The Significance of Messianic Jews in a "Theology after Auschwitz"?[72]

Ulrich Laepple

Retired Pastor, Author of works on Judaism and Israel
Bremen, Germany, Board member of the Ebenezer Home in Haifa

I. Yom HaShoah

Yom HaShoah in Israel is the day of remembrance for "the martyrs and heroes of the Holocaust," as it is officially described. Those who have experienced it will never forget it: at 10 o'clock in the morning, a siren sounds sharply for two minutes. For two minutes, all work stops, pedestrians suddenly come to a halt, cars pull over to the side of the road, and drivers stand next to their vehicles. For two minutes, life in the whole country comes to a standstill, outside and inside the houses. The six million people murdered in the Holocaust are commemorated.

It is true what a memorandum of the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany) says: "Every encounter between Christians and Jews today takes place in the shadow of Auschwitz!"[73]

On this day of remembrance, I prefer to be among the elderly residents of the Ebenezer Senior Citizen's Home in Haifa. It was founded in 1976 for Messianic Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, for Jews who believe in Jesus. On that day, they gather shortly before 10 a.m., and when these elderly people have laboriously stood up at the sound of the siren and then sat down again, one or more of those affected recount how they personally experienced and survived the Nazi persecution.

I will mention three names of people I personally knew well:[74]

Sima grew up in Moldova, where she found faith in Jesus Christ. Her brother was taken away by the Communists, never to be seen again, and her father was shot by the Germans. Her mother lived with her five daughters in the ghetto. After being transported from one labour camp to another, they survived as if by a miracle. In the 1970s, they managed to emigrate to Israel.

Heinrich Pollak was a Berlin Jew who, thanks to special guidance, joined the Confessing Church at a young age and, through a joint effort by Bishop Bell and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was fortunate enough to escape from dire straits in 1938 on a transport to England.[75]

Rose Warmer was a Hungarian Jewish Christian who was able to hide during the deportations. But what she could not bear was to watch her Jewish fellow citizens being transported to the camps. And because she did not want to let them go without the comfort of the gospel,

[72] A revised lecture at the Antisemitism Congress in Schwäbisch Gmünd from 24.9 to 26.9.2023.
[73] Quoted from Hanna Rucks, *Messianische Juden. Geschichte und Theologie der Bewegung in Israel*, (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 2014), 1.
[74] Cf. *Wir gedenken der letzten Generation des Holocausts* (Ebenezer Senior Citizen's Home: Haifa, 2023).
[75] See Heinrich Pollak, *Deine Treue ist groß. Erinnerungen eines Nichtariers* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Aussaat, 2007).

she left her hiding place and went with them voluntarily. She experienced Auschwitz and a labour camp in Essen at the Krupp company and survived.[76]

II. Auschwitz as "the eclipse of God" (Buber)

"Theology after Auschwitz" must not become a slogan or a code word. Even more than the many similar places such as Theresienstadt, Buchenwald, or Majdanek, Auschwitz stands for horror and murder. These were places of 'the eclipse of God,' as Martin Buber called the Holocaust, places of extreme questioning of faith in the face of God's hiddenness. Fifteen years after his experiences in the camp, Elie Wiesel wrote, "I will never forget the little faces whose bodies I saw transformed in the curling smoke under a silent blue sky. I will never forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust."[77]

The difficult struggle in dealing with such experiences is evident in the following thought by Rabbi Emil Fackenheim:

> I believe that although no conciliatory voice is heard from Auschwitz, an imperious voice can be heard: Jews are not allowed to grant Hitler posthumous victories. Jews . . . are forbidden to despair of God, lest Judaism perish. They are forbidden to despair of the world as God's domain, lest the world be delivered into the hands of the forces of Auschwitz.[78]

There are people who try to make sense of the experiences of the Holocaust by understanding the state of Israel as a kind of compensation from God. Abraham Heschel, the great Jewish religious philosopher, however, describes such compensation as "blasphemy" and then says, "There is no answer to Auschwitz. But Israel (the creation of the state) enables us to perceive the agony of Auschwitz, without radical despair, as a glimmer of divine light in the jungle of history."[79]

I would like to add another Jewish voice. It is the message of the famous painting *The White Crucifixion* by Marc Chagall.[80] The viewer sees in the background the crimes against Jews in the context of Russian pogroms, but they are projected onto and concentrated on the one Jew in the foreground. He hangs on the cross. Above him, Hebrew letters spell out, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." A divine ray of light falls on this crucified Jew. The prophetic insight of this painting from 1937 is doubly shocking: firstly, because of the year in which it was created—it was created in the midst of the persecution of the Jews by the Nazi regime; but secondly, because this painting establishes the relationship of a community of suffering between Jesus and his people. Suddenly, one understands the words of the prophet Isaiah about the Servant of God: "He took up our pain and bore our suffering!" (Isa 53:4).

