

MBS TEXTE 122



6. Jahrgang
2009

Baruch Maoz

**Evangelising the Jewish
People – Toward the
Third Millennium**



Theological Accents
Theologische Akzente

Table of Contents

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Historical Background	3
Is the Message Valid?	5
Is the Church's Understanding of the Message Valid?	8
Does the Church Have the Right to Declare the Message?	10
Is the Message Relevant to the Jewish People at the Turn of the Third Millennium?	10
Eschatological Hopes	13
Messianic Judaism – Another Form of Human Triumphalism	13
In Closing	14
The Author	15
Impressum	16

Evangelising the Jewish People – Toward the Third Millennium

Baruch Maoz

As we near the end of the second millennium, an inexplicable human fixation with round dates accords us an opportunity to give some thought to an area which has been much in the news in recent years: the evangelisation of the Jewish people.

Historical Background

For many hundreds of years, there was no discussion of the topic. The Gospel was there to be preached, although the early Christians were not too sure whether or not that preaching was to include the non-Jewish nations of the world, and on what terms they could be admitted, if at all. Being Jewish and being Christian was one and the same thing in the mind of the early Christians because it was assumed that the Gospel is pre-eminently a Jewish matter, the fulfilment of Jewish hopes and the climax of a series of divine workings among and through the Jewish people. Astounded by the revelation that God had granted repentance unto salvation to the gentiles without their converting to Judaism (Acts 11:2, 18), some of the early Christian believers thought that the only right course open to these gentiles was now to embrace the fuller

implications of their faith in the Messiah of Israel. As it was put in Jerusalem: “the gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses” (Acts 15: 5).

At the same time, the rabbis took on an increasingly antagonistic attitude to the latitudinarianism that seemed to characterize the church in its’ attitude to gentile believers, much on the same grounds as did the Christian believers from among the Pharisees. They detected what has become somewhat blurred in the minds of some today, namely that, if the absolute identification of Judaism traditions with truly biblical Judaism was questioned, and if the keeping of either those traditions or even the Mosaic coda was not necessary for salvation, then it was no longer necessary at all. The Mosaic Law could no longer be construed as inherent to the faith of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In such a situation, it was logical to state, as did the early church, that in Christ there is neither Jew nor gentile, male nor female, bond nor free. But such a statement rocked the very foundations of the rabbi’s world view, threatening to shatter their much cherished division of the world into “them” and “us”, “them” representing all that is tarnished in the world and “us” representing all that will

ultimately inherit what is, by the power of God, yet to be.

In order to protect the Jewish nation from such unwelcome consequences, the rabbis therefore embarked onto a concerted effort to distance the Christian church from Judaism. They took effective measures to remove Jewish Christians from their synagogues, perhaps most pronouncedly by means of the famous *Birkat HaMinim* that was added to daily prayers, calling imprecations down upon the heads of “the sectarians”. They forbade any social or contractual contact with the Jewish Christians, even to the extent of proscribing their medical services. Jewish Christians were not allowed to marry other Jewish spouses, their testimony was not accepted in court and they were not counted as making up the 10 Jewish males required for public prayer. Further examples could be multiplied. The breach became final when Bar Kochba led a rebellion against Rome while claiming to be the Messiah. His initial successes fired the hearts of the nation who, when faced with a significant Jewish Christian minority in the nation that refused to fight under his false title, turned on the Jewish Christians with a vengeance.

Meanwhile, the established church took on a predominantly non-Jewish character. Disdainfully rejected by the rabbis as representing the true hope of Israel, the now-established church responded with equal disdain. The contest between Jews and Christians was in full swing and the church began to

adopt its own firm measures to secure the gap between itself and the Jewish people. It insisted upon a change in the date of Easter, ignored and thereby encouraged rabid anti-Jewish remarks, developed a theory according to which the Church replaced Israel in the purposes of God and later made room for what became full-blown anti-semitism.

