

## Messianic Jews and 'Judaizing' Christians - notes from Brazil and Israel

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Something is happening in the world of evangelical Christianity which may herald further ruptures in the boundaries dividing great religious traditions – and as usual the change is coming from below, is undermining even quite recently established academic classifications, and cuts across geographic and cultural divides in unforeseen ways.

I refer to the multiplicity of criss-crossing ventures combining themes from Jewish liturgy, ideas from Jewish history, Jewish artefacts and symbols, the sacred status of the land where the events of the Bible took place, and much related language and imagery, with evangelical ideas about the return of the Messiah and the end of days, about the implications of recognizing in new ways the Jewish identity of Jesus, and the eschatological significance of the State of Israel. And that is only for starters - a short list of the elements which are assembled in different permutations and combinations and which so far would be very hard to fit into a pattern save this one: the continuing erosion of religious authority across most countries save those in which religion is in the grip of the state – or vice versa – and the adherence to the Bible over and beyond any particular religious tradition, and all post-Biblical commentary and elaboration.

These subjects have been talked about a great deal in journalistic and political comment for many years, but the talk has been mostly focused on the United States and on the political support for Israel directly and in the Congress coming from evangelical churches who are said to believe that supporting Israel will somehow hasten the return of the Messiah or the end of days and so on. I am not concerned with such political matters, or indeed with the United States. My interest is to convey a sense of grassroots-driven activities which assemble different strands of Judaism and Jewish religious practice and combine them with evangelical style and ethos. My observations come from Brazil, from joining Brazilian evangelical travellers to Israel, and from observing messianic congregations in Israel, and the links in to global networks of like-minded people are evident.

## Cases:

### 1. Congregação Har Sião in Belo Horizonte

In Belo Horizonte (pop. 2.4 million) on a Sabbath morning you can go to the 'official' synagogue of the small Jewish Community and if you are lucky you will find ten men gathered to say their Shabbat prayers. If, however, you go to the Congregação Har Sião<sup>1</sup> - the Mount Zion Congregation – near to the vast Mineirão football stadium, you will find, as I did in October 2013, some 300 people assembled in a service which in many ways is a mimic or a copy of a fairly orthodox Jewish service: the men wear skullcaps and prayer shawls (*talletim*, sing. *tallit*), the prayer book, issued with Portuguese translation and transliteration, by the Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry based in Jerusalem, is an abbreviated version of the original with excerpts from standard Jewish liturgy, the tunes are drawn from the Ashkenazi tradition. The building is protected by a wall which looks like an imitation of the stone work of Jerusalem and turns out to be intended as such. This congregation figures prominently on the [website of Netivyah](#).

The Torah scrolls are authentic, one of them bought in Israel but originating in Iraq, and they are carried around the hall as in a standard Jewish service, before the reading in Hebrew and Portuguese. On the day I was there a young man read from the Torah: he made some mistakes, but no more than one often hears when inexperienced people read in 'mainstream' synagogues. He did not read the whole of the week's *parashah*<sup>2</sup>, but then again neither do many Reform and Liberal (and other) synagogues. As in Reform synagogues, the parasha is also read in the vernacular.

The Kedushah – a set of chanted responses which appears in the recitation of the 18 blessings (the 'Amidah') in morning services - is sung to the same tunes and with the same pattern of responses as in many Orthodox synagogues. (Belo Horizonte Har Sion. Likewise when it comes to opening the ark where the Torah scrolls are kept (minute 30). The name Yeshua (Jesus) is inserted at certain points. Thus the opening sentence – O Lord open though our lips and our mouth shall declare thy praise' (Psalm 51:17) becomes '... and our mouth shall declare Jesus'.

There were many differences, to be sure: the blessing of the *cohanim* (priests – that is men who are descended from *cohanim*, though it is not a condition for which there is any required certification, and it does not bring any special privileges in Jewish communities save that of being called up first to the weekly

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ensinandodesiao.org.br/congregacao-har-tzion/>

<sup>2</sup> Textual portion from the Pentateuch, which is read in a sequential annual cycle in all synagogues, in portions fixed since time immemorial.

reading from the Torah scroll) was performed by all the grown men present, with their sons and daughters next to them, tallit over their heads. Since – with two exceptions on this occasion – they are all new to Jewishness of any kind, the title of *cohen* is hardly accessible. Women and men sit together.

There are features of the service, however, which are unmistakably evangelical. One is the relationship of the congregation to the leader, characterized by oscillations between friendliness and humour and leaps of incantation and rousing oratory and moral exhortation, and another is the patience of the congregation in listening to him: his address lasts twice as long as the entire liturgical part of the service. In a conventional synagogue such longwindedness would not be tolerated. He intersperses his address with the call to them to repeat 'Amen': 'Amen, gente!' – and they reply 'Amen!' Where an evangelical preacher would pronounce 'In the name of Jesus' – 'Em nome de Jesus' – Marcelo says 'En nome de Yeshua' – the Hebrew name for Jesus. The interplay between the leader and the congregation is standard *evangélico*. There is also a pause when the members of the congregation are called to come to the front and deposit their *dizimo* – their tithe – in a collection box: both the word and the procedure are the same as in Pentecostal services. Transliterations of Hebrew are projected onto screen and a small trio of percussion and wind accompanies the singing and praying throughout.

The leader of the congregation is Marcelo Guimarães, a retired engineer with a career in a leading German corporation, who also used to be a Pentecostal pastor at a vast church in Belo Horizonte – the Igreja da Lagoinha. But he began to be curious about Jesus as a Jew and also about his own origins. He says he initially joined the Jewish community but later distanced himself from them. He does not explain the reasons, but he may well have been continuing his vocation of leadership acquired as an evangelical pastor. In any case, he has been twice ordained in the messianic stream, and one of these was by the US-based Union of Messianic Hebrew Congregations. Early on he captured the conjoining of ethnic and belief-based identities which is distinctive to Judaism. He used to go to Germany three or four times a year on business (the Netivyah website describes him as a 'former CEO of a German company' but this is an exaggeration – he worked for Mannesmann the engineering company) and twenty years ago he took to stopping over in Portugal in search of his ancestry and he went to the Torre do Tombo National Archive in Lisbon where there are documents from 40,000 Inquisition trials and, according to its website, birth records from 1563 – though he himself says his family came from Portugal during the Minas Gerais gold rush ('ciclo de ouro') in the 18th century.

In this attachment to centuries-old Jewish roots Marcelo is far from alone. There is a very widespread belief among Brazilians that they are descended from Jews who came over from Portugal in the early colonial period fleeing from or hiding from the Inquisition, and this has become a uniquely Brazilian addition to Messianism, since it places Brazilians in a separate category from other messianics who do not claim to be Jewish. Marcelo explains that Pedro Alvares Cabral, who first established Portuguese sovereignty in Brazil, was a crypto-Jew –

like his own family - practised his religion secretly, and he says the Jews who arrived in Brazil practiced cousin marriage, which he believes to be typically Jewish. (It may be his way of alluding to Jewish endogamy.)

Marcelo recounts how despite his secularized background, his parents spoke of their Jewish ancestors and kept certain traditions of dress, observed laws of mourning, of having a bath on the Sabbath, following the Jewish tradition of mourning,<sup>3</sup> and would set aside part of the harvest for the poor. Laughing, he says his grandmother would sweep the house starting outside so as 'não jogar prosperidade fora' – so as not to sweep wellbeing, or prosperity, out of the door – and remarks that this is a Sephardi custom. I have heard similar stories from others in Brazil, about parents or aunts or grandmothers who would never do their shopping on Saturday, who always cleaned the house on Friday and even one who said his aunt used to touch the upper part of a doorpost as she walked into a room as if touching the mezuzah in the Jewish custom. (Note the prominence of women as bearers of these traditions.) This sense of heritage and descent is perhaps the foremost element among Brazilian messianics: they are automatically qualified because this notion has spread among the Brazilian population for several decades now. It provides a basis on which different groups adopt Jewish customs and rules according to no discernible pattern. Carlos Gutierrez' research in São Paulo for example described an ex-pastor in the lower middle class east of the city who requires that his followers keep kosher and not travel by car on the Sabbath, and found a religiously qualified person to perform circumcision (Gutierrez 2011).

