

Jews on Mission: An Introduction to the (New) Jewish Universalists

Kai Kjær-Hansen¹⁰⁷

The theme “Jews on Mission” is *not* one about Messianic Jews — or Jesus-believing Jews — and their mission. By “Jews on Mission” this paper refers to Jews who do not believe in Jesus but who very boldly advocate active mission or outreach among gentiles.

These (new) Jewish universalists challenge the Jewish community and undermine a number of prevalent Jewish ideas about Jews and their mission. Even if it is not their intention, Jewish universalists also complicate a number of prevalent arguments against Christian or Messianic Jewish mission — irrespective of whether these arguments are advocated by Jews or Christians.

Consequently study of Jewish universalists is warranted for those involved in Jewish evangelism. I shall allow their spokesmen to express their views in rather long quotations below.

The (New) Jewish Universalists

I bracket *new* in front of “Jewish universalists” because even in our time there have already been tentative beginnings of Jewish outreach among gentiles. Best known is the Reform movement’s then-leader Rabbi Alexander Schindler, who in 1978 called for U.S. Jews to reach out to unchurched gentiles. He repeated his appeal in 1993. Rabbi Stephen Lerner, head of the Center for Conversion to Judaism, and a handful of other Conservative rabbis are also said to have “published articles or founded shortlived organizations expounding the same cause” since the 1950s.¹⁰⁸

In 1982 Rabbi Daniel F. Polish says about Schindler’s call for outreach in 1978, that the violent attacks from Orthodox spokesmen and leaders of the so-called “secular” community made Schindler modify his viewpoints. “Interestingly, as Schindler clarified his statement, it seemed to recede further and further from being a program of active outreach to non-Jews,” Polish maintains. “Rabbi Schindler calls upon rabbis to be less emphatic in discouraging those who express the desire to undertake such conversion, this especially in the case where an ‘unchurched’ person is marrying a Jew.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Kai Kjær-Hansen has his Ph.D. on Studies in the Name of Jesus. He is the author of several books on Jewish evangelism and the Messianic Jewish movement. Presently he serves as International Coordinator of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE).

¹⁰⁸ *The Jerusalem Report*, Jerusalem, February 20, 1997:30.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel F. Polish, “Contemporary Jewish Attitudes to Mission and Conversion”, in: Martin A. Cohen and Helga Croner (eds.): *Christian Mission - Jewish Mission*, (New York, Stimulus Foundation: 1982), 151.

Jews do not engage in mission

It is often said that Judaism does not engage in mission. To some degree this is true today. For the Jewish universalist, this absence of active Jewish mission exposes an internal Jewish problem. It is quite a different matter for the Jews who are active in the Jewish-Christian dialogue: the fact that Jews do *not* engage in mission can be used in the ongoing dialogue. They hold that the Jewish “virtue” of not engaging in mission among Christians ought to inspire Christians to a parallel “virtue.” The underlying message from Jewish quarters is quite clear: “Keep your hands off us. We lost enough Jews during the Holocaust.” And this plea is supported by Christians who can be heard to say this, for example: Jewish evangelism is “die Endlösung der Judenfrage mit anderen Mitteln” - the final solution to the Jewish question by other means.¹¹⁰

The basic attitude to Christian mission in the leading dialogue between Jews and Christians was well-expressed in the magazine *Christians and Israel* in connection with the reactions to the resolution which the Southern Baptist Convention passed in the summer of 1996. Here it is said: “The above-cited Baptist resolution is clearly not in the spirit of our time: the spirit of interfaith respect, cooperation and dialogue.”

And it goes on to say: “implicitly or explicitly, it has been recognized in enlightened Christian circles that dialogue and evangelization cannot peacefully coexist.”¹¹¹

Reactions to the Southern Baptists were prompt, even if their resolution did not really contain anything new. It is my guess that dialogue theologians — Jewish as well as Christian — will meet the Jewish universalists with deafening silence. What the Jewish universalists say is certainly not “in the spirit of our time.” as this has been defined by dialogue theologians. But it is in the spirit of people of genuine conviction and faith who want to share with other people what good they themselves have received. For that reason the Jewish universalists and their mission must be welcomed. At long last there are Jews who dare leave their defensive attitude and who proudly and fearlessly dare say that since Jews find Judaism so attractive a religion, it must also be attractive for non-Jews, as all people are created in God’s image.

