Finding our Way Through Nicaea:
The Deity of Yeshua, Bilateral Ecclesiology, and Redemptive Encounter with the Living God

Mark S. Kinzer, 2010 Hashivenu Forum (Los Angeles)

The Question & Its Importance

A few years ago a controversy erupted in the Israeli Messianic Jewish movement over the question, "Is Yeshua God?" Some leaders had publicly answered the question with a definitive "No!" Their refusal to call Yeshua "God" ignited a firestorm. In the eyes of many, these dissenting leaders had denied the basic tenet of Yeshua-faith.

Though common in Christian parlance, the wording of this question has problematic features which we will examine later in this paper. Nevertheless, the passionate responses evoked on both sides showed that the question touched on a matter of grave concern to all.

The main reasons for this concern are threefold. First, the message of the Good News challenges all of its hearers to answer Yeshua's own question to Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29). The mystery of Yeshua's identity underlies the narrative of all four *Besorot*, and constitutes the core proclamation of the Apostles. The exalted character of Yeshua is the central theme of the Johannine writings, which present him as the enfleshed divine Logos through whom all things were made, the bearer of the divine Name who is one with the Father and who shared the Father's glory before the foundation of the world. While couched in a different idiom, this theme likewise permeates the synoptic *Besorot* and the Apostolic letters. "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" cry the stunned disciples after Yeshua exercised authority over the elements (Mark 4:41). As the early Yeshua-movement grew, its basic confession of faith became the

affirmation, "Yeshua is Lord!" (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Phillipians 2:11). The Good News itself makes the question of Yeshua's transcendent identity a matter of fundamental importance.

Second, discussion of this question dominated the first four centuries of the Yeshua-movement, and resulted in the creedal definitions which gave shape to the Christian theological consensus of the past sixteen centuries. For most of those who identify themselves as "Christians" and as members of the historical community known as the Christian Church, the results of these councils define the substance of their faith, even if they have never heard of Nicaea or Chalcedon and even if they consider the Bible their only doctrinal authority. Affirmation of the deity of Yeshua – and, for many, acknowledgement of the doctrine of the Trinity – constitutes both the center of their confession and the boundary that demarcates its unique character.

As Jewish Yeshua-believers, we may identify as members of the revived "*ekklesia* of the circumcision" rather than "the Christian Church" – which we see as the "*ekklesia* of the uncircumcision," legitimate but incomplete without its Jewish partner. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the reality of the historical Christian community as the primary enduring witness to Yeshua in the world. If we embrace bilateral ecclesiology, then we must seek unity with the Christian Church even as we maintain our own distinctive identity. Once again, the question of Yeshua's transcendent identity – now embodied in explicit and official doctrinal formulations – becomes a matter of fundamental importance.

Third and finally, the denial of Yeshua's deity has been almost as significant for classic forms of Judaism as its affirmation has been for the Christian faith. Until the

middle ages, acknowledgement of Yeshua's deity and worship of the Trinitarian God were considered by Jewish authorities to be *avodah zara*, i.e., idolatry. Eventually this assessment changed in regards to Gentile Christians, but not in regards to Jews who believe in Yeshua. According to traditional Jewish sources, for a Jew to believe in Yeshua as the divine Son of God – and not just as the human Messiah – is to violate the *Shema,* the central Jewish confession that undergirds all Jewish faith.

Jews and Christians thus have agreed on the central importance of the doctrine of Yeshua's deity. The doctrine functioned for many centuries of Jews and Christians as a mutually accepted litmus test for distinguishing authentic Judaism from authentic Christianity. It provided a doctrinal correlate to the practical issue of Torah observance, drawing an unambiguous theological line between the two feuding religious communities just as the Jewish imperative and observance (or Christian prohibition and non-observance) of circumcision, Shabbat, holidays, and *kashrut* established a clear boundary on the level of praxis. For the Jewish people, the chief community-defining positive commandment was "You shall observe the Torah" and the chief negative commandment was "You shall not believe that Jesus is the Son of God." For the Christian Church, the chief community-defining positive commandment was "You shall believe that Jesus is the Son of God" and the chief negative commandment was "You shall not observe the Torah."

The classical Jewish view of the deity of Yeshua becomes especially troubling for Jewish believers in Yeshua who are convinced of the truth of bilateral ecclesiology, and who consequently see themselves as members of the Jewish religious community and heirs of its tradition, as well as partners with the Christian Church within the twofold

Body of Messiah. Just as we are pressed from the Christian side to give up or dilute our conviction that Torah observance is incumbent on every Jew, so we are pressed from the Jewish side to give up or dilute our conviction that Yeshua is more than a man. It would be much easier to deny bilateral ecclesiology, and to live as Jewish Christians who affirm the deity of Jesus in classical Christian terms and treat Torah observance as a mere cultural option, or as conventional Torah-observant Jews who respect Yeshua as a rabbi, prophet, or even Messiah but who refuse to honor him as divine or to seek any organic connection to the Christian Church.

Thus, wherever we turn, we face this burning question, raised for us by the Jewish community in which we claim membership, by the Christian community with which we seek partnership, and by the Good News itself which has laid hold of our lives and claimed our unrestricted allegiance. As Jews steeped in *Tanakh*, formed by a religious tradition centered on confession of the unity of God and ever-sensitive to the dangers of *avodah zarah*, how do we understand and articulate the transcendent identity of Yeshua our Messiah, as presented to us in the *Besorah*? And how do we assess the Christian doctrinal tradition and its articulation of his identity?

The Way of Approach

We have now formulated our question. How shall we best proceed in addressing it? It would seem natural to begin by studying the relevant teaching of the Apostolic Writings, and then continue by examining and critiquing the classic Christian creedal formulas on the basis of that teaching. This approach appears logical and cogent, since it reflects both the unique authority of Scripture within the tradition of the Yeshua-faith community, and the historical progression whereby later theological developments build

upon earlier ones. It also conforms to the standard methodology of evangelical scholarship, which has shaped the theological education of most leaders in the Messianic Jewish world.

