Performing Liturgy, Performing Identity: An Ethnography of Messianic, Orthodox, and Hebraic Roots Congregations of West Texas

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PERFORMING LITURGY, PERFORMING IDENTITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHY

The work of an ethnographer is a peculiarly multifaceted method of inquiry, one that probes into the deeper layers of symbols, beliefs, and meaning-making even while it documents the surface details of a social gathering. The ethnographer of the performing arts has an even more challenging task, as Krüger (2008) describes it in *Ethnography in the Performing Arts: A Student Guide*: to unravel these layers within the details of a performance (a specific genre of social interaction that comes with its own rules) and then show how they are situated in the enveloping culture. (In an ethnographic context, the term *performance* can refer to any "performed" activity, not only a staged presentation). The musical ethnographer may have to play the additional roles of ethnomusicologist and ethnochoreologist, engaging innovative methods of inquiry like performance ethnography in addition to the traditional methods (participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, transcription). For my first foray into musical ethnography, I chose to explore the relationship of liturgical practices and identity formation within the Judeo-Christian tradition. After some preliminary investigation, I narrowed my focus to Messianic Judaism, concentrating on concepts of ecclesiology as identity and liturgy as ecclesial praxis, and specifically on the emphasis that the Messianic movement(s) accord to the city of Jerusalem as a touchstone of both ecclesiology and praxis. I conducted fieldwork in three west Texas congregations. Despite their striking differences, all three fell within the scope of Messianic Judaism as defined by the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (http://www.thekingsforum.com/index.php?topic=2789.0): "a movement of Jewish congregations and congregation-like groupings committed to Yeshua the Messiah that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant."

To lay the groundwork for reporting my findings, I will note the theoretical perspectives that informed my work, as well summarize the history of the Messianic movement(s) and the interaction between Jewish and Christian musical sources. As explained by Hunter (2010), George Herbert Mead's (*Mind, Self, and Society*) and Herbert Blumer's ("Symbolic Interaction: An Approach to Human Communication") theory of symbolic interactionism undergirded my perspective, for two reasons. First, as Mead says, society is "the web of social relationships that we create, that creates us, etc., occur[ing] through symbolic interaction, and not without it." In other words, symbols – objects or ideas whose existence provokes us to define them and then associate ourselves with them, thereby defining ourselves – are the means by which identity formation takes place. Religion is a powerful form of human interaction, mediated primarily through symbols or symbolic actions; the worshiping community (e.g. the church or synagogue) is bound together by symbols that signify a shared communal life, purpose, and destiny. Thus, music performed in religious worship virtually always has identity formation (that is, concretion of the existing group identity) as at least a secondary goal. In the case of liturgy, this is often the primary goal. Second, Blumer's description of social construction as the natural outflow of symbolic interaction matches the description of liturgical worship given by many sources in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Blumer writes, "The life of any human society consists necessarily of an ongoing process of fitting together the activities of its members" – that is, society's concern is to transform individuals and unite them as a cohesive organism (a "body" – the concern of ecclesiology). Furthermore, social interaction "is a process that forms human conduct….By virtue of symbolic interaction, human group life is necessarily a formative process" – in other words, the process of transformation and union is mediated by symbols (which may be words, icons, actions, or music – the material of liturgy).

Liturgy literally means "the work of the people" or, in a more general sense, "public service." In the days of Greek paganism, it referred to the elaborate religious and civil pageantry funded by wealthy members of society (or even to public entertainers, like jugglers). In the Greek LXX – Septuagint Old Testament, the word is used for the first time in a strictly religious context to translate the Hebrew words *'eved*/*'aboda* (servant, service), *kohen* (priest), and *tziva*/*mitzvah* (commandment, appointment) (Werner, 1959). Today, the term is used to refer to the forms of worship employed by any faith community, but particularly those that follow a set pattern of ritual participation (e.g. an agreed-upon set of symbols). More narrowly, it signifies the forms of public worship followed by Jews and Christians throughout their history. While theologians and mystagogues of every persuasion have elaborated on the ecclesiological meanings of liturgical acts such as the Eucharist, an accessible source for lay readers is Scott Hahn's *Letter and Spirit: From Written Text to Living Word in the Liturgy*. Hahn (2005) presents a Roman Catholic explanation of the Eucharistic liturgy and, in doing so, offers a broadly applicable perspective on liturgy as a typological recapitulation of past events that shape communal identity. In the fourth century, Augustine taught that "the *very events of sacred history* were fashioned by God as material signs [of] eternal truths"; therefore, "The liturgy is the place where tradition lives, where memory lives." Hahn writes:

> In the liturgy, God remembers his covenant and calls the church to do the same. This does not mean that the church, or God, will forget the covenant at all other times. But in the liturgy the church commemorates, and celebrates, and preserves its identity from moment to moment.
>
> ……..

> In the liturgy, the church knows its identity and teaches more surely than in the most solemn of papal documents.

The following quotation from a Messianic congregant at Beit HaDerekh illustrates a similar perspective. In an online forum, the congregant posted a comment made by her son, a former Messianic who converted to the Anglican Church.

> R. Yeshua tells us a story about the wise man who built his house on the rock. I think most of you know the story. The house will only stand if the foundation is firm. Theology is our foundation…
>
> The walls and roof are our legal/ethical systems, our prayers, rites, and practices. They are the things we inhabit daily…but not the end.
>
> THE END IS TO LIVE IN THE HOUSE. The end is to conduct our daily lives on the basis of theology, inside our rites and sacraments, beneath the covering of our ethical/penitential system. (emphasis in original)

In the same vein, Hahn writes, "Liturgy sustains the assembly of God's people – the *qahal*, the *ekklesia*, the *church* – and liturgy restores it when it falls." In this profound meditation on the transcendent power of symbols, the reason behind liturgy's power to effect transformation and union is liturgy's origin: heavenly worship. The prophets (Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) "saw the worship of heaven and bequeathed it as a model for earth. Their canticles have endured for millennia in the daily and festal prayer of both Jews and Christians."

