

LITURGICAL TIME IN THE MOSAIC RELIGION AND IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Abstract: The article “Liturgical time in the mosaic religion and in the Church of Christ” analyses the direct connection between the mentality of the Jew regarding religion, God and time, and the Christian. Unlike the polytheistic religions, where the source of the devotion was a myth and the time was structured cyclically, the Jewish and Christian religions have their source in time, as persons and events in history, and the time is linear, oriented toward a supreme goal, and the feasts are only gates to heaven, when the believer remembers a historical fact and enters the eternal realities.

Keywords: Time, feast, cyclical, linear, history, eternity, theology, anthropology

The people of Israel is the chosen people in the Scriptures. He received from God the Law on the Sinai Mountain and every step of the way he was guided by God Savaoth, called secretly Iahveh, through patriarchs, judges, kings and prophets. This order coming from heaven, in which the people of Israel is the bride of God, being all the time taught, admonished, praised, helped by God, is the fundamental dimension of the mosaic religion. The Jews were in connection with the God even when they departed from his will. All the events of the history of Israel were filled with sense through this connection of love between God and his beloved people.

The patriarchs of the Old Testament spoke with God directly, and communicated that to their people. The dialogue between man and God was an unmediated one, a council between two kingdoms: the world created by God, and the kingdom of God.

This dialogue faded away when the chosen nation departed from God and embraced the foreign nations, polytheistic religions and even murdering laws of faith. They were summoned by God, they lost his support, his presence because of their wickedness and their evil deeds.

In this order of understanding, all the events of the history of the people of Israel is marked by this divine presence. The famine, the exile in Egypt, the wandering through the desert, the conquest of the promised land, the period of the judges, the rule of the kings, the defeat and the exile in Babylon et caetera.

The Church of Christ, established on the Cross through the Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world, is the continuation and the fulfilling of the prophecies about the new chosen people of God. She is the New Jerusalem, the people of the New Covenant, where the worship of God is not anymore conducted into one temple on the Moriah Mount, but everywhere on the holy altars of the churches, the Temple of Christendom being the Body of Jesus Christ, present on the altars through Holy Eucharist.

The Christians took this historical vision of the world, explained all the prophecies of the Old Testament about Messiah and the Church, the linear dimension of the world opposed to the circular pagan understanding of faith and universe. They integrated the Judaic cult and worship, the psalms and the Old Testament together into the cult of the new people of God. That is why psalms of David can be heard into Christian churches, prophecies of the old saints are the foundations of the understanding of the Church, the liturgical time of the Jews is the source for the cult of the Christian Church. This is also in accordance to the practice and understanding of Jesus Christ himself, who didn't want to abolish the old Law, given by God, but to fulfil it into his teaching and life, sanctified through His sacrifice of blood on the Cross.

Another important issue in this order of ideas is that the Christians always believed that the people of Israel will be saved through the oikonomia of God, at the end of times. The immense respect for the Judaic teachings, for the Old Testament, for the prophecies, the songs, the psalms, the saints of the Jewish heritage is the landmark of Christianity. In the first two or three centuries after the Ascension of Christ, the new Church struggled to express the new kerigma of Christ, undressing herself from the impression of being a Judaic sect into the polytheistic universe of the roman empire. All the Christian apostolic fathers of the Church wrote theology in order to make the essential difference between the Law of Moses, based on the Sinai Decalogue, and the Law of Christ, based of love and the sacrifice of Christ. The tension between Tallion and Christ was necessary in order to open the perspectives of the Church to conquer spiritually the entire western world, which did happen in few centuries.

The Christendom embraces together the linear, historical, messianic vision of history of the mosaic people and the circular, rhythmic, cosmic vision of the peoples of Europe. The liturgical feasts are in the same time celebrations of historical events, not myths, and rhythmic entries into the eternal kingdom of God. There is history and eternity in the making.

The rhythmic time of the Hebrew religion is marked by the essential feasts of the people of Israel, as points of entry of the sacred into the history. There was a cultic time, a rhythm of prayer every day, every Saturday (Shabbath), and every year, as remembrances of the salvation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt or other important moments into the history of the chosen people. This conscience of being elected by God to be the nation that will give the Messiah, kept the people together in times of trouble, in exiles, in defeats, in the wandering through the deserts of Arabia etc.

