Towards Messianic Jewish Traditionism in Israel – Between Comfort and Duty?[1]

1. Introduction

We have been asked by the conference organizers to review the papers presented at the 2013 Helsinki Consultation. On reviewing my own contribution I found myself wanting to pursue further two notions I investigated previously, that of the plurality within Messianic Jewish approachest to *tradition*, and of the possibility of what I called "Messianic Jewish *traditionism*".

For the purposes of this paper, with the brief to bring something to the consultation and to my fellow participants which will be of value and something new, I want to conduct the thought experiment of designing a new form of Messianic Judaism, or rather give theoretical and theological coherence and justification to one which already exists, but has not been clearly articulated, which I want to call Messianic Jewish traditionism.[2] I want to set this in the particular context of the Moishe Rosen Centre in the Florentyn quarter of Tel Aviv, an area which I am coming to know quite well as I now spend time there regularly teaching, training and mentoring, and as every teacher knows, learning far more than I actually teach.

I want to ask the question, what does an approach to Jewish and Christian tradition look like when lived out in these particular contemporary, ortho-secular, multi-cultural, contemporary Israeli contexts, by the next generation of Israeli Messianic Jews. I am thinking of those second and third-generation Israeli believers, many from marriages where one parent is Jewish, who are struggling to express their own forms of both Christian and Jewish identity, in the midst of the complex and many-faceted variety of Jewish, secular and Christian expressions that make up contemporary Israeli society.

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[1] Alternative title – "Towards a Post-Religious and Post-Secular Messianic Jewish Understanding of "Authority, Freedom, and Tradition in the life of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua" with Reference to Contemporary Israeli Traditionism". A shorter version will be presented with power point presentation (to follow).

[2] "We will each have an opportunity to present a short paper (20 minutes) on that Sunday on our main topic for the year, "Authority, Freedom, and Tradition in the life of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua." Our main focus is on the role of Jewish tradition in our living out of the Torah (as a follow-up to the last two years), but the topic of Christian tradition is also relevant to the discussion."

I want to set the discussion of Tradition and Authority within the context of a young generation Israeli believers. As I meet with them, I hear them expressing the concerns of their generation both to learn from and also move on from the experiences of their parents and grandparents in the faith of Yeshua, a generation who pioneered the presence of Messianic groups in the Land of Israel, and whose own identity was formed by their experiences of making aliyah, settling, going through the Israeli education system, serving in the army, and setting up or joining congregations and synagogues. They found their livelihoods, set up their social networkds, and integrated into the wider social context, and have left a legacy on which the next generation have now to build on.

Many of them are younger generation believers, fresh out of their army service and now faced with the choices of which career to follow, what training to receive, whom to marry and how to plan and start a family. In addition to what they have inherited as 'sovereign foundations'[3], they now have their own choices to make as to how to integrate their faith and culture. Many of them share frustration at the immaturity of the Messianic movement in Israel, finding it not sufficiently relevant to their own personal growth needs, nor catering for their own style of discipleship.

Whilst there are encouraging signs that Israeli believers are developing their own styles of worship and liturgy, music and artistic expression, forms of evangelism and congregational life, there are also great needs for fuller involvement of the next generation in this process. Anecdotal evidence of this writer and others is that a considerable proportion of 18-35 year olds brought up as second-generation believers in Yeshua, who have been through the children's camp programs, do not feel involved in congregations, and have either stopped attending regular congregational worship, or are looking to create alternatives.

In my paper last year I wrote:

1. Messianic Jewish Traditionism

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[3] Clinton ref, Making of a Leader

I am looking for an approach to Torah that relates to the growing phenomenon in Israel of what Yaacov Yadgar identifies as "Jewish-Israeli traditionism".[4] Resisting the "predominance of binary, dichotomous distinctions, which divide the world into allegedly 'coherent' and 'systematic' constructs of polar opposites", he identifies 'traditionism' (*masortiyut)* as an "adherent stance toward tradition, which at the same time is non-orthodox, refusing to sanctify tradition in a conservative, tradition*alist* manner."[5] According to Yadgar, one third or more Israelis identify themselves as *masorti* without idenitifying themselves as *haredi* or *dati.* Whilst they are thus usually understood as *chiloni* (secular), they rather express a combination of both "religious" and "non-religious" behaviour, typified by the anomaly of *davening* on Shabbat morning and then driving to the beach in the afternoon.

