

Introduction to the Thought and Theology of Mark Kinzer

THE FIRST TIME I met Mark Kinzer, we sat at a coffee shop in Pasadena, CA and shared our stories. As a Jewish believer in Jesus living primarily in the Christian world, I sensed intuitively the existential angst inherent in self-identifying as a Messianic Jew. I had all but buried my Jewish identity, and I knew that this was in many ways the easy road. But recently, I had felt repeatedly allured to acknowledge and explore my Jewishness, and my meeting with Mark came at an opportune time. One of my Christian mentors had told me that bridges are useful, but no one lives on a bridge. With this in mind, I mused about how isolating it must be to live between two worlds, and I will never forget Mark's response: "Yeshua¹ never said that our way would be easy." The gravity of this statement penetrated deeply, and I have not stopped reflecting on—and experiencing—the truth of it since.

Messianic Judaism's path is anything but easy. Mark Kinzer continues to play a pioneering role in a movement fraught with trials on

1. Referring to Jesus by his Hebrew name, Yeshua, issues a reminder that Jesus was (and is) a Jew and that this fact carries with it certain implications that are all too often overlooked by the church. Kinzer feels strongly about this and related terminological specifications, for they serve to linguistically reinforce his theological position. In *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Kinzer includes the following explanation of terms: "The one known in the church as Jesus Christ will here be referred to as *Yeshua the Messiah*. As a matter of historical record, all scholars today recognize that the first-century figure Yeshua of Nazareth was a Jew. However, very few of those who believe that he was raised from the dead acknowledge that he remains a Jew today and will do so forever, or consider the implications of this fact. By using an alien, Jewish-sounding name to refer to the one who is so familiar to the church, I hope to suggest that Yeshua is still at home with those who are literally his family, and that the church must reckon with the subtle ways it has lost touch with its own identity as a messianic, multinational extension of the Jewish people" (Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 22).

Kinzer's early writings, including some of the sources printed and referenced in this volume, employ more typically Christian parlance. The changes in his terminology reflect his own process of theological and existential development.

all sides, and his negotiation of the numerous (and often conflicting) dynamics that characterize the movement is masterful. Kinzer is deeply committed to Jewish tradition and life while firmly holding on to belief in the messiahship of Yeshua. For Kinzer, Yeshua is not just someone who gets tacked on to a vibrant Jewish faith—Yeshua is at the heart of that faith, giving it its true texture and its deepest meaning. As a theologian, Kinzer holds a passionate conviction that we must do theology with Jewish religious tradition in one hand and Christian religious tradition in the other.

Judaism and Christianity² have historically, since the proverbial “parting of the ways,” most often been construed in contradistinction from one another, holding mutually exclusive theological claims. In this schema, Yeshua becomes the dividing line. Jews often quip that the one thing all branches of Judaism agree upon is that Yeshua was not the Messiah. Against this traditional and ingrained paradigm, Kinzer proposes a radically new arrangement of the theological puzzle pieces, one in which Yeshua is the *essential link* between Judaism and Christianity rather than their fundamental distinguishing factor.

Kinzer is unwilling to accept Judaism and Christianity as two completely separate phenomena and argues convincingly that this is not the configuration we see in the New Testament. Rather, the two are fundamentally linked and inextricably bound together—to each other and to God’s redemptive purposes for all of creation. Of course this argument cannot undo or deny the historical development by which the two have empirically become separate, distinct, and in many ways averse to one another. In Kinzer’s paradigm, Messianic Judaism and Messianic Jews provide the link that binds these two realities together. Kinzer’s ideas have relevance that reaches far beyond Messianic Judaism alone—his claims, if true, radically affect both the church and the people of Israel. According to Kinzer, each tradition holds a unique component of cre-

2. Kinzer understands the term “Christianity” to refer to the religious tradition of the Gentile wing of the Body of Messiah that developed to a large extent in distinction from and opposition to Judaism. In *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Kinzer writes: “Because the terms themselves imply mutual exclusivity, in this book I will not use the words *Christianity*, *Christians*, and *church* in a conventional manner. I will employ them only to refer to the developed institutional reality that became overwhelmingly Gentile in composition and character. In speaking of realities that should be conceived of as integrally bound to Judaism and the Jewish people, or even as situated within those spheres, I will speak of Yeshua-*faith* (rather than Christianity), Yeshua-*believers* (rather than Christians), and the *ekklesia* (rather than the church)” (Ibid., 22).

ation's unfolding redemption, and the truth is only revealed when these two pieces are united.

