



# The Present Messianic Jewish Movement in Germany\*

by **Stefanie Pfister**

That Messianic Jews have organized themselves worldwide is known. It is mostly still unknown that since 1995, they have organized as a movement in Germany. They meet in just 40 congregations and groups with about 1,000 regular visitors, so that Hans Hermann Henrix speaks in 2007 of a "surprising reality of current Messianic Judaism."<sup>1</sup>

Besides a short historical overview, I would like to show the specific features of Messianic Judaism in Germany, its origin, articles of faith, local forms, and areas of service.

## Historical Overview

The first Jewish Christians in Jerusalem thought that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Israel. They did this as a Jewish group, and lived in a Jewish religious context. With the admission of Gentile Christians there originated a mixed congregation. Different factors, like the admission of the (uncircumcised) Gentile Christians, new religious rites, the distance of the Jewish Christians from the Jewish struggles for freedom, etc., led to separation between the Jewish Christians and the Jewish community. Because the Gentile Christian church considered itself from the early second century on as the true Israel on account of replacement theology, it did not hold on to Jewish Christian members or their Jewish inheritance. This led to the fact that Jewish Christians "disappeared" as a distinct group. Still, until the fifth century, they left in some churches religious "tracks," such as customs or symbols. During the later centuries, the Gentile Christian church forced Jews to be baptized, and Jews suffered under pursuit and pogroms, and therefore there was no longer a Jewish Christian movement.

Only the Puritans and the Pietists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were interested in Judaism and a dialogue with Jews. The revivalist movements ("Great Awakenings") of the nineteenth century animated

\* A similar article appears in shorter form: Stefanie Pfister, "Messianische Juden in Deutschland. Ein Überblick über die gegenwärtige messianisch-jüdische Bewegung in Deutschland," *Materialdienst* 2/09 (2009).

<sup>1</sup> Hans Hermann Henrix, *Schweigen im Angesicht Israels? Zum Ort des Jüdischen in der ökumenischen Theologie* (Salzburger Ringvorlesung, Salzburg, 2007).



the Pentecostal, charismatic, and evangelical movements. The revivalist movements promoted Jewish missionary work, and that is why, for the first time in centuries, many Jews voluntarily accepted faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. Most remained, however, in the existing churches. A few Jewish Christian groups had only a short duration. Only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were Jews who believed in Jesus Christ called “Hebrew Christians” and organized themselves in congregations. The most important alliances were, for example, the Hebrew Christian Union (HCU) in 1865, the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA) in 1915, and in particular, the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (IHCA) in 1925.

Within the Hebrew Christian movement, single groups which integrated many Jewish elements into their services met at the beginning of the 1970s. Then, stimulated by the American evangelical and charismatic movements and a new consciousness of Jewish identity, the movement of Messianic Jews originated in 1975, at a Hebrew Christian conference in America. From then on, the alliances were called Messianic Jewish alliances.<sup>2</sup>

### Messianic Jews Worldwide

Meanwhile, Messianic Judaism has spread worldwide in a very divergent movement, estimated to include from 50,000 to 332,000 Messianic Jews in 165–400 congregations.<sup>3</sup> The largest number of Messianic Jews is in the United States, estimated at 40,000 to 60,000.<sup>4</sup>

The liturgical forms, especially in American Messianic congregations, contain many Jewish elements, although about half the visitors are non-Jews.<sup>5</sup>

For Israel, Bodil Skjøtt and Kai Kjær-Hansen give a total number of just 5,000 Messianic Jews in 1999. Here, the Messianic community is marked by an extraordinary linguistic and cultural variety.<sup>6</sup>

The Messianic Jewish movement in the former Soviet Union (CIS) is still very young, because it originated from the work of different missionary organizations after the breakdown of communism. The theology of the

2 Detailed historical backgrounds in David Rausch, *Messianic Judaism: Its History, Theology, and Polity* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982); Robert I. Winer, *The Calling: The History of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America 1915–1990* (Wynnewood, PA: Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, 1990); Robert I. Winer, “The Messianic Jewish Alliance of America 1901–1939,” *Mishkan* 15 (1991): 48–56; Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History and Philosophy* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries Press, 1992); Carol Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism: A Rabbi’s Journey through Religious Change in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil Skjøtt, ed., “Facts & Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel,” *Mishkan* 30/31 (1999); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (New York: Continuum Press, 2000).