The Jewish universalists are people of determination, people who do not lay down their arms before the battle and ask for mercy, people who do not lie down and allow others to walk over them, people who want to fight for their cause. In short: When it comes to missionary zeal, Jewish universalists are equal to advocates of Christian/Messianic Jewish mission. The time is past when Jews would accept the role of the underdog.

In this connection the following quotation of a Jewish universalist is worth noting:

The cultic and Christian efforts prompted a defensive response against the conversionary overtures in the Jewish community. The increase in acceptance of conversion can in this sense in part be seen as an ironic acceptance of the aim (but not the tactics) of those whom they saw as posing a religious

¹¹⁰ Heinz Kremers, *Judenmission heute? Von der Judenmission zur brüderlichen Solidarität und zum ökumenischen Dialog*, Neunkirschen-Vluyn, Neukirschener Verlag: 1979), 31. Cf also my paper: “Jewish Evangelism in Post-Holocaust Europe”, *Eleventh North American LCJE Meeting, New York 11-13 April, 1994*.

¹¹¹ *Christian and Israel - A Quarterly Publication From Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, Vol. V. No.4, Autumn 1996:1.

threat; welcoming converts became a way of fighting religious fire with religious fire.¹¹²

Harold M. Schulweis' outreach

It is refreshing to hear about Jews who go in for active mission among “unchurched” people, which in the USA also include nominal Christians. Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, Los Angeles, is a man in whom the media recently have taken a great interest. In Vince Beiser’s words: “one of the most prominent and charismatic Conservative rabbis in America has launched an effort to get Jews to stop concentrating on intermarried couples, and instead start showcasing Judaism to *all* gentiles looking for a new religious path.”¹¹³ In the same magazine Schulweis is quoted for the following in November 1996:

I want to make clear ... that my approach is not opportunistic. I do not see converts as replacements for Jews lost to the Holocaust or to assimilation. These people are on a spiritual quest. They are not, as a rule, motivated by a wish to marry a specific Jewish spouse. They are attracted to a tradition that encourages question-asking, that does not burden people with inherited culpability (in the guise of the doctrine of Original Sin), and that values deeds and words, not just blind faith.¹¹⁴

I must admit that I do not fully recognize myself as a Christian in Schulweis’ description. I too value question-asking, deeds and words and, admittedly, I am convinced of the truth of the doctrine of original sin; I think that I see original sin manifest itself far too often in my own life and sometimes also in the lives of others! But let us leave that alone.

In his essay “Open the Doors” in *The Jerusalem Report* Schulweis writes, “Many of the unchurched or disillusioned are seeking everywhere for alternative paths to spirituality — in ashrams, mosques, cults — everywhere but Judaism.”¹¹⁵

These are the kind of people to whom Schulweis wants to offer Judaism. For all men are created in God’s image. Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad hasidism in the 18th century, contends that the souls of gentiles “emanate from unclean husks that contain no good whatever.” Schulweis in his essay terms these “xenophobic thoughts,” and also contends that these thoughts are expressed by Yehuda Halevi, the Maharal and the Zohar. Schulweis goes strongly against Orthodox rabbi and philosopher Michael Wyschograd, who in the book “The Body of Faith” (1993) argues that Judaism is a “carnal election.” According to Schulweis, Wyschograd argues that God chose to elect a biological people, that remains elect even when it sins. Jews, in short, are corporally chosen. About this Schulweis says in his essay:

That these voices are accepted as the prevailing judgment of Judaism means, in my view, that we must not only actively seek out those who would convert, but also educate native-born Jews so that they have a truer understanding of what Judaism advocates.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Lawrence J. Epstein, *The Theory and Practice of Welcoming Converts to Judaism: Jewish Universalism*; Book 2 on Epstein’s Home Page on the World Wide Web <<http://members.tripod.com/~epst>>. 16 February, 1997, I was visitor no. 5,963.

¹¹³ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997:30.

¹¹⁴ *The Jerusalem Report*, November 14, 1996:4.

¹¹⁵ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997: 32-34. Quote from p. 32.

¹¹⁶ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997: 32-34. Quote from p. 33.