Kinzer's method represents the cross-directional twin tasks of explaining the Jewish piece to Christians (who have historically perceived Judaism as either spiritually bankrupt because of its rejection of Yeshua or as a typologically significant precursor to Yeshua whose significance has since been superseded by the church) and the Christian piece to Jews (who have historically experienced and therefore justifiably perceived Christianity as a threat to the very lifeblood of Jewish existence). In the implementation of this dual representation, Messianic Judaism emerges as the critical link, and Kinzer's theology offers a call to Jewish Yeshua-believers to embody the bridge-building role to which they have been existentially assigned.

The radical nature of Kinzer's proposal has produced a host of critics,³ yet Kinzer feels a prophetic call to speak the truth as he sees it. In a manner reminiscent of Martin Luther, the great reformer, Kinzer stands behind his controversial paradigm claiming, "I can do no other." The connection that Kinzer builds between Israel, Yeshua and the Yeshua-believing community (or *ekklesia*) creates a rich and nuanced interpretation of salvation history that opens new vistas for understanding God's redemptive work in the world. The relationship that Kinzer develops between each of these component parts lays the groundwork for his theological paradigm—a paradigm with far-reaching implications.

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Kinzer's understanding of Messianic Judaism is "postmissionary," and he emphasizes the significance of Messianic Judaism's primary identity lying fundamentally *within* the people of Israel. According to Kinzer, Messianic Jews do not stand apart from or over against the people of Israel but rather should identify deeply with Israel's complex history and ongoing journey. By living in solidarity with the people of Israel, Messianic Jews take upon themselves the many facets of Jewish covenantal life and build a bridge between Israel and the church. Kinzer offers three primary markers of a postmissionary stance:

3. See Kinzer, "Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, Three Years Later: Reflections on a Conversation Just Begun," 175–95.

First, *postmissionary Messianic Judaism summons Messianic Jews to live an observant Jewish life as an act of covenant fidelity rather than missionary expediency* . . . Second, *postmissionary Messianic Judaism embraces the Jewish people and its religious tradition, and discovers God and Messiah in the midst of Israel* . . . Third, *postmissionary Messianic Judaism serves the (Gentile) Christian church by linking it to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thereby confirming its identity as a multinational extension of the people of Israel*.⁴

Each of these three markers provides an important foundational element for Kinzer's theology. Kinzer's first claim is twofold, asserting unequivocally that Messianic Jews are indeed "to live an observant Jewish life." This core tenet of Kinzer's theology, stated firmly throughout his writings, is a significant statement in its own right. This stance goes against the grain of much of Christian history and points toward a radical reconfiguration of the church's understanding of the Jews in its midst.⁵ For Kinzer, the ecclesiological implications of this claim are grounded in its biblical precedent. "Contrary to what is usually assumed, I conclude that the New Testament—read canonically and theologically—teaches that all Jews (including Yeshua-believers) are not only permitted but are obligated to follow basic Jewish practice."⁶

The implications of this claim undergird Kinzer's entire theological system. Commenting on *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Kinzer asserts that "while the message of *PMJ* goes far beyond the obligatory nature of Torah-based Jewish practice and identity for Jewish Yeshua-believers, one cannot underestimate the centrality of this proposition for the argument of the book as a whole. It is far more important as the basis for reaching other conclusions than as a conclusion in its own right."⁷

The second part of the first claim is equally important: Messianic Jewish covenant fidelity is not motivated by "missionary expediency." If Messianic Jews understand themselves as part of the larger people of

4. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 13–15.

5. Kinzer comments on the strange reversal perpetuated by the church with regard to Jews and Gentiles—"while the early Jewish Yeshua-movement decided that a Gentile did not need to become a Jew in order to be saved, the growing consensus among Christians was that in effect a Jew did need to become a Gentile to be saved!" (Ibid., 194).

6. Ibid., 23.

7. Kinzer, "Three Years Later," 184.

Israel, then their commitment to that people and their acceptance of Israel's covenant responsibilities are rooted in their identification with and participation in that covenant.⁸ According to Michael Wyschogrod,

To be a Jew means to labor under the yoke of the commandments . . . Now the point is that once someone is a Jew, he always remains a Jew. Once someone has come under the yoke of the commandments, there is no escaping this yoke. So baptism, from the Jewish point of view, does not make eating pork into a neutral act. In fact, nothing that a Jew can do enables him to escape from the yoke of the commandments.⁹

The implication is clear—belief in Yeshua as the Messiah does not cause a Jew to cease being a Jew, and thereby does not exempt them from Jewish covenant responsibilities. While Wyschogrod (an Orthodox Jew) does not agree with Kinzer's theological convictions regarding Yeshua, he does agree with Kinzer's position on how Messianic Jews ought to live.

