

Response from the Authors of *Facts & Myths*

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Mishkan was first published in 1984 and since then 32 issues have appeared including the present one. Without exaggerating it can be said that none of the 29 issues published before the double issue (issues 30-31), entitled *Facts & Myths About the Messianic Congregations in Israel*, have received as much attention and interest as this double issue.

Mishkan's Celebration of the State of Israel's 50 Years Anniversary

The editorial of this issue addresses some of the questions put to us as authors of *Facts & Myths* after it appeared. It is of course not the first time the editorial board has received reactions and also negative critique of an issue and, dare we say, fortunately so. Had this not been the case the conclusion would be that all the previous published articles had been without stimulus and impulse.

Although the survey appears as a book, it is a double issue of *Mishkan* and should be viewed and evaluated by the same criteria as other *Mishkan* issues. Articles in an issue of *Mishkan* often address the same main theme looking at it from different perspectives.

Similarly, *Mishkan* 30-31 is an issue with a main theme. It is the last of three issues celebrating the 50 years anniversary of the State of Israel as *Mishkan* announced it would do by "focusing of the mission of the Christian Church and on the conditions of Messianic Jews in Israel from 1948 to the present." (*Mishkan* 28/1998 p. 1.)

The list of contents on p. 3 of *Facts & Myths* clearly indicates how the survey is compiled. The order in which the chapters appear as well as the vocabulary used show when we talk about Messianic congregations and when we talk about other groups. How the survey was conducted is explained in the chapter "Collecting and presenting the material" (pp. 11-20).

And now to the five objections mentioned in the editorial which it is our responsibility as authors to answer.

Five Critical Objections

Although we would much rather discuss some of the many challenges to the Messianic movement raised in the survey, we shall attempt in brief to answer the five objections already mentioned in the editorial.

We did not know that it would look like this.

This objection has come from a couple of the congregations which granted us an interview. Our answer is that we made it clear during the interview that it would be published in *Mishkan*. We find it difficult to accept that printing the material with a different cover makes a significant change. After writing up the interviews those

interviewed were sent a copy for their approval. Below is a copy of the letter attached to the profiles sent for approval. Based on this the reader can decide whether we acted unethically. The letters were sent in the end of May 1999 and read:

Re: Survey of the Messianic Congregations in Israel 1998-1999

First of all thank you very much for your time and your cooperation in connection with our survey of the Messianic congregations and fellowships in Israel. We appreciate it very much and it has been of great help.

As mentioned when we did the interview we would like you read it before publication. Included is what we have written about your congregation or group in particular. It is based on the information you gave. If we have used other sources as well these are mentioned at the end of the article. The article about your congregation will be one of the about 70 articles to be printed, each one on a different congregation. The articles on the congregations will follow a more extensive article with the title: "Facts and Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel." It will have a historical introduction, an explanation of how the survey has been done and then focus on some general questions and issues. We hope to be able to send this issue of Mishkan to the printer around 1 July 1999 and will of course send you a copy when we get it back from the printer.

*Please take time to read through our write-up on your group. If there are things that we have misunderstood, please correct them. Especially we would like you to pay attention to numbers mentioned, including the numbers in the different categories, and spelling of names, both the name of the congregations and names of persons mentioned. We have left a few things in **bold**. Hope you can fill out the missing information. Should you have newspaper clippings about the congregation we would appreciate a copy.*

We would prefer to use full names. But should you or any other persons mentioned feel hesitant do let us know and we will of course respect your wish. It is possible to use initials or just the first name.

We hope very much that you can return this to us within a few days with your corrections. Please - if possible - use this fax number (Caspari Center) 02 6251933. If we have not heard from you before 5 June, we will assume that you have no comments.

Again thank you very much for all your help.

Yours - in our Messiah - and with greetings also from Kai Kjær-Hansen.

Bodil F. Skjøtt

Edit. secr.

We did not give our permission.

This objection came from a couple of the six congregations which did not grant us an interview. Our response is that when we approached them for an interview we did not ask for permission to write about them, but for an interview in order to be able to write the profile on the congregation as accurately as possible. Had we been granted an interview we would of course have sent them our draft for their approval before publishing it. Five of the congregations which did grant us an interview had second thoughts before the publication. We therefore did not publish their names nor locations. In the book they appear as anonymous (see pp. 14-15).

With regard to the congregations which did not grant us an interview, the criteria we set for ourselves as authors were to avoid publishing names of people still living unless their names appeared already in material from the Israeli press. We have expressed our apologies to one person whose initials we have used although we had not found the person's name in any material from the Israeli press.

