A Messianic Jewish Approach to Jewish Catholicism:
Responding to Antoine Lévy's *Jewish Church*

Antoine Lévy is a French Catholic priest, a Dominican friar, a patristics scholar, and an expert in Eastern Orthodox theology. As his name suggests, he is also a Jew. In recent years he has focused his energy on practical initiatives aimed at strengthening the Jewish identity of Jewish Catholics (and baptized Jews in general). He has now offered a programmatic theological rationale for those initiatives in a groundbreaking 2021 publication, *Jewish Church: A Catholic Approach to Messianic Judaism.*[1]

I make no pretense of being an objective reviewer of Lévy's work. I have been a partner with Lévy in the practical initiatives referenced above. I wrote the book's foreword. The volume examines the same questions I address in my own work, and does so largely by scrutinizing the answers I have given. I am enmeshed in the web which Lévy has woven.

The text on the back cover concludes in this way: "In this book, Lévy examines Kinzer's positions critically, bringing forward an alternative vision of what a 'Jewish Church' could and should be. This is only the beginning of what promises to be a fascinating discussion." The present essay could be viewed as the next step in that discussion.

In this response I will aim to accomplish three objectives in three stages. First, I will summarize Lévy's central thesis, which I endorse with enthusiasm. Second, I will seek to disentangle my actual views from Lévy's often exaggerated depiction of them. (Hopefully, this second stage will clarify how I am able to welcome so much of Lévy's constructive proposal, even when he claims to refute me.) Finally, I will attempt to articulate what I see as the important disagreements that remain, even after the caricatures of my positions have been set aside. If we could come to one mind on the formulation of the *real* disagreements, the discussion between us might become theologically fruitful, and even more "fascinating."

I. A Catholic Bilateral Ecclesiology

As the title and subtitle of Lévy's book suggests, the author argues for the establishment of a Jewish *ekklēsia* within the context of the Roman Catholic Church. Lévy acknowledges that his proposal "implies a bilateral ecclesiology in the sense advocated by Mark Kinzer" (377), though he immediately attempts to distance the content of his proposal from mine. As anyone familiar with both Lévy's work and mine will attest, our proposals indeed differ. Lévy's Catholic model offers far more concrete specificity than anything I have set forth, and those specifics are imagined within the framework of existing Roman Catholic governmental and sacramental structures. Nevertheless, there is little in his ecclesiological model or its practical elaboration that is incompatible with what I have written.

1. The Foundation: Soteriology

[1] Antoine Lévy O.P., *Jewish Church: A Catholic Approach to Messianic Judaism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2021).

Lévy situates his project in the context of Catholic thinking about the Jewish people since Vatican II (15-27). The emerging Catholic position on this topic reflects a fundamental tension. On one hand, official Catholic teaching now provides a ringing affirmation of God's irrevocable covenant with the people of Israel. On the other hand, in accordance with unbroken tradition, the magisterium has continued to assert the unique, universal, and unsurpassable role of Jesus in the mediation of salvation. Lévy notes the theological difficulty raised by juxtaposing a novel Israel-doctrine with an unchanged Jesus-doctrine, and quotes from a 2015 Vatican document commemorating *Nostra Aetate* that frankly acknowledges the challenge: "That the Jews are participants in God's salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery" (Lévy, 22).[2]

Responding to this challenge, Lévy begins his book with a discussion of soteriology as the groundwork for his ecclesiology. He argues that by "assuming Jewish flesh [in the Incarnation], the Word of God unites himself with Israel. In this manner, Jews find themselves united with Yeshua as their King by virtue of the salvation that he carries with him or rather that he is" (19). Lévy supports this proposition by offering bold exegesis of Matthew 27:25 ("His blood be upon us and our children") and the "prophecy" of Caiaphas in John 11:49-52 ("it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed"). I will say more about this argument at a later point, but for now it is sufficient to note that, for Lévy, Jesus establishes an ontological bond with the Jewish people through his salvific death and resurrection that holds despite (and, in some ways, because of) the epistemological rupture signaled by the people of Israel's "no" to his messiahship. As a consequence, "Yeshua was united with suffering *Am Israel* [the people of Israel] through his own suffering," and his "death on the Cross had a redeeming effect on Israel *qua* Israel." While this redemptive union did not relieve the "dire physical realities of [Israel's] exile," it did touch "the invisible and integrally spiritual core of Israel's relation to God" (75).[3] Lévy thus reconfigures the Church's Jesus-doctrine to account for the Messiah's ongoing salvific bond with the Jewish people, and thereby makes the Church's traditional soteriological affirmation the basis for its newer Israel-doctrine.

Moreover, Lévy seeks to prod the Church to go even further in unfolding the implications of her Israel-doctrine. This becomes evident especially in his treatment of the land and State of Israel. In Lévy's view, the Church's affirmation of God's irrevocable covenant with the Jewish people leads naturally to a similar affirmation of the enduring theological bond linking this people to the land promised to its ancestors. The acknowledgement of such a bond would have a profound impact on how Catholics assess the providential character of the return of Jews to the

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[2] *The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable* (Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews), paragraph 35.

[3] Lévy picks up this theme again later in *Jewish Church*, employing the story of Esther to convey the hidden reality of Yeshua's presence in Jewish history: "For the Jewish disciples of Yeshua, the hidden character of the Name in the story of Esther indicates that the Messianic hand that is secretly piloting most Jews through the meanders of history remains unknown to them. They believe that the true Messiah of Israel has always been actively at work to deliver the nation from its enemies, albeit in a hidden manner." (289). He builds upon two elements of the book of Esther which are prominent in traditional Jewish exegesis: (1) the name "Esther" is similar to the Hebrew word for "hidden," and (2) the Name of God is absent from the book, and so one may say that God "hides" in the midst of its pages.

land, and of the emergence of the State of Israel. "If Catholic faithful are so insistently asked to acknowledge God's providence at work in the ongoing existence of the Jewish nation…for what reason are they prevented from also envisaging the 'existence of the State of Israel,' that is, the return of this Jewish nation to the Land of the Promise, from a 'religious perspective'?" (329-30).

Lévy views this providential development in soteriological and eschatological terms. "[T]he creation of the State of Israel must in some way be connected to the manifestation of Christ's salvation. But in what manner? It is difficult to conceive such a crossing of paths otherwise than from an eschatological perspective…One can hardly deny that the ingathering of Jews on the Land…and the final welcoming of the Messiah's salvation by the Jewish people…are all part of God's revelation manifested through Scriptures" (335). Lévy rejects simplistic and mechanistic eschatological schemes often associated with evangelical dispensationalism, in which there is "a radical discontinuity between the secular reality of a Jewish State…and the miraculous encounter of Jesus with his people as a result of a sudden conversion of these Jews to the true faith." Instead, he envisages a scenario in which "the very State of Israel, with all its purely secular components," serves "as the providential instrument of Yeshua's gradual revelation or rather 'self-unveiling' to his unbelieving people" (336).

Thus, Lévy envisions Israel's history as culminating in a gradually unfolding encounter with Yeshua, the Messiah unveiled at the end of the age as the secret truth of Jewish identity through all ages. The unveiling occurs only in the final phase of its history, but the saving hidden presence of Yeshua has never abandoned Israel. In support of this thesis, Lévy cites Paul's list of divine gifts bestowed on Israel in Romans 9:4-5: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law [Torah], the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever." He infers from this list that "All these gifts are intrinsically ordained to the Messiah's work of Salvation…As Israel preserves the legacy of Moses's Torah by observing the Mitzvot, she is united to Yeshua's Salvation by virtue of the intrinsic nature of her faith" (72). Lévy's interpretation of Romans 9:4-5 resembles that of the 2015 Vatican document commemorating Nostra Aetate, which states that "Christians affirm that Jesus Christ can be considered as 'the living Torah of God,'" and "The Hebrew *dabar* means word and event at the same time—and thus one may reach the conclusion that the word of the Torah may be open for the Christ event."[4]

2. The Building: Ecclesiology

Yeshua's unbreakable bond with the Jewish people also has radical implications for the Church. If Yeshua is united to Israel, and the Church is united to Yeshua, then the Church is united to Israel through Yeshua. To describe this ecclesiological reality, Lévy draws upon the traditional notion of the "marks" of the Church:

> Jewishness is not a Church in the Church. It is what the Catholic tradition calls a *mark* of the Church. As the Church is, according to the Creed, one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic, likewise the Church is Jewish…[J]ust as claiming that the Church is apostolic does not

[4] *The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable*, paragraph 26.

> make all of her members apostles, claiming that the whole Church is Jewish does not make all of her members Jews. Jewishness as a mark of the Church means that the whole Church, *encompassing all human* groups, is ontologically related *not only to the tradition but also to the existence of a particular human group.* (241; emphasis original)

While Lévy does not draw attention to the parallel, it is as if this ontological truth of the Church's identity has been hidden from the Church much as Yeshua has been hidden from Israel. For Lévy, we are now in an era in which these two intertwined secrets are being unveiled.

What does this mean for Jews within the Church? In the era when the Church failed to recognize Jewishness as an essential mark of her own identity, Jews were expected to surrender their national distinctiveness and blend into their new gentile environment. They were to marry gentiles, and their descendants were destined to lose all sense of connection to the Jewish people. But a Church whose eyes have been opened to her own Jewishness must take a different approach to the Jews in her midst. They should be encouraged to express their Jewish identity, and thereby become a visible sign of the truth that "the whole Church…is ontologically related not only to the tradition but also the existence" of the Jewish people. They should also seek to transmit Jewish identity to their baptized children and grandchildren.

But the expression and preservation of Jewish identity within a Church populated overwhelmingly by gentiles can only occur if the Church establishes or makes room for Jewish corporate environments designed specifically for that purpose—that is, for a distinct Jewish expression of the *Jewish Church.* Since Jewishness is a mark of the Church (and in that sense the entire Church is Jewish), such a corporate ecclesial body is not simply another national Church or rite. In fact, there is a sense in which such a Jewish ecclesial environment is the complementary partner of the entire Church of the nations, despite the drastic disparity in size distinguishing one from the other. Such an insight is already implicit in a stunning assertion found in the 2015 Vatican document referred to above: "It is and remains a qualitative definition of the Church of the New Covenant that it consists of Jews and Gentiles, even if the quantitative proportions of Jewish and Gentile Christians may initially give a different impression."[5] This "qualitative definition of the Church" has been an unstated mark of the Church's identity throughout her existence, but it has never been embodied institutionally in a way that made it self-evident to all her members. If such an institutional expression of this definition were to arise, it would inevitably take the form of a bilateral *Ekklēsia*—one Church assuming two distinct corporate forms.

