

JOSÉ AFONSO MOURA NUNES & OTHERS

*Trilogy of the Path*

VOLUME  
I

JESUS  
*of*  
NAZARETH

*The Best  
Among Us*

4<sup>th</sup> edition

BELO HORIZONTE  
2022

*This book was translated from Brazilian Portuguese to American English by Matheus Milagres with assistance of the free version of the translation tool DeepL*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The fascinating, historical and grandiose figure of Jesus of Nazareth has aroused a permanent interest of scholars, researchers, religious and ordinary citizens worldwide for centuries.

Despite the incalculable universe of works written about Jesus of Nazareth by Christian authors, atheists, followers of other doctrines, with the most diverse points of view possible, there is still much to be understood and known about his legacy.

José Afonso Moura Nunes brings to readers a thorough and precise book, supported by a relevant and meticulous research, where there is predominantly a historical analysis of the facts lived by Jesus of Nazareth, his origin, the revolutionary spirit, the definitive transformations that he caused in the society of his contemporaries and that remains to this day.

The Divinity attributed to Jesus of Nazareth, proclaimed messiah and son of God, is undeniable. But what is mainly presented to us, by the author in this book, is the human figure, widely exposed, fought, and persecuted, which will certainly bring the reader closer to the one who might have been the most important human being in our history.

*The Editor*

*“Dear José Afonso, ...your work is very important. Done with seriousness and based on the best bibliography. The figure emanating from your book on Jesus of Nazareth is fascinating. You are able to avoid erudite arguments and go straight to the essentials.”*

*Leonardo BOFF, 12/30/2021. (Own translation)*



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# INTRODUCTION

Rogers Lenaers, in his book *Another Christianity Is Possible: Faith in Modern Language* (own translation), places Christianity - one could say that other religions as well - before an enormous challenge: to transmit its message in a language that today's scientifically and technically trained man can understand and eventually accept. At 83, Lenaers, a theologian and philology specialist, does not hesitate to say that "the language that the Church continues to use no longer says anything to the men and women of today, because its terms and categories come from world and social views that were in force until the Middle Ages but are incompatible with contemporary common sense".

In his introduction to Lenaers' book, Manuel Ossa notes that "the focus is on Jesus of Nazareth, seen as a man in search, close to us in his weakness and in his hope and, for that very reason, the expression and figure of a God who grows and suffers together with human beings, in a shared history." (LENAERS, 20110, p. 8; 9, own translation)

Lenaers' text constitutes an important contribution to complement the work of reading and discussing José Antonio Pagola's book, *Jesus: a historical approach* (own translation), undertaken by three couple friends who sought, for six years, to systematically study Jesus of Nazareth as a historical figure. This process led the group to create a website in 2012 ([omelhordenos.com.br](http://omelhordenos.com.br)) and also gave rise to the book *O melhor de nós* (*The Best Among Us*, own translation), which had its first edition in May 2015, in a run of one thousand copies, in Belo Horizonte, by Ramalhete publishing house, and, in the following year, in São Paulo, by Fonte Editorial (another thousand copies) - all sold out.

This new edition of *The Best Among Us* presents a revised version of the first part of the previously published book, plus three new chapters - two of them based on books published in 2016 - and an Addendum, entitled *From Jesus of Nazareth to the Christ of Faith* (own translation). In the revision emphasis was placed on Jewish authors and/or experts on Judaism, first and foremost because Jesus of Nazareth was Jewish by birth and religious and cultural background.

In *The research of the historical Jesus* (own translation), Giuseppe Segalla (2013, p. 29) points out three reasons that not only justify, but actually demand research on Jesus of Nazareth:

1. "the theological reason: the incarnation - the need to anchor the person of Jesus - the object of faith of 2 billion Christians (HARARI, 2015, p. 246, own translation) - in his story as a humble, manual laborer" who spends more than 90% of his life in complete anonymity;

2. "the interest, the admiration, the love for Jesus impels one to take an interest in him; even the humble vessels that Jesus used, the sociopolitical environment, the cultural and agricultural environment, and the city, in particular of Galilee and Jerusalem, all these become living and historical testimony of the Gospel sources and an introduction to their intelligent reading";

3. "by the cultural, academic profile of the research: it is in this field that one can enter into dialogue with the lay, academic and university culture".

The dialogue with lay culture to which Segalla refers does not seem to live up to its need. Of the 98 works that comprised the bibliography of this book when the research was conducted (April 2018), the collection of seven Christian universities - five Catholic (MG, RJ, PE, DF, PR), one Evangelical (SC) and one Presbyterian (SP) - averaged 23 books, or 23%. The libraries of three Federal Universities (MG, BA and SC) had together 17 books, an average of 6% each, which seems to give reason to the criticism of omission and prejudice in the academic world, expressed by Augusto Cury in his book *The Most Intelligent Man in History* (own translation)<sup>1</sup>. This absence of works about the historical Jesus in university libraries causes strangeness. This is because it is an absolutely unexpected and noteworthy fact that a manual laborer, day laborer, "jack of all trades", resident of an insignificant village (Nazareth), located in an out-of-the-way region, with a strange speech (the Galilee of the Gentiles), in a marginal and uncomfortable province of the Roman Empire (Palestine), became the turning point of human history. We cannot, therefore, ignore it!<sup>2</sup>

The Marxist philosopher Roger Garaudy once said: "Give him to us! Give Jesus of Nazareth also to us, who are non-Christians, or even atheists. You, in your Churches, cannot keep him only for yourselves."

"Without having to be a Christian, I can testify to what this Jesus means in my life," Gandhi said (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 21, own translation).

It is about Jesus of Nazareth - his person, his circumstances, his message, his arrest and crucifixion - that this book is about, from the point of view of historians and other researchers of the subject. This is not a "pious" book, or a theology book, but history as it is read by the academic world. It is a book for dialogue with non-believers and believers alike, which seeks to make it clear that there is no single, univocal, impersonal, impartial, neutral point of view.

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter XIX.

<sup>2</sup> "It is not without reason that there are no professorships and research centers on early Christianity or Jesus of Nazareth in Brazilian public universities." Doctor Paulo Augusto Nogueira, in CHEVITARESE; (CORNELLI, 2009, p. 70, own translation).



With those who today call themselves non-religious, or even atheists, the dialogue will certainly flow, because, as Hoornaert states, "our knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth is imprecise and precarious; working in the field of scientific knowledge, we formulate probabilities and not certainties" HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 15, own translation). For those who are familiar, even a little, with the New Testament texts - the main source of information about Jesus of Nazareth - the book aims to provide greater knowledge of the context, since we believe that ignorance of historical circumstances impoverishes the reading of the text.

On the other hand, with those who naively cling to the text of the Bible, dialogue may be difficult or impossible.

Are these points of view? They are! "There is no account without a point of view." (MARGUERAT, 2018, p. 25, own translation)

Do we deal with certainties, objects of faith? No! Does this book discuss or challenge statements of faith, dogmas? No! It is not our object of study; we pass over it!

What we present is the result of research, that is, facts, probable statements. Tomorrow, certainly, other researches will see the same theme in a different way, in a more plausible, more convincing manner. This is how science grows, a field in which this book dives, searching for the most reliable information published in the last years, in Brazil and in Portugal. As coordinator of the authors' team, I tried to honor their academic life and my many years of teaching Research Methodology and Technique at UFMG.

We hope that readers will enjoy our contribution so that they get to know more about Jesus of Nazareth, the one who, for us, is - here goes a value judgment! - THE BEST AMONG US - the best that humanity has ever produced.

*José Afonso Moura Nunes - Coordinator*

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# JESUS OF NAZARETH

(4/6 B.C. – 04.07.30 A.D.; friday)<sup>3;4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Luke is wrong to associate the Census of Quirino in 6 A.D. with the birth of Jesus, which most scholars place near 4 B.C., the year mentioned in Matthew's Gospel" (ASLAN (2013, p. 55, own translation). "It is not known what interest led Luke to associate the birth of Jesus with the Census, except for obvious theological reasons, i.e., to make Bethlehem the birthplace of the messiah and to legitimize him as a royal Davidic descendant." (SCARDELAI, 2021, p. 271, own translation)

<sup>4</sup> "The date of Jesus' birth remains unknown. Apparently, it must have been before the spring of 4 B.C., and more likely in 5 B.C., or a little earlier." VERMES. Nativity, p. 105, own translation. For Colin Humphreys, a scientist at Cambridge University, "Jesus was born in April 5 A.D. and was nearing his 37th birthday when he died, on April 3rd, 33 A.D. (HUMPHREYS, 2012, p. 94, own translation)



# I

## NAZARETH: THE VILLAGE AND COMMUNITY LIFE<sup>5</sup>

Our character, Jesus - the current Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, then pronounced Ieshua, or iehua in the Galilian pronunciation (FLUSSER. 2010, p. 7, own translation) - is a man who lived about 90% of his life in an unimportant village in green and fertile lower Galilee. Since we only live the present, but carry the past in the conscious and especially in the unconscious, we will have to talk about Jesus' experience prior to his public life, which, precisely for this reason, is very little known.

"The boy underwent the rite of circumcision - performed by his father [or a mohel] - eight days after he was born, on which occasion his parents solemnly gave him the name Jesus [Yahweh saves], a name quite widespread among the Jews of the time." <sup>6</sup>

He was probably born in Nazareth,<sup>7</sup> a small cluster of houses on the side of a mountain. At its feet, a verdant valley. There lived the clan, or family nucleus, of Yosef (Joseph) and a few others, which numbered perhaps between 200 and 400 inhabitants (MARTIN, 2014, p. 45, own translation). Several houses, very close together, with beaten floors, leading to an inner courtyard where the children played and the adults worked and talked. There was, for common use, a small mill, where the women ground the grain, and an oven, where they baked bread <sup>8</sup>. The Iranian films by Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Majid Majidi (Children of Paradise, 1998) give us an idea of the simplicity of the houses and the village.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jesus was probably born in Nazareth (and not in Bethlehem). The analysis of the literary procedures used (in the infancy gospels of Matthew and Luke) shows that, more than accounts of a biographical character, they are Christian compositions elaborated in the light of faith in the resurrected Christ. They were not written to inform about facts that had occurred (probably little was known) but to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah..." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 61, own translation)

<sup>6</sup> "Each town had a mohel-a trained practical to perform the delicate operation with a precise script: the execution of the cut, the opening of the skin, sucking out the wound, and putting a bandage of oil, wine, and cumin on the wound." (THOMAS, 2007, p. 43, own translation)

<sup>7</sup> "At the time it was written Natzareth, which means "little son." It was founded by a family clan, the Nazoreans or Nazarenes, who claimed to be descendants of David. It is highly probable that Mary and Joseph were also of the same royal lineage." (PETITFILS, 2015, p. 58, own translation)

<sup>8</sup> "Usually villagers shared facilities such as wells, olive presses, threshing floors, and ovens for making bread, but this easily gave rise to local dissension rather than fostering a community spirit." (FREYNE, 1996, p. 137, own translation)

<sup>9</sup> About life in Nazareth, check out the competent and exquisite "conjectural reconstruction" by Prof. Clodovis Boff, in The Daily Life of Mary of Nazareth (BOFF, 2009, own translation).

"Houses" (on average 20 to 40 m<sup>2</sup>) of rough stones piled up, covered with clay or mud and even dung mixed with straw, to favor thermal insulation (BETTO, 2015, p. 45-46, own translation), sometimes of only one room. "The roof of the houses was made of wooden boards nailed to beams or rafters and usually covered with clay, marl or clay" (Lk. 5, 19, own translation).<sup>10</sup> Simple, with few utensils: a cot for sleeping, a rustic stool, jugs, ceramic vases, a lamp; little, or nothing else.<sup>11</sup>

Joseph's family nucleus was not small: father, mother, seven or more children, and perhaps some other relative. Jesus had four brothers - James, Joseph, Judas and Simon - and some sisters, about whom we do not even know the names. In the patriarchal culture of the time the woman had no identity of her own, she lived in dependence on her father and later on her husband.

"In 2002 it came to light - solemnly exhibited in Toronto, Canada - the existence of a 1st century ossuary with the inscription in Aramaic: "James (Ya' akov), son of Joseph, brother of Jesus (Yeshua)". In my opinion it is virtually certain that the James ossuary and the inscription are ancient and authentic artifacts." (SHANKS, 1992, p. 65, own translation)

Joseph's seven or more sons lived together as brothers. Whether they were brothers only on their father's side, or cousins, there is no consensus among researchers.<sup>12</sup> The household's sustenance was guaranteed, or rather, was literally dug out, day by day. We do not know if Joseph's clan owned a piece of land, or if, landless, its members worked as day laborers to earn their daily bread.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Luke's reference to shingles seems inappropriate in the setting of a first-century Galilean village." (VERMES, 2006, p. 63, own translation)

<sup>11</sup> "In Qumrân [2nd century B.C.-68 A.D.] the roofs of the houses were of palm branches, covered with reeds and lined with grout, just as in the houses of Jericho now" (CONNOLLY, 1998, p. 57, own translation)

<sup>12</sup> "Assuming communitar contigentia, the usual procedure, Miriam - Mary and Jesus are later Hellenizations - would have been 15-17 when Jesus was born and Joseph would have been 25. The assumption that Joseph, who, in the Gospels, is only mentioned in the childhood accounts, died early, is justified. Mary would have been integrated, with her son, into the wider circle of relatives." GNILKA. Jesus of Nazareth, p. 75, own translation. "From the second half of the second century on, the expression 'brothers and sisters of Jesus' was understood in three different ways. The first conception, the most natural, the brothers and sisters of Jesus would simply be children of Joseph and Mary, born after Jesus. According to the second interpretation, James and his siblings would be from a first marriage of Joseph. The third theory, called Jeronimian, appears for the first time around 383 in a text by Jerome: the brothers would be cousins, descendants of two brothers, two sisters or a brother and a sister, children of a sister of Mary, called Mary of Cleophas." (BERNHEIM, 2003, p. 16, own translation)

<sup>13</sup> "The urban elite of Judea referred to the Galileans ironically as 'people of the land,' a term used to indicate a dependence on subsistence agriculture. But the expression had a more sinister connotation, indicating the ignorant and wicked, who failed to keep the law correctly, particularly when it came to paying the obligatory tithes and making offerings to the Temple." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 113, own translation)

Everyone worked as a peasant, plowing, planting, harvesting and tending, probably a small vineyard, some fig and olive trees.<sup>14</sup> The tributes and taxes were heavy and consumed a third or even half of what they produced.

The first word Jesus spoke was certainly "immá", mother in Aramaic,<sup>15</sup> the language spoken in Galilee, with a very characteristic accent, easily recognized by the inhabitants of Judea.<sup>16</sup> Given the lesser involvement of men in raising children at this age, Jesus took a little longer to pronounce "abba", father, thus affectionately naming the figure that will mark him for the rest of his life and that will be for him the best image of God.<sup>17</sup>

When Jesus was about four years old, the Romans razed Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee and surrounding villages. Since Nazareth was three or four miles from Sepphoris, the event certainly resonated strongly in the community and made itself present in the conversations and education of the children. "The death and enslavement of tens of thousands of Galileans around the time of Jesus' birth must have left a collective trauma among the population." (HORSLEY, 2004, p. 36, own translation)

Until the age of eight, Jesus was under the care of women: his mother, Mary<sup>18</sup> – in Hebrew Miriam, in Aramaic Mariām - aunts and sisters, always present and vigilant, also because infant mortality at that time was extremely high.<sup>19</sup>

Care, affection, and the feeling of being loved must not have been lacking for the baby Jesus.

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<sup>14</sup> By soil analysis it was found that "at that time 97% of the land was cultivated in Galilee." (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 215, own translation)

<sup>15</sup> "When Mary gave birth she was probably no older than fourteen." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 137, own translation)

<sup>16</sup> "There are two ancient Jewish proverbs that express the mentality of the time: 'Paradise is in the lap of mothers' and 'God cannot be everywhere, so he created mothers.'" SCHLESINGER; PORT. Jesus was a Jew, p. 77, own translation.

<sup>17</sup> "The word Abba, used in the prayer (Mk. 14:36, own translation) is without parallel in the context of the time." (GNILKA, 1999, p. 34, own translation)

<sup>18</sup> "Mary is a simple woman, outstanding in the dark history of the poor, who usually remain anonymous. She stood out as the mother of that poor man who became the most celebrated personality in history." (ZILLES, 1999, p. 129, own translation)

Modern Jewish authors have rediscovered the meaning of Mary, Jewish by origin and by destiny, companion of the "Jewish drama," symbol not only of the Church, but also of the Jewish community, in short, a figure of universal validity, as one of them, David Flusser, expresses it in his "modest praise of the Jewish Mary." (BOFF, 2009, p. 114, own translation)

<sup>19</sup> "Dwellings were small and clustered and generally conditions must have been primitive, giving rise to frequent illness and a short life expectancy." (FREYNE, 1996, p. 136, own translation)





## II

### UNDER THE FATHER'S GUARDIANSHIP

At the age of seven or eight Jesus is passed on to his father's guardianship,<sup>20</sup> thus being left in the care of the men of the family clan: older brothers and uncles. They are now the ones primarily in charge of the boy's education. "Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem every year for the feast of the Passover. When the child was twelve years old, they went up to the feast as usual" (Lk. 2:41, own translation).<sup>21</sup> It is with them that Jesus will learn to work and study. He will accompany the family group in the activities in the fields and with his father he will learn the trades of carpenter, bricklayer and blacksmith..<sup>22</sup> Part of the time is devoted to farming, since Nazareth, for its size, did not have enough demand for carpenter work for one person, much less for father and son. They didn't exactly have a workshop. The work, in wood, stone or iron, was done outdoors when working on larger pieces. Many jobs were done in the homes of the customers: shoring houses, making and redoing roofs, fixing doors and windows, etc.<sup>23</sup>

As Jesus grows older, he accompanies his father on a search for carpenter's work in the surrounding villages.<sup>24</sup> During Jesus' youth, Antipas, one of the four heirs to the kingdom of Herod the Great, to whom Galilee and Perea fell, decided to rebuild the capital, Sepphoris,<sup>25</sup> burned by the Romans when Jesus was four years old. Being only 5 km from Nazareth, it is

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<sup>20</sup> "The Hebrew term *baith*, like the Greek *oikia*, meant the family, the house in which they lived and their possessions. The father was responsible for all three, and over all three he had the broadest rights." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 145, own translation)

<sup>21</sup> "The law required an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem on the feast of Passover (Deut. 16:16, own translation), although for most Jews who lived further away, it was not possible to attend every year. Twelve years would have been about a year before Jesus officially became an adult Israelite and accepted the responsibility of keeping the law." (KEENER, 2017, p. 216, own translation)

<sup>22</sup> "The contemporaries of Jesus saw him wearing a wooden shavings behind his ear, which was the special identification of those who worked with wood; and they saw him smoothing wood with a planer and beating it with a mallet." DANIEL-ROPS, own translation. *Daily Life in Jesus' Time*, p. 481. "Luther (16th century) writes that Jesus is the son of a carpenter, and this was later adopted in editions of the Gospels. But the Greek term *tekton* indicates any kind of manual labor." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 98, own translation)

<sup>23</sup> "A Jewish boy was automatically apprenticed to his father and learned the trade as he grew older." (CONNOLLY, 1998, p. 63, own translation)

<sup>24</sup> "As an artisan and day laborer, Jesus would have belonged to the lowest class of peasants in 1st century Palestine, just above the indigent, the beggar, and the slave." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 59, own translation)

<sup>25</sup> "The original size of Sepphoris is unknown, but Antipas planned it, Roman-style, for a population of 25,000 people. MURPHY- O' CONNOR, 2008, p. 26, translation, "According to calculations, Sepphoris had 40,000 inhabitants at the time of the young Jesus. There lived a new type of Jew: urban, wealthy, Greek-speaking, progressive, cosmopolitan, influenced by the great ideas of Hellenization and Romanization of the world." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 199, own translation)

likely that Joseph and Jesus found in the rebuilding of the capital enough demand for their skills.<sup>26</sup>

"Varo's troops burned the city of Sepphoris and enslaved its inhabitants. This mass destruction and enslavement would have affected the population of all the villages in the immediate area of Sepphoris, such as Nazareth." (HORSLEY, 2004, p. 36, own translation)

It was probably in Sepphoris, a city of 8,000 to 10,000 inhabitants, that Jesus had his first contact with the urban world and with the Greek language, from which he must have learned more than a few phrases. There also Jesus would have contact with some human ills: social inequality, misery, abandonment and prostitution.

