

Jewish Evangelism Exists

Editorial

In the middle of the 1980s, the Mormons received permission to build a big study center in Jerusalem. Many discussions and negotiations had preceded this. The Ultra-orthodox community in Jerusalem called for the building license to be revoked because they feared that the Mormons would engage in missionary activity. The then Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, fought on behalf of the Mormons. Today the Mormons have a beautiful building on the Mount of Olives to which they send 100 students three times a year. And why shouldn't they? Many non-Mormons also enjoy the building because of the many concerts held in the spectacular setting. So far so good.

Teddy Kollek received an honorary doctorate in Salt Lake City, Utah, the Mormon headquarter. He was, as he said to Amos Kollek in an interview in the Jerusalem Post on 25 August 1995, "received like a hero" in the presence of 25,000 people.

What should be noted, however, is the price the Mormons had to pay for the building — not in dollars but in promises. Teddy Kollek speaks openly about this, too.

He underscores that he did not fight this battle for the sake of the Mormons, but for the sake of freedom of religion in Jerusalem. That is fine. He should be commended for this.

As he also explained in the Jerusalem Post, however, in the initial negotiations with the Mormons he made it very clear that the Jewish people have lost six million people in our lifetime. No proselytizing could therefore be allowed.

Kollek continues: "The Mormons have now been in Jerusalem for eight years, and not a single case of proselytizing has occurred. Everyone who comes over, be he a teacher, a student, or a regular visitor, is told that if he distributes books or pamphlets or engages in any other form of proselytizing, he will be sent home immediately."

Kollek's words are worth noticing. Are such conditions an expression of freedom of religion? Other groups in Israel do have permission to disseminate books and pamphlets, just as Jews in other democratic countries have the right to distribute their writings.

The price the Mormons have paid in promises given far exceeds the high price they paid in dollars for the land and the building.

That is their problem.

Teddy Kollek has talked himself into a problem. Mission in Israel is not forbidden, even though some Christians outside Israel seem to think so. The so-called "anti-missionary law" of 1976 does not make missionizing illegal. Rather it prohibits the giving of bribes in order to persuade someone to convert.

Christian organizations can run into difficulties if, in their eagerness to build a big center — or receive recognition from the Israeli government — they give their word that they will not engage in any missionary work. For one thing, in making such promises the Messianic believers become losers.

This issue of MISHKAN shows that Jewish evangelism exists — both in the democratic state of

Israel and worldwide. Some will note this with regret; others will rejoice.

Jewish anti-missionaries and Christian theologians who, from different reasons and expressed in a different choice of words, believe that Jewish evangelism is the “Endlösung der Judenfrage mit anderen Mitteln” (the final solution to the Jewish question with other means), will continue their fight against Jewish evangelism. It is their right to do so.

Jewish evangelism exists. It is true that after the Holocaust some Jewish missionary organizations, especially in Europe, have ceased to exist. But when these disappear, others have often been established by people who have felt it their obligation to bring the best which the Church received from Israel back to Israel. And in areas of the world like Japan and South Korea, one can these days find a new interest in Jewish evangelism amongst Christians.

Jewish evangelism exists. One might not receive that impression merely by reading mission documents published by different church societies within the last 50 years. These documents will only reveal as an exception that the number of Jewish believers in Jesus is growing today. And only very seldom will one find in these documents a clear call for Jewish evangelism.

That is a problem for the church!

The articles in this issue of MISHKAN reflect some of what is happening in the area of Jewish evangelism at the present time. They can be read as a continuation of what was said in MISHKAN no. 10, 1/1989.

The good news is that much more is happening than what is reported in these pages.

For those of us who look forward to the salvation of Israel in the name of Jesus, this is good news indeed.

Kai Kjær-Hansen

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