3 The different estimates are summarized in Stefanie Pfister, *Messianische Juden. Eine historische und religionssoziologische Untersuchung* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2008), 93.

4 Vgl. Tuvya Zaretsky, *Das Evangelium – auch für Juden. Impulse aus der messianischen Bewegung* (Basel/Gießen: Brunnen-Verlag, 2006), 41.

5 See Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 78.

6 See Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 18, 70, 72.

congregations in Israel, the USA, and the CIS is evangelical.<sup>7</sup>

The Second World War led to a complete demolition of the Jewish Christian movement in Germany, so that there were no Hebrew Christians or Messianic Jews here until the middle of the 1990s.

### The Situation of Jews in Germany after the Second World War

The Jews in Germany were a community of survivors of the Holocaust, and the Jewish congregations were viewed as being temporary.<sup>8</sup> During the following years, their memberships were marked by strong fluctuations. On the one hand, seven times as many Jews died as were born; in addition, about 400 Jews emigrated from Germany, and about 1,000 Jews immigrated to Germany yearly. At the end of the 1980s, congregational membership in West Germany was estimated at 27,000–28,000 in about 65 congregations.<sup>9</sup>

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Without the immigration of Russian Jews from the former Soviet Union, there would have been neither a revival of Jewish congregations in Germany nor the development of an active Messianic Jewish movement. The German Bundestag underlines the importance of the immigration of Jews. It had a historical-moral dimension: "The immigration of the emigrants and the Russian Jews is formed by the historical German responsibility. This historical-ethical dimension varies substantially in the acceptance of both groups compared to other forms of immigration."<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the Prime Minister's conference decided in Bonn on September 1, 1991, that people who are of Jewish nationality ("according to the

7 See Kai Kjær-Hansen and Ole Chr. M. Kvarme, *Messianische Juden. Judenchristen in Israel* (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev. Luth. Mission, 1983); Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt; Cohn-Sherbok; summarized in Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 76–97.

8 See Julius Hans Schoeps, Willi Jasper, and Bernhard Vogt, *Ein neues Judentum in Deutschland. Fremd- und Eigenbilder der russisch-jüdischen Einwanderer. Neue Beiträge zur Geistesgeschichte* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1999), 97; Monika Richarz, "Juden in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik seit 1945," in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. Micha Brumlik (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1988), 16.

9 See Michael Brenner, *Nach dem Holocaust. Juden in Deutschland 1945–1950* (München: Beck, 1995); Julius Hans Schoeps, Willi Jasper, and Bernhard Vogt, *Russische Juden in Deutschland. Integration und Selbstbehauptung in einem fremden Land* (Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1996), 17; Rainer Hess and Jarden Kranz, *Jüdische Existenz in Europa heute. Probleme des Wandels der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland infolge der Zuwanderung russischer Juden nach 1989* (Berlin: Logos, 2000), 98–99. Summarized in Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 100.

10 Paul Harris, "Russische Juden und Aussiedler. Integrationspolitik und lokale Verantwortung," in *Aussiedler. Deutsche Einwanderer aus Osteuropa*, ed. Klaus J. Bade and Jochen Oltmer (Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Rasch, 1999), 263.



governmental, civil status certificates of Jewish nationality issued before 1990, and in line with the previous Soviet instructions<sup>11)</sup> or descended from at least one Jewish parent are (along with members of their family) within the scope of the refugee law (HumHAG) and can attain permanent residence.<sup>12</sup> According to the Federal Offices for Migration and Refugees, a total of 198,189 Jewish immigrants who descended from at least one Jewish parent (along with their family members) immigrated between 1993 and 2006 (with admission permits from 1991 and 1992: at most 226,651 Jewish immigrants).<sup>13</sup>

In the Soviet Union, "Jewish" was a valid nationality (Russ. *nationalnost*), and one was registered in Soviet passports as *Jewrej* (Jew) beside the Soviet citizenship. Either the father or the mother could transmit Jewish identity, and the children could take the other parent's nationality after turning sixteen. Even a grandparent's share could serve for the derivation of Jewish descent.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, applicants presented their personal documents in which patrilineal or matrilineal descent was documented for the German admission authorities.<sup>15</sup>