---

[76] I met Rose Warmer shortly after becoming a parish pastor in Essen, when she returned to the sites of her former slave labour with great emotional courage. This encounter had contributed to my decision at that time to take on joint responsibility for the Ebenezer Home in Haifa and then to familiarise myself with questions of Messianic Jewish theology. Her life story can be found in the book by Myrna Grant, *Reise im Gegenwind* (Marburg: Francke-Buchhandlung, 1979).

[77] *Umkehr und Erneuerung. Erläuterungen zum Synodalbeschluss der rheinischen Landessynode 1980 'Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses von Christen und Juden,'* ed. Bertold Klappert, Helmut Starck (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag), 270.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] https://www.marcchagall.net/white-crucifixion.jsp

The "eclipse of God" at Auschwitz (i.e., the absence of any discernible meaning in these events) intensifies for Jews the challenge to faith in a merciful God to an unbearable degree, especially to the God who has made himself known in his covenant with Israel. This experience has changed theology: Christian discourse about God is accompanied by the knowledge of the incomprehensibility of his ways. But discourse about human beings has also changed, namely in the direction of their terrifying capacity for evil.

The message of Chagall's painting is not an answer to Auschwitz. But it is a prophetic reference to a close connection between the Jewish people and the Jewish Messiah in suffering. The cry of despair, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" connects the two. Israel has its Messiah at its side. It is not just Pilate's mockery and sarcasm towards the Jews that he had the words "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written above the cross of the suffering Jesus. The Gospel of John, which reports this, means to say: this is precisely the truth, that the crucified one is the King of the Jews (John 19:12, cf. 1:49).

This Jewish Jesus, the suffering Messiah, must stand at the beginning of a theology after Auschwitz,[81] a Christian theology that does not separate Jesus from his people, regardless of whether this people says "yes" (like the Messianic Jews) or "no" (like the majority of Jews) to him.

III. Christian theology *before* Auschwitz

Christian theology *before* Auschwitz had attached little importance to the fact that Jesus was a Jew and was therefore able to easily separate him from Judaism, from his people. As early as the second century, this led to a Christian theology without Israel and against Israel. The church increasingly distanced itself from everything Jewish and soon separated itself from Jewish Christians as well, if they did not completely renounce Jewish customs. The church, which was becoming increasingly gentile Christian, based its theology on the grave error that it had replaced Israel, that it was now the true heir to the promises of the Old Testament and had taken the place of the supposedly "rejected Jewish people." The Jewish "God-killers" had forfeited their election by crucifying the Saviour.

This conviction was not merely a minor error on the part of the church. For centuries, it served as a licence for the degradation and disenfranchisement of Jews and pogroms against them. It had a poisonous effect on the depth and breadth of Christian teaching handed down over the centuries and continues to burden us to this day. We are all familiar with the black-and-white stereotypes that shaped us from confirmation classes to university theology: Judaism is national, Christianity universal; Jews are worldly, Christians are spiritual; they follow the law, we follow the gospel; they believe in God's justice, we believe in God's love; they emphasize works, we emphasize grace; they have only promises, we have fulfilment. The Christian position was gained by negating everything Jewish—and this was often a division between the Jewish Old Testament and the supposedly non-Jewish New Testament.

