

Azusa, Rome, and Zion

First Talk at Strefa Zero conference, Katowice, Poland

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Earlier this year I had a new book published with the title *Azusa, Rome, and Zion*. As I thought about the Strefa Zero conference, I thought this title provides an appropriate theme. This book is in fact a collection of papers that I have given in various settings (Society for Pentecostal Studies in North America; European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association, Livets Ord in Uppsala, Sweden, Toward Jerusalem Council Two). The only chapter written for this book is the final one that aims to show how all the chapters form a unity that reflects the unity of focus in my ministry has taken over the last twenty-five years.

Each of these three words is both specific, and symbolic. Each – Azusa, Rome, and Zion, refer to a specific reality, but also have an extended reference. I will explain. Azusa means the origins of the Pentecostal movement, but it also serves as a symbol for the Pentecostal and charismatic movements as a whole, that is the twentieth century outpouring of the Holy Spirit associated with Spirit-baptism and an abundant bestowal of the charisms of 1 Corinthians 12: 8 - 10. Rome specifically means the Catholic Church in communion with Rome, but it also symbolizes the historic churches of East and West for whom continuity with apostolic tradition is important. Zion means the city of Jerusalem, but it also symbolizes the land of Israel and the Jewish people first in Israel but also in the diaspora. [So as I speak about these three elements, I am mostly focused on the first level of meaning, but I suggest that the points made apply in some way to all that the primary term symbolizes.]

So I begin by expressing my conviction that the three elements symbolized by Azusa, Rome, and Zion, are all essential parts of a central work of the Holy Spirit in our day, that is taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth, that involves the rise of new Christian denominations and groupings and the renewal of the historic churches, and that is already showing signs of gathering together the whole scattered body of Christ. This combination of all these elements is then preparing for the consummation of all things in Christ. Through my years of Christian service, I have come to see how deeply these three spheres need each other. Each brings something that is needed for the consummation of God's plan. All are tempted to see themselves as self-sufficient, but this is a self-centred delusion that fails to understand God's full purpose. The need of Azusa, Rome, and Zion for one another is the focus of this teaching.

[Pentecostal Christians have typically seen the Pentecostal movement as the climax of church history – the Latter Rain downpour following centuries of drought that until 1906 had only been relieved by occasional showers. Only more recently are some Pentecostals recognizing the importance of historic Christianity, particularly Pentecostal scholars¹ but also a few prophetic leaders. In the last 30 years there has been a rise of serious Pentecostal scholarship, first in North America, but also on other continents. For these scholars dialogue with Catholics is now accepted as normal and necessary, though these more ecumenical attitudes are less common among Pentecostal pastors and people, particularly in countries like Poland with a large Catholic majority. It is easier for Pentecostals to link Azusa and Zion. First, the Pentecostal movement began at the time when

¹ For example Simon Chan of Singapore, Cecil M. Robeck, Amos Yong, Dale Coulter, Tony Richie, Cheryl Bridges Johns, among others in the USA.

there was growing Evangelical interest in the fulfilment of biblical prophecy in relation to the Jewish people and the question of their return to the land of Israel. So it was not unusual for Pentecostal teaching on the Latter Rain to interpret Pentecostal revival in terms of the final harvest extending to the Jews and their return to the land of Israel. But for them, the inclusion of the historic churches is not part of their normal thinking, and the inclusion of Rome is likely to provoke some strong reactions. For Catholics, linking Rome and Jerusalem can be challenging, but not unthinkable. But Azusa, what can that have to do with God's ultimate purposes? That is more difficult for Catholic scholars and leaders for whom historic apostolic succession has been foundational. For them, it is like Nazareth for the leaders of Israel at the time of Jesus. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1: 46).

For Messianic Jews, there are also major challenges. For them, the Catholic Church (and to a great extent the Orthodox Church also), the Catholic Church may still represent the ancient oppressor, and Rome the new Babylon (see 1 Peter 5: 13; Rev. 17: 6, 9). Rome for them means Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions and enforced baptisms.]

We see that many who appeal to Azusa, to Rome, or to Zion, see their focus as the one that really matters. Each grouping suffers from its own forms of exclusivity. Pentecostals, or Pentecostal and charismatics, or Pentecostals and Evangelicals, can think that God's final purposes will be realized by them. They are the ones who filled with the Holy Spirit will evangelize the world. Catholics have long been convinced that the salvation of the world can only be realized through the Catholic Church. Even though Vatican Two and many papal documents urge

dialogue and recognize that the Holy Spirit is working through and in other Christian communions, the common Catholic expectation largely remains that it will happen just through the Catholic Church. The Messianic Jews and Evangelical lovers of Israel often speak and act as though the only things of importance in God's purpose concern Israel and the Jews.

