

*A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People*

# MISHKAN

*Issue 84, 2021*

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*A Virtuous Woman Who Can Find?*

*Women in the Body of Messiah – From “Church Mothers” to  
Modern-Day Messianic Women*

# MISHKAN

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# MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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# Introduction

Welcome to this double issue of *Mishkan*.

The topic for this issue is women through history: Church Mothers; Deaconesses and Women in Israeli Messianic Communities; and others. Some of the women featured in the issue are famous and well known to us, like Edith Stein. Other women, such as Emilia Baeyertz and Maisie Pillemer, are perhaps not as well known, but nonetheless they were women who made a big difference in their time.

Jerusalem, October 2021.

Happy reading,

Caspari Center staff

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# Church Mothers – Creative Women with Many Roles

Anni Maria Laato

## 1. Introduction

In the first centuries AD, women played important roles in the spread and formation of Christianity. As martyrs, ascetics, mothers, pilgrims, poets, and, in many other ways, active members of the Church, they participated creatively in the development of Christian practices and theology. They studied the Scriptures, taught, prayed, and took care of the poor and sick. Some founded and led hospitals and monasteries; others travelled to the Holy Land and wrote about what they experienced; still others hosted Christian services in their homes. While some of these women had official tasks as deaconesses, widows, or virgins, others were lay people. These early Christian women can be called Church Mothers.

In recent decades, there has been a notable increase in scholarly publications on early Christian women.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will give an overview on what we know of these women, as well as give some examples of the many roles they could have. Before doing that, I will say a few words about the sources and what should be taken into consideration when reading them.

## 2. Where Can We Find Information About Church Mothers?

Only a few texts written by early Christian women are preserved today: Egeria's *Itinerarium*; Perpetua's diary; Faltonia Betitia Proba's cento-poem; and a letter written by Paula and Eustochium.<sup>2</sup> There are, however, a number of texts about women: martyr-stories; lives

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<sup>1</sup> See Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Michael Glazier, 1983); Ross Shepard Kraemer, "Women and Gender" in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christianity*, eds. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 465–492; Lynn Cohick and Amy Brown Hughes, *Christian Women in the Patristic World: Their Influence, Authority, and Legacy in the Second through Fifth Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017). My book on Church Mothers, *Matres Ecclesiae – Kirkkoäidit* (Perussanoma 2011), is published in Finnish.

<sup>2</sup> Useful collections of texts by or about Early Christian Women in English translations include Carolinne White, *Lives of Roman Christian Women. Translated and edited with an Introduction and Notes* (London: Penguin, 2010); Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Patricia Cox Miller, *Women in Early Christianity. Translations from Greek Texts* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005). An English translation on Proba's cento is found in Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet. The Christian Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia*

(*vitae*); church orders; and historical texts. Women also occasionally appear in theological treatises and sermons; for example, Jerome tells of Paula and Eustochium in many of his biblical commentaries, and Augustine tells about his mother Monnica here and there in his texts. There are many letters written to women, most notably by John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Jerome. Women's letters to these bishops are not preserved, but that is no wonder; this is also most often the case with men's letters — usually only the famous bishop's letters were copied and saved, not the letters they received. We can also learn about Christian women's lives by studying funerary inscriptions, visual art, and other material sources.

These sources must be read with some caution. As antique texts, they are not meant to give modern-style objective descriptions about the persons in question, but rather to set their lives (or deaths) as examples to other Christians, or just to remember their good deeds. Additionally, we must bear in mind that texts in antiquity often followed given models and conventions, and therefore, for example, *vitae* (lives) usually emphasize the holiness of the people and remain silent about negative things. We must also bear in mind that texts written by men do not necessarily picture a woman in the same way she would have pictured herself, but instead reflect the author's ideas and intentions. Finally, some texts, in particular church orders, do not usually describe how things actually were, but more how the author thought they should be.<sup>3</sup> Despite these challenges with the sources, there is quite a lot we can learn about the early Christian women.

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*Proba* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), and on Egeria's *Itinerarium* in Anne McGowan and Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria. A New Translation of the Itinerarium Egeriae with Introduction and Commentary*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Academic, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> An additional question is the authenticity of the texts that claim to be written by a woman. While there is no doubt about the authenticity of Egeria's and Proba's texts, some scholars think that Jerome wrote the letter preserved in Paula's name, and some have even doubted whether Perpetua's diary is genuine (see Kraemer). For the majority view on this matter, see Thomas J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). On the other hand, others have suggested that some anonymous texts may have in fact been written by women. For arguments for the authenticity of Paula and Eustochium's letter to Marcella, see Anni Maria Laato, "What makes the Holy Land Holy? A Debate between Paula, Eustochium, and Marcella (Jerome, Ep. 46)" in: *Holy Places and Cult*, eds. Erkki Koskenniemi and Cornelis de Vos, J. (Winona Lake, Indiana, USA: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 169–199. For possible examples of other texts written by women, see Susan Weingarten, "Was the Pilgrim from Bordeaux a Woman? A Reply to Laurie Douglass" in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7:2, summer 1999, 291–297.

### 3. Late Antiquity – A Changing World

During the first centuries, Christianity spread rapidly to new areas in the Roman Empire and even beyond its limits. In new cultural environments, and faced with new historical situations, Christians had to find new ways to express their faith. When the persecution ceased in the beginning of the fourth century, travel became easier, making it possible to build churches and monasteries, to take care of the sick and the poor in more organized ways, and to live openly as a Christian. The new situation meant also more responsibilities in society. In these changing situations, Christian women developed new ways to live according to their faith.

Since at this time there did not yet exist any old Christian traditions, there was quite a lot of space for creativity. Christian women could initiate activities that had not existed before. So, Fabiola founded a hospital in Rome, while Marcella, Makrina, and others founded ascetic communities and developed daily praxis in these. Surprisingly, many of the first pilgrims that travelled to the Holy Land were women.<sup>4</sup>

In the Roman Empire, the society was highly hierarchical. Rich and poor, free people and slaves, everybody knew where they belonged. Christian faith, and especially the ascetic movement, challenged this system, but the change was slow. Even when Christianity had become the religion of the majority, a person's life was in many ways dictated by the class one was born into. The rich and educated women lived completely different lives than the slaves. For example, upper-class women could own large estates and be responsible for running them, and other women could be active in many professions and in this way have a lot of influence in society, despite the fact that they could not officially participate in politics.

It has been discussed if, and how, Christianity changed the view on women in antiquity, and what becoming a Christian meant to individual women. It is not easy to give a simple answer. For some women, a lot changed; for others not so much. Most women still stayed at home, taking care of their children and their property or being active in their different professions. Wealthy Christian women still got better education and had more opportunities to travel than poorer ones. However, Christian ideals of equality and charity,

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<sup>4</sup> For women pilgrims, see Anni Maria Laato, "Jerusalem as Egeria Saw It" in: *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish people* 81 (2019), 20–26; Laato, "What Makes the Holy Land Holy?", 169–170.



as well as the development of the ascetic movement, initiated new ways to live and challenged old customs and attitudes.<sup>5</sup>

Ascetic movement spread in the fourth century and attracted many women from all classes of society. Becoming a mother was no longer seen as the only option for a woman as it had traditionally been in the Roman society. As an ascetic, she could have the option of focusing on studies, prayer, and spiritual life, or in some cases she could become a leader of a large community of ascetic women. In these communities, traditional boundaries could be broken; for example, Gregory of Nyssa, in the book he has written about his sister Makrina, stresses that Makrina and their mother Emmelia, who originally came from a very wealthy family, shared their lives with their former servants in their ascetic community, performing similar tasks and living under the same conditions. In ascetic communities, the lives of men and women could be very similar; the days consisted of attending services, praying, studying the Scripture and theological literature, and helping the sick and poor, as well as performing everyday tasks such as cooking and cleaning.

According to Christian teaching, it was clear that before God women and men are equal. Christians valued highly the study of the Bible and spiritual life — in this aspect there was no difference between women and men. Both attended the same services, listened to the same homilies, and were expected to understand the teaching and to live according to it; the ethical commandments were the same. Martyrs and holy persons, such as Perpetua and Felicity, were seen as examples for all, both women and men. Yet the attitudes of ancient Roman society occasionally shine through in the writings of the Fathers. Women martyrs may occasionally be praised for being courageous and strong “despite being female.” It could be written, for example, like this: “in case anyone should think to criticize me for praising a woman, I would say that one should not refer to her (Melania) as a woman but as a man because she behaved like a man” (Prologue of the Life of Melania the Younger).

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<sup>5</sup> One of the greatest changes to society happened in relation to babies. In Roman society, it had been acceptable to abandon unwanted newborns to die. The Jews and Christians opposed this practice, and eventually the laws were changed. For more on this topic, see Erkki Koskenniemi, *The Exposure of Infants among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009).

#### 4. Augustine's Letters as a Window into Women's Lives

Because so little material from antiquity has survived to our day, in our sources we mostly meet women from the highest levels of the society. Fortunately, some of the sermons and letters of the Fathers give us an opportunity to look into the lives of more ordinary women. I shall start with presenting some of the letters Augustine wrote to different women.

Augustine did not have such close personal female friends as Jerome and John Chrysostom did, but there still are many letters to women that were preserved. He consoles Sapida, a grieving sister (letter 263); advises an over-enthusiastic ascetic Ecdicia (letter 262); encourages the young Florentina to study theology (letter 266); and gives advice to Seleuciana (letter 265) and Maxima (letter 264), who had encountered heretical teachers.

Letter 130 to Anicia Faltonia Proba is a long and thorough tractate on prayer; Thomas Aquinas quotes it in *Summa Theologica*. In another letter (131), Augustine consoles the same Proba after some unidentified loss. Proba's granddaughter Demetrias decided to take veil and got advice from three leading theologians of her day: Augustine (letter 150); Jerome (letter 130); and Pelagius (PL 30.15–45).

Through Augustine's letters we get also glimpses of the problems in Africa. In letter 208 he gives advice to consecrated virgin Felicia, who had earlier been a Donatist but then converted to the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, Augustine had sent a new bishop to her hometown of Fussala, a young man who had turned out to be dishonest and greedy. In this long letter, Augustine apologizes and discusses what to do when pastors and bishops act wrongly. One should still not leave the church. Another case, where Augustine at least partly admits that he made a mistake, is found in his letter 126 to Albina. It starts wonderfully: "My dear brother and your son Pinianus never was in the threat of losing his life by the people of Hippo." Pinianus and his wife Melania had visited Augustine's hometown Hippo, and the congregation had tried to forcefully ordain Pinianus as a priest. He refused, and a tumult had developed. Eventually Melania and Pinianus fled into the night, never to come back. They sailed to the Holy Land, and Pinianus never got ordained. In this letter to Pinianus' mother Albina, Augustine tries to explain everything as well as he can.

When it comes to Augustine's attitudes towards women, many scholars have focused on the few utterances in his theological treatises, above all *On the Trinity*. The letters he wrote to real women he actually knew show that he respected them highly and expected

them to understand quite deep theological discussions. He even took time to write to less-educated women and answer their questions.

### 5. Mothers and Grandmothers

Most Christian women were married and led ordinary lives raising their children. In many homilies and theological treatises, we find teaching about marriage and love between spouses.

Many bishops remembered their own mothers with warmth and appreciation. The most famous example is that of Augustine, who in his *Confessiones* and in his other texts talks about his mother Monnica<sup>6</sup> a great deal, describing her faith, prayers, and love, but also her shortcomings.<sup>7</sup> Many remember the answer she got from a bishop who grew tired of her petitions that the bishop should help his son: “It cannot be that the son of those tears should perish” — but not so many know that she is the reason for the English expression “when in Rome.” Monnica had asked what she should do when she noted that some practices were different in Milan than in other Christian parishes. Then-bishop Ambrose had answered with his famous principle: in matters that people can decide (that is, they are not commanded in the Scripture nor in tradition), he usually follows the praxis of the local community. When in Rome, he does like the Romans do; when in Milan, as they do.<sup>8</sup> With this answer, Monnica was happy. Monnica was also there when the Arians surrounded a Catholic Church, and the faithful stayed inside the church singing and praying.<sup>9</sup>

Mothers and grandmothers were important educators, as in the case of the family of Makrina, Basil, and Gregory. The grandmother, Makrina the Elder, came from Neocaesarea in Pontus. As a child she had listened to the teaching of Gregory Thaumaturgos, a student of Origen. Thaumaturgos was known for his teaching about the Holy Spirit. Makrina’s grandchild, Gregory of Nyssa, tells that during the persecutions she had fought for the Lord; that is, she was a confessor. She had many grandchildren, of which several became bishops and leaders of monasteries. Two of them, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, have greatly

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<sup>6</sup> In this article, I prefer to use her original name instead of the English version.

<sup>7</sup> For Monnica, see the wonderful book by Gillian Clark: *Monica, An Ordinary Saint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Aug. Letters 36.32 and 54.3.

<sup>9</sup> Aug. Conf. 9.7.15.

influenced the teaching on the Holy Spirit — can we assume that their grandmother had transmitted to them teachings of Gregory Thaumaturgos? Her eldest grandchild, Makrina the younger, became a famous ascetic, a leader of a community, and an important spiritual advisor.

In the texts, we meet glimpses of Christian mothers bringing their children to baptism and to participate in the liturgy. Egeria mentions that even small children participated in the liturgical life in Jerusalem. She tells that on Palm Sunday, when the people came down from the Mount of Olives to the city, parents carried their children on their shoulders with branches of palms in their hands.<sup>10</sup> Christian mothers also discussed how to raise children and what kind of things these should read instead of antique mythology. Makrina's mother expressed opinions on in which order Biblical texts should be read and Proba provided them with new materials.<sup>11</sup> Jerome gave, in his letters 197 and 128, instructions to mothers on how to raise little girls: they should study a lot, especially languages.

Other notable mothers and grandmothers include John Chrysostom's mother Anthusa, the Nonna, the mother of Gregory Nazianzen, his sister Gorgonia, Paula the mother of Eustochium, Proba (not the poet) and Melania the Elder.

## **6. Hebrew Studies on the Aventine Hill in Rome**

Many of the early Christian women are known for reading and studying the Scripture. In ascetic communities and monasteries, the Scripture was read, studied, and learned by heart.

When Egeria writes about the liturgical life in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, she constantly refers to the rich and well-reflected use of the Bible in the holy sites. Melania writes that she copied texts by hand and read commentaries. Paula and Eustochium had developed such knowledge on the Bible that they thought that Ambrose's *Commentary on Luke* was so bad they asked Jerome for a better one. In his letters to ascetic women, Jerome gives lots of advice and encouragement for reading the Scripture.

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<sup>10</sup> *Itinerarium Egeriae* 31.3.

<sup>11</sup> For Christian education of children, see Anni Maria Laato, "Adam and Eve Rewritten in Vergil's Words: Cento of Proba" in *Adam and Eve Story in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Perspectives*, eds. Laato, A. & Valve, L. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2017) 85–117.

In this article, I cannot go into all this material, but I will lift up one person, Marcella in Rome.<sup>12</sup> She was widowed young, and founded an ascetic community in her palace on the Aventine hill in Rome. There the ladies studied the Scripture, and something about the level of their seriousness and abilities shows that they discussed how certain words in Hebrew should be translated. Several of Jerome's letters to her are preserved. In his letter 127, Jerome characterizes Marcella as follows:

As in those days my [Jerome's] name was held in some renown as that of a student of the Scriptures, she [Marcella] never came to see me without asking me some questions about them, nor would she rest content at once, but on the contrary would dispute them; this, however, was not for the sake of argument, but to learn by questioning the answers to such objections might, as she saw, be raised. How much virtue and intellect, how much holiness and purity I found in her I am afraid to say, both lest I may exceed the bounds of men's belief and lest I may increase your sorrow by reminding you of the blessings you have lost. This only will I say, that whatever I had gathered together by long study, and by constant meditation made part of my nature, she tasted, she learned and made her own.

Her delight in the divine scriptures was incredible. She was for ever singing, "Your words have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against you," as well as the words which describe the perfect man, "his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law does he meditate day and night."

She remembered also the prophet's words, "through your precepts I get understanding," and felt sure that only when she had fulfilled these would she be permitted to understand the Scriptures. In this sense we read elsewhere that "Jesus began both to do and teach."

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<sup>12</sup> For Marcella, see Silvia Letsch-Brunner, *Marcella – discipula et magistra: auf den Spuren einer römischen Christin des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998).

## 7. Early Christian women and Jerusalem

There lived, of course, Christian women in Jerusalem from the beginning of the Church. During the time of the persecutions, there was, however, not much interest in pilgrimage there. As soon as it became possible to travel safely, pilgrimages began to increase. Constantine's mother Helena came to Jerusalem already in the year 326 and set an example for following generations. In fact, many of the fourth-century pilgrims that we know by name are women. I shall present some of them.

Melania the Elder (c. 341–410) was a young widow from high aristocracy, who left Rome in 372 to travel to Jerusalem. She came first to Egypt, where she visited desert fathers for several months, most notably Pambo. She stayed in the Holy Land for more than 25 years, establishing monasteries for men and women. Church historian Palladios tells in his *Historia Lausiaca* that Melania was an extremely learned woman. Palladios writes,

Melania was very learned and loved literature. She would turn night into day by going through all the writings of the ancient commentators — three million lines of Origen and a quarter of a million of Gregory, Stephen, Pierius and Basil as well as other admirable writers. She did not read them only once or in a casual way but worked hard on them, ploughing her way through each seven or eight times. So, she was able to be liberated from what is falsely called knowledge and to mount on wings, thanks to those books: elevated by good hopes she transformed herself into a spiritual bird and so made her journey to Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Theologically, she was close to Origen and his followers, and befriended Rufinus of Aquileia and Evagrius of Pontos. Jerome first commented positively on her but changed his mind during the origenist controversy.

Melania's granddaughter, Melania the Younger (c. 385–439), came to Jerusalem two generations later. Her life is well known because of her *vita* written by Gerontios, the texts written by Palladios, and because of what Augustine says about her in his letters 124–126. She, too, came from an extremely wealthy family. She married Pinianus when she was young, and when their children died at infancy, they decided to assume ascetic lifestyles. The couple

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<sup>13</sup> White, *Lives of Roman Christian Women*, 55–56.

fled Rome when the Goths threatened it and settled for a time in Africa. From there, they came to the Holy Land via Alexandria (where they had had a meeting with Cyril of Alexandria). She befriended the empress Eudocia (see below) and together they built a chapel on the Mount of Olives.

Melania the Younger was involved in theological discussions on the three most timely topics at her time: Christology, Pelagianism, and Donatism. She met Donatists in Africa at her estate. Pelagius was in the Holy Land after his teaching had been condemned. Melania discussed with him and decided that his theology was in order, and subsequently wrote to Augustine about her views. Augustine answered with a tractate called *On the grace of Christ and original sin*. We do not know in detail Melania's views on Christology, but she followed Cyril of Alexandria, and Gerontios says that she opposed Nestorios' views.

I have elsewhere written about Egeria, who in the 380s came to the Holy Land and Jerusalem *orationis causa*, that is, to pray on the holy sites.<sup>14</sup> In her travel diary, she carefully describes her journeys in the Holy Land, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor, as well as the rich liturgical life of Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> Her text is an enormously important source for knowledge about the holy sites, pilgrimage, liturgy, and Christian life in the Holy Land at this time.

Close to the time of Egeria's visit, or perhaps even at the same time, Paula and Eustochium came to the Holy Land.<sup>16</sup> They were Jerome's disciples and friends and founded a monastery in Bethlehem close to the place where Jerome lived. They too, were learned women, and Jerome dedicated several of his biblical commentaries to them. In his letter 108, Jerome describes in detail Paula's journey through the Holy Land. Unlike Egeria, Paula was deeply emotional when she visited biblical sites, and she told that with the eyes of faith, she could see biblical events happening in front of her eyes. Jerome's letter as well as Paula's letter to Marcella (letter 46 in Jerome's letters) are also important sources for the holy topography and architecture in the Holy Land in the fourth century. Today, when visiting the grotto in Bethlehem where Jerome worked with his translations and commentaries, the names of Paula, Eustochium, and Fabiola, are visible in a column.

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<sup>14</sup> Laato, "Jerusalem as Egeria Saw it"; Laato, *Egeria: Matka pyhälle maalle*, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> See McGowan and Bradshaw, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria*.

<sup>16</sup> For their visit, see Laato, "What Makes the Holy Land Holy?"

The Greek Empress Aelia Eudocia Augusta (c. 401–460) made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 438–439, and returned there in 443, after being banished from the court, to stay there for the rest of her life. Eudocia wrote poems in hexameter on Christian themes. According to *Life of Barsauma*, Eudocia used her influence on Theodosius to improve the situation of the Jews so that they were allowed to come to pray at the site of the Jerusalem Temple for the first time since its destruction by the Romans in 70 AD.<sup>17</sup> Not all Church Mothers were as positive towards the Jews; like many bishops and teachers at their time, for example, Paula saw the time of the Jews as passed.

There are many other woman pilgrims who came to Jerusalem and the Holy Land to pray and to participate in the life of the local Church. It was important for them to read at actual sites found in text from the Scripture. Paula and Egeria especially express the theology of pilgrimage. Of course, for Christians the most important thing is the heavenly Jerusalem, the home of all Christians, but visiting the earthly Jerusalem can help Christians to understand the Scripture better and to grow in faith.

### **8. Many Roles of Women**

When it comes to the interests and emphases of the early Christian women, we find the same diversity as in the church overall. Some were more inclined to theological learning; others were more practical. The African martyr Crispina discussed religious freedom philosophically with proconsul Anullinus, whereas Perpetua and Felicitas would in modern terms be called charismatics. Makrina the Elder, the grandmother of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Makrina, taught dogmatics so well that Basil in his letters referred to her teaching.<sup>18</sup> Makrina the Younger organized distribution of food during famine, and Fabiola founded a hospital. Egeria made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and wrote excellent notes about the liturgical life there. Marcella of Rome was interested in exegetical questions and corresponded with Jerome, so did Paula and Eustochium. Olympias was an ordained deaconess and a leader of a monastery. Desert Mothers were spiritual advisors and examples

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<sup>17</sup> For the discussion on the historical accuracy of this story, see Jan Willem Drijvers, “Barsauma, Eudocia, Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount” in *The Wandering Holy Man. The Life of Barsauma, Christian Asceticism, and Religious Conflict in Late Antique Palestine*, eds. Johannes Hahn and Volker Menze. (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020), 91–96.

<sup>18</sup> Basil, letters 204 and 223.



of Christian life. In their many roles, they were essential to the formation of the life of the church.

In theological debates we find women in different sides. For example, in the origenist controversy, Marcella and Jerome were on one side, Melania and Rufinus on the other. Felicia, to whom Augustine wrote letter 208, had been a Donatist, but converted to the Catholic Church. When it comes to the contents of theology, there were no differences between women and men, but when it came to the ways they talked about the faith and how to practice it, such differences can occasionally be found. For example, Amma Syncretica used in her teaching images and metaphors common in the everyday lives of women: giving birth, breastfeeding, and laundry.<sup>19</sup>

With the rapid spread of Christianity, the charity the Christians — both women and men — showed to each other and to outsiders played an important role. Ordinary Christians talked about Christ with their neighbours and invited them to the services. Several Church Fathers tell about their mothers who instructed their children, prayed for them, and acted as examples of Christian life. Wealthy women invited Christians to celebrate services in their homes. Groups of ascetic women, later monasteries, became centres for charity and education.

It would be wonderful to know more about the contents of the faith of these women. Recurrent themes in the sources are their eagerness of the study of the Scripture, their devout prayer, and their participation in the liturgical life of the church. The centre of their lives was Christ. Paula of Bethlehem ends her letter to Marcella of Rome with words that characterize what even other Church Mothers felt. When she summarizes why she wants to stay in Bethlehem, she quotes the Song of Songs and applies it to Christ: “We shall say one to another, ‘I have found Him whom my soul loves; I will hold Him and will not let Him go.’”

*Anni Maria Laato (b. 1963) is adjunct professor in Dogmatics at the Åbo Akademi University, and in Patristic Studies at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She is also the chair of Societas Patristica Fennica. After her dissertation Jews and Christians in de duobus montibus Sina et Sion (1998), she has published monographs and articles, mainly in the field of patristics. Her recent articles include “The New Jerusalem in Tertullian”, in Understanding the Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Three Abrahamitic Religions. Laato, A. (red.). Brill 2019; “Faustus and Augustine: A Manichaean-Catholic Debate on the Mosaic Torah” in The Challenge of the mosaic Torah in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Laato, A. (red.). Brill 2020; “Biblical mothers as images of the*

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<sup>19</sup> *Vita Syncreticae; Apophtegmata patrum.*

*Church*” in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 2019;; “*Tertullian and the Deacons*” in *Deacons and Diakonia in Early Christianity. The First Two Centuries*. Koet, B. J., Murphy, E., & Ryökäs, E. (red.). Mohr Siebeck, 2018. She has recently published a translation into Finnish and a commentary on Egeria’s travels to the Holy Land (*Egeria: Matka pyhälle maalle*, 2021).

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# Deaconesses as Levites

Pauliina Pylvänäinen

## Why Are Early Christian Deaconesses Analogized with the Tribe of Levi?

The Apostolic Constitutions (herein abbreviated “AC”) can be regarded as the key written source that preserves the memory of early Christian deaconesses. Similarly, it is the all-embracing document among the so-called “ancient church orders.”<sup>1</sup> In this article, I focus on one analogy that the compiler has written in the document. He parallels contemporaneous deaconesses with ancient Levites:

Those, which were at that time sacrifices, are now prayers, entreaties and thanksgivings. Those, which were first-fruits, tenths, tributes and gifts, are now Christian sacrifice of worship and praying, which are brought through the holy bishops to the Lord God through Jesus Christ, who has died for them. For they are your high priests, presbyters are your priests and male deacons, readers, singers, door-keepers, female deacons, widows, virgins and orphans are your Levites.<sup>2</sup>

Why does the compiler of AC draw the analogy between deaconesses and the Levites? To be able to answer this question, we must treat the analogy from divergent viewpoints. Hence, I consider both the role of deaconesses in the congregation and the way the compiler uses Scripture in his document.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> AC is known as the broadest collection of the early Christian church orders and as the end product of a church order tradition. It is dated to Syria, Antioch area, in 380 CE. The original language of the document is supposed to have been Greek. The edition has been published in volumes 320, 329, and 336 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985–1987). See, e.g. Pauliina Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy, Charity and Communication: The Tasks of Female Deacons in The Apostolic Constitutions* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 33, 51–60.

<sup>2</sup> AC 2.26.2–3.

<sup>3</sup> The main source for AC is a document called *Didascalia Apostolorum* (“DA”). The analogy in AC 2.26.3 has originally been presented in DA 9. Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 106. In DA, the author sees correspondence in two groups, between the high priest and priests as well as Levites. In AC, however, the compiler presents three positions: The bishop has remained in the position of the high priest, but the presbyters are assigned to position of the priests. The rest are grouped under the label of Levites. The compiler of AC has added the female deacons and some other categories of people that do not appear in DA to this category. Joseph G. Mueller, *L’Ancien Testament dans l’Éclésiologie des Pères. Une Lecture des*

### A Liturgical Distribution of Work?

In the analogy under consideration, each group of figures listed seems to be assigned a correspondence with some aspect of Israelite Temple service. The compiler puts bishops, presbyters, deacons, and others into positions that correspond to the triad of the high priest, priests, and Levites of the Old Testament. Those who in the era of the Old Covenant were called Levites, have various names under the new dispensation, including male deacons, readers, singers, door-keepers, female deacons, widows, virgins, and orphans. Along with them, the sacrifices, first-fruits, tithes, offerings, and donations of old have their counterparts in the life of the Church. The compiler of AC seems to have thought that the tabernacle was in all things the prototype of the Church.<sup>4</sup>

In the Old Testament, Levites refers to the descendants of the patriarch Levi, whom God appointed as workers in the tabernacle and temple. Their duties are presented in Numbers. They are *inter alia* responsible for keeping guard over the people who are ministering in the tabernacle and taking care of it. Levites are overseen by priests and the high priest.<sup>5</sup>

Why does the compiler of AC associate the Levites with the female deacons, then? I think that the compiler describes the female deacons as subjects who have duties in the assembly corresponding with the Levites who carried out some tasks in the tabernacle of testimony. He mentions female deacons in the context of the tabernacle of testimony when he

- a) argues for the tasks of the female deacons in the liturgical assembly: “The doorkeepers stand at the entrances for the men guarding them, and the female deacons at the entrances for the women, like stewards. Namely in the tabernacle of testimony the same pattern was followed.”<sup>6</sup>

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*Constitutions Apostoliques* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 291–292. See also Aimé Georges Martimort, *Deaconesses. An Historical Study* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 61. Like other Antiochenes during the fourth century, the compiler uses LXX version as Scripture. Hill (2005), 50–51. When referring to LXX in this article, I use *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*.

<sup>4</sup> See Mueller, *L’Ancien Testament*, 297, and Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g. Numbers 1:50–53, 3:5–39; Exodus 30:30; Leviticus 16:32–33.