"Sepphoris was a very Hellenized place, as evidenced by inscriptions from that time, as well as the magnificent theater - with room for 5,000 sitting (D'ANCONA, 1996, p. 181, own translation). It was completed around the year 19, when Jesus was about 24 years old. The following year, Herod Antipas decided to move the capital of his kingdom from Sepphoris to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and build the monumental city of Tiberias there.(VERHOEVEN, 2011, p. 59;61, own translation)

Studies revolved around the Torah and the other holy books.<sup>27</sup> In the synagogue of Nazareth - in Jesus' time the term synagogue designated not a specific place, but the village assembly, the basic social form of community cohesion and autonomy - the villagers gathered whenever necessary and on Saturdays for prayer and the reading of the Torah.<sup>28</sup> Women could, but were not required to attend. It was at the Sabbath meetings that Jesus perfected his Aramaic and learned to read the Scriptures in Hebrew.<sup>29</sup> The texts were read in Hebrew and translated and commented on in Aramaic. The recitations of the texts exercised his memory. Not having opportunity to practice writing, for lack of material, his ability must have remained rudimentary.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Sepphoris, in Hebrew zippori, means little bird. It received this name because it was a city situated on a hill, in the shape of a bird, 940ft above the sea." (ARRUDA, 2014, p. 453, own translation)

<sup>27</sup> "There are three main texts in Jewish tradition: the Tanakh, the Torah, and the Talmud. The Tanakh is the canonical compilation of the Jewish Scriptures and was apparently assembled 500 years before the birth of Jesus. It is also known as the Jewish Bible; Christians refer to it as the Old Testament. The Torah consists of the first five books of the Tanakh: Genesis, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Talmud was written 600 years later, after the fall of the Temple in 70 A.D." (O'REILLY, 2015, p. 19, own translation)

<sup>28</sup> "Not until the mid-first century is synagogue used for the place or building where the congregation met [...] Luke's two stories: that of the synagogue in Capernaum, which the centurion had supposedly built for the people (Lk. 7:1-5, own translation) and that of Jesus supposedly reading the Isaiah scroll on the Sabbath in the synagogue in Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-20, own translation) are projections that Luke makes of his own later experience in the "synagogues" of the diaspora and that he introduces into the ministry of Jesus." (HORSLEY, 2000, p. 132-133, own translation)

<sup>29</sup> "Whatever languages Jesus may have spoken, there is no reason to think that he could read or write in any of them, not even in Aramaic." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 60, own translation)

<sup>30</sup> "Leaving aside rosy, romantic readings of the Nazareth family, the life of the child, teenager, and young Jesus will have been hard, austere, very poor, economically and culturally. Everything revolved around the religious and

The synagogue was a place for teaching and learning as well as for prayer. Since for the Jews the only place where God should be worshipped was the Temple in Jerusalem, everyone prayed in the synagogue and elsewhere, facing Jerusalem.

Although Nazareth was 130 km away from Jerusalem, a three to four day trip, the Temple nevertheless exercised its influence on the local community. The pilgrimages to Jerusalem were religious and social events. They were a celebration for the whole community, as were the religious celebrations. Each caravan brought news of the great city and the magnificent sacred temple.

Luke's account (Luke 2:41-51, own translation) of Joseph and Mary's visits to Jerusalem for the Passover feast when Jesus turned 12 "is the story of a precocious scholar, one might say a young Talmudist". Today a Jewish boy comes of age at 13; back then, a 12-year-old could already be considered an adult.<sup>31</sup>

Weddings had a separate place in the community festivals; they lasted for three days. The Jewish people had a positive and pleasurable view of sex and marriage, difficult to find in other cultures (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 81, own translation). At every wedding Jesus attended, in Nazareth or in neighboring villages, he was certainly charged for the fact that he did not marry. "The normal age for marriage for men was eighteen to twenty." (JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 131, own translation). An unusual fact that confused his relatives, friends, and especially the girls, whose parents would like to offer them in marriage.

"Jesus' renunciation of sexual love does not seem motivated by an ascetic ideal, similar to that of the "monks" of Qumran, who sought an external ritual purity, or the Alexandrian therapists, who practiced the "mastery of the passions." Nor do we have data to suspect that Jesus heard a call from God to live without a wife. His lifestyle is not that of a desert ascetic, like that of John the Baptist." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 82, own translation)

It is possible that Jesus simply postponed marriage, at first because he became the breadwinner, i.e., of the family group, and then to be able to devote himself to proclaiming of the kingdom of God. In the quiet life of Nazareth, the non-marriage of Jesus was the novelty, the unusual.<sup>32</sup>

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family poles." LIBANIUS. Languages about Jesus: from Christ the carpenter to the cosmic Christ, p.75, own translation.

<sup>31</sup> FLUSSER. Jesus, p. 11. / "Although the official ceremony of Bar Mitzvah - son of the commandment - may not have existed at the time of Jesus, its analogy to Roman rites of passage of age support the evidence indicating a ritual, in Jewish culture, of official entry into adulthood performed with boys about that age." KEENER, 2017, p. 216. Historical-Cultural Commentary on the Bible: New Testament, p. 216, own translation.

<sup>32</sup> "The Hebrew term for marriage is Qiddushin = sanctification. [...] In the list of virtues for achieving holiness, virginity is absent. [...] The only celibate rabbi on record is from the second century: Ben Azzai. [...] According to

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Flavius Josephus, in *Jewish Wars*, 'celibacy is practiced only by the (heretical) sect of the Essenes.'" MAGGI, 1999, p. 112; 114, own translation)

# III

## NAZARETH: THE FAMILY

"Yeshua bar Yosef, Jesus son of Joseph, lived, contrary to what we usually imagine, in a large family, sharing affections and care of parents, aunts and uncles, with 5 brothers and at least 2 sisters. Brothers or cousins, it doesn't matter, they lived as brothers, in a small house, in a tiny village, "in the province of Galilee, occupied by a pagan population". (RATZINGER, 2007, s. p, own translation)

But there was a strong love triangle: Father, Mother and Son, for each son/cousin a unique love, as only parents can give. There was nothing extraordinary to be highlighted but the intensity of the love. Relationships in which loving silence and concrete gestures of affection were present. As Paul Claudel wrote: "Silence is the Father of the Word. There in Nazareth there are only three people, very poor, who simply love each other. They are the ones who will change the face of the earth"(own translation).

Few facts of life in Nazareth have gone down in history.<sup>33</sup>

"Both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke provide a set of accounts surrounding the conception, birth, and childhood of Jesus. They were not written to report on facts that occurred (probably little was known), but rather to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah awaited in Israel, the Son of God, born to save humanity." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 62, own translation)

The day of every family in Nazareth began and ended with a prayer.<sup>34</sup> A manifestation of faith and trust in God. Simple prayer, full of unction, a declaration of collective love for God. Piously recited the Shema, Israel ("Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength").

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<sup>33</sup> "One among many, just like everyone else, without any importance, from the small unknown world of Nazareth, without horizons of culture and news of what was happening in the world. He did not possess the passport of that time that was called Roman citizenship (...) someone of pure daily life like so many Josephs and Marys from the outskirts and countryside. Politics was decided in Rome, Greek culture was established in Alexandria and shone in Athens, the splendor of the Jewish religion shone in Jerusalem, and Jesus was born and lived in the hidden simplicity of Nazareth". (LIBÂNIO, 2013, p. 79, own translation).

<sup>34</sup> The Jewish religion, in Jesus' era, knew two categories of prayer: statutory and private. The two statutory, daily, most important: the Shema ("Hear, O Israel") at dusk and in the morning and the Eighteen Blessings, known as the "Teriphah prayer par excellence," recited, standing, in the morning, afternoon and evening. Private prayer also allowed freedom to the individual..." (VERMES, 2006, p. 251, own translation)

The child Jesus absorbed the love for the Law with his mother's milk; he was educated in the strict observance and deep respect of the Torah of Moses; and from an early age he began to observe it faithfully. This reality is admirably reflected in one of the most important events of the first years of his life: The Bar Mitzvah, his presence in the Temple at the age of 12, according to Luke, on the occasion of Passover. (SCHLESINGER, 1979, p. 72, own translation)

Faith was thus nurtured daily in the home and on Saturdays in the synagogue. A simple, conservative faith, deeply rooted in the hearts of those poor peasants.

Along with the synagogue, the home was of central importance to the Jewish educational system, since Torah knowledge was absolutely fundamental to the way of life and therefore taken seriously as part of the parents' responsibility. The home was also the place for the celebration of marriages, funerals and circumcisions. (FREYNE, 1996, p. 177, own translation)

As a peasant, Jesus' attention was focused on the land, on nature. His gaze was a gaze of faith. Later, he will invite people to look at the lilies of the field, the birds of the sky, and God's loving care of his creation.

We do not know when Joseph died. Considering that life expectancy at the time was about 30 years (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 69, own translation); it is possible that he died when Jesus was a teenager or young man. So, early on, he must have often left home to fight for his daily bread. He must have taken part in the work, as a carpenter/bricklayer/stoner in the rebuilding of Sepphoris, the Hellenistic capital of Galilee, only an hour and a half's walk from Nazareth. Sepphoris, - "the crown of Galilee," in the expression of Flavius Josephus - had been destroyed by the Roman soldiers of Publius Quintilius Varus, governor of Syria, in the year 6 A.D. "The hypothesis that Jesus received some formal education in the nearest synagogue is well founded." (MEYER, in RAUSCH, 2006, p. 74, own translation)

The memories of the cruelty of the Romans razing the surrounding villages and beheading their inhabitants or taking them as slaves must have been still very much alive in the community. "Jesus cannot fail to witness, scattered along the road as far as the eye can see, the extensive row of crosses on which the rebel prisoners were nailed." (SCHLESINGER, 1979, p. 76, own translation)

Despite the short acquaintance with Joseph, in terms of time - as one supposes - it must have been very intense in Jesus' life and important for the formation of his personality and experience of work.

The mark of his father, Joseph, was so strong that the object of his spirituality migrates from Yahweh, just, holy, sometimes jealous and vengeful, to a sweet, understanding, merciful figure, like Abba, "little father". His father, Joseph, in interiority/spirituality is the personalization of God, his Father.

"Jesus' interpretation of God as Abba (Mt. 4:36, own translation) has no parallel in all Jewish literature. This remarkable fact is explained from the fact that "Abba" (father) was a familiar everyday address, which no one would have dared to apply to God." (JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 196, own translation)

A similar role must have been played by his mother, Mary (in Hebrew, Miriam), who accompanies him throughout his life, until his death. According to the narratives of the first communities, Mary is a woman of firmness (before the angel), of contemplation (she kept everything in her "heart") and of action (Elizabeth, Cana), zealous ("your mother and your brothers are there [...]"), courageous (at the foot of the cross) and in solidarity (with the disciples after Jesus' death).

Mary is a simple woman, outstanding in the dark history of the poor, who generally remain anonymous. She stood out as the mother of the poor man who became the most celebrated personality in history: Jesus of Nazareth. And it happened in a despised village, in Nazareth in Galilee. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 7:41-42, own translation). (ZILLES, 1999, p. 129, own translation)

Two deeply rooted customs of the family life of his time, Jesus would one day go against with words and actions: the way patriarchal authority was exercised, which subjected everyone, and the confinement of women to the home.

In debt-ridden Galilee, in a poor village, as a poor peasant and laborious craftsman, working, studying the Scriptures, praying, observing and learning in the school of life, Jesus matures as a man and prepares himself for the mission that Yahweh, his Father, has in store for him.<sup>35</sup>

"The urban elite in Judea referred to the Galileans ironically as "people of the land," a term used to indicate their dependence on subsistence agriculture. But the expression had a more sinister connotation, indicating the ignorant and wicked, who failed to keep the law correctly,

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<sup>35</sup> "The hypothesis that Jesus had been formed in Essene environments is today increasingly accepted [...] there are indications that lead us to postulate his proximity to the Essene movement. The place where he walked in Jerusalem, where the Cenacle (in which he celebrated the Passover) is said to have been situated, was the neighborhood of the Essenes." (BIANCHI, 2011, p. 31-32, own translation)

particularly when it came to paying the mandatory tithes and making offerings to the Temple."  
(ASLAN, 2013, p. 115, own translation)



# IV

## MEETING JOHN THE BAPTIZER

The first scandal Jesus caused in the quiet community of Nazareth was not to get married; the second was, as an adult, to leave his family. In Nazareth, the family was everything: place of birth, school of life, and guarantee of work. Outside the family, the individual was without protection, without security.

The decision to leave Nazareth is a moment of rupture. We do not know when, nor in what circumstances it occurred. It is quite possible that she was influenced by the news that came to Nazareth about the actions of her fellow countryman John, the baptizer.<sup>36</sup>

"The social structure of Jesus' family must have changed dramatically, especially if Joseph died before or during Jesus' ministry (Jesus' father is last mentioned when Jesus was 12 years old). Since James was probably the second son, the responsibility for the family's welfare would fall on him, and he may not have welcomed this change in his life." (Mk. 3, 21, 31-35, own translation) (WITHERINGTON, in SHANKS, 2008, p. 120, own translation)

John was preaching and baptizing east of the Jordan, in the region of Perea, under the jurisdiction of Antipas, like Galilee. Opposite Jericho, across the river where, according to tradition, Joshua had crossed the Jordan to enter the promised land. The place seems to have been chosen intentionally to symbolize a new liberation of Israel.

The news certainly spoke of a man living in the desert with some followers, eating what he found there: "sun-dried locusts and wild honey" (MIEN, 1998, p. 63, own translation). Dressed austere in a camel-skin cloak, he preached repentance, baptism, and penance.<sup>37</sup>

The search for penance, purification, and the desert as a path of purification was not an isolated fact. The "monastery" of Qumram, where a large community of "monks" sought purification, was about 20 km away from the place where John preached and exercised the

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<sup>36</sup> "[...] the historian Flavius Josephus will remember John and describe him as 'a good man, exhorting the Jews to cultivate virtue and to use justice in their relations with each other and devotion for God in order to receive baptism.'" (DUQUESNE, 1995, p. 66, own translation)

<sup>37</sup> "Some similarities between John the Baptist and the Essenes cannot be denied: their distance from the temple, the sojourn in the desert, conversion as a central theological category linked to immersions." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 222, own translation)

"baptism of conversion": a radical change of behavior, as a condition to return to the Covenant with God.

"The probability is great that John lived with the Essenes, and from the midst of the Essenes God calls him to the new mission. John lived in the desert in the style of the Bedouins, prophets and itinerants, but it was not different from the life of the men of Qumran, who lived in caves, worked in the fields, took care of goats and sheep". (MAZZAROLO quoted by CHEVITARESE; CORNELLI, 2009, p. 124, own translation)

Today, a sociologist could perhaps see in this cultural broth of that time the threatening and violent presence of the Roman Empire and its consequences, the sycophancy of its local representatives, always willing to please the bosses with the sacrifice of the impoverished population due to tax and other debts.

Oppression generated urgency for an immediate response to the ever-present expectation of salvation of the children of Abraham. Dissatisfaction was in the air, leading to revolt and waiting for something or someone to bring salvation.

John saw in the suffering of the people of his land, occupied and exploited by pagans, the sign of nearness and the need to prepare for what or who was to come. His preaching in the desert had great repercussions throughout Judea. From everywhere, including the capital Jerusalem, crowds came to hear his call to conversion and to be baptized. Most of them returned to their homes after having confessed their sins and were willing to convert to Yahweh. Others stayed in the desert with John, listening to him and helping him.

The baptizer was austere, hard on himself, and courageous in denouncing the sins of all. He openly condemned Herod, who lived in love with "Herodias, a forty-year-old woman full of charm" (PETITFILS, 2015, p. 95, own translation), the wife of his brother Antipas. Antipas had sealed the peace with the king of Nabatea - a frontier region and a warlike people - by marrying his daughter. Herod's behavior was repudiated not only for moral reasons, but because it threatened the peace in the region. Herod Antipas, feeling threatened by John's accusations and the revolt of the neighboring Nabateans, had John imprisoned in the fortress of Machaerus.

According to Pagola, John the Baptizer began his unusual and surprising "rite" in the waters of the Jordan between the autumn of the year 27 and the spring of 28 of our era and ended in 29. Jesus, in 29, then 33/34 years old, seeks John to be baptized.<sup>38</sup> "The depth and maturity of his character lead some to think that Jesus experienced a period of quiet searching

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<sup>38</sup> "Jesus would have been born in 5 B.C., or 3755 of the Hebrew calendar. Thus, Jesus was 34 years old when he plunged into the waters of the Jordan alongside John the Baptist." (RANCÉ, 2012, p. 87, own translation)

before meeting the Baptist." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 87, own translation) For Raymond Brown... "the common source that Matthew and Luke used [meaning: Q] tried to fill in the vague description given by Mark ('He was tempted by Satan') with a dramatic summary of the genre of temptations that awaited Jesus when he began to perform in public" The temptations tell us something about what Jesus would yet experience, but they tell us nothing about what happened to him in the desert." (VERHOEVEN, 2011, p. 82, own translation)

"There is no evidence whatsoever that Jesus lived among the Essenes, although it makes perfect sense to think that he lived with some of them in the time he spent with John the Baptist." (ALVAREZ, 2018, p. 50, own translation)

In his search for God, Jesus is touched by John's call to conversion and submits to the baptism of repentance and purification. The encounter with John and the baptism mark a turning point in Jesus' life; they constitute the initial milestone of his public life.

Matthew describes the baptism scene: "As soon as he was baptized, Jesus came up out of the water. Behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and hovering over him..." (Mt 4:16, own translation).

Luke details, "then the heavens were opened; the Holy Spirit descended upon him in a bodily appearance, like a dove..." (Lk 3:22, own translation)

A curious observation to say the least: there are exegetes who argue that the original text was mistranslated and that the original said, "the Spirit of God descended upon him smooth as a dove..."

An improper translation would have led to the association in Christianity, of the Holy Spirit with the image of a dove.

"All authors are in agreement in admitting that baptism was a defining experience in Jesus' life and that with it he radically distanced himself from the mission of John the Baptist." (ALONSO, 2022, p. 145, own translation)

Jesus stays for some time, for a long time, according to Gerhard Lohfink (LOHFINK, 2015, p. 405, own translation), in the company of John and his disciples, including three of his future disciples: brothers Andrew, Simon and Philip, friends of John. In this period it becomes clearer to him his points of convergence and divergence with John, whose vision of God is that of a judge who comes to judge and restore the covenant with his people, who must repent and confess their own sins, accept His forgiveness and begin a new life, form a new covenant. He, John, is just the one who came to prepare the path.

Jesus agrees with John in his view of Israel's situation and the need for change. His experience of God is different. He sees in Him a merciful Father. He would have to seek a new lifestyle and message; to go out to meet the people in the towns and villages, to seek out the most abandoned and share their joys and sufferings. In a short time he would leave the desert to walk his own path.

From John he takes the idea of preparing the people to meet God; to call the people to welcome their God, to awaken hope in their hearts. His mission becomes clear: to announce and establish the kingdom of God.

# V

## THROUGH THE PATHS OF GALILEIA

Living with John the Baptist and his disciples, Jesus understood that his mission would not be to live in the desert, in penance, but in the midst of the simple and poor people, participating in their joys and sufferings.<sup>39</sup>

After John's arrest,<sup>40</sup> Jesus left the region of Perea, on the other side of the Jordan, in northern Judea. Invited by the brothers Simon and Andrew, whom he had known as John's disciples, Jesus goes to live with them in Capernaum, possibly convinced by the two brothers of the privileged geographical situation of this city for his plans as a wanderer.

It was then the region that had the largest concentration of population in Galilee. Among the most important cities were Magdala, Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, mentioned in the Gospels, and the main one, Tiberias - named after the emperor Tiberius - ignored there.

Capernaum was a fishing village, a customs post, on the shores of Lake Genezareth, the Sea of Galilee,<sup>41</sup> situated along the Via Maris.<sup>42</sup> The "way of the sea" was a major trade route that, starting from the Euphrates, crossed Syria, reached Damascus, and descended toward Galilee, to cross the country diagonally and then continue on toward Egypt. According to Pagola, "Jesus never ventured along the routes of the empire. His feet trod only the paths of Galilee and the roads that led to the holy city of Jerusalem." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 110, own translation)

Simon and Andrew, being fishermen and originally from Bethsaida, on the opposite shore of the lake, knew the region well. Capernaum, a small town of no more than a thousand

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<sup>39</sup> "Jesus was not only Jewish by descent, by his lifestyle and intellectual habits, but his spiritual message is deeply rooted in the Jewish soil of Israel." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 480, own translation)

<sup>40</sup> "John was arrested by troops of Herod Antipas - according to Flavius Josephus, because he feared that John had such an influence on the Jewish population that it might lead to a revolt - and taken to the fortress of the royal palace of Machaeron (present-day Mukavir in Jordan), situated in the Hills by the Dead Sea." (VERHOEVEN, 2011, p. 79, own translation)

<sup>41</sup> "The Sea of Galilee today is about 12 by 6 mi, in the old days it was a bit bigger." (VERHOEVEN, 2011, p. 133, own translation)

<sup>42</sup> "Two types of taxes were collected in Capernaum: one was the maritime tax that fishermen had to pay [30 to 40%] in the Roman period; the other was the border tax, levied on goods transported along the Via Maris, an important trade route between the Mediterranean Sea and Damascus (located 56 miles inland)." (D'ANCONA, 1996, p. 37, own translation)

inhabitants (KAEFER, 2012, p. 70, own translation), was much larger than Nazareth. In the excavations that have been made, no traces of riches, such as those found in Tiberias, have been found to date. However, they have revealed a synagogue so imposing that "scholars estimate that the population of Capernaum housed about seven thousand inhabitants." (PAGÁN, 2015, p. 70, own translation)

From there Jesus could move with some ease to other small towns, avoiding the large cities of the region, such as Sepphoris, which had between 8,000 and 12,000 inhabitants, and the splendid new capital, Tiberias, of 8,000 inhabitants, built by Antipas. There is no record that Jesus ever went to Tiberias, the pride of the Tetrarch of Galilee, built in honor of the Roman emperor Tiberius, only 10 miles from Capernaum and 20 miles from Sepphoris.

