

The Relationship between the Messianic Jewish movement and the Charismatic movement

In this article I wish to reflect on the relationships between the Messianic Jewish and charismatic movements in order to look at their places in God's one plan to "bring together everything in heaven and on earth under the headship of Christ" (Eph. 1: 10). It is not my understanding that the Messianic Jewish movement simply forms part of the charismatic movement. However, the links between the two are more than merely incidental, as the charismatic movement has exercised a major influence on the Messianic Jewish movement and has contributed significantly to its dynamism.

The Rise of the Messianic Jewish Movement

My interpretation of the historical data is that one can date the rise of the Messianic Jewish movement to 1967 following the Six-Day war in June that year. Of course there were significant antecedents prior to 1967. For example there was the congregation of the Israelites of the New Covenant formed by Joseph Rabinowicz in Kishinev, Moldova in the 1880s; there were the Hebrew Christian congregations formed in North America from soon after the first World War, and there was the initially slow emergence of congregations of Jewish believers in Israel following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. However, none of these gave rise to a dynamic movement, not even on a merely national or regional level. But they were truly forerunners of today's Messianic Jewish movement.

It was the charismatic component deriving especially from the Jesus movement of the late 1960s in the United States that launched a real movement or current of the Holy Spirit that steadily gained momentum, especially in North America. The Messianic Jewish argument for a corporate Jewish expression of faith in Yeshua is fundamentally a theological argument and is not primarily presented as an instrument of spiritual revival. It was the fact of considerable numbers of mostly young Jews in North America, who were caught up in the experience-oriented, conversionist and nonconformist atmosphere of the Jesus movement that created a dynamic current of the Holy Spirit among the Jewish converts. It was the dynamism of these young Messianic Jews, as they soon called themselves, that led after a few years to the decision to change the name of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America to the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. This change of name represented in effect a change in vision, direction and goals for these Jewish believers. The new name reflected the determination of these Jewish believers to promote a vibrant and authentically Jewish expression of faith in Yeshua in place of being largely content with an occasional social and cultural presence within basically Gentile Christian churches.

In its development in the United States in the early 1970s, the Messianic Jewish movement was predominantly charismatic in experience and expression. This period was in many ways a formative stage that gave the Messianic Jewish movement a particular shape. The percentage of charismatic Messianics later declined somewhat in the USA, when the non-charismatic Missions to Jews were gradually won over to the Messianic Jewish vision¹ and when the Southern Baptists – always allergic to anything charismatic - decided to sponsor Messianic Jewish congregations within their denomination. Nonetheless, a definite majority of Messianic congregations have a clear charismatic component. But

¹ See Yaakov Ariel *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880 – 2000* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), esp. Ch. 20 "The Rise of Messianic Judaism", pp. 220 – 251.

above all the dynamism that drove the movement forward had a charismatic inspiration. In Israel, the charismatic impulse was felt, though there were a number of congregations founded before the arrival of the charismatics that remained resolutely non-charismatic, generally strongly Evangelical in theology and mentality. The Messianic believers arriving from the former Soviet Union mostly had a charismatic dimension, though often very undeveloped due to the lack of opportunities for formation in formerly atheistic societies, resulting in a low level of knowledge both of Judaism and of Christianity.²

When the major conference took place in Kansas City in 1977 with virtually all streams of the charismatic movement and many Pentecostals represented, the Messianic Jews were given their own track along with the various denominational (and non-denominational) groupings. For many charismatic Christians, this provided a first awareness concerning the Messianic Jews and a pointer to the strongly charismatic element in their origins and growth.³

The Affinities between the Messianic Jewish Movement and the Charismatic Movement