If, for any reason, a Jew wanted to become a Christian, he was informed that it would be his first and paramount duty to disavow anything that smacked of Jewishness. Following is malediction that Jewish converts to Christianity were required to make: “I renounce all customs, rites, legalisms, unleavened breads and sacrifices of lambs of the Hebrews, and all other feasts of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers, aspersions, purifications, sanctifications and propitiations, and fasts and new moons and Sabbaths and superstitions and hymns and chants and observances and synagogues and the food and drink of the Hebrews. In one word, I renounce absolutely everything Jewish”. The malediction goes on to promise that no common table will be held, no Jewish spouse sought and nothing but “openly confuting them and condemning their vain faith” be undertaken under pain of “the trembling of Cain and the leprosy of Gehazi ... May I be anathema in the world to come, and may my soul be laid with Satan and the devils (if I transgress this undertaking)” *Assemani Cod. Lit.* pg. 105, *Profession of Faith, Church of Constantinopol.*

The evangelization of the Jewish people had taken on a new character. It became a struggle of secular power, masquerading as religion and seeking to crush any potential challenge to its absolute and authoritarian rule. The task was mostly one of “openly confuting them (the Jews who refused to believe in Jesus) and condemning their vain faith”. Forced conversions, forced listening to sermons, the secret baptism of Jewish children then claimed for the church, pogroms and a terrible arrogance ultimately led to the unspeakable horror of the Second World War, described by some (John Loftus and Mark Aaron, St. Martin’s Press, Lucy S. Davidowitz, Doubleday) as the western non-Jewish world’s “War against the Jews”.

Coupled with that has been an all-too-obvious failure to establish the kingdom of God on earth. The church’s high hopes have to no small extent been dashed against the rocks of mundane reality. Human pettiness that considers itself threatened by anything different; a selfishness that assumes an air of morality when vested interests are threatened in Kuwait or Bosnia but is indifferent to the plight of a million Tutus who had the misfortune of being born black and in a convenient distance from so-called “civilisation”; an arrogance that really believed that it could create heaven on earth by destroying human liberties; mounting crime due to widespread economic and social desperation, aimlessness that is the inevitable result of hypocrisy in religion – these and many

more products of human, often also of professed Christian endeavour have all forced the church to stop, retreat and take stock. In the context of our own discussion, it has asked itself four important questions.

By way of reaction, embarrassed by the revelation of its own sinful humanity, the church in many parts of the world has begun to question 1) the validity of its own message, 2) the validity of its understanding of that message 3) its’ right to declare that message, 4) and the relevance of the message to the Jewish people. Questions such as these are very much in place and should be discussed with frank courage that prefers truth to comfort, God-fearing honesty and a sincere subservience to the will of God to winning an argument, and loyalty to being acceptable in the eyes of others. It would be terrible if the church, after having failed to justify itself through one kind of human effort, by seeking to crush its most obvious opponent, now chose to devise some other means of human self-justification and thereby rejected the only means by which sinful human beings can be made right with God and can amend their ways.

Is the Message Valid?

One question raised by the events of the last 2.000 years described above in brief has to do with the validity of the Church’s own message. Is it possible that the church, which has failed so dismally to transform the world into the

kingdom of God, has simply latched on to the wrong message? Is it possible? Yes, it is possible, but possible does not necessarily mean that this is, in fact, what happened. The Church's considerable shortcomings are not necessarily those of the message it has been commissioned to proclaim.

Before we can determine whether or not the message is valid, we must first define that message. What, then, is the message committed to the Church? In terms void of the academic sophistry of human intellectualism, the message is, quite simply, the Gospel as defined by the Old and New Testaments. In a nutshell, it is this:

In the beginning, God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – created the heavens, the earth and all that is in them. He had no need of these, but chose by his grace to create them and to share the eternal blessedness of his glory with them. He then created man, male and female, in his own divine image to love, serve, enjoy and glorify his Maker eternally. With those purposes in view, God created for man a venue – spiritual, moral and physical – in which man was to conduct his life. This venue was defined by God's gracious provisions and his wise and gracious laws. But foolish man rebelled, sought to establish his own independency and transgressed the limits of the venue accorded to him, bringing upon his descendants the terrible consequences of that rebellion: spiritual, moral and physical corruption, displacement from the presence of God and eternal lostness. His initial sinful

deed also brought corruption, sickness, death and torment to the world. Even before he sinned, his finite efforts could please God only by grace, but now that sin had effected every fibre of his being, his best efforts were finite, tainted expressions of his rebellious nature.

