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Messianic Judaism as a Mode of Christian Authenticity

Exploring the Grammar of Authenticity through Ethnography of a Contested Identity

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Abstract. – While most studies of Messianic Jews focus on how they grapple with anxieties of in-authenticity in relation to the broader Jewish community, this article considers how adherents understand their faith as a unique form of authenticity. On one level, both Messianic Jewish claims of authenticity and critics of Messianic authenticity reflect the same cultural logic of what I call the "evaluative grammar of authenticity." The evaluative grammar of authenticity values causal/metonymic indexes over manipulated symbols and is undergirded by a suspicion that general appearances are symbolically manipulated in order to mask actual indexical underpinnings. This article argues that the strong stance on Messianic Jewish authenticity in this community is facilitated by the employment of the evaluative grammar of authenticity within a model of reality strongly influenced by the eschatology and epistemology of American Christian fundamentalism. The indexical underpinnings of the cosmos within this model of reality make it logical to conceive of the Messianic Jewish movement as a manifestation of authentic biblical religion. This mode of authenticity is briefly compared to that reflected by critics of Messianic Jewish authenticity who tend to employ this evaluative grammar within a more natural/historical model of reality. This ethnographic example is useful for exploring some of the basic contours of conflicts over authenticity, including how the value-laden domains of knowledge and agency are implicated in these conflicts. It also illustrates how the evaluative grammar of authenticity exemplifies a shared cultural value that, due to its internal logic, tends to engender division and cultural heterogeneity as much, or more, than it engenders cultural consensus. *[North America, authenticity, Messianic Judaism, fundamentalism, millenarianism, evangelical Christianity, dispensationalism, religious conflict]*

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Some would argue that anthropology has historically been a science of authenticity (Wolford 1999). This disciplinary focus has oscillated between the objectivist approach of rigorously authenticating cultural artifacts, practices, and beliefs and the constructionist approach of demonstrating the historical contingency and illusory nature of specific claims to authenticity (Handler 2000). More recently, some anthropologists have explored the concept of authenticity itself as a cultural artifact. In her analysis of ethnographic data on the Vietnamese interpretation of brand piracy, Elizabeth Vann (2006) claims that international copyright laws are based on a Western model of authenticity that does not have cross-cultural resonance. In a related vein, Charles Lindholm (2008) argued in his book "Culture and Authenticity" that authenticity is a distinctively modern value and identified its logic in social forms ranging from charismatic religion to the slow food movement. His book is suggestive for anthropologists engaged in the ethnographic study of modern culture because it proposes that a wide array of modern social practices can be understood in terms of a single shared cultural logic.

Lindholm (2008: 2) defines authenticity as a "pure" and "original" condition and a state of hav-

ing "appearance" match "essence." However, what seems most distinctive about it as a *value* is the perceived backdrop of non-originality, non-purity, and disjuncture between essence and appearance that is *implicit* in authenticity as an object of disciplined moral pursuit. In other words, the pursuit of authenticity as a prime focus implies a sense of its absence. Literary critic Lionel Trilling (1972) observed that, despite a yearning for authenticity in modern society, all seem doomed to suffer from its lack. "Certain exceptions are made: The poor, the oppressed, the violent, the primitive" he writes, "[b]ut whoever occupies a place in the social order in which we ourselves are situated is known to share the doom" (102). So how does Trilling define this condition of authenticity that, because of the artificiality of "civilization" one inevitably lacks, yet feels so desperately like one needs? Early in his essay he tells us that it "implies a downward movement through all the cultural superstructures to some place where all movement ends and begins" (12). In a recent review of Lindholm's book, Steven Parish (2009) suggested a way to conceptualize authenticity that, I believe, usefully translates Trilling's views into semiotic terms. He argues that the anxiety over authenticity in modern culture is the result of a widespread acknowledgement of the arbitrariness of symbols. The sense of generalized contingency creates an urge to identify the necessary, the unmanipulated, or, in Charles Peirce's (1991) terms, the indexical. While the inauthentic is something manipulated, contrived, or merely conventional, the authentic has a causal or metonymic relationship to what is. It is not the fortuitous product of passively received "cultural superstructures," but exists as a natural condition of the unmanipulated real.

This study will show how authenticity can be in one sense a highly shared cultural value,[1] while in another sense it assumes radically varied and idiosyncratic expressions. I will illustrate this point by showing how authenticity is one of the constitutive values of a community widely understood to embody authenticity's inverse. Messianic Jews thwart a categorical separation two millennia in the making by subscribing to an evangelical Christian theology while claiming legitimate affiliation with primordial, and sometimes contemporary, Judaism. From the perspective of most Jews and mainline Protestants, their use of Jewish symbolism and claims to Jewish identity constitute a disingenuous marketing ploy. As one prominent rabbi put it, Messianic Judaism is a "carefully constructed ruse" (Ariel 2000: 240), or, as a group of establishment church leaders put it, a "manufactured religion" (Harris-Shapiro 1999: 39), the main aim of which is to manipulate the "feelings" of its Jewish target market through a deceptive use of symbolism. Conversely, Messianic Jews see their practice and identity claims as uniquely authentic because of their perceived fidelity to the pristine Jewish form of Christianity practiced in biblical times. Because the original Christians were Jews, they contend, it is their critics' model of Christianity – i.e., a model of Christianity that precludes Jewish identity and practice – that is "manufactured."

Despite their incommensurable views on the authenticity of Messianic Judaism, Messianic Jews and their critics share the same cultural value of authenticity in one key respect. In their assessments both employ what I call the "evaluative grammar of authenticity." My use of grammar here is inspired by Wittgenstein's (1953) broad employment of the term to designate the patterned rules that establish what can constitute a meaningful statement in a given context of human interaction. The evaluative grammar of authenticity is typically employed in the context of conflicts over the authenticity of properties ascribed to a given object, group, or collectivity. Grammatically speaking, a meaningful defense of the authentic qualities of a person would require one to make the case that the person's manifest characteristics have a clear causal/metonymic relationship to their unmanipulated essence. For example, in making the case for the authenticity of one's emotional expression, one needs to argue for the causal connection between the expression and one's spontaneous feelings. A meaningful rebuttal would consist of an argument that the expression was manipulated to look like a causal index of spontaneous feelings while it was really a contrived symbol that masks ulterior motives. The kind of value judgment involved in such a conflict indicates that positive value is placed on being transparent about the indexical underpinnings of an instance of signification, while symbolic manipulations, which are presented as indexes, are held in particular derision.

I am treating index and symbol here as, in some respect, emic categories (see footnote 1). This is not to say that the semiotic categories of index and symbol are overtly conceived by the people themselves, but that the question of whether a significatory relationship is arbitrary or causal/metonymic varies with respect to the contours of particular models of reality. Moreover, *what* a signifier indexes is also relative to these models. Evans-Pritchard's (1976) debates with his Azande informants on the topic of

1 I use the term value in Weberian sense, which is to say that something is considered of value to a given person or collectivity if it is the object of disciplined moral pursuit as an end in itself.

witchcraft – while not conflicts over authenticity in the sense discussed here – are classic examples of two parties with incommensurable views on the indexical underpinnings of certain events. While one Azande young man implied that his festering wound was an unambiguous index of witchcraft, Evans-Pritchard retorted that it only indexed a careless accident combined with a failure to protect the wound from infection. Disagreements over authenticity are similar to this example in that they constitute a conflict over the indexical underpinnings of a given signifier. However, these conflicts do not have the same moral implications as conflicts over authenticity between Messianic Jews and their critics. I will return to these differences at the conclusion of this article.