The charismatic movement demonstrates many points of affinity with the Messianic Jewish movement. Very significantly, the charismatic movement following its antecedent in the Pentecostal movement has promoted more holistic patterns of worship and ministry with the encouragement of bodily gestures and movements: for example in the raising and clapping of hands, in the use of physical gestures including the imposition of hands in ministry, in dance and procession, in prophetic actions. In all these physical expressions, the charismatics are closer to Jewish patterns than the classical Evangelicals with a religion of the Word appealing primarily to the understanding. However, this affinity was more marked in charismatic practice than in charismatic teaching, and somewhat paradoxically this combination then influenced the Messianic Jewish movement. So among the Messianic Jews, influenced by the charismatic currents, there is much more physical expression than appears in their biblical exegesis and teaching. We can see this charismatic element expressed widely among Messianic Jews in their dancing, more common than among charismatics, and in their celebration of the Jewish feasts. There is often in fact a tension within Messianic Jewish life between the authentically Jewish elements and emphases that are holistic and corporeal and the un-Jewish elements that come from exaggerated Gentile dichotomies between body and spirit.

The love of the Scriptures – though not always the love of serious study – has also marked the charismatic movement. Charismatic Christians regularly carry their Bibles with them. This love of the Scriptures and the experience of the Holy Spirit opening up the meaning of the Word has helped charismatic Christians to see how central in the biblical revelation are the election of Israel and the promises given to Israel. They are generally more open than other Christians to the Holy Spirit opening up neglected or forgotten aspects of the biblical revelation. Similarly, charismatic believers have often been receptive to a Messianic witness concerning the Jewish roots of the Church and the restoration of a Jewish witness to Jesus, particularly when it is not formulated in strongly Zionist terms.

² A report on the movement in Israel by Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil F. Skjøtt, *Facts and Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel, Mishkan 30-31* (1999) reveals that some of the Russian-speaking congregations have very little that is recognizably Jewish in their worship.

³ I myself first heard of the Messianic Jews through reading David Manuel's book on the Kansas City conference, *Like a Mighty River* (Orleans, MA: Rock Harbor Press, 1977). See in particular pp. 83 – 84, 160 – 70.

The Messianic Jewish movement has been strongly evangelistic, first with the influences coming from Evangelical Christians and their Missions to the Jews and then from the Jesus movement.⁴ This has been another ground for affinity with the charismatics, whose baptism in the Spirit has provided a new impetus for evangelism and spreading the gospel. This evangelistic thrust among Messianic Jews is a major reason why the average age in Messianic congregations is much lower than it was among the Hebrew Christians, as also than the Hebrew Catholics, and why the Messianic Jewish movement has a high growth potential. The charismatic dimension is also a reason why many Gentile charismatics are attracted to Messianic Jewish congregations, though this can produce a challenge as to the Jewish character of some congregations and weaken their Jewish character.⁵

The rediscovery of the importance of the prophetic in the life of the Church also facilitates close understanding between charismatic Christians and Messianic Jews. The Messianic believers naturally interpret the return of the Jews to the land of Israel and the appearance of the Messianic movement as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Charismatic Christians with their rediscovery of the prophetic in the life of the Church often find it easy to understand and receive this prophetic focus on the eschatological fulfilment. We will look at this eschatological dimension more fully in the next two sections.

The Place of the Charismatic Movement in God's Plan

All those blessed by the Lord in the charismatic movement believe that this work of the Holy Spirit is for the revival and renewal of Christians and of Church, though Church would be understood differently as between the historic church and the free church sector. Many see in the charismatic movement a God-given grace for Christian unity, in view of the Holy Spirit being poured out in the same way on Christians in many different churches and traditions. Again what unity means will be differently conceived by the historic churches and the free churches.

I have argued in several writings that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is most fundamentally to prepare the Church and the Churches for the coming of the Lord in glory.⁶ First of all, every work of the Holy Spirit in Christian history is to prepare for the coming of the Lord and the fulness of the kingdom of God; this follows from the New Testament teaching on the gift of the Holy Spirit as first-

⁴ It should be noted that at the world-wide level Evangelical (Evangelikal) cannot be equated with free church, since there are significant Evangelical groupings within the historic churches, particularly within the Anglican communion.