In fact, Jewish and Christian liturgies do claim their origins in the mandate of heaven. The forms of corporate worship in early Christianity drew from the wellsprings of the Temple liturgy established by Second Temple Judaism, which was based on the detailed prescriptions in the Torah (the Pentateuch). After sacrificial worship ended with the destruction of the Temple in

A.D. 70, the synagogue assumed even greater prominence as the seat of formal worship, prayer, and study. Harper (1991), in *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century,* indicates that little detail survives relative to Christian liturgy prior to Constantine. From around A.D. 313 onward, however, there is evidence of a plethora of liturgical "rites" (established patterns) in various regional styles and vernacular languages. The rites included the following elements: daily common prayer ("Liturgy of the Hours" or "Divine Office"), the Eucharist, and rites of initiation (Baptism and Chrismation). Variable ("Proper") texts were created to enhance the feast days when inserted within the invariable ("Ordinary") liturgical texts of the services. The Church also established holy days throughout the year to commemorate events in the life of Christ and the acts of saints.

Not only do Jewish and Christian liturgies share a material origin in the Tabernacle of Moses and the Second Temple, but they share a musical origin in ancient Hebrew melodies, as Werner (1959) demonstrates in *The Sacred Bridge: The Interdependence of Liturgy and Music in Synagogue and Church during the First Millennium*. Around 1900, Abraham Idelsohn pioneered the study of the relationship between the ancient liturgies of Babylonian and Yemenite Hebrews and the chant of the Catholic Church. Idelsohn demonstrated that the melodies carried out of Palestine by Hebrews who emigrated prior to the time of Christ lived on in the Temple and synagogues and were introduced by Jewish cantors into early Judeo-Christian congregational worship. Despite melodic similarities, however, the liturgical spectrum has become extremely diverse over the past two millennia. Cultural forces supported a trend of "*constant borrowing and lending*" between the two traditions as they grew side by side, but in an increasingly polemical relationship with each other.

First- and second-century Christianity was actually a sect of Judaism that identified itself with the Messiah (Greek *Christos*, "anointed one") Yeshua (Greek *Iesous*, or Jesus, "YHWH is salvation"). Therefore, it was the funnel through which the later Christian Church (in its Roman, Eastern, and Anglican manifestations) received its liturgical heritage from Second Temple Judaism. According to the Messianic Jewish Association of America (http://www.mjaa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=rd_messianicmovement_messianic_judaism):

> Historical and Biblical evidence demonstrates that following Yeshua was initially an entirely Jewish concept. Decades upon decades of persecution, division, and confused theology all contributed to the dichotomy between Jews and believers in Yeshua [Christians] that many take for granted today.

Despite this pervasive antagonism, the musical "borrowing and lending" described by Werner continued for centuries. For one, Gentiles had begun to swell the ranks of converts to the Messianic faith almost immediately, outnumbering Jewish believers by 100 A.D. Even though Gentile converts held a somewhat disdainful attitude toward their Jewish brethren (in part because political unrest among non-Messianic Jews was drawing unfavorable attention from Rome), they worshiped together with them for the first few centuries and did not establish separate houses of worship on the first day of the week until Gentile Church leaders began to rail against "Judaizers" who kept the Sabbath and the Biblical holidays (http://shema.com/messianic-judaism/what-is-it/). The transition from a Hebraic to a predominantly Greco-Roman expression of the faith is documented in detail in Wilson (1989), *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*;, Juster & Juster (1999), *One People Many Tribes: A Primer on Church History from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*; and

Dowgiewicz & Dowgiewicz (1996), *Restoring the Early Church*. The transition did not occur overnight. Rabbi David Chernoff writes (http://shema.com/messianic-judaism/what-is-it/):

> In spite of the many pressures put upon Jewish Believers to give up their faith, it seems that Messianic Judaism continued into the seventh century AD. [In speaking of a specifically Jewish expression, Chernoff does not even address the Gentile Christians in areas like Ireland who kept the Sabbath and other "Old Testament" injunctions until about the same time.] First, non-Messianic rabbis pressured Messianic Jews to relinquish their faith in Yeshua as the Messiah. In addition, the dominant Gentile expression of Christianity pressured Messianic Jews to abandon their Jewishness. Finally, in the seventh century AD, the rise of Islam caused distress for Messianic Jews. Despite all this, the real reason for the disappearance of early Messianic Judaism was that Messianic Jews lost their "vision" – no longer regarding it as important to remain Jewish after accepting Yeshua. Consequently, they assimilated into the Gentile expression of Christianity.

Chernoff suggests that departure from the traditions of synagogue worship caused the decline of a vitally Jewish expression of the Messianic faith.

The traditions were not entirely lost, however; they were simply reappropriated by the Gentile majority. Worship centered around the synagogue for at least two generations after the Temple fell; and even then, Church leaders continued to show "adoration and even reverence for the Temple as the central sanctuary of both Jews and Christians" (Werner, 1959). From Bishop Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians* (written around A.D. 95-100), Werner gives us details:

> Let each of you, brethren, in his own order give thanks unto God, maintaining a good conscience and not transgressing the appointed rule of his service, but acting with all seemliness. Not in every place, brethren, are the continual daily sacrifices offered, or the

> freewill offerings, or the sin offerings and the trespass offerings, but in Jerusalem alone and even there the offering is not made in every place, but before the Sanctuary in the court of the altar; and this too through the high-priest and the aforesaid ministers….

