

Association of Hebrew Catholics

New Zealand Branch

www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz

A Position Statement

by **Bill Hodge**

Spring / Summer 2016

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Background

1. The Association of Hebrew Catholics (AHC) began in New Zealand by Sister Mary of St. Joseph, an Auckland Carmelite sister, organising (via a friend) a small interest group to meet monthly and pray about the place of Jews in the Catholic Church.
2. A small group of highly motivated and well informed young people met monthly at the Carmelite Monastery in Mt Albert, and together, explored things Jewish in the context of the Church.
3. They used to advertise their monthly meetings in the "N Z Catholic" but had very little response.
4. The group were involved in other apostolates and in fact this involvement led them to all take up various pursuits as youth missionaries in New Zealand and overseas, or to enter religious orders.
5. When I came on the scene (in 2011) the members of the group were already in transition to other causes.
6. Sister Mary of St. Joseph asked me to assume responsibility for the AHC in New Zealand. I continued meeting with the small number of young people remaining, until the last went overseas to a religious order. We advertised but received no sign of interest.
7. During the first year of my involvement, I corresponded frequently with David Moss, the president of the AHC in St. Louis, U.S.A. He is the international head of the Association. Despite our small numbers David Moss appointed me President of the New Zealand Branch of AHC. David saw in our communications the opportunity to do this as a first step towards mobilising interest in building the AHC, as well as a better understanding among New Zealanders of the Hebrew Catholic perspective.
8. It became increasingly clear to me that any people of Jewish lineage, if they entered the Catholic Church, tended to "play down" any Jewish links they had. I understood this since I was frequently disturbed and embarrassed by the way some of our people referred to Judaism and Jews, and how they misinterpreted the Scriptures. One or two such examples were bordering on being anti-Semitic.

Any Jew or person of Jewish descent would quite reasonably shrink at this kind of demeaning and demonising references to Jews and their Faith!

The people involved in these examples are amongst the finest one could ever hope to meet — but their attitudes and perceptions of things and people Jewish can be terribly hurtful and divisive. Our response to this is not to protest but to offer our perspective in a culture of reflection, discussion and meditation. It is the Hebrew way.

9. When I considered this in the context of attitudes towards Jews in the 1940's and 1950's when I grew up, I could see that there was, among a large section of our Church members, little appreciation of the immense contribution Jewish culture has made to the life and liturgy of the Church.
10. I discussed this situation with a friend of mine, a Presbyterian Elder, who had a deep interest in Hebrew Catholic culture, though choosing at the same time, to remain committed to his own Faith community.

I decided that, with his help, I would try to do something positive and creative about the lack of knowledge and appreciation of Judaism's role in Salvation History, by preparing a series of "Reflections" on the Gospel readings in the Three Year Lectionary.

These modest Gospel Reading notes, with their Hebrew Catholic perspective, are presented in a format to assist readers in home settings who wish to explore the depths of the Scriptures in a Jewish approach to meditating on the Divine Word. Complementary notes on meditation are also made available on our website.

11. The series of Gospel Reflections is, therefore, a response to the need to find a starting point for AHC in New Zealand to commence an active apostolate. Our approach can thus proceed from a positive and reasonably informed, truly Biblical position. This "position" has shaped the contents of our website — www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz .

At this point we would like to draw attention to our utmost loyalty to the Holy See, and its prohibition regarding the proselytising of Jews. We are highly motivated towards evangelisation, but our role is carried out within the Church — and it is from this position we believe we can offer the greatest support to the Church in these troubled times.

12. We have now reached a stage where we can review the role we might perform and invite interested parties to participate in discerning how best we can move forward.

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective in New Zealand

A number of key points and principles emerged as significant features we want to uphold and promote. These have guided a number of papers, tracts and articles we have published on our website. We list some of those principles here:

1. To begin first with Jews who come to accept Jesus (Yeshua) as Messiah and thus become members of the Church. They need (and deserve) to find a welcoming, warm and friendly fellowship which reflects aspects of their culture, and seeks to draw from that culture insights which enhance our perception and understanding of Jesus, and our relationship with Him. It is not enough just to invoke inspiring documents and say the right things. We need to be "doing it on the ground".
2. We believe it is critically important to understand that the Hebrew Catholic apostolate is not just for Jews alone. It is part of a vast and beautiful stream of Hebrew Catholic heritage which welcomes all who support our aims and wish to participate. Regardless of one's family lineage, we can all belong to this stream of Living Water.

There is a wonderful feast of instruction in the teaching of the Blessed Apostle Paul dealing with how Jews and Gentiles in the Church can all call upon Abraham as "our father in the Faith" Thus we can celebrate our sharing something precious to God.

As Pope Pius XI said, "We are all Semites, spiritually".

