glosses. The same Siddur, however, adapts the blessing for kindling Shabbat lights to reflect Messianic theology: “Blessed are you . . . who has sanctified us *in your Word, and given us Yeshua our Messiah, and commanded us to be light to the world. Amen.*” By omitting the standard rabbinic formula, “who has sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to light the candles of Shabbat,” this rendition avoids the problem for Messianics of appearing to obey a rabbinic commandment; Messianics want to keep the ritual but they need the language to conform to their theology. John Fischer, *Siddur for Messianic Jews*, Ninth Edition, revised (Palm Harbor, FL: Menorah Ministries, 2008).

¹⁰³ Kaplan, “A Divine Tapestry: Reading the Siddur, Reading Redemption, Reading Yeshua,” 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

For Hashivenu, this horizon should be the Jewish people, Judaism, and Jewish history not Christianity. Rather than add a Christian Jesus to a foreign Jewish liturgy, Kaplan and Kinzer both approach the problem of integrating their Christian faith with Jewish practice by looking for the meaning of their faith from within the continuum of Jewish history and its liturgical tradition. This means reading and praying the Siddur with an understanding of Jesus/Yeshua as a Jewish messiah who is yet to fully accomplish Israel's redemption—a messiah whose primary theological context is eschatological rather than soteriological.

Like other Hebrew Christians and other Messianic Jews, PMJs understand themselves to be a saved remnant of the divinely chosen Jewish people.¹⁰⁵ PMJs differ from other Messianic Jews and Hebrew Christians, however, by having chosen to live out the eschatological reality of what they believe is Israel's prophetic destiny in communal form as though it were a present reality. PMJs see themselves as a proleptic Jewish community, functioning as much as possible like other kinds of American Judaism, supporting the Jewish people and maintaining a faithful commitment to Israel's covenant of Torah. Stuart Dauermann explains:

Because the Holy One holds us responsible to be signs, demonstrations and catalysts of this proleptic future, we must become a community in which the future has arrived. . . . The Messianic Jewish Remnant must serve as a

¹⁰⁵ Harris-Shapiro interpreted this remnant theology among her Messianic Jewish congregation as a mediating category between sustaining an ideological loyalty to the Jewish people and the reality of rejection. I see that same function persisting into Hashivenu, however, there does not seem to be the routine expression of projected anger at the American Jewish community among Hashivenu Jews that Harris-Shapiro noted in her study. On occasion it does surface, as it did in the matter of Bush and MJB, but as a rule, there is a greater degree of alignment with the wider Jewish community than in the missions community. I would attribute the lack of overt “othering” of the mainstream community to the fact that at least some groups of Messianic Jews have developed a solid sense of their own legitimate Jewishness apart from the mainstream's endorsement. Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 104–05.

sign that God has a continuing purpose for the Jewish people. . . . The Messianic Jewish Remnant must serve as a demonstration of that purpose - a proleptic preview. . . . The Messianic Jewish Remnant must serve as a catalyst assisting greater Israel toward that Divine purpose. . . . Our communities, living in covenant faithfulness, would be missional magnets as was the case for the earliest Yeshua-believing Jerusalem congregation which proved so attractive to the surrounding Jewish world. We would be a proleptic preview of Israel's future, a foretaste of things to come.¹⁰⁶

Mainstream exclusion can serve to confirm PMJs theological self-understanding as a pious remnant awaiting the final dénouement of Israel's redemption, at the same time that the New Testament scriptures, properly interpreted, can authorize this remnant status and its Torah observant lifestyle. Bruce Lincoln describes this type of interconnected discourse as unacknowledged mutual mediation. The real life situation of the Messianic Jews "conditions the way they read, remember, cite, and interpret the Bible, while their knowledge of the Bible colors the way they perceive and engage their immediate circumstances."¹⁰⁷ In this way PMJs are simultaneously creating their own interpretive tradition while constructing a social world that reinforces its correctness. Unlike the traditional Jewish narrative of Israel as a chosen people separate from the nations, however, this new Messianic narrative must contend with the fact that their communal definition of Israel has to expand to include non-Jewish Christians who have

¹⁰⁶ Dauermann, "Seeds, Weeds, and Walking the High Wire: The Role of the Remnant—Embodying Israel's Destiny," 8, 33, 40. Ironically, the early Christian message proved more attractive to non-Jews than Jews, just as it has proved to be for the late 20th century Messianic Jews who fairly quickly became a minority population in their own Messianic Jewish movement.

¹⁰⁷ Lincoln, *Terrors*, 47.

embraced the Jewish story as their own, without jeopardizing the ethnically Jewish character of the whole. These Christians complicate the definition of Israel in ways that they do not for any other kind of contemporary Judaism. This is not a question of whether a non-Jewish spouse can become functionally Jewish without converting, but whether non-Jewish Christians who consider themselves “spiritual Jews” because they have been told they are part of greater Israel by Messianic Jews count as equal members of Messianic Jewish congregations. It is also not a question of whether some strands of rabbinic Judaism affirm a theological role for the nations in their eschatology, but whether those from the nations who claim Jesus as their savior are co-members with the Jewish people in an expanded definition of Israel. In Messianic Jewish theology, it is impossible for Israel to be entirely synonymous with the Jewish people.

This leads to the Messianic Jewish claim that the Jewish core of the ekklesia (which sees itself simultaneously as part of the larger Jewish people) must live a life that is recognizably and religiously Jewish. They feel that they must live, in some measure, as Torah-observant Jews, and that, concomitantly, non-Jews must *not* so that the lines between Jew and Gentile, which are critical to Judaism, are not blurred. Messianic Jews also see themselves as having a responsibility to represent the redeemed remnant of national or ethnic Israel to the nations; a role that Gentile Christians cannot possibly undertake. In order to authorize their unique view of the present relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church and between Christians and Jews in the larger social world, PMJs must go back to the beginning.

In the authentic past of PMJ discourse, they read the New Testament as painting a picture of the nascent ekklesia (church) as a two-winged body; on one hand, there is a community of former Jewish disciples and relatives of Jesus centered in Jerusalem, and on the other hand, there is a growing number of Gentile converts to the new, Messianic

Jewish faith forming small house churches under the leadership of Paul and Barnabas. The Jewish disciples under James were the pre-eminent leaders of the new movement but, under pressure from Paul's apparently successful missionary work, they agreed to incorporate the influx of Gentile converts into their rapidly expanding community *without making them Jews*. "For Luke, as for all first-century Jews," writes Kinzer, "Jerusalem was the center of the world" and James, the presumptive brother of Jesus in the New Testament, is ultimately responsible for determining the requirements under which Gentiles would enter the movement. "Thus," he concludes rather expansively, "the Jerusalem congregation represents the Jewish portion of the Yeshua movement to the Gentile portion and thereby also represents the Jewish people as a whole [to the incoming Gentiles]." ¹⁰⁸

This role of representation is critical to Kinzer's understanding of contemporary Messianic Judaism's function as it affects the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Messianic Jews, under the authority of the New Testament scriptures, should be seen as legitimate representatives of the Jewish people who can enfranchise believing non-Jews into the "expanded commonwealth of Israel." Extending this logic further, Kinzer sees Messianic Jews who identify with Judaism as a bridge between the Gentile church (comprised of converts to Christian faith from the nations) and the Jewish people; or reading this from the opposite perspective, Messianic Jews, who are members of the church and the Jewish people, make it possible for Gentile Christians to have a part in the life and eschatological promises belonging to Israel. Either way, it is critical that these two communities—Jews/Jewish people and Gentiles/Church—are differentiated and distinguishable by their historic New Testament roles and practices.

¹⁰⁸ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 153–54.

Many commentators perceive that, according to Acts, Jews and Gentiles within the early Yeshua-movement lived according to different customs (*ethne*). However, few have seen that these distinct customs presume and require distinct communal expressions (they are *national* customs) . . .

There is one ekklesia, but it contains within it two distinct communal entities: a Jewish ekklesia (representing and serving as a bridge [for Gentile Christians] to Israel as a whole) and a Gentile ekklesia.¹⁰⁹

Supersessionism and the crumbling of the ecclesiological bridge, i.e., the Jewish ekklesia, damaged the church in a profound way [and] produced a schism in the heart of the people of God. Ultimately the schism was between the multinational ekklesia and the Jewish people. However, this basic schism was precipitated by an internal schism *within* the Messianic ekklesia—between the Gentile ekklesia and its Jewish counterpart, whose role was to bridge the gap between Israel and the Yeshua believing Gentile community.¹¹⁰

The eschatological perspective of Messianic Jewish theology—believing Jews representing Israel together with a complement of believing Gentiles representing the saved from the nations anticipating the return of Israel’s martyred messiah together—provides a paradigmatic past on which to re-pattern the present in anticipation of the future. Believing Gentiles are no longer the ultimate “other” in the unfolding narrative of Israel’s ultimate redemption, but are now intimately related to Israel, the Jewish people:

In the new eschatological setting created by Yeshua’s resurrection and Israel’s multinational extension, the term [Gentiles] loses its negative

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 159–160.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 210–11.

connotations of idolatry and alienation from the people of the covenant.

The term can even take on a positive meaning, since it implies a relationship between the nations of the world and Israel, the elect community.¹¹¹

If the past is represented by the incorporation of converts from the nations into Israel, the recurrent structure on which the past, present and future is built remains the binary of Israel/the Nations where Israel is the preferred element in the pair and the Nations have been divided into those who have believed in Jesus and those who have not. The present is problematic because the composition and constitution of the Messianic ekklesia (i.e., the Christian church) no longer reflects the authentic pattern of Jews leading and authorizing the grafting-in of Gentiles into an expanded, eschatological, messianically redeemed Israel. Since the eschatological future revealed in the New Testament scriptures is certain—all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26),¹¹² and all people will remain permanently divided into two categories: Jew and Gentile¹¹³—then the present can and should be made to conform to this eternal reality. If the past is the most authentic portrait of the ekklesia as it was, pointing to the way the future will look when the eschaton arrives, it should, logically, serve as an authentic template for the present as well as.

As should be clear by now, the near success of PMJ's platform depends on institutional Christian cooperation and support more than it does on the Jewish community's acceptance of Messianic Jews and their kind of Judaism. At least since the 1970s, Messianic Jews' integration into the broader Christian religious community has

¹¹¹ Ibid., 22.

¹¹² Ibid., 128.

¹¹³ Kinzer, "Genus," 22.

provided an alternative social setting where apostatized Jews could find ways to connect personally with the community's non-Jewish majority through the medium of shared faith if not a shared historical or biological connection. Indeed the success of this social interaction has led to a troubling situation for the health of the Messianic Jewish Movement: most Jewish Christians remain in the traditional Christian church (rather than in Messianic synagogues), and most of these find the fellowship of other non-Jewish believers a significant factor in determining what kind of congregation they attend. In short, as the normative Jewish community knows, intimate association with non-Jews leads to an increased rate of assimilation into the dominant culture and its religion (or no religion) with a cascading effect into future generations, shared biology notwithstanding. To overcome this slide toward assimilation, Kinzer needs to convince the church that reinforcing his ecclesiology and encouraging its Jewish members to live Jewish lives in solidarity with the wider Jewish world rather than remain in the multinational church of the nations is in its best interests and faithful to its religious obligations. If there is to be a mini exodus of Jewish believers from the church pews into Messianic congregations, the church must agree to completely renounce its supersessionist tendencies and come to see itself as a community of non-Jews who collectively participate in the "eschatological blessings of an expanded Israel," and to see Messianic Jews as Kinzer would like to be seen, as representatives of the whole of the Jewish people before God, living "as agents of unity, binding together the *ekklesia* of the nations [the Christian church] and the Jewish people."¹¹⁴

While on the surface, this appeal to return to the past where everything was in its proper order reads very much like a kind of American Christian restorationist message, Kinzer's rhetoric inevitably serves his very pragmatic interests in maintaining a visible

¹¹⁴ Kinzer, "Priestly Remnant," 24.

and viable, generationally sustainable, Jewish identity for Jews who have been rejected by the Jewish mainstream and are being effectively assimilated into the evangelical church.¹¹⁵ Just the fact that Jews join the church is insufficient to establish this “visible Jewish component” according to Kinzer; perhaps this is because Jewish assimilation ultimately testifies to the Gentile church’s propensity to erase Jewish difference in support of its self-understanding as the new, inclusive people of God in the divine economy. It is only when *Jewish* has qualitative meaning in the larger social context of Jewish community, that Kinzer thinks Messianic Jews can fulfill their role in the eschatological and soteriological community of the church. Messianic Jews must be “Jews *first* ...” before they can perform the tasks that the *ekklesia* requires of them, and being Jews means rooting “their lives deeply in Jewish soil.”¹¹⁶ Since the church, according to Kinzer, must acknowledge “the logical and temporal priority of national Israel” in order to overcome its tendency toward supersessionism, the best expression of that recognition would be to honor the Jewish core within, the Messianic Jewish community that alone is able to represent “national Israel within the multinational *ekklesia*.”¹¹⁷ Exactly how the new PMJ will be “recognizably Jewish” is largely a function of religious practice combined with institutional presence and participating more directly in the general goals and activities of the broader Jewish community. In the new self-understanding, postmissionary Messianic Jews would become ‘practicing’ Jews as a

¹¹⁵ Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., “Sects, Cults and Mainstream Religion: A Cultural Interpretation of New Religious Movements in America,” *American Studies* 26, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 5–16.

¹¹⁶ Kinzer, “Genus,” 23.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

matter of religious obligation, consciously re-entering the stream of rabbinic tradition as it informs this practice ¹¹⁸.

If it is our destiny to be *the head and not the tail* according to prophecy, it is time we cease following the trends of contemporary Christianity and find our expression of faith in traditional expressions of faith and practice. . . . We have a long way to go, but its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace.¹¹⁹

This rabbinically informed practice—communal religious worship following the traditional prayer book, calendar, and ritual regulations—is what Hashivenu leaders propose will set Messianic Jews apart from their Gentile or non-Jewish brethren in the church and align them instead with mainstream American Judaism. A key premise in this early iteration of Kinzer’s PMJ platform is that Jews and Gentiles, though related through a common faith, maintain a critical social and religious distance. This mandate is framed in terms of transcendent authority, which for Kinzer and now for most of the Messianic movement is the Jewish-only obligation to the Torah. Maintaining “Torah-based distinctions between Jew and Gentile” is the only means he sees of counteracting the forces of assimilation and absorption that work toward normalizing Jewish difference in the “body of Messiah.”¹²⁰

Summary

Messianic Jews, whose behaviors and beliefs have put them outside the range of possibilities considered normative by the wider Jewish world, understand the need to overcome the stigma and pain of being judged and branded as deviants, heretics, traitors

¹¹⁸ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 95.

¹¹⁹ Schiffman, “Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century: A Historical Perspective on ‘Oral Torah.’”

¹²⁰ Kinzer, “Genus,” 23.

or apostates if they are to persist into the next generation with a continued desire to identify as members of the Jewish people. Over the past 40-odd years the Messianic Jewish Movement has grown from a handful of start up fellowships of young Jewish converts to a full fledged congregational movement with two umbrella organizations representing a rich variety of worship styles, denominational training, and ethnic constituency. But, it has attracted more Gentiles than Jews and more Jews who believe in Jesus are still sitting in church pews than are taking their place at the Messianic Jewish synagogue. This has led a small group of avant-garde thinkers in the movement operating under the label of Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, or the Hashivenu group, to formulate a new strategy for maturing the movement into a community that can declare its independence from evangelical Christianity and the overt missionizing strategies of Christian Missions to the Jews and claim a stake in the territory allotted to Judaism on the map of American religion.

In order to make this transition viable, this new postmissionary Messianic Judaism will need to decrease the sense of affinity it currently has with the evangelical missions to the Jews community and increase a sense of solidarity among Messianic Jews for the wider Jewish world so that the primary community of reference becomes the Jewish people and not the church. For Kinzer, Messianic Judaism should be comprised of observant Jews who believe in Jesus, while Christianity should become synonymous with the Gentile wing of the universal and metaphysical Body of Messiah (*ekklesia* writ large). If Messianic Jews can shift their thinking and social location along these lines, PMJs think this gives the Messianic movement a way to survive into the next generation with a strong sense of its Jewish identity in tact. Under Mark Kinzer's theological guidance, the group has put together a think tank of articulate and concerned advocates for the new paradigm (Hashivenu) with a set of core values, and its Messianic

rabbis have created a council to speak for the movement on issues of communal practice (MJRC). From a sociological perspective, the new postmissionary paradigm has challenged the Messianic Jewish movement to move to a Torah observant lifestyle in sync with a range of other modern Judaisms (Reform to Modern Orthodox). This in turn necessitates transitioning into the social world of the broader Jewish community where these practices and a new rhetoric of separation from what Kinzer terms the Gentile Christian church, may help to overcome the mainstream Jewish community's prejudice and stereotyping of Messianic Jews and Messianic Judaism.

From a discursive perspective, appropriating the mythic past as a template for the present and future, that is identifying contemporary Messianic Jews with the leaders of the first believing community who were indisputably, normatively, Jewish, may help to ameliorate the pain of rejection and the loss of communal Jewish identity that Jewish converts to Christian faith have suffered by virtue of their exclusion from the mainstream of American Jewry. In addition, to the extent that PMJ is set in conversation with other forms of American Judaism, their sectarian orientation and messianic ideology necessarily infuses their experience of Judaism with a vital sense of religious purpose, authenticity, and meaning crafted specifically for Jews who believe in Jesus that can be missing from mainstream institutional religious experience, whether that is Christian missions to the Jews or a liberal to conservative Jewish mainstream.

Taxonomically speaking, the new sub-movement called Postmissionary Messianic Judaism is the strongest, most deliberate attempt by Christian Jews to break down the monothetic definitions of Christianity and Judaism. Throughout the history of the contemporary Messianic Jewish Movement there has been an attempt to blur the boundaries between these two religious systems in order to soften boundary crossing for Jews who come to believe the Christian gospel's claims about Jesus from some form of

rabbinic or secular Judaism to Messianic or Biblical Judaism. Generally this has amounted to re-describing Protestant evangelical Christianity in a Messianic Jewish congregational configuration as “true” Judaism and recoding critical terms in Judaism-friendly language. But Postmissionary Messianic Jews are engaged in recreating Messianic Jewish religion as a kind of contemporary Judaism complete with an halakhically regulated, Torah observant lifestyle in fidelity to the Mosaic covenant, a return to communal self-understanding as part of the wider Jewish world rather than the church, and the redefinition of Christianity as a Gentile movement. Viewed from the perspective of the dominant groups being challenged by Messianic Judaism, Hashivenu is trying to uncouple and transport its Christian beliefs from Christianity into Judaism, or conversely, they are busy smuggling traditional Jewish religious practices and a meaningful hierarchy of ethnic difference into Christianity.