However, Jewish congregations in Germany do not recognize patrilineal descent of Jewish identity, because according to the traditional halakhic definition, only one who was born to a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism is a Jew. Congregational membership is thereby complicated for many immigrants. In addition, linguistic and cultural differences, as well as the religious unawareness of the immigrants, often lead to integration difficulties in the Jewish congregations.<sup>16</sup> Till the end of 2006, only half of the immigrants have become members in a Jewish congregation (99,671 of a total of 107,794 members).<sup>17</sup>

11 Sonja Haug, *Soziodemographische Merkmale, Berufsstruktur und Verwandtschaftsnetzwerke jüdischer Zuwanderer. Working Papers 8 der Forschungsgruppe des Bundesamtes* (Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2007), 7.

12 The new immigration law which became effective in 2005 tightens the restrictions: now immigrants must produce proof of being in a Jewish congregation in the federal territory before being admitted.

13 See Bundesministerium des Innern and Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, ed., "Jüdische Zuwanderer aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion," *Migrationsbericht des Bundesamtes für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (2007): 83–87.

14 Hess and Kranz, 41, 114.

15 However, there were also several documents in which the Jewish affiliation was registered without official confirmation (e.g., before application position) again, after it had been erased consciously in the Soviet Union in order to escape discriminations. Those persecuted for purely political reasons lacked original documents to be able to make their identity plausible. See Franziska Becker and Karen Körper, "Juden, Russen, Flüchtlinge. Die jüdisch-russische Einwanderung nach Deutschland und ihre Repräsentation in den Medien," in *Das Flüstern eines leisen Wehens, Beiträge zu Kultur und Lebenswelt europäischer Juden*, ed. Freddy Raphaël (Konstanz: UVK, 2001), 435; Karen Körper, *Juden, Russen, Emigranten. Identitätskonflikte jüdischer Einwanderer in einer ostdeutschen Stadt* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag GmbH, 2005), 17.

16 See Körper, *Juden, Russen, Emigranten*; Judith Kessler, "Jüdische Migranten aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion seit 1990," <http://www.berlin-judentum.de/gemeinde/migration.html>, article 4.2.2 [accessed December 30, 2008].

17 See Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland, ed., *Mitgliederstatistik der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland für das Jahr 2007, Auszug* (2008): 2.

### Messianic Jews in Germany

A specific feature in Germany is the relation between Jews and Christians, which is marked by Christian-Jewish dialogue. After the Second World War, the second Vatican council, the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (EKD), and other churches, among others, acknowledged responsibility in the Holocaust, denounced anti-Semitism, and underlined with a look at Romans 9–11, the remaining election of Israel. Therefore, for historical and theological reasons, most churches and Jewish communities reject mission to the Jews.<sup>18</sup>

However, against this stand many evangelical organizations like Evangeliumsdiens für Israel (EDI, founded in 1971), Arbeitsgemeinschaft für das messianische Zeugnis an Israel (AMZI, in Germany since 1985), and Beit Sar Shalom Evangeliumsdiens (BSSE, founded in 1996), a German branch of Chosen People Ministries (CPM), which work in evangelism among Jews.

Though evangelical Christians and Jesus believing Jews support the consensus of Christian-Jewish dialogue (refusal of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, remaining election of Israel, etc.), they provide the remaining election of Israel with another theological meaning: Evangelical believers underline that God's alliance with Israel continues, therefore "all Israel" can be saved at the return of Jesus when they accept him as Messiah. That is why evangelical believers do not denounce Jewish mission. Besides, they will not deny the order of Jesus to announce the Christian faith to all people.<sup>19</sup>

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Some Messianic Jews, who have established Messianic congregations in Germany, were converted in the beginning of the 1990s by their contact with evangelical believers in the Soviet Union. Sixteen of the thirty-two Messianic Jewish leaders of congregations in Germany interviewed said they came to faith in Jesus as the Messiah between 1990 and 2000 in the former Soviet Union; others converted after entering Germany.

Some of these pioneers of the Messianic Jewish movement (A. Uschomirski, B. Galinker, A. Ignatenko, V. Pikman, and J. Schechtmann) attended the same congregation, Beit El Gibor, in Kiev, but not at the same time. In a conference in Mosbach, Germany (1995), they became partially acquainted for the first time, shared their experiences, and planned evangelism in different German towns.