Despite their employment of the grammar of authenticity in conceptualizing their faith, Messianic Jews are in the position of having their authenticity constantly contested by critics and casual observers alike. This is because, by both subscribing to Christian theology and affirming a Jewish identity, Messianic Jews place themselves in an interstitial and, thus, ill-defined position with respect to the almost universally recognized categorical separation between Judaism and Christianity (Feher 1998; Douglas 1966). Consequently, Messianic Jewish authenticity can be described as both manifestly idiosyncratic and grammatically normative. In this discussion I will use the concept of authenticity as an evaluative grammar to make sense of the duplex quality of Messianic authenticity. The discussion is based on 20 months of fieldwork with a southern California Messianic Jewish community. This fieldwork included attendance at Messianic Jewish worship services, classes, special events, and social activities, as well formal interviews conducted with 28 individuals.

In this article I will show that the idiosyncratic expression that my Messianic informants give to the shared evaluative grammar of authenticity is an outgrowth of its criteria being applied within a Christian fundamentalist model of reality. By all appearances, this affinity was not an afterthought to my informants, but comprised a vital part of what made Messianic Judaism meaningful for them. Moreover, the transition from a conservative Christian congregation to a Messianic synagogue – which is the trajectory through which most of my informants came into the movement – was meaningful because the manner in which a fundamentalist model of reality parses out the symbolic and indexical makes this particular form of Messianic Judaism a logical medium for realizing religious authenticity. I will focus on this point in the first and second sections. In the third section I will argue that the stark contrast between my Messianic Jewish informants and their critics' evaluations of Messianic authenticity can be made intelligible when one understands that each applies the same evaluative grammar of authenticity within the distinct worldviews of fundamentalism and what I will gloss here as "modernism." Finally, in the conclusion I will suggest some wider implications this case may have for the conceptualization of authenticity as a culturally shared value economy.

As a disclaimer before I begin, I would like to make clear that the article is making no claims concerning what constitutes Jewish authenticity, which is a sensitive and controversial matter within Judaism itself (Charmé 2000). My aim here is primarily to understand the cultural logic of authenticity as reflected in the discourse of Messianic Jews. This understanding is facilitated by briefly juxtaposing it with the discourse of some of their critical interlocutors.

Fundamentalist Model of Reality

Before discussing the ethnographic data, this section will outline what I mean by a "fundamentalist model of reality." I group the Messianic Jews under discussion here with fundamentalist Christians primarily because they share with them certain ontological claims that tend to distinguish fundamentalism from the broader category of evangelicalism.[2] It is important to note that Messianic Judaism is by no means a monolith (Ariel 2004). My categorization of this group as fundamentalist applies to the kind of Messianic Judaism represented by many members of the community I studied. While it is not representative of the community as a whole, it is safe to say that this community is well within the parameters of widely acceptable Messianic belief and practice. For example, members of the local leadership have held leadership positions in a major umbrella organization for the Messianic Jewish movement, the Union of Messianic Jewish congregations.

A fundamentalist worldview will be distinguished here by two strains of thought in American cultural history: Baconian empiricism and dispensational premillennialism (Marsden 2006).[3] Both of

2 The category of evangelical denotes a Christian who places high importance on missions and a born again experience. They are particularly known for placing the Bible at the center of their religious belief and practice. Unlike fundamentalism, these characteristics do not imply a specific eschatology or hermeneutic approach.

3 Among the members I interviewed, some described themselves positively as fundamentalists, while others, perhaps partially due to a desire to appeal to liberal Jews in America,

these perspectives view the relationship of the Bible to the cosmos in a manner comparable with what would be considered pre-modern Christian thought, with one key exception that will be addressed shortly. The premodern Christian approach to the Bible is illustrated by the logic of figural interpretation, which was a respected method of interpreting the Bible before a certain hermeneutic shift that accompanied the modern critical approach to the biblical text. Concerning figural interpretation, Auerbach (1953: 555) writes:

> Figural interpretation [of the Bible] establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first … The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness with a divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections. *Their direct earthly connection is of secondary importance* [italics added] (also quoted in Frei 1974: 29).

The model of reality that makes figuration a valid mode of interpretation holds that the entire biblical narrative, rather than being contingent on a historically particular chain of events, is the product of a transcendent intentionality. Since, in this view, the Bible constitutes the very grounds of reality, the concrete "earthly connection" is secondary to the divinely intended meaning which constitutes it.

Harding's (2000) ethnography of American moral majority rhetoric documents a frequent use of figural language to assert contiguity between Reverend Jerry Falwell's institutional activities and the biblical narrative. This discursively placed his movement alongside the Bible as "parts and reflections" of the divine plan and thus attributes both with an equivalent providential cause. It would be incorrect, however, to consider contemporary fundamentalism a wholesale revival of premodern Christian thinking. In order to address the difference between the two, I will be drawing on the work of theologian Hans Frei. Frei was a specialist in the history of religious thought and is known among theologians for innovative work in biblical hermeneutics. I am interested in a shift in Protestant biblical hermeneutics, which Frei (1974) associates with the intellectual developments of modernity. As stated in the Auerbach quote above, premodern, figural interpretation of the Bible reflects a view in which the divinely intended meaning is primary, while the concrete events referred to in the text are treated as a secondary, taken-for-granted outgrowth of it. By the 18th century, Frei argues, this hermeneutic priority was reversed, in that the meaning of the Bible became contingent on specific historical references. The writings of both conservative and liberal exegetes reflected this reversal. Now conservatives, wishing to assert the unitary meaning of the Bible, could no longer consider the "direct earthly connection … [to be] of secondary importance" (Auerbach 1953: 555). Frei locates the earliest evidence of this shift in the writings of Cocceius, a conservative professor of theology in the 17th century. Cocceius sought to demonstrate the unity of the Old and New Testaments by arguing that the Christian salvation economy was experienced and accessed by the Israelites of the Old Testament. This marks a concern with specific points of earthly correspondence not present in premodern interpretation. Previously, whatever the actors in these stories thought they were doing was subsumed into the divinely imposed meaning of the Bible's multi-millennia epic. By examining the writings of Luther and Calvin, Frei argues that such a preoccupation with identifying specific earthly correlates of biblical references was simply not reflected in earlier exegetical writings.

I maintain that the fundamentalist understanding of the Bible's relation to the cosmos is similar to a premodern approach in that it views human history and the cosmos as "reflections and parts" of the divine plan as it is inferred from the Bible. I also hold that it is distinct from the premodern approach in its inability to take the earthly component of that plan for granted. Following the shift that Frei observes, the meaningfulness of a literal reading of the Bible had to be established according to a shared grammar between higher critics and conservative apologists. This grammar is not dissimilar from the evaluative grammar of authenticity, in that the literalist had to

repudiated the label. Marsden (1991) notes that fundamentalists are typically separatists and militant in their opposition to secular society. While the Messianics I worked with shared fundamentalist concerns over the alleged moral dangers of secularism and modernism, I am not confident that *militant* and *separatist* are the best words to describe them. One reason for this is that the Messianic rabbi – despite receiving a master's from the Talbot School of Theology at Biola (Bible Institute of Los Angeles), which is widely known for its fundamentalist orientation (Marsden 1987) – was relatively moderate in some of his stated political positions. For example, while voicing his opposition to same-sex marriage over the pulpit, he also publically voiced support for civil unions – a position that Bialecki (2009) identified as evidence of a budding progressive politics in his account of a Vineyard congregation. Also, following his graduation from Biola, he did a year of rabbinic studies at the University of Judaism and is persistent in his attempts to associate and identify with the wider Jewish community. I am not sure these behaviors are entirely consistent with typical fundamentalist separatism. For this discussion, at least, I use the label fundamentalism not to indicate militancy and separatism per se, but to indicate subscription to the two strains of thought outlined in this section.

identify specific points of earthly correspondence with biblical referents, or, in the terms employed for this discussion, causal/metonymic indexes of the divine plan in the concrete world. Prior to this point, generalized correspondence was assumed as an outgrowth of what Frei calls the "explicative sense," or divinely intended meaning, of the biblical text. It is within this model of the universe – a universe in which the Bible constitutes the very grounds of earthly reality, yet the earthly signs of that constitution are indefinite and need to be specifically identified – that fundamentalists pursue the modern value of authenticity. Achieving fundamentalist authenticity entails penetrating the manipulated symbolic rubric that occludes the divine predication literally referenced in scripture, and thereby gaining a proper understanding of and orientation to divinely initiated indexical chains. Conversely, a "modernist" model of reality reverses this allocation of indexes and symbols, which I will discuss in a later section of this article. Fundamentalists are not the only Christians seeking to ferret out divine indexes amidst an inadequate symbolic "cultural superstructure," but their efforts can be distinguished by their employment of Baconian empiricism and dispensationalist interpretations of history in this pursuit.

