

The background of the book cover is a vibrant stained glass window. The upper portion features a large, circular floral design with a central green and white flower surrounded by blue, orange, and red petals. Below this, the window is divided into several panels. The right panel depicts the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, with a central figure on the cross and other figures below. The left panel shows a figure, possibly an angel or a saint, in a dynamic pose. The overall color palette is rich, with deep blues, greens, oranges, and reds.

JEWISH CHURCH

A Catholic Approach to Messianic Judaism

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FOREWORD BY MARK S. KINZER

Conclusion

The Wider Fence

One cannot speak of a Jewish *ekklesia* without contrasting her with the other dimension of the global *Ekklesia*, namely the Gentile one. But although any consideration regarding a Jewish *ekklesia* implies a bilateral ecclesiology in the sense advocated by Mark Kinzer, there are multiple ways of conceiving the nature of such a Jewish *ekklesia*, some of which are very far from the model brought forth by Kinzer. There are multiple models of a Jewish *ekklesia*, but the Church of Christ is one. It is therefore decisive to determine which of these models—if any—is the most faithful to the Church founded by Christ. The only possible way to do this is that of critical discussion based on shared faith, common sense and the texts that all partners in this discussion hold for expressing the sacred word of God. The goal of this book was to rely on such a discussion to bring forth a picture of the Jewish *ekklesia* that is as different from the model proposed by Kinzer as it is far from all other existing models.

The singularity of the model presented in the book stems from the foundational principle of a Jewish *ekklesia*. There is something fundamentally lacking in the notion that such an *ekklesia* can be born out of the “conversion” of the global Church to the ongoing value of the first Covenant and of the religious tradition that is based on it. A Jewish *ekklesia* cannot arise out of a change that merely concerns Gentiles and their attitude toward the Jewish tradition. The word *ekklesia* speaks about the calling (*klesia*) out (*ek*) of a specific condition. To follow Yeshua, one leaves the condition in which one was when one did not yet know him. A Jewish *ekklesia* results from a divine calling that is specifically directed at *Am Israel*. It is not to remain who they were without knowing Yeshua that Jews are called by Yeshua to become part of his Church *as a people*. The foundational principle of a Jewish *ekklesia* lies in this specific calling of Israel *qua* Israel in Yeshua, a calling that both

implies a change of condition, a conversion, and the acquisition of a distinct corporate identity within the living Body of Yeshua that is the Church. Of course, the Church cannot make room for a Jewish *ekklesia* without Gentiles seeing the value of the Jewish existence and tradition, but what constitutes a Jewish *ekklesia* in the first place is the affirmative answer of Jews to a calling that, as I argued in the first part of this book, is rooted in the salvation of Israel *qua* Israel in Yeshua.

Such a perspective challenges us to go back to the core of the New Testament revelation and decipher the essential message of the Gospels in a new light. The extreme tension between Yeshua and the representatives of his people can no longer be understood according to the reading of the Fathers of the Church as leading to the exclusion of Jews from God's economy of salvation. On the contrary, it opens the path to a corporate partaking of Yeshua's salvation that is invisibly oriented toward a full and explicit welcoming of this salvation (see I. "Salvation," especially I.2). The foundation of a Jewish *ekklesia* within the *Ekklesia* should be conceived as the first portent of this full reception of Yeshua's salvation by Israel *qua* Israel. Accordingly, the condition of Israel within the *Ekklesia* cannot be identical to her condition before or beyond the *Ekklesia*. Why become *ekklesia* otherwise? Nothing in the teaching of Yeshua as transmitted by the Gospels and the writings included in the New Testament indicates that Israel should cease to be *specifically rooted as a people* in the Torah transmitted by Moses. The New Covenant sealed on Golgotha does not abolish, but rather both confirms and renews the first Covenant proclaimed on the Sinai. This is the very *raison d'être* of a Jewish *ekklesia* that is distinct from the Gentile *ekklesia* and its constitutive parts. But at the same time, everything in the teaching conveyed by the writings of the New Testament points toward a new, Messianic interpretation of Torah-faithfulness when it comes to Jewish disciples. While human traditions of Torah interpretation still have a place, they are no longer the defining authority of Torah-faithfulness since this supreme role is henceforth devolved to Yeshua's divine authority. For contemporary Jewish disciples, the reference to the rabbinic economy of *mitzvot* is still indispensable as it reflects the singularity of Israel's Torah-faithfulness. Still, the dismissal of their character of *obligation* under penalty of sin is intrinsically connected with obedience to Yeshua's demanding, albeit freedom-giving, imperative of love and forgiveness (see chapter 2). It is on this basis that the members of a Jewish *ekklesia* can be said to constitute, together with their Gentile brothers, one body united in the love of Yeshua.

