The Enduring Sacramental Character of Jewish Life in the Messiah
A Messianic Jewish Perspective
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Sacrament & Kedushah[1]

> The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us (CCC 1131).

In these words the Catholic Catechism provides a succinct definition of the Church's sacraments. The definite article ("the") and the plural form of the noun ("sacraments" rather than "sacrament") are both important: this is a definition of the seven sacraments which are administered in the life of the Church. It is not a definition of the term "sacrament," which has a broader meaning. When reflecting on this broader meaning, the Catechism states that the term "emphasizes the visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation" (CCC 774). In this less technical – and more basic – sense, the word is appropriately applied to Jesus himself as the incarnate Logos, and to the Church as his Body (CCC 774-775).[2]

One rarely encounters the word "sacrament" in Jewish theological discourse. When the word does arise, it is often in the context of interaction between Jews and Christians, where Jews are drawing upon Christian language to make themselves better understood. Occasionally the word is used in internal Jewish discussion to contrast Jewish and Christian approaches to spiritual life.[3]

Despite the characteristically Christian origins and connotations of the word "sacrament," and despite polemical attempts to use the word to draw artificial lines of demarcation between Jewish and Christian religion, the reality to which the word points is an integral feature of Jewish life. It is the reality of divine mediation -- of the infinite God's gracious self-giving within the finitude of the space-time world by means of "visible signs" (human words, human acts, and created things). In the idiom of the Torah, this reality is signified by the word kedushah (holiness) and its cognate forms. God is holy – utterly distinct from creation in purity and power. Yet, God also chooses certain people, places, times, and objects within the created order to belong to Him in a particularly intimate way and to be the locus of His special presence.[4] By

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[1] I would like to express my gratitude to Fr. Jean-Miguel Garrigues, who early in the history of our Dialogue Group spoke to me about his belief in the sacramentality of the Jewish people and of the Land of Israel. His words to me rang true at the time, and have influenced my thinking in subsequent years. I have attempted in this paper to elaborate on his insight. Of course, Fr. Jean-Miguel is not responsible for my elaboration, which will undoubtedly go beyond what he initially intended.

[2] See footnote 7 below.

[3] Such an approach is implicit in the following remarks by Max Kadushin, which ostensibly contrast Judaism with the mystery cults: "Communion is no more a biblical idea than it is a rabbinic idea. It is the central idea of the mystery cults, where 'the characteristic rite is sacramental – an act of communion and reunion with the daemon.' What is experienced in all the forms of Jewish worship considered here is not communion but God's nearness" (180-81).

[4] Kadushin identifies divine possession as an essential component of the word's definition in Jewish thought: "…what is holy is regarded as belonging to God in a special sense, as being God's own" (Kadushin, 224).

virtue of this divine act of election, those people, places, times, and objects also become holy. This means that they assume the role of mediating the light and life of God within the created order.[5]

Catholic tradition recognizes well the relationship between the terms "sacrament" and "holiness." In fact, it often uses the latter term to explain the former. Thus, when Aquinas distinguishes the sacramental elements in what he calls "the Old Law" from the non-sacramental elements, he does so by asserting that the sacramental rites (such as the Passover meal) conferred holiness, whereas the non-sacramental rites did not confer holiness (though they might have been holy in themselves).[6] Similarly, the Catholic Catechism roots the Church's sacraments in the "holy and sanctifying (i.e., making others holy) humanity" of Jesus. The Church's sacraments are holy and sanctifying because of the relationship they have to the Incarnate Word, who is himself the true "sacrament of salvation" (CCC 774).[7]

Holiness and Sacrament are likewise connected in their eschatological significance. I have argued elsewhere that the biblical category of kedushah is essentially eschatological.[8] The terminology of kedushah first appears in reference to the Sabbath rest of God, which is an eschatological reality. The holiness which Israel receives and bears after the Exodus is a proleptic expression of the Messianic Age. As Zechariah 14 and Revelation 21 imply, that Age will be characterized by the universal proliferation of holiness, so that all creation becomes a Temple for God's glory. Similarly, the Church's sacraments are eschatological in nature. Baptism anticipates our bodily entry into resurrection glory, and the Eucharist anticipates the Messianic banquet. The holiness of the world to come has invaded this world through the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit, and the sacraments mediate this eschatological blessing.

When Aquinas explores the sacraments of "the Old Law," almost all of his attention is devoted to rites associated with the Temple.[9] This is normal in traditional Christian treatments of "Jewish" sacraments. Such an approach accords well with a supersessionist interpretation of Jewish sacramental life, since these rites have been defunct in practice for two thousand years. In contrast to this traditional approach, I wish to explore those sacramental elements of Jewish life

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[5] Pamela Eisenbaum captures well the connection between holiness, the divine Presence, and mediation: "…biblical holiness may be defined as the space within which God can dwell…Hence, when God says to Israel "You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6), holiness is the distinguishing feature that makes Israel both different from other nations and able to mediate between God and humanity" (Pamela Eisenbaum, Paul Was Not a Christian 155).

[6] "…the sacraments [of the Old Law] are, properly speaking, things applied to the worshippers of God for their consecration [i.e., holiness] so as, in some way, to depute them to the worship of God" (ST I-2, Q.102, Art. 5).

