

MBS TEXTE 128



6. Jahrgang
2009

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**Evangelizing the
Jewish People**

*Biblical Methodology
and Social Distinctives*



Theological Accents
Theologische Akzente

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Prepared for the International Jewish Evangelical Fellowship April 2007 Conference
Media, Pennsylvania

1. Aufl. 2009

Evangelizing the Jewish People

Biblical Methodology and Social Distinctives

Baruch Maoz

Introduction

The topic for this paper is the product of a common concept that has given rise to an emphasis on social distinctives as both a guide for evangelization and a basis for congregational life. This concept has repeatedly led to the assumption that, if the church learns to cater to the social distinctives of people groups, its witness will be more effective, resulting in further conversions. In the past, such an assumption led to discussions concerning the validity of Christian Ashrams, Mosques and Synagogues. Of these ideas, none but that of Christian Synagogues has remained, now under what used to be the guise of Messianic Synagogues. The still-evolving reality bred in and by these Synagogues is itself pertinent to the discussion now before us, and we shall have occasion to refer to that reality as we proceed.

This paper – unabashedly – begins with a number of fundamental assumptions. We believe that the Gospel is, in and of itself, the power of God unto salvation, and that there is neither need nor validity to an effort to render the

Gospel more attractive or more effective in accomplishing the purposes for which it was framed. Indeed, we believe that any human addition to the Gospel distorts the message God delivered into our care. We therefore deliberately address our hearers, as did the apostle, without *words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power* (I Cor. 1:17). We fully recognize that *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (I Cor. 1:18).

We further believe that true conversion, that is to say, conversion to God rather than to a religion or to a denomination, is an inherently spiritual work in the heart of man by the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of regeneration, of being born from above. It cannot, therefore, be the product of manipulation, intellectual persuasion, the offer of material or social bribes. Unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

We believe that the primary purpose of evangelism is to glorify God, not to add to our church. Conversion has to

do with a man recognizing the holiness of God and seeing himself in light of that holiness, as reflected in the law of God, as unclean, guilty and lost. We believe that only in light of that recognition should the Gospel of God's grace be preached to man, because only then is he capable of understanding his need of a saviour. We believe that such an understanding is the firstfruit of conversion, followed by faith and the seal of the Spirit in which repentant, believing, grateful man is assured that God forgives him for Jesus' sake. Finally, we believe that salvation is far more than forgiveness of sin. Salvation is nothing less than becoming *a partaker in the divine nature* (II Pet. 1:4), of being transformed by the power of the Spirit and made to love those things that are loved by God, despising those things despised by him, especially when found in the heart and life of the redeemed.

Therefore, the efficacy of our Gospel preaching is ultimately not up to us but to God.

The Gospel Versus Social and Cultural Distinctives

How the Gospel Should be Presented

We are, of course, to do all in our power to present the Gospel faithfully, coherently and persuasively, but the order is as just given: first of all, **faithfully**. No part of the gospel is to be shaped to the whim of sinful man; sec-

ond, **coherently**. As much as in us lies, every part of the Gospel we preach is to be presented in a way that is understandable to sinful man; third, **persuasively**. Every part of the Gospel we preach is to be presented in a way that addresses the image of God in man – his conscience, his will and his emotions.

It is important that we recognize in this regard the difference between addressing cultural and social distinctives on the one hand, and catering to those distinctives on the other. The Gospel does both. It **addresses** cultural and social distinctives by responding to the questions, needs and sinful propensities presented by those distinctives. It **caters** to those distinctives by accommodating their emphases, employing their language and increasingly sanctifying their potentials.

Perhaps some examples might be helpful. Jewish distinctives create a need for answers to questions concerning the cause of the nation's historic unpopularity in the family of nations, as evidenced by the consistent evil of Anti-Semitism. Will evil ever end? What is its cause? Instinctively, we recognize its fundamental invalidity and are forced to ask, why does it exist? The Gospel **addresses** our needs for answers relating to the existence of evil. It tells us that evil will have an end, that it is the fruit of man's rebellion, and that it exists under the Lordship of God, who will use it, contrary to its nature, to promote his own glory.

