

Liturgy and Eschatology in a Pentecostal - Charismatic Ecumenism

Ecumenical Studies Group

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In this paper I propose that eschatology is a key issue in the relationship between the historic Churches and the newer Evangelical – Pentecostal revivalist currents, and especially therefore for Catholic – Pentecostal dialogue. Eschatology as the science of ultimate destiny shapes all Christian life and provides the contours for our understanding of the present and the past. Where there is no operative eschatology, there is no ultimate hope, and where there is no ultimate hope, there is little present life and no forward dynamic.

But eschatology is especially important for historic Church and Pentecostal dialogue for other reasons too, of which it is important to mention two at the outset. The first is that Pentecostalism is at heart a revival movement, and revival movements have typically served to reawaken eschatological expectation. This is all the more so with the Pentecostal movement as a current emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit and the centrality of the event of Pentecost. In consequence, Pentecostalism has from the beginning given a major place to the imminence of the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory. The two poles of Pentecostal faith, clearly manifest at Azusa Street, were expressed in the banners: “Pentecost Has Come” and “The Lord is Coming Soon”. Here the Pentecostal revival takes up and intensifies the eschatological thrust present in all movements of Evangelical revival. The strong missiological dynamic unleashed at Azusa Street combined these two elements: the power of the Holy Spirit poured out, with the spiritual gifts as Holy Ghost equipment, to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth before the Soon-Coming of the Lord Jesus.

The second factor is that Evangelical – Catholic differences and oppositions are at their most glaring in the area of eschatology. The issues connected with millennialism fuel a constant Evangelical debate, with Pentecostals typically embracing pre-millennial positions and believing in a rapture of the saints.¹ The pre-millennialist position has generally been linked with the restoration of Israel, with many Evangelicals and Pentecostals seeing the return of the Jewish people to the land, and the establishment of the state of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and as heralding the soon-coming of the Lord. The timing of the “great tribulation” has often been a recurring theme. There has been much interest in apocalyptic imagery concerning the identity of the antichrist, the beast, and the scarlet woman of Revelation 17, still occasionally identified with the church of Rome and its bishop. The major themes of Evangelical – Pentecostal eschatology are not simply absent from Catholic theological discourse, they are experienced as totally alien elements coming from a world with quite

¹ Interestingly, many of the new charismatic churches have not followed this Pentecostal trend.

different presuppositions and Christian experience. Even as the Catholic Church has rethought its relationship to the Jewish people and has repudiated the historic “replacement” view of the Church and Israel, there has been no sympathetic interest in Evangelical eschatology and no detectable influences crossing the Evangelical – Catholic divide.

Eschatology as Consummation

I want also to suggest that the great differences over eschatology are bound up with and in some way represent the summa of the

profound differences between the historic church traditions and the streams of revival that have produced Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations. I want to outline these major differences in approach, in presuppositions and in framework so as better to perceive the radical necessity of tackling the issue of eschatology in historic church dialogue with Evangelicals and Pentecostals. In the following chart, some Evangelical – Catholic contrasts are generally true for the last three hundred years, but a few represent the ideal proposed more perhaps than the reality on the ground.

Chosen Points of Contrast	Evangelical – Pentecostal	Catholic - Orthodox
Starting Point	PERSONAL	CORPORATE
Basic Conviction	IMMEDIATE ACCESS	MEDIATION OF GRACE
Major Focus	SPIRITUAL	SACRAMENTAL
Worship Patterns	WORD & FREE	LITURGICAL
Action of Holy Spirit	REVIVAL	RENEWAL
Success in Goal	PERSONAL ON MASS SCALE	ECCLESIAL
God’s Action in History	DISCONTINUITY	CONTINUITY
How?	NEW WAVES	DEVELOPMENT & PROCESS
Recommended Stance	ACTIVIST ZEAL	REFLECTIVE-CONTEMPLATIVE
Primary Outreach	EVANGELISM	CHARITY/JUSTICE & PEACE
Vision of Church	GATHERED CHURCH OF THE SAVED	MIXED CHURCH OF WHEAT & TARES
Eschatology	PERSONAL HOPE	CORPORATE HOPE

I hope that the compilation of such a list helps us to grasp the inter-connectedness of all our distinctive convictions and stances as Christians. It highlights the centrality of liturgy and our forms of communal worship that express how each Christian community understands their relationship to the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God’s dealings with humankind, and the nature of the Christian community before the all-holy God. Key Evangelical - Catholic differences in understanding and emphasis are expressed in our patterns of worship: for example the relationship between the individual believer, the church and society, issues of the individual and the corporate, the relationship of the physical – bodily order to the spiritual, as well as the different ways in which we approach and make use of the Sacred Scriptures. In other

words, the discussion of eschatology cannot prescind from the issue of liturgy.