[7] The identification of Jesus's humanity as the essential or primary sacrament, upon which all ecclesial sacraments depend, is an important insight that clarifies the meaning and significance of the term. The insight is also affirmed by Reformed theologian Thomas Torrance: "…the primary mysterium or sacramentum is Jesus Christ himself, the incarnate reality of the Son of God who has incorporated himself into our humanity and assimilated the people of God into himself as his own Body, so that the sacraments have to be understood as concerned with our koinonia or participation in the mystery of Christ and his Church through the koinonia or communion of the Holy Spirit" (Torrance, Theology in Reconciliation, 82). Thus, sacraments involve a personal participation in the life of Jesus though the Spirit, and should not be conceived of in impersonal mechanistic terms.

[8] See "Beginning with the End" in *Israel's Messiah and the People of God*, 91-125.

[9] Circumcision is the main exception to this generalization.

whose existence and efficacy are independent of the Tabernacle and Temple, and which have endured through the two millennia following the Temple's destruction.[10] Proposing that Christian theology should affirm the continuing sacramental character of these elements of Jewish life, I will reflect upon their meaning and importance for Jewish disciples of Jesus and for the ekklesia as a whole.

Judaism's Five Primary Sacramental Signs

There are five expressions of holiness in this world that I will focus upon here: (1) Israel as holy people; (2) the Sabbath (and the holidays) as holy time; (3) the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem as holy place; (4) the Torah as holy word; and (5) the mitzvot as holy deeds. All five of these realities exist independently of the Temple, and their status in Jewish life was unchanged by the Temple's destruction.

Jews have generally approached these five realities in a manner closely resembling the way Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and liturgically-oriented Protestants have treated Christian sacraments. By God's gracious decision and action, each of the five bears an intrinsic holiness that sets it apart from other members of its earthly class (i.e., peoples, times, places, words, deeds) . The increasing influence of Jewish mystical thought and practice in the medieval period accentuated this sacramental approach. While Jews of a rationalistic bent have criticized such sacramentalism, their position was a minority viewpoint until the modern era, and remains a minority viewpoint within the world of traditional Judaism.[11]

Holy People: Flesh-and-Blood Israel as Sacrament

As noted above, the terminology of kedushah appears in the Torah first in Genesis 2. God blesses the seventh day and "makes it holy" (va-ye-kadesh). The holiness of this day represents the eschatological consummation of creation when the world will become a temple for God's glory. The world of the first six days is good, but it still awaits the holiness of the seventh day.

Holiness terminology is absent from the rest of the book of Genesis. It next appears in Exodus 3:5, as part of the narrative of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush at Mount Horeb: "the place on which you stand is holy ground" (admat kodesh). God here commissions Moses to free the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt – but Moses is also told to bring Israel "to worship God at this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). The holiness of the burning bush is but an anticipation of the holiness that awaits all Israel when it arrives at Mount Sinai.

[10] In no way would I seek to minimize the significance of the Temple for our understanding of Israel, the ekklesia, or sacramental realities. However, I would argue that an exclusive focus on the earthly Temple – often in the context of an implicit or explicit supersessionist polemic -- has tended to obscure rather than clarify other modes of divine action and self-manifestation.

[11] For an enlightening discussion of this tension within Jewish thought between sacramental and non-sacramental perspectives, see Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006). Kellner does not employ the language of sacrament, but instead contrasts the "ontological" or "essentialist" views of holiness expressed by the mystical tradition with the "teleological" or "normative" views advanced by Maimonides and the rationalist tradition (see 85-126).

At Sinai God reveals to Israel through Moses the purpose of their redemption: "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (goy kadosh). Just as every first-born son from among the Israelites was to be "consecrated" to God (kadesh li, Exodus 13:2), so Israel as a whole was God's first-born son (Exodus 3:22) who was consecrated by the Exodus and the revelation at Sinai for the worship of their Father (Exodus 3:23). We should note that this corporate vocation of holiness is established before any instructions are given regarding the Tabernacle or the Aaronic priesthood. These liturgical institutions are not the condition for the realization of Israel's holiness but only the subsequent means by which it will be expressed.

God sanctifies the people of Israel by coming to dwell in their midst. It is the presence of God in the midst of Israel that makes it a special people (Exodus 33:16). The Tabernacle embodies this reality when Israel journeys through the wilderness. Yet, as Jewish commentators often note, the purpose of the Tabernacle is that God may dwell "among them" (betocham, Exodus 25:8), not that God may dwell "in it" (betocho).[12] When Israel leaves Egypt it does not merely build and carry God's sanctuary -- it becomes that consecrated place (Psalm 114:1-2). When Israel's sins cause the Divine Presence (kavod) to depart from the Jerusalem Temple, the Glory does not return to heaven but instead joins Israel's exiles in Mesopotamia (Ezekiel 10:18-22; 11:22-25; 1:1-5). God's commitment to dwell in the midst of Israel means that the Divine Presence itself must go into exile beyond the borders of the land of promise.