The Gospel also **addresses** our sinful social and cultural distinctives by call-

ing us to recognize that we Jews are no better than any of mankind; that we are as liable to sin and guilty of sin as are any of the nations. It addresses our sinful cultural propensities by calling us to humility and away from self-reliance so that we learn to rely on God. Paul recognized Jewish and Greek cultural distinctives when he said, *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom* (I Cor. 1:22). How did he relate to these distinctions? Did he meet the expectations created by them? Let Paul speak for himself: *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (I Cor. 1:22–24).

He refused to cater to cultural distinctions that touched the essence of the Gospel. He explained: *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God* (I Cor. 2:1). This was not a coincidence but the product of contemplated resolve (vs. 2). He goes on to say, *my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words* (vs. 4).

The reason for this is simple: any accommodation of the Gospel's essence to expectations and assumptions formed by an ungodly culture emasculates the Gospel and renders it ineffective. It removes the offense of the cross and renders the message an innocuous announcement of God spineless

benignity. It transforms preaching into an wholly human event in which the Holy Spirit has no part, consequent to which the faith of respondents is based on the wisdom of man rather than on the power of God. Conversion is transformed into mental or emotional assent void of moral and personal content, to which God is bound to respond with favour. **That** is not the Gospel.

Instead, Paul says, *this is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment* (I Cor. 2:13–15).

Paul accepted the fact that not all will be won over by his message: *we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God* (II Cor. 2:13–18).

The apostle knew himself to be a messenger of God. He knew there was no room to try and make the Gospel more attractive to his hearers, Jewish or Greek. All he needed to do was to proclaim the Gospel faithfully. *Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this*

ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (II Cor. 4:1–6). That's why he could say earlier, we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

On the other hand, the Gospel **caters** to our social and cultural distinctives by assuring us of an essential continuity with the promises, covenants and history of our people. It creates and enhances a sense of community. It speaks to us in a language we understand because it speaks to us in the terms forged by Moses and David, Isaiah and Ezekiel, our historic, biblical, national festivals all point to the Messiah whom the Gospel heralds and our national identity is wrapped up in his message. It also increasingly sanctifies our social and cultural distinctives by enlisting them

into the service of God; and it does so gradually, taking our distinct social and cultural weaknesses into account and weaning us off of them much as Paul's message weaned the Roman world off slavery by transforming the relations between slave and slave owner.

The Gospel should be preached **faithfully, coherently** and **persuasively**, and such should be the order of priorities. Let us explore that order. Then we shall free to go on and examine the three standards.

A **faithful** presentation of the Gospel must always be our first priority because that is the only means by which we can secure ourselves from the human tendency to add to, subtract from and otherwise extensively modify the truth. The Gospel is God's message, and only in a very secondary manner is it ours. We must heed the words of the Lord and neither add to nor subtract from his words (*Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar* Prov. 30:5–6).

A **coherent** presentation of the Gospel is necessary because the Gospel addresses the whole of man, including his rationale, his emotions and his will. Unless our hearers understand the message, it cannot have its intended impact on them. We recognize, of course, that the natural man is incapable of understanding spiritual truths, but that incapacity is not total. Most humans are capable of understanding enough to make a choice, although the choice they will make is always governed by

their sinful nature. Among these will be those upon whom the Spirit will work, enlightening their understanding still further, giving them faith and repentance. But the Spirit's work is precisely one of enlightenment, not of imparting new knowledge. Wood is needed for the fire to burn. Truth needs to be coherently proclaimed for the Spirit to enlighten it.

A **persuasive** presentation of the Gospel is necessary because, as we have said, the Gospel addresses the whole of man. Persuasion is an aspect of credibility. A Gospel preached without conviction carries no spiritual, moral, intellectual or emotional weight. It is a mere whimper. No, even a whimper conveys some felling and therefore some power of persuasion.

However, it is important to note that persuasion is not manipulation. It is not social or material bribery. It is a spirited presentation of a message such as was delivered by Stephen when he was filled with spirit (Like 1:17, 2:40, Acts. 17:6, Rom. 12:11). If we address our hearers in this way, they will often not be able to counter the spirit in which we speak (Acts. 6:10).