However, it may be helpful to note a largely unnoticed paradox that exists between the historic churches and the newer Evangelical – Pentecostal revivalist currents. On the one hand, the historic churches rarely preach and teach on the end-times, but their liturgies are full of the eschatological hope. On the other hand, the Evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic currents give an important place to eschatology in their preaching and teaching, especially in their initial phases and inspiration, but are suspicious of liturgical forms.

I shall focus on Catholic – Pentecostal relations, as clearly embodying these issues,

while recognizing that most points apply also to the other historic church traditions on the one side and to the newer charismatic churches on the other side, though the latter have been less influenced by dispensationalist thinking than the Pentecostals.

Historic Church – Revival Stream Dialogues to Date

If we examine the themes treated in the many bilateral dialogues that have been taking place in the last forty-five years across the historic church – Evangelical divide, we will find that eschatology has rarely featured. What is perhaps more surprising is that this neglect of eschatology in ecumenical dialogue has also extended to the Catholic – Pentecostal dialogue, which is now in its sixth quinquennium. Although the first five years (1972 – 77) were in effect between Catholics officially nominated and some of the friends of David du Plessis, mostly charismatics, this dialogue subsequently involved only Catholics and Pentecostals,² with a slow increase in the number of Pentecostals mandated in some way by their denominations. The most significant document to come from this dialogue has been *Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness* (1997). At the end of the first two quinquennia reports were prepared containing a list of themes for further discussion. But eschatology does not feature among them.³ An Orthodox – Pentecostal dialogue has only recently got under way, and it may be that eschatology will come on its agenda more quickly in view of the stronger eschatological awareness present throughout the Orthodox world.

A first series of occasional meetings between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic) and the World Evangelical Fellowship took place between 1977 and 1984,⁴ and a second series between 1993 and

2002,⁵ with a more regular five-year dialogue beginning in 2009. A second series of conversations between representatives of the Baptist World Alliance and a Catholic team appointed by the Pontifical Council has just been completed.⁶ Likewise, despite the chasm between most Evangelical eschatology and historic church eschatology, the subject has not yet made it to these dialogues either.

The more these “new frontier” dialogues start to address the biggest differences and the neuralgic issues, the more important becomes the level of trust and rapport among the dialogue participants. It is highly significant that the Catholic – Pentecostal dialogue was only possible because of the life and ministry of David du Plessis, who was neither a scholar nor a theologian, but who traveled the world making contacts and developing friendships so as to build bridges of reconciliation and who had the courage to visit the Vatican. In fact, the ecumenical movement from its beginning has been hugely advanced by some remarkable friendships, which would make a fascinating theme for a doctoral dissertation.⁷

In commenting on the absence of eschatology from these dialogues to date, I am first simply making an observation, not a criticism. It can be argued that not discussing eschatology is not getting to the root of the differences. But it can also be argued that the delay in taking up eschatology reflects a practical wisdom and the timing of the Lord. It may be that the time will only be ripe for the Catholic – Pentecostal dialogue to take up the eschatological issues when both teams are composed of men and women who have all had a prolonged exposure to the real life of the other “side” and through their mutual relationships who have developed a love for the Holy Spirit’s work among each other.

⁵ Documented in the report *Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of Koinonia*.

⁶ A first phase lasted from 1984 – 88, while the second phase (2006 – 10) has treated “The Word of God in the Life of the Church: Scripture, Tradition and Koinonia”.

⁷ One of the highly significant ecumenical friendships was formed between Fr Fernand Portal, a French Catholic priest, and Lord Halifax, a prominent Anglo-Catholic in British society and political affairs. From their friendship eventually issued the Malines Conversations (1921 – 26).