Yadgar notes "many have dismissed traditionism as no more than an inconsistent cocktail of beliefs and practices characterised by this lack of clarity."[6] But he goes on to state what for our purposes is significant, that such behaviour is in fact indicative of a set of values, theological assumptions and understandings of the reality of the Jewish life and experience in Israel that is profoundly appealing to many and allows a way of making sense of the competing and seemingly conflicting pieces of Israeli and Jewish identity.

What does Messianic Jewish traditionism look like? I am an example. I flexibly apply Shabbat to allow for travelling and *kashrut* to allow for exceptions (I eat what is put in front of me, but would not choose *treif*). I seek to be principle-driven and objective-driven in my interpretation of the Pentateuchal legislation and its re-interpretation and re-application over the millennia. My love for Jewish synagogal worship and liturgy is limited to my own personal devotions by the fact that I am not a member or regular attender of a synagogue or have a Messianic group near me that can provide this opportunity.[7]

My paper this year will explore further some of the issues associated with Messianic Jewish pluralism as regards *tradition*, and the development of Messianic Jewish *traditionism.*

2. Definition of Terms

It is clear that a theoretical framework is needed for discussion of key concepts such as 'tradition', 'traditionalism' and 'traditionism'.

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[4] Not the same as *traditionalism* – an orthodox lifestyle. Yaacov Yadgar, "Transcending the 'Secularization vs. Traditionalzation' Discourse: Jewish-Israeli Traditionists, the Post-Secular, and the Possibilities of Multiculturalism" in Avi Sagi and Ohad Nachtomy, *The Mutlicultural Challenge in Israel* (Academic Studies Press, Boston, 2009), 150-179, 150.

[5] Yadgar, 152.

[6] Yadgar 152.

[7] Richard Harvey "Fulfilling the Torah in Jesus Christ" Helsinki Consultation, Oslo, 2013, pp. 4-5.

Scholars have pointed out the difficulty in defining such terms, and have developed various taxonomies and systems for discussing them. Those of us within faith traditions such as Judaism and Christianity also have value-laden and theologically loaded understandings of the terms, and these are often contrasted with other concepts such as Scripture, Reason and Experience. Discussions of orthodoxy, modernity, fundamentalism and secularization all engage with understandings of tradition.

The phenomenon we are trying to investigate and correlate with Messianic Jewish traditionism is identified by Sagi as a 'hybrid' category, a label often applied to us as Jewish believers in Yeshua, and which gives us cause to be circumspect in our understanding and acceptance of the term:

> It is hard to pinpoint exactly what it [the traditionalist category] is composed of, but it is clearly a hybrid category, feeding off the two other categories: "religious" and "secular". In other words "religious" and "secular" are extreme categories representing stable and solid social reference groups; "traditionism", by contrast, is a category which exists between the two – it contains some of the practices and beliefs of the religious category, and some of the freedom and autonomy in fashioning those practices, gained from the secular category.[8]

For the purpose of this paper I am employing the understandings of tradition, traditionalism and traditionism developed by, among others, Yaacov Yadgar, Senior Lecturer in Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University, who is particularly interested in traditionism and traditionist identity as it affects the nature of Jewish and Israeli identity.

As a political scientist Yadgar is interested in how the political discourse of Zionism employs a certain construction of (religious) Jewish identity. Yadgar aims for terminological definition and clarification in his use of the terms tradition, traditionalism and traditionism which is more functionally geared to his analysis of the changing currents within Israeli society and identity politics than to

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[8] Avi Sagi. *The Jewish-Israeli Voyage: Culture and Identity*. Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2006, 202 in Yadgar 2011:35.

an analysis of the development of doctrine or religious practice found in Christian and Jewish theological discussion. This admittedly reduces the attention paid to the 'faith component' in our discussion, and takes our reasoning on the topic outside the normal range of discussion within the two faith communities to which we belong. But it also brings a useful lens, or mirror, which helps us to understand better our own theological concerns, which to us as Jewish believers in Yeshua representative of different faith traditions, is primary in our thinking.

My focus as a theological reflector on these social and political aspects of identity construction is to ask how this might affect the development and maturing of the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel, which is also challenged with the task of developing an identity that is both Israeli, Jewish, and affirming faith in Yeshua.