This conscience of being the people of God was even more pregnant into the religion of God incarnate, Jesus Christ. As the whole ancient testament speaks, a new people, a new Jerusalem, a new sacrifice and a new law will appear. All the rituals of the old times are only prophecies, signs and symbols for the union of God with humanity into Christ. Indeed, the Christendom took this conscience of election and salvation, and the new Jerusalem is indeed every holy table of the Church, the nation of God is not bounded by ethnic characteristics, but is the gathering of all the nations into the Church of God. The new sacrifice, bloodless, pure and performed once and for all is the Sacrifice of Christ extended into the world through the Divine Liturgy, that spreads the living

Blood of Christ into the whole humanity, through Eucharist. The new Law is the law of love, of compassion, replacing the law of Talion (eye for eye, tooth for tooth) as mimetic response for evil, with the ever flowing law of self sacrifice and love for all beings.

We can say that the liturgical time of the Christian religion is not a circular one, as the polytheistic religions were, nor a linear historical one, but a spiral time where the cyclical recurrence of the feasts as remembrances and mysteries celebrate the verticality of the plan of salvation in history. Moreover, the Christian religion is a historical religion, with a historical source: Jesus Christ, not a mythical religion as other faiths on earth. This spiral inherited from the Jewish faith is indeed a unique phenomenon into the history of religion, where the goal of the creature toward the infinite is answered by the revelation of God and the incarnation of the Son of God in history.

Unlike the all other religions of the time, the Jewish feasts referred to a course of history, not an immemorial, mythical cycle of events. The epiphanies of the divine to the people of Israel are not "in illo tempore", as the oriental or Greek polytheism, does not follow the natural rhythm of the seasons, as animistic, agricultural religions claim, but the recent history of the people of Israel and the encounter of it with God¹.

The presence of the Lord Yahweh into the middle of the people is the landmark of the history of Israel². There is – indeed – a liturgical synthesis between the cosmic rhythms and the saving historical events in the structure of Hebrew feasts.

This synthesis was taken and completed into the Church of Christ. Here, all the cosmic energies of nature serve the historical presence of God, not only through messages, symbols and signs, but through the real presence of God among people, through the Incarnation. So the source of religion is the presence of God as man into the world, through Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Another important issue of the Judaic mentality of prayer is the conscience that God is ever present into the middle of his people, into the inaugural moments of history, and every moment has a cosmic significance.

For instance, the feast of asymes (unleavened breads) was occasioned both by the harvest of cereals and the deliverance from the slavery of Egypt³.

This rebirth of the people was assimilated with a new beginning of Judaic history.

The liturgical feast of the Jews was a remembrance of the historical moment of salvation. The liturgical feast of the Church of God is something quite different. It is not at all only a remembrance, a memory of a salutary moment of history, a commemoration of the past, an evocation of the great times of old. In the Church of Christ – and that is the landmark of the true Christianity – the liturgical feast not only commemorates the past but enters into the eternal reality of God, working in history. It is a spiritual portal, a gate to heaven, a door to the Kingdom of God, where the history and the eternity unites with each other, transfiguring the creatures into sons of God in grace.

¹ We recommend the article *Liturghia iudaică*, in Jacob J. Petuchovski and Clemens Thoma, *Lexiconul herder al întâlnirii iudeo-creștine*, Humanitas, 2000, pp. 156-159.

² R. De Vaux, *Les Institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, Paris, Ed. Du Cerf, 1960, vol. II, 385-390.

³ Jean Marie van Cangh, in his article „Temps et eschatologie dans l'Ancien Testament” asserts a certain influence of the natural religions of Canaan in the early Jewish religion, in *Temps et eschatologie – Donnees bibliques et problematiques contemporaines*, Paris, Ed. Du Cerf, 1994, p. 18.

The feast becomes an interface of the divine. That is why all the liturgical feasts of the Church have in the centre, in the core, the Divine Liturgy, as unification between spirit and matter, eternity and time, aeon and history. The feast is an actualisation of the past, a presence of the people of God into the eternal light of the Creator. This is the reason why all the people of God enter into the Kingdom of God. The initial blessing of the Divine Liturgy in the Orthodox Church is: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages".

This blessing shows to the entire Church that the Divine Liturgy is indeed an entrance into the Kingdom of God, not being an abolishment of history, but a sanctification of history, a divine union between created beings and their Creator.

The end of this blessing and of all the liturgical "ekphoneses" – id est blessings of the ritual contains three realities: "now", "for ever" and "the ages of ages – *secula seculorum, aionas ton aionon*". These three theological realities of the prayer correspond to the three realms of reality. Now is the sign and symbol of time, where the created beings flow from their beginning to their end. The time is a perpetual now, because, as Saint Augustin of Hippo stated, the past doesn't exist anymore but in memories of a living being, the future is non-existence expected but not real. The present is the factual reality, the out of reach, but provable existence of created things. God is indeed an everlasting present, a eternal Now.