I will propose and model here a different approach to the question. Instead of beginning with Scripture, I will begin with the consensus confession of the Christian world, the Nicene Creed, and consider it alongside and in light of Scripture and within a Jewish frame of reference. I will not assume that the Nicene formulation is the best available or the most appropriate for us as Messianic Jews, but I will look for points of continuity between that formulation and the biblical teaching, and will give it the benefit of the doubt when it is under scrutiny.

What is the value of such an approach?

First of all, it expresses an ecclesiological commitment which is controversial among Messianic Jews, but which I consider crucial. To grasp the nature of this commitment, we must ponder the meaning and implications of bilateral ecclesiology. This view perceives the *ekklesia* to be a single but essentially twofold reality: the one *ekklesia* of Messiah is composed of a Jewish and a multi-national *ekklesia*. They are distinct, but inseparable. The Messianic Jewish community has its own distinct identity, but it also has an intimate partnership with the Christian Church.

The history of the Christian Church features an abundance of figures, events, practices, decisions, and ideas that trouble us as Messianic Jews. Fortunately, many of them also trouble our Christian friends. The Christian tradition, like the Jewish tradition, has proved itself to be dynamic, reflective, and self-correcting. We have witnessed remarkable self-correction in the past sixty years in the Church's teaching regarding

Judaism and the Jewish people, and the continuing nature of this process inspires hope for the Church's future. It also opens the door to the bilateral partnership required by a common life in Messiah.

For some Messianic Jews, one of the troubling elements of Christian history is Nicene orthodoxy. However, unlike supersessionism, antinomianism, the inquisition, and the blood-libel, it is inappropriate for us to ask our Christian partners to repent of the Nicene Creed. The Nicene consensus on Christology has endured over more than sixteen centuries, and continues to define the basic contours of Christian faith. In those settings where commitment to Nicene orthodoxy wanes, the Christian Church loses its grip on the Good News as a whole, and weakens in its faith and spiritual vitality.

The Christian Church which is our partner is a Nicene Church. Bilateral ecclesiology calls us to a corporate commitment to this Church. If this is the case, then we cannot dismiss the Nicene Creed in a cavalier fashion. We cannot treat it in a neutral way, as though it were one of many equally viable doctrinal proposals on the table. This Creed summarizes the essential and enduring teaching of our ecclesiological partner, and this means that we must take it seriously and treat it with respect. The Creed need not remain immune to all criticism, but it should always be given the benefit of the doubt. This is sufficient reason to begin our study with the Creed, viewed alongside Scripture and in light of Jewish thought.

A second reason for this approach is hermeneutical. Once Nicene orthodoxy prevailed, it became the lens through which all read the biblical text. Even those who oppose the Nicene consensus read Scripture looking for evidence to support their anti-Nicene

position, demonstrating that they also fail to escape the new interpretative horizon established by the Creed.

There is value in historical scholarship which attempts to bracket off ways of reading the Bible that have pervaded Christian civilization for more than a millennium and a half. However, as soon as we move from historical reconstruction to theological analysis and assertion, we should reject the belief that we are able to abstract ourselves from the flow of history. We should not pretend that we can construct a normative theological system directly from Scripture, uninfluenced by the later theological consensus, and can then evaluate and critique that later consensus objectively on the basis of the system we have constructed. Of course, we can attempt to follow such an approach, and many do. But we should then be unsurprised if many of our readers fail to see a resemblance between the method we purport to follow and the process we actually practice.

I am far from suggesting that a later theological consensus should automatically determine how we read the biblical text. That would be an untenable position for a Messianic Jewish theologian who must continually challenge conventional Christian and Jewish assumptions. I am only arguing that we need to keep both the later Christian theological consensus and the biblical material in sight, and seek to read each in light of the other – and also in light of additional relevant factors, such as the Jewish theological tradition. Scripture has logical and theological, but not methodological, priority.

In effect, I am proposing a theological and hermeneutical approach in which we as Messianic Jews take our place as part of the Jewish community with its tradition of interpretation, and as a partner to the Christian community with its tradition of interpretation, and from that place listen and respond to the Bible's witness to the God of

Israel and the Messiah of Israel. From this place of communal connection, we learn to hear what Jews and Christians have heard before. However, because we are connected to *both* communities and traditions, we also hear new things which these communities' mutual and unnatural isolation prevent them from hearing.

We can describe this as a hermeneutic of *dialectical ecclesial continuity*. In this context, I am using the term "ecclesial" to refer to both the Jewish and Christian communities as historical realities. When we read as those covenantally bound to both of these communities, we read and listen expecting to discover continuity between the message of Scripture and the consensus interpretations it has received in the communal tradition. This expectation may not always be realized, but it nevertheless directs our reading and listening.

Of course, these two communities have disagreed with one another on fundamental matters. This is why our hermeneutic must be *dialectical* as well as *ecclesial*. We view these two communal traditions as one ruptured whole, the broken fragments of a schism that should never have occurred. To read and hear dialectically is to seek to gather up the fragments, to perform a *tikkun* – a repair of what has been broken. We expect each tradition to offer correction and healing to the other.

With our question defined and our approach to it explained, we are now ready to plunge into the deep theological waters that lie before us.

The Nicene Problems

The Problem with the Council

The Council of Nicaea, which convened in 325 C.E., gave its name to a creed that is still sung as part of the weekly liturgy in many Christian churches. As such, the name carries a positive resonance in the ears of most Christians.

This is not so for Messianic Jews. At best, our visceral reaction to Nicaea is ambivalent – and for understandable reasons. First among them is the role played by the Emperor Constantine. The Emperor initiated the Council, and influenced its results. He desired a united Church to promote a united Empire. Thus began the long history of Church-State entanglement that has had such dire consequences for the Jewish people.

A second concern arises from the lack of representation at Nicaea of the Jewish *ekklesia.* Granted, at this time the community of Yeshua-believers who continued to identify and live as Jews was small and marginalized. But it did still exist, as Epiphanius and Jerome later attest. We do not know whether Nazarene bishops were deliberately excluded from the Council, or whether they chose to stay away, or whether they were so marginalized that the question of attendance never arose on either side. In any case, it is difficult for Messianic Jews to view Nicaea as a truly "ecumenical" council, since it was unilateral rather than bilateral in composition. It was a council of the *ekklesia* of the nations.