No Jewish thinker has perceived or articulated this truth more clearly than Michael Wyschogrod. As a theologian in constant conversation with Christian tradition, he is even willing to use the language of sacrament to convey his insight: "If there is no need for sacrament in Judaism, it is because the people of Israel in whose flesh the presence of God makes itself felt in the world becomes the sacrament."[13] Wyschogrod goes too far in his contention that the people of Israel is the only Jewish sacrament. He is correct, however, in emphasizing its sacramental primacy. In the narrative of the Torah, the people of Israel becomes the first-fruits of the eschatological consummation which awaits all creation on that day when all the world will become a temple for God's glory.

While circumcision is the sign of Israel's distinctive covenantal identity, it is not the means by which the individual Jew is sanctified, or by which the genealogical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, first joins the holy people. A Jewish male possesses a sacramental character before being circumcised, and a Jewish female possesses such a character without ever being circumcised. The rite of circumcision has a sacramental dimension as one of the most important of the mitzvot (all of which are sacramental), but it is not in itself a sacrament of the sort we are considering here.

Holy Time: The Sabbath as Sacrament

The Sabbath enjoys a privileged position in the story of holiness. As we have seen, the only usage of the word before the revelation at Horeb is in reference to the seventh day of the creation narrative. That reference points not to a "past" event when "God rested" but instead to an eschatological reality that still awaits its fulfillment. In the meantime, God chooses Israel to

[12] See, for example, Etz Hayim (The Rabbinical Assembly, 2001), 487.
[13] Michael Wyschogrod, The Body of Faith (Jason Aronson, 1996), 19-20, 25.

be a sanctuary in the midst of the world, and commands Israel to rest on the seventh day as a sacramental sign of the holiness to come.

The holiness of the Sabbath is closely aligned with the holiness of Israel. One of the versions of the Sabbath commandment in the Torah makes this explicit: "You must keep My Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I Adonai have made you holy (me-kadish-chem). You shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy for you" (Exodus 33:13-14). God sets Israel apart to belong to God in a special way, and God sets the Sabbath apart to belong to God in a special way. When Israel acknowledges in practice the holiness of the Sabbath as God's special possession, it confirms its own holiness as God's special possession.

The Sabbath also corresponds to the Tabernacle. Many biblical scholars have pointed out the close connection between the creation account and the description of the construction of the Tabernacle, and the role of the Sabbath in both. Jon Levenson draws these conclusions:

> The Sabbatical experience and the Temple experience are one. The first represents sanctity in time, the second, sanctity in space, and yet they are somehow the same. The Sabbath is to time and to the work of creation what the Temple is to space and to the painful history of Israel which its completion brings to an end, as God has at last given Solomon "rest from all his enemies round about" (1 Chr 22:9).[14]

The Sabbath commandment is reiterated twice in the midst of the chapters of Exodus devoted to the tabernacle: once at the end of God's directions to Moses regarding the construction project (Exodus 31:12-17), and once at the beginning of the unit which describes how Moses carries out those directions (Exodus 35:1-3). The Sages drew a legal conclusion from this literary pattern: the types of labor required for the building of the Tabernacle are the types of labor prohibited on the Sabbath day. But if the building of the Tabernacle corresponds to the six days of the working week, so the descent of God's glory upon the completed structure corresponds to the holiness of the seventh day. As Levenson again recognizes, "Since the creation of the world and the construction of the Temple are parallel, if not identical, then the experience of the completed universe and that of the completed sanctuary should also be parallel."[15]

But the universe is not yet complete. Israel tastes that completion on the Sabbath day, but the experience is sacramental and proleptic. The Sabbath grace after meals includes the following prayer: "May the Compassionate One grant that we inherit that Day which will be entirely Shabbat and rest for life everlasting." Faithful Jews receive a foretaste of the world to come when they observe the Sabbath, but they know that it points beyond itself – or, rather, that it grants anticipatory access to a world that remains now beyond our grasp but within the range of our hope and prayer.

[14] Jon Levenson, Sinai and Zion (Harper and Row, 1985), 145.
[15] Ibid., 144.

Holy Place: The Land of Promise & the City of the Great King

The holiness of the People and of the Sabbath are aligned not only with one another, but also with the holiness of the promised Land. Just as God gives Israel the Sabbath as an "inheritance" (nachalah) and as "rest" (menuchah), so God gives Israel the Land with the same intent.[16] Both of these terms ("inheritance" and "rest") have eschatological connotations; just as the Sabbath is a sacramental foretaste of the world to come, so the Land of Israel is intended to be a proleptic sign of a creation that is entirely sanctified.

Like the holiness of the people of Israel and of the Sabbath, the holiness of the Land exists antecedent to and independent of the Tabernacle and the Temple. Its special character is evident in the call and journey of Abraham and in the lives of the patriarchs and matriarchs.[17] The special character of the city of Jerusalem is also implied by the story of Melchizedek, king and priest of "Salem" (Genesis 14:18). In celebrating the Exodus the Song of the Sea refers to the goal of Israel's journey as "Your holy abode (neve kodshecha)" (i.e., the Land; Exodus 15:13) and as "the mountain of your own possession…the Holy Place (mikdash) that Your hands have established" (i.e., Jerusalem; Exodus 15:17).[18] The Land and its future capital were the holy destination of Israel's journey, sanctified by God before the ark of the covenant was constructed and transported to its precincts.