Lévy displays sympathy and historical imagination when describing the obstacles in the post-apostolic era which impeded the development of such an institutional expression of the Church's unalterable two-fold identity. But this sympathy does not prevent him from recognizing "a flaw or a missed opportunity affecting the early development of the Church" (188). This "missed opportunity" consisted of a "failure of the early Church's leadership to conceive a sustainable model of communion-safeguarding-the-distinction between Jewish and Gentile disciples," and this failure was "greatly responsible for the first rift that tore apart the Body of Yeshua" (351) Moreover, this "rift" had profound and tragic consequences in the Church's later history: "With a number of other Catholic theologians, I believe that the other major schisms that tore apart the

[5] *The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable*, paragraph 43.

one Body of Christ in the course of centuries are delayed or 'carried-over' effects induced by the first crack in this foundational communion…" (352). The hopeful side of this diagnosis is the possibility that the establishment of an adequate institutional expression of this "foundational communion" of Jew and gentile in the Messiah might open the way for the restoration of communion between other estranged brothers and sisters.

What concrete form should such a Jewish Church take? What sources should guide its journey and shape its distinctive pattern of ecclesial life? Here Lévy makes an audacious claim, at least in the context of the history of Catholic theology. He contends that a Jewish Church must receive its distinctive character from the Torah. "Jewish existence conceived according to its corporate manifestation is tied up with the notion of Torah" (103). As noted above, Lévy's treatment of Romans 9:4-5 echoes the Vatican document commemorating Nostra Aetate in viewing the Torah as Christ's continuing mode of communion with the Jewish people. Lévy now extends this notion to the Jewish *ekklēsia*: "Messianic Jews are no less called to observe the Torah than non-Messianic Jews" (122). "[B]eing Torah-positive is a condition for Messianic Judaism simply to be" (103).

Traditional Catholic thought distinguishes the moral commandments of the Torah from ritual and civic ordinances. The former preserve their literal meaning for Christians, whereas the latter are now fulfilled and replaced by the Church's sacramental and civic life. Missing from this conceptual scheme is the category of "precepts that pertain to the nation of Israel" (194). These are commandments given for the purpose of ordering Israel's corporate life as a distinct nation. As Lévy notes, this category is critical for the Jewish understanding of Torah: "What characterizes the Jewish notion of Torah is the inseparability between the moral dimension and the practical observances that are given to Israel specifically" (122).

But how are the leaders of the Jewish Church to interpret and apply the Torah? While the Torah is for all Jews, "this does not necessarily mean that Messianic Jewish and Jewish non-Messianic understanding of the manner in which the Torah should be observed are identical" (122). Members of the Jewish *ekklēsia* must be guided above all by the teaching of Yeshua and the apostles, and by the new relationship to the Torah which is given by Yeshua through the Spirit. Drawing upon 1 Corinthians 9:21, Lévy asserts that "The relationship to Christ translates into a new relationship to the Law: not 'under' but 'inside' it" (149). Such a new relationship to the Torah for Jewish believers in Jesus is not incompatible with Christian tradition, but is illumined by it.

At this point Lévy makes his second audacious claim. While the New Testament and Christian tradition are necessary for a truly Catholic Torah observance for Jewish disciples of Jesus, they are not sufficient. To develop their understanding of the meaning and practice of Torah, Jewish disciples of Jesus must also engage seriously with rabbinic tradition. Moreover, Christian tradition and rabbinic tradition must each be read in the light of the other. Lévy describes this complex process of Torah interpretation as "hermeneutical cross-breeding": "For a Jewish *ekklēsia* to see the light of day, Christian tradition…needs to be plunged into the elements of rabbinic tradition. Conversely, rabbinic tradition needs to be plunged into the newness of Christ's teaching and grace…In this 'hermeneutical cross-breeding,' the old—rabbinic

tradition—can be newer than the new—Christian tradition—as when the former brings out a radically new form of existence from the latter" (197-98).

To illustrate this complex hermeneutic, Lévy offers an insightful reading of Catholic structures and practices in light of Jewish thought (206-49; 296-312), and a similarly perceptive reading of Jewish observance in light of Catholic thought (250-96). The latter focuses especially on the Jewish calendar and the holidays which govern its inner logic. In the course of this reflection on the Jewish year, Lévy enunciates a messianic principle or pattern that can be applied to Jewish religious practice as a whole. He labels the pattern "fulfillment without replacement," and suggests that "when applied to more complex but also more fundamental cases," this pattern "gives an idea of what could give birth [within the Jewish Church] to a new and wonderfully rich liturgical life" (254). A few pages later he applies the pattern to a paradigmatic case: the relation of the seventh day (i.e., the Jewish Sabbath) to the "eighth day" (i.e., the Christian Lord's Day): "The peace of Shabbat is to be found in partaking of Christ's Resurrection, but never can this peace be experienced as more real than in the celebration of Christ's Resurrection itself. This is why one is entitled to speak of the relation of the Seventh day to the Eighth day in terms of fulfillment. However, this must be conceived as a fulfillment without replacement" (260).

Lévy's "hermeneutical cross-breeding" yields similarly provocative results in its treatment of Catholic practices and structures. He offers illuminating reflections on the role of the Virgin Mary, the saints, images, and monasticism as seen in light of Jewish tradition (296-312). Regarding structures, he affirms and defends papal, episcopal, and presbyteral authority and the Church's teaching concerning apostolic succession (238-50). But his contention that Jewishness should be considered a "mark of the Church" leads him to suggest that a Jewish expression of the Church must have a distinctive if not unique structural expression as part of the wider *Ekklēsia*. Its internal operations should be less hierarchical (in accordance with the Jewish tradition of decentralized authority), and it should enjoy more autonomy than other national Churches or ordinariates. Celibacy should not be required of its pastors, and greater freedom should be given to it in the selection of its leaders.

This brief summary provides only an inkling of the richness of Lévy's radical thesis regarding a Jewish Church. The whole deserves intensive study, and has the potential to open new avenues in both the Church's relation to Judaism and her self-understanding.

II. MISREADING HIS INTERLOCUTOR

Lévy elaborates his expansive bilateral ecclesiology by engaging with my writings on the same topic. Those texts explicate my understanding of Messianic Judaism, and Lévy counters with his own "Catholic Approach to Messianic Judaism" (the sub-title of his book). While I admire Lévy's constructive proposal, I cannot say the same for his portrayal of my views.

I will illustrate Lévy's persistent pattern of misreading my work by citing examples related to the issue of Torah observance, a topic central to both of our writings. His misreading goes well beyond this particular issue, and affects every discussion in *Jewish Church* where my writings

are invoked. But these examples should be sufficient to make my point: if you want to know what Lévy thinks, read Lévy; if you want to know what Kinzer thinks, read Kinzer.

1. New Testament Argument for the Obligation of Torah Praxis

Most of Lévy's misreading of my work relates to his formulation of my conclusions. I will begin, however, with a misreading of a different sort. In this case he states my conclusion accurately, but entirely misunderstands the methodology and argumentation which leads to that conclusion. As a result, Lévy refutes an exegetical argument which I never made.

The issue concerns the obligation of Torah-observance. Does an objective duty exist for Jewish disciples of Yeshua to observe the practices of the Torah directed specifically to the Jewish people? Lévy rightly states my affirmative response to this question. He then rejects my position, proposing instead that Jews are invited by God to embrace these practices freely as a vow-like response to a divine call. In critiquing my view and defending his own, he explores in turn the approach to the Torah taken by James and the Jerusalem *ekklēsia* (127-30), Paul (130-55), and Jesus (155-71).

Lévy suggests that "the underlying logic" of the model I advocate takes the form of the following syllogism:

a. Halacha [i.e., *halakhah,* Jewish legal rulings] has its source in the Torah destined to Jews and revealed by Moses
b. Jesus [and James, the Jerusalem *ekklēsia*, and Paul] used to abide by Moses's Torah
c. Therefore a Jewish follower of Jesus must abide by Halacha (124, 155)

The critical role played by the minor premise (b) explains the route taken by Lévy's exegetical journey, which focuses on the historical figures of James, Paul, and Jesus, and their respective approaches to the Torah. He draws from the Acts of the Apostles in his discussion of both James and Paul, but his attention throughout is riveted on the views of the brother/cousin of Jesus and the apostle to the gentiles, not on the perspective of the author of Acts. Similarly, in his treatment of the Gospels he is interested almost exclusively in the teaching and practice of Jesus, and pays little attention to the theological concerns of the evangelists.

Lévy's syllogistic summary of my logic and the orientation of his exegetical studies stand in stark contrast to the theological method and mode of argument which I have pursued in all my writings.[6] My starting point is never the views or practices of the historical figures referred to in the Gospels, Acts, or the Pauline corpus. I concentrate rigorously on the study of the biblical books themselves, and on the distinctive theological views expressed in each. While I assume the general historical reliability of the gospels, my theological concern is with determining the particular perspectives of their four authors, and not with the historical Jesus. I am more interested in the theological message of Acts than with the historical figures of James or Paul underlying the narrative. This means that I pay close attention to the connections between Acts and Luke, while taking little concern for what links the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the epistles.

[6] For a description of that methodology, see Mark S. Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 7-10.

On the matter of Torah observance, the implications of my methodology, and of Lévy's alternate approach (which he does not appear to recognize as such), become especially evident in our respective treatments of Acts 21:20-26. This text describes Paul's meeting with James and the Jerusalem elders upon arriving in Jerusalem for the celebration of the Jewish holiday of Pentecost. James and the elders address Paul in this way:

> [20] "You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. [21] They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs. [22] What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. [23] So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. [24] Join these men, go through the rite of purification with them, and pay for the shaving of their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law." [25] But as for the Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication." [26] Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made for each of them.