To become *ekklesia*, Jewish Torah-faithfulness undergoes a transformation at its very core. At the same time, in order to be Jewish, this *ekklesia* cannot but introduce a radically new mode of being part of the Church. The emergence of a Jewish *ekklesia* rests on what I called a process of hermeneutical

cross-breeding (see section 1.1.3 in chapter 3). While the traditional elements of Jewish life are now understood and experienced in a Messianic manner, the original Jewish dimensions of the core doctrinal, liturgical, and hierarchic constituents of Church tradition are brought back to light and life. The point where the Messianic dimension of Jewish tradition and the Jewish dimension of Church tradition come to coincide is the *locus*, the natural element of a Jewish *ekklesia*. From this point of view, the emergence of this *ekklesia* would not entail a return to a pristine golden age of the Church, the existence of which is highly doubtful (see 3.2 in chapter 2). It should be rather understood as a concrete institutional prefiguration of the end of times—the final reconciliation between Israel and Gentiles brought about by the final coming of the Messiah. What was conceived from the very beginning, the Messianic coming-into-unity of Israel and the Nations, would become a reality at the very end of a historical process that saw the religious traditions of Israel and the Church evolve independently of each other, with an attitude of hostile diffidence toward each other.

Be that as it may, I tried to outline the concrete features of a Jewish *ekklesia* that emerges out of this hermeneutical cross-breeding between the two traditions. While sacraments according to their content witness the radical transformation of Torah-faithfulness brought about by Yeshua (they are not inherited from Moses but established by Yeshua or in him), their current form is the product of a tradition that has been drifting away from an originally Jewish setting for a little less than two millennia. And yet as soon as they are interpreted in the light of the religious tradition of Israel, they recover their naturally Jewish dimension (see sections 2.1–3 in chapter 3). The symmetrically opposite happens with the rich liturgical cycle of Judaism: as soon as it is contemplated against the background of the liturgical tradition of the Church, the Messianic element it contains comes to light so as to open the door to a genuine Messianic Jewish liturgy within the global *Ekklesia* (see section 4 in chapter 3).

Speaking in general, the widening of the global *Ekklesia* to the riches of Jewish tradition cannot go without a symmetrical Jewish reappropriation of core features of a Church tradition that developed in the Gentile world. There is no real communion in the Church when what constitutes a part of her rejects as ill-founded practices and beliefs that other parts consider as pertaining to the core of her teaching. This is why I argued that a Jewish approach to the cult of Mary and the saints, to sacred images and monastic life, is not only possible but would also bring back to life ancient aspects of Jewish worship as well as materialize recurrent insights of the later Jewish tradition (see section 5 in chapter 3).

The same hermeneutical cross-breeding applies to the institutional structure of a Jewish *ekklesia*. On the one hand, the hierarchic structure that is typical

of the Gentile *ekklesia* must be reinterpreted in the categories of Jewish religious life (see sections 3.3–3.5 in chapter 3). On the other hand, this new corporate entity must find its place in the living organization of the global *Ekklesia*, so that it will function in harmony with the whole and vice-versa. Because the Jewish *ekklesia* is the church of the nation out of whom salvation came, she cannot be put into the same category as churches representing the diversity of nations that *received* salvation from the apostolic kerygma. Her emergence pertains to the universal/catholic structure of a Church, a structure defined as resting on the communion between Jewish and Gentile disciples of Yeshua. Therefore, instead of qualifying her as an independent *ecclesia particularis* on the model of the Maronite Church or the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, I propose to grant her the status of ordinariate since this category merely refers to an institutional structure associated with a specific historical, spiritual, and liturgical legacy (see section 3.1 in chapter 3).