In fact, throughout the centuries, Jews who entered the Church very quickly lost their Jewish identity. Within several generations they intermarried and the Jewish traces disappeared . . . In short, if all Jews in past ages had followed the advice of the Church to become Christians, there would be no more Jews in the world today. The question we must ask is: Does the Church really want a world without Jews? Does the Church believe that such a world is in accordance with the will of God? Or does the Church believe that it is God's will, even after the coming of Yeshua, that there be a Jewish people in the world? . . . If, from the Christian point of view, Israel's election remains a contemporary reality, then the disappearance of the Jewish people from the world cannot be an acceptable development. Closely related to the survival of the Jewish people is the question of the Mosaic Law.¹⁰

Just as Wyschogrod offers this challenge to the church, Kinzer sees his theology as a clarion call for the church to reconsider its stance toward the Jewish people. "Christians who now affirm the irrevocable nature of the covenant between God and Israel must rethink their ap-

8. This of course raises questions about a Messianic Jewish stance toward Oral Torah, the necessary bridge between biblical commandments and their execution. Kinzer addresses this question in chapter 7 of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, as well as in the essay "A Biblical Defense of Oral Torah," 29–61.

9. Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 206.

10. *Ibid.*, 207–8.

proach to Jewish practice as rooted in the Torah—for all Jews, including Jewish Yeshua-believers.”¹¹

The second marker of postmissionary Messianic Judaism highlights the solidarity between Messianic Jews and the larger Jewish world, pointing the way to a Christology rooted in God’s covenant with Israel and positing significant continuity between the Hebrew Bible and the New Covenant Scriptures. The third marker lays the groundwork for understanding Messianic Judaism as an essential link between Israel and the church. Again, this configuration offers a new way of understanding Yeshua as a bridge rather than a wedge and puts forth a paradigm whereby Judaism and Christianity are joined while retaining their unique, complementary distinctions.¹² The *ekklesia* becomes an extension—rather than a replacement—of Israel.

While Kinzer makes the case for Messianic Jewish identification with the Jewish people as a whole, belief in Yeshua is not without significant implications.

Messianic Judaism involves more than the subtle tweaking of an existing form of Jewish life and thought—adding a few elements required by faith in Yeshua and subtracting a few elements incompatible with that faith. Instead, the Judaism we have inherited—and continue to practice—is entirely bathed in the bright light of Yeshua’s revelation. In a circular and dynamic interaction, our Judaism provides us with the framework required to interpret Yeshua’s revelation even as it is reconfigured by that revelation. In this way our Judaism and our Yeshua-faith are organically and holistically “integrated.”¹³

Kinzer’s construal of the relationship between Messianic Jews and the larger people of Israel follows Pauline remnant theology, seen most clearly in Romans 9–11. The remnant is both *part of* and *distinct from* the people as a whole. “In Paul’s view the remnant does not replace Israel but instead represents and sanctifies Israel. It serves a priestly function

11. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 210.

12. Following Paul in Galatians 3:28, Kinzer treats the union between Jew and Gentile as analogous to the union between man and woman in marriage. Kinzer claims that “the unity of Jew and Gentile does not imply the elimination of all distinction between the two, any more than the unity of husband and wife eliminates all gender differentiation” (*Ibid.*, 170).

13. Kinzer, “Prayer in Yeshua, Prayer in Israel: The Shema in Messianic Perspective,” 63.

on behalf of the entire nation.”¹⁴ The remnant is called to identify with the Jewish people as well as point this people toward their long-awaited Messiah who fully embodies the mission and identity of Israel.

If this is the role of the remnant of Israel that accepts Yeshua’s messiahship, the reality remains that the vast majority of Israel denies this claim. While much of Christian history has condemned Israel for this fatal blunder, Kinzer views the Jewish people’s rejection of Yeshua as part and parcel of God’s plan for salvation. “Whereas a traditional reading of Romans 9–11 has seen the hardening of nonremnant Israel as exclusively punitive in nature, the texts we have been exploring point in another direction. They depict Israel’s partial hardening as a form of suffering imposed by God so that God’s redemptive purpose for the world might be realized.”¹⁵

Here Kinzer joins with a number of scholars who have begun to read Israel’s rejection of Yeshua in a new light. According to Paul van Buren,

The Gospel met Gentiles as a demand to abandon their pagan ways and the service of the gods that are not God. The Gospel met Jews, as the church after Paul’s time preached it, as the demand to abandon the express commands and covenant of the very God whom the church proclaimed! Here is a profound incoherence that has arisen because of the lack of a proper Christian theology of Israel. The theological reality which such a theology must address, then, is that Israel said No to Jesus Christ out of faithfulness to his Father, the God of Israel.¹⁶

In accordance with van Buren’s assertion, Kinzer observes that “not only does Israel suffer despite its fidelity to the covenant—it actually suffers because of its fidelity to the covenant.”¹⁷ Richard Hays offers a similar assessment, noting that Israel’s partial hardening comes as a result of God’s action, not merely Israel’s obduracy.