⁵ A preponderance of Gentile members in Messianic Jewish congregations is a major issue in the United States, but it is also the case elsewhere, as in the Netherlands. "So, for example Jeffrey Wasserman wrote in the year 2000: 'For the most part, the majority of members and leaders of American Messianic Jewish congregations are Gentiles.' (Jeffrey S. Wasserman, *Messianic Jewish Congregations* (Lanham MD: The University of America Press, 2000), p. 160, adding in a footnote: "My survey reflects 60% Gentile membership with 50% Gentile leadership." (*ibid.*, note 15, p. 164).

⁶ Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame* (Guildford: Eagle Publishing, 1994), translated into French and Swedish; *Blazing the Trail* (Stoke-on-Trent; Bible Alive Ltd., 2001), chs. 9 & 10, translated into Polish; and *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), ch. 6.

fruits⁷, as guarantee or down payment⁸, and as seal⁹. Secondly, in times of revival outpouring of the Holy Spirit, there is a constant witness to the reawakening of hope in the coming of the Lord among Christians. This aspect was particularly marked in the origins of the Pentecostal movement and present though less strongly in those of the charismatic movement.¹⁰ In this context, the restoration of long-neglected gifts of the Holy Spirit can best be understood as the equipping of the Church to fulfil her calling in this age before its completion. The charisms are an essential element in the preparation of the Bride for the wedding feast of the Lamb. For charismatic Christians who have been given an understanding of the role of Israel in God's plan, the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel and the rise of the Messianic Jewish movement are a confirmation that the Church finds herself in the later phases of her history on earth, though this does not enable us to say what this means in terms of human chronology.¹¹

The Place of the Messianic Jewish Movement in God's Plan

The Messianic Jews naturally believe that the rise of their movement is to bring the whole people of Israel to faith in Yeshua as their Messiah. They are aware of the prophetic word of the apostle Paul in Romans 11 that "all Israel" will be saved. Messianic Jews commonly assume that "all Israel" means not just the conversion to Yeshua of big numbers of individual Jews, but they understand "all Israel" as having a corporate reference, that their people will come to salvation as a people. Although some Messianic Jews can be turned in on themselves and not be enthusiastic about relations with Gentile Christians, largely because of historic hurts, it is nonetheless part of the heritage of Israel's faith that they are called to be a "priestly people" (Ex. 19, 6) and to be "a light to the nations" (Is. 42, 6; Luke 2, 32). The vision of the Messianic Jews then typically includes the nations being brought into right relationship with the Jewish people and with Jerusalem. Because the Jewish people are the bearers of the messianic hope, it is normal for Jews who come to faith in Jesus, particularly in the conversionist context of the Messianic Jewish movement, to interpret the rise of a movement of Jesus-believing Jews as a sign of the coming of the Lord. For the Jewish believers in Jesus, it is normal to believe in the literal fulfilment of the promises that the Messiah will be given "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1: 32), that is in Jerusalem, and that "he will reign over the house of Jacob forever" (Luke 1: 33). For them, a spiritualizing exegesis that interprets the promised land as heaven is virtually impossible, especially in Israel.

For the Messianic Jews then, their place in God's plan is generally clearer than their place is for

⁷ See the use of the word ἀπαρχή in Rom. 8: 23.

⁸ See the use of the word ἄποικος in 2 Cor. 1: 22; 5: 5; and Eph. 1: 14.

⁹ See the use of the word σφράγις in 2 Cor. 1, 22; 5, 5; in Eph. 1: 13 and 4: 30.