Josephus (30-100 A.D.) tells us that Galilee was densely populated in his day, with 204 villages - with intensive cultivation of the land - and towns, of which three are mentioned: Sepphoris, Tiberias and Gabarot. Jesus would have intentionally avoided the Herodian cities (FREYNE, p. 128, 130, own translation).

The construction of Tiberias was part of the "process of Romanization through urbanization for the commercialization of Lake Tiberias, greatly increasing its tax base. [...]. From then on they could no longer own a boat or bring their catch to shore without taxation. They probably had to sell what they caught to Antipas' factories (in Migdal or Magdala), which dried or salted the fish." (CROSSAN quoted by CHEVITARESE; CORNELLI, 2009, p. 28; 30, own translation)

Jesus had known well the life of the peasants and artisans in his hometown of Nazareth and the neighboring towns. In John's company he knew the human misery of the poor and the rich who came in search of forgiveness and hope. Now he will meet the lives of fishermen - some owners of small boats, others just day laborers - as well as the oppressors of the poor, in the countryside and in commerce, with stifling taxes and fees. Defying religious prejudices and norms about impurity, Jesus lunches at the house of Levi of Alphaeus and with many collectors and customs men, all sinners, according to the learned of the party of the Pharisees.

He travels through the nearby towns around the lake, aptly called the Sea of Galilee: Chorazin, distant only 2 miles north of Capernaum; Bethsaida ("fisherman's house"), hometown of Simon, Andrew and Philip; Magdala - located 4 miles south of Capernaum and 3,5 miles north side of Tiberias - important for its workshops preparing dried fish, "which was sent in baskets to Jerusalem, Damascus and even to Spain" (PETITFILS, 2015, p. 109, own translation) and where Jesus healed one of the three Marys, who always accompanied him, Mary of Magdala, or Mary Magdalene.

Much of Jesus' public life takes place between these small towns: Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin. But he also traveled through some villages in southern Galilee, among them Cana, Nain, and Nazareth, 7,5 miles from Nain.<sup>43</sup>

In Nazareth, his countrymen, who had known him as a simple peasant and craftsman, are amazed at his wisdom and authority, and Jesus is saddened by the incredulity of his own, remembering the Scriptures: "No prophet is well accepted in his own country".

To go through the villages with a group of disciples, staying as guests and eating what they are given, seeking the people in their midst, talking to everyone, men and women, and alleviating their sufferings, comforting them and transmitting hope to them, was something completely surprising. A new way of being: poor and dispossessed, asking for help and offering love and hope. A free way of acting, free of prejudice.

"He wanders in an unstable life of a pilgrim throughout Galilee, totally and definitively given over to God's will, to God's plan. He lives for the sake of Israel, for the sake of the eschatological unity of God's people." (LOHFINK, 2015, p. 289, own translation)

"Jesus definitively breaks with what is most sacred for a family in the first century: with the criteria of honor and status - socioreligious and cultural - and with the relationship of fidelity, understood as pious conformation to one's family heritage and genealogy." (LUCIANI, 2017, p. 164, own translation)

An easy language, steeped in nature, work and domestic life, that the illiterate people (it is estimated that only 10% of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire and 3% of the Palestinians were able to read and write) understand and make it spread, as well as the fame of Jesus, quickly throughout Galilee and reach Judea and neighboring regions.

Before long, crowds begin to seek him out wherever they hear he is. Often he doesn't even make it to the cities. He stays in uninhabited places, by the hills, outside the cities. Other times, borrowing a boat from the fishermen, he speaks from it to the crowd gathered on the shore. Jesus tells stories, speaks in parables (Greek for "comparison") rich in images of life, with which the people can identify. The messages reach the people in a way that is easy to understand. Sometimes also, pedagogically, he leaves the listeners with more questions than

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<sup>43</sup> "Galilee was an agrarian society comprising approximately 200 villages. A region where Jewish villages and Hellenized populations were mixed, concentrated in the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias." (RAUSCH, 2006, p. 94, own translation)

answers. Sometimes even his own disciples, more accustomed to the new language, do not get the meaning.

It was not Jesus' habit to theorize about the divine. His concern was to represent perfectly, in his own person, the role of the son of his Father in heaven, and to teach his disciples to live in the same way. (VERMES, 1996, p. 67-68, own translation)

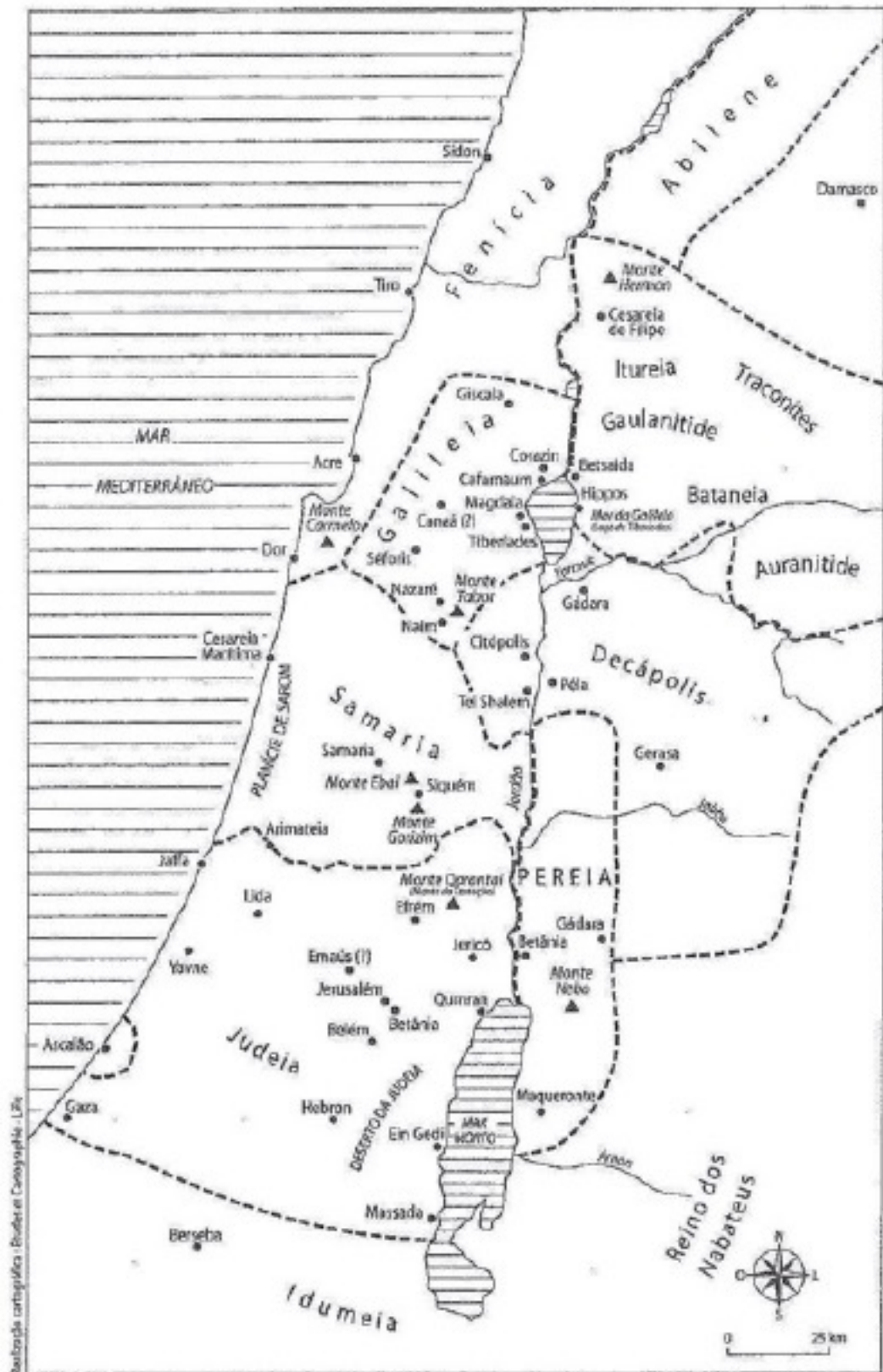
Often Jesus seeks out a synagogue, a space not exclusively religious, where the assemblies of the local community are held. There he comes into contact with the communities, who gather to solve their problems. His support for the peasant communities strengthens family ties threatened with disintegration by the impoverishment of Galilee.

The messages suggest, invite, propose, in an attitude of deep respect for the other. They always converge on a theme, their passion and reason for being: the kingdom, or dominion, of God.

Sociologist Bruce L. Malina summarizes the context and meaning of Jesus' message:

"Jesus' mission took place in the Roman Empire. In the eastern Mediterranean, Roman power shared by local elites made cruelty and extortion part of daily life. For the non-elite people of Israel, the collapse of the Israelite elite patronage system appeared as real treachery and disloyalty on the part of the best aristocratic families in whose interest the political economy and political religion operated. The rescue from this situation would only occur with the God of Israel taking control of the country and restoring divine protection in the face of the political perfidy that filled the land. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God was, in fact, his social gospel." (MALINA, 2004, p. 43, own translation)





Palestine at the time of Jesus  
 Source: VERHOEVEN. Jesus of Nazareth, p. 50.



# VI

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### The context

*The preaching of this pilgrim who went through the villages of Galilee is a response to the situation he sees and an invitation to overcome*<sup>44</sup>. And what does he see in the villages of Galilee?

A simple, hard-working people, disinherited, sick and mistreated by the civil and religious authorities. Those who should be the representatives of the people of God are allies of the Roman invaders and their oppressors. The leaders are landowners and tax collectors. They live in the cities at the expense of the poverty of the peasants.

Among the people, some, besides being sick, live in completely marginalized groups, excluded from social life.

The region had already produced rebels who were massacred by the Romans. It is likely that Jesus, in his youth, heard comments about the brutal massacre executed under the command of Varus. According to the historian Flavius Josephus, Quintinus Varus, quelling the rebellion of Judas the Galilean, son of Hezekiah, had 2,000 people crucified in Judea. In the year 6 of our era, Gaius, under the command of Varus, had burned Sepphoris, then the capital of Galilee, only 3 miles from Nazareth and some surrounding villages.

*To this suffering and abandoned people, Jesus, raised next to them, returns with good news: the kingdom of God.*<sup>45</sup>

But what does the kingdom of God consist of, the focus of Jesus' preaching and the *raison d'être* of his life?

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<sup>44</sup> "Early in his public life, Jesus naturally made use of the synagogue institution for his evangelizing work. Only later did he set about speaking in the open air, in the countryside or by the lakeside." (SCHLESINGER, 1979, p. 96, own translation)

<sup>45</sup> "Jesus' message was designed to be a direct challenge to the rich and powerful, whether they were the occupiers, in Rome, the Temple collaborators, or the new moneyed class in the Greek cities of Galilee. The message was simple: the Lord God had seen the suffering of the poor and dispossessed, had heard their cries of anguish, and would finally do something about it." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 120, own translation)

The concept of the kingdom of God is a creation of Jesus, one of the few that is his own, since most of his concepts come from the Old Testament, that is, from the people who formed him. (COMBLIN, 1971, p. 92, own translation)

## **The announcement**

So far we have tried to stick to the historical facts that up-to-date and competent researchers agree on. But when it comes to talking about the message of Jesus of Nazareth, what he intended to transmit, things get complicated. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate what he said from what his countrymen remembered or understood and, above all, reinterpreted after the resurrection, an extraordinary and overwhelming experience.<sup>46</sup> Other disciples came later, and others, and here we are today, reading these accounts and trying to draw from them, through an objective/subjective look, what we think is more representative and significant.<sup>47</sup>

Not long ago an interview with José Antônio Pagola, one of the most respected researchers on Jesus of Nazareth, appeared on the internet. In all simplicity, he said that we are just beginning to understand what Jesus intended and that the few twenty centuries that separate us from him have been marked by circumstances that have shaped and deformed the readings of his message.

With these caveats, let's try to see what Jesus of Nazareth said and still has to say to us.

He gave himself a mission: to announce the kingdom of God. For this he lived and for this he died.

The announcement of God's reign is determined by the Jewish understanding of God: God is unconditional will for good. Jesus spread the certainty that this will soon be established in the world. He will help the weak in maintaining their rights, empower the poor, satiate the hungry, and give sinners a chance for conversion. This unconditional ethical will is already at work in the present [...]. One must "seek" the Kingdom of God - just as one must seek wisdom (Mt. 6:25, own translation). (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 298; 300, own translation)

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<sup>46</sup> For Geza Vermes - "the greatest Jesus scholar," according to The Sunday Times - "these are genuine themes of Jesus' message: faith and trust; efficacy of prayer; belief in the fatherhood of God; need to be like children; bond with community overrides blood loyalty." Vermes adds two features of a stylistic nature: "healing and exorcism; hyperbolic and verbally nuanced speech when speaking of the Kingdom." (VERMES, 2006, p. 439, own translation)

<sup>47</sup> "The characteristic features of Jesus' kerygma are these: (1) the proclamation of the kingdom of God, both its imminence and its presence-Jesus saw himself as the instrument of this end-times sovereignty, but he did not set himself up as the content of his kerygma; (2) the call to repentance and faith in the face of God's end-times power and claim-Jesus himself was not the object of faith; (3) the offer of forgiveness and a share in the messianic banquet of the new order, with its ethical corollary of love." (DUNN, 2009, p. 81, own translation)

But what is the kingdom of God - whose better translation would be "God's domain" - an expression quoted 162 times in the New Testament and 101 times in the Gospels?<sup>48</sup> A profusion of quotations and many interpretations.<sup>49</sup> We could summarize by saying that Jesus tries to transmit a personal experience of personal experience of discovery of God, as his and our father, daddy, little father.<sup>50</sup> Someone immensely merciful, who only wants what his children want most: that they be happy, that they have life in abundance, in plenitude.<sup>51</sup>

The expression "kingdom of God" evokes what the present world would be like if it were ruled by God, in a utopian, eschatological political and religious vision.<sup>52</sup> It has very little, if anything, to do with the promise of a better life in heaven. Jesus announces by doing, and by doing, he makes present, visible, the kingdom of God, which is something concrete, which is already here, which is silently being built, and which will be great in the future, the future that only the Father knows when it will come.<sup>53</sup> But one thing is certain: the world can and will be much better when everyone loves each other as children of the same Father. It will be for everyone, excluding no one.<sup>54</sup>

The Kingdom of God is 100% political and 100% religious - the two aspects completely and unfailingly intertwined at the same time. Kingdom is a political term, God is a religious term, and Jesus would be executed because of, in a world where, for Rome, God already sat on Caesar's throne because Caesar was God. (CROSSAN in CHEVITARESE; CORNELLI, 2009, p. 20, own translation)

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<sup>48</sup> In Mark, 14; Matthew, 51; Luke, 34 and in John only 2 times. (PETITFILS, 2015, p. 117). This is "a political term: empire of God. The term *basileia*, which Christian sources invariably repeat to translate 'kingdom [of God]' is only employed in the 30s to speak of "the empire of Rome" (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 41, own translation)

<sup>49</sup> "The idea of the Kingdom of God is dream, the cause, the utopia, the ideal, the center and life of the true historical Jesus 'and distinguishes him from the Jesus of faith and late theologies.'" VIGIL in ARIAS. The great secret of Jesus: a revolutionary reading of the Gospels, p. 71, own translation.

<sup>50</sup> "In the gospels Jesus calls God 'Father' 170 times, in contrast to the rarity of the term in the Judaism of his day. The use of this appellation in prayer seems to be proper to Jesus, but its translation as 'papa, little daddy' is disputed." ESTRADA. From salvation to a project of meaning: how to understand the life of Jesus, p. 85, own translation.

<sup>51</sup> "In contrast to the didactic style of John and Paul, who aimed to investigate Jesus' relationship with God and his 'mystical' function as redeemer of humanity, Jesus' genuine teaching contains nothing abstract, theoretical, or speculative. He was not intrigued by the nature of the Deity, and even less so by his own role in the great drama of the *éschalon*. Rather, he was trying instead to convey to his audience, especially the inner circle of his apostles, how to approach God and respond to his call through religious behavior and action." VERMES. The Authentic Gospel of Jesus, p. 456, own translation.

<sup>52</sup> "The kingdom is the Good News, God's lordly dominion, his merciful power, and his history." PETITFILS. Jesus: a biography, p. 117, own translation.

<sup>53</sup> "Scholars are probably right that Jesus believed that very soon God would institute a special kingdom on earth." WILSON. Jesus, the greatest man in the world, p. 170, own translation.

<sup>54</sup> "The kingdom would not be complete for Jesus unless it contained all Israel, and that meant the untouchables, the unclean, the outcasts, and the sinners." WILSON. Jesus, the greatest man in the world, p. 174, own translation.

This certainty is anchored in our perception and hope. It is not something spectacular, a manifestation of power - in fact, Jesus had a great mistrust of power - but something that, once discovered, perceived, changes our way of seeing and acting, makes us convert. To convert, in essence, is to turn to others, especially to the most abandoned. It is not to want to dominate, but to serve.

Jesus doesn't just announce God's sovereignty, or God's sovereign mercy/compassion with words; he makes it happen by alleviating the suffering of those he meets or who seek him. Asked by John the Baptist's disciples if he was the Messiah, the expected one of Israel, Jesus said, "Go and tell John what you have heard and seen; the blind see, the hods walk, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor [...]" (Mt. 11:5, own translation).

"The Kingdom is not a private state of spiritual life, or the transcendence of this history. It is a fraternal way of being in solidarity with one another, without imposition or violence, and a filial way of treating God with deep trust. Jesus makes his wager for a fraternal life concrete through: a) the exercise of non-violence (Mt 5:9, own translation); b) the struggle for justice (Mt 5:10, own translation); c) the option for the poor and the victim (Lk 6:20, own translation); d) caring for the sick and the weak (Lk 7:21, own translation). (LUCIANI, 201, p.30,179, own translation)

The facts, some extraordinary, seen as miracles, are to a great extent results of his inner strength and signs of Jesus' compassion for human suffering. In fact, Jesus saw his healings as ambivalent. Ten lepers were healed, but only one returned to give thanks. He healed the disease, but did not change his heart.

He often asked that news of the healings not be spread.

It is not easy to define or describe the kingdom of God. From Jesus' words it is possible to extract some information about what it is not, what it is about, to whom it is addressed, and what the visible consequences are. The kingdom is not a religious doctrine or detailing of the teachings and traditions of Israel. It is not a set of laws and moral norms. On the contrary, he himself and his disciples break religious norms of purification and respect for the Sabbath rest. His statement: "The Sabbath was made for man and not the other way around" became famous. Man, the son of God, is the central reference of this kingdom.

The kingdom of God does not come as a vengeance of Israel against its oppressors, or a victory of the saints over sinners. The kingdom of God is not within us, as something private and spiritual, removed from the world. It is not something that is drawn from texts, however sacred, but from the lives of the humiliated and despised. "The last shall be first [...]" (Mk. 10:31, own translation).

"So what is the kingdom of God?"<sup>55</sup>

It is a turning to God, Father of all, kind, merciful, caring for his children; the best of fathers; slow to anger and rich in love and faithfulness, full of compassion for sinners and Gentiles. It is a kingdom of life and peace and happiness in abundance. This turning to God has only one way: by loving our neighbor, that is, the one in need or the one who finds himself on his way through life.<sup>56</sup>

Jesus of Nazareth embodies the kingdom of God because the concrete, daily life of the people, with its joys and sorrows, captures his thoughts, his heart and his passion for the Father.

Jesus of Nazareth discriminated against no one; he welcomed everyone, men and women, righteous and sinners; however, he had a preference: the poor, the sick, the marginalized, not because they were better, but because they were more in need and because they were brothers and sisters, children of the same Father.<sup>57</sup>

"The beatitudes of Jesus declare blessed not the poor but the destitute, not poverty but begging [...]. Jesus would have spoken of a Kingdom not for the peasants and artisans, who earned by their labor, but for the unclean, the degraded, and the despised." (CROSSAN, in ARIAS, 2012, p. 122, own translation). "God's reign is a family feast for those who have no family. Before the marginalized and underprivileged God shows himself as a provider father." (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 359, own translation)

Jesus spoke of the coming of the kingdom as an imminent reality (CROSSAN in CHEVITARESE; CORNELLI, 2009, p. 25, own translation). There is a certain consensus among experts that Jesus of Nazareth was mistaken about the arrival of the kingdom of God and about the identity of those (Jews and Gentiles) who were to become citizens of the kingdom of God. (VERMES, 2006, p. 430, own translation)

"Jesus began by accepting John's theology of the imminence of God, but precisely because of what happened to John (executed by Antipas), he changed his thinking to a theology of the presence of God. It is not we who are waiting for God, it is God who is waiting for us.