All these forms of exclusivity concerning the working of the Spirit of God call for a metanoia if a real openness to the Holy Spirit is to replace the exclusivity and the ideological element in this widespread thinking. Metanoia has to characterize Azusa, Rome, and Zion. It is not helpful to start making comparisons, urging who has the most to confess. As the Lord's gifting of Azusa, Rome, and Zion, is distinctively different, so are the patterns of abuse of these giftings. But it can be said that the first responsibility to make metanoia belongs to the Catholic Church, in view of its long history and in view of the fact that the biggest Christian divisions were forms of protest against developments in the Catholic Church.

[The argument in my book is that all three are necessary elements in the working of the Holy Spirit today. The subtitle expresses this inter-relationship: Pentecostal Life, Catholic Reform, and Jewish Roots.]

Why the Azusa Contribution is Essential

The distinctive contribution of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements to the overall work of the Lord (we may say to the Church in its widest sense) is baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is the power and life of the Holy Spirit poured out in a sovereign way to transform Christians, Christian communities, and all expressions of the Church. It is because this has been a sovereign outpouring from the

throne of God that it can be received in every Christian context and church framework. It was never first a doctrine nor the "property" of any Church or denomination. Because it is the same work of the Holy Spirit it unites Christians at the inner level of the Spirit, enabling them whatever their theology or ecclesiology to pray together, to witness together, to serve together. As a sovereign outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the gift of baptism in the Holy Spirit awakens the one hope of full salvation of body, soul, and spirit, and the hope for the coming glory.

The whole Christian world needs this Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the Church to be able to move towards the coming of the Lord and the full realization of the Kingdom of God. This work of God which brings the fuller equipment of the Spirit is needed for the wounds of division to be healed, and for the Church to cry out with one voice, "Come, Lord Jesus." It is needed for the completion of the "times of the Gentiles (nations)," the effective preaching of the Gospel to all nations in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[The difference between a Spirit-filled ministry and what has been accepted as normal in the Churches was brilliantly described by a first-generation Pentecostal preacher, D. Wesley Myland, in his book, *The Latter Rain Covenant*, where he contrasts the cultivation of the land in Egypt and in Canaan. Egypt, he says, "was a land watered by foot-power", irrigated from the Nile, a process that was "laborious and expensive." For the water to reach the fields, slaves had to expend much physical energy for not a lot of water. But the promised land of Canaan is watered by rain from heaven, that comes at the right time. "For the land which you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where

you sowed your seed and watered it with your feet, like a garden of vegetables; but the land which you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it" (Deut. 11: 10 – 12).² Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the Lord's heavenly downpour, the flow of the Holy Spirit to the human spirit.]

Why Historic Christianity is Essential/Irreplaceable

Let us move now to the Roman Catholic Church but not forgetting the other historic Churches. The Pentecostal and charismatic currents of revival need the Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches, and the historic churches of the Reformation. This is a different need from the need of those churches/traditions for baptism in the Spirit. It is the need for historical roots, it is the need for inter-generational transmission of a heritage that comes down through the centuries. This Christian heritage needs reform and revival (the need for Wittenberg and Azusa). The Bible is central in this heritage, as are ancient liturgies closer to the roots in Israel. Without interaction with this heritage (divided though it is), Spirit-enthused believers are in constant danger of having to create church, creed, liturgy *ex nihilo*. [This is not to deny the urgent need for reform and revival – that is why the Pentecostal and charismatic movements are so important – but it is to recognize that] Christian faith never just descends from heaven immediately but is transmitted through every Christian generation. We always need both: the rain from heaven, and the seed passed down through the generations. We need the patriarchs, the kings, and the genealogies; and we need the prophets.

² D. Wesley Myland, *The Latter Rain Covenant* (Springfield, MO: Temple Press, 1910), p. 7.

The heritage passed down is essential, because in our human weakness, no generation ever fully grasps the heritage that comes from Jesus. We are excited by some parts – some teachings, some elements from the Bible, some holy and inspiring figures, some practices. But the heritage of Bible, liturgy, wisdom and spirituality, is always greater. There are always elements awaiting retrieval, rediscovery, and new life. The iconoclastic spirit of the denouncers of tradition easily destroys or banishes what is in fact gold-bearing, a treasure beneath the surface.