In terms of what to make of Postmissionary Messianic Jewish community given Lincoln’s polythetic definition of religion, on the one hand it would be fair to say that to the extent they are able to implement their paradigmatic vision of Messianic Jewish community on the ground, PMJ would be held together by a common discourse grounded in the transcendent authority of the Christian New Testament scriptures and their historical reconstruction of its views. This dependence on the New Testament would have the effect of creating strong ties of affinity to the rest of Christianity as a religious system and to other Christian communities, whatever their ethnic make up. But, it would also estrange PMJs from all other forms of historical Judaism for whom the New Testament may be a set of interesting documents from Second Temple Judaism, but for whom it has never held the status of scripture. On the other hand the common practices that would bind them into a community—halakhic Torah observance (for Jews but not Gentiles) and a traditional if modified rabbinic liturgy—are paradigmatic of

contemporary rabbinic Judaism, and have been, up until now, antithetical to evangelical Protestantism.

Can affinity created through practice outweigh estrangement created by belief in the value system of American Judaism? This remains to be seen. Kinzer's call to accept the religious legitimacy of rabbinic tradition for all Jews, whether they believe in Jesus or not, has already created some degree of discomfort within the broader Messianic movement and the non-Messianic evangelical community at large, signaling that practice is a critical category for any definition of Christianity as a religious system and that rabbinic Judaism still remains a strong antithetical identity against which Christian institutions define themselves. In addition, the fact that PMJs have no intention of jettisoning Christian baptism and the Eucharist/communion, but must find ways to incorporate these rituals into their form of Messianic Judaism in order to retain a living connection to their Christian faith and other non-Jewish Christians, undermines PMJ's implicit argument that Christian faith is somehow institutionally neutral and can be detached from one religious system (Christianity) and moved seamlessly into another (Judaism).

At the present time, the Messianic Jewish Movement appears to be at a crossroad communally speaking. The mainstream is tightly connected to evangelical Christianity's missions to the Jews discursively and organizationally, while the Kinzer-led Hashivenu group is pulling away from this culture to stake out a place in the religious landscape within the orbit of American Judaism. If the movement as a whole can embrace the postmissionary paradigm, Jewish believers in Jesus will be able think of themselves as the head and not the tail of the Messianic ekklesia (the church). As self-defined representatives of the Jewish people, they can script for themselves a new role as mediators between Jews and the Gentile Christian church and as so called priestly

servants whose messianic faith and practices ensure the ongoing sanctification of all Israel until the final redemption which both Jews and the Christian church teach will take place.

At this point in time, however, the Messianic movement is deeply entrenched in the machinery of evangelical missions to the Jews; even within the sub-community of Hashivenu and its proponents there is a residual orientation towards the church and a strong sense of solidarity with other Messianic Jews and Jewish missionary organizations regardless of their different ideological approaches to presenting the gospel to the Jewish community. By comparison, though, neither remaining an indigenous missionary arm of the Protestant church nor returning to mainstream liberal to conservative Judaism with its ambivalence toward religious Jewish particularism can provide anything near the potential to create a new community with the kind of emotional commitment or spiritual fulfillment that Postmissionary Messianic Judaism offers Jewish Messianics. The question is whether enough Jewish believers in Jesus can be convinced that the Jewish in Messianic Jewish needs to be expressed through a religiously observant lifestyle in solidarity with the Jewish community and in conversation with rabbinic Judaism. If so, then this will likely constitute a new religious community that can be classified phenomenologically as Judaism with its uniquely halakhic way of life and membership through ethnic status, and Christianity with its historically developed Christology, membership through right beliefs, and core ritual practices of baptism and Eucharist/communion. As a practicing religious community, however, Hashivenu style congregations will continue to be excluded from most normative Christian and Jewish communities because of the religious dualism PMJ theology requires.

Chapter 5 Hashivenu Messianic Judaism: A synchronic study

Modern Messianic Judaism

This chapter is an attempt to contribute to the project of defining Judaism polythetically by identifying and analyzing the characteristic elements of Hashivenu or Postmissionary Messianic Judaism as they relate to Michael Satlow's three conceptual maps: Israel as a self-defining group of Jews, textual tradition, and practice. Mapping Hashivenu's Judaism reveals the tension between a polythetic, second-order definition of religion in which the family of traditions identified with Judaism is represented by various historical religious communities that share a stronger or weaker family resemblance, and first order definitions of Judaism that exclude or anathematize difference when it is threatening to the status quo. Necessary inclusion in the former may conflict with justifiable exclusion from the latter.

From this perspective, Hashivenu represents the elite core of an ideological movement whose aim is to overcome this disconnect by conforming as much as possible to the normative model of contemporary Judaism as an ethno-religion of praxis while it works out a systematic theology to make sense of its membership in the catholic *ekklesia* and a symbolic vocabulary that has yielded mutually exclusive worldviews. The major obstacles to a coherent Messianic Jewish worldview that would comport with both a rabbinic and normative Christian system are the meaning of Israel and Torah. Both of these symbols are embedded in competing interpretive traditions and each has acquired a meaning that seems incapable of being reconciled with its discursive twin. Israel in Rabbinic Judaism is a synonym for the Jewish people but in Christian discourse Israel has a double meaning that separates body from spirit. In the traditional understanding of Rabbinic Judaism, Torah is whatever the rabbis transmitted as Torah, and nothing else. In modern American Judaism, Torah has a much broader meaning. Torah, as such, has not had much currency as a positive orienting symbol in Christian discourse, but has

served better as a foil for the superiority of Christ who abolished the Law of Moses and became the eternal mediator of God's saving grace. Hashivenu wants to connect its Messianic worldview with the powerful symbol of Torah in Judaism so that the Torah and Christ/Messiah are not a binary but a complementary pair, and to reinforce the ethnic meaning of Israel without jettisoning its spiritual dimension that includes believing Gentiles. A Judaism without Israel as the Jewish people and Torah as its orienting symbol would have little currency or credibility in the American religious landscape. A Messianic Judaism that doesn't enfranchise Jesus-believing Gentiles as religious equals or that requires Messianic Jews to live out the terms of the Sinai covenant despite Christ's fulfillment of the Torah's obligations subverts Christianity's historic efforts to create a separate religious identity out of an inherited set of Judaic symbols for its non-Jewish membership.

How these critical symbols are interpreted and assigned meaning is what sets Hashivenu Messianic Judaism apart from the evangelical worldview it was birthed in, as well as from the rabbinic or even liberal Judaic worldview of all members of American Judaism. Messianic Judaism does not have a new revelation like the Qur'an or the Book of Mormon, nor does it have a charismatic prophet or teacher to give its religious world a distinctive identity apart from its two traditions of reference. If it is to survive as a recognizable stream of contemporary Judaism and not simply embody a Christian evangelical strategy to proselytize Jews it must create its own world view where Jewish believers in Yeshua are the central characters in Israel's mythic narrative, and where the claim that Yeshua is Israel's messiah makes sense in that narrative as it unfolds in Jewish historical experience.

Dimensioning Judaism in Three Conceptual Maps

Michael Satlow's work on constructing a polythetic definition of Judaism attempts to overcome the disability of relying on first-order definitions in the academic

study of religion. He suggests that in order to work toward building a true polythetic definition of Judaism, researchers and scholars should focus first on producing nuanced studies of individual Jewish communities whose religious identity would fall under the rubric of Judaism. Following Jonathan Z. Smith's lead, Satlow's work contributes to the project of merging conceptual and synchronic approaches to defining religion(s). As a beginning paradigm, Satlow proposes three conceptual maps for organizing characteristics that belong to Judaism: Israel, discursive tradition, and practice, and three sets of questions that scholars should attempt to answer in the course of producing their individual studies. In this chapter I use Satlow's conceptual maps and his set of questions to draw a picture of what I will call Hashivenu Judaism.¹

At present, I would classify Hashivenu as a discourse community that formed in the late 1990s and is now comprised of a small number of Messianic Jewish leaders and thinkers representing an even smaller number of Messianic Jewish congregations, most of which are located in the U.S.² This community shares a common goal of bringing order and structure to the forty-plus year old Messianic Jewish movement and defining its religion as a form of Judaism. Hashivenu is embedded in an older and much larger Messianic Jewish community, which consists of hundreds of congregations represented by two major and a number of minor umbrella organizations. Hashivenu groups are almost exclusively members of the older but smaller Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, which was formed in 1979.³ The Messianic Jewish mainstream is

¹ Satlow, "Defining Judaism."

² By discourse community I mean a community made up of individuals who have chosen to participate in a particular conversation on a given set of texts and who actively share goals and communicate with other members in the pursuit of these goals. See, Erik Borg, "Key Concepts in ELT: Discourse Community," *ELT Journal* 57, no. 4 (October 2003): 398–400; Phillips and Hardy, *Discourse Analysis*, 3–5.

³ Resnik, *Introducing Messianic Judaism*.

generally mapped with reference to those congregations in the younger but much larger International Association of Messianic Congregations (IAMCS), an arm of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) and successor to the early twentieth century Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA).

The Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC), established formally in May 2006, is an outgrowth of the Hashivenu think tank and its annual Forum is. In 2009, the MJRC website listed seven congregations that were connected to the council through their rabbis or associated leaders: Ahavat Zion in Beverly Hills (Joshua Brumbach, Stuart Dauermann), Beit HaShofar in Seattle (Jason Forbes), Congregation Ohr Chadash (John Fischer) in Palm Harbor, Florida, Ruach Israel (Richard Nichol) in Needham, Massachusetts, Shuvah Yisrael (Paul Saal) and Simchat Yisrael (Tony Eaton) in West Hartford and West Haven, Connecticut respectively, and Zera Avraham (Mark Kinzer) in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The current website (2015) adds Tikvat Israel (Jamie Cowan) in Richmond, Virginia, and two havurahs (small fellowships): Or HaKodesh (Daniel Lerner) in Houston, Texas, Congregation Sha'arei Shalom (Michael Schiffman) in Cape Coral, Florida. The congregational websites and personal blogs of the MJRC members exhibit varying degree of conformity with the rhetoric of the Hashivenu think tank and the Rabbinical Council's official position, but mostly they appear to be on a common trajectory of differentiating themselves from the church without severing their spiritual relationship to other fellow believers in Jesus. The kind of Messianic Judaism that Hashivenu and the MJRC members are creating arises out of the discourse generated by these websites, official Hashivenu Forum papers, blogs, books, social media and other venues afforded to these individuals to discuss and make a case for their vision.

The rest of this chapter is organized around Michael Satlow's conceptual maps and the specific questions he poses. First is the map Satlow labels "Israel," which he defines as an imagined community whose meaning can be plotted along a spectrum from

ethnicity to religion. Hashivenu Messianic Jews (HMJ) understand themselves to be part of “Israel” where Israel most often acts as an ethnonym synonymous with the historic Jewish people. However, their theology expands the semantic meaning of Israel to include non-Jewish, unconverted Gentile believers in Jesus, or Christians, so that unlike the discourse of other contemporary Jewish groups, the religious and the ethnic meanings of “Israel” in Hashivenu do not have a direct one-to-one correspondence.

The second map is labeled “Discursive Tradition” by which Satlow means an evolving conversation or discourse on a set of authoritative texts, which for contemporary Judaism he identifies as a distinctive tradition that has developed around the Hebrew Bible and the Rabbinic Oral Tradition. Hashivenu’s religious discourse is also built on the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible, but to this set of scriptures, they add the Apostolic Writings (New Testament), which, in treating Hashivenu religion as Judaism, become a sectarian set of texts that it shares with the Christian church. Together, the Hebrew Bible and the Apostolic Writings form the core of Hashivenu’s Messianic Jewish canon. Hashivenu Jews are only now beginning to enter the common conversation of rabbinic tradition in which other American Judaisme have been engaged for centuries, which leaves the question of how they will relate to this Jewish tradition a matter for further discussion in this chapter.

Finally, the third map is “Practice,” which Satlow uses to mean ritual religious behaviors that have either been authorized by the rabbinic textual tradition or that particular Jewish communities may have developed independently of that tradition but which, if they survive, can be incorporated into the tradition for later generations. Jewish ritual practices function both as carriers and as sources of Jewish tradition. Messianic Jews have always incorporated elements of rabbinic practice into their communal and individual life practices, but they have done this without accepting the authority of the rabbinic tradition in which these practices developed. Hashivenu Judaism would

standardize these ritual practices and conform them to the models provided by other denominations of American Judaism while affirming the authority of the rabbis to have acted as tradents for Jewish tradition in the absence of any specifically Messianic Jewish community from late antiquity through the present. In addition to the usual categories of practice that would fall under mainstream Jewish observance, Hashivenu Jews are adding distinctive rituals that have direct counterparts in Christian communities but are completely lacking in any other denomination of American Judaism: *Tevilat Mashiach*, which is an entrance ritual to their particular faith community, and *Zichron Mashiach*, which is a symbolic ritual of remembrance celebrating the sacrificial work of their messiah and affirming their communion with all others who believe that Jesus, God incarnate, is Israel's messiah.⁴ Since I have already devoted space to these two rituals in Chapter 4, and since most of Hashivenu practice mimics the mainstream, I'll focus my discussion of practice in this chapter around developments in liturgy.

Israel

In what sense do Hashivenu Messianic Jews understand themselves to be part of Israel? Before this question of Satlow's can be addressed with reference to Hashivenu Messianic Jews, it is important to understand the complex meaning of Israel that Messianic Jews acquired as part of evangelical Missions to the Jews discourse. Israel is indeed an imagined community "to use Benedict Anderson's felicitous phrase," but it has normatively been used within Judaism as a synonym for the collective Jewish people, regardless of the different categories of belonging that have been available in contemporaneous political or sociological discourse and which Jewish communities have used to locate themselves in relationship to others — race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, for example. In early Christian discourse, the church understood itself to be the new

⁴ See chapter 4 for a discussion of the MJRC's halakhic guidelines for these two characteristic ritual practices.

Israel, continuing the covenantal relationship with God that the Jews had forfeited by rejecting Jesus.

Christian theologies have always insisted that Christians are the heirs to the Jewish covenant. The Church has traditionally construed itself as part of the unfolding history of Israel. Indeed, it is “the New Israel,” which for Christians often meant the replacement of the “old” Israel. Christians have seen themselves as the contemporary recipients of the divine blessing given to Abraham and as members of the covenantal chain from Abraham to Moses that culminated in the new covenant established with the blood of Jesus. In other words, Christians see themselves as the new chosen people.⁵

Jews who converted to Christian beliefs after the third or fourth centuries CE were generally assimilated into the church’s by then antinomian, non-Judaic culture and Jewish converts to Christianity ceased to retain a separate communal Jewish identity within its social structures.⁶ Jews who did not join the church became the Christians’ antithetical others, “the Jews,” a false Israel identified with the synagogue opposed to Christians, the “true Israel” represented by the church.⁷ This historic Christian doctrine

⁵ Eugene Korn, “Covenantal Possibilities in a Post-Polemical Age: A Jewish View*,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 6 (2011): 6.

⁶ Messianic Jews are aware that there is no historical record of an ethnically differentiated Jewish community of messianic faith that parallels that of the Gentile Christian church. Several efforts have been made to reconstruct such a history, but after the fourth century CE, these histories amount to more of a record of individuals who are still identified as Jews within the institutional church. There is, therefore, no independently transmitted messianic Jewish tradition for contemporary Messianic Jews to develop for their own communities today. See, e.g. Mottel Baleston, “Messianic Jewish History, at <http://arielm.org/outlines/o-mjh.pdf>, 2007.

⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1995), 117–225.

of Jewish displacement and Christian replacement came to be known pejoratively as supersessionism.

Supersessionist ideology shaped the Christian church's official attitude toward the Jews of history from the beginning of the third century CE until the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust and the fruit of Christian anti-Semitism gave the church reason to rethink the moral implications of its theological position. In the aftermath of WW II Protestant and Catholic institutions had come to the conclusion that God had not utterly rejected the Jews and replaced them with Christians, but that the church had either been grafted into Israel's covenant alongside the Jews or that there were two divine covenants, one for lineal descendants of Israel and one for the body of Christ, or some other circumlocution for resolving the Christian dilemma that a politically reprehensible but not entirely dispensable supersessionist theology posed.⁸ In post WWII Christian discourse then "Israel" as a symbolic identity could represent a common "people of God" comprised of the Jewish people and grafted-in Gentiles, arguably contiguous with the

⁸ For a typological taxonomy of Christian supersessionism that differentiates between punitive, economic, and structural supersessionism, see R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). For twentieth-century statements repudiating supersessionism in the interests of interfaith dialogue and unity, see, e.g., the Vatican's 1965 statement, *Nostra Aetate* (which avoids the term, Israel but speaks of the church as the "new people of God" with a New Covenant); "Building New Bridges in Hope," a lapsed resolution of the United Methodist Church that affirms the continued covenantal relationship of Jews with a common Jewish-Christian God even while tacitly affirming that "Judaism as been superseded by Christianity as the new Israel; and the American Presbyterian Church's paper, "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews" that admits Christianity and Judaism both "claim relationship with the ancient people Israel" but repudiates supersessionism or replacement theology in favor of teaching that the church has been "engrafted into the people of God by the covenant of Abraham." Israel remains a "particular people" chosen by God as "a sign and foretaste of God's grace toward all people."

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/-building-new-bridges-in-hope-deleted-or-expired-2012>, <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/theological-understanding-relationship-between-chr/>, accessed September 2, 2015.

ancient Biblical Israel, or it could refer to a contemporary Jewish national identity, or to Jews as an ethnic group, or to the Christian church, or it could be used in any or all of these senses simultaneously. Theologically the Christian definition of Israel could no longer entirely displace the physical Jewish people from their relationship with God, but neither could “Israel” be used tout court as an antonym for the Christian church.

Under the influence of dispensationalist theology, Protestant Christian missions to the Jews adopted a view of Israel that made a clearer distinction between the Jewish people and the church. In Dispensationalism the church, a mystery unknown to the ancient Israelites because it was not revealed to them in the books of the Hebrew Bible, intrudes into the divine time line bifurcating Israel’s ongoing covenantal story to make way for God’s dealing with the Gentiles. During this historical period that begins with the church and ends with the second coming of Jesus, the Jewish people are sidelined and the spotlight turns to the New Israel of the spirit, the Christians, who take up the mantle of spreading the gospel of Jesus to the world. According to dispensationalist ideology, this time of the Gentiles will end at some point and the Jewish people will once again enter the stage of divine history to bring all things to their consummation in Jesus. In classic Dispensationalist teaching, Israel is not the church, it is a physical nation identified with the Jews, and the church is not Israel, it is a heavenly reality. Modern day Jews who believe in Jesus are considered members of the church and their destiny lies with the rest of the Gentile believers, not with the physical nation of Israel.⁹

The most widely held dispensationalist view is premillennial in which the church exits in something called the rapture while Israel takes over evangelizing the unsaved who are left behind (as dramatized in a series of books of the same name by Tim LaHaye,

⁹ H. Wayne House, “The Future of National Israel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (December 2009): 472. House provides a cogent summary of the basic Christian doctrines concerning the relationship between Israel and the Church in Christian theology.

and the runaway best seller of 1970, *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey).¹⁰ This pre-millennial dispensationalist viewpoint dominated much of evangelical Christianity in the twentieth century and was certainly the fare on which most contemporary Messianic Jews cut their theological teeth. When young Jewish converts began to enter the evangelical church in the 1970s on the heels of the new state of Israel's victory in the Six Day War, many felt that they were the Jewish remnant destined to usher in the return of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. As the fleshly representatives of a national Israel were returning from all parts of the globe to Israel, newly converted Jews were thought of by the church as the harbingers of Christ's second coming. Christian Missions to the Jews evolved into a programmatic attempt led by Jewish converts to enlist Jews in this end time scenario where they could not only secure their own personal salvation through faith, but serve as native emissaries bearing the Good News of Israel's ultimate redemption in Christ to their own nation.¹¹ Jews for Jesus, like other Christian missions to the Jews groups, inherited the church's definition of Old Testament Israel. "The Jews" or "the Jewish people," a nation once uniquely chosen by God to be a light to the nations, had been temporarily set aside because of its unbelief in favor of the church.¹² Over the course of history they were told, only some Jews, a holy and believing remnant of Israel

¹⁰ See, <http://www.leftbehind.com/>; Hal Lindsey and Carole C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970).