Characterized in this manner, the Jewish *ekklesia* is certainly not susceptible to being acknowledged as a part from any of the various streams of which the Jewish religious world is formed. But, as I repeatedly emphasized in the course of this book, the belief that rabbinic Torah-observance would be sufficient for Jewish disciples of Yeshua to be included in this world does not, according to me, amount to much more than wishful thinking (see especially section 6.1 in chapter 3). However, Judaism or the Jewish religious world is not the Jewish world, and this is of paramount importance. The emergence of a Jewish *ekklesia* would change everything in this regard. With members that would identify themselves as ethnically and culturally Jewish, a relatively autonomous Jewish *ekklesia* would no longer practice a deceitful form of proselytism among Jews. Even if accusations of trying to destroy the Jewish people are unlikely to stop, the fact is that witnessing the Gospel among Jews will no longer end up with turning Jews into Gentiles: Jews that come to faith in Yeshua, Messiah of Israel, will be welcomed by other Jews within a Jewish entity (see equally section 6.1 in chapter 3). These considerations are especially relevant when taking the existence of an independent and democratic Jewish state into account. Israeli Jews have no problem identifying as Jews fellow-countrymen that are Buddhists or practice no religion at all. Why should “Catholic Jews” be considered to be lesser Jews than Buddhist or atheist Jews, especially when they are part of a religious entity that proclaims the truth of the Torah and draws on the riches of the Jewish tradition?

One needs to reflect on the existential and theological significance of the State of Israel from the perspective of a global *Ekklesia* that would include a Jewish *ekklesia*. Jewish disciples of Yeshua are Jewish and a Jew can hardly be a Jew without understanding that the connection with the Land is part of his or her identity as Jew. No truly Jewish *ekklesia* can see the light of day in a global *Ekklesia* that would ignore the extraordinary significance of the

creation of an independent Jewish state on the very Land that God, according to the Scriptures that this *Ekklesia* holds for sacred, promised to his people as part of His Covenant with them. I argue in this book that there is nothing in the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church that would prevent her from acknowledging and affirming the theological significance of the State of Israel (see section 6.3.1 in chapter 3). Moreover, the emergence of a Jewish *ekklesia* in the State of Israel can be understood as a substantial step toward the eschatological fulfillment of history: the final reconciliation between Yeshua and his people in the very place that witnessed their bitter conflict and the parting of the ways between the Church and Israel (see III, 6.3.2).

Meanwhile the impact of a Jewish *ekklesia* conceived in these terms would not be limited to the Jewish world. The establishment of a Jewish *ekklesia* would affect the whole Church as this movement back to her Jewish roots is equally a movement back to what fundamentally unites disciples of Yeshua beyond the divergences related to beliefs and modes of worship that throughout history have precipitated divisions within the universal Body of Christ. I argue that this leap back to a condition that is qualitatively different and ecclesially broader than her current one, as it precedes the successive schisms that have torn apart the seamless tunic of Christ, would allow the Catholic Church to actually and fully become the Church of Christ that has never ceased to subsist in her (see section 7 in chapter 3).

The whole argument contained in this book can be considered as my contribution to the discussion that gave rise to an over ten-year long friendship with Mark Kinzer. The first time I met him, in 2009, it was after a speech he had made at a Baptist Church in Jerusalem where he talked about the discussions and controversies that his recently published *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* had stirred up. I was very eager to establish a contact with him, but it was difficult to approach him as a crowd of enthusiastic listeners surrounded him. Battling my way as I could and having only a few seconds to draw his attention, I asked him the question that lingered on my mind throughout his excellent presentation. For myself I called it the question about Abraham and Juliet or Romeo and Sarah. It is actually one very simple question; namely,

- (a) supposing the existence of a Jewish *ekklesia* in actual communion with a Gentile *ekklesia* and therefore forming one “Catholic” or universal Church with it;
- (b) given the quantitative disproportion existing between Gentiles and Jews in the world, a *fortiori* in any ecclesial entity;
- (c) how could one prevent the Jewish *ekklesia* from dissolving in this larger ecclesial entity within the span of several generations due to the foreseeable rate of intermarriages between Jewish and Gentile disciples of Yeshua?

