

**The Secret of  
the Prince of Peace**

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**T**HE DREAMWORK of Western civilization is not fundamentally different from the dreamworks of other peoples. Only a knowledge of practical circumstances is needed to penetrate its mysteries.

In the case before us, there really are very few practical options to choose from. It would be most convenient if the dating of Jesus's ministry was wrong—if it could be shown that Jesus had not begun to urge his fellow Jews to love the Romans until after the fall of Jerusalem. But an error of forty years in the conventional chronology of events such as Judas of Galilee's tax revolt or Pontius Pilate's governorship is inconceivable.

Although we cannot be in error about *when* Jesus spoke, there are many reasons to suppose that we are in error about *what* he spoke. A simple practical solution to the questions raised at the close of the previous chapter is that Jesus was not as peaceful as is commonly believed, and that his actual teachings did not represent a fundamental break with the

tradition of Jewish military messianism. A strong pro-zealot-bandit and anti-Roman bias probably pervaded his original ministry. The decisive break with the Jewish messianic tradition probably came about only after the fall of Jerusalem, when the original politico-military components in Jesus' teachings were purged by Jewish Christians living in Rome and other cities of the empire as an adaptive response to the Roman victory. That, at least in brief, is the argument that I shall employ now in order to relate the paradoxes of peaceful messianism to the conduct of practical human affairs.

Continuity between the original teachings of Jesus and the military-messianic tradition is suggested by the close link that existed between Jesus and John the Baptist. Dressed in animal skins and eating nothing but locusts and wild honey, John the Baptist clearly corresponds to that genre of holy men whom Josephus describes as wandering about the badlands of the Jordan Valley, stirring up the peasants and slaves and making trouble for the Romans and their Jewish clients.

All four gospels agree that John the Baptist was the immediate forerunner of Jesus. His mission was to perform the work of Isaiah, to go into the wilderness—the bandit-infested backlands full of caves that echoed with the memories of Jahweh's covenant—and cry out: "Prepare ye the ways of the Lord; make his paths straight." (Repent for your sinfulness, recognize your guilt, so that you may at least be rewarded with the promised empire.) John "baptized" Jews who confessed their guilt and were properly penitent, bathing them in a river or spring to symbolically wash away their sins. According to the gospels, Jesus was the Baptist's most famous penitent. Upon being washed in the Jordan River, Jesus embarked on the climactic phase of his life—the period

of active preaching that led to his death on the cross.

John the Baptist's career replicates the pattern of desert oracles described in the previous chapter. When the crowds around him grew too big, he was taken into custody by the nearest guardian of Roman law and order. This happened to be the puppet king, Herod Antipas, ruler of the part of Palestine east of the Jordan where the Baptist had been most active.

There is no hint in the gospels that John the Baptist might have been arrested because his activities were regarded as a threat to law and order. The entire politico-military dimension is absent. Instead we are told that John the Baptist's arrest resulted from his criticism of the marriage between Herod and Herodias, the divorced wife of one of Herod's brothers. The story goes on to attribute John the Baptist's execution not to any political motive but to Herodias's desire for revenge. Herodias gets her daughter Salome to dance for King Herod. The king is so pleased with the performance that he promises the dancer anything she wants. Salome announces she wants John the Baptist's head on a platter, and Herod complies. Herod is said to have been overcome with remorse, just as later on Pontius Pilate is said to have been overcome with remorse at the execution of Jesus. Considering what John the Baptist was telling the crowds in the wilderness before he was arrested, the lack of political references and the remorse attributed to Herod seem most inappropriate. What John preached was a pure military-messianic threat:

One mightier than I cometh—He shall baptize you in spirit and fire: his winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly

cleanse his threshing-floor, and gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.