It is clear from Leviticus 18 that the Land was already holy before Israel entered it under Joshua. This chapter contains the rules of sexual immorality that are incumbent upon Israel as a holy people. The chapter concludes by warning Israel about the consequences of disobeying these rules:

> Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled); otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. (Leviticus 18:24-28)

[16] The Bible frequently refers to the Land as Israel's "inheritance" (nachalah; e.g., Numbers 26:52-56; Deuteronomy 4:21, 38); but the traditional prayer of Kiddush which inaugurates the Sabbath describes the Seventh Day in the same way ("For you chose us and sanctified us from all the peoples, and in love and favor gave us Your holy Sabbath as a inheritance"). The Bible also commonly associates the Sabbath with "rest" (menuchah; e.g., Exodus 20:11; 23:12), but likewise speaks of Israel's secure possession of the Land in the same manner (e.g., Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:10; 25:19).

[17] Abraham takes great care that his son Isaac not leave the Land (Genesis 24:5-6). Jacob does depart from the Land in order to flee from his brother, but he experiences extraordinary encounters with God as he leaves (Genesis 28:10-17) and as he returns (Genesis 32:24-32), thus underlining the significance of the place.

[18] Jacob Milgrom draws the appropriate conclusion from Exodus 15: " the epic (JE) Song of the Sea expressly states that 'you brought them and planted them in the mountain of your inheritance' (Exod 15:17a; cf. Ps 78:54). Again, the land must have been YHWH's even before Israel's arrival" (Leviticus 17-22 [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 1404.

The Land could only become "defiled" if it were previously holy. The Land purifies itself from the defiling conduct of its inhabitants by "vomiting" them out. As Jacob Milgrom correctly infers, "…by what right did YHWH have the land expel the Canaanites for polluting the land (18:24-30) – unless the land was already his!"[19]

The holiness of the Land – like the holiness of the Sabbath -- is antecedent to the holiness of the Tabernacle. However, again like the Sabbath, the Land and its holy City correspond to the Tabernacle and are the fitting site for its residence. The Tabernacle and the Temple demonstrate the human participation that is required in the transformation of the created order into a sanctuary for the glory of God, and hint at what that transformed world will be like. The holy Land and the holy City are the initial workplace for this sanctifying eschatological activity. When the holy People live in the holy Land and the holy City, their aim should be to make their entire communal existence a Temple in the midst of the world. That Temple is itself but the proleptic sign of what God desires for the entire creation.[20]

Holy Word: The Torah

By divine election Israel, the Sabbath, and the Land are holy. In themselves they are but another people, another day, another place; but God has graciously designated them as his own and chosen them to mediate his illuminating presence. Is there anything that is of this world and yet so intrinsically holy that we cannot conceive of it apart from its relationship to the one who calls it his own? The answer to this question leads us to one of the most important of all the holy realities of this world: the Name of God.

The holiness of God's Name is a basic assumption of Scripture.[21] The revelation of the divine Name to Moses at the burning bush coincides with the first appearance of the Hebrew root k-d-sh after the creation narrative.[22] From this point on the Divine Name is linked with the people of Israel. God establishes an eternal connection between the divine Name and the people who have received the covenant, so that Israel's disobedience and humiliation profane the Name that dwells among them.[23]

In Jewish tradition this Name is so holy that it can only be spoken by the High Priest (the holiest Israelite) in the Jerusalem Temple (the holiest place) on Yom Kippur (one of the holiest days). While in almost all circumstances it is unspeakable, it can be written down, and the transcription of God's Name within the Torah and the other Jewish scriptures – in the language in which it was originally spoken to Moses – is the fundamental event which renders those texts holy. In fact, after the destruction of the Temple the only objects which are truly holy are those which include writing sanctified by the Divine Name, transcribed by an appropriate person in an appropriate manner. Max Kadushin provides a clear summary of the traditional halakhah regarding these holy objects:

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[19] Ibid., 1404.
[20] The connection between the holy People, the holy Sabbath, and the holy City, and the eschatological significance of that connection, are conveyed beautifully in the classic Sabbath hymn Lecha Dodi.
[21] See Leviticus 20:3; 22:2; 22:32; Ezekiel 36:20-23; 39:7; 39:25; 43:7-8; Isaiah 29:23; Amos 2:7; 1 Chronicles 16:10, 35; 29:16; Psalms 33:21; 103:1; 105:3; 106:47; 145:21.
[22] Exodus 3:5, 13-15.
[23] Leviticus 20:3; 22:2; 22:32; Ezekiel 36:20-23; 43:7-9.

> Certain things – a sefer-Torah, tefillin, mezuzot, and sefarim (scrolls of the Prophets or Ketubim) – are classified by the Halakhah as Kedushah. Even objects directly used in connection with these holy things, objects which are characterized as tashmishe Kedushah [i.e., holy utensils], such as the receptacles or cases for the holy things, are to be stored away when no longer used, and not just thrown aside carelessly. (This applies all the more, of course, to the holy things themselves.) On the other hand, a second group of objects…[which are employed in rites governed by the Halakhah] – sukkah, lulab, tzitzit, and shofar – may be thrown away when they can no longer be used, and this applies not only to them but also to "others like them." Classified by the Halakhah as tashmishe Mitzvah [i.e., utensils for the fulfillment of a mitzvah] the objects in this second group are thus regarded as merely being essential to a particular rite and nothing more. They are not holy in themselves. If, in contrast to tashmishe Kedushah, they may be finally thrown away, it is because they are basically of an ordinary character.[24]