We have also noticed that it is old, well-established, and well-known congregations which have objected here, rather than new, young, and Russian-speaking congregations.

Information about congregations (or about me) is inaccurate.

This objection has come mainly from the few congregations which did not grant an interview. The description of the history of these congregations is – as stated in the individual profiles – based on written sources. We will be the first ones to admit that these sources are imperfect. Some of the inaccuracies of the survey would have been avoided had an interview been granted.

In the final editing some changes were made which we as authors are responsible for. In one case we had written “the leader had a call from the Lord.” This was changed after the person had given his approval to “the leader received what he describes as ‘a call from the Lord.’” Our intention was not to pass any value judgment. As authors writing history we can express what the person believes, but we cannot express ourselves on behalf of God.

Why discuss arguments and old wounds which have healed?

The objection comes mainly from congregations which did not grant us an interview. Our response is that this we have learned from the authors of the Bible. There is much in the stories told in the Bible that hurts, and the biblical authors are very open and honest in their descriptions of the people of God. Both the Tanakh and the New Testament mention splits and disagreements. In *Facts & Myths* we have tried to give a realistic picture of the Messianic movement today. To be on holy ground and to be part of the national restoration of Israel have not eliminated splits and disagreements. Perhaps we have destroyed a romantic picture of a movement where people are more in agreement with one another than believers elsewhere.

Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses should not have been included.

This objection has been raised by many from within the Messianic movement, including three members of the editorial board, Gershon Nerel, Ray Pritz and Tsvi Sadan.

However, we wish to acknowledge that the decision to include these groups was that of the authors of the survey and ours alone. In our discussions with board members after the publication, the three persons mentioned made it clear that they would have omitted the material on the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. We as authors decided differently.

On p. 12 and p. 56 of *Facts & Myths* we have made clear disclaimers concerning how we see the two sects in relation to the Messianic movement. It should also be mentioned that these two groups and those dealt with in chapters 9 and 10 are not included in the statistical material and analysis.

We have heard the reactions from many within the Messianic movement in Israel, and we recognize that for some this is a very significant issue. They therefore feel that the need to show sensitivity should have taken preference over the academic

considerations that normally apply to material included in *Mishkan*. We wish to be sensitive to the positions of our brothers and sisters, and it has not been our intention to hurt the image of anyone, not through our discussion on these two sects nor through any other material included. Taking note of reactions from Messianic leaders we placed a note in copies of the survey sold after 1 October 1999. The note reads,

Concerning the inclusion of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons in Facts and Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel (Jerusalem 1999)

In light of reactions received from several members of the Messianic Movement in Israel to the inclusion in this publication of a section on the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons the authors want to make the following statement:

1) *The authors do not in any way consider the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons part of the Messianic Movement. This is stated clearly on p.12 and repeated on p.56. Neither are members of the two communities in any way included in the statistical material of the book.*

2) *The authors regret that the inclusion of the two groups by some readers might be seen as underscoring the myth that there is no difference between them and the Messianic Movement and that they all together are "cults". The authors strongly disagree with this view and maintain that the teaching and doctrines of both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons place them outside the camp of the Messianic Movement.*

However, in writing and compiling the material for *Mishkan* 30-31 (or *Facts & Myths*), we have worked under the assumption that *Mishkan* is an academic journal, "A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People." In the academic journal of *Mishkan* all topics which in one way or another are relevant for Jewish evangelism can be dealt with.

Our decision to include them can be compared to the decision made by authors writing on Rabbinic Judaism. Some rabbinic Jewish authors writing on Rabbinic Judaism in Israel today would omit a chapter on the Samaritans and the Karaites. However, other authors would find it relevant to discuss such groups in a book on Rabbinic Judaism and therefore decide to include such a chapter, with or without disclaimers.

On p. 56 of *Facts & Myths* we pointed out two observations which we thought warrant inclusion in the work. The first concerns the Jehovah's Witnesses. We expressed that they "are equally if not more active than the Messianic movement in presenting their message. They are the target of similar harassment and opposition (as the Messianic movement is)." For any minority group it is important to be aware of the situation and experiences shared with other minority groups.

Regarding the Mormons we said that they paid a high price to be allowed to establish their center on Mount Scopus by giving a promise to the Israeli authorities not to evangelize in Israel. This should serve as a warning to the Messianic movement as well as to foreign churches not to make an agreement with the authorities which would make evangelism illegal.