<sup>6</sup> AC 2.57.10.

b) imposes the so-called ordination prayer for deaconesses: "... who in the tabernacle of testimony and the temple appointed a guardianship for Your holy gateway..."<sup>7</sup>

Hence, the analogy seems to refer to the tasks of the female deacons in the liturgical assembly. In AC, the female deacons are instructed to guard the doors through which women enter the church building. They must carry out this task both at the beginning of the liturgical assembly as well as at the time of anaphora. The purpose of standing at the entrance seems to be to watch over the women.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Old Testament, there were some anonymous women at the entrances of the tabernacle of testimony. They have been mentioned in Exodus: "This one made the bronze washbasin and its bronze base from the mirrors of the women who fasted, who fasted by the doors of the tent of witness, in the day he pitched it."<sup>9</sup>

However, I think that the correspondence between the Levites and the female deacons in the analogy under consideration follows the description specifically presented in Numbers 18. In it, the Lord describes the role of Levites during the worship:

And they shall keep your guard duties and the guard duties of the tent, but they shall not approach the holy furnishings and the altar, and both they and you shall not die. And they shall be added to you, and they shall keep the guard duties of the tent of witness, according to all the ministries of the tent, and no alien shall approach you. And you shall keep the guard duties of the holy things and the guard duties of the altar, and there shall not be wrath among the sons of Israel. And as for me, I have taken your brothers the Levites from the midst of Israel's sons, as a gift given to the Lord, to minister in the ministries of the tent of witness. And you and your sons with you shall maintain your priestly office according to the whole manner of the altar and that which is within the veil. And you shall minister in the ministry as a gift of your priesthood, and the alien who comes near shall die.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> AC 8.20.1.

<sup>8</sup> Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy*, 181-191.

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 38:26.

<sup>10</sup> Numbers 18:3-7.

In AC, different people, e.g. the bishop, deacons, and presbyters, have different tasks during the liturgy. The analogy under consideration has been seen as justifying the differentiation between the tasks. It has been interpreted that, through the analogy, the compiler indicates the hierarchy of the congregation. Mueller states that the compiler interprets the distinction between the high priest, the priests, and the Levites in terms of submissive service. The relationships between them are seen as service, in which the subject is responsible to his superior. The tasks, instead, are seen as ranks on a scale. As a result, for example, the Levites-deacons cannot accomplish a priestly task, that is to say a task reserved for the bishop, who has authority over the deacons.<sup>11</sup>

We have to note, however, that in the analogy under consideration the compiler does not list just male deacons, readers, singers, door-keepers, and female deacons in the group of 'your Levites,' but also widows, virgins, and orphans. In other words, he mentions people who have and do not have tasks during the liturgy. The compiler seems not only to have had the clergy in mind. Hence, I think that the compiler does not primarily refer to the different functions within the triad of the high priest, priests, and Levites in the analogy under consideration. In another verse in the document, instead, he reminds us of the separation between different functions inside the Old Testament priesthood.<sup>12</sup> There the tasks of bishop, presbyters, and male deacons must be understood in the context of distinct and separate functions. But in the analogy under consideration, his very focus is something other than giving a distinct prescription of their tasks during the liturgy.<sup>13</sup>

### **Right to Charity**

Why are the widows, virgins, and orphans analogized with the Levites in the analogy under consideration? They are not addressed any tasks during the liturgy. Instead, widows and orphans are thought to be the objects of Christian charity.

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<sup>11</sup> Mueller, *L'Ancien Testament*, 302. See also Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy*, 194.

<sup>12</sup> AC 8.46.6.

<sup>13</sup> Mueller, *L'Ancien Testament*, 295–296. See also Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy*, 194–195.

In AC, the compiler stresses helping the widows and orphans.<sup>14</sup> People can help the needy in various practical forms, according to the compiler. He often writes about tenths and first-fruits.<sup>15</sup> In the analogy under consideration, they are described as Old Testament-based metaphors that refer to the offerings the people are now instructed to give.<sup>16</sup> However, tenths and first-fruits do not seem to be just metaphors. In AC 7.29.1–3, the compiler gives a detailed instruction as to how the first-fruits and tenths must be given. Among the first-fruits he lists, for example, wine, grain, oxen, and sheep. The tenth is, instead, made up of money, clothing, and property.

The comparability between AC and the Old Testament is clear. During the wilderness wanderings, the tribe of Levi is said to have received a tithe of all the offerings. When the wanderers settled in the Promised Land, all tribes except Levites received a major land grant in the Israel area. The Levites made their living by teaching and guiding the Israelite people, and were allowed to eat a portion of most offerings.<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, Mueller notes, according to the compiler of AC, some people in his congregation have the right to live on congregational property. Like the Levites, they live and work in the congregation. The same principle applies to them: the laborer deserves his wages. Because female deacons are mentioned in the groups that are analogous to Levites, they can be regarded as worthy of being supported by the congregation in the same way as their Old Testament examples.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Epitome of Biblical Interpretation**

Our analysis has shown already that the compiler describes the roles of ecclesiastical figures by means of biblical material. He seems to think that the life of the Church provides him with

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<sup>14</sup> AC 3.1–5; AC 4.1–2; AC 5.1. See also Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of Christian Gathering. Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 269–270.

<sup>15</sup> e.g. AC 8.30.1–2.

<sup>16</sup> In AC 2.26.6 and AC 8.31.1–3, offering is closely linked with the theme of honouring. Both passages demand that the people who give the offering should honor those who receive their parts of the offering.

<sup>17</sup> Numbers 18:8–32; Joshua 21. See also Edward A. Engelbrecht (general editor), *The Lutheran Study Bible. English Standard Version* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 170.

<sup>18</sup> Mueller, *L'Ancien Testament*, 182–183. See also Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy*, 195–196.

a key to interpret the Old Testament. At the same time, he uses the Old Testament to justify the institutional organization of the Church by showing that it has its origin in God's will.<sup>19</sup>

This kind of interpretation is typical of the compiler throughout the document. He uses Scripture extensively. As in the analogy under consideration, he interprets Scripture in his contemporary context. For the compiler, the New Testament informs the ideas in AC, whereas the Old Testament serves as the basis for most of the teachings. He establishes the authority of ecclesiastical regulations and traditions on the "old covenant."<sup>20</sup>

According to Joseph G. Mueller, a characteristic technique for the compiler is the usage of examples called *skopos* (σκοπός). The compiler has taken the examples from Scripture and used them in two ways that are not always easy to distinguish:

- a) *Skopos* is a role model: By bringing up σκοπός, the compiler presents an ideal that the people should imitate.
- b) The compiler uses *skopos* to confirm or illustrate his ideas precisely. In these instances he expresses an idea by way of an example that functions as a sample taken from a category.

Hence, in the thinking of the compiler, *skopos* is both "an example" and "for example." When he aims at providing role models for his audience, he uses examples that refer to the people and events mainly in the Old Testament.<sup>21</sup>

Mueller dissociates *skopos* and *typos* (τύπος), although the distinction is not easy to make in AC. In his view, the use of *typos* refers to a process of interpretation in which people, things, institutions, or events of the Old Testament are considered foretelling figures that are fulfilled in NT. The use of *skopos* examples does not provide this kind of relationship and fulfilment. Rather, the examples show the continuity in the world of ethical values or in the history of relations between God and man.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Mueller, *L'Ancien Testament*, 186, 297–298. The compiler thinks that the Church can provide an interpretation of the Old Testament as key because Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament law.

<sup>20</sup> Marcie E. Lenk, *The Apostolic Constitutions: Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Construction of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2010), 53.

<sup>21</sup> Mueller, *L'Ancien Testament*, 160–161. See also Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy*, 113–116.

<sup>22</sup> See Mueller, *L'Ancien Testament*, 176–177.



Just before the analogy under consideration, the compiler declares that the tabernacle of testimony, known in the Old Testament, is the *typos* of the Church.<sup>23</sup> The former is seen as the pattern of the latter at every point. Their relationship is an analogy, which accentuates the similarity between the ministries of the old and new covenants presented in the analogy under consideration. Despite the compiler calling his analogy *typos*, it seems to me that he still uses the Old Testament figures the way Mueller has described the usage of *skopos*.<sup>24</sup>

Why does the compiler refer to the Old Testament so much? Marcie E. Lenk has demonstrated that the compiler uses Scripture to give extra emphasis to certain parts of the texts. He does not use the authority of Scripture simply to back up the teachings, however. He both adopts and adapts the teachings from the sources. Therefore, the compiler uses Scripture to support and authorize the institutional structures he intends to endorse in the document.<sup>25</sup>

Mueller thinks that AC witnesses a particular tradition of early Christian ecclesiological exegesis, which bases its ecclesiastical doctrine on the Old Testament. The exegetical techniques that have been used in the tradition were of Jewish origin.<sup>26</sup>

We note that there really is much in common with AC and the Jewish tradition. To authorize community structures and hierarchy by using Scripture is also common to Jews. Lenk argues that “Jews and Christians were using their shared texts in similar ways in order to deal with many of the same issues that were important to their different communities.”<sup>27</sup> She has found similarities in a variety of issues, e.g. comparisons between the authority of God and the authority of community leaders.<sup>28</sup>

In previous research, AC has actually been shown to in many ways reflect a Jewish-Christian interaction that was typical of Antiochene life during the fourth century: AC contains prayers that originate in synagogues; the compiler commands the congregation to celebrate the Sabbath and Sunday side by side; and the way the compiler uses Scripture creates a fruitful basis for interaction between Jews and Christians. The probable reason the

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<sup>23</sup> AC 2.25.5.

<sup>24</sup> See also Mueller, *L’Ancien Testament*, 183–184.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Lenk, *The Apostolic Constitutions*, 49, 78–79.

<sup>26</sup> Mueller, *L’Ancien Testament*, 337–338, 349, also 519–520; and Lenk, *The Apostolic Constitutions*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Lenk, *The Apostolic Constitutions*, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Lenk, *The Apostolic Constitutions*, 79–92.

compiler prefers the Old Testament in his biblical interpretation is that it reflects the Jewish-Christian context in which he lives. From this, it follows that drawing an analogy between Old Testament figures and contemporaneous deaconesses is a natural way for the compiler to comprehend the life of the congregation.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusions

In this article we looked at AC 2.26, in which the compiler of the document presents an analogy and parallels the deaconesses with Levites. We concluded that the deaconesses can be considered as Levites from two viewpoints. Firstly, the compiler of AC draws a detailed analogy between the Israelite Temple service and Christian liturgical assembly by referring to the tabernacle of testimony. Because the deaconesses have certain tasks to complete in the assembly, they can be regarded as Levites.

However, the compiler does not primarily aim to construct a general or liturgical, Old Testament-based hierarchy in the congregation of AC. The focus is more specific. The compiler draws an analogy between the Old Testament and AC to enumerate the people who are allowed to live by way of the generosity of the faithful in the congregation. Consequently, the analogy shows that the female deacons are one group who are supported by the congregation.<sup>30</sup>

The analogy under consideration also reflects the way the compiler uses Scripture in the document. This indicates that AC has been remolded in a context in which the interaction between Jews and Christians has yet been lively at the end of the fourth century.

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<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy*, 94–118.

<sup>30</sup> See also Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1976), 36; Mueller, *L'Ancien Testament*, 184; and Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy*, 196.

# Edith Stein and Me<sup>1</sup>

Judith Mendelsohn Rood, PhD

I had a recurring nightmare. In it I fell into a deep, dark pit, ringed by barbed wire down into the depths, behind which wraiths stood, dressed in striped prisoners' garb, their hands reaching out to me, imploring me to save them as I plunged deeper and deeper, helpless to help them or to stop my own endless fall. The Holocaust had soaked my thoughts in tragedy, grief, and despair. I was suffering from the survivor's guilt that is typical of my generation. The dream stopped only when I accepted Yeshua as my God and Savior in 1983.

Putting the past behind me, I delved into my doctoral studies and then began teaching world history to undergraduates, first at public universities and then at evangelical Christian colleges. My specialization became Jewish/Christian/Muslim relations, and, inevitably, I began teaching the Shoah to my Christian students, who wanted to know my family's story. I wanted these students in particular to learn about those Germans who professed Christianity — Protestants and Catholics — who held profoundly antisemitic views. But I struggled to find voices who could help me — and them — to understand how their religion led their country to commit genocide.

When my grandmother passed away in 2005, my father created a digital photo archive for me and my siblings. The photos accompanying this article represent a fraction of our collection, which includes documents tracing my grandparents' and my father's escape to the United States. I used the collection in class to share my story and my faith with my students. When one of my honor students decided to write her senior thesis about the Nazi T4 Euthanasia program, I told her it was too dark a subject, and urged her to choose another

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based upon a presentation I made at Tyndale University Chapel on September 30, 2015, at the invitation of my beloved friend, Natasha Duquette, now Academic Dean and Professor of Literature at Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College in Barry's Bay, Ontario, Canada. I dedicate this to her, in thanks, and to my students at Biola University, who launched my research, especially Autumn Swindoll.

topic. She insisted, and I told her that if she was going to write about the Holocaust, I would, too.

My great-grandparents, Jenny and Alexander Moses, were synagogue members their entire lives. They were deported from Hamburg on July 20, 1942, and relocated to an attic into an apartment house on the main square of Theresienstadt, the one with the big church, just down from Gestapo headquarters.



1. My great-grandmother Jenny and my father, Herbert Mendelsohn, 1939.



2. Alexander and Jenny Moses, my great-grandparents, before 1933.



3. A page from my father's photo album with his annotations. The photo above is the last one taken of Alexander and Jenny before their deportation in 1942. Below is a picture of the "stumplestones" ("Stumbling Stones") marking where their apartment building stood. It was destroyed in the firebombing of Hamburg on the night of 28/29 July 1942, one week after their deportation and its confiscation by a Nazi officer and his family. All perished in the conflagration.

On September 5, 1942, my great-grandmother perished, followed by my great-grandfather two months later, on November 7, 1942. My grandmother only received confirmation of their deaths November 18, 1948. My grandmother and father were able to emigrate to the US on the last boat leaving Rotterdam in 1939. My grandfather was pressed



into the labor gang working on the Kiel Canal, whence he escaped to the east, arriving in Pittsburgh in 1940. Their hushed stories about those years only hinted at their astounding escapes; I knew only that my great-grandparents had perished in the Holocaust, along with a score of their close inner circle of relatives and friends.

12 (10.11.42)

- L 417 Today's Ghetto Museum. This former Terezin school served as a home for boys.
- Q 619 The Terezin Town Hall was the seat of what was called Bank of the Jewish Self-Administration and other offices; it was also the venue of various cultural performances.
- L 414 The building of the former Fortress Headquarters first served as the SS Camp Headquarters, later as a post-office and a youth home.
- L 410 A dormitory for young girls where drawing lessons were given by Friedl Dickler-Brandisová.
- Marktplatz Fenced off and inaccessible to the inmates, the main square was turned into a park opened to the prisoners during Terezin's "beautification campaign".
- L 415 One of the stores that were located primarily in the L 4 and L 3 Streets.
- Q 418 A cafe was opened in this house in December 1942.
- O 414, 416 The buildings housing the SS Camp Headquarters. The infamous bunkers were in the cellars.
- L 311 The Engineering Barracks, home for elderly inmates and a makeshift hospital.
- L 315 The seat of the Ghetto guards who helped maintain order in Terezin.
- L 318 Home for small kids and children of early school-age. Terezin kindergarten. It also housed a kitchen for children.
- Block F III Homes for children and apprentices.
- Block G II The seat of a Czech gendarmery unit guarding the camp.
- Block H II Known as Bauhof, this was the site of craftsmen's workshops.
- L 324 Called Viktoria-Haus, this building served as a canteen and flats for the staff of the SS Camp Headquarters.
- Block H IV The Bodenbach Barracks – prisoners' dormitory, in the middle of 1943 given over to the needs of the RSHA Archives from Berlin.
- Block J IV The Aussig Barracks – a central warehouse of clothing and luggage seized from the inmates.
- Block H V The Dresden Barracks – a dormitory for women prisoners, with the camp's prison in its cellar.
- Block G VI Homes for suckling infants and small children. A library with a reading room, and a theater hall were set up in one of the houses.
- Stadtpark A children's pavilion was built during the "beautification campaign" and the park was turned into a playground.
- Block E VI The Hohenelbe Barracks – central hospital and baths.
- Block E VII The Kavalir Barracks served the accommodation of the elderly and mentally ill inmates.
- Block D VI The town's former brewery was turned into a disinfecting station.
- Former army riding hall housed a mechanical joiner's workshop.
- Block B V The Magdeburg Barracks – seat of the Council of Elders and the central office for the Jewish Self-Administration. Today this building houses Terezin's Meeting Center and attic theater. Visitors can view a replica of the dormitory from the time of the Ghetto as well as permanent exhibitions devoted to different walks of cultural life in the Ghetto.
- Block B IV The Hannover Barracks – a dormitory for men fit for work.
- Block A IV Terezin's bakery and main food warehouse.
- Bahnhofstrasse Part of the railway siding leading from the Bohusovice Railway Station to Terezin, built by the inmates in 1942-1943. This provided for faster handling of transports to and from Terezin.
- Block C III The Hamburg Barracks – a dormitory for women. In 1943 mostly Dutch prisoners were accommodated in this building, which also housed the main center for handling incoming and outgoing transports, the so-called slojka (sluice or check-point).
- Block A II The Jäger Barracks – a dormitory for elderly inmates and a quarantine.
- Südberg The Southern Hill – prisoners were allowed to enter this part of town in 1943 when a sports ground was built there.
- Block E I The Sudeten Barracks – the Ghetto's first building and a dormitory for men fit for work. Vacated in the summer of 1943, the building housed part of the RSHA Archives transferred from Berlin.
- Objekt C I Sokol gym – initially used as a hospital ward, it was turned into what was billed as the Ghetto's "Community Center" during the "beautification campaign".
- Südstrasse The Mortuary and funeral rooms. The Columbarium is located opposite.
- The Jewish Museum with Crematorium.
- The Memorial site by the Ohře river where the ashes of the cremated prisoners were thrown into the river at the Nazi orders in 1944.

**Ghetto Museum & Magdeburg Barracks**  
 Visiting hours daily, throughout the year  
 winter season Nov 1 – March 31: 9 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.  
 summer season April 1 – Oct 31: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.  
 closed on Dec 24 – 26, Jan 1

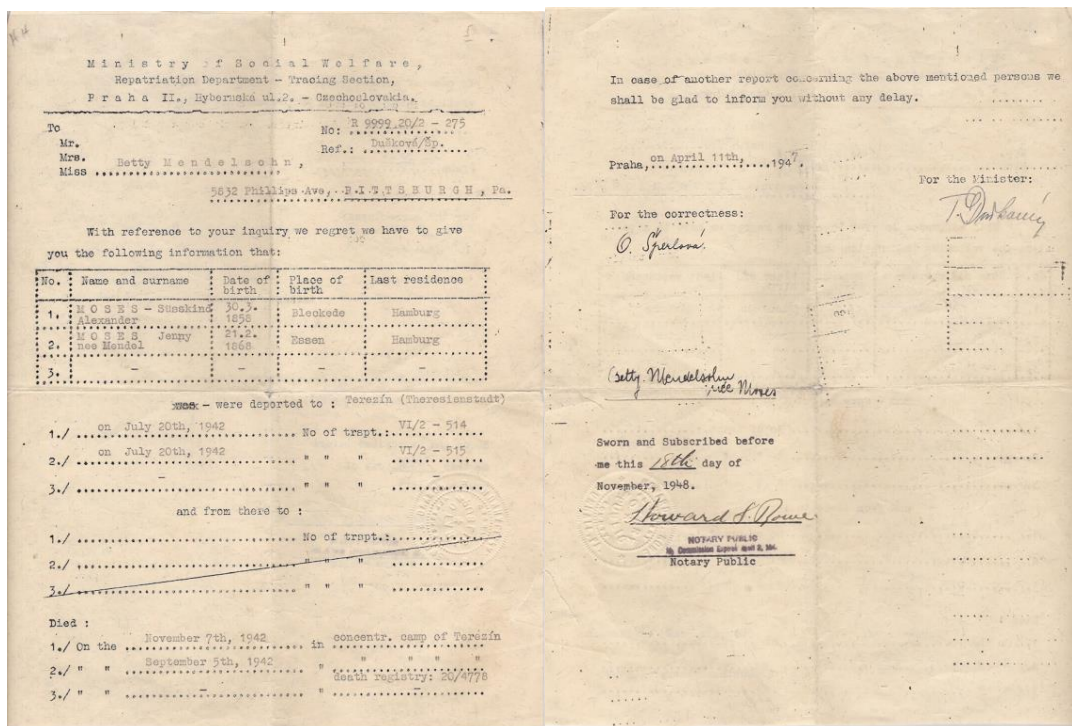
**Columbarium, Ceremonial Halls and Central Mortuary**  
 Visiting hours daily, throughout the year 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
 closed on Dec 24 – 26, Jan 1

**Crematorium**  
 Visiting hours all year round except Saturdays  
 winter season Nov 1 – March 31: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
 summer season April 1 – Oct 31: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
 closed on Dec 24 – 26, Jan 1

Address: Ghetto Museum Terezin, Komenského ulice, CZ-411 55 Terezín • Telephone: +420-416 782 576-7 • Fax: +420-416 782 300 • E-mail: manager@pamatnik-terezin.cz • http://www.pamatnik-terezin.cz

Established in October 1991, the Ghetto Museum now houses a permanent exhibition tracing the history of the Ghetto and portraying the individual aspects of everyday life of the inmates. Sightseeing tours include displays of works of art made by both adult and young prisoners. • Documentaries are screened in the cinema hall. • Specialized literature, promotional items and videocassettes on Terezin may also be purchased here. • A permanent exhibition is also housed in the Crematorium.

4. Map of Theresienstadt showing location of the building where my great-grandparents were housed in separate quarters for men and women in the garrett.



5. The Red Cross Notification addressed to my grandmother Betty reporting the known facts of her parents' deaths.



6. Me in the Old Jewish Cemetery in Theresienstadt at the location of the mass burial of the cremated dead from 1942.

In 2007 I visited there, after the Lausanne Consultation of Jewish Evangelism Conference held in Lake Balaton, Hungary. At the conference, Kai Kjær-Hansen had just presented a shocking paper about the numbers of ethnically Jewish Christians killed in the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup> I was able to find out exactly where my great grandparents were housed by bringing the Red Cross document sent to my grandmother, which told her of their fate, to the archivist at the Holocaust Museum. With Kai's paper in mind, I searched for my great grandparents' unmarked graves. I found them buried anonymously in a mass grave organized only by numbers indicating the dates of their deaths in the old cemetery next to the crematorium. I prayed the Mourner's Kaddish and prepared myself to tell their story, and the story of the one-tenth of the Jews murdered by the Nazis who were professing Christians, to my students, who organized an annual Holocaust Awareness Week at Biola University and invited me to begin to tell my family's story in public venues. I was invited to give the keynote address to a gathering of Shoah scholars at the University of Portland in 2010, which was then published by the Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture in 2011.

When I embarked upon my research, I assumed that the Catholic Church was completely complicit with Hitler. I also assumed that the Protestant churches were in fact an organized state church, ordered by Hitler to obey his commands. Both these assumptions proved erroneous, as Victoria Barnett, the eminent Holocaust historian, revealed in her review of my manuscript in private correspondence with me. She corrected these assumptions and left me with my painful question: I could not imagine the fact that one-tenth of the people sitting in the pews were Jewish converts and their descendants, who'd never been part of organized Jewish life and were even life-long Christians, could suddenly be ejected from the pews, and in some cases the pulpit, without protest. How could the Christians of Germany allow this nightmare to happen? While it was true that a tiny number of them organized the Confessing Church to oppose the Nazis, even Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the

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<sup>2</sup> Kai Kjær-Hansen, "With Hans Walter Hirschberg and Arthur Goldschmidt in Theresienstadt," Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism Eighth International Conference Proceedings (Lake Balaton, Hungary 19-24 August 2007, 23 August 2007), <http://lcje.net/papers/2007.html> (accessed May 4, 2010).



most famous of the group, had to admit that theological antisemitism blinded Christians to the fate of Jewish people.<sup>3</sup>

As I did my research, one Jewish voice stood out to me among the many who converted to Christianity and who died in the Holocaust: that of a Jewish convert to Catholicism — the brilliant scholar Edith Stein. Edith, who died at Auschwitz, is recognized by the Vatican as a doctor of the Church, one of only three, and as a co-patron of Europe, which stirred up a tremendous public controversy: could she still be considered a Jew? To many, she could not. Even more controversial, her order, the Carmelites, sought to establish a retreat center to her memory at Auschwitz, and the plan had to be adjusted to allay Jewish criticisms. To me, as a female Christian scholar, she was also a marked contrast to Hannah Arendt, her peer, whose life I had studied and upon whom I had modeled my early academic quest and persona, before I came to faith in Yeshua.

Stein's entire life's work was a quest to understand her own deep intellectual and spiritual need for truth, connection, and belonging.<sup>4</sup> Edith became my muse as I plunged into the depths of Holocaust studies, retracing the experiences of my family in Germany. Over the course of those studies, I found myself writing about the differences between the Protestant churches and the Catholic Church, and their relationship to Hitler through the lens of Jewish converts.

In the intense atmosphere following the First World War, the Patmos Circle, a group of intellectual Jews, Christians, and Jewish converts, which included Hans and Rudolf Ehrenberg, Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Karl Barth, Leo Weismantel, Viktor von Weizsäcker, Lev Shestov, Hugo Bergmann, Florens Christian Range, Nikolai Berdyaev, Margaret Susman, Werner Picht, and Paul Tillich, worked for a post-Nietzschean revival of religious thought through their Patmos publishing house and its offshoot *Die Kreatur*. Common to this group was the belief that revelation disclosed layers of

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<sup>3</sup> Rood, "Shoah/Nakbah: Offerings of Memory and History" in *History (1933–1948): What We Choose to Remember*; Margaret Monahan Hogan, James M. Lies, editors (Portland, OR: Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture/University of Portland, 2011), 425–432.

<sup>4</sup> Gertrud von le Forte, a Protestant who was close to Stein, wrote about her as the exemplar of feminine leadership in *The Eternal Woman* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010).

experience and creativity that remain inaccessible to the metaphysics of naturalism. Taking their inspiration from the “Seer of Patmos” John the Apostle, they believed that civilization could be saved only by the daily spiritual and practical renewal of the Word of God, “embodied in speech and action.”<sup>5</sup> During the interwar period they interacted with one another, discussing the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. But many Jews, especially well-educated Jewish women like Edith Stein of Breslau, were increasingly left stranded in the male-dominated secular academic culture, bereft of social or vocational acceptance, forced to pursue their spiritual quest for truth in isolation.

Stein wrote her autobiography in 1933 as a defense of the Jewish people following Hitler’s ascension to power as the savior of the German people. In it, she wrote, “I had given up practising my Jewish religion when I was a 14-year-old girl and did not begin to feel Jewish again until I had returned to God.”

Edith related that as a teenager she discovered the academic field of philosophy and decided to specialize in the field known as “phenomenology.”<sup>6</sup> It was a field dominated by the German Jewish philosopher Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century. He aimed to describe the way that human beings know — epistemology. His work recognized a reality beyond the mind, unlike many other forms of philosophy, which posited the idea that reality is a construct. Edith excelled in the secular setting of the German universities where she studied during the First World War. She wrote and defended her dissertation on the problem of empathy, leading Husserl to make her his assistant. Recent scholarship on their relationship has made it clear that she was responsible for writing much of the work attributed to Husserl in his first phase of publication. There does not seem to be any connection between the students of Husserl and the circles of the “New Jewish Learning” that could have bridged the deepening gap between the secular and religious spheres.

While she was studying for her doctorate, the First World War was raging. Edith had been good friends with Husserl’s Göttingen assistant, Adolf Reinach, and his wife. Husserl and the Reinachs had all converted to Protestantism. When Reinach fell in Flanders in November 1917, Edith went to Göttingen to visit his widow. Edith felt uneasy about meeting

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<sup>5</sup> Mark R. Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 27.

<sup>6</sup> All quotations are from Edith Stein’s autobiography, *Life in A Jewish Family*, first published in 1933 and translated by Josephine Koeppel (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1985), unless noted.

the young widow at first, but was surprised when she finally met with her, because she recognized her as a woman of faith. Edith relates: "This was my first encounter with the Cross and the divine power it imparts to those who bear it ... it was the moment when my unbelief collapsed and Christ began to shine his light on me — Christ in the mystery of the Cross."

During this period, Edith went to Frankfurt Cathedral and saw a woman with a shopping basket going in to kneel for a brief prayer. "This was something totally new to me. In the synagogues and Protestant churches I had visited people simply went to the services. Here, however, I saw someone coming straight from the busy marketplace into this empty church, as if she was going to have an intimate conversation. It was something I never forgot." Toward the end of her dissertation, she wrote: "There have been people who believed that a sudden change had occurred within them and that this was a result of God's grace."