Yadgar defines 'traditionism' (*masortiyut)* as a 'specific, positive and binding relation to tradition', the 'self-image held by either the individual or the community as to their relation to tradition'.[9] For Yagdar, an increasing number of Israelis who do not see themselves as either 'secular' or 'religious' nevertheless have a considerable adherence to tradition based more on their commitment to maintain an Israeli and a Jewish identity that on a faith commitment to a religious system. But as the meaning of the term 'tradition' is somewhat ambiguous, this should be defined first before exploring the tensions of Israeli traditionist identity.

a. Tradition

"Tradition" should not be seen simply as a transferring of what was done, thought or believed in the past into the present. Tradition is lived out in a variety of historical, social, political and theological contexts, and claims its normative authority in tension with other notions such as individual freedom and community needs.

Edward Shills' definition of tradition as 'anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past'[10] needs to be extended to

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[9] Yaacov Yadgar. *Secularism and Religion in Jewish-Israeli Politics: Traditionists and modernity.* Routledge: London and New York, 2011, p.9.
[10] Edward Shils 1981. *Tradition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 12 in Yadgar 2011:10.

recognize the dynamic, contemporary nature of the influence of tradition on the present. Yaacov Yadgar prefers an understanding of the function of tradition which sees it as the 'conserving element for major social and cultural units, seen as the most "eternal" element when it comes to the communal and cultural structuring of reality".[11] Shills adds:

> Traditions are beliefs, standards and rules of varying but never exhaustive explicitness, which have been received from the previous generation, through a process of continuous transmission from generation to generation. They recommend themselves by their appropriateness to the present situation confronted by their recipients and especially by a certain measure of authoritativeness which they possess by virtue of the provenience from the past. Their authority is engendered by the sheer fact of their previous observance by those who have lived previously.[12]

Tradition is a 'molding social and cultural reality' with a present, current character. Tradition thus has a founding, constitutive role in the construction of reality. It is a Kuhnian 'paradigm' around which both the individual and the community build their private and collective identities. It enables the fusion of the two horizons (Gadamer), of past and present realities, and generates the prejudgments or preconceived ideas on the basis of which we construct and interpret the reality of our existence.

Whilst tradition itself is dynamic, evolving and changing, and each new generation 'invents' tradition as relevant to its present needs, it is not in itself 'frozen' in one particular form. Rather, as Alastair MacIntyre observes, it is a dialogical and deliberative concept.

> Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict. Indeed, when a tradition becomes Burkean [conservative, set and "frozen"], it is always dying or dead ... A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.[13]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Edward Shils. "Tradition and Liberty: Antinomy and Interdependence". Ethics 68, no. 3 (April 1958): 153–65 in Yadgar 2011:10-11.

[13] Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd edn. Notre Dame,

Macintyre's dynamic definition of tradition continues:

> A tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflicts: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretive debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by those whose progress a tradition is constituted.[14]

Tradition is not a set and fixed object – 'a sealed chest, passing down through the generations from a transcendent past to the present'[15] but 'exists as a collective memory which by definition is living, present and changing.' John Thompson distinguishes four 'facets of tradition' that are useful for our purposes, demonstrating how the constitutive role of tradition is to be assessed in contemporary contexts.

First, tradition has an interpretive or 'hermeneutic' facet, by which the 'prejudices' or set of base assumptions generated by tradition exist in the background of the daily life of both individual and community.[16] Tradition acts as an interpretive setting, a historically generated legacy by which to understand the present.
Secondly, tradition's 'normative' facet recognizes the normative criterion for present-day practice, as the inherited set of assumptions practices and beliefs holds authority, to vary extents. This progresses to the third aspect, the 'legitimacy' of tradition, as a form of authority and justification, where tradition serves as the source of support for the exercise of power, influence and authority. The fourth facet of tradition is that of 'identity', playing a double role in the construction of both private and collective identities. Thompson uses these different aspects to understand the changing role of tradition in modernity and postmodernity. The 'detraditionalization' that has

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Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, p.222. In Yadgar 2011:13.

