

The Historic Churches and the Messianic Jews

Second talk given by mgr. dr. Peter Hocken to the Toward Jerusalem Council Two European Consultation in Vienna, Wednesday 19th February 2003

In this document 0117uk on website StuCom:

- A Framework for Understanding
- The Messianic Jewish Movement
- A Major Challenge to All Christians
- The Key Issue of the Marranos in Spain
- Consequences for the Messianic Jews
- The Lordship of the Holy Spirit

StuCom-webmaster: <http://home.hetnet.nl/~stucom>

TJCII is a vision for reconciliation between the Jewish and the Gentile parts of the body of Messiah. The most difficult part of this enterprise, both humanly and spiritually, is the relationship between the ancient Churches of East and West, on the one hand, and the Messianic Jews on the other hand.

For the Messianic Jews, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are seen as the major perpetrators of the age-long oppression and humiliation of the Jewish people, as well as those responsible for the various forms of replacement of the Jewish by the Gentile, including the replacement of the Sabbath by the Lord's Day. The veneration of Mary and the saints that constitutes a common element in the heritage of the ancient churches is perceived by the Messianic Jews as a sign of typically Gentile debasement of authentic Jewish monotheism.

But for the ancient Churches, it is also not easy to approach or to understand the Messianic Jews of our day. To the Catholic or the Orthodox eye, the Messianic Jews do not look like a "Church". There are no commonly-accepted patterns of liturgy or worship; there is no commonly accepted creed and there is no commonly accepted governing authority. You will understand that I am not trying to be fair here, but simply to record how things easily appear to the uninformed.

A Framework for Understanding

When I was doing my doctoral dissertation on the charismatic movement over twenty years ago, I began by studying what theologians were writing about the renewal. Over the first year of research, I came to realise that this was not the right approach, and I sensed that I was not to study what theologians think about the work of the Spirit, but I was to study what the Holy Spirit was doing. In this way, I arrived at a methodology that has governed my work ever since. It has been first to study what has been happening, seeking to identify the work of the Holy Spirit, and then to reflect on that in the light of the Scriptures and previous history.

In this process, I learnt that the way God works is itself significant, as well as what God does. So I think it will be helpful here to reflect on how the Holy Spirit brought the Messianic movement into being. We need to honour the work of the Holy Spirit and the instruments the Spirit has used. It will be helpful here to sketch some developments of the last 270 years, in order to understand better the way in which the Messianic Jewish movement came into being.

Something new began to happen in Christian history in the first half of the 18th century, particularly since the 1730s. This is when there appeared new streams of revival that were inter-denominational. This inaugurated a pattern of Christian discipleship in which the stream-identification became increasingly important and often in more recent times more important than the denominational. The leading British historian of Evangelicalism traces its origins back to the 1730s; it has been followed by the Holiness movement from the mid-19th century, the Pentecostal movement from the start of the 20th century and the charismatic movement from the mid-20th century. As the more recent variations of revival movement have developed, the previous streams have continued to flow, a good reason for not using the terminology of “waves”. In the 20th century, these movements have become truly global phenomena, with growth-rates more marked in Africa, Asia and Latin America than in the Christian heart-lands of Europe and North America.

In the last thirty years, spurred by transformed means of communication and greatly-adapted forms of human organisation, this *revivalist Christianity* has been re-shaped in a largely charismatic-evangelical mould increasingly outside the control and influence of traditional denominational leadership¹. The revolution of the last thirty years is the explosion of new forms of Christian congregation, new forms of church oversight and new forms of itinerant ministry. Its style is highly pragmatic and results-oriented. Leadership patterns largely follow the patterns of contemporary entrepreneurial business culture. Patterns are constantly shifting. Networking is the term that maybe best captures this spirit of cooperative enterprise marked by flexibility in the service of success – in this case, church growth, both quantitative and qualitative.

The historic Churches have not paid enough attention to this major phenomenon of our day, and are too apt to dismiss it as a deplorable multiplication of sects that can be countered by denunciation without accurate knowledge. I believe on the contrary that these trends have to be seen as profound currents of the Holy Spirit, mixed up with many patterns of contemporary culture and also of human hubris. They are currents of the Holy Spirit, because their deepest impulses are Christocentric and conversionist, with a more holistic element entering through the Pentecostal and charismatic streams.

The Messianic Jewish Movement

What is the relevance of this history to the rise of the Messianic Jewish movement. First, it is the Evangelical-charismatic matrix that has first made the Messianic Jewish

¹ A major contributory factor in this development is the widespread penetration of Evangelical Christianity since 1980 by aspects of charismatic spirituality.

movement possible and has then contributed to its general shape and character. I want to pick out three ways in which I see that the evangelical-charismatic matrix has contributed to the emergence of the Messianic Jewish movement. These three ways correspond to three stages in the historical development.

