



22. THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Bible of the Jews identifies with the Law (*Tōrāh*), composed of first five Books (Greek Πεντάτευχος, *Pentateuch*) attributed to Moses, but certainly elaborated soon after returning to Palestine, i.e. after 520 BC. Only at a later time, a new part called *the Prophets* was added to the initial nucleus¹: these chapters, written around the 3rd century BC, are dedicated to the predications and deeds of the prophets² (*Nevi'im*).



1. The Hebraic Bible

As the reader will recall, the Greco-Roman tradition makes a clear distinction between the Mysteries and the oracular cults: the former constituted the actual esotericism, that is to say, the initiatory sector of Tradition, while the Oracles were part of the religious-exoteric aspect. The Oracles were pronounced by special priestly orders whose members were provoked a state of trance through different techniques. During the trance, they were possessed by a deity who gave responses on private matters (as the Pythia of Delphi), or on the general cosmic situation (as the Sibyls) upon request. These were predominantly prophecies concerning future events, and therefore were part of the rites of possession, clairvoyance and divination, which tradition carefully kept distant from the initiation rites of inner purification.



2. Essene initiation by immersion rite

In Hellenistic Judaism, on the other hand, the two domains were often overlapping and the prophets were possessed by the “Spirit of God” who spoke through their mouth³. Naturally, the subject always concerned the future glories of the “chosen people”, or the tribulations and injustices that the “chosen people” suffered because of other “nations”, interpreted as evidence sent by God himself. The prophets were therefore personalities belonging to Jewish initiatic ways, who held a function of guidance,

¹ Later, around the first century BC, a third part was added, which included the Psalms and the book of the prophet Daniel. Among these, the longest text is that of Psalm 104, a remake of the hymn to Aton, which closely relates Judaism to the heresy of Pharaoh Akhenaton.

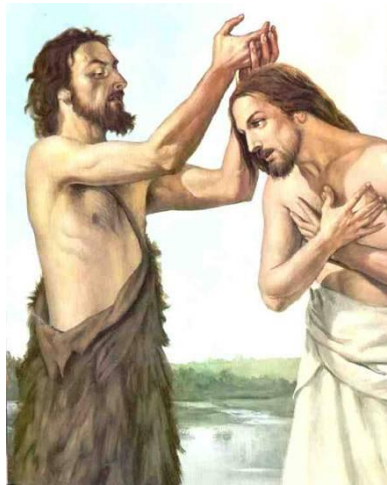
² From the Greek προφημί (read profemi), pre-say.

³ The first confusion between the two domains, in the Greek sphere, occurred with Gnosticism.





admonition and prediction for the outer masses. Not all initiates, however, assumed the prophetic function: some of them limited themselves to make a life separate from society, living in asceticism and celibacy⁴. The latter, known as Nazarites, could come from any social group. What is certain is that by strictly following an austere life they were in fact considered equal in dignity to Jewish priests⁵. At this point it is reasonable to question where exactly this initiatory current came from. Now, if it is clear that the prophetic aspect was typical of Jewish monotheism, the real initiatory transmission came from an environment of Chaldean origin, that is, from the Midianite Mysteries⁶. With the passing of time, the prophets became increasingly rare, while the Nazarites continued to form numerous communities of hermits, also called Essenes. It is therefore clear that Jesus was called Nazarene because he had taken that ascetic vote and not because for a while he had lived in some unknown village called Nazareth. Thus John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus and one of the last prophets, has always been described wrapped in a wild fur garment.



3. The Prophet John the Baptist initiates by immersion the white dressed Jesus

In the prophetic literature, in the Psalms and in the Book of the prophet Daniel, there is often mention of a figure who would come in the near future to defeat all the “nations” and subjugate them to the dominion of the “chosen people”. This mysterious person is credited with the title of “Messiah”, the Lord's anointed one⁷. His coming would coincide with the end of the current historical cycle and would begin the long lasting Kingdom of God on earth. One must also refer to rabbinical interpretations to fully understand the function of this mysterious figure. First of all, the coming of the Messiah would have been announced by a prophet, presumably Elias, miraculously returned to the earth⁸. The title of Messiah, as we have already discussed, is attributed in the *Tōrāh* to a King of Israel or Judah who had been anointed with a priestly ritual. Therefore, this future Messiah was predominantly described as a warrior King, descending from the blood of King David and hence belonging to the tribe of Judah. However, in the period between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD, the Jewish royal function was usurped by the priests. Therefore, many prophecies of that period alluded to the coming of a priestly Messiah, descending from the tribe of Levi.

⁴ As did Jesus, the Nazareans wore long white dresses, whereas those who became prophets used sheep's fur coats. All other Jews wore light coloured dresses adorned with long black stripes

⁵ Elia Benamozegh, *Gli Esseni e la Cabbala*, Milano, Armenia Ed., 1979, pp. 69-75. Jewish society was divided into twelve tribes. Among them of particular importance were the priestly tribe of Levi, whose members could only become (Cohen) priests of the Temple of Jerusalem, and the tribe of Judah, from which the kings and nobles descended.

⁶ According to the very reliable judgment of Benamozegh, this initiation was transmitted within Judaism by Jethro, the "polytheist" father-in-law of Moses. Ibid. pp. 77-78.

⁷ See www.vedavyasamandala.com, Western Tradition, *From Cosmos to Chaos*, Ch. 21. The Semitic Religions.

⁸ According to the biblical account, Elias did not die, but ascended into heaven on a chariot of fire. He should, therefore, return to earth at the end of time to announce the coming of the Messiah and only then, eventually, die.





4. The prophet Elijah on the chariot of fire

In some cases, the Hebraic literature of that period mentions two Messiahs, one priestly and one royal, who were supposed to sanction the victory of Judaism throughout the world. Naturally, the priestly Messiah would have played a sacred role superior to the purely military role of the other Messiah.



5. The twelve Israelite tribes and their symbols

Some writings even make the warrior and priestly Messiah one person. In addition to these uncertain and sometimes contradictory ideas, there is also the case of a possible Messiah who would come to be killed. After his death he would have migrated to heaven to found a Kingdom of Heaven⁹. All texts, however, agree in affirming that the Messiah would become aware of his mission only at the moment of his anointment. Therefore, during the first part of his life, his true identity would remain somewhat hidden to everyone. The centuries when these controversial prophetic texts were written saw a fervent expectation of the Messiah by the Jews. It seemed that the end of the world was near and that the Roman domination was the sign of the greatest abomination to which the world had been subjected. Figures prophesying the coming of the Messiah emerged everywhere. Some even proclaimed themselves Messiah, and the frenzy of the Jews led to an increasingly unstable political situation with real acts of rebellion, guerrilla warfare and terrorism against the foreign occupants, as well as, the Jewish ruling classes who collaborated with the imperial authorities. At the same time, in the different cities of the Roman Empire where Jewish communities had migrated, began a very aggressive missionary action. Considering the Jewish exclusivist mentality, this missionaryism did not aim to convert the “polytheists” to Judaism, but rather to make them semi-converts (Hebr. *ger-toshab*) ready to accept their inferiority and submission to the “chosen people”¹⁰. They also undertook an activity of

⁹ Geza Vermes, *Jesus el Judio*, Barcelona, Muchnik Ed., 1977 (1st ed. *Jesus the Jew*, London, W. Collins Sons, 1973), pp. 140-154.

¹⁰ Hugh J. Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, London, Element Books Ltd., 1968, Ch. 3.





This was certainly a Nazarite or Essene initiation rite¹³ during which, according to the Gospels, the spirit of God descended upon him. Jesus then understood that he was the Messiah and that John the Baptist was the “prophet Elias” who had preannounced it to the Jewish people and who at that moment recognized him as such. Furthermore, his maternal descent from the tribe of Levi and his paternal one from the tribe of Judah made Jesus both a priestly and a royal Messiah. He was often called King of the Jews by the crowd of his followers, and he never rejected such title. However, his hesitance to make self-proclamation of such magnitude was certainly by prudence to avoid being noticed by Roman authorities or by the priests of the Temple who in fact collaborated with the Romans in the administration of Judea. Indubitably, he nurtured among the Jews the hopes of a forthcoming anti-Roman uprising and the beginning of a reign of the millenarian “chosen people” that would dominate all other peoples of the Earth. He, therefore, always behaved like a Messiah without ever affirming himself to be so. In fact, the title that the twelve apostles and seventy-two (sometimes seventy) disciples attributed to him was that of *Rav*, master (or *Rabbi*, my teacher). This title has two different meanings. The exterior one is attributed to the doctors of the Law, experts in *Tōrāh*, rituals, customs and traditions. The other sense of *Rav* is the initiatory one, which corresponds to the Sanskrit *guru*¹⁴. Since Jesus did not follow any specialized course at the Temple or any synagogue, it is logical to deduce that in his case *Rav* meant initiatory master (*dīkṣā guru*). It is well known that Jesus taught to his apostles, disciples and the crowds publicly, while at night he appeared with only few disciples like Nicodemus¹⁵, Joseph of Arimathea¹⁶ and the “disciple whom he loved”¹⁷, to teach them secret doctrines¹⁸.



The title that Jesus apparently attributed most often to himself is “Son of Man”. The Christians poured rivers of ink in the attempt to give a unique spiritual meaning this denomination. However, it has been easily proved that “son of man” in the biblical language is not a title, but simply means “human being”; and Jesus uses it as a third person in place of “I”. For instance: “When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (*Gospel of St. Luke* 18:8), simply means: “when I will return”¹⁹. Another title that Jesus sometimes used for himself, but which is mostly attributed to him by others, is “Son of God”. In the same way he turned to God calling him Father. In the Bible there are three uses of this title. 1) “Son of God” is referred to any celestial or angelic being; 2) It is also commonly used to question any representative of the “chosen people”; 3) Finally, in the prophetic literature it becomes a title to respectfully allude to a King or a Messiah. It is certain that the second and third uses represent the prevailing meaning found in the Gospel. Jesus thus claimed himself to be a true member of the Israelite religious community and, at the same time, made clear to those able to understand, that he was the Messiah. Certainly, the interpretation of “the only-begotten Son, generated and not created” does not correspond to the use at the time of Jesus and must be considered late, and instrumental for Christian theologians to identify the historical Jesus with the divine Logos (*Sskr. śabdabrahman*); this topic,

¹³ The continuation of this initiatic tradition of Judaism during the Middle Ages has been known as Qabbalah (oral transmission).

¹⁴ In Islam the first meaning corresponds to that of *qadī*, *mullah* and *ālim*. The second one is called *pīr* or *shaykh* of *tariqa*. However, it is also a sharaitic use to refer to a *qadī*, a *mullah* and an *ālim* with the title of *shaykh*. Thus in India school teachers or university professors are often called *gurus*, always in an exterior sense. It is precisely in this outward sense that non-priestly Jews who have studied in religious schools are still called rabbins.

¹⁵ *Gospel of St. John*, III.1-21.

¹⁶ *Gospel of St. John*, XIX.38.

¹⁷ *Gospel of St. John*, XX.21-23. Later he was arbitrarily identified with the same St. John.

¹⁸ To these three secret disciples we can add the three siblings Lazarus, Martha and Mary, who play an important role alongside Jesus without ever appearing as apostles or disciples. Traces of these initiatory teachings are found in the apocryphal Gospels, which for this reason have been officially banned by the Church. Contrary to what is commonly believed “apocryphal” (Gr. ἀπόκρυφος) does not mean false, but “secret”.

¹⁹ Geza Vermes, *cit.*, pp. 167-202.





however, will be further discussed in a future article²⁰. In fact, our next commitment will be to describe how the Christian current of Judaism became an independent religion

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8. Jesus portrayed as King of the Jews

²⁰ *Ibid.* 203-234.