Was Herod Antipas blind to the connection between the desert oracles and the zealot-bandits? A king whose reign was to last forty-three years and who was the son of the tyrant bandit-killer Herod the Great could not have been indifferent to the dangers involved in permitting people like John the Baptist to attract large crowds in the desert. And how could an oracle whose messiah was not related to the zealot-bandit cause attract such large crowds?

The Baptist's place in the military-messianic tradition has been clarified as a result of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These documents were found in a cave near the ruins of an ancient pre-Christian community called Quamran, located in the region where John baptized Jesus. Quamran itself was a religious commune dedicated, like John the Baptist, to "clearing the path in the wilderness." According to the commune's rich and previously unknown sacred literature, the history of the Jews was leading toward an Armageddon in which the Roman Empire would meet its doom. Rome was to be replaced by a new empire with its capital in Jerusalem, ruled over by a military messiah descended from a branch of the House of David, mightier than any Caesar yet seen on earth. Led by the "anointed one of Israel," invincible general, commander in chief, the Jewish "Sons of Light" were to go into battle against the Roman "Sons of Darkness." It would be a war of annihilation. Twenty-eight thousand Jewish warriors and six thousand charioteers were to strike against the Romans. They "will take up the pursuit in order to exterminate the enemy in an eternal annihilation . . . until

he is wiped out." Victory was guaranteed because "as thou hast declared to us from old; 'a star shall come forth from Jacob, a sceptre shall rise from Israel'" (the prophecy in the Book of Numbers that was later applied to Bar Kochva). Israel was to be victorious "because as in the past, through thine anointed ones thou hast devoured evil like a blazing torch in a swath of grain . . . for of old thou hast proclaimed that the enemy . . . shall fall by a sword not of man, and a sword not of man shall devour him."

The Quamranites had the order of battle worked out down to the last detail. They were even ready with a song of victory:

Arise, O Valiant One!  
Lead away Thy captives, O glorious Man!  
Do Thy plundering, O valorous One!  
Set Thy hand upon the neck of Thine enemies  
And Thy foot upon the heap of the slain!  
Strike the nations Thy enemies  
And let Thy sword devour guilty flesh!  
Fill the land with glory  
And Thine inheritance with blessing!  
A multitude of cattle in Thy pastures,  
Silver and gold and precious stones in thy palaces!  
O Zion, rejoice greatly!  
Appear amid shouts of joy, O Jerusalem!  
Show yourselves, O all you cities of Judah!  
Open thy gates forever.  
For the riches of the nations to enter in!  
And let their kings serve thee  
And let all thy oppressors bow down before thee  
And let them lick the dust of thy feet!

We know that the Quamranites sent missionaries to act as a vanguard for the Anointed One. Like John the Baptist, these missionaries are said to have eaten locusts and wild honey and dressed in the skins of animals. Like John the Baptist, their task was to make the children of Israel repent. It can't be proved that they also practiced baptism, but at Quamran itself archaeologists have uncovered extensive ritual bathing facilities. John's ritual of baptism may very well have been introduced as an abbreviated form of the more extensive ablutions and purificatory rites performed in the commune's baths and which in one form or another were long a part of Jewish ideas about spiritual cleanliness.

I think a point that needs special emphasis here is that the existence of this literature was not even hinted at in the writings of such people as Josephus or the authors of the Christian gospels. Without the scrolls we would know absolutely nothing about what these militant holy men were up to, because Quamran was destroyed by the Romans in 68 A.D. The communards sealed their sacred library in jars and hid them in nearby caves before the "Sons of Darkness" swooped down and obliterated the commune. Because they could not have been tampered with during the two thousand years their existence was forgotten, the scrolls now constitute one of the great manuscript sources of information about Judaism in the period immediately prior to, during, and shortly after the time of Christ.