God in his grace did not leave mankind or the world without hope. He determined to send them a saviour. For the accomplishment of that promise he chose a nation – Israel – gave them in the Law promulgated from Sinai a revelation of his goodness, holiness and glory and buttressed their hope with covenantal promises and intimations of the salvation that was to come. He taught them to distance themselves from the sin that was to be found in world around them and called upon them to be faithful to him at any cost.

But, like Adam, Israel was unfaithful. Even during periods of spiritual and moral reformation, the change was superficial. When prophets were sent, the people despised and persecuted them, causing some of them to be killed. Changing political opportunities interested their kings and leaders more than following the Lord. Their priests became corrupt and they had as many or even more false prophets as they had true ones. Israel was never intended to be the saviour of the world, but it was meant to be a people through which the revelation of God's grace and holiness would come, who would itself be saved, and from whose descendants would appear the wonderful saviour, the Messiah, anointed by God to save.

God was true though every man turned out to be a liar. He punished the people of Israel, and then restored them. He rebuked them, warned them and punished them again. But his purposes, covenants and promises are irrevocable. God has shown the world the wonder of his grace by being faithful to a people that consistently flaunted his will and rebelled against him. Then he sent them the promised saviour, to call them and the world to himself. That anointed one is Jesus, God become man, a Jew born in Bethlehem who was brought up under the rule of Rome, and who declared the word of God to Israel again. He led a perfect life – void both of sin and of the finitude of human ability to please God. He taught the true meaning of the Mosaic covenant and called upon the people to repent, cast themselves on the mercy of God and accept the yoke of his kingdom, which yoke they had repeatedly refused. He was rejected by them, and crucified at their instigation through Roman connivance, contrary both to Jewish and to Roman law, an offence against God.

But Jesus had come into the world in order to die and by that means to bear the due punishment of the sins of the world. His death secured the spiritual and moral re-transformation of all whom the Father had given him, both Jewish and gentile. That re-transformation is the work of God's grace by his Spirit and through the merits of Messiah. All have a need for it, but none have a right to it. Yet God promises that all who turn to him from themselves,

their arrogance and their self-effort, seeking his grace, will be granted it, for all who call upon the name of the lord will be saved.

Salvation is not merely forgiveness of sin. It is, as stated above, a transformation, a new birth from above through which a process commences, leading to man's complete re-reformation into the very image of God corrupted through the sin of Adam. It places man once again in holy communion with God and with his fellow creatures, it gradually forms in his heart a desire to do God's will as revealed in the holy scriptures, so that God might be glorified in all things.

That, in sum, is the Gospel. And now to return to our question: is the message valid? Our answer: absolutely yes! Such a message touches at the very heart and substance of human need. It reflects the glory of God. It is true to the scripture. One can take biblical texts and impose upon them ulterior meanings, but no one armed with even a modicum of literary ability, who is able to read a simple message, can deny that such is the message of the Bible today, as it always was.

In these modern days, some of us are embarrassed by spiritual things – unless they are esoteric and mysterious. The luminous appeals to us only if it does not stand over us and command our thinking, our patterns of life and our emotional behaviour. But, let it be said in no vague way: if God be true, then the Gospel is valid and it is the only way mankind can find salvation. The horri-

ble facts of history have done nothing to weaken the force of the Gospel. Rather, they have strengthened it, for the Gospel has repeatedly declared that human effort to establish a divine kingdom on earth is doomed without recourse to collapse into moral anarchy. Man cannot build the kingdom of God, and the Church's arrogant effort to ignore that truth and to construct a tower that reaches up into heaven is just another form of human rebellion – even if it is carried out in the name of Christianity. The church has failed but the Gospel stands having this seal: “the Lord knows who are his”, and “let everyone who fears God depart from iniquity”.

We cannot save ourselves – the problem is not in our environment, it rests in who and what we are and there is no way that we can raise ourselves up by our own shoestrings. We are in the hands of God to live or to perish. That is the whole point of the Gospel: God's saving grace to sinful mankind. That is precisely why the gospel is so pre-eminently relevant, so valid to address the truly human predicament.

