

Fulfilling the Torah in Jesus Christ
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1. Introduction and Aims

David Neuhaus and I have tried to capture our areas of agreement and disagreement by giving our own personal perspectives, explaining our main views, and then engaged with one another to see how and we can make progress towards agreement.

David and I have met several times to discuss our paper this year and previously. It is always a delight to be welcomed into the warmth and spirituality of my Catholic brothers and sisters at his home in Jerusalem, to participate in their contextually sensitive and in the best sense of the work “evangelical” proclamation of the love of God through our Messiah in Hebrew, with the beauty and simplicity of a liturgy that is simple, sensitive, worshipful, musically delightful, and rich in wisdom and doctrine.

When we meet to discuss our views, there is always one sticking point on which we do not agree, which I think reveals two different sets of assumptions that operate within our theological systems, and are the indicator of a much bigger fault line between two tectonic plates of doctrinal understanding. It is the issue of an ongoing ethnic rather than purely spiritual, symbolic, ethical or Christological (in a narrow sense) significance to the meaning of Israel (the Jewish people) as the people of God.

David rightly fears the dangers of an overemphasis on Jewish ethnicity that might lead to exclusivism, ethnocentricity, political oppression claiming religious justification, and an avoidance of the openness, universality and inclusiveness of the truly ‘catholic’ faith. Whilst I understand these concerns I disagree with David because of the “post-supersessionist” assumptions with which I seek to operate. I see the ongoing election of Israel as an ‘epistemic foundation’ vital for the construction of a sound and healthy theology.¹ This will include the materiality of covenant, the specificity of ethnicity and territory, in addition to the need for practical outworking of issues of justice, peace and reconciliation within the *realpolitik* of a divided and conflicted Middle East.

We find ourselves in agreement on many issues. With David I find myself agreeing more than with many others, especially on questions of social justice, political theology, catholicity, engagement with contemporary culture, etc. In

¹ Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 171-2. Marshall states: ‘When it comes to deciding about truth, God’s unshakeable electing love for Israel forms that conviction within the open field of possible beliefs which the faithful Jew is most unwilling to give up or reinterpret, and correlatively that with which all other belief and practice must at least be consistent in order to be held true or regarded as right.’

addition he challenges me to add to my growing understanding of and willingness to sympathetically engage with major chunks of Catholic doctrine which I from my experience mainly within Protestant (and Protestant Evangelical) experience I have had little exposure to. But in terms of the particularity, specificity and ongoing purposes of God for the Jewish people, and my reluctance to spiritualise, universalise or see Israel purely as representation of the universal nature of the Body of Christ or the nature of salvation – we find ourselves in disagreement, or at least, not as yet able to recognise the common ground we share or the full validity of one another’s position.

2. Torah and Messiah

So when we come to our topic, the outworking of Torah, how are we to understand this? We have agreed to tell our stories, express our distinctive views, and then engage with one another in good humour, respectful disagreement, and conduct an “argument for the sake of heaven” in the presence of our friends, colleagues and constructive critics.

This author is only too aware of the inconsistency within his own positions, but part of the discipline of theology as mature reflection on matters of faith is to attempt to describe, articulate and reflect on such inconsistencies. Attempting to reconcile conflicting views in respectful conversation contributes to the development of a theological tradition, nowhere more needed than in the interaction between Jews and Christians which we as Jewish believers within the body of Christ are particularly called to engage in and to which I hope we have something to add.

Can we still think of “Jews” and “Christians” today? I know this sounds like a foolish question, and in the eyes of the overwhelming majority of Jews and Christians the answer is clearly ‘yes’. But in recent years I have come more and more to think that, rightly understood, and certainly if God is truly the God of both Israel and the Church, the answer is not so easy. If the ‘schism’ that divides Jews and Christians today, leaving Jewish believers in Yeshua on the margins, alienated and often conflicted in their identities, then it should be possible to say that there is only one people of God, only one covenant of creation, redemption and restoration of the Israel, the nations and all of the *κοσμος*, and that both Israel and the nations are included, if not yet fully enjoying the benefits, of our loving Heavenly father’s provision.