² The exception was Howard Ervin, listed among the Pentecostal participants at some meetings, but described as American Baptist Church.

³ Norbert Baumert & Gerhard Bially (ed.) *Pfingstler und Katholiken im Dialog* (Düsseldorf: Charisma Verlag, 1999), pp. 15, 33.

⁴ Documented in the report *Evangelical – Roman Catholic dialogue on Mission*.

Areas of Mutual Complementarity?

I want to ask now how a full Christian eschatology faithful to the biblical revelation requires the complementary witnesses of the Evangelical – Pentecostal revival streams and of the ancient churches of East and West, Orthodox and Catholics. The complementarity of the fundamental convictions on both or all sides is a necessary component in the preparation for the eschatological completion. Briefly, it is to argue first that we need each other, and then that the Lord needs this coming together to make the eschatological consummation possible.

The Personal and the Corporate. The necessary polarity of the personal and the corporate is not difficult to accept. Both dimensions are clearly present in the Scriptures. The eschatological hope is both corporate and personal, the hope of God's covenant people, now become the body of Christ, and the hope of every believer. The cry "Maranatha, come Lord Jesus" is the cry of the Spirit and the bride (Rev. 22: 17). It is the cry of the one bride in process of purification (see Eph. 5: 27; 1 John 3: 2 - 3) and it is the cry arising from the heart of each believer who has received the "first fruits" of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8: 23). The cry of the church is first a liturgical cry, evidenced in the Didache around the year 100 CE,⁸ and also expressed in many anaphorae (eucharistic prayers) in the Trisagion, Holy, Holy, Holy through the Messianic cry: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord".⁹

But while it is not hard to affirm that the kingdom hope is both personal and corporate, there is a chasm between the Evangelical – Pentecostal world and the heritage of the ancient churches. The Pentecostals with a strong eschatological thrust from their beginnings affirm that the hope is for all the saved, but can this really be said to be a corporate hope? Is it not rather a hope for all

the saved en masse, but not for a living body in history "joined and knit together by every joint" (Eph. 4: 16)? The ancient churches express their eschatological hope in their liturgies, but is not the real hope of most Catholics an individual hope that they will eventually get to heaven? The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "Since the apostolic age the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit's groaning in the Church: Marana tha!" (para. 1130). But how much is this the experienced and lived hope of participants in Catholic liturgy? Most Catholics would probably be very surprised to hear that at Mass they are longing for the Lord to come in glory.¹⁰ Pentecostals do not need to be judgmental to suggest that the lack or weakness of the hope is due to inadequate presentation of the gospel and to a lack of conversion among many Catholics that would transform the theory into a living hope. There is a tension here between the eschatological gathering of the individually saved in the Evangelical – Pentecostal world and the corporate body of the ancient churches including wheat and tares, alive and dead members, that will be separated on the last day.

The Spiritual and the Physical – Sacramental. The revival streams from the Evangelical to the Pentecostal and Charismatic privilege the spiritual. What matters above all is the inward, not the outward, the inner transformation of the heart, brought about by the Word of God and the direct action of the Holy Spirit upon each believer. By contrast, the ancient churches see God's grace mediated through liturgy and sacraments, the spiritual being conferred in and through the physical, bodily order. Even though the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have led to the introduction of physical gestures and movements as vehicles of the Spirit, the overall paradigm remains largely in place.

In the Pentecostal – charismatic world, this focus on the spiritual has been accentuated by the expectation of rapid and visible spiritual

⁸ "May your grace come and may the world pass away. Hosannah to the God of David! If anyone is holy, let him come; if he is not holy, may he do penance, Marana tha" (end of Eucharistic prayer in the Didache).

⁹ See Luke 19: 38.