Marcelo says that there are some 15 Jewish families in his congregation – that is, people who have been brought up Jewish, plus *anussim*, some of whom have proof of their Jewish ancestry. But they all love the Jewish people, they love Israel and they want to learn Torah.

Marcelo's address sounds as if it is drawn from a mixture of sources and also from his own thoughts. He insists – as many messianics do – on the special apocalyptic or millenarian status of the land of Israel – not the Jewish people or the Jewish religion, but the land. This is where the Messiah came – he did not come anywhere else. In another context, in Israel itself, Brazilian evangelicals on a study tour tell me: God is everywhere but yet this is where the Messiah came, or this is where he sent his son. 'Marcelo again: There is no difference between Jews and others, but *Israel* is different: because Jesus will return there and nowhere else.' On the Sunday morning, as on the third Sunday of every month, a group gathers at Belo Horizonte's tiny Praça Estado de Israel (State of Israel Square) high above the city centre, to pray for Israel. They stand in a circle and recite thirty quotations and blessings, all with one exception from the Prophets and Paul's letters. The support for Israel is not framed in a combative geopolitical

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<sup>3</sup> He mentioned sitting *shiva* for seven days and he also mentioned *yahrzeit* - the annual day of mourning on the anniversary of a parent's or close relative's death. During *shiva*, depending on particular traditions, one is expected to stay at home, sit on low chairs and so on. On the seventh day the mourners revisit the burial place of the deceased.

language though Marcelo himself is well informed about some of the ins and outs of Israeli life and politics.

He says he does not accept the title of rabbi which some of his followers use to refer to him, but he is the undisputed leader and in the Preface to the prayer book he signs himself 'Rabino Mesiânico'. He explains that he left the church when he came to terms with the fact that Jesus was a Jew and the belief that the Messiah will return to Jerusalem as prophesied in the Book of Revelation – a prophecy cherished by most Messianics. If Jesus was a Jew then the proper liturgy for his followers is the Jewish liturgy. But there is more, namely the attachment to the Land of Israel and to the State of Israel. For Messianics the attachment to the land is extremely important. When I discuss this with them they do not necessarily mention the idea of a 'Promised' land, but turn rather to the concrete – 'that is where it all happened'.

**Commented [DL1]:** Needs more about Tribulations, Book of Daniel etc.

So Marcelo travels frequently to Israel and meets with his colleagues or contacts in the Netivah Ministry, and he takes groups with him in what Brazilian evangelicals all call 'caravanas'. His son, who has a degree in theology from the Dallas Theological Seminary<sup>4</sup>, has been studying for a Masters in Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the father reckons he will eventually settle in Israel. When I ask how he can sort out the legalities of such a step he replies that they have lawyers working on the case.

It would be a mistake to try and force the numerous statements, expectations, histories and exhortations which one hears from Marcelo or from the other preachers I have heard in these congregations into a coherent set of views. It would be preferable to think of them as calling up a set of sympathies and sensibilities while at the same time trying to forge, if not an identity, then a strand within the evangelical field. Thus while Marcelo was claiming Jewish ancestry he also was anxious, it seemed to draw a line:

'The Jew who recognizes Jesus remains a Jew, and the Gentile who recognizes Jesus remains a gentile. Gentiles and Jews are equal – they are cut from the same root (ceiba)'

So despite the strong identification as descendants of the secret Jews or forced converts – known as *anussim*, meaning 'those who have been forced' - they are not Jewish, they are Messianic, though they pray in a synagogue saying the same prayers which Jesus said.

As among evangelicals, the interpretation of Biblical stories is quite free. For Marcelo, ever since Abraham God has appeared to men to announce their redemption. One of the three men who appeared to Abraham was silent yet Abraham bowed before him: he thinks this must have been a prefiguring of Jesus because it is forbidden to bow before an angel. In his address he also dwells on the story of Lot – which figures in this week's Torah portion - and tells his

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dts.edu>

listeners that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis, 19) because she looked back in nostalgia, not just out of curiosity – that is, she was still attached to the life of debauchery in Sodom.

Marcelo has taken his espousal of Judaism into the theme of persecution and anti-semitism by building a small Museum of the Inquisition.<sup>5</sup> It is well organized with display cases, quite a number of original books in Hebrew and about Jewish-Portuguese or Brazilian matters and Torah scrolls which he has obtained in his travels, and also a reproduction of the Inquisition's instruments of torture. Its educational purpose is augmented by audio-visual aids. It is established as a non-profit foundation and has the support of various Jewish dignitaries and also of Professor Anita Novinsky of the University of São Paulo who has been the pioneer of the history of *cristãos novos* (New Christians) in Brazil. The sponsor is ABRADJIN – Associação Brasileira de Judeus da Inquisição – founded in 2000.

One can see how conversations he has had in Israel have rubbed off on Marcelo. Like many Israelis he criticizes 'fanaticism' - and also criticizes people who spend all their time studying Talmud with out a *dosis* of real life – a word he repeats many times in his address to the congregation. He also appears to position himself within Jewish religious politics by referring to the variety of Jewish messianisms – the followers of Sabbatai Zvi, for example, or of the more recent Lubavitcher Rebbe – an observation which can be interpreted as an off-the-cuff remark to show he does not aspire to monopolize any particular current, or as evidence for the legitimacy of the new wave of messianics of which he is part, even though they seem to be as much an offshoot of evangelical Christianity as a future branch of Judaism.

To a person familiar with Jewish ritual the practices assembled by Marcelo and his followers seem to be a hotch-potch, or bricolage. But then, some would respond, is that not the history of religious worship? Perhaps, but here many important questions are left in the air: it is unclear whether Jesus is regarded as the Messiah who will return, as is stated on the *anussim* website, or whether he was a great rabbi and prophet and that he – or someone else – will return as the Messiah at the end. It is unclear whether the people who join his congregation are called on to observe Jewish customs relating to food and to Sabbath observance, for example, though it is clear that he does not try to impose observance, leaving this up to individuals. The message in the sermon did not touch on these subjects, keeping to moral themes similar to those one hears from Pentecostal preachers. A perusal of websites relating to *anussim* and messianic congregations produces a variety of ideas, or concepts, most of which leave open the relationship between the site's sponsors and Jewish people and practices and institutions as conventionally understood.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.museudainquisicao.org.br>; see also [www.anussim.com.br](http://www.anussim.com.br)

## 2. Congregação Israelita da Nova Aliança (Israelite Congregation of the New Covenant)

In Porto Alegre Manoela Capenedo took me to a tiny congregation meeting on the Sabbath in a small hall rented in the neighbouring town of Canoas. The feeling was quite different from Belo Horizonte. Men and women sat separately; all the men had a few days' growth of beard, the women were dressed in close imitation if not exact replication of the modest haredi style prevalent in Jerusalem, in London's Stamford Hill and in Williamsburg (Brooklyn, New York) – save that they did not use wigs, rather delicately tied headscarves.