¹¹ Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*.

¹² Technically it could be argued that the church no longer thought of itself as replacing Israel entirely and for all time in the divine economy of salvation, but it certainly did think of itself as taking up the religious space and intimate connection to Israel's God that this empirical Israel, or the Jewish people continued to think they uniquely inhabited and enjoyed. The term structural supersessionism has been used to describe this theological displacement of the Jewish people from any ongoing hermeneutical significance they might have in the Church's reading of their scriptural canon. For a discussion of the difference between hard and soft supersessionist theologies, see David Novak, "The Covenant in Rabbinic Thought," in *Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 65–80.

had been able to enter into the church, the New Covenant People of God whose head was Christ, the Jewish Messiah. On the threshold of Christ's second coming, which in the prophetic language of the 1970s evangelical church meant any day now, Jewish believers were expected to be mega-missionaries, opening the portal for their unbelieving Jewish brethren to enter the eschatological Israel of the future.

This modified supersessionist doctrine fed the religious imagination of younger Jews coming into the church who saw themselves as a purified, "true" portion of empirical, ethnic Israel that had been re-connected to the "Body of Messiah," the true vine from which non-believing Jews had been pruned. Empirical Israel, or Israel according to the flesh, differentiated the Jews as an ethnic group from eschatological Israel, an innovative circumlocution for the Christian church, a voluntary association of people from different ethnic backgrounds—Jews and Gentiles—united by a common belief that Jesus was/is Israel's promised messiah and a universal savior. Remnant theology informed Messianic Jewish self-understanding and was the basis on which Messianic Jews felt confident enough to claim a continued connection to the Jewish people (empirical Israel) despite their membership in the church (eschatological Israel) in the Christian imagination. Only the Christian church, an institution that attributed no religious significance to an individual's ethnic identity found it necessary to differentiate between empirical and eschatological meanings of Israel in a way that undermined the unchallenged equivalence between Jews and Israel in Judaism.

Kinzer's Israelology is a modified version of this inherited paradigm, but the institutional and social possibilities inherent in this theological bifurcation between eschatological and physical Israel, between the *ekklesia* of God and the genealogical sons of biblical Jacob, provide Kinzer with the elements of a new paradigm for Messianic Judaism. At first glance Kinzer's use of the term Israel appears to track with normative, contemporary Jewish self-understanding and scholarly definitions. Israel refers to the

Jewish people who claim to be physical descendants of the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and those non-Jews by birth who have converted. Judaism is the religion of these Jewish people.¹³ “Though Judaism is a religion, it is a religion that is founded upon and oriented to a particular tribe – Israel, the Jewish people.”¹⁴ Empirically, Israel is constituted by the Jewish people; it is a natural family and a nation with an ancient pedigree and historical presence. Most Messianic Jews claim to be physical or biological Jews, or in a few interesting cases to be Jews by virtue of conversion to Messianic or some form of mainstream Judaism.¹⁵

But Kinzer’s writing evidences a more nuanced use of this term than a simple equivalency with the Jewish people. Israel is both a physical people (empirical Israel) and an imagined community of Jew and Gentile with soteriological significance (eschatological Israel). Plainly put, Israel is not exclusively the Jewish people, it is the church described from a Jewish rather than ethnically neutral center. The non-Jews in the church are re-described as an enlargement of its Jewish core, a core that guarantees continuity with the Jews’ covenantal relationship (and its promises) with God.

The *ekklesia* does serve as a kind of eschatological enlargement or multinational extension of Israel. . . . Non-Jews who join the *ekklesia* become in some significant sense heirs of the promises made to the patriarchs and participants in their covenant with God . . . understood in

¹³ Martin S Jaffee, *Early Judaism : Religious Worlds of the First Judaic Millennium* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2006), 13; Satlow, “Defining Judaism,” 840; Neusner, *The Way of Torah*, 15; Fishbane, *Judaism*, 19–20.

¹⁴ Kinzer, “Genus,” 2.

¹⁵ Kinzer does not specify whether he relies on matrilineal, patrilineal, or some other principal of reckoning kinship, although the MJRC accepts both. In the early days of the contemporary Messianic Jewish movement non-Jews sometimes converted to Judaism with the help of mainstream Jewish clergy in order to be reckoned as Jews in the Messianic movement.

eschatological and soteriological terms as defining the community of salvation.¹⁶

However, eschatological Israel is also a synonym for the “Body of Messiah,” a messianic *ekklesia* that has accepted the fact that its Jewish core is both necessary and sufficient to establish its corporate identity and to overturn the verdict of supersessionism.

In *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism (PMJ)* I argued that the Messianic *ekklesia* should exist in two interdependent and united corporate forms, one Jewish and the other multi-national. The Jewish corporate expression of the Messianic *ekklesia* lives as a sub-community within the wider Jewish world, and there bears witness to Israel’s identity as a people chosen by God in Messiah Yeshua for an eschatological destiny under his headship. Through its unity with the multinational *ekklesia*, the Jewish body of Yeshua-followers also enables its non-Jewish partner to share in the eschatological riches of an expanded commonwealth of Israel without falling prey to supersessionism.¹⁷

Messianics are not the only Jews who have understood Israel as a composite supra-identity. Jewish scholars have also defined Israel in post-exilic Judaism in terms of two constituent groups of people, those who enter by birth (ethnic Israel) and those who join by choice (naturalized Israel). Michael Fishbane explains the two-fold composition of Israel this way:

The first derives from ancient Israel and pertains to the ancient ethnic core of the Jewish people. The second . . . also derives from antiquity, but it took on new forms in the classical [i.e., rabbinic] period of the religion.

¹⁶ Kinzer, “Genus,” 15.

¹⁷ Kinzer, “Priestly Remnant,” 14–15.

Through it Judaism extended its divine covenant to anyone who would believe that the Torah is a divinely revealed way of holiness and salvation and who would practice that “way”. Once converted by the established procedures, such persons are Jews in all respects and their descendants are fully Jews “by nature” as it were. In the sense that Judaism is both grounded in a closed religious-ethnic community and open to all who would accept its teachings, the religion of Judaism includes both particularistic and universalistic elements.¹⁸

According to Jacob Neusner, however, Rabbinic Judaism defines “Israel” in wholly supernatural and homogeneous terms. Even in its social experience, he argues, Jewish communities are essentially transcendental faith communities, not ethnic enclaves.

A gentile of any origin . . . may enter that Judaism’s “Israel” on equal terms with those born into the community. They become children of Abraham and Sarah. The children of converts are Israelite without qualification. . . . It follows that the “Israel” of Rabbinic Judaism must be understood in a wholly theological framework. It is not an ethnic classification, based on cultural or territorial assimilation, and marrying into Israel without conversion to the God of Abraham and Sarah accomplishes no change in the status of the gentile. For that same reason this Judaism knows no distinction between children of the flesh and children of the promise and therefore cannot address a merely ethnic “Israel”. . . . Rabbinic Judaism thus set forth a theory of the social entity formed by those who observed its way of life and who adhered to its

¹⁸ Fishbane, *Judaism*, 20.

worldview that identified that social entity with the “Israel” of which Scripture spoke.¹⁹

But the Rabbinic definition of Israel is based on a fundamental distinction between Jews (Israel) and non-Jews (Gentiles) and it maintains that fundamental distinction even within the imagined, transcendent notion of Israel. Despite Neusner’s claim that Gentiles who convert are indistinguishable theologically from native born Israelites, Sacha Stern’s work shows that the rabbis were compelled to acknowledge the inherent difference between those who were descended genealogically from Jacob/Israel and those who were given a fictive kinship through Abraham and Sarah (and not Jacob) at the same time that they sought to overcome any potential deficiency for the true convert.²⁰

Michael Satlow notes that in antiquity even Philo “curiously distinguishes the communities ‘Israel’ and the ‘Jews.’” Although there is a fundamental overlap between the social entity and the imagined community, Philo’s Israel, like that of Neusner’s rabbis, appears to be a community primarily defined in theological not ethnic terms. Philo’s Israel potentially makes room for non-Jews who may have joined themselves to the discipline of Judaism as a means to spiritual and moral perfection apart from any official conversion. As in the previous examples, there is no *necessary* equivalence

¹⁹ Neusner, *The Way of Torah*, 99.

²⁰ Although Rabbinic tradition does maintain a hierarchy of status within the greater rubric of Israel and therefore converts do retain a measure of distinction from native born Israelites. All Israelites, however, are equal in that they are loved by God and at the same time duty bound to keep the terms of Israel’s covenant as the rabbis interpreted their obligations. Inferior lineage “does not appear to affect the convert’s identity as ‘Israel’”. See, Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*, *Arbeiten Zur Geschichte Des Antiken Judentums Und Des Urchristentums*, [Bd.] 23 (Leiden ; New York: Brill, 1994), 88–96.

between Jewish ethnicity and membership in Israel, although practically speaking Jews have owned and inhabited that identity longer than anyone else.²¹

Kinzer's messianic theology, however, becomes a mirror image of the rabbinic model for incorporating the ethnic other into Israel without losing Israel's distinctive quality as a holy nation and chosen people. The Rabbis opted for converting the non-Jew and having him conform his behavior to Jewish norms whereas the contemporary Messianic Jewish community resists the idea of Gentile conversion to Messianic Judaism in favor of reifying Jew-Gentile difference and restricting non-Jewish access to Jewish space and religious practice. In Rabbinic Judaism, Israel is expanded physically through birth, ritual, and social incorporation. In Messianic Judaism only physical Israel increases by natural means. Metaphysical, heavenly Israel (the church) expands through right belief and ritual immersion. The full, physical realization of Israel's multi-national expansion, however that will be explained, is deferred to the eschaton.

Messianic Jewish and Rabbinic approaches to creating Judaism are based on the same fundamental distinction between Israel and the nations. They share the same basic conceptual categories and symbols of God, Torah and Israel, but their ideal Jewish communities differ, partly because of the historical and socio-political situations in which their worldviews take shape. The rabbis may have constructed their Judaism in light of a developing Christianity but they had the advantage of having started out as a singular *ethnos* with an established ancestral tradition that was recognized by successive imperial powers. They arrogated to themselves the religious authority to include or exclude Gentiles seeking to affiliate with their Jewish communities, and at least for the first century or so of Christian sectarianism Jews even set the boundaries and

²¹ Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*, 100–103; C. T. R. Hayward, *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and Some Early Christian Writings : From Victorious Athlete to Heavenly Champion* (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK, 2005), 156–93.

determined the terms under which non-Jews could fellowship or join the earliest Jesus-believing messianic communities. Today's Messianic Jews are trying to create a Judaism that makes sense out of their experience as Jesus-believing Jews who arrived at their messianic faith through the ministrations of a non-Jewish church steeped in supersessionist ideology. They are at the bottom of a waterfall, swimming upstream against a powerful tide of Christian anti-Judaism, replacement theology and entrenched institutions, both Jewish and Christian, that are invested in maintaining the long-established dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity. They are trying to establish Jewish difference *within* the meaning of Israel that they have inherited and to express that difference physically based on the way Jewish-Christian difference is measured in the larger society.

Messianic Jewish insistence that Christian faith can be part of a re-created but modern Judaism means that Messianic Jews will necessarily have to engage with non-Jewish Christians as spiritual equals while maintaining an ethnic distinctive with religious meaning. This is a problem that did not plague the Rabbis who created what we call Rabbinic Judaism. They were able to structure their world around the Christians without the need to account for them theologically. By refusing to add a third category of humanity to their existing binary pair, rabbis converted Jewish Christians into minim (us but deviant and dangerous) while non-Jewish Christians remained in the category of Gentiles (inherently other). In historical comparative terms, the Rabbinic worldview cohered in spite of Christianity despite a shared symbolic vocabulary and a common set of Scriptures. Messianic Jews' historical and cultural context precludes this possibility for their kind of Judaism. Because modern Messianic Judaism took shape within Protestant Christianity and because Messianic Jews are de facto members of the Christian church community, their worldview must include and account for non-Jewish Christians as insiders. Mainstream Judaism, however, is free to take up the original

Rabbinic position in response to Messianic Jews, who have become the modern day heretics, still deviant and potentially destabilizing to a normative Jewish identity.

It is not too difficult to understand why even the MJRC has been reluctant to take too positive a stance on conversion for non-Jews to Messianic Judaism.²² There are already many more Gentiles than ethnic Jews in Jewish congregations and offering an open path to conversion could easily lead to diluting “authentic” or native-born Jewish presence in the movement even further. Mark Kinzer deals with this controversial topic in a 2011 paper submitted to the Hashivenu forum.

A community that consists of more non-Jews than Jews is not Jewish community. It is not in continuity with the historical reality of Jewish peoplehood. Therefore, *it is not a Messianic Jewish community*. . . . It is not enough to have a substantial number of Jews present. If they do not make up the overwhelming majority of those present, and if they are not exclusively responsible for giving shape to the community’s Jewish way of life, this is not a Jewish community — and thus not a Messianic Jewish community. . . .

The question of conversion often arises in the context of this dilemma. . . .

If the non-Jews become Jews, the problem disappears! To look at conversion in this way is to . . . view Judaism as a philosophy or a religion

²² In August, 2014, the MJRC published a pamphlet containing its halakhic standards for the Messianic Jewish movement. In that pamphlet, the MJRC notes that it has established a “responsible conversion process” for Gentiles that makes it possible to permeate the Jew-Gentile boundary within the movement. The pamphlet carefully delineates what religious activities and privileges the non-Jewish Messianic congregational member is permitted to participate in and what activities and privileges remain the prerogative of those the MJRC defines as Jews. Here, the MJRC follows Reform and Reconstructionist Judaisms in America in accepting patrilineal Jews but depart from these movements in privileging those Jews with matrilineal descent claims. The pamphlet is available in PDF form at http://ourrabbis.org/main/documents/MJRC_Standards_Aug2014.pdf.

that one adopts or joins ... However, if Judaism is the way of life of a holy people, a sanctified network of kinship and culture, then one can no more “convert” to Judaism than one can “convert” from being Japanese to being Polish. . . . You cannot change who you are. . . .

In our current anomalous social context, characterized by rampant intermarriage and the consequent proliferation of non-Jews of Jewish ancestry conversion becomes an essential but still exceptional instrument for clarifying ambiguous boundaries ... it should not be treated as a natural, normal, and common method of changing one’s religious affiliation. . . . Few of the non-Jews in Messianic congregations should ever become converts.²³

Kinzer’s reluctance to convert also hints at the possibility that what is really at stake in this internal debate in the Messianic Jewish community is whether Gentile converts are in fact converting to another religion called Judaism, or trying to acquire a more prestigious ethnic identity, or just trying to pass in a Jewish world where they believe they have been called to “minister.” What theological sense does it make, after all, to turn a member of Kinzer’s eschatological Israel into a member of physical Israel?

In classic Rabbinic Judaism the Gentile convert undergoes a complete transformation in personal and spiritual status. He becomes an Israelite and his former identity as a Gentile outsider is, at least in theory, completely eradicated vis-à-vis the Jewish community he enters. The convert also embraces the God of Israel and forsakes the worship of all other gods. In Messianic Judaism, it would seem that the Gentile convert changes his or her ethnic identity, but no transcendent transformation on a par with that imagined by the rabbis takes place since in Messianic Jewish theology the

²³ Kinzer, “Priestly Remnant,” 25–27.

Gentile Christian is an eschatological Israelite and already a theological convert to the God of Israel. The ethnic component of Messianic Judaism remains critical to its claim to be Judaism, but Israel is so radically reimagined that it cannot be equated with the Rabbinic meaning of Israel as a Jew (native or convert). As Stern notes, Israel is ever and always a term that stands in opposition to the non-Jew and non-Jewish nations:

In a Halakhic context, 'Israel' represents the Halakhic category of the individual Jewish person. . . . As an Aggadic term, 'Israel' refers to the Jewish people in its totality.²⁴

Compression of the non-Jewish nations into a single, monolithic entity, the 'nations', serves the purpose of opposing a coherent—and equivalent—'other' to the single entity of 'Israel'. This results in a balanced contrast between self and other, upon which Jewish identity can be predicated.²⁵

Kinzer's bifurcated Israel—national, fleshly, ethnic Israel represented by Messianic Jews and spiritual, eschatological Israel represented by unconverted Gentile Christians—works against rather than in harmony with the prevailing rabbinically constructed Jewish self-understanding that still informs most if not all of denominational Judaism in America. Martin Jaffee points out that when Paul radically reconfigured the meaning of Israel to include uncircumcised Gentiles who were not obligated to keep the terms of the Mosaic covenant, he ensured that the new churches with their large non-Jewish membership would have little success in remaining connected to the wider Jewish world.²⁶ Since there is no real difference between Paul's gentile/Jew *ekklesia* and the common Messianic Jewish definition of the Christian

²⁴ Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*, 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁶ Jaffee, *Early Judaism*, 152–58.

church, or the congregational makeup of most congregations in the Messianic Jewish Movement, it makes sense that Kinzer, who wants the rest of Am Yisrael to accept Messianic Jews as part of the Jewish people, would want to separate Jews and Gentiles into equal but distinct taxonomical and social locations in his version of Messianic Judaism. Still, this does not alter his ultimate conception of Israel's proleptic character as a bi-lateral configuration of faithful Jews and Christian Gentiles.²⁷ This conception of Israel is only meaningful to Jews who are relying on the authority of the New Testament Scriptures where this possibility is first mentioned and where the ideal membership and practices of this new church are explicated. The next logical question that arises from treating Hashivenu as a form of Judaism is the extent to which these texts can be considered part of a complex Jewish textual tradition rather than (or as well as) a set of Christian scriptures entirely foreign to contemporary Judaism.