And now, to our second question:

Is the Church's Understanding of the Message Valid ?

If by such a question we imply that understanding of the Gospel intimated above, then our answer is short and to the point: it is not. The church has erred greatly by assuming that the material

and intellectual richness of its organization, the fortitude of its spirit, the consistency of its efforts and the firmness of its authority will lead mankind toward the promised land. The Gospel is a gospel of grace – of God's grace. It repeatedly declares the painful fact of human frailty and utter sinfulness. There is no room in a truly God-fearing church for triumphalism or for authoritarian imposition such as that what has been displayed in the way the Church for many years has related to the Jewish people. Forced conversions are no conversions at all, unless they imply the conversion of the instigator to a man-made religion.

When the Church arrogated to itself all the promises of Israel, carefully screening itself from Israel's responsibilities and from the promises of punishment should those responsibilities be shirked, it put itself in an untenable position. True, Israel has failed in terms of obedience to God. But, let not the wild branches – grafted in contrary to nature – boast against the natural branches: can the church in any way say that it has proven more faithful than have the people of Israel? If God forsook Israel for its sin, as some say, why will he not forsake and terribly punish the church for the same reason?

Replacement theologians must at the very least reconsider their position with regard to Israel. Paul, painfully aware of Israel's sin, understood the Gospel enough to rest on the eternally determined, uncontingent grace of God with regard to Israel. Not only did he declare

God to be able to graft them in again, but, he said, that God would actually do so. He argues (Rom. 11: 24) that, if God acted contrary to nature by grafting in the gentiles, “how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?!” So as to leave no room for doubt about the import of his statement, Paul goes on to say: “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a partial hardening until the full number of the gentiles has come in, then all Israel will be saved as it is written, ‘a redeemer will come from Zion, and he will turn ungodliness away from Jacob, because this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins’” (ibid., vv. 25–27).

The Church’s triumphalist understanding of the Gospel, as if it were a testimony to human worth, is altogether mistaken. Only God takes away sins, and he saves only those who recognize that they have such sins that need to be taken away, and that there is nothing they can do in order to rid themselves of sin or of its terrible consequences. The Church’s efforts to force itself on the Jewish people is a denial of the very essence of the Gospel and clear evidence of the extent to which the church has failed to understand the very message it sought to proclaim.

In present days the church is responding in an equally mistaken fashion. Reeling under the revelation which history affords of the Church’s sinfulness, some of the best minds and hearts in

the church have evidenced a tendency to deny the Gospel rather than deny themselves the arrogated honour of being in the right. “Let God be false and every man true – especially if he is a theologian”, such seems to be the new modern cry. Another Tower of Babel is being constructed, yet another human effort is being made by man to justify himself, even if it is at the expense of God’s glory. Some in the church are now insisting that the Gospel must be shorn of its supernatural elements, cleansed of its claim to be uniquely true and placed on the supermarket of human religions, to be inspected, weighed and then accepted or set aside just like any other religion in the world. The truth of the matter is that most of such theologians have never really understood the gospel, or experienced its’ saving power and that those who have, have forgotten what they once knew.

The Gospel is God’s word, not man’s – not even the Church’s. God speaks from heaven, from his holy throne. It is ours to hear, heed and be saved – or to hear, reject and perish. There is no room for modifications of the Gospel under the guise of increased knowledge. The Gospel claims to be true in a unique, compelling way. It demands man’s obedience in a manner that only God can demand of man, and it promises man’s salvation in a way that only God can promise. There is no other way. The theory of two covenants, one for Israel and one for the gentile nations is wholly void of biblical support. The Gospel claims to be the fulfilment of

Israel's hopes, based on the terms of the covenant God made with Israel. If that claim is false, then the Gospel is false and our present discussion is in vain. If Jesus is not the saviour of Israel, he is not the saviour at all because his claims are false.

The church, in its distorted way, has understood this and therefore could find no rest because Israel rejected the Gospel. Foolishly, it tried to resolve the problem by force. But to redirect that force toward the Gospel by denying it, is no less serious an error, and will lead to moral capitulation no less severe than that evidenced in the history of the Church which we have reviewed.