The most serious problem with Nicaea from a Messianic Jewish perspective is the explicitly anti-Jewish tenor of its conclusions regarding the celebration of Easter. An official synodal letter from the Council rejected any reckoning of the date of Easter in relation to the Jewish calendar:

> We further proclaim to you the good news of the agreement concerning the holy Easter…that all our brethren in the East who formerly *followed the custom of the Jews* are henceforth to celebrate the most sacred feast of Easter at the same time with the Romans and yourselves and all those who have observed Easter from the beginning.[1]

The concern of the Nicene Council was to end a situation where Christians followed "the custom of the Jews." The bishops rejected any sign that the Church was dependent on the Jewish people for its faith or way of life. This intent becomes even clearer in the letter written by the Emperor Constantine announcing the results of the Council:

> It was declared to be particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom [the calculation] of the Jews, who had soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded…We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews…and consequently, in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep the feast….[2]

Nicaea thus represents the definitive moment in the history of Christian supersessionism, when the Christian Church in alliance with the Roman Emperor formally renounced its bilateral constitution.

As a result of these three factors, Nicaea evokes a different visceral response from Messianic Jews than it does from most Christians. The Council as a whole symbolizes for us the Church's conscious and decisive *turning away* from the Jewish people and *turning to* the Roman Empire. We must acknowledge this inner reaction, and be able to explain it to our Christian friends. But it need not determine our judgment of the Nicene Creed.

When Christians honor the Council of Nicaea, they are not paying homage to a Constantinian synthesis of Church and State that most no longer see as valid, and that

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[1] *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume XIV The Seven Ecumenical Councils* (eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 54. Emphasis added.
[2] *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume XIV*, 54. Emphasis added.

even the Catholic Church now finds lacking. They are not denying a vision of a bilateral Church of Jews and Gentiles, which most have never even conceived as a possibility. They are not making the supersessionist claim that the Christian Church lacks any organic connection to or dependence upon Judaism and the Jewish people; in fact, it is theologians loyal to Nicene orthodoxy who have taken the lead over the last forty years in combating supersessionism. When Christians honor the Council of Nicaea, they are doing one thing and one thing only: they are paying homage to Yeshua, and glorifying him as the divine Son who is "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebrews 1:3).

The Nicene Creed is thus analogous to the Church's celebration of Christmas, which is the Creed's ritual correlate. The latter traces its origins to a pagan festival. The former derives from a political process influenced at times by unsavory motives and interests. Neither the holiday nor the Creed should be judged by the purity of its sources or the circumstances of its adoption, but instead by the way it has been understood and practiced by Christians through the centuries.

The Problem with the Creed

These preliminary considerations concerning the Nicene Council clear the way for us to examine the Nicene Creed, and to assess it on its own terms. Before we look at what it says, however, we must raise a significant problem that Messianic Jews have with the Creed itself. The problem we see is not with what the Creed says, but with what it fails to say.

I refer to what Kendall Soulen calls structural supersessionism. Unlike punitive and economic forms of supersessionism, structural supersessionism involves a sin of

omission rather than commission.[3] It summarizes the basic narrative of God's dealings with the world in a manner that ignores the central role played by the Jewish people. It tells the story in a way that moves directly from the creation and fall of human beings, to the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. The people of Israel appear solely as background to the main plot. This supersessionist Christian narrative takes an authoritative form in the Nicene Creed. Like all major Christian confessional statements before and after, the Nicene Creed omits any reference to the people of Israel and its crucial role in the story of God's dealings with the world.[4]

Structural supersessionism constitutes both the most difficult form of supersessionism to overcome, and the easiest. It is most difficult because the Church must do more than merely reassess particular doctrinal positions, such as the enduring validity of Israel's election; the Church must reconstruct its entire theological framework in a manner that gives Israel its proper place in addressing every theological topic. But it is also the easiest form of supersessionsim to address, because it does not require the repudiation of any authoritative doctrinal positions from the Church's theological tradition. Instead, it calls for a doctrinal development that adds to rather than subtracts from the Church's confession of faith. To overcome structural supersessionism, the Church must only recontextualize its historically transmitted deposit of faith within the framework of God's dealings with Israel and the nations.

Thus, the structural supersessionism of the Nicene Creed need pose no problem for us here. We are not evaluating the adequacy of the Creed as an embodiment of the ecclesial

[3] For definitions of these terms, see R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 29-31.
[4] "This omission is reflected in virtually every historic confession of Christian faith from the Creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople to the Augsburg Confession and beyond" (Soulen, 32).

canonical narrative. If we did, we would certainly find it lacking. It requires the addition of material dealing with the people of Israel, material that would provide the necessary context for the affirmations it makes about the person of Yeshua. However, our purpose here is only to assess those affirmations. We are concerned with what the Creed says, not with what it fails to say.

Having examined the problems with Nicaea from a Messianic Jewish perspective, we are now ready to examine what the Creed teaches about Yeshua.

The Nicene Creed

What the Creed Denies

To know what to expect from the Nicene Creed and the right questions to ask concerning it, we must understand the nature of explicit and official doctrine in the history of the Christian Church. George Lindbeck provides a helpful introduction.

> …controversy is the normal means whereby implicit doctrines become explicit, ` and operational ones official. For the most part, only when disputes arise about what it is permissible to teach or practice does a community make up its collective mind and formally make a doctrinal decision…In any case, insofar as official doctrines are the products of conflict…they must be understood in terms of what they oppose (it is usually much easier to specify what they deny than what they affirm)…[5]

This runs counter to our usual assumptions about official doctrine. We normally conceive of Church doctrine as though it were analogous to scientific theory, offering propositional affirmations about reality formulated in technical terms coined for their clarity and precision. Church doctrine does involve affirmations about reality, but they are rarely unambiguous in nature, as demonstrated by the debates concerning their interpretation

[5] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 75.

that invariably follow the establishment of explicit and official doctrine. As Lindbeck points out, what is affirmed may be ambiguous, but what is denied must be clear.