Both dispensationalist eschatology and the Christian application of Baconian empiricism reflect a preoccupation with identifying earthly correlates of biblical references. I will address each of these individually. First, Marsden (2006) argues that Christian fundamentalists are the cultural heirs of the "Baconian ideal" as it enveloped American culture in the 19th century. Baconian common sense philosophy calls for a science dedicated to the strict observation and classification of the facts and, in theory, eschews all forms of speculation and a priori assumptions. It maintains that reality can be discerned by reasonable application of a universal common sense that all human beings are born with. Evangelicals in the 19th century appealed to what they took to be universal common sense for their belief in a creator and the truth of the Bible. They were enthusiastic about this kind of science because they believed that, as facts were observed and classified, the truth of scripture would be confirmed. For them, the book of scripture took a parallel position to the book of nature, each functioning as a source for the collection and classification of facts that would eventually be synthesized into a mutually reinforcing whole. At the turn of the century, evangelicals who rejected Darwinian evolution appealed to Baconian empiricism in asserting that evolutionary theory is nothing more than speculation that deviates from the scientific task of strictly observing and classifying facts. Appeals to common sense became more difficult as the academic community came to wholly reject literalists' views of scripture, but fundamentalists' inheritance of the Baconian ideal is still very much alive in their parallel scientific enterprise of creationist science and their continued use of tropes of reason and science in their battle with secularism.

While creation science looks for earthly correlates of biblical referents in the past, dispensationalist eschatology looks for it in contemporary and future events. At the turn of the 18th century – around the time Frei (1974) notes a general increase in concern among conservative Christians with identifying earthly correlates of biblical references – one can see an increased interest in apocalyptic prophesy (Sandeen 1970). Students of apocalyptic writings were specifically interested in establishing correspondence between prophesies and contemporary events. Among the several eschatological theories developed in the early 18th century, John Darby's dispensational premillennialism has become the ideological centerpiece of Christian fundamentalism in America (Marsden 2006; Harding 2000). From their reading of a prophesy in Daniel, Darby and his colleagues concluded that Jesus should have returned to inaugurate his millennial reign seven years after his death (Weber 1979). In order to solve this problem, Darby proposed that Jesus's coming was postponed due to Israel's rejection of him. This postponement created a period of "parenthesis," called the "church age," when God would turn his attention to the gentiles and prophetic time would be suspended. God now had two distinct people: the church, God's heavenly people, and Israel, God's earthly people. Reflecting its status as God's heavenly people, scripture only refers to the church in its description of the "rapture," when the church will be taken up into heaven before the cataclysmic reinitiation of prophetic time. Following the rapture, the Jews, God's earthly people, would again assume their role as the divinely chosen focal point of the biblical narrative.

As counterintuitive as it may seem, "[d]ispensationalist thought was characterized by a dual emphasis on the supernatural and the scientific" (Marsden 2006: 55). Like good Baconian empiricists, dispensationalists valued their system because they saw it as the product of pure induction applied to scriptural and historical data. In Israel, God's earthly people, they had identified the empirical center of history where the Bible and Earth unambiguously intersect. The Jewish people came to be prized as an index of the immediacy of biblically predicated reality amid the man-made edifices of secularism and liberal theology. Since they read prophesy as stating that the

Jews would return to the Holy Land, fundamentalists have typically been avid Zionists. Also, because of its apparent correspondence to prophesy, the capture of Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War significantly increased the confidence of dispensationalists in the empirical validity of their belief system. For example, a 1967 article in *Christianity Today* exclaimed that the fact that "Jerusalem is [now] completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible" (Weber 2004: 184).

In sum, a fundamentalist model of reality, like the model of most theological conservative Christians, understands the Bible, the cosmos, and human history to be caused by a singular divine intentionality. However, they are distinct from, say, charismatic Christians – who hold subjective experience to be a primary site where indexes of the Bible's God are manifested (Luhrmann 2004) – in privileging the observable world of "facts" as a major site of divine indexicality. The fundamentalist world of divinely caused empirical facts centers on the objective referentiality of the written word of God (Crapanzano 2000) and the core historical correlate of those references in Jews as biblical Israel (Weber 2004). My ethnographic data will show how the Messianic Jewish sense of authenticity can be a logical outgrowth of the core fundamentalist position that the biblically referenced, the objectively factual, and the historically Jewish constitute the interrelated node of divine indexicality.

Messianic Judaism as a Central Index of the Unmanipulated Real

In approaching the Messianic synagogue one sees two signs on display that seem to make no secret of the community's syncretic nature. One designates the building as a Messianic Synagogue, the other designated it as a Baptist Church. The two groups share the building, each worshiping on their respective Sabbaths.[4] Outside of the front door, I was greeted with "Shabbat Shalom!" by a woman named Anne standing behind a pamphlet-filled table. She began to explain her beliefs to me and in the process she made a statement that surprised me: "We have a lot in common with Christians." This is where I first became aware of the unique way that Messianics divide up the religious landscape. Some aspects of this division are important to quickly outline. First, "Messianic believers" is their catch-all phrase for everyone who participates regularly in a Messianic congregation. Within this group there are two categories: Messianic Jews and Messianic gentiles. Self-designation as a Messianic Jew typically requires at least a quarter Jewish ancestry, which can be traced through the paternal or maternal line.[5] When I asked Anne if she had a Jewish background, she was quick to point out that her grandfather was Jewish. This kind of pedigree was highly valued and enthusiastically shared by members of the congregation. Those who did not have the required Jewish genealogy identified themselves as "Messianic gentiles" or by the catch-all "Messianic believer." Both these groups tended to make a categorical distinction between themselves and Christians, even though they considered themselves all part of the same "body of Messiah."

Following my discussion with Anne, I went inside the building and, in the entry hall, noticed a rack with *kippot* (skull caps) and prayer shawls for guests and a shelf of prayer books with traditional Jewish and Messianic prayers. As I sat waiting for the service to begin, a gentleman – who looked like a regular with his multicolored prayer shawl, full beard, and personalized *kippa* – introduced himself and kindly went to the entry hall to get me a *kippa* so that I would be properly attired for the synagogue. If the outside of the building comes off as a blatant indication of Messianic believers' peculiar mode of Christian/Jewish syncretism, their form of worship does not. I was surprised to find the liturgy bereft of Christian symbolism. It consisted of worship songs sung to the tune of Israeli folk music. The songs scrupulously avoided overt Christian terminology (like Christ, Jesus, and cross), and were sung interchangeably in Hebrew and English. In the front of the synagogue, members participated in choreographed Israeli dances. In between songs, the *gabbai*[6] would lead the congregation in chanting, and sometimes hastily reciting, in monotone, traditional Jewish prayers in both Hebrew and English. (Messianic prayer books contain side-by-side versions of each prayer in Hebrew script, English transliterations of the Hebrew, and English.)

