

[R703 : page 6]

## **A JEWISH-CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA**

A most remarkable religious movement is in progress among the Jews in Southern Russia. It is nothing more nor less than the establishment of Jewish-Christian congregations among the Jews, which are to be in connection with none of the Christian religious communions as at present existing, but are to constitute a peculiar Christian association in close connection with Jewish customs and manners, and with the rejection of all Gentile-Christian dogmas. The soul of the movement is a **Jewish [R703 : page 7]** lawyer, Joseph Rabinowitz, a man of high reputation among his people. For many years the social and religious status of his people has been an object of deep concern to him, and in 1880 he published a program in which he advocated a complete reorganization of the Rabbinical system. He was further active in the work of a society for the promotion of agriculture among the Jews of Southern Russia; and during the days of persecution in 1882 earnestly advocated the return of his people to Palestine. During that period the change in his religious convictions took place. It was not the result of Christian mission work, nor is he a convert in the ordinary sense of the word. The change was gradually effected, and only after long deliberation did the thought of organizing Christian congregations of the Jewish nationality assume maturity in his mind. After his return from Palestine his conviction was: "The key to the Holy Land lies in the hands of our brother Jesus." In the words "Jesus our Brother" lies the kernel of his religious views. His work has been successful, and now there are no less than two hundred families adhering to this new Jewish Christianity, and recently the Pesach

festival was celebrated in accordance with the liturgy drawn up by Rabinowitz.

Prof. Franz Delitzsch, of Leipzig, the leader of Jewish missions in Germany and editor of the *Saat auf Hofnung*, a quarterly devoted to this work, has just published a pamphlet of about seventy-five pages on this new religious development, the largest space in which is occupied by original documents, in both the Hebrew and the German translation, on this movement. These documents embrace thirteen theses: a confession of Faith of the National Jewish Church of the New Testaments; an Explanation of the Faith in the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, in the sense of this congregation; a Haggada for the Israelites believing on the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth; and, finally, an Order of the Lord's Supper. As appendices are added a declaration of a teacher, Friedmann, to the Jewish believers in Christ, and a declaration adopted by a conference of the latter, held in March of the present year in Kischinew. The little pamphlet thus contains all the materials for a study of the new movement, as these are all original documents by its advocates.

The theses, which are to be regarded as the basis of the new faith, start out with the deplorable state of the Jews in Russia, and maintain that the endeavors at improvement on the part of the Jews themselves have proved futile. "There is need of a deep and inner moral renewal, of a spiritual regeneration. We must cast aside our false gods, the love of money as such, and in the room thereof must establish in our hearts a home for the love of truth as such, and for the fear of evil as such." For this, however, a leader is necessary. Who is he to be? In Israel none can be found. "The man who possesses all the qualifications of a leader – love of Israel, sacrificing of life, pureness, deep knowledge of human nature, earnestness in the exposal of the sins and evils of his

people – we have, after careful research in all the books of the history of our people, found only in one man, in Jesus of Nazareth." The wise Israelites in his day could not understand him; "but we, in the present year (5644) can say with a certainty that he, Jesus, he alone has sought the welfare of his brethren. Therefore we should sanctify the name of our brother Jesus." "We should receive the gospel books into our houses as a blessing, and unite them with all the Holy Scriptures which were handed down to us by our wise men." The last thesis reads: "We hope confidently that the words of our brother Jesus will bring us, as fruit, righteousness and salvation; and then the hearts of the people and the government will be turned to us in friendship, we shall have life and prosperity like other nations who live in safety under the shadow of European laws, framed in the spirit of our brother, who has given his life in order to make the world happy and remove evil from the earth! Amen."

The rest of these documents are in the same vein, and all show that the movement is, as yet, guided by an undefined and crude idea. The Jewish character is stamped on its brow; but who will deny that great possibilities lie, in germ, in it? It will, doubtless, be wise to heed Delitzsch's admonition to withhold judgment for the present and await further developments. He closes his preface to his pamphlet with the words, "Spoil it not. There is a blessing in it." – N.Y. Independent.

Bishop Titcomb, of the English church in Northern and Central Europe, in a letter to the London Times, mentions this same movement, and gives the following as one of the most noteworthy of a series of articles of faith which they have drawn up:

"According to the decree of the inscrutable wisdom of God, our fathers were filled with hardness of heart, and the Lord

punished them with the spirit of deep sleep, so that they opposed Jesus Christ and sinned against him until the present day. But by their unbelief they led other nations to greater zeal, and they thus contributed to the propitiation of mankind, who have believed in Jesus Christ, the son of David, our king, when they heard the good tidings through the peace-promising messengers (Isaiah 52:7), who had been disgracefully expelled from communion with Israel. In consequence, however, of this our sin against the Christ of God, the world has grown rich by its faith in Christ, and the nations in fullness have entered the kingdom of God. Now, too, the time of our fullness has also come, and we, the seed of Abraham, are to be blessed by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and the God of our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, will take pity upon us and replant the branches which have been torn out, into our own Holy Root – Jesus. And thus all Israel shall share the eternal salvation, and Jerusalem, our Holy City, shall be rebuilt and the throne of David be reestablished forever and evermore."

-----