

tion of whose definition of the “kingdom of God” is preferred.

Internal theological shifts within Jewish and Evangelical circles create a space for religious encounter across traditions. As Evangelicals and other Christians pay increasing attention to Jesus’s life and teaching, they necessarily focus on his Jewish identity. Jewish progress beyond demands for recognition and reconciliation toward discussion and action on common ethical obligations creates room for non-Jewish participants within specifically Jewish elements of the conversation.

We are open to finding resources in each

other’s traditions that can inform our own. Jews need not feel embarrassed that they are inspired by Christian worship. Christians can appreciate the deep connection the Jews have with their tradition, how they raise Jewish families, and how they create and maintain Jewish culture and peoplehood. As we share practices between traditions, even if we understand those practices in different ways, we acknowledge that we are walking a shared path. We are moving in the direction of the upside-down, justice-oriented, kingdom of God, and we will partner with anyone who shares a similar passion.

Is Christian Missionizing a Real Problem?

Ron Kronish

Contrary to popular opinion, Christian missionizing is not a significant problem in Israel. In comparison to the pervasiveness of Western pop-culture in Israel, Christian missionizing is a nonexistent threat to Jewish identity in Israel.

First of all, the Catholic Church, which established diplomatic relations with the state of Israel more than ten years ago, is officially against proselytizing of Jews in Israel or anywhere else in the world since Vatican II in the 1960s. Mormons — who missionize all over the world — signed a special agreement with the state of Israel when they opened the campus of Brigham Young University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem in 1987.

Although Christian Zionists are often accused of missionizing Jews, in 1998 they signed an historic “understanding” in which they clarified their position with regard to Jews in Israel:

“We believe that the covenant which God concluded with the people of Israel was never revoked. We deeply respect the Jewish people in their identity and integrity and will therefore not engage in activities, which have as their intention to alienate them from their tradition and community... We also recognize the potential for healing between our faith communities as we live in the midst of a Jewish majority, sharing its challenges while living together in a land sacred in both our traditions.”

One of the leading Christian Zionists in Israel for many decades, Clarence H. Wagner, former director of Bridges for Peace, explained that “Classical Evangelism is no longer on the agenda.”

Moreover, local indigenous Christians in

Israel do not engage in missionizing whatsoever. According to Daniel Rossing, Director of the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations, which began within the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel three years ago, there is a clear consensus among all the historic Christian communities in the country that members of all three faiths should respect the integrity of each other’s historical and religious inheritance and thus should refrain from any and all attempts to persuade individuals to change their faith or religious tradition. None of the indigenous Christian churches engage in proselytizing. “The small minority of individuals and groups whose outlook and actions are outside this broad consensus often come from outside the country,” says Rossing.

So as it is a minor problem, why do Jews in Israel and abroad still worry about it so much? Mostly, this is a function of Jewish history, in which Jews were the target of Christian missionaries in Europe for centuries. In addition, it is a function of ignorance; most Jews in Israel are unaware of the revolutionary changes in Christian thinking toward Jews and Judaism that were brought about by Vatican II in the 1960s, and they unfortunately continue to live with a view of Christianity that prevents them from dissociating Christianity from antisemitism. It would be more beneficial to engage in healthy and productive Jewish-Christian dialogue — both with visiting and local Christians — than to engage in witch-hunting for Christian missionaries in Israel who hardly exist any more.

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