This anti-Israel theology came at a high price. It allowed paganism to enter Christianity through a wide-open door in the form of ideologies, philosophies, and false authorities. One of the evil fruits of this development during the Nazi era was the church party of the *Deutsche Christen* with their contempt for the Old Testament. The low point was their founding of the Eisenach Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life,

[81] The expressions "before" and "after" Auschwitz express the monstrous and unique nature of the event and are understood as a call to examine everything that followed Auschwitz to see whether it can still be valid. Can one still write poetry after Auschwitz? Can one still pray after Auschwitz? Such questions have been dealt with frequently.

which was established by several German regional churches (*Landeskirchen*) in 1939 and existed until 1945. Hitler's destructive, racist antisemitism was able to build on a mainly anti-Jewish Christianity that had forgotten Israel as God's chosen people. Herein lies the Christian complicity in the hatred of Jews that made Auschwitz possible in the midst of "Christian" Germany.

IV. On the way to a theology *after* Auschwitz

A theology *after* Auschwitz, as far as the question of Judaism is concerned, must go beyond an admission of guilt and, above all, focus on and change the theological and ecclesiastical history of errors *before* Auschwitz, not just here and there, but fundamentally. Theology must change its coordinates by pursuing theology not against Israel and the Jews, but with Israel and in connection with Jews. However, one may ask whether such a task can succeed at all, whether it is beyond our capabilities. After all, we are dealing with a legacy that has built up over many centuries and has been shaped by well-known Church Fathers and Reformers, not least by the great Martin Luther.[82] And the question has to be asked whether Jews are still willing to enter into dialogue with Christianity at all.

Attempts have been made, however, to question and overcome this anti-Jewish legacy. Reference can be made here to three major EKD memoranda from 1975, 1991, and 2000, but above all, to the well-known synodal resolution of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland of 1980. These documents became milestones in Germany for a theology after Auschwitz.[83] However, the fact that this took until 1975 resp. 1980 shows how difficult it was.

This makes it all the more important to turn our attention to two pioneers who, immediately after 1945, tirelessly called for a new ecclesiastical and theological orientation and rescued it from oblivion. They are Adolf Freudenberg and Heinz David Leuner, two persecuted individuals from the Jewish-Christian spectrum.

Adolf Freudenberg's wife was a Christian Jew. Although he himself was not Jewish, the Aryan Paragraph of 1933 sealed the end of his career as a lawyer because of his Jewish wife. His subsequent studies in theology did not lead to the ministry either, because here too—a shameful fact—his non-Aryan wife was an obstacle to his becoming a pastor. In 1939, Freudenberg—who was a friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer—set up an ecumenical refugee service and helped countless people. His great achievement after the war was that he kept urging the Protestant church to take action to renew Christian-Jewish relations. "Israel is a question of God," he emphasized, and agreed with others that only those who stand with Israel can stand with God. His tireless efforts led to the founding of the Working Group of Christians and Jews at the German Protestant Church Congress (*Kirchentag*) in Berlin in 1961.[84]

This church congress in 1961, with its three days of joint work in the Working Group of Christians and Jews, including big names from Judaism and Christian theology, became a milestone on the way to a theology after Auschwitz, long before official church statements

[82] This includes, not least, Luther's anti-Jewish polemic against the Jews: cf. Martin Luther, *Die Juden und ihre Lügen*. Newly edited and annotated by Matthias Morgenstern (Berlin: University Press, 2016).

[83] *Christen und Juden I–III. Die Studien der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland 1975–2000* (Gütersloh, 2002). On the Rhineland synodal decision, see note 4, ibid. p. 264ff.

[84] Der Deutsche Evangelische Kirchentag is the largest gathering of German Protestants, often attracting more than 100,000 participants. It takes place every two years in a major German city.

were made.[85] One of the personalities who strongly influenced the work was the Jewish Christian Heinz David Leuner. Together with his wife, he had narrowly escaped the Nazis and fled to England via Prague. After the war, he became secretary general of the European Hebrew Christian Alliance. The working group "Christians and Jews" at this church congress, which had become so historic, also included Jewish Christians. As such, Leuner explained how he understood himself as a Jewish Christian: "The Jew who has come to Jesus as his Messiah is already today a guarantor and proof that God stands by his promise (to Israel). Even after their conversion and baptism, Jewish Christians want to profess their belonging to the ancient people of God, from whom the Messiah and Saviour of the world came forth."[86]

According to Leuner, Jewish Christians, Jews who believe in Jesus, are a kind of anticipation, a foreshadowing, a promise of the fulfilment of God's promises to all of Israel. They do not see themselves as people who, having become Christians, have severed their ties to Judaism. On the contrary! With their Jewish existence, they profess God's faithfulness to Israel in the midst of the church.