The group numbered about 30 and was noticeably different from the Belo Horizonte congregation in social composition – less prosperous – and also in their proximity to Jewish customs. We were all seated on benches, not chairs. They spend the whole of the Sabbath in the synagogue so as to avoid travelling, and during the Sabbath they do not handle money or answer the phone (though they made an exception for our visit, for which we were very grateful); they did not proselytize, and indeed were wary of inviting outsiders in lest they start to proselytize among the group. (Manoela had to speak at length with the leader's wife to persuade her of our good intentions.)

The reading of the passage from the Torah follows a similar procedure to that in orthodox synagogues. The chanting is authentic but the reader is still improving his Hebrew and also, being poor, they only have an imitation Torah scroll in which the words are printed with vowels, unlike a standard scroll, which of course is not printed but handwritten by a skilled scribe. They call people up to be blessed at intervals in the reading, and each one has to wear a prayer shawl. But like other ventures in this Jewish-Evangelical space, they blow the shofar on the Sabbath, which mainstream (or at least Orthodox) Jews never do: the usual orthodox and Reform practice is to blow the shofar only on New Year and Yom Kippour.<sup>6</sup>

Even so, there is a musical accompaniment in the form of a single electronic keyboard, and the shofar is sounded even though in mainstream synagogues this is only done on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippour. This practice seems quite popular in Brazil among Messianics and also in some Pentecostal churches.

The leader gives a lengthy address and interactive address which is complemented by points made by other men. He talks about the week's portion (Parasha Vayeera, Gen. 23) – which recounts the negotiations between Abraham and Ephron the Hittite over a site for his tomb and Abraham's insistence on paying for the land. This leads him in to a matter of great concern to the community, namely marriage – and he alludes to the passage about Laban's trickery (Gen. 29), two generations further on, when he tried to deny Jacob the wife he really wanted. This brought him to marriage and reproduction which are

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<sup>6</sup> However, the blowing of the shofar in secular locations is not unheard of – for example in Jerusalem supermarkets in the lead-up to the New Year.

big challenges for this community: they do not evangelize and do not look for visitors and they do not have very large families on the haredi pattern, so reproduction depends on organic growth. Through the nationwide network they are affiliated to – also named Congregação Israelita da Nova Aliança<sup>7</sup> (CINA)<sup>8</sup> – they link up with communities elsewhere in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in Curitiba and so on: through CINA they have relations with another congregation in Curitiba for example and one young man promised to marry a young woman from there. Alessandra and another heavily pregnant woman have themselves proudly photographed. So we see how the apparently archaic practice of the *shidduch* – the concerted marriage system prevalent in the ultra-Orthodox world – appears as a vital necessity for a community which is forced by its isolation to consider its own survival. CINA, to judge from its website, seeks to institutionalize membership, so for example some affiliates are ‘Congregations’ others are simply affiliate groups. The leader of this one in Canoas has the title ‘Rosh’ (head) which is also used by CINA. It is an unusual title for the leader of a community (as distinct from heads of yeshivas) but is symptomatic of an impulse to institutionalization.

In the Canoas community there is no mention of Jesus, of the messianic return or any such themes. Although some of the members have been Pentecostals they have left all that behind them. They allude to the Portuguese colonial Sephardi heritage but do not make of it a claim to full Jewish acceptance. They want to be good Jews and to that end they want to make what contemporary Jewish jargon calls *t’shuva* and they call ‘retorno’. *T’shuva* does of course have an ancient meaning as, simplistically, repentance, but in the 20th century it came to be used in daily parlance to refer to secularized Jews who ‘return’ (hence the Portuguese ‘retorno’) to strict observance. But they are a heterogeneous group: one of the members was born in Brazil, lived in Argentina aged 9-14 (more or less) and then returned. He only learnt to read at 16. Another, who is making most progress in learning Hebrew, speaks of a grandfather who came from Lithuania and thinks he might have been Jewish. And there is the question of circumcision, which brings nervous chuckles. It is unclear whether the adult males in the group have undergone circumcision but they say a certain Rabbi Gottlieb, who has a son in Brazil, comes from London and performs the operation, and has trained others to do it. This seems to be quite prevalent in Messianic communities, but had not been mentioned in Belo Horizonte.

The community in Canoas may belong to CINA but does not seem to follow CINA’s strong messianic and pro-Israel as depicted on its website. However, it should also be said that these seem to be loose associations and maybe what is written on a website does not reflect more than the view of the individuals who control it. The Canoas community seems distinctive in that it has gravitated to a much

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<sup>7</sup> Nova Aliança is a version of the Hebrew Brit Hadasha which means New Testament, which in theory complicates this congregation’s purist approach to their Judaism.

<sup>8</sup> <http://cinanoticias.blogspot.com.br>  
and [www.israelitas.com.br](http://www.israelitas.com.br)



more orthodox Jewish variant, with an emphasis on the habits of daily life, compared with others I have encountered so far. The uniformity of the women's dress code was particularly noticeable, as were the men's 'three-day' beards and the eagerness to observe the Sabbath as strictly as possible.

### **3. Congregação Beit Tefilah Yeshua (Jesus' House of Prayer), Rio de Janeiro (Humaitá)**

This case is different yet again. It is led by Eduardo Stein, who was brought up as a Jew and in a predominantly Jewish environment in Rio and married a wife from the same background. At a certain point Stein changed towards a Messianic affiliation and set up a synagogue in the middle class district of Humaitá. He has named his synagogue and community Beit Tefilah Yeshua (Jesus' House of Prayer). He is the rabbi and Ludwig Goulart is the 'Rosh'. Ludwig plays the guitar during services and also takes a lead role in speaking and liturgy. Rabbi Stein has also written a book entitled 'Cabala da Autossuficiência' ('The Kabbala of Self-sufficiency')

When I spent the Sabbath there in October 2013 there were about 30 people. Unlike some congregations one visits, they were not easy to situate socio-economically, but Rabbi Stein told me he wants to relocate to a lower income area because it is hard for people to travel to his current location – public transport in Rio being something of a nightmare.

But whatever their class position, as a group members of the congregation told extremely varied life histories. There was a young medical student from Bahia who was doing a thesis on gender identity: he said he had had little opportunity to attend a religious service in accordance with his Jewish background in Bahia, but now was a regular attendant; the son of a Pentecostal pastor who has a degree in theology from a Theology Faculty which seems to specialize in training evangelical pastors in Rio (Faculdade de Teologia – Seminário Unido<sup>9</sup>) is also himself a 'pastor auxiliar' in his father's church – he said his father was away doing a psychoanalysis course; a young man who had a degree in Hebrew from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and spoke the language quite well;

Ludwig had gone to live in Los Angeles in his late teens and did a variety of jobs, but he had a series of health problems and it was during an operation on his kidney that he had a revelation which drew him to messianic Judaism, helped by a Rabbi. He devotes a lot of his time to studying Torah and Hebrew and seems able to live on his income as Rosh – like the Rabbi. Like several other people in this – and other – congregations he liked to speak English. This is particularly true of the Nayra Pedrini's Apostolic Church on the Ilha do Governador where her close associates always address me in English. Rabbi Stein for his part speaks

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<sup>9</sup> This faculty has no website.

excellent English and has sent his son to study Economics in Iowa. He himself talks about eventually going to live in the US.

Rabbi Stein's preaching is the closest to Pentecostal that I heard in these three cases. In an address on a Parashah which can be heard on the internet<sup>10</sup> he draws the example of Abraham to develop the theme of obedience to a call: Abraham had a life, he had wealth, and yet he answered the call, and the same went for the fishermen who answered Jesus' call ('ye shall be fishers of men'... 'let the dead bury the dead'). For him Jesus was sent by God as his son, and it is thanks to Jesus, who took the message across the world, that Jews have been able to be a 'light unto the nations'. His focus on this occasion is on obedience. In the services I attended he spoke of the promise of prosperity and health, though not at length, and he also placed his hands in a gesture of healing on congregants. One very young man is brought to the front, the Rabbi's wife brings in a flask, he is blessed and a prayer is said for his sick son. But this is not dissimilar (save for the flask) from a prayer for a sick person in any synagogue. It was quite discrete in comparison with the dramatic gestures one sometimes observes in Pentecostal churches. For her part, his wife, evidently affected by illness in her own family, expressed her faith in the Messiah's healing capacity and also her belief in depression as a consequence of diabolic possession: 'Satan steals not only what you are but your future, what you might become'.