After reciting some prayers from the "Torah service" section of the prayer book, a large Torah scroll, garnished with a gold breastplate and velvet

4 Institutionally, the two groups are unrelated; they only share a building. Many of my informants were quick to point out that many mainstream Jewish congregations share buildings with churches.

5 Messianic Jews believe the Orthodox requirement of matrilineal Jewish descent to be unbiblical, while their criteria follow the biblical pattern.

6 *Gabbai* is a title given to the person who conducts the liturgy. The same title is given to people who do similar duties in traditional Jewish synagogues.

purple cloth was taken out of an ornamented cabinet (also called "The Ark," which is part of what occluded a large cross behind the podium). The scroll was passed around the room, while people sang in Hebrew. My self-appointed guide instructed me to touch the scroll with my prayer book as it went by. He touched it with his tallith and kissed the part that had touched the scroll. Once it was carried to the front, the *gabbai* commented "Did you see how the Torah is dressed in purple like a king, it represents Messiah. We stand in the presence of the Torah, just as we would stand in the presence of the King." At this point the "Torah blessing," as the prayer book called it, was chanted, after which the *gabbai* chanted some verses in Hebrew from the Torah scroll. After a series of readings and chants, the Torah scroll was placed back into the cabinet. At this point the congregants were given permission to be seated: "The Torah is at rest, now you can rest." Much of their service was modeled after traditional Jewish liturgy, with a number of Messianic innovations. Some of these innovations implied Christian content but none employed overt Christian symbolism.

The rabbi's sermon this week was on the 62nd chapter of Isaiah. This and surrounding chapters reflect the frustrated expectations of national restoration of the ancient Israelites. Unlike the authors of the earlier portions of Isaiah, Trito-Isaiah, as it is called by contemporary biblical scholars, is more nationalistic and focuses more exclusively on the political interests of the Jewish people in contrast to the more universalistic message of previous chapters (Miller and Miller 1959).[7] Most contemporary Christians would interpret the references to national restoration as a type for universal Christian salvation (see for example Pritchard 1993), expanding its significance beyond the narrow focus originally intended. The rabbi's commentary on Isaiah 62, by contrast, emphasized and celebrated its narrow focus, placing his movement and calling at the center of it. The chapter was, after all, talking about Jews, those whom he took to be *his* people in a concrete, historical and biological sense. Reading this chapter as a reference to the physical and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people, his message elaborated on the centrality of Jewish redemption to biblically predicated, providential history. In this sermon, we can see how Jewish identity allows for smooth rhetorical shifts between the Biblical and actual, while – as Crapanzano (2000) noted was a preference among the fundamentalists he studied in California – keeping allegory to a minimum.

The rabbi started his sermon with an affirmation that his focus on Jews was not a narrow partisan interest, but is a work of universal significance:

> This isn't an AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] lecture. It's not the Jewish Federation this afternoon. This is TORAH. This is the BIBLE. And if you haven't been keeping up on the reading for these seven Shabbats, it goes all the way from Isaiah 40 to Isaiah 62. It's *God*'s heart. It's not just my shtick. "Oh the Jewish guys, they're always talking about Jerusalem." Well GOD is always talking about Jerusalem. I would propose to you today that we need to have a burden for Zion's sake. It's not extra credit. It's not just for Messianic Jews, even. But listen. If we Messianic Jews don't have the burden, then who will? It starts in our own house, does it not? But it's the same Bible, as far as I can tell. Christians have Isaiah in their book too.

As Messianic Jews, they need to have a "laser focus for Jewish salvation," not like many Christians who fail to recognize Jewish salvation as the "central hub in the wheel." It was a friendly rebuke of the Christian world for not recognizing the centrality of "Jewish redemption." It was also an exhortation to the Jews present to live up to their responsibility as the chosen people by sharing "Yeshua" (Hebrew for Jesus) with their own. The focus on "Jewish outreach" was what I was expecting when I came to the service. However, I was a bit bewildered by the worldview that undergirded it. Most Messianic Jews reject the idea that Jews need to be converted at all. In this sermon, and others like it, the rabbi does not lament the failure of Jews to convert to Christianity, but their failure to "return" to their original faith and enjoy the benefits of true Judaism – a faith that always has been, and always will be, uniquely theirs. He lamented his people's persistent failure to take their rightful place at the center of history as God's chosen people, redeemed by their Messiah. With a quiver in this voice, the rabbi echoed the first verse of Isaiah 62, declaring, "I will NOT KEEP QUIET! Sorry … we can't, because we [the Jewish people] have a rich inheritance that we are not fulfilling at the moment."

While the rabbi's critique may seem novel, it actually has a strong precedent in the history of American dispensationalism and is reflected in the way dispensationalism has directed Christian pursuits of authenticity. The absence of the church from the

7 Chapters 40–55 of Isaiah have been assigned by modern scholarship to a prophet, or prophets, living after the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and well after the period of the original Isaiah son of Amos. – It is believed that these chapters were written during the rise of the Persian Empire when many were returning to Judea and there was hope of rebuilding the temple. To my knowledge, the Messianic Jewish community I studied does not recognize this scholarship.

biblical narrative created a disjuncture between sacred history and immediate experience (Robbins 2001; Weber 1979). This disjuncture can create sense of the generalized lack of biblical authenticity in the contemporary world. However, even though the indexical correlates of the Bible are decidedly absent from the believer's immediate vicinity, they are clearly identified in Israel. Thus, the Jewish people provide a means to remedy an absence of biblical authenticity characteristic of the church age. The establishment of the state of Israel in particular created a way to personally connect with the biblical time and space. Historian Timothy Weber (2004) documents a major surge in Christian Zionist activism among dispensationalists following the Six-Day War. Numerous lobbying and charity organizations are dedicated to what they see as the biblically mandated task of "blessing Israel." Support of these organizations enable dispensationalists, as one plea for donations put it, to not "just read about prophesy … [but] be a part of it" (Weber 2004: 225). During the 19th and 20th century, dispensationalists also spearheaded special missions to the Jews as a means to "be a part of" prophesy. In his history of missions to the Jews in America, Yaakov Ariel (2000) persuasively argues that increases in special evangelical efforts targeting the Jewish community was a direct outgrowth of dispensationalist ideology. The missionaries believed that their evangelistic enterprise was a necessary predecessor to the emergence of 144,000 Jewish evangelists that would convert the entire Jewish world prior to Jesus's return. Missions to the Jews thus enabled one to become an indexical "reflection" of the divine plan by making a causal contribution to the central role the Jews would eventually play in prophesied events. Since the Jews had a future role to play as *Jews*, missionaries told Jewish converts that they were not abandoning their Jewish identity in converting. Rather, they were fully realizing this identity as God intended. Because the missionaries' rhetoric asserted the continued relevance of Jewish identity for the believer, Ariel (2000: 250) argues, "Messianic Judaism has been the logical outcome of the rhetoric and activity of the missionary movement and its dispensationalist eschatology."