Discursive Tradition

Moshe Halbertal describes three ways that religious groups make use of their canonical scriptures: exemplary, normative and formative. These will be useful terms to help make sense out of the way the leaders and thinkers behind Hashivenu Judaism are approaching texts from both Christian and Jewish scriptural traditions:

“Canonical” as an adjective describing a text refers to the text’s special status. . . . Texts form a *normative* canon; they are obeyed and followed, as for example, are Scriptures and legal codes. They can also be canonical

²⁷ While Israel also means the Jewish people in its entirety, past, present and future, Kinzer’s eschatological Israel will apparently consist of those Jews who have been faithful to the covenant but have not accepted Yeshua, in which case Yeshua is understood as a silent mediator between and God and the faithful Jew, or those who have accepted Yeshua as Israel’s messiah and who may or may not be sufficiently mature enough to understand their need to be Torah observant. The theological implications of combining Christian faith and Jewish obligation to live an observant life have not been entirely worked out and arbitrating between these conflicting means of achieving salvation or divine approval are the basis of much contention in the broader Messianic Jewish movement.

as a constitutive part of a curriculum; such texts are not followed in the strict sense but are taught, read, transmitted, and interpreted. These texts establish a *formative* canon, and they provide a society or a profession with a shared vocabulary. . . . In yet another sense of the word . . . canonical texts serve as paradigmatic examples of aesthetic value and achievement: models for imitation. . . . These constitute an *exemplary* canon. . . . Different kinds of canonization occasionally converge in a single text. . . . Not all canonical texts enjoy equal status.²⁸

All groups in the Messianic Jewish movement, including those associated with Hashivenu begin by accepting the canon of normative scriptures found in the Protestant Bible: 39 books in the Old Testament that correspond in content but not form to those in the Jewish Tanakh, and 27 texts in the New Testament. Most American Messianic groups use a Hebrew Torah scroll in the Saturday morning service, and most will make use of parts of the rabbinic textual tradition to structure practice, but few outside of Hashivenu would label rabbinic literature canonical in a normative sense, or use its texts in a formative sense as part of their religious curriculum.

Rather than appeal to the Old Testament or Old Covenant, most Messianic Jewish groups prefer to refer to same texts in language familiar from Jewish tradition: the Jewish Bible or Tanakh. For example, David Rudolph's clearinghouse style website, messianicjudaism.net, lists a Messianic Jewish Scripture reading cycle that follows the traditional Jewish weekly Torah portions along with a daily schedule for the Prophets and Writings (*Nach Yomi*) developed by the Orthodox Union, and a "one-year reading cycle for the New Testament called *Shlichim Yomi*." In an adjacent column on the

²⁸ Halbertal, *People of the Book Canon, Meaning, and Authority*, 3.

“Scripture”²⁹ webpage there is a link to an English language “Jewish Audio Bible” that uses David Stern’s *Complete Jewish Bible*, in which the standard arrangement of books in the Jewish Tanakh are followed by the standard books of the Christian New Testament. The latter have been retitled to fit the overall theme of this composite Bible as a Jewish rather than Christian canon:

- I. Torah (Teaching, Law)
- II. Nevi'im (Prophets)
- III. K'tuvim (Writings)
- IV. The Good News of Yeshua the Messiah (Canonical Gospels)
- V. The Acts of the Emissaries of Yeshua the Messiah (Book of Acts)
- VI. Letters/Epistles
- VII. The Revelation of Yeshua the Messiah to Yochanan (John)³⁰

The Protestant canonical list of texts in the Old Testament is arranged according to the ancient Greek Septuagint, the early church’s Scripture, and ends with a prophetic foreshadowing that heralds the appearance of the Christ in the Gospels that follow.

Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.” (Malachi 4:5-6, NRSV).

The tripartite Hebrew canon dates at least to the second century CE and reflects the Jewish hierarchy of sacrality: Torah, Prophets, and Writings. This arrangement of the biblical texts ends with the story of Israel’s return to the land and the Persian king’s permission for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

²⁹ <http://www.messianicjudaism.net/scripture.html>, 2012, accessed October 18, 2015.

³⁰ Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible*.

The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him! Let him go up. (2 Chron. 36:23, NSRV).

By appending the Hebrew canonical arrangement to the New Testament, Messianic Jews have lost the intimate connection between Jewish prophecy and Christian fulfillment that the standard Protestant canon created. “Malachi . . . [is] the final message of the O.T. [that] contains the prophecy of John the Baptist’s ministry, the fulfillment of which begins the N.T.”³¹ The Hebrew canon, however, can be used to highlight the national story of the Jewish people in the Land as a continuation of Divine providence and to sync the use of these texts to the normative Jewish liturgical cycle. This use of the Hebrew Bible rather than the Protestant canon also casts the New Testament stories of Jesus in the gospel accounts that directly follow in a more historic Jewish light where they can be nativized as part of Jewish covenantal history. This also links Jesus physically to the Temple and to the Jewish community in the Land in a way that the Protestant canon does not.

Kinzer acknowledges that a community’s canon expresses the message most critical to the community’s religious life. In the Hebrew Bible, that message is particularistic, highlighting the role of the Jewish people in the divine economy. In the Christian Bible that message is the pre-eminence of Jesus. Reconnecting the message of the Hebrew canon with that of the New Testament can convert a Christian Jesus into a Jewish Yeshua, “Israel’s greatest son, the ultimate high priest,”³² who, according to

³¹ C.I. Scofield, ed., *Oxford NIV Scofield Study Bible: New International Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 957.

³² Saal, “Messianic Jewish Communities by Design: Open Doors and Reserved Seating,” 17.

Kinzer's theology, recapitulates in himself the entire life of the Jewish people. This approach to re-Judaizing the gospel story is exemplified in the way Kinzer approaches the Yom Kippur liturgy as a Messianic Jew:

If Yeshua is the perfect one-man Israel, then his death as a martyr under the Romans sums up all of Israel's righteous suffering through the ages, provides the ultimate expression of the commitment to God and self-giving love shown first in the *Akedah*, and effects definitive atonement. Since Yeshua represents and embodies Israel, Isaiah 53 is fulfilled by him *and* by the people as a whole. A Messianic Jewish version of the canonical narrative will see the death of Yeshua in continuity not only with Israel's Temple system but also in continuity with Israel's ongoing life in this world. As with the incarnation, so with Yeshua's atoning death: the Messiah epitomizes and elevates Israel's story, rather than ending it and beginning something entirely new.³³

In this reading of the New Testament story, the Jewish world is not ruptured by the appearance of the Christ, but rather the Jewish covenantal relationship with God, the Temple, and the Torah's sacrificial system continue in perpetuity with Yeshua serving as the eternal high priest.³⁴

While the enfleshment of the *Memra* (Word) is a new and unique event, it should nonetheless be viewed in continuity with what precedes it – as a concentrated and intensified form of the Divine Presence that

³³ Kinzer, "Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition," 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 33. In Kinzer's theology Yeshua serves as a symbolic reference for Judaism's personal deity (YHWH), the ground of all Messianic Jewish reality. Yeshua is eternal priest, he is the Temple, he is the atoning sacrifice, he is the Messiah, he is the eschatological ruler of all Israel and the nations, "he" is Israel's God, the "Divine Word" made flesh.

accompanies Israel throughout its historical journey. Thus contrary to the common Christian canonical narrative, the Divinity of Yeshua can be seen not as a radical rupture and disjunction in the story but as a continuation and elevation of a process initiated long before.³⁵

This connection between the Temple cult, the Mosaic covenant, the Jews and the canonical New Testament is crucial to Kinzer's theology for Messianic Judaism, for Messianic Jewish liturgical worship (which follows the rabbinic model) and for locating contemporary Messianic Jews in relationship to Israel's national story. Where traditional Protestant exegesis would see Old Testament symbols pertaining to the Temple cult as types that Jesus fulfilled so that Judaism (the way of the Jews) is replaced by Christianity (the way of the Christians), Kinzer's messianism proposes that the Sinai covenant and its Temple cult continue on in full force and effect under a new heavenly dispensation. The difference is expressed in terms of Jesus actualizing and elevating Judaism rather than fulfilling its requirements and thus bringing the old ways to an end.

In his sacrificial martyrdom Yeshua actualizes the fullness of Israel's covenantal pledge at Sinai, recapitulates the Akedah at a higher level (i.e., God is now the father whose son yields himself to sacrifice), and consummates the authentic demonstrations of covenant fidelity enacted throughout Israel's history. . . . Yeshua's loving martyrdom does not detract from the nobility of those other witnesses to the covenant, but empowers them to attain their intended purpose.³⁶

Again, as with the Messianic celebration of the Yom Kippur liturgy, this understanding of Israel's covenant and the ongoing validity of Mosaic law for the Jew who accepts Yeshua

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ Kinzer, "Shema in Messianic Perspective," 10.

as a divine messiah enables Messianic Jews to participate in traditional Jewish prayer as members of the Jewish people, but with insider's knowledge that the whole system is valid only because of Yeshua's work. By reading a Jewish Yeshua into the major elements of a traditional Jewish world view, Messianic Jews can try to make sense of their Christian beliefs as part of normative rabbinic practice. The messianic rereading of Jewish history also permits Messianic Jews to reevaluate of the efficacy of non-messianic Jewish piety, further distancing the new messianic Jewish approach from the Christian canonical reading of scripture that projects Jesus as a watershed in salvation history:

This vision of Yeshua as the epitome of Jewish covenantal fidelity should shape our recitation of the Shema as Messianic Jews. . . . For us, the recitation of the Shema serves as more than just a renewal and reenactment of Sinai: it is a memorial of Yeshua's loving obedience unto death, which completes the covenantal encounter at Sinai and raises it to a higher level. . . . [A]ll Jews who have lived faithful but imperfect lives before God and who have recited the Shema daily and at the hour of their deaths can only attain the consummation of their aspirations through union with Yeshua, the one-man Israel.

While Kinzer's theology depends on recovering Jewish continuity for the messianic Jewish canonical narrative, the meaning of this narrative must derive wholly from a messianic Jewish reading of the New Testament scriptures. Messianic Jews can read the Hebrew Bible as Jews with faith in Jesus—even pray rabbinic prayers centering themselves in that same faith—but they cannot support that faith position without appealing to the New Testament. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, Messianic Judaism has no continuous textual or interpretive tradition of its own that connects their current movement with the apostolic period described in the New Testament writings of the church. As Jeffrey Wasserman notes, “modern Messianic Judaism is a modern

phenomenon and no direct ecclesiastical link with first century Jewish Christianity has been established. . . . Messianic Judaism has its genesis in Protestant Evangelical Christianity.”³⁷

All forms of Messianic Judaism, including Hashivenu’s postmissionary approach, are efforts to contextualize a Christian gospel message within a Jewish frame of reference. Without the message, which is a function of the New Testament canon, or the so-called Apostolic Witness, there is no Messianic Judaism. Hashivenu’s efforts, however, represent the most radical and perhaps credible approach to contextualizing Christian faith within a Jewish religious world view to have gained a foothold among mainstream Messianic Jews thus far. Their efforts raise several critical questions for religious studies including whether Christian faith can be treated as a portable commodity that can be excised from its moorings in the institutional church and transplanted to a new religious world. Can belief alone be constitutive of a world religion or is it one characteristic among many in a polythetic definition? Can Buddhist religion, for example, accommodate Buddhists who profess faith in Jesus based on a New Testament witness and remain Buddhism? Does belief in Jesus, however that is internalized by the believer, necessarily convert the believer’s religious identity to Christianity, or is personal faith, even when such faith is anchored in a set of texts that have been canonized by the Christian church, only one characteristic—a necessary but not sufficient characteristic—in a polythetic definition of Christianity? Are individual texts of the New Testament (if not the entire canon of texts), most if not all of which scholars agree arose out of a Jewish messianist milieu, equally portable, especially when their destination is a new kind of Judaism?

³⁷ Wasserman, *Messianic Jewish Congregations*, 154.

Judaism presents a somewhat different scenario for exporting and importing Christian faith than the Buddhist example above, however, since Christian and Jewish religious traditions have developed in tandem over the last millennium at least, and unlike Buddhism, they share a number of sacred texts and characteristic symbols. According to Hashivenu member, Paul Saal, a major obstacle to normalizing the Messianic Jewish narrative and relating it to modern Judaism is the existing anti-Jewish interpretive tradition that surrounds the New Testament. Ironically, the sacred texts that need a new messianic Jewish hermeneutic to support Messianic Judaism's claim to be a legitimate expression of modern Jewish identity are those in the Christian canon, not the Hebrew Bible. Messianic faith rests on the New Testament's witness, but the New Testament does not openly support Messianic Jews' desire to identify with the non-Messianic Jewish community and its religious life at the expense of a primary membership in the *ekklesia*.

This dilemma explains Kinzer's decision to abandon the historical-grammatical interpretive tradition the movement inherited from evangelical Protestantism in favor of a more historical-critical reading of the canonical texts where it is useful to the cause.³⁸ Even though Kinzer affirms the sanctity, divine inspiration, and authority of the New Testament for Messianic Judaism, his reading of the canon relies more on the language of Jewish-Christian interfaith discourse (as some of his critics have remarked) than it does the power of religious rhetoric for persuasion. He accepts the New Testament as a normative canon but he uses its texts to subvert its normative, canonized meaning in the church. As Halbertal writes,

³⁸ Kinzer, "Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition," 2, 17. In particular, this approach to interpreting Scripture helps Kinzer overcome the evangelicals' bias against tradition (man-made), to re-read the Pauline corpus when it conflicts with Kinzer's argument that the *ekklesia* should exist in two wings, Gentile and Jewish, and to rehabilitate rabbinic Judaism given the historic church's treatment of the Jew and his religious obligations under the Mosaic covenant.

If a text is authoritative, then the issue of who may interpret it is of enormous importance. [This issue] is connected to the broader question of what sort of text becomes canonized and for what reason. Is it the text as a potential source of meanings, a specific reading of the text, or is it an institution that defines the meaning of the text?³⁹

It seems reasonable to argue that the Christian interpretive tradition evolved as it did because the texts in the New Testament were canonized by the church in support of its own communal self-understanding as the church, a word that rarely appears in the gospels and is entirely absent from the Old Testament. By the second century CE when these texts were circulating and had begun to be treated as canonical, the church that had formed was not ethnically Jewish and the set of practices it had developed deliberately differentiated the church's religious way of life from Judaism. The canon is a product of the Gentile church, not Jesus' original Jewish disciples or even a Jewish Paul, whose writings, if read at face value, are difficult to correlate positively with Hashivenu's claims or interests. Even if the anti-Jewish bias were stripped from the canonized interpretive tradition, the writings would not necessarily support a Jewish rather than Christian reading. To accomplish this, Kinzer would have to recover an existing tradition among Jewish Christian groups or fabricate one post facto. Given the facts at hand, Kinzer has no option but to pursue the latter strategy.

For us as Messianic Jews the communal hermeneutic imperative raises complex questions, since we lack our own continuous communal tradition, and share in two broader communities that possess a tangled, joint history of mutual antagonism and denunciation. . . . We must maintain a primary engagement with the wider Jewish community and its

³⁹ Halbertal, *People of the Book Canon, Meaning, and Authority*, 5.

theological tradition if our claim to being a form of Judaism is to carry any weight. At the same time, our bond with the *ekklesia* must also be acknowledged and honored. . . . This is what is distinctive about Messianic Jewish hermeneutics. It is not that we follow a unique method of interpretation, but that our life seeks to bridge a vast and daunting sociological gulf. The success of our hermeneutical enterprise depends upon the authenticity and durability of that communal life.⁴⁰

In effect, Kinzer is saying that the only way to produce a viable Messianic Jewish interpretation of the New Testament canon is to do so from within the lived experience of Jewish life embedded in the wider Jewish world. However, this will necessitate repositioning and redefining Messianic Judaism's spiritual relationship to the (Gentile) *ekklesia* within a Jewish theological framework. Not only will Hashivenu Jews add Christian faith to the academic's polythetic definition of Judaism, they will be bringing in a sectarian set of scriptures for which their community will have to produce and institutionalize a new canonical reading.

The first to second century texts that comprise the New Testament canon (if not their fourth century canonical status in the church), could be treated as an extension of the Jewish textual tradition that begins with the Torah and Prophets, Psalms, and includes other Jewish works alluded to or mentioned in the New Testament. The Apostolic writings would then become the core of an alternative discursive formation to the later rabbinic tradition that appears in writing in the late second century with the Mishnah. The New Testament canon is a product of the non-Jewish church, but it is conceivable that a contemporary Jewish group could pick these texts up and reread them as Jewish texts, perhaps accepting some and rejecting others, even adding some the

⁴⁰ Kinzer, "Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition," 25–26.

church rejected so as to reflect the new community's own needs and self-understanding. In this case, the canonical texts could be authoritative for two divergent religious communities (as is the case with the Hebrew Bible), but each would abide by its own particular reading of those texts and each would comprise a distinct discursive community. Satlow's conceptual map focuses on the discursive options provided by the texts rather than on specific content, so that one cannot peremptorily exclude the New Testament texts because they contain supposedly heretical content or even because they are used by a competing religious group. This is certainly a provocative claim, but one that must be entertained given the nature and purpose of a polythetic definition of Judaism.

Rabbinic Tradition

Satlow would like any study of religious Jewish groups contributing to the definition of Judaism to address a two-part question. "How do they accept or reject their received texts and their attendant discourses?" and "How do they use (or not) this tradition to authorize and inform their beliefs and values?" I have already discussed the use of biblical material, although in this section I will elaborate a bit more on how the text of the Tanakh as well as the New Testament are used to authenticate rabbinic tradition, which will be the focus of this section. A thorough reading and preliminary analysis of the 2014 revision of the MJRC Standards for Messianic observance discloses how and to what extent these Messianic rabbis are making use of their canon and traditional Jewish texts to structure their practice and educate their leadership and laity. Although Satlow's question directs attention to beliefs and values, in Messianic Judaism rabbinic tradition is more often used to inform practice and occasionally values than beliefs.

Messianic Jews in the Hashivenu movement do not openly reject any of rabbinic Judaism's received texts, but neither do they uncritically accept any of them into their

Scriptural canon. Stuart Dauermann claims that all of Jewish history and all Jewish texts are part of the Messianic Jewish repertoire. If Messianic Judaism is to be Judaism, he writes, Messianic Jews must see the history of the Jewish people as their history, and this includes Jewish religious history as well. “It means that the Talmud and the books of religious Jewish life are our books as well as theirs, for these books as well [as the Tanakh] record Israel’s and *HaShem*’s mutual engagement.”⁴¹ But this reception is conditional and selective. Kinzer, for example, accepts the authority of the Talmudic sages in matters of halakhah but he dismisses the notion that the Talmud is a direct, word-for-word revelation from God on a par with the Written Torah. Carl Kinbar teaches Midrash in the MJTI’s graduate program, but he is careful to differentiate between the absolute authority of Scripture and the conditional authority of tradition. Oral Tradition and church tradition share the same authoritative status, while “the Torah” refers only to the Messianic Jews’ Scriptural canon of Hebrew Bible and Apostolic Writings.

Nevertheless, interpretive tradition is critical to Hashivenu Judaism because in order to make a case for some modicum of conformity in Messianic Torah observance, the MJRC will have to make use of the rabbis and their work product to create a set of halakhic guidelines and to standardize a Messianic version of Jewish liturgy. This implies that the Oral Torah needs to be authoritative in three areas: halakhah, biblical exegesis, and liturgy. The rabbis’ authority will have to be derived from the Hebrew Bible and affirmed by the Apostolic Writings before their halakhah can be authoritative. If Messianic Jews are going to enter the Jewish conversation on the biblical texts, then the rabbinic authors of midrashic works will need to be granted the benefit of divine guidance, if not inspiration. And before Messianic Jews can use the traditional liturgy of

⁴¹ Dauermann, “Making Israel’s Story Our Own,” 8.

the Jewish Siddur, the rabbis will have to have something of theological value to contribute.

