Weaving a Threefold Cord
Spirituality, History, and Theology in Service to the Jewish People and the Christian Church

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I'm grateful to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Fribourg for this extraordinary honor. To say that it came as a surprise would be an understatement. Upon receiving the congratulatory email from the dean, I was convinced that it was a phishing expedition from some diabolically clever hacker in Russia or Africa.

Why such surprise? Because I'm a Messianic Jewish theologian, and, as such, am usually spared the burden of prestigious awards. A professor-friend at a respected institution of higher learning once told me, with regret, that no prominent Christian school in the United States would employ a professor who was publicly identified as a Messianic Jew. Needless to say, the attitude towards us in the Jewish world is even less laudatory. As an Orthodox Rabbi once commented, while stealthily arranging a meeting with me, "You guys are radioactive."

Thus, my surprise at being notified of the award, but also my lack of surprise when I learned that its public announcement had stirred controversy. The protests had nothing to do with my writings or related activities. They arose simply because I was a Messianic Jew. And Messianic Jews are known to be troublesome creatures.

It's true that even within that exclusive club familiar with my writings, I have at times been viewed as troublesome. But in most cases, those upset by my work have been other Messianic Jews. As one such respondent wrote two decades ago, "If Kinzer's platform were to be adopted, the biblical faith of Jesus would be destroyed among both Jews and Gentiles." Such Messianic Jewish critics might view the present controversy the way Jacqueline Kennedy treated popular fears about electing her husband as America's first Catholic president. She is reputed to have said: "But Jack is such a *bad* Catholic."

Whether I am an exemplary or a bad Messianic Jew has been a matter of debate within the Messianic Jewish community. But there's no debating that my theology and life-story are atypical for that world. The most potent Christian influences on my spiritual and theological formation have been Catholic and Eastern Orthodox rather than Protestant. The most formative Jewish influences have been encountered directly in traditional synagogue contexts, rather than filtered through Messianic Jewish sources. My academic training was received not in a conservative Protestant bible school or seminary, but in a major public university, and included initiation into the practice of historical critical methodology.

All of which has led me to a peculiar perspective on a movement which is seen by most Christians and Jews as fundamentalist, triumphalist, and sectarian. For me, the mission of all Jewish believers in Jesus is to promote the renewal of the *whole* people of God through witness to the mystery of Jesus the Messiah of Israel. That mystery consists of His hidden presence in the midst of the Jewish people, and Israel's hidden presence through Him in the midst of the Church. Together Israel and the Church constitute the one people of God. It's this ecumenical

vision which has troubled some Messianic Jews, who reject either my view of the sanctifying presence of Yeshua within the Jewish people, or my corresponding view of the unifying presence of Israel within the Church.

This broadly ecumenical vision of the role of Jewish disciples of Jesus stems from the arc of my own biography, and the way my life-circumstances have placed me at the intersection of three religious and intellectual currents of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: (1) ecumenical spiritual movements which encourage Jewish disciples of Jesus to maintain their Jewish identity; (2) revisionist historical interpretations of Christian and rabbinic Jewish origins; and (3) post-supersessionist Christian theology and Christian-inflected Jewish theology. Immersed serially in these three currents of life and thought, I came to see Jewish disciples of Jesus as uniquely situated participants in the weaving of a three-stranded cord binding the Christian Church to the Jewish people.

The aim of the present lecture is to highlight the ecumenical potential of movements which summon baptized Jews to live visibly Jewish lives, and to argue that the realization of that ecumenical potential *befits* the findings of revisionist history and exegesis, and *is entailed by* a post-supersessionist Christian theology. I'll pursue these aims by telling my own story of existential and intellectual discovery, situating it within the broader context of the story of these three religious and intellectual currents of modernity.

Strand #1: Ecumenical Spiritual Movements & Jewish Disciples of Jesus

From the patristic period through the Middle Ages, virtually everyone assumed that Christianity and Judaism were mutually exclusive categories. The consensus was well-summed up by Jerome in his critique of the Jewish-Christian "sect of the Nazarenes": because "the Nazarenes" desired "to be both Jews and Christians," they were in fact "neither the one nor the other."[1] In keeping with Jerome's dictum, throughout this period Jews who were baptized were required by the Church to sever all connections to the Jewish community and abandon all public and private expressions of Jewish identity.