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<sup>55</sup> "The concept of the Kingdom of God is the axis around which the whole of the beatitudes revolve. The beatitudes - Jesus' manifesto to those who wish to embark with him on his great eschatological mission - are precious pearls in Jesus' teaching both from the point of view of devotion and that of poetry." (VERMES, 2006, p. 355, own translation)

<sup>56</sup> "The consistent portrait of Jesus is that of someone absolutely committed and faithful to the mission of realizing and objectifying God's will and values in history." (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 104, own translation)

<sup>57</sup> "There was something inherently challenging about Jesus' preaching. His language is disturbing, unsettling, a language that brought distress to those who were comfortable and brought comfort to the afflicted and disadvantaged." RAUSCH, 2006, p. 132, own translation)

The kingdom is present, it is an interactive process, a praxis and a program. The logic of Jesus' kingdom is the mutuality of healing - as the basic spiritual power - and commensality - as the basic physical power - shared freely and openly." (CROSSAN in CHEVITARESE; CORNELLI, 2009, p. 25, own translation)

Gradually the kingdom of God will become a reality in the world, and one day our beautiful and battered earth will be the kingdom of God desired and predicted by Jesus of Nazareth [...]. Someday, sooner or later, depends on us.



# VII

## THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT IN WHICH JESUS LIVED

Epicurus, a Greek philosopher who exerted a great ethical influence on the Greco-Roman world in the three centuries before Christianity, left us a prescription of four remedies for human happiness ([www.tetrapharmakon.com.br](http://www.tetrapharmakon.com.br)).

The first of these remedies - "nothing to fear from the gods" - reflects a conception of divinity totally different from the Jewish conception of God. For Epicurus, the gods have nothing to do with human things. They neither help nor hinder. Ignore them and make yourself happy.

The God of Israel is a God of relationship. His history is the history of the relationship of the people and their leaders with God. An Alliance was built between God and the people. The initiative came from God: He called a man, Abraham (1850 B.C.), from a distant land - Ur of Chaldea (today Iraq) -, made him travel a long distance, tested him and promised that he would be the father of a numerous people. He rescued these people when they were enslaved in Egypt, gave them a great deliverer, Moses (1300 B.C.) and, through him, the Ten Commandments.<sup>58</sup>

Through Moses, God summons the Hebrews and they become aware that they are a special people, a "church" (ecclesia in Greek: the assembly of the called) and they collectively commit themselves to this covenant.

After making the people wander in the desert, he gave them a land of their own. These people constituted themselves as a nation and had good and bad leaders, depending on their behavior. They were warned many times by the prophets, men of great courage and sense of justice.

This whole odyssey was told orally and then recorded in writing over the centuries. Folk tales, stories, laws, philosophy of life (proverbs), poems, prayers, exhortations and visions were compiled. The last of the books that came to form the Bible (plural of "biblos", book) was Wisdom, written in the year 50 B.C. A set of five books - Genesis, Exodus,

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<sup>58</sup> "God is the Lord who commands: that is the fundamental statement in Old Testament theology (...) Everything derives from that. All the rest is based on that. Everything else can be understood with reference to that and that alone." Koeler in ASLAN. God: a human story, p. 186, own translation.

Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy - made up what the Jews, even at the time of Jesus, called the Pentateuch, also called the Book of the Law or Torah.

In the last 500 years before Jesus of Nazareth, his ancestors were subjected to different empires. They knew oppression in their lands, and worst of all - exile and slavery. About 500 to 600 thousand Jews lived in Palestine at the time of Jesus and about 4 million were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, which did not prevent the People of the Covenant from preserving their cultural and religious identity.

If, for Epicurus, one must forget the gods in order to be happy, for the Jews happiness is in doing the will of the One who created us and knows and wants what is good for his people. Happiness is in seeking and doing the will of Yaveh.<sup>59</sup> "I pledge to lead you to happiness if you keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:6, own translation). "At the time of Jesus there was no religious orthodoxy, but several currents of ideas, or sects, among which were the Pharisees and scribes, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and the Zealots."<sup>60</sup>

The Pharisees - recruited mainly from among merchants and artisans, no more than 6,000, according to Flavius Josephus - were pious Jews, knowledgeable about the Law, spread by them mainly in the synagogues.<sup>61</sup>

"Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary: now go and learn" - Hilel the Elder's answer, when asked what was the essence of the Torah.<sup>62</sup>

The label of hypocrite has a circumstantial origin and is deeply unfair.<sup>63</sup> Their distrust of power, zeal for the Law and presence among the people made them very influential and

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<sup>59</sup> Yahweh - Representation of the most accepted Jewish pronunciation of the tetragrammaton - four capital letters, no vowels to represent the unpronounceable name of God, often replaced by Adonai (Lord), Elohim (Lord of Heaven). The tetragrammaton appears 6,828 times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

<sup>60</sup> "The division (which is due to Flavius Josephus) among the Jewish "sects" of the 1st century is well known: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. Josephus' division is far from complete. There were more types of Jews. It is difficult to discern whether Jesus belonged to any of these groups." (ZUURMOND, 1998, p. 60-61, own translation)

<sup>61</sup> "In legal matters, the Pharisees proved to be particularly attentive to three points: shabbat obedience, loyal purity, and the payment of sacred tithes." (SCHLESINGER, 1979, p. 133, own translation)

<sup>62</sup> "The Herodian period was one of intense religious creativity within the Pharisaic community, from which, according to later talmudic traditions, emerged the competing schools of the Hilel (60 B.C. - 9 A.D.) and Shamai (50 B.C. - 30 A.D.), liturgists. (SHAMA, 2015, p. 160, own translation)

<sup>63</sup> "The execrable role played by the curses against the Pharisees in the birth and development of Christian antisemitism is undeniable. Hypocrisy is a universal phenomenon in religious behavior, not just a characteristic of the Pharisees. After a detailed and penetrating study of the concept in both Greek and the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic, the eminent linguist James Barr observes: 'Hypocrisy is not pretending to be good, it is the conviction of being morally superior [...]. Christian hypocrisy [...] has not been absent from the historical scene. In primitive times, it was already there. Peter himself and his companions were, according to Paul, implicated in hypocrisy' (Gal. 2:13, own translation).

popular, although they intended to "be separate" from the people, who were ignorant and far from the Law, therefore impure. This concern with purity stifled them as much as it did the poor, who paid a heavy burden for their observance. The rules were difficult to comply with, distressing and expensive. Any touching of anything or anyone unclean - blood, certain animals, foreigners, people with skin diseases (called lepers) - made the person unclean.

Eram muitos os marginalizados pela impureza: doentes, mutilados, loucos, possessos, samaritanos, estrangeiros. As normas sobre a pureza eram um fardo pesado, sobretudo para os pobres. Imagine ter que destruir um forno porque uma lagartixa ou barata passou sobre ele...

The scribes - many of Pharisaic observance - also called teachers of the Law, were few in number, but socially influential.<sup>64</sup> They occupied a social position right after the elders and were well represented in the Sanhedrin, a 71-member council which acted as a court of justice, doctrine and control of religious life, whose head, the High Priest, was also the supreme head of the nation.

The Sadducees ("the righteous")<sup>65</sup>, although not numerous, formed the ecclesiastical aristocracy based in Jerusalem and had great religious and political influence. Attached to the written Law, they distrusted the prophets. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. For them, God blessed the righteous with wealth and power, which was their own.

Because they considered themselves the legitimate heirs of the priestly traditions, the Sadducees considered themselves the owners of the Temple. They lacked a more universalistic view of life: their mental horizon coincided with the physical horizon of Palestine (SCHLESINGER, 1979, p. 153, own translation).

The Essenes - about 4,000, according to Philo and Josephus - with groups scattered throughout the country, including Jerusalem, constituted an apocalyptic "sect". The Qunram community in the desert, on the shores of the Dead Sea, about 20 km from where John preached and baptized, was ruled by strict organization, with severe rules for admission and clearly defined penalties. The community was destroyed by the Romans in 68 A.D. (SHANKS, 1992, p. xix and 196, own translation)

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<sup>64</sup> "In both Mark and Matthew's tradition, the scribes are also grouped with the Pharisees. This seems to suggest a later stage, around and after 70, when the originally Pharisaic practices were being applied to a wider group and [...] will drive formative Pharisaism [...] and, later, rabbinic Judaism." (OVERMAN, 1997, p. 73, 47, own translation)

<sup>65</sup> "The name of the Sadducees comes from the priestly family of Shadoc, a priest who served under David and Solomon, according to Ezek.40:46;44:15. They were a national-liberal party of the upper bourgeoisie." (SCHUBERT, 1979, p. 15,53, own translation)

Set apart from society to keep themselves pure, they were of such rigorism as to surpass that of the Pharisees.<sup>66</sup>

"It is more likely that, unlike the Pharisees, the Essenes did not want to influence all the people. They kept their teachings secret and avoided discussions with outsiders. That is why we find in the tradition of Jesus debates with the Pharisees, but not with the Essenes." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 161, own translation)

Trusting in God, the zealots resolutely defended the Temple, the Law, and the chosen people, fighting for the extermination of the wicked, at the time, especially the Romans, who identified them as brigands and sycarians.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to note that Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots are rival, sometimes mutually hostile, groups within the Jewish nation, generally united in resistance to Greek internationalism and Roman military imperialism.<sup>68</sup>

The situation of dissatisfaction of the people of Israel helps to understand the success of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. The religious precepts were suffocating and placed many on the margins of society as unclean. A people thirsting for liberation, "sheep without a shepherd", waiting for someone or something to come and fulfill the promises of liberation, repeated in prayers every day.<sup>69</sup> In this context, some choices of Jesus of Nazareth marked his life and activities:

Being baptized by John and becoming, for a time, a follower of this ardent prophet;

To live in Capernaum, to get along with the fishermen, among whom he made his best and most faithful friends for the rest of his life;

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<sup>66</sup> "The Essenes first mentioned by Josephus in the middle of the second century B.C. are still flourishing near 50 A.D." Vermes points to five areas of contact between the Qunram Community and the New Testament: "eschatological expectation, the true Israel, attitude toward the Old Testament, attitude toward the Temple, and similar organization and custom." (VERMES, 1996, p. 149; 142, own translation)

<sup>67</sup> "After Herod's death, Judas the Galilean joined forces with a mysterious Pharisee named Zadok to launch an entirely new independence movement, which Josephus calls the 'Fourth philosophy,' to differentiate it from the other three 'philosophies': the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes...they were called zealots. These 'zealots' should not be confused with the Zealot party, which emerged years later after the Jewish revolt of 66 AD. During Jesus' lifetime, zealotism was an idea, an aspiration, a model of piety associated with the apocalyptic expectation of a new, divine order that was about to be revealed." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 66, own translation)

<sup>68</sup> "For the Zealots - 'zealots,' as they called themselves - the glory of Yahweh and the freedom of the People are regarded as inseparable greatneses, so the humiliation of the People implies the humiliation of God. What made them immediately notorious was their use of violence with which they thought they had to smooth the way for the Kingdom of God." (GNILKA, 1999, p. 64, own translation)

<sup>69</sup> "Opposing parties and factions, sharp disagreements, hatred against 'impure' pagan rule, a 'last days' atmosphere, vexations and afflictions of all kinds, fanatical prophets, messianic figures thrilling the people, violence everywhere, zealots plotting, sicarians committing murders for religious and nationalistic reasons. In the midst of this incredible turmoil lived the boy, the young adult, the mature man, named Jesus, known as the son of the carpenter Joseph." (STEIN, 2002, p. 101, own translation)

To search for the "lost sheep of Israel": the poor, the sinners and the sick, wandering through the villages, mainly in Galilee;<sup>70</sup>

To become, himself, an impure, outcast, out of compassion, without withdrawing from the company of all;<sup>71</sup>

To announce to everyone a good news, source of joy and happiness: the beginning of the kingdom of the merciful God, Father who never abandons anyone;

Not to impose new legal precepts, norms and rites, but to appeal to trust in God, compassion for one's neighbor, and hope for better days;<sup>72</sup>

To choose from among the people and train a group of followers, capable of spreading and continuing his message;

Not to bow down before those who cling to money, prestige, power, and mere group solidarity;

Accept the consequences of their actions, not fleeing imprisonment, suffering, and death."

We have tried to stick to the facts. This selection of facts from the life of Jesus of Nazareth (inspired by the book *Jesus Before Christianity*, by Alberto Nolan), does not escape subjectivity.

More precisely, as Gerhard Lohfink warns:

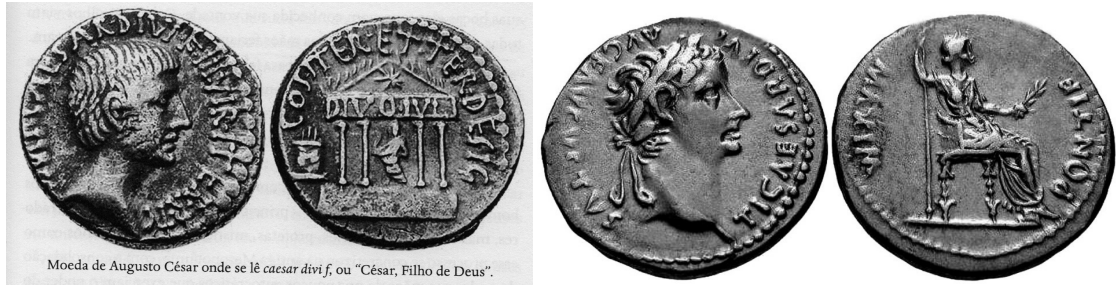
"[...]whoever states 'this and that is a fact' already separates it from the infinite torrent of events... without interpretation there is no understanding. Even the most precise and rigorous historical exposition does not take place without constant interpretation... And interpretation presupposes interpretive community... it presupposes cultural memory." (LOHFINK, 2015, p. 25-27, own translation)

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<sup>70</sup> "The polemic reaction of the Jewish authorities, namely doctors of the law and Pharisees, was not due to their relationship with the common people or with socially and economically disadvantaged layers of the people, but aimed at Jesus' relationship with sinners." (MENDONÇA, 2015, p. 200, own translation)

<sup>71</sup> "Immersed among the people, with prostitutes and sinners, austere - no purse, no shoes, no saddlebags (Lk.10, 3-4), sharing bread, healing the sick, Jesus preaches forgiveness, mercy and charity as the ultimate expression of fidelity to the Law." (MAZZAROLO in CHEVITARESE; CORNELLI, 2009, p. 126, own translation.)

<sup>72</sup> While the Pharisees were concerned with interpreting the law, seeking to apply it to every situation, Jesus refused to legislate and did not promulgate any set of rules. "To love God and our neighbor as ourselves [...] such precepts were not "legal," neither prescribed nor prohibited any specific action; they could not be imposed and thus rested entirely on the internal disposition of men." (DAVIES, 1967, p. 38-39, own translation)



Moeda de Augusto César onde se lê *caesar divi f*, ou "César, Filho de Deus".

Coin of Augustus Caesar that reads *caesar divi f*, or "Caesar, Son of God".

Source: Denarius - Tiberius Caesar, Divi Augusti Filius Augustus / Verse: Pontifex Maximus

Source: ASLAN. God: A Human Story, p. 125, own translation.

"[...]whereas Romans had what we might call a retrospective eschatology, in which people looked back from the perspective of a "golden age" that had already arrived and saw the whole of history reaching the point where they were [...]"

"[...] Jews cherished and celebrated a prospective eschatology looking forward from the perspective of a non-ideal time, longing, praying fervently for the freedom, justice and peace that they were convinced belonged to them once by right. God would do it! In the end, God's plan would come to pass!" (WRIGHT, 2020, p. 55, own translation)

"We can say without fear of being mistaken that the "great religious revolution" carried out by Jesus is to have opened another way of access to God, different from the sacred: the help to the brother in need. Religion does not have the monopoly on salvation; the best way is to help the needy. Many men and women who have not known Jesus walk on it." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 235, own translation)

# VIII

## THE TEMPLE, THE FEASTS, THE SYNAGOGUES AND THE SABBATHS<sup>73</sup>

Some institutions permeated the whole social and religious life of the Jews at the time of Jesus: the Temple, the feasts, the synagogues and the Sabbaths.

The Temple of Jerusalem was the ultimate reference, the greatest symbol of God's covenant with the people and vice versa. Initially built by Solomon, it was destroyed in 587 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar. Rebuilt, with modesty, in 515 B.C., after the Babylonian exile, it was completely remodeled and richly adorned by Herod the Great in 20 B.C. The work took ten years to complete, with 10,000 workers.

The temple had 5,000ft of inner wall, with oblique buttresses, and was up to 130ft thick. The sanctuary was guarded by a 165 inches portico (SCHLESINGER, 1979, p. 33)

A monumental construction, built on a 525 x 330 yards piece of land, where a great 165ft cube stood out - the temple itself. There was the room called Holy, where the altar of perfumes and offered bread and the seven-armed candelabrum were. Separated by a curtain - the Veil of the Temple - was the empty space, the holiest place on earth for the Jews - the Holy of Holies - where the Lord was present. Only the High Priest, once a year, on the Feast of Atonement, with great fear, penetrated this enclosure, where there was only one presence, that of Yahweh, the Lord of Israel. This was the central point, the most important reference point for every Jew. The closer to it, the more sacred the place was.

The huge 1,550,000 ft<sup>2</sup> site - five times the size of the Acropolis in Athens and ten times the size of today's St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican - on which the temple itself stood was not a single plateau, but had slopes. At the highest point was the Holy of Holies. On this plateau were built the palaces of Herod, of the Asmoneans, of Caiaphas and, next to the temple, the Antonia Fortress, from where the Romans took care of security, watching what happened there, especially at Passover, when the Roman Procurator would leave Caesarea, on the shores of the Mediterranean, and install himself in the Fortress to observe what was happening in the temple courtyard and to intervene promptly in case of any disturbance of order. So Rome demanded, so he did.

Through Solomon's Gate entered Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). This was where the merchants of oxen, rams, doves, oil, flour, and other implements needed for worship were installed, as well as the money-changers who exchanged coins for pilgrims coming from all over. Considering that Jerusalem had about 30,000 inhabitants<sup>74</sup> and that at the time of the annual festivals, especially the Passover, the

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<sup>73</sup> "Synagogue: etymologically this term simply means 'gathering'. In Jesus' time it simply designates meetings, or meeting places. The synagogue as an institution develops in the late 1st century and early 2nd century. There are 1st century buildings interpreted as synagogues (i.e., meeting places) at Herodium, Massada, Gamala in Gaulanitis, Magdala (26.7 ft. x 24.6 ft.), and, perhaps, Chorazin." (OVERMAN, 1997, p. 65, own translation)

<sup>74</sup> "One can estimate the total to be between 50,000 and 150,000 inhabitants, that is, in the vicinity of 100,000." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 103, own translation)

number reached 150,000, one can imagine the compact mass movement and the commercial importance of the temple.<sup>75</sup>

Beyond the courtyard, towards the center of the temple, were the three gates leading to the courtyard for women. Another six gates, three on each side, gave access to the Israelite courtyard, where no uncircumcised person, under penalty of death, could enter. Then came the priests' court, the altar, the Holy One and the Holy of Holies. The 80ft wide by 25ft high altar had nothing to do with our altars; it looked more like an incinerator or crematory furnace, since whole animals were to be burned (holocaust). Only the skins were not burned; these became the property of the priests.

It is estimated that at the time of Jesus, there were about 9600 Levites - who took care of the music and administration - and 7200 priests, who took care of the worship. (BETTO,2015, p. 21, own translation)

Two lambs were immolated, one in the morning, the other in the evening, every day of the year in Israel's perpetual sacrifice to God.<sup>76</sup> The function of sacrificing the animal and collecting the blood was exclusive to the priests, except for the paschal lamb, which was sacrificed in the temple by the head of the family, who, at that moment, figuring the people, was elevated to priestly dignity.

The community of priests was divided into 24 classes, whose members, dispersed in Judea and Galilee,<sup>77</sup> were called periodically to Jerusalem to celebrate the Temple sacrifices. Under them there was a lower clergy, the Levites, who were men of every service: singers - the most prestigious function - Temple police, etc.

Many priests lived in Jericho, a city considered to be priestly, situated on the banks of the Jordan River, 17 miles from Jerusalem, to which they went to attend their respective eight-day work shifts in the Temple.