For ever correspond to the "aion" (aiwn), the unmovable cradle of angels, the perpetual expectation without will, the realm of the dead who cannot work their salvation anymore, but can be saved through the intercession of the Church in time and history. And the "ages of ages" means the kingdom of God, the eternal unity between God and his creations, the blessed completion of the created kingdom.

So, the blessing of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the essential dogma of the Christian Church, takes place in heaven, in hell, in history and in eternity, in the realm of angels and dead souls, on earth, into the Kingdom of God and everywhere.

There is a liturgical realism⁴ of the Liturgy, because, in the religion of Jews and fulfilled into the Christianity, all references are to historical moments, historical persons, realities of this world and the future one. The axial moment of the history of mankind is the Incarnation of God on earth that opens the time of salvation, the year of the benevolence of God, the period of unity between human and divine, into the unique person of the Son of God who became man, Jesus Christ. The Church is his Body, the extension through the Holy Spirit of Him into all the persons that died and rose from the dead, mystically, in the waters of Baptism. So, Christ is expanding into history and world, forming his Church, without destroying the identity and free will of his believers, but fulfilling their real humanity, who is not completed without the union with God. The real humanity is the divine humanity of the Son of God, united with his deity for ever.

This theology of the presence of God in creation through prayer and liturgical feast is present into the Jewish theology, as a seed, and completed and brought to perfection into the theology of the Incarnate God.

⁴ Jean Marie van Cangh, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

The source of the ritual in Judaism and Christianity is indeed the irruption of the divine into history, avoiding of being a mere cyclical repetition of mythical hypotheses, or being a simple remembrance of the history of the past. The screen of the real faith is not a immemorial mythical and symbolical one, but a fact in history, provable with documents, remembered incessantly into the centuries of the Church, ever present into the mind of faithful members of the Church. At the same time, this historical moment of Incarnation is filled with the whole eternity of God that flows through the Body of Christ, humane and divine, accessible to all believers through Eucharist.

The theology of liturgical time is therefore the consequence and the extension of the Jewish vision of history, where the events of time do not relapse or recur cyclically, but happened once and for all into history. The definitive character of these events is the foundation of the Christian theology of time and eternity. For instance, the penance of David, the prophecies of the Old Testament, the messianic words, the context of events, the miracles of Yahweh for the chosen people, all are circumscribed to the historical vision of the Jews, in which God manifest himself to the people.

The Hebraic and biblical time does not exist in itself, as a autonomous reality of the world, but is the life of humans, flowing with the blessing of God. Time is man himself in his flowing from birth to death. The Jew does not make any difference between time and the event occurred in time, and even between time and the person that lives that moment. Time is life and conscience of life, is sharing and mind. That is why time is filled with human being, with affects, ideas, fillings of man. Time is flexible and heterogeneous, depending of the human experiences in it.

In this order of ideas, the feast is indeed a re-creation of the world through the emergent and present power of the Lord of life, Yahweh, into the heart of the history of Israel. The Jew doesn't celebrate only the salvation of his forefathers from the slavery of evil (Egypt, Babylon are only historical occurrences of it), but he celebrates his own salvation from the slavery of sin and death.

This mystical and spiritual correspondence and identity between nation and person, between human and the universe, will be completed in the Mysteries of the Church, where the person receives the experience of the presence of the whole into the part (*pars pro toto* lat.), the integration of the person into history, the eschatological reality of the human being and the presence of the whole history in the human being in the eternal plan of God.

The ritual of the Church is therefore a divine continuous creation in the chosen people of God that is His Church. The prophet Isaiah speaks about an universal salvation of all nations, different of the conscience of a chosen people. (cf. Isaiah 11, 1-12; 65, 1-25). The Jew and Christian time is a liturgical continuation of the presence of God in the middle of his people and the presence of the people into God's heart and work. That fact supposes an intimate relationship between the creature and the Creator, promises, messages, love letters, punishments et caetera.

The rhythm of feasts of the Temple will become in the messianic time a permanence of celebration. The liturgical time is therefore a metaphor of eternity through Messiah, the Son of God incarnate.

One of the important dimensions of the theology of Christian feast is the anthropology of celebration. The feast is the man himself, in his doxological hypostasis. In the mind of the prophets, the human being is the Sabbath of God, the rest of the Creator, and the feast is the concrete presence of this reality in the people of God, who “take rest into the saints” (cf. Isaiah 59, 20; I Peter 4, 14).

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