Does the Church Have the Right to Declare the Message?

That is our next question. In typically Jewish fashion allow me to say both "No" and "Yes". Right? No man has the right to declare the word of God to another. We are all sinners. With all too few but welcome exceptions, the history of the church's attitude to the Jewish people certainly accords the church little but shame and remorse. But we have a duty imposed by grace and we have no right to be silent in order to find acceptance among those whom we have wronged. Israel needs the Gospel, as does all mankind. It is a very strange form of anti-semitism that would first enter into the blessings of Israel and

then refuse to share them with those for whom they were originally intended.

God has concluded all men in unbelief so that he might have mercy on all. He has allowed the wickedness, both of Israel and the church, to be revealed so that none can legitimately boast in his sight, and so that we – despairing of ourselves – might cast ourselves on the mercies of his grace.

Preaching the Gospel is an evidence of grace, because we preach as sinful people to an equally sinful nation. Now the Gospel is no longer perceived as a message of human triumph, but of the conquests of divine grace, the victories of God's mercies. As we preach the Gospel, we confess our own sins and praise God for not forsaking us because of them. That is the Gospel we declare to Israel: the good news of a gracious saviour who can do for all mankind what none can do for themselves. We have no right not to preach the Gospel, but we must preach it humbly, faithfully and with a courage buttressed by the knowledge that it is God's own promise of salvation to all who will believe.

Is the Message Relevant to the Jewish People at the Turn of the Third Millennium?

Absolutely: it addresses universal human need, be it Jewish or gentile, and it is the fulfilment of the covenants made by God with Israel. That is why

the Gospel is meant for “the Jew first”. In Rom. 1:16–17 Paul describes the essence of the Gospel, thereby explaining why he is not ashamed of it. He is not ashamed because of what it is: 1) *the power of God*. Paul did not perceive of the Gospel as a delightful theory or as a religious probability. He believed that the Gospel is a powerful divine intervention. 2) It is the power of God directed to a very wonderful purpose: *unto salvation*. Paul had no doubt that God saved, and that he saved by the Gospel. He believed in the forgiveness of sins through a propitiatory sacrifice of God’s Son on behalf of sinners. He believed in the power of God to transform human life. He believed the Gospel and was not ashamed of it. 3) Although Paul was a faithful, committed Jew, he was delighted to know that the Gospel is the great leveller. Promised to the Jews, it was ultimately meant for the salvation of *everyone* who believes, be he Jewish or gentile, rich or poor, wise or foolish. Paul had a special delight in this aspect of the Gospel. 4) Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel because he knew it to be the power of God for the salvation of *everyone who believes*. Since man could not work to save himself, Paul had learnt from the Gospel that what man could do, and even that only by the gracious enabling of God through the Gospel, was to *believe*. There is no room for human achievement, for human boasting. Salvation is of the Lord, all of it, from beginning to end. Yet man is called upon to respond, to *believe* as

did the smitten children of Israel in the wilderness, when they looked to Nehushtan and were healed.

5) Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel for yet another reason. Still speaking of the essence of the Gospel he describes it as God’s power to save everyone who believes, *the Jew first and only then for the gentiles*. Let us think for a moment about this statement. What Paul is saying is that, in some way, before the Gospel is God’s power to save gentiles, it is his power to do so for Jews. Why? What does that mean? Quite simply what it says. *“Theirs is the adoption as sons, theirs is the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the Patriarchs and from them is traced the human ancestry of Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised, Amen”* (Rom. 9:4–5). New Testament faith issues wholly from the Old Testament, is dependent upon it and has been designed by God to fulfil it. As we have said before, either the Gospel is relevant to the Jewish people or it is relevant to none at all.

In this manner we have provided the first argument in defence of the relevance of the Gospel to the Jewish people at the turn of the third millennium. Although there is more than one such argument, the afore-mentioned is the primary one. If the Gospel is Gospel at all, its very nature cries out its everlasting relevance to the Jewish people before it can be considered relevant to the other nations of the world, for the Gospel declares that God is rich

in mercy to all who call upon him in truth.