1. It is the Evangelical movement that has taken the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel, the people, the land and Jerusalem with real seriousness. It is the Evangelicals who have taken seriously the link between Israel and eschatology. This is true particularly since the 1820s. At this time the historic Churches largely took a replacement understanding of the old covenant for granted, and so no contemporary or future significance was attributed to the Jewish people, their land or their holy city². In the 20th century, the Pentecostals generally accepted the Evangelical reading of the Bible. To the growing interest in biblical prophecy among Evangelicals in the late 19th century, Pentecostals added the belief in the contemporary availability and use of prophetic gifts. The events of 1917 (the Balfour Declaration), of 1948 (the founding of the state of Israel) and of 1967 (the reunification of Jerusalem) were all understood and celebrated by many Evangelicals and Pentecostals as fulfilments of biblical prophecy.

In the phase of attention to the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel, there were some pioneer figures who began to say that the return to the land would be accompanied by a turning of the Jewish people to their Messiah. It was the period of the formation of Hebrew Christian Alliances, the coming together of Jewish believers within the historic Protestant churches to support each other in their ongoing Jewish identity without any idea of forming Jewish congregations. It was also the period when some pioneer thinkers began to advocate the establishment of Jewish congregations. There were also here and there attempts to form Jewish or Hebrew Christian congregations, without any movement really developing or the idea really catching on.

2. But from 1967, the Messianic Jewish movement came into being. I do not think that this transition from inchoate vision to a dynamic movement could have happened without the power of the Holy Spirit present in the revivalist streams, particularly the charismatic movement.

I am aware that the Messianic Jewish movement is not totally charismatic. But I think the evidence is there that the movement-character of Messianic Judaism came from the dynamic unleashed among young Jews in the United States through the Jesus movement of the late 1960s. It requires a massive charge of spiritual energy with all the creativity of the Holy Spirit to bring into being this “new creation” that is the Messianic Jewish movement. Resurrection is the mightiest work of the Holy Spirit: “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1: 19 – 20).

² However, it should be noted that it was at this time that the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne took place in France, and led to the first re-thinking of Catholic positions regarding the Jewish people.

3. The form that the Messianic Jewish movement has taken is in fact characteristic of the forms being taken by the new thrusts in evangelical-pentecostal-charismatic Christianity throughout the contemporary world. The loose patterns of affiliation within the Messianic Jewish Alliance follow the pattern of the Evangelical Alliance. The structure of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations in the United States is similar to that of the Baptists, at least in the earlier stages of the Baptist Union. The structure of Messianic ministries like Tikkun, led by Dr Daniel Juster, is characteristic of contemporary charismatic-type ministries. Beit-sar-Shalom in Germany with its cluster of new Messianic congregations under Vladimir Pikman, is just like a new charismatic church network. So it is not surprising that men like David Chernoff and Daniel Juster are invited to meetings of heads of networks, often called apostolic ministries.

Now in this charismatic-apostolic type of ordering of ministry, I can see something providential. While it may be difficult for Catholics, Orthodox and many Anglicans to relate to structures that do not belong within the historic apostolic succession, it is integral to the character of the present-day Messianic movement that it is self-governing, and not under Gentile control. Here the spiritual restoration parallels the national: just as the Zionists longed for their own land, where the Jews would no longer be under the rule of the nations, so the Jewish believers in Jesus look for the restoration of a Jewish expression of the Church that will not be under Gentile Christian domination. The rise of inter-denominational revivalist streams has made possible the rise of new forms of church government that are not “denominational” and that in turn have made possible a governmental autonomy within the Messianic Jewish movement in general.

A Major Challenge to All Christians

I have said that the restoration of a Jewish expression of the Church required a totally new work of the Holy Spirit, and could not take place within the normal patterns of ecclesiastical restoration³. The restoration of a Jewish expression of the Church has the character of a resurrection from the dead, as is implied in Romans 11: 15, that cannot be humanly planned or organised. This resurrection of the Jewish expression of the Church, visible in the Messianic Jewish movement, is deeply challenging to all the Christian churches and traditions.