The Quamran scrolls make it extremely difficult to separate John the Baptist's teachings as reported in the gospels from the mainstream of the Jewish military-messianic tradition. In the ambience of the prolonged and bloody guerrilla war with Rome, the Baptist's metaphor of "chaff burned in unquench-

able fire" cannot reasonably be opposed to what the Quamranites predict about a "blazing torch in a swath of grain." I don't propose to say what was in John the Baptist's mind, but the earthly context in which his behavior should be judged can't be that of a religion as yet unborn. I can only think of his reported sayings and actions in the context of a dusty, surging ragtag mass of peasants, guerrillas, tax evaders, and thieves, knee-deep in the Jordan, burning with an unquenchable hatred for the Herodian tyrants, puppet priests, arrogant Roman governors, and heathen soldiers who farted in holy places.

Immediately after the Baptist was captured—probably while he was still awaiting trial in Herod Antipas' prison—Jesus began to preach among precisely the same kind of people and under the same kinds of risky conditions. The resemblance in lifestyle was so great that among Jesus' first disciples, at least two—the brothers Andrew and Simon Peter (St. Peter)—were former followers of the Baptist. Herod Antipas later found so little difference between Jesus and the Baptist that he is said to have remarked, "It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead." At first Jesus did most of his preaching in the back country, performing miracles and attracting large crowds. He was probably always only one jump ahead of the police. Like John the Baptist and the messianic messengers discussed by Josephus, Jesus was launched on a collision course that would end either in his arrest or in a cataclysmic insurrection.

The logic of his growing popularity drew Jesus forward into increasingly dangerous exploits. Before long, he and his disciples set out to missionize Jerusalem, the promised capital of the future Holy Jewish Empire. Deliberately invoking the

messianic symbolism of the Book of Zechariah, Jesus rode through the gates mounted on a donkey (or possibly a pony). Sunday School teachers claim that Jesus did this because it signified an intention to "speak peace unto the heathen." This ignores the overwhelmingly military-messianic significance of everything else in Zechariah. For after Zechariah's messiah appears, lowly and riding on an ass, the sons of Zion "devour and subdue" . . . and become "mighty men which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in battle . . . because the Lord is with them and the riders on horses shall be confounded."

The lowly figure on the ass was not a peaceful messiah. It was the messiah of a small nation and its apparently harmless prince of war, a descendant of David, who also rose from apparent weakness to confound and subdue the enemy's horsemen and charioteers. The heathen were to have peace—but it was to be the peace of the long-awaited Holy Jewish Empire. That at least is how the crowds who lined the way understood what was happening, for as Jesus passed by, they shouted: "Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed be the Kingdom of our Father David that is coming!"

Nor was there anything notably peaceful in what Jesus and his disciples did after they entered the city. By choosing to invade Jerusalem just before the beginning of Passover, they assured themselves the protection of thousands of holiday pilgrims arriving from the countryside and from all over the Mediterranean. Zealot-bandits, peasants, laborers, beggars and other potentially volatile groups were all streaming into the city at the same time. During the day Jesus went nowhere unless surrounded by tumultuous and ecstatic

crowds. When it became dark he slipped away to the houses of friends, keeping his whereabouts hidden from all but the inner core of disciples.

Jesus and his disciples did nothing that would have distinguished them from the members of an incipient military-messianic movement. They even provoked at least one violent confrontation. They stormed into the courtyard of the great temple and physically attacked the licensed businessmen who changed currencies so that foreign pilgrims could purchase sacrificial animals. Jesus himself used a whip during this incident.

The gospels recount how Caiaphas, the High Priest, "plotted" to arrest Jesus. Since Caiaphas had witnessed the violent attack against the moneychangers, he could not have entertained any doubts about the legality of putting Jesus in jail. What Caiaphas had to figure out was how to arrest Jesus without provoking all the people who thought he was the messiah. Mobs were extremely dangerous in those days before the invention of shotguns and tear gas, especially if the people believed they had an invincible leader. So Caiaphas instructed the police to take Jesus, but "not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people."