Torah observance is a key plank in the Hashivenu platform both because Kinzer's theology has elevated observance from a permissive behavior to a religious obligation for Messianic Jews, and because without it Messianic Judaism would not read as an authentic form Judaism in the American religious landscape. In the past, observance seemed to be more mimicry than an act of personal devotion; the rabbis may have provided the forms but Messianic Jews rejected any attempt to regulate practice based on rabbinic standards. Those who are now sympathetic to the Hashivenu vision believe this attitude of do-it-yourself Judaism must change. Michael Schiffman echoes the general consensus of Hashivenu rabbis that the need to conform or at least find points of connection with the Jewish community within Jewish tradition necessitates validating the tradition, if for no other reason, than because it has become a defining characteristic of contemporary Judaism.

The Jewish tradition is based upon the teachings of the ancient Rabbis, as recorded in the Mishnah and Gemarah, having been adapted and interpreted in later writings such as the Shulchan Oruch. While it is argued in the Messianic community that these writings do not have the level of authority of Holy Scripture, it should be noted that they have formed the basis of Jewish definition since the Second Temple period . . . to discard Jewish tradition does not yield a more pure Judaism, but will result in following traditions of our own making that may be more stringent and idiosyncratic than any put forth from the Jewish leadership. . . . The more idiosyncratic we get, the less we blend with our people.⁴²

⁴² Schiffman, "Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century: A Historical Perspective on 'Oral Torah,'" 2-4.

Accordingly, the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council has developed a set of standards for Messianic practice and has posted these to its website as a downloadable PDF.⁴³ It is evident that there has been a great deal of discussion and thought given to what these standards should be. More important for the purposes of this study and to answer Satlow's questions, however, is the way these standards are formulated, how Messianic Jewish tradition is defined, and where in Jewish tradition the MJRC rabbis have derived these standards and asserted their institutional right to prescribe them for the community. The latest revision available publically on the MJRC website is dated August 2014; the earliest is dated March 2011. The most significant revisions to the 2011 pamphlet are the addition of halakhot for observing two New Testament commandments ("Community Practices 4:4 and 4:5") and sections on the MJRC's authority and approach to halakhah ("The Halakhic Authority of the MJRC" 1:1 and 1.2.1). The Table of Contents groups the standards by topic: Issues of Status, Kashrut, Community Practices, and Lifecycle, and addresses some issues that common to American Jewish movements like rules of family purity and Shabbat observance. It also treats others that are less common (priestly caste), or that are unique to the Messianic movement, such as how to regulate mixed congregations of Jews and Gentiles, and how to perform the previously mentioned Christian ordinances of baptism and communion.

If the Standards material seems to bend over backwards to demystify or explain basic practices that overlap with the Jewish mainstream, this can be explained in part by the MJRC's admission that most members in the broader Messianic Jewish movement are either "unaccustomed to or uncomfortable with traditional religious Jewish life" and the non-Messianic Jews they would like to reach out to with their message are highly

⁴³ The Standards have undergone multiple revision from 2011 through August, 2014. Various versions are available to download from the website's document index at <http://ourrabbis.org/main/documents>. Accessed 10/22/2015.

secularized and assimilated. Either or both populations will need to be gently eased into the idea of observance before they are introduced to the weightier side of halakhah, let alone Kinzer's new theology. As a result, the Council has opted to identify its halakhic work product as part of the Hashivenu mission aimed at reconnecting Jews (from both camps) who are for one reason or another disenfranchised from Jewish practice to an observant Jewish life.⁴⁴ To this end, the rabbis have elected to follow the halakhic precedents set by other liberal movements of American Judaism where they represent a communal consensus and long-standing norm of practice, only deviating when and where they are obligated to do so based on their Apostolic teachings or in order to sanction or accommodate their own congregational practices.

Like most Messianic Jews, we acknowledge the Torah as the constitution governing all Jewish life, and seek to obey it in accordance with the teaching, example, and redemptive work of Yeshua the Messiah while also drawing upon Jewish tradition, especially those practices and concepts that have won near-universal acceptance by devout Jews through the centuries. This commitment to the Torah has motivated us to seek a common approach to its practical observance.⁴⁵

In the section dealing with the qualifications and responsibilities of the Messianic Jewish rabbi, the text of the Standards explains that one of the essential functions of the rabbi is to "expound and apply Torah." Although in this context, it notes, Torah should be understood in its broadest sense, at "its core, the Torah entails the Scriptures revealed to Israel and canonized in the Tanakh and the Apostolic Writings." (p. 10) Arguably, the Messianic canon is not quite equivalent to the Christian canon, but the Standards make

⁴⁴ *MJRC Standards of Observance* (New Haven: Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, 2014), i.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ii.

it clear that the sectarian texts of the Apostolic Writings control the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible.

Messianic Jewish rabbis are pledged by the terms of their ordination to expound this dual-canon Torah “as fulfilled in and mediated through the person, teaching, and work of Yeshua” (p. 10). It is not clear from reading the 2014 Standards exactly what the Council has in mind by expounding a Torah that has been “fulfilled in” the person, teaching, or work of Yeshua, but likely refers to preaching the Messianic Jewish gospel. Nevertheless, “expounding the Torah” seems to be a different practice from the Council’s task of formulating halakhic standards for the Messianic Jewish community. For the latter task, and in the individual role of the rabbi as exemplar rather than preacher for his congregation, the Council appeals to the collective Jewish tradition that it shares with the American Jewish community. “The Tanakh, the Apostolic Writings, and rabbinic literature are filled with examples of people learning the ways of God . . . through their actions.” (p. 11) Here the rabbinic literature is treated as part of a normative though non-Scriptural canon, in the sense that the literature provides models for right practice, or halakhah.

The Council’s Standards spell out both a basic and an expanded approach to observance. The guidelines for basic practice are meant to serve as a minimal bar to measure observance at the entry-level of Jewish practice and are the guidelines that their Messianic rabbis are pledged to follow. The expanded guidelines indicate the path that Messianic Jewish observance may take toward more rigorous compliance in the future. Occasionally the basic attitude is explained as the *peshat* or straightforward meaning of the biblical text, as in the discussion of whether a menstruating woman is unclean for seven days from onset (basic) or an additional five to seven days after cessation (extended). “*We view this traditional practice as a commendable fence around the Torah, to be treated with respect. Nevertheless, our basic practice is limited to the*

requirements contained in the peshat of the biblical law” (p. 51, italics in the original). In the very short section on family purity, the only primary sources cited are select, relevant verses from Leviticus 15, 18, and 20. In this case basic means biblical, which is less likely to offend or incur criticism from those Messianic Jews who are suspicious of rabbinic legislation. The rules for kashrut exhibit a similar attitude toward traditional canonical sources where only biblical texts from the Tanakh and the Apostolic Writings are cited. In this case, the New Testament sources are used to support the Biblical laws, and interestingly, to provide the rationale for excluding Gentiles from observing the rabbinic rules of kashrut while requiring them of Messianic Jews.

3.1.1 All pork products, shellfish, and food containing their elements (e.g., lard) are to be avoided . . . These basic laws of kashrut are first enjoined in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. However, the distinction between animals that are tahor (ritually pure) and those that are not tahor is already found in the story of Noah (Genesis 7:2). . . . As a priestly people set apart for Hashem from all the nations of the world, Israel is summoned to limit the animals it consumes so that its table may be analogous to the temple altar. While many have argued that these dietary laws have hygienic value, the Torah itself provides a different rationale: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44; see Deuteronomy 14:2). . . . Peter’s vision in Acts 10 suggests that the nations of the world are now being called to share in Israel’s holiness . . . they may now become holy, like Israel, without adopting Israel’s dietary regimen. However, Acts 10 does not imply that Israel may fulfill its own particular priestly calling apart from that regimen. (p. 22, italics in the original).

Because the MJRC begins to formulate its guidelines by looking to the existing norms in liberal to Conservative Judaism, there are many instances of secondary sources. For example, “3.2.1 *For our basic practice we will adopt the standards of the Conservative Movement that treat all gelatin and cheese as acceptable. . . . (S. Dresner, Keeping Kosher [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2000], 63.)*” (p. 22, italics in the original). Here the basic rule follows a mainstream rabbinic ruling, but in fact does not push Messianic practice beyond the biblical prohibition against eating a non-kosher animal.

In some cases, the Council incorporates rulings from different secondary authorities to arrive at its own stance, as in the matter of Jewish status.

2.1 Following the consensus of Jewish tradition, we recognize as a Jew anyone who is born of a Jewish mother or who is a convert to Judaism. . . . *Like the Reconstructionist and Reform movements, we in the MJRC accept patrilineal descent as sufficient for Jewish status if it is accompanied by appropriate actions. . . . Nevertheless . . . in contrast to the Reform movement, we in the MJRC do not treat patrilineal and matrilineal descent in an equivalent manner. This would lead to a narrowing of the traditional reckoning of Jewish status rather than its broadening. . . . As Messianic Jews, we should never find ourselves in a situation where we deny Jewish status to those accepted as Jews by most in the wider Jewish community. . . . The Reform decision also departs dramatically from the historical Jewish consensus regarding the sufficiency of matrilineal descent for determining Jewish status. In this matter we see no good reason for such a radical departure* (p. 16, italics in the original).

On yet other occasions, the halakhah for Messianic Judaism is ambiguous, accommodating but falling short of endorsing (i.e., not forbidding but not commending) certain normative rabbinic practices that would likely not be tolerated by Messianic congregations merely for the sake of halakhic conformance. Such is the case with some of the long-standing regulations for observing Shabbat like handling money and writing or drawing. It is a common, long-standing practice in Christian culture to give tithes and offerings during the main worship service of the week, either Saturday morning or Friday evening for Messianic congregations or Sunday for Christian churches. It is also customary in evangelical churches for churchgoers to take copious notes during teaching sessions before the worship service and to underline or write in their bibles or notebooks during the minister's sermons. These challenging circumstances warrant the MJRC breaking with rabbinic tradition when there is no direct biblical support for the ruling.

4.1.7.3 Credit card purchases are buying.

4.1.7.4 Offerings and *tzedakah* on Shabbat do not constitute buying and selling. . . . *Rabbinic tradition extended [the] prohibition of buying and selling by forbidding any contact with money on Shabbat. This helpful custom reinforced the basic prohibition, and fostered an experience of the holiness of the day. Strict adherence to this halakhic extension would, of course, rule out the giving of offerings and tzedakah on Shabbat. While acknowledging the value of the traditional practice, the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council takes no official position on the appropriateness of giving offerings and tzedakah on Shabbat. Decision 4.1.4 does, however, make clear that such giving does not violate the Torah's basic prohibition of buying and selling on Shabbat (p. 31, italics in the original).*

4.1.10 Writing and Drawing

Due to the demands of modern life, the traditional prohibition on writing and drawing places an excessive burden upon the Messianic Jewish community in our contemporary situation. Therefore, our basic practice will not include prohibitions of the sort of writing and drawing that enhances the community's ability to experience Shabbat and that does not violate the spirit of Shabbat. At the same time, we appreciate the reasons for these prohibitions and recognize their great value, and therefore commend them as part of our expanded practice (p. 32).

There are few instances of halakhic decisions in the Standards document that do not have a counterpart in mainstream Judaism. Two rulings are dedicated to commandments Messianic Jews are given in their Apostolic Writings, and a third section explains that there are actually two sets of halakhic standards in the Messianic community—one set governs Messianic Jewish life and the other that of Gentile Christians. In some ways this third section resembles the way Orthodox Jews would outline the responsibilities Gentiles have to keep the universal laws of the Noahide covenant, but Messianic Jews are constrained from separating themselves in such an ontological manner from Gentiles because of their joint membership with non-Jewish Christians in the universal *ekklesia*, and because of back pressure to treat all members of their congregations equally. Instead, Jews reserve certain ritual privileges for themselves: wearing a tallit, laying tefillin, counting in a *minyan* (quorum of ten for prayer), reciting a *mitzvah berachah* (a blessing before performing a commandment), taking an aliyah to read from the Torah, and acting as a *shaliach tzibbur* (individual who leads communal prayer). Only Messianic Jewish children may have a bar or bat mitzvah or a *brit milah* (circumcision) and only couples with at least one Jewish partner can be married by a Messianic rabbi. These ritual practices would be restricted to Jewish

members in most mainstream Jewish communities as well, but in Messianic congregations non-Jewish (Gentile) Christians are the main targets of these exclusionary practices. This section of the Standards does not provide the reader with any support for its position from either Christian or Jewish tradition. It does, however, explicitly make the point that Messianic congregations are part of the Jewish social world and as such they need to respect and reflect a “clear distinction . . . between Jews, who are themselves fully part of the Jewish people, and those who are not fully part of that people but participate actively in its life” (p. 18).

The Standards are liberally sprinkled with citations from the Hebrew Bible, the Apostolic Writings, and primary Rabbinic sources (i.e., Babylonian Talmud, Mishnah). The use of Rabbinic sources is meant to be explanatory and informative, letting the reader know where the normative halakhic decisions (or discussion) can be found in the original sources. All of these sources are treated as part of what Halbertal would classify as a normative canon for members of the MJRC; the laws and other standards of behavior cited in these texts are taken as authoritative for practice, whether or not individual Messianic Jews are willing or capable of incorporating these standards into their own lives.

The question of what kind of authority each of these texts carries in Hashivenu circles is an interesting one. Kinzer’s theology of the catholic *ekklesia* posits a bilateral configuration: Jews form one wing of the church and Gentiles another. This same bilateral configuration then informs the MJRC’s stance on the nature and authority of rabbinic halakhah for each of these wings. Under the section in the Standards on Christian tradition, the MJRC thanks the “*ekklesia* of the nations” for preserving the Apostolic Writings, but using the Jewish language of halakhah, the Messianic rabbis deny that the church’s tradition is binding on Messianic Jewish practice.

We have already stated our acceptance of the Apostolic Writings as Scripture, and the central role those writings play in our interpretation of the Torah. In doing so we are recognizing as authoritative a collection of books which, while composed mainly or exclusively by Jews, has been canonized, preserved, and transmitted to us by Christian tradition. We are grateful to the *ekklesia* of the nations for this treasure . . . However, the disappearance of the Jewish *ekklesia* and the growth of anti-Jewish sentiment and belief in the historical church undermined the authority of ecclesial teachers in their halakhic interpretation of the Apostolic Writings as applied to the distinctive features of Jewish life (p. 8).

In matters of Christology and other “non-halakhic” areas of teaching, however, the MJRC accepts that the ecclesial tradition may be suitable for study, and “discerning reception” (p. 8). Setting aside the rhetorical strategy of anachronistically re-describing Christian tradition as either halakhic or non-halakhic teaching, what the MJRC is doing in this passage is effectively differentiating between Christian faith and Christian practice. The former they agree is a characteristic that Messianic Jews share in common with the non-Jewish church, but practice must be wrenched out from under Christian institutional control so that it can function as a discriminating characteristic for the Jewish wing and become a point of common connection between the Jewish church and the wider Jewish community. For the MJRC, all Messianic practice can be re-described as Jewish by employing the language of halakhah and connecting this practice with rabbinic discourse.

In Lincoln’s definition of religion, however, the relationship between discourse and practice is the inverse of what the MJRC has in mind. Practice is not a passive component of religious discourse, but a means of rendering the controlling discourse operational. Ritual and ethical practices “have a transitive character, being the way

discourse acts on the world, including the people through whom this action occurs.”⁴⁶ Once the horizon from which Messianic Jews view their religious identity, their faith in Jesus, and their practice shifts from an evangelical Protestant world view to that of the rabbis, these elements will have to be re-examined and explained in light of rabbinic discourse in order to create the coherent world view they need to remain a viable religious movement. Discourse controls its actors as much as—and perhaps more than—it yields to their manipulation. For baptism and communion to reproduce Christian meaning, they will need to remain situated in Christian, not rabbinic discourse. Hence these rituals are marked with Jewish ritual language, but they cannot be nativized in rabbinic theology without capitulating to its non-Christian world view.

The power of discourse becomes evident in the way the Apostolic Writings are utilized in the Standards as secondary support for its halakhic guidelines. The base position for their guidelines is derived from rabbinic halakhah that has been accepted as normative by the Jewish community as a whole, and then shown to be in conformity, or at least not negated by, the Apostolic Writings:

Messianic Jews should begin with the consensus practices and way of life of observant Jews, and then assess and adapt them in light of the theological and practical wisdom gained through the Apostolic Writings and the living tradition of the Church.⁴⁷

The Jewish community recognizes that lighting Shabbat candles is a quintessential Jewish religious practice as well as an expression of Jewish cultural identity. There is no biblical commandment to light Shabbat candles; this injunction is characteristic of classic Rabbinic discourse. There is no commandment in the New

⁴⁶ Lincoln, *Terrors*, 6.

⁴⁷ See, Kinzer, “Jewish Disciples of Yeshua,” 5.

Testament for Christians to light Shabbat candles, although it was a common practice among Jews of the time. The MJRC's position is that since the rabbis are the authoritative tradents of the Jewish halakhic tradition and not the church, then Messianic Jews need not justify participating in a normative rabbinic observance unless it conflicts with an Apostolic teaching. Since the Apostolic Writings are silent on the matter of lighting candles, Messianic Jews are obligated to comply.

The controlling discourse is not the Apostolic Writings but the rabbinic tradition, and the community of reference is not the Christian church but the Jewish synagogue. This scenario is repeated for virtually all of the halakhic standards in this 2014 text for which any textual support is provided, with the exception of the two Christian rituals that have no clear equivalent in rabbinic tradition, which are imported and Judaized.⁴⁸ Where the Apostolic Writings are brought to bear on rabbinic halakhah, they never are interpreted in a way that would invalidate the rabbinic norm adopted in the Standards. In one notable instance, contrary evidence about ritual hand washing in the Apostolic Writings is explained away as a historical contingency:

The Besorot (Gospels) record a dispute between Yeshua and Pharisaic teachers concerning the practice of hand washing before meals (Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23). The dispute had less to do with hand washing itself, and more with the primacy of biblical law over Pharisaic oral tradition, the primacy of basic moral imperatives (such as honoring parents) over ritual minutiae, and the nature of true defilement and purification. . . . Since Yeshua showed consistent respect for Jewish

⁴⁸ Ibid. Kinzer calls these “distinctive sacraments of the Renewed Covenant” and asserts that Messianic Jews should receive them as transmitted by the historical Church, but to “seek to practice them in forms adapted from Jewish tradition.”

norms, we cannot assume that he would treat ritual hand washing today as he did in his original disputes with the Pharisees.⁴⁹

On the one hand, halakhah is the glue that binds Messianic Jews to the Jewish community and separates it from the Christian church, but halakhah is embedded in rabbinic discourse, which the church does not accept as part of its own communal identity. On the other hand, the Apostolic Writings contain a literary witness to a common belief that Jesus is Israel's Messiah as well as commandments to perform at least two critical rituals that confer a common identity onto all believers. Messianic Jews have already made these rituals part of Messianic Jewish practice, and now in the Standards, these rituals have acquired new guidelines articulated in the language of halakhah (pp. 47-49). As such they will enter the domain of rabbinic discourse rather than church tradition, despite what Messianic Jews intend. Kinzer is confident that Messianic Jews will be able to rework the "post-biblical Jewish tradition" under the "guidance of the Spirit" so that it can be made to serve the interests of his Christian theology, but disconnecting these rituals from their moorings in Christianity and rabbinizing their performance will not make them into normative Jewish practices. It will be interesting to see what effect this transposition from a Christian to a rabbinic Jewish framework will have on the meaning of these two Christian rituals for Messianic Jews as their movement's Jewish theology develops over time.