The contacts of these first Messianic Jews are closest with evangelical organizations like BSSE, EDI, AMZI, etc. Many missionary activities originated

<sup>18</sup> See statements and documents in Rolf Rendtorff and Hans Hermann Henrix, ed., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum. Dokumente von 1945–1985, Bd. 1.*, 2nd ed. (Paderborn/München: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei/Chr. Kaiser, 1989); Hans Hermann Henrix and Wolfgang Kraus, ed., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum. Dokumente von 1986–2000, Bd. 2* (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifatius, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> See Zaretsky, 19–30.



in Berlin, and one of the pioneers, V. Pikman, founded the first Messianic Jewish congregation in Germany, Beit Shomer Israel (“House of the Keeper of Israel”), at a Jewish Shavuot party in Berlin.

Other congregations originated in Dusseldorf (1996), Hamburg (1996), Stuttgart (1996), Mülheim/Ruhr (1998), a second congregation in Berlin (1998), Hannover (1999), Munich (2000), Heidelberg (2000), a second and third congregation in Stuttgart (2000, 2001), Bremen (2000/2001), Aachen (2001), Chemnitz (2001), Koblenz (2001), Augsburg (2002), Wuppertal (2003), etc. At this time there are 20 congregations and 19 Messianic Jewish groups in Germany. In total, 29 congregations and groups are, at the time of the research, under Jewish management. The theological background or local origin of the leaders is largely evangelical. Nine leaders have received an evangelical theological education, and two other leaders finished accredited university studies at the time of the research.

The Messianic Jewish congregations are led by monarchic structures, that is, a leader takes over the main functions of the management and “represents (until the establishment of a council of elders) the management of the congregation and looks after the spiritual condition of the members of the congregation.”<sup>20</sup> At the time of the research there is only one woman in a leadership position, in Chemnitz.

The membership and visitors figures in the congregations are rather low. At the time of the research by Pfister (2004–2005),<sup>21</sup> there were 914–1042 members and regular visitors in the congregations (Messianic Jews and non-Jews); of these about 577–687 are Messianic Jews (55%–75%). There are 59% women in the case study and 41% men.

The percentage of non-Jewish visitors in the different congregations is between 25% and 45%. Almost one-third are German-born (27%), over one-third are immigrant Russian non-Jews (38%), and a little less than one-third are “ethnic German immigrants” (28%).

An extremely homogeneous membership structure is noteworthy. Thus 95% of the interviewed Messianic Jews entered Germany from the former Soviet Union. And also the time of their conversion, which is called by them “decision for the faith/acceptance of faith in Yeshua the Messiah,” occurred for the majority (82%) in the years 1991 to 2005.<sup>22</sup> Most Messianic Jews (59%) joined a Messianic Jewish congregation between 2001 and

20 Anatoli Uschomirski, et al, *Satzung der Gemeinde Schma Israel. Kurzfassung* (Stuttgart), translation from the Russian by A. Dyskine (November 28, 1998), reworks from Hartmut Renz (December 23, 1998), printed in Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 397.

21 The empiric investigation in 2004–2005 enclosed 14 participant observations in 11 different congregations/groups, 211 valid questionnaires from 16 different congregations and groups, and 3 analyzed (from 12 controlled) “Narrative Konversionserzählungen” (“narrative conversion stories”). There are 36 conducted expert’s interviews with local leaders and people responsible in the movement, in Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 163–213.

22 A total of 18.3% of the Messianic Jews questioned stated that they converted before 1990; 23.8% in 1991–1995; 34.4% in 1996–2000; and 23.8% during 2001–2005 (Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 232–33).

2005, and since 2001, more non-Jews than Jews have joined the congregations.<sup>23</sup>

### Messianic-Jewish Articles of Faith<sup>24</sup>

In March 1998, a three-day Messianic Jewish conference with about 100 participants took place in Pracht/Westerwald; it was organized by EDI and BSSE. The participants and local leaders Pikman, Swiderski, Uschomirksi, and Braker formulated and confessed the first Messianic Jewish articles of faith, which are recognized by most present congregations.

Messianic Jews view the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as an inseparable unit, which God inspired verbally and which is, therefore, the highest authority for life and action. They confess the Trinitarian faith that Yeshua is the promised Messiah of Israel and true God, and his soteriological function.