The formation of the Hebrew Christian Alliance in 1915 is the earliest institutional expression of dispensationalist Jewish converts' sense of having a special eschatological identity as God's chosen people. Messianic Judaism – which expresses identity as "believing Israel" through an overt categorical distinction from Christians – did emerge here and there, but was suppressed by the evangelical community until the latter half of the 20th century (Rausch 1982). Many Messianic Jews see the Six-Day War and the rise of Messianic Judaism as a parallel sign that the stage is being set for the full restoration of Israel that will precede the millennium. As one prominent Messianic rabbi put it, "As Jerusalem was restored to Jewish control during the 1967 Six-Day War … a powerful measure of God's *Ruach HaKodesh* [Holy Spirit] was released upon our Jewish people" (Chernoff 2001: 11). The result was, according to him, that "the Messianic Jewish revival was reborn in 1967 and has increasingly flourished ever since" (12). My Messianic Jewish informants saw themselves as the "first fruits" of the restoration of Jews to their providential status. This bridges the gulf separating sacred history from everyday life created by the "great parenthesis" (Robbins 2001; Weber 1979), or suspension in prophetic time, by making believers into the embodied indexes of divine movement in history. Like the Jewish state, Messianic Jews are not "the church" floating in parenthesis, but "Israel" at the center of the biblical narrative. This first person stance as biblically-referenced, eschatologically-significant, believing Israel was made strikingly apparent in a statement by the rabbi at the end of the sermon addressed earlier. Here, he made a rare, and slightly ironic, reference to "Jesus" (as opposed to Yeshua) to make a point to Christians about the indispensability of Jews, like themselves, to their eschatological hopes:

> You want *your* Jesus to come back, "Maranatha. Come, Lord. We're looking forward to the second coming." Well you better start praying for Jerusalem and Israel, and for Jewish hearts to open up, because, to put it bluntly, Jesus ain't coming until *our* people WELCOME HIM BACK!

The sense that Messianic Jews are the initial phase of Israel's full restoration to their chosen status was common in this community. "Jewish outreach," the term they preferred over "evangelism," was one means to enact their identification with this prophesied role. Another key component of enacting this identity is their adherence to Jewish practices. In a sermon, the rabbi labeled "Messianic Judaism 101," he argued that because of the ancient covenant God made with Israel it is "incumbent" on Jewish believers to remain Jews and gentile believers to remain gentiles. To give up a Jewish lifestyle at conversion is seen by many as an abandonment of divinely bestowed birthright. This attitude is exemplified by one of my informants. Tevia, now in his mid-twenties, was raised a Messianic Jew and completed an undergraduate degree in Jewish studies at a secular university. He is currently attending seminary in preparation for a ministry he hopes to start in Israel. Tevia recently adopted a Hebrew name and

brandishes a rabbinic-style beard. Of his own volition he brought a traditional Jewish prayer book to our interview to show me what he chants from every morning as part of his "daily walk with God." He maintains a positive relationship with the evangelical community and attends classes at churches on a regular basis. Tevia felt that, because Christians were not part of the original covenant God made with Israel, they had no obligation to follow the commandments of the Torah. Jewish believers, on the other hand, because of their lineage, have a different obligation.

The following excerpt from my interview with Tevia is fairly representative of how Messianic Jews tend to relate Jewish identity and practice with their understanding of the biblically predicated history:

John: Is it [observing Jewish practices] something you do as part of your heritage, or is it something that you are called to do?

Tevia: I would say it's a little bit of both.

John: A little bit of both.

Tevia: It's my identity. I'm a descendant of the children of Israel coming out of the wilderness. At the same time, I know enough that, you know, it's something that the Bible calls us to do, in like Leviticus, you know, God says you should do this in perpetuity, a perpetual thing, so I feel both … I believe we're chosen for a reason. We're called to be a people set apart and he's given us these laws and these precepts … it's really sad that some of our people have fallen by the wayside and rejected what God has called them to be. I think it's a really special thing … it goes back to the fall of man in the garden. God tried with Noah, but it didn't work … I'd say it didn't work because after the flood man started doing … very sinful after that. I think eventually he felt a need to pick a specific people of the earth and use them to show his glory to the whole world in different ways … to show his glory through the eventual birth and giving the Messiah, which is a big light unto the world, which is what people follow now. I think he chose us because he wanted to bring redemption to the world, a world that was fallen and very wicked.

My either/or question at the beginning of the excerpt was inadequate because, for Tevia, heritage and calling are mutually constitutive. What God wants Tevia to do is a function of what he is in a concrete, historical sense, or, as another informant put it, "It's in my DNA." Messianic Jews' adherence to historically-specific commandments given to a historically-specific, biologically-specific population is a mark of their eschatological status as God's earthly people.

Messianic Jewish identity not only allows one to embody the kind of *objective* point of biblical contiguity that is the concerted aim of fundamentalist authenticity, it also makes one's life into an indexical microcosm of the narrative's totality. That is, not only are Messianic Jews a single part of the divine plan, but the combination of inherited Jewish lineage, adherence to the ancient covenant God made with the Israelites and end-time belief in Yeshua indexes the major events that have and will occur in providential history. This is in part because, through a believing Jewish identity, they become an effect or causal index, of the same intentionality that caused the composition of the Bible, the history of the ancient Israelites, and the coming of the Messiah. Additionally, their temporal position in this caused chain of events makes them into a cumulative effect of all that has happened in that narrative and a metonymic "part and reflection" of the narrative's culmination in the millennium. Jewish identity can thus function as a pure medium for connecting to what fundamentalism posits as the real supernatural core of existence. Therefore, Messianics can appeal to a mainstream Jewish audience by incorporating Jewish signifiers and worship styles, while at the same time – for reasons that are often independent of evangelizing objectives – reinforcing their own strong sense of biblical authenticity. It is their use of Jewish signifiers that marks their status as the spiritual "first fruits" of the duplex restoration of biblical Israel, which is one of the most specific, unambiguous indexes of the actuality of biblical time posited by a fundamentalist worldview.

The appeal of Messianic Judaism to Christians with no Jewish background could also be understood better by keeping in mind how the movement can be conceptualized and experienced within a fundamentalist model or reality. Dispensationalist eschatology limits possible human correlates of biblical references to an objectively discrete kind of person, and the Messianic worship environment brings those kinds of persons into a form of belief and practice that seems to recreate the biblical context. This gives worshipers a profound sense of its biblical authenticity. Even though most elements of Messianic liturgy are not in the Bible, because of their connection to Jewish tradition, they seem closer to the practices of biblical peoples than those developed within European Christendom. For example, during the Rosh Hashanah service, the rabbi commented, "Many of these prayers may go back to the time of Yeshua." Consultation with numerous members confirmed that this assumption colors much of the Messianic experience with their often incomprehensible Hebrew/English liturgy. In general, Messianics have a sense that they are worshiping in the way that most resembles how Jesus worshiped

and, thereby, living as Jesus lived. This biblical recreation properly coalesces with the establishment of the state of Israel in the prophetic timeline and, thus, gives adherents a sense that the Bible is unfolding right before their eyes. The configuration of their community within this dual fulfillment is implied at many points of their discourse and practice. For example, once a week, the rabbi leads a prayer group dedicated to "praying for Israel." For thirty minutes, members take turns offering spontaneous prayers that couple supplications to "bless Israel's military" and "economy" with petitions for God to "bring all of Israel to belief in the Messiah." "Israel," in the context of spiritual redemption, normally refers to worldwide Jewry. The sense of seamless correspondence between the Bible and the world in Messianic worship can be thrilling for many members, Jewish and gentile. Tiffany, a Messianic gentile, reported that, a few years ago, she read in the New Testament that all Jews would accept Jesus in the last days and felt compelled to pray regularly for that prophesy's fulfillment. Upon her first visit to the Messianic synagogue, she reports that, "Seeing *Israelites* believing in Jesus, in person, not just reading it in the Bible, but *seeing* it in person made my faith, like, real and I was crying … because I was really hearing from God." All these elements in Messianic worship function to, as many of my Messianic Jewish and gentile informants stated, "make the Bible real."

