

The statistics as regards the conversion of Jews to practising, Bible-based Christianity reveal one [true follower of Jesus] per hundred (1%) by A.D. 1430, two per hundred by A.D. 1790, three per hundred by A.D. 1940.<sup>1</sup> Considering that Christians have been trying so hard to convert Jews to Christianity since the Church began, we seem not to be doing as well as might be expected. We need, therefore to examine our methods of Evangelism to discover what will be the better way to bring the Good News to Jewish people. While doing so we will also be examining the historical and sociological background and theological assumptions going along with these methods for their appropriateness to a mission to Jews. There are four approaches to evangelism that we will be examining:

I. Evangelism: Sharing with people within one’s own culture.

This type of evangelism is a witness to people who share ones own language and cultural background, and especially it is a way of bringing up a young generation which has grown up going to church, hearing the Gospel and reading the Bible. We may call them “Christianized” but without the experience that Jesus referred to in John’s Gospel Chapter Three as being born “again” or “from above”. This type of evangelism is perhaps the simplest. But its simplicity is not in itself the assurance to those people who are truly saved.

Are we able to reach out effectually to those Jewish people to whom this type of evangelism would apply, i.e. those participating with us in Christianized environments? We can not deny that some Jews come to know Jesus as their Messiah during their attendance at Christian based school and college. It is however a very small minority . But we need to remind ourselves though some Jews “converted” to Christianity with insincere motives, this does not negate the fact that true conversions

<sup>1</sup> Michael L, Brown, Let No One Deceive You: Confronting the Critics of Revival, Shippensburg, Destiny Image, 1997, Page212

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took place as well. They often are rejected by their own people because their conversion. A primary reason for opposition to such missions lie in the examples of those educated or religious Jews who, to make possible the holding of high political or social office in the past (for example Benjamin Disraeli) or for monetary gain or because of social pressure appeared to convert to Christianity (whilst often still continuing privately to hold to their original faith). Jewish people are therefore convinced that this conversion had nothing whatsoever to do with appreciating reasonable arguments or forming honestly held theological convictions. We saw two [true followers of Jesus] per hundred by A.D. 1790 (1 to 49 after 360 years)<sup>2</sup>. Where cultural Christianity dominated the society in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, it is true that a number of Jews “converted” to the faith with the sole purpose of gaining social or economic advancement.<sup>3</sup>

As far as I can see it will be very difficult to apply this method today. Even those Jewish people who attend Christian institutions in the main continue with a strong practice of traditional Judaism. They bring up the next generation with a straight Rabbinic interpretation of Hebrew Scripture and the 613 laws (except of course those connected with temple practice). This type of evangelism would tend to draw people back to their Jewish tradition to affirm what they believe and practice.

## II. Evangelism: Bringing the Gospel across cultural and linguistic barriers within society

A witness to those who live within the boundaries of the same nation but within a different subculture, i.e. whose cultural and religious presuppositions

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid,

<sup>3</sup> Michael L. Brown, Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus Volume one, Baker Book house, U.S.A. 2000, page 49

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may be very different. An example would be white upper middle class Christians bringing the Gospel to unsaved lower class blacks in the inner city, or inner-city black Christians bringing the Gospel to unsaved whites in the suburbs. Another example (closer to home for me) would be a Chinese Christian witnessing to communities in Taiwan, where the main religion is Buddhist.

This approach would translate to missionary outreach into the Jewish community. Since there are no recognised or accepted forums where such activities would take place this would amount to doorstep confrontation outside Jewish homes. I am afraid that this type of evangelism creates a lot of difficulty. Jewish people have a totally negative experience of “crusading missions” from history. When Constantine established Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 312, he issued many anti-Jewish Laws. Jewish people were forbidden to accept converts, and at the same time, he used to make them forsake Judaism with every enticement.