[14] MacIntyre 1988:12 in Yadgar 2011:14.
[15] Sagi 2006:103 in Yadgar 2011:14.
[16] John Thompson. "Tradition and Self in a Mediated World". In *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, eds. Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, and Paul Morris, 89–108. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell. In Yadgar 2011:15.

affected late modernity means that the 'normative' and 'legitimating' aspects of tradition have been considerably devalued, whilst the 'hermeneutic' and 'identity' facets continue to instill the meaning of the past in the present, and generate identity and belonging.

b. Traditionalism and Traditionism

Recognizing the complex nature of tradition allows us to clarify the meaning of 'traditionalism' and 'traditionalism'. Tradition is dynamic, in flux, and modifiable. 'Traditionalism' is used to refer to those who consistently adopt a conservative response to tradition over against modernity, and to stricter interpretations of original texts. Traditionalism is respresented as a 'rigid and ultra-conservative image of tradition, viewing it as a frozen and eternal framework.'[17]

For the traditionalist, anything which once existed in the past is 'entirely sacred'. It is an ultra-conservative approach, sometimes also characterized as 'fundamentalism', where

> Traditionalism, which is a form of heightened sensitivity to the sacred, demands exclusiveness. It is content with nothing less than totality … It is satisfied only if the traditionalist outlook permeates all spheres – political, economic, cultural and religious – and unifies them in a common subordination to the sacred as it is received from the past.[18]

This strict, ideological, rigid and ultra-conservative attitude to tradition is to be contrasted with *traditionism*, which is marked by a dimension of choice and reflection in the construction of an identity which is distinctly non-traditional*ist.[19]* Yadgar states:

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[17] Avi Sagi. *Tradition vs. Traditionalism: Contemporary Perspectives in Jewish Thought.* Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
[18] Shils 1958:160 in Yadgar 2011:17.
[19] It can of course be argued, and would be by those who are committed traditionalists, that their choice of the 'rigid, ultra-conservative' position they take is not done unthinkingly or unreflectively, but after full and measured consideration of the alternatives presented to them. In this respect the use of the term 'traditionalism' begs a further set of questions as to the intuitive processes entertained by those who choose this option, and challenges the framers of the distinction. But this is to go beyond the present purposes of this paper. The benefits of distinguishing the terms to allow for 'traditionism' to be identified in

I would argue that traditionist identity is an identity of choice which exists within a continuing and constant process of reflection. It is the result of the choice of individuals who view themselves as free to choose their identity (even if this choice is inherently limited, and they are aware of these limitations), and by so choosing they demonstrate their fidelity to what they – and their community – view as the "substantial nucleus" of tradition, maintaining it as the foundation from which the grow and are able to define their identity. Choice serves as such a marked gulf, differentiating the terms, since it is perceived to be completely absent from the "traditionalist" world.[20]

For Yadgar the binary oppositions between religious and secular, orthodoxy and modernity, and traditional and modern, need to be rejected as inaccurate, and for traditionism to be recognized as a growing phenomenon of modern life where individuals – 'reflective, skeptical, autonomous creatures, wielding sole authority over their agenda and choice of identity' are the 'absolute antithesis' of traditionalist identity.[21]

Traditionism is worked out through critical engagement and reflection on tradition, in a practical rather than a textual or philosophical way. It is not as yet expressed conceptually or with theological or philosophical coherence, but through day-to-day engagement with the complexities of living Jewishly, practicing Jewishness rather than Judaism, in the Israeli context.

This lifestyle, along with the myriad choices and practical decisions it entails, are all part and parcel of the critical dialog being undertaken with tradition: this practical construct highlights what traditionists see as the "essence" of tradition (thus also signaling its "non-essential" parts), interprets it, and

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Israeli identity and the Messianic Jewish movement are sufficient justification of the present argument.

[20] Yadgar 2011:18. Again, we might add that it is not so much the exercise of choice that is missing, but the decision to choose an alternative to the most conservative option, whereas traditionists opt for a synthesis of modern and conservative.

[21] Sagi 2008:9 in Yadgar 2011:19.

often updates what constitutes a loyal depiction of tradition in contexts mostly seen as "modernized" and "secularized".[22]

Yagdar quotes Gadamer:

> Such confrontation [with tradition] does not occur in the workshops of the philologist or historian or in the eagerness of bourgeois cultural institutions to impart historical education. Every experience is such a confrontation.[23]

There is no 'clear-cut' definition of traditionism, and descriptions of traditionist identity must avoid the trap of 'essentialism'. So Yadgar considers the 'spirit of traditionism' through a process of 'thick description' (Clifford Gertz) of his subjects, teasing out from personal interviews the synthesis of identity they construct through selection, reflection and engagement in the challenge of forging their own Jewish and Israeli identities.