Later, she wrote: "Things were in God's plan which I had not planned at all. I am coming to the living faith and conviction that — from God's point of view — there is no chance and that the whole of my life, down to every detail, has been mapped out in God's divine providence and makes complete and perfect sense in God's all-seeing eyes."

One evening Edith picked up an autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila and read it all night. She recalled, "When I had finished the book, I said to myself: This is the truth." She was then 26 years old. Upon her conversion, she joined the Carmelite order, where she was now known as Sister Teresa Benedicta a Cruce: Teresa, Blessed of the Cross.

During the time immediately before and quite some time after my conversion I...thought that leading a religious life meant giving up all earthly things and having one's mind fixed on divine things only. Gradually, however, I learnt that other things are expected of us in this world...I even believe that the deeper someone is drawn to God, the more he has to 'get beyond himself' in this sense, that is, go into the world and carry divine life into it.

In 1933, when she was 42 years old, during Easter Week in April, Edith stopped in Cologne at the Carmelite convent during the service for Holy Thursday. She attended it with a friend, and by her own account, the homily moved her very deeply. She wrote:

I told our Lord that I knew it was His cross that was now being placed upon the Jewish people; that most of them did not understand this, but that those

who did would have to take it up willingly in the name of all. I would do that. At the end of the service, I was certain that I had been heard. But what this carrying of the cross was to consist in, that I did not yet know.

She observed that “Every time I feel my powerlessness and inability to influence people directly, I become more keenly aware of the necessity of my own holocaust.” She learned that it was possible to “pursue scholarship as a service to God...It was not until I had understood this that I seriously began to approach academic work again.” Thereafter, she successfully combined scholarship and faith in her work and her teaching, seeking to be a “tool of the Lord” in everything she taught. “If anyone comes to me, I want to lead them to Him.”

It was during this time that Edith wrote, “I had heard of severe measures against Jews before. But now it dawned on me that God had laid his hand heavily on His people, and that the destiny of these people would also be mine.” It was clear even then that the Aryan Law made it impossible for Edith to pursue her dream of a professorship, or even as a lay Catholic teacher. She wrote, “If I can't go on here, then there are no longer any opportunities for me in Germany.” She understood that now “I had become a stranger in the world.”

Edith's entry into the contemplative Carmelite Order was not about escapism. “Those who join the Carmelite Order are not lost to their near and dear ones, but have been won for them,” she wrote, “because it is our vocation to intercede to God for everyone.”

Even still, Edith resolved not only to intercede in prayer for our people, but to take action. On April 12, 1933, she sent a letter directly to the pope asking him to condemn Hitler's escalating program of persecution against Jews and Catholics. The letter was only released to the public on February 15, 2003, from the newly opened Vatican Archives pertaining to the time of Pius XI's papacy (1922–1939).<sup>7</sup> She wrote:

*Holy Father!*

*As a child of the Jewish people who, by the grace of God, for the past eleven years has also been a child of the Catholic Church, I dare to speak to the Father of Christendom about that which oppresses millions of Germans. For weeks we have seen deeds perpetrated in Germany which mock any sense of justice and*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship/stein1939april>

*humanity, not to mention love of neighbor. For years the leaders of National Socialism have been preaching hatred of the Jews. Now that they have seized the power of government and armed their followers, among them proven criminal elements, this seed of hatred has germinated. The government has only recently admitted that excesses have occurred. To what extent, we cannot tell, because public opinion is being gagged. However, judging by what I have learned from personal relations, it is in no way a matter of singular exceptional cases. Under pressure from reactions abroad, the government has turned to "milder" methods. It has issued the watchword "no Jew shall have even one hair on his head harmed." But through boycott measures — by robbing people of their livelihood, civic honor and fatherland — it drives many to desperation; within the last week, through private reports I was informed of five cases of suicide as a consequence of these hostilities. I am convinced that this is a general condition which will claim many more victims. One may regret that these unhappy people do not have greater inner strength to bear their misfortune. But the responsibility must fall, after all, on those who brought them to this point and it also falls on those who keep silent in the face of such happenings.*

*Everything that happened and continues to happen on a daily basis originates with a government that calls itself "Christian." For weeks not only Jews but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany, and, I believe, all over the world, have been waiting and hoping for the Church of Christ to raise its voice to put a stop to this abuse of Christ's name. Is not this idolization of race and governmental power which is being pounded into the public consciousness by the radio open heresy? Isn't the effort to destroy Jewish blood an abuse of the holiest humanity of our Savior, of the most blessed Virgin and the apostles? Is not all this diametrically opposed to the conduct of our Lord and Savior, who, even on the cross, still prayed for his persecutors? And isn't this a black mark on the record of this Holy Year which was intended to be a year of peace and reconciliation?*

*We all, who are faithful children of the Church and who see the conditions in Germany with open eyes, fear the worst for the prestige of the Church, if the silence continues any longer. We are convinced that this silence will not be able in the long run to purchase peace with the present German government. For the time being, the fight against Catholicism will be conducted quietly and less brutally than against Jewry, but no less systematically. It won't take long before no Catholic will be able to hold office in Germany unless he dedicates himself unconditionally to the new course of action.*

*At the feet of your Holiness, requesting your apostolic blessing,  
Dr. Edith Stein*

*Instructor at the German Institute for Scientific Pedagogy  
Münster in Westphalia, Collegium Marianum.*

She received no reply. It was then that she turned to helping her people by describing her family to German readers. She explained, “I simply want to report what I experienced as part of Jewish humanity,” pointing out that “we who grew up in Judaism have a duty to bear witness...to the young generation who are brought up in racial hatred from early childhood.”

Ultimately her entreaties to the pope indirectly influenced the 1937 Papal epistle, “*Mit Brennender Sorge*,” (*With Burning Anxiety*) smuggled from Rome into German parishes, which denounced the racism and pagan ideology of the Third Reich.<sup>8</sup>

In the shadow of the swastika, she met with the prioress of the Carmelite Convent in Cologne and explained why she wanted to enter the convent. “Human activities cannot help us, but only the suffering of Christ. It is my desire to share in it.”

The following year, on April 21 1938, she entered the cloistered life as a Carmelite nun. She had taken a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

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<sup>8</sup>The papal encyclical is entitled “*With Burning Anxiety*” issued in German, not Latin, smuggled into Germany, and read from pulpits in on Passion Sunday March 14, 1937, in an attempt to reverse the infamous “*Concordat*” signed when the Nazis came to power. My Biola colleague Daniel Christensen remarked, “It caused quite a stir.” I thank him for his help on this detail. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_14031937\\_mit-brennender-sorge.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_14031937_mit-brennender-sorge.html)

For the service where she made her eternal vow, she had the words of Teresa of Avila's protégé, St. John of the Cross, printed on her devotional picture: "Henceforth my only vocation is to love." While in the Cologne convent, Edith was permitted to resume her academic studies and to become a writer. She wrote: "I understood the cross as the destiny of God's people, which was beginning to be apparent at the time (1933). I felt that those who understood the Cross of Christ should take it upon themselves on everybody's behalf. Of course, I know better now what it means to be wedded to the Lord in the sign of the cross. However, one can never comprehend it, because it is a mystery."

In particular, she wanted to intercede to God for her people: "I keep thinking of Queen Esther who was taken away from her people precisely because God wanted her to plead with the king on behalf of her nation. I am a very poor and powerless little Esther, but the King who has chosen me is infinitely great and merciful. This is great comfort," she wrote on October 31, 1938, when she was 47 years old.

*Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass, took place on November 9, 1938. On that night, the violent threat of the Nazis became apparent to the whole world. Synagogues were burned, and the Jewish people were subjected to terror; some were killed. The prioress of the Carmelite Convent in Cologne did her utmost to help Sister Teresa Benedicta a Cruce to move abroad. On New Year's Eve 1939 she was smuggled across the border into the Netherlands, to the Carmelite Convent in Echt in the Province of Limburg. This is where Edith wrote her will on June 9, 1939: "Even now I accept the death that God has prepared for me in complete submission and with joy as being his most holy will for me. I ask the Lord to accept my life and my death...so that the Lord will be accepted by His people and that His Kingdom may come in glory, for the salvation of Germany and the peace of the world."

In Echt, Edith hurriedly completed her study of "The Church's Teacher of Mysticism and the Father of the Carmelites, John of the Cross, on the Occasion of the 400th Anniversary of His Birth, 1542–1942." In 1941, at age 50, she wrote to a friend, who was also a member of her order: "One can only gain a *scientia crucis* (knowledge of the Cross) if one has thoroughly experienced the Cross. I have been convinced of this from the first moment onwards and have said with all my heart: '*Ave, Crux, Spes unica*' (I welcome you, Cross, our only hope)." Her magnum opus on St. John of the Cross is entitled: "*Kreuzeswissenschaft*" *The Science of the Cross*, which she was working on in her exile. She and her sister Rosa were

arrested and deported suddenly one day, leaving behind the scattered pages of the almost-completed manuscript to be collected and organized by the nuns, who saved it and saw to its posthumous publication after the war.

As a child, I had been unable to imagine my great-grandmothers' humiliating deportation to and murder at Thereisenstadt. I wondered: How could Jews have so willingly submitted themselves to death? Unlike my great-grandparents' final journey, we have eyewitness accounts of what happened on Edith's final journey. This has helped me to imagine what happened to my great-grandparents in their own final journey, and it led me to this realization: Christ was with them, visible only in those who served Him in that place. They were not alone. God had not abandoned them. Even if they did not recognize their savior, He was there.

In recent years a group of Catholic Jews sponsored a *Novena to St. Benedicta de la Cruce*, to serve as a meditation on the life and death of the saint in order to honor her memory as they commemorate the anniversary of her martyrdom every year.<sup>9</sup> The word "novena" is derived from the Latin word for nine, or "novem." Typically, a novena refers to nine days of prayer, asking God for a specific intention, often through a Saint's intercession.<sup>10</sup> Novenas are a beautiful way to grow purposeful, consistent, and persistent in daily prayer.

They interviewed eyewitnesses to her journey, and based upon what they learned, wrote the *Novena* that tracks the last nine days of her life, and this account draws upon it. It

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<sup>9</sup> St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Catholic Church, Lawrenceburg Indiana, <https://stteresab.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Novena.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> "Novenas are a beautiful way to grow purposeful, consistent, and persistent in daily prayer." "...The number nine might have been chosen for several reasons. In the Acts Jesus told His disciples "to gather together and pray after His Ascension into Heaven. Catholic Tradition tells us that the Apostles, along with the Blessed Virgin Mary, went to the Upper Room and prayed together for the nine days between Jesus' Ascension (believed to have been 40 days after His Passion/Passover) and Pentecost." Finally, another "reason could be that nine is significant because of the nine months that Mary carried Jesus in her womb. In fact, people in the Middle Ages traditionally spent nine days in prayer leading up to Christmas to signify the nine months that Jesus spent in the womb of His mother! Many of the most popular and widely-prayed novenas begin or end on a Saint's feast day. And it's important to note that while most novenas are indeed nine days long, there are some exceptions (like the St. Andrew Christmas novena, which is 25 days long!). "All About Novenas," <https://blessedishe.net/blog/novenas/>, Feb. 26, 2019.



helps me to imagine my great-grandparents' deportation from Hamburg that same year, in September.

*Day 1 – Saturday, August 1st, 1942*

*Carmel of Echt, Holland*

*It was the last day of freedom for Saint Edith and her sister, Rosa. By then Saint Edith had reached a clear perception of the eschatological nature of the crisis affecting the Jews of Germany and the role she was called upon to play in the drama, as a victim of expiation for her people and for mankind.*

*As far back as March 26th, 1939, Edith had addressed a petition to her Prioress on a used postcard (for motives of monastic poverty) asking permission to offer herself to Jesus in expiation, that the sway of Antichrist be broken and peace ensue.*

*"I am asking this, today, because it is already the twelfth hour. I know I am nothing, but Jesus wills it and He will call many more to the same sacrifice in these days."*

*What happened that day in the Carmel of Echt, is now known the world over; but the circumstances need to be recalled.*

*The Catholic Bishops of Holland had issued a joint protest against the deportation of Dutch Jews by the Nazis, which they instructed was to be read out at every Mass in all churches on Sunday, July 26th. Prior to that, the bishops had procured an exemption from deportation for Catholics of Jewish origin, from the Nazi authorities, who accorded the privilege on condition that the persons concerned had belonged to a Christian organization before January 1941.*

*The pastoral letter of the bishops created apprehension about the possibility of a Nazi reaction; it was soon forthcoming. On August 2nd, Christians of Jewish origin of every religious community in the country were arrested and carried off by the Gestapo. The General-Commissar Schmidt announced publicly, that he was taking reprisals for the pastoral letter of the 26th July. He specified, saying:*

*"We are compelled to regard the Catholic Jews as our worst enemies and consequently see to their deportation to the East with all possible speed."*

*The savage reaction of the Nazis to the pastoral letter of the Dutch Bishops is what motivated His Holiness, Pius XII, to withhold and destroy his own protest which he had already composed. If such be the reaction to the protest of the Dutch Bishops, he argued, what might not be the reaction to a protest of the Pope. On his orders, the monasteries and convents throughout Italy had taken in Jewish refugees fleeing the persecution of the Germans. The Vatican itself was fill to overflowing with Jews who had come to its doors seeking refuge.*

*The deportation of our Martyr and her sister was an act, undertaken in hatred of the faith, as a reprisal for the condemnation of the Nazi persecution of the Jews by the Catholic Hierarchy of Holland; that our Martyr was of Jewish origin, would not in itself, have furnished a sufficient cause for her deportation and death.*

*Days 2-4*

*August 2-4, 1942*

*Echt to Westerbork.*

*Edith and her sister were arrested by the Gestapo on 2 August 1942 (51 years old), while she was in the chapel with the other sisters. She was to report within five minutes, together with her sister Rosa, who had also converted and was serving at the Echt Convent, where they had fled to escape the Nazis in Germany. Her last words to be heard in Echt were addressed to Rosa: "Come, we are going for our people."*

*Together with many other Jewish Christians, the two women were taken to a transit camp in Amersfoort and then to Westerbork. This was an act of retaliation against the letter of protest written by the Dutch Roman Catholic Bishops against the pogroms and deportations of Jews. Edith commented, "I never knew that people could be like this, neither did I know that my brothers and sisters would have to suffer like this.... I pray for them every hour. Will God hear my prayers? He will certainly hear them in their distress." Prof. Jan Nota,*

*who was greatly attached to her, wrote later: "She is a witness to God's presence in a world where God is absent."*

*The Gestapo crowded the deportees into goods-trains, filled to suffocation. Saint Edith and the other Sisters, still dressed in their habits, were in the middle section of the train. The other prisoners were in prison-uniform, though the fact is disputed.*

*August 5-7, 1942?*

*In the Westerbork Assembly Camp*

*One eyewitness reported, "Her whole appearance, as I picture her in my memory sitting in that hut, suggested only one thought to me, a Pietà without Christ, a Rachel weeping for her children."*

*The next equally striking testimony comes from a Jewish businessman from Cologne, Julius Markan, who had been put in charge of the prisoners at Westerbork Camp and, along with his wife, was spared deportation. He wrote:*

*Amongst the prisoners who were brought in on the 5th of August, Sister Benedicta stood out on account of her calmness and composure. The distress in the barracks and the stir caused by the new arrivals were indescribable. Sister Benedicta was just like an angel, going around amongst the women, comforting them, helping them and calming them. Many of the mothers were near to distraction; they had not bothered about their children the whole day long, but just sat brooding in dumb despair. Sister Benedicta took care of the little children, washed them and combed them, attending to their feeding and other needs. During the whole of her stay there, she washed and cleaned for people, following one act of charity with another, until everyone wondered at her goodness.*

*Our Saint spent as much time as she could in prayer, never complaining, neither about the food nor about the behavior of the soldiers. Everyone, Rosa the first, benefited from her uplifting example.*

...

*She went about, talking, praying, like a saint. In one conversation she said to me: "The world is made up of opposites, but in the end, nothing remains of these contrasts. What only remains is great love. How is it possible for it to be otherwise?" She spoke with such security and humility as to conquer all her listeners. A conversation with her was a voyage to another world. In those moments, Westerbork ceased to exist. By now there was no doubt that she and the other baptized (Jews) would be deported elsewhere in a few hours' time. I asked her whom she wanted me to inform about what was happening and whether I could do anything to help her. She replied asking why should an exception be made for her or her group? It was only just that the fact of being baptized should not bring her any privilege. Her life would be ruined if she could not participate in the fate of the others.*

*Day 7 – Friday, August 7th, 1942*

*Departure from Westerbork to Auschwitz*

*On Thursday afternoon, a woman arrived at the camp carrying civilian clothes for the sisters. It was supposed, therefore, that they would be obliged to change on their arrival at the frontier...*

*It is touching to learn that the train passed through Breslau, only 50 to 60 kilometers from Auschwitz, on its way to the Polish frontier. Breslau was our Saint's birthplace, though the wagons were so well sealed that she might well have been unconscious of the fact.*

*At Scifferstadt, however, a door might have been opened for a few moments, during which time, our Edith managed to recognize an ex-pupil standing on the platform and to convey to her greetings for her sisters. "Tell them," she said, "I am on my way to the East." Perhaps she was unaware that she was on her way to Auschwitz.*

*Many died en route, though permission was not granted to remove the corpses along the way. The thirst, hunger, and suffering, both mental and physical, of the*

*passengers in those “death trains” can hardly be imagined although these trips have been well-documented.*

The *Novena* continues:

*Later that same day, having been transferred to a cattle train, she reportedly stopped briefly in her old hometown of Breslau, and was...sighted by the postal worker, Johannes Weiners, who was working in the railroad depot in Breslau (now in Poland). Weiners noticed the nun appearing at the entrance of the railway car as the door was slid open by a guard. After their initial conversation, Sister Benedicta looked around to see where she was; then she said: “This is my beloved hometown. I will never see it again.” She added: “We are riding to our death.” Johannes Weiners asked her: “Do your companion prisoners believe that also?” She answered: “It’s better that they do not know it.” The account continues with a description of the postal workers arguing among themselves whether or not they should do anything for those in the railway car. When some of them asked her if they could bring them any food or drink, she answered: “No, thank you, we accept nothing.”*

*These gentle words of refusal, of gratitude, and of detachment are the final words recorded from her. If Sister Benedicta spoke these words as a way to protect the railroad workers from retribution, then the act of charity through self-denial would have freed the postal workers from their difficult situation. Other accounts of people who observed Sister Benedicta during the transport to her death record that she gave special attention to the needs of the children and of their mothers during this traumatic time.<sup>11</sup>*

*Day 8 – August 7–8, 1942*

*In the death train to Auschwitz*

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<sup>11</sup> Christine Hope Allen, *The Passion of Edith Stein—Revisited*, 21.

*The convoy numbered exactly 987 persons, men, women, and children; each wagon being crowded with from fifty to eighty prisoners. Conditions inside the wagons were horrendous.*

*Day 9 – Sunday, August 9, 1942*

*The Auschwitz Extermination Camp*

*Auschwitz was at that time a small provincial Polish town, which was to give its name to the notorious concentration camp, opened nearby by order of Himmler for political prisoners on April 27, 1940. The first camp was rather small in size and was called, subsequently, Auschwitz I. In October 1941, a far more extensive camp was set up, named after a neighboring village, Auschwitz II-Birkenau (Encyclopedia Judaica Vol. 3, Coll. 854–871). From March 1942, Jews were directed to the second camp.*

*Mass murders of Jewish prisoners by Zyklon B (prussic acid) gas were instituted at Birkenau as of January 1942, at the instigation of Adolf Eichmann, who was in overall command of the execution of the “Final Solution” of the Jewish Problem by genocide, decided on by the Nazis at Wannsee in 1941. The gassing continued for two years and ten months, during which time a million Jews perished in the camp.*

*The convoys arrived at the rate of three or four a day; they were usually met at the platform by the Camp Commandant, Rudolph Hoess, later executed for war-crimes, and the infamous Dr. Mengele, who performed the “Selektion,” strong prisoners being separated for forced labor in mines and factories, the remainder being consigned for immediate “elimination.”*

*The first transport of prisoners from Holland arrived in July 1942; the one carrying our Saint was, perhaps, the third, being preceded by a transport of men which had reached the camp that afternoon.*

*The newcomers were taken to barracks and told to leave their clothes on a numbered peg, to be retrieved after the shower, which they were falsely led to believe would follow. Women usually had their hair cut off. The prisoners had*

*then to walk four hundred meters along a path till they came to a large room, with tubes running across the ceiling. Force was used to get them to enter, when necessary. The metal doors were locked, levers operated, and the gas introduced into the rooms. Twenty to twenty-five minutes later, electric pumps evacuated the gas, allowing special commando units to enter and empty the chambers. Not all the victims were dead. Gold dentures were removed, and the corpses carted away to be thrown into a common fosse. Crematoria had not yet been installed at Auschwitz; but, later, to obliterate traces of their crimes, the Nazis exhumed the corpses and had them burnt.*

*From the moment of the arrival of a convoy to the extermination of the victims, no more than an hour and a half would elapse, as a rule. The killing of human beings became a monotonous routine.*

*Saint Edith, her companions, and a thousand other Hebrew Catholics died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz II-Birkenau on the morning of August 9th from suffocation by prussic acid fumes. She then entered into her glory, accompanied, as we like to believe, by many others.*

Truly, Edith's life was a single prayer.

Many victims of terror and violence shift their vision so that they see only through the eyes of faith, trusting in God, who enables them, as Martin Buber wrote, to see "the time beyond their death," time which they will spend with God, even though they knew him not before that moment. Even Jesus asked, "Father, why have you forsaken me?" knowing that He existed only in that moment in relationship to God. Many Jews, at the moment of their death, their physical lives literally embodied only by the space that they took up at that moment, were transported into the life of the spirit. I believe that some may have experienced the presence of the Lord with them, while many perished utterly alone because they did not believe in God, their father.

I concluded from my research into the Holocaust that the presence of Jewish believers — Catholic and Protestant — among the victims of the Holocaust embodied Christ, who was with them, unseen.

No one knows what my great-grandparents Jenny and Alexander Moses thought as they were crowded into that attic in that apartment house on the block just down from Gestapo headquarters on the main square of Theresienstadt, with the one church with its steeple on the same square, within view of their building, where they witnessed and suffered the agonies of dysentery, typhoid, or cholera as these afflictions slaughtered the old German Jews. My heart still breaks when I think of them. My prayer has been that my great-grandparents were among those who experienced the faith of their fathers in a new and profound way beyond their suffering. Their faith in human progress and pride in the Enlightenment, a faith made famous by Moses Mendelssohn and Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, their heroes, and whose translation of the Old Testament into German was among their most precious belongings, whose Reform Judaism had built the schools where they sent their children to be educated as Jews and as modern Germans, and whose teachings had shaped my family's Jewish understanding, had been destroyed by the pagan Nazis. Did my great-grandparents, and the millions of other Jews of that generation, have the faith to believe in unseen things at the moment of their martyrdom? Did they feel the presence of the Lord with them? All that I know is that there were believers present there, among them, and some of them, Jewish believers in Yeshua like Edith, who were sharing and living out the Good News with them. It is likely that there was no one there to comfort them but God Himself. Still, I believe in the omniscience, justice, and mercy of God, and this helped me to release my ancestors to Him and trust in His compassion. I believe my father's survival was a miracle, and the fact that I was the first of my father's family to be born in the United States means that my life is a miracle too. The Jewish faith of my family grounded me in my own faith in the God of Israel, a faith that led me to the foot of Cross to meet Yeshua, and to recognize Him as my kinsman-redeemer, savior, and lord. My life, my family, and my work are a testament to the faithfulness of God to my people. Glory be to God!

In Israel, at the entrance to the Deir Al-Mukhraqa Carmelite Monastery on Mount Carmel, there is a stone inscribed with these words: "Israel is a living sign in world history, that God lives & his word is 'yes and amen.' – The Carmelites." This epigraph became the foundation of my teaching career. In April 2017, Biola's final Annual Holocaust Awareness Week celebrated Palestinian Muslim Mohammed Dajani Daudi's contribution to Holocaust education. The events of that week involved hundreds of students, faculty, and staff. Yet the



campus climate had changed, as the white identity movement began to attract students alienated by the current racial discourse in the United States. The massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, my family's synagogue, on October 27, 2018, brought home the urgency of teaching Jewish history, antisemitism, and the Holocaust. I believe that by teaching theology in a vacuum, we are not enabling Christian students to think about God's work in world history. It is clear that theology can all too easily be twisted by politics and culture; today's Christians need to study history in order to engage with contemporary issues.



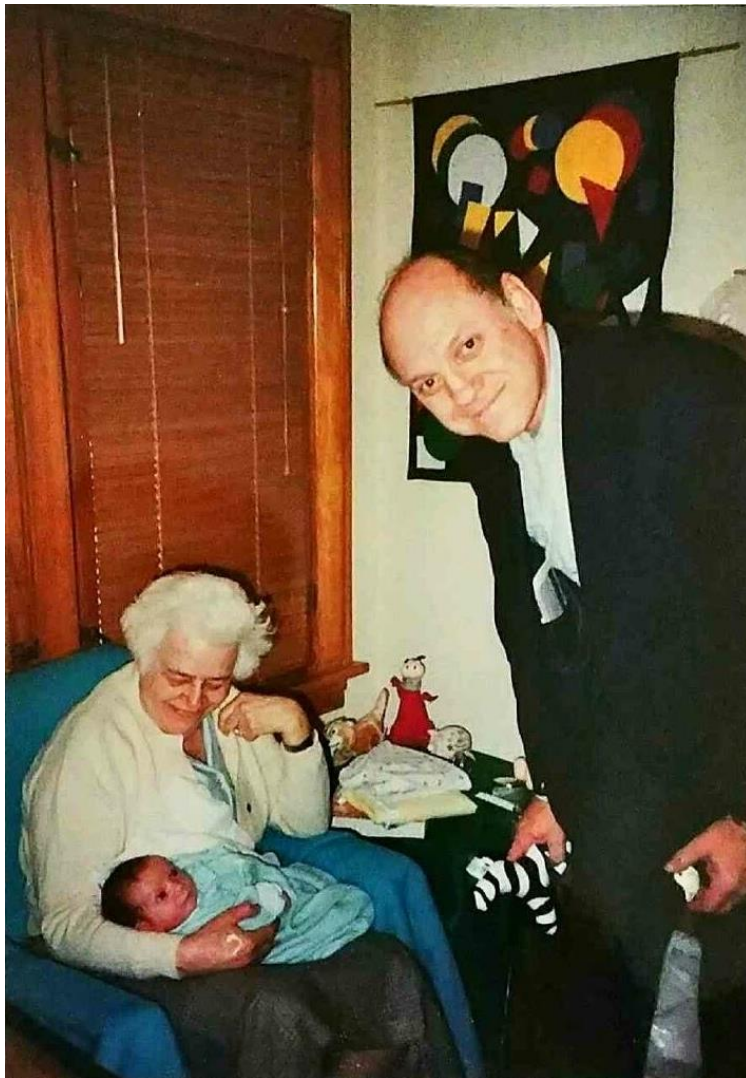
7. My grandmother, née Betty Moses, and my father, Herbert Mendelsohn, reunited with Alfred Mendelsohn, my grandfather, in Pittsburgh, 1940.



8. Me with my grandfather, Alfred Mendelsohn, Pittsburgh, 1958.



9. Me with my grandmother, Betty née Moses Mendelsohn, Pittsburgh, 1958.



10. Herbert with Betty and Samuel, my firstborn son, Oak Park, Illinois, January 1988.



11. Me with Betty, or "Omi" as we called her, my sister, my sister-in-law, my sons Samuel and Joshua, and their cousin, David Frances, Pittsburgh 1991.

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# Emilia Baeyertz: The “Jewish Lady Evangelist”

Rich Robinson

For this women’s edition of *Mishkan*, I wanted to write about a Jewish believer in Jesus who influenced the lives of thousands of people during her decades as an itinerant evangelist. She remains largely unknown to many, partly because her ministry was for quite some years centered in Australia, with little attention being paid to her outside of students of the Australian revival circuit. Moreover, she is little known even among those who study the lives of Jewish believers in Jesus, for (except for one brief period) her ministry was not specifically to Jewish people.

Nor have her biographers had much to say about her Jewish background. As politically incorrect as it sounds today, Emilia Baeyertz — the subject of this essay — was known by the sobriquet of “the Jewish Lady Evangelist.” Her Jewishness was thereby frequently alluded to in publicity materials, in the press, and in her own messages. But although Baeyertz made no secret of her Jewish background and often mentioned it to underscore one point or another in her public speaking, very little exploration has been done of that aspect of her life.