As in the other messianic synagogues and all evangelical churches, a loudspeaker amplifies the voice of the leader or preacher, and the service is accompanied by a band – in this case, even though the room is small, a five-man band (tom-tom drums, clarinet, bells, guitar, hand-held 'cymbals'). But unlike the other cases the tunes have little if anything in common with the tunes one hears in mainstream synagogues, even though Stein must know those tunes well.

Yet side by side with these evangelical themes, prayers are drawn from a standard Orthodox prayer book with Hebrew text and Portuguese translation and transliteration. But the recitation of the prayers is modified: a line is taken from a psalm and repeated over and over again.

The Rabbi celebrates marriages but his approach does not fit any model: he says that if the man involved is a member of his congregation he will do it, but if he is not he will require him to commit to join, yet at the same time he affirms the headship of the husband: 'o homen é a autoridade' ('authority rests with the man'). Overall he attaches little importance to the ethnic dimension of Judaism, especially in a 'racially mixed society like Brazil' ('um país miscegenado como o nosso'). He does not mention the anussim theme so dear to other Messianics in Brazil.

The pastor mentioned previously said that there had been many healings in this place, many miracles – both here and in his church. The rationale of his dual adherence remained a mystery, compounded by his pastor-father's attendance at

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.novabty.com/#!artigos-judaismo-messianico/cxto>

a course on psychoanalysis, which is not a discipline much promoted by evangelicals. Another person spoke of the vocation of raising the awareness of evangelical churches about Judaism and said that some pastors feel 'touched by a love for Israel and may even adopt some Jewish devices or customs' ('uma expressão judaica').

The congregation's website displays its own credo of 14 principles of faith ('Estatuto da Fé')<sup>11</sup> which include several core Christian principles, such as that Jesus died for the sins of the world, that he rose again after three days, and will return to rule forever; that Jesus is the mediator between God and all creation; and (quoting verses from the New Testament in support) that the Torah is immutable and contains laws for the whole world.

In conversation one member spoke of the true Judaism as a 'transcultural' obeisance which encompassed 'everybody' – a Biblical as opposed to a rule-bound ethos which like Chassidic Judaism went for beyond mere liturgy.

#### 4. Nayra's Church: Igreja Apostilica Unidade em Cristo

This case is much better known to me since I have been accompanying it ever since I met its leading pastor Nayra Pedrini da Silva at the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem in 2011.

Nayra's church has many features which might be called classically Pentecostal: on her Facebook page<sup>12</sup> she regularly announces services such as 'Culto de poder' (to the Power), Confraternização, Ministerio de Mulheres (for the promotion of women's ministry), a Youth Congress and so on. Her church in short is a hive of activity. The preaching focuses a lot on family, on the difficulties of bringing up children, the dangers of drugs, the corruption of the children of the wealthy.

But today the notion of a classic model has given way to a multiplication of habits and ritual features and ideological trends so that the word 'classic' has lost its meaning. Likewise the neo-Pentecostal label is also no longer easily summarized because the model pioneered by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God has been borrowed and its component elements have been unpicked and recomposed not only by other organizations in Brazil and outside but also by the Universal Church itself.

Nayra's church holds about 800 people at its main premises in the Ilha do Governador, near to the international airport in Rio de Janeiro. It has a small number of branches, notably one in Tokyo, but it is not an empire-building organization. The church's social base seems to be among Brazil's 'emergente'

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.novabty.com/#!estatutos-de-fe-/c1qyt>

<sup>12</sup> look for Nayra Pedrini da Silva

classes: the sectors which have brought a rapid expansion in the country's urban middle class in the period since the late 1990s. If you attend a weekend service the women are dressed quite formally and the men too take care with their appearance. Most people seem to come by car.

The church does not only run services: it also runs many Bible Study classes, and it has organized social work in local communities as well as visiting in hospitals. This last has developed so far that I was told of plans to establish itself as a fully fledged charitable organization in order to provide the service more professionally.

But Nayra's church does stand out from other Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals not just in its affinity for things Jewish – Jewish artefacts, the State of Israel – but in the seriousness with which Nayra and her close associates take this. For Nayra is a university graduate who leads tours of the Holy Land and studies the archaeology so she can provide competent explanations as well as Biblical exegesis. In addition she now also takes groups to Turkey and Jordan, visiting sites from the Epistles of Paul, for example.

I have accompanied her more than once as she leads groups around Jerusalem and the surrounding area. The visits are to sites associated with events in the life of Jesus, but each time her description of what happened at the site – the Pool of Siloam for example, or the Garden of Gethsemane – begins with a quotation from the Old Testament prophesying the events. Finding correspondence between Old and New Testament is important to her preaching. At the Sheep Gate she says maybe this was where sheep were washed before being sacrificed at the Temple.

The Pool of Bethesda is besides the Sheep Gate to the Old City and Nayra, linking the Sheep to Jesus as the Lamb of God, recounts the miracle performed by Jesus there (John 5:1-14), but she does so with an important gloss: many people believed that miracles were performed there by angels – for example there was a belief that from time to time an angel would come to stir up the water and perform a miraculous cure, but only the first person to bathe in the pool would be cured. So there was a rush. Jesus healed a man who could not get there in time – Nayra describes the sick man as a tetraplegic. What they did not understand was what lies behind the supernatural: when that is why later Jesus encountered the man again he warned him 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you'. And Nayra elaborates: 'why are you hanging around? why aren't you with your family celebrating your cure?'

But then she changes register and brings together Ezekiel 38:9 (God saves Israel from the King of Gog) and the Apocalypse (Revelations 6) (the Seven Seals followed by the announcement of the great day of God's wrath). This brings her to contemporary events: the Arab Spring, Israel's discovery of offshore gas, which may produce more than Russia: 'these are announcements, fulfilling the prophecies. Prepare for the last days.'

She reiterates: it is wrong, or mistaken, to seek the supernatural without seeking God behind the supernatural. When she reaches the Garden of Gethsemane – or

the property which bears that name - scene of Christ's passion, she says: The devil was tracking Jesus' every step - that is, people may gain benefits from Jesus' healing but the devil wants to prevent them from drawing the correct conclusions: the devil would want them just to take the benefit and continue life as usual.

In Nayra's words: 'God does not tempt us - he puts us to the test; it is Satan who tempts us' (Deus não tenta - ele prova; Satanás tenta')

At the same time Nayra brings the sacred figures to life as flesh and blood individuals: if Jesus in his agony shed blood this means he had a heart attack; the servant of the high priest - whom she names Malko - whose ear was cut off by a disciple and was immediately restored by Jesus (Luke 22:50) - would lose his job without his ear.

Nayra's charisma is unusual - although the technique of bringing biblical incidents and figures to life in an immediate way is common to Pentecostal preaching, in other ways she is quite different. She does not raise her voice like many Pentecostal preachers, and she has a rather unevangelical respect for erudition, as observed in her eagerness to learn from Eli's archaeological expertise; but her followers are in awe of her both for her learning and also for the air of sanctity she exudes: at one point, at the church of St Anne near the pool of Bethesda, the group all kneel down around her and she blesses them.