3. Israeli Traditionism – Case Studies and Reflection

The interviews conducted by Yadgar reveal a variety of approaches and motivations for traditionism. Through in-depth qualitative interviews with more than one hundred traditionists (80% of whom are Mizrachi), the choices made by them were carefully described and analysed, identifying the major components of their identity, and the limitations, dynamics and responses such a choice of identity, mid-way between orthodoxy and secular lifestyle, presented. The justifications for such an identity choice, and the price to be paid for maintaining it, in addition to the 'method' underlying the traditionist way of life, was also identified.

Rather than accusing traditionists of being "inconsistent", "incoherent", and people who "do what they feel like", free of any clear guidelines Yadgar proposes that traditionist "method" to revolvesa round what he terms (following Bauman) as the traditionist Jewish "identity project". This also involves dealing with the sense of guilt that can arise between the alleged gap between

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[22] Yadgar 2011:25.
[23] Gadamer 1979. The problem of historical consciousness. In *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, eds Paul Rabinow and William M Sullivan, 103–62. Berkeley: Universityof California Press, p.108 in Yadgar 2011:25.

theory and practice in traditionist life, that some see as an inherent part of traditionist identity.

Yadgar discusses the practices that are observed by traditionists, not as a prescriptive list, but in order to discern how such practices help construct traditionist identity in the light of the way they are understood not only by traditional understandings but also in the complexity of traditionist understanding. How traditionists resolve the challenge they face of being allegedly hybrid and 'inconsistent' and respond to the pressures they face to abandon their fusion of binary opposites of religion and secularity are discussed. The key facets of communal identity, ethnicity and gender that make up traditionism are identified, especially within the Mizrachi subjects (80% of the interviewees). Traditionists view their ethnic identity in relation to their Jewishness rather than vice versa, and female respondents balance their identity as feminists with their proclaimed identity as traditionist Jews. Finally Yadgar considers how traditionists relate to the dominant identity structures in Israeli society of orthodox and secular, and refine their own identity choice, discussing the traditionist understanding of the existing as well as the desired connection between religion and morality.[24]

Yadgar's study of Jewish traditionism concludes with the observation, anticipated by Gershom Scholem in 1974, of a Jewish identity comprised of a lifestyle of minimal practices (Shabbat, *kashrut* and the holy days) that was both apprehensive of secularity but also seeing the orthodox life of the *Shulchan Aruch* as impossible. Yadgar sees the main outlines of traditionism as a modern mission of identity construction that does not wish to step out of history, but actively wishes to live 'modernly', with a dynamic and dialogical approach to tradition.[25]

4. Implications for Messianic Judaism

We pause here to reflect on the implications for Messianic Judaism. It is often claimed that Messianic Judaism, being a relatively recent phenomenon of the latter part of the 20th century, does not have a tradition to draw upon. However, it is the inheritor of two streams of tradition, of Judaism and Christianity, and has to form a synthesis or harmonization of the two. In order for Messianic Judaism to develop

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[24] Yadgar 2011:33-34
[25] Yadgar 2011:261.

a coherent theological tradition of its own, it must work with the materials of both traditions, and find an appropriate method for the construction of its own tradition. In some ways this task is similar to the task of Israeli traditionists, who are navigating their own way to create a synthesis between the Orthodox and Secular identities that challenge them to construct an alternative.

Just as Maimonides and Aquinas in the 12th century worked to incorporate the newly rediscovered philosophical traditions of Aristotelian thought with their own Christian and Jewish traditions, so today Messianic Jews are called to integrate not only the two streams of tradition which they inherit from Judaism and Christianity. As the abandoned child of both traditions, they find themselves 'home alone' in a large house where their parents and siblings have home without them, and they are at the mercy of strange threats from outside, and uncertainty within the house. Only their creativity and ingenuity can enable their survival.[26]

In addition to creating a Messianic Jewish 'traditionism' that is mid-way between Judaism and Christianity, Messianic Jews are in the process of forming their own tradition. Within this tradition there are several streams, which I have attempted to identify elsewhere. Rather than see these as binary opposites, either between Judaism and Christianity, or between Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism, or between Missionary Messianic Judaism and Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, I have proposed a spectrum or continuum with 8 types of Messianic Jewish theology. I chose not to focus on anthropological or social psychological description in identifying this typology but rather the theological bases for these different positions.