"Situated 850 feet below sea level - Jerusalem was more than three thousand above the sea - in the midst of a scorching desert, Jericho was an oasis thanks to a huge and permanent water source." (KAEFER, 2012, p. 49, own translation)

"Jericho played a key role because of its geographical location, because, in addition to agriculture, the city was a mandatory stop for pilgrims heading to Jerusalem from the south or the east... one of the oldest urban settlements in the world, a place where communities and

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<sup>75</sup> "The Paschal Lamb had to be eaten by the pilgrims within the sacred limits of the city, under penalty, to be enforced by the religious guard, of forty lashes." (WILSON, 2006, p. 219, own translation)

<sup>76</sup> "On Sabbaths, on New Moons, on feasts, the number of sacrifices was greater. And one must add to the 1,093 lambs or goats, the 113 bulls and 32 goats offered annually, an abundant amount of flour, wine and oil." (MORIN, 1988, p. 102, own translation)

<sup>77</sup> "According to J. Jeremias' estimates, there were about 7,200 common priests in Palestine. With their wives and children, they thus represented almost one-tenth of the population. They performed their duties two weeks a year and on the great feasts. They could not live on tithes alone. Some were scribes. Many exercised manual professions. They were the officials of legal purity." (MORIN, 1988, p. 63, own translation)



settlements can be identified over eight thousand years ago." (PAGÄN, 2015, p. 72,74, own translation)

Let us imagine concentric circles of holiness, from the inside out: the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest could enter; the Holy, where the priests had access; the priests' courtyard, a space between the Holy and the altar, where the priests - even those unfit for worship: disabled people of all kinds - had access; the courtyard of Israel, meant for the adult men of Israel; the courtyard of the women; the spaces where commerce was concentrated, frequented by Jews and Gentiles; the spaces outside the courtyards where the leaders of the cult lived, the logistics of the temple; the city of Jerusalem; the country of Israel; and, finally, the rest of the world. In this way holiness was being diluted and purity was becoming impurity.

The temple was the reference point for all Israelites. In and around it was the largest buying, selling and trading market in the country. It was a source of pride for every Israelite, but also a burden because of the obligation of going on pilgrimage three times a year and the tax collected.<sup>78</sup> Every adult Israelite was obliged to celebrate every year in Jerusalem the historical events of Israel's liberation: Passover, Pentecost (the Feast of Harvest) and Tabernacles, or Tents. Of course, not everyone could fulfill this precept.

Although Jesus and his followers participated in the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, out of respect for the existing Temple and what it stood for, there is complete silence (in the Gospels) about his or his followers' involvement in any of the Temple rituals or about him or his followers bringing offerings to the Temple, such as fruits of the earth. (FREYNE, 1996, p. 205, own translation)

Other important feasts on the Jewish calendar in Jesus' time, celebrated in the villages, were Yom Kippur (Day of Forgiveness), New Year's Day, Dedication, and Purim, a kind of carnival commemorating the liberation of the people.

The most spectacular of the feasts was the Feast of Tabernacles, during which each family built, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, a hut of leaves in which they lived for a week. It had the appearance of a harvest festival, with the usual risks of drunkenness.

The data on the number of inhabitants of Palestine in Jesus' time (500,000 to 600,000) and of annual participants in the Passover in Jerusalem (120,000 pilgrims, plus the 30,000 to

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<sup>78</sup> "Each village in Palestine fell under one of the 24 sections, or priestly districts, that divided Judea and Galilee. These districts were responsible for paying the taxes necessary for the maintenance of the Jewish state and the priestly class. In addition to the many tributes, the temple earned much from the continuous movement of daily sacrifices, ransoms of the firstborn, daily rites of purification and atonement. Some estimate that every Passover about 20,000 lambs were sacrificed at the temple by the priests, who traded the hides and the blood, which was sold as fertilizer." (CRB, 1996, p. 139-140, own translation)

50,000 inhabitants of the city) give us an idea of the impact of the annual pilgrimages. The population of Jerusalem, for one week, three times a year, tripled. A quarter of the population of every village in the country would gather in caravans and travel for days, on foot, for up to 125 miles towards the capital.<sup>79</sup>

On the spiritual, daily level, the biggest reference was the synagogue, a weekly community meeting place for religious formation and prayer, a prayer that was repeated daily in each house, in the morning and in the evening. It was also a place to discuss community problems. Here the consciousness of the national identity and its alliance with Jehovah, its God, was formed.<sup>80</sup>

The service began with the recitation of the Shema and a series of prayers that spoke of daily needs and of the great collective hope: the messianic era. Although everyone spoke Aramaic, the readings from the Torah (Pentateuch) were given in Hebrew, which one of those present either translated verbatim or not. Any adult Jewish male (over 12 years old) could do the reading and had some freedom to choose the text. The Torah reading was followed by another one taken from the Prophets. It was customary for a man to give a sermon, commenting on the texts read or exhorting people to piety. Among the peasants, in general poorly educated, it was customary to pass the word to visitors or to the scribes and Pharisees, who took on the function of livening up the meetings, which increased their prestige. Jesus, in his pilgrimages through the villages, sought out the synagogues to speak to the people.

In general, synagogues were rectangular - where they existed, which is not the case in most of the villages of Galilee in Jesus' time - some with stone benches on the sides. The women and children were separated from the men by a wooden balustrade. Everyone's body and heart were turned toward the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>81</sup>

The one day's rest each week (Sabbath), introduced in Israel as part of a series of courageous, civil, social reform measures - land rest every seven years (Sabbatical Year), the forgiveness of debts, the freeing of slaves, the return of pledged land every 50 years (Year of Jubilee) - was sacralized.

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<sup>79</sup> "Joachim Jeremiah estimates the number of pilgrims in Jerusalem at 125,000. If one adds to this number the 55,000 inhabitants of the city, it follows that on feast days the city was home to nearly 180,000 people." (GNILKA, 1999, p. 260, own translation)

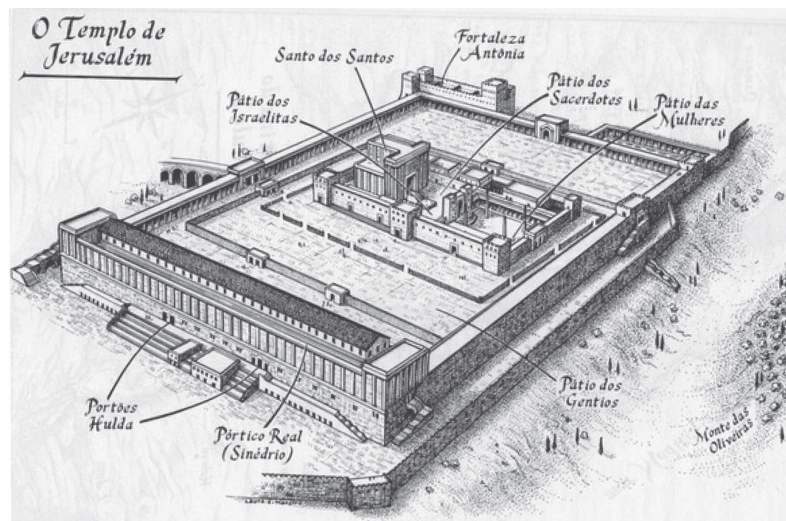
<sup>80</sup> "There were in the Judaism of that time two kinds of prayer: the public, which was done standing up and in which each Jew felt united with all his people, and the personal, which was done with the face on the ground, more or less as Muslims do today." (AUGIAS, 2011, p. 37, own translation)

<sup>81</sup> "Chorazin and Tharisee (Magdala) - the latter 3,7 miles south of Tiberias - are among the few towns around the Sea of Galilee in which contemporary archaeologists have discovered synagogues from the 1st century A.D., buildings that may suggest moderate prosperity and the local influence of Pharisees." (STAMBAUGH, 1996, p. 93, own translation)

The historical origin of Shabbat (Sabbath) is very old. It is associated with the ideas of celebration and time off from work. The narratives about it give it religious value and justify it by saying that even God rested on the last day of the creation of the world. Over time the narratives are transformed into laws, in this case priestly legislations codified during the Babylonian exile (598 to 538 B.C.). The laws will make up a book, and this book becomes sacred.

There are two fundamentally different ways of reading the Bible: by investigating its origins, or by focusing exclusively on what is written, as the word of God. In the first case, the sacred is life and the humanizing initiatives that go through history; in the second case, the sacred is what is written, as being the unquestionable word of God.

The Sabbath, such a healthy and liberating institution, by the narrow reading of the book, enslaves man.<sup>82</sup> Jesus breaks this tie that binds us to the Law, reestablishing the primordial value - life, men - for which the Sabbath was made..

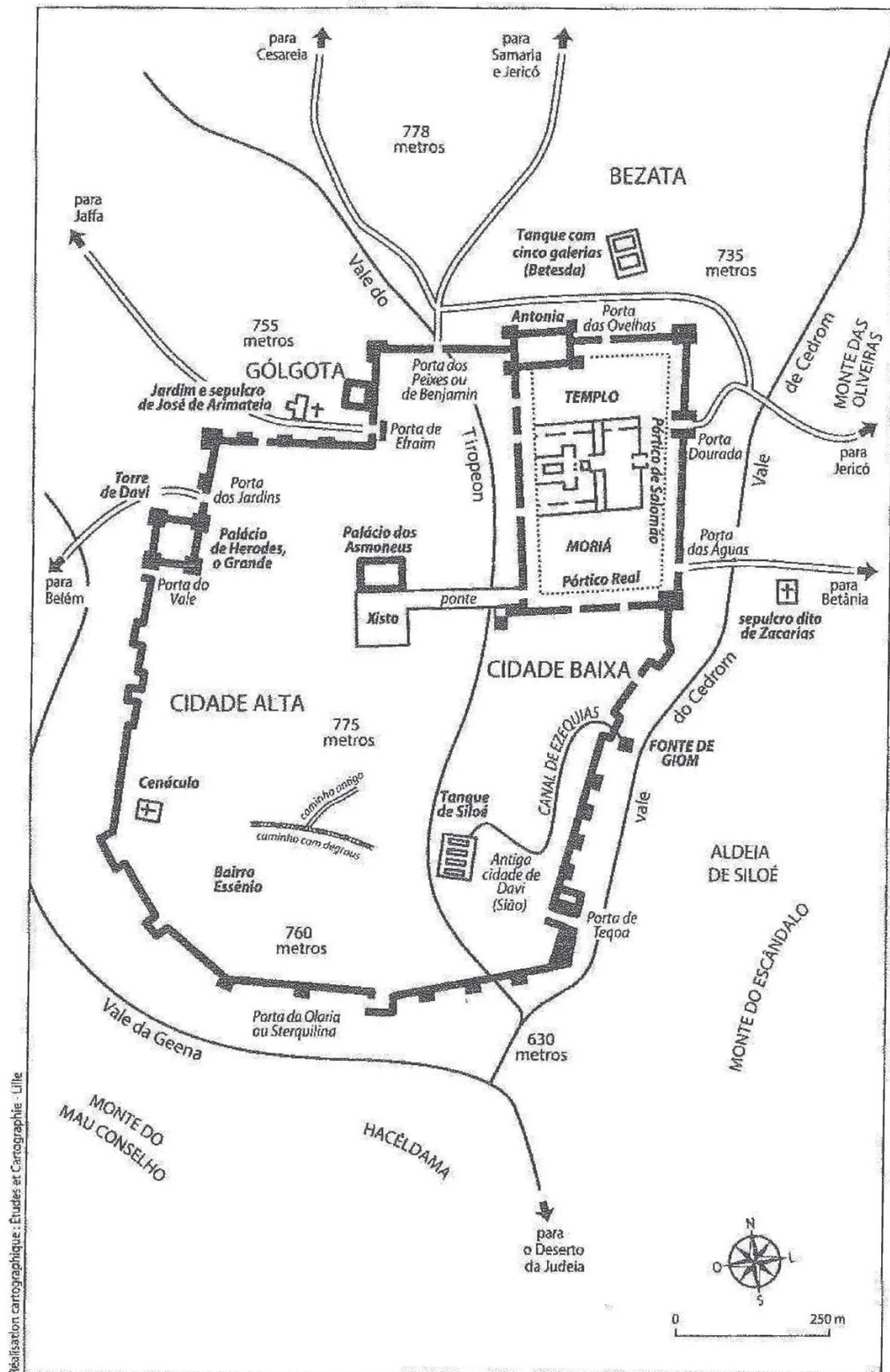


Jerusalem Temple

Source: ASLAN. Zealot: the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth, p. 10.

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<sup>82</sup> "The rabbis distinguished 39 kinds of work that were forbidden on the Sabbath (including 'two loops... sewing two folds... writing two letters...'). In Jesus' view this attitude made the people slaves to the Sabbath. Such a Sabbath tradition kept them from keeping the commandment of love." (DUNN, 2009, p. 141, own translation)



## Jerusalem in Jesus' Era

Source: PETITFILS, Jean-Christian. Jesus, a biography.

# IX

## THE SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT IN WHICH JESUS LIVED

In the deeply rooted Jewish conception, the land belonged to God and God gave the Jewish people the promised land and made an Alliance with them.<sup>83</sup> This portion was called Canaan, and from Hellenistic times on it was called Palestine. In 63 B.C., General Pompey conquered Jerusalem and incorporated Palestine (Judea, Perea, Samaria and Galilee) into the Roman Province of Syria, which had been conquered the year before. The two cities of Syria, Damascus and Antioch, were joined by the third most important city in the region, Jerusalem.

Palestine was important to the Romans because it was a strategic region - the important trade route from Mesopotamia to Egypt passed through Galilee - it was small and dense, which favored military control and tax collection.

Palestine occupied a strip of land of 7.7 thousand mi<sup>2</sup> (smaller than the state of Sergipe), 150 miles long by 50 miles wide, between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River.<sup>84</sup> To the south was rugged Judea, to the center was ethnically heterogeneous Samaria, and to the north was Galilee.<sup>85</sup> Inhabited by about a million people, Palestine was one of the densest regions in the Province (GNILKA, 1999, p. 66, own translation).

The size of the Diaspora, numbering about four million, compared to the Jewish population of Palestine of at most one million, hints at the extent of the migration, favored by the attractive and favorable conditions in the large commercial cities of the West, as well as the frequent hardships in Palestine.(JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 131, own translation)

*Galilee, with a strong Hellenistic influence, was disparagingly called, by southern Jews,<sup>86</sup> since the time of the prophet Isaiah, the "Galilee of the Gentiles." Bilingual region, where the people spoke the*

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<sup>83</sup> "The notion of Jew encompasses three distinct components: ethnic, linked to descent from Abraham and belonging to one of the twelve tribes of Israel; territorial, linked to residence in the land of Israel; and sociocultural, associated with certain beliefs and customs." (BERNHEIM 2003, p. 62, own translation)

<sup>84</sup> "Palestine: 155 miles north-south; maximum of 60 miles east-west; 21,000 miles (smaller than the state of Espírito Santo which is 28,000 miles); 600-700 thousand inhabitants. Jerusalem, without the pilgrims: 25-30 thousand inhabitants." (MORIN, 1988, p. 9, own translation)

<sup>85</sup> "Galilee had around 200,000 inhabitants." (VOIGT, 2008, p. 13, own translation)

<sup>86</sup> "In Jesus' day, the term Jew lacked precision. Accurate terms were Galilean, Idumean, Israelite, but not Jew." (HORSLEY in HOORNAERT, 2000, p. 101, own translation)

*traditional language - a Hebrew-Aramaic dialect - and the soldiers, foreign merchants and others spoke Greek. Among Jesus' disciples there were at least two who spoke Greek.<sup>87</sup>*

In several cities there was a mixed, Hellenized population, which made the Galileans a more liberal people, less strict about Hebrew customs and Pharisee precepts. However, among the pious Galileans there reigned a strong nationalism and willingness to resist the Romans.

The Gospels mention Decapolis several times, a reference to the ten Hellenistic cities, nine of which were to the east, across the Jordan. Matthew says that people came from Decapolis to see Jesus. Mark tells of a demoniac from Gerasa, who was healed by Jesus, and also comments that Jesus, returning from Tyre, went on towards Lake Galilee, passing through Sidonia and crossing the mountains of the Decapolis. One of the cities of the Decapolis was Philadelphia, today Amman, the capital of Jordan.

The land of Judea was arid, lending itself more to livestock than to agriculture. Galilee was fertile. "The entire region of Galilee is destined for cultivation and there is no part of its soil that is unused" (Flavius Josephus (37-100 A.D.) - Jewish historian, own translation).

Wheat, widely cultivated in Galilee, formed the basis of the diet, although the more bitter barley was "the bread of the poor".<sup>88</sup> Galilee produced for its own consumption and the surplus was used to supply Judea, and especially Jerusalem. The best that was produced went to the temple, the "sheaves of first fruits" and the "showbread". Besides cereals, Galilee cultivated vineyards, olive and fig trees. There are records of vegetables being grown: lentils, peas, lettuce, chicory, and watercress. In addition to fruits, such as apples, pomegranates, and dates.

The peasant economy was based on the exchange of goods. To meet their obligations, peasants sold their surplus production at prices determined by the large landowners. The requirement to pay fees and rents in cash was another way of increasing the pressure on smallholders and making them even more dependent on larger landlords. (MOXNES, 1995, p. 71, own translation)

Most properties were about two to four hectares, so that a family could only make a living with a lot of effort and work. (VOIGT, 2008, p. 17, own translation)

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<sup>87</sup> "Galilee at this time covered an area of about eight hundred square miles. The population, largely Jewish, was close to two hundred thousand inhabitants. (BERHEIM, 2003, p. 43, own translation)

<sup>88</sup> "Soft wheat was rare, even in Galilee, but there were several varieties of durum wheat used for milling. Horses, mules, and donkeys were fed barley, which cost half the price of wheat and was often the food of the poor." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 33, own translation)

Plutarch (46-126 A.D.) stated that every day pomegranates and dates from Galilee arrived at the emperor's table in Rome. Wine was the customary drink of all Palestine.

In Judea, sheep and lambs were raised, which were necessary for worship. Meat was consumed by the wealthier population, being restricted to the Passover feast and other special occasions for peasants and the poor in general.

In industry, fishing in Lake Tiberias<sup>89</sup> and the preparation of dried fish in Magdala were prominent. The spinning and weaving of wool in Judea; in Galilee silk, possibly from China, and linen, perhaps produced locally.

The leather industry was quite significant and was intended for local consumption and export. The leather of the animals slaughtered in the temple, during the annual festivals, the daily sacrifices and the private sacrifices of atonement, belonged to the priests. On Passover alone about 18,000 lambs were slaughtered.

"It is justifiably suspected that the trade in sacrificial animals was a profitable business controlled by the family of Annas. In the year 30 who controlled it was the "head of the clergy," Jonathan, son of Annas and brother-in-law of Caiaphas." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 448, own translation)

Other industrialized products at the time: pottery, bitumen, and luxury crafts - souvenirs of the Holy City for pilgrims and perfume for the temple.

Trade in Palestine in general was small and made of many exchanges. Surplus production was consumed by the cities. Jerusalem, with a fixed population of 30,000 to 50,000 inhabitants, and about 120,000 pilgrims on great feasts, was the city which concentrated the greatest wealth and demanded the most goods and services. The goods arrived in camel caravans, managed by real transport societies.

"In Jerusalem, there were regular markets for grain, cattle, fruit and wood. There was also an auction post, where slaves were displayed and offered for sale. Through the Gospels, we know that there was an annual market in the outer court of the Temple, related to the Passover feast and beginning about three weeks before it." (GNILKA, 1999, p. 9, own translation)

It mainly exported food, fruit, oil, dried fish, cloth, bitumen and perfumes. The temple, the High Priest and the civil and religious aristocracy were the main importers. They bought

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<sup>89</sup> "In the days of Christ's ministry this lake had not yet received the name Tiberias; it was often called the Sea of Galilee, although this was a pompous title, for in fact a boat could cross the lake in half an hour. Also called 'Lake of Genezareth' - one of the most beautiful places, to this day, in the world. Like Aneci and the lake of Genoa, the most famous in Europe have been compared to it." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 20, own translation)

cedar from Lebanon, incense and perfume from Arabia, fabrics and spices from India and Babylon. This trade was in the hands of great merchants, Jewish or not, with offices and warehouses all over the empire. Some of these had residences in Jerusalem, where they enjoyed the court and its pleasures. The luxury of the wealthy class in Jerusalem was lavish.<sup>90</sup>

As every Jew in the Diaspora (the number of Jews outside Palestine at the time of Jesus is estimated at 4 million)<sup>91</sup> had to contribute two drachmas annually - the didrachma - to the maintenance and beautification of the temple, which was a great financial center. There was the largest exchange house, where currencies from all over the world were exchanged for the only currency valid in the temple. As a kind of "exchange house", it fixed the exchange rate of each currency. It was the largest banking institution of the time.

"The empire's relations with the Hebrew religion and were well defined by the recognition of "religio licita" (permissible religion), won by the Jews' support of Caesar in the historic campaign in Egypt (48-47 B.C.).

Paul Trebilco lists 5 privileges for the Jews including from the diaspora in Asia Minor: 1) Right to assembly; 2) Right to build buildings; 3) Right to collect the temple tax and state protection for its transportation; 4) Waiver of military services for Roman citizens among the Jews; 5) Right to observe the Sabbaths, dietary prescriptions, and to live according to the laws of the ancestors."(NUNES, 2016, 447, own translation)

The tax burden imposed by the empire was higher. Every Jew - girls over 12 and boys over 14 - was required to pay annually one denarius (equivalent to a day's work) and a quarter of the production every two years, that is, about 13% of the production each year.

The collection of taxes was entrusted by the Romans, in order to be more efficient, to the rich families, who hired others, in the form of leases, to do this "dirty work".<sup>92</sup> One of these chief tax collectors, Zacchaeus, was visited by Jesus. Another, Levi/Matthew, an impure and sinful tax collector, in the evaluation of the Pharisees, was recruited by Jesus to be his disciple/apostle.