I argued in *Jerusalem Crucified* that this is a crucial text for Luke-Acts and its portrayal of Paul.[7] The author prepares the way for these verses as far back as the Lukan infancy narrative, which serves as an introduction to both Lukan volumes. That introduction includes accounts of the lifelong Nazirite status of John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), the circumcisions of John and Jesus (Luke 1:59-63; 2:21), and the pilgrimage feast of Jesus's family at Passover (Luke 2:41-51). The author continues his foreshadowing of Acts 21 by depicting Paul as a practitioner of these same three Torah customs, recounting his circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3), his undertaking of a vow (Acts 18:18), and his pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Finally, the author brings all three Torah customs together in the climactic scene of Acts 21:20-26: Paul is accused of telling Jews that they need not circumcise their sons (with this fundamental practice seen as paradigmatic for "observing the customs" in general, vs. 21); he participates in a temple rite associated with a Nazirite vow as a proof that the accusation is false (vvs. 23-24, 26); and all of this takes place in Jerusalem during the pilgrimage feast of Pentecost where Paul had come "to bring alms to my nation and to offer sacrifices" (Acts 24:17).

Furthermore, Acts 21 refers back to the Acts 15 narrative of the Jerusalem Council by mentioning the apostolic decree (verse 25). All interpreters of Acts acknowledge the centrality of Acts 15 for the message of the book as a whole. In that scene the apostles and elders, led by James, rule that gentile believers in Jesus are not required to observe the laws which stipulate Israel's national customs (*ethē*), represented paradigmatically by circumcision, but need only keep the ritual practices of the Torah contained in their decree. But what about Jewish believers in Jesus, and their obligation to the Torah? Acts 21 answers that question: Paul agrees with James, the Jerusalem elders, and those "thousands" of Jewish Jesus-followers who are "zealous for the Torah." Moreover, Paul's many apologetic speeches in the remainder of Acts continue

[7] *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen*, 200-210.

this message by underlining Paul's loyalty to the Torah (25:8; 28:17), the temple (25:8), and the Jewish people (28:17).

Why does Luke so emphasize Paul's Torah-fidelity? In *Jerusalem Crucified* I examine that question in relation to the book's compositional context rather than in terms of the historical events the book describes. I suggest that early forms of the later Marcionite antinomian reading of Paul are already part of the author's environment. The Lukan infancy narrative and the book of Acts have been composed with this situation in mind. The family of Jesus (including James), Jesus himself, and the apostle Paul all emerge as thoroughly Torah-observant Jews, loyal to their people and its traditional way of life. In effect, the author of Luke and Acts defends the "Jewish Church" against those early mis-interpreters of Paul who would deny its legitimacy.

Lévy's treatment of Acts 21 gives no hint of the methodology or argumentation summarized above. He pays no attention to the narrative structure of Luke and Acts, or to the theological program of the author. For him Acts is but a historical source-book shedding light on the thoughts and habits of Peter, James, the Jerusalem *ekklēsia*, and Paul. He divides up the text, treating some aspects of Acts 21 in his section on James (128-29), and other aspects of the passage in his section on Paul (133). He asks questions such as "Did James go further than merely *allowing* Jewish disciples to practice Torah and actually hold that they had *the duty* to be Torah-observant?" (128), and "what was the need for such a solemn reaffirmation [of Torah observance] in the context of the original community of Yeshua-followers, a community that had experienced no historical discontinuity with a way of life thoroughly shaped by Torah-observance? (129)—questions aimed at the pre-70 narrative setting of Acts, and not at the post-70 compositional setting inhabited by the author of the book. I am not now challenging the legitimacy of those questions or of Lévy's preferred methodology, but only pointing out their inadequacy as a response to my completely different mode of argumentation.

This misreading of my argument becomes especially evident in Lévy's contention that James and the Jerusalem elders do not identify with the "thousands" of those "zealous for the Torah" who have heard false rumors to the effect that Paul has forsaken the Torah. This point becomes crucial for Lévy's argument that Acts 21 does not support a Torah-obligation for Jewish Jesus-followers. Here are some of Lévy's comments:

> Conversing with Paul, James and the elders of the Jerusalem community speak of "thousands of Jews" who are "all zealous for the law…" (Acts 21:20)…They are probably the same ones that Paul blames for trying to force Gentiles to adopt Jewish customs…As much as James identified with the nation of Israel, there is no sign that he identified with this group of zealots…Unlike the zealots, James and the elders do not suspect Paul. (129)
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> How could "those most zealous for Torah-fidelity . . . honor James as their leader," as Kinzer claims…if James, far from endorsing their accusations against Paul, helps Paul to convince the group that their accusations are unfounded? James was certainly regarded by the group as having some authority. And still his authority was not sufficient to calm down their suspicions since James had to talk Paul into making the personal demonstration of his attachment to Torah. (Note 36, page 175)

> It is most likely that the reason for the mutual estrangement between on the one hand, James and the elders of the community, and, on the other, the Jewish zealots within the community was due to the fact that the Messianic understanding of Torah-observance developed by the former was perceived as increasingly at odds with the narrow, non-Messianic, exclusively Torah-based concept of halachic obligation advocated by the latter. (130)

Contrary to Lévy's assertions, the narrative of Acts does not say that those Jerusalem-based Torah-zealous Jesus-followers are accusing Paul of anything. Instead, Acts says that *others* are accusing Paul, and these Jesus-followers have been exposed to the accusations, and so need reassurance. The author soon provides narrative clues as to the identity of the accusers: "Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd. They seized him, shouting, 'Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place" (Acts 21:27-28). For Lévy, it is not the Jewish pilgrims from Asia who accuse Paul, but the Torah-zealous Jesus-followers of Jerusalem. That is why he can state that "there is no sign that he [James] identified with this group of zealots." If we focus on the narrative itself, however, it becomes evident that the opposite is the case: there is no sign in the text that the reader should treat James as holding a different position from the one held by this group.

Moreover, the wider narrative framework of Luke and Acts reinforces this conclusion, for one of its prominent features is the scrupulous Torah-fidelity of Jesus's family (*Jerusalem Crucified*, 195-200). For the author of Luke and Acts, the named individuals who are best described as "zealous for the Torah" are Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, John, Jesus—and, in Acts 21, James.

One can now see how far Lévy's syllogistic summary of my logic fails in its stated task. As we recall, the syllogism runs as follows:

a. Halacha has its source in the Torah destined to Jews and revealed by Moses
b. Jesus [and James, the Jerusalem *ekklēsia*, and Paul] used to abide by Moses's Torah
c. Therefore a Jewish follower of Jesus must abide by Halacha (124, 155)

The minor premise bears no resemblance to my exegetical and theological argument. My focus is not on the habits of Jesus, Peter, James, the Jerusalem *ekklēsia*, and Paul, but instead on the authoritative *teaching* about Torah-praxis provided by the canonical text of the Gospel of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospel of Matthew, the letters of Paul, etc., each interpreted in light of its own distinct theological point of view. The author of Luke and Acts, like the author of Matthew, does far more than record historical episodes of Torah observance; these authors are both theologians, not archivists, and the texts they compose transmit normative teaching about the Torah, not mere historical precedents.

As the following sections will show, the syllogism's conclusion (c) is just as flawed—given the fact that, in Lévy's vocabulary, "Halacha" means the Torah prescriptions of rabbinic tradition as taught within "Orthodox Judaism."

2. Messianic *Halakhah* and Rabbinic Tradition

Throughout *Jewish Church* Lévy portrays my approach to the Torah as one that receives the entire body of traditional rabbinic *halakhah* as authoritative. He calls this the "continuity model" of Messianic Jewish Torah interpretation, since it assumes a non-dialectical harmony between the teaching of the rabbinic sages and Yeshua the Messiah. He contrasts this with his own proposed mode of Torah interpretation, which he calls the "Messianic Torah model":

> I would argue against Kinzer that it does not behoove Jewish disciples of Yeshua to take their cue from rabbinic authority when it comes to living according to Torah—what I called the "continuity model." I would advocate the exact opposite view: when it comes to living according to the Torah, Jewish disciples of Yeshua who acknowledge rabbinic authority should take their cue from the teachings of Yeshua…Here I would propose a fourth model according to which rabbinic tradition should be interpreted in the light of Yeshua. I would call it [the] "Messianic Torah model." (124)

As was evident in our discussion of his "hermeneutical cross-breeding," and is again evident here, Lévy recognizes a certain measure of "rabbinic authority." He only seeks to subordinate that authority to the sovereignty of the Messiah in such a way that the teaching of Yeshua shapes Messianic Jewish reception of rabbinic tradition. In his view, the "continuity model" which I allegedly advocate fails to do this, for it ascribes "supreme authority" to rabbinic tradition: "As they heed God's call to embrace the Torah of Israel freely, Messianic Jews cannot but turn to the tradition that has transmitted this Torah from one generation to the next. And yet at the same time, they cannot grant to the rabbinic interpretation of the Torah the same character of supreme authority as non-Messianic Jews" (123). The "continuity model" presupposes harmony between rabbinic *halakhah* and the teaching of Yeshua, and as a result there is no dialectical tension in need of resolution.

Lévy knows that my writings contain many references to the transformative impact of Yeshua's incarnation, death, and resurrection on the lives of his Jewish disciples. But he describes that impact as dispositional rather than behavioral. I am supposedly advocating a way of life that is externally identical to that practiced by all other Torah-observant Jews, while internally distinctive in its Yeshua-centered intentionality.

> Rabbinic Judaism has inherited the ancient dispositions regarding the rights and duties associated with God's covenant with Israel. According to Kinzer, the Incarnation of the Word did change something regarding these dispositions. But what it changed seems to have more to do with their invisible content that to their visible form…Christ changes something fundamental but at the same time this change is nothing more than the unfolding of a mystery that was present in the Covenant of Israel since its inception. It is not a modification of the previous Revelation but a shift in the understanding of this Revelation. (109)

Lévy knows that I affirm the incarnation of the divine Word in the one Jew, Yeshua of Nazareth, and his redemptive death and resurrection. His critique arises because he contends that this

pivotal-point of cosmic history leaves no discernable mark on my vision for the way of life of Yeshua's Jewish disciples.