Nayra has a loyal and admiring group of assistant pastors and helpers around her, mostly women, as well as her husband who shares the leadership of the church in Rio but rarely accompanies her on these trips to Israel. Listening to them and to her and also listening to Eli the guide and other Messianic Jews, one might be led to seek a consistent set of interpretations, in the manner of a doctrine. But that is not, so to speak, 'how it works'. At any particular moment they may express firm views which are formulated as definitive truths, but they also formulate their ideas in quite speculative ways - as Nayra does in some of her interpretations. Some of the things she said at the Sheep Gate, or about the high priest's servant, were stated more tentatively than dogmatically. The certitudes are in the underlying message of the moral life, constantly under threat from the forces of evil, and in the proclamation of a relationship of trust, faith and adoration of Jesus. She says nothing about prosperity as one hears in standard neo-Pentecostal churches notably the Universal Church.

The use of the Bible and the ritual free associations which characterize Nayra's church and her words raise important questions of interpretation. For example, at one point I was told that they celebrate Christmas as a 'family festival' and that they regard the Jewish feast of 'Tabernacles' ('Sukkot') as a commemoration of Christ's birth. Yet on another occasion it was explained to me by her assistant pastor, Tiago, in terms of the three Jewish seasonal festivals, the other two being Passover (Pesach) and the Feast of Weeks (Shevuot). Since Passover commemorates the Paschal Lamb and Shavuot commemorates the Pentecost, Sukkot should be the announcement of the return of the Messiah, of Redemption. He notes that Sukkot is known in Portuguese as 'Tabernáculos' (and in English as

Tabernacles) and that refers to Jesus having come to dwell among men (the Portuguese version and the Greek version use the word meaning that he 'dwelt' among men). For Tiago these are 'Biblical' festivals, whereas other Jewish festivals (Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, Purim) were just Jewish, and he made a distinction between what is Jewish and should not or need not be adopted by evangelicals or messianics, and what is 'Biblical'. Tiago was therefore organizing, through his travel agency, a mass meeting for 1500 people from Brazil and Argentina to celebrate Tabernacles in a high profile conference centre in Jerusalem in 2014. Yet he was quite firm in his disapproval of the adoption of Jewish rituals by evangelical churches and praised 'the Argentines' for firmly stopping it before it spread.

Yet it seems hard to draw the lines. At Easter 2012 at Nayra's church in the Ilha do Governador she presided in front of some 800 people at a lectern, and at her feet was arranged a complete Seder table: that is, all the items which go to make up the ceremony which accompanies the recounting of the Exodus which takes place in Jewish homes on Passover: matzohs (unleavened bread), 'haroset' (dates - symbolizing the mortar used to build the pyramids or similar), wine, bitter herbs or horseradish (bitterness symbolizing the servitude in Egypt)), and a lamb bone (the paschal lamb). At the same time, to one side of the stage, a large cross was draped with a long piece of red cloth and in front of it young women danced in tutus while the congregation sang songs of praise. All the while a band of keyboard, guitar and percussion was playing, as is habitual in evangelical churches. She almost called on me to pronounce the blessing over the matzohs, but thought better of it.

Nayra's church is by no means alone, and each example I have come across has its own way of mixing and matching elements of Jewish and evangelical practice and tradition, liturgically and doctrinally. The dynamic and highly successful Pastor René Terra Nova from Manaus has adopted a cellular structure in the name of the twelve disciples of Christ but also of the twelve tribes of Israel. This model is meant to empower individuals to establish a cell with their own house at its centre, attracting followers from their neighbourhood and from other churches. Terra Nova's church does not celebrate Christmas (regarded as a pagan festival dedicated to consumerism) but does on the other hand celebrate various Jewish festivals, including in addition to Passover and Pentecost (Shavuot), others which Nayra's deputy Tiago would regard as Jewish rather than biblical like Purim, Hanukkah and Yom Kippur (de Souza and Pinto 2013).

Terra Nova has a travel agency and tour guides in Jerusalem marvel at the size of the groups he brings to the country: he is reputed to travel the land with a caravan of thirty buses!

Tiago, for his part, has an agency, Amar Turismo, which, on the basis of his relationship built up with Nayra with churches and training institutions in the US, has expanded to take people to Florida on holiday, and he leads a somewhat frenetic internet and Facebook-fuelled life managing his disparate ventures. His

posts alternate between promotions of his agency (Amar Turismo), expressions of love for God and exhortations to the good and moral life.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. Yad Hashemona

Nayra and others have close relations with the community of 'believers' or Messianics in Israel. These are people who are Jewish by birth or origin yet believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and according to one informant number some 10,000 in Israel. One of their main locations is a kibbutz called Yad HaShemona (The memorial of the Eight) which was originally and uniquely established by a Finnish people in memory of the eight Jews who were taken from Finland and killed by the Nazis. Eli, the guide who often accompanies Nayra and her groups, and of whose explanations more later, lives there. One source of the growth of Messianics, which is moderate rather than rapid, is in the waves of immigrants to Israel - for example people from the former Soviet Union who had had contact with evangelical churches yet came to Israel as Jews.

I visited Yad HaShemona in 2011 and spoke to long-established members. This did not yield a coherent set of beliefs or a doctrine. It could be said that it is too much to expect a member of any religious group produce such a thing, but in this case the issue is not their beliefs but rather whether they have a liturgy or a set of practical precepts which set them apart. Even that is hard because as is well known evangelical Christians also have widely varying practices (but a rather uniform set of rhetorical techniques or styles) and even an individual pastor has only a loose liturgical scheme. Many Messianics have explained to me that they recognize the teaching of the New Testament and the divinity of Christ as the Son of God sent to save the world, and that they also have a concept of the Second Coming, or the return of the Messiah drawn from the teachings of Christ and the Book of Revelation. On the other hand, others speak of Christ more as a great Jewish Rabbi, and

Beyond this the Messianics of Yad HaShemona do not specify a doctrine: in two conversations with prominent and long-established members, one of whom - Ayelet - was a fourth generation Messianic, and the other, born in Venezuela, had been an adherent since 1982. In the words of Ayelet, they use the label 'Messianic Jews' as an umbrella term in order to avoid fitting in to a particular stream or package. They described elements of evangelicalism, as in a spiritual conversion experience in one case, in the unstructured character of their Sabbath meetings, and the spontaneous character of the prayers: 'we open our mouths and speak to God'. There was an emphasis on correspondences in the Old and New Testaments, though they were not theologically or textually very elaborate: thus I was referred to the mention of vineyard in Jesus' parable (Matthew 20:1-16) and the vineyard in (Isaiah 5:1-7) but the reader would have trouble finding anything in common between the texts beyond the use of the figure of the vineyard in very different metaphorical senses.

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<sup>13</sup> look for Tiago Brunet

The informants I spoke to at Yad Hashemona were particularly eager to express doubts about the validity of Jewish ritual observance like the separation of milk and meat, and they criticized Christian baptism as an ancient Jewish ritual reformulated to create divisions between Christians and Jews. There was little sign of ritual devices defining a frontier between the 'believers' and other Jews or non-Jews, yet they have an 'internal obligation' to marry among themselves though in doing so may well have difficulty persuading the Israeli Rabbinate that they are eligible: I was told they do indeed have difficulties with the Ministry of the Interior, presumably in gaining eligibility for Israeli citizenship for converts and affiliates. But the community living of Yad HaShemona is not typical of their way of life – most live dispersed around the country and not in close-knit communities.

