

THE THIRD TESTIMONIUM by David FLUSSER.

The Latin word 'Testimonium' means testimony. This musical event, which has already become an established tradition, offers interesting and revealing evidence about the various aspects of Israel's history and its significance. The word 'Testimonium' also reminds us of the most tragic aspects of the history of our people. The Greek word for witness is 'Martyr' - the Jew or the Christian who died for his faith. If 'martyr' means 'witness', then even this term belongs to the Jewish heritage: those who die for the sanctification of God's name are witness before God for mankind.

However, the word 'Testimonium' has also a wider meaning. The lives of all the children of Israel, their sufferings, their hopes and God's creation enshrined therein, all constitute a long and varied testimony. The 'Testimonium' not only tries to give artistic expression to the experiences of previous generations of Jews, but aims at offering testimony on our part as well as on the part of the artists taking part in it. The artists, the performers and the audience are themselves witnesses who offer their evidence on what happened in Jewish history. Thus, this important manifestation offers contemporary evidence for the identification of the nation with its part. I do not know of any other event which is comparative to the 'Testimonium' in this respect.

It is a historic and, at the same time, a modern work of art in the fullest sense of the meaning: contemporary music, ballet, theatre - all rooted in the aesthetic values and idioms of our days. How did this happen? It seems to me that the basic reason lies in the Jewish national renaissance, the return of the Jews to their country and ancient homeland. Thus, Jewish history in its full breadth is being renewed in Jerusalem, Israel's eternal capital, and we see events of bygone days as if they were happening before our own eyes.

However not only Jews are partners in the modern renaissance of Judaism and its ancient values. Together with us many other nations look with favour upon the renewal of our ancient Jewish values. Because of this, religion which is based on the Old Testament, on Judaism, is not alien to Christians, but it often awakens childhood memories. Therefore some nations who admire our historic renaissance, are prepared to learn from us, not only in the theatre, but also about our past history. Thus non-Jewish composers participate with us in the 'Testimonium' and I hope that their number will grow in the future.

In the 'Testimonium' we have thus created a unique synthesis between sublime historic events and modern musical composition. Both these components are of decisive importance to the audience. Without any doubt historical memories constitute the central element of the Jewish renaissance, not only in our country, but all the world over. When we relive our past we renew our strength in ourselves, so necessary to us in order to maintain our 'elan vital' - and to enable us to bear the trials which face us - this second aspect is perhaps no less important than the first. Sometimes it would seem as if we in Israel were far removed from the contemporary international musical scene. Our audiences are in need of musical education in order to be able to understand modern musical idioms. The 'Testimonium' gives us the opportunity to listen to some of the best in contemporary music in masterly execution. The Jewish content of the works will attract wide audiences who will listen to the revolutionary language of modern music, so rich in expression and so powerful in its impact.

Such results could only be achieved through the inspiration and initiative of an outstanding personality. Without the untiring efforts of Recha FREIER this cultural manifestation would never have been born and her creative charismatic personality influences every stage of the 'Testimonium'. To a large extent the unique achievement and the special artistic atmosphere of the 'Testimonium' are a reflection of her fascinating personality.

Ovadiah The Prose

During the Middle Ages it was extremely difficult for a non-jew to convert to Judaism - the main obstacle and deterrent being the churches' threat to punish any such offenders by execution. Despite this a few did convert and among them was Ovadia Hager.

He was of Norman extraction and lived in Southern Italy. His Christian name was Johannes. In 1070 an unusual incident occurred. The Bishop of Bari, a man by the name of Andreas, changed his faith and became a Jew in Constantinople and was consequently forced to flee to Egypt. Many followed his example and this was one of the main influences for the subsequent conversion of Johannes in 1102. His conversion occurred in the East, outside the boundaries of the Christian countries. He followed a nomadic life, staying awhile in Baghdad, where he studied the Torah in a Yeshiva. During his travels he was constantly pursued and in danger of death. He stayed in Aleppo for some time, reached Damascus, and from there he passed into Dan in the North of Israel. Finally he reached Egypt through Sidon.

The story of his life can be studied from extracts in the Genisa in Cairo. The greatness of this convert was the greatness of a Jew suffering from persecution, but he lovingly accepted his fate. From his biography we learn much about the history of the Jewish nation and that of the world during that period. From the extracts we also learn of the many messianic movements that existed in the past. In this way the biography of a Norman aristocrat, a Jewish convert, has become an important historical document on the sufferings and hopes of the Jewish nation in the Middle Ages. Ovadia's account of one messianic movement amidst the Jews has already formed the subject of an interesting essay in the previous Testimonium.

Apart from the biography, which has been handed down to us, we have other writings of his, amongst which are songs and musical scores. The score of the present Testimonium has been based on the songs.

David Kussner

RABBI AKIBA BEN YOSEPH

RABBI AKIBA BEN YOSEPH, who was murdered by the Romans for the glorification of God after the Bar Kochba wars, was an exceptional man.

Famous both in his knowledge of the Halacha and the Agada, he became an authority, as one of the wise men of Israel, on the oral law. This sensitive man, who was always full of enthusiasm in all he did and envisaged, strongly influenced all the attitudes of the Jewish nation in both the national and the religious fields. He gave his own personal meaning to Jewish existence and suffering, a meaning which is still relevant until this day. He also provided his own interpretation of the holiness of God. His extraordinary life and death quickly became the source of many legends which seem like a historical romance based on true fact.

A poor man's son, he did not learn the Torah in his youth, but studied with the assistance and encouragement of his wife. He remained a simple worker till his name spread far and wide.

As one of the 'wise men' he laid the foundation for Jewish studies both in Israel and abroad, and in this connection he travelled extensively.

During the Bar Kochba wars he joined the rebels in the hope that Bar Kochba was the true Messiah. Despite the Roman law, banning the study of the Torah, Rabbi Akiba continued to teach until he was finally brutally executed.

The many stories that have grown around him, are just one proof of the extent to which the general populace and the wise men admired him. It is befitting that his memory should be the guiding light for the nation even today. He is undoubtedly a personality who deserves world wide recognition and praise. He is also a shining example to the world of a great and loyal Jew.

David Fusser