In light of this perspective, let us begin our study of the Nicene Creed by looking at the doctrinal positions that the original Creed of Nicaea anathematized:

> But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different (*ex heteras*) hypostasis or substance (*ousia*) [from the Father], or is created, or subject to alteration or change – these the Catholic Church anathematizes.[6]

Nicene orthodoxy arises as a response to and rejection of Arianism. The Arians believed that the Son of God was a creature. They accepted the biblical teaching that he existed before becoming incarnate and that the world was made through him, but they held that "there was [a time] when He [i.e., the Son of God] was not." If all reality may be classified as either eternal and uncreated or temporal (i.e., with a beginning in time) and created, the Arians place the pre-incarnate Son of God in the "temporal and created" category. He is the first created entity, the highest of the angels, the most exalted being in all creation. But he is not eternal, and he is not truly divine.

The Arian position reflected the Hellenistic philosophical assumptions dominant in the period. According to those assumptions, the eternal realm of divinity was absolutely transcendent, and could have no direct point of contact with the temporal and material world. Such a system of thought excluded divine incarnation in principle. But its implications went far beyond the exclusion of incarnation. In effect, it suggested that the transcendent God was ultimately unknowable, and could not be truly present within the created order. *Such a system of thought excluded in principle the living God of Scripture, the self-revealing One who enters into an intimate covenantal relationship with the*

[6] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 232. Brackets added.

people of Israel. In rejecting Arianism, the Nicene Creed took a stand *against* the common philosophical notions of the day, and *for* the biblical portrayal of the God of Israel

What the Creed Affirms

Now that we have a clear idea of what the Nicene Council sought to deny with its Creed, we are ready to consider what it affirmed.[7] For our purposes, it will be sufficient to look at the opening section of the Creed.

> We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
> maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.
> And in one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah,
> the only begotten (*monogenē*) Son of God,
> begotten (*gennethenta*) of his Father before all worlds,
> Light from (*ek*) Light, true God from (*ek*) true God,
> begotten (*gennethenta*), not made,
> having the same *ousia* (*homoousion*) as the Father,
> through (*dia*) whom all things were made..

The basic framework of this confession of faith derives from Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 8:5-6:

> Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven and on earth – as in fact there are many gods and many lords – yet for us there is one God (*Theos*), the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord (*Kyrios*), Yeshua the Messiah, through (*dia*) whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Paul likely uses the term *Kyrios* here as a Greek substitute for both the tetragrammeton and the Hebrew word *Adonai* ("My lord") which in Jewish practice acts as its surrogate. In this way he builds upon the most fundamental biblical confession of faith, the *Shema,* highlighting the two primary divine names (*Theos/Elohim* and *Kyrios/Adonai*) and the

[7] We will actually be examining the form of the Creed adopted at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE that has become the standard version of the Nicene Creed. It has no significant differences in Christological teaching from the Creed actually adopted at Nicaea.

word "one."[8] Paul thus expands the *Shema* to include Yeshua within a differentiated but singular deity.[9] The Nicene Creed adopts Paul's language ("one God, the Father…one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah…"), and thereby affirms its own continuity with the *Shema*. Paul's short confession is a Yeshua-faith interpretation of the *Shema*, and the Nicene Creed is an expanded interpretation of Paul's confession.

Drawing upon Second-temple Jewish traditions which see the creation of the world as occurring through the mediation of a hypostatic Wisdom or spoken Word, Paul presents "God" as the one "*from whom* are all things," and the "Lord" as the one "*through whom* are all things." The Nicene Creed likewise draws upon Paul's terminology here, describing God the Father as "the maker of heaven and earth and of all things" and Yeshua the Lord as the one "*through* (*dia*) whom all things were made," i.e., by God the Father. It thereby preserves both (1) the Pauline *distinction* between God the Father and the Lord Yeshua by designating each of them with a different divine name (*Theos* and *Kyrios*) and by employing the characteristic Pauline preposition *dia* for the role of Yeshua in the work of creation; and (2) the Pauline *identification* of God and Yeshua through ascription to them of the two primary biblical names for Israel's singular deity, through reference to their joint activity as the source of all created things, and through reiteration of the word "one." Once again, Paul offers a Yeshua-faith interpretation of existing Jewish tradition, and the Nicene Creed offers an expanded interpretation of Paul's teaching.

The Nicene Creed elaborates on this Pauline (and Jewish) framework by adding explanatory language drawn from elsewhere in the Apostolic Writings. The one Lord,

[8] See Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 114.
[9] As the context makes clear, Paul's expanded Messianic *Shema* is aimed, like its traditional Jewish model, at the rejection of pagan idolatry and polytheism.

Yeshua the Messiah, is also "the only-begotten (*monogenous*) Son of God" (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). In John this word may or may not carry the connotation of "begetting" – it may simply mean "only (Son)."[10] The Nicene Creed, however, exploits the word's range of verbal associations by adding two references to the Son's "begetting": "begotten (*gennethenta*) of his Father before all worlds," and "begotten, not made." The Creed thus brings together the Johannine *monogenēs* with a Yeshua-faith interpretation of Psalm 2:7 ("You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; see Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5), and interprets John's *monogenēs* in light of Psalm 2 as "only-begotten Son."

But the Creed also interprets Psalm 2 in light of John. What is the meaning of the "today" in which the Son of Psalm 2 is begotten? Is this a reference to Miriam's conception of Yeshua? To Yeshua's birth? To his immersion in the Jordan at the hands of John?[11] To his resurrection from the dead?[12] For John, the existence of the Son of God antedates all these events in the earthly life of Yeshua, and precedes even the creation of the world (John 1:1-5; 18; 6:46; 17:5). Therefore the "today" of Psalm 2:7 must be eternal rather than temporal. The Creed's exegetical juxtaposition of John and Psalm 2 thus yields the completely appropriate phrase, "begotten of his Father before all worlds."[13]

The Creed draws two conclusions from its fundamental proposition that the Son is "begotten of his Father before all worlds." These two conclusions are conveyed in the

[10] William F.Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 527.
[11] As implied by variant readings of Luke 3:22.
[12] As implied by Acts 13:33.
[13] Oskar Skarsaune argues that this phrase also "is an encapsulated version of Proverbs 8:22-31" and thus reflects the Wisdom Christology that is a central motif of the Nicene Creed. See *In the Shadow of the Temple* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 333.

phrases, "Light from (*ek*) Light, true God from (*ek*) true God."[14] First of all, the Son draws his being from (*ek*) the Father. Their relationship has a *taxis*, a structure or form, in which the Father is the ultimate source of the Son's existence and nature. That structure is eternal rather than temporal; as a star never exists without emitting light, so the Father never exists without the Son. Secondly, the Son shares the Father's nature. As the Father is "Light," so the Son is "Light"; as the Father is "true God," so the Son is "true God." Though the Son is ordered after and in relationship to the Father, he is not a demigod, a secondary divinity at a lower level of being from the Father.