Israel’s temporary rejection has occurred for the sake of the Gentiles. It is *God* who has broken the Jewish branches off in order to allow the Gentile branches to be grafted on . . . Thus, in Paul’s mind there is a definite—if mysterious—analogy between

14. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 125.

15. *Ibid.*, 129.

16. Van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*, vol. 2, 34, 276.

17. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 132.

the ‘hardening’ of Israel and the death of Jesus: God has ordained both of these terrible events for the salvation of the world. Thus, the fate of Israel is interpreted Christomorphically, including the hope of the Jews’ ultimate ‘life from the dead’ ([Romans] 11:15). Any Christian community that reckoned seriously with this soteriological analogy between a rejected Israel and a Christ who became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13) would certainly find its treatment of the Jewish people transformed.¹⁸

According to the notion that Israel’s suffering mysteriously participates in Yeshua’s suffering, we see the full implication of Kinzer’s Christology in continuity with Israel. Not only does Yeshua represent the one-man Israel (as we will explore below), but the people of Israel are likewise ontologically tied to their Messiah, even when they do not recognize him. Hence, Kinzer asks, “is it possible that Paul is hinting through these striking parallels between Romans 8 and Romans 9–11 that Israel’s temporary unbelief in Yeshua is itself, paradoxically, a participation in Yeshua’s vicarious, redemptive suffering?”¹⁹

Thomas Torrance notes a similar connection between Yeshua and Israel. “To be the bearer of divine revelation is to suffer, and not only to suffer but to be killed and made alive again, and not only to be made alive but to be continually renewed and refashioned under its creative impact. That is the pre-history of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus in Israel.”²⁰ While Torrance references Israel’s suffering as prefiguring that of Yeshua, Clemens Thoma asserts that Israel’s role was more than merely precursory; the suffering of the Jewish people continues to mirror that of Yeshua.

Auschwitz is the most monumental modern sign for the most intimate bonding and unity of Jewish martyrs—representing all Judaism—with the crucified Christ, although this could not have been conscious for the Jews concerned. The Holocaust is for believing Christians, therefore, an important sign of the unbreakable unity, grounded in the crucified Christ, of Judaism and Christianity despite all divisions, individual paths, and misunderstandings.²¹

Kinzer reaches a similar conclusion, offering a reading of Isaiah 53 that synthesizes the classic Jewish interpretation of the text with the classic Christian interpretation. “Since the Middle Ages, Jewish reading

18. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 433.

19. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 133.

20. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 11.

21. Thoma, *Christian Theology of Judaism*, 159.

of this text has largely followed the classic commentary of Rashi, who views the suffering servant described in the chapter as the people of Israel. Traditional Christian commentators, on the other hand, see this figure as the Messiah and consider the suffering, death, and resurrection of Yeshua to be the fulfillment of the prophecy. In light of the Holocaust, some Yeshua-believing interpreters are suggesting that *the two readings should be combined*.²² If Israel's corporate life is represented by and embodied in Yeshua, then Yeshua's suffering reverberates through his own flesh and blood family. According to Kinzer, "Israel's apparent no to Yeshua resulted in Israel's intimate participation in Yeshua's yes to God."²³

THE PERSON OF YESHUA

As we have already noted, Kinzer's Christology highlights the continuity between God's work in Israel and the mission and identity of Israel's Messiah. Kinzer places Yeshua within the narrative framework of Israel, showing how he comes as the fulfillment of Israel's destiny. "While the enfleshment of the *Memra* (Word) is a new and unique event, it should nonetheless be viewed in continuity with what precedes it—as a concentrated and intensified form of the divine presence that accompanies Israel throughout its historical journey. Thus, contrary to the common Christian canonical narrative, the divinity of Yeshua can be seen not as a radical rupture and disjunction in the story but as a continuation and elevation of a process initiated long before."²⁴

One of the ways in which we see Yeshua embodying "a concentrated and intensified form of the divine presence" is through the invasive quality of his holiness. While Israel was commanded to refrain from contact with ritually unclean objects and persons, lest Israel's holiness be defiled, Yeshua's holiness flows *outward* into the impure world. "Yeshua's contact with the impure does not defile him, but instead transmits purity, holiness, and life to the impure ones around him. Yeshua's life and mission

22. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 228. Italics added. Martin Hengel offers support for interpreting Isaiah 53 as referring to both the people of Israel as well as a future Messiah. "Under certain circumstances the two possibilities could be viewed simultaneously as different aspects of the text, because a Messianic figure is always at the same time a representative of the whole people" (Hengel, "The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period," 81).

23. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 230.