There is already some significant material on Baeyertz. The most extensive biography is in a 2007 publication by Robert Evans.<sup>1</sup> This is the premier source of information on Baeyertz, which includes a huge and invaluable assortment of primary-text newspaper reports of her ministry. Additional papers and monographs exist,<sup>2</sup> including a biography, her

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist: Her Career in Australia and Great Britain; An Historical Study, and Compilation of Sources* (Hazelbrook, N.S.W., Australia: Research in Evangelical Revivals, 2007). The several hundred pages of contemporary news reports of her ministry are invaluable.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, E. K. “‘Totally devoid of sensationalism’: Mrs Baeyertz, the ‘Jewish lady evangelist from Melbourne,’” *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings* 49:3 (2002), 153–166.

own testimony,<sup>3</sup> and a fictionalized biography with a well-researched companion volume.<sup>4</sup> Brief notices appear in various publications on Australian biography,<sup>5</sup> and information can be found in publications dealing with Australian revivals and the like.<sup>6</sup> Much of what I write here of the general contours of her life and ministry are taken from these existing materials. What I have tried to do is to present them in a compact and useful way, and then explore the Jewish aspects of her life and ministry. The latter sometimes involved synthesizing existing material in a new way. It should be noted that much relevant material is to be found in Australian libraries and is not yet digitized; thus I have worked at something of a disadvantage with regard to primary-source research.

### 1. The Jewish Community of North Wales and Baeyertz's Upbringing

A number of accounts of Baeyertz's early life mention either her "strict" religious upbringing<sup>7</sup> or that she was born into a "wealthy" Jewish family.<sup>8</sup> Her family was indeed Orthodox, as were all of Welsh Jewry until the middle of the 20th century;<sup>9</sup> however, they were most certainly not wealthy, at least not at the time she was born in 1842.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The biography is Sydney Watson, *From Darkness to Light: The Life and Work of Mrs. Baeyertz* (Cork, 1895). Her testimony is found in *Five Lectures Delivered by Mrs. Baeyertz, the Converted Jewess with the Story of Her Conversion from Judaism to Christianity* (Toronto, Canada, 1891).

<sup>4</sup> Betty Baruch and Amanda Coverdale, *This Is My Beloved: The Story of Emilia Baeyertz, Jewish Christian Lady Evangelist* (n.p.: Emilia Baeyertz Society, 2017); Garth Coverdale, ed., *This Is My Beloved Companion: For Readers of This Is My Beloved, The Story of Emilia Baeyertz* (n.p.: Emilia Baeyertz Society, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., *Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, <https://sites.google.com/view/australian-dictionary-of-evang/>

<sup>6</sup> See bibliography at end.

<sup>7</sup> So Baeyertz herself: "Before proceeding, I must tell you that I and my family for ages back were strict Jews, . . ." [*Five Lectures Delivered by Mrs. Baeyertz, the Converted Jewess with the Story of Her Conversion from Judaism to Christianity* (Toronto, Canada, 1891)]. "Strict" seems to have been a common trope for describing "Orthodox" in many writings of the period.

<sup>8</sup> "Born in North Wales in April 1842, into a wealthy, orthodox Jewish home, . . ." (Evans, "Introduction" (no page numbers are provided). Similarly in "Chapter Two: A Short Biography": "The daughter of wealthy Jewish parents . . ." (from "Christians of the Australian Clay," [australiansaints.blogspot.com/2011/09/b-c-d-surname-list.html](http://australiansaints.blogspot.com/2011/09/b-c-d-surname-list.html)).

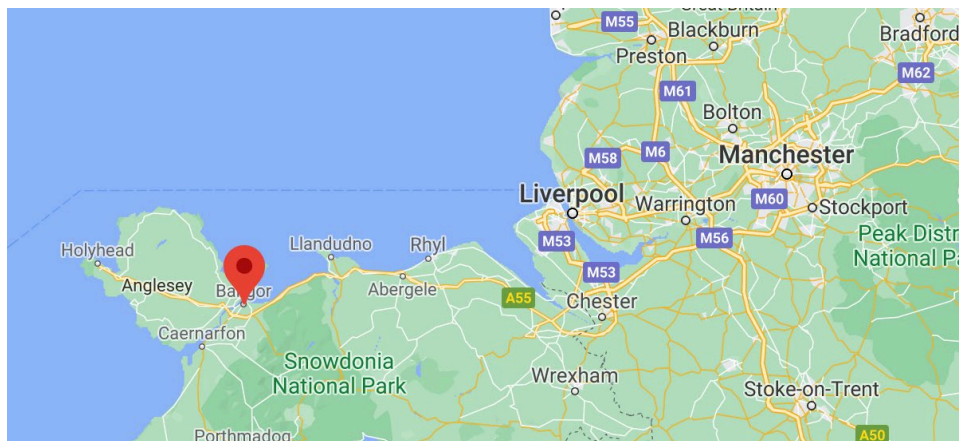
<sup>9</sup> Cai Parry-Jones, *The Jews of Wales: A History* (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2017), ch. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Parry Jones, *Jews of Wales*, ch. 2: "Indeed, Bangor's Jewish community was so poor and few in number in 1894 (around fourteen families) that they required financial support from co-religionists through the United Kingdom to help pay for a rented room they had 'fitted up for synagogal purposes' . . ." If that was true in 1894, how much more so in 1842!



Wales is not generally the first place that comes to mind when thinking of Jewish emigration, but for very good reasons a sizable enough Jewish presence ended up there. Jews from Prussia or the Netherlands had by the early 19th century established themselves in England. That emigration had as much to do with limited economic opportunities in Eastern Europe as it did with persecution, maybe more so. From England, Jews established communities first in south Wales, and later in north Wales, the former being the larger of the two communities. Little contact ensued between north and south due to the geography of the country; it was easier to connect with cities in England than to traverse Wales north to south.

Among the cities in England settled by Jews were Manchester and Liverpool; Manchester remains a leading Jewish population center. In the early 19th century, as population and economic competition grew in the English cities, Jews would often commute to north Wales as peddlers, a trip of about 100 miles, soon facilitated by a steam-packet between Liverpool and Bangor which, according to an 1830 news article, included "Jew pedlars" among its passengers.<sup>11</sup> North Wales was more rural than the industrialized south, and provided a place to peddle jewelry and the like during the week, then to return to Liverpool or Manchester for the Sabbath.



The pin marks Bangor, to which Liverpool and Manchester Jews could commute as peddlers. Image from Google Maps.

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<sup>11</sup> Cai Parry-Jones, "The History of the Jewish Diaspora in Wales," PhD diss., Bangor University, 2014, pp. 50–51.

It was not long before some peddlers permanently settled in north Wales. By the 1820s, the Hyman brothers, Michael and Joseph, had opened a watchmaking business.<sup>12</sup> By 1828, so too did brothers John and Solomon Aronson, who settled in the town of Bangor. These were not people of wealth, but those who sought opportunity found it; the Jewish community remained miniscule for quite some years, a few dozen people maybe. For a long time there were no funds for a synagogue, and when one was finally established in the 1890s, it did not meet in its own building. Nor was there a *mikveh* or a Jewish cemetery nearby, Manchester and Liverpool serving as destination points for those. Common occupations of those who settled north Wales included jewelry salesman, watchmaker, clothier, or pawnbroker.<sup>13</sup>

It was in this environment that Emilia Louisa Aronson was born on March 29, 1842, to John and his wife Maria (née Lazarus), one of an eventual eleven siblings.<sup>14</sup> One source reports that nine years later, in 1851, her father John opened a jewelry store at 272 High Street, perhaps a relocation from an earlier shop. That building, built in 1849, still stands today, occupied by the HSBC Bank.

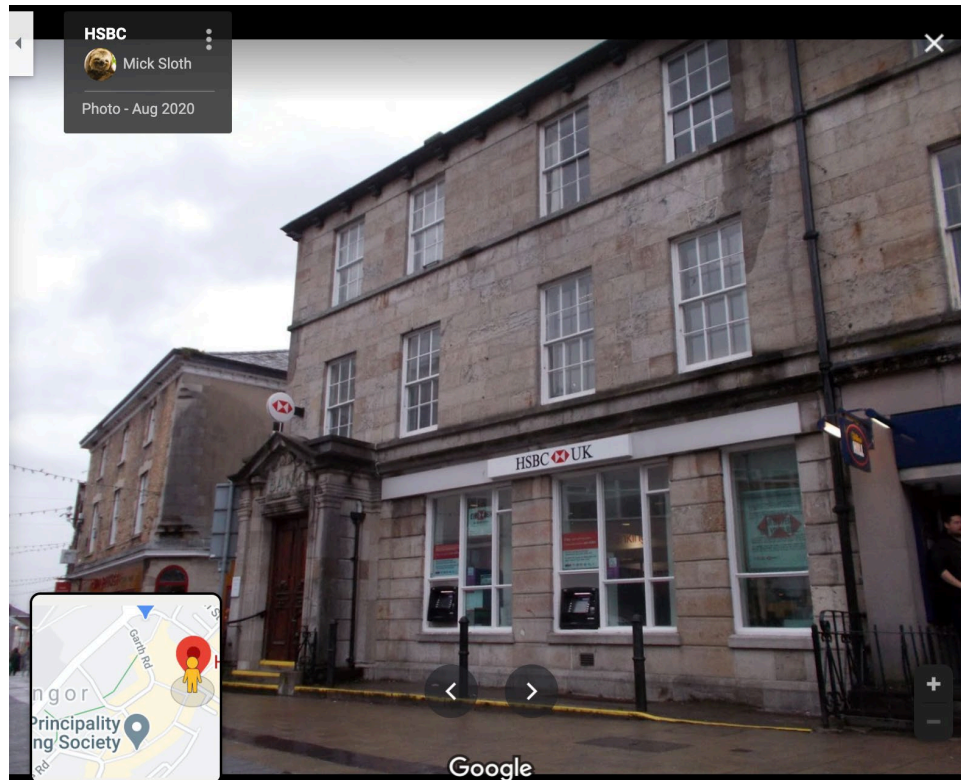
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<sup>12</sup> <https://nation.cymru/opinion/the-secret-jewish-history-of-wales-high-streets-is-hidden-in-plain-sight/>; Parry-Jones, "History of the Jewish Diaspora in Wales," pp. 49–50.

<sup>13</sup> For many details, see Parry-Jones, "History of the Jewish Diaspora in Wales."

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/15696360/person/18016818566/story?\\_phsrc=ZA098&\\_phstart=successSource1](https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/15696360/person/18016818566/story?_phsrc=ZA098&_phstart=successSource1). A grandson kept the name Aronson in addition to Baeyertz: Rudolf Emil Aronson Baeyertz, <https://archives.library.auckland.ac.nz/agents/people/249>





The Aronson jewelry store was located in this building.

The Aronsons were not the most prominent members of Bangor's Jewish community; more well-known were the Wartskis (selling jewelry and drapery) and the Pollecoffs (drapery).<sup>15</sup> That may have been true in due time; in the early years, at least, no one would have had time to become "prominent" as they transitioned from peddling to settling down and opening businesses.

An 1851 census reveals that the Aronson family lived at 47 High Street in Bangor.<sup>16</sup> Jewish education in the Aronson family would have taken place in *cheder*, if a teacher were to be found, or else at home. No Jewish day schools existed at the time outside of London and Birmingham, and lay teachers would often need to be procured.<sup>17</sup> As a girl, Emilia would likely not have had much of a religious education compared to the boys, and especially not in the mid-19th century. But surely she imbibed some things if only by overhearing

<sup>15</sup> Parry-Jones, "History of the Jewish Diaspora in Wales," p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> An inquiry to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales was inconclusive in locating this address for 1851 but provided tools to research in the future.

<sup>17</sup> Parry-Jones, "History of the Jewish Diaspora in Wales," see ch. 2 under "Education." For all these references, see also Cai Parry-Jones, *The Jews of Wales: A History* (University of Wales Press, 2017).

conversations at home, or at a Shabbat meal, or by participating in holidays that included both genders, such as Passover.

In passing, we can note that another Aronson in the family, Lewis, co-founded the first synagogue in north Wales in the 1890s with Morris Wartski; it lasted till the mid-20th century. Lewis served as the first synagogue president from 1894 to 1899.

Such was Baeyertz's early Jewish life. Religious, warm, and for a while, uneventful.

## 2. The Move to Australia and Her Journey to Faith

While her recollections of her early life at home are warm, tragedy struck Baeyertz early on. While still at home in Bangor, she was engaged to be married to a young Jewish man who, unfortunately, died of "consumption" (tuberculosis) not long after.<sup>18</sup> In ill health after this tragic turn of events, she accompanied one of her brothers to Australia where a sister had already settled in Melbourne, with the aim of restoring her physical and emotional well-being. This trip took place in February of 1864,<sup>19</sup> meaning that her engagement probably occurred at age 21 or 22 years of age. (Two of the Aronson brothers, George and Saul, also eventually settled in Melbourne in the jewelry business.)

Baeyertz has left us with the story of her testimony.<sup>20</sup> While it is a valuable document, it was designed for public consumption and for retelling as occasion arose. Certainly, there is much left unsaid that a full autobiography would have included. According to her own account, once in Australia, she embarked on a life of "pleasure"<sup>21</sup> and was busy making the social scene. This would have been a pleasant distraction after the death of her fiancée as she participated in the world of young party-goers. After a time, she met Charles Baeyertz, an Anglican and a bank employee with whom she fell in love. Their relationship did not sit well with either family and in the end, they opted for a secret marriage at Christ Church, Hawthorn, on October 16, 1865, when Emilia would have been 23 years of age.<sup>22</sup> Emilia's

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<sup>18</sup> Watson, *From Darkness to Light* (Cork, 1895), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Introduction (no page numbers provided).

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>21</sup> Baeyertz, *Five Lectures*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Chapter Two: A Short Biography.

family proceeded to disown her, even though from her own account, her proviso in agreeing to the marriage was that no attempts be made at converting her.

Interestingly, upon the birth of their two children Charles (b. 1866) and Marion (b. 1869), Emilia decided that she wanted them brought up in her husband's faith. Marion was baptized, and Emilia herself was baptized as well (!) so that she would have some part in Charles Sr.'s Anglicanism. She continued as a pseudo-Anglican, so to speak, by getting confirmed and participating in communion. Why she agreed to raise the family in the Anglican church is not clear; perhaps it was simply love for Charles or a Victorian-era ethos, in which Charles as the father should set the religious direction for the entire family.<sup>23</sup>



Christ Church, Hawthorne, site of the secret marriage of Emilia and Charles. It looks much the same today.

At that point tragedy struck yet again. After six years of marriage, when they both were 29 years old, Charles died in a shooting accident that took place on March 4, 1871, while he was out hunting quail. A detailed report in a local newspaper indicates that he lingered for two days and had his arm amputated before dying on March 6 — and that “this is the second accident the unfortunate gentleman has met with while shooting having on a previous occasion shot two of his toes off.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> I am not an expert on Victorian mores. However, see e.g., “Parenting in Victorian England,” part of The North and South Project at Duquesne University, [annagibson.com/northandsouth/?page\\_id=30](http://annagibson.com/northandsouth/?page_id=30)

<sup>24</sup> “Melancholy Accident,” *Colac Herald*, March 7, 1871. Reproduced in Garth Coverdale, ed., *This Is My Beloved Companion: For Readers of This Is My Beloved The Story of Emilia Baeyertz, Jewish Christian Lady Evangelist* (Melbourne: Emilia Baeyertz Society, 2017), pp. 13–14. See also <https://ourgen.es/1940>.

It is not easy to piece together all the dynamics that go into someone's journey of faith. In Emilia's case, based on her own words and those of her biographers, it seems that she was driven by a desire to be with Charles after death. She began reading the New Testament, and in conjunction with conversations with Christian friends,<sup>25</sup> finally came to faith while reading John's Gospel. How long this process took is not certain. What is clear from piecing together several accounts is that it involved both friendships with Christians and the reading of the New Testament, catalyzed by grief and a desire to sort out questions about the afterlife. A felt need, a Christian friend, the Bible — these are certainly the components that come together in many people's coming to faith.

### **3. The Beginnings of an Evangelistic Career**

Following Charles' death, Baeyertz relocated with her two children to Geelong, about an hour's drive southwest of Melbourne. According to Evans' biography, she began evangelizing in the prison and hospital right away under Anglican auspices, as well as teaching Sunday school to teens.<sup>26</sup> At this time, as Evans and others report, she underwent a period of great consciousness of sin, leading to the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (though not of the emotional Pentecostal variety) and involvement in what we would call the "Holiness" movement. Thus began her long and fruitful career as an itinerant evangelist.

At this point rather than proceed chronologically, it will be more helpful to engage with Baeyertz's life and ministry under several topics.

### **4. The Overall Context of Her Ministry**

#### ***The Social and Theological Context***

There are numerous sources available that detail the revival movement in Australia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The Methodists and Wesleyans were prominent in the movement, and those denominations also allowed women preachers. Despite that, there were also a strong social countercurrent in Victorian society that demarcated a woman's sphere to be within the home. Although societal changes were soon

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<sup>25</sup> See her own testimony book: ". . . and raised up dear friends who showed me that only in one way could I ever hope to see my husband again." (p. 6)

<sup>26</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Chapter Two: A Short Biography.

afoot regarding gender roles, Baeyertz struggled when it came to the propriety of speaking to "mixed" audiences. Eventually she simply felt that God called her to speak to such audiences, though she also ended up holding separate meetings at set times for women only and for men only. She gave two rationales for holding separate-gender meetings:

I was at the time holding a mission, and assisting one of the ministers. The church was full whenever I spoke, but like it is everywhere else — I suppose it is very much the same in Nelson — there were very few men present; so the minister consulted with me. "Can't we do something," he asked, "to get the men to come? What do you say to holding a meeting for men only?"

"The very thing," I replied, "about which I have been seeking guidance; I'll do it. And I did, and found it a great success; and that was how I adopted the plan. It has this great advantage, too, that among the poorer classes, where both the father and mother can't very well get away at the same time, one can come one night and one another."<sup>27</sup>

Evans remarks that "While Mrs. Baeyertz's teaching was normal Nineteenth Century Protestant Evangelical theology, it had perhaps a Baptist flavor, instead of the more normal Methodist or evangelical Anglican flavor."<sup>28</sup> He points to several prominent features of her preaching: the deity of Jesus; the fulfillment of Passover and the Day of Atonement in Christ (more on this below); the beauty of Christ, arising from her own personal experience; and the doctrine of holiness.

In regard to the latter, Baeyertz was what today we would call "fundamentalist" in her approach to the "world." This was likely a combination of reacting against her early forays into "pleasure" as well as the result of teaching in the circles she moved in as a new believer. As a result, she opposed the theater, concerts, dancing, card playing, and the reading of novels. (More on this below.)

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<sup>27</sup> Watson, *From Darkness to Light*, p. 75.

<sup>28</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Chapter Four: Her Theology.

***Her Schedule, Audiences, and Follow Up***

Her "missions," as reported in numerous newspaper accounts reproduced in Evans, usually lasted sixteen days. I have found one reference to a fourteen-day series, but in general she would come into a town for around two weeks at a time. The cross-denominational sponsorship of these meetings is noteworthy. Afternoon meetings were aimed at those already Christians, to encourage them in their spiritual life and to a deeper consecration. Evening meetings were evangelistic, aimed at the nominal churchgoer or the nonbeliever. Some meetings were for families, and others were conducted separately for women and girls and for men and boys.

Meetings were followed by an "after-meeting," to which those who desired further conversation about the gospel were invited. At one such meeting, at Sandhurst, at least 2,200 people were in attendance,<sup>29</sup> and

sixty or more remained to the after-meeting; about twenty of these were men; those who usually remained at the close of the former services had been mostly women and girls. After Mrs. Baeyertz had spoken to them a few words, several rose to testify that they were now enabled to rest on Christ. After these had left, Mrs. Baeyertz and the Christian workers went down amongst the anxious ones remaining, not a few of whom also professed their faith in the Lord Jesus before leaving.<sup>30</sup>

Baeyertz's approach in these after-meetings was unique, according to the contemporary accounts. "This evangelist makes much of the after-meeting, which she conducts after the fashion of a Bible-class, each inquirer after truth being supplied with a copy of the Book and directed to this passage and to that bearing directly on the way of salvation."<sup>31</sup>

Another look at the nature of these after-meetings comes from the pages of *The Christian*:<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> That is the reported capacity of the meeting hall, which was maxed out, people being turned away. *Willing Work*, Aug. 1, 1879, p. 92, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>30</sup> *Willing Work*, August 1, 1879, p. 92, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>31</sup> *The Christian*, July 21, 1898, p. 23, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>32</sup> *The Christian*, November 5, 1903, p. 28, reproduced in Evans.

The after-meetings were a feature of the mission, being conducted on (to us) new lines. Anxious ones<sup>33</sup> were invited into a separate room, but there was no personal dealing unless specially requested. Each person was provided with a "marked" Testament, and after verses bearing on salvation had been read aloud by Mrs. Baeyertz, and brought forcibly to the minds of the inquirers, they were asked to speak silently to God on the matter, thus bringing the soul into direct contact with God, and leaving Him to do His own work with His own Word. The result more than satisfied those who were inclined to doubt this new method of dealing with souls. Scores who came into the room, looking sad and sorrowful, left with bright, rejoicing faces, only to return the following evening to lead some friend into similar blessing.

As an example of Baeyertz's schedule, here is a four-page brochure of invitation to a mission in 1897.<sup>34</sup> Note some of the meetings marked "Women and Girls" and "Men and Lads."


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<sup>33</sup> "Anxious" was a common term for those inquiring spiritually. In the U.S. a term in use was the "anxious seat" or "anxious bench," defined as "a seat reserved at a revival meeting for those troubled by conscience and eager for spiritual assistance,"  
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/anxious-seat>

<sup>34</sup> I no longer recall where I found this piece of "ephemera."



**Mrs. E. L. BAEYERTZ,**  
A Jewish Christian Lady Evangelist.



Will (D.V.) conduct a **SIXTEEN DAYS' MISSION**  
IN THE  
**RINK HALL, BLACKHEATH**  
(Opposite S.E.R. Station), BEGINNING  
**SUNDAY, 10TH OCTOBER, 1897.**  
Sundays at 3.30 & 7 p.m. Week-Days at 3 & 7.30 p.m.  
No Meetings on Saturdays.

[For Subjects of Addresses see inside pages.]

At the request of well-known local Christian friends

**MRS. BAEYERTZ**

has undertaken to conduct the **SPECIAL MISSION** now announced. For thirteen years she laboured in the Australian Colonies with a great blessing. Carrying with her the affectionate commendations of a large number of Clergymen and Ministers of various denominations—headed by the venerable Dr. John G. Paton, Missionary to the New Hebrides—"to the Churches of Christ, wherever in the providence of God she may be led, as a sister in every way worthy of their confidence and esteem," she has since then conducted many Missions in the United States, Canada, and several large cities in Great Britain with the same results.

The inhabitants of Blackheath and neighbourhood are cordially invited to avail themselves of this opportunity of hearing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; and Christians of all denominations are asked to pray that God's abundant blessing may rest upon these Services, to the increase of spiritual life among believers, and in the conversion of many souls.

**Sundays at 3.30 & 7 p.m. Week-Days at 3 & 7.30 p.m.**  
NO MEETINGS ON SATURDAY BRING YOUR BIBLES.

**ORDER OF**  
FROM OCTOBER 10

**Sundays and Week Evenings.**

Sunday,	October 10th,	at 3.30,	"Mary, Martha and Lazarus."
"	"	" 7.0,	"Unpardonable Sin."
Monday,	October 11th,	" 7.30,	"My Conversion from Judaism."
Tuesday,	October 12th,	" 7.30,	"Atonement"—from Genesis
Wednesday,	October 13th,	" 7.30,	<i>Women and Girls.</i>
Thursday,	October 14th,	" 7.30,	<i>Men and Lads.</i>
Friday,	October 15th,	" 7.30,	"Passover" (with table spread Modern Jewish way).
Sunday,	October 17th,	" 3.30,	"The Conditions of Effectual Prayer."
"	"	" 7.0,	"The Master is come, and calletth for thee."
Monday,	October 18th,	" 7.30,	"Jewish Day of Atonement."
Tuesday,	October 19th,	" 7.30,	"The Lord's Coming; how to get ready for His appear- ance."
Wednesday,	October 20th,	" 7.30,	"Impossible to renew them again unto repentance. Whom?"
Thursday,	October 21st,	" 7.30,	"Great White Throne."
Friday,	October 22nd,	" 7.30,	"The Lord's Coming to the earth. Return of the Jews to Jerusalem. Ushering in of the Millennium."
Sunday,	October 24th,	" 3.30,	"Perfect Heart."
"	"	" 7.0,	"Come."

**SERVICES.**

OCTOBER 25TH.

**+ Bible Readings. +**  
DAILY AT 3 P.M.

Monday,	October 11th,	... "Secret of Failure."
Tuesday,	October 12th,	... "Consecration."
Wednesday,	October 13th,	... "Fruit-bearing."
Thursday,	October 14th,	... "Seven Steps in the Blessed Life."
Friday,	October 15th,	... "Clean Heart."
Monday,	October 18th,	... "Worry."
Tuesday,	October 19th,	... "Christian Joy."
Wednesday,	October 20th,	... "Temptation."
Thursday,	October 21st,	... "Always."
Friday,	October 22nd,	... "Secret of Victory."

**Last Day of Mission.**

Monday,	October 25th,	at 12.0,	"Five Talents or One."
"	"	" 3.0,	"Baptism of the Holy Ghost."
"	"	" 7.30,	"Holiness."

A Hearty Invitation and Welcome to All.

**SANKEY'S HYMNS WILL BE USED.**

Collections to Defray Expenses.



Large audiences attended her missions. Newspapers reports from a variety of cities and dates reveal a general pattern of overflow crowds when she gathered, in many cases remarking that people had to be turned away. In Sandhurst, "Mrs. Baeyertz entered the densely packed building — which we are told holds twelve hundred . . ." <sup>35</sup> Los Angeles, she could "pack to the doors the largest church in town with over 4,000 people present." <sup>36</sup> In Hull, "Prospect-street Church was packed in every corner where standing ground could be had, and an overflow of nearly 1,000 filling Albion Congregational Church." <sup>37</sup> In Hawick, "the last Sunday's services will be especially memorable, the large Public Hall, accommodating over 2,000 persons, being packed, while, unfortunately, hundreds had to be turned away." <sup>38</sup>

We can note one convert at her meetings, famous in some Christian circles: T.C. (Thomas C.) Hammond, <sup>39</sup> whom those of a previous generation may remember as the author of the discipleship book *In Understanding Be Men*. The title is taken from the King James version of 1 Corinthians 14:20, which is rendered in more modern versions as "be mature" or "be adults." Written in the 1930s and in use probably till the 60s or 70s, its title would today be quite problematic, as few women would want to be men, in understanding or in any other way!

Finally, we should note that Baeyertz's manner was dignified, forceful, and effective. One publications noted "her pathetic [that is, speaking to the emotions] manner and earnestness in delivery . . ." <sup>40</sup> She "excels all whom we have heard in Nelson in fluency of speech, and in plain speaking upon the truths taught in the old evangel." <sup>41</sup> "Her style is clear and forcible, her diction easy and elegant, and her manner of elucidating passages of Scripture plain and easily understood." <sup>42</sup> "Mrs. Baeyertz is a lady of prepossessing manner and appearance, while her voice is soft and musical, and her articulation clear and

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<sup>35</sup> *Willing Work*, July 25, 1879, p. 84, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>36</sup> No source, no date, reproduced in Evans. But her Los Angeles missions would have taken place in 1891 (see Evans, Appendix: List of Missions Conducted by Mrs. Baeyertz.)

<sup>37</sup> *The Christian*, February 18, 1896, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> *The Christian*, November 8, 1900, p. 36, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>39</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Chapter Seven: Her Achievements as an Evangelist, and his footnote 67.

<sup>40</sup> *Willing Work* (January 19, 1878), 31, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>41</sup> No source, no date, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>42</sup> *Truth and Progress*, July 1, 1881, p. 81, reproduced in Evans.

emphatic.”<sup>43</sup> Her clothing was plain: “A simple black dress made in a manner neither ultra-fashionable nor ante-deluvian . . .”<sup>44</sup> “Mrs. Baeyertz had a dress code which militated against colorful or expensive clothing or ornamentation. She was noted several times for wearing tastefully designed clothes, though black.”<sup>45</sup>

Overall, one gets the impression of a refined, cultured English lady who bore herself with dignity, composure and assurance.

## 5. Emilia Baeyertz and Jewish Evangelism

With the above to set the context, we can now begin to explore Baeyertz’s experience with Jewish evangelism. This falls into three areas.

### ***Direct Jewish Evangelism***

According to Evans,

After this period in Geelong, she was asked to move to Melbourne and commence a missionary outreach to Jewish people. She responded, but found that this of work did not succeed. The Jews looked upon her as an apostate. There were threats against her life. She had to withdraw, and re-direct her efforts.<sup>46</sup>

Who made this request of her? Wilson provides further details:

Her next move was to Melbourne, where Rev. H. B. Macartney, an Anglican minister in Caulfield, asked her to be a missionary to the Jews. Two aspects of Mrs Baeyertz’ circumstances gave her freedom which other women did not have: she was a widow in comfortable financial circumstances, and she had been [*sic*] Jewish. She was often advertised as “the converted Jewess”. This latter gave her the advantage of being already rather unusual, if not an object

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<sup>43</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, June 28, 1886, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> No source, no date, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>45</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Chapter Five: Her Spirituality.