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<sup>90</sup> "Rome acted directly on local elites by imposing the liturgical system of fees in exchange for rewards offered through the granting of citizenship, patronage, and imperial service. It created a sense of public discipline nurtured by local elites that became the price to pay to maintain the status quo of the imperial order [...] and a factor in sharpening local social inequalities." (MENDES in CHEVITARESE, 2009, p. 138, own translation)

<sup>91</sup> "There were three to four million Jews in the dispersion and one million in Palestine, for about twenty million free men in the entire Roman empire" (CARREZ, 1987, p. 28, own translation)

<sup>92</sup> "The collectors of the royal taxes (individuals or groups) signed a contract, almost always fortnightly, which obliged them to pay a fixed amount and gave them the right to recover their money from the taxpayers. So in order not to be disadvantaged, they taxed widely. These indirect taxes were received under the high control of a financial procurator who had to be a gentleman, a Roman citizen" (MORIN, 1988, p. 28, own translation)



The total tax burden for the peasant population was overwhelming. It is estimated that it amounted, for families like Jesus', to something between one third and one half of what they produced. Many lost their property because they were unable to pay.

Rome, the capital of the empire - some historians speak of 650,000 to a million inhabitants - was maintained by the wealth of the conquered countries. The Roman legionary had to be a competent performer, able to collect taxes, guarantee supplies and maintain order, the *pax romana*.

Three social phenomena, intertwined and associated with imperial rule, took place in Jesus' time, deeply affecting the lives of his countrymen: the expansion of monoculture and construction and, as a consequence, the expansion of *latifundia*, the monetarization of the economy and the concentration of wealth.<sup>93</sup> . The concentration of property and the increase of the contingent of landless people had dramatic consequences. Many peasants who lost their land left the countryside to work in the cities.<sup>94</sup> The reconstruction of Sepphoris, the construction of Tiberias, around 20 A.D., and the fortification of Julias - ancient Bethsaida, where Philip and the brothers Simon and Andrew came from - by Herod Antipas, besides serving the policy of Rome, aimed to employ peasants who had lost their land. Situations of indebtedness, unemployment, slavery, day labor or sharecropping, were witnessed, experienced by Jesus of Nazareth and narrated in the Gospels.

"[...] the construction of two capital cities in the span of two decades implied an unprecedented economic exhaustion of the Galilean peasants, precisely during the lifetime of Jesus and those who were part of his movement. Moreover, for the Galileans, the Roman-style cities built by Antipas with tax revenues were a constant reminder of Roman imperial domination." (HORSLEY, 2004, p. 91, own translation)

The Gospels - written 40 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth - may give the impression "that Jesus was then at the center of Palestinian history." Viewed, however, from

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<sup>93</sup> "Through the New Testament, the Talmud and Josephus, one gets the impression that there was no middle class, or almost none at all. People of intermediate position, between rich and poor, in Palestine were only found in the Greek cities, which did not belong to the Chosen People. Numerous documents show open enmity between the classes. The balance of society seemed uncertain, its solidity precarious. The enmity between the classes, interrupted constantly, on the slightest pretext, taking on political and social colors." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 174; 181, own translation)

<sup>94</sup> "The archaeology of Galilee, Judea, and Perea in the period of Roman expansion points to the gradual disappearance of small estates and the increase of large estates. The evidence shows Israelite elites relapsing in their obligations to local clients. Rather than mediating with the Romans for the status quo situation, it appears that Israel's aristocrats chose to use their own power and the Roman presence to force the local peasantry beyond its bearable limits [...] it was dispossessed large landowners who became the local bandits of the region." (MALINA, 2004, p. 42, own translation)

the historical perspective, Jesus was a peripheral figure. We do not immediately find traces of him when studying first century Palestine after Christ." (THEISSEN, 1991, p. 17, own translation)

# X

## DISCIPLES OF JESUS: RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Matthew tells in his Gospel:

"As he was walking by the lake of Galilee, he (Jesus) saw two brothers - Simon, nicknamed Peter, and Andrew his brother, who were casting their nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Come with me and I will make you fishers of men." And they immediately left their nets and followed him. A little further on he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John, who were with their father mending the nets. He called them, and they left the boat and immediately followed him." (Mt. 4:18-23, own translation)

A beautiful narrative, showing the firmness of the invitation and the radicalness of the surrender. However, Jesus' choices do not seem to have been so intuitive and sudden.

Jesus of Nazareth leaves the company of John, the baptizer, to make his way. As we have seen before, he settled in the house of the brothers Simon and Andrew, whom he had met in John the Baptist's group of disciples. In the same fishermen's quarter, in Capernaum, lived the other two brothers mentioned, James and John, sons of Zebedee and Salome, partners of Simon.

Jesus lived with the fishermen for a long time, probably working as a carpenter/bricklayer/iron worker and learning the trade of a fisherman to the point of knowing where and when the shoals were concentrated in the lake. <sup>95</sup>

It was at the customs house in Capernaum, a little later, that Matthew, also called Levi of Alphaeus, a tax collector, was recruited. The office of tax collector was leased from the Romans, and those who held it were regarded as sinners, collaborators, and thieves, who enriched themselves at the expense of the people. In fact, they were poor people who submitted themselves to this subordinate function that only enriched their bosses, like Zacchaeus.

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<sup>95</sup> "Like fishermen and tax collectors, carpenters had far higher incomes than field workers; it was Jesus' calling, not involuntary poverty that called both he and his followers to a sacrificial life." (KEENER, 2017, p. 6, own translation)

On the occasion, Matthew offered a banquet for Jesus, his disciples and his former colleagues, "collectors and sinners".<sup>96</sup> Experts say that the Greek text gives rise to the interpretation that the hosts of this banquet were Jesus and the disciples, at least the four friends already mentioned. In this hypothesis, the disciples celebrate with Jesus the entrance of one more in the group, the first non-fisherman. In any case, for the disciples to participate in a meal where tax collectors, considered impure and sinners, were present, it is to be assumed that they had already adhered to Jesus' ideas and attitudes and accepted to be considered impure. They were already living the kingdom of God that discriminates against no one. They did not mind the criticism from the "learned men of the Pharisees' party".

In contrast to the austere John the Baptist, "who neither ate nor drank", Jesus is accused of being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of collectors and sinners" (Mt. 11:19, own translation).

Commensality, whether with publicans and notorious sinners or with his own, in smaller or larger groups, is an essential characteristic of the historical Jesus." (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 210, own translation)

"From the very beginning of his militancy, the sharing of bread was the hallmark of Jesus (Luke 1:53; 6:21). The commensality was the most characteristic experiential expression of his spirituality, for which there was an intimate relationship between the Father (the love of God and to God) and bread (the love of neighbor)." (BETTO, 2015, p. 115, own translation)

Jesus' enemies insulted him, calling him a eunuch (because he was celibate), just as, because he ate at table with publicans, prostitutes and sinners, they called him a "glutton and a drunkard" (Mt. 11:19). (GNILKA, 1999, p. 170, own translation)

There is not enough historical data to retrace Jesus' steps, but we do know that the disciples accompanied him on this pilgrimage through the towns and villages. These followers - some invited, others who came to join the group - lived as brothers and sisters, men and women, on equal terms, witnessing with their selflessness and joy the coming of the kingdom of God.

Jesus' ascetic lifestyle as an itinerant preacher/healer created an undeniable attraction, breaking down some social barriers of that relatively closed society, both in terms of culture and class. (FREYNE, 1996, p. 203, own translation)

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<sup>96</sup> "As 'sinners' were designated: 1) people who led immoral lives (e.g. adulterers, counterfeiters) and 2) those who practiced dishonorable profession (i.e., a profession that notoriously led to dishonesty or immorality), such as tax collectors, shepherds, muleteers, peddlers, tanners." (JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 135, own translation)

In the same chapter in which Matthew recounts his calling, he tells of the choice of the twelve special disciples, who will later be called apostles, or envoys<sup>97</sup>. At least five or six of the twelve were from or lived in Capernaum and had a long association with Jesus. Among those selected were fishermen, a publican<sup>98</sup>, a zealot, men with Hebrew and Greek names, such as Simon, Andrew, and Philip. A programmatic list that recalls the 12 tribes of Israel.

"In Jesus' day, the word zealot could simply mean "zealous," but perhaps it means, in Matthew, an involvement of Simon in revolutionary activities before he became a follower of Jesus; at the time the gospels were written, the more likely meaning would be that." (KENNER, 2017, p. 74, own translation)

As stated in Mark's Gospel (the oldest), "they were chosen to live with him and to send them out to preach." This diversity enriches the group, strengthens the understanding of the mission, and facilitates its spread. <sup>99</sup>

"Oscar Cullmann has insisted on the fact that in the group of disciples not all thought the same way and that each one had different reasons for following Jesus. We should probably think of a group of followers of diverse tendencies gathered around a leader." (AUGIAS, 2011, p. 74, own translation)

In Luke's narrative, Jesus chose 72 other disciples - an artificial composition, according to experts - and sent them ahead, two by two, "to the cities and places where he thought to go".<sup>100</sup> He gives them all authority and power to carry out the mission. He instructs them all how to behave, what to take, where to stay, what to say, and what to do<sup>101</sup>. They go stripped, without staff, without a bag, without bread, without money, with only one tunic, dependent on

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<sup>97</sup> "The word "apostle "(one who is sent) is most likely post-Passover...the word disciple (one who learns) appears more than 250 times throughout the New Testament, most of them in the Gospels and Acts." (RAUSCH, 2006, p. 118; 123, own translation)/ "The term apostle is borrowed from the Roman administration, which maintained, throughout the length and breadth of the Empire, a service of 'apostleship,' i.e., confidential mail," (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 32, own translation)

<sup>98</sup> "The term "publican," which occurs 18 times in the Synoptic Gospels-Mark, Matthew, and Luke-is used to designate one who acquires from the state the exercise of the state rights of taxation and levying taxes and collects them from his debtors. This profession aroused rancor and distrust. Publicans were accused of seeking to get rich dishonestly, of having contact with Gentiles, of neglecting the precepts about the tenths and purity. For this reason they were integrated among those ignorant of the Law and mentioned as the opposite of the Pharisees." (MENDONÇA, 2021, p. 252, own translation)

<sup>99</sup> Simon the Zealot and (probably) Judas Iscariot, both named not by chance (Mk. 3:18; Mt. 10:4), form a duo (Mk. 6:7).

<sup>100</sup> "The number 72 is not to be taken literally because it corresponds to the number of wise elders of Israel assembled by Moses in the wilderness to help him rule the people and also the number of nations of the world, all born, according to Genesis, of sons of Noah. But it means that the disciples were quite numerous." (DUQUESNE, 1995, p. 84, own translation)

<sup>101</sup> "Modern research into how the 'Jewish and religious traditions' (the oral torah) were transmitted by the rabbis has shed light on how the disciples transmitted the Master's teachings. The apostles used the same technique and mnemonic methods as the rabbis of their time to transmit the Master's tradition faithfully." (TERRA, 1977, p. 38; 40, own translation)

the good will of those who want to receive them "to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Mt. 4:23; Mt. 10:1, own translation)<sup>102</sup>.

The journeys of Jesus and the disciples are painful journeys, because they are made on foot, but they are joyful. They carry messages of joy for everyday life, trust in God, and hope for better days. They preach what they practice: liberation from prescriptions, from feelings that give rise to sickness and from illnesses that are attributed to the power of the evil one. They bring the good news of the kingdom of God at work: life in abundance. The conditions are simple: trust in God/Father and compassion for all.

On the disciples' return, Jesus reviews their mission with them and curbs their enthusiasm, lest they lose their focus. When the disciples dispute among themselves for power in the kingdom of God, Jesus invites them to dispute the willingness to serve<sup>103</sup>. On another occasion, he invites the disciples, "come away by yourselves to an uninhabited place to rest a while," for they did not even have time to eat (Mk. 6:31, own translation).

"Here are some episodes in which Jesus' way of forming his disciples for the mission shines through:

a) involves them in the mission (Mk. 6, 7; Lk. 9, 1-2; 10, 1); b) on his return, he reviews with them (Lk. 10, 17-20); c) corrects them when they err (Lk. 9, 46-48; Mk. 10, 14-15); d) helps them discern (Mk. 9, 28-29); e) questions them when they are slow (Mk. 4, 13; 8, 14-21); f) prepares them for conflict (Jn. 16, 33; Mt. 10, 17-25); g) commands them to observe reality (Mk. 8-27-29; Jn. 4, 35; Mt. 16, 1-3); h) reflects with them on the issues of the moment (Lk. 13, 1-5); i) confronts them with the needs of the people (Jn. 6, 5); j) teaches that the needs of the people are above ritual prescriptions (Mt. 7, 12); k) has moments alone to instruct them (Mk. 4, 34; 7, 17; 9, 30-31; 10, 10; 13, 3); l) cares for their rest (Mk. 6, 31); m) thinks about their food (Jn. 2, 9); n) defends them when they are criticized by their adversaries (Mk. 2, 18-19; 7, 5-13); o) insists on vigilance and teaches them to pray (Lk. 11, 1-13; Mt. 6, 5-15)." (MESTERS, 1995, p 80-81, own translation)

After some time announcing in the synagogues the kingdom of God, Jesus is sought after by thousands of people, to the point "that he could not present himself in public in any

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<sup>102</sup> Sending adherents as messengers was probably a genius idea to seek effectiveness of "mass communication" in a society of oral communication. (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 105, own translation)

<sup>103</sup> "In the Jewish wisdom tradition, the truly wise people were not wise in their own eyes, who trusted in their understanding, but the simple, whose wisdom was grounded in the fear of the Lord." (KEENER, 2017, p. 79, own translation)

city, but stayed outside in the unpopulated. Sometimes he would hide himself for the necessary silence and prayer<sup>104</sup>.

In a little more than two years, between 28 and 30 A.D., Jesus traveled through various cities and villages of Judea, the regions of Tyre and Sidon, Caesarea Philippi, Decapolis and much of Galilee, concentrating his action in Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida. These cities disappointed him. The Gospels disagree about the length of Jesus' public life: a little over a year according to Mark, Matthew and Luke, or three years according to John<sup>105</sup>.

Although there were no women among the twelve apostles, Jesus' behavior towards them completely escaped the standards of the time<sup>106</sup>. They could not speak in the synagogues, address a man outside his home, or even greet him, much less testify in court. No matter how many women there were in a synagogue, worship could not take place without the presence of men. Proverb of the time: "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah, teaches her prostitution, for she will misuse what she has learned."

The woman's place was in the home, caring for her children, her husband, and spinning wool in Judea and flax in Galilee. There were weekly production quotas, but they did not keep the earnings from their work, not even what of their work, not even what they could find. However, this situation already began to change in the cities under the influence of the Greeks and Romans.

The Gospels record the presence of several women among the disciples. They are not called disciples, for the simple reason that there is no word to name them that way in the Aramaic of that time. Some well-known names: Mary, his mother; Mary Magdalene; Mary, mother of James and Joseset; Joanna, wife of Herod's steward; Salome, mother of James and John; Suzanna and many others, among them Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus of Bethany, a family that Jesus highly esteemed.

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<sup>104</sup> "The ambivalence of Jesus' behavior toward the Torah can also be seen in the fact that the disciples were not required to study it, which contrasts with the monks of Qunram who prescribe: 'Where ten are found, there should not be missing a man who studies the Torah night and day, taking turns with each other...'" (GNILKA, 1999, p. 213, own translation)

<sup>105</sup> "Gradually, Jesus becomes aware of the failure of his project in Jewish society. Hence his change of strategy. On the one hand, he ends his activity in Galilee to make his last attempt in Jerusalem. On the other, he leaves direct evangelization of the people (Mt. 1-8) to concentrate on his disciples (Mk. 8-15), despite their attempts to divert him from his mission (Mk. 8:11; 10:2; 12:15). (ESTRADA, 2016, p. 129, own translation)

<sup>106</sup> "Jesus' praxis regarding the relationship between the sexes cannot be deduced from either Jewish or Hellenic praxis." (FIORENZA, 2005, p. 119, own translation)

Jesus' behavior toward women, speaking to them in public, giving them attention, letting himself be touched, protecting them, asking for their favor, actually accepting them as itinerant disciples, contrasts with the rigid patriarchy of the time, recommended and practiced.<sup>107</sup>

Among the disciples, three men - Simon, John and James - and three women - Magdalene, Salome and Mary, mother of James and Joset (Mk. 15:40, own translation) - enjoy a special friendship from Jesus. Mary of Magdala, or Magdalene as she became known, has nothing to do with the sinner mentioned in the Gospels. She was a special disciple, who never abandoned Jesus, from the time he delivered her from evil forces that tormented her. She would have been, according to some historians, the first person to whom Jesus revealed himself after his death. She is the most quoted woman in the Gospels (17 times) and the only one whose hometown is mentioned.

By welcoming women into his group of disciples, Jesus did something that was regarded as a great provocation to his contemporaries. The existence of female disciples was unthinkable in the Jewish rabbinate. (GNILKA, 1999, p. 176, own translation)

"It is a prophetic-charismatic, sapiential, popular and itinerant movement that aggregated and congregated many women (Lk. 8, 1-3, own translation) who in Jesus found another way to live their lives in the patriarchal context of the Roman Empire and patriarchal religious cultures. In this movement of intra-Jewish renewal, they were welcomed despite the exclusive gestures and words that also existed there, they were freed from various ills, diseases and oppression, they were considered disciples blessed by the love of God and who left their old ways of life to place themselves in the following of Jesus. (REIMER, 2013, p. 74, own translation)

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<sup>107</sup> "A disciple of the sages must not speak to a woman in the street... even if it is his wife, his daughter, his sister [...] Everyone who speaks too much to a woman brings disgrace upon himself, abandons the words of the 'Torah,' and ends up in gehenna. [...] No wife is permitted to open her mouth before her husband." Teachings of the time (MAGGI, 2013, p. 64; 131, own translation)



# XI

## HEALINGS, EXORCISMS AND MIRACLES

A number of circumstances made the situation of the poor especially critical in the Palestine of Jesus' time. Under the rule of the Romans, a local elite is co-opted and enjoys power and wealth with them. Both transfer to the people the burden of maintaining and enriching the empire. A socioeconomic stratification is then configured, composed of three layers:

- a rich and powerful stratum composed of the members of Herod's royal family, the high court dignitaries, the families of the priestly and lay aristocracy, the landowners, the great merchants, and the chief tax collectors. The Holy Temple, as a shrine and pilgrimage destination, and all the trade that revolved around it, was the main source of wealth of the local elite, i.e. the rulers of Israel;
- the middle stratum was quite small and composed of small merchants, the lower clergy and the owners of craft workshops and inns;
- the poor corresponded to the absolute majority of the population: wage earners, laborers and peasants, fishermen, beggars, and slaves. There were two categories of poor: the poor who lived by hard, daily, uncertain work, and the destitute who had nothing to live on.

Jesus belonged to this third category, experiencing with the other inhabitants of Nazareth the daily struggle for survival. In his public life, Jesus takes on the life of the dispossessed, welcoming everyone - rich and poor - and bowing down to no one.

During Jesus' first 20 years, Galilee experienced for the first time the phenomenon of urbanization. Herod Antipas built two large cities within 30 miles of each other: Sepphoris and Tiberias. To make them viable, taxes were increased and the economy was monetized, with strong consequences on the people's economy: indebtedness, loss of land and consequent concentration of property and income, expansion of monoculture and disintegration of families.

The poor then became poorer, relegated to the condition of day laborers, beggars, and prostitutes. If their situation was desperate, it became worse in times of drought and epidemics. It is an undeniable historical fact that Jesus of Nazareth turned especially to them, especially to beggars, the blind and crippled, peasants and slaves fleeing from creditors and owners, widows, barren and disowned wives, and prostitutes. The people of the street, we would say today.

The objective situation of this social layer was desperate. They could expect little from the rulers and from society in general. Nor could they expect much from religion as it was

taught and practiced: a series of norms stigmatized them as impure. Impurity was hard to get rid of, which contaminated others, making them impure at the slightest physical contact.

Wealth was considered a blessing from God. Poverty, consequently, the absence of God's blessing, therefore, abandonment, or worse, a punishment for personal or ancestors' faults. No wonder, in this environment where no light could be seen at the end of the tunnel, the widespread occurrence of three strong feelings and behaviors mixing together: sickness, in many and diffuse forms, revolt, and eschatological hope.

The eschatological hope was translated into the expectation of the coming of the Messiah, or of a new great prophet, since none had appeared in Israel's history for four centuries.

The revolt translated into a grudge against the Romans and against all those who collaborated with them, such as the tax collectors and, especially, their leaders, who were the ones who got rich. There were also those who took up arms against the Romans, many of whom were crucified by the thousands. History records that during the first years of Jesus' life, the soldiers of Varo, Governor of the Roman Province of Syria, crucified about a thousand Jews in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

The picture of sickness among the poor, especially among the destitute (there were many Galileans in debt) was extensive and complex. There are many sick people because there are many poor people. If health, like wealth, is a blessing from God, sickness is a punishment and healing the return of God's blessing.<sup>108</sup>

We know that illness is not just a biological fact, or, as they say, there are no illnesses, there are sick people. Everyone suffers in his own way and in the way of his cultural environment. In the context of the Palestine of Jesus' time, the lame and the blind - who, by Israel's tradition, could not enter the house of God - the paralyzed, the lepers, and the disturbed are considered sick, as described by the evangelist Matthew: possessed, lunatics and paralytics.