[The contribution of Rome and the historic Protestant communions corresponds more to the role of the body, and of the soul-mind. In a book published in 1955, called *The Household of God*, Lesslie Newbigin wrote of the Church needing Catholic order, Protestant truth, and Pentecostal life. Catholic Christianity is embodied, structured – perhaps arthritic or sick in the words of Pope Francis – but it is through the body that there is human society and continuity across the generations. Body preserves structure. The historic Protestant churches insist on the primacy of the Word of God, on the need for a biblical theology and a Christian mind. Jaroslav Pelikan here spoke of Catholic substance and Protestant principle. You cannot form church by principles alone, but without them (the Word) you cannot have a healthy and living Church. The principled structures then need the breath of the Spirit.]

The work of revival and reform through the Spirit is always hard work. The temptation of the Spirit-filled is to try and avoid this hard work, appealing to the immediacy of the Spirit. Inspiration can happen in an instant, but building takes time and work. Both are needed.

Metanoia is needed on all sides: among those who resist the Pentecostal Spirit, among those who neglect or

trivialize the Word of God, among those who try to bypass Christian history – and lastly from those who have not done any Metanoia.

Why Zion is Essential

Is a massive Pentecostal-charismatic revival deeply impacting the whole Christian world enough? I think not. There is the third element Zion, the Jewish people, Israel. First, without Zion, there is no clear destination. Or in more theological terms, there is an inadequate eschatology. But secondly, the point of departure, the launch pad, is not rightly understood.

A classical presentation of Christian faith that eliminates the essential role of Israel is expressed in the four spiritual laws, and all other summaries of the Christian message that move directly from Genesis 3 to Matthew 1, that argue from the fall that a divine redeemer is needed, and Hey presto, God provided this redeemer in the Incarnation. The Old Testament Messianic prophecies can be reduced to apologetic proof texts.

When Christians have formulated the destination without Israel and the Jewish people, they speak of heaven and the kingdom of God. But without Israel, there is a huge disconnect! Heaven and the kingdom become abstract concepts without any power or traction. The rich Old Testament promises and prophecies, which speak of a real land, a real people, and a real city, became disconnected from reality by a supersessionist hermeneutic that spiritualized and universalized: the promised land became heaven; Jerusalem became the Church, Israel becomes the kingdom of God. Metanoia is needed here also – especially in regard to forms of Christian faith that have marginalized eschatology and the coming of the Lord in glory.

Azusa stands for a worldwide Pentecostal revival centred on baptism in the Spirit, which extends to historic Protestant churches in the charismatic movement, and then to the Roman Catholic Church. This sequence can/should be understood as the Holy Spirit reaching back through Christian history to heal the wounds of division. But the going back through history cannot end with Rome, as Roman Catholics easily assume. It has to reach back to Jerusalem, to Zion. For the original divisions concerning the Church involved the Jewish people: first, the division between Jesus-believing Jews and Jesus-denying Jews, i.e. a split within Israel on account of Jesus/Yeshua (in fact prophesied by Simeon to Mary in Luke 2: 34); and secondly, between the Church and the synagogue. So I believe we can see the sequence: Pentecostal revival outside the historic Christian world; charismatic renewal in the Protestant churches; charismatic renewal in the Roman Catholic Church; rise of the Messianic Jewish movement. This sequence is in some way a return back through history – reversing the path from Jerusalem to Samaria to the God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue to the completely pagan right to the ends of the earth.

Recognizing that the Holy Spirit is taking the whole Church back to the roots in Israel presents all Christians with huge challenges. Rediscovering the Jewishness of Jesus, and of his teaching. A recent statement from the Vatican on the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* expresses the challenge in this way: "One cannot understand Jesus' teaching or that of his disciples without situating it within the Jewish horizon in the context of the living tradition of Israel; one would understand his teachings even less so if they were seen in opposition to this tradition."³ But this is precisely how

³ *Reflections*, para. 14.

Christians have often opposed the teaching of Jesus to received Jewish tradition. The challenge of Metanoia for the failures and neglects, even blindness, of our tradition/ church/movement.

[The initiative Toward Jerusalem Council Two that embraces all forms of Jewish believers in Jesus and all expressions of Christian faith requires the participation of the Catholic and the Orthodox churches as their confession of sin and repudiation of replacement teaching is necessary for the healing of the wounds of history. This initiative presents the Messianic Jews with their need for the Churches including the ancient Churches, as well as the need of the Christians in the nations for Israel and Zion. Metanoia is needed also from the Messianic Jews, who can be tempted to arrogance and a disrespect for everything coming from the Gentile world. This easily leads to the wrong idea that all Christians have to abandon Sunday worship, Christmas, Easter, and the feasts of the Church for the observance of the Sabbath and the feasts of the Lord in the Old Testament.]