I want to look particularly at the issue of unity. We have been saying that the restored/resurrected Jewish expression, the remnant, will be the instrument to restore unity between the divided churches of the nations. But in fact, the Holy Spirit is challenging all our understandings and forms of unity. Various Christian traditions have emphasized different aspects of unity. It might be said that the Catholic has emphasized the material element, the bodily character, the structural components. The Classical Protestant, by contrast, emphasized unity brought about by the Word of God; it was an

³ Within the Catholic framework, one could instance here the restoration of the permanent diaconate and the restoration of eucharistic concelebration through the decisions of the Second Vatican Council.

emphasis on the right understanding of the Scriptures. The free churches, particularly the Pentecostal and the charismatic, have focused on the spiritual dimension of unity, often attaching little or no importance to outward and institutional elements. But the bodily, the intellectual and the spiritual are all essential components of the human person. There can be no authentic unity of human beings that does not possess all these characteristics.

When the free churches look at the ancient Churches, they do not see what they believe to be the New Testament reality of organic unity. They see a mixed phenomenon, churches made up of believers and unbelievers. From the other side, the mainline Churches do not see the free churches as having an organic unity: what they see is a pattern of voluntary association, sometimes followed by voluntary dissociation.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the Messianic Jewish movement deeply challenges all our understandings of unity. The loss of the original Jewish expression of the Church must have seriously injured the unity of the one body, for how could the foundational element be suppressed or outlawed without grave injury to the unity willed by the Holy Spirit for the Church? The classical Protestant and free church emphases can be seen as protests and reactions against an excessive Catholic reliance on the bodily and the outward. But do these protests lead to an organic unity such as we read of in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians? The return to the root requires the return to all the biblical components of the Spirit-given unity of the one new man.

In the contemporary Messianic movement, there is much talk of “the body”, but this seems to be expressing a deep desire and longing, as much as a present reality. All believe that the Lord wants to restore the pattern of unity described in the book of Acts and taught in Ephesians. How then can the Messianic movement acquire a organic unity that it longs for but does not yet really possess or exhibit?

How did the Lord bring into being the organic unity of the one body? What are its component elements? First, the whole history of Israel is the formation of a people with strong bonds of blood and of faith within the covenant. Clearly too the call by Jesus of the twelve disciples is foundational for the Church. He formed the twelve in a special way for the structuring of the body. So we find in Revelation 21, the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are placed on the foundations of the city walls of the heavenly Jerusalem (v. 14). Most importantly, the Church is formed out of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is a transformation within Israel, a transformation of Israel, in the person of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. The one body is his body, the body offered on the cross. The ancient liturgical traditions of the Church have always seen the Eucharist as forming the organic unity of the body, the Eucharist that is a transformation of the Passover, so that those who eat one bread become one body. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Cor. 10: 17). And finally, there is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The one organic body is formed by the Holy Spirit. We have to take all these elements seriously, just as we have to take the bodily, the psychic and the spiritual dimensions seriously.

The way the Lord formed the leadership of the Church is really rather strange! He chooses twelve disciples and forms them in a special way. They are truly to play a foundational role. But then we find that none of them is leader of the church of Jerusalem. That role is filled by James, the brother of the Lord, who was probably only won over through the trauma of Jesus's death and the joy of his resurrection (see 1 Cor. 15: 7). We hear very little of the ministry of the twelve, and much about an apostle, who was like one "untimely born" (1 Cor. 15: 8), Saul of Tarsus, who becomes Paul, the apostle to the nations. Here we have three very different forms of calling to a structuring foundational formation of the Church: one historical, we may say, with formation over a period during the earthly ministry of Jesus; one familial, a rapid promotion but with no record of how the call was given; and the third through heavenly intervention, directly from the Lord without earthly human processes. This is a strong challenge to our normal ways of thinking that there is only one divine pattern for Church leadership.

The Key Issue of the Marranos in Spain

In our presentation of the TJCII vision, we have emphasized the essential role of repentance, especially for the ancient Churches that carry the weight of the long oppression and persecution of the Jews. In the repentance of the Catholic community, I believe a particular importance attaches to a heart-felt confession for all the oppression and atrocities concerning the Marranos of Spain and Portugal. One of the Messianic members of the TJCII executive once said to me that there were two great wounds of the Jewish people: the first was the Shoah, the second was Spain.

The oppression of the Marranos was directed specifically against those Jews, who had been baptized, and who thus came officially under the laws of the Church. The roots of this problem lay in the official Catholic decision that only physical force invalidated the baptisms conducted in conditions of fear and duress. It is this part of Catholic history that has caused baptism to be regarded with particular horror by the Jewish people, and the baptism of a Jew to be followed by funeral prayers. The presupposition of all the accusations made against the Marranos is that one could not be a true believer in Jesus the Messiah and at the same time continue to assert any Jewish identity or take part in any Jewish practices.