¹⁰ The same could be said of the following beautifully expressed paragraph: "The Holy Spirit's transforming power in the liturgy hastens the coming of the kingdom and the consummation of the mystery of salvation." (CCC, para. 1107).

results. The twentieth century has seen a certain subversion of Evangelical – Pentecostal faith by an ideology of success, particularly in the Western world. This world does not understand the role of hiddenness that is intrinsic to the age of the church when spiritual realities are only partially visible through their embodiment within the physical order. By contrast, the historic churches which profess faith in the spiritual efficacy of liturgy and sacraments often hardly seem to expect any tangible results. In its worst expressions, it can assume that spiritual reality is totally invisible, a position that is hard to reconcile with the incarnation. There can result a blindness to evident signs of spiritual deadness and hopelessness, and a blindness to the ravages of evil spiritual powers. In some places, the historic churches are being reduced to planning future decline. It is not that no long-term fruit is expected, but there is a suspicion of dramatic sudden effects, which need a long-term testing of their authenticity and depth.

A renewed liturgy and a renewed eschatology are both necessary to move the Christian world beyond these polarisations and extremes. A renewed liturgy, within which the transforming power of the Spirit through the Word of God is affirmed and manifested, manifests the right relationship between the invisible and the visible, between the spiritual reality and its visible signs, during this age of the church. A renewed liturgy makes clear its inner ordering toward the eschatological completion when all that is hidden will be manifest and the age of signs comes to an end. A healthy eschatology presupposes a holistic anthropology affirming God's salvific purpose for the whole created order, for the whole of human society and for the whole human person. A renewed liturgy and a renewed eschatology can together provide the necessary corrective to all naïve forms of optimism and to all forms of pessimistic fatalism.

Revival and Renewal: Radical Newness in Radical Continuity. In many ways the Evangelical movement has been born of revivals and is always longing for new waves of revival. By contrast, the historic church world has not sought such dramatic unexpected inbreakings of the Spirit of God, but in recent and more difficult times has more readily

recognized the need for renewal.¹¹ These two terms, revival and renewal, encapsulate many major differences in emphases between the two worlds.¹² Revival envisages a new outpouring of the Spirit of God upon a city, region or nation that brings large numbers of people – unbelievers, backslidden and lukewarm – to conversion and living faith in Jesus. Revival presupposes a discontinuity and a radical newness in God's workings. Renewal envisages a process within the churches in continuity with the past that involves a return to biblical roots and first principles producing new life for individuals, communities and denominations-churches.

Revival typically revivifies the eschatological hope. Renewal often has no particular eschatological awareness, tending to see the church continuing to labor through the ages without any concrete expectation of a sudden and dramatic consummation.¹³ I see revival and renewal as complementary concepts describing different emphases that ultimately belong together. This means in particular that we need a theology of the church in history that recognizes the necessary element of discontinuity and the essential element of continuity. The ecumenical question is how to relate the two. The foundation for a satisfactory answer has to lie, I suggest, in the elements of discontinuity and of continuity in the Incarnation of the Son of God and in his death and resurrection. It seems highly

¹¹ I am conscious here that the term "renewal" has been adopted by currents influenced by the "Toronto blessing" of the mid-1990s to describe their understanding of the work of God that they have experienced. This seems to me an unfortunate choice of terminology. Perhaps the term "refreshing" might have been more appropriate.

¹² I refer in particular to my article "Revival and Renewal", *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association XVIII* (1998), pp. 49 – 63 for a fuller treatment of these differences. See also an earlier article Peter Hocken, "The Pentecostal – Charismatic Movement as Revival and Renewal", *Pneuma* 3/1 (Spring, 1981), pp. 31 – 47.

¹³ However, it is the renewal of biblical studies in the Catholic Church that has led over a half-century to a clearer recognition of the eschatological hope of the New Testament church and that has made possible the much greater eschatological awareness expressed in The Catechism of the Catholic Church.

plausible that the relationship of the discontinuous and the continuous in the second coming of the Lord in glory follows the pattern of the Incarnation and of the death and resurrection of Jesus. A theology of the church that wishes everything to be continuous without any inbreaking from the sovereign Lord is unlikely to focus on the ultimate unpredictable inbreaking of the parousia.¹⁴

Return to the Jewish Roots

The currents of ecumenical bridge-building and reconciliation can hardly ignore the role of Israel and the Jewish people. For all Christians have to recognize that the roots of Christian faith lie in the covenant between Israel and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moreover, the unity of the new covenant in Jesus has its roots in the unity of the first covenant, and the eschatological hope of the church has its roots in the messianic hope of Israel.