We have made provision for the establishment of a Fellowship to work within and / or alongside the Association of Hebrew Catholics. This has been done to offer people of quite different backgrounds a chance to participate in a wide variety of systematically organised educational and devotional pursuits.

Our website presents the two sides of our work here in New Zealand.

There are some excellent and truly inspirational articles and statements published by the Vatican and, more generally, an increasing array of Christian literature to help readers benefit from the rediscovered treasury of Jewish Scriptural Spirituality and culture. Our articles offer links to some of this invaluable literature.

3. Why do we hold our Jewish heritage in the Church to be so precious?

Our third point is that the Hebrew Catholic "perspective" is not just a fascination with the past. Rather, it is an intense desire to rediscover and share our recovery of a vital part of our Christian "psyche". This brings the **real** Jesus into focus in a world of confusion and disintegration.

Jesus Christ (Messiah) is our King!

**The real Jesus
is the real answer
to the real needs
of this world!**

4. Another principle we hold dear is our focus on the family and their home. We are a home-based apostolate. That certainly does not exclude Church or Synagogue gatherings, but we are strongly family-focussed.

**The Holy Family is our model.
YMY: Yeshua, Miriam and Yossef.**

5. We direct much of our effort towards equipping and strengthening parents and caregivers to conduct study and worship gatherings with other families, neighbours and friends. We emphasise our belonging to Jesus Messiah — and His Body, the Church — and therefore to one another.

We are family!

6. We have a strong sense of service to God and our communities — wherever we live. As one example of how this can be expressed, we have adopted a sevenfold model of service. Each phase in this is vital. A summary of this model is attached to this article.
7. Young people have a major contribution to make at **every** level of this model. In the Hebrew tradition: from the time of their Confirmation and Bar or Bat Mitzvah, they are respected as young adults with essential and critically important roles to perform. They are taught to listen: "Shema!" And they are also listened to.

These are some of our key values and principles of operation.

And So — Where To From Here?

The Association of Hebrew Catholics and its partner body, the Messianic Fellowship of the Household of God have been in a state of "pause". This was not a period of "just waiting for something to happen". The skeletal "steering" party have been working at the fastest rate of which they were capable, producing a basic curriculum of Biblical materials (i.e. Gospel Reflections) to provide a platform from which to build a basis for understanding the Hebrew Catholic perspective.

During 2017 we would like to strengthen our steering group with others who share our vision — or at least, would like to know more about it and become an integral part of the unfolding vision.

A Little Extra Reading

You may like to peruse articles on our website www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz .

We recommend the following as an extension of what is written in this paper. We consider them an essential and integral part of this presentation.

"Meet The Real Jesus"

Fulfilment For All In Jesus Messiah

Role of the Jewish People After the Coming of the Messiah

Our Messianic Charism

Hebrew Catholic Presence

The Appendix, "Our Model of Service" is taken from our booklet "[Messianic Fellowship of the Household of God](#)" which is available on our website.

Our Appreciation

Thank you for reading this article. We wish you and your loved ones every blessing.

Shalom!

Our Sevenfold Model of Service

Seven candles giving light to the world.

Welcoming and nurturing one another — We are family.

1. Hospitality:

Highlighting the dignity of being members of the Household of God, — building a culture and atmosphere befitting such a Household; and welcoming *any genuine person* who wishes to be associated with us.

2. Caring:

Helping by prayer and action, *any person* in need, especially those experiencing misfortune or suffering from some disability, injustice, social disadvantage or deprivation.

3. Fellowship:

By intercession, personal spirituality and various activities, fostering and maintaining a spirit of inclusivity, belongingness, and unity among members, as well as seeking the recovery, reconciliation and restoration of *anyone* who has been separated from God in any way — offering them every assistance within our reach.

Learning and Sharing — We are disciples of Jesus Christ.

4. Education:

Providing appropriate learning experiences ranging from simple guided learning to advanced leadership training and studies — thus equipping members and *any interested persons* who participate with Christ-focussed Biblical and spiritual knowledge, skills and values.

5. Discipleship:

Fostering the spiritual life of each member of our Fellowship and *all who wish to be associated* in any way — thus strengthening their relationship with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

6. Evangelisation:

Pursuing a wide range of opportunities to communicate the living vitality of our Lord Jesus *to all in need of His love and care*.

Celebrating and Worshipping — We are members of the Household of God.

7. Worship:

Guiding private and public worship, meditation and contemplation, to help us respond with love and gratitude to the awesome presence of God in the world, in our communities, in our homes, and in our hearts, as we await the Glorious Return of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ at the end of time.

Inviting *all* to celebrate the whole of Salvation History in a Hebrew Catholic manner, centred in the Eucharist and to let it flow on into all aspects of life in the Church: the Body of Christ.

This is an extract from the Hebrew Catholic website paper page 28, entitled

"Messianic Fellowship of the Household of God"

Jesus Christ is our King!

Shalom!