The crowd surrounding Jesus certainly had not had time to adopt a nonviolent lifestyle. Even his most intimate disciples were clearly not prepared to "turn the other cheek." At least two of them had sobriquets which suggest that they were linked with militant activists. One was Simon, called "The Zealot," and the other was Judas, called "Iscariot." There is an uncanny resemblance between Iscariot and *sicarti*, the word used by Josephus to identify the knife-wielding, homicidal dagger men. And in certain Old Latin

manuscripts Judas is actually called *Zelotes*.

Two other disciples had warlike nicknames—James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were called “Boanerges,” which Mark translates from Aramaic as “Sons of Thunder” and which could also mean “the fierce, wrathful ones.” The sons of Zebedee deserved their reputation. At one point in the gospel narrative they want to destroy an entire Samaritan village because the people had not welcomed Jesus.

The gospels also indicate that some of the disciples carried swords and were prepared to resist arrest. Just before being taken into custody, Jesus said, “He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.” This prompted the disciples to show him two swords—indicating that at least two of them were not only habitually armed but had kept their swords concealed under their clothes . . . like dagger men.

All four gospels record the fact that the disciples put up armed resistance at the moment of Jesus’ capture. After the Passover supper, Jesus and his inner circle slipped away to a garden in Gethsemane where they prepared to spend the night. Guided by Judas Iscariot, the High Priest and his men burst in on them as Jesus was praying and the rest were sleeping. The disciples drew their swords and a brief struggle ensued, during which one of the temple policemen lost an ear. As soon as the police grabbed Jesus, the disciples stopped fighting and ran away into the night. According to Matthew, Jesus told one of his disciples to sheath his sword, a command which the disciple obeyed but was obviously unprepared to hear, since he immediately deserted.

In the gospel narrative, the price given to Judas resembles Herodias’ denunciation of John the Baptist. If Judas was in fact *Zelotes*—a zealot-bandit—he might have betrayed Jesus

for any number of tactical or strategic reasons, but never simply for money. (One theory is that Jesus wasn’t being militant enough.) By identifying Judas’ motivation as pure greed, the gospels may simply have repeated the kind of distortion that Josephus and the Romans automatically employed with respect to all zealot-bandits. But zealot-bandits were prepared to kill without getting paid—that at least should be clear from the events described in the previous chapter.

Why did the disciples all run away, and why did Simon Peter deny Jesus three times before the night was over? Because as Jews they shared with Caiaphas the lifestyle consciousness of their ancestors and understood that the messiah was to be an invincible, wonder-working military prince.

All this leads to one conclusion: The lifestyle consciousness shared by Jesus and his inner circle of disciples was not the lifestyle consciousness of a peaceful messiah. Although the gospels clearly intend to deny Jesus the capacity to carry out violent political acts, they preserve what seems to be an undercurrent of contradictory events and sayings which link John the Baptist and Jesus to the military-messianic tradition and implicate them in the guerrilla warfare. The reason for this is that by the time the first gospel was written, nonpeaceful events and sayings which had been attributed to Jesus by eyewitnesses and by unimpeachable apostolic sources were widely known among the faithful. The writers of the gospels shifted the balance of the Jesus cult’s lifestyle consciousness in the direction of a peaceful messiah, but they could not entirely expunge the traces of continuity with the military-messianic tradition. The ambiguity of the gospels in this regard is best demonstrated by arranging some of Jesus’

most peaceful statements in one column and the unexpected negations in another:

Blessed are the peacemakers.  
(Matthew 5:9)

Whosoever shall smite thee  
on thy right cheek, turn to  
him the other also.  
(Matthew 5:39)

All that take the sword shall  
perish with the sword.  
(Matthew 26:52)

Love thine enemies; do good  
to them that hate you.  
(Luke 6:27)

I should also note at this point the obviously false construction traditionally given to what Jesus said when he was asked if Jews ought to pay taxes to the Romans: "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's." This could mean only one thing to the Galileans who had participated in Judas of Galilee's tax revolt—namely, "Don't pay." For Judas of Galilee had said that everything in Palestine belonged to God. But the authors of the Gospels and their readers probably knew nothing about

Judas of Galilee, so they preserved Jesus' highly provocative response on the mistaken assumption that it showed a genuinely conciliatory attitude toward the Roman government.

After they had captured him, the Romans and their Jewish clients continued to treat Jesus as if he were the leader of an actual or intended military-messianic uprising. The Jewish high court put him on trial for having made blasphemous and false prophecies. He was quickly found guilty and turned over to Pontius Pilate for a second trial on secular charges. The reason for this seems clear. As I showed in the chapter on cargo, popular messiahs in colonial contexts are always guilty of a politico-religious crime, never merely a religious one. The Romans had no interest in Jesus' violation of the natives' religious codes, but they were vitally concerned with his threat to destroy the colonial government.

Caiaphas' predictions about how the crowd would react once Jesus was shown to be helpless was soon fully vindicated. Pilate publicly exhibited the condemned man and not a voice was lifted in protest. Pilate even went so far as to offer to free Jesus, if the mob wanted him back. The gospels claim that Pilate made this offer because he himself believed that Jesus was innocent. But Pilate, you will recall, was a tricky, heavy-fisted military hard-liner who kept having trouble with the Jerusalem mob. According to Josephus, Pilate once lured several thousand people into the Jerusalem stadium, surrounded them with soldiers, and threatened to cut their heads off. On another occasion his men infiltrated the mob by wearing civilian clothes over their armor and on a given signal clubbed everybody in sight. In presenting Jesus to the rabble that had only yesterday adored and protected him, Pilate was making use of the inexorable logic of the



apostles. The first question they put to the risen Jesus is: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Another New Testament source, the Book of Revelations, depicts the returning Jesus as a many-crowned rider on a white horse who judges and makes war, who has eyes as "a flame of fire," wears a garment "dipped in blood," and rules the nations with "a rod of iron," and who returns to "tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."

There is also some convergent evidence on this point from the Dead Sea Scrolls. I said a moment ago that the idea of messiah returning from the dead was not unprecedented. The Dead Sea Scrolls refer to a "teacher of righteousness" who is killed by his enemies but returns to fulfill the messianic task. Like the Quamranites, the first Jewish Christians organized themselves into a commune while awaiting the return of their "teacher of righteousness."

The Acts of the Apostles states:

All that believed were together and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them among all, according as any man had need. . . . Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet.

It is of considerable interest that the Dead Sea Scrolls contain prescriptions for establishing communities of penitent Jews in the cities to be organized along the same communistic lines. This is additional evidence that the Quamran militants and the Jewish Christians were either responding in similar ways to similar conditions or were actually aspects or

branches of one and the same military-messianic movement.

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the image of Jesus as the peaceful messiah was probably not perfected until after the fall of Jerusalem. During the interval between Jesus' death and the writing of the first gospel, the groundwork for a cult of peaceful messianism was laid by Paul. But those for whom Jesus was primarily a Jewish military-messianic redeemer dominated the movement throughout the period of expanding guerrilla activity leading up to the confrontation of 68 A.D. The practical setting in which the gospels were written—gospels which depict a purely peaceful and universal messiah—was the aftermath of the unsuccessful Jewish war against Rome. A purely peaceful messiah became a practical necessity when the generals who had just defeated the Jewish messianic revolutionaries—Vespasian and Titus—became the rulers of the Roman Empire. Before that defeat, it had been a practical necessity for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to remain loyal to Judaism. After that defeat, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem could no longer dominate the Christian communities in other parts of the empire, least of all those Christians who lived in Rome at the sufferance of Vespasian and Titus. In the aftermath of the unsuccessful messianic war, it quickly became a practical necessity for Christians to deny that their cult had arisen out of the Jewish belief in a messiah who was going to topple the Roman Empire.

The Jerusalem commune was led by a triumvirate called "the pillars" in the Acts of the Apostles, consisting of James, Peter, and John. Among these, James, identified by Paul as "the Lord's Brother" (precise genealogical connection unknown), soon emerged as the preeminent figure. It was James

who led the struggle against Paul's attempt to obscure the Jewish military-messianic origins of the Jesus movement.

Although Jerusalem remained the center of Christianity until 70 A.D., the new cult soon spread beyond Palestine to many of the communities of Jewish merchants, artisans, and scholars found in every major city and town of the Roman Empire. The overseas Jews learned about Jesus from missionaries who toured the foreign synagogues. Paul, the most important of these missionaries, was born Saul of Tarsus, a Greek-speaking Jew whose father had acquired Roman citizenship for himself and his family. Paul insisted that he had become an apostle of Jesus by the authority of revelation and without any direct contact with the original apostles in Jerusalem. In his letter to the Galatians, written sometime between 49 and 57 A.D., Paul said that he had been missionizing Arabia and Damascus for three years and had never talked to any of the original apostles. The letter states that at that time he visited briefly with Simon Peter and talked with James, "the Lord's Brother."

For the next fifteen years Paul was on the road again, traveling from city to city. His first converts were almost invariably Jews. This had to be the case because it was the Jews who were most familiar with the prophetic lineage that Paul claimed Jesus fulfilled. Even if Paul had not studied with rabbis, had not spoken Hebrew, and had not considered himself a Jew, he would still have found the Jews scattered throughout the eastern portion of the Roman Empire the people most likely to respond to the appeal of the Jesus cult. Not only were the Jews one of the largest groups of displaced persons in the empire, but they were among the most influential and up to 71 A.D. enjoyed many privileges which were

denied to other ethnics. Paul had between three and six million Jews to proselytize outside of Palestine—more than twice as many as James had to proselytize within Palestine—and virtually every one of the foreign Jews lived in a city or town.

Paul made a special effort to recruit among non-Jews whenever he was rebuffed by an overseas Jewish community. But this in itself was no novelty. Attracted by the social and economic advantages which Jews enjoyed as a result of their long experience in cosmopolitan settings, there always had been a steady stream of converts to Judaism. Male converts were welcome as Jews as long as they were willing to obey the commandments and be circumcised. The greatest novelty associated with Paul's proselytizing was not his messianic message, but his willingness to baptize non-Jews as Jewish Christians without bothering to have them circumcised or certified as Jews.

The Acts of the Apostles states that Paul returned to Jerusalem after a prolonged absence, and pleaded with James and the Jerusalem elders not to interfere with his efforts at converting non-Jews to Christianity. James's verdict was that non-Jews could become Christians without submitting to circumcision provided they renounced idolatry, fornication, and meat that was strangled or bloody. But James and the Jerusalem communards insisted that uncircumcised Christians were inferior to Jewish Christians. Paul reports that when Simon Peter visited him in Antioch, all the Christians ate together. But with the arrival of a commission of inquiry sent out by James, Simon Peter immediately stopped eating with the uncircumcised Christians, "fearing them that were of the Circumcision"—that is, fearing that the Jewish Christian commissioners would tell James.

It was to Paul's advantage, given his overseas constituency, to underplay the privileged role to be allocated to the children of Israel in the Holy Jewish Empire. It was also to his advantage to ignore the worldly military and political components in Jesus' messianic mission. But Paul's ecumenical innovations created a strategic problem that he was never able to solve. Inevitably it brought him into deeper conflict with James and the Jerusalem communards, since the survival of the Jerusalem Christians depended on their ability to maintain their standing as bona-fide Jewish patriots. In order to survive amid the various factions involved in the escalating war with Rome, it was essential that James continue to worship in the Jerusalem temple and that his followers maintain an image of devotion to Jewish law. Their faith in Jahweh's covenant had been increased, not diminished, by their belief that Jesus would soon reappear.

Paul was accused of urging Jews in foreign cities to disregard the laws of Judaism and of treating Jew and non-Jew as if there were no difference between them—as if Jew and gentile were equally entitled to the blessings of the forthcoming messianic redemption. If such an interpretation of the Jesus cult were ever to spread to Jerusalem, James and his followers were doomed. In Brandon's words: "From the Jewish point of view, such a presentation was not only theologically outrageous, it amounted to apostasy of the most shocking kind, involving both race and religion."

The preserved evidence of Jesus' reported actions and sayings provides no support for Paul's attempt to scrap the distinction between Jew and non-Jew in the overseas communes. In the Gospel according to Mark, for example, a

Syrian Greek woman falls at Jesus' feet and begs him to drive out the devils from her daughter. Jesus refuses: "Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs." The Syrian Greek woman argues back, saying: "The dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs," whereupon Jesus relents and cures the woman's daughter. "Children" here can only mean "children of Israel" and "dogs" can only mean non-Jews, especially enemies like the Syrian Greeks. Incidents and sayings of this sort were preserved in Mark and the other gospels for the same reason that the other vengeful and ethnocentric sayings and actions could not be entirely expunged. There were lively oral traditions upon which the gospels were based. Too many eyewitnesses like James, Peter, and John were still active, eyewitnesses who insisted on the authenticity of the military-messianic and ethnocentric themes. Besides, Mark was Jewish by birth and therefore was probably never entirely free from some degree of ambivalence about the ethnic distinctions that had formerly been insisted upon by the founders of the Jerusalem mother "church."

To protect the Jerusalem commune, James dispatched rival missionaries instructed to preserve the Judaic significance of Christianity; they were not above jeopardizing Paul's following by impugning his credentials. Paul was vulnerable to these attacks because he admitted that he had never seen Jesus except in a vision. Moreover, he continued to need the support of the foreign synagogues. So, in 59 A.D., despite forebodings and oracular warnings, Paul decided to return to Jerusalem and have it out with his accusers.

Paul appeared before James as an accused person appears

before a judge. James admonished Paul by noting that there were thousands of Jews in Jerusalem who believed in Jesus, yet they were all "zealous of the law." He then ordered Paul to demonstrate that he was a loyal Jew and that the charges against him were unfounded—to demonstrate "that thou walkest orderly and keepest the law." He demanded that Paul submit to seven days of purificatory rites in the Jerusalem temple. Paul accepted these demands, proving: (1) James, the Lord's Brother, was the supreme leader of Christendom at that time; (2) James and the Jewish Christians still worshiped in the temple—they had no separate "church"; (3) the Jewish Christians believed that Jesus would return to fulfill the Davidic covenant by making Jerusalem the center of the Holy Jewish Empire; (4) all baptized penitent believers in Jesus and Jahweh would be redeemed, but Jewish Christians would be redeemed more than the rest.

Paul's attempt to reaffirm his loyalty to the Jewish national ideal was cut short, undoubtedly by treachery. A group of pilgrims from Asia recognized him, stirred up a mob, dragged him from the temple, and started to beat him to death. Only the timely intervention of the Roman captain of the guard saved Paul on that occasion. Brought to trial by the high priests, he again narrowly escaped death. More plots were laid against him, but he finally managed to escape from Palestine by invoking his Roman citizenship and demanding that he be tried by Romans, not by Jews. He was sent to Rome and kept under house arrest, but what happened to him afterwards is not definitely known. What probably happened to him is that he was martyred in 64 A.D., when the Emperor Nero decided to blame a huge fire in Rome—which his

enemies said he himself had set to clear out the slums near his palace—on a convenient new bloodthirsty sect that had arisen among the Jews, members of which were "enemies of mankind."

Too late for Paul, the outbreak of full-scale war in Palestine drastically altered the political context of his aborted mission. By 70 A.D. the Jewish Christian mother "church" in Jerusalem no longer held the upper hand over the overseas Christian communities. It ceased to be a significant force, if it can be said in any sense to have survived the fall of Jerusalem. The protracted revolution of 68–73 thoroughly embittered relationships between the overseas Jews and the Romans. Also, it catapulted the very persons responsible for the defeat of the Jews into control of the empire. In 71 A.D. Vespasian and his son Titus held a stupendous triumphal procession—commemorated on the Arch of Titus in Rome—during which Jewish prisoners and spoils were marched through the streets while the last zealot-bandit commander of Jerusalem, Simon ben Gioras, was strangled in the Forum. Vespasian thereafter dealt harshly with the Jews in the empire, restricting their liberties and diverting their temple tax to the treasury of Saturn. During the remainder of the first century A.D., anti-Semitism became an established feature of Roman life and letters; it was met with smoldering defiance, insurrection, and intensified repressions that led to the second Armageddon of Bar Kochva in 135 A.D.

From the stress placed by Mark upon the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem as a punishment for the killers of Jesus, Brandon infers that this gospel—the first to be composed and the model for the others—was written in Rome

after the fall of Jerusalem. As Brandon says, it was probably written in direct response to the great victory celebration of 71 A.D.

The appropriate conditions for the spread of the cult of a peaceful messiah were at last present in full force. Jewish Christians now readily joined with gentile converts to convince the Romans that *their* messiah was different from the zealot-bandit messiahs who had caused the war and who were continuing to make trouble: Christians, unlike Jews, were harmless pacifists with no secular ambitions. The Christian Kingdom of God was not of this world; Christian salvation lay in eternal life beyond the grave; the Christian messiah had died to bring eternal life to all mankind; his teaching posed no threat to the Romans, only to the Jews; the Romans were absolved of any guilt in Jesus' death; the Jews alone had killed him while Pontius Pilate stood by, helplessly unable to prevent it.

The secret of the peaceful messiah lay on the battlefields and in the aftermath of two earthly Armageddons. The cult of the peaceful messiah as we know it would not have prospered had the course of battle gone against the "Sons of Darkness."

The primary source of converts to this new religion—if not in number, certainly in influence—continued to be urban Jews scattered all over the eastern Mediterranean. Contrary to legend, Christianity made no headway at all among the great mass of peasants and slaves who constituted the bulk of the population of the empire. As the historian Salo W. Baron points out, *paganus*, the Latin word for "peasant," became for the Christians a synonym for "heathen." Christianity was eminently the religion of the displaced ethnic

urbanites. "In cities where Jews had often amounted to one third of the population and more, this, so to speak, new variety of Judaism marched triumphantly ahead."

Jews who remained Jews were far more the victims of Roman persecution than Jews who became Christians. The age of full-scale imperial persecution of Christians did not begin with Nero, but much later—after 150 A.D. By that time, because they were concentrated in the urban centers, had infiltrated the Roman upper class, maintained effective social welfare programs, and were building a fiscally independent, international corporation led by skilled administrators, the Christian churches had once again become a political threat to Roman law and order. They had become a "state within a state."

I shall have to refrain from following out the chain of worldly events that eventually led to the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire. But this much should be said: When the Emperor Constantine took that momentous initiative, Christianity was no longer the cult of the peaceful messiah. Constantine's conversion took place in 311 A.D. as he led a small army across the Alps. Warily approaching Rome he saw a vision of the cross standing above the sun, and on the cross he saw the words *IN HOC SIGNO VINCES*—"By this sign you will conquer." Jesus appeared to Constantine and directed him to emblazon his military standard with the cross. Under this strange new banner, Constantine's soldiers went on to win a decisive victory. They regained the empire and thereby guaranteed that the cross of the peaceful messiah would preside over the deaths of untold millions of Christian soldiers and their enemies down to the present day.

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THE RIDDLES OF CULTURE

MARVIN HARRIS



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