My present proposal is based on an understanding of identity construction which works to form the theological materials into a

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[26] "Home Alone is a 1990 American Christmas family comedy film written and produced by John Hughes and directed by Chris Columbus. The film stars Macaulay Culkin as Kevin McCallister, an eight-year-old boy who is mistakenly left behind when his family flies to Paris for their Christmas vacation. Kevin initially relishes being home alone, but soon has to contend with two would-be burglars played by Daniel Stern and Joe Pesci. The film also features Catherine O'Hara and John Heard as Kevin's parents. As of 2009, Home Alone was the highest-grossing comedy of all time." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_Alone (accessed June 2014).

creative synthesis. Discussion of subjects such as tradition, authority, freedom and

My concern is for Messianic Judaism to develop a healthy tolerance of pluralism within its approaches to tradition. Just as within Judaism Orthodox scholars such as Jonathan Sacks[27] have argued for a limited degree of acceptance of non-Orthodox traditions, so it is incumbent on Messianic Jews to recognize the variety within their own approaches as a divine gift and blessing rather than cause for controversy, criticism and censure.

This is the approach of Avi Sagai in his book *Jewish Religion after Theology.*[28] Sagai uses Peter Berger's concept of 'cognitive dissonance' to explore the possibilities of tolerance between Orthodox Jews, whose 'traditional conservative consciousness through which they describe and explain their world'[29] creates a dissonance with the modern values which they also endorse, or tolerate in others.

5. Messianic Jewish tradition and traditionism

In his chapter on Messianic Jews and Tradition, Carl Kinbar notes:

> Among Messianic Jewish leaders, there is a consensus that the Scriptures are the central and primary (or even the only) Messianic Jewish sacred texts. While it is also evident to most of these leaders that the Scriptures do not function alone but in concert with tradition, the precise nature and outworking of this relationship is a matter of contention. Thus Messianic Jewish leaders hold a wide variety of views on the extent to which Jewish tradition should provide context and practical guidance for contemporary Messianic Jewish life. A discussion of these views is beyond the scope of this essay and has been dealt with elsewhere.[30]

Kinbar then chooses to focus on the particular understanding of Torah and the role of Tradition articulated by the Hashivenu Forum, the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, which are well represented

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[27] Jonathan Sacks. *One People? Tradition, Modernity and Jewish Unity.* The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, London, 1993.
[28] Avi Sagi. *Jewish Religion after Theology.* Translated by Baty Stein. Boston, Academic Studies Press, 2009.
[29] Sagi 2009:45.
[30] Carl Kinbar. "Messianic Jews and Jewish Tradition". In David Rudolph and Joel Willetts (eds.). *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations.* Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2013, p.74.

at this consultation by our good friends Mark Kinzer and Jen Rosner, who are well able to articulate their own approaches to tradition. The 'elsewhere' referred to in the Kinbar's footnote refers to pages 140-220 of *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology* where I devote two chapters to "Torah in theory" and "Torah in practice", surveying the difference theological understandings and practical application of Torah in the Messianic movement.

These remaining streams of the Messianic movement, represented here by Vladimir Pikman and myself, are also part of the mix that makes up the Messianic Jewish movement worldwide, and in terms of popular appeal, numerical support, and present likelihood of continuity into the next generation of Jewish believers in Yeshua in Israel and Diaspora, are in the majority.

In the conclusion of my first chapter on "Torah in theory" in Messianic Jewish Theology I summarized four approaches to Torah as "abandon, adapt, adopt or accept":

> Messianic Jews believe that the Law has been fulfilled by Yeshua (Matthew 5:17) and that He is the 'goal of the Law' (Romans 10:4). Just as there are different understandings of Torah in the Jewish community, so too among Messianic Jews. Some (Baruch Maoz and Arnold Fruchtenbaum) see the Law of Moses as obsolete. Yeshua has inaugurated the *new* covenant. The old has gone. The laws of sacrifice have been fulfilled in Christ. The civil laws were only relevant to ancient Israel. Only the universal moral law as exemplified in the Ten Commandments is still applicable. It is therefore misguided to observe aspects of the Mosaic Law that lead back to bondage in legalism. If Messianic Jews observe the Mosaic Law they are denying the grace of God and justification by faith alone. They rebuild the 'middle wall of partition' (Ephesians 2:14), attempting to justify themselves by works of the law.
>   A second view (Gershon Nerel) affirms the cultural and social practices of the Mosaic Law yet this is not for 'religious' reasons. Customs that make up Jewish identity have been incorporated into Jewish life by tradition over the centuries, such as the calendar, circumcision and the food laws. These are still normative for ethnic, cultural and national identity but have no theological merit and do not add to righteousness. Consequently they are not prescriptive on Jewish believers in Jesus, who are free to observe them if they choose.
>   A third approach (Daniel Juster, David Stern and several others) recognises the continuing validity of Jewish tradition as the interpretative context for understanding the biblical Torah of the Tanach and New Covenant. Yeshua, in His teaching and example, and the practice of the early church, defined a new *halacha* for the new covenant community. This *halacha* is developed today following the first Messianic Jews'

