Jan Jensen

CHRISTIANITY, PRESENCE, AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY: ON TWO FORMS OF CHRISTIAN TEMPORALITY IN THE FAROE ISLANDS

ABSTRACT

In this article, I compare two forms of Christian temporality in the Faroe Islands. In so doing, I problematize some of the ways in which the idea of *history* has been applied theoretically to studies of churches and congregations in the country. I propose the concept of dispensational disagreement to show how different churches function based on different views of their own place in history. This discussion contributes to the ongoing debates within the anthropology of Christianity about the way that different temporalities play into Christian life. I argue that we should be careful of the kinds of historical imagination that we apply to different groups, keeping in mind that these groups might not see themselves as functioning along these lines. Instead, I draw on the theology of my interlocutors to argue for a view of history that is more based on presentism rather than historical advancement.

Keywords: Faroe Islands, Pentecostalism, temporality, history, theology, presence, dispensationalism, orthodoxy

INTRODUCTION

This article deals with two Christian movements in the Faroe Islands and their differing views on humanity's place in history. Spurred by recent debates in anthropology about the role of different temporalities in Christian societies, I ask whether or not the lines drawn so far can be applied to this context of churches that on some points have strong similarities, but in more substantial ways differ wildly in how they see their own place in society. My discussion centers on the now famous debate within anthropology that asks whether Christianity in its essence is a movement that is based on principles of rupture (be they sociological, cultural, soteriological) or whether it is better understood as a movement based on the idea of continuity (tradition, reproduction etc.). I ask whether we can can divide the different Christian movements into the categories that have often been used based on this distinction, and more specifically, whether or not we can see Pentecostalism as based entirely on rupture, or whether, as is the

case in the Faroe Islands, this movement itself has some strong ideas of continuity at its core. Alternatively, this article can also be read as dealing with the normative ways in which the social sciences apply ideas about historicity to the people being studied. In anthropology, this discussion has now become well established, with authors like Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) leading the way in asking how the social sciences have traditionally not taken on a self-critical view of how they themselves come to understand their own concepts. This article is a contribution to this literature, showing how even between what are seemingly quite homogenous groups of Christian believers, differences in theology can play a large part in what theoretical concepts actually are applicable, and where these concepts fall short.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF TIME, THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY

Ever since the latter half of the 20th century, anthropology started taking an increased interest in the question of temporality in human life, and so also its corollary, the question of history. Rather than seeing societies as existing in a sort of stasis in which they reproduce themselves indefinitely, anthropology came to have an awareness that societal developments exist over a certain period and that historical forces would necessarily reshape how these societies came to be formed. Perhaps most well-known in this regard are works such as Eric Wolf's intervention in *Europe and the People without History* (1982) and Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* (1983) which both emphasize, in a post-colonial context, how the concepts of time and history have been differentially applied to our ideas of society depending on where in the colonial landscape one finds oneself. So while anthropologists and other social theorists do not seem to have had any issue with seeing their own societies as existing 'in time' or 'in history', the same notion was not extended to other, often smaller, so-called 'primitive' societies in which anthropologists did most of their work. During this period, then, anthropology came to configure time and history as elements that themselves needed to be given critical attention, and the consequent outpouring of works that deal explicitly with these questions has been growing ever since, so much so that by 1992, Nancy Munn (1992) saw the time as being ripe for an extensive review of the literature.

But while this initial (usually highly critical) literature came to deal with how anthropology itself 'makes its object' as Fabian would have it, there was also a slightly divergent strand that started to deal with how temporality itself shapes human life. That is to say, while the former body of literature mostly dealt with the way in which anthropology 'allowed' Others to exist in a stream of historical developments, this second strand was more interested in how time itself is experienced by the people in question.[1] In this strand, questions about how people experience their memories of the past, how they imagine possible futures, and how they come to see themselves as part of a bigger (often cosmological) history of the world itself, became central. It is from this development that works such as Alfred Gell's *The Anthropology of Time* (1992) came to deal explicitly with what can be called cognitivist studies of the experience of time among different peoples. So we have two strands that each deal with temporality, but each in their own way—one emphasizing the role of history in society and the other temporality more generally in human life.

As our short genealogy shows, once we enter the 1990s, the anthropology of time seems to have become well-established and it is

during this same period that we begin to see an anthropology of Christianity take shape. One of the first and most telling examples of how intertwined the anthropology of time and of Christianity were is to be found in the works of Jean and John Comaroff in their studies of the missionization of South Africa in the 19th century. While not self-consciously referring to themselves as working within something called an anthropology of Christianity *per se*, many of the questions that the authors brought up were exactly the same questions that would later be taken up by anthropologists who would come to see themselves as working within this emerging sub-discipline. What Jean and John Comaroff show in this work is how Christianity itself came to function as an historical force that helped shape Tswana society. Spurred on by the varying political engagements of the missionaries themselves, Christianity and its ideas about elements such as work discipline, political authority, and Gender roles introduced new forms of social relations that over time would become the new norm. Interestingly for our discussion here, the authors seem to touch on both the historical and the temporal-experiential questions, showing first how historical actors affected social life, but subsequently also how Christian ideas about the temporality of social and religious life (for example the seven day week with Sunday set aside for religious worship) became internalized for the new converts (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986; 1997).