As a result of all prejudice and coercion, a distinctive community came into existence, that could be seen as a kind of caricature of a Jewish Church: Jewish by origin and by identity, Catholic by baptism and outward practice. It is as though the Church authorities, having accepted the consequences of coercion, refused all Jewishness and so attacked the creature it had brought into being. It is a tragic and shameful story, in which one sin leads to another. Ultimately, the healing of relationships between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community (including the Messianic community) requires the explicit Catholic repudiation of all the tainted and evil elements in this contorted history.

Consequences for the Messianic Jews

This Catholic repentance will have a particular force for the Messianic Jews. It will enable them to be freed from the wounds of the past and will enable them freely to appropriate whatever elements from their own heritage the Holy Spirit wants them to receive. The Evangelical affinities of the Messianic Jewish movement have reinforced Messianic antipathies towards those elements of the Christian heritage that are most characteristic of the ancient Churches of East and West. These elements retained much that was distinctively Jewish, especially embodied in the ancient liturgies, but extending also to forms of biblical exegesis and preaching, as well as forms of spiritual union with the Godhead. The Messianic Jews need to be interiorly free to interact with every element of the Jewish heritage, that comes from the biblical witness and that is compatible with the uniqueness of Yeshua.

One thing this history shows me as a Roman Catholic is that the history of the Church is much more like the history of Israel than we have ever acknowledged. As we struggle to deal with the evil in our past, I ask you, Messianic Jews and Protestant sisters and brothers, to encourage us and to intercede for us rather than to complain. The call of Pope John Paul II to a Catholic repentance is so new, that it has not yet penetrated deep into the Catholic consciousness, and some who are aware of it do not understand that the confessions of the Jubilee Year 2000 are only the beginning of a huge undertaking that will be painful and humbling. We have gifts to contribute out of our long heritage, but their reception will only be possible as we Catholics really get to grips with our history, of which the treatment of the Jews forms the most deplorable part. However, the huge steps forward that have taken place since 1965 provide grounds for great confidence concerning the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the future.

The Lordship of the Holy Spirit

I have emphasized that the resurrection of the Church of the circumcision is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, and that the honouring of the Messianic Jews is a recognition of this fact. Just as the Holy Spirit led, directed and created the opening of the Church to the Gentiles, as we see in the story of Cornelius and Peter, so the Holy Spirit is equally leading, directing and creating this work of resurrection and the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile in Jesus the Messiah. The key question for all of us at each stage in this restoration and reconciliation is: Is this the work of the Holy Spirit? Is this the leading of the Holy Spirit? Following any other criteria that we have used in the past other than the biblical criteria for discernment of the Spirit will only erect barriers to this new creative work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit leads to the confession that Jesus is come in the flesh, to confessing Jesus as Lord, to crying out “Abba, Father”, to repentance, to praise and to all the fruit of the Spirit, of which the first is love. In my talk yesterday (see StuCom document 0116) I spoke of the need to work in the opposite Spirit to that we so often showed to the Jews throughout Christian history: humility instead of arrogance, respect instead of contempt, truth instead of lies, and freedom instead of coercion. This is saying the only way forward is strict attention and obedience to the Holy Spirit.

Part of our humility before the Holy Spirit is to recognize the limits of our understanding. None of us know how the Lord is going to resolve many of these difficulties that block the way to the full organic unity of the one body of Messiah and to the coming of the Kingdom. We have to learn to say, “This is a work of the Holy Spirit, even though I do not yet understand understand how the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit relates to historic succession, understand what a restored Jewish church will look like, understand all this implies for the repentance, conversion and transformation of our Churches in the Gentile world. I know that the Jew has the first place, but I do not know what that will look like in terms of reconciled relationships and the renewal of the Church. It is only the Holy Spirit that can show us, and the Holy Spirit will show us at the right time. We just have to have the humility that will free us to hold back from insisting on our ideas of what things should look like. We are seeing a wonderful work of God. It is in an early stage brought about by the Holy Spirit of God. We can only move on to the following stages through complete dependence on the Holy Spirit.

This talk has been published with permission as document 0117uk on web site StuCom (www.kcv-net.nl/stucom or <http://home.hetnet.nl/~stucom>). Document 0116uk was his first talk for TJCI in Vienna 2003: Deepening the Vision - The Restoration of the Church of the Circumcision. Document 0104uk tells more about Peter Hocken. Other articles of Peter Hocken on this web site StuCom: 0100uk, 0101uk, 0102uk, 0103uk and 0114uk.