example in the book of Acts. They observed Jewish lifestyle and practices, adapted some, abandoned others and applied only a few to the nations. Messianic Jews who observe Torah in this way both acknowledge its value but challenge its interpretation by the main branches of Judaism. They propose a new interpretation of Torah based on the teaching and practice of Yeshua and the first disciples.

A fourth position (Mark Kinzer, Hashivenu and the MJRC) argues that Messianic Jews should observe the Torah according to Orthodox or Conservative tradition, with only a few exceptions. Torah observance is a necessary response of gratitude and obedience in the light of God's election of Israel, which has not been abrogated, diminished or substantially altered with the coming of Yeshua. Torah observance preserved the Jewish community through its rabbinic leaders over the centuries, and Messianic Jews should accept their normative authority and work within this. This will enable them to develop their primary identity within the Jewish community rather than the mainstream church. They should see themselves as members of the community of Israel, even if others do not accept them.

This challenges Messianic Jews to identify fully with their cultural and religious heritage rather than deny, ignore or approach it in an adversarial manner. A few (such as Elazar Brandt) would extend this approach to a complete identification with non-Messianic Judaism in its observance of Torah. The Jewish tradition is itself the inspired, God-given vehicle for the preservation of the Jewish people, and should not be criticised except from within, by those who already adhere to it. The problem raised by this approach is the potential compromise on the significance of Yeshua, and his soteriological role. Whilst such an option may be attractive for those wishing to receive a validation of their identity from the Jewish community, it can lead to a diminishment of effective testimony. The self-understanding that may be gained from such an approach leads to isolation from other believers. Torah observance at the cost of the visible unity of the Body of Messiah made up of Israel and the Nations can only result in loss of fellowship and faith.[31]

All this is to summarise many different positions on the role of Torah. At the time of writing, I had not focused on the nature, role or authority of tradition, either Jewish or Messianic Jewish, in deciding such issues. But our present consultation presses us to do so, and as a participant-observer in the Messianic movement I wish to make some suggestions about the nature of tradition, traditionalism and traditionism, terms which need some unpacking in the light of their anthropological and theological significance.

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[31] Richard Harvey. *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach.* Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2009, pp. 181-3.

MJT has yet to reflect seriously on these options, which are still at an early stage of presentation and debate. The manifold values behind some form of 'Torah observance' will continue to challenge and inspire the movement. Living a godly life, following the example of Yeshua, having a culturally sensitive lifestyle and witness, demonstrating the freedom given to observe or not observe aspects of *halacha,* taking up the responsibilities of Israel, reacting against assimilation, are all motivations to be integrated in 'taking up the yoke of Torah'. What is needed for the future development of MJT is further reflection on the theological assumptions, hermeneutical methods and exegetical processes that Messianic Jews bring to the subject of Torah. Also needed is a systematic development and working out in detail what a Messianic *halacha* will look like. It is with that question in mind that the next chapter considers Torah in practice, focusing on the specific aspects of Sabbath, *Kashrut* and Passover.