> [W]hat if the Word of God had from all eternity determined that his Jewish disciples on earth should follow rabbinic Halacha?...[I]s it plausible that the purpose of the divine Word's incarnation, human life, death, and Resurrection was to uphold a way of life defined by Jews who believe nothing of this divine Mission? I find a vibrant theological rationale in support of this apparent paradox in Kinzer's writings. (108)
>
> This seems to imply that regarding Jewish disciples [of Yeshua], the purpose and scope of the Incarnation are fulfilled whenever these disciples lead a life of Torah-observant Jews in the rabbinic sense of the term. (112)

Having so defined my position, Lévy dismisses it as a diminution of the transformative character of the Gospel: "Claiming, as Kinzer does, that a Jewish disciple of Jesus is on principle obligated to the same religious lifestyle as a Jew who is not a disciple cannot but reduce the purpose of the Gospel to nought" (170).

This approach to *halakhah* has its most devastating consequences in the sphere of Messianic Jewish prayer.

> The problem I see is that his [Kinzer's] ecclesiological thinking makes it impossible for this communal prayer to specifically express or reflect a Jewish Messianic faith. In his attempt to emphasize the role of Jewish disciples as a living bridge between the Synagogue and the Church, he often presents the prayer life of Jewish disciples in the *Ekklēsia* as *grosso modo* indistinguishable from that of the Synagogue. How this identification with the Synagogue can endure notwithstanding the celebration of rituals such as the *ha-Zikkaron/*Eucharist that are utterly specific to Messianic faith, remains unclear… (250-51)

The Gospel requires appropriate liturgical embodiment, as in the Church's celebration of the Eucharist, but apparently the "continuity model" finds traditional forms of Jewish prayer adequate for Jewish disciples of Jesus without supplementation.

In all of the above, "Kinzer" serves as a straw man fashioned in a manner that enables Lévy to define and defend his own positions effectively. To show my actual views on these matters, I will quote from my published writings and other publicly available materials. I will begin with an essay on Oral Torah found in my 2011 volume *Israel's Messiah and the People of God*. In that paper, originally delivered in 2003, I argue that the Gospel of Matthew offers a complex teaching on halakhic authority. "On the one hand, Matthew provides us with two accounts in which Yeshua gives his students the authority to 'bind and loose.' In accord with later rabbinic usage, these terms probably refer to the authority to render *halakhic* decisions. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Matthew sees the leaders of the messianic community as the newly constituted Sanhedrin" (54). However, the qualified endorsement of Pharisaic authority in Matthew 23:1-3 implies that halakhic rulings from leaders in the wider Jewish community must

also be respected (54-55). At the end of the article, I draw a practical conclusion for Messianic Jewish communities today:

> [A]ny Messianic Jewish version of the Oral Torah must recognize two legitimate *halakhic* authorities in tension—those recognized by the Jewish community as a whole, and those presiding over its messianic sub-community. Our *halakhic* authority to bind and loose is prophetic in nature, just as Yeshua's own authority derived not from institutional office but from messianic empowerment. When the requirements inherent in the faith of Yeshua conflict with the norms of rabbinic tradition and the institutions of the wider Jewish community, then we must find a way to be true to Yeshua while maintaining respect for the community and its tradition. This is often an excruciatingly difficult task, but Yeshua never said that our way would be easy.[8]

This citation reveals the chasm between my approach to rabbinic tradition and Lévy's "continuity model." Far from presupposing harmony, I acknowledge a situation of "tension" and "conflict" that can be "excruciatingly difficult" to negotiate.

This essay on Oral Torah laid the groundwork for the approach to halakhic authority formulated by the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC). As Lévy knows, I am a founding member of the MJRC, and have been intimately involved in composing its Standards of Observance. The MJRC Standards include the following paragraph on authority.

> Though the Sages of the rabbinic tradition are legitimate bearers of halakhic authority, they are not the only leaders with such competence. As the embodiment of heavenly Wisdom and the living Torah, Yeshua himself is the ultimate earthly source of halakhic authority. While he acknowledged the authority of some leaders in the wider Jewish community, he also formed his own messianic subcommunity and bestowed upon its designated leaders—the Apostles—the authority to bind and loose (Matthew 16:16-19; 18:18). In doing so, Yeshua was authorizing the Apostles to regulate the life of the messianic community according to their Master's interpretation of the Torah and according to the guidance of his Spirit who writes the Torah on the hearts of his disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:26; Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 3:2-3). Following their Master, the Apostles respected the authority of the wider Jewish community and its leaders for the governance of public Jewish life (Acts 23:4-5) but also asserted their freedom to diverge from its rulings when they were clearly incompatible with the commandments of the risen Messiah (Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-32).[9]

Building on this approach to authority, the MJRC Standards of Observance elaborate a pattern of Messianic Jewish life that draws from rabbinic tradition but also develops it in a distinctive manner. This is especially evident in its decisions regarding what it calls *Tevilat Mashiach* (baptism) [10] and *Zichron Mashiach* (Eucharist).[11] Each of these two sections begins by defining the messianic practice in view as a *mitzvah*[p1]. Thus, the MJRC asserts that there are distinctive

[8] Mark S. Kinzer, *Israel's Messiah and the People of God* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 61.
[9] http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27/sources-mainmenu-28
[10] http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/tevilat-mashiach
[11] http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/zichron-mashiach

messianic ways of observing traditional Jewish practices, and there are also distinctive *new* messianic practices which give liturgical expression to fundamental aspects of the *besorah* (i.e., gospel).

As for Messianic Jewish forms of prayer, one need only consult the order of worship for Shabbat morning services which I composed for Congregation Zera Avraham in Ann Arbor, Michigan.[12] (Lévy has attended services at Congregation Zera Avraham on more than one occasion, and so is familiar with its liturgy.) While the structure of this service, and its main contents, derive from the traditional prayers of the synagogue, there are multiple additions to the liturgy that explicitly proclaim the distinctive Yeshua-faith of this worshipping community. For example, the recitation of the Shema is introduced in the following way:

> There is One Body and One *Ruach*
> -- just as we were called to One Hope when we were called --
> One LORD, One Faith, One *Tevilah*;
> One God and Father of all
> who is over all and through all and in all.
> Therefore, in union with Messiah Yeshua,
> who gave his life in wholehearted love to his Eternal Father,
> let us acknowledge the sovereignty of the God of Israel
> and pledge our lives to love Him completely
> as we accept the yoke of the kingdom of heaven
> by reciting the words of the Shema.

One will not hear those words in a traditional synagogue! One might say the same for the introduction preceding the cantor's recitation of the *birkat kohanim* (the Aaronic benediction):

> Our God and God of our ancestors,
> as Aaron and his descendants blessed Your people in the courts of the sanctuary
> with the threefold blessing written in Your Torah,
> so may the eternal Kohen according to the order of Melchizedek
> bless us from the sanctuary on high, saying…

Many more examples could be cited from the Shabbat liturgy of Congregation Zera Avraham, but these should suffice to show that my vision of "the prayer life of Jewish disciples in the *Ekklēsia*" does not lead to a liturgy that is "indistinguishable from that of the [traditional] Synagogue" (250). In fact, one might fittingly describe my own approach to Messianic Jewish prayer, and to Messianic Jewish *halakhah* in general, as a "Messianic Torah model."

3. Rabbinic Tradition & Orthodox Judaism

The phrase "Messianic Jewish *halakhah*" itself deserves notice. For me, and for others in the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, the term "*halakhah*" does not refer to a standardized code of legal rulings observed in Orthodox Jewish communities. For us (and for many other observant

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[12] https://www.amazon.com/Shabbat-Siddur-Isaac
Roussel/dp/1545508976/ref=sr_1_8?dchild=1&keywords=Isaac+Roussel&qid=1627233429&sr=8-8

Jews as well), halakhic rulings flow from a dynamic process of engaging with the laws and teachings of the biblical text in the light of Jewish tradition and ever-changing contemporary realities in particular locations. Moreover, for us that "biblical text" includes the Apostolic Writings, and Yeshua the Messiah constitutes its living heart.

For Lévy, the word "*halakhah*" (as in his Kinzer syllogism) means traditional rabbinic *halakhah* as studied and observed in an Orthodox Jewish milieu. He portrays my work as an argument for the promotion of Orthodox Jewish practice among Jewish disciples of Yeshua. That is the implication of his syllogism, and it is a point he reiterates time and again:

> After showing that the "continuity model" leads to hardly satisfying consequences, I would like to examine the consistency of its principles. That all Jews are bound to follow rabbinic Halacha, lest they sin…is the most basic tenet of traditional Jewish orthodoxy…Is the rationale for such obligation still valid in the case of Messianic Jews? Is the obligation that binds Orthodox Jews equally binding for Messianic Jews? (117)

As the leading proponent of this "continuity model," Lévy here suggests that I embrace "traditional Jewish orthodoxy" and treat any divergence from "rabbinic Halacha" (i.e., Orthodox Jewish interpretation of Torah-faithfulness) as sin.

> Yet seeking the recognition of the wider Jewish world, as praiseworthy as such an undertaking might be, is not essential to the project of establishing a bilateral *Ekklēsia* in a non-Kinzerian sense of the term. What we have in mind is a Church that would make room for a distinct Jewish corporate presence in her midst without necessarily modeling the lifestyle of Jewish disciples on that of the Orthodox Jewish tradition. (193)

A "non-Kinzerian" bilateral ecclesiology does not adhere to "Orthodox Jewish tradition." One may infer that such adherence characterizes the "Kinzerian" version.

> I believe one of the reasons of Kinzer's emphasis on the necessity of stringent *mitzvot* observance is the desire to guarantee the consistency of a Jewish biosphere within the Church. It is the idea, fairly common in the Orthodox Jewish world, that keeping the Gentile world at bay is the best way to preserve the chances of Jewish biological continuity through religion-based endogamy. (199)

My supposed emphasis on "stringent" observance of the *mitzvot*, as in the Orthodox Jewish world, is traced back to a conviction that I am alleged to share with that world.