<sup>46</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Chapter Two: A Short Biography.

of some curiosity, and her behaviour [e.g., speaking to mixed gender groups] could be to some extent explained away on this basis if necessary.

The Jewish ministry was not successful (in fact she received death threats), and she soon began work among factory girls.<sup>47</sup>

Regarding the sort of opposition she received, a rather colorful incident is recounted in Baeyertz's testimony booklet *From Darkness to Light*:

[Baeyertz] was visiting in rather a poor part of the city, and called at a house where she had once been before. She had only just entered, when the daughter said, "Father has sworn by an oath, which he would not break, that if he catches you here again he will kill you!"

The words had scarcely escaped the lips of the girl, when the father — who was out when Mrs. Baeyertz called — passed the window on his way to the front door. The girl raced to the door and locked it; then seizing Mrs. Baeyertz's hand, she whispered, "Come with me quickly! This is your only chance."

Following the girl through the narrow passage, Mrs. Baeyertz found herself thrust hurriedly through a small door in the rere [sic] of the house, while the trembling voice of the girl whispered hurriedly, "Run for your life!"<sup>48</sup>

Let us note several things about her foray into Jewish evangelism. First, it came at the advocacy of H. B. Macartney, Jr., not to be confused with his more prominent father. Macartney Jr. was a huge advocate of mission work to all sorts of groups,<sup>49</sup> and he undoubtedly enthused over the prospect of Baeyertz ministering to her own people. An evangelical Anglican, he was among other things a supporter of women's missionary work (as were others in the late 19th century) and interdenominational evangelism. He also participated in the "Higher Life" (Keswick) movement, which espoused the idea of "entire

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<sup>47</sup> Wilson, E. K. "'Totally devoid of sensationalism': Mrs Baeyertz, the 'Jewish lady evangelist from Melbourne,'" *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings* 49:3 (2002), pp. 153–166.

<sup>48</sup> Watson, *From Darkness to Light*, p. 61.

<sup>49</sup> For this, see Darrell Paproth, "Hussey Burgh Macartney Jr: Mission Enthusiast," *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review* 2.4 (2011–2012).

sanctification," and produced the periodical *The Missionary at Home and Abroad*. We can imagine that his influence on Baeyertz was a strong one in terms of her doctrine and teaching as well as in her missionary career.



H. B. Macartney, Jr.<sup>50</sup>

The second point of note is that Baeyertz had no training in Jewish missions, nor did she have a team to work with. Nor for that matter was she under the auspices of an existing Jewish mission. Her method, during this time, was to go door to door and seek an invitation in to read the Bible, New Testament included.<sup>51</sup> In those circumstances, it is not surprising that her "Jewish ministry" was short-lived in the face of opposition. Or was it? It is quite possible that a lack of funding may have contributed to her change of plans. Wilson writes:

See a plea in *The Missionary, At Home and Abroad*, November 1877, p. 163:  
"The Editor has for many reasons concealed from all but a small circle of friends the fact that for the last two years a most fitting agent has been employed to watch every opportunity of carrying the gospel to the Jews of Melbourne. The circle of private contributors has so seriously diminished that

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<sup>50</sup> As reproduced in Elisabeth Wilson, "Wandering stars': The impact of British evangelists in Australia, 1870s–1900." Ph.D. diss., University of Tasmania, 2011, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Watson, *From Darkness to Light*, pp. 60–61.

the Editor, half heart-broken at the apathy of the whole Church regarding the 'Israel of God' ventures to ask some reader of *The Missionary* for £50." This may refer to Mrs Baeyertz.<sup>52</sup>

If this indeed refers to Baeyertz, it would not be the first time that Jewish missions found themselves underfunded. After all, two years is a good amount of time to persist in the face of opposition and death threats; while the latter makes for good stories, it is just possible that financial problems contributed as much or more to the situation.

The third thing to note is that what counted as "success" in Jewish missions was not necessarily the same as it is today. Those engaged in Jewish evangelization efforts today see opposition as a necessary concomitant of the work (though granted that actual death threats are rare today), and expect only a relatively small number of Jewish people to come to faith at any given time. Faithfulness in the work is coupled with modest (compared to some other mission field) expectations and the hope expressed by Paul that ultimately "all Israel will be saved." In addition of course, the contemporary Jewish community's attitude to Jesus is far more positive than it was in the 19th century. It is quite possible also, that the revivals that were part of Australian religious life in the 19th and early 20th centuries<sup>53</sup> led to expectations that Jewish people would come to faith in large numbers. For whatever reasons, then, Baeyertz's time in direct Jewish evangelism lasted around two years.

### ***Jewish People in Attendance at Her Meetings***

When Baeyertz began her missions to the general public, the only distinctions made in audience makeup were when at certain times she addressed women and girls separately from men and boys; otherwise, they were mixed-gender events open to all.

In the many reports from the time preserved by Evans, we note the occasional presence of Jewish attendees. On one occasion, we note opposition being defused, though we could wish for further details on this rather unusual report:

It is worth noticing that on the last night of the meeting a Jew came forward and confessed that he left home with the intention of disturbing the meeting,

<sup>52</sup> E. K. Wilson, "Wandering Stars," footnote 158.

<sup>53</sup> Evans mentions two books he published on Australian revivals and notes that 1880–1914 was "the heyday of evangelicalism in Australia" (Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Introduction.)

but on his way the Lord said to him, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm."<sup>54</sup>

And various publications remarked on the presence of Jewish visitors at her meetings:

It is especially gratifying to notice how the Jews flock to hear her and how faithfully she proclaims the message that Christ is the true Messiah, the King of the Jews.<sup>55</sup>

Many Jews and Jewesses have attended the meetings, and some of them are anxious to know more about the Saviour whom their sister has found.<sup>56</sup>

In the vestry there was a young Christian lady — once a pronounced infidel, but who some years ago had been converted through Mrs. Baeyertz — dealing with Jews and Jewesses anxiously seeking the truth; reasoning with them out of their own Scriptures that our Jesus is the promised Messiah they look for.<sup>57</sup>

"Last night we were packed out the demand for tickets for the holiness meeting is so great that we shall have to take Queen's Hall for Monday, seating 1,500. The Jews have come wonderfully. I go to Freemantle (sic) the second week in September, then to Calgoorlie (sic) in October, and to Geraldton in November."<sup>58</sup>

Of course, without numbers it is impossible to know what "flocking" to meetings means, or "many" attending, or how "anxiously" they were seeking to know the truth, or in what numbers they were "coming wonderfully." It seems, though, that Baeyertz was restrained in her communications and not given to exaggeration. And since she was invariably billed as the "Jewish Lady Evangelist," that in itself would have attracted curiosity on the part of some Jews. And because large attendance was common at the time for events such as her missions, we can well imagine that out of 2,500 people at a given meeting, some, maybe even a good number, could have been Jewish. So it may well be that Baeyertz had a wider influence in

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<sup>54</sup> *The Christian* (October 27, 1910), p. 24, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>55</sup> No source, no date, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>56</sup> *The Christian* (February 2, 1893), p. 20, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>57</sup> *The Christian* (December 5, 1895), p. 12, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>58</sup> Baeyertz's own words, in *The Christian* (September 29, 1904), p. 27, reproduced in Evans.

reaching Jews for the gospel than she had previously in her earlier attempts at exclusively Jewish evangelism.

We can note at this point that, as mentioned earlier, two of Baeyertz's brothers had located to Melbourne and were engaged in the jewelry business. One can only wonder at their response to the highly publicized meetings that their sister conducted!

### ***Lack of Involvement with Jewish Mission Organizations***

Evans points out:

The other side of this matter, however, also needs to be stated clearly. In the volumes of *The Christian*, through the years when Mrs. Baeyertz worked in Great Britain, mention and detail is made of many activities of Christian Missions to Jews — in Jerusalem; in many European cities; in London, and in provincial English cities. So far as I am aware, there is no indication at all that Mrs. Baeyertz became involved in any of these missionary activities, or that she attended or spoke at any of their meetings. It does not seem that she actively supported these missions to Jews at all. If this judgment is not correct, I certainly hope someone will point it out to me.<sup>59</sup>

This may not be as perplexing at it seems. Baeyertz had her own sense of God's calling, and in addition the Jewish missions did not usually move in the holiness/Wesleyan/Methodist circles that influenced Baeyertz. True, she was often associated with Anglicans as well, and worked cross-denominationally. But it may have been a mix of her associations and her conviction as to the nature of her own ministry that led to her to lack of association with the Jewish mission agencies. Furthermore, she conducted her missions on invitations from groups like the Y.M.C.A. and local church associations. Had a Jewish mission agency invited her to speak, she may well have accepted, though large two-week events were not the *modus operandi* of the Jewish missions. And perhaps her own experience with Jewish opposition and/or lack of funding had something to do with it as well. This is an area where we would like to know more.

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<sup>59</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Chapter Seven: Her Achievements as an Evangelist.

## 6. Jewish Influence on Her Messages and Meetings

Baeyertz was always billed as the "Jewish Lady Evangelist," and made frequent mention of the fact that she was raised Jewish. As we read in *From Darkness to Light*:

Mrs. Baeyertz is evidently proud of her Jewish extraction. Twice she referred to it last evening, and both times with an emphasis of voice and manner which was singularly impressive. "I am one of God's chosen," she said, "one of the seed of Abraham, the friend of God; and yet I have had need to be born again before I could be saved and gain eternal life. How much more do you Gentiles need to be born again!" And once again she said, "I was brought up a strictly religious Jewess. My father was an orthodox Jew. On the day of atonement I fasted, and did all I could do for the atonement of my sins, and I lived up to the strict tenents [sic] of my faith. I will never allow anyone to speak in my presence disrespectfully of Judaism. I love it, and respect it. Christianity is not antagonistic to Judaism, but it is supplementary to it, and a fulfilment of it."<sup>60</sup>

### *Her Passover and Yom Kippur Messages*

Among Baeyertz's "stock" repeated messages were one on Passover and one on Yom Kippur. Much as Jewish mission organizations do today, she presented Passover to her church audiences utilizing a table laid out with the usual seder items.

The Passover message seems to have garnered the most popularity. Evans writes that, "The most popular address was based upon the Jewish Passover, both as it was practiced amongst orthodox Jews in the late Nineteenth Century, including in her childhood home, and as it was practiced when the Biblical Passover actually occurred."<sup>61</sup> On another occasion, *The Christian* observed that: "The address most looked forward to, however, was that on the 'Passover.'"<sup>62</sup> At that particular occasion, the same publication waxed poetic when it observed, "By a strange coincidence the address took place at the hour the Jews were celebrating the Passover, and the Paschal Moon streamed in all the windows during the

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<sup>60</sup> Watson, *From Darkness to Light*, p. 101.

<sup>61</sup> Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist*, Chapter Six: Some Major Preaching Themes.

<sup>62</sup> *The Christian*, April 16, 1896, p. 21, reproduced in Evans.



service.”<sup>63</sup> One man was reported as saying “that he would not have missed the ‘Passover’ address even if it had involved walking back to Cardiff.”<sup>64</sup> Baeyertz’s address was given in Newport, Wales, and on Google Maps estimates a four-hour walk time to Cardiff!

### ***Her Passover Table***

The table setup was noted in several publications. “Special interest was awakened by Mrs. Baeyertz’s address on the Passover, illustrated by a table furnished in the modern Jewish fashion,” reported *The Christian*.<sup>65</sup> And “... her address on ‘The Passover’ was illustrated by means of a table spread in the modern Jewish fashion, as she had often seen it spread in her father’s house, with its piece of burnt bone as the miserable relic and memento of the Paschal Lamb.”<sup>66</sup> Nine years later we still read that she presented Passover “with table spread in modern Jewish fashion.”<sup>67</sup>

An 1892 account from Belfast describes Baeyertz’s display in detail:

The first thing that was done was to spread a clean, white tablecloth upon the table. At a corner of the table was wine, not intoxicating wine, but ordinary wine, which was made by the master of the house. There was always great controversy as to what wine ought to be drunk at the Lord’s Table. While the Passover was going on intoxicating wine was not allowed to be touched at all, it was just the same as the Children of Israel eating leavened bread at the time of the first Passover when commanded to eat nothing but unleavend [sic] bread. The wine that was consumed at the Passover was simple non-

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> *The Christian*, February 6, 1908, p. 24, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>65</sup> *The Christian*, May 4, 1893, p. 24, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>66</sup> *The Christian*, October 26, 1893, p. 16, reproduced in Evans.

<sup>67</sup> *The Christian*, June 5, 1902, p. 28, reproduced in Evans. So too in 1908, “the hall was packed for the address on the Passover, when the evangelist spread a table according to the modern Jewish fashion of keeping the feast” (*The Christian*, April 2, 1908, p. 24) and 1913, “the ‘Passover table’ being spread in the sight of the people, as the Jews have it to-day at the beginning of Passover Week” (*The Christian*, February 6, 1913, p. 24). And 1914: “This address was made more effective on account of a table which she spread before her, as she used to spread the table in her father’s house, in her girlhood days” (*The Christian*, June 4, 1914, p. 24.)

intoxicating wine, and if they cared about what kind of wine ought to be consumed at the Lord's Table, they should first do away with the bad wine that was used at the Lord's Table, and use the wine which from, a Jewish point was the wine used by our Lord himself. At the end of the table was a round dish, on which was laid unleavened bread. On the top of that was hyssop, and there was also a small plate of roasted lamb bone, burned quite black with the fire, which was emblematic of the Lamb that had been slain. There was also another plate of bitter herbs, and that was to keep in memory the time of their slavery in Egypt. Between those two plates there was generally a sort of mixture, the secret of which only the head of the family, but which was handed down from generation to generation. At sundown every evening all the members of the family engage in prayer in a very solemn and impressive tone of voice. That was continued for some time. After which a psalm was sung called the Hallow [sic — of course this is the Hallel], and which was the 118th Psalm. Altogether, the scene was a most impressive one. She then, went on to give an account of the history of the Jews.<sup>68</sup>

Noteworthy here is the emphasis on the non-intoxicating kind of wine used; that it was homemade; the presence of hyssop; the "secret" recipe for *charoset*; and the remark about the "bad" kind of wine usually used at Communion (!). Did these details reflect an Orthodox seder table in 19th-century Wales? It would be interesting to find out.

### ***Her Passover Message***

Here is a précis of one such message from 1879. I quote the following extract at length since it is probably the closest, we can come to her actual text:<sup>69</sup>

In the afternoon, the subject of address was from Exodus xii. 13. The Passover lamb represented the first-born; and he represented the family. It was not enough that the lamb should be slain, the blood must be sprinkled on the

<sup>68</sup> From the "Belfast N/L" of May 20, 1892, a scan of which was kindly provided to me by Elisabeth Wilson.

<sup>69</sup> *Willing Work*, August 8, 1879, p. 101, reproduced in Evans. It is hard to know when the reports intend to reproduce a more-or-less verbatim transcript or whether they are only summarizing the messages. Often it is the latter, and in the process the reports omit the illustrations Baeyertz used.

doors. The speaker then led her hearers' thoughts to Calvary; to the holy Lamb of God hanging there, for sin, not His own, but of the world. There was no atonement but through blood. The blood was to be put upon hyssop, where it was applied to the door. What was hyssop? Was it a plant very difficult to get? No, it grew in abundance in every corner and crevice, a simple little plant; it was not hyssop that saved them, but the *blood*. It is not faith that saves, it is the blood; some persons think too much about their faith, instead of the object of their faith, who alone could save them. After the unsaved had been earnestly and faithfully pleaded with, and shown the awful responsibilities of turning away from the blood of the Lord Jesus, a few words were addressed to Christians. They were to feed on the Lamb as the children of Israel did—living in communion with the Lord—if they wanted to be real fruit-bearing servants. Their loins girded, always ready to do His bidding. Their shoes on their feet; their houses in order, and their wives not to be engaged in anything in which they knew they had no right to be as God's servants. Leaning on their staff, something outside themselves; so to be always leaning on Jesus.

Another undated account gives this:<sup>70</sup>

. . . The angel unsheathes his sword and the firstborn dies.

He passes through Egypt, and now he comes to the land of Goshen. Here is a humble dwelling, but God sees the blood on the doorpost. The lamb has been slain. The firstborn has already died in the person of the lamb, and the child is safe. *The best way to keep out death is by dying.* "I have died upon the cross, but not in my own person, but in the person of Christ."

The Israelites had only to keep within the houses and they were safe. "Trusting" and "taking shelter" mean the same thing. But where is the blood that we may take shelter behind it? Do we not read in the epistle to the

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<sup>70</sup> No source, no date, reproduced in Evans. But the place is given as Wellington.

Hebrews that Christ has gone into heaven with his own blood? God sees the blood. I do not see it. I only *trust* it, and thus I am taking shelter, and am safe.

The blood was on the two sideposts and overhead on the lintel. On one place there was no blood. There was none on the ground. It was not to be trampled on. It was not to be counted an unholy thing. To trample on and despise the blood of Christ is the sin alluded to in Heb. x., 2–9. This is “the unpardonable sin.” God save you from rejecting the atonement of Jesus Christ! There is no other way of salvation but by the blood of Jesus.

Much is made of symbolism, though in a different way than would be usual today, relying more directly on Christian tropes than on connecting the symbols with Jewish understandings. In addition, “Even her most directly evangelistic messages . . . assume a considerable degree of familiarity with the Bible.”<sup>71</sup> The fact that she would weave her own Jewish upbringing into the message undoubtedly helped attract audiences. It might be recalled that Baeyertz’s style was regularly reported as decorous. It greatly contrasts with the Passover program of Hermann Warszawiak, missionary to the Jews in New York City in the 1890s. The *New York Herald* (March 27, 1893, p. 4), breathlessly reported on Warszawiak’s flamboyance with that era’s typically long headline and subheads: “LIFTED A KNIFE OVER A LIVE LAMB. — Realism of the Rev. Hermann Warszawiak, Converted Hebrew, in a Sermon. — HAPPILY, THE PET WAS SPARED. — Besides the Lamb and the Knife Were a Passover Table and Cloths to Represent Houses. — AFTER THE SERMON A SCENE.” The 28-year-old Warszawiak “excused himself from killing the lamb outright out of consideration for the audience.” It may have well been powerful and effective, but Baeyertz’s effectiveness came simply through in other ways. At least it all reminds us that Jewish culture is not monolithic; Warszawiak’s “rough” Eastern European manner contrasts sharply with Baeyertz’s refined Welsh bearing.

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<sup>71</sup> Elisabeth Wilson. “Wandering stars’: The impact of British evangelists in Australia, 1870s–1900” (Ph.D. diss., University of Tasmania, 2011), p. 256, n. 193.

***Her Day of Atonement Message***

Likewise with the Day of Atonement, Baeyertz described both ancient and modern practices.<sup>72</sup> Her description of the Yom Kippur she grew up with runs as follows, with some rather unusual transliterations of the Hebrew:

. . . let me tell you how it is now kept up among the Jews. Every fast and feast of the Jews begins at sundown. So in the evening, "*Yaum Kippour*" is ushered in by the Jews going down to their synagogues, where a very solemn service is gone through. They return home after that and early the next morning they return to the synagogue again, where they spend the whole day, sometimes from seven o'clock in the morning, in fasting and prayer, and by fasting, I mean that not one morsel of bread, and not one drop of water, is taken from sundown one evening to sundown the next evening, and all through the day the prayers are kept up—they confess their sins, they weep, they smite upon their breasts. Then towards the end of the day the "*shauphor*" (or ram's horn of consecration) is blown. The service closes with the intoning of the additional prayers, and then, when it is all over, they go away to their homes, believing that through their prayers, their fasting, and their confession, their sins are all forgiven. For how long? Until the next Day of Atonement, when the same thing has to be gone through again.

From there Baeyertz goes on to Leviticus 16, described in great detail. She makes distinctively Christian application of the various elements of that chapter. For example:

First of all, there is the *ephod*, . . . and the high priest was to bear these names before the Lord upon his shoulders, for a memorial, continually. The shoulder is the place of strength, and that is where Jesus bears His people. The next thing was the breast-plate, . . . The breast-plate was worn on the heart, the place of the affections; and that is where the Lord Jesus carries us.

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<sup>72</sup> "The Jewish Day of Atonement," in *Six New Addresses Delivered by Mrs. Baeyertz (Jewish Evangelist)*. Perth: City Printing Co., 1904, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-52821324/view?partId=nla.obj-98977664#page/n6/mode/1up>. All the following quotations from the message are to be found here.

The bell was for sound, that Aaron might be heard when he went into the Holy Place before the Lord. The pomegranate meant fruit. And, as it is said, "*one* bell and *one* pomegranate," it is to teach us that God expects as much fruit as sound. How is it with our lives?

And, perhaps the most imaginative of all:

Now the people hear the tinkle of the golden bells as the blue robe is put on again, and they rejoice, for they know that soon the high priest will come forth to bless them. And have we nothing to correspond to the tinkle of the bells? Yes, indeed we have. Every time we get an answer to prayer, every time the Holy Spirit brings Christ's words to our remembrance, or the love of God is shed abroad anew in our hearts, it is a tinkle—tinkle from the golden bells on the robe of our High Priest, and we know that He is within the veil for us, and that soon, very soon, He will come forth to bless us. Have you heard the tinkle of the bells to-day?

And as she moves from atonement to the resurrection, Baeyertz rounds up with an explanation of why Jesus told Mary to not touch him (John 20:17):

Why was she not to touch him? If you will turn to Leviticus, 16th chap. 17th verse, you will see — "There shall be no man in the Tabernacle of the Congregation when the High Priest goeth in to make an atonement in the Holy Place *until he come out*. Under the Levitical Law it was defilement for the priest to come into contact with anyone on the *Day of Atonement until the atonement was complete*; and Jesus wished to fulfil the whole Law; until He had gone into heaven "with His own blood" the atonement was not complete.

To those used to "historical-critical" methods of interpretation, these sorts of applications can seem fanciful in the extreme, if not approaching allegorical — though not without a certain appeal. And perhaps we have all seen examples of Christian interpretations of this kind. While Baeyertz may have learned from her teachers to approach the Scripture in this way, it also has overtones of Midrashic methods. And so, I would like to turn to the possibility of the influence of midrash on Baeyertz's messages.

***Influence from Midrash?***

As a child, Baeyertz would likely not have had recourse to the same Jewish education as her brothers, though she likely overheard enough conversation. Some of her methods and content are reminiscent of traditional Jewish approaches to the biblical text, and it should not be ruled out that there was an influence, albeit unconsciously, from that realm.

In midrash and rabbinic exegesis, much can be made even of a single word from which multiple meanings can be extracted. Evans reports that "Another technique that Mrs. Baeyertz used from time to time was to choose one word which appeared several times at least in the Bible, and she would use several of them as points in her sermon." Examples include sermons on "Tears," "Behold," "Doors," and "But" (!). Here is one summary of such an address:

On the evening of Wednesday, May 26th, Mrs. Baeyertz gave an address, even more than usually tender and solemn, her subject being the word "Now," in seven different passages of Scripture. The first was for the unconverted, from 2 Cor. vi. 2. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." She referred her hearers to the 4th chapter of Luke, where the Lord Jesus, after he had read the passage from Isaiah, ending "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord," closed the book, and sat down. She reminded any unsaved who might be present, that the book is still closed; it is still the acceptable year of the Lord; and earnestly begged them not to delay any longer, but to accept that very night the salvation freely offered to them. Another "Now" was from 1 John iii. 2. "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Then will be the harvest time for the Great Sower, then the full ingathering from that "corn of wheat" which bringeth forth much fruit. Mrs. Baeyertz spoke of God's purpose that we should be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. viii. 29), and this led to 1 Cor. xiii. 12, "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Here are two "*nows*" and two "*thens*;" *now* we see only from or by "a dim window," as it may be rendered, but *then* we shall see Him as He is, and the conformity to His image, which is being slowly

wrought here, will be suddenly made perfect. *Now* we know in part, but *then* as we "have been known." It is not too much to think that the Lord will then explain the way He has led us, and make clear all that seems now so mysterious. The concluding "now" was from Rom. xiii. 11. "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."<sup>73</sup>

Midrash would typically take the word "now" in a single verse and find multiple meanings, but in the process citing verses from elsewhere in Scripture. This example from Baeyertz is at least a cousin to the midrashic approach. Of course, it is impossible to sort out where the influences from her youth overlapped with the teaching and examples she received from her Christian mentors. At the least we can ask how certain Christian approaches to Scripture may overlap with Jewish methods of interpretation — and what that means for our evaluation of them.

### ***Her "Fundamentalism" — Jewish or Not?***

Above we mentioned Baeyertz's negative attitude to secular culture. According to one account, here is what she had to say at one of her meetings:

Take warning, Christians; and if you have given way to sin confess it at once. The prodigal son was sent to feed the swine; think what a disgrace to a Jew. He would have eaten the husks, the swine's food, but he was not allowed. I remember before I was converted a Wesleyan Christian said to me, "I cannot dance, it is not allowed with us." I wish there were such rules among all Christians. Your taste for it, Christian, will soon go. Some Christians read novels. I could not descend to read them, after reading the Bible. Dear young Christians, put away all this trash. A young girl was awakened, and weeping about her sins; her parents were worldly, and tried to make her forget all serious thoughts; they got up a grand ball, and had a beautiful dress made for her; she was the bell [sic] of the ball; a few weeks afterwards she was taken

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<sup>73</sup> *Willing Work*, June 4, 1880, p. 446, reproduced in Evans. Italics original.



ill; she asked her mother for her ball-dress, when brought, she pointed to it saying, "That is the price of my soul," and so she passed out of this world.<sup>74</sup>

Certainly, this betrays the influence of the particular holiness movements in which Baeyertz moved. And equally likely, it could have been an (over)reaction to her pre-Christian life. At first blush, it seems distinctly non-Jewish. But of course, there are Jews who would resonate with this sort of approach to life, such as the Haredim who live insular lives and seek to deflect the influence of the outside world on their communities. Baeyertz didn't grow up Haredi; she was part of the Orthodox Jewish world of Europe which was not nearly so insular. But we have to wonder if in fact her Orthodox upbringing made her more amenable to a "fundamentalist" Christian mindset and the influences of "world-avoiding" Christian friends. Again, we have a question to ponder: how do certain kinds of Christian and Jewish "fundamentalism" look like when compared and contrasted? And what can we learn from that?

## 7. Conclusion

Emilia Baeyertz died in London in 1926. She was an influential figure on the Australian revival circuit. Her ministry there and in other countries bore much fruit time after time. In this paper I have tried to highlight the neglected Jewish aspects of her life and career. There is much to yet be researched, but for now we come away with a picture of a refined Welsh Jewish lady whose faith was born in personal tragedy and who never lost sight of her Jewishness — or neglected to remind others as well.

*I want to especially thank Elisabeth Wilson and Garth Coverdale for their help on various matters as we corresponded by e-mail over the past few months.*

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<sup>74</sup> *Willing Work*, July 25, 1879, p. 84, reproduced in Evans. The meeting took place in Sandhurst.

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# **Dared to Believe: The Story of Maisie Pillemer, a South African Missionary to the Jewish People**

Originally published in 2014. Abridged with permission from Viking Publishing, Jews for Jesus, and the author, Andrew Barron. Abridged version edited by Sasha Goswami.

*Note: I interviewed Maisie Pillemer before her death in 2002. When I moved to South Africa in 1989 Maisie was still working for Hope of Israel. She became my employee after our missions merged. She continued to work for many years doing evangelism; leading Bible Studies, prayer meetings and speaking in Churches. She came out on the street with us to hand out Bibles and literature. She was hounded by sickness, tremors, and pain but she was fearless. When we launched the book after her death, many people came out to give testimony of her influence. As much as possible we kept Maisie's memories and stories in her own words. — Andrew Barron.*



We were on the beach on New Year's Eve. One of us was preaching the gospel using puppets. A Jewish man came and started yelling at us. A crowd gathered

and we were surrounded by many Jewish people and we were being heckled. One man yelled,

“I don’t agree with them but lets here what they have to say.” Several of our workers broke into the crowd and we had many conversations.

This report was dated 1963 and it was written by Maisie Pillemer. The beach was called Muizenberg. It was a popular tourist destination for Jewish people in South Africa in the summer. Maisie Pillemer was there with a team of workers from a mission called the South African Jews Society. Maisie’s journey to that beach began in 1918.

### **Early Days**

It was Friday evening, and the candles were lit at Grandfather’s house. The sun had just set, and little Maisie Pillemer could see the first of the Shabbat stars out the kitchen window. She was always eager to count the first stars in the velvety South African sky. As a child, Maisie loved Fridays at Grandfather’s. Maisie’s father died when she was four years old and though could not really remember her father at all, Grandfather had taken his place in many ways. Grandfather and Grandmother lived only a short distance away from where Maisie lived with her mother, her older sister Nan, and her younger sister Eunice.