Schulweis does not think that outreach to unchurched people compromises inreach to Jews. “Outreach has taken nothing from inreach,” he says with a reference to his own congregation which has a *keruv* (outreach) commission. That Judaism for a long period of time has not missionized is not due to a Jewish prohibition. The first convert to Judaism was Abraham. Jewish history includes many proselytes. Christianity, not Judaism, forbade Judaism to missionize. But, says Schulweis:

We are not living in the fourth century under Roman sovereignty. We need a new vocabulary and a new self-understanding of Jewish purpose and a renewal of our witness to those who seek. Ours is a unique faith that rejects the notion that there is only one way to God, one truth and one way to salvation. No rabbinic sage would declare as did the church father Cyprian “extra ecclesium nula salus” [extra ecclesiam nulla salus!] - outside of the Church no one is saved. In Judaism there is nothing to be saved, and no supernatural original sin to be supernaturally atoned for. In Judaism, you don’t have to be Jewish to love God or to be loved by God. Precisely for that reason, Judaism is attractive to non-Jews.

Schulweis ends his essay on a cautionary note: “Whatever message the Jewish community gives to unchurched potential converts must be forthright ... I do not encourage them to become Jewish for ulterior motives — to please the Jewish partner or appease the Jewish partner.” And he ends:

I address them as men and women created in the God’s image who have something of great importance to gain in identifying with His Jewish people and with Judaism, and who have much to contribute to the quality of Jewish life. The end of *keruv* is not to be dissolved or absorbed but to be enriched. We need a new vocabulary and a new way to speak to the stranger in our midst. The language must be persuasive, and must be informed by love of God, Judaism and humanity.¹¹⁷

Lawrence J. Epstein’s Jewish Universalism

Before we consider some reactions to Schulweis’ outreach program and draw some conclusions, we shall devote our attention to the group around Lawrence Epstein and the Jewish universalists, as they call themselves. I have visited Epstein’s home page on the internet.¹¹⁸ Although it is first of all probably aimed at cases of intermarriage, Epstein is all on Schulweis’ side. In the interview in *The Jerusalem Report* he says:

There are an increasing number of gentiles who are not romantically attached to a Jewish partner but who are in search of meaning in their lives and find Judaism appealing ... Schulweis’ efforts deserve to be applauded and, most of all, emulated.¹¹⁹

Some quotations from Epstein’s Home Page can give us an idea of what the (new) Jewish universalists stand for. Epstein writes in the beginning of Book 1:¹²⁰

Jewish universalism is a term I suggest be used to designate a religious interpretation of Judaism in

¹¹⁷ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997; the last quotations from pp. 33-34.

¹¹⁸ “Conversion to Judaism”; Epstein’s Home Page on the World Wide Web; see note 5 above.

¹¹⁹ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997:35.

¹²⁰ Cf. note 5 above. Part I: “The Theory of Jewish Universalism”; Part II: “The History of Jewish Universalism”; Part III: Under Construction.

which welcoming converts is seen as central to the Jewish enterprise in history. The theory of Jewish universalism I propose and will describe holds that God created the entire universe as a single entity, that all people were created for a common moral purpose, and that God chose the Jews to convey a moral message to all humanity so that redemption available to all people through God might occur. Part of the moral message delivered by the Jews was that Judaism, though not religiously required, was available to all people and that Jewish people has the religious obligation, as embedded in their covenantal agreement with God, to offer Judaism to the world and welcome converts.

And from the introduction of Book 2:

From the point of view of Jewish universalism, an analysis of the willingness and ability of the Jews to perform their divinely-mandated conversionary mission forms the basis of understanding the meaning of Jewish history.

The strong words “divinely-mandated conversionary mission” cannot but sharpen our interest. Allow me to bring to the fore some features from section I. “Mission” in Book 1:

The idea of religious mission is that the entire Jewish people, divinely chosen, having freely accepted an agreement with God that included missionary obligations, has the spiritual vocation to bear witness to Judaism, to bring God’s universal moral message to all humanity by offering their faith, and to welcome converts who accept the particularities of the moral message.

They take exception to missionary work which includes “force, threats of force, and bribery as well as a variety of insistent, intrusive, deceitful, or unwanted attempts at persuasion.” One has to guess whom (in Jewish evangelism) they have in mind when they say: “Some contemporary examples of such intrusive efforts include accosting strangers in public, going house-to-house to seek converts, or demeaning the religious legitimacy of other faiths.” It is said that the “Jewish concept is opposed to any coercive, deceptive, or intrusive conversionary methods” (cf. my comments below).