Elsewhere Kadushin describes the hierarchy that exists among these holy objects, and the transcriptive acts which render them holy:

> In descending order, that hierarchy [of holy objects] consists of a Sefer Torah (a scroll of the Pentateuch), tefillin (four specified passages from the Pentateuch), mezuzot (two specified passages from the Pentateuch on parchment), sefarim (scrolls of Prophets and Ketubim [from Psalms to Chronicles]), a synagogue [i.e., a place where sacred texts are kept and publicly read]. Failure to conform with but a single one of the many rules for the writing of a Sefer Torah and for the preparation of its parchment is enough to disqualify it, and similar rules apply to the making of tefillin and muzuzot. A number of those rules have to do with the kavanah, intention, and one rule in particular reminds us of kavanah in the case of sacrifices and of tithes: names of God in a Sefer Torah, tefillin, and mezuzot must be written with kavanah, that is, each name must be written with the idea in mind that it refers to God.[25]

The scribe (sofer) is thus like a Kohen, who takes that which is ordinary and renders it holy by bringing it into contact with the Holy One, in one case through the mediation of the transcribed Name of God, in the other through the mediation of the Temple altar.

For anyone familiar with Catholic piety and practice, Kadushin's discussion of holy objects calls to mind the Eucharistic elements. There is, in fact, an analogy between the sanctifying activity of the scribe (the sofer) and that of the Catholic Priest, and of the reverence shown to the Sefer Torah and to the Eucharistic elements. The analogy breaks down when reckoning with the difference between reverence and adoration – but the similarity is nonetheless striking. There is also an analogy between the role played by the Torah service in the synagogue liturgy, and that played by the Eucharistic service in the Catholic liturgy. The analogy can also be extended to the qualifications for contact with the Sefer Torah (i.e., one must be a Jew) and those for Eucharistic communion (i.e., one must be a Catholic).

[24] Max Kadushin, The Rabbinic Mind (New York: Blaisdell, 1965), 171-72.
[25] Worship and Ethics, 221.

We should also note the significance here of the Hebrew language. The sacred writings only maintain the summit of holiness in their original form. Translations are esteemed and employed, but they are not holy in the same way as the Hebrew text. This means that the holy text is bound closely to the holy people, who guard and transmit the language through which the Holy One is revealed and in which the holy Name is inscribed.

Holy Deeds: The Mitzvot

For Jewish tradition, the mitzvot (commandments) constitute the heart of the Torah. They provide the framework for Israel's holy life in fulfillment of its priestly vocation. The connection between the mitzvot and holiness appears in Numbers 15:38-41, which is recited twice daily as the third paragraph of the Shema. These verses speak of the fringes which Israelites are to affix to the four corners of their garments, and which represent "all the commandments (mitzvot) of Adonai" (vs. 39). When Israelites look upon the fringes, they are to remember to "do all my mitzvot" (vs. 40). The latter verse ends with these words: "and you shall be holy to your God."

These words at the conclusion of verse 40 could be taken as a relational reason for keeping the mitzvot. In this reading, the keeping of the mitzvot is the behavioral imperative implicit in a holy status: if one is holy (i.e., belongs to God), then one observes the commandments of God. In contrast, Jewish tradition has generally understood the latter as a promise contingent upon fulfillment of the former: "if you observe my mitzvot, then you shall be holy." In this view, observance of the mitzvot becomes a means of sanctification rather than its result. This is the interpretation reflected in the blessing recited before performing any ritual commandment: "Blessed are you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by your mitzvot, and commanded us to…" As the Sages state, "With every new mitzvah which God issues to Israel He adds holiness to them."[26] As Abraham Joshua Heschel realizes, this means that the mitzvot are sacramental. "The mitzvot are the Jewish sacraments, sacraments that may be performed in common deeds of kindness."[27]

In the eyes of Jewish tradition, why do the mitzvot have sanctifying power? One explanation comes from a midrashic interpretation of the phrase "my mitzvot" (Leviticus 26:3), which takes it to mean "the mitzvot which God observes."[28] Thus, the mitzvot represent the characteristic behavior of God, and to keep them is to imitate God. The Sages depict God as one who visits the sick, feeds the hungry, and comforts mourners; when Israel observes the mitzvot which command such behavior, they are entering into God's own way of life. Heschel takes this interpretation one step further:

> A mitzvah is an act which God and man have in common. We say: 'Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His mitzvot.' They oblige Him as well as us. Their fulfillment is not valued as an act performed in spite of 'the evil

[26] Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Exodus 22:30.
[27] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, 278. Paul Mendes-Flohr likewise uses the language of sacrament to characterize Franz Rosenzweig's understanding of the mitzvot and Jewish ritual observance ("Law and Sacrament: Ritual Observance in Twentieth-Century Jewish Thought" in Jewish Spirituality From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present, ed. Arthur Green [New York: Crossroad, 1997], 326-32).
[28] Leviticus Rabbah 35:3.

drive,' but as an act of communion with Him. The spirit of mitzvah is togetherness. We know, He is a partner to our act.[29]

According to Heschel, the mitzvah does not merely bring us into God's characteristic way of acting; it also implies a promise that God will join with us in our actions when we make the mitzvot our characteristic way of life. By emphasizing the co-operative nature of the mitzvot – God acting in and with our acting -- Heschel heightens the sacramental dimension of the mitzvot which is already central to the tradition.