There is another reason that I would like to mention in brief as to why the Gospel is relevant to the Jewish people at the turn of the third century. After 2.000 years of awful suffering we, the people of Israel, have returned to our own land. The founding fathers of the State thought that the mere facts of political, economic, social and cultural rejuvenation will bring rest to our souls. But now we are tormented with the question of the nature of our existence or, to put it in common terms, by the question of "Who is a Jew?". We have established a strong, virile state with an excellent army, an agricultural industry that amazes the world. We have made important contributions to the present technological revolution which the world is undergoing. We have fine musicians, competent industrialists and able writers, but we do not know who we are.

Having rejected the shackles of rigid religious Orthodoxy (albeit, with a guilty conscience), having tried and found liberal socialism wanting, we are at loss to define the very issue that most concerns us: what is the substance of our Jewishness?

The Gospel has the answer. Jewishness is bound up with Jesus, with faith in the God who saves the undeserving by grace, who keeps covenant even those he has made when his people do not believe, and who commands Israel to be taken up with him rather than

with its own passing, earthly interests. Jewishness is brought to its climax by the Gospel, by serving as the means through which men and women of every human race, kindred, tongue and nation can take his gracious yoke upon them, learn of him and find rest for their souls. Jewish distinctiveness is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end, which is the glory of God on earth through the manifestation of his kingdom of grace by the Gospel.

Finally, the Gospel is relevant to the Jewish people at the turn of the third millennium because the Jewish people are in danger of being swept up in a new form of human triumphalism, that of Jewish religious Orthodoxy. Jewish orthodoxy is as triumphalist as was the most arrogant version of mediaeval Christianity. In spite of its denials, it is a religion of works, of self-made men (never women) who have managed to ascend the ladder of what is assumed to be spirituality by their religious devotion, brilliant legal pedantry and the firmness of their convictions in the face of contradictory fact. Orthodox Judaism subjects God to the dictates of the rabbis and subjugates all its adherents to traditions that have little or nothing to do with God's will, with the holy scriptures or with spiritually-minded morality. The Gospel is relevant to the Jewish people at this stage of history because the Jewish people need to be saved from going down the awful road of human self-confidence disguised as religion. The church has already learnt

from its own experience where such a road can lead.

Eschatological Hopes

As we near the beginning of the third millenium, eschatological expectations have been heightened. Often, such hopes are not framed in terms of the Gospel of God's grace, but of a triumphalism in which God is seen to conquer yet where all too much of the comfort and glory leak out to man. Biblical eschatology has to do with the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, not with sequences of events, stupendous turmoils and the machinations of the powerful in the world. We should not be tormented by the future any more than we should be fascinated with trying to guess or identify its outworking. God reigns, that is what matters, and he shall reign to all eternity. The day will come when all Messiah's enemies will be like a footstool for his feet, when sin shall be banished from the face of the earth and God will be all in all. Then grace will finally triumph. Then we shall cast our crowns before his glorious throne and give him the glory he deserves – through all eternity.

Messianic Judaism – Another Form of Human Triumphalism

Messianic Judaism is that relatively new movement among some followers

of Jesus, who insist that being Jewish is to some extent an asset in the kingdom of God, and that loyalty to Jesus implies some form of loyalty to Jewish religious custom. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of Messianic Judaism. I have done this elsewhere and am presently engaged in writing on the subject for another forum. But it is part of our present discussion for me to state that Messianic Judaism is, in fact, another form of human triumphalism. It is an inadvertent, unintentional and unconscious but very determined effort on the part of Jewish Christians to strike back at the church which mistreated them for so long, and to legitimize what the church had repeatedly described in the past as condemnable. It also provides some grounds for human boasting: "I'm a Jew!" – as if being Jewish is something we chose for ourselves or that accords us superior standing in spiritual matters. He that boasts should boast in the Lord, and give him praise.