Persuasion is not enough. Goebbels had tremendous powers of persuasion, but he served the darkness and led many into darkness with him. His words were persuasive but incoherent; they played on the emotions and on the lowest aspirations of the people who heard him. Nor is **coherency** enough. The communist system was coherent. Nazism was coherent. So are atheism, polytheism

and Mormonism. Persuasion coupled with coherency is extremely dangerous unless the two are hitched to the wagon of truth. **Faithfulness** must always be our first priority.

The Gospel versus Jewish Social and Cultural Distinctives

It would be helpful if we commence by outlining those social and cultural distinctives addressed in this paper. I do not presume to present a full catalogue of the distinctives of Jewish society, or to be able to present such. What follows is a brief presentation of those I consider most pronounced in Jewish life and culture. Some of these distinctives are shared by other cultures. Which renders them precisely Jewish distinctives is the combination of these various traits on the one hand the intensity with which they are evidenced on the other.

a. A Sense of Family and of a Caring Community

Jewish people maintain a heightened sense of a caring community that has been largely lost in the West. Many Jewish people consider belonging to the nation a high priority, for which purpose they are prepared to invest a good deal of time, money and effort. Jews who arrived in a foreign city can always rely on the local Jewish community to feed and accommodate them, provide them with community, care for them if they are ill, harbour them if they are in

danger, and bury them when they die. Jews are expected to redeem their fellow Jews from captivity and slavery, to contribute of their resources to the weal of the community at large, including that of individuals within the community.

Belonging to the Jewish community is cherished, viewed as a high privilege. The threat of being removed from the Jewish community is generally viewed as truly dire. The lack of opportunity for a distinctly Jewish community, such as is often experienced in remote areas (it is hard to find a populated area of the world in which Jews are not to be found), weighs heavy on the average Jew. Wholly secularized Jewish young people throng by the hundreds and the thousands to attend Passover Seders organized by the Chabad movement in Goa, India and Lhasa, Tibet.

The Jewish family has earned a name for itself as generally close-knit, regardless of distances of geography, time, language, age or culture. Cultivated by the heightened sense of community and by the many family festivals in which all have a part, by the – now largely lost – practice of Sabbath-keeping, as well as by the need to support each other in the ongoing contest with a threatening environment, the Jewish family is an important bond of love, care, encouragement and mutuality.

In addition, ongoing Jewish suffering and sense of community have created among Jews a lively sense of social responsibility which has often put them at the forefront of social reformation. The role Jews played in the Communist

revolution, in the struggle against discrimination against blacks in the USA and in the overthrow of the apartheid regime in South Africa are but three examples among many that may be quoted.

b. A Sense of Historic Community – Continuity with the Hebrew Bible, Jewish History and Jewish Tradition

The average Jew may not know his Bible, but he still feels a deep sense of ownership of the Hebrew Bible (what Christians call “the Old Testament”) that is obvious even to the superficial observer of Jewish life. Jews today see themselves as the physical and ideological progeny of the patriarchs, prophets and poets of biblical lore. The Bible is viewed as containing the nation’s early history. It also functions in Jewish life as the foundation of what historians term *the national myth*, that is to say, the nation’s saga, expressive of its historic self understanding. Of course, the term myth is employed here only in a technical sense. It does not imply a shred of doubt as to the historic truth of the biblical record. This national myth, conjoined with the ongoing saga of Jewish history from the fourth century BC onward, unites Jews, regardless of color, language, age or background.

The Bible – especially the Torah, the Law as given thorough Moses – finds its abiding validity in its ongoing interpretive and applicatory tradition, enshrined by Judaism in the Mishna, the Talmud, the G’mara, and in rab-

binical dictum (*Halacha*) and legend (*Agada*), developed over the years. Most Jews pay only lip service to that tradition, as they do to the Bible. Most are ill acquainted with the tradition, as they are of the Bible. But they have a sense of reverent obligation to it in spite of their practical denial.

This sense of obligation explains the disproportionate influence that Orthodox Judaism has in Jewish life, as well as the disproportionate clout the representatives of Orthodoxy have in Israeli politics. Jews have adopted a substitutionary Judaism, a Judaism by proxy: most Jews believe that what Orthodox Judaism represents is what they are obliged to be by virtue of their Jewishness. But most Jews do not want to be what Orthodox Judaism represents. By way of compromise and in an effort to preserve Jewishness, they allow Orthodox Judaism a significant say in Jewish life, national and personal, while ignoring Orthodoxy when doing so is convenient.