These two affirmations about the Father and the Son always belong together. They produce the ambiguity that has always characterized discussions of the Son's "subordination" to the Father. The Son is subordinate to the Father in the sense that he derives his existence from the Father, and serves the Father in the fulfillment of the Father's purposes. But the Son is not subordinate to the Father in the sense of possessing a secondary level of divinity, as though occupying a lower rung in a Neo-Platonic hierarchy of being.

The Son is "begotten, not made." This contrast between begetting and making is crucial for the teaching of the Creed. The Son is not like a painting or a sculpture that springs from the genius of an artist but remains fundamentally different in kind from the artist himself. Just as offspring in the temporal created order are the same kind of beings as the ones who generate them, so in the eternal uncreated order the Son is as much divine as is the Father from whom he derives his being.

[14] The phrase "Light from Light" alludes to Wisdom 7:26 and Hebrews 1:3, again expressing Wisdom Christology (Skarsaune, 333).

The contrast between "begetting" and "making" helps explain the most famous phrase of the Creed, "having the same *ousia* (*homoousion*) as the Father." In this context *ousia* appears to mean the kind of thing that something is. [15] Thus, the *homousion* does not add anything new to what has already been presented in the Creed. It does not provide an explanation or theory for how this could all be so. Instead, it expresses through one technical Greek term what the Creed states elsewhere in more allusive biblical language.

The Nicene Creed thus offers a highly plausible rendering of the Apostolic teaching on the divinity of Yeshua, in light of controversies that had emerged in the early centuries of the Yeshua movement. Though it spoke in the language of its own time and place, it did not conform to the philosophical theories that were currently in fashion. Instead, the Creed upheld a commitment to an authentic encounter with the Living God who acts in a revelatory and redemptive manner within the world. It maintained the Jewish and biblical witness to the qualitative difference between the transcendent Creator and that which is created, the particular personal character of the Creator as the God of Israel, and the reality of this God's activity within the created order. It affirmed that God can be known and encountered in the person of Yeshua the Messiah.

The Nicene Creed does this as an expansion of a Pauline confession of faith, which was itself an expansion of the *Shema*. In this way, it implicitly points us back to the basics of Jewish monotheism, and presents Yeshua as the one who realizes in this world the revelatory and redemptive purposes of *Hashem*, God of Israel and Creator of all.

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[15] For this view of the *homoousion*, see Skarsaune, 333-35. J.N.D. Kelly likewise thinks that the original intent of this term at Nicaea was to mean "of the same nature" (Kelly, 234-37). Over time the term took on the additional meaning of "numerical identity," i.e., that the Father and Son (and Spirit) are together one being (Kelly, 245-47), while the related term *hypostasis* expressed the distinct identities of the Father, Son, and Spirit. (As the creedal anathemas demonstrate, at Nicaea *hypostasis* and *ousia* are treated as synonyms.) Nevertheless, no true theological consensus emerged on the precise meaning of the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis*. All agreed only that the former expressed the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit, and the latter expressed their distinction.

Medieval Jewish Parallels to the Arian Controversy

Jewish history provides us with a surprising parallel to the Arian controversy and the Nicene response. The similarity supports our contention that what is at stake at Nicaea is not merely an orthodox Christology, but the authenticity of human encounter with the redemptively self-revealing God of Israel.

Rabbinic texts usually treat the biblical accounts of God's self-revealing presence in a realistic fashion. The Sages are not embarrassed by biblical anthropomorphism. They assume that the figure who appeared to Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and to all of Israel at the Sea and at Sinai, was none other than *Hashem*, the God of Israel. In fact, *aggadic* material sometimes makes the anthropomorphism of the biblical theophanies look restrained. God is there portrayed as wearing *tefillin*, praying, and arguing about the Torah with the angels. In recent decades, scholars have even employed the language of incarnation in describing this dimension of the rabbinic imagination.[16]

The 9th century Karaites, influenced by Greek philosophical currents absorbed into Islamic thought, attacked the anthropomorphism of the rabbinic texts. To ward off these attacks, Saadia Gaon drew upon the same philosophy that guided the Karaites. He reinterpreted rabbinic thought in a way that eliminated all anthropomorphism, even from the biblical theophanies. His formulation had tremendous consequences for later Jewish thought, and is worth citing at length:

> Peradventure however, someone, attacking our view, will ask: "But how is it possible to put such constructions on these anthropomorphic expressions and on what is related to them, when Scripture itself explicitly mentions a form like that of human beings that was seen by the prophets and spoke to them…let alone the description by it of God's being seated on a throne, and His being borne by the angels on top of a firmament (Ezekiel 1:26)…Our answer to this objection is that

[16] For example, see Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

> this form was something [specially] created…It is a form nobler even that [that of] the angels, magnificent in character, resplendent with light, which is called *the glory of the Lord.* It is this form, too, that one of the prophets described as follows: *I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit* (Daniel 7:9), and that the sages characterized as *Shekhinah*. Sometimes, however, this specially created being consists of light without the form of a person. It was, therefore, an honor that God had conferred on His prophet by allowing him to hear the oracle from the mouth of a majestic form created out of fire that was called *the glory of the Lord*, as we have explained.[17]

On the one hand, Saadia treats realistically the biblical theophanies. He does not doubt that Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Daniel truly saw an enthroned human figure, referred to in the text as *Hashem*. He also does not doubt that such a figure possessed objective existence beyond the imagination of the prophet. On the other hand, his philosophical commitment to absolute divine transcendence – which he understands as a necessary corollary of the divine unity – excludes the possibility that this enthroned human figure can in fact be the eternal uncreated One. Therefore, he concludes that the form seen by the prophets – the *Kavod* (Glory) or *Shekhinah* – must be a created entity, more exalted than the angels, but not divine.