How do people come to see Messianic Judaism as a prime means to realize biblical authenticity? A large number of my informants reported pursuing fundamentalist authenticity prior to their involvement in Messianic Judaism. It is reasonable to suspect that this is not atypical of the movement's Messianic Jewish and gentile constituency. In a recent survey of 62 American Messianic Jewish synagogues, Wasserman (2000) found that 98% of genealogically Jewish members had converted to Christianity before becoming involved in Messianic Jewish worship. This is consistent with previous data on the effectiveness of Messianic Judaism in recruiting mainstream Jews (Schiffman 1988). Furthermore, Harris-Shapiro (1999) found that half or more of the membership of Messianic Jewish congregations she studied were comprised of Messianic gentiles. My field experience is more or less consistent with these findings. This indicates that the actual function of the Messianic appropriation of Jewish identity is quite different from the often attributed function of deceiving Jews into Christian conversion. The few ethnographies that have been written on Messianic Jews focus on how they relate to the mainstream Jewish community (Harris-Shapiro 1999; Feher 1998). During my fieldwork, however, I found that the wider Jewish community is peripheral to the vast network of evangelical/fundamentalist churches over which Messianic synagogues seem to exercise the bulk of their influence. Most of my Messianic informants came from these churches and many continued to attend their old Bible studies and worship services after becoming members. Messianic rabbis are often asked by the pastors from these churches to, among other things, give classes on Jewish-related topics that can span several weeks. Many of my informants decided to start coming to the Messianic synagogue after listening to the Messianic rabbi at their church. Very few reported opposition from their former pastors to this change. While some members were raised in observant Jewish households, as Feher (1998) also observed,[8] a large number of adherents attained most of their knowledge of Jewish practice and idiom after becoming Messianic Jews. In this congregation, learning Jewish culture and worship motifs is facilitated by the postgraduate work the rabbi did at a Jewish seminary after he graduated with his theology degree from the Bible Institute of Los Angeles.

According to many narratives I collected, the decision to identify with Messianic Judaism was the end product of the disciplined moral labor of separating what is socially conditioned, and therefore arbitrary, from what is seen as a causal result of the conditions of the cosmos. This drive for an authentic view of the real might be characterized as a variant of the modern work of purification (Keane 2007; Latour 1993) because it constitutes a moral labor of *separating* what are seen as incommensurable phenomena.[9] The reported method for doing so was a disciplined study of the Bible. The pious anxieties my informants expressed also reflect what Engelke (2007) identifies as a general Protestant anxiety over

8 In her ethnography of a California Messianic Jewish congregation, Feher (1998: 76) notes, "Yiddish is used in everyday speech even by Jews who were raised with no Jewish culture in their homes. The most striking example is Rabbi Jason, who had to learn everything 'Jewish-wise.' He says the extent of his Jewish knowledge while he was growing up was that 'Passover is Matzo ball soup'."

9 The work of separating indexes and symbols broadly maps onto Latour's (1993) description of purification as the work of separating nature from society in academia and Keane's (2007) focus on the work of separating humans from nonhumans in his study of Calvinist missionaries' confrontation with fetishism. Symbols are socially constructed by human minds, like society, and indexes, like nature, are often extensions of the conditions of the universe that are independent of human creative activity. Authenticity as a work of purification works to avoid misattributions between the two by clearly separating them.

forms of mediation. From Engelke's analysis of Frei (2007: 173 f.) it is evident that the Friday Apostolics he studied and Messianic Jews are at opposite ends of Frei's hermeneutic spectrum in terms of how the Bible functions as mediator of the divine. Frei (1974) claimed that the modern conceptual distinction made between meaning and reference in biblical hermeneutics resulted in one either taking a conservative approach by defending its full referential validity, lest the Bible become meaningless, or asserting that the real message is beyond the medium of what are seen as generally unreliable biblical references (which is the approach typically taken by Liberal Christians). Friday Apostolics represent an extreme manifestation of the latter approach because they disregard the Bible entirely as a flawed medium and seek to locate the "real Bible" that exists beyond it through "live and direct" revelation.[10] American fundamentalists, on the other hand, including many Messianic Jews, view the words of the Bible as a pure medium, an index of divine intent. It can thus be examined like an empirical object via a method that meets the standard of the Baconian empiricism. For fundamentalists, therefore, the preoccupation with mediation is manifested by a drive to "purify" one's belief and practice through separating biblical and unbiblical media and maximizing the former.

Because of their desire to limit purported divine mediation to the objectively biblical, Pentecostal gifts of the spirit and the sacramental rituals of European Christendom evoke the suspicion of fundamentalists.[11] However, according to my data, Jewish rituals have a different biblical status and can thus evoke great enthusiasm.[12] The Passover Seder at the Messianic synagogue was reported to have hundreds of visitors from local fundamentalist/evangelical congregations. Some local churches even hold their own Passover service. In my interviews, claims for the superior biblical authenticity of Messianic worship by both Messianic Jews and gentiles focused on their practice of the "biblical holidays" to exclusion of "pagan" holidays like Christmas and Easter. They reported that their decision to abandon Christian holidays was a consequence of a disciplined, systematic study of scripture. The intellectual process they describe is distinctly Baconian in its claim to be free from emotional attachments and received assumptions. "I just wanted to know the truth" and "I go where the evidence leads" were common statements made. They also made a clear distinction between what they were "taught" by parents or leaders, and what they discovered through independent investigation. The following account, given by Samuel – a Messianic Jew whose grandfather was a Jewish convert to Christianity and was raised Christian – is characteristic of the intellectual trajectory outlined by many Messianic Jews and gentiles when they explained how they came to embrace the Jewish holidays:

> And being an avid Bible reader, I remember reading in the book of Numbers chapter 21 where it says "These are the feasts that ye must keep." It describes Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. … I looked and I thought, "This is really cool! This is scriptural!" you know … "Christmas and Easter suck!" You've got this fat guy in this suit, and you know that's all *bubkis*. *Bubkis* is a Yiddish word meaning "nonsense." Santa Clause is *bubkis*. You think about it, he sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He's like this old voyeur who is spying on children. Now that's just crazy. … Why are we lying to our kids about these totally bogus things?

The next portion of Samuel's account is unique because it tells of a public confrontation with the leadership of his former church, implying an uncommon tension between his newly found views and those of his former community. The account deserves to be quoted in full because it dramatizes the antagonistic relationship between received knowl-

10 Friday Apostolics are like liberal Christians only in how they conceive the relationship between the biblical text and reality, but differ dramatically in the properties they ascribe to reality itself. Liberal Christians look for the "real Bible" in abstract principles beyond the text, which can be situated within a modernist worldview vacated of the Bible's ostensive supernaturalism. Friday Apostolics look for the "real Bible" in immediate experience of the supernatural, which, according to them, the Bible as text fails to adequately convey.

11 Messianic Judaism also attracts Pentecostal Christians and the dancing and other spontaneous aspects of worship reflect charismatic elements (Samuelson 2000). Also, some Messianic synagogues, though not the one that is the focus of this article, practice gifts of the spirit. The reason for the focus on fundamentalists here is primarily because it characterizes the community I study. It also characterizes a large portion of the general Messianic Jewish polity.

12 It's important to make a distinction between expressive media, which are generally recognized as arbitrary, but is embraced as a clever method for spreading pure "biblical" beliefs, and ritual media, which are purported to have an ontological status parallel to scripture. The former are more or less embraced by fundamentalists, as evidenced by fundamentalism's portability to a vast array of youth cultures (Luhr 2009). Catholic sacramental rituals and Pentecostal gifts of the spirit are examples of the latter and are on the whole rejected by fundamentalists. While some fundamentalists view Messianic Jewish rituals as an ethnic form of expression that parallels youth subcultural expression, many see them as having a unique ontological status that separates them from other forms of media in that they are "biblical" and divinely created. This view has currency among fundamentalists but has not generated the kinds of critical reactions one sees with respect to Pentecostal and Catholic ritual practices.

edge and "Bible truth" that emerged in the majority of my interviews:

> The senior pastor said if you have any questions you can raise your hand and the whole sermon time will be a Q and A. I raised my hand and I said "The Bible tells us to follow these holidays and they are the Jewish holidays. Why do we instead follow these holidays which we *know* have pagan roots? We know we are not supposed to follow paganism. How come we are following holidays with pagan roots, instead of holidays with biblical roots?" And they went "Uhhh … well [drawn out with ironic pitch change] these are our traditions for a very long time. And we view these holidays as really more of cultural thing." A friend of mine was sitting in front of me and she turned around and said to me "That was a good question and he did not give a good answer." And I said "Yeah you're right." So I started attending a Messianic shul and I started to feel myself pulling away from Christianity.