Lévy rejects my approach to *halakhah* because he believes that "the Orthodox understanding of Torah-faithfulness is incompatible with the Messianic interpretation of it that Yeshua revealed to his disciples" (195). On the other hand, he sees non-Orthodox streams of modern Jewish thought as sharing much in common with his own project.

> However the Orthodox concept of Torah-faithfulness is not the only possible *Jewish* understanding of it. Both Reform and Conservative Jews have a much more liberal and nuanced approach to rabbinic tradition than Orthodox Judaism…Rabbinic tradition is the

> only source that can teach about a Jewish Torah-faithfulness, as distinguished from the Gentile Torah-faithfulness that characterizes the Christian tradition. Nonetheless one does not need to consider compliance with the *Shulkhan Arukh* [i.e., the most authoritative halakhic code in Orthodox Jewish circles] or the complex system of Jewish observances as mandatory in order to cherish rabbinic tradition and learn from it. Within Judaism, other streams than the Orthodox one assess compliance with rabbinic tradition in the light of historical evolution and the growth of humankind's moral conscience, for example. Why should disciples of Yeshua not assess such compliance in the light of Yeshua's teachings and a moral conscience that grows together with their personal faith in him? (196)

Lévy's "Messianic Torah" model adopts a similar posture in relation to rabbinic tradition as do Reform and Conservative Judaism. Kinzer's "continuity model," on the other hand, is aligned with Orthodox Judaism.

I have already demonstrated the error in Lévy's charge that I advocate such a "continuity model." He is just as mistaken in identifying my work with Orthodox Judaism. My father was president of a Conservative synagogue, I celebrated my *bar mitzvah* in a Conservative synagogue, and I have attended services at a Conservative synagogue (in addition to the services at our Messianic Jewish congregation) for the past forty-five years. As already noted, I am one of the founders of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, and no one who has studied the MJRC Standards of Observance would confuse that document with the *Shulkhan Arukh* or any other Orthodox Jewish halakhic code. The MJRC approach to *halakhah* is much closer to that of the Conservative Movement, which Lévy holds up (with Reform Judaism) as illustrative of how the Jewish *ekklēsia* can interpret the Torah in innovative ways while still remaining Jewish.

Lévy is not the only one to ever mischaracterize my perspective on the Torah as identical to that of Orthodox Judaism. Others read my 2005 volume, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* and drew the same inaccurate conclusion. In that book I used the term "rabbinic Judaism" to refer to the post-Talmudic Jewish religious tradition as a whole, received and adapted in varied ways within the diverse streams of modern Judaism. Some readers assumed that the term "rabbinic Judaism" referred to the particular religious stream of modern Jewish life known as "Orthodox Judaism." That is why I attempted to clarify my views on this matter in a lecture given in 2008 (and later published in *Israel's Messiah and the People of God*).

> I have enormous respect for Orthodox Judaism, but I make no claims to be an Orthodox Jew, nor am I working to form an Orthodox version of Messianic Judaism. I do seek to live as an observant Jew, and I aim to foster an expression of Messianic Judaism that learns from the full breadth of Jewish tradition. Nevertheless, Messianic Judaism will always provide its own distinctive interpretation of Judaism, centered in the teaching, example, and redemptive work of Messiah Yeshua. In this way it seeks to renew, develop, and contextually reapply the rabbinic Judaism that is the common heritage of the Jewish people as a whole.[13]

[13] *Israel's Messiah and the People of God*, 187.

Anyone familiar with the full breadth of my published writings, and with other publicly available materials which are associated with my work (such as the MJRC Standards of Observance), would know that the "Messianic Torah" model which I advocate has more in common with Conservative rather than Orthodox Judaism.

4. Creative Theologian, Unreliable Interpreter

From the many examples I have cited, one can conclude that Lévy is not a reliable interpreter of the work of Mark Kinzer. As a result, his attempted refutations of my positions fall flat, for one cannot refute propositions and arguments one has inadequately understood or represented. Nevertheless, this failure does not vitiate the achievement of *Jewish Church.* This is so because interpreting Kinzer is not Lévy's chief concern. He is a brilliant thinker, and he almost certainly could have done better if that task had been his priority. My books and articles serve less as a subject of study in their own right, and more as a spark that ignites Lévy's own intellectual flame. One should pay close attention to his creative theological proposal and the reasoning behind it, and treat Lévy's Kinzer as largely a literary construct rather than a living personage.

While "Kinzer" is largely a fictional dialogue partner for Lévy, he is not entirely so. While I agree with much of Lévy's thesis, even when it contradicts the literary construct bearing my name, I do not agree with it all. On three crucial points Lévy understands my work properly, confronts it seriously, and rejects it decisively. Since he has not convinced me of error on those points, I will respond to him in kind. Those three points concern (1) ongoing Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus; (2) Christian responsibility for the emergence and entrenchment of ecclesial supersessionism; and (3) the resulting theological evaluation of Jewish and Christian tradition. These points of disagreement undergird the theological divide that distinguishes our alternative forms of bilateral ecclesiology.

III. REAL DISAGREEMENTS

1. Ongoing Jewish Responsibility for the death of Yeshua

Lévy identifies my failure to acknowledge ongoing Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus as the "Ur Problem" which undermines my articulation of bilateral ecclesiology.

> I surmise that Kinzer's inability to take the measure of the collective grace that stems from the Passion and the Resurrection of Yeshua derives from the widely spread difficulty to face the issue of Jewish responsibility related to the crucifixion…This, in my opinion, is the *Ur Problem* of Kinzer's ecclesiology. (30)
>
> I consider his [Kinzer's] failure to see that Jewish collective responsibility is the doorway to collective salvation, and therefore the key to fathoming how a Jewish *ekklēsia* happens to be anchored in the salvation of Christ as the *Ur-problem* of his "bilateral ecclesiology." (87)

In turn, I see his attributing to Israel ongoing responsibility for the crucifixion, along with his whitewashing of Church supersessionism, as the Ur Problem undermining his articulation of bilateral ecclesiology. On these important points our disagreement is real, and deserves thoughtful attention.

Lévy's Argument

Lévy's assertion of Jewish responsibility for the crucifixion is subtle and nuanced, and could easily be caricatured. It should not be confused with the traditional Christian charge of deicide which produced horrific persecution. Lévy recognizes that the Jews who were involved in the arrest and handing over of Jesus to the Romans acted in ignorance, as did Jews throughout history who have said "no" to the claims of Jesus" (98, note 101). As explained above in our treatment of Lévy's soteriology, he sees the grace of Yeshua's death and resurrection as a hidden force at work within the Jewish people throughout the ages, a grace which faithful Jews have appropriated through their obedience to the Torah. Lévy even understands the Jewish "no" to Jesus, which is of one cloth with Jewish complicity in his death, as a gracious means by which God preserves the Jewish people (62-63).

Beyond this, Lévy boldly proposes that Jewish corporate responsibility for the death and rejection of Jesus lays the foundation for Israel's uniquely corporate ecclesiological vocation: "What I am arguing [is] that Yeshua's salvation displays its effects in a different manner among Jews than among non-Jews due to the involvement of the Jewish nation *qua* nation in his death. In other words, the path of the Jewish nation toward Yeshua's salvation is distinct from the path of the nations toward this salvation, and this consideration is fundamental when it comes to conceiving a Jewish *ekklēsia* within the global *Ekklēsia*" (98, note 101). If I understand Lévy correctly, he is here considering the contrast between Jewish corporate responsibility for rejecting Yeshua, on the one hand, and a more generic and individual gentile responsibility for sin, on the other, as the foundation for two distinct paths which Jews and gentiles take when entering the Church, and two distinct forms in which their life within the Church is to be lived. Gentiles must repent for their individual sins when entering the Church, and then take their place with other individual gentiles in the vast organic edifice that is the Body of Christ.[14] The repentance of Jews, on the other hand, must take account of their nation's corporate responsibility for the death of Jesus; as a consequence, they are each joined to all other repentant Jews as part of a unique corporate expression of the Body of their Messiah.

Lévy's exegetical argument for this creative proposal hinges on his interpretation of the text in Matthew which provided the grounds for the notorious charge of deicide: "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). Lévy asserts that "[t]he theological message of Matthew's insert is unquestionably clear: the whole Jewish nation takes responsibility for the death of Israel's Messiah" (46). He sees Matthew's statement as a double-entendre referring at the same time to Israel's blood-guilt, and to Israel's covenant-sealing sacrifice—the latter echoed likewise in "the words of the Lord to his disciples at the Last Supper: 'for this is my blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt 26:28)" (49).

[14] "If the apostolic kerygma to the Gentiles equally proclaims the purification of sins that faith in Yeshua accompanied with repentance provides, this repentance has nothing to do with responsibility for the death of Yeshua" (85).

Moreover, in Lévy's reckoning these two apparently opposite meanings are linked, for it is in acknowledging the first (i.e., blood-guilt) that the Jewish people will fully make their own the second (i.e., blood-atonement and covenant renewal). Lévy's formulation of these theological implications of Matthew 27:25 can at times veer perilously close to the wording of the old deicide accusation: "For those who will recognize that it is through this homicidal death that salvation is brought to them, the blood of punishment will change into the blood of redemption…" (52-53). Yet, careful attention to his entire argument reveals the stark difference between the two.

Lévy sees this message of Jewish corporate responsibility for the death of Jesus, and corporate repentance for the same, as expressed in the apostolic proclamation to Jewish audiences in the Book of Acts. He rightly identifies Peter's speeches early in Acts (2:14-40, 3:12-26), and Paul's synagogue speech in the middle of the book (Acts 13), as emblematic of that proclamation. Peter's speeches are unequivocal in their assignment of responsibility:

> "This man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law." (2:23)
>
> "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." (2:36)
>
> "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead." (3:13-15)

When Peter calls upon his audience to repent (2:38; 3:19), one reasonably assumes that this repentance will include the audience's role in the putting of Jesus to death.