As Gershom Scholem notes, Saadia's interpretation became "a basic tenet of the [Jewish] philosophical exegesis of the Bible." We find it in such classic writers as Yehudah Halevi and Maimonides. Scholem also points out its radical novelty.

> These respected authors could hardly have ignored the fact that this conception of the *Shekhinah* as a being completely separate from God was entirely alien to the talmudic texts, and could only be made compatible with them by means of extremely forced interpretation of these texts. Nevertheless, these philosophers preferred 'cutting the Gordian knot' in this way rather than endanger the purity of monotheistic belief by recognizing an uncreated hypostasis.[18]

The parallel here to the Arian interpretation of the *Logos* should be evident. The underlying concerns are identical: a desire to guard the purity of divine transcendence

[17] Saadia Gaon, *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, II:10 (Rosenblatt, 121).
[18] Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken,1991), 154-55.

and unity understood in terms of Greek philosophical conceptions. The problems encountered as a result of this concern are likewise identical: the realistic biblical presentation of God's self-revelation to Israel. Finally, the strategies adopted to overcome the problems are the same: the thesis that the One who is called by the divine Name and who apparently manifests the divine Presence is a created entity, distinct from God and at a lower level in the hierarchy of being.

Just as the Jewish philosophical reinterpretation of the *Kavod/Shekhinah* parallels the Arian reinterpretation of the *Logos*, so the kabbalistic response to the Jewish philosophers parallels the Nicene response to the Arians. Like the Nicene fathers, those who championed the tradition of the *Zohar* agreed with their opponents on the ineffable and transcendent nature of God. These Jewish mystics employed the term *Eyn Sof* (i.e., the Infinite One) to refer to this aspect of the divine reality. However, also like the Nicene fathers, the kabbalists viewed the self-revelation of God (the biblical *Kavod*, whom they referred to as the *Sefirot*) as both distinct from and one with *Eyn Sof*. The infinite and transcendent nature of God required the distinction, but the objective reality and truthfulness of divine revelation required the unity. If the *Kavod* revealed to Israel is not truly and fully divine, then God remains unknown to the world, and Israel's claim to a covenant with a redemptively self-revealing God is rendered fraudulent.

Even the language used by the kabbalists to express the relationship between the *Sefirot* and *Eyn Sof* resembles the language employed within the stream of Nicene orthodoxy. "The kabbalists insisted that Ein Sof and the sefirot formed a unity 'like a flame joined to a coal.' 'It is they and they are It.'"[19] This language distinguishes both *Kabbalah* and Nicene orthodoxy from Neo-Platonic thought, in which each stage of

[19] Daniel Matt, *Zohar* (Ramsey NJ: Paulist, 1983), 33.

emanation involves a gradation in the hierarchy of being, and in which everything below the ineffable "One" occupies a lower ontological status in that hierarchy.

> The hidden God in the aspect of *Ein-Sof* and the God manifested in the emanation of *Sefirot* are one and the same, viewed from two different angles. There is therefore a clear distinction between the stages of emanation in the neoplatonic systems, which are not conceived as processes within the Godhead, and the kabbalistic approach.[20]

Thus, while kabbalistic thought in some ways resembles Neo-Platonism, and was influenced by it, on this fundamental point the two systems diverge. *Kabbalah* here has more in common with Basil of Caesarea than with Plotinus.

This commonality derives less from direct influence than from similar issues and concerns. For both the Christian and the Jewish traditions, Greek philosophy challenged the biblical presentation of the God of Israel and the living faith of the communities who worshipped that God. Nicene orthodoxy and Jewish mysticism responded by drawing insights and terminology from the challenging philosophical systems and employing them within a new framework provided by Scripture and the tradition of the worshipping community.. The philosophical terminology of *ousia* and emanation now served faithful testimony to the infinite transcendent God who acts within the world to establish a covenant relationship with a people, a relationship in which this God is genuinely and redemptively known.

Post-Nicene Christology in Messianic Jewish Perspective

We have examined the teaching of the Nicene Creed concerning the deity of Yeshua in light of Scripture and Jewish tradition, employing the hermeneutic of *dialectical ecclesial continuity*. This examination has exposed nothing objectionable in the teaching

[20] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 98.

of the Creed, but instead has confirmed it as a faithful witness to Israel's God and Messiah by the Church of the Nations in the particular circumstances of the 4th century Greco-Roman world.

However, affirmation of the Nicene Creed need not imply uncritical reception of the normative Christian piety and theological expression that it generated. Here, we must stress the *dialectical* component in our hermeneutic. At this point our Jewish sensibility comes to the forefront, and raises pressing questions.

First, many Messianic Jews question whether Christian thought and practice have dealt adequately with the differentiation of the Father and the Son. As noted above, the Creed rules out any inequality of being between the Father and Son, at the same time as it recognizes that the Son derives his being from the Father and is thus ordered after and towards the Father. It rules out the one type of "subordination," while implying the other.

However, in the history of Christian spirituality this delicate balance became increasingly precarious, as the equal divinity of the Son was stressed at the expense of the distinction between the Father and the Son. Especially in the Western Church, this exaltation of the Son threatened the unique position of the Father as the source and goal of all things. Consequently, many Christians have a diminished sense of the inner order and differentiation within the divine life, an order that was expressed in the early Yeshua-community by its normal mode of worshipping the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.[21]

[21] Many Christian theologians of the 20th and 21st centuries have recognized the need to recapture the structure or *taxis* of differentiation between the Father and the Son. For example, John Zizioulas writes: "In making the Father the 'ground' of God's being – or the ultimate reason for existence – theology accepted a kind of subordination of the Son to the Father without being obliged to downgrade the *Logos* into something created. But this was possible only because the Son's otherness was founded on the *same substance.*" (*Being as Communion* [Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985], 89. Similarly, Colin Gunton: "There is, in the biblical representation of the way in which the acts of God take shape in time,