Every Friday night they would gather to light the candles. Maisie watched in fascination as Grandmother brought the candles to fiery life, waving her arms over them three times, saying the traditional blessing with her eyes closed. Maisie closed her eyes too, and when she opened them, Sabbath had arrived. In the soft glowing light, she felt holy from head to toe.

They ate the Shabbat meal by candlelight. As Maisie sat at the table listening to the Kiddush prayers, she could not help but admire Grandfather as he spoke. She knew he was speaking to God, though she could not understand the Hebrew words. How wonderful it must be to pray like him. He was a very good man, an orthodox Jew, and the chairman of the synagogue. The other Jewish men treated Grandfather with the greatest respect. Maisie respected him too and loved him. It was because of him that she was proud to be a Jew, to go to Shul on special occasions, and to watch the candles being lit every Friday. Because of Grandfather, she knew she was special.

Maisie went to school and helped Mother and Grandfather run their little shop. Mother had not remarried, and in order to provide for the family, she sold household items from their corner stand. It was a struggle, because her health was poor and her English wasn't very good. Mother was a Russian Jew who had immigrated to South Africa from Lithuania when she was 17. In Johannesburg she met Maisie's father and settled into the Jewish neighbourhood of Mayfair Fordsburg. Maisie was born September 26, 1918. Life was not easy for the family. Maisie helped in the shop whenever she could. In her young eyes it was fascinating, and she was eager to do a good job with whatever task she was given. Maisie was 15, loved going to school, and did well in her classes. She dreamed of one day going to college if she could afford it.

Grandfather told wonderful stories about growing up in Lithuania and the importance of keeping their Jewish traditions. "There are some things that Jews do not mix, like milk and meat," he would say. And then sometimes, in a lower voice, he told of the Russian pogroms and the persecution of the Jews. He told her about the Spanish Inquisition and how people had suffered terrible things because of someone named Jesus. Maisie didn't know who he was but had an idea that this Jesus must not like the Jews. Jesus was just a man the Gentiles worshipped, but Jews worshipped the God who had created the heavens and Earth, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Maisie knew their God had nothing to do with Jesus.

When times were hard in the shop, Grandfather would throw up his hands and say, "Our only hope in life is the Moshiach." Maisie knew the Moshiach was going to come and save the Jewish people some day. Money was often tight for Maisie's family, but Grandfather was always generous.

One day in 1933, an unexpected sorrow snuffed all the happiness out of Maisie's heart. Her beloved Grandfather died unexpectedly, and something shriveled up in Maisie's soul. He was the only person who spoke of God in a way that made sense to her. It was Grandfather's faith she had respected and admired. All her spiritual thoughts had begun with him. As his life passed into memory, the Jewish traditions and their meanings grew dimmer. With no man in the house, her family stopped having the Shabbat meal on Friday nights. Fridays seemed dark and empty now. Maisie missed the candles, and Grandfather, terribly. Occasionally she asked Mother, "What do you know about God?"

Mother would reply, "Well, God is big. He's somewhere up there, and He cares about us. We must just know that if we go to Shul and keep Yom Kippur, we'll be alright." And then she would turn back to her neverending work.

Slowly, God disappeared from Maisie's thoughts. There were other matters to worry her now.

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### **Illness**

Maisy was not able to return to high school because the family needed extra income. She was not qualified for much but found a job in a candy factory. She was determined to do something better with her life, so she took night classes to learn shorthand typing. In addition to the long days and short nights, grief ate away at Maisie's heart and weakened her body. She was tired and her eyes ached continually.

One evening, soon after she started working at the factory, Maisy could not focus her eyes. Strangely, she was seeing double. Her eyelids felt heavy. She had to fight to keep her eyes open, but it was not from drowsiness. Maisie started to feel panicked, and opened her eyes as wide as she could, but one of her eyelids remained half closed, obscuring her vision.

She went from doctor to doctor, but they could not find out what was wrong with her. Her vision improved, but her eyes continued to ache, and on bad days her focus would blur. Her eyelids remained somewhat drooped. Then her muscles began caving in, but still the doctors made no diagnosis. Eventually they told her it was all in her mind, that she just had to get rid of all this nonsense and she would be fine. As time passed however, Maisie could feel herself getting more and more tired. She felt limp, listless, uninterested in life. Thinking of Grandfather still sent a stab of pain through her chest. She was desperate to feel happiness, to feel alive in some way.

Maisie found a measure of comfort and distraction with a group of girls from work. They were nice girls, but they had a few bad habits, and soon Maisie was gossiping and swearing along with them at work. She started going to dances with them and soon got used to her life of work and parties, night classes and cinemas, homework and helping at home, all the while pushing back troublesome thoughts when they arose. Her illness plagued her on and off, and she had to fight the times her body felt like giving way to weakness. She still

felt a gnawing despair at night when all was quiet. Was there a purpose to her life? Would she ever be happy?

### **The Gospel**

When Maisie was 17, a girl named Dorothy Fisher started working at the factory and was assigned to Maisie's table. Dorothy was 16, pretty, with a fresh, innocent face and a ready smile. Maisie watched the new girl throughout the day. There was something different about her. Her smile was genuine, and she had a soft kindness that stood in contrast to some of the harsher edges of the other girls. Dorothy seemed to shine with a kind of joy Maisie had never seen.

The longer she knew Dorothy, the more she was puzzled and attracted by her behavior. She was impressed by her happiness, and the way she seemed to really care about others. Love came naturally to her, but why? One day she asked Dorothy directly.

Dorothy reached into her purse and pulled out a little leather book. She turned to Maisie with shining eyes and held up the book. "This is what has made the difference in my life."

Maisie gave a little laugh. "A Bible? Why on earth would a beautiful young person like you read the Bible? Bibles are for old people."

She wondered at first if Dorothy was joking, but the look on her face told her otherwise. Dorothy opened the pages, turning to a marked place and began reading.

"Maisie, this is God's book. It has a message that is very important. For me, and for you." She started reading from the prophet Isaiah:

He was wounded for our transgressions,  
he was bruised for our iniquities:  
the chastisement of our peace was upon him;  
and with his stripes we are healed. (Isa 53:5)

Dorothy continued with another passage from Isaiah:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:  
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,  
The mighty God, The everlasting Father,  
The Prince of Peace. (Isa 9:6)

“You see Maisie, this one who was born to us, this Son, is the same one who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. He was born to us on earth, and He died for us on the cross. This Son is Jesus! He died and gave His life for us on the cross. He suffered on the cross for *you*. And before He died, He said, ‘Father forgive them. They don’t know what they’re doing.’ Maisie, maybe Jesus cried that prayer for you and for me, that God would forgive us for what we did to His Son.”

At the mention of that name, she felt a prick of fear. Jesus had nothing to do with her. She was a Jew, and Dorothy knew that.

“This one who died and rose again is in heaven, but He promised that He was coming back again. The Jewish people are waiting for the coming of a Messiah, and so are we.”

“The Messiah?” Maisie almost laughed. “But the Messiah is Jewish! He’s coming for the Jewish people, not the Gentiles.”

“You know how we’re going to know him? We’re going to recognise Him because He’s going to have the nail prints in His hands. Maisie, do you know what the Messiah’s name is?”

“No, of course not. Nobody knows that.”

“His name is Jesus.”

*What cheek!* Maisie thought angrily. *This is nonsense.* Dorothy kept talking about Jesus — his life, death, and resurrection, about heaven and hell, and how He would return for those who were His. The words were strange and seemed to pierce her clothes, her skin, her soul. She felt uneasy, blinking back moisture in her eyes.

“Jesus is coming back, Maisie. For the Jews and the Gentiles. Will you take Jesus into your heart and life? Will you accept Him as your Savior, your Messiah, and your God?”

Maisie felt hot tears streaming down her face. It was perfectly ridiculous to be standing on the street corner on a warm summer day crying in front of Dorothy like this. She



tried to stop but could not. She just wanted to get away from Dorothy, from this conversation about Jesus, from this suffocating feeling. . .

“Look, I’m in a terrible hurry,” she gasped. “I must go home now. . .” Maisie turned and walked away as quickly as she could, but she heard Dorothy call out after her. “Maisie, I’ll be praying for you!”

She hardly knew what to think as she walked home. She had not expected this from Dorothy. Her heart was pounding in her chest. She tried to put the conversation out of her mind, but the words from the Bible kept ringing in her ears.

She spent a troubled night wrestling with Dorothy’s words, fighting against them, pushing back the overwhelming sense that they were somehow *true*, that they were not just Dorothy’s words, but God’s words. She tried to avoid Dorothy at work, but Dorothy came over to her. She had a book in her hand. Maisie pretended to ignore her.

“God told me that I must give you this New Testament. I spent the whole night on my knees in prayer for you.”

Maisie was genuinely surprised but remained silent.

“Maisie, I could not sleep. I had to pray for you. And God told me to give you this.”

Dorothy handed the book toward her, but Maisie recoiled as if it was a snake. She was at the point of refusing it outright when she felt a tapping on her shoulder. She turned and looked behind her, but no one was there. As she turned, her hand made an involuntary motion, and before she knew what was happening, Dorothy placed the book in her hand. Maisie turned back toward Dorothy, but she had gone quickly back to her desk. She was left holding the little book. She stared at it with a kind of terror, not knowing what to do with it. She dared not take it home, for fear her family would see it and ask questions. She certainly did not want to read it. At length she decided to throw it in the dustbin, but when the time came, she did not have the courage. She put it in her bag instead. She would figure out what to do with it later.

Maisie carried the offensive book home with her, all the while feeling an irresistible pull towards it. Later that night, when her mother and sisters had gone to bed, Maisie went to her bedroom and locked the door. She waited till she was quite sure her family was fast asleep, and then could stand the curiosity no longer. She pulled the New Testament out of her bag, opened it up, and started reading. It was ten o’clock. She started with Matthew, the

first book, and read right through it. She had the feeling she was meeting a wonderful man for the first time. As she read the stories about Jesus, she made two important discoveries.

First, Jesus was a Jew. It was there right in front of her. The books were undeniably Jewish. Anger rose in her. Why do Christians worship a Jew and yet hate Jews? Grandfather's stories came back to her mind. It was Christians who had persecuted her people. She wished Grandfather were alive. If there was anyone, she could talk to about all this, it was him. But she was not just angry, she was fascinated. She had never considered that Christians worshipped a Jew. *Well, if this man is a Jew, that is amazing. I better read a bit more and find out all I can about him.* So, she kept reading. She read Mark, and then Luke. The three books were very similar, and it was a confirmation to her that these three men had written the same things about this Jesus.

Second, she was surprised to discover that Jesus was a good man, a wonderful man. In fact, he seemed more than an ordinary man. A deep stirring in her heart told her this book was not an ordinary book either. It was speaking to her, as if it was alive somehow. And then, *she knew* — this book was the living Word of God. These were heavenly truths. She was reading God's holy words. *I have got to believe it,* she thought. And to her own amazement, she did. She believed that the New Testament was the living word of God, and that Jesus was who He said He was — the Messiah. She knew it in her heart, and nothing could convince her otherwise. Instantly she felt an awakening in her soul, like light had flooded into the darkest corners of her being. She looked at the clock. It was three o'clock in the morning. She was tired, but not with the heaviness of depression or hopelessness. Her heart was finally at rest.

When Maisie woke up something was different. Everything was different. She ate breakfast with her family but didn't tell them anything about her midnight decision. She went to work, and when she arrived, Dorothy was already there. She came over to Maisie with a look of expectation. "Oh Maisie, I prayed all night for you last night. Second time now."

Maisie smiled with a joy she had never experienced before. "Dorothy, I know. I know now that Jesus is the Messiah. I read the New Testament last night, and I know that the Bible is the living Word of God. I'm a believer!"

"Oh Maisie, I'm so happy! You must come to my home. My family will be so pleased to meet you. They are all believers too. Friday is a good time. We can have Bible study together

every Friday and compare the Old Testament and New Testament.” Maisie agreed excitedly, eager to learn how to be a follower of Jesus from the girl who introduced her to Him.

Within two weeks of her arrival, Dorothy was gone from the factory. She found a better job elsewhere. Maisie would miss working with her but looked forward to their Friday meetings. She knew that God had brought Dorothy to the factory *just for her*, to lead her to the light of the Messiah.

Dorothy’s family opened their home and their hearts to her, taking time to talk and pray with her, and eventually Maisie started going to church with them. Maisie’s secret meetings with them went on for about 18 months. She did not dare tell her family about her conversion, but she felt a growing uneasiness about the matter. She knew what God’s Word said, that “we must believe in our heart and confess with our mouth.” She had only obeyed half. But the more convinced Maisie became of the truth of Scripture, the more she wanted her mother and sisters to know the truth as well.

### **Opposition**

One Friday evening, Maisie had spent about an hour at the Fishers when she began to feel extremely uncomfortable. She pulled Dorothy aside. “I’ve got a premonition there’s trouble waiting for me at home. I know I must go home now. I think God is opening the way.”

“You go home, and I’ll pray for you. I’ll pray your courage does not fail.”

Maisie left the Fishers with much trembling. As she neared the house, she could see her older sister Nan waiting for her on the veranda. Maisie prayed for courage and walked up the steps. Nan leapt out immediately and slapped Maisie, first one side of the face and then the other. Her eyes were flashing with vivid anger and she screamed at Maisie.

“What have you done?! You have broken your mother’s heart! You have broken up our home. You have brought disgrace to the family. How could you do this?”

Maisie could not speak. *They knew.*

“Why have you changed your religion?” Nan continued, shouting fiercely. “Why are you reading books about Jesus Christ and going out with his followers?” She spat the name out as if it were poison. “Have you gone mad? Yes, I found all the books you were hiding away in your drawer, and I’ve burned the lot.”

Maisie stood silently, praying for guidance and help. Nan slapped her again with even more rage. Then Maisie spoke. She looked Nan in the eyes and confessed, "Yes, I am a believer." Nan was gripping her tightly and made a move to shove her to the ground but stopped suddenly and let Maisie go. Maisie ran into the house, her face stinging, but nevertheless relieved. In a way she was glad they knew. Nan followed her in to where Mother was sitting. Maisie stopped in shock. It was Nan who spoke first.

"Look what you've done! Your mother's turned grey overnight!"

Maisie stood in disbelief, staring at her mother. It was true. Her hair had gone completely grey, and she was sobbing violently.

Maisie broke down. She flew to her room and shut the door behind her. She ran to her drawer where she had hidden some Christian books, tracts, and her beloved New Testament. All were gone except the New Testament. She could still smell the fire in the stove and breathed a prayer of thanks that they didn't have the courage to burn the Word of God.

She thought of her mother's grey hair. It had been dark yesterday. She wished they could have learned the truth from her own lips. Oh, what anguish Mother must be feeling! She did not care about Nan's abuse or what would happen to her. But her poor mother. . . She collapsed onto the bed crying in desperation. "God, I can't go on with this anymore. What I feared most has happened — look what's happened to my mother!"

No sooner had Maisie uttered these words than a flash of dazzling light bolted across the room. Though it was late evening, the room was brilliantly illuminated for a few seconds. In the flash she heard an audible voice, powerful and unmistakably clear. "*Follow Me.*" Maisie looked up in wonder. And then it was gone. Amazed, she fell to her knees on the floor.

"Jesus!" she cried. "Of course, I'll follow you. I cannot do anything else. I've got to follow you."

She got up a few minutes later with a calm readiness to face her mother and sisters. She went back out to the living room. Mother was sitting with her face in her hands, tears mixed with strands of silver hair around her shoulders. Maisie went over and sat down beside her.

"Mum," she said gently. "I want to tell you why I believe that Jesus is the Moshiach."

Mother did not look up and her voice sounded strange and tight behind her hands. "Get out of my sight. I don't ever wish to see you again."

From that point on, home became one of the loneliest places Maisie had ever known. At first, Maisie considered leaving the house and going out on her own. But God clearly showed her that she was to stay where she was, and so she remained.

Maisie was no longer allowed to have any Christian friends. She was forbidden to go to Church, or to the Fishers. All her movements were watched very closely. She knew they looked through her things on a regular basis. They hadn't told the rest of the family, and for Mother's sake, Maisie tried to be discreet when the family gathered together. Perhaps they thought Maisie would give up her foolish ideas and return to the old life. But Maisie knew nothing could change her mind. She was convinced. Mother's anguish pained her more than anything.

Sundays were especially lonely. Nan was married and living in her own house by this time, but every Sunday she came to have lunch with Mother. This always caused friction. Nan still despised her and ended up arguing with Mother over what to do about Maisie. Maisie did not want to upset things further, so she started leaving the house whenever Nan arrived. She took to walking the streets by herself on Sunday afternoons. She would wander until she thought it safe to return. The Lord also made it clear to her that she was not to be at home when Nan was.

Her only comfort in those tense days was her New Testament, and she read it every opportunity she had. She found an unspeakable comfort and strength in those pages. Her faith grew, and the joy of knowing her Mashiach broke through even the most difficult times with her family. She came to understand why Dorothy had been so eager to share the truth of Jesus with her. The truth welled up inside her till she felt she simply could not contain it. It was not long before she started witnessing to the girls in the factory. They were puzzled at the change in her, but God provided many opportunities to share with them. She hoped she could be the kind of influence Dorothy had been.

Still, she longed for Christian fellowship and for the freedom to live out this new faith to the fullest.

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The sense of God's nearness carried Maisie through her family's initial rejection, but another crisis was looming. By age 19, Maisie was qualified to work in an office as a typist for the General Mining Company. She was glad to be out of the factory, and the typist job paid well. Mother no longer worked, and Maisie was now the main breadwinner of the family. However, her health had not been good since Grandfather's death. She was able to cope with the headaches for the most part, but her muscles were steadily deteriorating. One day at work, they simply stopped working.

At the ringing of lunch bell, she went to rise from her chair but found she could not straighten her knees. She moved to pull herself up, but could not raise her hands, or even grip the table in front of her. Her muscles seemed to have collapsed completely. She tried to cry out for help, but even her throat muscles could not respond. She felt her eyelids falling like weights over her eyes. Barely able to speak, she managed to get the attention of another typist. The typist rushed over to find Maisie powerless to move.

She was taken immediately to hospital and the doctors were finally able to give her a diagnosis: *Myasthenia Gravis*, or Acute Muscular Weakness. It was in an advanced stage, and Maisie was told she could not leave the hospital. She was given a medicine called *Prostigmin*. It helped to restore the strength to her muscles, but its effects did not last long. When the medicine wore off, the weakness returned. All the doctors could do was increase the dosage. Maisie got thinner and thinner as the weeks passed. She had no appetite, and it took such energy to chew and swallow anything. She was surrounded by medical staff and strained conversations. The only time Maisie was strong enough to eat or talk or move about a little was directly after an injection. The rest of the time she lay weak and motionless in her bed. Maisie knew it without being told. She was dying.

On days when she felt well enough to read, Maisie spent the quiet hours in her hospital room with her Bible. Now, even in the face of death, she felt only happiness. She knew that if she would die the next day, her soul would find its final rest in her Lord, and this was a great comfort. She longed to share this confidence with her family, but they still would not hear a word about Jesus. They knew she read her New Testament when they were not there but could not bring themselves to take it away from her.

Maisie was overjoyed, especially since she was now free to read it openly. Whenever she got an injection, she read for as long as her muscles would allow her to turn the pages

and focus her eyes on the words in front of her. She also made many friends in the ward, and spoke to them at every opportunity, witnessing to patients and doctors alike about the message of the Bible. For as long as she was able, Maisie was determined to share her faith in Jesus.

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About four months into her hospital stay, Nan surprised her with a visit from a minister from a nearby church. Maisie had no idea how Nan had found him, or what prompted her to seek out a Christian minister. He was very kind and spent some time talking with her and reading her favourite verses. Nan stood against the wall, observing closely. Before he left, he prayed with Maisie, asking God to make her well again. He was deeply concerned about her situation and promised he would call the members of his church together that evening to pray for her. Maisie's spirits were lifted and encouraged, and even Nan seemed more at ease as they bid him farewell. Maisie turned to Nan with a shining smile of gratitude.

"Thank you," she whispered, reaching out her arms to embrace her sister. Nan swept her into a hug, but the effort took all Maisie's energy, and Maisie fell back down gasping, her muscles turning to jelly. Nan eased her onto the bed, calling out for a nurse.

Maisie declined quickly throughout the afternoon. The nurses gave her more injections, but with no effect. She could not move or speak and could barely open her eyes. An enormous weight was pressing down on her eyes, her thoughts . . .

In the half darkness that evening, she heard the sister of the ward tell one of the nurses to telephone her family to come quickly. "She's sinking fast . . ."

Maisie drifted in and out of awareness throughout the evening, constantly surrounded by the concerned hovering of medical staff. It was late into the night when Maisie was finally able to open her eyes again and saw the clock on the wall — it was one o'clock in the morning. The strength of dozens of fervent prayers had carried her through the valley of the shadow of death. She knew she was not going to die. For the first time in five months, Maisie sat up in bed on her own.

That was the turning point, and her health grew steadily better in the following days. The minister who had called his church to pray came to call on Maisie a few days later. He

told her how the church had met and prayed for her healing, how they did not stop praying that night until they sensed God's assurance that He had heard their petition. Maisie was not surprised to find out that the prayer meeting had wrapped up at 1:00 am, the same hour she woke with the assurance that she was healed. Maisie was discharged from the hospital within two weeks, the anticipated date of her death. It seemed God had other plans for Maisie Pillemer.

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### **Call to Serve**

Gradually, Maisie's body recovered from its battle with death. Five months in the hospital had taken their toll on her body, and her sisters told her she looked like a walking rake! The doctors gave her tablets to take half an hour before each meal to give her strength. In between the pills, her strength waned until she could not speak or eat. With each pill she felt a small burst of strength which allowed her to carry on hour by hour. Her eyelids still drooped often, which made everyday things difficult. But Maisie was determined to go out and live her life. She went back to the Mining Company, where they had held her job for her during her hospital stay. This was another answer to prayer, as her salary was sorely needed. The pills helped her work through the pain. Maisie would continue taking the little pills for the rest of her life, but it seemed like a small price to pay for the life God had given back to her.

She knew it was a miracle, and her family seemed to know it too. They didn't speak about it, but they treated Maisie with a new gentleness. There was a new openness to the reality that had saved Maisie's life. They no longer prohibited Maisie from meeting with her Christian friends or attending Church, and she gladly joined Troyville Baptist Church with the Fishers, where she was baptized.

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World War II had ended. Now in her late twenties, Maisie was still living at home with Mother and Eunice, supporting the family with her salary from the General Mining Company. During this time Eunice was thrilled to be offered a free ten-day vacation from The Star Seaside



Home, a Christian organization that provided holidays for less fortunate young people. During Eunice's visit, they preached the gospel of salvation in Christ, and she opened her heart to accept Jesus as her Messiah.

Maisie was overjoyed to hear the news of her conversion, the fruit of many tearful prayers. A new bond developed between the sisters, for they knew the deepest secrets of each other's hearts. A shared Messiah brought them together as family again, a feeling Maisie had not experienced since her own conversion so many years ago.

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Eunice went on to marry a Jewish believer, Eddy Levine, who worked as a missionary for the British Jews Society (BJS). Maisie's brother-in-law would have a tremendous influence over the direction of Maisie's life, introducing her to Jewish missions. Maisie had prayed in the past, "Please God, in Thine own good time, open the way into mission work, but not Jewish mission work!" She loved the native people of her country and hoped God would one day send her to work among the African people. But Eddy wrote letters to Maisie full of enthusiasm about his growing ministry among the Jewish people in Cape Town and encouraged her to join them in missionary work. His letters were thought-provoking, but Maisie had no desire to do any such ministry herself. Though she admired Eddy and Eunice's work, she brushed off the idea, telling them she did not feel called to the Jewish people.

But one night at their house Maisie had an experience that challenged her feelings. She had gone to bed after a long conversation with Eunice about their work with the Jewish people. She could not deny the conversation made her think. She was eager to work for the Lord. But Maisie prayed her usual prayer that night, that God would open the door to mission work among the African people.

She went to sleep, but it wasn't long before she woke up. It was as if God had nudged her awake and whispered in her ear, "Maisie, I want you to work among your own people."

Maisie was not sure if she had heard right. Her heart raced a little. She prayed, "No, Lord, not the Jews. Send me to the Africans."

After hearing no answer, she went back to sleep. However, a short time later, she was awakened again by the same call. "Maisie, I want to send you to the Jews."

Again, Maisie prayed, "Please Lord, send me anywhere else." Wouldn't God answer her heart's desire? After a few moments of silence, she fell back into a restless sleep, but like little Samuel in the temple, was awakened a third time.

This time, she surrendered and said, "Yes, Lord. I'll go to the Jews." The inner wrestling ceased, and she felt a peace settle over her heart. Maisie fell into the sound sleep of obedience.

Maisie volunteered as the Secretary-Treasurer at Hebrew Christian Alliance in Johannesburg and held the post for several years. During this time, Eddy and Eunice were also transferred by the BJS from Cape Town to Johannesburg. They had two children, but Eunice suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, and she was no longer able to make ministry visits with Eddy. So, when Eddy had to visit some of the Jewish women in the area, he asked Maisie to come. Maisie hesitated at first, but Eddy persisted, "Look, I can't go alone to visit women. I want you to come with me." She agreed rather reluctantly but was soon going on regular visits.

Eddy taught her how to approach people, how to answer their questions and objections, and how to show them in their own Hebrew Scriptures. In the beginning Maisie listened silently as Eddy spoke to the women, but soon she was chatting along with a freedom she felt came only from the Lord. She looked forward to meeting new people and sharing the peace she had found in Christ.

Maisie was becoming more and more familiar with the work of the BJS. The Society asked her to write up her testimony of how she came to believe in Jesus. She agreed, and in 1958, her testimony and picture appeared in the February issue of the *Jewish Missionary Herald*. Her testimony would be read by Jews not only in South Africa but in Great Britain, Israel, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, India, and Europe.

Maisie was becoming more involved with Jewish people, yet she was still resisting God's call. She was making 500 Rand a month at the Mining Company and told herself she had too much to do already with Sunday School and Girls' Club at the church. Maisie poured all her spare time into visits, church work, her prayer meeting, and looking after Mother.

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Maisie went along quite contentedly until her aunt, Mother's twin sister, took seriously ill. Her aunt was not saved, and Maisie felt a deep pain in her soul over this. Maisie kept an eye on her mother, whose weariness increased with the despairing news. Maisie was not able to visit her aunt but tried to ease Mother's burden at home. One night Eddy went to see their aunt in hospital. Maisie was at home, praying as she prepared dinner. She knew Eddy would talk to her about salvation in Jesus, which was comforting. She also knew that whatever happened, God would be glorified. While Maisie was cooking, she saw her mother get up and go the phone. She called two of her sisters, sisters that did not approve of any of the family who had, in their eyes, betrayed them by becoming Christians.

Mother's voice was shaky but determined as she told them that Jesus was the only one that could help their dying sister now, and that they must pray to God in the name of Jesus. Maisie was amazed at her mother's unusual courage. Maisie's aunt died the next day, but that phone call changed something in Mother. It was as if the illness had forced her to acknowledge out loud the truth she was beginning to accept in her spirit. All the fighting and resisting ceased, and whenever Maisie or Eunice spoke about Jesus, she would sit and listen intently with a curious love in her eyes.

### **Full-Time Service**

After her aunt's death, God spoke to Maisie again about full-time work among the Jews. Maisie listened but replied that she could not go to Jews she did not know while her own mother and sister were still unsaved. She felt a duty to them and could not leave her mother alone now. Five months later, her mother fell and broke her hip. The injury uncovered a deeper illness. The diagnosis — cancer — was grim. Nan reacted badly, becoming very nervous and unsettled. One day Maisie and Eunice found Nan on her knees sobbing in the house. Nan told them she promised God, she would serve Him if only He would spare their mother from suffering.

Over the days of Mother's illness, Nan surrendered her bitter life to God. Maisie and Eunice prayed with her often, especially on Mother's bad days, giving Nan the strength to face Mother without dissolving into tears. Their pastor came to visit Mother as all hope of her recovery was slipping away. After spending some time with her, he came out and assured them that she had indeed put her trust in Jesus as her Savior. She passed away peacefully a

few days later. Maisie was keenly aware of how different this grief was to that of Grandfather's death. Yes, the pain was there, but so was God's comfort, and Maisie could see God's hand moving silently through all the events leading up to her death, culminating in the salvation of both Mother and Nan. God truly had been glorified even in their suffering.

After the funeral, Maisie participated in a special week of prayer at the church. At one of the meetings, Maisie felt God doing a new work in her heart, and for the first time Maisie was ready to surrender her life wholly to Him, no matter what the cost. The reverend spoke that night from a passage in Jeremiah 18. As Maisie opened her Bible to the passage, the words of verse 11 leapt off the page, as if God had penned them in gold to get her attention. She heard His voice clearly as she read: "*Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*" The words settled in her soul as a divine confirmation. From that day forward, Maisie devoted her life to mission work among her own people, the Jews.