The historic churches today are much more aware of the theological importance of the Jewish people through the self-examination provoked by the unprecedented horror of the Holocaust. The Evangelical and Pentecostal world has been paying attention to Israel largely because many see the return of the Jews to the land of Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. The new openness to the Jews in the historic churches has led in several countries to the establishment of Jewish – Christian councils and to patterns of regular dialogue between Christian leaders and Jewish rabbis.¹⁵ The openness to the Jews in the Evangelical – Pentecostal world has led to the creation of groups supporting the state of Israel,¹⁶ and among some a strong support for the Messianic Jewish movement of Jewish believers in Jesus seeking to live out a corporate commitment as Jewish disciples in congregations promoting a Jewish life-style.

¹⁴ Close observers of the Roman Catholic world will be aware of a major discussion in the Vatican emphasizing a “hermeneutic of continuity” as against a “hermeneutic of rupture” in the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council.

¹⁵ This openness at official levels does not mean that there is little remaining anti-Semitism at the local level.

¹⁶ For example, Christian Friends of Israel and the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem.

The return to the Jewish roots is fundamental for the renewal of Christian eschatology because the existence of the Jewish people is grounded in the messianic hope. It is central to the Jewish tradition to be the bearers of the messianic hope. The synagogue liturgy and the Jewish feasts are strongly impregnated with the hope for the coming of the Messiah to save his people.¹⁷ This messianic hope for a fulfillment in this world is strongly present among those Jews least affected by modern rationalism. I remember once meeting the mayor of an Israeli city who saw all the upbuilding of his city and the cultivation of the land as preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

The liturgical and eschatological character of the Jewish tradition is the obvious starting point for a dialogue with the Catholics and the Orthodox about eschatology. There is a basic earthiness about the Jewish heritage with the promise of descendants to Abraham, the promise of the land, the rite of circumcision as entry into the covenant, the role of blood sacrifice in the covenant, etc. Just as sin has polluted the human conscience, the corporate life of Israel, her leaders (priests, prophets and the wise) and the land, so the promise and hope of redemption is for the cleansing and deliverance of the people, the leaders and the land. The prophecies of messianic restoration and deliverance speak both of salvation coming from above, and also of salvation springing up or sprouting from below, from the earth, and of Israel as being in gestation. This double movement of preparation is a recurring theme in the Roman liturgy for Advent when this verse is repeated: “Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also; I the Lord have created it.” (Is. 45: 8).

Pre-Millennial Dispensationalism. In a paper focusing on the centrality of eschatology for

¹⁷ An example from the Ashkenazi liturgy for Sabbaths and festivals: “Gladden us, Hashem, our God, with Elijah the prophet, Your servant, and with the kingdom of the House of David, Your anointed, may he come speedily and cause our heart to exult.”

Catholic – Pentecostal dialogue, it is necessary to say something about the system of pre-millennial dispensationalism, particularly as fashioned by John Nelson Darby, who was a key figure in the origins of the Plymouth Brethren in Great Britain. While many of us seek to pursue an ecumenical method of repudiating all the false “either – or” oppositions that have fractured the body of Christ, Darby was the specialist in such separations. His system of dispensations is founded on the idea of the failure of each successive dispensation through human disobedience and divine judgment, and its replacement by a new dispensation operating according to different principles. In his system, the total separateness of Israel and the church is central. Israel and the church have separate destinies, Israel an earthly destiny and the church a heavenly destiny. It was this separation of destinies that necessitated the theory of the “rapture of the church”, as Israel’s destiny can only unfold on earth after the removal of the Church. The age or era of the church is even described as “parenthetical”, being a parenthesis between God’s two periods of dealing with Israel.