As I pointed out a number of times in this book, I believe that more than any anti-Judaizing legislation, the authentic communion between Jewish and Gentile disciples, naturally translating into intermarriages, is to be held responsible for the disintegration of the original Jewish fabric of the Church in the early centuries of her existence. By the time the first anti-Judaizing measures saw the light of day at the beginning of the fourth century (Council of Elvira, 305), the Church was already a massively Gentile entity.

I was pleased to see that the question had the desired impact on the one to whom it was addressed. Mark Kinzer turned to me, gave me an answer to which I replied, and in the few seconds that followed our exchange, we decided that we would meet face to face a few days later. Our friendship—a dialectical friendship as one may easily gather after reading this book—as well as enduring collaboration began in this manner. Although I cannot remember the exact substance of Mark’s answer on that evening, it comes out clearly from his written works. His solution is in continuity with the rabbinic tradition. *Mitzvot*-observance is sufficient to create a stable and homogeneous Jewish environment within the Church as it will preserve the “practical” boundary between Jews and Gentiles that exists elsewhere.

The notion that *mitzvot*-observance is the condition to the preservation of the Jewish nation goes back to the early times of rabbinic tradition. It can be identified with the notion of “fence” that Jews need to build around the Torah. One already finds it formulated in the first lines of *Pirke Avot* (1:1B), a treatise written at the beginning of the third century. It is listed among the three precepts that the “Men of the Great Assembly,” the legendary Council of Prophets and Doctors of the Law that administered justice in Israel at the onset of the fourth century BC, gave to the children of Israel when they transmitted the Torah that they had received from the elders, the elders from Joshua, Joshua from Moses, and Moses from God at Mount Sinai:

Be deliberate in judging;
 Educate many students;
 Make a fence around the Torah
 . יְעִזְבוּ גְּפוֹת לַתּוֹרָה .

In the same treatise, *Pirke Avot*, R. Akiva is said to identify the fence with the notion of tradition (3:13b), by which he intends all the precepts issued by rabbis (*mitzvot d’rabbanan*), by contrast to Torah precepts that were revealed by God (*mitzvot d’oraita*). A Jew that complies with rabbinic *mitzvot* contributes to building the fence around the Torah revealed by God. His or her own decisions regarding the practical ways to avoid Torah defilement are part of a task that involves all Israel. J. Neusner characterizes this fence as the “frequent implementation of restrictive measures that assure compliance

with the actual word of the Torah.”¹ To the extent that *mitzvot*-observance is the manner in which the Torah is put into practice, it is the manner in which the Torah is kept from defilement as Jews draw the line between themselves and a surrounding non-Jewish world that is by nature idolatrous².

I argued in this book that defining the Jewish *ekklesia* in terms of *mitzvot*-observance was incompatible with the founding principle of the apostolic Church; namely, the acceptance of Gentiles as Gentiles in the Body of Messiah (see section 1.1.1 in chapter 3). Non-*mitzvot*-observant Gentiles are not Pagans; they are no lesser members of the Church than *mitzvot*-observant Jewish disciples. The Church cannot be established on genuine communion between Jews and Gentiles when a line continues to separate those who, by virtue of God’s election, strive to preserve Torah-purity from those who, according to their nature, put it at constant risk of being defiled (see section 1.3 in chapter 2, and sections 1.1.1–2 in chapter 3). In my opinion, an opinion that on this point does not differ from classical Christian tradition, the incident of Antioch bears witness to this clear awareness in the primitive Church (see section 3.2.3.2 in chapter 2).

However, this position implies that the “Romeo and Sarah” issue keeps its full aporetic strength: once the fence of the Torah is abolished, what can prevent the Jewish presence in the Church from disintegrating after a few generations? Is this not the sign that a Jewish *ekklesia* is not meant to be?

What we have been advocating throughout this book could be summarized in terms of *wider fence*. This wider fence is not a simple extension of the rabbinic fence because it differs from the latter according to its nature: instead of *separating*, it merely *distinguishes*. It enables Jewish and Gentile disciples to experience their fundamental communion in Yeshua, a communion that rests on a sacramental and doctrinal unity within the same visible and hierarchically organized institutional body. And yet at the same time, it preserves a distinct Jewish identity within this institutional body through forging a specifically Jewish way of being a disciple of Yeshua—a spiritual and practical way of life based both on the Messianic dimension of the rabbinic tradition and the Jewish kernel of the Christian tradition. This corporate entity would provide a stable biosphere for the Jewish disciples of Yeshua, preventing the rapid disintegration of a living Jewish identity within the global *Ekklesia*. As I argued, the loss of members as a consequence of intermarriages could eventually be compensated with the establishment of rituals of passage enabling non-Jewish disciples of Yeshua to become Jewish ones (see section 1.1.4 in chapter 3).