¹⁰ See, for example, D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

¹¹ Here it is remarkable what der *Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche* teaches about the Jewish people and the coming of the Lord: "Das kommen des verherrlichten Messias hängt zu jedem Zeitpunkt der Geschichte davon ab, dass er von „ganz Israel“ (Rom. 11, 26) anerkannt wird, über dem zum Teil „Verstockung liegt“ (Rom. 11, 25), so dass sie Jesus „nicht glaubten“ (Rom. 11, 20). Der Eintritt der „Vollzahl“ der Juden (Rom. 11, 12) in das messianische Reich im Anschluss an die „Vollzahl der Heiden“ (Rom. 11, 25) wird dem Volk Gottes die Möglichkeit geben, das „Vollmass Christi“ (Eph. 4, 13) zu verwirklichen, in dem „Gott alles in allen“ sein wird (1 Kor. 15, 28)." (S. 674).

charismatic Christians. The differences among Messianic Jews concern who forms part of the body of Messiah. They typically have an Evangelical free church understanding of the Church and of what constitutes its unity. The issue of relationships with the historic Churches and their relationship to the coming Kingdom is one on which Messianic Jews are far from united. The same is even more true of their evaluation of rabbinic Judaism and whether it has any place in the preparation for the Lord's coming.

How Open have Charismatic Christians been to the Messianic Jewish movement?

Despite these obvious elements of affinity between the two movements, charismatic Christians have not always been open to the Messianic Jews and in many cases not even aware of this phenomenon. Here there is a contrast between receptivity in the historic Churches and receptivity in the free churches. The receptivity to the Messianic Jewish movement has generally been much lower in historic church renewal circles than in the free churches. One obvious reason is that the Messianic movement has been strongly influenced by Evangelical teaching so that Messianic theology can sometimes be Evangelical teaching plus some Jewish additions, while the structures in the Messianic movement are most similar to those of the new charismatic free churches. The teaching and theology of the Messianic Jews have generally been conservative and occasionally more fundamentalist in relation to biblical criticism and exegesis. Their literalist reading of the Scriptures has often made it more difficult for Christians from churches with a more critical and developed theology to take the message of the Messianic Jews seriously.

In the charismatic renewal in the historic churches, there have been few examples of the leadership accepting the Messianic Jews and affirming their importance for the Church. It would seem that a major reason for this reluctance is the focus of mainline church charismatic leaders to win acceptance for the renewal movement from their church (confessional) leadership. This concern has made many leaders very cautious in welcoming anything that could prove controversial. Peace and harmony in the movement tend to prevail over prophetic witness. In this area, Germany is not typical of the international scene, so that the positive interest in the Messianic Jews within the Geistliche Gemeinde Erneuerung in the EKD is somewhat unique among renewal bodies within the historic churches. No doubt the strong awareness of the horror of the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazi regime has made many German Christians more sensitive to the importance of the Jewish issue and more aware of the need to rethink old positions.¹²

In the last fifty years, the historic churches have generally opted for dialogue with the Jewish community, which has promoted greater awareness of the wrongness of replacement theology but also a great reluctance to embrace anything that would upset the Jewish community. This combination is generally the driving force behind the so-called “two-covenant” theology that denies the need of the Jewish people for Jesus Christ and that closes the mind to any possibility of recognizing Messianic believers in Messiah Jesus. Although not generally the intention of Church leadership in opting for dialogue, one effect has been a lesser sense of the need for direct evangelization in general and a great reluctance to proclaim the gospel to the Jews. Since the Messianic Jewish movement has been strongly

¹² Among Roman Catholics in Germany, Johannes Hartl, who directs a house of prayer in Augsburg would be one who has a clear teaching on the role of Israel.

evangelistic, in contrast to the Hebrew Catholics, it arouses disquiet among the practitioners of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

In the Roman Catholic Church, with the exception of some communities (see next section) the charismatic renewal has not shown much awareness of the Messianic Jewish movement, despite the very positive teaching on Israel and Christian unity by one of the most admired teachers, Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, ofm cap, since 1980 the preacher to the papal household. So in general charismatic Catholics are unaware of the Messianic Jews, their history and the charismatic element among them.