Passive and active witnessing

For the Jewish universalist it is a sign of “a morality of powerlessness,” to engage solely in passive witnessing:

Jewish universalists draw a distinction between the belief that at the end of time non-Jews will come to God and so it is not necessary to do anything now (passive witnessing), and having such a belief coupled with a continuing belief in the covenantal obligation to act now to offer Judaism to non-Jews rather than just wait (active witnessing).

The passive witnessing is due to historical circumstances of persecution. But now delay is no longer morally tenable. “Jewish universalists agree that historical conditions today allow for an active mission,” after which it is said:

Jewish universalism does not dismiss passive witnessing; indeed, it embraces all witnessing, claiming only that passive witnessing is, by itself, insufficient. Jews must surely wait, hope, and pray for the coming of the messiah, but such passivity makes for an insufficient Jewish present. Waiting ignores the necessary tasks to be completed now, so that a messianic redemption could complete, rather than replace, human efforts.

Offering Judaism

The signals in this section are also refreshingly clear:

There is a crucial difference between ‘offering’ Judaism and explaining it. In the case of explaining, Jews wished pagans and other non-Jews to remain as they were, but simply to have a fuller understanding of the Jewish way of life. In ‘offering,’ a Jew wished to provide Judaism as an alternative. Sometimes the distinction was hard to make because ‘offering’ began with ‘explaining,’ but ‘offering’ clearly is the correct word, because the Jewish motive was to make the non-Jew know that Judaism was available as a religious alternative.

This “offering” of Judaism is seen as a consequence of the prophetic vision of mission. It can even be contended: “Welcoming converts provides a touchstone to judge how effectively Jews are performing their mission.” And: “The faith God offered to the Jews contains a universal moral message. God offered the same Torah given to the Jews to other nations, all of which refused. God didn’t prepare a separate Torah for the Jews.” A number of biblical persons are then brought to the fore: Abraham (“a Jew by belief not birth”), Moses (“seen as a model of a Jewish missionary”), Ruth (“probably the most famous convert in the Bible”), the prophet Jeremiah (“a prophet to the nations”).

“Offering” and activities

The following activities (from the Greco-Roman period) are stressed: (1) relying on God; (2) creating missionary literature; (3) using the synagogue; (4) personally approaching potential converts; (5) assimilating non-Jews who lived among the Jewish people; and (6) marriage.¹²¹

Point (4) is explained this way in Book 2:

There is mixed evidence about whether or not there were ever any organized Jewish “missionaries.” In general, however, Judaism did not have a need to create a specific missionary occupation in the way it is commonly understood because, as the occupation warranted, all individual Jews would spread the religion.

Is conversion to Judaism required or desirable?

It is argued that it is not required for gentiles to become Jewish to achieve salvation, or to be considered righteous. But the question is posed: “Is it sufficient to convert the world to morality rather than, specifically, to Judaism?” The answer is also clear:

The answer, of course, is that it may be sufficient and desirable, but it is not ideal. The crucial

¹²¹ The activities mentioned are also highlighted by Scot McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles. Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). He finds that the contemporary Jewish “positive attitude toward, and acceptance of, proselytes is to be methodically distinguished from aggressive missionary activity among the Gentiles”, p.48. Peder Borgen argues that McKnight ought to draw more attention to the extrovert and active efforts which Jews would sometimes engage in, among these: force, coercion and violence; cf. Peder Borgen, “Militant proselytisme og misjon” [Militant Proselytism and Mission] in: R. Hvalvik and H. Kvalbein (eds.), *Ad Acta: Studier til Apostlenes gjerninger og urkristendommens historie*, (Oslo, 1994), 9-26. Nevertheless, Borgen finds (p.10) that McKnight modifies his main thesis in his conclusion where he says, “Although there is some evidence for conversion through literature and missionaries, the predominant means of conversion appear to have been the life of individual Jewish citizens,” p.117.

missionary questions are: how can Jews help make righteous people out of non-righteous, more righteous people out of the minimally righteous, and the most righteous possible out of the more righteous? To make the world as righteous as it can be is to make it as Jewish as possible, for Jewish adherence to Judaism implies that Jews believe that their religion expresses the most central and complete religious truth and the most thorough and accurate moral guidelines, and that other faiths are only partially true and morally complete.