Looking now at the big picture, that is, from a perspective that encompasses not only the global Church but the whole Jewish world, it is clear that the establishment of a Jewish *ekklesia* would not constitute a factor of extinction in the destiny of the Jewish people but on the contrary would become

a new, a *wider* manner of affirming and fostering its existence. A Church that shows real concern about preserving Jewish identity can no longer be accused of willing to destroy it, consciously or not. Of course, there is no way to prevent accusations claiming that a Jewish *ekklesia* is in reality some sort of Trojan horse, conceived to lure Jews out of Judaism and turn them into standard Christians rigged out in some folkloric Jewish vestments. But while Jewish disciples should not be barred from witnessing to the truth that lies at the heart of their existence (see section 6.3 in chapter 3), the fact that they see it as intrinsically bound with the destiny of the whole nation of Israel and that they cherish rabbinic tradition as invisibly linked to the sacrifice of Yeshua on behalf of Israel (see section 2.5.1 in chapter 1) should be enough to demonstrate that these accusations are groundless. The destiny of a Jewish *ekklesia* is integrally attached to the existence of a vibrant Jewish nation. It is reasonable to assume that a Jewish *ekklesia* will never be the object of any sort of acknowledgment on the part of the non-Messianic Jewish world, being persistently viewed as the umpteenth strategy of the Church to precipitate the downfall of an independent Jewish nation. But this should not hinder a Jewish *ekklesia* from carrying the concern for the life and living legacy of the Jewish nation to the very heart of the Church, assuming the role of a wider fence planted on its behalf in the midst of the Gentile world. In this fight for and in the name of the Jewish nation, the members of the Jewish *ekklesia* should not expect the support of human praise. They will draw their sole strength from their faith in a God that has never ceased to fight alongside them.

NOTES

1. *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, J. Neusner, Allan J. Avery-Peck & William S. Green eds. Vol. 3 (Leyden: Brill, 2000), 1462.

2. Actually, four centuries before Pirke Abot, it was the Torah itself, the revealed Law of God, that was seen as a fence erected against the Gentiles. In the *Letter to Aristeeas*, we read (§139): “Now our Lawgiver being a wise man and specially endowed by God to understand all things, took a comprehensive view of each particular detail, and fenced us round with impregnable ramparts (περιέφραξεν ἡμᾶς ἀδιακόποις χάραξι) and walls of iron, that *we might not mingle at all with any of the other nations*, but remain pure in body and soul, free from all vain imaginations, worshipping the one Almighty God above the whole creation,” *The Letter of Aristeeas*, Anon E. Mouse ed. (UK: Abela Publishing, 2017), 17.

About the Author

Fr. Antoine Lévy was born in Paris in 1962 and raised in a Jewish, non-religious but fervently Zionist home. He discovered Christian faith while studying Philosophy and Ancient Greek at the Sorbonne, at the École Normale Supérieure (St. Cloud) and at Moscow State University. After receiving Baptism into the Catholic Church, he entered the Dominican Order in 1990. He wrote a PhD in Dogmatics and Patristics at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He was appointed as the director of the *Studium Catholicum*, a Dominican cultural center located in Helsinki, Finland, in 2004. He taught theology and history of ideas at the Faculty of Theology of Helsinki University (adjunct-professor) and at the School of Theology of the Eastern University of Finland (strategic professor and adjunct-professor). In 2009, he and Rabbi Mark Kinzer launched the “Helsinki Consultation,” an annual international gathering of theologians of Jewish descent. He became a member of the Dialogue Group between the Catholic Church and Messianic Judaism in 2012. He is currently involved in a new global organization, Yachad be Yeshua, that aims to connect believers in Christ of Jewish descent regardless of their ecclesial affiliations. He is the author of a large number of articles, among others, regarding Jewish issues in Russia and the State of Israel. He is currently established in Jerusalem and researching on the Jewish dimension of Edith Stein’s philosophical thought.