Prophetic Voices from within the Charismatic Movement in favour of the Messianic Jews

Mention should first be made of the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary in Darmstadt, who though not confessedly charismatic have had a strong sympathy for the renewal movement, no doubt through the role of spiritual gifts in their origins. They have influenced many believers, particularly through the writings of Mother Basilea Schlink. The emphasis of the Mary Sisters on repentance for the past sins against the Jewish people has contributed significantly to Christian repentance for the sin of the rejection of Jewish life in Jesus the Messiah. The works of Mother Basilea have been translated into many languages, and so their influence in favour of the Jewish people and of a Jewish witness to Yeshua has spread far beyond Germany. Another forerunner has been the Union de Prière of Charmes-sur-Rhône, a dispersed Reformed community in France, founded by Pastor Louis Dallière immediately after the second world war following his charismatic experience early in the 1930s.¹³ Among the four prayer subjects that govern the life of the Union de Prière the second is “the illumination of Israel”¹⁴. As early as 1936, Dallière taught the ongoing significance of the distinction between Israel and the nations, a distinction that is fundamental for the recognition of the legitimacy and necessity of the Messianic movement. He gave this teaching in an eschatological framework.¹⁵

Although the Catholic charismatic renewal has not yet become a witness to the restoration of Jewish faith in Jesus, there are some Catholic charismatic communities that have in rather different ways born a witness to the ongoing call of Israel and shown an openness to the Messianic Jews. The first has been the community of the Béatitudes, founded in France in the first half of the 1970s. From the beginning, the Béatitudes have manifested a love for Israel and more recently have shown an openness to the Messianic Jews.¹⁶ The community of Koinonia Giovanni Battista, founded in Italy in 1979 by an Argentinian priest, Fr Ricardo Argañaraz, has shown a deep love for Israel, as a result of which they have formed a community in the Jerusalem area with contacts with the *gehila* of the Berger brothers.

¹³ Dallière, a Reformed pastor, came into the experience of “Pentecost” through the ministry of a Pentecostal evangelist from Britain, but was deeply convinced that he had to stay within the Reformed church. In this way, he was a forerunner of the charismatic movement.

¹⁴ This theme had originally been entitled “the salvation of Israel”.

¹⁵ In a series of articles articulating his vision of the task of preparing for the coming of the Lord, Dallière expressed for the first time how he understood the ongoing role of the Jewish people in God’s plan: “The Jewish people in relation to the return of the Lord” (*Esprit et Vie* 5/6 June 1936, 215 – 216) and “The nations in relation to the return of the Lord” (*Esprit et Vie* 5/7 July 1936, 227 – 228).

¹⁶ The founding group in Béatitudes were all members of the French Reformed church and had been influenced by the Union de Prière of Charmes.

In Italy, the Comunità di Gesù in Bari, which had developed a strong ecumenical commitment with close association with some free church leaders in Italy, has since 2004 organised an annual conference with Messianic Jews, at which Messianic leaders from the U.S.A., Israel and Germany have taken part. The community's magazine *Tempi di Unità* has regularly published articles on the Messianic Jews. Arising from the experience of these conferences, Fr Carlo Colonna, SJ, a spiritual adviser to the community, has written the first book by a Catholic scholar on the Messianic movement.¹⁷ This book is reaching theological and leadership circles in the Italian church and making the movement known in circles not previously aware of its existence. The Comunità di Gesù also has a branch community in Buenos Aires, Argentina, that has been spreading this vision and which has been supportive of the Toward Jerusalem Council II initiative (TJCII), on which see the following section. Although not a community, the group of Irish Catholics calling themselves the Evangelical Catholic Initiative has become strongly supportive of the Messianic movement, with Paddy Monaghan organising tours of Ireland by Vladimir Pikman from Berlin.