This detailed allusion to Temple practices betrays a "typically Jewish reverence" on Clement's part, as does his inclusion of the early prayer *Tersanctus* ("Thrice-Holy"), based directly on the *Kedusha* (an important part of Temple and synagogue worship). Werner suggests that prayers like this one may have entered Christian worship through the *hazan* (the appointed cantor, which would become a professional position in Diaspora communities), who preserved elements of Temple ritual in the synagogue setting. A few generations later, however, "Christianity inclined toward the reconstruction of a wholly imaginary and idealized Temple," borrowing elements "not from the real one…but from its stylized image, existing only in the minds of Christian theologians." Although Werner suggests that Christianity replaced the Jewish memory of the Temple with a stylized ideal because the Temple-era hierarchy had represented a threat to the fledgling sect, led by unlettered men, I believe it is more likely that the influx of Hellenistic-educated Christians reoriented the faithful from a real to an allegorical Temple. Greco-Roman culture prized allegory, mysticism, and abstraction; this same system of cultural values led Augustine to write that events in the life of the nation of Israel were "material signs [of] eternal truths" and *therefore* less important than events in the life of the (now-)Gentile Church – the "spiritual" triumphing over the "material" just as Plato taught "reason" should rule over corrupted "flesh." It is no coincidence that Church figures from Augustine to Luther hounded Jews for being a "failed" experiment on the part of God – Orthodox Jews who refused a "Gentile" Christ, and Messianic Jews who received Christ but wanted to eat their matzos too.

With this history, not surprisingly, Jews asked nothing from Christians except to be left alone. Not until the mid-nineteenth century did Gentile Christianity see an influx of Jewish converts. Calling themselves "Hebrew Christians," they formed the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA) in 1915 (http://www.thekingsforum.com/index.php?topic=2789.0). While most Hebrew Christians assimilated into evangelical congregations, some formed alliances like the HCAA to advocate for their Jewish heritage. After the Holocaust destroyed European Judaism, their center of gravity shifted to the United States. The succeeding generation, desiring to identify primarily as Jewish believers, persuaded the HCAA to rename itself as the MJAA (Messianic Jewish Alliance of America) in 1972 and encouraged the formation of separate Messianic Jewish congregations. By 1982, some congregations had banded together to create new associations: the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) and the International Alliance of Messianic Jewish Congregations and Synagogues (IAMJCS). Others include the Association of Southern Baptist Messianic Jewish Congregations and the Association of Messianic Jewish Congregations. Worldwide, there are as many as five hundred autonomous congregations, most of which affiliate with one or another of these associations (http://www.chosenpeople.com/main/jewish-roots/304-messianic-congregations-and-the-modern-messianic-movement). At least fifty congregations subsist in the state of Israel (although the majority of Messianics still choose to worship in traditional evangelical churches) (http://shema.com/messianic-judaism/what-is-it/).

According to the MJAA website (http://www.mjaa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=rd_messianicmovement_messianic_judaism), "Jewish congregational worship" is a vital antidote to repeating the old pattern of assimilation into the Gentile churches. Practices such as "worshiping in Hebrew, following Mosaic Law,

dancing as King David did before the Lord, and keeping Biblical holidays" provide continuity and community. All these would fall under the rubric of *'avoda* ("service"), one of the words which the LXX translated with *leitourgeia* (named by Stuart Daurman of the Messianic organization Hashivenu as a pillar of the Messianic lifestyle http://www.hashivenu.org/). What is more pertinent to our questions of symbolic interaction and social construction, these practices provide a strong sense of identity. For instance, keeping the Torah "helps us live an authentic Jewish lifestyle. It helps us remain part of the Holy People." The Biblical holidays are "written in the Torah for Israel to observe these festivals forever" (http://shema.com/messianic-judaism/what-is-it/). Intriguingly, even though the worship may be deliberately tinged with the austerity of the Temple, congregational governance is designed to resemble the synagogues, in which, Werner (1959) reminds us, the "individualistic, active, lay characteristics were always predominant." Whereas the Temple, the house of sacrifice, was "theocratic and ritualistic," the synagogue, the house of study, was "anthropocentric and democratic." In the same way, modern Messianic congregations are autonomous, led by a teaching rabbi or group of elders; lay volunteers carry out many functions in worship services and community life.

The Sabbath service is the most important liturgical event in the majority of Messianic congregations. Werner (1959) describes the liturgy of first-century Judaism that animated early Messianic worship. During the period ca. 100 B.C. to A.D. 200, the synagogue performed three daily prayer services, also cited by New Testament authors, the *Didache* ("Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"), and Tertullian as common Christian practice. The services included prayers of praise, thanksgiving, and petition, as well as doxologies, professions of faith, and the *Beraka* – the benediction (Greek *eulogia*). *Beraka* implies the act of kneeling before God to acknowledge

an act or gift He has bestowed; each "blessing" begins with the rabbinic formula that addresses God directly – for example, one of the most frequently recited blessings is the one that precedes a meal: "Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." The *'Amida* (the "standing" prayer consisting of eighteen blessings) was the only set of *berakot* mandated for daily prayer in the first century, as the sages encouraged variety and spontaneity rather than a completely fixed liturgy. Before the *'Amida*, the worshiper stands and bows as if before a king; at its conclusion, he takes three steps backward as if respectfully taking leave. As today, the *'Amida* was recited silently, but the cantor would repeat it aloud on behalf of those who were too ill to recite or who were illiterate.