In the Dialogue With Trypho, A Jew, By Justin Martyr (160 C.E.) said: “ *If some, through weak-mindedness, wish to observe such institutions as were given by Moses, from which they expect some virtue, but which we believe were appointed by reason of the hardness of the people’s heart, along with their hope in this Christ...*”<sup>4</sup>

He had a very limited tolerance of Messianic Jews who keep their Jewish distinctiveness but the position of Christianity actually hardened considerably following this. John Chryostom (307-407 C.E.) said “*The Jews, the odious assassins of Christ and for killing God there is no expiation possible, no indulgence or pardon.*” At the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E. he said, ‘*It is right to demand what our reason approves and that we should have nothing in common with Jews.*’ So the connection

<sup>4</sup> Justin Martyr, “Dialogue With Trypho, A Jew” in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, editors, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975, Volume I, pp.218

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between Christianity and the original practices of the Jewish Disciples were broken: for example, the Sabbath was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week and the date of Easter was separated from Passover. The Roman church instructed people to fast on the Jewish Sabbath to show they were not “Judaising”.

When Roman Catholic Christianity became the dominant religion of Europe those who rejected it were identified as the force of Anti-Christ. So the Jewish people were considered by the R.C. Church to be the ‘Anti-Christ’, and they were suffering continual persecution. In 613 C.E, all Jews who refused to be baptised had to leave the country.<sup>5</sup> The First Crusade in 1096 saw fierce persecution of Jewish communities. 12,000 Jews were killed in the cities along the river Rhine alone. When the Crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099 they massacred all the Jews and Muslims they found.

In 1215 Pope Innocent condemned the Jewish to eternal slavery for, “*The Jews against whom the blood of Jesus Christ calls out, although they ought not to be killed, ...yet, as wanderers ought they remain upon the earth until their countenance be filled with shame.*”<sup>6</sup> In 1478 the Spanish Inquisition was against Jews and non-Catholic Christians. In 1492 Jews were ordered to make a choice of forced baptism or expulsion from Spain. 300,000 left penniless as a result.

Martin Luther hoped initially that he would attract Jews to his Protestant faith, understanding that they could not accept the superstitions and persecutions of Rome. But when the Jewish people rejected his attempts to convert them, and even worse, many in Bohemia who were leaving the church actually converted to Judaism, he turned on them and gave vent to bitter words of hatred- those same words that also were used by Nazis in their propaganda:

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<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1980, pp245-256

<sup>6</sup> Tony Pearce, *The Messiah Factor*, New Wine Press, England, 2004, pp12

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*“What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? I shall give you my sincere advice: First, to set fire to their synagogues.. in honour of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians.... I advise that their prayer books and Talmudic writings... be taken from them...I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb... [w]e will believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is truthful when he declares of the Jews who did not accept but crucified him,....”*<sup>7</sup> The resulting suspicion that all Gentiles are anti-Semitic at heart prompts many Jews to feel an instinctive fear and distaste for Christian religious symbols such as the cross and the (Anglicised, Romanised, Grecian) name of Jesus.

In addition to this Jews have become far more comfortable with emphasizing religious practice than with faith in the unseen God. Rabbi Richard Rubenstein of Pittsburgh University expressed the feelings of many Jews when he said, *“After Auschwitz I find I must reject a transcendent God entirely.”*<sup>8</sup> One of Jews attends a Messianic Jewish conference ask Dr, Michael Brown. *“Why did God allow six million Jews to die in the Holocaust? Before I could even think about believing in Jesus, I need an answer to this question.”*<sup>9</sup> Over the centuries we have been trying so hard to convert Jews to Christianity with the confrontational type of evangelism. It seems to me it is not the right way to approach Jewish people.