It was 1960 and Maisie was 41 years old. With no formal training except her years of experience with Eddy, Maisie was assigned to the town of Bloemfontein, about 200 miles south of Johannesburg. She was given a small salary of 60 Rand a month. In August 1960, Maisie wrote of her call in the *Jewish Missionary Herald*:

"As I look back, I can see God's hand guiding all the way. He called me with His still small voice, He confirmed the call with His word and brought circumstances to confirm that it was all of Him. Why He should choose me I do not know. I only know that He has called me, and here I am in Bloemfontein, in the heart of the Orange Free State. A new town, a new home, and new Jewish faces all needing a Savior."

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Maisie did not know a soul in Bloemfontein. She did not have a place to live and had little money. She did not know what her work would look like, but the BJS trusted her to know what to do. When she arrived, she phoned the only contact she had been given by the BJS, a local Baptist minister. He was not expecting her, but graciously took her to his home, and he and wife took a shining to Maisie instantly. They offered her a room in their house and meals while she looked for a flat and furniture and all the other little things she needed until she found a flat. In two weeks, she found a flat, and it just so happened that a furniture store was

going out of business and needed to sell off their inventory. Maisie got the furniture for much less than she expected, a blessing to the 60 Rand salary that had to stretch a long way each month.

As she was getting settled into the flat, she received a phone call from her cousin. When she told him how much she was making, he was shocked.

“Maisie, you can’t possibly live on that amount of money,” he declared.

“No, I can’t,” she replied. “You’re right. But God can, and He will provide for me. I will not ask for a higher salary because I don’t believe God wants me to. This is what they offered me, and I am trusting God that it will be enough. He is my provider, Jehovah Jireh.”

Altogether in Bloemfontein there were at least six people who opened the doors of their hearts to Jesus as their Messiah and Lord because of Maisie’s fearless and faithful work.

By 1962, the British Jews Society in South Africa was expanding and changed its name to the South Africa Jews Society (SAJS). Eddy and Eunice were retiring from the SAJS after ten years of service and were moving to America to work for a Jewish mission there. Maisie hated parting with her family, for they were also her closest friends and coworkers in the Lord, but she had heard things were happening with Jewish missions in the United States. It seemed like an exciting opportunity for them, and she wished them every success.



Miss/Mej. Maisie Pillemer,  
Durban

Maisie was transferred to Durban, which was quite a change from Bloemfontein. It was the largest and busiest port city in all of Africa. Maisie found an apartment quickly, near the beaches. She was still receiving 60 Rand a month as a salary but was also expected to do deputation in Durban to raise funds on behalf of the Society and to support her own work. Her salary was barely enough to live on, but God provided in an unexpected way.

Maisie was “adopted” by an anonymous donor. She never knew who it was, but he sent a sum of money each month and she always had just enough to get by. Besides, Maisie was so busy with her work that she hardly had time to worry about money.

As she settled into life in Durban, Maisie was again hit with the reality of her chronic health issues. There were some months and even years when her condition lay nearly dormant in the background of her life, suppressed by the little pills she took daily. But during her first year in Durban, the illness began to surface with increasing muscle weakness and

fatigue. Between her own appointments and visiting other Jews in the hospital as part of her ministry, Maisie became quite familiar with the doctors and nurses. It was there she met Dorothy, a 26-year-old nurse who was half-Jewish. Through many hospital visits, Maisie and Dorothy got to know each other. Maisie shared with the young nurse about another woman named Dorothy who had changed her life so many years ago. Dorothy started visiting Maisie in her flat, and in April of 1962 she became Maisie's first decision for Messiah in Durban. Maisie was convinced that even her physical weaknesses were used by God for his glory and as an opportunity for the gospel.

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At the end of the year, Maisie suffered a period of illness that landed her in the hospital. She was frustrated to be away so long from her work and the people she was getting to know but kept right on witnessing from her hospital bed. Once home, she made phone calls from her flat, but waiting in line for the bus or walking to neighboring homes was especially challenging. When the Society heard about this, they made an appeal for donations toward purchasing a car for Maisie. By the middle of 1963, enough donations had been made and Maisie was given a car.

In 1965, Maisie was in a car accident. The car was smashed, but God protected Maisie's life and she escaped with shock and minor injuries. It was a setback for her health and her visiting schedule, but while she was in hospital, she was able to see one of her contacts who was also there. His illness was terminal. Maisie was pleased to find that he had received some tracts from another Christian worker during his stay. He had some questions, and Maisie had the opportunity to give her testimony. He requested a Bible, which he began to read regularly, much to the displeasure of his wife. He was a man who knew his life was coming to an end and was seeking peace. Maisie prayed he would find the Prince of Peace in the pages of the Bible she gave him.

In 1966 Maisie received sad news from Eunice. Eddy had passed away suddenly. He had been working for Israel's Remnant, a mission society based out of Michigan. He was only 43 at the time of his death, and much beloved by his American coworkers. Eunice wrote to say she and the children were coming back to South Africa. Maisie wished she could have

welcomed them home on happier grounds. Everyone missed Eddy for different reasons; Maisie missed him as a brother-in-law, friend, and fellow missionary. If it was not for Eddy, she might never have joined the SAJS. She could not imagine what else she would have done with her life.

Maisie spent seven years in Durban. They were years of hard work, fighting illness, frequent deputation, phone calls, and many, many house visits. Her favourite times were the Friday night Discussion Groups that she pioneered, getting the other Jewish Believers involved in leading groups. Her own neighbourhood had many Jewish people, and she visited every block of flats on the beach front where she lived, inviting as many as she could to the Discussion Groups. This proved to be the most effective and popular means of getting the gospel out in Durban.

Overall, there were few decisions in Durban: between seven and nine who had made a commitment to Christ. All she could do was follow God wherever He led her and invite as many as she could to heed His call.

In 1968, the year Maisie turned 50, she was transferred to Johannesburg to take on the growing work there. It was an exciting time for the South Africa Jews Society, with increased staff, new methods, and contagious energy. Maisie was happy to be back in Johannesburg, where she renewed contact with many of her Jewish friends. She threw herself into the work with great enthusiasm.

Her ministry was put on hold for a time in 1970 when Eunice passed away after an illness, leaving behind two children, Ronnie and Adele. Nan and Maisie grieved for their younger sister, and for Maisie the world seemed lonelier without Eunice in it. However, nothing could erase the peace and even joy Maisie had knowing she would see Eunice and Eddy again, thankful for the years they had together as part of Christ's family. Maisie had numerous decisions for Messiah in her first few years in Johannesburg, including her nephew, Ronnie.

One night at Discussion Group in 1974, Maisie had some unusual visitors: a lady and a gentleman she had never seen before. As far as she could tell, they were not Jewish, but she invited them in nonetheless. The group was enjoying themselves, eating and chatting about all sorts of things. As soon as the lady took out a notepad and the gentleman uncovered a camera, she knew who they were — a reporter and photographer from a popular magazine *The Personality!* Maisie felt like throwing them out on the spot, but another missionary, Stan, whispered, “Just leave them alone. Let us see what they’re going to do.”



MISS M. PILLEMER  
Johannesburg

The group carried on as normal with the discussion at hand. At first the two intruders sat listening to the conversation, while the woman jotted down what the group was saying. When the man started taking photographs of everyone, some of them tried to brush him off, but he kept on taking pictures. He got right in Maisie’s face with his camera as she was talking, and she pushed him away, quite annoyed at the disruption, just as he snapped a shot. *They have no right to be here!* Maisie thought angrily.

Finally, they departed with more than a few pages of notes and several rolls of film taken. Maisie hardly knew what to think. Why on earth would *The Personality* be interested in their little meeting?

A few days later, she found out why when she saw the latest issue of *The Personality*. The front page had their photos plastered all over it, including one of her looking like a very angry person indeed, ready to throw everybody out of her flat! Next to their pictures were warnings about the terrible missionaries trying to convert the Jews! There was a full article about the recent number of Jews becoming Christians, and the rabbis’ warnings against the missionaries. There was a picture of one of the Johannesburg rabbis. He was extremely angry and ranted that the public should not listen to them because they were all *meshuga* and needed their heads examined! He accused them of taking narcotics, predicting they would all eventually end up in the asylum! The Jews should only listen to the Shul teachers, and not all this missionary nonsense.



But the article also quoted much of the group's conversation and remarks about their faith in Jesus and why they believed He was the Messiah. It included a statement that Stan made at the meeting:

“Being a Christian does not make me any less Jewish. We appreciate our cultural background and are preserving it. Jesus was the greatest Jew of all. If you have a real experience of the living God, as the Christian Jews have had, it removes all doubt from your heart. When I accepted Jesus, God became so personal, and I became aware of this wonderful communication with Him.”

In the end, it provided even greater publicity for the Society who wrote a long letter in answer to the rabbi, which *The Personality* published. The Society put the letter into a tract called “A Reply to a Rabbi,” which gave them another tool with which to witness. The more they were in the public eye, the more inquiries people made about who they were and what they believed. God turned opposition into opportunity, thanks to a couple of intruders.

The decade of the '70s was an exciting time for Maisie and the SAJS. New methods coupled with Maisie's old indomitable determination saw the fruit of many decisions in those years. There was a new believer who Maisie visited every week for a year to help her study the Bible and become rooted and established in her faith. There was the woman who opened her heart to Christ in the front seat of Maisie's car after a challenging conversation. There were the daily phone calls and daily prayers for searching souls. Some of Maisie's decisions for Messiah were ripe to receive the Lord, while others required years of nurture until they blossomed like new flowers in the sun. All the while Maisie knew her labor was not in vain, and in God's good time would produce a harvest.

By the end of 1980, the Society decided to send Maisie back to Durban. In those days, when a director asked you to go somewhere, there were no questions asked. You went. She worked for about two years in Durban, but times had changed since the old days of lively discussion groups in her flat. Those who were interested in hearing about Jesus were few and far between. Nevertheless, she felt blessed to be back. She was especially excited by what she found in the churches. At last, they were beginning to take an interest in Jewish missions. Maisie was invited to speak to numerous congregations, and many of them formed prayer meetings devoted to intercession for salvation of the Jewish people. More of her time in Durban was spent in deputation than in visitation. There were few Jewish homes open to visits, but Maisie met regularly with a tiny group of interested Jewish people.



### Later Years

Maisie returned to Johannesburg in 1984, but the momentum they had built was slowly eroding. They kept visiting and deputizing, but Maisie could see things were going downhill. The work was declining, and it saddened her greatly. Though she hated to admit it, she was also slowing down as she got older, though her concern was as strong as ever. There was no spiritual hunger among the people. She was not seeing souls come to the Lord. Most of the missionaries were elderly. There was just no “oomph” left. Desperately she prayed for something to happen.

Though she kept her mouth shut, Maisie had been keeping her ears open, and liked what she was hearing about Jews for Jesus in America. A musical group from Jews for Jesus, *The Liberated Wailing Wall*, had visited Johannesburg several times. They had sparked interest and drawn crowds with their forthright, direct methods, especially among the younger Jewish population, which was something the SAJS could not do. Jews for Jesus seemed to know what they were doing, and God was blessing them.

There was some talk in the Society of working together with Jews for Jesus. At a workers' conference the idea was discussed, but the reaction was mixed. There was no question that the work had been struggling for years. Maisie felt she *must* say something. In the middle of the discussion, she stood up. She adjusted her glasses, looking intently at each Council member and missionary present. What she said next was spoken out of the deepest conviction of her heart.

"There's only one thing left that's going to save the work here in South Africa," she said passionately. "And that's if we call Jews for Jesus to come and help us or take over."

And so, a relationship began between the South Africa Jews Society (by this time the SAJS had changed its name to The Hope of Israel) and Jews for Jesus. Jews for Jesus would merge with Hope of Israel and begin a new work in 1989. It would be the first overseas work of Jews for Jesus, headed by Andrew and Laura Barron.

By this point Maisie was semi-retired, but she loved the energy and spirit of the new work. She thought the bold methods of Jews for Jesus produced better results among the Jewish people than beating around the bush and trying too hard not to offend. Spiritual hunger began to grow again. People were looking for peace in their lives in the face of an uncertain future and were more open to what Jews for Jesus had to say. What the Hope of Israel sowed in tears, Jews for Jesus reaped in joy. She had great hope for the future of Jewish evangelism in South Africa.

Maisie's life and ministry in the '90s were quieter and slower. She settled into a different type of life, but always in contact with Jewish people, both Jewish Believers and unbelieving Jewish people. If she lived, she knew there was still work for her to do with Jews for Jesus and in her own family. In an interview with Andrew Barron in her later years, he asked her if she could relay a message to Jews and Christians alike all over South Africa and around the world, what would she say?

"My hope for Jewish evangelism in South Africa is that all the Jewish people who have been brought to the Lord in this period Jews for Jesus have taken over will not die out, but that the work will continue until the Lord's coming. No matter who takes over."



“If I could speak to every Jewish believer in the world, my advice is that you would never be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that you would witness fearlessly. Do not be ashamed of who you are. Do not be afraid to let the world know whose side you are on. If every Jewish believer would witness fearlessly, we would see God moving in a greater measure today than ever before.”

“If I could speak to every church, I would tell them that the Bible preaches that the gospel is to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, and that every church is under an obligation to recognize that command. If they did obey this command, they would find Jewish people in their congregations everywhere, and they would have the joy of knowing they have obeyed God’s command. Churches should not think the gospel is only given to the Gentiles. It was always to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles, no matter what generation. And my burden for the churches today is that they would know God’s word and obey it.”

“If I could speak to every Jewish person who didn’t know Jesus, I would tell them that the most wonderful thing that could ever happen in their lives is to know the Mashiach of Israel. The Scriptures spoke of this. Old and New Testaments prove it without a shadow of a doubt. The Mashiach is *Y’shua Ha-Mashiach*, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

*Andrew Barron presently serves with Jews for Jesus in Canada. He was in South Africa from 1989–1996 and, during that time, had the opportunity to work with Maisie Pillemer. He lives in Toronto with his wife Laura. Andrew and Laura have three children: Rafael, Ketzia, and Simona. [Andrew.barron@jewsforjesus.ca](mailto:Andrew.barron@jewsforjesus.ca)*

# The Israeli Take on the Female Question

Alec Goldberg

In the broadest context, it is the question of woman's place and function in the family, society, and the church vis-a-vis those of man. Over the last two years, Caspari Center has been surveying the Israeli Messianic fellowships, and among the questions raised was one that dealt with the possibilities of female congregational ministry and leadership. Below, we briefly present some of our findings in this important area of congregational life.

David Serner, Director of International Studies at Caspari Center, who is also a pastor in the Danish Lutheran Church, and I interviewed, mostly by telephone, over 200 leaders of local fellowships. Our question was not whether women continue to play active and important roles in the congregations, leading worship, teaching children and youth, serving as deaconesses, etc. That was a given to us, as we knew the situation from both personal experience with the Israeli Messianic movement and from various sources. The goal was to find out if a woman is allowed to teach the whole congregation, i.e., a group consisting of both women *and men*, and if so, in what specific leadership capacity. The relevant question in our questionnaire therefore went as follows: "What is the highest leadership position in the congregation available for a woman?" The standard answer options were: senior pastor; co-pastor<sup>1</sup>; teaching elder; ministry leader with no teaching authority over men; teacher; and undefined.

According to the figures we obtained after processing all the answers, the Israeli Messianic movement in general is quite open to the idea of women teaching and preaching to men: only 32%, i.e., less than a third of the fellowships, do not accept it. Most unified in their support of female teaching ministry are the Spanish- and Amharic-speaking congregations, while the Hebrew-speaking ones are the most conservative, with close to a half of them (45%) believing that a woman should not teach a man. The Russian- and English-speaking communities occupy the middle positions between the two aforementioned groups, but of the two the Russians are more conservative.

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<sup>1</sup> Co-pastor here is a married woman serving as a pastor alongside her husband.

This picture is a reflection of the attitude to the spiritual gifts — another area of congregational theology that was on our radar: while the Hebrew-speaking congregations are the least charismatic on average, the Amharic- and Spanish- speaking are the most charismatic. An obvious theological explanation of the tight correlation between the two findings is that acknowledgement of the 1 Cor. 12 Spirit gifts opens the mind to the importance of gifts in general, including ministry gifts, and the possibility of the latter being unconditioned by gender, just as the former (cf. Acts 2:17–18, 21:9). Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil Skjøtt, who did a similar survey in 1999, came to a conclusion that was virtually the same but framed with a different point of reference in mind:

The survey indicates that the introduction of women pastors or women in eldership does not derive from the influence of veteran, foreign organizations working in Israel but is a development within the Messianic Movement, one which is closely related to immigration and the charismatic movement. The occurrence of women elders/pastors is also limited to post-1990 congregations.<sup>2</sup>

With all the above said, let us also distinguish between beliefs and reality. Although many fellowships feel positive toward female leadership, only a minor fraction are indeed led by a woman. We have found four fellowships where a female is the main leader; of these, two are house groups, and two are congregations. Irena Friedman, pastor of the “Rivers of Living Water” congregation, leads not one congregation but a network, in which some fellowships are also led by women.

There are also nine congregations where, according to the interviewees, women serve as co-pastors or co-elders together with their husbands. The number is probably not quite accurate, as some congregations where women de-facto serve as co-pastors, either did not grant an interview or did not answer the question or are unwilling to be recognized as such.

Finally, there are those congregations where women teach and preach, but do not serve as co-elders or co-pastors. It is difficult to state the number of such congregations exactly, but our general impression is that they are not a majority. Some leaders are open to

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<sup>2</sup> *Facts & Myths*, Caspari, 1999 p. 36.

female spiritual leadership in principle, but would not allow them to preach or teach the entire fellowship due the sensitivity of the Israeli male-dominated culture.

Of the four fellowships led by women, three were founded after 1999, and we see that the openness of the Israeli Messianic movement to female spiritual leadership is growing. Pointing to specific reasons for this acceptance with certainty is difficult, but the influence of Western theology on female leadership and church culture are two likely factors. To do justice to the work of K. Kjær-Hansen and B. Skjøtt, one might add that the Western influence on the Israeli Messianic movement is coming not necessarily through the few foreign agencies still working in the land, but primarily through multiple direct connections of local leaders with various foreign churches and movements that support them in different ways.

On a personal note, I could add that many developments in the Israeli Messianic movement, including the attitude toward female spiritual leadership, are identical to theological drifts of Western evangelicalism — the part of global Christendom that the Israeli Messianic mainstream is aligned with more than with any other. It is no secret — and if it was, it won't be any longer after the coming publication of our survey's results — that financial support plays by no means the smallest role in this alignment. Before one rejoices or grieves over the present Israeli Messianic solutions to the female question, it would be good to ask oneself: How authentically Israeli are these solutions?

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# The Place of Women in the Israeli Messianic Jewish Community

Vered Hillel and Lisa Loden

Messianic Jewish women in Israel are pioneers! They have worked tirelessly alongside their husbands and other male leaders to establish the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel and worldwide. “Just as women worked alongside men in the early pioneer days of the modern State of Israel, Messianic Jewish women have labored with strength and vision, alongside men, to lay the foundations of today’s Messianic Judaism.”<sup>1</sup> Though the modern Messianic movement in Israel was not visibly recognizable as an organized entity until after the Six-Day war in 1967, the few Jewish Believers who were in the land during the time of the British Mandate, and those who stayed after the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, paved the way for the birth of the modern Messianic movement. Two Messianic Jewish female pioneers who labored early in the Jewish Messianic community exemplify the traditional role of women in the Israeli Messianic Movement and the exception.

Pauline Rose, the Lady of Mt. Zion (1898–1973), started the first Messianic Jewish Christian congregation in Israel.<sup>2</sup> In March 1948, Pauline arrived from England to kindle “the Sabbath light of the Messiah” in the Holy Land. During this trip, Pauline met with resistance from Jewish Yeshua believers, as well as from Jews. Despite the resistance, Pauline was able to gather enough Jewish Yeshua believers to form a small congregation, the Jerusalem Fellowship. Due to the difficulties surrounding the War of Independence in 1948, only a handful of the members of the Jerusalem Fellowship remained in Jerusalem during the war, still under the leadership of Pauline Rose. At that time some Jewish Yeshua believers, including Pauline, were accused of spying for the British under the guise of religion. They

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Wolf, “Messianic Judaism and Women,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*, David Rudolph and Joel Willits, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 98–106.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Pauline Rose, her encounter with Yeshua, and experiences in Israel, as well as the messianic congregation, see Boaz Michael, “The Lady of Mount Zion: The Pauline Rose Story,” *Teaching from Zion* 36 (2017): 24–31. <https://netivyah.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/tfz36edited.pdf>, last accessed Dec. 29, 2020.



were arrested, interrogated, and eventually released. Through these events, the congregation suffered serious consequences from which they could not recover. Pauline left the congregation in 1965 and started a “parachurch” organization for Jews, Arabs, and Christians on Mt. Zion. By the early–mid 1970s, the Jerusalem community founded by Pauline ceased to exist. As a congregational leader, Pauline is an exception to the typical role of women in the Messianic Jewish community, but her leadership in a “parachurch” organization is a more traditionally accepted role.<sup>3</sup>

Rachel Bar-David (Haimoff), another Messianic Jewish female pioneer, exemplifies the role of most women in the Messianic Jewish movement. Rachel, also known as Schelly, did not lead a congregation or organization, and did not have any titles. She is said to have raised a “Modern Messianic Jewish Tribe” through the final years of the British Mandate, the establishment of the State of Israel, and into the late twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Rachel, along with her husband and seven children, is one of the few Jewish Yeshua-believing families to live in Israel from the time of the British Mandate through the establishment of the State of Israel and beyond. She devoted her life to raising and training her seven children as believers in Yeshua through these difficult and lean years. Though she held no position or title in the fellowship led by her husband that met in their home, she was a vital part of its success through her hospitality, preparation, work with the women and children, and prayer. She is like one of David’s mighty men, Dodo the Ahohite, who guarded the lentil patch (2 Sam. 23:11).

These women are two of the few Jewish Yeshua believers who were not evacuated from Israel in Operation Mercy after the War of Independence. They lived through the decimation of the Jewish Yeshua-believing community and the ideological and theological changes resulting in its aftermath.

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<sup>3</sup> Pauline Rose is not remembered by many. Nevertheless, her name belongs in the list of Messianic Jewish pioneers alongside Joseph Rabinowitz, Isaac Lichtenstein, Philip Cohen, Hayyim Pollack, Moshe Imanuel Ben-Meir, and Hyman Jacobs (Jerusalem) and Paul Levertoff to name a few.

<sup>4</sup> Gershon Nerel, “Rachel Bar-David: Mother of a Modern Israeli Messianic Jewish Tribe,” *The Messianic Jew and Hebrew Christian*, 67.3 (1994): 6670. <http://seeisrael.co.il.tigris.nethost.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Rachel-Bar-David-Mother-Messianic-Jewish-Tribe-MESSIANIC-JEW-HEBREW-CHRISTIAN-67-1994-66-70.pdf>. Last accessed Dec. 23, 2020.

At the end of the 1948 War of Independence, it is estimated that under 30 Jewish Yeshua believers remained in the newly born State of Israel.<sup>5</sup> As refugees streamed into Israel, included in their number were a few Yeshua-believing Jews.<sup>6</sup> They brought with them their faith traditions and established small communities along the same doctrinal and orthopraxic expressions as they had in their countries of origin. One such group was of Romanian extraction and had been reached for Yeshua by Norwegian Lutheran missionaries to the Jews who worked in Romania. A Romanian-speaking congregation was established in Haifa.<sup>7</sup> Today, some of the descendants of this group meet in Tel Aviv.

Although the infrastructure of the Yeshua-believing community was destroyed, a number of the Christian denominational properties remained. During the period from 1948 until 1967, many missionaries from Protestant denominations arrived in Israel. Some of these missionaries recovered their historic properties. Examples of this are the works of the Israel Trust of the Anglican Church (ITAC), formerly the Church Mission to the Jews (CMJ), and the Lutherans, both of which have properties in Haifa, Jerusalem, and Jaffa, where communities of Yeshua-believing Jews joined with expatriate Christians and a few Jews who became Yeshua believers through their outreach. Others established new works to evangelize Israeli Jews. The Southern Baptists were particularly active in the evangelization of Israeli Jews. The evangelization efforts of all the groups mentioned above had limited success, but their influence on the nascent body of Jewish followers of Yeshua continues to shape the role of women throughout the Israeli Messianic community. Leadership roles are the exclusive domain of men according to the patriarchal understanding that women are designed and created to be man's helpmeet and her domain is that of the home and the family.

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<sup>5</sup> Gershon Nerel, "Operation Mercy on the Eve of the Establishment of the State of Israel," *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 61 (2009): 21–32, specifically 28, and Kai Kjaer-Hansen, "Numbers Connected with Operation Mercy," *Mishkan*, 61 (2009): 33–43.

<http://seeisrael.co.il.tigris.nethost.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Operation-Mercy-before-Establishment-of-State-of-Israel-MISHKAN-61-2009-21-32.pdf>. Last accessed Dec. 29, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Menachem Benhayim, "The Messianic Movement in Israel 1963–1998: A Personal Perspective," *Mishkan* 28 (1998): 3–27, specifically 6. <http://www.caspari.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/mishkan28.pdf>. Last accessed Dec. 29, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Benhayim, "Messianic Movement," 4.

During this time of change and upheaval as the new state was struggling for its existence and Jewish identity, those in the land who had come to faith in Yeshua desired to create an identity and distinction in their form of worship, separate from the Christian missions and churches in the land. The challenge was implementing their desire. How were they to emancipate themselves from the form, theology, and liturgy of the historical churches? Most Jewish believers leaned toward indigenization, toward developing and maintaining theological and organizational independence from the traditional churches. Organizational independence was achieved, and denominational titles were abandoned in favor of more biblical congregational names, but the theology and style of worship was so deeply entrenched that only cosmetic changes occurred.

The attitude toward, and the role of, women in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community is one area where only limited changes have occurred due to deeply rooted ties to traditional churches. For the most part, women are still precluded from holding any role or ministry that gives them authority over men. Practically, this means that women may not be congregational leaders or hold the positions of pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, and so on. They may, however, be leaders and teachers of other women and children and hold leadership positions in “parachurch” organizations. This practice reflects complementarian theological position (complementarianism), which maintains that men and women are ontologically equal (equal as persons before God) but have different functions. Men are appointed to primary headship roles and women to support roles. Despite the many different theologies and contrasting hermeneutics prevalent in the Messianic Jewish community in Israel, complementarianism is widely taught and practiced.<sup>8</sup>

The Israel College of the Bible (ICB; One Israel Bible College) exemplifies both the teaching and practice of complementarian theology. About ten years ago, ICB adopted the policy restricting women from teaching the Bible or theology. While women do teach at ICB, they are limited to teaching language, geography, or history courses. ICB does recognize the calling of women and the need for women to be trained for ministry. The college has a

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that not all leaders of Messianic Jewish congregations identify complementarianism as the theological basis for their view toward women, even though they hold this position. One reason is they accept the theology and hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture of the historical churches from which they emerged as accurate and proper without further exploration.

women's leadership training program whose goal is to develop "a movement of women grounded in Biblical truth, who are affirmed in their identities, strengthened in their callings, and equipped to lead lives of ministry. Shifting the general paradigm from a few women who are carrying the load, to a community of women who are seen, heard, and known by God and equipped to serve His people..."<sup>9</sup> This ten-course program is designed to train women for practical, biblical ministry to women, and only to women.<sup>10</sup> Thus, ICB both models and teaches that women need to be equipped in order to fulfill their gifts and calling, as long as the ministry is to women or their teaching is limited to subjects other than Bible and theology when men are present.

Exceptions to complementarianism do exist in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community and some women do hold positions of headship or leadership, but they are sparse. While senior leadership in Messianic congregations is overwhelmingly male, there are a number of exceptions. A large Messianic congregation in the center of the country that consists primarily of Messianic Jews from an Ethiopian background was founded by, and is led by, a woman. Her leadership is both recognized and blessed by the male leadership of a country-wide, united group of Ethiopian congregations. At least one congregation of Russian-speaking Messianic Jews in the north of Israel is led by a woman, as is another small congregation of Hebrew- and English-speaking believers in the south of the country.