In the above narrative, Samuel's principled stance on rationally grounded truth is opposed to passively received "traditions", "bogus" lies to children and intellectually flimsy, emotionally grounded attachment to a "cultural thing."[13] Like Samuel, my other Messianic informants stress that they had rejected what Trilling calls "cultural superstructures" in favor of an underlying reality that is obscured by society's symbolic manipulations. Thus, Messianic authenticity – in its division between traditional culture and rational real – is often said to begin in something that looks like modernity's classic rupture from a traditional past (Keane 2007; Brenner 1996). While it may seem counterintuitive, opposition to the past is not an uncommon place for fundamentalists to position themselves. John Darby taught that all existing Christian churches had apostatized from the original faith and advocated that true Christians separate themselves from them (Weber 1979). Early dispensationalist missionaries – who were themselves heirs to the protestant break with a traditional Catholic past – saw themselves as breaking with an anti-Semitic Christian past and an unbiblical, secularizing, Christian present (Ariel 2000). "They are attached to their traditions" and "because it's what they have been taught" were common answers given by Messianics to my inquiries as to why most Christians do not recognize the superior biblical authenticity of Jewish practices. As one might expect from fundamentalists generally, Messianic Jews and gentiles attributed errors in Christendom to a failure to shed a priori assumptions and penetrate the manipulated cultural rubric by applying detached, common sense to both the Bible and the empirical world.

Messianic Jews, Their Critics, and Attributions of "Staged Authenticity"

Writing on tourism, Dean MacCannell's (1999) claims moderns recognize that the majority of public life is "staged." That is to say, despite the efforts that go into staged public displays, there is a tacit assumption maintained between interlocutors that the actual nuts and bolts of life are occluded by carefully contrived appearances. In certain cases, however, people are deceptively made to believe they are encountering an unmanipulated reality behind the scenes. MacCannell claims that this contrived "demystification of social life," what he calls "staged authenticity," is often perceived as "not merely a lie but a superlie" (1999: 103). In essence, staged authenticity consists of an attempt to convince an audience that manipulations by a human mind are causal/metonymic extensions of the real. Its purported insidious character stems, I would say, from it being interpreted as an *intentional* attempt to get an audience to mistake an arbitrary symbol for a causal index and thereby diminishing the audience's agentive capacities as knowing subjects. Messianic Jews and their critics attribute each other with some degree of staged authenticity. I will now try to show that their differences result from the fact that both employ the same evaluative grammar of authenticity – that is, both hold that accurate discernment between arbitrary symbolic couplings and causal/metonymic indexical relations as morally desirable – but each employs it within mutually exclusive models of reality. This results in each group holding different views on what counts as an index and what counts as symbolic manipulation.

Most criticisms of Messianic Judaism are predicated on what could be categorized as a "modernist" model of reality. In the contexts of American religion, modernism stresses "the naturalistic" and sees "social forces as … crucial to understanding religion" in areas where fundamentalists stress "supernatural intervention" (Marsden 1991: 41). For a religious modernist, religious modes of signification index one's affiliation with a religious tradition that is *historical* in the natural, sociological sense. Iden-

13 Messianic leadership at this synagogue does not condemn those who practice Christmas and Easter, but treat it as a gentile ethnic practice. In this, the holidays are quite distinct from Jewish holidays, which are "biblical." The real problem is in the failure of Christians not to recognize the proper difference between the two modes of practice. For a more focused discussion of Messianic views of Christian holidays in relation to Jewish holidays, see Harris-Shapiro (1999: 87–96, 147–155) and Feher (1998: 90–93, 99–115).

tification with a religious tradition implies affiliation with institutions, attitudes, and beliefs that emerge over time from the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual life of an enduring community. A modernist critic would evaluate Messianic Judaism's claims to authenticity by scrutinizing their "natural-historical" connections to the Jewish tradition; this can include tracing the cultural history of its members' and leader's ideology, attitudes, and ultimate objectives, as well as looking at funding sources, education, social networks, etc. What do critics conclude when scrutinizing Messianic Judaism through a natural-historical lens? A Jewish reviewer of Feher's sympathetic ethnography of a Messianic synagogue sums up what tends to be the general consensus: "Feher's descriptions of Messianics' current and prior religious education, training, attitudes, ancestry, and experiences (including its rabbi) seem to support" the claim that Messianic Judaism is not really Jewish (Shneider 1999: 285).

Thus for critics of Messianic Judaism, the use of Jewish signifiers by a group that does not have the appropriate natural-historical connections to the Jewish tradition constitutes a clear case of staged authenticity. They become a Trojan horse, an undercover agent for the enemy; they are "people who are pretending to be relatives and using their pretended relative status to trick the rest of my family" (Rabbi Gellner quoted in Feher 1998: 30). Despite their Jewish worship style, it is clear to critics that Messianics have disconnected themselves from the natural-historical sources of Jewish continuity and connected themselves to Christian institutions that are seen as hostile to Jewish survival. "The issue is deceit," Rabbi Margolis wrote to a reporter. "This is a deceptive missionary movement, organized and heavily funded by evangelical Christians whose sole purpose is to convert Jews to (fundamentalist) Christianity" (quoted in Breen 2005). In this view, the display of Jewish signifiers by Messianics appears to index membership in a "family" – a people associated with an enduring historical community – to a Jewish audience, when, in a natural-historical sense, Messianics are no such thing. Many Christians object to Messianic practice for similar reasons; they do not want to be party to a deceptive presentation of the Christian faith (Byassee 2005). However, the way critics of Messianic Judaism view the coupling of Jewish signifiers with an evangelical ideology/institutional affiliation mirrors the way Messianic Jews view the Christian abandonment of its Jewish roots. I say this because both are understood to constitute an arbitrary symbolic coupling by a human mind that is deceptively made to look like a causal/metonymic indexical extension of the real.

While many Messianic Jews would welcome stronger natural-historical connections to traditional Judaism (and they have made some progress in this regard),[14] their concept of what makes an authentic Jew is based first and foremost on their readings of supernatural predications in the Bible. Similarities between fundamentalist views and those of Messianic Jews are not attributed by Messianics to common natural-historical connections, but to the dedication both groups have to the Bible as God's word. Likewise, they believe that the normative Jewish view that belief in Yeshua is incompatible with Jewish identity is the result of most Jews not fully accepting the Old Testament as the word of God, or at least not interpreting its messianic prophesies in a serious, unbiased manner. The boundary between Judaism and Christendom is an arbitrary misrepresentation of the limits of Jewish identity, conjured up in the minds of the Christian fathers and rabbinic sages, which are now incorrectly taken to be an indexical outgrowth of the genuine biblical tradition. In so misrepresenting the biblical faith, one informant gravely opined, they "curse Israel" by "hiding their Messiah from them." While to modernists generally, fundamentalist constructions of the supernatural occlude the indexical interconnections of natural-historical causation, to Messianic Jews, representations of human history in exclusively natural-historical terms occlude the indexical interconnections of supernatural causation.