24. Kinzer, "Beginning with the End," 104.

thus display a new type of *kedushah*, a prophetic, invasive holiness that needs no protection, but reaches out to sanctify the profane.”²⁵

Here we see Yeshua enacting the fulfillment of Israel’s destiny, as Israel’s holiness was always intended to expand outward and sanctify the world. When Abraham is called by God in Genesis 12, this element of outward expansion is already present—“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*” (12:3). The prophet Isaiah repeats this idea: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. *I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth*” (49:6). In this way, the presence of God that rests on Israel is mediated to the world through Yeshua.

Once again, Kinzer’s ideas align with those of Michael Wyschogrod. Wyschogrod makes the claim that, along with the temple in Jerusalem, the Jewish people are God’s actual dwelling place. “This is the utter seriousness of the election of Israel. God has decided to tie to himself a people, a people defined by a body, by the seed of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, and this people, who constitute a physical presence in the world, are at the same time the dwelling place for God in the world.”²⁶ While Wyschogrod does not accept the idea of God’s incarnation in the person of Yeshua, he sees this claim as a variation of a Jewish idea rather than something entirely novel. “My claim is that the Christian teaching of the incarnation of God in Jesus is the intensification of the teaching of the dwelling of God in Israel by concentrating that indwelling in one Jew rather than leaving it diffused in the people of Jesus as a whole.”²⁷

The intensification and concentration that Wyschogrod speaks of perfectly characterizes Kinzer’s Christology. “In Yeshua the tent of the divine presence takes a new form. As the true Israelite, blameless and holy, Yeshua sums up all that Israel was intended to be. He becomes the perfect temple, priest, and sacrifice, offering himself to God on behalf of Israel, the nations, and the entire creation. Yeshua dies not only as a sacrifice but also as Israel’s perfect martyr, who, like Isaac in the *Akedah*, embodies all

25. *Ibid.*, 107.

26. Wyschogrod, “Incarnation,” 212–13.

27. Wyschogrod, *Abraham’s Promise*, 178.

of Israel's martyrs in himself, and whose blood is shed both to atone for sins and to prepare the way for the coming of *Olam Haba*.²⁸

In fact, Kinzer's Christology posits that Yeshua is precisely the intensification of God's presence in Israel—for Kinzer, Yeshua is the one-man Israel. "The New Testament employs many biblical images in its attempt to explore the meaning and significance of Yeshua. One of those images has special relevance to our topic of study: Yeshua as representative and individual embodiment of the entire people of Israel."²⁹ Yeshua both sums up the story of Israel and points forward toward the prophetic fulfillment of Israel's ultimate destiny as a light to the nations and the sanctifying agent for the whole world. Along these lines, N.T. Wright observes that the gospels "tell the story of Jesus in such a way as to convey the belief that this story is the climax of Israel's story. They therefore have the *form* of the story of Israel, now reworked in terms of a single human life."³⁰

As well as seeing the incarnation as an intensification of the reality of God in Israel, Kinzer views Yeshua's death in a similar manner.

Just as the Apostolic Writings [New Testament] portray the divine enfleshment in the priestly imagery of the *Mishkan*-temple, so they portray the death of Yeshua in the priestly imagery of atoning sacrifice . . . If Yeshua is the perfect one-man Israel, then his death as a martyr under the Romans sums up all of Israel's righteous suffering through the ages, provides the ultimate expression of the commitment to God and self-giving love shown first in the *Akedah*, and effects definitive atonement . . . A Messianic Jewish version of the canonical narrative will see the death of Yeshua in continuity not only with Israel's temple system but also in continuity with Israel's ongoing life in this world. As with the incarnation, so with Yeshua's atoning death: the Messiah epitomizes and elevates Israel's story, rather than ending it and beginning something entirely new.³¹

Christology conceived in this manner implies a close *ongoing* connection between Yeshua and the life of Israel, as noted in the previous section. R. Kendall Soulen makes this connection explicit: "Jesus, the firstborn from the dead, is also the first fruits of God's eschatological

28. Kinzer, "Beginning with the End," 122–23. The *Akedah* is the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22; *Olam Haba* is the world to come.

29. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 217.

30. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 401–2.

31. Kinzer, "Beginning with the End," 108.

vindication of Israel's body. In light of Jesus' bodily resurrection, it is certain not only that God will intervene on behalf of the whole body of Israel at the close of covenant history but also that by this very act God will consummate the world."³² Such an understanding also prevents the possibility of a high Christology leading to an over-realized eschatology. According to Kinzer, Yeshua not only embodies Israel's history but also points forward to the future consummation of that history.

