II. BOOK REVIEWS

Michael T. Miller, *Ben Ammi Ben Israel: Black Theology, Theodicy and Judaism in the Thought of African Hebrew Israelite Messiah. 2025. Bloomsbury, 254pp. €76.50 hardback, ISBN: 9781350295155.*

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This is a brief, but thorough study, which presents Ben Ammi Ben Israel from different points of view, considering various aspects and the wider context. The author deals with the modern religious African Hebrew Israelite movement, calmly pursuing objective truth in accordance with Leopold von Ranke's nineteenth-century research principle – *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist.* The book's narrative serenely move through recent, disturbing political issues without ever relinquishing the high principle of objectivity and academic standards.

The book's title is sufficiently descriptive and captures the theme – more the ideology than the history of the independent and original African Hebrew Israelite group founded by Ben Ammi Ben Israel (1939–2014). The introduction presents the main historical and biographical background, divided into sections to make its important narrative clearer. "By Means of a Beginning: History, Race and Truth" concerns Ben Ammi's attitude to the themes in its title, which are easily defensible as starting points. Judaism appeals to tradition and sacred history rather than dogmas and doctrines. Its origin in a tribal cult makes the justification of a new group in this religion of special importance, and this follows in the section "As in the Days of Noah: Eschatology and Apocalypticism." Every new movement ought to explain its aims so as best to reflect the present and past.

Naturally, the narrative leads to "Black Messiah: Ben Ammi Yeshua and Messianism," revealing a very curious topic. Ben Ammi and his community consciously set aside their Christian roots to absorb Judaism. The influence of Christianity on Judaism (and of course vice versa) is not rare in the history of these religions. Yet it is commonly ac-

cepted that one should keep silent about exogamous inspirations. Bens Ammi absorbs Christian notions into his speculations. "Pneumatic Immanence: God, Ontology and Law" and "Divine Justice/Deserved Liberation: Suffering, Agency and Chosenness" situate discussion of basic theological problems in a wide context, referring to their prior religious background and drawing comparison with parallel ideas in Judaism. "The Vital Self: Body, Soul, Spirit, World" continues to pursue theological problems, but includes more personal individual aspects, presenting some of Ben Ammi's original theories, theories which sound very modern, even contemporary, and exceeding any narrow religious or national regulations. "The Power to Define: Words, Ideas, Names and Scripture" futher displays original theories, this time possessing a certain attraction and similarity to ideas mainly associated with Kabbalah and Western esotericism. "Revolutionary Conservatism: Social Theory, Human Life and Gender" illustrates the view of Ben Ammi and his community on the place of a person in society, in tradition, in sex, marriage and nation. Finally, the conclusion introduces Ben Ammi's ideas into the wider context of various traditions of Black theology, Kabbalah (Lurianic), and Gnosticism (Hans Jonas).

That is not the first study of Ben Ammi's movement. However, Michael Miller's book is more systematic than previous efforts. It is the result of more than ten years of research, including the examination of documents in the community's library in Dimona, Israel. The book succinctly, brilliantly, and comprehensively covers a wide spectrum of questions. The organization of problems reflects a view from the outside rather than the inside. However, this makes the book more comprehensible to the "general reader." Miller's study answers the questions outsiders would most readily ask about a modern religious movement.