The members are enthusiastic citizens of the state of Israel and run various businesses out of their kibbutz: it has a hotel and catering establishment, which receives, for example, Israeli civil servants on a conference as well as Universal Church tour groups from Brazil – who seem to insist on being accommodated here and only here. And the members are much in demand as guides for evangelical groups. The Venezuelan-born Salomón loops the loop of the connections among evangelicals by mentioning how a Brazilian pastora, Valnice Milhomens, brought the cellular system, from Colombia to Brazil in 1999, and it was then taken up by Pastor Terra Nova as we have seen.<sup>14</sup>

When asked about how they enact the religious dimension of their messianic adherence the three people I spoke to at Yad HaShemona, all long established members, gave answers which pointed to a loose, unstructured and non-prescriptive sort of religious practice. They meet on the Sabbath, bring petitions to God and study Scripture, a subject on which they have much expertise, being inspired by Biblical prophecies in their messianic expectations. Even so, the teachers are treated as guides rather than authoritative interpreters: 'God can be trusted to guide people even if his guidance has to be translated'. There is no religious leadership, or indeed any political leadership: Yad HaShemona does have a leadership structure by virtue of its status as an agricultural community, not its religious character. But I heard from another informant (Joseph Shulam of Netivyah – see below) that the Yad HaShemona kibbutz is riven by factions that they have several different synagogues and some go to synagogues elsewhere.

## 6. Pentecostal experiences in Jerusalem

Pentecostals obviously go to Israel for religious reasons, but they are not pilgrims in the same sense as Catholics and Orthodox. Traditionally, Catholics go on pilgrimage as part of an exchange – they have made a vow or are seeking a benefit. Even if they go to be cured, as at Lourdes, they are making the sacrifice of

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<sup>14</sup> <http://scristiane26.blogspot.co.il/2011/02/valnice-milhomens-biografia.html>



the journey as part of the exchange, and others – their carers and at Lourdes the army of supporters – are making sacrifices on their behalf.

But the kissing of tombs, the lighting of candles and so on are regarded as pagan by Pentecostals. To be sure pentecostals do offer cures, but these are part of a bargain with a church rather than with the supernatural. The standard Pentecostal life story has an episode of healing linked to joining a church. Pastors place their hands on a person to invoke the power of Jesus and call for a cure – the expectation being that the person being blessed or eventually healed will join the church as a contributing member.

So when they go to Jerusalem Pentecostals do not visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is regarded as a pagan site where visitors touch tombs and light candles. Or worse, Catholic churches are places to trade and make money – heirs to the Temple from which Jesus ejected the merchants. Instead they go to the Garden Tomb, a site owned by a UK-based Protestant charity which is said to be – the staff are quite careful not to be too emphatic about this – the place where Jesus was buried. Opposite the Garden a bare rock face overlooking the East Jerusalem can be interpreted as depicting a skull – as in Golgotha, the Hill of the Skull, though again the staff are quite cautious in their description. They also firmly forbid any incantations or magical practices – something which has led Brazilian groups from the Universal Church to be summarily ejected after trying to conduct magical procedures with materials from the site.

Visitors to the tomb itself, where Jesus was buried and from which he then disappeared, go in, look around and have themselves photographed at the open door. More important moments for them are the prayers which take up most of their time in the Garden: it has several spaces furnished with benches and groups conduct services much as they would at home: their preachers lead them in prayer and pronounce an address, often concluding with a ceremony of eating bread and drinking wine – a version of the Eucharist but shorn of its transubstantiation doctrine: these elements are ‘representations’ only.

The main ritual undertaken by evangelical visitors in Israel is baptism – or re-baptism – by immersion in the River Jordan. The Kibbutz Yardeni has constructed premises with a large coach park, and changing rooms where visitor can don the white gowns provided and then walk down steps to the riverside where their leaders will hold them while they are immersed by throwing their heads backwards and under water, emerging to the applause of their companions. There is also a shop well stocked with souvenirs including a range of flacons bearing the words ‘Water from the River Jordan’ in different languages. Outside there are numerous uniform and large tiled plaques bearing a scriptural text in many languages – similar to the House of Prayer on the Mount of Olives.

The religious tourists do not just wonder around: they are in groups and they are guided, both by their own leaders and by local guides, who are certified by express very varied opinions.

Asked about the significance of the Temple for Christians (i.e. evangelicals) a pastor who is leading a group provides an explanation: The Jews had made an idol of the Temple – they were obsessed by it and the prophet Ezekiel wrote that God took the Holy of Holies (in Portuguese ‘a Gloria’) away from the Temple on the wings of Serafim, and then at Pentecost it poured down on 120 witnesses (not twelve) as in Acts 1:8. For him the temple is mere materiality.

Guides are certified by the Israel Ministry of Tourism which requires them to follow a lengthy course of study and pass a difficult examination in archaeology, history, and even scientific aspects of Israel’s environment. But still they bring distinctive interpretations. We have seen how Eli from Yad HaShemona provides his own millenarian interpretation. Another guide who spoke good but strongly accented Portuguese provided a highly politicized commentary as his group emerged from the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial – a site which is not usually on the itinerary of evangelical groups. (He blamed Roosevelt for the Holocaust because he did not bomb Auschwitz when it was known what was happening; he criticized Lula the Brazilian president for visiting Arafat ‘the greatest terrorist of them all’; but he also invoked the memory of the Portuguese diplomat who saved thousands of lives by illegally issuing passports to fleeing Jews. “Germans’, he said, ‘are not intelligent: they just obey.’ And Europe’s recent moves to boycott products from West Bank settlements were ‘anti-semitism’.) But it is not clear to me that the tourists are impressed by this discourse, or whether indeed it means anything to them: they wandered through Yad VaShem without a guide<sup>15</sup> and were of course shocked by what they saw, but they did not appear to link it to the city of Jerusalem or the State of Israel.

Another guide, who had the talent of a natural ethnographer, tries to educate the visitors in modern history and archaeology, as if she was giving a first year university course: I listen as she explains that the Pharisees were caricatured in the Gospels; Paul was great at ‘marketing’.

But what do the tourists make of it all? For much of the time they do what tourists do: they buy souvenirs and drink coffee. Their contact with Jews is minimal, limited to the guides. They tend to stay in hotels in East Jerusalem which are staffed by Arabs; they do not arrange contacts with Israeli institutions, religious or secular. Their interest, if it is to be summarized, is to set foot in the land where it all happened – it is a Biblical interest. At the end of the trip they receive certificates from their own pastors and also from the Israeli Ministry of Tourism.

A pastor leading a group tells how in the end, at the Second Coming, the ‘remaining’ Jews will recognize Messiah. He does not relate this to the Jews he sees in the street. The visitors can nevertheless be impressed by the religiosity, the faith, of the Jews they see at the Western Wall.

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<sup>15</sup> Yad VaShem only permits its own guides to escort visitors and on that day the arrangement had failed.

Quite often one hears people say the visit changed their lives or infused them with a sense of holiness or divine inspiration. Among a group of Argentine and Brazilian evangelicals, several of whom are students at a Mexican leadership training institution called MISION which receives students from all over Latin America, someone says he 'feels something' as soon as he gets off the plane in Israel; there are people who come repeatedly. The importance of the experience is linked back to the Bible, to the miracles and epics which they have heard in their churches: 'God is everywhere, but he sent his son to this place, so this place is special'. And with the Bible comes the Word: on seeing the Dead Sea Scrolls someone speaks of the 'preciousness of the word'. They seem to be looking to link up personally and materially with the Biblical stories more than with Jews or any other contemporary social category.

Tiago Brunet's groups are always taken to the Jerusalem House of Prayer for all Nations at the summit of the Mount of Olives, which once belonged to a Muslim who, he told me, had a vision telling him to open it to Christ. They say the vision persisted till he obeyed and handed it to evangelicals – principally it seems to evangelical author Tom Hess. The house has a large skylight looking to the sky, surrounded by indicators pointing to all the countries of the world. Outside a passage from the Bible is reproduced in numerous languages on tiled plaques, as at the baptismal site at Kibbutz Yardeni. In the House of Prayer groups spend as long as two hours praying and singing, often interspersed with sobbing and cries of praise.