Leuner lived up to his commitment to Israel. For decades, he travelled as an author and sought-after speaker, giving lectures in schools, communities, and universities throughout Europe to serve as a mediator between the church and Judaism. He worked tirelessly to free the Christian faith from dualistic anti-Jewish stereotypes and to explain to an ignorant church what the Jewish people were all about. As a close friend of Rabbi Robert Raphael Geis, he worked with the director of the Institute for Church and Judaism at the Berlin University, Professor Peter von der Osten-Sacken.[87]

When we ask ourselves the question posed in the title, What significance do Messianic Jews have in a theology after Auschwitz?, the first answer refers to a historical fact: two people from the Jewish-Christian context, both persecuted by the Nazi regime, were the driving force behind and warning voices at the beginning of the Protestant church's journey to a new attitude towards Israel in Germany. They called for a renewal of theology, a theology after Auschwitz, and initiated the necessary major rethinking that includes Judaism and Israel in the biblical sense. They reminded the church of her duty towards Israel, her theologically and historically based connection to it, and her practical obligation towards it, which had to be more than an expression of regret and shame in the face of the Shoah.

It took until the synodal decision of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland in 1980 before the churches were able to formulate the outlines of such a theology. I highlight it below because it is probably the best-known German church statement and because, as a member of the committee responsible for it, I was able to accompany the process in the years that followed. In the run-up to the consultations, a request was already made to Jews: "Help us to renew our theology on the basis of our Holy Scriptures. We need you!"[88]

The fact that Jews, especially the Dutch Rabbi Yehuda Aschkenasy, responded to this request is what I call the miracle of Christian-Jewish dialogue, as I was privileged to experience it. It

[85] This working group included well-known names such as Schalom Ben-Chorin, Hans Joachim Kraus, Helmut Gollwitzer, Rabbi Robert R. Geis, and Heinz David Leuner.

[86] Ulrich Laepple, "Leben und Werk von Heinz David Leuner," *Mishkan* 37 (Caspari Center, 2002), 79–95.

[87] Heinz David Leuner, *Zwischen Israel und den Völkern. Vorträge eines Judenchristen*, ed. by Peter von den Osten-Sacken (Berlin: Veröffentlichungen des Instituts Kirche und Judentum 6, 1978), 66.

[88] Synodalbeschluss zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses Christen und Juden, in *Umkehr und Erneuerung*, 164–166, see note 6.

was not without tense moments. At times, everything that had been achieved threatened to collapse again. But finally, it led to a breakthrough.

The shift in coordinates that a theology after Auschwitz had to undergo in contrast to a conventional theology and a church without Israel is made concrete in the following key points of the resolution approved by the Synod of the Rhineland Church:

1. The confession of "the shared responsibility and guilt of Christendom for the Holocaust";

2. The Old Testament ("the Scriptures") is "the common basis for the faith and action of Jews and Christians";

3. "We confess Jesus Christ, the Jew, who as the Messiah of Israel is the Saviour of the world";

4. "We believe in the enduring election of the Jewish people as God's people";

5. "The State of Israel and its creation are a sign of God's faithfulness";

6. We believe with the Jews that justice and love, in their unity, are God's instructions for our entire lives;

7. We believe that Jews and Christians, each in their own vocation, are witnesses of God before the world and before each other: "therefore we are convinced that the church cannot fulfil its mission to the nations without fulfilling its mission to the Jewish people";

8. "What is new in the 'new covenant' is not the abandonment of the 'old covenant,' but its confirmation in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. 'The first and permanent addressee of the Gospel of Jesus is the people of Israel.'"

I carry these achievements with me to this day with joy and gratitude. As an active member of this committee, however, I was also concerned with the question: What place do Messianic Jews have in this renewed theology? Who are they, and what significance do our Jewish sisters and brothers have, theologically and ecclesiologically, in the community of the Christian church?