The Sabbath liturgy opened in the home on Friday evening with Psalm 92 ("a Psalm for the Sabbath day"), the *Shema* (the creed, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one"), a portion of the *'Amida,* and the *Kaddish* ("sanctification") over wine. The morning synagogue service included the Hallelujah Psalms (Psalms 146-150, which begin with the Hebrew *hallelujah*, "Praise YHWH"), Miriam's Song (Exodus 15:21), the *Shema,* and the *'Amida*; however, "The nucleus of the Sabbath liturgy was then, as it is now, the public reading of the scripture." In the first century, the reading consisted of a periscope from the Torah and one from the Prophets (the so-called *Haftarah*), rotating on a triennial cycle. Today, many Messianic synagogues add a reading from the *Brit Chadashah* ("New Covenant") and read on an annual cycle developed by post-Second Temple Judaism. As today, the reading was preceded and followed with *berakot* and *Kaddish*; it was supplemented by the *Mussaph* ("addition"), which functioned to replace the additional sacrifices mandated by the Torah on the Sabbath and holy days. The service concluded with a priestly benediction, the *Kaddish*, and the *'Alenu*. The afternoon service paralleled the morning, but was embellished with readings from the Song of

Songs. The evening concluded with the *Habdala* ("separation" from the Sabbath to begin the next week) service: blessings over kindled light, spices, and wine.

The following summary from Werner indicates the most important symbolic acts in Judeo-Christian liturgy (word, song, and prayer), which have assumed a variety of forms over time:

> The common elements are: (1) The scriptural lesson, or reading, which in the course of time developed a highly organized system of periscopes, to be read or recited regularly and periodically. This public reading required a primitive musical intonation. (2) The vast field of psalmody. In this work we understand by the term 'psalmody' not only the singing of psalms or psalm-verses, but the rendering of any scriptural or liturgical text, after the fashion in which psalms are chanted. (3) The litany or the congregational prayers of supplication and intercession, especially on fast-days, which from time immemorial, have been used as important media of musical and religious expression. (4) The chanted prayer of the priest or precentor.

Although most Messianic congregations uphold the weekly performance of the liturgy as essential to preserving Jewish heritage, congregational autonomy is one factor that supports a great diversity in liturgical expressions. Another factor is the diversity that exists among the sects of Judaism proper, shaped by cultural and historical events. For instance, traditional Orthodox Judaism forbids instrumental music on Sabbath and holy days, lest playing an instrument cause one to perform work by tuning or repairing it. Reform Judaism broke with this tradition in the mid-nineteenth century by introducing the pipe organ, and again in the 1960s by introducing the guitar as the symbol of a new "participatory" ethic and an emphasis on cultural relevance and social consciousness (Cohen, no year available). The youth culture of the 1960s had an

unprecedented impact on Judeo-Christian attitudes toward music as well as social mores (Mermelstein, 1996). Since the 1960s, all Jewish denominations (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform) have felt "a major tendency towards popularization [and e]ven Hasidic music has been influenced by pop music." While the Holocaust nearly extinguished the Ashkenazi tradition of synagogue chant, the establishment of the state of Israel inspired modern synagogues to revitalize their worship with a more "Mediterranean" style of music. (Schleifer, 1995). Citing Hoffman (1977), Yust (2009) notes that worship expression is an evolving social language. "The linguistic, visual and kinesthetic aspects of this language are all shaped by human engagement in the world…even the choreography of a prayer service and the aesthetics of the space in which it occurs."

Similarly, the Messianic movement, which was going through a "teenage" stage as it sought to establish an independent identity in the 1960s and 1970s, took on influences from both popular music and "Mediterranean"-style Jewish worship. Walking the tightrope between relevance and tradition, artists like Joel Chernoff of Lamb pioneered the new sound known as "Messianic music." Artists who followed in his footsteps include Paul Wilbur, Marty Goetz, and Ted Pearce. The Messianic worship genre today is as diverse as any other, with influences ranging from gospel, pop, and CCM (Steve McConnell, Misha Goetz) to R&B and indie styles (Michael ben David, Christene Jackman), as well as the obligatory Eastern European (Ashkenazi) or Mediterranean (Sephardi) "Jewish" sound (The Liberated Wailing Wall, Zemer Levav). Whatever the stylistic influence, Messianic music demonstrates profound reflections on identity and community. Themes that emerge include the Jewishness of the Messiah, the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers, and the hope of a future ingathering of "all Israel" (a code for persons of Jewish heritage) into faith in the Messiah. Some artists emphasize specific aspects of

the lifestyle, such as the Sabbath (see Zemer Levav's "Sabbath Song"), the importance of a personal relationship with God driven by repentance from sin and prayer for forgiveness (see Christene Jackman's "Choneni Elohim"), or even the significance of identifying as a member of the "commonwealth of Israel" and a follower of a Hebrew-speaking, *tallit*-wearing, Sabbath-keeping Messiah (see Michael ben David's "Shema Yisrael"). The historical development of differences in belief between mainstream Jewish Messianics and non-Jewish believers who identify as "Hebraic Roots" for religious reasons (e.g. Christene Jackman) or as "Israelite" for ethnic reasons (e.g. Michael ben David) is beyond the scope of this paper; however, I will touch on it briefly in the ethnography as a point of distinction between congregations that affects choice of worship music.

Hoffman (2010) observes, "Liturgy is…a reliable barometer of a community's search for religious identity." While Reform Jews were experimenting with folk guitar and pop sounds in the 1960s and 1970s, they also reconfigured the *Haggadah* (the Passover liturgy) from a celebration of Jewish identity bound up with deliverance from Egypt to an affirmation of a global messianic hope embodied in the end of poverty and suffering. This was a new treatment of the Jewish hope for restoration. Throughout centuries in the Diaspora, Jews had prayed, "Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth…if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy." The traditional Passover Seder concludes with the shout, "Next year, in Jerusalem!" Reif (2001) states:

> Jerusalem was obligatory in the statutory prayers throughout Jewish history. This includes the Yom Kippur benediction, the grace after meals, the *'amidah*, and the benedictions for the Ninth of Av, the *haftarah*, and the wedding feast, as well as five lesser contexts.