Peter addresses Jews in Jerusalem, where the death of Jesus occurred. In contrast, Paul speaks to Jews in the diaspora. Paul's message thus plays a critical role in determining the extent to which Peter's message of responsibility for Jesus's death extends to Jews who had no apparent connection, direct or indirect, with that event. Lévy begins his treatment of Paul's speech in Acts 13 by stating his basic thesis: "Paul's kerygma in Antioch conveys the same fundamental message as Peter's kerygma to the Jews of Jerusalem" (80). This is how Lévy characterizes Paul's call for Jewish repentance:

> If Yeshua is the one that saves Israel from her sins, this cannot take place without repentance on the part of Israel. It is by walking the path of repentance that Israel must come to meet the one that comes to meet Israel to forgive her sins. This is why Paul adds "before his coming John had already proclaimed a Baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel" (v.24)…The repentance of Israel for her sins preached by John in the days of Yeshua's lifetime is now inextricably tied up with the awareness of Jewish responsibility for Yeshua's death. (81, 83)

Summarizing the conclusion to be drawn from these speeches of Peter and Paul, Lévy states: "The path of Israel goes through both a personal and collective acknowledgment of her complicity in the death of her Messiah" (84).

The Flaws in Lévy's Argument

Lévy rightly claims that I reject this notion of Jewish collective responsibility for the death of Jesus, or the need for Jewish repentance as a result of such alleged responsibility. But he also overstates my position: "Kinzer is reluctant to envisage Israel's exile in terms of punishment notwithstanding the testimony of the Rabbinic tradition in this regard" (338). In truth, my entire argument in *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen* depends upon the claim that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 occurs because of Israel's infidelity. I speak there of Jerusalem's *judgment*: "If Jerusalem is judged rather than redeemed [in 70], then Israel is judged rather than redeemed" (*JCJR*, 32). As Lévy notes, this is the unanimous assessment of Jewish tradition, and I see no other possible biblical perspective on the events of 70. That is not the nub of our disagreement. We diverge not in our recognition of judgment or its eliciting cause, namely, Israel's corporate sin. Instead, our disagreement centers on how the death of Jesus is related to that sin and its consequent judgment.

Even on that point, we are not in total disagreement. I do not entirely dismiss the significance of Israel's responsibility for the death of Jesus as a cause of the judgment of 70: "Indeed, Luke views the destruction of Jerusalem as judgment for the unjust execution of Jesus" (*JCJR* 40). While acknowledging the role played by this particular sin, my reading of the Gospels offers a more complicated picture than that painted by Lévy. "[T]hese passages [in Luke] imply that the events of 70 CE are a consequence of the events of 30 CE—or, more precisely, a consequence of the consistent behavior over several generations which comes to a head with Jerusalem's rejection of its divinely-appointed king" (*JCJR* 40).

Here is my reading of the teaching of the Gospels concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and divine judgment. The mission of John the Baptist precedes that of Jesus, and he comes proclaiming an imminent judgment for Israel (Luke 3:7-9). Jesus links his own mission to that of John (Matthew 11:2-19), and Matthew presents the imprisonment and execution of John (Matthew 14:1-13) as a turning point in the mission of Jesus, a sign of what will befall John's successor.[15] In his teaching Jesus presents the spiritual condition of Israel as worthy of judgment, antecedent to and independent of Israel's response to him (Luke 13:1-5). Moreover, the repentance demanded by his message as the only means of averting that judgment refers primarily to a return to the essential commandments of the Torah (Luke 16:19-31). All four Gospels record Jesus's cleansing of the temple, and all four associate his action with some failure among the leaders of Israel in their stewardship of that central institution in Israel's life (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46; John 2:16). Most importantly, in both parable (Mark 12:1-11) and direct statement (Luke 11:47-51), Jesus presents himself as the culmination of a series of divine messengers who have all been rejected and abused. He implies that he has been sent to give Israel one last chance before judgment comes (Luke 13:6-9). The Gospels thus

[15] "The juxtaposition with 13:53-58, where Jesus the prophet is rejected by his own, is hardly accidental. 14:1-12 discloses the true meaning of the previous pericope: the Messiah will surely die" (W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew, Volume 2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 476.

suggest that Israel's response to Jesus cannot be separated from Israel's antecedent multi-generational response to the word of God encountered via Torah and prophet.[16]

In *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen* I argue that Luke presents the death of Jesus as his bearing of the coming judgment of Jerusalem in his own body. I thus propose that the relationship between the death of Jesus and the destruction of the city is not "unidirectional," with the latter merely a punishment for the former, but dynamic and mutually conditioning. "Luke views the destruction of Jerusalem as judgment for the unjust execution of Jesus; but he also sees Jesus's death as a voluntary act in which Jerusalem's future king proleptically bears the judgment that will come upon his guilty but still beloved city" (*JCJR* 40). Lévy finds this nonsensical. "[Kinzer's] explanation reverses the order of cause and consequence continuously emphasized by Christian tradition: *Am Israel* is not punished because of its involvement in the death of Yeshua; instead Yeshua dies because of the punishment of Israel (that will take place anyway). But then why is Israel punished in the first place?" (74). I am not in fact "reversing the order of cause and consequence," but complicating it by proposing that each event conditions the other. As for Lévy's question, "why is Israel punished," I have already indicated that the Gospels themselves offer an answer that is more complicated than the one Lévy prefers. God judges Israel for its disobedience to the law and the prophets over many generations. Jerusalem's sin in putting Jesus to death is but the culmination of an extended divine appeal in which God called to Jerusalem and the city turned her face and went her own way.

What about Lévy's claims regarding the summons to Jewish repentance found in the speeches of Peter and Paul in Acts? Lévy correctly notes that the opening speeches of Acts hold the entire city of Jerusalem responsible for the death of Jesus (Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-15; 7:52). The second person plural pronoun is used in these speeches addressed to the residents of Jerusalem when depicting the agents of Jesus's execution: "*You* did this foul deed!" However, Lévy ignores the fact that as the narrative moves beyond Jerusalem into the Jewish diaspora, responsibility for the death of Jesus does not move with it. In Paul's message to the diaspora synagogue, it is only "those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers" who committed this act (Acts 13:27), and the pronouns of agency in bringing about the death of Yeshua remain third person throughout his speech (Acts 13:28-29). Paul's diaspora hearers are responsible only for what they do in response to the message they now hear; they are not held responsible for what happened in Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate, Annas, and Caiphas. If that is the case for diaspora Jews before 70 CE, how much more so for Jews living centuries after the event?

And what of Lévy's reading of Matthew 27:25, in which the text refers to corporate Israel throughout history? Lévy makes much of Matthew's designation of the speakers as "the people as a whole (πᾶς ὁ λαός[p2]): "The theological message of Matthew's insert is unquestionably clear: the whole Jewish nation takes responsibility for the death of Israel's Messiah" (46). On the contrary, it turns out that this conclusion is eminently questionable. As Anders Runesson points out, "The basic assumption behind the argument that πᾶς ὁ λαός should be interpreted as referring to Israel as a whole is that, in the LXX, the expression is always used in the same way,

[16] "While Jesus's death is surely part of the filling up of the measure of sin through the shedding of innocent blood, the point in Matthew is, in my view, that it was already too late to stop the temple's destruction *before* Jesus's execution" (Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016], 243, footnote 91).

as referring to the Jewish people as an entity. This is…simply incorrect." Instead, the meaning of the phrase in the LXX is context-dependent, and this is also true in Matthew.[17] Runesson proceeds to show that the context in Matthew 27:25 suggests that πᾶς ὁ λαός here means "the entire city of Jerusalem."

As both Runesson and Matthias Konradt stress, the Gospel of Matthew sets Galilee over against Jerusalem, underlining the guilt of the latter, and viewing the former as the source of salvation (4:12-17; 28:10, 16-20).[18] Konradt draws the appropriate conclusion regarding the significance of Matthew 27:25: "Matthew saw the due punishment having taken place in the destruction of Jerusalem, as indicated by the conspicuous addition of the children in v. 25b…The inclusion of the next generation serves to bridge the approximately forty-year period between the crucifixion of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem…Matthew is not, however, postulating a guilt that applies to *Israel*. In the light of 21:9-11 [in which the crowds that acclaim Jesus on his entry to Jerusalem are explicitly distinguished from the Jerusalemites] it is evident that, in the Matthean narrative conception, Jerusalem does not represent Israel."[19]

This would not necessarily preclude Lévy's double-entendre. However, it would require that, just as the meaning of "his blood" undergoes a radical shift in the second level of interpretation (from blood-guilt to blood-atonement), so the meaning of "us and our children" would likewise change (from "all Jerusalemites and one generation of their descendants" to "all Israelites, for all generations"). But this dissimilarity within the double-entendre would negate Lévy's soteriological/ecclesiological thesis, in which Israel's corporate responsibility for Jesus's death prepares the way for Israel's cross-generational repentance and corporate ecclesial identity.

As an advocate for bilateral ecclesiology, I appreciate the ecclesiological payoff of Lévy's bold thesis. I also admire his unflinching wrestling with the most troubling of New Testament texts, especially those in the Gospel of John.[20] Nevertheless, in the final analysis, I find his

[17] *Divine Wrath & Salvation in Matthew*, 296.

[18] "Galilee here [i.e., in the resurrection narrative of 28:16-20] stands in contrast to Jerusalem. Already in ch. 2, the resettlement in Nazareth resulted from the fact that "the king of the Jews" could not remain in Judea, so that Galilee became the beginning point and center of Jesus' ministry in Israel" (Matthias Konradt, *The Gospel according to Matthew* [trans. M. Eugene Boring: Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020], 441).

[19] Konradt, 419.