I dwell on Darby’s teaching because of the paradoxical fact that some aspects of it have been widely received by Pentecostals, despite Darby (and the Brethren’s) cessationism in relation to the spiritual gifts and because of its drastic deepening of the gap in eschatological teaching between the followers of dispensationalism and the historic churches. Darby’s system seems to a Catholic to be irredeemably individualistic; in his system of sequential dispensations, all doomed to failure, any corporate renewal becomes impossible and salvation becomes entirely individualistic. His teaching on “the ruin of the church” following the failure of the church dispensation meant that God’s work of salvation is continued only through a remnant of faithful believers, so he wrote:

The doctrine of succession, and all its accompaniments, becomes the stamp and mark of recognized and sanctioned, because perpetuated, apostasy; for if the church has failed, as these texts declare, the provision of its perpetuation becomes the provision for the perpetuation of the failure, and

the maintenance of the object of the Lord’s sure judgment.¹⁸

This separation of Israel from the church and the doctrine of the rapture deny the apostle Paul’s vision of the church in Ephesians as “the one new man”, made up of Jew and Gentile, reconciled through the cross. The most fundamental criticism of the eschatology of “Darbyism”¹⁹ that I have read comes from Pastor Louis Dallièrè (1897 – 1976), the founder of the Union de Prière in France, who argued that the doctrine of the rapture removes the central task of the church to prepare for the coming of the Lord on the last day.

If the Jews, according to this plan [of Darby], are converted by sight, without faith, after the rapture of the Church, there is a profound reason for this: it is that the message of faith only ever converted individuals, but never built up a Church. What is raptured is an invisible Church, that is to say not a Church at all; but an ensemble of individuals completely isolated one from another.²⁰

However, there is an insight of John Nelson Darby that appears both valid and important, and that can serve as a potential bridge between revivalist eschatology and the historic churches. It is the marked difference between the this-worldly character of Israel’s messianic expectation already noted and the heavenly character of the eschatological hope in the New Testament. It is clear that the heavenly dimension is decisively opened by the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The key question then becomes: what is the relationship between the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth and the heavenly character of the promised kingdom?

The Messianic Jews

¹⁸ J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings: Ecclesiastical No. 1* (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, n. d.), p. 123.

¹⁹ The French term coined by Dallièrè to describe Darby’s dispensationalist system.

²⁰ Notes from Dallièrè’s teaching at the 1947 retreat of the Union de Prière, on the theme of “Le Retour de Jésus”, p. 4 (author’s translation).

Over the past forty years there has been a growing Christian awareness that return to the biblical sources means return to the sources in Israel, for the New Testament is really just as Jewish as the Old. But it is also during these years that the movement of Messianic Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world has sprung up. The Messianic Jews belong at one and the same time to modern currents of revival and to the Jewish heritage that is the root within which Christian faith took shape. It is both modern and ancient. The question raised by the theme of this paper is the difference made by the Messianic Jews to the ecumenical task in the area of eschatology. I will address this question by considering the challenges posed by the Messianic Jews to the Evangelical – Pentecostal world and to the historic churches.

Challenges to Evangelicals and Pentecostals: The challenge that an authentic encounter with the Jewish heritage poses to Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians are mitigated because of the strong influence of Evangelical thought and theology on the Messianic Jewish movement.²¹ Thus, the majority of Messianic Jews have, at least initially, imbibed the anti-liturgical and anti-tradition animus of Evangelicalism. But this suspicion of liturgy and tradition do not make sense for a Jew, because Judaism is essentially a liturgical faith with divinely-appointed feasts and observances and because it belongs to the heart of the Jewish heritage to be descendants of Abraham and to transmit the Torah of Moses to each subsequent generation. Only as the Messianic Jews integrate these elements of Judaism into their corporate life will they present a challenge to Evangelicals and Pentecostals in these areas.²² Similarly,

²¹ The Evangelicals were the first group of Christians to take seriously the ongoing relevance of much Old Testament prophecy and to found missions to the Jews. In consequence, the Messianic Jews of today relate more readily to Evangelicals than to other parts of the Christian world. Because the Messianic Jews are majority charismatic in their faith, they have an affinity with the Pentecostals, and their emerging structures are similar to those of the new networks of charismatic free churches.