Nevertheless, if these Messianic Jewish articles are reminiscent of evangelical Christian religious faith, note that Messianic Jews emphasize along with their affiliation to the congregation from the nations, their continuing Jewish identity: "Jews who believe in Jesus continue to be Israel, the chosen people of God."<sup>25</sup> They think highly of "biblical-Jewish heritage," confess their support of Zionism, and confess their "commitment to share the truth of Yeshua to the Jew first and to all people."<sup>26</sup>

### Messianic-Jewish Services and Congregational Life

The Hebrew names of the congregations draw attention: Shma Israel ("Hear O Israel") in Stuttgart, Bnei ha'Or ("Sons of the Light") in Munich, Beit Chesed ("House of Mercy") in Dusseldorf, Adon Yeshua ("Lord Jesus") in Stuttgart-Feuerbach, Kalat Yeshua ("Bride of Jesus") in Köln, and Adat Adonai ("Congregation of Adonai") in Heidelberg, to name only some.

At Messianic Jewish services, which take place mostly on Sabbath and in Russian, many Jewish symbols are seen, like a menorah, an Israeli flag, a shofar, a kippah, and a tallit, and the liturgy is very Jewish.<sup>27</sup> Participants light Sabbath candles, recite the Shema (mostly in shortened form), sing Hebrew songs, and hold the Sabbath Kiddush or Havdalah ceremony. A minister reads from the Torah, and the local leader speaks the priestly blessing and the blessing over the children: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh," or, "May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah." Some congregations recite prayers from the Siddur, and the exclamation *Amen. Baruch atta* ("Amen. Blessed are you") often resounds at

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 232–35.

<sup>24</sup> Evangeliumsdienst für Israel, ed., "Eine messianische Gemeinde stellt sich vor, 'Schma Israel,'" (Leinfelden-Echterdingen, 2000), also in Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 380–81.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., article 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., article 13.

<sup>27</sup> Up to now only two congregations have a *Sefer Torah* (Hannover and Berlin).



the end of the service. After the service all participants have a common meal lasting one or two hours.

However, many Jewish rituals are also absent (e.g., Amida, Kaddish, Adon Olam, the prayer Alenu), or are interpreted “Messianic-Jewishly”: In lighting the Sabbath candles, a reference is made to Yeshua as the light of the world and lord of the Sabbath. Thus is the blessing: “Blessed are you, our eternal God, King of the world, who has healed us through the belief in Yeshua the Messiah, the light of the world, in whose name we light the Shabbat candles.” The recitation of the Shema also covers faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. The interpretation of Torah always refers to the New Testament.

But there are also original symbols, formulations, or rituals: Often the inserted short confession “Yeshua haMashiach” is found in prayers, songs, and interpretations. The lighted menorah, as a symbol of Messianic hope, is found in many congregations. Also the symbol of the Star of David connected with a menorah and a fish exists in the congregations, expressing the wish for unity of Jewish and non-Jewish believers as it was in the early church.

Characteristics common to a Christian evangelical service are the open, direct, often-simplified sermon form; the freely-formulated, spontaneous prayers; praise songs with catchy melodies, short texts, and many repetitions; personal contacts before and after the service; and active participation in the services by parishioners. Christian religious content – such as faith in the Trinity, faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, and his soteriological function – predominates in the religious statements of the rituals, songs, prayers, and Bible interpretations.

All congregations take Jewish life-cycle events seriously, and conduct many ceremonies like weddings, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, etc., according to Jewish tradition.

The celebration of the Passover is especially interesting. Messianic Jews follow a Jewish Passover Haggadah and include many biblical-Jewish thoughts like sacrifice and freedom, which are connected with Messianic Jewish faith: Jesus is seen as the Passover lamb who can release the people from sin, and the afikoman, a broken matzah which is hidden and then found again later, is here a reference to Jesus’ death on the cross (division), his burial (hiding), and his resurrection (found again). Many congregations hold communion with the taking of the afikoman and the third cup of Passover wine, and indicate that Jesus spoke the suitable installation words during the Passover. As they integrate communion into Passover, Messianic Jews implicitly connect the traditional Jewish celebration with the new covenant. By this interpretation of the Jewish celebration, they take elements of rabbinical Judaism (the Haggadah), maintain biblical-Jewish concepts (sacrifice, release), and also continue, at the same time, elements of the Jewish Chris-

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tian movement (“Herrenmahl,” new covenant).