[20] ~~Levy~~Lévy reinforces his interpretation of Matthew 27:25 by presenting a provocative reading of the Gospel of John and its use of the collective term *hoi Ioudaioi* (53-70). His reading of John leans heavily on the hypothesis that *hoi Ioudaioi* in John function as unwitting priests offering a sacrifice: "If John's Jews are those on behalf of whom Christ is offered as a sacrifice of redemption, or in other words, if they are the ones who unconsciously offer the sacrifice *on their own behalf*—possibly through the priests who represent them as the immediate agents of this sacrifice—they need to be collectively involved—involved as a nation, *laos*, in this sacrifice" (61). This interpretation is problematic for several reasons. (1) It confuses the act of slaying a sacrificial animal with the priestly offering of a sacrifice. The offering of a sacrifice takes place *after* the animal has been slain, and consists of the pouring out of the blood and the burning of parts of the animal on the altar. The slaying of the animal is but a prologue to the sacrificial act; the latter represents not the taking of a life (through killing) but the offering of a life (through the presentation of blood and a fragrant aroma); (2) It conceives of the offering of sacrifice as entirely independent of the intentionality of those doing the offering. But sacrifice consists of offering a gift esteemed by the offeror as valuable, to One who is esteemed as most valuable. As a result, sacrifice cannot exist in total independence from the knowledge and intention of the offeror; (3) If murder can be conceived of as a priestly act, then every tyrant who has killed a martyr might merit that dignity.

reading of these texts exegetically and theologically flawed. Furthermore, I worry about what minds less subtle that Lévy's, and lacking his Jewish loyalties, might do with his theory. To his credit, Lévy acknowledges this danger.

> It might be said that, even if associated with the reality of salvation, the accusation of collective responsibility for the death of Christ leveled at Jews, is too much reminiscent of traditional Christian anti-semitism…to be acceptable. The objection is perfectly valid in my opinion. Any accusation of the kind should be firmly rejected…Accusing or presenting the Jewish nation in this light is one thing; acknowledging the Jewish nation's…sin by ignorance…as a member of this nation is a completely different one…What I am arguing [is] that Yeshua's salvation displays its effects in a different manner among Jews than among non-Jews due to the involvement of the Jewish nation *qua* nation in his death. In other words, the path of the Jewish nation toward Yeshua's salvation is distinct from the path of the nations toward this salvation, and this consideration is fundamental when it comes to conceiving a Jewish *ekklēsia* within the global *Ekklēsia.* (98, mote 101)

Just as Lévy recognizes the validity of my concern, so I recognize the validity of his distinction between an outside accusation leveled at Jews and an internal Jewish confession of sin. But I find this distinction of little practical import when it comes to published theological proposals. Regardless of Lévy's good intentions, and regardless of the ethical blamelessness of his own nuanced thesis, any widespread promulgation of his proposal would likely seed new forms of the deicide charge. And that likelihood should give Lévy and his readers pause.

Lévy's soteriological/ecclesiological theory about corporate Jewish sin and corporate Jewish ecclesial identity constitutes the basis for his critique of my alleged ecclesiological Ur-Problem. In itself, I find his theory troubling. When combined with the next item in our discussion, a pattern emerges that gives a new angle of vision on our disagreements. From my perspective, this pattern reveals the Ur-Problem in his own ecclesiology.

2. Excusing Christian Supersessionism

To some extent this second area of genuine disagreement between Lévy and myself is also a topic of disagreement, or at least tension, between Lévy and Lévy. In my initial appreciative summary of Lévy's book I noted his assertion that the leadership of the early church failed "to conceive a sustainable model of communion-safeguarding-the-distinction between Jewish and Gentile disciples," and this failure was "greatly responsible for the first rift that tore apart the Body of Yeshua" (351) Moreover, this primal "rift" led to "the other major schisms that tore apart the one Body of Christ in the course of centuries," which are but "delayed or 'carried-over' effects induced by the first crack in this foundational communion…" (352). Given the tragic long-term consequences of this initial failure, it seems as though Lévy holds the leadership of the early church responsible for much of what needs repair in the church's internal dealings with Jews and Judaism.

Unfortunately, these comments appear near the end of a long volume in which Lévy has consistently argued the opposite. In this contrary view the gentilization of the Church derived

from the Jewish "no" to Jesus, and was an inevitable process. The supersessionism that accompanied this process was also inevitable, and thus the Jewish people are ultimately more responsible for this Church failure than the Church's own leadership. "Supersessionism is the outcome of a somehow mechanical—demographically unavoidable—Gentilization of the Church" (65). "[S]upersessionism is not a Gentile ideological invention that starts to take shape in the second century. It is caused by the dismissal of the Good News by the vast majority of Jews…" (85). In these stark assessments Lévy rightly sees himself opposing my perspective on this troubled history. "Kinzer views the supersessionist turn of the Church as a schism happening within the people of Israel, a schism induced by the leadership of the Church that resulted in her being effectively segregated from the whole of Israel" (348). Lévy adopts the more traditional Catholic position which views the original schism as instead "the secession of the Jewish nation from the Church" (347).[21]

Lévy's interpretation of this history is summed up well in the following citation:

> As trivial as it might sound, the non-acceptance of the Gospel by a great many Jews is the first cause of the rift between the Church and Israel. It is this non-acceptance that triggered the process of Gentilization of the Church…From this perspective, presenting supersessionism as the source of the rift turns historical realities upside down. In actual fact, supersessionism is the almost inevitable consequence of the rift, being nothing but the theological justification of this ethnic shift in the composition of the People of God…In short, if the "supersessionist turn" of the Church caused a schism within the living body of Israel, it is only a belated consequence of a "Jewish refusal" that tore apart the early Church." (349-50)

One can now see clearly the connection between the two fundamental points of disagreement in the Lévy-Kinzer dialogue. For Lévy, it is the Jews who are responsible for the death and subsequent rejection of Jesus, and likewise for the supersessionism which emerges in the Church as a result of that rejection. Lévy is quick to add many extenuating circumstances which diminish Jewish culpability, but these extenuating circumstances lay no additional moral or spiritual burden upon the Church in light of her historical actions. It is Israel that needs to *repent*. The Church only needs to correct a "flaw" in her structure—a structure that, given the historical circumstances, could not have been erected in any other way.

In this context the Lévy-Kinzer dispute over obligatory Jewish Torah observance takes on new significance. I have argued that Luke-Acts and the Gospel of Matthew teach that Jewish disciples of Jesus are duty-bound to observe the Torah. Lévy argues that Jewish disciples of Jesus are free from such an obligation, but are nonetheless invited to embrace the Torah in the

[21] Lévy dissents from the traditional Catholic position only in diagnosing this "secession" as a schism rather than a heresy. "Speaking of a schism in this case leaves the possibility open that the 'parting of the ways' between the Church and the Synagogue stemmed more from a concern about the survival of the Jewish nation in the framework of the newly born Church rather than from a dogmatic rejection of Yeshua's Messiahship. In this configuration, the healing of the schism would not depend on the miraculous 'conversion' of unbelieving Jews but the restoration of a Jewish *ekklēsia* guaranteeing the survival of the Jewish nation within the Church of Christ" (348). This diminishes the blame assigned to the Jewish side of the dispute, but does not change who is portrayed as the agent of schism. For Lévy, the Jews are the one who break away from the Church. For me, it is the Church which breaks away from Israel.

manner of a vow. Lévy bases his argument largely on his reading of the Pauline epistles, but also on the Gospels and on Acts viewed exclusively in terms of the pre-70 historical settings they describe. I base my argument on a reading of Luke-Acts and Matthew from the perspective of the post-70 historical setting in which they were composed, and on the letters of Paul viewed in light of those later texts.

Focusing on the pre-70 history, Lévy finds it of immense importance that there is no evidence for formal ecclesial rulings regarding Jewish Torah observance:

> Here lies a major objection to Kinzer's central argument: there is no material record of an official attempt at imposing the observance of *mitzvot* on Jewish disciples, and this at a time when the mission to the Jews (under the patronage of Peter) was still distinguished from the mission to the Gentiles (under the patronage of Paul). In order to counter the mechanical process of disintegration through assimilation, should not the allegedly rigorous observance of the Jerusalem community have been explicitly promulgated as a rule throughout the Church, had it ever existed as such? Earlier, as we went through topical passages from the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of Paul, we did not find a trace of such rulings. (184)

In what strikes me as a puzzling inference from this lack of "official" ecclesial action, Lévy attributes to it the later suppression of Jewish practice within the Church.

> It is only natural that the refusal to endorse a formal commitment to Jewish observance at the highest level of the nascent Church should have given birth to an "anti-Judaizing" current in the Church, a current that would primarily target unregulated, spontaneous forms of Jewish practice among the Jewish—and, even worse, Gentile converts. (184-85)
>
> The absence of formal commitment to impose a distinct Jewish practice was rapidly interpreted by Gentile believers as a deliberate and global condemnation of any form of Jewish practice within the Church." (187)

I am baffled as to why the "absence of formal commitment to impose a distinct Jewish practice" would necessarily lead to "a deliberate and global condemnation of any form of Jewish practice within the Church." In Lévy's construct, the suppression of Jewish practice in the Church is an inevitable historical development, just as is supersessionism.

I find Lévy's argument regarding the early Church and Torah practice to be suspect on at least two grounds. First, it is anachronistic in its view of the operations of the pre-70 *Ekklēsia.* His notion of an "official attempt at imposing the observance of *mitzvot*" which would be "explicitly promulgated as a rule throughout the Church" fits a well-established centralized institution adept at making and disseminating authoritative rulings. That does not at all fit the situation of the pre-70 *Ekklēsia*, which was a decentralized charismatic movement inventing itself on the fly. Moreover, this movement was eschatologically driven, expecting the Messiah to return at any moment, and as such it made only short-term decisions—since the present age would have no "long-term."

Second, the critical issue facing the pre-70 movement concerned the status and behavior of gentile, not Jewish, Jesus-followers. The latter only became an issue in the next (i.e., post-70) generation, with the advancing numerical disproportion~~ality~~ of gentiles and Jews in the *ekklēsia*, and, even more importantly, with the growing influence of the Pauline writings on those same ecclesial gentiles. As the Marcionite movement of the early second century demonstrates, in such a setting those Pauline writings were easily interpreted in anti-Jewish ways. That is why it becomes so important to read Matthew and Luke-Acts as post-70 attempts at doing through texts what Lévy unrealistically sought from ecclesiastical machinery in the pre-70—namely, authoritative teaching that "imposes the observance of *mitzvot* on Jewish disciples." As I argue in *Jerusalem Crucified*, and summarize above, this explains the centrality of Acts 21 in the overall framework of the Lukan corpus.