III. Evangelism brings the Gospel across cultural and linguistic barriers that at times can seem all but insuperable.

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, “On the Jews and their lies” (1543), translated by Martin H. Bertram, edited by Franklin Sherman: Volume 47, pp121-306 of Jaroslav pelican and Helmut T. Lehmann, Luther’s Work (Philadelphia: Fortress Press and St. Louis Concordia Publishing house, 1962-1974) pp268-278

<sup>8</sup> James Yaffe, The American Jews, Paperback Library Edition, Random house, 1969,pp73

<sup>9</sup> Michael L. Brown, Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus Volume one, Baker Book house, U.S.A. 2000, page 177

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This type of evangelism is conveyed by the traditional model of the missionary living amongst a primitive jungle tribe learning the language, inventing an alphabet, translating the Bible, fighting the alien cultural and physical environment, all in order to make God’s grace known. For example Jim & Elizabeth Elliot and other four missionary couples served in South America. They learned their language, culture, and engaged in a translation of the Bible in the native tongue. The five men of the missionary couples were killed by tribes people. After the death of the missionaries, Elizabeth Elliot with other missionaries went back to continue their Bible translation and live amongst the tribes people. It is God’s grace that touched one of the killers who became a Christian and an interpreter, and he attended the international world evangelism conference in Germany with Elizabeth Elliot as a testimony to the grace and greatness of God.

I suggest we draw the parallel of CFI-the Christian friends of Israel who have gone as a help and support to the land of Israel and to supply practical help to the needy. There they help with things as diverse as wedding dresses for Russian immigrants and school equipment for Ethiopian Jewish children. Living amongst the people they have built up a genuine relationship with the needy among them. To be permitted to do this work with the support of the Israeli Government they have made clear that their mission is not overtly evangelical. And yet often Jewish people want to know the mystery of what power is driving these practical expressions of love and so subtly the witness does indeed take place. If Jewish people came to know Jesus as their Messiah, It would be type II or III in the past history.

IV. This Type of evangelism requires not a Gentilized Gospel contextualized for Jews, but a restoration of the true Jewishness which is in fact in the Gospel.

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Any Jew can be like Saul, be Messianic and remain Jewish. (Romans 11:1 “I also am an Israelite” not *was*) From a sociological point of view perhaps, the Jews are just another culture as the Chinese have their own culture. From the theological viewpoint, the Jews are unique as a vehicle for God who chose them to bring salvation to the world.

“We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.” (John 4:22b) “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.” (Romans 3:1-2) “Who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.” (Romans 9:4-5) Does this mean that we do not need to share Gospel with them? No, we have an obligation to do so. Please let me explain the reason why we need to preach the Gospel to Jews as well as Gentiles. “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you [Jews] first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 13:46-47)

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Romans 1:16) “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the gentiles.” (Romans 11:11) I believe these verses not only to contain the justification for a mission to the Jews but also provide a clue to God’s methodology to reach Jewish people. It is not type I, II or III of evangelism. It is not to convert Jews to Christianity. Because God ordains Gentiles to provoke Jewish people to jealousy: “Concerning the Gospel they are

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enemies for your [Gentiles] sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” (Romans 11: 28-29) Why? “...if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.” (Romans 11:23)

This type of evangelism is particularly to evangelize the people of God in the way that communicates a Gospel which is theologically consistent with hermeneutical Hebrew scripture and Habrit Hachadasha, the New (the Hebrew equally means renewed) Testimony of God’s salvation for Jewish people. Dr. David H. Stern said: “... *contextualizing the Gentile form of the Gospel for the Jews is a double diversion. Originally its Jewish form was contextualized for Gentiles – this was Sha’ul’s [Paul] great contribution to evangelism. But then, as the early Messianic Jewish communities fell on hard times and disappeared, the Jewishness originally present in the Gospel also vanished, so that a Gentile- contextualized Gospel deprived of its Jewish substratum was the only Gospel there was, a Procrustean bed in which the Jewish believer was forced to lie...*”<sup>10</sup>