All together, there are three different local forms which can be distinguished in particular in the services: 1) In some congregations, the trend is toward more Christian content (Lord’s Prayer, communion) and symbols (cross), and less Jewish rituals and symbols. 2) At most congregations, many symbols from Judaism are taken, interpreted Messianic-Jewishly, and new liturgical expressions, prayers, etc. are found. 3) Some other congregations try to express their Jewish identity even more. Here prayers from the Sid-dur are used, the Shema is recited in full, other Jewish liturgical elements are incorporated, and many members show their Jewish identity by carrying a kippah or tallit.

### Conversion to the Messianic-Jewish Faith

The conversion event holds a high value for Messianic Jews. Thus they can report in detail about their “decision.” Of the Messianic Jews interviewed, 81.9% converted between 1991 and 2005; 23.8% between 1991 and 1995; 34.3% between 1996 and 2000; and 23.8% between 2000 and 2005. About half of the interviewees (51.7% in total) converted while still in the former Soviet Union.

The converts describe communism, and the atheism following from it, as an everyday component of their life before their conversion, as with 48-year-old Vladimir from the Ukraine:

Well, this is not hard to say, I am . . . I am born in the former Soviet Union and the country was very, how do you say, very atheistic. . . . The Bible was forbidden and also the Word of God was forbidden and the believers were . . . as I said before, the enemies of the people. This term and everything that was connected to the term God, was forbidden. And we were born and grew up in a normal atheistic family, and at around age 30 I asked myself, “Why do I live? Why do I even live?”

And then the so-called Perestroika began and I . . . understood, that communism is not the right road for a human.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, they lacked a consciousness of Jewish identity before conversion. The conversion becomes a function of the economic situation and a new life phase, picked out as a central theme of their entry to Germany. Every conversion event remains individual. However, the consensus is a total of one “passive–active–passive–active conversion scheme”: The potential converts describe a “God experience” experienced passively, or a “knowledge of the existence of God,” long before their conversion. They report that they considered themselves religious searchers looking actively for God, reading the Bible or visiting services. Afterward, everyone describes a

<sup>28</sup> Excerpt from narrative interview 10, p. 1, line 11–21, controlled on June 13, 2008, in Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 106.



passive “experience” which triggered the conversion (intervention of God, healing, sudden knowledge, an unusual event), and an active decision (prayer, confession) which concluded it.

Other factors in conversion were friends or other persons who believe in the Messiah Jesus. Of the Messianic Jews interviewed, 34.5% said that a non-Jew showed them the faith; 38% stated that they were accompanied by another Messianic Jew; 18.2% said they found the faith without human mediation; and 37.6% stated that a heavy stroke of fate or a tragic life change was responsible for their conversion. In total, 72.5% had been “led” or accompanied to conversion by another Jesus believer.

Although 85% of the Messianic Jews interviewed for the empiric study agreed that their Jewish origins had become “more important” after conversion, the converts reported difficulties in dealing with their Jewish identity. Problems originate if, on account of patrilineal descent, they cannot join themselves unambiguously to the Jewish people, or if their faith in Messiah Jesus cannot be integrated with their Jewish identity. Thus three different “types” of Messianic Jews reveal themselves here:

Type A: Here the Jewish identity is subordinated, has no meaning, and the converts consider themselves “Christians” rather than Jews. An example is Pawel (28 years), who defines himself as patrilineally Jewish:

For me this is difficult – according to Jewish law, I am not a Jew. Because my mother is a Russian, even worse: She is half Russian and half Kazakh. And my father is a Jew according to Jewish law. . . . The Jewish people in Germany take me as Jewish, they accept me, but still I am different. . . . That – the question of my identity – is a difficult question for me personally. . . . Where I come from it was a sign in the passport, because both the citizenship and the nationality were mentioned in the passport. Of course being Jewish was a nationality.<sup>29</sup>

He is recognized within the Messianic Jewish congregations as a Jew, and also feels his Jewish descent: “That is quite strong – the arche-generationme.”<sup>30</sup> Still, he calls himself unambiguously a Christian: “because I believe in God – and I believe that Yeshua was the Messiah.”<sup>31</sup>

Type B: The Messianic Jew feels connected by his new faith to the congregation from the nations. On the other hand, the convert identifies with the people of Israel, because he considers himself a physical descendant of Abraham and because for him faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, absolutely belongs to