Welcoming converts

The few negative remarks in the Talmud against welcoming gentiles must mostly be attributed to historical circumstances. The Talmud and other Jewish religious texts, it is contended, “supported what Jews actually did: they gave gentiles the opportunity to embrace Judaism.” The section “Mission” ends with the following:

The specific inclusion of welcoming converts as a central focus of the missionary task is important because such an inclusion gives Jews a means to evaluate their success in carrying out their mission. While a mission is a general statement about Judaism’s corporate intentions, it is necessary to list goals. Goals are the specific means by which the mission is to be achieved. Offering Judaism and welcoming converts are the goals of the Jewish mission. Therefore, measuring the number of converts is one central way of seeing whether the missionary objective has been met. Without a specific measure, it would be impossible for Jews to determine if, in fact, they were succeeding with their mission. Activity is sometimes confused with achievement. Without a measurable means of evaluation, the mission itself becomes hopelessly abstract, unable to define itself, unable, most importantly to engage in the self-evaluation necessary to determine if the covenantal obligations are being met. Measuring the number of converts, that is, allows Jews to determine if they have been following their Divine mandate.

Of course, there are other aspects besides the quantity of converts that determine the mission’s success. The quality of converts is, for instance, vitally important. Additionally, the efforts to offer Judaism should be assessed in ways supplementary to the accounting of converts. Still, the number of people who actually convert is a crucial criterion in determining the mission’s success.

I must say that Lawrence J. Epstein presents his case well, indeed so well that I can only recommend others to visit his “Conversion to Judaism” home page on the World Wide Web <<http://members.tripod.com/~epst>>.

Reactions

I have not yet seen any reactions or comments to Schulweis’ views from Christians. There have been quite a few from the Jewish community, many of them negative. The most negative have come from the Orthodox Movement — not surprising since they unanimously advocate passive witnessing. It is interesting in itself to follow the internal Jewish discussion on the mission of Judaism. I think we can learn something! Jews who are against Christian/Messianic Jewish mission should also be able to learn something or draw some conclusions from this. It is this last thing which interests me most here.

I do not imagine that all Jewry as if with a snap of the fingers will change its views on mission, i.e. mission which Judaism engages in, with the result that it will again become actively

missionizing, as it was earlier, e.g. in the Greco-Roman period.¹²² What Schulweis' and Epstein's (new) Jewish universalists stand for is at this time a minority view in the Jewish world.¹²³ I do not know if Schulweis and Epstein have expressed any *principles* concerning Christian/Messianic Jewish mission. I do not know if they are willing to grant us the same right to engage in mission among Jews, as they are perfectly entitled to among unchurched people. But it is the only logical consequence of their view. It is not least for this reason that their views are relevant for us who are involved in Jewish evangelism. And for the same reason their views become a dangerous threat for the majority of Jewry, who have objected to Christian/Messianic Jewish mission among Jews.

Let me show you a few examples of how Schulweis and Epstein advocate views which, in my opinion, undermine the criticism levelled against Christian/Messianic Jewish mission.

1) David Rosen, an Orthodox rabbi and the Anti-Defamation League's co-liaison with the Vatican, has realized the danger of Schulweis' viewpoint. He says that "Jews have insisted that it's 'presumptuous and insulting' to tell people their current religion is inadequate." And then notice the following:

Relations with Christian groups, especially the Catholic Church, are founded on the commitment that they won't proselytize to us, says Rosen. If a Jewish campaign to convert non-Jews gained momentum — which Rosen considers unlikely — and if it pulled in not only the unchurched but affiliated Christians, Jews in Eastern Europe or parts of Latin America might face 'a great deal of discomfort. Their argument against proselytizing in their midst would be much weaker.'¹²⁴

What is David Rosen actually saying? Something like this: Schulweis, can't you see that you are undermining all that we Jews have achieved in the Jewish-Christian dialogue? We have struck a good bargain: we have promised each other not to missionize to each other. But now you come along saying that we Jews want to engage in mission. Can't you see that we stand to lose one of our best arguments against Christian mission to our people?

I must refrain from going further into this subject. My point is that if Schulweis' and the Jewish universalists' views prevail, they will not be applauded by Christian dialogue theologians. For their views involve a blunt renunciation of the principal ideas of the dialogue theology of the last decades. If the Jewish universalists are right, it will be the end of dialogue theology as such.