We compare with Type I, II, III and IV evangelism methods. We found that the type IV evangelism is more approachable to Jewish people. But there is some issues we need to be aware of to ensure that we do not divert Jewish people from the truly Gospel and back to Judaism again. The Messianic Jewish Congregational Movement is operating in Type IV evangelism, i.e. presenting scripture and it’s interpretation in the original Hebrew context and they have been very successful in reaching a lot Jewish people in the United States, as well as about ten thousand in Israel itself. One of Mission organisation is called “Jews for Jesus”. There are some controversial theological issues being contested in the Messianic Movement. The

<sup>10</sup> David H. Stern, “Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel – A message for Christians” 1988, U.S.A. Jewish New Testament Publications,



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organization of the Hebrew Christian Alliance in America has consistently assuaged the fears of fundamentalist Christians by emphasizing that it is *not* a separate denomination but only an evangelistic arm of the evangelical church. For mainline denominations; the Messianic claim to be “Jewish” believers of Jesus was regarded as deceitful. Perhaps the Augustinian conception that salvation is not available outside the Church proper is still subconsciously held. The Jewish community viewed them as a cult. Even most evangelicals opposed the Messianic Jews, accusing them of rebuilding the wall of partition between Jewish and gentile Christians and, in fact, of going back under the Law. David A Rausch interviewing a leader in missionary outreach to the Jewish community got the following report: *“To these “Messianic Jews” Jewishness means Judaism . . . a rabbinic Judaism of the Ashkenazic flavor. . . . They neither have a real knowledge of Jewish history or of Jewish-Christian history, nor do they possess a good handle on biblical exegesis. . . . Like the Ebionites of old they will finally blend into Judaism and deny the Messiah.”*<sup>11</sup> Even Billy Graham has come out against evangelistic enterprises aimed solely at Jews by Jews. These people believe that such a tactic only increases the historic antipathy felt between Christians and Jews -- antipathy that has expanded into crusades and pogroms. The effectiveness of the message of Christ is thus lost.

Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum in his book of “Israelology: The Missing link in Systematic Theology” said: *“Do the proponents of the American Messianic Synagogue Movement think that all potential Christian Jews can come to Christ more easily through other Jews rather than through loving, sensitive Gentiles? History would say that is not always the case. Aren’t they in many respects trying to resurrect some forms of Jewishness that in no way approximates Old Testament Judaism?”*<sup>12</sup> “

<sup>11</sup> David A. Rausch, *Christian Century* September 15-22, p. 926. [www.christiancentury.org](http://www.christiancentury.org).

<sup>12</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “Israelology: The Missing link in Systematic Theology” U.S.A. 1989

Dr. Fruchtenbaum presents his view from his scriptural perspective, that there appears to be grave deficiencies, mistakes, and errors in the American Messianic Synagogue Movement. He makes a clear line between a Hebrew Christian and a Messianic Jew. “A Hebrew Christian, therefore, must acknowledge that he is both a Jew and a Christian. If a Jew accepts baptism solely to lose his identity as a Jew, he is by no means to be considered a Messianic Jew; he is a renegade, a traitor, and an apostate. A Messianic Jew is proud of his Jewishness. He is also proud of his faith in the Messiahship of Jesus. <sup>13</sup>This was true of the thinking of the Apostle Paul. (Romans 11:1 and 2 Corinthians 11:22)

In conclusion, “shall Christians attempt to convert Jews to Christianity”? I would not recommend this way to approach Jewish people. We should attempt to preach the Gospel to Jews and make all our effort to do so for those reasons that have been presented in the type IV evangelism section. It is not trying to “convert them” as through the church history we have done so much more harm than good. We should provoke them to jealousy, so God is able to graft them in again into their own olive tree. We should be very careful how we present the Gospel to them. Yes, we can reveal to them the *Jewishness* of the Gospel through their own Hebrew Scripture, not majoring in the rabbinic interpretation of scripture, as we do not want them to go back Judaism again.

So they may be able to echo that first century Messianic Jew , Andrew who said “ We have found the Messiah!”

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Ariel Ministries, pp931

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp754.