This suggests that the direction taken by the early *ekklēsia* was not inevitable, as Lévy claims. Perhaps the numerical disproportion between its Jewish and gentile segments was inevitable, but the suppression of Jewish practice and its supersessionist presuppositions were chosen from among a set of conflicting voices in the post-70 era. Matthew and Luke-Acts were received as canonical texts, but were then interpreted in ways that nullified their narrative arguments for a Torah-faithful Jewish *ekklēsia.*

If Matthew and Luke-Acts should be read as teaching that Torah-fidelity is an obligation for Jewish disciples of Jesus, then one cannot avoid the conclusion that, in suppressing Torah-observance in its ranks, the leadership of the early gentile church opposed the commandments of God. Eventually, the most respected teachers of the church (such as Aquinas) taught that *it was a mortal sin for a baptized Jew to obey the divine commandments!* The radical conclusion I reach in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* derive from this impossible possibility: those Jews who encountered the demand to violate God's covenant with Israel as a condition for baptism *obeyed God when they refused baptism.* When Jews suffered or were killed as a result of this refusal, they were bearing witness to the God of Israel, and thus also to the obedient and suffering Messiah of Israel. Their apparent "no" to Jesus was actually a "yes"![22]

Of course, Lévy does not so read Matthew and Luke-Acts. At this point one can see how our disagreement on the issue of obligatory Torah observance affects our conclusions regarding ecclesial culpability on the issues of supersessionism and the suppression of the Jewish *ekklēsia.* Furthermore, one can see how our disagreement over ecclesial responsibility, combined with our first disagreement over Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus, might affect our respective approaches to Jewish and Christian tradition. To that topic we now turn.

3. Symmetry or Asymmetry of Traditions?

Lévy and I agree that the Jewish *ekklēsia* cannot exist without drawing upon both Jewish and Christian traditions as divine gifts. We also agree that Jewish disciples of Jesus are called to be loyal members of both the Jewish people and the bilateral *Ekklēsia*. However, we disagree on the level of authority carried by each tradition, and on the nature of our identification with the historical Church (i.e., a multi-national Church with no visible institutional mode of expressing

[22] Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 213-33.

its inherent bilateral constitution). In my view, this disagreement derives from the two fundamental disagreements discussed above.

On the relative authority of the two traditions, Lévy says the following: "What does not make sense is placing on the same footing the Church and rabbinic tradition as if the fulfillment of Jewish identity was a matter of choosing between their respective 'advantages' and 'drawbacks.' Rabbinic tradition, even if it originates in Torah, is a human institution. The Church, *if what she claims to be is true,* is a divine institution" (220, emphasis original). The Jewish disciples of Jesus may regret some of the directions taken by Christian tradition, but they are not free to distance themselves from that Church or its tradition. On the other hand, "[a]s emotionally painful as it might be, one must accept that…distance from the rabbinic religious world lies at the foundation of the Church. According to its essence, this distance does not result from the attitude of the Church but from the rabbinic world…[T]his distance stems from the rejection by the rabbinic world of the belief on which the entire Church rests" (221). Rabbinic Judaism says "no" to Jesus, and this "no" defines its essence; but apparently the "no" which the Church has historically said (and to a great extent continues to say) to Israel and Torah in its midst, carries far less weight. For Lévy, the two traditions are asymmetrical.[23]

Lévy's position makes sense, given his view of (1) Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus, and (2) Jewish responsibility for Christian supersessionism and the suppression of Jewish practice within the Church, excusing the Church itself from such responsibility. As noted above, Jews must *repent*; the Church need only correct a "flaw." If, however, as I contend, his positions on the first two matters of disagreement are unsustainable, then his approach to the Jewish and Christian traditions and to Messianic Jewish identity are likewise unsustainable.

For Lévy, "Rabbinic tradition…is a human institution," but the Church (and presumably its tradition) "is a divine institution." For me, the Jewish and Christian traditions are both divinely authorized, and they function within the Jewish and Christian worlds as resources of equal value. I have outlined my approach to the two traditions in an article on the Nicene Creed.[24] In that article I identify the affirmative truth at the heart of each tradition (the person and work of Jesus in the Christian tradition, the election of Israel embodied in the gift of the Torah in Jewish tradition). I then propose that each community historically erected a second negative boundary around its identity, and in each case the negative boundary consisted of a rejection of the truth which stood at the heart of the rival tradition. Finally, I argue that Messianic Jews should affirm both affirmative truths and negate the two negations. Here is some of what I conclude:

> I am proposing a theological and hermeneutical approach in which we as Messianic Jews take our place as part of the Jewish community with its tradition of interpretation, and as a partner to the Christian community with its tradition of interpretation, and from that place listen and respond to the Bible's witness to the God

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[23] I am unsure as to how Lévy's approach to Jewish and Christian tradition in these citations fits with his call for "hermeneutical cross-breeding." The latter has much in common with my own "hermeneutic of dialectical ecclesial continuity" (see the following paragraphs on the meaning of this term). When Lévy introduces his hermeneutic as an approach to Jewish and Christian tradition, he and I seem to agree far more than we disagree.

[24] "Finding our Way through Nicaea," published as Appendix 4 in Mark S. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 216-39

> of Israel and the Messiah of Israel. From this place of communal connection, we learn to hear what Jews and Christians have heard before. However, because we are connected to *both* communities and traditions, we also hear new things which these communities' mutual and unnatural isolation prevent them from hearing.
>
> We can describe this as a hermeneutic of *dialectical ecclesial continuity*. In this context, I am using the term "ecclesial" to refer to both the Jewish and Christian communities as historical realities….Of course, these two communities have disagreed with one another on fundamental matters. This is why our hermeneutic must be *dialectical* as well as *ecclesial*. We view these two communal traditions as one ruptured whole, the broken fragments of a schism that should never have occurred. To read and hear dialectically is to seek to gather up the fragments, to perform a *tikkun*—a repair of what has been broken. We expect each tradition to offer correction and healing to the other.[25]

This is not "a matter of choosing between their respective 'advantages' and 'drawbacks.'" Each tradition has a particular sphere of authority, in which its teachings are to be received and honored by Jewish disciples of Jesus. Those spheres derive in large part from the affirmative truths which stand at the heart of each tradition. This was my point in writing an article for Messianic Jews which defended the Nicene Creed. It was also the point in my writing an article for the same audience which defended the notion of Oral Torah (without endorsing any particular interpretation of the Oral Torah current in the wider Jewish world).[26] This is a matter of receiving both traditions as authoritative in what they affirm, and needing correction in what they deny.

It is crucial to define this Lévy-Kinzer disagreement properly. It is not the case that Lévy treats Christian tradition as divinely authorized and Jewish tradition as necessary but merely human, whereas Kinzer does the opposite. Instead, Lévy treats the two traditions as inherently unequal, whereas I ascribe to them equal status and authority. It is true that I see Messianic Jews as having a primary connection to the Jewish tradition and only a secondary connection to the Christian tradition, but that is attributable not to a higher level of Jewish authority but to the different spheres to which each tradition naturally applies.[27]

The radical conclusions I reach in ecclesiology derive from my subverting the traditional Christian approach to Jewish culpability for its corporate "no" to Yeshua (by seeing its "no" as in reality a hidden "yes"), and my heightening Christian culpability for its "no" to Israel (by asserting the obligation of Torah-fidelity for Jewish disciples of Yeshua, and the Church's prohibition of that fidelity). This levels the playing field between the two traditions, and opens the way for Jewish disciples of Yeshua to identify as heirs of the Jewish tradition. On the other hand, Lévy's soteriology heightens Jewish responsibility for its "no" to Yeshua, and diminishes Christian culpability for supersessionism and its internal suppression of Jewish covenantal

[25] "Finding our Way through Nicaea," 221.

[26] "Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the Twenty-first Century: A Biblical Defense of Oral Torah," *Israel's Messiah and the People of God* (29-61).

[27] If Torah observance shapes the contours of Messianic Jewish life, then Messianic Jews will naturally be looking more to Jewish than Christian tradition for guidance in defining those contours.

fidelity. This tilts the playing field in favor of the historical Church, and justifies Lévy's Catholic starting point.

There are other points of disagreement between Lévy and myself, but they all are related in some way to our opposing answers to these three questions: What sort of moral or spiritual responsibility do the Jewish people have for the death and subsequent corporate rejection of Jesus as the Messiah? What sort of moral or spiritual responsibility does the Christian Church have for the supersessionist assumptions which have dominated its thinking, and for the suppression of Jewish observance for Jewish disciples of Jesus which has marred its practice? What authority and scope should Jewish and Christian tradition have in shaping the corporate life of Jewish disciples of Jesus? These are the questions that deserve most attention in our future theological exchange.

CONCLUSION

Given the role my writings play in *Jewish Church*, I deemed it necessary and appropriate to offer a response to this seminal volume. Nevertheless, I do so with some misgivings. Most prominent among them is the concern that such a response will concentrate attention on the points on which Lévy and I disagree, and distract attention from the far weightier matters where our views coincide. I would thus inadvertently amplify one of the features of *Jewish Church* which I find most misleading.

When one sets Lévy and Kinzer in the wider context of Jewish and Christian reflection on the relationship between the Jewish people and the Church, the differences between us pale to near insignificance. Bilateral ecclesiology remains an outlier in the world of theology, and any two theologians who advocate such a view should be considered partners and allies. How much more so when the two are literally partners in a common programmatic initiative to translate ecclesiological theory into concrete practice.

Having thus labored to clarify and defend my own views, as distinct from those of Lévy, I now ask the reader to place front and center the essential message of *Jewish Church* which I wholeheartedly endorse. I would welcome the emergence of a bilateral Catholic Church of the sort proposed by Lévy. I would remain a Messianic Jew, rooted primarily in the world of Judaism, at least as long as the wider Jewish world treated the Jewish people and the Catholic Church as two mutually exclusive territories. But I would reach across the remaining divide to clasp hands with my Jewish Catholic brothers and sisters, seeking to represent together with them the first-fruits of the eschatological unity of the twofold people of God. That is the heart of my Messianic Jewish approach to Jewish Catholicism, as it is exemplified in Antoine Lévy's *Jewish Church.*