2) As already mentioned, Schulweis' outreach aims at *all* gentiles looking for a new religious path, not just for gentiles in cases of intermarriage. By taking this stance he clearly distances himself from people in own ranks in the Conservative Movement. For example Ismar Schorsch, the Chancellor of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary and "one of the most prominent leaders of Conservative Judaism," finds Schulweis' message "offensive." "The superiority of Judaism lies in the fact that it doesn't try to sell itself," says Schorsch. But reporter Vince Beiser observes shrewdly in his interview: "But in case of intermarriage, the Conservative movement's

¹²² Bernard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmud*, (New York, KTAV, 1968) is still a principal work. Cf. Scott McKnight's book in note 13 above.

¹²³ I have not been in a position to check possible differences of emphasis between Schulweis and Epstein but I note that Epstein backs up Schulweis' outreach; cf. *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997:35.

¹²⁴ *The Jerusalem Report*. February 20, 1997:35.

position is that the non-Jewish partner should be encouraged to convert.” The question is, in other words, if Schorsch does not hereby reveal an inconsistency. Ismar Schorsch replies:

There we are concerned about unity in the household, about making sure that the children will grow up Jewish ... So there the outreach is an effort to retain the Jewish partner and the child of that intermarriage. It’s not meant to go after people who aren’t in our orbit. Interfaith partners have come into our orbit.”¹²⁵

This statement is interesting. “Interfaith partners have come into the Jewish orbit,” Schorsch says. True enough. That is the way matters stand in a Jewish perspective. But it is equally true — of course — that Jewish partners have come into the Christian orbit. This is the way matters stand, seen in a Christian perspective. Therefore if it is legitimate from a Conservative Jewish position that the non-Jewish partner should be encouraged to convert, then it must also be legitimate from a Christian/Messianic Jewish position to endeavor to prompt the Jewish partner to become a Jesus-believer. You cannot have your cake and eat it too.

That the Conservative movement through their outreach wins a gentile partner in an intermarriage over to Judaism is not something which fills me with delight, but I recognize their right to do it and I do not question their intentions or motives. When Jews through Jewish evangelism are won to faith in Jesus, there is also no joy among Jews because of that, but they ought to recognize our right to evangelize. Generally speaking, this is not what happens, on the contrary they cast doubt on our methods. If Ismar Schorsch is unwilling to draw the conclusion — and he certainly does not do it in the above-mentioned interview — I will do it: If one recommends outreach to gentile partners, one should also grant others the right to outreach to Jewish partners, i.e. grant Christians/Messianic Jews the right to outreach at least in cases of intermarriage. But further, if one has accepted outreach in cases of intermarriages, the logical conclusion is a general acceptance of outreach.

Perhaps we who are involved in Jewish evangelism have been inattentive. Somehow the Jewish party in this controversy has succeeded in presenting the matter in such a way that it seems to be all right with outreach to non-Jewish partners in cases of intermarriage, but wrong with a Christian/Messianic Jewish outreach to Jews — even in cases of intermarriage.

This leads me to some considerations concerning the number of persons won for Judaism and Christianity/Messianic Judaism respectively.

3) According to Epstein there are now 200,000 Jews by Choice in the USA. In “An open letter to Jews by Choice” on his Home Page the introduction says:

“Dear Friends,

We who were born Jewish need you. There are about 200,000 of you out there. One of every 37 American Jews is a Jew by Choice rather than a Jew by birth.”

According to *The Jerusalem Report* (20.02.1997:30) this number is increased by 5000 per year in the USA. And: “by some estimates, converts will comprise nearly 10 percent of the U.S. Jewish population by the year 2010.”¹²⁶

¹²⁵ *The Jerusalem Report*. February 20, 1997:34.

¹²⁶ *The Jerusalem Report*. February 20, 1997: 30.

I do not know how many Jews become “Christian” in the USA every year but I doubt that the number is 5000. However, I have no reliable data about this.

In the case of Israel I am not quite up-to-date either, but nevertheless on firmer ground. “In 1992, 740 people managed to convert to Judaism in Israel; in 1991, 593 people,” writes Yossi Klein Halevi in 1993.¹²⁷ I must admit that I cannot by any stretch of imagination think that the same number of Jews in Israel came to believe in Jesus in those same years.