According to the anthropological and cosmological representations of the ancient world, shared by the Synoptic Gospels, human beings are dominated by demons, terrible despots, who cause physical and psychic suffering. In Galilee, at that time, the fear of the devil was deeply rooted (GNILKA, 1999, p. 119, own translation).

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<sup>108</sup> "He went looking for the marginalized of society in order to integrate them into the Kingdom. It is in this perspective that the meaning of his miracles emerges. His healings are not incomprehensible prodigies... they are beneficial acts... The sick person was seen as under the dominion of the forces of evil (sickness and sin were intimately linked), and therefore marginalized; he was then put back into the social environment. This is the Kingdom of God (Mt. 11:2-6)." (MORIN, 1998, p. 96, own translation)

Every person with an extensive skin disease that made the person repulsive was considered a leper.<sup>109</sup> It is interesting to note that "to date no archaeological remains belonging to a person sick with leprosy have been discovered in ancient Palestine." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 193, own translation)

Jesus proposes as a mission for himself and his disciples "to announce the kingdom of God and to heal." Healing, for Jesus of Nazareth, was a form of love and, by healing, he announced the kingdom of God by being present.<sup>110</sup> His fame as a healer spreads and creates in people the conviction that he carries within himself, independently of any ritual, the healing power. All that is needed is to touch him. He himself seems to feel the presence of this force when, in the middle of the crowd, he asks "who touched me?" A force that improves, relieves, saves or heals, without charging anything, or pre-establishing anything other than faith, trust in God and in oneself.<sup>111</sup> Healing for Jesus is the door that opens to more life, life in abundance, to see God as he is, a merciful Father. It is a sign of a new world, made present here and now; the kingdom, God's domain, under construction.

This is the conversion he asks for or suggests: the conversion to compassion toward all, as God is compassionate.<sup>112</sup> It is also a historical fact that Jesus was a famous exorcist, who, according to the mentality of the time, cast out demons.

In the chain of cause and effect, which associated, in the minds of the ancients, illness with the devil, there remains one more element, sin. Besides healing the flesh and exorcising the mind, the holy man had another task to perform: the forgiveness of sin. (VERMES, 1996, p. 18, own translation)

Today's exegetes understand that possession encompassed epilepsy, hysteria, schizophrenia, and altered states of consciousness. The bearers of these maladies were considered possessed, invaded by evil spirits. Jesus starts from the feelings of those who find

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<sup>109</sup> "The Aramaic word *sàra át* denoting leprosy refers to the legislation of Leviticus 13-14 and covers a wide range of skin diseases that includes psoriasis, eczema, and other mycoses. This legislation long predates leprosy itself, introduced into the Near East by the armies of Alexander the Great, who died in 323." (RANCÉ, 2012, p. 150, own translation)

<sup>110</sup> "Miraculous healings took over in the Jesus movement the place that, in the resistance movement, was occupied by terrorist acts. We should not imagine the reign of God as a pale theological program. On the contrary, its proclamation meant that in Palestine a fundamental transformation would take place at a very near moment, in which a small group of marginalized people would become rulers over Israel (Mt. 19:28)." (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 287, own translation)

<sup>111</sup> "The historian Étienne Trocmé summarizes an almost general opinion: 'it is clear that Jesus had exceptional gifts as a healer and made selfless use of them.'" (DUQUESNE, 1995, p. 101, own translation)

<sup>112</sup> "The center of Jesus' inner experience is not occupied primarily by God, but by the "Kingdom of God," for he never separates God from his project to transform the world.... He presents him committed to making a more human world." (PAGOLA, 2016, p. 203, own translation)

themselves possessed and frees them from evil, with the voice of one who has authority, one who can and wants to cast out evil.

"[...] in ancient times and in Judaism every chaotic and destructive element was attributed to demonic powers. This applied especially to psychoses and psychic illnesses in general. Marginalized people were thus provided with 'a social construct' that enabled them to express their socially desperate situation 'within a publicly accepted language of symptoms'. In this way these people were able to be noticed, to have concern for them, to be 'treated'." (LOHFINK, 2015, p. 191, own translation)

There are researchers who "suspect that Jesus himself underwent a dramatic transformation during his performance," as an exorcist, against the power of whoever or whatever steals the life, freedom, and fellowship of the possessed. His family members even thought "that he was out of his mind". "That which in others aroused admiration arouses in him a deep disturbance: we see him resort to prayer in an attempt to obtain enlightenment." (AUGIAS, 2011, p. 158, own translation)

The preaching of John the Baptist was centered on the forgiveness of sins; that of Jesus of Nazareth on alleviating the suffering of the most unfortunate, on making present the "kingdom of God." "Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every kind of sickness and disease among the people." (Mt. 4:22, own translation)

"Jesus' signs would certainly be misunderstood if they were understood as miracles, because miracle would mean what his opponents wanted from him: a sign that excluded all doubt. One cannot lose sight of the association between the preaching of the Kingdom of God and the healings of Jesus, if one wants to characterize correctly this facet of his, perhaps for us today, less comprehensible" (GNILKA, 1999, p. 307, own translation)

"In antiquity the stories of miracles are concentrated on a few personalities. To no individual of antiquity have as many traditions of miracles been attributed as to Jesus. That Jesus was a charismatic exorcist and healer is beyond dispute." (THEISSEN;MERZ, 2015, p.134, own translation)

# **XII**

## **THE POLITICAL CONTEXT IN WHICH JESUS LIVED**

Israel, after the glorious monarchies of David and Solomon, fragmented, lost its independence and spent five centuries as a province of successive empires: Babylon, Persia, Assyria, Egypt, Syria, Greece, and Rome. This loss of political sovereignty as a nation reinforced the cultural and religious identity of the people of Israel, when a large contingent lived in the Diaspora (outside Palestine).

It is estimated that there would be, at the time of Jesus, about 4 to 5 million Jews dispersed around the world. "They formed more than 150 colonies, some of great importance: Babylon, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, Ephesus, Smyrna and Damascus." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 333, own translation) Every Jew, from Palestine or the Diaspora, was obliged to pay, annually, the didacma, that is, two drachmas - equivalent to two days of work - for the reconstruction and beautification of the temple.

This huge contingent of people dispersed around the world - about 10% of the entire Roman Empire - provided for the development of international trade and the banking system, making the temple also a great stock exchange, since the only currency valid there was the "shekel", the currency of Israel.

Palestine (Judea, Samaria and Galilee) at the time of Jesus was part of the Roman empire. In 63, Pompey, the Roman general, besieged Jerusalem. The last resistance was entrenched in the temple. After three months of siege, Pompey took over the city and had all the leaders beheaded. A heavy tribute was imposed on Jerusalem and the surrounding area and the region was placed under the authority of Syria, which had been conquered the previous year and where two of the largest cities in the region, Damascus and Antioch, were located.

"Eager to re-establish Roman power in Palestine after the eruption of the 'civil war' between rival factions of the puppet Asmonian dynasty, Cassius enslaved 30,000 people in and around Tarichea (= Magdala) by the Sea of Galilee in 53-52 B.C.). (HORSLEY, 2004, p. 35, own translation)

In just 20 years, from 57 to 37 B.C. there were three revolts in Galilee. The Romans, in 47 B.C., appointed Herod, from a wealthy Jewish-Indumean family, military commander of Galilee. In 40 B.C. the Roman senate appointed Herod "king allied and friend of the Romans." He went from being governor of equestrian (military) order to being governor of senatorial

(civil) order. It took Herod three years to control his kingdom, but in the year 37 B.C. he took Jerusalem, the capital of Judea, with support from Roman troops.

From the year 37 B.C., Herod ruled Palestine with a strong hand. Authoritarian, cruel, sycophant of the empire, hated by the Jews, who considered him half-Jewish, he passed into history as a great builder. He rebuilt with luxury and splendor the Temple, completed 14 years after his death, around the year 10 A.D., when Jesus was between 14 and 16 years old.<sup>113</sup>

Herod desired to transform the Temple - a center of worship and sacrifice of profound devotional value to the Jews - into a city that would rival other sensational achievements of the ancient world: Athens, Alexandria, and Rome. Indeed, Jerusalem and Caesarea Maritima became the magnetic poles of Jewish life in the Roman period: two entirely different ways of leading that life.... (SCHAMA, 2015, p. 163, own translation)

He rebuilt Samaria, restored several fortresses, turning three of them into palaces for himself. He built the city of Caesarea - a great and prestigious strategic center, rival to Alexandria as a port and to Jerusalem as the new vital axis of the country - on the shores of the Mediterranean, where he implemented the quadrennial games in honor of the emperor Augustus. "Within its walls, Jews were barely tolerated and Romans were allowed to walk the streets lined with statues to their emperor gods." (THOMAS, 2007, p. 97, own translation). Herod enjoyed the confidence of the emperor, whom he flattered by accumulating gifts.

The Roman occupation was evident in many ways: in the aqueducts, in the buildings, in the policy of strengthening the cities - which increased the contrast with the poverty of the countryside - in the soldiers, in the taxes, in the coins, and in the crosses placed near the entrance of the cities, where the rebels were crucified, a penalty of exclusive competence of the Romans.<sup>114</sup>

When Jesus of Nazareth was one year old (year 4 B.C. in the current calendar, drawn up by the monk Dionysius the Little, in the 4th century, with an error of 5 to 6 years less) Herod the Great died in his palace in Jericho. His kingdom was divided among his three sons: Herod Antipas took Galilee and Perea, Philip took Itureia and Trachonides, and Archelaus took Judea, Idumea, and Samaria, with the title of ethnarch, or regent. Rome denied all three

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<sup>113</sup> "The closure of the Temple construction work caused ten thousand men to be unemployed, causing misery." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 93, own translation). "Flavius Josephus speaks of eighteen thousand unemployed." (JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 143, own translation)

<sup>114</sup> "The city symbolized the moral order of society as a whole and the security of the empire, insofar as it acted as a symbol of Rome's power transferred to the provinces. This symbolic potential of the city was translated by the meaning of the messages conveyed by the material constructions that organized the urban and rural space [...] which evidenced and imposed the worship of omnipotence, the acceptance of the daily cruelty of the empire and the local elites." (MENDES in CHEVITARESE, 2009, p. 136-139, own translation)

the title of king. Philip ruled until his death, with the title of tetrarch, or viceroy (4 B.C. to 33/34 A.D.). During Archelaus' 10 years of rule (4 B.C. to 6 A.D.), Palestine experienced one of the most violent periods in its history. On the day of his inauguration, he massacred 3,000 people in the temple square.

Revolts in Galilee and Judea caused the Governor of the Roman Province of Syria to send General Varo, who destroyed Sepphoris, capital of Galilee, 3 miles from Nazareth, razed several neighboring villages, and crucified about a thousand Jews in the vicinity of Jerusalem. "In the mountainous region of Judea, Varo totally destroyed the village of Emmaus (known for one of the stories related to Jesus' resurrection (HORSLEY, 2000, p. 36, own translation).

Jesus was four years old at the time. In A.D. 6, when Jesus was 10 to 12 years old, Rome deposed Archelaus and decreed a census in order to organize the administration and update the collection of taxes. The census provoked a strong popular reaction and gave rise to an opposition movement inspired by zeal for the Law, which boycotted the census and refused to pay taxes. The adherents came to be called zealots. <sup>115</sup>

Having deposed Archelaus, Rome appointed a Roman procurator, Coponius, for Judea.<sup>116</sup> The procurator was a paid official, directly dependent on the emperor, recruited from among the members of the equestrian order, and reported to the Governor of Syria. The procurator resided in Caesarea Maritima, where he had auxiliary troops: a garrison of 3,000 non-Jewish men, since the latter were, by concession from Rome, exempt from military service. The legions - 4 at the time, with 6 thousand men each - were in Syria. In Jerusalem, there was a cohort of 600 men stationed in the Antonia Tower, right next to the temple. <sup>117</sup>

The procurators, also called prefects, did not intervene in the ordinary administration of justice, both civil and criminal, which was the responsibility of the local Jewish courts. The imposition of the death penalty was the exclusive competence of the procurator, and only Roman citizens could appeal the sentence, a right exercised by the apostle Paul years later.

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<sup>115</sup> "The difficulties faced by the Romans in dominating the Jews of Judea were marked by socioeconomic, political, and religious conflicts that already existed in the region before the conquest, such as: socioeconomic antagonisms and the differences between urban and rural spaces; the high degree of fractionalization of the local elites; the absence of elites that were representative enough to act in the region to minimize resistance against Rome's power; exclusivism of Jewish monotheistic thought; the strong role of Judaism as a factor in marking political identity; dissensions from Judaism; or the existence of several Judaisms. " (MENDES in CHEVITARESE, 2009, p. 142, own translation)

<sup>116</sup> "Palestine in Jesus' time was in fact administered by two men, the tetrarch Herod in Galilee and a Roman official in Judea and Samaria." (DANIEL-ROPS, 2008, p. 83, own translation)

<sup>117</sup> "The inhabitants (of the empire) with Roman citizenship enjoyed the following privileges: buying and selling property; exemption from territorial and individual taxes; enjoying the protection of Roman law; not being imprisoned or suffering whippings (imprisonment only in extreme cases, such as treason, for example); right to appeal to the emperor in case of trial." (CARVALHO; NAKANOSE, 2009, p. 17, own translation)

The procurator acted as an overseer and the Sanhedrin as the authentic government. However, the members of the Sanhedrin were approved by Rome. The High Priest, who presided over the Sanhedrin, was appointed by Rome.

*"The Jewish people venerated the figure of the high priest, the Roman prefect respected this secular tradition. Therefore, the stereotypical opinion of a military occupation by Rome in Jerusalem does not correspond to reality. In that city there was no Roman occupation, nor was there gentile domination". (ALONSO, 2022, p. 132, own translation)*

*The procurator Coponius, appointed when Archelaus was deposed, was prefect of Judea from 6 A.D. to 9 A.D. In his first year in office, he appointed Annas, one of the richest men in Jerusalem, High Priest. In A.D. 15, when Jesus was between 19 and 21 years old, the mayor Valerius Gratus dismissed Annas. Three years later, when Jesus was between 22 and 24, the same mayor appointed Joseph Caiaphas, married to Annas' daughter, as High Priest. This is the one who, 12 years later, together with his father-in-law, will hand Jesus over to Roman authority.*

*The prefect, Pontius Pilate, appointed by Rome, arrived in Caesarea Maritima in the year 26, when Jesus was between 30 and 32 years old. Four years later, Joseph Caiaphas, presiding over the Sanhedrin, will condemn Jesus of Nazareth and ask for the death penalty for him. Pilate, against whom the people had revolted three years earlier when he tried to introduce military banners with the emperor's effigy and the Roman eagles into Jerusalem, had Jesus scourged and crucified.*

*Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher, Hellenist, contemporary of Jesus, blames Pilate for "countless and continuous deaths." The governor of Syria, Lucio Vitellius, in the year 36, taking up complaints from the Jews about Pilate's violence, removed him from office and sent him to justify himself to the emperor Caligula. When Pilate was removed from office, he committed suicide in 37 A.D., according to the historian Eusebius of Caesarea.*

*In some Christian communities, it was believed that Pilate had converted. His wife, Procula, came to be venerated as a saint in the Orthodox Church. Historians see in the origin of these traditions the attempt to mitigate the guilt of the Roman governor, when Christianity was facing the power of the empire.*



# XIII

## JESUS' PARABLES <sup>118</sup>

*"The word parable, from the Greek parabolé, which in Jesus' mother tongue corresponds to the Aramaic word mathla, designated all kinds of figurative language: parable, comparison, allegory, fable, proverb, enigmatic saying... joke" (JJ, p. 10-13)*

In the Christian sources are preserved about 40 parables with a more or less developed account, along with a score of images and metaphors that remained in a sketch or parable note (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 147, own translation). Such as they have come down to us, Jesus' parables have two historical roots: concrete situations in Jesus' life and readings experienced by early "Christian" communities. Jesus' parables of the kingdom accurately represent the village world in the Galilean countryside as a world of kings and princes whose ministers are slaves. The parable of the wedding feast, in which the king sends troops to destroy a recalcitrant village (Mt. 22:2-14), is the world of Herod the Great, Archelaus and Antipas (see the characterization in Mk. 6:17-27), not the world of the Greek democratic cities. It is a world of the very rich and the poor, of the king and the peasant, of only two social classes. (STAMBAUGH, 1996, p. 80, own translation)

The parables that reflect the core message about the coming of the kingdom of God have been heavily touched up by Jesus' death, faith in the resurrection, and Christian expectation of Jesus' parousia (ES, p. 155).

We lose much of its flavor by not knowing what concrete fact motivated the parable, as seems to be the case with the parable of the night robber (Mt. 24:43), referring to a robbery that happened recently, which the whole village is talking about (JJ, p. 46). The parables of the dishonest steward (Lk. 16ff.), the weed among the wheat (Mt. 13:24), the rich man (Lk. 12:16ff.), and the merciful Samaritan (Lk. 10:30ff.) seem to be linked to concrete facts.

"From a literary point of view, parables are stories that combine metaphor with narrative. They are the raw material of Jesus' language and refer to the daily reality of nature and human activities. Open-ended, they allow multiple readings and are often disturbing and

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<sup>118</sup> Text based mainly on four books: Parables of Jesus, by Joaquim Jeremias (JJ); Jesus: A Living Person's Story, by Edward Schillebeeckx (ES); The Way Opened by Jesus: Luke, by José Antônio Pagola (JP); Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus, by Reza Aslan (RA).

challenge common sense. They also give access to Jesus' imagination and give us a glimpse into his experience of God." (RAUSH, 2006, p. 137, own translation)

Mark, who is from an older Gospel tradition (70-71), has few parables. He is more interested in Jesus' actions, his teachings to his disciples, and the praxis of his life than in his parables. Half of the parables in Matthew's gospel (80-90) are not found elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>119</sup> More than half of the parables we find in Luke (85-90) are found only in it, who must have found them in a certain tradition (ES, p. 153).

According to Étienne Trocmé, the parables do not belong so much to the general preaching of Jesus to the crowds, but rather to "the conversations at the table, which he had with all kinds of citizens", which would explain both the somewhat late integration of the parables into the Gospel tradition about Jesus, and also why in these parables meals (of all kinds) and "masters" and "servants" are mentioned so often (ES, p. 154).

A parable moves around a core of scandal, at least something paradoxical and unusual. It wants to lead the listener to reflect by including some element of strangeness and surprise within an ordinary event.

"Jesus suggests two types of parables, naming them 'closed parable' and 'open parable'. The first is offered to the audience without any interpretation. The second is explained by the teacher in order to make its content evident. In the first case, the master refuses to clarify his purpose, perhaps he wants the listener to make the effort to understand, to invest in a (teaching) study in a limud." (HADDAD, 2016, p. 121, own translation)

Except for three parables ("The rich miser"; "The rich man and Lazarus"; "The publican and the Pharisee"), all the stories are earthly, and in them God is not directly mentioned. Thus, the commonplace becomes a stimulating provocation. It shakes and unsettles. The parable is so provocative that a neutral attitude toward it becomes impossible (ES, p. 152).

The God of the parables is above all merciful and forgiving (Lk. 18:10-14; Lk. 18:7), consoling (Lk. 16:19-31) and even incredibly magnanimous (Mt. 18:23ff; 20:1-16; Lk. 15, 20, 32), of generous rewards (Mt. 25, 21-23), not according to results, but according to his own goodness (Mt. 20, 15) and is unsurpassed in longsuffering (Lk. 13, 6-9; Mt. 13, 24-30). In this we rediscover the God of Jesus, of the reign of God, who thinks only of what is good for humanity (ES, p. 154).

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<sup>119</sup> The theologian José Comblin sees in the emphasis given by Mark's Gospel to the actions and teachings of Jesus a protest against the tendency to dehumanize him, that is, to make Jesus an object of worship, to the detriment of following Jesus. (BARROS, 2014, p. 181, own translation)

Jesus not only spoke in parables, but also acted. His most impressive parabolic actions were his granting table fellowship to the despised (Lk. 19:5) and his welcoming them into his home (Lk. 15:1-2) and even into the circle of disciples (Mk. 2:14; Mt. 10:3). In his concern for human beings and the history of their suffering, with publicans and sinners, with the poor, paralyzed and blind, with outcasts and people alienated from themselves by evil spirits, Jesus is a parable of God and his reign among men (ED, p. 153).

Pagola highlights how disconcerting the parable of the Pharisee and the publican is (Lk. 18:9-14):

"At that time Jesus said this parable to some who, considering themselves righteous, felt sure of themselves and despised others: - Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing up, prayed thus in his inner self: "O God, I thank you because I am not like the others: thieves, unjust, adulterers; nor like this publican. I fast twice a week and pay tithes of all that I have. The publican, on the other hand, stayed behind and didn't even dare to raise his eyes to heaven; he just beat his chest saying, "O God, have mercy on this sinner. I tell you, this one went home justified, and that one did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted". (Lk. 18, 9-14, own translation)

Jesus' conclusion is revolutionary. The publican cannot present God with any merit, but he did the most important thing: he took refuge in his mercy. He returns home transformed, blessed, "justified" by God. The Pharisee, on the contrary, disappointed God. He leaves the temple as he came in: without knowing the compassionate gaze of the Father (JP, p. 303).