Though the Messianic Jewish movement possesses very few universal characteristics, a reasonable candidate for this designation is the custom of addressing formal congregational worship to God the Father rather than to Yeshua the Son. This almost instinctive pattern of Messianic Jewish prayer arises, I suggest, as a result of a Jewish sensibility that sees Yeshua as the one who brings us to the Father, who mediates a relationship with the Father by revealing rather than replacing the Father. He can only do this because he is fully divine. But he must do this because the Father is the source and goal of his own existence.[22]

Secondly, the continuation of the second article of the Nicene Creed affirms unambiguously the historical humanity of Yeshua, who was born of Miriam and suffered under Pontius Pilate. Nevertheless, the challenge posed by Arianism led the Christian Church to stress Yeshua's divine rather than human nature. Just as the delicate balance between the equality and differentiation of the Father and the Son was threatened, so also was the balance between Yeshua's divinity and humanity. Christians found it increasingly difficult to accept at face value the texts in the Apostolic Writings which suggest Yeshua's ignorance of future happenings, growth in knowledge, need for

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some support for Zizioulas' giving of priority to the Father. It is often said that when the New Testament writers use the word 'God' *simpliciter*, they are referring to God the Father, so that Irenaeus is true to Scripture in speaking of the Son and Spirit as the two hands of God, the two agencies by which the work of God the Father is done in the world…Such talk of the divine economy has indeed implications for what we may say about the being of God eternally, and would seem to suggest a subordination of *taxis* – of ordering within the divine life – but not one of deity or regard… The Spirit is the giver of faith, not in himself, nor even, strictly speaking, in Christ, but in the Father through Christ. In that respect, we return to the theme that God *simpliciter* is God the Father, the fount and goal of our being. But we neither receive our being in the first place apart from Christ, the mediator of creation and salvation, nor are directed to our goal apart from the Spirit, the perfecting cause." (*The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* [New York: T&T Clark, 1991], 197, 199. Finally, from Thomas Torrance: "All the revealing and saving acts of God come to us from the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, and all our corresponding relations to God in faith, love and knowledge are effected in the Spirit through the Son and to the Father." (*The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 147).

[22] A concern about the role of God the Father as the primary addressee of prayer appears in the two most seminal texts of the early Messianic Jewish movement: Dan Juster's *Jewish Roots* (Rockville: Davar, 1986), 187-88; and David Stern's *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament, 1988), 94.

companionship, fear of death, and learning of obedience amid temptation to disobedience.

The Creed's lack of reference to Israel rendered it vulnerable to this imbalance. If the person and work of Yeshua had been properly situated in relation to his own people, it would have been more difficult to swallow up his humanity in his divinity. If the Creed had mentioned not only his birth but also his circumcision, it would have buttressed its affirmation of his concrete and particular human identity. Instead, the reverse happened: the accentuation of Yeshua's divinity at the expense of his humanity made it more difficult for the Christian Church to grasp the significance of Israel or to recognize the implications of the fact that it had been incorporated into the Body of a resurrected Jew.

Once again, a concern about this historical imbalance tends to characterize the Messianic Jewish movement as a whole. Our Jewish sensibility attunes us to the importance of bodily realities. Our convictions about the enduring significance of our own Jewish identity are connected to our confession of the enduring significance of Yeshua's Jewish identity – for us, but also for the nations of the world, and for all creation.

These two reservations about the outworking of Nicene Christology in the life of the Christian Church reveal the problematic nature of the question with which we began our paper: "Is Yeshua God?"[23] This three word question seems simple and straightforward, yet it contains at least two ambiguities that render any answer similarly ambiguous. These

[23] Referring to the man Yeshua as "God" is rare in the Apostolic Writings, but becomes extremely common in the early centuries of the Christian Church. It is a reflection of a Christian linguistic convention known as the sharing of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*), in which verbal expressions specifically appropriate to Yeshua's divine or human nature are applied also to his integrated divine-human person (see Kelly, 143; 296-301). We can not denounce this ancient practice as illegitimate, since it is also attested (albeit infrequently) in the Apostolic Writings (e.g., John 20:28). However, our Jewish sensibility alerts us to its potential for misunderstanding and abuse.

two ambiguities correspond to our two reservations stated above. First, the question could mean, "Is Yeshua the fullness of divinity, so that there is no Father distinct from the Son, from whom the Son receives his existence and to whom that existence is eternally oriented?" The answer to that question, according to Nicaea, is a resounding "no." Secondly, the question could mean, "Is the flesh and blood of the man Yeshua divine, so that it is uncreated, eternal, and thus unlike our own flesh and blood that is created and comes into being at a particular time?" Once again, the answer to that question, according to Nicaea, is a resounding "no."

One might say, "Nobody who asks this question means it in either of these ways!" This may be the case. However, in light of the two historical imbalances in Christian spirituality and thought described above, we have good grounds for assuming that many of those who ask the question fail to consider with sufficient care exactly what they do mean when they ask it. Moreover, as Messianic Jews we must also consider what our fellow Jews understand when they hear such a question, and when they hear it answered in the affirmative. What they hear and understand is usually as far beyond the limits of normative Christian faith as it is of Jewish orthodoxy.

Our hermeneutic of *dialectical ecclesial continuity* thus enables us to receive appreciatively from our Christian ecclesial partner, but also to offer proposals for rebalancing and repair that derive from our participation in the ongoing stream of Jewish ecclesial tradition. We can affirm the Nicene Creed, and then add our voice to the continuing argument as to how it should best be interpreted and practiced.

Conclusion

The primary contention of this paper finds expression in the parallel discovered between Arius and Saadia, Nicaea and *Kabbalah*. In accordance with the clear teaching of the Apostolic Writings, we see Yeshua not only as the Messiah but also as *Chochmah* (Wisdom), the *Logos*, and the *Kavod*, the mediator of all God's work in creation, revelation, and redemption. Obviously, mainstream *Kabbalah* does not accept this view, but it does affirm a distinct hypostatic reality, represented by the *Sefirot*, which fulfills an analogous role. Both Nicene orthodoxy and *Kabbalah* accept the philosophical acknowledgement of God as infinite, transcendent, invisible, and incomprehensible. But they also reject philosophical interpretations which negate the reality of God's involvement with and in the world, and which so separate God from creation as to render God utterly unknowable. They both accomplish this correction of the philosophical currents in their own religious traditions by distinguishing between God the Father and God the Son, or between *Eyn Sof* and the *Sefirot*, while simultaneously asserting their inseparable unity.