V. Jewish Christians before and after Auschwitz

1. Are Christian Jews still Jews?

The nineteenth century brought unprecedented tolerance to European societies through the ideas of the Enlightenment. Jews could now pursue any profession they wanted. The religious landscape had also changed. Just as there were Germans who were Protestant or Catholic, there were now Germans of the "Mosaic religion." Judaism was increasingly seen as a denomination. The divide between Christians and Jews became less deep. Marriages between Jews and Christians were commonplace, as were conversions of Jews to Christianity. Hundreds of thousands were baptized in the nineteenth century and also in the first decades of the twentieth century, and they became Catholic or (mostly) Protestant. Studies estimate that

300,000 people converted in Germany at the time the Nuremberg Laws were enacted in 1935.[89]

The motives for conversion at that time, which is referred to as assimilation, were manifold. On the one hand, it was a matter of adapting to the majority society for reasons of social and professional advancement, and in many cases was certainly an alienation from Judaism and its customs. It was not uncommon for conversion to have occurred out of genuine religious conviction.

These many conversions are an ambivalent finding. From the perspective of Christianity, they may have been a welcome development and a source of superiority, but from the perspective of Judaism, especially after the Shoah, they represent a painful loss and a drain on the community. This is another reason why the phrase "mission to the Jews" has such a frightening connotation for Jews. The term must be associated with Jews being lost to Judaism.

However, there were many among the Jewish Christians who said, I am baptised and a Christian, but I am still a Jew and want to remain so. I belong to the Jewish people and as a believer in Jesus, I want to remain a conscious member of my people. Why should I deny them or forget them when I believe in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah? Being Jewish is not just a denomination or religion. Being Jewish is also a sense of belonging to a people. This is the fundamental category throughout the Bible, in the Old Testament and from the early church in Jerusalem to the Apostle Paul, the missionary to the gentiles, who always pointed out that he belonged to the people of Israel.

The story is well known: Jewish Christians who thought this way founded the Hebrew Christian Alliance in England in 1866, which was soon followed by similar alliances in numerous other countries, including Germany. They formed a worldwide umbrella organisation, the International Hebrew Christian Alliance, and published the magazine *The Hebrew Christian*. In 1938, sixteen national Jewish-Christian alliances belonged to this European umbrella organisation. They worked as Jewish Christians in Christian communities, attended church on Sundays, but met beforehand on the Sabbath in groups of the Hebrew Alliance.

These Jewish Christians already showed signs of something that has become even more apparent among the so-called Messianic Jews since the founding of the State of Israel, especially since the 1970s: as Jews who believe in Jesus, they emphasize their affiliation with Judaism and the people of Israel. This can be expressed in the observance of Jewish identity markers, a life according to the Jewish festival calendar, circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, and dietary laws. Even if halachic observance of the commandments varies, being Jewish is usually accompanied by a strong solidarity with Israel, and it often leads, in the diaspora, to the establishment of separate Messianic Jewish communities alongside Christian communities.

2. The National Socialist persecution of the Jews

The National Socialist laws against everything Jewish were, as is well known, enacted in rapid succession immediately after Hitler's seizure of power and affected all people of Jewish descent. These laws decided in their own way whether baptized Jews were Jews. Immediately after the boycott on 1 April 1933, the so-called Aryan Paragraph followed in the same year

[89] Rucks, *Messianische Juden*, 1.

with countless professional bans, then in 1935, the Nuremberg Laws with their absurd and confusing classification of citizens into Aryans, full Jews, half-Jews, first-degree *Mischlinge*, second-degree *Mischlinge*, privileged *Mischlinge*, *Geltungsjuden*, etc. These laws left hundreds of thousands of people without work and without a home in their own country and later, also in the conquered countries.

On 9 November 1938, the *Reichspogromnacht* followed with arrests and deportations. Then, in 1942, the Wannsee Conference paved the way, in organizational and technical terms, for the so-called "Final Solution of the Jewish Question," the large-scale murder of the Jews.

It is well known that the Nazi persecution of the Jews was a Europe-wide crime. But little thought is given to Jewish Christians. The fact that they suffered just as much becomes painfully clear when one looks at the lists compiled by my Messianic Jewish friend Richard Harvey, based on thorough research and tireless work. His research shows that, in addition to the nearly nine million Jews living in European countries, there were nearly 400,000 Jewish Christians. Of these, over 198,000 were murdered. Of the sixteen Messianic-Jewish alliances, twelve had disappeared after the war.[90]

3. The open question of the significance of Messianic Jews in a "theology after Auschwitz"

My question about Messianic Jews in the concept of a renewed theology after Auschwitz was rejected with reproach in the committee work in which I was involved: "How can you even talk about Messianic Jews and Jewish Christians after Auschwitz?" The opinion was that after Auschwitz, it should be impossible to expect Jews to hear the term "Jewish Christian" because they could see it as a provocation, even as a questioning of the committee's work.