It is undeniable that, in the providence of God, Orthodox Judaism has played a large and positive role in preserving the Jewish people over the course of two difficult millennia. Whatever negative impact Orthodoxy may have had on the nation and its values, it has certainly been the primary means by which the Jewish nation was preserved.

The Jewish historic treasure-chest is not devoid of moral, intellectual and religious value. With all its faults, Judaism is a people's evolving endeavor to contend with and subscribe to the

teachings of the word of God. Jews therefore rightly prize Judaism, to some extent because they tend to be unaware of its failings.

History itself plays a large part in Jewish self-consciousness. Largely viewed in terms of "them" and "us", history is rarely if ever presented in benign terms. Passover, Purim, Hanukkah and Holocaust Day are all annual reminders of the history of animosity harbored toward the Jewish people by the non-Jewish world. The Church's widespread and persistent persecution of Jews, the expulsions from Spain and Portugal, the pogroms, the Nazi murder machine and the West's blind eye to suffering experienced by millions of Jews at the hands of the Nazis, the present increasing anti-Israel attitude in Europe, and the ebb and flow of anti-Semitism in various parts of the world all contribute to the average Jew's sense of identity and to the nature of his relations with non-Jewish society.

c. A Sense of Rejection and Consistent Threat

These also contribute to the Jewish person's sense of rejection and to the continual threat under which the average Jewish person lives. In what western or Islamic country have Jews not encountered anti-Semitism? In what country have they not experienced discrimination? Shakespeare could never be accused of being a Jew-lover, yet his Shylock puts it well, "*He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked*

at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew". Thus, Shylock is forced to plead his humanity: "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die?"

A more modern depiction on Anti-Semitism may be found in Dickens' Fagin in *Oliver Twist*. Fagin, repeatedly described by Dickens as "the Jew", is ugly, miserly, and avaricious, an embodiment of villainy. He is described as a "loathsome reptile" with "fangs such as should have been a dog's or rat's", or even as "the old one," a contemporary nickname for the devil.

Jews have been hounded as have members of no other nation, for longer and with more ardent determination than have the worst of humanity, for no other reason but that they are Jewish. After two terrible millennia of such persecution, it is but a small wonder that the average Jew is defensive, aggressive and ambitious, or that many have developed a cunning bred by necessity. Jews have been persuaded by history that they must either excel in the world, or sink, that they must offer their environment substantial gain, or be expelled, rejected and oppressed.

d. A Sense of Self-Reliance

Such persistent, wide-spread animosity, has bred among Jews a strong tendency to individualistic self reliance in their personal relations and with other communities. This tendency is greatly strengthened by the direction Orthodox Judaism has taken, according to which a Jew – on his own, at times acting as a member or representative of his community – must please God, bring Messiah, achieve the kingdom of God or otherwise secure blessing and favor. It is within human reach to do so. Those who achieve sufficient knowledge have authority to determine the meaning of scriptural injunctions, so that rabbis may even silence a voice from heaven (Acknai's Oven, Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metsi'a 59.2.1) or astonish Moses with their applications of the revelation committed to him.

Jews may also achieve esoteric power that enables them to manipulate God or force him to act as they deem fit. The well known story of Honi the Circle-Maker is but one outstanding example of this:

Once there was a terrible drought in the land of Israel. The people sent for Honi the Circle-Maker, who prayed, but no rains came. He drew a circle in the dust and stood in the middle of it. Raising his hands to heaven, he vowed, "God, I will not move from this circle until you send rain!"

Immediately a few drops fell. The people complained to Honi, "This is but a poor excuse for rain, only enough to

release you from your vow". So Honi turned back to heaven and cried, "Not for this trifling drizzle did I ask, but for enough rain to fill wells, cisterns, and ditches." Then the heavens opened up and poured down rain in buckets, each drop big enough to fill a ladle. The wells and the cisterns overflowed, and the wadis flooded the desert. The people of Jerusalem ran for safety to the Temple Mount

"Honi!" they cried. "Save us or we will all be destroyed like the generation of the Flood! Stop the rains!" Then Honi said to God, "This people that you brought out of Egypt can take neither too much evil nor too much good. Please give them what they ask so that they may be happy." So God sent a strong wind that blew away the rains.