Starting in the late nineteenth century, however, as political Zionists sought to build a Jewish homeland, other Jews turned the idea of "Jerusalem" on its head, from literal to metaphorical, from a Jewish to a human need for restoration. The most recent *siddurim* published by American and British Reform Jews have revised portions of the *'Amida*, traditionally called the Blessings for the Ingathering of Exiles, the Rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Flourishing of the Messiah. The American *Mishkan Tefilah* (2007) and the British *Forms of Prayer* (2008) express a Zionist ethos, but this ethos is "a form of 'Liberal Religious Zionism' that calls for the moral growth rather than the physical repair of Israel" (Stanley, 2011). This stands in striking contrast to the pro-Israeli rhetoric of Christian Zionists (primarily American and British evangelicals) and the performative acts (e.g. worship music, Davidic dance with banners and costumes, scripted or unscripted prayers, and events such as John Hagee's "Nights to Honor Israel") that reinforces that rhetoric. Messianic Jews tend to hover between the literal and metaphorical extremes. In its question-and-answer section, one Messianic website declares (http://shema.com/messianic-judaism/what-is-it/):

> Most Messianic Jews support Israel, not only because we believe the Jewish people need a national homeland, but also because we believe the reestablishment of Israel is a direct fulfillment of ancient Biblical prophecies (Ezekiel 36:24, 37:1-14, Zechariah 12). We believe the reestablishment of the nation of Israel is part of the divine plan and not a historical accident….Therefore everyone, especially Christians, should support Israel's right to our ancient land.

Notwithstanding this statement, Messianic rhetoric regarding the state of Israel tends to focus more on evangelism to Jews than on a Jewish "right to the land," which tends to be the province of Christian Zionist supporters. At the same time, some Messianic artists produce music that may

be interpreted as carrying pro-Israeli or Zionist overtones; see, for example, Zemer Levav's "Thus Saith the Lord" or Ted Pearce's "I Am Zealous over Zion."

The relationship between theology, religious identity, and performative acts comes into sharper focus when we examine the work of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006). Postliberal theologians and those engaged in the theology of inculturation draw from Geertz, who developed an approach that "sees culture in terms of meanings embodied in symbols" (Koning, 2010). Geertz (who also originated the concepts of local knowledge, thick description and culture as text) emphasized that symbols (the vessels, as it were, of cultural content) are arranged into patterns and systems that both transmit and transform meanings. He encouraged anthropologists to pay more attention to meaning-making in both the aesthetic and the practical aspects of culture – e.g. both artistic performance and religious beliefs. Although I did not discover Geertz until after I had completed my fieldwork, I found that I had mimicked his approach in that I had sought to find links among different types of symbolic performative acts and relate all these meaning-making activities to the primary cognitive schemata or worldview (*Weltenschauung*, perhaps?) of the religious community. I conducted fieldwork in Sabbath services at three congregations: Beit HaDerekh in Midland, Texas; Beit HaMidrash in Alpine, Texas; and Mayim-Hayim Hebraic Learning Center in Amarillo, Texas. Since one of these is my home congregation, I was able to incorporate both emic ("insider") and etic ("outsider") perspectives into my work. I collected data through participant-observation, informal interviewing, and performance ethnography. This paper serves as a preliminary report on my findings in which I note some major themes related to ecclesiology and identity, with Jerusalem as the touchstone; I will undertake a more complete analysis of the findings in my forthcoming

capstone project, *Exodus: A Journey into the Hebraic Roots Movement through Prayer, Music, and Autoethnography*.

Beit HaDerekh is a mainstream Messianic synagogue (associated with the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues) situated midway between two mid-sized west Texas cities. It meets in a newly constructed building funded by member donations. It is unusual in that most of its members are not of Jewish heritage, but are converts from evangelical Protestant backgrounds by way of the Hebraic Roots Movement. At the Sabbath morning service, I estimated the congregation at one hundred people, primarily single older adults (between fifty and seventy). Based on the presence of between twenty and thirty children, I estimated between six and ten families. Beit HaDerekh uses a Messianic *siddur* for group prayers (the *Shema*, a portion of the *'Amida*) and traditional chants (*Mah Tovu*, *V'shamru*) and follows the traditional pattern of offering *berakot* before and after the scripture reading; on the other hand, the worship incorporates unscripted prayers in English, scripted prayers in English and Hebrew, Davidic dance, and CCM as well as Messianic worship songs accompanied by a worship band and song leader (not the same person as the cantor). Nearly every part of the service is conducted in both languages (e.g. recited or sung in Hebrew and then read in English from an overhead slide). The worship time resembled the typical experience in a charismatic evangelical church.

The Scripture reading and lecture took up the largest portion of time during the service; however, the highest liturgical act in the Beit HaDerekh service is the Torah procession. In keeping with the congregation's mission "to read the New Testament, not from a 21st century Gentile perspective but from a 1st century Jewish viewpoint" and to join the Messianic movement in "preparing the world for the return of the King Messiah, the Living Torah"

(http://beithaderekh.org/?page_id=121), this event at the midpoint of the service combines celebration with reverence, somewhat akin to the display of the Host during the Roman Catholic Eucharistic liturgy. The Torah represents the lifeblood of the Jewish *and* Messianic community: God chose the Jewish people as recipients of His heavenly wisdom, and in response they preserved it scrupulously during the Babylonian Diaspora and beyond; the Torah lifestyle distinguishes the Jews from all other peoples on the face of the earth, and reverence for the Torah, not only in public recitation of the text but in dressing and carrying the scroll itself, marks a righteous person; finally, since Yeshua is called the Word (John 1:1), He is (metaphorically and, for some, literally) the "Torah made flesh." Therefore, the Torah scroll is the central object of religious material culture in Messianic synagogues like Beit HaDerekh. Intriguingly, the performative act of carrying the Torah around the room so that congregants could genuflect or touch it with the corner of a garment assumed an additional layer of symbolic meaning through the Messianic song that played over the sound system during the processional, augmented by Davidic dance with banners. (I was unable to confirm whether the same song is used every week; however, the nature of the processional event suggests that it is.) The song is Ted Pearce's "I Am Zealous over Zion":