Whilst the MJRC has a particular theological position which respects highly the religious traditions of the Jewish people, others in the Messianic movement take an opposite position. Michael Brown argues:

> Let me make a strong statement. If we are spiritually more at home with a prayer written by a traditional rabbi than with a great hymn written by a committed Gentile believer then our orientation is dangerously wrong.
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> I can only say that Biblical Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism are two very different faiths. One is based on the once and for all sacrifice of the Lamb of God; the other has substituted prayer, repentance, and good deeds. One is based on the witness of the indwelling Spirit and the revelation of the divine Word; the other is based on logical deduction and human tradition. One is based on the demonstration of the power of the living God; the other is based on majority rule. One releases its people into a free expression of praise, adoration, and prayer; the other legislates when and how to pray, and even what to say.
>
> I believe that we have been misled into thinking that we cannot identify with our people outside of rabbinic tradition. In fact, some of you listening may have already concluded that I am

saying: "Throw away your Jewishness! Quit praying for Israel! Who needs Torah anyway?" But that is absolutely not what I intend to get across. My point instead is this: What real connection is there between our life in Yeshua the Messiah and the traditions of those whose faith is built upon His rejection? Yeshua said that His truth was from above, hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes (John 3:31. 8:23; Mat. 11:25). Yet a leading rabbinic scholar said: "Let the truth emerge from the earth. The truth be as the sages decide with the human mind" (Aryeh Leib, introduction to his Kesot HaHoshen on Hoshen Mishpat, quoted by Berkovitz, Not in Heaven, 55). How can we harmonize these words?[32]

Michael Brown eloquently expresses a position on tradition in direct contrast and opposition to that of my friends in the MJRC. How can we in the Messianic movement not only tolerate but even encourage a theological pluralism on such a contentious topic? It is clear that a number of theological issues have to be discussed, particularly related to the Protestant reaction to authority and tradition articulated by the Roman Catholic Church, and also the question of the normative role of Orthodox Judaism. Our task is a challenging one, which will require resources of both a theological and personal nature if we are to mature into a theological tradition of our own.

I end with the conclusion of my paper last year.

The ongoing, developmental nature of the application of Torah in the light of Yeshua demands a continual reflection and reinterpretation of the revelatory events in the history of our people and a continual restatement of the values and meaning these have for today. Within each subculture within our people different streams of tradition have been emphasised, and within the Messianic movement, occupying both Jewish and Christian social space and combining both discourses symphonically, nothing other would be possible. What Yadgar identifies is a Jewish traditionism that is both "post-Orthodox" and "post-Secular". He demonstrates how Jewish traditionists know *halacha* but do not accept its full validity today.[33] They do not really want to change it themselves but want the rabbinic authorities to do so. They know this is what the *halacha* tells them – but they choose, because of other overriding principles, also based in their set of ethical values, to override the authority of rabbinic tradition to observe them.

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[32] Michael Brown. https://askdrbrown.org/portfolio/the-place-of-rabbinic-tradition-in-messianic-judaism/ (accessed June 2014).
[33] 168.

My own background in Liberal Judaism predisposes me to this position. My teacher Rabbi John Rayner, in his two-volume study on religious law, asserts a similar approach.[34] Where I as a Messianic Jew now situate myself in regards to Torah and Halacha is thus a product of my context, my particular reading of the text from an ethical perspective, and a certain *ad hoc* eclecticism and selectivity. I wish it were otherwise but cannot see how, or give myself a full rationale for changing one way or the other.

I am not yet fully convinced of my friend Mark Kinzer's 5 step argument for Torah observance as he understands it, and is the position of the Messianic Jewish Rabbincal Council. I am very sympathetic to detailed system built on strong biblical and rabbinic traditional and ethical values. I suppose I am still – "pre-post or mid-post-missionary". But I would very much like to see the project worked on and worked through.

It seems to me that what the Messianic movement/scene brings to the table is an attempt at a practical demonstration of a post-supersessionist theology, especially as regards an ongoing theological signifance of the election of Israel in the living reality of Jewish beleivers in Jesus as an ecclesial body/grouping within the body of Christ. But this has still a long way to go. No clear authority structure, little polity, theological tradition, maturity of institutions, and perhaps most challenging of all, no clear uniformity or community to expression of Torah or lifestyle.

Whilst Mark's proposal is the most theologically coherent statement of Torah in Christ, it has yet to be adopted by the vast majority of Messianic Jews in USA and Israel, and has, as myself an example, a number of critical questioners. Is it really self-obvious and self-authenticating, or does it require a certain starting position such as diaspora identity definition through religiosity, a commitment to a certain type of Jewish identity expression linked to a particular theological rationale. The answer is of course yes, but that applies equally to all our positions in one way or another. So is there a way out of such an impasse?

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[34] E.g. John Rayner. "Towards a Modern Halakhah" in *Reform Judaism* (Dow Marmur, ed.) (London: Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, 1973) 127 (in Cohn-Sherbok)