Shimon ben Shetakh, head of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, said to Honi, "I should excommunicate you for your audacity, but how can I, since you're Honi! God coddles you as a father does his young child. The child says: 'Hold me, Daddy, and bathe me, and give me poppy seeds and peaches and pomegranates,' and his father gives him whatever he wants."

With such powers envisaged, is there any wonder that there is a pronounced tendency to individualism among Jews?

How, then is the Gospel to be preached to the Jewish people, taking into account these social and cultural distinctives? How does the Gospel

address these, and how does it cater to them. That is the question we must now explore. Each of these following points could be greatly enlarged upon. Our goal here is to provoke thought, discussion and self examination, leading to such enlargement in the future.

Preaching the Gospel to Jews

Preaching the Gospel by Addressing Jewish Social and Cultural Distinctives

a. A Sense of Family and of a Caring Community

We have stated, *"Belonging to the Jewish community is cherished, viewed as a high privilege. The threat of being removed from the Jewish community is generally viewed as truly dire."* The tendency is, therefore, to seek to ameliorate the threat of such a loss which might be inflicted on converts to Messiah by lowering the Gospel threshold and by accommodating the Gospel to Orthodox Judaism.

However, that is not the biblical method of preaching the Gospel. The tendency to put family and community above God should be addressed with the same kind of firmness that the bible evidences throughout. Moses addressed this issue: *If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the peoples around*

you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. You must certainly put him to death ... If you hear it said about one of the towns the LORD your God is giving you to live in that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods you have not known), then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, 15 you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town (Deut. 13:6–9, 12–14)

If we are to preach the Gospel faithfully, we have no choice but to call our fellow Jews to be willing to follow Messiah *outside the camp*, where the nation's outcasts are to be found, *bearing the disgrace he bore* (Heb. 13:13). We must remember that Messiah called us to be willing to lose all for him, whom to gain is eternal joy and glory. He made it clear: *anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me* (Matt. 10:37). After all, there is a surpassing greatness to knowing Christ compared to which the best and highest of Judaism is but a shadow.

We dare not lower a threshold established by God himself. Those who have attempted to do so have reaped the sad fruit of their endeavors. We are now faced with a generation of self-centered, pleasure-seeking, indolent Christians

who lack the backbone necessary to live and to die for Messiah, to challenge and turn the world upside down.

Could the Gospel be preached more coherently or more persuasively that by focusing on god rather than on man?

b. A Sense of Historic Community – Continuity with the Hebrew Bible, Jewish History and Jewish Tradition

We have spoken of the influence Orthodox Judaism has over Jewish life. If we are to preach to Gospel faithfully to Jews, that influence should be addressed by a frank demonstration of its failure to understand the word of God. Rather than continuity with Judaism, we should call for a radical discontinuity that will enable us to be faithful to the Law and the Prophets. To this end we must engage in serious biblical and theological reflection, and must learn to address our Jewish compatriots intelligently, rather than attempting to silence their arguments with a string of disconnected scriptures.

We must address what I have termed "Judaism by proxy". No one can be Jewish on our behalf. None but Messiah can obey God for us, and his doing so obliges us to a life of consistent and sacrificial obedience.

We must address the frequent modern Jewish affirmation of duty that may be ignored when doing so is considered convenient. God repeatedly spoke to our forefathers through the prophets on this very point, charging them with hypocrisy, disobedience and rebellion.

It was for such that the first and second temples were destroyed, our land repeatedly invaded and our people twice exiled. The Gospel addresses all men as *children of disobedience* (Eph. 2:2, 5:6) and Israel frequently earned that ignoble epitaph. Speaking of Judah Isaiah says, *this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, "Send them back"* (Isa. 42:22). Why has this come about? The prophet replies, *Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come? Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his law* (Isa. 42:22–24). Other passages could be easily multiplied.

Another Jewish social distinctive which we must address as we preach the Gospel is the tendency to view the world in terms of “them” and “us”. Of course, we cannot and ought not ignore the wide-spread existence of anti-Semitism. We should combat that aberration wherever it raises its ugly head. But God made all man of one, Adam. All are equal in his eyes be they Jewish or gentile, freemen of slaves, male or female, though they are not the same. It is the purpose of God, *when the times will have reached their fulfilment, to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Messiah* (Eph. 1:10).