My response was that "Precisely because of Auschwitz, we must talk about Messianic Jews and Jewish Christians!" For Jewish Christians and Messianic Jews experienced the suffering of antisemitism, including Auschwitz and other labour and extermination camps, together with their fellow citizens—for one reason: because they were Jews. The testimony of those who survived has something to say to us. That is why I told them about the people from the Ebenezer retirement home who came to mind when I made this statement.

But it is true that the synagogue in general is perceived by Messianic Jews as an imposition and a provocation.[91] They remind Jews today of the history of the many attempts at aggressive and often violent Jewish missions. And it is also true that the participation of Jews in this Christian-Jewish committee was only possible under the express condition that the committee renounce a Christian mission to the Jews.

But can Messianic Judaism and the "mission to the Jews" simply be equated?[92] And can we simply skip the fact of the suffering that also affects Messianic Jews? And, above all, are the achievements of the Rhineland Resolution so new for Messianic Jews? Have they not, at least in part, been on this path for a long time, and could they not have been sitting at the table with

[90] Unpublished. But on recommendation by Richard Harvey, the following is a list with an informative overview: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/f4qdiet34mlg290lfovg2/imja-shoah-070523.xlsx?rlkey=uwgk06q2jk0eveptewys532pe&dl=0.

[91] *Messianische Juden – eine Provokation*, ed. Ulrich Laepple (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

[92] Hanna Rucks questions this for the Messianic movement in Israel in *Messianische Juden.* Mark Kinzers' concept is based explicitly on a "post-missionary Messianic Judaism": Mark Kinzer, *Post-missionary Messianic-Judaism. Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

their contribution, as they did in 1961 at the Berlin Church Congress? These are questions that apparently could not be answered in 1980 but were waiting for an answer.

4. Late reappraisal

It was not until many years after the events of the Shoah that Christian congregations and study groups began to record the names of lost Jewish-Christian members and to research where they had disappeared to and what had happened to them. They only became a subject of research in Germany in the 1990s or much later.[93] Was it indifference or forgetfulness when communities did not ask and, later, did little or no research into where their Jewish-Christian brothers and sisters had gone?[94] The ecclesiastical-theological milieu has contributed little to the perception and appreciation of Messianic Jews. Indeed, official church statements to this day tend to express critical distance towards Messianic Jews, rather than a welcoming attitude.[95]

However, not only the work of Hanna Rucks, but also further developments show how much theological work has been done in recent years, beyond the churches, in the worldwide Messianic Jewish movement, especially from the perspective of the relationship between the *ekklesia* and Israel.

VI. Conclusion and outlook

I now return to the question posed at the beginning of this lecture: What significance do Messianic Jews have in a theology after Auschwitz? I will attempt to answer this question in five points.

1. The achievements of a theology after Auschwitz concerning the Jewish people, formulated in 1980 by the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, are necessary for the gentile church and represent a turning point, but they are not really new to Messianic Jews. They are generally fully shared and, above all, lived by Messianic Jews. The significance of Messianic Jews, however, lies in the fact that they bring this theology after Auschwitz into the centre of the church community, to congregations and theological faculties, and thus become witnesses of

---

[93] See Sigrid Lekebusch, *Not und Verfolgung der Christen jüdischer Herkunft im Rheinland 1933–1945.* Schriftenreihe des Vereins für Rheinische Kirchengeschichte 117 (Köln: Rheinland-Verlag, 1995); *Evangelisch getauft – als Juden verfolgt*. *Spurensuche Berliner Kirchengemeinden*, ed. Hildegard Frisius et al. (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 2008); *Evangelisch getauft – als 'Juden' verfolgt. Theologen jüdischer Herkunft in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Ein Gedenkbuch*, ed. Hartmut Ludwig et al. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2014).

[94] *Christen – Judenchristen – Messianische Juden. Eine Positionsbestimmung des Gemeinsamen Ausschusses 'Kirche und Judentum' im Auftrag des Rates der EKD* (1917), www.ekd.de/positionsbestimmung-kirche-und-judentum-messianisch-juden-30414.htm. The paper recommends "Äußerste Zurückhaltung der Kirchen gegenüber Messianischen Juden" ("extreme restraint of the churches towards Messianic Jews," p. 23).