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<sup>29</sup> Excerpt from narrative interview 7, pp. 13–14, controlled on June 13, 2008, in Pfister, *Messianische Juden*, 106.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., narrative interview 7, pp. 15–16.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., narrative interview 7, pp. 29–30.

the Jewish chosen people. The Messianic Jewish congregation holds the optimum possibility for these converts to maintain their Jewish identity further. The convert considers himself and other Messianic Jews, according to Romans 9 and 11, the present "remnant" of Israel. However, also for the Jew who does not believe in Jesus, a conversion is conceded on account of Israel's election with the return of Jesus.

Type C: The third type devote themselves increasingly to Jewish identity. They use Jewish prayer forms, learn Hebrew, study the Torah thoroughly, and read prayers from the Siddur. A 72-year-old doctor from St. Petersburg, Galja describes her initial prayer as "awkward," "naïve," and "childish." These have been solely easy invocations. But as she learned the Siddur, she has included "doxologies/the praise of God" and "Prayers for the People" in her personal prayer. She says that thereby her prayers would get "somehow sorted" and "more precise with a greater depth."<sup>32</sup>

This type of education is also reflected in people's self-descriptions. Of the interviewed persons, 10.6% call themselves "Christians," and 11.4% "Hebrew Christians" (type A). The Jewish labels are clearly in the majority, with "Messianic Jew" (42.3%) or "Jesus-religious Jew" (24.4%) used by types B and C.

Baptism belongs indispensably with conversion here. After conversion, 79.4% of the interviewees were baptized into the Messianic Jewish confession, but they emphasize no conversion to the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the step of baptism is not dependent on an emotional decision and implies no other "revelation." But baptism is a symbol of the "God sonship" and an "avowed sign for both the invisible and the visible world." The interview partners pick out as a central theme that something new begins, and that they would like to become a part of the community of people believing in Jesus and confess this publicly. Therefore, baptism can be also called the "crown" of the religious life.

### Concluding Remarks

The churches in Germany have offered until now few connecting factors for Messianic Jews. One is quiet about the new congregations or looks at them as a religious fringe group. Often, this happens because one would not want to hinder Jewish-Christian dialogue, which holds to a consensus that rejects Jewish mission.

In the evangelical congregations, there are controversial voices. Opponents of the present Messianic Jewish movement accuse Messianic Jews of overemphasizing their Jewish identity. Within the Jewish community, recognition is even more difficult; at the moment, even the pluralistic model which Cohn-Sherbok suggests for America<sup>33</sup> seems to me unrealistic for Germany.

Messianic Jews would like to be noticed. With their consciousness of Jew-

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>33</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, 212.

ish identity, evangelical Christian religious content, and independent Messianic Jewish rituals, the movement is extremely dynamic and active, and the visitors' figures are growing steadily.

For Germany, the question is whether Messianic Jews should be "recognized" as part of the evangelical sphere or another sphere.

Messianic Jews have all aspects of individual confession and an organized movement (congregations, organized national and international structures, and distinctive vitality). Messianic Jews have combined elements of the Christian and Jewish systems, so that new liturgical elements, celebrations, and ceremonies have emerged. In addition, they have also developed their own symbols, Messianic Jewish rituals, interpretations, and liturgical elements. A religious confession with which visitors can agree on account of their own experience has also originated.

The Christian-Jewish dialogue should not ignore the fact that an independent religious movement, which also has international contacts, has developed in between Judaism and Christianity. Even if Messianic Jews will not stop their evangelism efforts on account of their confession, they are ready for conversation, and for them cooperation with churches and Jewish congregations is important. Therefore, it would be a pity if Messianic Jews are excluded from clerical and Jewish conversations. Meanwhile, Messianic Judaism is a religious movement with a typically Messianic Jewish repertoire, though with few conformities to the evangelical Christians and the Jews, and will develop even without recognition.