As a member of one of the great families of the Hasidic world, Heschel's spiritual orientation reflects the mystical approach to the mitzvot which crystallized in the teaching of Isaac Luria (16th Century). According to Luria, the mitzvot are God's instruments for effecting a tikkun (repair) of the broken cosmos. When Jews observe the mitzvot, they are participating in the process whereby the world is redeemed. For Luria, this was not an empirically observable humanitarian venture, by which we make the world better by our own efforts, but instead a hidden divine process in which God brings cosmic effects in response to the fulfillment of mitzvot which might seem empirically independent of those effects. In this view, the mitzvot become the instruments by which Jews sanctify the world, and not merely themselves.[30]

Just as the Sefer Torah of Jewish tradition resembles the Eucharistic elements of Catholic tradition, and the Torah service in Jewish liturgy resembles the partaking of those elements in communion, so the mitzvot in Jewish practice – at least among those, like Heschel, influenced by the mystical tradition -- resemble the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. Catholics understand the Eucharistic sacrifice as an offering which affects the world, and not just themselves. It has eschatological and sanctifying power. From a Catholic perspective, the Eucharist is the ultimate act of tikkun olam, in which the atoning self-offering of the Messiah is re-presented before God as the Messiah's own prayer for the redemption of the world.

Messianic Judaism, the Jewish Sacraments, & the Christian Church

The sacramental character of these five realities as bearers of kedushah should be evident from the biblical text and from Jewish tradition. But what is their significance for followers of Jesus after the death and resurrection of the Messiah? And what is their relation to the sacramental order of the Church?

It will not be possible here to respond to these questions in depth. To do so would require extensive exegesis of Scripture and theological argument. Instead, I will propose three basic theses for consideration, in the hope that they might generate the further study and discussion which would be required for their whole-hearted acceptance. The theses are as follows: (1) the Jewish sacraments find their messianic realization in and through Jesus; (2) the Jewish sacraments have enduring significance and efficacy in and through Jesus; (3) the Jewish

[29] God in Search of Man, 287.
[30] See Joseph Dan, Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1986), 107-113. Dan believes that "The concept of the tikkun is the most powerful idea ever presented in Jewish thought" (107).

sacraments are essential to the life and identity of the Church (as well as to the life and identity of Israel).

Realization in and through Jesus

As the Word made flesh and the bearer of the divine Name, Jesus is the living expression of the eternal and holy **Torah**, the one to whom the written and temporalTorah bears witness. As the messianic-king who represents and embodies his people in himself, and carries them into the next stage of their eschatological destiny by means of resurrection from the dead, Jesus is holy **Israel**. As the one whose perfect obedience to the commandments of the Torah culminates in his atoning martyrdom on the cross, and whose gift of the Spirit enables his disciples to follow the same path, Jesus brings the messianic realization of the holy **Mitzvot**. As the one whose Spirit is the pledge (arrabon), seal (sphragis), and first-fruits (aparke) of the world to come, and who will in the fullness of time return to reign over a transformed creation, Jesus is the Lord of **Shabbat**, the new Joshua who brings Israel into the promised **Land,** and the new David who establishes the holy **City**.

Thus, his role as the incarnation of the eternal Torah points to his divinity, whereas his role as Israel expresses the particularity of his humanity. His realization of the mitzvot reflects his redemptive life and death, and also the way of discipleship that participates in his work of tikkun olam. The proleptic holiness of Shabbat and the Land point to the new life given by the Spirit, and the inheritance of a renewed cosmos of which the Spirit is a deposit. These five Jewish sacramental realities inscribe prophetically the substance of the gospel in the daily life of the Jewish people.

Christian theology has traditionally treated these five Jewish expressions of holiness in the world under the heading of typology. Theologians have agreed that they point forward to the coming of Jesus and the new era he would inaugurate. They have disagreed over whether such types were truly sacramental in character, enabling those living before the Incarnation to participate proleptically in the messianic realities they prefigured.[31] While allowing for a distinction between the degree of participation in the Messiah available in the sacraments which anticipated his coming and those which he himself instituted, I am proposing here that the people and land of Israel, the Sabbath, the Torah, and the mitzvot are truly sacramental and truly grant such participation.[32] As the Rock that quenched Israel's thirst in the wilderness with "drink of the Spirit" (pneumatikon poma) was the Messiah (1 Corinthians 10:4), so the same pre-incarnate Messiah was active in and through all the "types" of the Torah, and most especially those five realities discussed above.

Typology, so conceived, provides a useful but still limited perspective on these five expressions of kedushah. The limitation arises because typology normally considers two separate

[31] For a discussion of this disagreement and an argument in favor of seeing types as sacramental, see Peter J. Leithart, "Old Covenant and New in Sacramental Theology New and Old," Pro Ecclesia (Spring 2005, XIV:2), 174-90.