I also find studies of identity formation, both within early Christianity that sought to differentiate itself from both Judaism and paganism in the Roman world, and of Jewish identity formation for purposes of both survival and integration with the diaspora, do not convince me of an ‘essentialist’ approach that sharply distinguishes a “Judaism” from a “Christianity” until the 4th or 5th centuries.² This makes discussion of Torah even more complex an issue, as we

² Adam H. Becker, Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tubingen, Mohr Siebeck 2003); Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius,

are talking about the construction and inhabitation of Jewish social and sacred space, in contradistinction, interaction and interdependency with the Christian world.³

3. Background Issues

My background and context affect me also, as as a diaspora Jew, with German Jewish forebears (like David, but unlike him *-not* having made aliyah), working now as a researcher teaching and preaching the outworking of faith and identity issues in a way that combines the professional disciplines of the academy (secular, disciplined, accountable to peers without faith perspectives that I may share) with the ministerial responsibilities that come from ecclesial activity, and the family commitments that come from my particular location, circumstances and relationships.⁴

So how do I come to the positions I now hold, and am trying to explicate further? My story gives away the tell-tale clues. My identity formation and my theological formulation cannot be separated. I am not a reductionist who rationalises one down to the other, but rather locates the contextuality of all theological systems and then makes a plea for healthy interdependency and mutual challenge and stimulation. Recent travels in Israel, German, the USA and now India have re-affirmed my understanding of the interaction of differing rationalities and worldviews, of which my feeble attempt to live within and help articulate an MJ perspective is the purest chutzpah of a voice from the margins, and yet a voice that claims, as the ‘missing link’ between Judaism (so-called) and Christianity (so-called), to have something vital and of significance to bring to the table.

More so, my emergence as a Jewish believer in Jesus in the time of differentiation between the Hebrew Christian and (first generation ‘missionary’ or pre-“post-missionary”) Messianic Judaism also challenged my youthful attempts at self-definition. I saw the *yiddishkeit* oozing from the fingertips of men like Eric Lipson (who mentored me), whose father was a rabbi and who trained to be one, disciple by Jacob Jocz and engaged within CMJ, the Church’s Missions to the Jews. I compared his life with some of what I saw of the superficiality and lack of authenticity of the fledgling ‘Messianic movement’ that had broken away from the older generation (in the USA). I knew that whilst I was a ‘new-style Messianic’, wanting to be part of an Messianic Jewish congregation and living

and Theodosius I” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*. Edited by Bengt Holmberg. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, pp. 59-92. Highly recommended and available at <http://jewishstudies.eteacherbiblical.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Anders-Runesson-Inventing-Christian-Identity.pdf>

³ Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, Berkely: University of California Press, 2006.

⁴ For my own story do read the pdf attachment “But I’m Jewish” available at <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/28495742/BIJ%20harvey.pdf>. (I would not write this same way today, but it does show something of my own story.)

foremost as *a Jew* who believed in Yeshua, I could not separate myself from the rich and significant heritage of “Hebrew Christianity”.

My family background also gives vital clues as to my understanding of Torah and my situating myself within the interface between Judaism and Christianity. Born Richard Simon Harvey, my great grandfather Richard Hirschland came from Essen, Germany in the 1880s where his uncle Simon Hirschland was the owner of the largest and longest surviving private bank in pre-WW2 Germany, bringing money into the rearmaments of Germany until nationalised under the National Socialists. My grandfather, Sydney Moses Hirschland, changed the family name when my father, Antony Adolf (a popular boy’s name until a certain other Adolph came along) was a boy. Sydney’s second name, Moses, after Moses Hirschland, the private doctor of the Krupp industrialist family whose estate was just outside Essen, was a British stockbroker, and not religious. When he prayed a prayer with me shortly before he died, it was at his suggestion the ‘Lord’s prayer’ and his own religious commitment was not noticeably Jewish or Christian, though his business contacts in the diamond business were with Jews, and my father became a ward of the Oppenheimer family in South Africa when he was sent from school in Switzerland at the outbreak of the WW2.

Assimilation, diaspora identity, German Jewish sensibility⁵ is there in each of my grandparents’ stories, in Vienna, Essen, and elsewhere. So when my parents married, it was in a non-religious service, and when they had children (I am the oldest of four brothers) they were founding members of the local Liberal (=USA Reform) Synagogue so that we might attend the religion school. My cousin, who along with me were dubbed by my grandmother as ‘the religious ones- one of us was right, she thought, but she never quite new which’ is now the Senior Rabbi of the largest Liberal Synagogue in the UK, boasting Michael Howard (former cabinet minister whose son Nick is a believer) and Paul McCartney (Jewish 3rd wife Nancy Shevell) as its attenders.

4. Messianic Jewish Traditionism

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”.⁶ 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

⁵ cf. “The Pity of it all”, Amos Elon.

⁶ Not the same as *traditionalism* – an orthodox lifestyle. Yaacov Yadgar, “Transcending the ‘Secularization vs. Traditionalization’ Discourse: Jewish-Israeli Traditionists, the Post-Secular, and the Possibilities of Multiculturalism” in Avi Sagi and Ohad Nachtomy, *The Multicultural Challenge in Israel* (Academic Studies Press, Boston, 2009), 150-179, 150.

tradition in a conservative, traditionalist manner.”⁷ According to Yadgar, one third or more Israelis identify themselves as *masorti* without identifying 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.”⁸ 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.