From an outsider's perspective, it is clear that any one-time initiation ritual like the Messianic *Tevilat Mashiach* with its halakhic regulations will strongly mark Messianic Jewish religion as a sectarian movement, whether it is seen in relationship to the normative Protestant Christian or American Jewish mainstream. The same is true for the Messianic Eucharist, or *Zichron Mashiach*, for which Kinzer has developed one new

⁴⁹ *MJRC Standards of Observance*, 30. Ritual hand washing with its traditional blessing is commended as an expanded practice for Shabbat meals in Section 4.1, p. 29.

liturgy and adapted an existing *Mussaf Amidah*. Neither Gentile evangelical Protestants nor non-Messianic Jews will be able to participate fully in this ritual. Together, these two rituals create a formidable barrier to integration in either mainstream community, but a more serious deficit relative to the Jewish community where any barriers to full participation in Jewish ritual life for community members are treated with suspicion and as obstacles to enhancing the identity of Am Yisrael.

If ritual can create barriers, it may be that other ways of engaging with rabbinic tradition will prove more useful in the pursuit of Hashivenu's long term goals. Two approaches that might bring Messianic Jews closer to the Jewish community rather than alienating them even further are biblical exegesis and communal prayer. The Hashivenu website mission statement describes these as two of three "paths of our ancestors— Avodah (liturgical worship), Torah (study of sacred texts), and Gemilut Chasadim (deeds of lovingkindness)" from which Messianic Jews have been disconnected and through which they believe they can rediscover their communal and individual identities. Messianic Jews feel that by engaging with these modes of being Jewish, or maintaining continuity with Jewish tradition, they will become an authentic expression of Jewish life.

Carl Kinbar has taken the initiative to introduce Messianic Jews to the fine art of rabbinic Midrash. His 2010 paper, "Israel, Interpretation, and the Knowledge of God: Engaging the Jewish Conversation," demonstrates how far Messianic Jewish scholarship is willing to plunge into the rabbinic tradition in both religious and scholarly arenas. The prevailing attitude among Jews in the Messianic movement is decidedly negative on the topic of rabbinic exegesis, or non-halakhic midrash, if Kinbar's defense of midrash in this paper is any indication. "R. Isaac's midrash is not the result of an 'anything goes' policy of interpretation. . . . midrash approaches Scripture in ways that are strange to us. . . [but] learning midrash on its own terms . . . does not devalue our world view . . . Rabbi Isaac's midrash on Genesis 12:1-4 . . . was not a random act of Rabbi Isaac's

imagination.”⁵⁰ Kinbar presumes that the majority of Messianic Jews are disdainful of rabbinic tradition and literalists when it comes to reading the Scriptures, so that midrashic storytelling will seem fantastical and useless for theological instruction. Kinbar promises his readers that there is a payoff for learning to engage the rabbis’ exegetical project, but at the same time he assures them that he is not lending “the Scriptures’ authority to post-Biblical midrash.”⁵¹ This should allay some of his readers’ fears, but most likely the reassurance is aimed at defusing the mainstream messianic Jewish critics who would like to keep all of rabbinic theology at bay. Despite this disclaimer, at another point in his paper Kinbar admits that “Torah” is more than the original words of Scripture; rather Torah in a Jewish communal context will “include the interpretive tradition that follows.” As Hashivenu thinkers lead the movement into a deeper connection with Jewish traditional sources, Messianic Jews will have to resolve the conflict between an evangelical doctrine of *sola scriptura* and the Jewish concept of Torah as a communal process of discovering or recovering the divine will. It will be impossible at some point to continue using “Torah” ambiguously when the meaning in Messianic Jewish discourse is presumptively the Scriptures and still share in a religious conversation with the rest of the Jewish community.

Kinbar works his way through an analysis of relevant portions of Shir haShirim Rabbah (Sh.Sh.R.) demonstrating how unraveling the process of midrashic exegesis can work for the benefit of a healthy Messianic Jewish self-understanding. His paper affirms the rabbinic value of Torah study as a means of knowing God, affirms an ongoing, loving relationship between God and the Jewish people, affirms the value of communal rather than individual participation in the midrashic process, and then affirms that the

⁵⁰ Kinbar, “Engaging the Jewish Conversation,” 5–10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

interpretive community that is Israel should include the Messianic Jew. “Messianic Jews are, or should be, part of that interpretive community as a dimension of our participation in Israel and our claim to be Judaism.”⁵² Still, if the theological points Kinbar makes in this paper are any indication of what the Messianic Jewish contribution might be to the communal Jewish conversation, it is unlikely that Messianic Jews will be any more welcome to contribute than they are now.

Shir haShirim Rabbah serves as an entry point into the by now familiar new covenant language in Jeremiah, which has served as a scriptural anchor connecting the Christian “Old Covenant” with its “New Covenant,” which in turn is mediated by the New Testament Jesus. Kinbar shows his reader how to make the New Covenant connections between Sh.Sh.R., Hebrews, and Jeremiah, thereby providing Messianic Jews with yet another way of portraying Jesus as the mediator of Israel’s New Covenant—the Hebrew “*dibbur*,” the Greek “*logos*,” the Aramaic “*memra*,” the rabbis’ second “kiss” of Torah from God to Israel via the divine Word made flesh. Midrash can be used as a medium for mediating the difference between Christian conceptions of Jesus as the incarnate word of God and rabbinic notions of an intimate relationship between a living Torah and the Jewish people. Strangely, Kinbar does not mention or cite Lev Gillet’s mid-20th century work, *Communion in the Messiah: Studies in the Relationship between Judaism and Christianity*, which appears to be the source for at least the connection between the midrash, “*dibbur*” and Christian theological claims about Jesus in Kinbar’s paper. Gillet rather patronizingly claimed he could identify “the embryo of a consistent theology” in an otherwise supposedly materialistic Jewish tradition that could be capable of translating (lofty) Christian ideas into Hebraic language:

⁵² Ibid., 17.

Let us take, for instance, the prologue of the Fourth Gospel, so often represented as a Hellenistic product: “And the word (*Logos*) became flesh, and dwelt (*eskenosen*) among us . . . Let us translate these Greek terms into Hebrew thoughts and words. We obtain something like this : “And the *Dibbur* (or *Memra*) became flesh, and was the Shekinah among us . . . thus the very heart of the Christian faith is expressed in terms and ideas familiar to traditional Judaism. . . . An important passage in the *Song of Songs Rabba* (i. 3) strongly personifies the Word: it is shown coming to and returning from Israel and speaking . . . the Word intercedes before God on behalf of Israel.⁵³

Then, again, there does not seem to be too much that is completely new in Hashivenu’s agenda and its understated (but ever present) attempt to fit Christian doctrine into Jewish categories of thought. Presumably the leaders who participate in the Hashivenu Forum are aware of where strategic insights like Gillet’s have been made before and who is responsible for uncovering them and re-engaging them in the contemporary Messianic Jewish movement. Perhaps citations are unnecessary when everyone acknowledges the common agenda and is familiar with the primary players and the formative canon of messianic Jewish missionary texts.

This is not to say that all of MJTI’s engagement with the midrashic corpus revolves around proving a connection to Christian doctrine. There is also genuine engagement with the sources, primary and secondary, much as there might be in any liberal Jewish learning environment. Derek Leman gives a glimpse of this in post to his

⁵³ Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah: Studies in the Relationship between Judaism and Christianity* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), 79, 98. Mark Kinzer wrote the forward to this 2013 edition. Gillet, a Russian Orthodox Priest writing in the 1940s, was an advocate for serious and respectful interfaith dialogue with the Jews in an attempt to explain the gospel in such a way that Jews would recognize it as a native message.

blog where he describes an intensive rabbinical class taught by Kinbar that he attended in July 2010. The classic text was the midrash on Lamentations, which the group tackled in the original languages, and the secondary textbook (or at least one of them) was *Parables in Midrash* by rabbinic scholar, David Stern.

There are seven students and two faculty here. Two more faculty will participate later in the week. This is a lot of attention poured out on a small class of students. . . .

We talked about the nature of midrash. . . . We talked about God's absence and presence in the world. We talked about study as digging through material for small revelations as opposed to a different kind of study, seeking to build edifices of theology that explain everything. We talked about the practical value of midrash for educating our synagogue members and for building a stronger future for Messianic Judaism. We talked about the similarities and differences between the midrashic writings and other rabbinic writings. Midrashic thought has a lot of value and aligns so well with the spiritual, mystical, theological emphasis in Messianic Judaism.

I finished my evening late into the night talking one on one with Rabbi Kinbar about rabbinics, the future of Messianic Judaism, the intersection of New Testament and midrash, and more.⁵⁴

Hashivenu's entrance into Judaism and Jewish tradition is just beginning; it is impossible at this stage to say how this dialectical process of fitting Christian elements into Jewish frames of reference and rethinking Christian doctrines because they are now

⁵⁴ <http://www.messianicjudaism.me/musings/2010/07/12/day-1-summer-rabbinic-intensive/>.

embedded in a larger discourse where faith claims occupy a minor role on the stage of Jewish history will play out.

In addition to midrash and halakhah, Messianic Jews are also working with liturgy. Jonathan Kaplan's paper entitled, *A Divine Tapestry: Reading the Siddur, Reading Redemption, Reading Yeshua*, presented at the 2004 Hashivenu Forum in Pasadena, is a fine example of how rabbinic theology and Christian doctrine can be brought to bear on each other, and where the limits of that mutual engagement are found.⁵⁵ Rather than deliberately reading Jewish tradition to mine it for nuggets of connection with Christian doctrine, Kaplan asks how Jewish liturgy can be made to read Yeshua, how Messianic Jews might do liturgical theology to arrive at an understanding of their messiah's role in redemption from the horizon of rabbinic theology in the Siddur.⁵⁶ The presumptions behind this project as Kaplan lays it out are threefold: liturgical performance shapes the way a community understands its place in the world, rabbinic liturgy is pluriform and adaptable given certain constraints, and the Siddur is where the average Jew encounters his theology.⁵⁷ The possibilities for advancing the Hashivenu cause through liturgical innovation are enticing. The Messianic Jewish laity would learn Messianic theology through their performance of liturgy, the Siddur would inculcate the intrinsically Jewish nature of Messianic beliefs into the participants, and any non-Messianic Jews who joined in might absorb Messianic beliefs as an unquestioned part of an otherwise normative rabbinic theology of redemption.

⁵⁵ Kaplan is Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin and faculty affiliate for the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies and Medieval Studies Program.

⁵⁶ Kaplan, "A Divine Tapestry: Reading the Siddur, Reading Redemption, Reading Yeshua," 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

Throughout his exposition of the Saturday morning liturgy, Kaplan reinforces the message that this liturgy is replete with redemptive tropes. Redemption in which Israel is the central figure of God's activity is a key concept that Messianic Jews share with non-Messianic Jews. The threads in this tapestry of Israel's redemption in the Siddur are an intensification of Torah . . . "the Exodus, the Messiah, Israel's return to Zion, and the accompanying return of the *Shekhinah* to the temple," all of which provide a vista from which Messianic Jews can "read" Yeshua. The largest section of Kaplan's paper is taken up with the techniques of doing so. He admits there is no way to simply harmonize the disparate theological systems that developed in the church and the synagogue and that are represented in church tradition and the rabbinic Siddur. Instead he tries to reread Christian theology from the perspective of Jewish experience. What does it mean to name Yeshua as the messiah if the Jewish people, and not the church, are the central focus of God's redemptive work? Can Messianic Jews read the Siddur and concede that Jesus did not complete the messianic vision it contains?⁵⁸ Can Messianic Jews craft (and internalize) a messianic theology that works from the horizon of lived Jewish experience? Perhaps, but this would certainly not be the canonical reading of the Christian gospels.

Kaplan, pace Byron Sherwin, brings up the possibility of understanding the historical figure of Jesus as a human messiah like others who have appeared on the Jewish horizon—a messiah like the son of Joseph in rabbinic literature—that is, a messiah who suffers with the Jewish people and dies a human death in preparation for the coming of the Davidic messiah, the consummator of Jewish redemption. Of course for Messianic Jews, Jesus is still the divine Son of God, and also the Son of David, but Kaplan wants Messianic Jews to consider internalizing this understanding of Yeshua as a

⁵⁸ Ibid., 33–35.

suffering Jew and forgo proclaiming the “triumphalist ‘Christ’” of missions discourse. Messianic Jews should elect to suffer along with the Jewish people and Jesus until the final ingathering of the exiles. In other words, Messianic Jews should shift their identify from the church to the Jewish people not only in rhetoric, but in an internally consistent approach to the performance of rabbinic liturgy. Kaplan appears to understand that even though Messianic Jews may be able to read Yeshua into the liturgy as the yet to come Son of David, they cannot proclaim him as such from this liturgical horizon without forfeiting their coveted location within the Jewish people. “We stand and suffer,” writes Kaplan, “with the rest of the Jewish people in anticipation of this common hope, though we may differ on the particulars.”⁵⁹ An honest engagement with the theological framework of the rabbinic Siddur and intentional participation in its prayers will necessarily constrain Messianic Jews to one frame of reference and one eschatological horizon at a time. They can be part of the Jewish people waiting for Mashiach, but only when they leave the Jewish people and enter the church can they proclaim his full divinity and exalted identity he acquires only in Christian discourse as the Messiah, Son of David, Son of God.

Theoretically and theologically, Kaplan’s reading of the Siddur and his solution for reading the Messianic Jews’ messiah into the text and into the fabric of lived Jewish experience may be compelling for some of his Messianic Jewish readers, but for most I imagine it will be odd and problematic, if not a mark of apostasy. How can Messianic Jews simply pray the traditional prayers but refrain from proclaiming the full gospel if they are to remain true to their calling as witnesses, internal or external, for the real Jesus? Even Kaplan tacitly admits that Messianic Jews cannot simply blend into a non-Messianic world view; they are obligated to add their own distinctive content to the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 37.

liturgy. But what content could make up for the absence of open testimony or proclamation? Moreover, how does praying the Siddur as a Jew on the rabbis' eschatological horizon help Messianic Jews inculcate their orthodox Christian beliefs about Jesus into the membership? Reading redemption from the Siddur sharpens the contrast between the rabbinically imagined community of Israel as the collective Jewish people occupying itself with the study of Torah while waiting for the coming of Mashiach and redemption from Exile and the Church's Israel as a community of the already fully redeemed, worshipping an exalted, and triumphant Messiah who has already come and vanquished death through his resurrection.

The rabbis and the church fathers seem to have bequeathed Jews two mutually exclusive positions from which to view the unfolding of God's plan for redeeming creation; a conclusion that I think Kaplan implicitly accepts and deals with in the rest of his paper. Faced with necessity of prioritizing membership in one theological construct over the other, the Christian *ekklesia* or the Israel of Rabbinic Judaism, Kaplan opts for the former. Messianic Jews must ultimately pray as Christians, conscious of the spiritual distance between the liturgy as is and what it needs to be to reflect their faith. The Siddur, which in addition to being a repository of rabbinic theology as Kaplan notes, is also a performative text for both mainstream and messianic Judaisms that he hints could be split to serve both interests. The form or structure of the Siddur (Hebrew *keva*), can function as an external "point of connection" for Messianic Judaism with the physical Jewish community, while Messianics can direct the *kavvanah* (intentionality) of its performance to reading Christian truth into its liturgical structure. Kaplan notes the possibility, however, that Messianic Jews might overemphasize their unique theological contributions to the detriment of the traditional structure and thus invalidate the authenticity and utility of the Siddur based service.

Keva refers to the structure of prayer both on macro and micro levels. *Keva is a point of connection with our community.* It is what enables Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews to enter our congregations and recognize that what we do is Jewish. . . . We must be careful that our work at making Yeshua alive and apparent in our worship does not distance our worship from the wider Jewish community.⁶⁰

Here Kaplan seems to imply that if the structure of the liturgy conforms to Jewish expectations, mainstream Jews will recognize what Messianic Jews do as “authentic” Judaism and be drawn in to the true meaning of the prayers by the display of messianic *kavannah*. Messianic *kavannah*, Kaplan writes, can be accomplished by directing the worshiper’s internal focus to Jesus; that is, Messianic Jews can recite the standard prayers and blessings, but mentally focus on Yeshua wherever a messianic theme arises. Or Messianic *kavannah* can be openly directed and integrated into the performance itself by inserting passages from the New Testament or other Christian material into the organic structure of the prayer service. If done thoughtfully, Paul Saal writes, the additions should “punctuate the theology of the liturgy such that the messianic vision of Yeshua arises naturally, in and through the worship of our people.”⁶¹

I do believe that the messianic Jewish community has the obligation to integrate passages into the prayer service which express our messianic understanding of the prayer service. . . . Examples of appropriate integration of passages from the New Covenant into our worship include the insertion of Philippians 2:6-11 in *Alenu* in the Siddur of Congregation

⁶⁰ Ibid., 41–42.

⁶¹ Ibid., 46.

Zera Abraham . . . and the insertion of *Ha'Elohim 'Asher Dibber*, a Hebrew liturgical rendering of Hebrews 1:1-3, at the end of the *Shema*.⁶²

Even Kaplan imagines the contemporary rabbinic Jew as someone who judges the authenticity of Judaism by outward appearance, and who, once comforted by external conformity, will see the divinity of Jesus as a natural component of his Judaism rather than a foreign Christian doctrine. The passage from Philippians is a Christological hymn recited as part of Catholic liturgy in the celebration of vespers. It extols the humility of Christ while proclaiming his divinity and incarnation. The passage from Hebrews contains a similar message of Christ's divinity and exaltation. It is hard to imagine how adding these blatantly Christological passages will appear as natural elements in rabbinic liturgy to anyone other than a Messianic Jew.

This is not to say that Kaplan or other Messianic Jewish leaders agree with the gratuitous name-dropping that was so prevalent in early Messianic Jewish worship. Everywhere Messiah appeared in a Jewish prayer or blessing that the movement had appropriated for its worship services, Yeshua's name was sure to follow. John Fischer's popular "Siddur for Messianic Jews" (Siddur Lihudim Meshichim) is a less glaring but typical example of this practice. The blessing for kindling Shabbat candles is altered to be useful but to avoid obeying a non-Biblical, rabbinic command to "kindle the Shabbat lights": "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctified us by your commandments and commanded us *to be a light for the nations and gave us Yeshua our Messiah, the light of the world (italics added).*" The traditional *Lekhah Dodi* sung as part of Kabbalat Shabbat on Friday evenings receives an additional chorus of "Sabbath peace in Yeshua / *Shabbat shalom eem Yeshuah.*" The phrase, "We offer all our prayers in the name of Yeshua ha-Mashiach" appears periodically in the Amidah. The

⁶² Ibid., 45.