[32] It is worth noting that, according to Catholic teaching, participation in the sacraments of the Church does not ensure the eternal beatitude of those who participate. The effectiveness of the "grace" conveyed by the sacrament may be thwarted by the evil disposition of the one who receives it. This would likewise hold for the sacramental realities of Israel which I am considering here.

realities, one of which demonstrates a pattern that is more fully revealed in the other. Thus, Moses as the one who redeems Israel from Egypt is a type of Jesus who redeems his people from sin. Moses is like Jesus, and one might also say that the pre-incarnate Messiah was himself active in and through Moses, but we would not say that Moses himself was active in and through Jesus. The situation is otherwise with our five primary expressions of Jewish kedushah. Israel and Jesus are not two separate realities; Jesus is an Israelite, and as the Messiah he embodies the entire people in himself. He was present and active in Israel's life before the Incarnation, but Israel is also present in his life after the Incarnation.

Similarly, the Torah does not merely prefigure Jesus, or give proleptic access to his pre-incarnate presence. Jesus studied the Torah, taught the Torah, loved the Torah, embodied the Torah. The Torah lived in him, just as Israel lived in him. They are not two separate realities, one of which points to the other. They are so bound together that wherever Jesus is, there is also the Torah. Israel and the Torah are ordered in relation to Jesus – he is the Master of Torah and the King of Israel, just as he is the Lord of Shabbat. But he is never apart from Torah, Israel, and Shabbat.

Enduring Efficacy in and through Jesus

The five sacramental realities with which we are dealing have remained the pillars of Jewish life and thought through the last two millennia, undiminished by the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. I have proposed that they were efficacious signs of the Messiah and of the messianic age before the Incarnation. What about after the Incarnation?

In this second thesis I am proposing that these five realities retain their sacramental status in the new order established through the death and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, I would suggest that their sacramental character is even heightened by the initial realization in Jesus of their messianic significance. The Messiah has been raised from the dead, the Holy Spirit has been given, and the next stage of Israel's eschatological journey has begun -- though this world has not yet been transformed into the world to come. In light of these events, there is no obvious reason why these five primary expressions of kedushah would be nullified rather than intensified.

In support of this thesis is the fact that the ekklesia of the circumcision of the first century continued to honor these five traditional expressions of kedushah. They circumcised their sons, indicating their continued identification as part of genealogical Israel. They observed the Sabbath and revered the city of Jerusalem. They studied the Torah and kept the mitzvot. All this is clear from the Acts of the Apostles, but is also confirmed by the letters of Paul.

Why did they act in this way? I have argued in Postmissionary Messianic Judaism that they did so out of obedience to the commandments of God, which had not been cancelled. But what was the purpose of those commandments? If the Messiah had come to fulfill the commandments and promises – to "fill them up" to their fullness – and if those commandments and promises had previously anticipated the Messiah's work and granted proleptic access to it, would it not make sense for the Jewish followers of Jesus to look for an even richer encounter with him through their engagement with Shabbat, the Land and the City, the Torah, the mitzvot, and through their participation in the corporate life of the people of Israel?

In support of this thesis is also the eschatological significance of the Jewish people in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. The Apostle to the gentiles asserts that genealogical Israel will embrace Messiah Jesus as part of the final act in the drama which culminates in his return (Romans 11:25-27). He also expresses his conviction that Jews who have not yet embraced Messiah Jesus are still "holy" (Romans 11:16) because of their enduring connection to the patriarchs and matriarchs (Romans 11:16. 28-29). The holiness of genealogical Israel helps to explain their role in the eschatological drama: the people who are set apart for the Messiah, who lived their life in his presence even before his coming (Ephesians 2:12), must welcome back their King with open arms and hearts if he is to return to reign over them (Matthew 23:39). If genealogical Israel retains its sacramental status to the end, despite its ignorance of the risen Messiah, why should we expect the abolition of any of the other four Jewish sacramental realities which are oriented to this most basic one?

The faithful engagement with these five sacramental realities by the early Jewish followers of Jesus, and the enduring holiness of genealogical Israel in anticipation of its eschatological acknowledgement of the risen and returning Messiah, suggest that these expressions of kedushah have a sacramental role in God's dealings with all Jews, Messianic or non-Messianic. Jesus lives on in the midst of genealogical Israel, and he does so – at least in part – through these five sacramental realities.

Essential for the Church

My final thesis is the boldest and most radical of the three: I propose that the five Jewish sacraments are not only of enduring validity, but are essential to the identity of the ekklesia as the mystical Body of the Messiah.

In the previous two theses I have presented a view of the Jewish sacraments that is thoroughly messianic in character: all five find their perfect realization in Jesus the Messiah, and all five continue after his Incarnation, death, and resurrection to mediate his presence and power among the people to whom he is eternally bound. In this way they are analogous to – and oriented towards -- the sacraments which he explicitly institutes in the ekklesia. For example, as I argued previously in a paper for this dialogue, the sacrament of baptism is intended as initiation into the next stage of Israel's eschatological vocation. As such, for Jews it is meant to function as a re-affirmation of their status as members of the people of Israel and as a re-commitment to its eschatological mission and destiny. Thus, the sacrament of Jewish identity – which is already messianic in character -- is to be realized in, but not replaced by, the sacrament of baptism into the Body of Israel's risen Messiah.

