

# Frequently Asked Questions

## A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

1. Why do you talk about a Hebrew Catholic perspective?
2. If Jewish people are joining the Church, would not their desire to preserve Jewish identity indicate an incomplete acceptance of Jesus Christ?
3. When Jews become members of the Church, do they blend in with other members, or do they prefer to keep close-knit in their new environment?
4. Do Hebrew Catholics, having undergone various education programmes in Christian living, find they want to share their knowledge with practising committed Jews?
5. Can ordinary Catholics who have no Jewish background or connections, be fully involved, realistically, in the Hebrew Catholic apostolate? Wouldn't they just be good-will associates rather than true members?

## 1. Why do you talk about a Hebrew Catholic perspective?

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century there is an increasing flow of Jews choosing to become active and loyal Catholics. They could have chosen to become Messianic Jews, or could have attached themselves to various Christian denominations: and many do so. Those who enter the Catholic Church are seeking to give expression in their Catholicism, to the vitality and immense spiritual richness of their Judaism. Perhaps one of the most common experiences these people share, is the discovery that the two spheres of religious culture, when properly understood, do not clash: they are, indeed, very harmonious and interdependent.

People of Jewish background, or connection, therefore find it thoroughly natural to look for ways they can demonstrate this harmony and thus support Catholic teaching and worship — and share these insights will all who are to take an interest. In presenting this perspective we emphasise that it is not a creation of any person or group. We are merely recording what already exists and helping others to recognise it as something which is authentically both Hebrew and Catholic. Again, in doing so, we emphasise that it is the heritage equally of all baptised Jews and Catholics who wish to participate.

The people who are identifying with this development comprise Jews who, before joining the Church, had no previous Catholic connection or experience, and likewise Catholics having no Jewish lineage or former contact. We should also be aware that many Christians who are not Catholics are associating themselves with this movement of the Holy Spirit. We welcome them and value their presence, as well as their participation and contributions.

It will be of interest to some readers to learn that among the members of our havurot (plural form of 'havurah' – group) are both Catholics as well as Protestants who have no Jewish background, but have discovered significantly Jewish links within their wider family. There is thus a certain degree of discovery and recovery of a formerly unknown heritage. We encourage these people to pursue this interest and to build upon their family history.

**2. If Jewish People are joining the Church, would not their desire to preserve Jewish identity indicate an incomplete acceptance of Jesus Christ?**

There is much written in official Church documents about inculturation and the importance of the Faith finding expression in the various cultures of the world. The term “Catholic”, of course, signifies the universality of the Church’s mission.

In the case of Judaism, however, the situation is somewhat different. Much of the Catholic Faith is already expressed in Jewish cultural forms: language, ceremony, customs, Biblical documents and so on. Jews entering the Church quite naturally recognise these as reflecting Jewish origin.

Therefore, it is not a matter of Jews failing to accept Jesus Christ fully, but rather to do so through the copious Jewish elements mentioned above, and to own them as Jews: Jews who embrace Jesus enthusiastically not only as the Messiah but in deed as the only Son of God!

They do not see themselves as foreigners in a strange land! They consider the gift of recognising Jesus for who and what He is as a very wonderful privilege, and having formally entered the Church, take great delight in expanding their knowledge and faith.

Many Jews rejoice openly with their friends and have no hesitation in acclaiming that in becoming active, committed Catholics, they do not cease to be Jews. This may be somewhat puzzling to some Christians, and we will therefore facilitate access to other web sites and sources of information to help readers understand this phenomenon.

**3. When Jews become members the Church, do they blend in with other members, or do they prefer to keep close-knit in their new environment?**

It may help to explain that Jews entering the Church do not, in fact, form a culture as such. They come from diverse ethnic cultures found throughout the whole world. It would probably be more to the point to refer to Hebrew Catholics as representing a stream across all the rites and churches which make up the Catholic Church.

Many Hebrew Catholics are dispersed throughout all levels of the Church over a very wide geographical spread. Some choose to keep their Jewish background private — others find it natural to let it surface spontaneously in daily affairs. There is undoubtedly a strong trend emerging in which Hebrew Catholics wish to encourage other Catholics, with no Jewish background to join them in celebrating the shared patrimony and inter-relationship between Judaism and the Church. This is leading to some very beautiful exchanges and developments.

**4. Do Hebrew Catholics, having undergone various education programmes in Christian living, find the want to share their knowledge with practicing committed Jews?**

The activities of some Jewish groups who accept the Lord Jesus as Messiah, are well known. The Hebrew Catholic stream within the Faith, in obedience to the Sacred Magisterium of the Church, does not initiate any proselytising activities or operations directed at Jews. There are numerous official documents outlining the Church's position on this matter.

The emphasis in Hebrew Catholic missions focuses within the Church. This finds expression in a number of projects in which members take an active role in building up the Church, defending its role and functions in society, and supporting the Magisterium at all levels.

Whilst the Hebrew Catholic apostolate has a specific mission within the Church, its influence, in fact, spreads far beyond. It therefore whole heartedly supports efforts to present the Faith to all humanity and to help any person according to their needs and circumstances.

**5. Can ordinary Catholics who have no Jewish background or connections, be fully involved, realistically, in the Hebrew Catholic apostolate? Wouldn't they just be good-will associates and supporters rather than true members.**

The answer to the first question is categorically, Yes!

We encourage Jews who enter the Church to preserve their Jewish identity, family lines and other relevant data for posterity. However, we also warmly welcome others to join us in this exciting apostolate. There is no division into upper and lower house! All who join the movement share fully and equally in the various aspects of its outreach to the wider Church and community. This is demonstrated in a variety of pursuits:

- Jewish and Christian festivals and celebrations
- Scripture study and meditation
- Hebrew Catholic prayer and worship
- Hebrew Catholic studies
- And many more

We would add that one does not need to know a single word of the Hebrew language. The language is a priceless treasure and every person who wishes to learn some — or perhaps just to learn a few short Biblical verses or Blessings in Hebrew will be encouraged to do so. Everything can be presented in English, but there will always be opportunities for the inclusion of traditional Hebrew blessings as appropriate. We mention this only to reassure people that they will not feel "out of place" in any Hebrew Catholic situation.

As to the supplementary question: Wouldn't they just be good will associates and supporters rather than true members.

Not so! There are countless references in the Gospels and Epistles emphasising our unity in Christ. The Hebrew Catholic stream within the Church warmly and strongly encourages fellow Church members to join in, learn, help one another, and together, get on with the job of building up the Body of Christ. We need keen and willing people at **all** ages and backgrounds to join us.

Please consider joining us. We need your help!