One of the earliest figures to break explicitly with this tradition was Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), leader of the pietist Moravian community centered at his German estate of Herrnhut. Zinzendorf's ecumenical attitude was demonstrated by his friendship with the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, and the breadth of his ecumenical vision extended as far as the Jewish people. Under his leadership, prayer for Israel became a normal part of the Moravian liturgy, through which the community beseeched God to "restore the tribe of Judah in its time and bless its first-fruits among us."[2] Even more surprisingly, he was among the first to envision communities of Jewish followers of Jesus who would maintain elements of a traditional Jewish pattern of life. In this way Zinzendorf unlocked the door to the dual identity of Jesus-Jews which Jerome had considered permanently sealed.

Zinzendorf was emblematic of a dramatic change that flowered in the subsequent century. Few nineteenth-century Christians went as far as Zinzendorf in encouraging baptized

[1] Letter 112 in the Letters of Jerome, and Letter 75 in the Letters of Augustine.

[2] Christiane Dithmar, *Zinzendorfs nonkonformistische Haltung zum Judentum* (Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter 2000), pp. 218-21.

Jews to observe distinctive Jewish practices such as the Sabbath or the laws of kashrut. But many Christians now acknowledged God's salvific purposes for the Jewish people, and many baptized Jews began to view themselves as ongoing participants in Israel's national vocation. In contrast to baptized Jews of the Middle Ages, who were known to incite hostile action against their former community, these Jewish Christians defended fellow Jews who were subjected to anti-Jewish attacks. Moreover, they now banded together to establish their own ecumenical (albeit Protestant) organizations, such as the Hebrew Christian Alliance (established in England in 1866) and the Hebrew Christian Prayer Union (1882). In the Catholic world, a similar phenomenon was evident in the vocation of the Ratisbonne brothers, who formed the Congregation of Notre Dame de Sion in 1843.

At the end of the nineteenth century the more radical aspects of Zinzendorf's vision surfaced among some prominent Jesus-believing Jews. The vision first took programmatic form in the work of Joseph Rabinowitz (1837-1899), who attempted to establish a Jewish Christian community in Kishinev (now Chisinau), at that time part of the Russian empire. Rabinowitz had been a respected member of the Jewish world, and he wanted his congregation to function as a Jewish institution within the local Jewish community, independent of Christian denominations or missionary organizations. While he sought Jewish ecclesial autonomy, he also formed friendships with a variety of Christian leaders. In order to express the nuances of this subtle pattern of communal relations, Rabinowitz arranged to be baptized in a Bohemian Lutheran church in Berlin, at the hands of an American Congregationalist minister, with a confession of faith which he himself composed in Hebrew.

Rabinowitz adopted Jewish practices which he understood to be biblically prescribed, such as circumcision and the Sabbath. But he maintained a critical distance from rabbinic tradition. That was not the case for some of his late nineteenth-century Christian Jewish contemporaries, such as Isaac Lichtenstein (1825-1908) and Theophilus Lucky (born Chaim Yedidiah Poliak, 1854-1916). Lichtenstein was a Hungarian rabbi who lived as an observant Jew after confessing faith in Jesus. Lucky was a polymath educated in Berlin and New York, who like Lichtenstein remained an observer of traditional Jewish law. Both continued to participate in Jewish communal life after becoming followers of Jesus.

Operating within the Russian sphere, Rabinowitz gained the attention of the eminent Russian philosopher, Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900). Solovyov straddled the borders separating Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy, and had a high regard for Judaism. He urged his fellow Russians to view Rabinowitz not as a Protestant, but as a son of Israel seeking to recover an authentic Jewish expression of faith in Christ.

The vast majority of those involved in the Hebrew Christian world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries didn't follow the path of Rabinowitz, Lichtenstein, and Lucky. Instead, they remained in their historic Christian communions, professing to be members of the Jewish nation while at the same time worshiping according to the rites of their particular church traditions. But the witness of Rabinowitz and company had its effect. In 1927 the Hebrew Christian Alliance established a Hebrew Christian Church Commission tasked with outlining doctrines, formulating a constitution, and evaluating the viability of establishing an independent Hebrew Christian religious community. The Jewish Anglo-Catholic priest, historian, and theologian, Paul Levertoff, took a prominent role in this process. In 1924 he had published an article entitled "The Possibility of a Hebrew-Christian Church", and in 1925 he composed a

Hebrew eucharistic liturgy that drew upon both Jewish and Christian liturgical traditions. While the Hebrew Christian Church Commission delivered its report in 1934, by that time the crisis caused by the rise of the Third Reich forestalled implementation of its findings.