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.⁹ 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.

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

⁷ Yadgar, 152.

⁸ Yadgar 152.

⁹ 168.

similar approach.¹⁰ 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 Rabbinical 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 significance of the election of Israel in the living reality of Jewish believers 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?

5. So How Do I understand fulfilling the Torah in Jesus Christ?

In my book MMJT I outline different MJ approaches to Torah in theory and Torah in practice. As you would expect, there is no unanimity within the Messianic movement on these approaches, just as there is much disagreement within the main streams of Judaism. But in general (with some exceptions) the “Torah-positives” are wanting to apply a positive understanding and outworking of Torah within their faith-practice as believers in Yeshua, and I would identify myself within those streams. I do not go as far as Mark Kinzer in his proposal for a five(?) -step program, so am probably closer to Dan Juster and David Stern's position, which whilst less structured and coherent, appears to me to reflect the majority position within the Messianic scene. In my summary of the survey on Torah in Theory I wrote:

¹⁰ E.g. John Rayner. “Towards a Modern Halakhah” in *Reform Judaism* (Dow Marmor, ed.) (London: Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, 1973) 127 (in Cohn-Sherbok)

Conclusion – Accept, Adopt, Adapt, Abandon?

Whilst there is a long history of Jewish and Christian attempts to understand and interpret the Law, and much recent New Testament scholarship has stressed the Torah-positive nature of the first Jewish Christians, Messianic Jewish thinkers have not often drawn from these resources in their own assessment of the role, authority and application of the Torah in the life of the individual and Messianic community. Messianic Jews do not construct their thought in a vacuum, and whilst not often consciously aware of the debt they owe to Jewish and Christian tradition, it is clear that the methods and resources they use in framing an understanding of Torah are derived from Christian and Jewish sources. Neither have the hermeneutical approaches of Judaism and Christianity been recognised by many in the Messianic movement, although the contemporary understanding and application of Torah in the movement owes much to previous attempts to define the relationship between the Old and New Testament in Christianity that are found within the Antiochene, Alexandrian and Reformed traditions of the Church,¹¹ with a particular emphasis on the place of the Law in the light of the teaching of Yeshua. Messianic Jews are more aware of their appropriation of Oral Tradition within Judaism, as reflected in the variety of Jewish understandings of Torah and Tradition found within the main groupings of Orthodox, Conservative (Masorti UK) and Reform (Liberal UK) Judaism. Failure to successfully integrate the two traditions leads to confusion, and only in more recent writing have Messianic Jews begun to deal with the questions systematically.¹²¹³

My interest, like David's, is to see this Torah (teaching) working out in practice, so for me five headings come to mind, with brief expansions.

1. Educational Torah as teaching – interpreted within tradition – applied within context – faithful, authentic, etc.
2. Ethical reading of Torah – justice, forgiveness, reconciliation

I have been teaching Old Testament Theology for the past 15 years, and one of subjects has been ethical readings - so my understanding of Torah is shaped by the desire to get inside the heart of the text and hear how the principles and values have been outworked in the life of (ancient) Israel. Using C Wright's paradigmatic approach (Living as the people of God) as a hermeneutical strategy has kept me thinking about the relevance of Torah to contemporary global, social, economic and political issues, as well as practical day to day holiness in family and community. But my lack of orthodox halachic lifestyle has challenged me to apply the basics of halacha in a consistent way

¹¹ Wright ref.

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¹³ See Kinzer, Berkowitz, Rudolph etc. below.

3. Ecclesial Torah

Seeing a distinctive role for Torah-observant Jewish believers in Yeshua within the Church, but not alienating those of the nations, or Jewish believers with different understandings.

4. Eschatological Torah – whilst Yeshua is the fulfilment of Torah, there yet remains an eschatological fulfilment, in the life of the people of Israel (the Jewish people) and the Church

5. Evangelistic Torah – Yeshua as Messiah, Torah incarnate

Our sharing of the Good News of the Messiah in a way that includes the nature of Torah.

6. Eclectic Torah

It would appear that in addition to the principles advocated by Reform and Liberal Jews for the development of *halacha*,¹⁴ three further principles may be added:

Messianic *halacha* will be constructed in the light of, and in reaction to Christianity's anti-Judaic and anti-nomian tendencies.

Messianic Jewish *halacha* will be constructed in the light of Judaism's self-referencing of authority and revelation in contrast to the claims of Christianity.

Messianic Jewish *halacha* will be constructed on the basis the example, teaching and authority of Yeshua as Torah incarnate, as the heuristic method, model and paradigm of Messianic Jewish life.

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