²² By virtue of their conviction that they are to be Jewish disciples of Jesus Messianic Jews have a

the Messianic Jews by virtue of being Jewish carry a definite sense of corporate identity. By virtue of being Jewish and their profound connection to the land of Israel, they are earthed and rooted. Most profoundly, their existence as a people is grounded in the messianic hope. The Messianic Jews fully share this messianic hope, only for them it is as for all Christians the second coming of the Messiah, this time in glory. It is above all in Israel that this messianic hope is most central to their faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior. Not only do the Messianic Jews carry the Jewish hope for the coming Messiah and the realization of the messianic age, but the Jewish hope is a corporate hope, the hope of a people. It is the hope for the coming of the Lord Jesus to his own city and his own people for the establishment of his reign of righteousness or justice on earth. Both terms righteousness and justice refer to individual persons and to the society in which they live, they have both personal and corporate reference. It is notable that the apostle Paul continues to speak of “the hope of Israel” when preaching Jesus to his people: “it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.” (Acts 28: 20).²³ This provides an important challenge to Evangelical – Pentecostal eschatology which is affected by the individualistic emphases of these revival currents.

The challenge to Evangelicals and Pentecostals both from the Jewish heritage and from the historic churches focuses on the corporate and on the relationship of the corporate to the bodily – physical order. The corporate and physically-based character of historic faith communities is rooted in their liturgies. When one examines Judaism and the ancient

connection to the original tradition and cannot long ignore the liturgical character of Jewish life and worship. This process can be seen at work in Messianic Jewish congregations as they seek to discover how to live as Jewish followers of their Messiah.

²³ See also the discourse of Paul to King Agrippa: “And now I stand here on trial for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!” (Acts 26: 6 – 7). Paul suggests that there is a deep irony in this accusation.

churches of East and West, there is the apparatus of institutional religion, though this has been far more marked in the churches than in Judaism through their dominant place in European history. But these faith communities will all agree that the most foundational structural element in their life is their liturgy, which is the continuous heritage of the obligatory worship of the Christian people as the body of Christ. The bureaucratic elements can come and go, being clothed in very different forms in different epochs. In the Catholic tradition, this absolute centrality of the liturgy is expressed in the theology of the Second Vatican Council and of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It is encapsulated in the dictum “Lex credenda lex orandi”: that is to say, the law or canon of faith is the law or canon of prayer-worship. Or, in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: the liturgy “makes the Church present and manifests her as the visible sign of the communion in Christ between God and men.”²⁴ The point is made in relation to the particular (local) church in the Constitution on the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council:

the principal manifestation of the church consists in the full, active participation of all God’s holy people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.²⁵

It is this foundational liturgical – sacramental structure of the historic churches that renders impossible the reception of any concept of a “rapture of the saints” before the coming of the Lord in glory. For in the sacramental framework, the sacramental signs belong to the entire “age of the church” which lasts from Pentecost to Parousia. This is the pattern for the eucharist mentioned by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Cor. 11: 26). This would also seem to be the implication of the words of Jesus to Jerusalem just before his

passion concerning his return as Messiah: “For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt. 23: 39).

The Challenge to the Historic Churches. By contrast, the Messianic Jews present two major challenges to the historic churches. The first is different to those facing the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals, that is the challenge to their amillennialist eschatology that they have espoused through the centuries, in the West since the time of St Augustine. The second is also posed to the Evangelical world, namely the common assumption that the Christian destiny is translation to a highly spiritualized heaven, that leaves the earth behind.

The key question is what happens when the Christ comes in glory. The Jewish expectation is that the returning Messiah will be enthroned in Jerusalem and will establish righteousness in Israel and among the nations throughout the earth. Ironically, this is precisely expressed in the angel’s message to Mary in a passage otherwise dear to the Catholics and the Orthodox: “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1: 32 – 33). In this Jewish understanding the Messiah – Savior is coming back to establish his reign of righteousness on the earth, starting from Jerusalem. In his book *Surprised by Hope*, Anglican bishop Tom Wright strongly criticizes the widespread belief that the destiny of Christians is to go to heaven when they die. He writes of the expectation of the first Christians: “They believed that God was going to do for the whole cosmos what he had done for Jesus at Easter.”²⁶

It is the organic coherence of all Catholic and Orthodox doctrine that understands the whole age of the church as the time for the preparation and purification of the Bride. The Bride is not just an agglomeration of holy Christians, but the body of the church. This preparation and purification will continue from Pentecost to Parousia. So in Ephesians:

²⁴ Catechism, para. 1071.

²⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, para. 41.

²⁶ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), p. 104.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her [that is from the beginning] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that the church might be presented before him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.²⁷

This presentation of the totally cleansed Bride will not happen before the parousia, a conviction that requires the healing of divisions and separation before the last day.