And so we arrive at what can be called the anthropology of Christianity as such. Around the turn of the 21st century some anthropologists started to talk about studies of Christian peoples coming more and more to the attention of the wider anthropological community, and so began attempts to draw up an outline of what this emerging sub-discipline might look like.[2] Quite quickly, the question of temporality came to be one of the emerging field's most important hallmarks. Instructive in this regard is Joel Robbins' work among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. A group of 300–400 people, the Urapmin were Christianized towards the latter half of the 20th century, and Robbins shows that for the Urapmin becoming Christian meant incorporating a whole new subject position in which they, as Robbins puts it, 'became sinners'. One of the recurring ways in which this new state of sinfulness plays out is in their imagining of the coming Apocalypse when God's Final Judgment decides once and for all who is to go to Heaven and who goes to Hell (Robbins 2004). In a later highly influential article Robbins extends his analysis to the question of temporality itself and how we as anthropologists tend to see the flow of history in different societies. Robbins points out that anthropological theories are most often based on ideas of continuity (for example the recurring reproduction of particular sociocultural forms), whereas the general issue Christianity raises is that at its core it contains a very strong notion of rupture. In becoming Christians, the Urapmin then are *not* simply reproducing older forms, but moving definitively towards a new way of relating to the world (Robbins 2007). What is more interesting for our present purposes is that this notion of rupture is not only to be found in the lives of individuals who start on a new soteriological journey. For many Christian groups around the world, rupture also refers to the way in which *this* world will end, and how to imagine oneself and one's community as part of this general theological-historical timeline.[3]

As I will show throughout later sections of this article, one of the main ways that my own interlocutors deal with this question—humanity's place in the grand history of the world—comes in the form of dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism refers to the way in which human history is divided into different periods (or dispensations) in which God relates to humanity in different ways based on specific covenants particular to that specific period. So, God's relationship with Adam in the Garden of Eden is one of complete relational proximity (God is even said to be himself walking in the Garden in Genesis 3:8), and this proximity is broken with the Fall of Man. This dispensation is then followed by a period in which humanity lives according to the Laws, until the day in which a new covenant is initiated with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[4] At this point, humanity is once again able to attain a personal, unmediated, relationship with God through salvational sanctification. The issue that is still left, however, is what to call the dispensation which follows.

THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT IN THE FAROE ISLANDS

The Faroe Islands is a country of around 50.000 people situated more or less equidistant between Iceland, Norway, and Scotland in the North Atlantic ocean. I have conducted fieldwork over a combined period of around 12 months among Christians in the capital, Tórshavn, where I have focused on the role of Christianity in a society which is almost wholly Christian. Sociologist of religion Janna Hansen (2014) shows, for example, that around 23 per cent of the Faroese population attends weekly church service in some form, and the monthly number reaches almost 45 per cent. The Faroe Islands are part of the Danish commonwealth (along with Greenland) and the largest Christian group in the country is the state Lutheran church (historically under Danish administration until 2007 when Faroe Islanders themselves took over the church), followed by the Plymouth Brethren and the Home Mission, and finally smaller Christian groups such as Pentecostals and Charismatics, the Salvation Army, and Jehova's Witnesses. Whereas the Lutheran church comprises around 75 per cent of the population, the Brethren make up around 15 per cent and the remaining 10 per cent are spread somewhat evenly among the remaining groups (and the small number of confessed atheists).[5]

What is remarkable about the Faroe Islands when compared to the neighbouring countries such as Iceland, Norway, and Denmark is firstly the high levels of religious (read: Christian—the number of religious practitioners of other faiths such as Buddhism and Islam are negligible) devotion. The weekly and monthly attendence in churches in the Faroe Islands just mentioned is around ten times that of Norway and Denmark. Secondly, the Faroe Islands has a disproportionate amount of members in non-Lutheran churches (so-called 'free churches') when compared to Denmark, although the proportion is similar to that seen in Norway. What this means is that Christian discourse in the Faroe Islands is highly vibrant, and suffuses much public debate, most notably in latter years during debates about such issues as inclusion of LGBT+ persons in the country's discrimination laws in 2006, and the passing of the law allowing people in same-sex relationships to get married in 2016. These laws were hotly debated in the Faroe Islands and, almost without fail, arguments against were based in Christian worldviews. It is my view that the strong presence of Christian adherents in public debate stems from the free church environment primarily. Without going too far into the differences between the Lutheran church and the free churches, suffice it to say that one of the main differences lies in the expected form of personal devotion. The Lutheran church does not play the role of Gospel-preaching,

expansionist Christianity that the free churches do, often having more of a central role in public rituals such as weddings and funerals.[6]

