

THE THEOLOGICAL MYSTERY, LOGICAL AMBIGUITY,  
HISTORICAL DILEMMA, PERSONAL  
PERPLEXITY, & HUMAN ANGUISH OF  
RELATIONS BETWEEN  
**JEWS & CHRISTIANS**

You're right, I can't cover all that in one Thinksheet. Rather, my purpose is simple, viz to try to express a **prayerful discomfort** over a self-contradiction, my finding it impossible to resolve a logical ambiguity: I am of two minds:

MIND #1: Every human **group** has the inherent right of self-definition, of identifying itself positively (ie, who we are) & negatively (ie, who are aren't).

MIND #2: **Individuals** native to a group have the dual right (1) to continue to identify themselves as of the group or (2) to dissociate themselves from the group, disclaiming their birth identity.

Here's a case to test my propositions:

1 I'm more apt to provide public support for rabbis than opposition, & I've never gone public in opposing rabbis' opposition to what for sixty years I've know as "Hebrew Christian" organizations, recent incarnations being Moshe Rosen's "Jews for Jesus" and the very recent "Messianic ["Completed"] Jews" movement. But when Rabbi Elias J. Lieberman, E.Falmouth MA, went public against Christian converts from Judaism who continue to identify themselves as Jews (in & since the Talmud, "belief in Jesus as messiah is simply beyond the pale of Jewish thought" [CCT letter, 26 Nov 91]), this prompted my letter (above) five days later.

2 Correctly, the rabbi mentions "thousands of people who choose to become Jews each year through the process of conversion." These converts need not surrender their birth ethnicity, but they must abandon any unacceptable beliefs, such as the Christian belief in Jesus. Converts from Judaism to Christianity must accept the Christian belief in Jesus, but why--contra the rabbi--should nonChristian Jews insist that these converts surrender their birth ethnicity? The conventional answer carries much truth: Jews have beliefs + **peoplehood** + community, Christians have only beliefs + community.

Does this mean that every Christian church is nonethnic? Far from it! Many are more ethnic than Christian, indeed are Christian chiefly as the primary means of remaining ethnic in a foreign land. But our ethnic churches are, unlike the synagogues, of many ethnicities. A few hundred of our churches are Hebrew-ethnic, Jewish-ethnic, a situation nonsensical to nonChristian Jews but perfectly sensible within Christianity, which is not a religion of a single ethnicity.

3 The Christian apostle Paul lived & died a Jew ("a pure-blooded Hebrew,...a Pharisee" [Phil.3.5], "a member of the strictest party of our religion, the Pharisees" [Ac.26.5]), but powerfully opposed Jewish Christians who thought of themselves as superior to nonJewish Christians. Christianity is a **universal** religion (Jesus Christ is everybody's Messiah-Christ-Savior, Ro.1.16f), so **tribal** Jewish trappings are not to be imposed on nonJewish Christians (Gal., Ac.15). No Jewish Christian group tries to impose Jewish customs on nonJewish Christians, but all of them are in perpetual danger of overvaluing, & overclaiming for, the Jewish elements in their Christian praxis (worship & life). For different reasons, the rabbi & I worry about them.

## Question of 'Christian Jews' debated

I can understand Rabbi Lieberman's objection to Christian Jews identifying themselves as Jews. He wants to keep neat and clear the division between Jews and Christians. But it violates the spirit of freedom for some Jews to tell other Jews to stop calling themselves Jews.

Furthermore, the separation is not as neat as he could wish. Consider:

■ All the earliest Christians considered themselves Jews, messianic Jews. Contemporary "messi-

anic Jews" see themselves as their heirs.

■ The rabbi's congregation meets in an 18th-century Christian (Congregational) building, given by the Christians to the Jews.

I could sympathize with the rabbi saying, "We refuse to recognize them ("messianic" Jews) as Jews." But he goes too far when he said, "They are not Jews."

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