If there are no Jews within the Body of the Messiah whose baptism functions in this way as a realization rather than nullification of their Jewish identity, an identity which was already inherently sacramental and messianic, then something essential is lost from the life of the ekklesia. We can see this most clearly in the case of the baptism of gentiles. The sacrament of baptism is supposed to bring them into an expanded eschatological Israel which retains its intimate relationship to genealogical Israel. If the connection to genealogical Israel for Jews is severed by their baptism rather than affirmed and renewed, then gentile members of the ekklesia

are left stranded, cut off from the very community to which their baptism was supposed to join them. In this way ecclesial denial of the Jewish sacrament results in damage to the sacrament instituted by Jesus.

As another example, let us look at the Eucharist. In its character as a sacrifice the Eucharist is a re-presentation before God of the atoning death of Jesus as part of a prayer for the final coming of the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus' act of martyrdom – in Hebrew, kiddush Hashem ("sanctification of the Name") -- was the culmination of a life lived in accordance with the mtizvot, an act which represented the fullness of that life and the fullness of the mitzvot. The Eucharistic prayer for the Messianic Kingdom, based on Jesus' realization of the mitzvot, has in view the eschatological renewal of Israel, as is evident in the institution narratives contained in the synoptic gospels. In this light, Jewish practice of the mitzvot within the ekklesia would function naturally as an extension of the Eucharist in which Jesus was continually active and re-presented before the Father for the redemption of Israel and the repair of the entire world (i.e., tikkun olam). The Eucharist would not render the mitzvot irrelevant any more than baptism would render Jewish identity irrelevant. However, if the Eucharist is almost never offered with genealogical Israel in view, and if the mitzvot are almost never practiced by Jews within the ekklesia, something fundamental is lost from the Church's life.

If these five Jewish sacraments are essential to the identity of the ekklesia as the mystical Body of the Messiah, then what should we conclude about the state of the ekklesia since its early centuries, when it unambiguously rejected their validity within the ekklesia? We may conclude, as I did in Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, that the ekklesia has been as wounded by its attitude to Jews and Judaism as the Jewish people has been wounded by its attitude to Jesus. But we may also conclude something more positive in nature: if the ekklesia remains the Body of the Messiah, despite its rejection of the Jewish sacraments, as we must believe it does; and if the Jewish people remain the people of God, despite their failure to acknowledge their Messiah, as we must believe they do; then it can only be because, in the eyes of God and of the Messiah, the two are viewed as one bilateral reality, locked together against their will for a joint future which neither can evade.

The Jewish sacraments are essential to the identity of the Body of Messiah – but, in the anomalous situation created by the disappearance of a recognized ekklesia of the circumcision, God accounts the honoring of these sacraments by the Jewish people as though it were done within the ekklesia. The Risen Messiah is essential to the identity of the Jewish people – but, in the anomalous situation created by the disappearance of a recognized Jesus-believing community within the Jewish people, God accounts the honoring of Jesus by the ekklesia as though it were done by genealogical Israel.[33] Each remains essential to the other, if only by God's merciful methods of accounting -- merciful, but not entirely a matter of legal fiction, since the two divided partners are joined ontologically in a unity which lies at the heart of the mysterious identity of each.

[33] As should be evident, I am speaking here of the sacramental status of the Jewish people and of the Ekklesia as communal entities, and not of the spiritual condition of the individuals within them.

Conclusion

The Jewish people as a whole, and the Messianic Jewish movement within it, can benefit enormously by reflecting on the Catholic understanding of sacrament, and employing it as a conceptual tool in the analysis of Jewish life. The category is especially helpful for Messianic Jews, as it offers a way of thinking about Jewish realities which binds those realities indissolubly to the person and work of Jesus without diminishing their intrinsic significance. In fact, such a sacramental perspective actually deepens the meaning ascribed to various aspects of Jewish life, and intensifies the motivation for faithful adherence to them.

Of course, appropriation of a Catholic understanding of sacrament also poses a serious challenge to Messianic Jews. For example, as we grow in our appreciation for a Catholic understanding of the Eucharist, we must assess our own practice of this rite, and ask if it is worthy of the holiness of the sacrament. Most of us, I think, will find that the answer is "no." If the approach presented above is accepted, this has implications for the integrity of our Jewish lives – since Jewish life now is inseparable from Jesus. Thus, I have proposed that our observance of the mitzvot be viewed and lived as an extension of the Eucharist. If we are not celebrating the Eucharist appropriately, then our observance of the mitzvot will also be affected.

At the same time, a sacramental understanding of Judaism likewise poses a serious challenge to Catholic self-understanding. The absence of Jewish sacramental life within the Catholic Church – and, historically, its active suppression – becomes a problem of tremendous urgency and importance, which has implications for the integrity of its own ecclesial sacraments. Thus, for both Messianic Jews and for Catholics the breakdown of sacramental compartmentalization offers both rewards and risks, hopeful prospects and fearful tests.

The fundamental vocation of Israel is to be a priestly people and holy nation. This entails an existence as a particular genealogical community with a universal priestly vocation, a vocation which attains its eschatological fullness in the death and resurrection of the Incarnate Word. In other words, Israel is a sacrament whose holiness expresses the holiness of the One in whom and for whom she was chosen, that she might mediate blessing to all the nations of the world. That vocation is just as real today as it was in ancient times. Happy are those who lay low the hills and raise the valleys before her and within her, so that she might be a smooth road on which the Holy One may come to consummate the world which was created in six days.