Israel's experience of the abiding presence of Hashem anticipates the consummation of the world, when "the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). That anticipatory experience is brought to a new height in the coming of Yeshua, the one-man Israel, in whom the divine Word becomes flesh. The Apostolic Writings begin their story by narrating the birth of Yeshua, who is Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), and conclude by describing the New Jerusalem as "the dwelling of God" (Revelation 21:3) . . . The incarnation, like the building of the *Mishkan*, also needs to be viewed in terms of proleptic eschatology—it points forward to a reality that is not yet fully in our grasp.³³

While Yeshua's life, death and resurrection are intimately intertwined with Israel's ongoing story, Yeshua inaugurates a future that Israel has not yet experienced. "Thus, certain features of Yeshua's identity and mission (his incarnation and his atoning death) are in continuity with Israel's past history, whereas other features (his resurrection and the founding of the twofold *ekklesia*) are pledges of Israel's promised future."³⁴

THE BODY OF MESSIAH

Having explored Kinzer's theology with regard to Israel and Yeshua, we are now prepared to turn to the ecclesiological implications of his position. Kinzer's ecclesiology is in many ways the capstone of his entire theological system; it provides a blueprint for healing the rupture that currently characterizes the people of God. Kinzer's constructive ecclesiological proposal is what he terms "bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel."³⁵

32. Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 166.

33. Kinzer, "Beginning with the End," 104.

34. *Ibid.*, 112.

35. See Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, chapter 4.

Bilateral ecclesiology is the practical outworking of Kinzer's constellation of theological claims. In *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Kinzer argues against the supersessionist notion that the church replaces Israel, claiming instead that "the Jewish people as a whole retains its position as a community chosen and loved by God. While, in Pauline language, Israel has experienced a 'partial hardening' that temporarily prevents her from corporately embracing Yeshua-faith, she nevertheless remains a holy people, set apart for God and God's purposes." This claim, coupled with the assertion that the "remnant" of Israel within the *ekklesia* is called to be "a representative and priestly component of Israel that sanctifies Israel as a whole,"³⁶ necessarily requires a new ecclesiological configuration.

According to Kinzer, if the remnant is to fulfill its God-given role, "this portion of Israel must truly *live as Israel*—that is, it must be exemplary in observing those traditional Jewish practices that identify the Jewish people as a distinct community chosen and loved by God."³⁷ However, the New Testament also makes clear that the body of Messiah is to include Gentiles who are not required to live as Jews.³⁸ How is the *ekklesia* to accommodate both the calling of the remnant to live as Israel *and* the acknowledgment that Gentile believers need not adopt Jewish practice? "Only one structural arrangement would allow for distinctive Jewish communal life within the context of a transnational community of Jews and Gentiles: the one *ekklesia* must consist of two corporate subcommunities, each with its own formal or informal governmental and communal structures."³⁹ According to this arrangement, the Jewish branch of the *ekklesia* remains distinct from the Gentile branch, and thus serves as a link between the wider *ekklesia* and the wider Israel.

Bilateral ecclesiology "provides the Gentile branch of the *ekklesia* with a way of sharing in Israel's life and blessings without succumbing to supersessionism."⁴⁰ Theologians across the spectrum are increasingly acknowledging a deep and destructive supersessionism woven throughout the church's history.⁴¹ According to Thomas Torrance,

36. *Ibid.*, 151.

37. *Ibid.*

38. See, for example, the ruling of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

39. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 152.

40. *Ibid.*

41. For an excellent assessment of supersessionism throughout the history of the

the deepest schism in the one People of God is the schism between the Christian and the Jewish Church, not that between East and West or Roman and Protestant Christianity. The bitter separation between the Catholic Church and the Synagogue that set in after the Bar Cochba revolt in the second century after Christ was one of the greatest tragedies in the whole of our history, not only for the People of God but for all western civilization . . . Only with the healing of that split in a deep-going reconciliation will all the other divisions with which we struggle in the ecumenical movement finally be overcome.⁴²

Kinzer's proposed ecclesiological shift offers a promising step toward repairing and renouncing this corrosive shadow-side of church history. In Kinzer's assessment, "the rise of Christian supersessionism is correlated with schism between the Jewish and Gentile branches of the *ekklesia*, schism between the Jewish branch and the wider Jewish people, and the demise of Jewish Yeshua-faith as a viable corporate reality."⁴³ If these are the factors that led to supersessionism's triumph, each must be addressed in order to repair the church's derailment with regard to the Jewish people.

Kinzer believes that restoring the Jewish branch of the *ekklesia* is a key factor in righting history's wrongs and healing the schism between Jews and Christians. Thus, as Kinzer states, "while I *am* arguing for the legitimacy and importance of Messianic Judaism, my thesis is that the church's own identity—and not just the identity of Messianic Jews—is at stake in the discussion."⁴⁴ While church history has perpetuated supersessionism, the church nonetheless remains fundamental in God's plan for reconciliation and redemption.