What is authentic Jewishness within in a dispensationalist world history comprised of "reflections and fragments" of the divine plan? Reverend Jerry Falwell's statement on the status of Jews sums up the views of most of my Messianic informants: "Some forty centuries ago, God promised Abraham that he would be the founder of a special nation … God chose the Jewish people to bear His name, to show forth His glory, and to be the channel through whom He would perform His will on Earth" (Simon 1984: 6f.). As is apparent in Tevia's statement earlier, God's work to "show forth His glory" through the Jews is understood to have continued with "Yeshua" and will culminate in his millennial reign. Despite what the wider Jewish community thinks,

14 At least one reformed rabbi, Dan Cohn-Sherbok (2000), advocates that Messianic Jews be recognized by the Jewish community, along with officially Buddhist and atheist Jewish organizations. It is part of his more general advocacy of highly inclusive Jewish pluralism as a means to preserve the Jewish community from the total loss of identity that can eventually result from assimilation and intermarriage. There is some discussion in the Jewish community over whether the Jewish genealogies and faithfulness of many Messianic Jews to Torah observance should qualify them for recognition. For a useful review of the issues see Kollontai (2004).

scripture assures them that adherence to God's covenant to Israel, coupled with faith in the Messiah, makes them *biblically* authentic Jews. Understood through the lens of a fundamentalist ontology, their evangelical ideology, their efforts to recruit the Jewish community to their cause, even their natural-historical connections with evangelicalism,[15] make them into what Jews were always meant to be. Their connections to evangelicals give them the ability to share Jewish knowledge with other parts of the "body of Messiah" and coalesce with those who also want Jews to fulfill their part in the divine plan. All this does not diminish, but contributes, to their fulfillment of Israel's biblical calling to "show forth … [God's] glory and … be the channel through whom He would perform His will on Earth" (Simon 1984: 6f.). Thus, the very thing that precludes their Jewish authenticity to outsiders – the coupling of Jewish identity with a fundamentalist worldview and affiliation in "the body of Messiah" – is part of what, to them, indexes their biblical authenticity. Because the Bible determines the really real in religion, history, and the cosmos, biblical Jewish authenticity, as they interpret it, is coextensive with Jewish authenticity proper.

Conclusion

Like Evans-Pritchard (1976) and his Azande discussants, Messianic Jews and their critics have a fundamental disagreement about the indexical underpinning of a certain state of affairs. While there may be some parallels in the moral implications of these two disagreements, the latter case is specifically informed by the evaluative grammar of authenticity. In conclusion, I would like to briefly address some possible moral implications of this grammar for how these sorts of meta-semiotic disagreements are interpreted. Parish (2009) argues that, at some point in the development of modernity people became aware of, and are often disillusioned by, the increasing human ability to manipulate the appearances, emotions, and even the self. Anxiety over the increasing human ability to rationality construct what at least had the appearance of reality led to the romantic backlash and its accompanying quest for authenticity. I believe many of Marx's writings give particularly poignant expression to this modernist anxiety. Marx was excited about modernity's creative capacities but profoundly disturbed by its destructive effects (Berman 1982). In many of Marx's (2000) major critiques of capitalism he directly connected "abstractions" or "fetishes" – i.e., symbolic manipulations that masquerade as reality – to oppressive limits capitalism places on human agency and awareness. Fetishistic abstractions like money, labor, and property, he argued, occludes very real exploitive relations of Capitalism and stifles the proletariats' capacity to act for their own interest with a clear vision.

It is fitting that Marx would use the fetish as a metaphor for these agency stifling misrepresentations of reality. Keane (2007: 179) described classic fetishism as the "pagan's inappropriate ascription of agency to nonhuman subjects." "Staged authenticity" involves the reverse misattribution – that is, it inappropriately ascribes the qualities of fixed naturalness to the symbolic manipulations of human agents. People are made to think they are rationally complying with given constraints of the real when they are, in fact, following the dictates of a manipulating agent. One sees this logic in the attributions of "staged authenticity" made by the two groups discussed here. In both cases, the alleged perpetrators obscure the view, and thus diminish the agency, of their victims. In one case, the victim loses genuine Jewish identity due to the overt symbolic manipulations of an unscrupulous missionary scheme and, as a consequence, the Jewish community is further depleted as its members are unknowingly lured into the camp of their historical persecutor. In the other case, knowledge of the real Jewish Messiah, the Jewish assumption of their destined role in history, and even their eternal salvation, is lost due to the symbolic manipulations of past Christian and Jewish leaders. Both groups see themselves as the demystifiers and, by extension, the liberators. Moreover, each constructs this view of themselves according to the same logic of authenticity, only it is employed within mutually inverted models of reality. These inverted models of reality likewise invert the semiotic status ascribed to Jewish signifiers within a Messianic Jewish context. The effects of this semiotic inversion is reflected in highly charged group conflicts over authenticity which implicate

15 While many Messianic synagogues function under the umbrella of para-church organizations, most fall under one of two independent Messianic Jewish organizations: the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations and the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. The synagogue this article focuses on is associated with the former. My claim that Messianic synagogues have natural historical connections to normative evangelical Christianity refers to the education of their leaders, the background of their members, the partnership between Messianic and fundamentalist leaders in pastoral roles, and the common objectives they share. I am not necessarily saying that they are not in many ways independent of normative evangelical organizations, but, in this, they are not unlike many fundamentalist congregations within this notoriously anti-ecclesiastical, anti-denominational religious culture (Marsden 1987).

the other in the morally repugnant act of diminishing another's capacity for awareness and agency.

Finally, the ethnographic example outlined here shows how authenticity can be both culturally shared in its basic evaluative criteria, yet highly varied in its manifest claims. I suggest the nature of Messianic authenticity as grammatically normative, but manifestly idiosyncratic, represents a regularity, rather than an exception, in claims for superior authenticity. In a similar vein, Trilling (1972: 94) suggests that, "authenticity is implicitly a polemical concept, fulfilling its nature by dealing aggressively with received and habitual opinion." Because a special claim for authenticity is often predicated on its independence from convention, its contrast tends to be found in something with widespread acceptance by a significant collectivity. Therefore, instead of engendering cultural homogeneity, the shared cultural value of authenticity should be expected to give rise to novel and contradictory cultural expressions.

Authenticity as a dividing rather than uniting cultural value can be seen in various facets of modern culture. In academia, it is reflected in everything from scientists "falsifying" common-sense ideas, to post-structural "deconstructions" of scientific objectivity. Despite their obvious conflict, both of these projects seek to demonstrate the symbolically manipulated nature of their objects of critique by uncovering the indexical interconnections that human manipulations allegedly occlude. Moreover, one can see this logic in youth subcultures that assume a vast and conflicting variety of forms, but are unified in their sense of thwarting convention to get at something more raw and real beneath the surface. Likewise, adult reactions to many youth subcultures might trivialize them as a kind of "staged authenticity," which arbitrarily signifies nothing more than adolescent stupidity or, more charitably, a developmentally appropriate expression of independence. Messianic Jewish claims to be practicing their faith out of a sincere desire for an authentic religion are dismissed in analogous fashion. Given the nature of authenticity's evaluative grammar, this is the kind of reaction that should be expected to follow from claims to a unique, superior form of authenticity. Thus, the Messianic position of being "betwixt and between" social categories (Van Gennep 1960) – and hence being eschewed as "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966) – can be seen as constituting their strong sense of authenticity as much as it threatens it. Moreover, the kind of Messianic Judaism discussed in this article maintains precisely the kind of liminality that one would expect Christian fundamentalists to find morally desirable. That is, they have thwarted the categories of "man-made religion" by occupying a role within fundamentalism's own prophetic script – all the while leaving that script intact.

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