There are also centres associated with the charismatic movement that have hosted events concerned with or involving the Messianic Jews. Prominent among these have been the Centre Chrétien in Gagnières in the south of France, a Protestant centre open to ecumenical charismatic events and to Israel. Another example is the En Christo conference centre in Lanckorona, Poland, located between Krakau and Wadowice, where the Catholic director, Andrzej Sionek, has developed contacts with Messianic Jews in Poland, in Belarus and the Ukraine. Lanckorona has regularly hosted the present author for teaching events in which some Messianic Jews often take part. Some charismatic free church circles in Europe teach about God's work of restoration among the Jewish people, though here also there is greater support in Germany than in most European nations. In England, none of the new charismatic church networks have yet been won over to such a vision. Prominent among the charismatic free churches open to the Messianic Jewish movement is Livets Ord [Word of Life] church in Uppsala, Sweden, and the Livets Ord network of churches, led by Ulf Ekman. Among charismatic publications, *Charisma* in Germany regularly gives space to Israel-related themes and to Christian – Messianic Jewish relations.

While many Messianic Jewish leaders are invited to preach in free church circles, the number receiving regular invitations to speak within historic church contexts is far smaller. The most influential Messianic Jewish teachers in Europe have undoubtedly been the Berger brothers from Jerusalem. Benjamin Berger visits the German-speaking countries regularly and Reuven Berger the French-speaking. Mention should also be made of the role of Christa Behr, who has served in the Berger brothers' congregation in Jerusalem since 1991 and who has developed an extensive network of Christian contacts in Germany and Austria, especially among Lutherans and free church charismatics. Other Messianic Jewish leaders who have wide contacts in the Gentile Christian world are David and Lisa Loden of Netanya, though their emphasis is less charismatic than that of the Berger brothers. Lisa Loden, who has made some scholarly contributions, was for a time the director of the Caspari Centre, and has extensive contacts with Scandinavian Lutherans, who have a long history of association with the Jewish people.

TJCII and the Charismatic Movement

¹⁷ Carlo Colonna, SJ *Gli Ebrei Messianici*

The Toward Jerusalem Council II initiative for the reconciliation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ would not have been possible without the charismatic movement. The original vision for TJCII came in a charismatic manner as a word of the Lord to Marty Waldman, the rabbi-leader of Baruch HaShem Messianic synagogue in Dallas, Texas. It was soon confirmed by Dr Daniel Juster, a leading teacher in the Messianic movement of strong charismatic convictions, and by several Christian leaders and teachers recognized in charismatic circles: John Dawson from Youth with a Mission; Brian Cox, an Episcopalian canon who served for many years as national director in the USA for SOMA, an international Anglican charismatic agency for short-term missions; and Fr Peter Hocken, a Catholic charismatic teacher and writer.

The first meetings of the TJCII leadership were highly charismatic events. In retrospect, it can be seen how this charismatic dimension and freedom made possible the knitting together in spirit of men coming from such different backgrounds. Some of the Messianic Jewish participants had never before met Roman Catholic or Anglican priests. The charismatic patterns of spontaneous praise and worship made possible a genuine fellowship in the Spirit and a common experience of the Lord's goodness that helped to bond the leaders together. In the first diffusion of the TJCII initiative, the leadership contacted leaders in the charismatic movement known to have a heart for the Jewish people. The most challenging steps taken in the first years of TJCII before the year 2000 were a series of prayer journeys to Spain, Rome, Nicaea and Israel that were the consequence of a vision received by one of the TJCII intercessors. This vision concerned four historic gates (Alhambra, Grenada, Spain; the Arch of Titus in Rome; a gate in Nicaea and the Golden Gate in Jerusalem). The depth of the prayer together in these places was the fruit of deep search of the Scriptures, our listening together to the Spirit of God and the freedom to express our profound grief before the Lord. We realized during these journeys that the road on which the Lord was leading TJCII is a road never travelled before. This realisation has contributed over the years to a greater sense that every step forward in Jewish-Gentile reconciliation in Messiah is totally dependent on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The experience in TJCII also showed much more clearly the strength of the spiritual opposition to the restoration of the Jewish witness within the Body of Christ. Because of an element of naiveté in approaching these spiritual strongholds without adequate intercessory cover, the TJCII initiative almost collapsed around the year 2000. Since then, a network of intercessory groups has been established drawing its participants from mature charismatic Christians with much intercessory experience and with a deep love for Israel.