If the numbers given by Jewish universalists are reliable in the case of the USA, it is certainly relevant to ask who “lost” most? I cannot substantiate my answer but it would seem that Jewish mission to non-Jews can present greater numbers than Jewish evangelism. In any case the information from the Jewish universalists about the number of converts questions the truth of the myth that Judaism will lose an enormous number of Jews due to Christian/Messianic Jewish mission. When that is said, it is presumably a fact that both parties lose most, not to mission by the other party, but to secularization.

4) One of Schulweis’ supporters is Reform Rabbi James Rudin, who on several occasions has spoken out against LCJE.¹²⁸ This is how *The Jerusalem Report* describes his reaction to Schulweis’ outreach program:

As long as he sticks to encouraging the curious, without stepping over the line into aggressive proselytizing, Reform Rabbi James Rudin, interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, is all for it. “I predict in 10 years we’ll be wondering why we didn’t start this a long time ago.”¹²⁹

Rudin’s statement is also interesting. He is trying to maintain a balance, unsuccessfully, as I see it, because he uses ambiguous terms. Certainly “encouraging the curious” as well as “aggressive proselytizing” are very subjective concepts. What some people see as “encouraging the curious” is for others active stimulating of seekers, and what some call “aggressive proselytizing” is for others the most natural thing of all: namely, face to face with a fellow human being who like oneself is created in the image of God, to ask that person if he or she has considered that Judaism or Jesus could be the answer to their lives.

The important thing is: if Rudin acknowledges these words, then it conveys his acceptance in principle of Jewish mission. The consequence of this acceptance in principle of mission to non-Jews must be acceptance of Christian/Messianic Jewish mission among Jews. When that is noted, we can go on to discuss methods since both parties — Jewish universalists and Christians/Messianic Jews — recognize that there are methods which should not be used.

This important question is, however, one I shall have to leave here. But having looked at Epstein’s Home Page I have a feeling that it will be rather easy to demonstrate that such differences as there might be between his methods and the ones we in Jewish evangelism generally use are not differences in nature but rather differences in degree. There is, however, one thing that I must say.

As mentioned above, Epstein contends that the Jewish concept of mission “is opposed to any

¹²⁷ *The Jerusalem Report*, May 20, 1993:11.

¹²⁸ Cf. e.g. my article “So Far Judaism Is the Victor”, *LCJE Bulletin*, no. 32, May 1993:2.

¹²⁹ *The Jerusalem Report*, February 20, 1997:32+35.

coercive, deceptive, or intrusive conversionary methods.” Being a Christian I can say some similar things about Christian/Messianic Jewish mission, but with a few additions on the question of having an *intrusive* attitude. This is a very elastic and subjective thing. And it is questionable whether the Israelite prophets who are mentioned in support of modern Jewish mission were not more *intrusive* than even the most “aggressive” Christian/Messianic Jewish witnesses are today. And: We Christians are the first to admit — and to dissociate ourselves from — the fact that down through history the church has forcibly Christianized Jews. But history can also produce examples of Jewish people who, when they had the political power to do so, forcibly Judaized other people.¹³⁰ As Denmark’s former Chief Rabbi Bent Melchior said in a farewell interview in the Jewish community’s magazine: “in its origin Judaism was missionizing, something from which we have not always acquitted ourselves so well.”¹³¹ I wish that the Jewish universalists had themselves have expressed such a self-evaluation.

Summing up

Harold Schulweis, Lawrence J. Epstein and other (new) Jewish universalists are convinced that they are under a divine obligation. They believe that Judaism is relevant for *all* people, and they actively struggle to present their views — even if they do *not* believe that Judaism is the only way to salvation for all people.

We also have what we consider a divine obligation. We believe that the message about Jesus is relevant for *all* people and we will continue to present this view.

When Jews who do *not* believe that Judaism is the only way to salvation for everybody nevertheless feel called upon to engage in mission to non-Jews, how much more must not we who believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation feel called upon to share the riches of the gospel — with everybody, Jews as well as non-Jews!

Everyone should be able to understand this conclusion — even if they cannot rejoice in Jewish evangelism.

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¹³⁰ Peder Borgen (cf. note 13 above) draws attention to a number of instances from Josephus’ writings of use of force and violence in connection with forcible Judaization, e.g. *Antiquitates* 13.257-258; 13.318-319; 14.75-76, 88; 15.253-254.

¹³¹ *Jædisk Orientering*, Copenhagen, June/July 1996:7.