No form of law or tradition keeping can assist us in an honest walk with God, and no honour is to be taken from Jesus in order to be attributed to whatever we might have done. Jesus is our all-in-all, and everything we have from God is the product of divine mercy purchased for us by the blood of his Son our saviour. Jewish Orthodox practice is in many ways contrary to the letter and to the spirit of scripture. As such it cannot be a viable option for the disciples of Jesus. It is a human edifice at odds with the Gospel of the grace of God and, in religious terms, should

be dismantled by the disciples of Jesus rather than embraced by them, even if it continues to inform a good deal of Jewish national culture.

In Closing

In considering Jewish evangelism at the turn of the third millennium, we have asked ourselves some important questions:

1) Is the message of the Gospel valid for our topic? Our answer has been an unequivocal “Yes”.

2) Is the church’s understanding of the message valid? To no small extent, we have been forced to answer that question with an embarrassed “No” and to confess that the Church has often acted arrogantly, misrepresented the Gospel and misunderstood it in terms of human achievement instead of terms of divine grace, wholly undeserved by humans.

3) Does the Church have the right to declare the Gospel? We have seen that no man has any such right, but that the Church is duty bound to declare the Gospel in spite of its sin, but that when it does so humbly – as it ought – it is better equipped for the Gospel than ever before.

4) Is the message of the Gospel relevant to the Jewish People at the turn of the third millennium? Here again our answer has been clear: the gospel is pre-eminently a Jewish thing. As such it is pre-eminently relevant to the Jewish people at any stage of history in which they might be found.

May God give us grace to believe the Gospel, wisdom to understand it and strength to represent it faithfully, whether we be Jewish or gentile, and may he be glorified in all we do.

Amen.

The Author

Über den Autor



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

Martin Bucer Seminar

Berlin • Bonn • Chemnitz • Hamburg • Pforzheim

Ankara • Innsbruck • Prag • Zlin • Zürich

Studienzentrum Berlin

Martin Bucer Seminar, Breite Straße 39B, 13187 Berlin
E-Mail: berlin@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Bonn

Martin Bucer Seminar, Friedrichstr. 38, 53111 Bonn
E-Mail: bonn@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Chemnitz:

Martin Bucer Seminar, Mittelbacher Str. 6, 09224 Chemnitz
E-Mail: chemnitz@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Hamburg

Martin Bucer Seminar, c/o ARCHE,
Doerriesweg 7, 22525 Hamburg
E-Mail: hamburg@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Pforzheim

Martin Bucer Seminar, Bleichstraße 59, 75173 Pforzheim
E-Mail: pforzheim@bucer.de

Website: www.bucer.de

E-Mail: info@bucer.de

Studycenters outside Germany:

Studienzentrum Ankara: ankara@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Innsbruck: innsbruck@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Prag: prag@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Zlin: zlin@bucer.de

Studienzentrum Zürich: zuerich@bucer.de

Martin Bucer Seminary is no university according to German law, but just offers courses and lists all courses in a final diploma. Whitefield Theological Seminary (Florida, USA) and other schools outside of Europe accept those courses under their own legal responsibility for granting their degrees to students. Much of the teaching is by means of Saturday seminars, evening courses, extension courses, independent study, and internships.

The work of the seminary is largely supported by the contributions of donors. North American supporters may send contributions to our American partner organization, The International Institute for Christian Studies. Checks should be made out to IICS, with a note mentioning MBS and sent to:

The International Institute for Christian Studies:

P.O. Box 12147, Overland Park, KS 66282-2147, USA

EU:

IBAN DE52 3701 0050 0244 3705 07

BIC PBNKDEFF



Publisher:

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

Editor:

Ron Kubsch, M.Th.

Editorial Committee:

Thomas Kinker, Th.D., Titus Vogt

Contact:

mbsmaterialien@bucer.de

www.bucer.de

MBS-TEXTE (MBS-TEXTS)

Theologische Akzente
(Theological Accents)

Es erscheinen außerdem folgende Reihen:

(The following series of MBS
Texts are also being published:)

Reformiertes Forum
(Reformed Forum)

Pro Mundis

Geistliche Impulse
(Spiritual Impulses)

Hope for Europe

Ergänzungen zur Ethik
(Ethics)

Philosophische Anstöße
(Philosophical Initiatives)

Vorarbeiten zur Dogmatik
(Preliminaries for a Systematic
Theology)