Over the years since 2000, several key decisions in TJCII were either the fruit of words received in prayer or were strongly influenced by them. Among these were the decisions for the executive to go to Addis Ababa in 2004 and to Antakia, the historic Antioch, in 2006. Both of these produced unexpected fruit. In Addis Ababa, we learned how deeply the Coptic Orthodox Church of Ethiopia has been influenced by its Jewish origins, with Ethiopian Orthodox Christians still observing the Jewish dietary laws and circumcising their boys on the 8th day. There was a very positive meeting with Patriarch Paulos of the Ethiopian Church. The executive went to Antioch through a word that the road to Jerusalem passes through Antioch and the sense that it was necessary to go there before holding an important prayer conference in Jerusalem later in 2006. It became clearer in Antioch that this was the place where the church of the “one new man” made up of Jew and Gentile reconciled by the cross first

came into being, as a result of which the apostle Paul was able to develop his teaching in the letters to the Romans and to the Ephesians. We saw that the historic church of Antioch goes back to the origins with Paul and Barnabas in a way that the historic church in Jerusalem does not. In Jerusalem there was a clear break in 135 when the Jews including the Jewish believers in Yeshua were banished and a Greek church was founded in the new city of Aelia Capitolina (138).

However, the charismatic component in TJCII without which the initiative could never have started and without which it cannot go forward presents TJCII with a dilemma. The initiative cannot be content with presenting this vision to charismatic leaders within the Christian world. This vision is for all the Churches and for all Christians and has to be presented to all. This dilemma presents itself most forcibly in major promotional meetings, when church leaders not active in the charismatic movement may be uncomfortable with the methods and style prevalent in charismatic circles. It may be that a way forward is being indicated in the TJCII meetings with Orthodox Christians that have been taking place annually in Romania since 2006. Here there can be no overt charismatic forms of prayer or ministry, and yet the experience has been that the Orthodox participants have been clearly touched by the depth of the Messianic Jewish witness, especially by the biblical insights of Benjamin Berger. Benjamin Berger, his brother Reuven and Marcel Rebiai have formed the Jerusalem Olive Tree Fellowship to express their eschatological vision for the return of the glory to Jerusalem at the heart of Israel. The coming together of the Ölbaum Fellowship with TJCII is an important step for strengthening the voice of TJCII in Israel and for keeping at the heart of TJCII the prophetic vision in which all converges on Jerusalem.

The experience in TJCII has revealed the immense potential of this vision for Jewish-Gentile reconciliation to manifest the deeper significance of the Messianic Jewish movement. In fact, TJCII opens up the full scope of the Messianic Jewish movement. Because it directly addresses the necessary reconciliation and unity-in-difference of the Jewish and Gentile expressions of the Church, it keeps before the Messianic Jews their calling to be catalysts for the unity of the whole body. It challenges the Messianic Jews not to accept any sectarian view of the body of Messiah, which can be a temptation in view of the deep wounding of the Jewish people through the centuries, especially at the hands of the ancient Churches.

At present, a number of Messianic Jewish leaders have difficulty in accepting the role of the historic churches in TJCII, especially the participation of the Roman Catholics. This is definitely the case in the Bible belt in the USA, in Latin America and in Israel. In Israel, there is a higher percentage of Messianic congregations that are not charismatic; their experience of the ancient churches in Israel is not positive. Moreover, in Israel many Messianic congregations are so absorbed in the day to day struggle for survival and to counter the anti-missionary Jewish organisations that they have little energy left for a larger vision. It is the hope of all in TJCII that the Ölbaum Fellowship can truly encourage a deeper vision in Israel and can truly contribute to the Lord's work of reconciliation and unity.

