

Helsinki Consultation 2014

Jewish Believers in Yeshua and tradition

Theologians and scholars taking part in the conference, all Jewish believers in Jesus, introduced their work on the above topic. They provided insight into the diverse dialogue of the Messianic-Jewish movement, which follows the pattern of diversity that has helped the Jewish people to survive. The healing and restoration of the Jewish and Christian traditions will come from Israel. The tradition of the Torah, the mitzvot and rabbinic literature belongs to the Jewish identity. However, the “oral tradition” is only a human commentary on the inspired Torah. The “relationship” between law, authority and freedom is worthy of note. Tradition means “handing down the living word of God”, which is the highest authority for the followers of Yeshua. Tradition is dynamic, inventive and adapts to the needs of the day. “Traditionism” is seeking a concept of identity.

Some members of churches in the Netherlands talked about the meaning of the conference for their churches.

The Messianic-Jewish movement in the USA, England and Germany, including its offshoots, has a varied way of viewing the role of Jewish tradition and lives it differently. In doing so, the Bible is taken as the highest authority. The movement follows the pattern of the diversity, which befits the Jewish people and has helped them to survive after the destruction of the Temple and in the Diaspora. This diversity leads to a greater dynamic and to a Jewish identity which keeps up with the times. (Rabbi Vladimir Pikman).

The splitting of the Jewish and Christian traditions into a “two-folding” people of God has torn this people into pieces. The fellowship of Jewish followers of Yeshua can contribute to the healing of the “two-fold tradition”. In an ecumenical brother- and sisterhood they could support each other so that the church, the Jewish people and the world hear and are blessed. (Rabbi Mark Kinzer).

The “Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council” (MJRC) consists of a group of ordained Messianic-Jewish rabbis. It advocates a third vision of “Yeshua-centred Torah observance” which respects the religious tradition of the Jewish people (Jennifer Rosner).

Yeshua lived a markedly Jewish lifestyle. A Jew who is serious in joining a church and living with Yeshua defends the value of Jewish tradition in the church. The restoration of Israel doesn’t come from the church in its current form. However, the restoration of the church will, according to Fr. Antoine Lévy, come from Israel when the nation acknowledges Yeshua by the grace poured out upon it by the Crucified One and the church acknowledges the physical existence of Israel. Every Jew who joins a church is saying. “Come, let us go for our people.”

“What do we need to obey?” The leading authority is the tradition of the Torah (Mitzvot), according to Svetlana Panich, as oppression, a form of violence, and as the highest form of freedom and a way to it. Everyone who takes the yoke of the Mitzvot upon himself acknowledges the Exodus (Sifra on Lev. 11,45).

The Jewish tradition with the rabbinical perimeter fence should be respected. The verse Deuteronomy 22,16, “the Lord your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws;

carefully observe them with your heart and with all your soul,” is developed on the basis of Midrash texts, e.g. “If you accept the Torah – fine, if not, there will be your burial place” (Shabbos 8) (Myriam Luzatti).

The tradition of the “oral Torah” has no prophetic authority. It remains a human commentary on the inspired Torah “a fence around the Torah” (Aboth 1,1). Jacques Doukhan argued it deserves respect, consultation and enjoyment, but it is not obligatory to salvation. He said that encountering Yeshua and the gospels changed his attitude to rabbinical Judaism, the way the Torah is read and the Mitzvot are observed, which is the hallmark of Jewish identity.

Law, authority, observation and freedom are interrelated. It can be said that the soul dances to the law of music. Authority means that the message conveyed is not only strong and articulated but also happy and magnificent. God’s Spirit shows how freedom and law can be connected (Lisa Loden/Boris Balter).

Tradition means “handing down the living Word of God” which is the highest and final authority for followers of Yeshua. It is conveyed to us in our humanity by tradition. The Jewish and Christian traditions lead to a symphony which accompanies us as we live in the footsteps of Yeshua and helps to comprehend the meaning of Judaism (Fr David Neuhaus).

The meaning of “Tradition-Traditionalism-Traditionism” is relevant. “Tradition” is dynamic, inventive and adapts to contemporary needs. “Traditionalism” describes tradition as a “frozen” frame. “Traditionism” marks the choice and considerations in the search for a concept of identity. The road upon which a Messianic-Jewish “Traditionism” can be invented lies between Judaism and Christianity. Messianic Jews are in the process of forming their own tradition and putting faith in Yeshua into a Jewish context (Richard Harvey).

I will summarize several main focuses of the diverse contributions. They are based on faith in Yeshua, the risen and crucified one. Because of the unity amidst diversity, Messianic Judaism does not need a “halachic platform”. The division between Jewish and Christian tradition requires healing, which can be sought in an ecumenical brother- and sisterhood. The restoration of the church will come through Israel if the church recognises Yeshua and the physical people of Israel. The traditions of the Torah, mitzvot and rabbinical literature are fundamentally important for Jewish identity. The “oral Torah” remains a human commentary on the inspired Torah. There is a connection between law, authority and freedom: the soul dances to the music of the law, which, through its authority, conveys the magnificent message of the Hebrew Bible. The Jewish and Christian traditions accompany our lives in the footsteps of Yeshua and reveal the meaning of Judaism: Messianic-Jewish “traditionism” can be found on the road between Judaism and Christianity. As part of this process, faith in Yeshua will be put into its Jewish context.

It is my desire that the beneficial diversity within the unity should be preserved.

What does the conference mean for the churches from the Netherlands which were invited?

During a conversation, the pastor of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in East Rotterdam, Florimco van der Rhee, said that there was very little sense of the significance of Israel in his church. He believed that articles about the theme of the conference could arouse the curiosity of church members.

The regional coordinator of the Gereformeerde Zendingsbond reported that there was a lot of interest in the significance of Israel because they had contact to several people in Jerusalem.

A member of the Conservative Protestant Church desired an increasing realisation of significance of Israel. This church has a monthly letter on Israel for church leaders. On the first Sunday in September it celebrates an Israel Day.

One member of the Catholic Church hoped that through the conference the significance of Israel would be increasingly appreciated in the Catholic Church.