In this article, I focus on two of these free churches—the Brethren and the Pentecostals. Focusing on the relationship between two Christian churches in the Faroe Islands seems perhaps especially apt considering Courtney Handman's (2015) recent argument that for many Christians, their primary 'Others' to which they (critically) relate is very often other Christians. In my case, seeing as how the Faroe Islands is more or less wholly Christian, it would really not make much sense to see the tension as lying between Christians and non-Christians, but rather the way different churches co-create one another *vis-à-vis* their inherent similarities and differences. So while on one level the free churches can be seen as very similar in their general critique of the Lutheran church (based in an inherent iconoclastic form of critique of what they see as ritual formalism in the latter), they also differ wildly in how they see themselves in dispensational and soteriological terms. For simplicity, let us call these positions of *orthodoxy* (Brethren) and *presentism* (Pentecostals). The Brethren, for their part, subscribe to a literalist reading of the Bible, arguing for all Truth to be ultimately found in Scripture, whereas the Pentecostals supplement Biblical truth with revelatory experience.

The Brethren[7] trace their beginnings in the Faroe Islands to the year 1865, when the Scottish missionary William Gibson Sloan arrived in the country to evangelize the Brethren faith. Historical theologist Gerhard Hansen (1984) writes about the arrival of the Plymouth Brethren to the Faroe Islands, along with the growth of the Home Mission around the turn of the 20th century. Hansen points out that the growth of these Revivalist movements resonates strongly with other changes in Faroese society around the same time. In 1856, nine years before Sloan arrived in the Faroe Islands, the Danish trade monopoly was abolished which led not only to an increase in the amount of economic trade going on, but also to a large increase in population size, demographic changes such as increased urbanization, and a change in the forms of labour, moving away from subsistence farming and hunting towards wage labour and industrialized fishing. What historians have pointed out so far is that the growth of the Revivalist movements should be seen as strongly determined by these developments (G. Hansen 1984; Jóansson 2012; Sølvará 2010). As the argument goes, changes in sociological factors necessarily lead to changes in the religious needs of society and individuals. What the Revivalist movements offered was a way for individuals to move away from a position of dependency in relation to the state church towards a more individualized form of religious practice within the Revivalist movements that resonated with their increased focus on individual pursuits, for example in the form of wage labour, where ideally the individual him- or herself decides how to offer their productive energy.

What this new Revivalist movement preached was more or less completely novel in the Faroe Islands and a break from the almost wholly state church-run form of religious life that had pervaded the islands until this point in time. The Brethren, tracing their origins back to the Scottish Enlightenment, mounted a strong critique of existing Christian practice at the time, arguing that the highly ritualized and habitual forms of practice seen in the state church fell short in creating and maintaining an active relationship between God and individuals. Instead, they preached an ascetic Christian lifestyle where God was to be at the center of everything that the individual did, as opposed to the 'Sundays-and-holidays' church

attendance seen in the state church. The tension between the state church and the Brethren came to a climax when the Brethren started to perform 'Believer's Baptism' in Tórshavn. The state church had performed infant baptism for hundreds of years, but now the Brethren were critiquing this ritual for being tantamount to heresy, rather baptizing individuals after their conversion to the new form of faith. This created so much tension between the state church and the Brethren that William Sloan, the Scottish missionary, had to leave the city for some time due to harassment, and the Brethren gained the derogatory term *baptistar* (Baptists[8]) (Jóansson 2012: 124).

But the Home Mission and the Brethren were not to be the final instance of groups of Christians breaking away from the established church. Towards the end of the 1920s another break happened. A Swedish missionary by the name of Herbert Larsson was invited to speak at *Ebenezer*, the largest Brethren congregation in the Faroe Islands, situated in Tórshavn. During this sermon, he preached of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the form of speaking in tongues, faith healing, and prophetic words. This sermon, however, was not well received among the Brethren. After the sermon, a group of Brethren left the congregation to go on to form the first gathering of Pentecostal-minded Christians in the Faroe Islands. This small gathering would later be galvanized by a visit from the British-born Norwegian pastor Thomas Ball Barratt, who is seen as one of the founding figures of Pentecostalism in Europe. This group of people would go on to found *Filadelfia*, the first Pentecostal proto-church in the Faroe Islands. It was not until the end of the 1940s, however, that a Pentecostal church proper would be founded, this time when the Norwegian-born Arly Lund founded *Evangeliihúsið* (Pétursson 1991). What I wish to note is that already in its earliest iterations, Pentecostal movements set themselves apart from the Brethren, and the axiomatic difference was always spirit gifts and the role of the Holy Spirit.

As was relayed to me by a formerly high-standing member of *Evangeliihúsið* (now *City Church*), the first Pentecostal church in the Faroe Islands, the Brethren movement emerged as part of, or at least parallel to, the Scottish Enlightenment. This movement came to be based mostly on what we have come to see as some of the most central central aspects of modern thought, such as rationalism and an avoidance of generally emotion-based religious expression. Most central in this regard is that the Brethren can be seen as a generally *logocentric* religious movement. What this means is that the Brethren have a strong predilection for the written word, and as such, their conception of truth is not one based on continual revelation of God to humans through the Holy Spirit, but rather they subscribe to the idea that any divine truth is ultimately to be found in the Bible.[9] During an interview, the interlocutor in question coupled this logocentrism with the historical emergence of the Brethren. As this 'new faith' was starting to find ground in British society, it was engaged in an attempt to do away with all the 'hocus pocus' of ritualized Christianity (most notably in the Anglican church) of the day and so attempted to focus on modern ideals of rational knowledge and minimal reliance on high-flying theological conceptions that legitimized what the Brethren saw as a corruption of the ideals of Christianity. These points of critique were aimed primarily at the clergy of the existing Anglican churches and the Brethren wanted rather to have a church made up of a group of equals (hence the name). What got lost in the process, as my interlocutor would have it, was the Holy Spirit, as the idea of concrete manifestations of the Holy Spirit (for

example in the practice of speaking in tongues) had come to resemble irrational practices found in other religious settings.

During my stay in the Faroe Islands, I have attended services and other activities mostly in two churches—*City Church*, which has its roots in some of the earliest expressions of Pentecostalism in the country, and *Ebenezer*, a Brethren congregation which was founded in Tórshavn at the end of the 19th century. At times, I would attend services in *City Church* in the morning and *Ebenezer* in the evening on a given Sunday. The difference in what can be heard from the pulpit in the two churches is striking. A common trope that can be heard in *City Church*, for example, is that Christianity is not, and should not be, about only preaching the Gospel in a way that will get individuals to convert to the Christian faith, but that all of one's personal energy as a Christian individual should be directed towards functioning as an instrument of extending God's blessing in the world. One of the most common refrains to be heard is that 'we should be *real* (*verulig*) towards other people', meaning that life in the present should be enough in itself for creating and maintaining relationships with people outside the church. Some hours later, I would attend the evening service at *Ebenezer*, and there would be a tangible feeling of humanity living in its 'Final Days'. Here the common refrain is to plead with non-specific individuals who may have found their way into the service hall on this particular evening to consider whether or not they 'have settled their accounts' in relation to the question of the debt of their own sinfulness. And the way to settle these accounts is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and by accepting Him as one's Lord and Saviour. Here, Heaven and Hell take on a tangible existence inasmuch as it is made clear that history itself is close to its final ending and that it is an urgent necessity that individuals sort out their spiritual allegiances before it is too late—encapsulated in another common refrain: 'Do you know where you are headed'?

In order to get a bit closer to this central difference between the two churches, let us look at the general outlines of Pentecostalism itself. Central to Pentecostal and Charismatic theology,[10] as opposed to their more conservative Evangelical counterparts, is the centrality of a divine agency in the world and the role of spiritual revelation in religious practice (Meyer 2006; on the centrality of the question of divine providence see Taylor 2007). This revelation is based on the Biblical story of Acts 2:1–4 (New International Version) where the Apostles are gathered on the day of the Pentecost:

> *1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

Today, this form of Christian practice is seen in the way miracles and spiritual experiences often play a central role in the different churches' ritual and social lives. For example, Thomas Csordas (1994) shows how among Catholic Charismatics, there is a strong predilection towards emphasizing personal experience of the divine spirit in ritual healing, be it healing of physical ailments, psychological therapeutics, or demonic exorcism. Crudely put, whereas 'traditional' Catholicism has had a strong focus on formal ritual practice, adding the 'Charismatic' suffix moves that formal ritualism towards a focus on what personal experiences are afforded by specific ritual

practices. Of course, a focus on individual experience is not a completely novel idea within the history of Christianity, but it did gain a certain impetus with the rise of Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of Christianity throughout the 20th century (Bialecki 2014). In the case of the Faroe Islands, this theology stands in stark contrast to that of the Brethren. For the Brethren, while the personal relationship between the individual and God is still emphasized, they do not believe in the sort of intense spiritual experience as seen among Pentecostals and Charismatics (for example in the practice of speaking in tongues). Rather, the Brethren take on a more orthodox approach and see truth as always inherently knowable through Biblical scripture. As such, the Brethren in the Faroe Islands have always had a strong predisposition for the written word, not only in its Biblical form, but also in their publishing of written materials (Jóansson 2012: 147).

While both the Brethren and the Pentecostals subscribe to many of the same tenets of faith, generally understood as encapsulated in historian David Bebbington's (1989) definition of evangelicalism as being based in Biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism, they seemingly differ on the question of divine intervention and the role of the spirit gifts (and by extension, to the role of the Holy Spirit). And it seems to me that this disagreement between the two is to be found more than anything in ideas about the dispensations, or put differently, in ideas about humanity's place in the grand history set in motion by God himself. As my previously mentioned interlocutor went on to say in the same interview, the Brethren make the argument based on 1 Corinth 13:8–10 (NIV) which reads:

> *8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.*

This phrasing, 'when completeness comes', my interlocutor told me, is what the Brethren read as meaning the day that the Bible itself is complete. On this day, the gifts of the spirit are thought to be superfluous since all that humanity needs can be found in written form. Needless to say, for the Pentecostals in the Faroe Islands this reading of 1 Corinth 13 makes no sense, instead believing it to refer to the day of *parousia* of the final days when humanity and divinity once again come to their initial approximation.

HISTORY AND PRESENCE

How are we to 'read' these differing accounts of dispensationalism in two Christian movements in the Faroe Islands? We can begin by looking at the existing literature on Christianity in the Faroe Islands and more specifically the assumptions they make about religious history and religion's place in a broader sociological setting. It is my argument that this literature has quite a limited view of what counts for historical factors in the development of Christianity in the Faroes, or at the very least, that these accounts do not give enough consideration to how different groups of Christians themselves see their history. Also, the concept of history that the authors have employed seems to be very much based on some classic theories of religion that are employed to varying degree in different disciplines and different empirical contexts. The most central of these is the concept of sociological denomination theory.

Founded on the works of Ernst Troeltsch (1992) and H. Richard Niebuhr (1929), this theory has proved resilient in historical analyses of churches in the social sciences. Broadly stated, this theory holds that denominations go through a sort of cyclical historical process whereby a denomination starts with a small sect that believes it has found some sort of religious or theological truth and breaks away from established society for members to devote themselves to practices based on the ideals of their new-found truths. Over time, this sect grows and much of the radical energy and fervor found in its early days becomes more and more domesticized and the sect gradually moves from being a sect towards being a church proper, which becomes the baseline of religious practice in a given society. Later, a group of people within this new church again find issue with some of the church's teachings, discover some new religious or theological truth, and break away, forming a new sect, and so the cycle continues. As the term 'sociological' in the title of the theory points to, this theory has its merits more than anything in the way that it is able to anchor denominational life to broader society and the way in which denominations can be seen as part of a holistic set of institutional relationships within that society.

This conceptual framework has been strongly applied by scholars on the history of Christianity in the Faroe Islands, most notably in the previously mentioned work by Gerhard Hansen as well as in the sole work on the arrival of Pentecostalism in the country by Pétur Pétursson (Pétursson 1991). In many ways, this line of thinking does make a great deal of sense, especially when applied to studies of religious societies in a Protestant context, which in its nature can be said to broadly function along these iconoclastic lines. We might say that Protestantism (at least in its ideal, Lutheran, form), is at its core a practice founded on this kind of ruptural historical imagination. Even soteriologically, Protestantism makes the claim that it is through a radical intervention in the life of the individual that Christianity (understood as entering a personal relationship with Jesus) makes its mark. In the Faroe Islands, this idea of interventionism also applies to the way Hansen and Pétursson show us that some of these sects (understood in the sociological sense) came to occupy a place in the religious landscape of the country. The argument can also be pushed further (see especially Rasmussen 1987) to encapsulate how some of these Revivalist movements brought with them not only theological ideas and changes in religious practices, but also came to have lasting effects on the Faroe Islands more generally, especially in language politics, which even today is an important venue for how nationalist politics play out.

As I mentioned earlier, this kind of temporal breakage has come to occupy a central place in the anthropology of Christianity, drawing strongly on the framework proposed by Joel Robbins (we might perhaps call this 'ruptural thinking'). Yet, there is a parallel line of analysis that emphasizes that continuity is also at the heart of many religious traditions. Talal Asad, for example, has shown how the continual reproduction of tradition is at the heart of Islam (Asad 1993), and even within what has come to be called the anthropology of Christianity, authors such as Chris Hann have argued that the new sub-discipline tends to over-emphasize these temporal breaks and obscure how Christianity itself is made up of many different traditions (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant etc.). As Hann argues, studies of Christianity have tended to focus mostly on the kinds of interventionist strands just mentioned which of course leads to strong arguments

in favour of Christianity *per se* being founded on the principles found in these movements (Hann 2007; 2014). In his own work Hann emphasizes the *longue durée* history of the Eastern Orthodox church, and in later years, we have also seen the anthropology of Christianity establish some of these lines of questioning in contexts that are not found in the kinds of Christianity such as Pentecostalism and other sects based on this kind of interventionist ideals (see for example Bandak 2017 on Orthodox Christianity; on Catholicism see Mayblin 2011). I do not wish to delve deeper into this particular discussion, other than to point out that the kind of ruptural thinking seen in the early days of the anthropology of Christianity have been much problematized in later years. However, it is my sense that this bifurcation of Christianities into ruptural (e.g. Protestant/Pentecostalism) and continual (e.g. Ortodox/Catholic) modalities itself obscures how some of these principles can be co-present in one and the same movement.

It is here that I find the Faroe Islands case to be instructive. And this especially so since the role of Pentecostalism in the country theologically stands in stark contrast to the otherwise ever-present kind of dispensationalist thinking found principally among the Brethren. Where the Brethren, as we have seen, subscribe to a strong reading of passages such as 1 Corinth 13 in favour of the near-disappearance of the Holy Spirit in the development of history, the Pentecostals still believe in the ever-present agency of the Spirit in all of life's circumstances. We might call this *dispensational disagreement*, and this is a concept that is at the heart of the tension between these different movements.[11] What I find highly noteworthy in all this is that the archetypal anthropological object for the argument of the ruptural nature of Christianity is exactly Pentecostalism, but in this tension between the Revivalist movements of the Faroe Islands, it is precisely the Pentecostals that show a tendency to emphasize the continuity with early Christianity, whereas it is the Brethren (whom we earlier called the orthodox branch) that seem to have more imagined points of rupture in the history of Christianity since the days of Jesus. It is in this sense that we should understand the concept of dispensational disagreement, in that the different sects might be said to live within wholly different historical trajectories, as the Pentecostals see themselves as partaking of the continual dispensation of history initiated by the death and resurrection (and subsequent Heavenly ascent) of Jesus Christ, a dispensation in which the Holy Spirit is one of the prime movers of history as a whole.

It is my claim that analyses such as that of Hansen (of the emergence of the Revivalist movements in the Faroe Islands) actually 'work'. However, I would argue that the main reason for this is that the backdrop of this analysis fits very well with the kind of dispensational thinking that pertains to the Brethren. The conclusions in Hansen's work resonate strongly with the developments seen around the turn of the 20th century, and what is more, time's arrow as it is found in sociological denomination theory fits very well with later developments, at least among the Brethren in the Faroe Islands (Jóansson 2012). However, following the arguments made by Jon Bialecki (2014), this way of seeing church development falls notably short when applied to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, which I will return to shortly. Perhaps most important is the fact that the Brethren's dispensationalism is also an inherently *eschatological* theology. So not only does this theology explain 'backwards' how the events of the Bible were to be seen as God acting in different ways towards humanity in different dispensations, it also points to the future. This future has some quite clear ideas about what is to come—the second coming of

Christ, the Rapture of Christian believers, and the final Apocalypse where life on Earth ends and humanity is faced with the Final Judgement (Harding 2000; Robbins 2001; Webster 2013). What is important to note for our present purposes is that Brethren theology actually fits quite well with how 'history' is often imagined. There is a clear and definite sequentiality in which one thing leads into another. It is an analysis that allows for history to have either a teleology, or at the very least a temporal field to expand into.

Naomi Haynes (2020; see also Agamben 2010; Coleman 2011) has recently called this shortening of Pentecostal temporality the *expansive present*, a concept that encapsulates quite well how my own interlocutors speak of their own place in history (or we might say, how they speak of the present dispensation). In my own materials, this is seen in how a church such as *City Church* constantly works towards extending the Blessing of the Gospel to other persons in society, regardless of these persons' professed personal convictions as regards questions of salvation and similar. While other temporal modalities are also co-present (we might say, for example, that the eschaton has been placed in the background), there is an overwhelming emphasis on the here-and-now, with the idea that one's relationship with God should lead to blessings in *this* life rather than a redemptive moment on the Day of Judgement.[12] The main principle behind this is that the church is seen not as being instantiated after the fact of, for example, the Biblical canon being completed (the Brethren reading of 1 Corinth 13), but is instead a continuation of the church of the Apostles as seen in Acts and the subsequent books of the New Testament.[13] In the words of the British-born Norwegian pastor Thomas Ball Barratt, previously noted as one of the founding figures of Pentecostalism in Europe, the goal is to go 'onward to primitive Christianity' (Hegertun 2015). What is important in this wording of what Barratt saw as the ideal of the Pentecostal church is that it is decidedly not an advancement of what Christianity had come to be at the turn of the 20th century but rather the reiteration of a kind of Christianity which had always been present since the story of Pentecost in the New Testament. The problem, as I see it, is that anthropology (or perhaps social sciences in general) has as yet not been able to appropriately capture this kind of expansive present in the way that some Christian groups seem to see their place in history. It is an argument for not applying our own pre-conceived notions of historicity onto all groups that we study. In the Faroe Islands, while current works in the social sciences that deal with the history of Christianity in the country have been able to give quite a strong account of the emergence and history of the Brethren movement (and to some extent also the Home Mission, which I have not been able to deal with in detail here, see Pons 2009, 2011), most of the other churches and congregations are much less understood, barring a few scattered works (J. Hansen 2014; Pétursson 1991). It is in the spirit of my argument here that one of the reasons for this relative lack of understanding is partly due to the difficulties that theologies such as that of Pentecostalism present to social science.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have taken up the issue of Christian temporality and how we as social scientists conceptualize the histories of the people that we study. I have used the inherent tension between two Christian movements in the Faroe Islands to point to what I have called dispensational disagreement, which can

be understood as an ethnographic example of tensions in historicity, which in turn seem to lend some groups of people to being better understood because of the way in which their own historicity fits with ideas common in the social sciences. I have argued that this difference in theology among different groups of Christians should be taken into account when we tread the waters of the now well-known debate in anthropology as to the nature of Christian temporality, that is often understood as being either based on a modality of rupture, or one of continuity (Robbins 2007).

NOTES

1 It should be noted, however, that this interest was not completely absent in anthropology prior to this temporal/historical turn. Benjamin Lee Whorf's (2011) controversial claims about Hopi grammar and its relation to the experience of time is one prime example.

2 Importantly, some of these first attempts took much inspiration from the existing anthropology of Islam (see Asad 1986).

3 In this article, I do not directly engage the question of the different forms of millennialism.

4 These are of course very broad outlines but they generally fit with how dispensationalism lays out the history of mankind.

5 Note however, that these numbers can be somewhat misleading, as the Lutheran church in principle contains all new-borns in the country, leading to an 'opt-out' form of membership. This is also compounded by the fact that many churches do not keep formal membership.

6 The Home Mission is formally part of the Lutheran church, and so is somewhat of an outlier when it comes to the free churches.

7 The Plymouth Brethren are generally understood to be divided into either the Open or Closed Brethren based on their different views on sectarianism. The variant found in the Faroe Islands is of the Open kind (see Jóansson 2012; Webster 2013).

8 Note that there is no strong, direct formal connection to the Anabaptists.

9 Which is not to say that Pentecostals have a lesser view of Biblical scripture. Rather, Pentecostals see revelation as an ongoing phenomenon between God and humans that is 'added to' scripture.

10 'Charismatic' Christianity refers to mainline churches which have since adopted many of the hallmarks of Pentecostal practice into their religious practice, such as speaking in tongues and faith healing. The word itself, *charisma*, is derived from Old Greek and translates approximately to a 'gift of grace'. While Pentecostalism proper emerged in the beginning of the 20th century, most churches who adopted charismatic practices did so starting around the 1960s (see Csordas 1994). In current scholarship on the subject, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are usually categorized as belonging to more or less the same broad category of Christian practice.

11 It should be noted that while this tension can be traced to disagreements that have played out over the last ~200 years of the history of Christianity in Western countries, the problem of 'cessationism versus continuationism' goes back at least as far as the Early Church Fathers (Ruthven 1993).

12 Of course, as much as we can call this a 'Pentecostal Theology' it can be argued that there as many *theologies* as there are Pentecostal churches (see Haynes 2018). My argument here rests on my own ethnographic work among (neo-) Pentecostals in the Faroe Islands and the way in which they conceptualize their own place in history. The question of these Pentecostals' thoughts about the future and the afterlife are dealt with in (Jensen forthcoming). Following arguments made by Eriksen et al. (2019), Pentecostals generally focus on Christianity as a religion of *life* in there here and now. In the case of the Faroe Islands, this argument applies well to how my own interlocutors talk about the future.

13 A similar case of Christians living out what they see as a more 'primitive' form of Christianity can be found in James Bielo's (2011) work among 'Emerging Evangelicals'. In that case, people actively work towards living a life that is similar to what they see among Jesus' disciples in the New Testament, for example the renunciation of a striving for worldly belongings and a personal involvement in missionizing among one's own society's members (Bielo 2011; see also Bialecki 2009).

REFERENCES

Agamben, Giorgio 2010. *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Translated by Patricia Dailey. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Asad, Talal 1986. The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam. In *Occasional Paper Series*. Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University.

Asad, Talal 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bandak, Andreas 2017. Repeated Prayers: Saying the Rosary in Contemporary Syria. *Religion* 47 (1): 92–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2016.1237158.

Bebbington, David 1989. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Bialecki, Jon 2009. Disjuncture, Continental Philosophy's New 'Political Paul,' and the Question of Progressive Christianity in a Southern California Third Wave Church. *American Ethnologist* 36 (1): 110–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2008.01102.x.

Bialecki, Jon 2014. After the Denominozoic: Evolution, Differentiation, Denominationalism. *Current Anthropology* 55 (10): 193–204. https://doi.org/10.1086/678284.

Bielo, James S. 2011. *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*. New York: New York University Press. https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814789544.001.0001.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Coleman, Simon 2011. 'Right Now!': Historiopraxy and the Embodiment of Charismatic Temporalities. *Ethnos* 76 (4): 426–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2011.580354.

Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff 1986. Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa. *American Ethnologist* 13 (1): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1986.13.1.02a00010.

Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol 2*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Csordas, Thomas J. 1994. *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing*. London: University of California Press.

Eriksen, Annelin, Ruy Llera Blanes and Michelle MacCarthy 2019. *Going to Pentecost: An Experimental Approach to Studies in Pentecostalism*. New York: Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9hj8pw.

Fabian, Johannes 1983. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Gell, Alfred 1992. *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images*. Oxford: Berg.

Handman, Courtney 2015. *Critical Christianity: Translation and Denominational Conflict in Papua New Guinea*. Berkeley: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520959514.

Hann, Chris 2007. The Anthropology of Christianity per Se. *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 48 (03): 383–410. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975607000410.

Hann, Chris 2014. The Heart of the Matter: Christianity, Materiality, and Modernity. *Current Anthropology* 55 (10): 182–92. https://doi.org/10.1086/678184.

Hansen, Gerhard 1984. *Vækkelsesbevægelsernes Møde med Færingernes Enhedskultur: en analyse ca. 1850–1918*. Tórshavn: Føroya Fróðskaparfelag.

Hansen, Janna 2014. *Betwixt and Between: religion og religiøsitet på Færøerne i det 21. århundrede*. Tórshavn: Fróðskapur.

Harding, Susan F. 2000. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691190464.

Haynes, Naomi 2018. Theology on the Ground. In J. Derrick Lemons (ed.). *Theologically Engaged Anthopology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haynes, Naomi 2020. The Expansive Present: A New Model of Christian Time. *Current Anthropology* 61 (1): 57–76. https://doi.org/10.1086/706902.

Hegertun, Terje 2015. Thomas Ball Barratt and 'the Spirit of Unity.' *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 35 (1): 34–47. https://doi.org/10.1179/1812446114Z.0000000006.

Jensen, Jan forthcoming. Reconfiguring Hell: Urgency and Salvation in a Faroe Islands Christian Church.

Jóansson, Tórður 2012. *Brethren in the Faroes: An Evangelical Movement, Its Remarkable Growth and Lasting Impact in a Remote Island Community*. Tórshavn: Fróðskapur.

Mayblin, Maya 2011. Death by Marriage: Power, Pride, and Morality in Northeast Brazil. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (1): 135–53. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2010.01673.x.

Meyer, Birgit 2006. Religious Revelation, Secrecy and the Limits of Visual Representation. *Anthropological Theory* 6 (4): 431–53. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499606071596.

Munn, Nancy D. 1992. The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1): 93–123. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.21.100192.000521.

Niebuhr, H. Richard 1929. *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. New York: Henry Holt.

Pétursson, Pétur 1991. *Från väckelse till samfund: Svensk pingstmission på øarna i Nordatlanten*. Lund: Lund University Press.

Pons, Christophe 2009. The Problem with Islands: Comparing Mysticisms in Iceland and Faroe Islands. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 22 (2): 145–63.

Pons, Christophe 2011. The Anthropology of Christianity in the Faroe Islands. In Firouz Gaini (ed.). *Among the Islanders of the North*. Tórshavn: Fróðskapur.

Rasmussen, Petur Martin 1987. *Den Færøske Sprogrejsning, med særligt henblik på kampen om færøsk som kirkesprog i national og partipolitisk belysning*. Tórshavn: í Hoydølum.

Robbins, Joel 2001. Secrecy and the Sense of an Ending: Narrative, Time, and Everyday Millenarianism in Papua New Guinea and in Christian Fundamentalism. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43 (3): 525–51.

Robbins, Joel 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. California: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520937086.

Robbins, Joel 2007. Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture. Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity. *Current Anthropology* 48 (1): 5–38. https://doi.org/10.1086/508690.

Ruthven, Jon M. 1993. *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles*. Tulsa: Word & Spirit Press.

Sølvará, Hans Andrias 2010. Guðfrøðistreymar og trúarligar vekingarrørslur í Føroyum og Íslandi. In *Frændafundur 7*. Reykjavík, Iceland.

Taylor, Charles 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Troeltsch, Ernst 1992. *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox.

Webster, Joseph 2013. *The Anthropology of Protestantism: Faith and Crisis among Scottish Fishermen*. First edition. Contemporary Anthropology of Religion. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137336545.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee 2011. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Mansfield Center: Martino Publishing.

Wolf, Eric R. 1982. *Europe and the People Without History*. London: University of California Press.

JAN JENSEN, PhD Cand.
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
jj480@cam.ac.uk