The Future Unfolding of God's Plan

If the interpretation is correct of both the charismatic and the Messianic Jewish movements as inherently oriented to the coming of the Lord in glory, then we would expect both movements to have an increasing influence. However, here we should note major differences between the two movements.

First, the charismatic movement is less clear-cut in its identity and goals than the Messianic Jewish movement. This is primarily because the profile of a Jew who believes in Jesus (Yeshua) is more clearly defined than that of a charismatic Christian. The charismatic movement, particularly within the historic churches, has been concerned that the whole Church become truly charismatic. Some early Catholic charismatics made a comparison with the liturgical movement. They said, just as the liturgical movement is meant to disappear into a liturgically-renewed Church, so the charismatic renewal should disappear into a charismatically-renewed Church.

By contrast, the Messianic Jewish movement is not a movement looking for its eventual disappearance into a transformed Church, but presents itself as Jewish believers in Yeshua who seek to live as Jewish disciples of Yeshua, without requiring Gentiles to do the same. It is primarily a corporate reality of congregations where Jewish believers can be fed and supported in their lives as Jewish disciples. The goal cannot be their disappearance, however much their existence is received and welcomed by the Churches of the nations. In fact, there is a trend among some Messianic Jews, particularly in North America, to dislike being labelled a “movement” and to describe themselves as “the Messianic Jewish community”. For them, the term “movement” suggests something impermanent that might suddenly disappear. The term “community” suggests something more stable that has “arrived”. At least to the present author, this is a one-sided perspective. The term “movement” is important, as it is first a movement or current of the Holy Spirit that has to remain in movement, both to expand geographically and to become more authentically Jewish whatever that means. To want to present the movement as “having arrived” is in real danger of weakening its prophetic character and of fixing the movement in its current state. In fact, it could be said that the whole body of Messiah needs to take on more of a movement character as the eschatological fulfilment approaches.

In this light, we can expect that the Messianic Jewish movement will grow and become better known in the Churches of the nations. However, we should not limit the restoration of the corporate Jewish witness to Yeshua to the Messianic Jewish congregations. In fact, the term “Messianic Jewish movement” is understood to cover those Jews who are part of Gentile Christian congregations that make a special place and space for Jewish believers. But there can also be groupings of Jewish believers within the older Churches, as with the Hebrew Catholics. This is also a part of God's work of restoring the Jewish witness, though as yet they only have limited possibilities to express their Jewish heritage within the Churches. But it should be recognized that the Messianic Jews form the most vocal, visible and prophetic witness to Jewish faith in Yeshua ha Mashiach.

The eschatological significance of both movements makes clear that they can only move forward to serve the Lord's purposes in dependence on the Holy Spirit. The charismatic movement as a whole needs to take hold of this eschatological dimension more strongly in order to maintain its dynamism, to remain a movement of the Holy Spirit and truly to contribute to the preparation of the Bride. The Messianic movement already has this eschatological orientation but needs to progress beyond its growth pains so as to enter more fully into its Jewish calling to be a blessing to the nations. The Messianic movement is still grappling with the issue of what it means to be Jewish disciples of Yeshua and how to receive all that is from God in the Jewish heritage. They need the encouragement more than the advice of Gentile Christians how to steer a path that is not compromise between an honouring of the Jewish heritage and a reception of the newness of Yeshua and of the new covenant in his blood.

The eschatological context reveals the urgency of the task, it gives hope and confidence that the Lord's purposes for Israel and for the Church will be fulfilled. The vision of Jews and Gentiles in one body through the cross of Yeshua will be realized, though almost certainly not in the way that any of us now imagine. The stubbornness of believers today and in the future will not prevent God's plan becoming reality. Our openness and our resistance will only hasten or delay the realization.

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