Refrain:

I am zealous over Zion

I am zealous over Zion

I am zealous over Zion

I will dwell in Jerusalem

She shall be called a city of truth

The mountain of the Lord of Hosts

Ha-Kodesh, for thus says the Lord

I will save my people

Refrain

For women and men shall sit in the streets

Each one with a staff in their hand

Children will play in the streets of the city

Joy will be heard once again

Refrain (repeat)

They shall return from the east and the west

To dwell in Jerusalem

They will be my people for I am their God

In truth and in righteousness

Refrain (repeat)

Since mainstream Jewish authorities often disavow political *and* religious Zionism, such pro-Israel elements in Messianic rhetoric seem to have more in common with Christian Zionism than with Judaism, just as the Messianic movement as a whole has more in common with evangelical Christianity despite differences in lifestyle or worship style. Overall, however, even though the Messianic movement shares the central symbol of Yeshua/Jesus with Christianity and stands on common ground regarding the state of Israel, identity at Beit HaDerekh seems to consist in being Messianic as distinct from Christian. One congregant, raised Baptist (but now Messianic for at least ten years), explained the distinction as a difference between the "Greek" and "Hebrew" ways of thinking (e.g. cognitive schemata):

> We wouldn't have gotten here except by being Protestant: questioning the status quo, wanting to learn for ourselves, believing in, one, justification by faith and, two, priesthood of all believers. But we're really not Protestant and can't be. The Greek way is to be very individualistic, while the Hebrew way is to live and define oneself within community. We work hard to reconcile the role of personal convictions with community orthodoxy.

Ironically, despite the efforts to maintain Jewish traditions such as the liturgy, Beit HaDerekh accommodates many evangelical traditions such as unscripted prayer by the worship leader and the use of CCM music. Even Davidic dance is not technically "Jewish," but a creative addition to worship developed by Christians supportive of Messianic Judaism.

I observed a comparable mix of liturgical elements at Mayim-Hayim Hebraic Learning Center in Amarillo, whose service included an hour of Davidic worship, prayers in English from the *siddur*, melodic chanting of the Hallelujah Psalms in Hebrew, and a ninety-minute lecture. This once-thriving Hebraic Roots congregation, which shares its storefront meeting space with a nondenominational church, dropped from one hundred people to fifteen when the leader, Archie Hunnicutt, Jr., steered them away from the Messianic movement altogether in the direction of Orthodox Judaism. Archie's Sephardi and Mizrahi heritage may have augmented the appeal of Judaism for him after he left his Roman Catholic upbringing and Baptist early adulthood for a modified Messianic Judaism in the form of Hebraic Roots Christianity. In his search for a more authentic Hebraic Roots faith that avoided what he saw as the Messianic movement's latent anti-Semitism, Archie encountered rabbis who influenced him to repudiate the central teaching of Messianic Judaism and Christianity: that God became flesh in Messiah Yeshua of Nazareth. Archie explained that they consider Yeshua the "Living Torah" in the sense that He fulfilled

every commandment perfectly, but they do not worship or pray to Him. Rather, the Oral Torah handed down by the rabbis draws the greater part of their reverence:

> Without the Oral Torah…[the Written] Torah is the notes to the lecture. The lecture was at Mount Sinai thirty-five hundred years ago. Moses taught them how to do the commandments. Many other rulings have been made in the last 3000 years….And the only ones who know the lecture are the Jewish people, because they've kept it and guarded it.
>
> Now that we understand our heritage, we're connected to a people more than thirty-three hundred years old. When three million people hear something at the same time and they're still doing it, you know that it's not made up.

At the time I visited, the congregation was in transition from a Messianic/Hebraic Roots model to an Orthodox liturgy with Portuguese melodies from a Sephardic *siddur*. Next year, Archie explained, after the congregation completes the conversion process, the service will consist entirely of *siddur* melodies and prayers, with no dance or recorded music. The weekly *piyyutim* (melodies) are available at the following link: http://www.piyut.org.il/english/

Mayim-Hayim's current service is even more eclectic than that of Beit HaDerekh. Although the congregation seems to place great confidence in Archie's leadership, the transition from their accustomed worship through this eclectic mix appears to be a challenge. Without accompaniment, Archie led the group in chanting three psalms and a number of *berakot* in Hebrew, using the Portuguese *piyyutim*. Only two congregants appeared comfortable enough with the melodies to sing along – one Archie's wife, the other a young woman with extensive experience leading evangelical worship as a choir member and worship dancer. Although the Jewish synagogue tradition is historically participatory, there was little overt congregational

involvement except at two points in the service: the Davidic worship hour and the reading of Torah and *Haftarah* prior to the lecture. Four women of varying ages and ethnicities (Latina and Caucasian, twenty-something singles and married grandmothers), including the ethnographer, participated in Davidic dance. Surprisingly enough, the accompaniment consisted of a playlist featuring Paul Wilbur and other Messianic and Christian artists with a decided orientation toward Yeshua/Jesus; the dancers and observers mouthed the words and even sang along (deliberately replacing "Jesus" with "Yeshua" in the one song that mentioned Him by name). As a performative act, Davidic dance epitomizes the spirit of Hebraic Roots/Messianic worship. It is participatory, emotionally expressive, holistic (involving the whole person), prophetic (that is, worshippers consider it a means of inviting God's presence into the service), and decidedly exotic in flavor. In short, it is "Hebrew" (as opposed to "Christian").