In the ancient tradition, this preparation of the body of Christ takes place primarily in the liturgy. So in the renewed eschatology taught in the Catechism of the Catholic Church it is said, “Since the apostolic age the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit’s groaning in the Church: Marana tha!”²⁸ It has to be admitted that most Catholics would be very surprised to hear that this is what they are doing when they go to Mass. Likewise with the statement: “The Holy Spirit’s transforming power in the liturgy hastens the coming of the kingdom and the consummation of the mystery of salvation.”²⁹

But, in the traditional perspective of the ancient churches, the destiny of the church has been seen as simply our transference to the heavenly realms. In popular Catholic piety, our destiny is immediate after death, whether heaven immediately or after a “period” of purgatorial cleansing. The resurrection of the body, which is prominent in all funeral liturgies, has little place at this level. But in most liturgical prayers, Jesus comes in glory to translate the redeemed to heavenly glory. In popular piety, the salvation of the cosmos has little or no place, though it survives in the liturgical traditions.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has two very different sections under the heading “I Believe in Life Everlasting”: one simply on Heaven, and the other on “The Hope of the New Heaven and the New Earth”. The section

on heaven simply repeats the received focus of many centuries with most of the footnotes referring to passages from Popes and Church Fathers.³⁰ The section on “The Hope of the New Heaven and the New Earth”³¹ is quite new, without parallel in previous catechisms, a fruit of the renewal in Catholic biblical studies and drawing on the Vatican Two Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. It must be confessed that with the teaching on Heaven³² it is difficult to see what significant difference the resurrection of the body on the last day, also clearly taught in the Catechism,³³ could possibly make.³⁴

But here we again enter the realm of paradox. There is a line of continuity from this Jewish vision of the redemption of the whole earthly order to the concept of the millennium. But the liturgical churches that have a tradition of the physical mediating the spiritual have not accepted the idea of a literal Messianic reign on the earth, while the Evangelicals have widely received this concept while having a suspicion both of the role of the physical in salvation and of liturgy.

Conclusion

One conclusion from this paper is that the coming together of liturgy and eschatology that has always existed in the Jewish tradition is necessary for the reconciliation of the ancient liturgical churches and the newer revival traditions.

This paper has argued that liturgy and eschatology are basic components for integrating the dimensions of the corporate, intrinsic to the ancient liturgical traditions, and the personal, that has been the focus of the revivalistic traditions of the West. The bodily

²⁷ Eph. 5: 25 – 27.

²⁸ Catechism, para. 1130.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 1107.

³⁰ Paras. 1023 – 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, paras. 1042 – 50.

³² “Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness” (para. 1024)

³³ Para. 1101.

³⁴ The Catholic practice of the beatification and canonization of holy people who lived lives of heroic faith also contributes, though unintentionally, to this impression of the non-consequentiality of the resurrection of the body on the last day. Canonization is also practiced by the Orthodox Churches.

character of liturgy is intrinsic to its church-forming capacity, and the constitutional role of the liturgy in Christian worship makes the liturgy the key resource for maintaining the continuity and the orthodoxy of the Christian faith. The liturgy holds the key for a right relating of the corporate and in the personal in relation to the church's use, transmission and exegesis of the Scriptures. The absence of liturgy in the revivalistic currents has caused eschatology to become individualistic: so the doctrine of the rapture is spoken of as "the rapture of the church", but in effect it is the rapture of millions of individual believers, as Louis Dalli re pointed out .

However, the reawakening of eschatological hope is a hallmark of movements of the Holy Spirit throughout the centuries. It appears

unlikely that the historic churches can recover a vibrant eschatological hope without a profound interaction with the revivalistic currents: Evangelical, Holiness, Pentecostal and charismatic. A major obstacle in the past has been the entanglement of the church with empires and states that encouraged a settledness in this world that made any eschatological message a threat to the political order. Today we are seeing a freeing of the churches from such political entanglement at the same time as we are seeing an intensification in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We thus live at a particularly propitious moment for a serious interaction of the historic church world and the revivalistic world that could bring unimaginable blessings and help to resolve some of the unsatisfactory dichotomies that have long plagued both sides.

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