We must therefore labour for the *one new man* (Eph. 2:15) which God is recreating in Messiah. We must work for the undoing of the divisions within mankind, making every possible effort to maintain and to sustain *the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace* (Eph. 4:3). True ecumenicity is to be found in the Body of Messiah, when humans of all nations are united through the sacrifice of the fleshly body of Messiah by which all are reconciled to God the Father. Anything less than that is less than the Gospel. It is neither coherent nor persuasive.

c. A Sense of Rejection and Consistent Threat

Faithful Gospel preaching will entail our addressing the Jewish sense of rejection and of consistent threat. While there is more to be said on this topic in relation to catering to that sense, it is important for to remind ourselves that when we discover ourselves to be accepted by God, man’s rejection counts for much less than before. When we come to know that the Lord is our shepherd, we sense far less threatened even while we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We fear no evil because we know that Jehovah God himself is with us to guide, protect and to comfort. Nothing can better address nagging fear than the love of God.

Coherence requires that we do not ignore obstacles to understanding, even if these are largely emotional – all the more so when they are firmly based on historical realities. Such coherence is

also necessary if we wish to preach the Gospel persuasively.

d. A Sense of Self-Reliance

We Jews are not the only people who need to learn humility, but neither are we excused from that duty. Frank Sinatra's arrogant "*I Did It My Way*" is but a tiny sampling of the Jewish sense of self-reliance. The hunger to undo one's sense of rejection and of threat by justifying the declaration "*I Did It*" – I, not God, must be brought before the cross of Calvary and there taught the impossibility of pleasing a God who is so holy that no degree of human effort could ever satisfy his terrifying purity.

We Jews must be taught to understand that we cannot manipulate the eternal maker of all that is, that God is not subject to our machinations, formulas, rituals, magic, incantations, prayer or fasts. He is LORD, above all, subject to none, glorious in himself and beautiful to behold, so beautiful that none can see him and live. Our God is a consuming fire!

Preaching that assume and inculcates such a recognition is faithful, coherent and persuasive preaching.

Preaching the Gospel by Catering to Jewish Social and Cultural Distinctives

a. A Sense of Family and of a Caring Community

We stated, "*Jewish people maintain a heightened sense of a caring community that has been largely lost in the West*", and

went on to give some practical examples. Surely The church should provide such a community to all who know and love the Lord, to some extent compensating for the loss Jewish Christians will incur as the price of their obedience to Messiah.

However, it would serve the church well if it allowed and encouraged within its own fold Jewish Christian fellowships, much as they allow Sunday School classes for the young, youth, men and women fellowships, and the such like. Jewish Christians have needs as specific and as valid as do these other groups.

Of course, such fellowships should be subject to church oversight and subservient to valid church concerns and interests. They should never be allowed to develop into substitute congregations. But in such fellowships Jewish Christians can reach out to each other, comfort, encourage and teach each other, participate in Jewish causes, celebrate Jewish feasts and present the Gospel in an understandable manner to fellow Jews who are not Christians. By virtue of their being part of the church, they are both addressing and catering to many of the issues raised by Jewish social distinctives vis a vis the Gospel.

Finally, the church should instruct and equip for, as well as exemplify a lively sense of social responsibility. In other words, the church should exercise its prophetic role in society rather than serve, as it sometimes has to its shame, the rearguard of moral social change. Should the church regain this divine

calling, it would well cater to the sense of social responsibility to be found in Jewish circles.

The Gospel will be far more coherent, far more persuasive to the Jewish mind which preached from and within such a context. It will be so because it will be a far more faithful presentation of the truth.

b. A Sense of Historic Community – Continuity with the Hebrew Bible, Jewish History and Jewish Tradition

Jews expect faith in Messiah not to be discontinuous with Jewishness. Their expectation is born of the recognition that Messiah is promise in the Hebrew scriptures, and that he is promised Israel. No other nation was promised Messiah. The other nations were *without a Messiah and foreigners to the covenants of the promise* (Eph. 2:12). We should therefore respond to this Jewish expectation by catering to it.