Our performance was an act of meaning-making that relied on continual reinvention. A dance step is not iconic, like a work of art or architecture or a piece of material culture; instead, like a musical passage or fragment of liturgy, it conveys meaning in the moment in which it occurs. In fact, such symbols more closely embody the definition of symbolic interaction, in that their meaning is created and negotiated through interaction rather than contemplation. The nature of dance as reinvention and recapitulation was highlighted as Archie's wife and the young woman with worship experience alternated leading dances from memory and improvising to fill in the gaps, all the while coaching me under their breath. Although the rest of the congregation seemed to avoid the Davidic worship hour, arriving near the end, it seemed to be the most meaningful part of the service for those who did participate. I came away wondering – particularly in light of the fact that congregational participation during the *siddur* was weak at best – how the congregation will sustain a symbolic center of gravity once the transition to

Orthodox is complete. Will more solemn liturgical acts like a Torah processional adequately fill the void left by this very personal, emotional act of worship?

On the other hand, the lecture is already the center of gravity for the service, and the symbolic power of entering the worldwide Jewish community may be sufficient to fill any void for this congregation, for a very specific reason: becoming Orthodox is their ticket into the Holy Land. For mainstream Messianics, as for many evangelicals, Israel's symbolic value lies in her importance to the Jewish people. Mayim-Hayim, on the other hand, has retained a vestige of Hebraic Roots teaching: the belief that the other Ten Tribes of Israel have yet to reclaim their rightful place in the Promised Land alongside the Tribe of Judah, and that the Caucasian races descend directly from the Ten Tribes. Most Jews and Christians are unaware that first-century rabbis and even the historian Josephus taught the same idea: the Ten Tribes exiled to Assyria (collectively known as Ephraim, after Joseph's son) were still in existence "beyond the Euphrates till now," and would be regathered to the Land just before the Messianic Age. Regardless of where the Ten Tribes are now, it is clear that today's "Jews" are descended from the Tribe of Judah, which went into a separate exile in Babylon. Nevertheless, mainstream Messianics perceive the teaching as covert anti-Semitism and so reject it as heresy.

The Mayim-Hayim congregation showed intense devotion to the Land as symbol, both in material culture (for instance, a painting of Jerusalem adorned the eastern wall) and in performative speech acts referring to the state of Israel. In his lecture, Archie emphasized the duty of Ephraimites to make *Aliyah* according to the rules set by the Orthodox majority (e.g. undergo Orthodox conversion), noting that since Ephraim wandered from God's covenant while Judah jealously guarded the Oral Torah, Judah has the right to set the bar high. A convergence of symbols and identities occurs in this speech act: the Land is not just a promise, but a possession

that one group can withhold from another until the second group comes into conformity with the first group's definition of the Covenant by engaging in a symbolic act of conversion and then embarking on a life of symbolic acts (fulfillment of the six hundred thirteen *mitzvoth*). The Land is something of a meta-symbol, since it functions on the surface level as a point of liturgical coherence (all Jews pray toward Jerusalem), on a deeper level as the substance of Jewish chosenness (the whole world has its eyes on this city, reinforcing its importance), and ultimately as the aim and goal of those very prayers and that chosenness (both Jews and "Ephraimites" seek to return there and believe they are called of God to do so). The story of the Land (Israel's entrance, exile, and return) is a meta-liturgy, recapitulated in every word of the *siddur*.

In contrast to Beit HaDerekh and Mayim-Hayim, my home congregation uses a minimum of musical liturgy for the Sabbath service. Our *siddur* consists of excerpts (the blessings over wives, sons, and daughters recited in English; the *Barchu*, *Mechamocha*, Blessing of Messiah, and *V'shamru* spoken in Hebrew; and the *Shema* and Aaronic benediction sung in Hebrew) from the liturgy published by B'nai Shalom Messianic Congregation, a larger assembly based in Oklahoma. The service, copied from http://lionlamb.net/v3/BnaiShalom/Blessings, follows the order below:

Kiddush

Candle Lighting

Baruch atah Adonai Elohenu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvohtav vetzi vonu l'chad leek ner, shel Shabbat. Amayn.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us by His commandments and has commanded us to be a light to nations and has given us Yeshua the Messiah, the Light of the World. Amen.

Blessing over the Cup

Baruch atah Adonai Elohenu Melech ha-olam, borey p'ree ha-gaphen. Amayn.

Blessed are thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine. Amen.

Blessing over the Bread

Ha-motzi l'chem min ha-eretz. We give thanks to God for bread, Our voices rise in song together, as our joyful prayer is said. Baruch atah Adonai Elohenu Melech ha-olam, ha-motzi l'chem min ha-eretz. Amayn.

Blessed are thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from out of the earth. Amen.

Blessing over Wives

Father, we thank You for giving us wives of proverbs and, O Lord, I thank you for the wife that You've given me.

May you be blessed as you rise while it is yet night to see about the ways of our household,

and may you be blessed as you see about the daily care and education of our children.

May your mouth be filled with wisdom and kindness,

May your heart meditate on the power and the glory of the Lord,

and may your hands perform the mitzvot, as you do the work of Yeshua. Amen.

Blessing over the Sons

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May He cause His face to shine upon you.

May He lift up His countenance and grant you peace.

May you be as Ephraim and Manassah.

May the Lord with you ever be.

May He bring you home unto the land prepared for thee.

(Father) May God bless you and grant you long life.

(Mother) May the Lord fulfill our Sabbath prayer for you.

May God make you good husbands and fathers.

(Father) May He prepare holy wives for you.

May the Lord protect and defend you.

May His Spirit fill you with grace.

May our family grow in happiness,

O hear our Sabbath Prayer. Amen.

Blessing over the Daughters

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May He cause His face to shine upon you.

May He lift up His countenance and grant you peace.

May you be like Ruth and like Esther.