[95] In the meantime, a lot has happened on the national and international stage:
- Richard Harvey's lecture at the German Protestant Church Congress in Stuttgart in 2015 reached and surprised many people.
- At the international conference of TJCII (Towards Jerusalem Council II) on the topic "Jesus – Also the Messiah for Israel? Messianic Jewish Movement and Christianity in Dialogue" in Vienna in 2023, there was an exchange between diverse positions within the Messianic Jewish community.
- With the international symposium at the University of Tübingen on the topic "Messianic Jews between Church and Synagogue" in January 2025, a trialogue conference between Messianic Jews, non-Messianic Jews, and non-Jewish Christian participants took place for the first time. (An anthology of the symposium lectures has been announced.)
- Other milestones include the books by Mark Kinzer and the discussions they sparked, beginning with *Post-missionary Messianic Judaism*, published in 2005 (see note 22).

Israel in the Christian church—provided that they are allowed to do so and do not experience rejection.

2. In a confession of guilt by the Protestant Church in Weißensee (1950), the German church adopted the concept of witness: "The New Testament testifies to the one church of Jewish Christians and gentile Christians. We see in our Christian brothers and sisters of Jewish origin witnesses to our indissoluble bond with the permanently chosen people of God, Israel."[96]

Jews who consider themselves part of the community of Jesus Christ, and therefore part of the body of Christ, live in him as witnesses to the indissoluble covenant history of the people of Israel. That such Jews have always existed, and that today they even constitute a growing movement in the world, is a great miracle. For despite the history of Christianity, they have found the Messiah Jesus—often not through what we call the "mission to the Jews," but often through the persuasive power of the biblical word itself.

3. The presence of Messianic Jews in the church of Jesus Christ makes the guilt of the gentile Christian church towards the Jews all the more visible, which Dietrich Bonhoeffer—speaking on behalf of the church (because the church did not)—described as follows: "The Church confesses that it has seen the arbitrary use of brutal force, the physical and mental suffering of countless innocent people, oppression, hatred and murder, without raising its voice for them, without finding ways to come to their aid. It has become guilty of the lives of the weakest and most defenceless brothers of Jesus Christ."[97] Against this background, the step of a Jew into the community of Christ, in whatever communal form, is a moving expression of forgiveness and hope for renewal.

4. The term "Messianic Jews"—in contrast to the terms "Jewish Christians" or "Christians of Jewish origin"—emphasizes Jewishness. People who describe themselves in this way do not leave Judaism behind like an old garment the moment they find Christ. They are not better Jews, but they represent the people of Israel in the Christian community. They bring the blessing that flows from Abraham through Israel to all nations (Gen 12). They teach us that Israel or Judaism is not a precursor to the "real thing," Christianity. Rather, the path of the gospel to the gentiles, on which most of us found Christ, is inscribed in the greater history of God with His people, Israel (Rom 11:26ff). Knowing this, the church of Jesus Christ also shares in Israel's present trials and blessings and accompanies it on its journey.

5. In fellowship with Messianic Jews, our black-and-white stereotypes in preaching and teaching will change. Sometimes I think: Just *one* listener in church wearing a kippah—and we pastors would preach differently! Our entire coordinate system of thinking and speaking about biblical texts would change. We would speak less one-sidedly about grace and works, we would not sit in judgment so self-righteously over the Pharisees, we would place the Psalms and the entire Old Testament more at the centre, and we would not appropriate Jesus as if he naturally belonged to us Christians. And we would examine our own position towards Israel.

When a Jew joins the Christian community in faith, Judaism and the chosen Israel enter into the mystery of the church and transform it. When we read the Bible, sing, and pray together with Messianic Jews, we read, sing, and pray with people who bear witness to and represent the Holy One of Israel in the midst of the church. In these encounters, which we must seek, a

[96] Quoted in *Christen und Juden I–III*, 222 (see note 12).
[97] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik* (München: Christians Kaiser Verlag, 1949), 121f.

theology after Auschwitz deepens and expands into a spiritual community not only with Messianic Jews, but with all of Israel.