Supersessionism and the crumbling of the ecclesiological bridge, i.e., the Jewish *ekklesia*, damaged the church in a profound way. But we must avoid the temptation to see church history in purely negative terms. The Gentile *ekklesia* preserved the essential message entrusted to it. It continued to proclaim Israel's risen Messiah. It rejected Marcionism and accepted the Jewish Bible as inspired, authoritative, and canonical. It collected the books of the New Testament and arranged them in a manner that further

church, see Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*.

42. Torrance, "The Divine Vocation and Destiny of Israel in World History," 92.

43. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 152.

44. *Ibid.*, 13.

countered Marcionite anti-Judaism. The most virulent forms of anti-Jewish teaching in the second century did not carry the day but were moderated by Irenaeus and later by Augustine. *The church faithfully preserved and carried within it the truths that would allow it eventually to reexamine its history and recognize supersessionism as an error demanding correction.* At the same time, the triumph of supersessionism and the crumbling of the ecclesiological bridge produced a schism in the heart of the people of God.⁴⁵

In other words, buried within the church's tradition and heritage lay the resources to repair the schism. However, these resources alone are not sufficient. Because the Jewish people remain a people elected by God and crafted according to his purposes, their role in salvation history is equally significant and necessary for the reunification of God's people. Just as Kinzer's method is cross-directional, so too is the healing of the schism in Kinzer's scheme. What piece does Israel contribute to the matrix of healing?

If the obedience of Yeshua that led him to death on the cross is rightly interpreted as the perfect embodiment and realization of Israel's covenant fidelity, then Jewish rejection of the church's message in the second century and afterward can rightly be seen as a hidden participation in the obedience of Israel's Messiah . . . When Christians sought to compel Jews to become Christians, they were also seeking to compel them to deny Judaism and the Jewish people—and thus God himself! In this case, saying no to the Yeshua proclaimed by the church became a way of sharing in his perfect yes to God . . . Paradoxically, the Jewish no to Yeshua becomes a sign of his presence in Israel rather than of his absence.⁴⁶

While Israel has apparently rejected God's redemptive work in the person of Yeshua, rabbinic Judaism⁴⁷ has safeguarded a key element of the very message the church proclaims. Kinzer argues that in order for God's consummative purposes to prevail, the church must acknowl-

45. Ibid., 211. Italics added.

46. Ibid., 225–26.

47. According to Peter Ochs, "there is, in one sense, no other Judaism for Jews than that which comes by way of Rabbinic Judaism, or the Judaism of the Mishnah, Talmud, synagogue, prayer book, and Torah study that emerged after, in spite of, and in response to the loss of the Second Temple. All of the new Judaisms that have appeared since have appeared from out of and in terms of this Rabbinic Judaism" (Ochs in Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, 3).

edge and embrace the contribution Jewish tradition has to make. This particular aspect of Kinzer's theology closely resembles that of Franz Rosenzweig.

In the final sections of Rosenzweig's magnum opus, *The Star of Redemption*, he employs the image of a celestial star to describe the relationship and mutual dependence between Judaism and Christianity. Judaism constitutes the inner burning core of the star, and its vocation is to preserve the truth *by preserving itself*. Christianity represents the rays that shine forth from the star, bringing its light and heat to the surrounding environment. For Rosenzweig, Christianity is necessarily missionary,⁴⁸ while Judaism is inherently inward-focused.⁴⁹ Even as each has its own prescribed vocation, they need one another to avoid the dangers that their respective trajectories entail.

According to Rosenzweig, without the balancing counterpart of Judaism, Christianity is susceptible to three related dangers: "spiritualization of the concept of God, apotheosizing of the concept of man, pantheosizing of the concept of the world."⁵⁰ In other words, Christianity is in danger of domesticating God, exalting humanity, and acting as though the world were already redeemed. Judaism's dangers represent a distortion of its calling to self-preservation, and entail forgetfulness of God's plan to redeem the *whole world*. Judaism is in danger of privatizing God, forsaking the world and isolating itself in its own existence.

The dangers of Judaism and Christianity stem from their separate but related tasks and foundations.

Christianity, by radiating outwards, is in danger of evaporating into isolated rays far away from the divine core of truth. Judaism, by growing inwards, is in danger of gathering its heat into its own bosom far distant from the pagan world reality. If there the dangers were spiritualization of God, humanization of God, making

48. "Christianity as eternal way must always spread further. Simple preservation of its continuance would mean for it the renouncing of its eternity and hence death. Christianity must be missionary" (Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 362).

49. "The heart of the fire must burn without ever stopping. Its flame must eternally nourish itself. It does not want nourishment from anywhere else. Time must roll past it without power. The fire must beget its own time. It must beget itself eternally. It must make its life eternal in the succession of generations, each of which begets the following one, as it itself again will bear witness to the preceding one. The bearing witness takes place in the begetting" (Ibid., 317).