The church must revert to a more extensively and more thoroughly biblical Faith by a better understanding of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. The church must learn to avoid proof-texting. It must learn to view the Gospel as the true Old Testament Faith. It can only achieve this through a theological comprehension of the Hebrew Bible that will be translated into solid, doctrinally-informed expository preaching.

The Church must address *“Judaism by proxy”* by rejecting *“Christianity by proxy”*. It must learn to insist again on church discipline, on the exemplary

moral behaviour of its members and especially of its officers. What Jesus did for us on Calvary obliges us to a life of consistent and sacrificial obedience. Surely, it is such an insistence that gives our message the moral and intellectual coherency it would otherwise lack. Such coherency renders our message morally, intellectually and emotionally persuasive.

c. A Sense of Rejection and Consistent Threat

Faithful Gospel preaching will revel in the grace of God toward all men. It will cultivate recognition of that grace and an application of it in the give-and-take of church life. Faithful preaching of the Gospel will therefore naturally cater to the Jewish sense of rejection and of threat.

Faithful Gospel preaching will entail developing an awareness and a consideration of Jewish sensitivities that are the product of a long and painful history. This will inevitably impact terminology used in the pulpit. The term *“the Jews”*, so common in the NT, was used by Jews and simply referred to the Jewish people or, as is likely on the Gospel of John, to the inhabitant of Judah as distinct from those of Galilee. But it has become a largely pejorative term – note for example the use of the term *“the Jew”* in Shakespeare’s already quoted *Merchant of Venice*. One example is brought here from Shakespeare’s Lorenzo: *“If e’er the Jew her father come to heaven, It will be for his gentle daughter’s sake: And never dare misfortune cross*

her foot, Unless she do it under this excuse, That she is issue to a faithless Jew.”

Jewish Christians need to be treated by their fellow Christians as humans, not as museum pieces or as remnants of long-passed ages. They do not need to be assured of acceptance; they simply need to be accepted for what they are, given an equal place in church life and encouraged to play their part in the wonderful symphony of Body life. Coherency is a product of consistency. Without consistency, our message can carry no weight. It might excite intellectual curiosity, but it cannot be persuasive. Consistency is not merely a matter of a well-constructed message; it is also a matter of well-demonstrated social consequences. We need to evidence the truth of the Gospel by the way we relate to the larger body of humanity.

d. A Sense of Self-Reliance

Every culture has its strengths and its weaknesses. Faithful preaching of the Gospel will not only address the weaknesses of cultures; it will also enlist its strengths while modifying them toward

the image of Messiah. Humility needs to be taught, above all by example. It needs to be preached, above all by the nature of the Gospel we preach. But a self of self-reliance can also be a confidence and a willingness to innovate that could serve any church well if handled wisely, gently – and humbly!

May God give us the grace to preach his Gospel by word of mouth and way of life faithfully, coherently and persuasively. May he then bless our poor efforts with a mighty work of the Spirit, hastening the day when Israel and will be a people in love with him, obedient to him and willingly reliant upon him. Amen

The Author

Über den Autor



American-born Jewish Christian converted in Israel while serving in the army in 1963. Married to Bracha, father of three. Pastor since 1976 of Grace and Truth Christian Congregation. (He pastored the church until his retirement, at the age of 65, in January 2009.) Authored nine theological and expositional books in Hebrew and one in English, another of his works is being prepared for publication in English. Two of his works have been translated into Dutch. Contributor to numerous books and author of numerous articles, including the extensive Jewish Christian Occasional Papers. Editor of the Modern Hebrew Bible, member of the editorial team for the New Hebrew Translation of the New Testament and of the Annotated New Hebrew New Testament. Initiator of Mishkan; the International theological forum on Jewish evangelism, Founder and Chairman of the International Jewish Evangelical Fellowship and of Keren Tkuma, the national social aid fund in Israel. Founder of the Fellowship of Hebrew Speaking Congregations in Israel, Instructor at the Israeli College of the Bible. Founder of the Messianic Action Committee which led the successful international protest against proposed anti-Christian legislation in Israel.

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Publisher:

Thomas Schirrmacher, Prof. Dr. phil.
Dr. theol. DD.

Editor:

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