Siddur also offers a list of Christian readings and prayers that can be inserted where desired according to the congregation's own needs.⁶³

You find little of this kind of overt Christianizing in the sophisticated messianic discourse coming out of Hashivenu and the MJRC. As Kaplan notes above, Messianizing Jewish liturgy is more likely to be done by interweaving Christological passages into blocks of unaltered Jewish prayers to reinforce the claim that everywhere the rabbis mentioned or alluded to the messiah, they were, however unintentionally, referring to Jesus. For example, in Mark Kinzer's abbreviated liturgy for the Eucharist, "Messiah's Remembrance Meal as Musaf Amidah," dated August 2013, responsive readings containing Christian theology are used to transition from one of the Amidah's blessings to another. Where the rabbis bless ADONAI as the "shield of Abraham," Kinzer inserts

As Abraham offered his only son on Mount Moriah . . . so have You, God of our ancestors, sent Your only beloved Son, whom embraced death on our behalf that we might stand living before You.

Where the rabbis declare God faithful to resurrect the dead, the Eucharist liturgy affirms the resurrection of "Yeshua the Messiah from the dead." The *kedusha*, in part a recitation from the book of Isaiah, which declares that the whole earth is full of God's glory, is followed by a declaration of the incarnation, and an avowal that, "We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father," and so on throughout this short service.

The Messianic Jewish movement has incorporated elements from the traditional Siddur into its private and public worship from the very beginning. Messianic Jews have had Siddurs of their own for decades, the earliest versions comprising little more than cut and pasted material from the Siddur with gross Christianizing. The movement has matured and today there are a few Messianic Siddurs that have made the grade and

⁶³ Fischer, *Siddur for Messianic Jews*.

become standard fare, Fischer's is one of those and Jeremiah Greenberg's, *Messianic Shabbat Siddur* is another. There are any number of independent Siddurs available on line, as well as Machzors, Siddurs for Hebrew Christians, CDs, Siddurs for Messianic Israel, and even an e-Siddur that a Seattle congregation uses so that updates can be made without having to repurchase hardback books. Rabbinic prayers and blessings are a fixed element in all of Messianic Judaism, but the most theologically sophisticated and serious use of Jewish liturgical forms to craft a homogenous, thoughtfully-integrated, Messianic Jewish approach to prayer in the U.S. is taking place within Hashivenu.

Liturgy, however, is but one of the areas where Messianic Judaism utilizes and adapts Jewish tradition to suit its own communal needs. Messianic Jews engage the tradition when they perform Jewish rituals like bar and bat mitzvahs, when they circumcise their male children, when they marry, when they bury, and when they celebrate the Jewish holidays. They study its texts, engage in a conversation on those texts, and observe the tradition's halakhic standards. In other words, Messianic Jews use tradition in much the same way that other denominations of Judaism in the American mainstream do. Of course, other groups do not openly and deliberately combine Jewish tradition with high Christology to arrive a new formulation of Judaism. Nor do other Jewish groups claim to be a practicing Jewish remnant of Israel that represents the Jewish people within the Christian church. This is the hallmark of Hashivenu Messianic Judaism

Hashivenu discourse is remarkable for the way it excises those characteristics of Christian religion that it wants to read as Jewish from Christian discourse and transposes them into a Jewish frame of reference. Here the MJRC bifurcates the unitary body of Christian tradition and sorts its pieces into the foreign as well as anachronistic categories of "halakhic" and "non-halakhic" teachings. This effectively disconnects Christian faith ("non-halakhic") from practice (halakhic) so that Messianic Jews can

control and convert those practices they need or want from Christian tradition into Jewish rituals, authorizing them as part of a natively Jewish religious discourse designed to govern a Jewish (not Christian) community. By redefining the Christian tradition in Jewish terms, rhetorically disconnecting the Christian New Testament from its place in the Christian Bible and repositioning it as the second section (Apostolic Writings) of a Messianic Jewish canon after the Hebrew Bible, and accepting the authority of rabbinic texts for their practice, Messianic Jews have destabilized the relationship between all four domains of evangelical Protestant Christianity in order to crystallize a new micro-religion that will be recognizable and will function effectively as part of Judaism.

Nevertheless, the question at hand in this chapter is how Messianic Jews make use of their received tradition in the process of creating Judaism, not whether one of the purposes is to contextualize their faith in order to share it with others. It seems clear enough that from an objective standpoint, Hashivenu is engaged in the same project of sifting through Jewish tradition to find what works for its own communal needs in its own historical context. To be fair, this is not substantively different from the way Reform Jews in America selected certain elements from Jewish tradition that advanced a positive of Jews and Judaism to Protestant society while rejecting others that conflicted with their self image and the perceived needs of the Jewish community at the time. Even core principles of rabbinic Judaism were not sacrosanct; as is well known, the earliest Reform statement of principles abjured the rabbinic concept of Israel as a nation, let alone the religious implications of being a divinely chosen people. Reform Jews rejected the authority of rabbinic tradition and invested the individual with sovereignty over the domains of religious practice and belief. When it became apparent that Jews were rapidly assimilating and losing their collective identity, Reform institutions reclaimed rabbinic ritual and cultivated the notion of Jewish peoplehood. Messianic Jews claim they too are facing a dismal future as Jews within a dominant Gentile Christian culture

and they too see the repository of Jewish rituals, texts, ideas, theologies, practices, and conversations about these items as a means of bolstering their Jewish identity and perpetuating their Jewishness to another generation. If religion is the creative product of self-identifying Jewish communities then both of these groups represent different possible outcomes given the complex set of characteristics that have contributed to the taxon scholar's call Judaism.

Summary

In this chapter, I have isolated and analyzed several differential characteristics of the Judaism that the Hashivenu discourse community is creating in an effort to stabilize and mature the forty-plus year old American Messianic Jewish movement that began in the mid 1970s. I have accounted for these characteristics using the three conceptual maps Michael Satlow has proposed for crafting a workable polythetic definition of Judaism for use in the academic study of religion. As part of this mapping project, I have made soft comparisons between Hashivenu's Judaism and that of the mainstream Jewish movements in America as well as between Hashivenu and the evangelical Protestant mainstream from which it emerged.

Satlow's conceptual maps—Israel, textual tradition, and practice—are useful for situating Hashivenu's identity, discourse, and religious practices within the broad framework of an objective, phenomenologically defined Judaism. The discourse group that formed under the label, Hashivenu, meets Satlow's criteria for inclusion in the taxon by virtue of its self-understanding as a Jewish community that considers itself part of the imagined community of Israel, an ethno-religious label that describes individuals who claim a fictive kinship with the Israelites in the Hebrew Bible. Before the appearance of the Hashivenu group at the beginning of the twenty-first century, so-called Messianic Judaism would have had a difficult time remaining a meaningful contributor to Satlow's rabbinically centered definition due to the fact that the Messianic Jewish movement had

inherited an antithetical relationship to normative, rabbinic Judaism from Protestant Christianity.

Hashivenu is consciously rejecting this anti-Judaism stance and deliberately engaging with Jewish rabbinic tradition in order to transform its religious identity from a subset of evangelical Christianity to an “authentic” form of contemporary Judaism. Because of this political element in the formation of Hashivenu Messianic Judaism, a purely theoretical mapping of shared characteristics cannot account for the fact that Messianic Judaism has been unequivocally rejected by the institutions of mainstream Judaism despite the significant phenomenal overlap that appears on the conceptual map. As I have shown in this chapter, the way Messianic Jews interpret, signify, and express the critical content that their Judaism shares with the normative Jewish and Christian mainstreams is what sets them apart from their religious neighbors on the map of American religion. Interpretation, signification, and embodied expression are the major processes by which alterity and difference can be transformed into a new religious identity with its own center of articulation, strategies for legitimation, and boundary setting mechanisms.

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the anti-Judaic bias Messianic Jews inherited from the church is the church’s supersessionist self-understanding, by which I mean the church’s claim to have replaced the Jews as the people of God, or to represent the “true” Israel of the spirit as opposed to the physical, fleshly Israel that is the Jewish people. Messianic Jews have an intrinsic conflict of interest; they are Jews genealogically but Christians spiritually. The question they have to resolve in order to create a coherent socio-religious community is whether the community will identify with the Jewish people and Judaism or the Christian church and Christianity. Hashivenu has opted for the Jewish people and Judaism, but it is not willing to jettison the “spiritual” meaning of Israel that membership in the church requires. Despite the machinations of a new

bilateral ecclesiology that creates distinctive social and religious identities for Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus, and a desire to rename the Jewish wing of the church's religion Judaism, Hashivenu's "Israel" includes both the Jewish people and the non-Jewish Christian church. Messianic Jews identify with the Jewish people, but see themselves as a redeemed remnant whose co-membership in the Church helps the Church overcome the charge of supersessionism. For the rabbis, Israel is the equivalent of the Jew, for whom the unconverted, non-Jew is the wholly "other." Hashivenu's "Israel" retains the church's distinction between an Israel of the spirit that is independent of, though not antithetical to, Jewish ethnicity and an Israel of the flesh that is defined by that same ethnicity. Unlike groups using rabbinic models of Judaism, Messianic Jews will not be able to erect comprehensive boundaries between unconverted (non-Jewish) Gentiles and Jews.

This inability to define the Gentile as completely "other" seems to compromise the Messianic Jews' claim to constitute an "authentic" Judaism within Messianic Jewish discourse. To rectify the situation, the MJRC developed a process for conversion to Messianic Judaism that would accommodate the need to enfranchise Gentiles when absolutely necessary but still maintain an ethnically defined boundary between Messianic Jews and the Gentile church. But this kind of conversion raises the difficult question of what religious change Messianic Jews imagine is taking place when Gentile Christians, who are the most likely candidates for this cross-over, convert to Messianic Judaism. If Messianic Judaism is an ethnic version of Christian faith, then crossing the boundary for religious reasons makes no sense; if Messianic Judaism were a Christian expression of Jewish peoplehood, then the Gentile believer would merely be adding an ethnic dimension to his existing identity as a member of spiritual Israel. Neither of these scenarios would seem to change the potential convert's relationship vis-à-vis the God of Israel. In these cases the function of conversion in the Messianic Jewish system is

theologically inconsistent with the classical rabbinic view. Of course, there might be cases where a non-believing non-Jew might wish to convert under Messianic Jewish auspices. This possibility is the most intriguing conceptually, since from the inside, the Gentile would simultaneously become a member of the Jewish people and a Christian. From the outside, the church would recognize the convert as a new Christian, but the new Jewish status would hardly be meaningful beyond the Messianic community. Mainstream Judaism, one imagines, would consider the convert to be a new Christian and therefore not a new Jew. Even within the Messianic Jewish community, the majority does not recognize the validity of Gentile conversion because for them, Jewishness is biological not religious. Religious identity is a function of belief not ethnicity, and that belief is anchored to a certain Protestant Christian discourse that is authorized by a dual canon of Scriptures, usually referred to as the Old Testament and the New Testament.

For most Messianic Jewish groups, including Hashivenu, the sacred core of its textual tradition is what David Stern calls the complete Jewish Bible, a dual canon that appends the Church's New Testament to the canonical Hebrew Bible of Judaism. The first and most obvious way in which Hashivenu has externally expressed its internal reorientation from Christianity to Judaism is by following Stern's lead, dropping the canonical arrangement of the Protestant Old Testament and adopting the tripartite Jewish canon of Pentateuch (Torah), Prophets and Writings. This new canonical arrangement severs the connection between the Old Testament and the New as a source of Messianic prophecies about Jesus, and facilitates Messianic Jewish use of the Hebrew Scriptures to highlight the continuity between Jewish covenantal history, the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the history of the early Jewish disciples of Jesus. This facilitates re-presenting the exalted Christ of Protestant Christianity as the very Jewish Yeshua of Messianic Judaism while it projects the Jewish character of the nascent *ekklesia* as normative for all of church history.

In addition to a set of canonical texts, Messianic Jewish religion needs an interpretive tradition to make those texts meaningful for its own communal self-understanding and to set guidelines for applying its precepts and norms to communal practice. Unfortunately, neither the Christian nor the rabbinic tradition can be used without emendation, since each developed historically in the negative image of the other, creating two mutually exclusive modes of belonging—the Church and the Synagogue. Although Messianic Jews look backward to the original Jewish disciples of Jesus as a model of how the church (or Judaism) should have developed, the Jewish church did not survive, and hence it did not produce a canonical set of Scriptures with a uniquely Jewish interpretive tradition, or develop its own religious practices. Today’s Messianic Jews have no option but to work out a feasible alternative using one or more of the existing traditions developed in the Christian church and the oral tradition from Rabbinic Judaism. Speaking in general terms, Messianic Jews draw on Christian tradition for doctrine, especially the church’s Christological and ecclesiological traditions, while they use the rabbis to structure practice, and in some cases ethics. Ethics are less useful as a category for comparison with normative Christian and Judaism, since there is a significant sharing between the two religious communities already. Rabbinic practice, however, has been as strong a marker dividing Jewish religion from Christian as has belief in the divinity of Jesus.

Since Hashivenu Jews wish to be counted as part of Judaism, it is critical that their practice conform to mainstream Jewish norms as much as possible without violating orthodox Christian doctrine. Therefore, the second way in which Messianic Jews make use of Jewish textual tradition is to authorize Messianic halakhah. Torah observance for Messianic Jews, but not Gentile Christians, is a key plank in the Hashivenu platform. Without a traditional set of halakhic guidelines of their own to follow, the MJRC has issued a set of Standards based on normative Jewish practice in

mainstream liberal to conservative streams of Judaism. This involves a secondary use of rabbinic tradition in that the sources for their Standards are drawn primarily from the halakhic decision making of other Jewish institutions, which are in turn based on the primary rabbinic textual tradition. By design, where the Standards cover common ground, such as kashrut or Jewish status, Messianic Jewish difference is as minimal as possible to make the strongest connection possible to the mainstream Jewish world. Where Messianic Jews must cover new territory, as they do when they introduce halakhic procedures for two Christian rituals, baptism (*Tevilat Mashiach*) and the Eucharist (*Zichron Mashiach*), the difference is characteristic of Messianic Judaism.

These rituals, even when they are overlaid with the language of Judaism, remain vehicles for creating and expressing membership in the Christian church, or *ekklesia* in Hashivenu terminology, whether the individuals being baptized or partaking of the Eucharist are ethnically Jewish or not. Messianic baptism, a one-time initiation ritual in the Messianic Jewish fellowship as well as the Christian church, will mark Messianic Judaism as a sectarian movement, whether it is seen in relationship to mainstream Christianity or Judaism. On one hand, baptism that not only creates a Christian but also converts a Gentile to a Jew coupled with a Eucharist overlaid with the particularist language of Jewish ritual, means Hashivenu Judaism will become increasingly estranged from mainstream Christianity. On the other hand, having two foreign rituals that make a Jew a Christian and confirm his ongoing membership in the universal church means Hashivenu Judaism will not be creating any offsetting affinity for Messianic Jewish religion among members of mainstream Judaism.

In addition to this secondary engagement with rabbinic halakhah, Hashivenu makes use of Jewish textual tradition in at least two other primary ways. One is liturgy, where new Siddurs and new liturgical formations have been created by inserting Messianic readings and prayers into the standard blocks of Jewish liturgy. Although the

goal is to make the Christian content arise naturally in the traditional flow of Jewish prayer, high Christological passages that are constitutive of Messianic Jewish difference are difficult to reconcile with a rabbinic theology that still longs for messianic redemption and an end to Jewish exile within the nations. Messianic Jews who perform these texts are constantly under theological pressure to identify with either the Jewish people who continue to wait for their Messiah or with the church that knows he has already come.

Another primary entry point into the rabbinic tradition is through rabbinic midrash. Here, Hashivenu Jews have engaged rabbinic exegesis in the original languages and in the primary texts. The results in terms of unique Messianic Jewish contributions to the discussion are limited by the fact that Messianic Jewish rabbis, as religious leaders, are excluded from the common conversation that takes place in mainstream rabbinic circles. The evidence from papers submitted to the Hashivenu forum shows a willingness to read the rabbis on their own terms, but at the same time there is a fixed limit to how much weight rabbinic theology carries in non-halakhic exegesis. That limit is set by orthodox Christian doctrines about the substance of Messianic Jewish faith as expressed in the person and work of its messiah. The classical rabbis have a delegated authority insofar as practice, but this does not extend to doctrine if and when it conflicts with Christian tradition and the Messianic reading of the New Testament Scriptures. There is also still the understandable desire to utilize the rabbinic tradition as a means of presenting Christian doctrines in Jewish categories of thought. The missions to the Jews organizations have a long history of this practice, so that Hashivenu rabbis will have to work hard to overcome the tendency to repeat the past. They will need to move beyond using the rabbis as a way to arrive at what are already foregone conclusions about how Jesus is the fulfillment of the church's messianic expectations in order to make the kinds of contributions to Jewish discourse that other Jews will read as Jewish not Christian.

This study of Hashivenu Judaism and its contributions to the conceptual maps in Satlow's project reveals the tension between a polythetic, second-order definition of religion in which Judaism is represented by various historical religious communities that share a stronger or weaker family resemblance, and first order definitions of Judaism that exclude or anathematize difference when it is threatening to the status quo. Necessary inclusion in the former may conflict with justifiable exclusion from the latter. While these results and the cognitive dissonance they present may appear to be a fatal flaw in the polythetic approach to defining religions, I read the same results as a positive indicator that the academic project has analytical value precisely because it is not obligated to conform to first-order norms in order to be useful. The polythetic project catalogues and describes the way individual Jewish communities who identify as Israel use Jewish tradition to create a Judaism that works for them and that meets their communal needs. It does not enforce social boundaries or require essential content. It does produce a set of maps and characteristics out of which nearly endless possible configurations of something someone calls Judaism can be created. It is not surprising given the historic development of Jewish and Christian communities out of a more or less common pot of symbols, rituals, texts, and practices, that at some auspicious point in time a group of Jews would select certain elements from the large number available and recombine them in a new, perhaps startling ways, to create a new kind of Judaism. It is not surprising that the Messianic Jewish project, which has crossed social and religious boundaries set up to protect the interests of the mainstreams who are charged with propagating their traditions and maintaining the integrity of their own communities would be either rejected outright or at least suspected of possible treachery.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Surprisingly, despite the fact that Messianic Jews have been summarily anathematized by mainstream American Judaism, Hashivenu, or Postmissionary Messianic Jews, share a good deal with the normative American Jewish world. Phenomenologically, both identify as part of the Jewish people and both are concerned about maintaining Jewish continuity for the next generation; both claim a place in the collective history of this people and a dependence on its religious tradition; and both have concluded that *halakhah*, as part of that tradition, is necessary to bind Jews together as a religious community and to create boundaries between Jews and non-Jews. Hashivenu Messianic Jews, along with Orthodoxy, Conservative and Reform Judaism, acknowledge a belief in the God who gave the Torah to Israel, his people, though admittedly not all of them understand the nature of this God in the same way, nor do they agree on what counts as Torah, or who counts as a Jew.