50. Ibid., 424–25.

God into the world, then here it was denial of the world, disdain for the world, mortification of the world . . . All three of these dangers are the necessary consequences of the inwardness turned away from the world, as those dangers of Christianity are the consequences of self-renunciation turned toward the world.⁵¹

While the specifics of Kinzer’s “dangers” are slightly different, the framework is the same. For Kinzer, the message of God in Yeshua is structurally flawed when it unhitches itself from Judaism, its source and counterpart. When the church required Jewish “converts” to renounce their former practices, Christianity lost contact with its rootedness in Judaism and thus lost a part of its very self. While it may seem as though this error only affects Jewish believers in Yeshua, according to Rosenzweig, Christianity’s very existence withers if it loses sight of the soil from which it sprouted. In losing its historical rootedness in Judaism, Christianity loses its very God.

Similarly, Judaism needs Christianity’s reminder that the whole world is God’s beloved creation, destined for redemption. Judaism’s delight in the Torah cannot obscure the fact that, through faith in Yeshua, “a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify” (Romans 3:21). Judaism must remember that the God of Israel is also the God of the Gentiles.

In Kinzer’s thought, redemption and reconciliation can only be accomplished when Judaism and Christianity offer their unique treasures and receive the offerings of the other. The implications of this model require the church to rediscover a part of itself that has been lost. “We have argued that the Christian church and the Jewish people together constitute the one people of God and, in a sense, the one Body of Messiah. The schism in the heart of this people has damaged each side and resulted, among Christians, in a truncated vision of the church’s own identity and the identity of its Messiah. To rediscover its own catholicity, the church must rediscover Israel and its relationship to Israel.”⁵²

Messianic Judaism plays a mediating role between the church and the wider Israel, and its calling is to represent and recommend each to the other. Messianic Jews are to play a precarious bridging role—living under the messiahship of Yeshua while fully identifying with the Jewish world. “Bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel summons the Messianic

51. *Ibid.*, 429–30.

52. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 310.

Jewish congregational movement to take a step towards the Jewish world and a step away from its evangelical matrix. Only by being distinct from evangelicalism, and connected to Judaism, can such a Messianic Judaism fulfill its vocation as an ecclesiological bridge enabling the church to discover its identity in relationship to Israel and enabling the Jewish people to encounter its Messiah as it has never done before.”⁵³



The essays included in this volume, several of which have never before been published, offer the reader a unique window into the richness and development of Kinzer’s theology. Each essay refracts Kinzer’s thought from a slightly different angle, allowing the reader to enter his theological system from many different portals. The nature of this volume makes it more accessible than *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, for it does not include the same type of sustained intricacies as the central, and groundbreaking, argument put forth in Kinzer’s first volume.

The twenty-seven year period of Kinzer’s life represented by these essays reveals that though his journey has been complex, the trajectory of his thought has remained constant. In many ways, the vision that is cast in seed-form in “The Messianic Fulfillment of the Jewish Faith” (1982) finds its mature expression in Kinzer’s recent work, as well as in the development of Messianic Jewish Theological Institute (MJTI), founded in 1998. Kinzer’s leadership of this growing educational institution (as well as Congregation Zera Avraham in Ann Arbor, MI) demonstrates the way in which he wholeheartedly lives out his vision for Messianic Judaism. Theology for Kinzer is more than an intellectual exercise—it is way of life.

The essays in this volume provide a tangible manifestation of Kinzer’s cross-directional method. The first two essays offer a sketch of Kinzer’s theology of Messianic Judaism. The third and fourth essays approach the topic from Jewish starting points, interacting with Oral Torah and Jewish prayer, respectively. The fifth and sixth essays begin from the traditional Christian loci of eschatology and soteriology. The seventh essay represents Kinzer’s involvement in the Roman Catholic–Messianic Jewish dialogue group, which met for the first time in the fall of 2000 at

53. Kinzer, “Three Years Later,” 191.

the Camaldoli monastery in Italy.⁵⁴ Finally, the last essay reveals Kinzer's assessment of the responses *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* elicited in the first three years of its reception.

It is my hope that this volume will generate conversations—among the Messianic Jewish, Christian, and larger Jewish worlds—about the person of Yeshua, God's redemptive purposes for creation, and the indelible link between Judaism and Christianity. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik ventures that “when God created the world, He provided an opportunity for the work of His hands—man—to participate in His creation. The Creator, as it were, impaired reality in order that mortal man could repair its flaws and perfect it.”⁵⁵ May we be among those whose lives contribute to the mending of the world, not least by working to repair the schism between Judaism and Christianity. But let us remember, the road will not be easy.

J. Rosner

54. The group has met every year since then, alternating between Italy and Israel (with the exception of 2008, when the meetings were held in Vienna).

55. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 101.