## 7. Messianic congregations in Jerusalem

In late 2013, after my encounters in Brazil, I pursued these themes further in Jerusalem, first by talking to Alec Goldberg, and later in a meeting with Joseph Shulam of the Netivyah Centre. Alec is Director of the [Caspari Centre](#) which I would describe as a messianic think-tank, headed by a Jew but staffed by Scandinavian Christians. He is Russian-born, Jewish, and a believer in the Messiah. Alex describes the Messianic Movement as 'Jewish at least in terms of its leadership' but with many followers who are not 'technically' Jewish. Later he says that this may be true in Israel but in the Diaspora most congregation members are not Jewish. In the US Messianics are 'much more Jewish' in their expression and rituals and call their premises 'synagogues', whereas in Israel they don't (see 'King of Kings' below). In Israel he describes Messianic congregations as following an evangelical style of worship, with little liturgy: 'everything is fluid'. In his depiction, Israeli messianism is not a home-grown phenomenon: most leaders became believers abroad and organizations depend a lot on overseas support, financial and other. For all this, he attaches much importance to ethnic Jewish identity and signs of belonging (viz. circumcision), to Zionist adherence, and says there is a preference for, though not an insistence on, marriage within the messianic community. In fact, there is not really an 'insistence' on anything – as he says 'everything is fluid'.

Joseph Shulam comes from a very different point of view and a very different background. I knew about his [Netivyah Centre](#) through Marcelo Guimarães in Belo Horizonte who, I now discovered, had contacted him after reading an article about him in *Newsweek* in 1993. He regards the Caspari Centre and the evangelical-style Messianic congregations described below as vehicles to convert Jews to Christianity (yet Alec Goldberg seemed to attach much importance to the practice of circumcision among his coreligionaries.) . For Joseph there is a 'chasm' between Christianity and Judaism, with their 'different histories and goals', but since Christianity is post-Gospel and even post-Pauline the New Testament has to be regarded as part of the Jewish heritage. Jesus of course was a Jew, all the apostles were Jews, and Paul as well. For him this heritage starts with the Old Testament and goes all the way to modern times, and should be valued for its universalism – so for example he mentioned A.J. Heschel as an example of the universalism which he says today is somewhat in retreat in Judaism. The word 'Christian' barely appears in the New Testament (three times in the Epistles of Paul) which 'belong to us'. Yeshua is 'the only bridge, and 'the key to the survival of the Jewish people'. So unlike King of Kings (below) for example, Netivyah has a synagogue with an Ark and Torah scrolls, and they use the standard Orthodox Israeli prayer book.

Joseph counts himself as a 'believer' like other Messianics, but he is not among those who are on a path to Christianity: indeed when he circumcised his newborn son in 1969 it caused a scandal among the believer circles. He is on the 'far left' of messianism – by which he means he is the most averse to a transposition of Jews to Christianity. He is also – like all the messianics – a fervent Zionist, who regards the settlers as the only Zionists, now that the rest of Israel (except the ultra-Orthodox) are post-Zionist. Side by side with his messianism is his strong conviction that Israel has a demographic crisis because of declining birth rates among those who are neither Arabs nor ultra-Orthodox. So this is where the anussim come to the rescue. There are millions of descendants of those who were forced to hide their Jewish identity by the Inquisition and yet very often continued to preserve some traditions in secret for centuries. He recounts for example how a Portuguese guide who escorted him and a group around the country eventually broke down and 'confessed' that her grandparents used to light a candle on Friday evening and hide it in a tin-lined cupboard, and he adds numerous other customs which I have also heard about in Brazil. This vast population can form the basis of new immigrants to Israel. And indeed Marcelo's congregation is the only other organization figuring on the Netivyah website. The website also contains numerous visual and audio resources which foreground more than my interview the political dimension of Shulam's vision: the joining of the religiosity of Israel's Jews and the Jews in general with the message of Jesus and the hope of his return.

Netivyah also has a social programme, subsidized by the Jerusalem municipality, distributing food entitlements worth 400 shekels to needy people.

I ask him, as I ask others, if there is a core or coherent doctrine which is common to the messianic movement as a whole, and he like others, says there is not and

above all he does not think there is a need for one. Rather he recalls how periods of crisis are also in Jewish history periods of creativity, so he is not concerned about the proliferation of procedures, rituals, beliefs and doctrines.

#### 1. King of Kings congregation

A congregation which gathers weekly in a room in a large building on Jerusalem's main street – Yaffo. The meetings are on Friday evening – Shabbat. The format is loose, and the central feature is an address by a preacher. The leader is called 'roeh' – shepherd/pastor. Songs are sung in Hebrew to words projected onto a screen with Roman transliteration: the songs include one very well-known Jewish song, but with a crucial change to mention the Holy Spirit (Ruach Elyon, Ruach Shalom) and at another point verses from Hatikva (the Israeli/Zionist Anthem) are introduced but again with a crucial change to include Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew).

In conversation with a congregant I ask how he would describe this meeting or meeting place – is it a synagogue? and he says 'no, there is no Ark...'

There is no Torah scroll or Ark. Just a simply podium and lectern.

The preacher tells me that the various Messianic congregations across the world do not have a 'core', that there is no point in looking for a core – the core is simply the Bible. He works for [Intercessors for Israel](#), and is born Jewish like various others present.

Simultaneous translation is provided for a group of people sitting in one part of the room.

#### 2. Messianic service at Christ Church, Old City

This is similar to the King of Kings, except that it includes, surprisingly, a Eucharist, which is celebrated with much ceremony and a clear emphasis on the doctrine of transubstantiation (which evangelicals reject), and there is even less Jewish material in the service. It takes place in Christ Church, which stands near to the Jaffa Gate in the Old City and resembles a standard English 19th century parish church. The leaders are a pair of brothers who were brought up in a yeshiva world but became messianics, or believers and have been running this congregation for forty years. There seems to be little evangelization and much of the congregation – maybe half – were non-Hebrew speakers using a very effective wireless-transmitted simultaneous translation system.

## 8. The temple of Solomon in São Paulo

In 2011 the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God started work on the construction of a building it has called the Temple of Solomon. Although initially described by some as a replica of the original, the Church has since dropped that

word, since as the architect told me, it is hard to speak of a replica which it is ten or more times larger than the original may have been. It is some 75 metres high – the height of a 19-storey building and the size of a shopping mall. The church has bought property in the surrounding streets to create the space and precincts needed, leading to a multiplication of property prices in the area. It seems that it will, and perhaps is intended to, bring about a financial or commercial transformation of an industrial area in decline (Braz) which once was the site of thriving textile factories, and now houses numerous small shops trading in the materials second hand clothes.