Thus, what is at stake here is not an articulation of doctrinal truth that has no bearing on our lives. We are not debating the number of angels that can dance on the head of a pin. Instead, we are seeking to bear verbal witness to the reality of a redemptive encounter with the living God in a way that does justice to the authenticity of that encounter and which effectively invites others to share in it. This is what it means for us to confess the deity of Yeshua.

A promising answer to an important question always raises several new questions. Our answer to the question of Yeshua's deity immediately provokes a host of new queries, three of which deserve note and comment as we conclude this initial stage of the journey.

First, affirmation of the deity of Yeshua leads inevitably to the question of the hypostatic identity of the Spirit, and from there into discussion of the Triunity of God. Thus, the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), which addressed the issue of Yeshua's deity, was followed by the Council of Constantinople (381CE), which addressed the deity and distinct identity of the Holy Spirit. We cannot adequately appreciate the significance of the deity of Yeshua for our life until we have taken this further stage of the journey. According to the Apostolic Writings, the Spirit joins us to Yeshua, who bring us to God the Father. Not only are we encountering God in Yeshua; in union with him, we are being ushered into the inner life of God. Once again, *Kabbalah* offers suggestive parallels. But that is a discussion for another day. .

Second, affirmation of the deity of Yeshua leads to the question of how this truth should function in the definition of our identity as a Messianic Jewish community. As noted earlier, the Christian Church has treated this doctrine both as its theological center and as its external line of demarcation. In many contexts denial of the deity of Yeshua places one outside the Church's communal boundary. While we might question whether this should be so, we can also appreciate the rationale for such an exclusionary practice. For Gentiles, union with Yeshua opens up for the first time participation in the covenant which God made with the patriarchs and matriarchs. Rejection of Yeshua's role as divine mediator of God's creative, revelatory, and redemptive purposes puts the covenant status of these Gentiles in jeopardy.

However, the Messianic Jewish community finds itself in a different situation. Our position in the bilateral *ekklesia* involves partnership with the Christian Church and also membership in the Jewish people. Messianic Jews are born into the covenant with the patriarchs and matriarchs, and then discover its full meaning and power in Yeshua. When someone in our world rejects the deity of Yeshua, they are putting in jeopardy the full realization of their covenantal identity, but not their covenantal identity itself. They are usually motivated, at least in part, by pressures exerted from the wider Jewish community. In effect, they are choosing a closer social connection to the covenant community of Israel at the expense of a connection to the Church. They are accepting the negative doctrinal boundary marker asserted by the wider Jewish community.

As part of the bilateral *ekklesia*, we refuse to accept the Jewish community's negative doctrinal boundary marker, just as we refuse to accept the Christian community's negative boundary marker dealing with our covenantal practice of the Torah. (Once again, we realize the significance of our hermeneutic of *dialectical* ecclesial continuity.) But should we exclude from our midst those Messianic Jews who adhere to these negative boundary markers, i.e., who deny the deity of Yeshua, or who deny the covenantal obligation of Torah? I am not convinced that we should. Affirmation of the deity of Yeshua and affirmation of the covenantal obligation of Torah observance for Jews are the two central principles of our communal existence, and we can rightly require that our leaders uphold them. They are our center, but they need not constitute our outer boundary.

Third, as we have just seen, affirmation of the deity of Yeshua brings us into conflict with the wider Jewish community that we call our own. Is it viable on a long-term basis

for us to identify so wholeheartedly with a community that has erected a social and cultural boundary that consists of a denial of what we so centrally affirm? I would answer: probably not. In the same way, bilateral ecclesiology lacks long-term viability if the Christian Church maintains its negative boundary concerning the covenantal obligation of Torah.[24] These two negative boundary definitions provided the Church and the Jewish community with a comfortable, unambiguous, mutually accepted border, fenced-in and well-patrolled. They also supported the illusion that these two social bodies represented two religions, each of which made total sense apart from the other. Our existence as a corporate Messianic Jewish presence bears witness to the arbitrary and unsustainable nature of this border, and of the religious illusion it perpetuates.

We exist as a movement in part to protest this negative border. Such a protest constitutes a crucial element in our prophetic calling. Moreover, our long-term viability depends on the success of that protest. We already see significant changes in the Church's attitude towards its negative boundary. While the Messianic Jewish view on the Torah has not yet carried the day, the contrary view is no longer a universal presupposition. We can and should hope and pray for the same changes in the Jewish community's attitude towards its negative boundary.

But this will never happen if we surrender our affirmation of the deity of Yeshua, or lose sight of its true significance, or yield to pressure and hide it from public view. It will also never happen if this affirmation becomes for us an abstract proposition, prominently

[24] Of course, our movement does recognize a sense in which full-orbed observance of the Torah should function as a boundary – not between the *ekklesia* and the People of Israel, but between the *ekklesia* of the circumcision and the *ekklesia* of the uncircumcision. This boundary distinguishes but does not divide – it is not a fortified border between two feuding countries, but a line marking out the territory of two provinces within the same nation. And it is not a negative boundary (except in the limited sense that it does not bind Christians), for the Christian Church should honor the Torah and endorse its full-orbed observance by all Jews.

displayed as a mark of doctrinal orthodoxy, but divorced from the revelatory and redemptive power to which it is meant to bear witness.

It is especially appropriate that this message be spoken and heard in the context of the Hashivenu Forum. The name "Hashivenu" has become emblematic in the Messianic Jewish world for the stream of Jewish Yeshua-believers who uphold Torah observance, Jewish tradition, and the importance of integration within the wider Jewish world. As such, those who identify with the name are also those exposed to the greatest temptation to deny or minimize the deity of Yeshua.

It is my hope that future generations will identify the name Hashivenu with a bilateral ecclesiology that rejects both the Christian and the Jewish negative boundaries -- exalting the Torah as the covenantal constitution of the Jewish people, and the deity of Yeshua, light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel.