

THE MESSIAH A POLITICAL PROJECT

A critical view of the origin
and evolution of Christianity

JUAN CATRON

INTRODUCTION

The historical process of building a collective identity and reinforcing it is a key item to understand peoples and political movements.

Centuries ago, religion and politics were one and the same, a single power that was consolidated and perpetuated through all kinds of strategies: prophecies were invented, royal lines of descent harking back to a Supreme Being were established by decree, entire peoples were enslaved and exorbitant taxes were levied...

Charles Tilly, the sociologist (2005, 2007) showed that every people has a limited repertory of collective actions, or ways of acting in common, based on shared interests. He has also offered a comprehensive framework for the study of political movements that become coercive, tending to forcibly sway the will or behavior of a community, tribe or nation. As for building social barriers and networks of trust, he has pointed out that political opportunists and specialists in the effect of violence know only too well that to consolidate their position of dominance they must maximize the polarization of the "Us – Them" dividing line. Tilly remarks ironically that peacekeeping specialists are also necessarily specialists in violence.

Human beings, especially some groups, perhaps due to certain circumstances of life, feel a "strong need" to restrict their bonding to a small circle, thus keeping the bond alive and creating a sense of exclusiveness among themselves. An example of this would be someone proclaiming himself to be the Chosen One, and his group to be the favorite of the Supreme Divinity, a frequent occurrence in various cultures.

According to Judaism, Zion, originally a fortress that was supposedly conquered by King David and one of Jerusalem's biblical names, is God's Promised Land for the Jews. Since the first century of the Christian era, most Jews have lived in exile.

After the Bar Kochba Revolt (132- 135 of the Christian era), they were expelled from the land of Israel to form the Diaspora. For centuries, a latent kind of Zionism existed among the Jewish Diaspora; a major religious-based nostalgia, with many of them

yearning to return to the biblical land, a land which their ancestors had showered with praise. A land that was specially chosen for them and that that nobody will ever take away from them again (according to their tribal ancestors) and a land that, among other things, would give birth to a great king, a Divine-anointed “chosen one” (an own Pharaoh, in fact) whose kingdom, based in Jerusalem, would last forever...

The birth of Zionism is partially linked to the emergence of nationalist ideologies in 19th century Europe, having in common the “one people, one state” leitmotif that underlies the nation-state concept. The aims of the Zionist political project, among others, are:

- The strengthening of the State of Israel based on its own prophetic vision of justice and peace.
- The preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the promotion of Jewish, Hebrew and Zionist education and Jewish spiritual and cultural values.

However, without a doubt the Bible is the most inspiring text of all, a ferment of inspiration telling an amazing story; the story of a group of men that were organizing themselves politically in an increasingly complex way under the assumed protection of all kinds of heavenly influences. The ancestors of the Jewish people wrote a moving story, generating a fantastic self-image.

Regrettably, any self-image, whether it be collective or individual, is not exempt from the generation of conflicts and problems... it usually functions as a mask of hypocrisy. Alfred Adler (1907) noted how certain feelings and thoughts about oneself, favored by adverse circumstances, produce a sense (an image) of inferiority and a tendency to overcome it through neurotic over-compensation.

Ever since high school we have been taught that monarchy, the “government of a single person” in its extreme or, if you will, pure version, is a form of government in which the monarch (whether bearing the title of King, Emperor, Inca, Pharaoh, Anointed, Kaiser, Tsar, Messiah, Sultan or any other) wields absolute power. In this system there is no division of power (executive, legislative and judicial). Although the administration of justice may show a relative autonomy in the case of the king, or parliamentary institutions may exist, the absolute monarch is free to change the decisions or rulings of the courts in the final instance, or reform laws at his/her will (The word of the king/queen is law). The amalgamation of all three powers is usually rationalized by taking into account the fact that the source of royal power is God; the term God justifying everything in this case.

“Power comes from God”. Most cultures have tried to justify power using God’s name. The meaning of the former age-old expression is not easy to pinpoint, beyond an evident intention of manipulation through the invoking of sacred authority. Perhaps it can be taken to mean that due to the mere fact of the existence of power in all societies, in order to keep them all cohesive, this power must have an outside and unquestioned source.

Over time this concept of a king whose power and justification proceeded from Divine sources began to be questioned: It implied the admission that tyrannical power also came from God... but all power was justifiable: How could such a thing be? The reason was the weakness or wickedness of the people themselves, who were thus punished. On the other hand, obviously, an Anointed One, the king of one’s dreams and God’s favorite, could even shoulder the guilt and suffering of others.

Humanity has always dreamt individually and collectively of a better present-future. As much so in times gone by as today, a Divinely inspired king or a President is the center of wide-ranging expectations. Beautiful examples of this may be found in the ancient histories of the peoples of the Mediterranean, Asia Minor and many other regions: protection against enemy peoples, streets paved with gold, lovely virgins (houris) available only to believers; “security in our time”, subway systems, tax relief, social justice...

A heavy dose of thought, speculation and political practice in Christian societies has brought us from the relative separation between temporal and spiritual power to the current democratic solution, which albeit imperfect is nevertheless better than its alternatives, as proven by its application in a number of countries.

Conceivably this separation has been a major deception with specific purposes, or perhaps not... what is a fact, however, is that culturally we still tend to endow certain real and/or perhaps imaginary subjects with a kind of absolute power and/or divine authority in the spiritual plane... those subjects whose stories are narrated in ancient texts and who nowadays have their vicars and successors.

To carry out a politically inspired critical analysis of the origin and development of the Judeo-Christian institution of Messianism it is convenient to start from a small set of basic questions.:

How was the idea of a Jewish Messiah born?

Did the Jesus of the Canonical Gospels exist?

Why did a Jewish figure take over as the “only God” in Imperial Rome?

It is therefore necessary for us to analyze and understand a number of historical, literary, sociological, political, religious and anthropological variables centered on the place and the time at which Christianity was being developed.

“The diversity of Christianity in the first century is greater than we can imagine...” (King, 2005).¹ So we may ask: Why do so many distinct original versions exist? Was there no hard historical truth behind these movements? Time goes by, and one version is canonized and becomes the accepted truth... Is the official history of Christianity the triumph of one position over others, and therefore a case of reductionism?

Each section of this paper contains and expresses a concern, which is basically a key response to the subject under analysis.

Decades and even centuries of in-depth study carried out by notable scholars and researchers are interpreted in this text.

These are different pathways which have been taken toward one and the same destination.

The birth and origin of the “Messiah Project”, “the historical evolution of the Messiah concept outside of Judaism” are topics that have long aroused my interest, an interest born as an adolescent after discovering some contradictions that arose when I compared the canonical gospels. Then came years of reading and research, which added new questions.

Truth, freedom and happiness are closely entwined. The tradition of a people confers identity to its children, but perhaps in many cases this identity can become a prison cell, a restrictive mold, a closed version of the Being whose nature we all share.

Did Jesus exist? Or is he a fictional character? Or perhaps Christ was a rabbi?

In *Jesús, 3000 años antes de Cristo* (Jesus, 3000 years before Christ) by Claude-Brigitte

¹ Source quote: “La diversidad del Cristianismo del primer siglo es mayor de lo que podemos imaginar.”

Carcenac (2003); the author states that the Christ of the gospels is a compendium of various previous myths (Osiris offers his blood in a glass of wine etc.).

In the text *La Conspiración de Cristo: La Mayor ficción de la Historia* (The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Work of Fiction in History) by Achayra S. (the author's pseudonym) a story is told of all the "Christs", with all their surprising similarities. Some researchers and scholars of the subject who are among "the Christians' older brothers" (as John Paul II fondly called the Jews in 1986), Joseph Klausner (1991 [1907]), David Flusser (1995), and Mario Saban (2008) say that if Jesus existed, he did not invent anything at all, and that everything he supposedly said was already being taught by them, so to all intents and purposes he invented a sect in which non-Jews could take part.

The theological limit of Judaism is the belief that when a person is considered to be a God, this constitutes idolatry. For a Jew to continue being a Jew, he may never commit "avoda zara" or idol worship. As Nahmanides (1194- 1270) said in the year 1263, "The difference between Christianity and Judaism is not whether Jesus is the Messiah or not, but rather whether Jesus is a man or God".²

That is why it is impossible for Jesus, if he existed, to have proclaimed himself to be God.

Furthermore, now some Discovery Channel documentaries and texts such as the Da Vinci Code, etc. lead us to believe that the Emperor Constantine ordered the selection and rewriting of a huge number of promising gospels for the creation of an Imperial cult. And that in Rome several people had been deified before Jesus, such as Caesar, who also had a gospel of his own.

How much truth is there in the official Christian story of Jesus?

Since the time of the Qur'an (or Koran), it is written that Muslims do not believe that Jesus was crucified nor obviously that he died on the cross. It was the plan of Jesus' enemies to crucify and kill him, but God saved his life and raised him up to His presence. Jesus' appearance was given to another person, and Jesus' enemies apprehended this man and crucified him, thinking he was Jesus.

² Source quote: "La diferencia entre el cristianismo y el judaísmo no es si Jesús es el Mesías o no lo es, sino si Jesús es un hombre o es Dios."

...“And they (The Jews) said: ‘We have killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Messenger of Allah’. But they neither killed him nor crucified him, but rather they were tricked into killing another in his place. Dissenters have doubts on this score. They do not have accurate knowledge but rather follow assumptions, and most certainly he was not killed by them”... ³ (Koran, 4:157)

But now new fronts emerge, generating all kinds of doubts:

- The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls that is still under analysis
- The Gospel according to Thomas found in Egypt in 1945
- Some suggestions from the best selling novel “The Da Vinci Code”
- Everything that is currently being discovered by archaeologists
- The Discovery Channel documentaries, for example the one on the number of “Christs” that have existed
- The dream of greatness of a people such as the Jewish one that believed itself to be chosen
- The number of contradictions in the Gospels
- The creation of Christianity as an official religion in the time of the Emperor Constantine.

...although perhaps all of the foregoing is part of a ploy promoted by some of the media.

The latest news: Judas was one of the “good guys”

The discovery was made in Egypt in the 1970s of the “Secret Chronicle of the revelation made by Jesus in his conversation with Judas Iscariot”, a text that has been called “The

³ Source quote: “Y dijeron (Los judíos): Hemos matado al Mesías Jesús hijo de María, el Mensajero de Allah. Pero no le mataron ni le crucificaron, sino que se les hizo confundir con otro a quien mataron en su lugar. Quienes discrepan sobre él tienen dudas al respecto. No tienen conocimiento certero, sino que siguen suposiciones, y ciertamente no lo mataron”.

Gospel of Judas”, disclosed by the National Geographic Society in 2006. It is a priceless papyrus. The text is only a few decades older than the gospels of the New Testament. In his writings dating from 180 AD, Bishop Irenaeus had given his opinion on it. In this version of Jesus’ words, Judas is not a traitor, he is a good man, and Jesus asks him to betray him.

Everything is becoming increasingly confusing...

To make matters worse, in the New Testament we find major contradictions in the episode of the tragic death of the character Judas: in the Gospel according to Matthew Judas gives back the money for which he betrayed Jesus and hangs himself; but in the Acts of the Apostles the poor Judas buys a piece of land with this money, where he supposedly jumps head-first off a cliff, his body bursting open, and this “well known” site in Jerusalem comes to be called “the Field of Blood”.

Always returning to the “sources”, so as to think from the beginning

Why do the gospels have such a wealth of detail from the Last Supper to the Resurrection of Christ?

Matthew and Mark devote almost 2 entire chapters to it, Luke 3. In John’s case, it is spectacular: he devotes half of his gospel to it, preserving even the “farewell speeches” in verbatim form... (“I am going to the father, I am the Vine, The Spirit will come, the prayers”...⁴)

Is it not strange how clearly and in how much detail those who wrote the gospels remember this moment in Jesus’ life?

It is especially striking when compared with all that they said about the rest of his life and work.

What may lie behind this patent attitude of “selective memory”? Could these chapters have been added years later?

⁴ Source quote: “Yo voy al Padre, Yo soy la vid, El Espíritu vendrá, las oraciones”.