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## OVERVIEW OF CONGREGATIONS IN GERMANY (2005)

MISSION ORGANIZATION	CONGREGATION	FOUNDED	VISITORS	MEMBERS	MESSIANIC JEWS
<b>BSSE e.V.</b>					
<b>CONGREGATIONS</b>					
Berlin	Beit Shomer	1995	approx. 100	40	ca. 80
Düsseldorf	Beit Chesed	1996	approx. 150	80	ca. 120
München	Bnei ha'Or	2000	20-25	no specification	18-22
Heidelberg	Adat Adonai	2000	20	12	at least 12
Aachen	mess. Gemeinde	2001	approx. 20	no specification	16
<b>GROUPS</b>					
Potsdam		2001/2002	approx. 15	no specification	at least 10
Erfurt	mess. Gruppe	2003	approx. 12-15	no specification	at least 7-8
Würzburg		2003	10	no specification	8
Bamberg	mess. Gruppe	2005	4-6	no specification	4-6
Osnabrück	mess. Gruppe	2005	10	no specification	no specification
<b>EDI</b>					
<b>CONGREGATIONS</b>					
Stuttg.-Vaihingen	Shma Israel	1996	35-40	23	at least 23-32
Hamburg	Adonai Zidkenu	1996	25-30	10	at least 10-20
new: Essen	Shalom	2006	?	?	?
Bonn (Swisttal-Heimerzheim)	Beit Rachamin	2005	approx. 15	no members' admission	no specification
<b>GROUPS</b>					
Karlsruhe	mess. Bibelkreis	1999	approx. 10	no members' admission	3-5
Chemnitz	mess. Gruppe	2001/2002	no specification	no members' admission	no specification
Schwerin	mess. Bibelgruppe	2004/2005	10-20	no members' admission	3-5

## OVERVIEW OF CONGREGATIONS IN GERMANY (2005)

MISSION ORGANIZATION	CONGREGATION	FOUNDED	VISITORS	MEMBERS	MESSIANIC JEWS
<b>AMZI</b>					
CONGREGATION					
Hannover	Shofar Chesed Yeshua	1999	25-30	no specification	25-30
<b>INDEPENDENT (NOT CHARISMATIC)</b>					
CONGREGATIONS					
St-Feuerbach	Adon Yeshua	2000	30	no specification	at least 27
Mülheim/Ruhr	Attend Shalom (ED) in Essen (since 2006)	1998	30-40	no specification	24-32
Berlin	Freude am Baum d. Lebens	1998	ca. 20	no specification	approx. 5
Bremen	mess. Gemeinde	2000/2001	no specification	no specification	no specification
Koblenz	mess. Versammlung	2001	40	12	20
Augsburg	Kinder Israels	2002	30-40	22	at least 20-36
Potsdam	messianische Gemeinde	2005	20-30	no specification	
<b>GROUPS</b>					
Frankfurt	Bibelkreis messianischer Juden	2001	10-15	no specification	6
Essen	Bible studie group	2001/2002	20-30	no members' admission	16-24
Wismar	messianische Gruppe	2003 (?)	14-15	no members' admission	7
Köln	Hauskreis/Gruppe	2004	approx. 7-10	no members' admission	3-5
Gießen	Hauskreis/Gruppe	2004	6-7	no members' admission	6-7
Köln	"Club"	2005	15	no members' admission	15
Duisburg		2004/2005	no specification	no members' admission	no specification
Solingen		2004/2005	no specification	no members' admission	no specification
Bad Pyrmont		2005	approx. 20	no members' admission	at least 10



### OVERVIEW OF CONGREGATIONS IN GERMANY (2005)

MISSION ORGANIZATION	CONGREGATION	FOUNDED	VISITORS	MEMBERS	MESSIANIC JEWS
<b>CHARISMATIC</b>					
<b>CONGREGATIONS</b>					
Chemnitz	Jajin Chadasch	2001	15-30	no specification	15-30
Stuttgart-Feuerbach	messianische jüdische Gemeinde	2001	70-80	20-30	10-12
Köln-Kornweiler	Kalat Yeshua	2005	20	8	8
<b>INDEPENDENT</b>					
<b>CONGREGATION</b>					
Bund Frei-kirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden (BFP): Wuppertal	Zion	2003	30-40	25	21-28
<b>NO ASSIGNMENT (POSSIBLY)</b>					
<b>CONGREGATION</b>					
Nürnberg					
<b>GROUP</b>					
Nürnberg					
<b>TOTALS</b>			878-998 (+ respected 36-44) = <b>914-1042</b>	252-262 (+ respected 50-100) = <b>302-362</b>	552-646 (+ respected 25-41) = <b>577-687</b>