It took more than three decades for these seeds to sprout. The birth of the Messianic Jewish movement in the 1960s and '70s should be seen in this context. It was both a genuinely new development, and an extension of what had come before. Now Zinzendorf's eighteenth-century vision of communities of Jewish disciples of Jesus, living according to ancestral Jewish custom, took stable institutional form for the first time. It wasn't quite what Levertoff and the other pioneers had envisioned, but it succeeded in challenging Jerome's binary identity-formula. For Messianic Jews, Jesus and Judaism were not antithetical, but belonged together.

This sets the stage for my own 1971 affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah. Within two weeks of that confession of faith, I met a man who would play a pivotal role in my life. His name was Haskell Stone. He'd participated in the Hebrew Christian movement of the 1950s, and then abandoned it because he saw it as lacking authentic connection to the life of the Jewish people. His heroes were figures like the Hungarian rabbi Isaac Lichtenstein, who'd gone so far as to refuse baptism in order to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Haskell urged me to attend synagogue with my father, marry a Jewish girl, and live an unambiguously Jewish life. He also urged me to study the history of Jews who believed in Jesus, and to take my place alongside Lichtenstein, Lucky, and Levertoff as a participant in that history.

Three months later I returned to my studies at the University of Michigan, searching for an environment that would provide support for this strange new path on which I was walking. I found it in an ecumenical charismatic covenant community called The Word of God. It was one of the first covenant communities emerging from the Catholic Charismatic renewal, and in the 1970s was the vital center of that burgeoning international movement. There I was encouraged to express my commitment to Jesus in Jewish forms and to worship at a local synagogue, while also learning from the diverse streams of Christian tradition. And there I first obtained an anticipatory glimpse of the catholic and ecumenical wholeness of the people of God.

After graduation, I became a committed member of The Word of God community. I there learned the art of pastoral care, taught Scripture and ecumenical theology to community leaders, and wrote practical teaching articles and books. At the same time, I attended synagogue, studied Hebrew, spent one to two months in Israel each summer, and led a small group of Messianic Jews. By the 1980s I was praying daily from the Jewish liturgy with *tallit* and *tefillin*, and observing a rudimentary form of *kashrut*. These years hammered the contours of my spiritual life into a defined shape: devotion to the Jewish Messiah through traditional forms of Jewish practice, wedded to a catholic and ecumenical vision of the wholeness of the people of God. But I hadn't yet entered into the institutional world of Messianic Judaism, and I hadn't yet articulated for myself how the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition—which didn't acknowledge Jesus as Messiah—could play a central role in that ecumenical vision. I also hadn't yet been schooled in the discipline of historical scholarship. Strand one of the threefold cord was an established part of my life, but strands two and three were yet to come.

Strand #2: Revisionist History of Christian and Rabbinic Jewish Origins

According to Jerome's binary identity-formula, Jewish and Christian identity never overlapped. From the outset Jesus and his followers broke with the Judaism of their day. They rejected the elitist temple system of the Sadducees and the legalistic piety of the Pharisees. They even denied the enduring validity of the ceremonial requirements of biblical law, since those requirements had now been fulfilled in Jesus. Judaism had become obsolete.

In this traditional historical framework, the emphasis on *discontinuity* between Jesus and the Judaism of his day was accompanied by a parallel emphasis on the *continuity* between later rabbinic Judaism and the Judaism which Jesus rendered obsolete. The Pharisees were portrayed as the real rulers of the Jewish world of Jesus, and the rabbis of the Talmud were their direct heirs. Thus, the irreparable rupture between Jesus and the Pharisees created an unbridgeable chasm between their respective descendants, as reflected in Jerome's binary identity-formula.

Over the past century historians have dismantled this traditional framework, piece by piece. The discovery of ancient texts such as those from the Cairo Genizah, the Dead Sea, and Nag Hammadi, have transformed our understanding of first century Judaism, increasing our awareness of its rich diversity, and illuminating the Jewish character of New Testament texts. There was no such thing as a single authoritative form of first-century Judaism. Historical-critical study of the rabbinic movement has revealed its marginality in its early centuries, and challenged its own claims of unbroken continuity with a pre-70 Sanhedrin. The new discipline of the history of Jewish mysticism emphasized points of tension within the emerging forms of rabbinic Judaism, and detected surprising lines of connection between the later mystical and earlier apocalyptic traditions. In this way affinities were discerned between Jewish mystical currents and the early Jesus movement. All these scholarly currents were nurtured by the more irenic religious environment which emerged in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. Jewish and Christian academics now had unprecedented opportunities to collaborate, and such joint efforts opened new vistas in understanding the history of the relationship between their two religious communities.

The scholarly world now embraced as axiomatic the narrative articulated by Alan Segal in his 1986 monograph, *Rebecca's Children*: Christianity was not the rebellious child of rabbinic Judaism, but the two movements were siblings, each tracing its origins to the variegated world of first-century Judaism. Christians had exaggerated their degree of *discontinuity* from that world, Jews had exaggerated their measure of *continuity*, and for their own reasons each had accepted the other's exaggerated claims.

Now Jewish and Christian scholars together studied the writings of the early Jesus movement as first-century Jewish texts. In 1991 the young Italian scholar Gabriele Boccaccini published *Middle Judaism,* in which he argued that Christianity itself should be viewed as a form of Judaism. In 2001 Boccaccini founded the Enoch Seminar, an international community of scholars dedicated to the study of the formative period which produced Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. In keeping with Boccaccini's own understanding of Christian and rabbinic Jewish origins, the Seminar would highlight the work of Jewish scholars who were redrawing the map of the historical relationship between these two traditions, such as Daniel Boyarin, Paula Fredriksen, and Mark Nanos.

Nanos deserves special mention in this context. His 1996 publication *The Mystery of Romans* won a Jewish Book Award in Jewish-Christian Relations. It also caused a stir in the world of Pauline studies. Nanos broke with the standard reading of Paul, presenting the apostle as a

Torah-observant Jew. Allied with two other Jewish Pauline scholars, Pamela Eisenbaum and Paula Fredriksen, Nanos's view of Paul as an observant Jew would gain momentum over the next decade. In 2010 it would take institutional form in the *Paul within Judaism* group of the Society of Biblical Literature. Since then, the so-called "Paul within Judaism *Schule*" has reconfigured the landscape of Pauline studies. It has also stimulated similar initiatives in the study of other New Testament texts, all bearing the moniker "within Judaism": "Matthew within Judaism," "Luke within Judaism," "John within Judaism," etc.

Perhaps the most significant expression of this revisionist current among Jewish scholars was the 2011 publication by Oxford University Press of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. Edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, all of its articles and commentaries on the New Testament are written by Jewish scholars, and take seriously the Jewish character of these ancient texts.

This ferment among historians of Judaism and Christianity also took the form of renewed study of those post-first-century Jesus-Jews whose identity Jerome had invalidated. In 1981 a seminar on early Jewish Christianity was held at the annual convention of the Society of Biblical Literature. Eventually this seminar became a permanent section, devoted to the study of Jewish Christianity and Christian Judaism in antiquity. A flood of monographs on this topic soon followed.

In 1990 I began my initiation into this guild of revisionist historical scholars. I met with the professor of New Testament at the University of Michigan, the Norwegian scholar Jarl Fossum, to see if the Michigan graduate program might suit me. He asked, "What are you looking for?" I told him that I wanted to study the New Testament as a Jewish book. He responded, "Then you've come to the right place."

Fossum was a close colleague of Alan Segal, and like Segal he saw the study of Jewish mysticism as an essential tool for understanding the high Christology of the New Testament. As a result of their friendship, Alan Segal became a member of my doctoral committee.

In 1992 Gabriele Boccaccini joined the faculty of the University of Michigan, and we soon became friends. I took every course that he offered, and, like Segal, he served as a member of my doctoral committee.

In the late 1990s I also became friends with the aforementioned Mark Nanos. Mark was fascinated by modern Messianic Jews. He viewed our movement as a laboratory for studying social dynamics similar to what he saw in play behind the Pauline letters. He spoke at Messianic Jewish conferences, and attended other events we organized. He didn't share our faith in Jesus as the Messiah, but was pleased that we continued to live as Jews and believed that we should be accepted by others as such.

It was only after the 2005 publication of my first theological monograph, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, that I met Amy-Jill Levine—editor of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (and now the first Jewish president of the Catholic Biblical Association). I heard through a friend that she liked my book, and was interested in meeting me. I contacted her, and accepted her invitation to speak to her Vanderbilt University class. I would repeat the visit several times in subsequent years. I had found another sympathetic friend.

My writings, especially *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (2005) and *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen* (2018), can't be understood apart from the second strand of the threefold cord. Just as my early adult circumstances fitted me to contribute to an ecumenical

vision of the role of Jewish disciples of Jesus, so this later phase of my personal narrative would position me in close proximity to a significant development among historians and exegetes. But the environment in which I lived and worked after completing doctoral studies in 1995 was not primarily that of historians and exegetes. To add the third strand to the cord, I would need a new social setting and an expanded cast of friends.

Strand #3: Post-supersessionist Christian Theology & Christian-Inflected Jewish Theology

In 1993 I left The Word of God community, which was in turmoil and a shadow of its former self. Rallying a small group of local Messianic Jews, I spearheaded the establishment of a Messianic Jewish congregation.

I'd lived in a world formed by Catholics, and had forged a Jewish life within that world. I now encountered a Messianic Judaism rooted in conservative Protestant soil. Where was the existential line of continuity in the midst of this massive disjunction? And what was my role to be in this new communal setting?

I found the unbroken line of continuity in my encounter with God—and Yeshua—through the traditional prayers and rites of Judaism. But how could Yeshua reveal himself so powerfully through words and actions ordained by Jewish sages who would shiver in revulsion at the sound of his name? And if Jewish religious life contained such power, could Jews today who practiced it with devotion really be classified as "unbelievers," as they were called by many Messianic Jews? And what was the theological significance of the history of Christian suppression of these same Jewish practices among baptized Jews? Such questions guided my thinking in the years that followed. In the process, I experienced a series of theological epiphanies.

Those epiphanies occurred in the context of a crystalizing conviction concerning my particular role in the Messianic Jewish movement. Upon completing my doctorate in 1995, I asked myself: what am I to do with this education? How can I use what I have received to serve this community? I was trained to be a biblical historian and exegete. Did the Messianic Jewish world need another bible teacher? I didn't think so. What the Messianic Jewish world manifestly lacked was a coherent sophisticated theology rooted in the Jewish textual and liturgical tradition, centered in Yeshua the Messiah, and informed by the broad spectrum of the Christian tradition. I became convinced that my task was to foster the development of just such a theology.

I read now with a clear sense of purpose. I read Abraham Joshua Heschel, who confirmed my conviction that a profound knowledge of the God of Israel remained embedded within the Jewish tradition. I read Franz Rosenzweig, and embraced his metaphor of the Star of Redemption as a suitable image for the relationship of the Church to the Jewish people. Previously I had been uncomfortable with the inward-focus of the Jewish tradition; now I saw that focus as an appropriate embodiment of the Jewish vocation, in contrast to the Christian calling to world evangelization. The Jewish people and the Christian Church were two parts of one whole, the twofold people of God.

I then read Will Herberg, an American Jewish theologian influenced by Rosenzweig. Herberg drew upon the concept of covenant as the divinely appointed mode for human beings to enter into relationship with God. By divine grace Israel was called into such a covenant

relationship, which God made the basis for all future covenantal engagement. But how were the nations to enter this covenant? The way for them was opened up by Jesus, whom God established as a "one-man Israel." When bound to Jesus, those from the nations were brought into the covenant that God had made with Israel.

Of course, for a Messianic Jew, with a high Christological understanding of Jesus as both Son of God and Messiah of Israel, I couldn't accept Herberg's restriction of Jesus's sphere of activity to the nations of the world. But the notion of Jesus as "one-man Israel" made possible a perspective that went beyond Herberg's intention. If Yeshua was the embodiment of Israel, then he could also be the hidden reality underlying Israel's ongoing intimacy with His divine Father. Construed in this way, high Christology could serve as a basic premise of a post-supersessionist Messianic Jewish theology. (This contradicted the claims of the radical Catholic theologian, Rosemary Ruether, who saw anti-Judaism as "the left hand of Christology."[3])

I read Paul van Buren, a Christian theologian who, like Herberg, was influenced by Rosenzweig. Van Buren was the first English-language theologian to produce a systematic rethinking of the Christian message in light of the irrevocable election of Israel. Van Buren stressed the need for theological reflection on the events of history—and especially the history of the Jewish people and the Church. Attending to the relationship between the two communities, he focused not on the violent atrocities perpetrated by Christians, but instead on Christian supersessionism and its implications for how we should construe theologically the historical Jewish response to the Christian message:

> The Gospel met Gentiles as a demand to abandon their pagan ways and the service of gods that are not God. The Gospel met the Jews, as the church after Paul's time preached it, as the demand to abandon the express commands and covenant of the very God whom the church proclaimed! Here is a profound incoherence that has arisen because of the lack of a proper Christian theology of Israel. *The theological reality which such a theology must address, then, is that Israel said No to Jesus Christ out of faithfulness to his Father, the God of Israel*.[4]

As a result, a visible Jewish presence within the Church disappeared. For van Buren, this is a historical development demanding theological reflection: "Staggering and unexpected events have occurred since the Apostolic Writings. Not least of these is the historical fact that the early church of Jews and Gentiles soon became an overwhelmingly Gentile enterprise."[5] Van Buren helped me think through the meaning of this problematic history in relation not only to the Jewish people, but also in relation to the history of Jewish followers of Jesus.

The most impactful writer I encountered in this process of theological reflection was the Orthodox Jewish theologian, Michael Wyschogrod. Four of his theses proved foundational. First, he viewed the fleshly reality of the Jewish people as a temple in which the Divine Presence

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[3] Rosemary Ruether, "Anti-Judaism as the Left Hand of Christology," *New Catholic World* (January-February 1974), pp. 12-17.

[4] Paul van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, Part 2: A Christian Theology of the People Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 34 (emphasis added).

[5] Paul M. van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, Part 1: Discerning the Way* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 128.

resided and was revealed. In a memorable formulation, he called Israel "the carnal anchor that God has sunk into the soil of creation."[6] Second, this view of the Jewish people could make sense to Christians if they conceived of Jesus as an individual embodiment of corporate Israel (in Herberg's words, a "one-man Israel"). In Jesus the Divine Presence diffused throughout the Jewish people is concentrated and brought to a peak of intensity. Union with Jesus thus brings Christians into union with both God and Israel. Once again, high Christology becomes a vehicle for transcending supersessionism.

These fundamental assertions about God, Israel, and Jesus prepared the way for his third and most daring thesis. In a seminal 1995 article, Michael published an open letter to an anonymous Jewish Catholic "friend" (who was later revealed to be Cardinal Lustiger).[7] The article argued that baptized Jews should live visible Jewish lives, observing the Torah as fully as their circumstances allowed. This was not a new idea for Wyschogrod. Already in 1970, he had asserted an essential linkage between Christian supersessionism and the Church's historical suppression of Jewish identity among baptized Jews.[8] But now Michael challenged a particular living Jewish Catholic to draw these same conclusions, and act upon them by becoming an observant Jew (without abandoning his Catholicism).

Michael's fourth thesis described the ecclesiological implications of his third thesis. According to Michael, in suppressing Jewish identity among baptized Jews, the Church had violated not only the Pauline principle of Israel's irrevocable election, but also the twofold ecclesiology that Paul shared with the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15: "The verdict of the first Jerusalem Council then is that the Church is to consist of two segments, united by their faith in Jesus. However, with respect to the Mosaic Law, Jewish Christians would remain under it while gentile Christians would come under the Noachide commandments."[9] In this way Wyschogrod anticipated both the Torah-observant Paul of Mark Nanos, and the bilateral ecclesiology of Mark Kinzer. And in this way, he also removed from isolation the first strand of the threefold cord related to Jewish Christianity and Christian Judaism, and for the first time knit it together with the second and third strands dealing with revisionist history and post-supersessionist Christian theology.

Wyschogrod's conclusions would be taken up by the Methodist theologian, Kendall Soulen, in his groundbreaking 1996 critique of supersessionism, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology.* Soulen defined the Church as a fellowship of Jews and Gentiles who together in the present age anticipate the relationship of mutual blessing between Israel and the nations that

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[6] This is the final sentence in Wyschogrod's magnum opus, *The Body of Faith*. The short paragraph in full reads thus: "The circumcised body of Israel is the dark, carnal presence through which the redemption makes its way in history. Salvation is of the Jews because the flesh of Israel is the abode of the divine presence in the world. It is the carnal anchor that God has sunk into the soil of creation." (Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God and the People Israel* [Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996], p. 256.)