The church's leader, Edir Macedo, has said he is building the Temple to enable Brazilians and others of all faiths who cannot go to Israel to have the experience of the Temple in their own country. The design of the building, whose progress is monitored on a [website](#), is based on Herod's Temple, with many features of a Roman temple. The architect told me that the description in the Book of Kings is impossible to interpret or reproduce because we do not know what the measurements really meant, and of course they are not technical descriptions anyhow. The important aspect from our point of view is that the building's reinforced concrete structure as well as its surrounding esplanade are entirely faced and paved with thin slabs of stone 3 cm. thick brought from Hebron, which the architect told me, was the source of the stones used to build the last two Jerusalem temples. It is designed for about 10,000 people, but also has recording studios, meeting rooms, accommodation for the church's leader and offices. Next to it, and somewhat dwarfed by it, sits a cupola which from the outside has the shape of a small mosque dome but is in fact the roof of a small museum where the history of the church will be exhibited. (The architect's assistant remarked on the disproportion between the two structures.) The pillars which stood outside the original temple, as described in I Kings 7 known as Jachin and Boaz, are reproduced, according to the architect, inside rather than outside. But the Encyclopaedia Judaica says that in Solomon's Temple they stood outside the sanctuary within the entrance hall.<sup>16</sup>

The Universal Church also uses some Jewish emblems in many of its churches in Brazil and perhaps elsewhere (since it is a global organization). Notable is the Star of David etched in stained glass windows or depicted in other prominent places, and a replica of the Ark of the Covenant on its podiums, painted in gold and with two long poles, as if ready to be carried by four people. Beyond that, however, the church has not gone far – that is its pastors do not commemorate Jewish festivals, for example. The Church does however place strong emphasis on connections with Israel, where it has established a small foothold and has cultivated connections with politicians. It arranges tours for its followers who

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with the architect, Rogerio Araujo on 15 March 2013. see II Kings 7:15–22, 41–42 and II Chronicles 3:15–17; 4:12–13.

The interpretation of the Encyclopaedia Judaica, is reproduced on the Jewish Virtual Library website:  
[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0011\\_0\\_09825.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0011_0_09825.html)

stay at Yad HaShemona and Macedo himself takes groups of his officials (bishops and pastors) from around the world on trips to Israel. They bring suitcases full of followers' prayers and petitions ('pedidos de promessa') which are offered in churches and they offer them as sacrifices on Mount Sinai – though tour guides in Jerusalem say they sometimes go to other summits to save time.

In conversations with Brazilian observers of the Universal Church I have heard various interpretations of what the Universal Church and above all Macedo is trying to achieve. Unlike other examples we have offered here the ritual procedures in the Universal Church are standardized, even though they change from time to time, but in that context the place of Jewish references is more to do with the Bible than with Judaism. This is not exceptional: we saw how Tiago Brunet of Nayra's church also made a distinction between what is Biblical and what is Jewish. Macedo does cultivate Jewish connections, but this is largely for political reasons – notably his interest in tourism, in Israel. Next to the vast 'Catedral da Fe' he built in the Rio suburb of Del Castilho there is a Museum containing a miniature replica of Jerusalem as it was at various times in its history, reproducing the replica at Jerusalem's Shrine of the Book (adjacent to the Israel Museum). This museum has received symbolic and political support in the form of visits by Israeli Diplomatic representatives and also by leaders of Rio's Jewish community.

## 9. Commercial aspects

In September 2011 I visited the Expo Cristão at São Paulo's Anhembi Conference Centre (Centro de Convenções). This is a commercial event for the benefit of the evangelical market. I had expected it to appeal mostly to pastors and business people but in fact the crowds – and they numbered many thousands – were overwhelmingly young people below, roughly, the age of 40. There were many stalls selling devotional, self-improvement and self-realization literature, including a large stall belonging to the Universal Church's own publishing house. But there were also several stalls belonging to travel agencies advertising trips to Israel and one which sold matzohs, prayer shawls, shofars, silver goblets and the like.

In my later researches I realized that pastors like Tiago Brunet are by no means exceptional: René Terra Nova also has a substantial travel agency business. In Israel some messianics seem quite heavily involved as tourist guides; Kibbutz Yardeni must be making fortunes from the baptismal 'ghat' it has built, though this is hardly specific to Messianics, catering principally to evangelicals.

## 10. Conclusions

Although they recognize the divine inspiration and validity of both Old and New Testament, and although it is impossible to define a core set of beliefs common to all those I have met – let alone the thousands I have not encountered – one generalization which could be made is that most of the Messianic congregations and groups do not use any recognizably Christian ritual elements – with the exception of the one I attended in Christ Church in Jerusalem’s Old City which celebrates the Eucharist with bread and wine and a proclamation of the transubstantiation. Insofar as they do have rituals, like those I observed in Brazil, they are Jewish or derivative of Jewish practices. But then what in this context are Christian rituals? For Messianics Christian means evangelical and evangelicals regard the rites of Catholic and Orthodox as forms of paganism. So they borrow, or inherit, from evangelicals, in varying doses, forms of address and interaction between preacher and congregation, use of music, tithing in some cases (when congregants line up to make their contributions), gestures such as holding their arms high, laying on hands in a gesture of healing, and occasionally (I am told) exorcism and glossolalia. These are uncodified but widely recognizable shared elements of evangelical culture. It is possible that they go to make up a classic stereotype which remains at the core even though there are many variations, but for the time being I do not see that core. Joseph Shulam (who described himself as on the ‘left’ of the movement’) is an exception: he uses no evangelical gestures and techniques.)

The messianics share these characteristics, but rather than so to speak ‘balancing’ them with Jewish beliefs or doctrine, they adopt Jewish practices and mark the dates of Jewish festivals with haphazardly selected practices like blowing the shofar, circumcision, or reading from the week’s Torah portion. In Rabbinic Judaism, in the yeshiva world, which lie at the heart of the Jewish heritage and Jewish education, they have no interest whatsoever. The only text of interest is the Bible, and the commentaries they refer to are the work of modern leaders of their movement.

Messianics also share a strong commitment to Jewish presence in the historic land of Israel, although the Messianics who are Israeli citizens seem to have a range of political opinions in Israel’s domestic spectrum. Messianics worldwide, be they of Jewish upbringing or not, also attach a great deal of importance to personal acquaintance with the land, and it may well be that this attachment, and the political advocacy which comes with it, are more fundamental and more motivationally important than my interviews conveyed. (I tended to avoid political issues.)

This attachment to the land can in turn be linked, perhaps, to an attachment to the concrete and a distancing from the symbolic and metaphorical which distinguishes some contemporary religiosity. It is surprising to me that people for whom the supernatural is quite intangible, and who for the most part reject transubstantiation as well as anthropomorphic representations for God or Jesus, express a strong attachment to the place which God chose to send the Messiah,



and also a strong commitment to the earthly political arrangements governing that place two thousand years later. Of course, they also believe Jesus will return and that he will return in this place, but given that so much else in their religious observance is symbolic or immaterial, why is this specific question concentrated into such concrete materiality?

In Brazil (in the cases I observed) the focus on the concrete takes the form of adoption of Jewish motifs in worship, such as prayer shawls, Hebrew liturgy, blowing the shofar, rules of Sabbath observance, and even of circumcision. This pattern seems independent of the emphasis placed on Jesus as Messiah, but whether that observance is of any significance I cannot tell. So much seems arbitrary or incidental.

Either way, there is little interest if any among Messianics in Rabbinical Judaism or Halakha. The Halakha ought to be a way of filtering the many commandments in the Bible, since it can be seen as a translation of those commandments into rules for everyday life. But the pattern of observance and adoption is localized and seems to reflect the options of congregations or their leaders which do not so far appear to have a 'logic'.

## Research Questions

What if anything do this family of messianic movements/congregations/churches/synagogues have in common?

How can one begin to explain the reach for the inclusion of Jewish themes in evangelical celebrations?

The phenomenon of Jewish 'believers' has to be explored, especially in the US and Europe. In Israel it is quite limited and may well be a derivative of the business and other opportunities provided by the vast Christian tourist industry in the country.

The core role of the Biblical text is important. This in turn maybe related to the focus on the concrete and the material which seems to characterize these movements.

Of course whether we focus on Jewish believers' congregations or on Christian people adopting Jewish habits, customs and procedures, there is a major question of religious authority. Most of these congregations have a local source of authority which is more or less connected to higher or global sources, but usually very little if at all.

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