May the Lord with you ever be.

May He bring you home unto the land prepared for thee.

(Father) May God Bless you and grant you long life.

(Mother) May the Lord fulfill our Sabbath prayer for you.

May God make you good mothers and wives.

(Father) May He bring you husbands who will care for you.

May the Lord protect and defend you.

May His Spirit fill you with grace.

May our family grow in happiness,

O hear our Sabbath Prayer. Amen.

Torah Service Blessings

Barchu

Leader: Bar-chu Et A-do-nai Ham-Vo-rach

All: Ba-ruch A-do-nai Ham-vo-rach Le-o-lam Va-ed

Leader: Bless the LORD who is to be praised.

All: Blessed be the LORD who is praised for all eternity.

Mechamocha

All: Me-cha mo-cha bah-ay-leem Adonai.

Me-cha mo-cha neh-dahr bah-ko-desh.

No-rah te-he-lote O-sey feh-leh, O-sey feh-leh.

All: Who is like You, O Lord among the gods?

Who is like You? Lord, there is none else.

You are awesome in praise, doing wonders, O Lord.

Who is like You, O Lord?

Blessing of Messiah

Leader: Ba-ruch A-ta A-do-nai El-o-hey-nu Me-lech Ha-o-lam,

A-sher Na-tahn La-noo Et Deh-rech Ha-ye-shoo-ah Be-Me-shi-ach Ye-shu-a

All: Blessed are You, O LORD our God, King of the Universe,

who has given us the way of salvation in Messiah Yeshua.

Veshamroo

Leader: Ve-Sham-roo Ve-nay Yis-ra-el Et Ha-Shabbat, La-a-sot

Et Ha-Shabbat Le-dor-ot-am Be-reet O-lam. Be-nee Oo-va-yan

Be-nay Yis-ra-el Ot Hee Le-o-lam Kee She-shet Ya-amin A-sah

A-do-nai Et Ha-sha-ma-yeem Ve-et Ha-arets Oo-vay-om Hash-vee-ee

Sha-vat Vay-een-a-fash.

All: The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath and observe the

Sabbath throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant.

It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in

six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh

day He ceased from work and was refreshed.

Shema

All: She-ma Yis-ra-el, A-do-nai E-lo-hey-nu, A-do-nai Ec-had.

Ba-ruch Shem Ke-vod Mal-choo-to Le-o-lam Va-ed.

YESHUA, Ha-Ma-she-ach, Hoo A-do-nai.

All: Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is One.

Blessed by His Name whose glorious Kingdom is forever and ever.

YESHUA, the Messiah, He is LORD.

Farewell

Aaronic Blessing

Ye-va-recha Adonai ve-yeesh-me-recha.

Ya-er Adonai panav e-ley-cha vee-choo-ne-cha Yeesa Adonai panav e-lay-cha v'yasem

> l'cha Shalom.
>
> B'Shem Yeshua ha-Ma-she-ach sar ha-shalom, shalom.
>
> May the Lord bless you and keep you.
>
> The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
>
> may the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.
>
> In the name of Yeshua the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, Shalom.

While the blessings may take ten minutes, the core of our meeting is a two- to four-hour round-table discussion of the Torah portion. The reasons for minimalism are several. For one, this home congregation consists of five adults, including the ethnographer. One is Sephardi, but was raised Roman Catholic; another spent a decade in mainstream Messianic congregations while studying Hebraic Roots teaching. She commented:

> I went to a synagogue in Colorado that was trying to be Jewish. The Talmud, the scrolls, the kippahs, the whole thing. And I said, this is not of the LORD.

In other words, simplicity is superior to the trappings of synagogue worship that symbolize the post-Second Temple rabbinic age. The oldest member of the group, a Caucasian woman in her seventies, stated that rabbinic teachings are the "traditions of men" against which Yeshua offered stern warning in the New Testament. Instead, she orients her lifestyle by the Written Torah as spelled out in the Pentateuch:

> Growing up on the ranch, all we did was read on our own. And as the youngest with no one near my age, I read a lot. So when we read the Bible, it was Genesis to Revelation. We saw it as one book. It came natural to us to keep what was written in the first five books….
>
> We don't want to go off on too many rabbi trails.

Her statement would sound misguided at best to mainstream Messianics. Some might even consider her anti-Semitic for taking on a "Jewish" covenantal obligation. She also considers herself an Ephraimite, however, stating:

When people ask what my religion is, I tell them, I follow Jesus and keep Leviticus.

She bridges the gap between two separate symbolic languages. This dual identity raises stumbling blocks on all sides. Jews see the Christian Jesus as incompatible with their Torah; Christians see the Torah as incompatible with their "New Covenant"; Messianics see Torah as valuable, but Christians who want to keep Torah as incompatible with Jewish chosenness. In fact, we all face this identity dilemma and have found the labels "Christian" and "Messianic," even "Hebraic Roots," inadequate. I raised this question with the other members of my congregation, asking, "What are we? How do we identify ourselves?" One suggested:

We identify ourselves as first-century Christians.

We agreed that we would not be accepted into a Messianic congregational alliance because of some of our specific beliefs. I wonder, however, if we are more "Messianic" in some ways than either Beit HaDerekh or Mayim-Hayim. Our liturgical simplicity, flexibility, and extended participatory discussions resemble the first-century synagogue routine as described by Eric Werner, and our theology draws from apostolic teaching. We have created a worshiping culture using only the few materials supplied in Scripture itself. Our central symbol is not the Torah, nor the Oral Torah, nor even the Land – although Jerusalem, as the subject of prophecy, is a frequent trope in our discussions. Rather, it is the invisible spiritual Reality behind the symbols – what the author of the Book of Hebrews calls "the heavenly Jerusalem," the kingdom of God to which all symbols point.

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