Both Hashivenu Messianic Judaism and modern American Judaism have to negotiate for the survival of particularistic Jewish identity, swimming against the tide in a sea of universalistic sentiment. In both cases, religious practice functions as a means of differentiating Jews from non-Jews in a religious setting and acts as a barrier against absorption and assimilation. In both situations the presence of non-Jews in Jewish religious space creates a socio-religious dilemma resolved by appealing to the power of religious ritual to mark Jew from non-Jew, while appeasing the non-Jew's feelings of estrangement from full participation in Jewish life.

All Messianic Jews, however, are admittedly Christians as well as Jews. This complicates the academic project of defining Judaism, especially if the project begins with a presupposition that Judaism and Christianity are mutually exclusive containers for religious identity, or discrete and bounded religions in an outmoded but still regnant World Religions curriculum. Most contemporary scholars of religion would agree that a

polythetic approach to defining religion/s makes more sense out of the data than do the essentialist models derived from the history of religions discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but there is paucity of studies on defining individual religions that takes this consensus into account. Michael Satlow is one of the few scholars to make a concerted attempt to follow up on the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, Martin Jaffee and Jacob Neusner in defining Judaism non-essentially. This dissertation has tried to provide what Michael Satlow called for to advance the cause: a synchronic study of Hashivenu Messianic Judaism, a group of self-identifying Jews who say their religion is Judaism and who see themselves as part of Israel, a redeemed remnant that not only belongs to the Jewish people, but to the Christian church as well.

Part of what makes Hashivenu Messianic Judaism unique is that it is a deliberate appropriation or integration of Jewish tradition into an existing Christian religious world view. Messianic Judaism has not developed organically in relationship to a normative Judaism, to use a familiar biological metaphor in describing the growth and development of religious traditions. Nor is it the product of a continuous transmission and reception process where one generation of Messianic Jews have inherited Jewish tradition from a previous generation and so forth back to some hallowed place in antiquity. Messianic Judaism, in all of its variety, is admittedly an artificially created, or humanly engineered, religious identity; this despite religious claims that Messianic Judaism is a “work of God,” and a divinely ordained step in Christian and Jewish salvation history. On the surface this may sound like a pejorative way to describe the Messianic religion, but in fact, as Jonathan Smith and Michael Satlow have argued, all historic religions, including Judaism and its Messianic interpretations, are the product of religious creativity (divine intervention notwithstanding). From an academic perspective, there is no reason why one of these creative products should be considered normative and another outside the pale of possibility. In fact, including the marginal or

“heretical” contender enlarges the horizon from which scholars can study the phenomenon of “creating Judaism” and encourages the methodological manipulation of difference to useful, knowledge-producing end.

If the purpose of a polythetic definition is not to adjudicate religious authenticity or to reify social boundaries, but to determine the range of possibilities that the taxon Judaism offers to groups of self-identifying Jews for creating a meaningful religious world in which to dwell. In the case of Messianic Judaism in general, and especially in the Hashivenu version, Judaism is stretched, perhaps to its extreme limits, by the selection and signification of critical symbols, practices, and texts in the expansive Judaic repertoire, and the inclusion of equally critical symbols, practices and texts from Christianity. A polythetic definition anticipates such overlap on a map where there are no impermeable boundaries between or essential content within its religious labels. However, a first order definition requires precisely what the polythetic definition forbids—essential content and clearly defined boundaries.

What appears as cognitive dissonance between the academic construct and the social reality, however, dissipates when a political dimension is added to the conceptually drawn maps. Satlow’s conceptual maps are, by design, drawn to make sense of symbolic or conceptual characteristics and pave the way for charting how individual historic communities use them to create Judaism to meet their own communal needs. The synchronic studies, such as this one of Messianic Judaism, are suggested as ways to link the conceptual to the historical, and I would presume, provide the raw material to be able to account change over time. Bruce Lincoln’s four-domain definition of religion is also a polythetic approach, but as it includes a domain to consider religious institutions—the communal authorities that create and disseminate discourse, regulate practice—both ethical and ritual, and monitor the boundaries around community, it has a better chance of accounting for on the ground contestations over authenticity, content, and social

location than the purely conceptual apparatus of Satlow's model. Both of these can work together to make sense of contested group identities that occupy space in the same territory at the same time, as in the case of Messianic Judaism, the American Jewish mainstream, and evangelical Protestantism. Change over time is not limited to what takes place within a particular group, but is also a function of how a mainstream forms and transmits a viable religious tradition from one generation to another so that there is, in some sense a history of Judaism that is more than just a history of ideas. Contestation on the ground pits conservative trends against innovation, so that the inevitable change is presented as original and authentic.

What strikes me as most salient about the study of American Messianic Judaism, and especially the avant-garde think tank, Hashivenu, is how it is struggling to create coherence, not in personal identity—reconciling being Jewish with believing in Jesus—as past studies of Messianic congregations have documented, but in collective group identity; that is, combining Christian faith and Jewish practice on a conceptual and institutional level in order to disengage from identification with Christianity, which becomes a religion for non-Jews, and engage with Judaism, a religion of and for Jews. It is one matter to say I am a Jew who believes in Jesus; I am Christian by faith and Jewish by ethnic origin, but quite another to create a fully dimensioned religion that makes sense of both claims. Here Lincoln's four-domain definition of religion helps explain the obstacles Hashivenu Messianic Jews will have to overcome to create a coherent community with a plausible world view. In Lincoln's definition, religious discourse drives the entire system. A shared set of sacred texts give rise to a particular kind of discourse, or interpretive tradition, that gives a particular community a place from which to articulate who it is in relationship to other religious groups. For Christianity, the critical discourse for self definition centers on the canonical texts of the Old and New Testaments and the interpretive tradition/s or discourses that have developed among

religious groups who share these texts. The major historical denominations of Christianity—Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism—are the institutional forms that these various discourses have produced and which in turn perpetuate and adapt their respective discourses.

Judaism is represented by a much more complex network of traditions, but for almost all contemporary Jewish groups, the critical religious discourse evolves out of the classical Rabbinic tradition. The core texts in Rabbinic Judaism are the Hebrew Bible, the Mishnah, the Babylonian Talmud and codes of law that have been produced in an attempt to simplify the complex legal system in the Talmud for local usage in diverse Jewish communities. Messianic Jews have no continuous, historical tradition of their own but they accept parts of both religious canons. From Christianity they take the New Testament and from Judaism they take the Hebrew Bible. How will they interpret these texts and apply them to their own unique historical context? How will they reconcile belonging to the universal church, which finds its genesis in the New Testament and its development in competing streams of Christian tradition, with belonging to the Jewish people whose story begins in the Hebrew Bible but whose religious tradition rejects the New Testament and follows the classical Rabbis instead? This is the fascinating if convoluted process that unfolds in the discursive output from the Messianic Jewish leaders who participate in the Hashivenu Forum and who have formed a rabbinical council of their own to move their ideas from paper into practice. As I have shown throughout the previous chapters, Hashivenu depends on the New Testament to differentiate itself from all other forms of contemporary Judaism, but uses the Hebrew Bible to set itself apart from Christianity.

Despite the high barrier erected between Judaism and evangelical groups like Jews for Jesus who claim an ongoing Jewish identity after conversion to Christianity, “smuggling” is an ongoing, largely undetected border crossing violation. If, for the sake

of analysis, I look at the religious territory now occupied by mainstream American Judaism as the equivalent of one bounded community (members, discourse and ideas, practice, institutions) and American Protestant Christianity as another, then Hashivenu Postmissionary Messianic Jews read as examples of Daniel Boyarin's iconic smuggler. Slowly but surely, while American Judaism's heresiologists are inspecting the wheelbarrow at every crossing for a contraband Jesus, these Messianic Jews have been transporting the Jewish community's traditions, rituals, history, memory, and very identity as a people back into Christian territory.

The goal of Postmissionary Messianic Jewish outreach to the Jewish community is not to export an ethnically repackaged, re-Judaized Jesus to the hostile and well-guarded territory occupied by potential American Jewish converts, but to import enough Judaism into Messianic religion so that Jewish faith in Yeshua is transformed into a phenomenologically Jewish religion. While the individual, personal motives for a Messianic Jew's decision to embrace Jewish peoplehood and re-enter the stream of Jewish religious tradition are undoubtedly overdetermined, the Postmissionary Messianic Jewish institutional agenda is clearly missiological. The objective has not changed from what it was in the pre-Postmissionary Messianic Jewish congregational movement; that is, to deconstruct the axiomatic opposition of Jewish peoplehood and Christian faith so that the Jewish people will read faith in Jesus as a legitimately Jewish option. What is new is the attempt to reconstruct Messianic Jewish religion and reclassify the synthesis of Jewish ethnicity and Christian beliefs into an authentic kind of contemporary, American Judaism, categorically distinct from yet inherently related to Gentile Christianity.

Postmissionary Messianic Jews are attempting to resolve the dilemma of dual-affinities: a primary affinity with the Christian community that arises out of sharing a set of authoritative texts (the Christian New Testament) that alone can legitimate the

existence of Messianic Judaism, and their natural affinity for the wider Jewish world by virtue of being American Jews who believe in Jesus but have refused (for decades now) to give up a share in Jewish peoplehood. Messianic Judaism's primary affinity to Christianity is evident in the fact that virtually all its energy has been spent resolving disagreements about the legitimacy of Messianic Jewish congregations, their precepts and their practices, through the medium of Protestant Christian theology. Its growing affinity for Judaism is most visible in the change in attitude toward contemporary Jewish practice and rabbinic tradition. Torah observance and halakhic discourse have become the hallmark of Hashivenu Messianic Jewish discourse, setting their movement apart from the mainstream of the broader Messianic Jewish Movement, legitimating religious boundaries between Jew and Gentile in the congregational setting to create "Jewish space," and aligning their religious practice with mainstream liberal denominations of American Judaism.

Hashivenu's decision to create Messianic Jewish religion as a form of Judaism raises the question of how scholars of religion can continue to define Judaism as a singular religious tradition, even polytheistically, without resorting to the same essentialist definitions that mainstream Jewish institutions employ to enforce the existing ideological boundaries between Christianity and Judaism. It is already difficult to account for the rich diversity of Jewish religious experience without fracturing a single Judaism into multiple Judaisms (Satlow and Neusner) let alone stretching the envelope to grant Messianic Judaism and its overlapping Christian elements a place on the map. The conclusion I am forced to draw from this conundrum is that accounting for Judaism in post-Enlightenment societies must be treated as an emic rather than etic project because the label "Judaism" is an internal element used by groups on the ground to define themselves rather than an external label that scholars are assigning to a set of data for their own heuristic purposes.

If scholars are to avoid becoming embroiled in contemporary first-order contestations over authenticity and refrain from engaging in theological arguments over orthodoxy and heresy in their attempts to define Judaism, then all groups who self-define or establish themselves in the religious landscape under the rubric of Judaism must be treated as equal contributors to the class. Marginal groups should not be explained away because they are out of sync with or because they lack some essential characteristic that is represented in the mainstream. The project of defining Judaism must begin with description not prescription so that the boundaries and content of Judaism are circumscribed by drawing a line around the set of all groups that, in good faith, have labeled themselves as part of Judaism. Everything inside the line needs to be granted de facto credibility and any group's Judaism should be understood on its own terms before analysis and objective scholarly explanations are provided. The set of groups that scholars study as members of Judaism can be expected to form multiple, parallel streams that run through the mapping project at any given time, sometimes colliding, sometimes crossing over, with some surviving through time, perhaps coalescing into a mainstream, while others dry up and vanish and possibly reappear in a new location at a different time.

From a scholar's point of view, above the fracas of interreligious dispute, Postmissionary Messianic Jews are de facto members of Judaism by virtue of their own self-identification as Jews who claim to be part of Israel. Consequently, the elements of their religious world can be described and explained using categories and descriptors from the study of Judaism. Even quintessentially Christian characteristics, like the New Testament scriptures, baptism, and communion can be assigned a status relative to Judaism for the purpose of analysis. The writings of the New Testament become sectarian texts vis-à-vis the Jewish mainstream, *Tevilat haMashiach* (baptism) is treated

as a conversion ritual to a form of Judaism, and *Zichron haMashiach* (Eucharist) is a ritual of commemoration honoring the Messianic Jews' messiah.

The academic purpose of this translation and re-description project is to see what happens when religious rituals and symbols are extracted from one religious context and placed into another. What changes when the texts of the Christian New Testament are embedded in a new religious discourse? Can they remain canonical for Messianic Jews in the same way that they are for the non-Jewish church? How will Messianic Jews read these texts? What will they keep or discard? What interpretive tradition will determine the canonical reading within Messianic Judaism? Can baptism retain the same meaning for Messianic Jews as it has in Protestant Christianity when it becomes a rite of initiation into the Jewish people and Judaism? How will Messianic Jews practice and understand the Eucharist when the suffering and sacrificial death of Jesus for the sins of the world in Christianity become the suffering and martyrdom of a Jewish messiah for the sake of Israel, his fellow Jews in Judaism? These issues are only beginning to surface in Hashivenu discourse as the leadership moves the Messianic Jewish Movement closer to identification with mainstream Judaism and its textual tradition. The need to read as “authentically” Jewish competes with an equal need for Messianic Jews to witness to the truth of Christian claims about the divinity and messiahship of Jesus and to honor the spiritual unity they have with non-Jewish Christians.

My research leads me to series of analytical observations. First, trying to craft a polythetic definition of Judaism without first classifying and categorizing everything that contributes characteristics to that definition is overreaching, premature and tends to default to a description of the mainstream rather than synthesizing mainstream and margin into a single subject of study. Even making sense of Hashivenu required delimiting the scope of what counted as Judaism to those groups that comprise a subset of American Judaism.

Second, not every group that makes it into the set carries the same weight in the definitional project. Hashivenu's self-identification as Judaism is prescriptive more than it is descriptive, and following Lincoln's lead, until it succeeds in empowering independent institutions that can disseminate its discourse and regulate practice, Hashivenu Judaism is a Judaism in progress rather than a fully dimensioned micro-religion within Judaism. That is, Hashivenu's leaders and thinkers are in the process of doing exactly what Michael Satlow describes as "creating Judaism," but they haven't quite pulled it all together in all four of Lincoln's domains. Discourse is conflicted and under development, a distinctive socially coherent community is yet to form, standards for practice are just being formulated and will be difficult to regulate, and organizations are fledglings—some are still connected to Christian institutions involved in missions. What Hashivenu will ultimately contribute to the definition of Judaism remains to be seen. Will it survive? And, if it does, will it continue to self-identify with Judaism? It shares a great deal with Christianity, and could still collapse back into the mold from which it came. Right now, Hashivenu, or Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, is an ideological movement led by a sophisticated and articulate elite who are making the best of being on the margins of mainstream Judaism. They understand that marginality does not mean exclusion from the taxon of Judaism, but rather is implicitly a means of insuring inclusion. An academic definition would have to grant them this place on the map to be objective and fair and avoid representing the whole by privileging the mainstream, but it would be premature at this point to consider its unique contributions to Judaism permanent.

Third, there is a small but critical set of characteristics that Hashivenu Messianic Judaism brings with it into the definition of American Judaism from Christianity, without which it would cease to be a meaningful religious identity: a belief that Yeshua is Israel's messiah and the world's savior, membership in an imagined, spiritually defined

community called the *ekklesia*, and a set of scriptures it calls the Apostolic Writings but which are identical in content and form to the Christian New Testament. Mainstream American Judaism considers the first characteristic incompatible with Jewish identity, and the second proof that the Messianic Jew has apostatized from Judaism. The third is rarely invoked in the rhetoric of otherness. From the academic perspective, however, these overlapping characteristics require consideration as part of what counts in the contemporary definition of American Judaism. I have treated these otherwise Christian elements as parts of Hashivenu's sectarian Judaism, and I have interpreted them from that perspective. This will sound strange, but it gives credibility to the Hashivenu's attempt to make them part of their Judaism.

The conclusion I draw from these observations and the analysis of Hashivenu Judaism is that what is required for a religious group to credibly relocate from one taxon to another is not to acquire a unique set of characteristics with no overlap between taxonomic classes, but rather to redefine the center from which all of the group's characteristics can be explained as part of a singular, coherent worldview in its target location. The religious discourse it disseminates would have to be persuasive enough to acquire a following and strong enough to create and empower an institutional force capable of replicating the group and its new discourse for another generation. If these criteria could be successfully accomplished by the leaders and thinkers spearheading the Hashivenu sub current of Messianic Judaism, the resultant discourse can create a coherent Jewish community with an ethnically Jewish core and a Gentile periphery, overseen and directed by a set of recognizably Jewish institutions empowered to define halakhic guidelines for congregational and personal religious practice and to educate and train rabbinic leadership for a new generation of members.

For Hashivenu Messianic Judaism, this would mean first shifting the hermeneutical center of Messianic Judaism from a set of doctrinal statements by which

the Church explained its difference from ancient and medieval Jewishness (*Ιουδαιϊσμός*) to ethnic Israel, which has provided both a distinctive identity and a tolerated religious particularism for self-identifying Jews in the face of the Church's supersessionist theology and Christian cultural and political hegemony. From this new center of Jewish ethnic identity, Hashivenu will have to resignify the meaning of characteristically Christian beliefs and practices so that they make sense and cohere in their new religious environment. Finally, it will have to persuade other Messianic Jews and Jews now making their religious homes in traditional Christian churches to join the Hashivenu movement and reorganize their social and religious lives according to its new platform so that the fledgling institutions Hashivenu Jews have already established will have some power to articulate and transmit the new vision under the rubric of Messianic Judaism.

Finally, any polythetic definition of Judaism that is put into the service of describing real religious groups in real time will have to take into account all representative groups that claim that identity for the time period under consideration. Rather than explaining away the marginal contenders, the analysis should try to identify the elements or symbols that lie behind whatever social tensions separate margin from mainstream. The contested elements and symbols are the ones most likely to have lost their differential qualities and are, I would say, at risk of either dropping from the tradition, losing value and being retained in form only, or undergoing a significant change in meaning in order to be retained as part of an internally consistent worldview. Messianic Jews have identified a major weakness's inability to define Judaism in religious terms. The need to say what Jews mean when they speak of "God" has lost meaning for much of mainstream Judaism; Messianic Jews can fill that void in a much more concrete way than liberal Judaism is willing to do. Jewish identity is no longer intimately connected to Jewish religious practice. A Jew can be a member of the Jewish people, or the Jewish nation without subscribing to the tenets of Rabbinic Judaism or

being consistently religiously observant. Messianic Jews believe they can reconnect Jewish peoplehood and Jewish religious observance under the umbrella of Messianic Judaism. In order to do this, Messianic Jews feel they must make common connections with the Jewish community. It is also important to Messianic Jews that they differentiate themselves from Gentile Christians, and to do this they have identified the strongest salient markers of Jewish identity: ethnicity and rabbinic practice. Whether these characteristics can help Messianic Judaism mature into another institutional form of American Judaism with a persuasive ideological core and strong transcendent meaning is yet to be seen.

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