[7] Michael Wyschogrod, "Letter to a Friend," *Modern Theology* 11:2 (April 1995), pp. 165-71. The entire issue of the journal was devoted to a discussion of Wyschogrod's thesis, with responses from Eugene B. Borowitz, David B. Burrell, Ellen T. Charry, Paula Fredriksen, George Lindbeck, and David Novak, and with an introduction and epilogue from Peter Ochs. The article itself was reprinted in *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (ed. R. Kendall Soulen; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 2004), pp. 203-10.

[8] See "Israel, the Church, and Election," *Abraham's Promise*, pp. 183-84.

[9] "Letter to a Friend," p. 171 in *Modern Theology* and p. 209 in *Abraham's Promise*. Wyschogrod offers a similar interpretation of Pauline ecclesiology in "Paul, Jews, and Gentiles" in *Abraham's Promise*, pp. 197-98.

will mark the age to come. Thus, the Church's preservation of the distinct national identity of the Jews in her midst is critical for two reasons: (1) for the Church to bear witness to God's irrevocable covenant with Israel; and (2) for the Church to fulfill her own vocation as a proleptic eschatological fellowship of Jews and Gentiles, blessing one another while remaining distinct.

Like Boccaccini, Nanos, and Levine, Soulen and Wyschogrod would become my friends. In a conversation after the publication of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Michael referred to that book's central contention as the "Wyschogrod-Kinzer thesis." I brought to the topic my unique experience as an observant Jewish disciple of Jesus formed in an ecumenical community established by Catholics; a historian and exegete trained in the study of Second Temple Judaism; and now a Messianic Jewish theologian grappling with the untidy realities of a young movement attempting to define its identity. I also brought to the topic a high Christology in which the person of Jesus was inseparable from the ongoing life of the Jewish people, and the life of that people inseparable from His person. But the main conclusions reached in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* were consistent with positions Wyschogrod had advocated over many years.

In developing an ecumenical form of Messianic Jewish theology, I had concluded that its main tenets were integral to a coherent post-supersessionist Christian theology. That was in fact the main argument of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*: that no coherent orthodox Christian attempt to overcome supersessionism could ignore the bilateral constitution of the Church, or the Church's bond with the Jewish people. To serve as an unbreakable threefold cord pulling the Church towards communion with the Jewish people, this rope requires the first strand to be knit together with the other two.

Conclusion

I arrived at this vision of the ecumenical potential of Jewish followers of Jesus through a personal journey unlike that of other Messianic Jews. The vision itself was articulated in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*. In fact, what I mean in this lecture when I use the word "ecumenical" has much semantic overlap with what I meant then by the word "postmissionary." To relate *ecumenically* to unbaptized Jews or to Christians from another church tradition is to treat them as those already part of the same covenant community as ourselves. We may disagree with them about important matters, and face practical obstacles in sharing a common life, but we don't question their basic covenantal status.

It was this ecumenical (or postmissionary) orientation to the Jewish people that made my 2005 volume so controversial within the Messianic Jewish world. Some went so far as to label me a heretic. More than twenty years later, the situation has evolved. While my ecumenical vision is still a minority view, it's now a normal part of Messianic Jewish discourse. Within the diverse and contentious constellation of groups that constitute the Messianic Jewish world, one might even dimly discern an ecumenical trajectory. Thus, those Christians who see such an ecumenical form of Jewish life in Yeshua as *befitting* the revisionist history traced above, and as *necessarily entailed by* a post-supersessionist theology, have reason to be encouraged.

So how should post-supersessionist Christians relate to Messianic Jews? Despite the "ecumenical trajectory" I discern, the fact remains that the Messianic Jewish movement still sometimes displays fundamentalist, triumphalist, and sectarian tendencies. If one sees no

ecumenical potential here, or no need for what I call the first strand of the threefold cord, then a boycott on all engagement with Messianic Jews makes sense. But that's certainly not the approach taken by the last four Popes. They've all supported constructive engagement with Messianic Jews, and this has produced good ecumenical fruit among the Messianic Jews so engaged. I can only assume that these Popes have seen the latent ecumenical potential, and decided to invest in fostering its actualization.

I've recounted my own story as a means of illuminating the greater story of the threefold cord being woven by divine Providence in the midst of the troubled centuries of the modern era. In such times, it's surprising to discover Jewish followers of Jesus as a harbinger not of further trouble but of healing and renewal. As Pope Francis often said, our God is a "God of surprises." My story, culminating in this honorary doctorate, suggests that on this matter the Holy Father had it right.