The contrasting theology to complementarianism is egalitarianism. Both theological perspectives are rooted in Scripture.<sup>11</sup> Egalitarianism, like complementarianism, views men and women as ontologically equal, but views roles differently. Egalitarianism holds that roles should be based on ability and not gender. While egalitarianism is prevalent in Israeli society and in various expressions of Judaism and Christianity, it has not greatly impacted the Israeli Messianic Jewish Community. Nevertheless, egalitarianism, along with other sociological factors, has affected some changes in the Messianic Jewish community since the days of Pauline and Rachel. One change is the realization of the necessity and value of women's

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.oneforisrael.org/women-in-leadership/> last accessed Dec. 29, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oneforisrael.org/women-in-leadership/> last accessed Dec. 29, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> For a concise explanation and the biblical basis for complementarianism and egalitarianism, see Alyssa Roat, "What Are Complementarianism and Egalitarianism? What's the Difference?" *Christianity Today* <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-are-complementarianism-and-egalitarianism-what-s-the-difference.html>. Last accessed Dec. 29, 2020.

voices to be heard among congregational and community leadership. This need is being actualized in various ways apart from recognition as congregational headship/leadership. Some congregations have husband and wife leadership teams or have wives join their husbands from time to time at elders or leadership meetings. Yet, except for rare occasions, women's voices and input are filtered through a male leader. Another substantial change is that women now serve as worship leaders and fulfill other roles that place them in front of the congregation, albeit with stipulations. Women can "share" or "give testimony" but not preach or teach in the congregation. With few exceptions, teaching and preaching are understood as roles of headship and therefore male roles, whereas sharing and giving testimony are supporting roles that women are allowed fulfill in a congregational meeting. A few congregations do allow women to teach and preach in the congregation, but with rare exception, the women do not hold positions of headship/leadership.

One area where women's leadership is accepted and respected is in "parachurch" ministries. Although few women serve as pastors of Messianic congregations, many women serve in leadership roles in parachurch organizations; they serve on the boards of a number of Messianic Jewish organizations, with a few serving as board chairs and as directors of various parachurch ministries.<sup>12</sup> Women also write theological books and serve as administrators of Messianic Jewish congregations. For women who serve on advisory boards of organizations that hold to a complementary theological position, their role is limited to the oversight of the "business." It is not acceptable for them to bring a biblical devotion that is an integral element in all the board meetings. Interestingly, Caspari Center pioneered theological education by extension in the early 1980s. A number of study books were developed to be taught by tutors who traveled to remote locations that had no Messianic congregation, but where small numbers Messianic Jews resided. During that phase, from 1984 to the early 1990s, at least one of the tutors was a Messianic Jewish woman.

Complementarianism is by far the determinate influence on the Israeli Messianic Jewish community attitude toward women. Nevertheless, other issues also come into play.

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<sup>12</sup> B'Ad Haim, a pro-life organization, although founded by men and women in partnership, is today led by a woman. Musalaha, a reconciliation ministry, has women on their advisory board, as does HaGefen publishing. The Jerusalem Institute of Justice, founded by a Messianic male, is today headed up by two women.

The diverse backgrounds of Israel's Jewish population as well as the various forms of Judaism — Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and so on — influence the worldview of Jewish believers and predispose their views toward Messianic Jewish congregational life and attitude toward women and their roles. Jews from Western countries are typically less patriarchal than Jews from African or Asian countries, mainly because the cultures and societies from which they come are more egalitarian, and Jews from Orthodox backgrounds are more complementarian than Jews from Reform or Reconstructionist backgrounds. The orthodox view toward women is influential in a couple of congregations, whereas the greater influence of Conservative and Reform Judaism lies in the area of congregational polity and observance of Jewish tradition. Interestingly, animosity in Israel between *hilonim*, secular Jews, and *dati'im*, religious Jews, has led the majority of Messianic Jews and congregations to shy away from any form or practice of "orthodoxy," which is equated with rabbinic tradition, except for their view of the roles of women in religion. A rather large gap exists in their views toward marriage relationships, with Messianic believers leaning more toward partnership, and the role of women in secular space.

In preparation for writing this article, we spoke with many women from a wide variety of backgrounds and theological understandings to hear about their experiences in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community and about their attitude toward and reactions to the prevailing view of theological complementarianism. From our conversations, a portion of women are complementarians who believe that God has mandated different roles for women than for men and, further, that He forbids women to teach men. Another portion of women agree with complementarianism in the church, but not in marriage or secular life. A third group of women do not agree with the hermeneutical interpretation of complementarianism. Yet they submit to the theology of the congregation they attend and work within those parameters. This third view seems to be most prevalent among Boomers and Gen Xers. Millennial and Gen Z women have a greater tendency to vocalize their objections to the attitude toward and the roles of women emanating from complementarian theology. As a result of this theological perspective, some women we spoke with have left Messianic Jewish congregations for Conservative and Reform synagogues, while others are forming home groups with their husbands and likeminded believers.

Women, particularly younger women, increasingly desire to develop their skills to use their gifts and callings more effectively in the Messianic community. At present, little opportunity is available for those whose gifts and calling are in the areas of leadership or teaching. As a result, women are seeking opportunities for their voices to be heard in the larger Messianic community and outside of the community. Women are forming unofficial groups, both inside and outside of the Messianic community, to meet for fellowship and encouragement. Women want to use their God-given talents to serve in the Messianic Jewish community; they want to serve the body of Messiah in Israel. If Messianic Jewish congregations do not provide space where women can use their gifts for the benefit of all, and if their voices are consigned to be heard only by other women and children, the body of Messiah in Israel runs the risk of becoming increasingly impoverished.

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# **Lévy's *Jewish Church*: A Review**

**Raymond Lillevik**

Antoine Lévy, *Jewish Church: A Catholic Approach to Messianic Judaism* (Lanham; Boulder; New York; London: Lexington Books) 2021.

These 400 pages carry a vision of reconciliation. Most of the time, Dominican friar Lévy argues for the establishment of a Jewish *ekklesia*, a fellowship of Jewish believers in Jesus, within the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, he wants the Catholic Church to open up for more or less independent Messianic fellowships, in order to come to terms with the church's own Jewishness. The title of the book then, refers to both the need of a church for people with Jewish identity and a (Catholic) Christian faith, as well as the need for a visible mark of the Jewish character of the church itself. It turns out, however, that Lévy believes this fellowship will also play a significant role in the ecumenical reconciliation process between the established churches.<sup>1</sup>

The book is a critical dialogue or response to the theology in Mark Kinzer's works over the last few years; for example, his 2005 book *Post-missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*. Lévy and Kinzer have much in common, but already in Kinzer's foreword one of their main disagreements is addressed: The role of the synagogue's rejection of Jesus in the question about the salvation for Jews.<sup>2</sup>

Lévy fully agrees with Kinzer that there should be room for a community (*ekklesia*) of Jewish believers in Jesus within the universal church (*Ekklesia*), particularly in the Roman Catholic Church. However, Lévy differs from Kinzer in how this should be done. In contrast to Kinzer, Lévy addresses the concept of the salvation by Christ as the fundamental issue for all other topics.<sup>3</sup> The first chapter is therefore on salvation, where Lévy holds that the collective redemption of the people of Israel is connected to its collective involvement in the

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<sup>1</sup> Antoine Lévy, *Jewish Church: A Catholic Approach to Messianic Judaism*, 353–354.

<sup>2</sup> Antoine Lévy: *Jewish Church*, x.

<sup>3</sup> Antoine Lévy: *Jewish Church*, 9.



death of Jesus. For him, rabbinic Judaism and its identity is structured on its rejection of Jesus as Messiah.<sup>4</sup>

In the second chapter, *Torah*, we find the strongest disagreements between Kinzer and Lévy. Here the author rejects the idea that the disciples of Jesus in the New Testament were Torah-observant in the rabbinic sense. Lining up Kinzer's views on Jesus' and Paul's relationship to circumcision, Sabbath observance, and the dietary laws, Lévy claims that to maintain this observance as mandatory splits the new fellowship in Jesus. Not that Torah observance, particularly the one of Halacha, is not necessary. On the contrary: "For a Jewish disciple of Jesus, there is no observance of Torah without Halacha."<sup>5</sup> But, its character of being mandatory is absent for Jesus-believing Jews: "...the use and therefore theological weight of Halacha appears to be very different for a Jewish disciple of Jesus and an observant Jew who does not accept the teaching of Jesus."<sup>6</sup>

*Ekklesia* argues for an organization of a spiritual fellowship with the churches as "communion-in-the-distinction." This is in principle similar to the situation for Chaldean and Ukrainian churches within the overall structure of the Catholic Church, hence the title "Jewish Church." This refers to the long Catholic acceptance of what is called extraterritorial "particular Churches," with distinct rites and canonical disciplines. These parallels are only valid if one has sorted out the questions regarding Torah observance and salvation first. However, there are still a massive amount of theological, practical, and political issues to handle. No wonder, then, that this chapter is the longest.

One of the themes is the place of the Jews in the Catholic Church, and perhaps to give Messianic Jewish believers a voice there. To do so Lévy argues that the historical background for the disappearance of Jewish Christians communities after the first centuries of the Church is important, or more precisely; the interpretation of this history. If this happened accidentally, it is easier to incorporate believers with a Jewish identity within the overall Catholic Church than if the separation was dogmatic.<sup>7</sup> As the former was the case, according to him, Messianic ecclesiology will help the Church to incorporate the Jewish dimension. This

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<sup>4</sup> Lévy, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Lévy, 169.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 183.

dimension he finds integral to the Church's nature, but then in what he describes as in a "non-Kinzerian sense," where a corporate and distinct Jewish church is in full communion with the non-Jewish believers.<sup>8</sup>

This is a demanding task, not only when it comes to building a Messianic church structure in a Catholic context, but also mirroring the Jewish liturgy and calendar to the faith in Jesus. Most people familiar with Messianic liturgy in one way or another will recognize what Lévy does here, although in a comprehensive and interesting way. His brief synopsis on page 294 and 295 of the Jewish and Catholic calendars is helpful for the sake of overview, and also for me as a non-Catholic. However, shaping a Jewish fellowship within the Catholic Church also means that this fellowship must embrace Catholic teachings. Lévy is well aware that making Messianic Jews accept veneration of the Virgin Mary, the saints, images etc. sounds rather far-fetched. His attempt to show how this also corresponds to Jewish experience and tradition is not something I am able to evaluate, but I am really looking forward to see how this is welcomed.

Lévy differs between what he thinks is the connection between the crucifixion of Jesus and the Jewish people, and the traditional accusation of deicide, the Jewish guilt in Jesus' death. Considering the tremendous historical impact of this accusation, I am not sure if the book gives enough attention to this problem. I also feel that the criticism of the Middle-East politics of the Vatican for not being more supportive for the State of Israel is somewhat superficial. Lévy may have a point that a church should be expected to let the theology of the survival of the Jewish people be heard in its own statements. Nevertheless, that would also include the prophets' critique of the people in the Land as I see it, and I am curious how that would work out, politically at least.

For many interested in Messianic Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations, this book will give much to reflect on, and like me perhaps the reader will also learn something new.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 193.

# **Cottrell-Boyce's *Jewish Christians in Puritan England*: A Review**

**Richard Harvey**

Aidan Cottrell-Boyce, *Jewish Christians in Puritan England*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock/Pickwick Publications. Paperback: 298 pages. Pp. 288. ISBN: 9781725261419.

Cottrell-Boyce's fascinating study of Puritan Judaizing in 17<sup>th</sup> century England examines Thomas Totney, the Tillamites, and others against the backdrop of the social, religious, and political upheavals of their times. While the title "Jewish Christians" is usually understood as referring to Jews who became Christians, the focus here is on Christians who became more "Jewish" in their own understanding. Their adoption of Jewish ceremonial law was not merely a redefinition of faith. It was, according to Cottrell-Boyce, a plea for the recognition of a "singular identity" within the plethora of emerging religious and political movements. This tumultuous period led to apocalyptic manifestations, revolutionary protests, and self-appointed Messiahs.

Totney (1608–1659) blended millenarianism, political activity, and esoteric teaching. Experiencing a revelation that he was a "Jew of the Tribe of Reuben," he took the titles High Priest and Recorder to the thirteen Tribes of the Jews. He circumcised himself, claimed divine powers, and was convicted of blasphemy. John Traske (1585–1636), Anglican cleric and peripatetic preacher, observed the Sabbath and practiced the Jewish dietary laws. Branded as punishment, he later recanted, whilst his followers joined the Amsterdam Jewish community. These and a constellation of other lesser-known figures are discussed using a wealth of anthropological and social psychological insights.

This well-researched book critically engages with 17<sup>th</sup> century Judaizing, noting the "otherness" of such groups and their plea for "singularity." Following Richard Popkin, David Katz, and Christopher Hill, Cottrell-Boyce links Christian "Judaizing" to early modern Hebraism and the resultant streams of esoteric, apocalyptic, and skeptical thought. Zygmunt

Bauman's notion of "allosemitism" identifies the Jew as "other" and is the touchstone by which Cottrell-Boyce constructs the narrative of the instigators and their establishment respondents. His reading of the sources and his critical analysis of the effects of such groups is instructive for anyone unfamiliar with the period and interested in the parallels with contemporary narratives of identity, ideology and the dynamics of protest and power.

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# **Ruderman's *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis*: A Review**

**Rich Robinson**

David B. Ruderman. *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis: The Evangelical Alexander McCaul and Jewish-Christian Debate in the Nineteenth Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.

In 1839, Alexander McCaul, missionary with the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, published a book called *The Old Paths*. It was largely an argument for Jews to abandon the Talmud and rabbinic Judaism and return to the “old paths” of the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps “attack” would be the more appropriate word; the book ignited several firestorms of sorts. These firestorms included Stanislaus Hoga, a Jewish believer who translated *The Old Paths* into Hebrew under the title of *Netivot olam* but later turned against the London Society. John Oxlee and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna were evangelicals opposed to McCaul and to “aggressive proselytizing tactics” (Ruderman’s term) and who advocated for Jewish observance on the part of Jewish believers. Then we have Isaac Baer Levinsohn and Samuel Joseph Fuenn, eastern European maskilim (learned proponents of the *haskalah*), and Raphael Kassin, a Syrian Jew, who all produced books opposing McCaul.

If read only at the level of biography, Ruderman paints a fascinating portrait of these diverse individuals all ranged for or against McCaul and *The Old Paths*. More importantly, though, Ruderman also situates all of them in terms of the negotiation of boundaries — Christians who were (are?) Jews; evangelicals who believed in the restoration of Jews to the Land but opposed evangelism and the denigration of Judaism; Jews who counter-attacked McCaul for his view on the Talmud yet who themselves could also speak strongly against rabbinic tradition from within their positions in the *haskalah* movement or even Reform Judaism. Self-identity was a messy affair in 19th-century England, and is no less so today.

McCaul himself was a similar exemplar of such tensions, which some might call paradox or contradiction. He was virulently anti-Talmud, but spoke out in defense of Jews, most notably following the 1840 Damascus blood libel. He, too, was part of the matrix of boundary negotiation.

Chapters 1–3 are Ruderman’s biographical account of McCaul and his writings. Despite his polemics, he advocated for the well-being of the Jewish people. He was well versed in Hebrew writings and rabbinics, and viewed the Talmud as a roadblock for poor Jews, non-Jews, and women. Some of his arguments are perhaps unexpected: kashrut was a burden on poor Jews who could not afford kosher food.

*The Old Paths* became a standard Jewish evangelism textbook even through the 1890s, and it says something about the tensions of those times that even some Jews who likewise opposed Talmudic Judaism valued it and reviewed it positively even while disagreeing with some of its content. Most interestingly, McCaul and Hoga intimated that it was *The Old Paths* that gave impetus to Reform Judaism.

In his final years, McCaul severed his ties with the London Society, citing fiscal mismanagement and a loss of interest in Jewish evangelism on the part of the Jerusalem bishopric. He instead devoted his energies to defending the truth of the Bible in the face of modern criticism. As Ruderman points out, this new endeavor was of a piece with his previous work: McCaul sought to uphold the Old Testament against both rabbinic Judaism and higher criticism.

Chapter 4 tells the story of Stanislaus Hoga, a Jewish believer who embraced rabbinic practice along with faith in Jesus. His personal life appears to have been in some disarray, as he committed himself to writing, only to vanish from public view several times. Having worked with the London Society early on, he eventually wrote of his grievances with them, most especially the missionaries’ attitude to rabbinic Judaism. His affirmation of Law observance for Jews who followed Jesus gave him something of a reputation in the Jewish community as a “good” apostate. The last part of his life was spent as an inventor, capping a curious and rather erratic career.

Chapter 5 introduces us to McCaul’s Christian opponents. First, we have John Oxlee, a Church of England rector. Though he was against Talmudic “superstition,” he saw parallels to the Trinity and the Incarnation in kabbalah and midrash. But he opposed “aggressive”

evangelism like McCaul's, particularly the idea that Jewish believers in Jesus needed to stop being Jewish and abandon the Law. Nevertheless, he did maintain an interest in Jewish evangelism, if not of the McCaul variety.

Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna was another Christian opponent. While believing in the restoration of the Jews to the Land, she was no friend of "conversionists." In fact, she disagreed with Oxlee's keeping the door open to Jewish faith in Jesus, though the two were closer than she imagined.

Chapter 6 is the account of Moses Margoliouth, a Jewish believer cut from a different cloth than Hoga. Described as restless and arrogant, he was a Church of England minister who identified as both Jewish and Christian, and who in his mind separated Jewishness from Judaism, though not always successfully. Like McCaul and unlike Hoga, he opposed the Talmud and rabbinic practices. After a trip to the Land, he returned to England only to fail multiple times as a parish minister. Eventually he spoke, and bitterly, against those in the London Society and elsewhere who hypocritically "loved" Jewish believers but inwardly despised them. As Hoga was a "good" apostate to the Jewish community, Margoliouth was a "bad" one. Nevertheless, he retained a clear attachment to Jewish music, poetry, and we might say, "feeling." Whether his problems in ministry and vis-à-vis the London Society were due to his own personality, to real hypocrisy on the part of Christians, or to both remains something of an open question.

Chapters 7-8 details the Jewish responses to McCaul. Isaac Baer Levinsohn penned two books on the subject. As a maskil, he had to walk a metaphorical tightrope, defending traditional Judaism while also criticizing it. Levinsohn's critique of McCaul included arguments that (1) McCaul did not meet Levinsohn's high bar for studying rabbinics; (2) religious debate is only an exercise in power relationships, encourages atheism, and is moot anyway since anybody can be saved; (3) Christianity also has an oral tradition, and has a record of cruelty; (4) Judaism has a high "moral profile"; and (5) if McCaul objects to the materiality of the idea of eating Leviathan in the world to come, well, the idea of a 1000-year kingdom is grossly material as well.

Two other Jewish respondents are profiles. First is Samuel Joseph Fuenn, who used Philo in one of his arguments, since Philo had become key to arguments of Christian origins. Further, law always developed organically and orally in all societies, showing that McCaul

not only misunderstood rabbinic Judaism but the history of religions in general. Then we have Raphael Kassin, a Syrian rabbi who broke from the usual rabbinic criticism of having any contact with missionaries. Indeed, in his first book, written in the form of a dialogue, he appeared to accord equal validity to Judaism and Christianity. Moving as time went on toward Reform Judaism, Kassin also saw a “causal” connection between *Netivot olam* and the Reform conference of 1844. Then, in a second book, he ended up being far less respectful of Christianity than in his first writing. Ruderman does not claim to understand why the two works differed so greatly in tone.

From the above, it is apparent that so many of the issues surfacing in the 19th century are still with us today. What should be the relationship of Jewish believers to the Law and to rabbinic Judaism? How are Judaism and Christianity to be seen in relation to one another? Are polemics ever useful or justified? How do Jewish believers negotiate their Jewishness vis-à-vis their faith in Jesus? Are non-Jews qualified to make pronouncements about Judaism? (Or for that matter, are Jews qualified to make pronouncements about the New Testament?) What kind of evangelism, if any, should happen among Jewish people? And so on. It strikes me that an acquaintance with the writings of all the figures mentioned in Ruderman (some of which have yet to be translated into English) would provide help in the current debates.

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# **Wilson's *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage*: A Review**

**Rich Robinson**

Marvin R. Wilson. *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

This volume is a companion to the author's earlier *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (1989; second edition June 2021). It is a wide-ranging book that focuses on the distinctives of Jewish approaches to the Bible and its interpretation. Wilson exhibits a generosity of spirit in the Jewish-Christian conversation, evidenced by the involvement of a breadth of conversation partners, particularly those from within the Jewish tradition. Indeed, Wilson acknowledges Abraham Joshua Heschel, whom he cites frequently, as a major influence.

The author's thesis is that Christians must understand the "Hebraic heritage" of their faith in order "to make the Christian student more knowledgeable and obedient as a *talmid* or 'disciple' of Jesus." This will lead to "a renewal of perspective on various biblical themes." Under the rubric of "Hebraic," Wilson includes not simply the Tanakh but also the post-biblical writers of the Second Temple period through the Talmud and on to more recent voices. (I do wish Wilson had simply said "Jewish" instead of "Hebraic" — the latter term is simply not in common enough use, and I don't find it particularly helpful.) In keeping with Jewish understandings, Wilson sees engagement with Scripture's meaning as an ongoing, dynamic process. To underscore the continuity of Jewish approaches to the text, Wilson uses the term "Judaism" to refer to the full chronological sweep of Jewish thought from Tanakh onwards. And adding those later Jewish sources into the mix can be rewarding and illuminating; as Wilson notes, engagement with extra-biblical texts should be done both critically and with an openness to new perspectives.

The volume is divided into five major sections: "Theological Sources and Methods" (on the nature of revelation, theological method, and the Tanakh); "People of God: An

Abrahamic Family” (on who God’s people are, and on Abraham); “God and His Ways” (on God, idolatry, and the image of God); “On Approaching God” (on worship and the spiritual life); and “Moving into the Future” (on supersessionism and Scripture study).

There is plenty to ponder in each section; many Christians will not be familiar with some of the perspectives offered, including matters pertaining to hermeneutics and spirituality. Outstanding in particular are the two chapters on Abraham (the patriarch, not Heschel!). Some insights new to me included the Eastern churches’ embrace of Jewish elements in their worship and theology in comparison with the Western church. Each chapter concludes not with a handful of study questions, but with upwards of 20 to 40! This makes it highly suitable for classroom settings in academia, churches, and synagogues.

Well taken is Wilson’s emphasis on knowing the Tanakh and not simply beginning with the New Testament. He writes that “I would contend that any hermeneutic that starts with the New Testament rather than the Jewish Scriptures potentially minimizes the importance of Judaism and may result in spiritualizing Israel right out of this flesh-and-blood world” (ch. 13). In this he aligns with scholars such as Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. who stress the priority of interpreting the New Testament in light of the Old, not vice-versa.

By way of setting a broader context, it is helpful to note that the Jewish theological perspectives that Wilson presents are an ideal, and an ideal held by only portions of the Jewish community. The majority of Jewish people today are not very traditional; many are secular. Much of the Jewish heritage as portrayed in Wilson’s book is in many ways as unknown to many Jews as it is to Christians, even though some values — such as the Jewish virtue of always questioning — tend to be espoused by even the most non-religious Jews. So both Jews and Christians can benefit from the material provided here.

What Wilson recognizes is that we are really dealing with different hermeneutical approaches to Scripture, not merely different texts. Exploring such differences can be both perplexing and refreshing, but hopefully it can lead to a broadening of perspective and appreciation of what one’s “dialogue community” is trying to do. Here is where a teacher can be a helpful guide.

I do, however, have an important caveat. At the end of the day, *Exploring our Hebraic Heritage* is concerned with enabling Christians to better understand their own faith by seeing it through Jewish lenses. In his appreciation of the “Hebraic” way, Wilson tends to

homogenize centuries, if not millennia, of Jewish approaches to the text: the continuities within the Jewish interpretive tradition take precedence over the discontinuities. Similar to how scholars have treated “Judaism” vis-à-vis “Judaisms,” Wilson could have benefited from considering our Hebraic “heritages.” Not all Jewish interpretation is created equal, and the differences in Jewish interpretive approaches over the centuries are at least as important as the similarities. Here we think of the changes from inner-Tanakh exegesis to Second Temple approaches, Talmudic hermeneutics, and the debates over whether every textual detail has meaning or whether the Tanakh was written in the manner of human speech. More give and take would have helped, and some pushback on methods (gematria, for example, or PaRDeS, the latter of which is described without any evaluation) and questioning of approaches would have been welcome — and would have been squarely within the Jewish tradition of questioning! Though Wilson does speak in passing of the need to be critical in exploring Jewish traditions, he does not really unpack that in any substantial way.

I commend *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage* especially for group settings, where the study questions can be used to best benefit. They are really put together quite well, and involve the student in serious thinking. Wilson speaks of the distinctives of the Christian viewpoint throughout without compromising them, and recognizes that true dialogue includes making our convictions known as well as listening to and learning from the other person. Though it falls short in the area of critical evaluation, it will help Christians appreciate the richness of the Jewish tradition.

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# **From the Israeli Scene: Israeli Coexistence Between Glass Walls**

**Tanja Shoshani**

This year I am studying to be a licensed Israeli tour guide. The course is in English and therefore the backgrounds of the participants are very varied. Approximately one-third of the group is observant religious Jews, and another third is Muslims. The rest of us are a mixture of secular people and others, including believers in Jesus, Messianic Jews, and Christian Arabs. The course is very intensive; the 2-year program is packed into just 10 months. This means that as a group we routinely spend long hours together.

During our last 5-hour lecture, we had one luxurious 30-min break instead of multiple short breaks. The reason for this longer break was the time of day: the Jewish evening prayer *Minha* had to be held, and the break also provided Muslim participants with adequate time to end their Ramadan fasting for that day. And after these religious rituals, we gathered again to learn about Second Temple history.

Our group reflects the multicultural character of Israel. During course hours we are all in the same situation. We come from various ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and countries, we have different thoughts and views of Israel, but we are all Israelis.

## **Bubbles and Invisible Boundaries**

Israel is at the junction of three continents, merging influences from all points of the compass. The nation is knit together from people and cultures from around the globe, e.g. from the Jewish communities in different parts of the world. Some new immigrants who move to Israel under the Law of Return are not actually Jewish according to the Rabbinical Law. Messianic Jews are viewed by outsiders as falling between Judaism and Christianity. They see themselves as Jews, while Orthodox Judaism considers them Christians due to their faith in Jesus.

Another major sector of the Israeli society is the Arabic-speaking population, both Muslim and Christian. Many of these people are native to the land, having lived here for generations; some emigrated from surrounding Arab countries just a few years or decades before the creation of the modern state of Israel.

There are also many dividing lines within the Hebrew and Arab-speaking communities. Within both groups are people from diverse backgrounds, with distinctive cultural and religious customs compared to the others in the same ethnic group.

In addition to these main ethnic groups, there are other minorities in this land: Arabic-speaking Druze, a people group also found in Syria and Lebanon; Arabic-speaking Bedouins, who inhabit various areas in Israel, Jordan, and Egypt; Armenians, who speak either Hebrew or Arabic, depending on where they live; Circassians, who are usually Sunni Muslims and serve in the Israeli army; and Samaritans, who consist of a tiny Hebrew-speaking community in Holon and a tiny Arabic-speaking community near Nablus. These minorities have their own schools with their own curriculums, their own local municipalities, etc.

The coexistence of all these sub-groups is often challenging, but on the whole, it seems to work. There isn't always that much interaction between these groups. Many prefer to keep their own communities and traditions, and they basically live all their lives in their own cultural bubbles. You could even claim that between the groups there are thick cultural glass walls that are almost impossible to penetrate.

It's funny: when Israelis fly abroad, all the passengers from various backgrounds suddenly become unified and very "Israeli," no matter whether they are religious, secular, Russian, Ethiopian, native Israelis, or new immigrants. The picture of the people in Israel is like a mosaic: scattered pieces coming together to form one body.

### **Shattering the Glass Walls**

While writing this article in May 2021, clashes erupted in Israel, in cities where different ethnicities had typically gotten along for decades. Unlike in previous conflicts, incidents of extreme violence took place in mixed Arab-Jewish neighborhoods. Cars and properties were burned, and flames of hatred flared. Political tension has existed for a long time, but such vicious acts among neighbors are new. Suddenly, bubbles and glass walls began to shatter.

Many were afraid that the third intifada would start. Fortunately, Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire after eleven days of fighting. However, tensions remain, and some rioting continued.

In the midst of frightening potential scenarios, there is a phenomenon that brings a spark of hope: many Jews and Arabs joined together to promote peaceful coexistence. During this latest conflict, and following it, thousands of people gathered to demonstrate in favor of harmonious relations between Jews and Arabs. Some of them were leftists, calling for the two-state solution. Other grassroots movements drew participants from wider political and religious spectrums, for example Women Wage Peace. On Facebook, people resisted hatred and promoted peace by joining the group Jews & Arabs Refuse To Be Enemies.

Believers haven't remained silent either. The national board of Messianic pastors and elders came out on May 17 with a statement lamenting the polarization and hatred: "We Israeli Jews and Arabs, who share the same faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord, declare that we are united in brotherly love that is rooted in our faith and based on the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament — Our hearts agonize at the expressions of violence and hatred in our country, where we all live together and we have no other country." The statement goes on to call all believers to express unity in love, help each other, and through all this, confront the forces of Satan raging around the country.

Obviously, the conflict has two levels: the political level and the practical level. On the political level, this is a conflict that will unfortunately not be solved in the near future. On the practical level, most people in Israel want to return quickly to "normal" life — or at least to what is considered normal here. Living in bubbles has been the way people from different cultural and religious backgrounds have successfully coexisted in peace for generations. This can be seen as a positive thing. We hope to see relative harmony prevail again, as we continue to dream of an end to the conflict and pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

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