The permanent tendency to moralism on the part of a number of "good people" shows the timeliness of this parable, in which ethics takes precedence over morality. The pious Pharisee, as Eduardo Hoornaert said, interprets the Law in a moral way - to fulfill the obligations; Jesus, in an ethical way - understanding and mercy overlap the "laws and customs".

Aslan understands that "Jesus' parables, especially that of the Good Samaritan, were full of the same anticlerical sentiments that shaped the politics and faith of Galilee and that would become the hallmark of his ministry."

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who snatched everything from him and beat him. Then they went away and left him almost dead. By chance a priest was coming down that road; when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. The same happened to a Levite: he came to the place, saw him and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was traveling, came near him, saw him and had compassion. He came to him and bandaged his wounds by pouring oil and wine on them. Then

he put the man on his own animal, and took him to a boarding house, where he took care of him. The next day, he took two silver coins and gave them to the owner of the boarding house, saying, "Take care of him. When I return I will pay whatever he has overspent." (Lk. 10:30-37, own translation)

Christians have long interpreted this parable as reflecting the importance of helping people in trouble. But for the audience gathered at Jesus' feet, the parable would have less to do with the kindness of the Samaritan than with the lowliness of the two priests (RA, p. 124, own translation).

For Schillebeeckx, the parable of the useless servant is perhaps the most shocking in the context of Jewish spirituality in Jesus' day:

"If anyone of you has a servant who works the land or tends the animals, are you going to tell him, when he returns from the field, 'Come quickly to the table'? On the contrary, are you not going to say to the servant, "Prepare dinner for me, gird yourself and serve me, while I eat and drink; after that you will drink and eat"? Are you going to thank the waiter, because he did what he was told to do? So will you too: when you have accomplished everything you are told to do, say, "We are useless servants: we have done what we were supposed to do." (Lk. 17, 7-10, own translation)

Jewish spirituality at the time was based on obedience to God, according to the norm of the Law. Whoever knew God and, moreover, fulfilled the Law exactly, possessed certainty of salvation, for God being just, was obliged to give happiness to the faithful observer of the Law. In the parable, the servant does well everything he was told to do, and Jesus concludes: "you too, when you have done everything you were told to do, say: we are useless servants, we did what we were supposed to do. We have not done more than our duty, as we would say today.

Craig Keener concludes his commentary on this passage from Luke: "The teaching seems to be this: faith grows as we use it as servants: the purpose of faith is to serve-it is never an end in itself." (KEENER, 2017, p. 265, own translation)

# XIV

## HERALD OF COMPASSION AND HOPE

The root of the word compassion in Hebrew has a sense of "bowels". It refers to what a woman feels for the child in her womb and suggests "to give life," "to nourish," "to care for."

This seems to have been the word that best expressed Jesus' faith: God is the Father who has passion for his children and wants it shared: compassion. Filled with compassion, certain that the Father only wants the happiness of his children, Jesus goes out to announce, he becomes a herald.<sup>120</sup> A comment from one of his listeners registered the impression left by the messenger: "He speaks as one who has authority.

Jesus did not speak like the scribes, nor like the priests. He knew the Scriptures well, but did not argue from them. With the soul of a poet, he invited his listeners to take a new look at everyday reality, where life and love are present. His parables - of which 40 have come down to us through the Gospels - are peculiar and unusual.<sup>121</sup>

The most surprising fact about Jesus' parables is the scarcity of direct scriptural quotations and allusions, no more than 40, when Paul's Epistle to the Romans alone contains twice as many quotations as the sum total of those that Mark, Matthew and Luke associated with Jesus. Compared to the scripture-based style of the Pharisees and scribes, this is quite remarkable (VERMES, 2006, p. 246, own translation).

His speech, based on everyday facts, gives him a context, as we would say today, profane, secular, desecrated. Or does everything become sacred?<sup>122</sup>

"Jesus not only spoke in parables, he acted. His most impressive parabolic actions were the granting of table fellowship with the despised (Lk. 19:5f), his reception in his home (Lk. 15:1-2) and even in the circle of his disciples (Mk. 2:14; Mt. 10:3)." (JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 246, own translation)

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<sup>120</sup> "The loving God (Abba, Father) appears 19 times in Mark, 61 in Matthew, 52 in Luke, and in John, over 100 times." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 62, own translation)

<sup>121</sup> "The parables of Jesus are something totally new. In all rabbinic literature, in the time before Jesus, we have no parable except two comparisons by Hillel (by the year 20 B.C.), namely, the jocular comparison of the body with a statue and the soul with a guest." (JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 8, own translation)

<sup>122</sup> The parables are radically profane tales. There are neither gods, nor demons, nor angels, nor miracles, nor time before time, as in the creation accounts, nor even founding events like the Exodus account... on the one hand these stories are - as one critic put it - tales of the ordinary, but on the other hand, it is the Kingdom of God that is said to be like that. The extraordinary is like the ordinary. (MENDONÇA, 2015, p. 78, own translation)

As words convince, but it is the example that drags, Jesus of Nazareth drags many (multitudes, as the Gospels say, sometimes with a certain exaggeration), with the example of his hopeful compassion. And hope is another key word. He knows that the much he can do is little, but he wants to show that it is possible, that one can build the kingdom of God, a kingdom without a king.

His way of showing God's compassion is to embody this compassion, is to alleviate the suffering of those he meets along the way and those he seeks in the villages: he heals, casts out demons, resurrects those who are asleep, taking advantage of the healing talent the Father has given him. He befriends the marginalized, lets himself be touched and touches the unclean, sits at table with sinners, welcomes publicans and prostitutes, causes scandal in many "pious" people. These too have to realize that the Father wants "compassion, not sacrifices." <sup>123</sup>

Jesus' followers consisted predominantly of slandered people, people who enjoyed low reputation and esteem: the "amme haarets," the uneducated and ignorant, those whose religious ignorance and moral behavior closed, according to the conviction of the time, the door to salvation.(JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 137, own translation)

God's love is nothing discriminatory, conditional, or suffocating. Nor is it a collector; it does not demand repentance or sacrifice. If one gives back, all the better; then one has compassion. His friendship, manifested in group coexistence, in sharing one's daily bread with the marginalized, frees them from shame and humiliation. He makes everyone, anyone, feel like a person, like a child of God.

For Rabbi Philippe Haddad, "this is the good news of Jesus: to tell the nations that God loves them, that God forgives them, and that one must know how to offer his heart to God at the size of a needle or a mustard seed. (HADDAD, 2016, p. 22, own translation)

There seems to be no doubt that Jesus realized that the first and most important renewal to be made in Judaism was the concept and way of relating to God.(CASTILLO, 2015, p. 77, own translation)

"This, then, is the beginning of conversion and new life: that man learns to call with all childlike confidence his God Abba, because in him he recognizes himself sheltered and loved without limits." (JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 137, own translation)

Someone with such a capacity to welcome, to attract, to captivate, who believed he was seeing the arrival of the kingdom of God, could only be happy and joyful. His joy was certainly

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<sup>123</sup> "Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels shows his preferential love for people living on the margins of society, publicans and prostitutes [...] in the Fourth Gospel for those on the margins in religious terms: Samaritans and Galileans." (BEUTLER, 2015, p. 130, own translation)

contagious. His sense of humor - reflected in the details of his parables - suggests that songs and good laughs in the group of his followers aroused the curiosity of those who were coming.

He lived in a time when the popular expectation of God's intervention was imminent: an eschatological time. A new time was coming. "Soon the world would be radically transformed by the liberating and saving power of God the king [...] It is in the surrender of the self to God's will that his sovereignty is realized on earth." (VERMES, 1996 p. 52, own translation). For many, God would send someone to deliver Israel and subject the enemies of the chosen people to his feet.

Jesus seems to have shared the eschatological expectation of his time. Only for him it was not "the end of the world" or the end of a world of oppression, being replaced by a new form of oppression. His Father wanted him to announce the advent of a new world, but to be built here and now, or germinated like a "mustard seed: very small, which grows and gives rise to a tree, where the little birds come to make their nests". That was his mission: "For this I have come, to do the will of my Father."

"Jesus changes the future eschatology and transforms it into a "present eschatology." The present is a full time, the beginning of the definitive salvation (Mk. 1:14; 2:18ff and others). [...] in Jesus, what the future kingdom will bring is already present." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 255;267, own translation)

This was his hope: to see God's kingdom - kingdom of life, of happiness, of perfect joy - expand. And his hope was nurtured, day by day, on his walk through the villages. His welcome was the welcome of the kingdom of God. His message of the Father's compassion was a call to compassion for one's neighbor. A conversion not as introspection and repentance, but turning wholeheartedly to one's neighbor.

He was not one for many quotations from the Torah (the Law), nor for recitations of prayers, other than the usual ones, but he taught a new prayer, whose version, with an Aramaic<sup>124</sup> flavor, is very concrete and where the keynote is loving reciprocity:

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<sup>124</sup> "Jesus lived in a world where the public reading of the Bible was only in Hebrew, and prayers had to be said in that language. He taught his disciples to pray in everyday Aramaic, not the classical Hebrew of the written texts. It follows that if there is no sacred language, there is no sacred culture." (BAILEY, 2016, p. 97, own translation)

Father, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; give us this day our daily bread; forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, and do not put us to the test.<sup>125 126 127</sup>

In Jesus' perception, the Father's love for his children is unconditional, personal and universal.

"It is because he was so faithful to tradition and to the standard of his people that his message is so universal. He helped his people to be more Jewish, more true to themselves, and thus more human." (CRB, 1996, p. 32)

Compassion for him is not quite mercy, which seems to suggest a top-down relationship. It is not simple good will, it is a demanding feeling, which calls for action; to turn to one's brother, especially to the little ones, or, as we would say today, to the invisible ones. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:39).<sup>128</sup>

The indigent, yesterday as today, are condemned to live in shame. They are usually invisible, nameless figures who frequent church doors for years, without the faithful even knowing their names.

"We can say, without fear of being mistaken, that the great religious revolution carried out by Jesus is to have opened another way of access to God, different from the sacred, the help to the brother in need." (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 235, own translation)

For Jesus, the Father was building in his land, with his countrymen, a new kingdom, through his action. There was joy, there was friendship, there was spontaneity, freedom; there was life in abundance, a new quality of life. But not everything was roses. There were also moments of disappointment, for some and for himself. He even said to his closest disciples: "Don't you want to leave too?"

All indications are that Jesus garnered popularity while no danger threatened, but in the end had little success in his preaching about the great change as a manifestation of the coming of the kingdom of God.(SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 291, own translation)

"He increasingly had staunch opponents, especially among theologians. They deliberately sought to defame him. They called him a 'glutton and drunkard' (Lk. 7:34), a 'friend

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<sup>125</sup> "The themes of the Lord's Prayer - the fatherhood of God, his worship, the expectation of the coming of his Kingdom, prayer restricted to immediate needs, penance and forgiveness - reveal to the attentive observer the core of Jesus' Gospel." (VERMES, 2006, p. 263, own translation)

<sup>126</sup> "Sins are not forgiven by virtue of their death, but rather through a triangular relationship between man, God, and his neighbor." (AUGIAS, 2011, p. 38, own translation)

<sup>127</sup> "The structure of this prayer in Luke's Gospel is as follows: 1. An invocation: Our Father; 2. A wish: Your name be hallowed; 3. A vow: Your kingdom come; 4. Three requests: bread, forgiveness, help in temptation". (MENDONÇA, 2021, p. 258, own translation)

<sup>128</sup> "In addressing the commandment of love of neighbor, Søren Kierkegaard concludes that Agape includes Eros, or rather, the only way to exercise love of neighbor is to exercise it as if this neighbor were the exclusive object of love." (GUERRA in CHEVITARESE, 2009, p. 147, own translation)



of sinners' (Lk. 7:34), a 'possessed Samaritan' (Jn. 8:48), a 'deceiver' (Mt. 27:63), a 'perverter of the people' (Jn. 7:12), a 'deserter of the faith' (Mk. 3:22), and a 'eunuch"', as can be inferred from Mt. 19:12. (LOHFINK, 2015, p. 206-207, own translation)

His hope was put to a radical test when he sensed imprisonment and death.

"One would call Jesus naïve who would claim that he simply went up from Galilee to Jerusalem without having any idea of the dangerous resistance he was to encounter there [...] his words and actions created an extremely dangerous situation for himself from the heads of Jewish society at the time." (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 291, own translation)

Two and a bit years of announcing a good news, of hope spread among many villagers, a handful of followers: what would be left of that with his death? A poignant moment of his humanity: what will remain - not of me, that is too little - of what I have done and said? He had eyes not for himself, but for the Father's mission; what would be left of the Father's kingdom, just started? Sadness, heartache, but total trust in the Father's will: He knows what He does - "His will shall be done".

The emergence of small "communities" of followers of Jesus seeking to remember his sayings and to live his communal lifestyle, wandering or otherwise, highlights the strength and vitality of his mission, the Kingdom, or reign of God, which seemed doomed to failure with his death.



# XV

## A DECISIVE FORTNIGHT

A chronology of Jesus' life and preaching is not available. The evangelists had no sense of history, much less concern for establishing a chronological sequence of events. A series of narrated events, which occupy almost a quarter of the first three Gospels and half of the Gospel of John probably occurred in the last fortnight of Jesus' life.<sup>129</sup>

Jesus decides to go up to Jerusalem for the Passover, as he had done a few times before, but now the circumstances are different. He had not wandered alone through the villages of Galilee and Judea for some time. He was accompanied by disciples, men and women. They were all poor, shabby, certainly several. They ate what they had or earned and lodged wherever they were offered lodging.

There was no unanimity among the closest disciples about the advisability of going to Jerusalem at that time. Some thought that Jesus should go - he who was already so admired as a prophet in Galilee - and demonstrate before the holy city and the thousands of pilgrims who were moving there. Let's remember that Jerusalem, which had a fixed population of about 30,000, was at that time hosting about 120,000 pilgrims. Tents in profusion were pitched or improvised in the outskirts and neighboring cities of Jerusalem. The prophet from Galilee, who had gained fame there, could have a triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Other disciples thought that it would not be wise for them to go. Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, would be there. Pilate would also be there, along with the Roman guard, reinforced during the great feasts. It was public knowledge that Herod had already thought of arresting Jesus and had not done so for fear of the popular reaction against him and against Rome. He had become more unpopular with the death of John the Baptist, the last promising prophet to emerge in Israel after 400 years of absence of prophets.

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<sup>129</sup> "The week in which Jesus died is undoubtedly one of the most important in the history of the world and about which the most has been written. The four Gospels allow us to reconstruct those days in detail. We have four major problems with Jesus' last days: First, there is a lost Wednesday: a day when nothing seems to have happened. Second, there is the Passover conundrum: was the Last Supper a Passover meal or not? Third, there is not enough time between the Last Supper on Thursday night and the crucifixion at nine o'clock on Friday morning to fit all the events described in the Gospels. Fourth, the trials seem to flagrantly disregard Jewish legal procedures [...]" (HUMPHREYS, 2012, p. 1-13, own translation). The author thinks he has solved these four problems and presents the chronology of the last week of Jesus' life, summarized in the chart affixed at the end of the chapter.

Jesus decides to go and not dodge or run away from the people. He goes straight to Jerusalem and is received in a festive atmosphere by those who knew and admired him and by others who had heard about his healings, his attention to the poor, and the fraternal coexistence with his disciples. All this was unprecedented and attracted popular curiosity.

After his entrance - better said as an antitriumphal entry - told in the Gospels almost as a parody of the triumphal entry of the Roman authorities, who went to Jerusalem with the best uniforms, armor, horses and escorts - Jesus enters on a colt. The simplicity and joy of the people clashed with the solemnity, arrogance and pride of power. The Roman authority, which was watching everything, would not have failed to register that affront, reason enough to arrest the Nazarene.

"Historically, "the emergence of Jesus is located in a phase of relative stability between two periods of crisis: on the one hand, the "War of the Raiders" (6 A.D.), and on the other, the crisis of Caligula (39/40 A.D.). This is the time when Judea was ruled by prefects. Here tensions emerged less as violent conflicts, but became symbolic conflicts, which had the effect of a provocation.

Jesus did not exercise any power politics, but did politics through symbolic actions, consistent with his nonviolent ethos." (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 313;400, own translation)

Going to the temple - a sacred place par excellence for Israel - Jesus comes across, in the courtyard of the Gentiles, the mess of a marketplace where money-changers, vendors, ranked according to the value of the animal to be sold for sacrifice: sheep, goats and pigeons. You can imagine the hustle and bustle of this market where everyone, screaming, wants to sell or exchange their product. As demand for the products increases, prices rise and the poorest are the most sacrificed.

The blood boils in Jesus' veins and zeal for his Father's house supersedes prudence. He "makes a scene", more or less according to each evangelist: He overturns the tables, spreads the coins - coins from all over the world, which were exchanged for the "shekel" - a silver drachma minted in Tyre - the only currency accepted in the temple, the strongest and most stable.<sup>130</sup> Considering the enormous dimensions of the Gentile courtyard, where the "expulsion of the peddlers from the temple" takes place, the disturbance of order was circumscribed and quite

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<sup>130</sup> "Since the 2nd century B.C. the currency of Tyre was officially authorized as Temple currency, with which the temple tax was also paid. The predominance of this currency in Palestine was due to the fact that "Tyre bought from Palestine wheat, wine, oil and other products of the land and in this way placed the Palestinian economy in the old commercial capitalism." (KIPPENBERG, 1998, p. 138, own translation)

limited. It did not break the bank, but brought enough nervousness to one of the most celebrated stock exchanges of the time.

According to some scholars, this event was the last straw that determined the authorities' decision to eliminate Jesus: if his fame as a popular leader was a threat to order, the disruption of order in the temple compromised the authority of the Jewish elite as guarantors of order with the representatives of the Roman Empire. It is likely that the authorities then identified Jesus as a zealot.<sup>131</sup>

For other researchers, this incident would have been more extensive, planned and executed with the participation of others, early in Jesus' public life. An incident that marked him against the Sadducean priestly caste:<sup>132</sup>

"The right to sell doves etc. and exchange foreign coins for local money was restricted to relatives of the high priests and other persons from hierarchically prominent families." (WINTER, 1998, p. 271, own translation)

According to the narrative of the first evangelist, Mark, on Tuesday three clashes occurred between Jesus and the religious authorities, attended by many people, who supported him. After this "incident", Jesus retired to Bethany, to the home of his dear friends, the brothers Lazarus, Mary and Martha, where he used to stay when he went to Jerusalem, two miles away.

Seeing the popular support for Jesus, on Wednesday, two days before Passover, the religious authorities begin to plot a way to arrest him. Jesus senses or senses, as a keen observer of the facts and of human nature, that he could be arrested and that anything could happen, including crucifixion, if he surrendered to the Roman authorities.<sup>133</sup> He then plans a farewell meal with his disciples.<sup>134</sup> He obtains in advance the loan of a large place, large enough to receive many people, probably men and women, for it would not be in his nature and custom

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<sup>131</sup> "Jesus' answer to the captious question "is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, or not?" - give back to Caesar what is his and give back to God what belongs to God-is a zealot argument in its simplest and most concise form. And it seems enough for the authorities in Jerusalem to immediately label Jesus a **lestes**. A thug. A zealot." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 101, own translation)

<sup>132</sup> "The forty-six years of temple construction mentioned in John's Gospel (Jn. 2:21-22) situates Jesus' words in A.D. 27." (KEENER, 2017, p. 301, own translation)

<sup>133</sup> "It can be shown with high historical probability that Jesus counted on a violent death and that he found foreshadowed the necessity of his passion in Is. 53." (JEREMIAS, 2016, p. 224, own translation)

<sup>134</sup> "Wishing to organize his Last Supper in Jerusalem, Jesus made plans with an Essene to use their cenacle and celebrate Passover, using the pre-exilic calendar, which the Essenes also used [...] which helps unravel the act of washing the disciples' feet out of respect for their hosts." (HUMPHREYS, 2012, p. 202; 204, own translation)

to exclude them<sup>135</sup>. What we usually call the Last Supper was a festive, joyful gathering of friends, like so many others provided by Jesus. It was not, experts<sup>136</sup> say, an Passover supper:

"In research on Jesus it is a controversial topic whether the Last Supper was as such an paschal supper. While the tradition of the first three gospels clearly states that it was a Passover supper on the night of Nissan 15, the fourth gospel, of John, does not narrate the Last Supper as a Passover supper." (LOHFINK, 2015, p. 328, own translation)

Mais, ainda:

"Jesus probably celebrated a farewell supper with his disciples the day before Passover in the awareness that his life was at risk, but also in the hope that the imminent irruption of the Kingdom might save him. In this, he interpreted a simple meal (probably not an Passover meal) as the celebration of a "new covenant" with God, which aimed to inscribe God's will directly into the hearts of men. For him and his disciples, this supper was a substitute for official worship, which Jesus had radically devalued through harsh criticism (expressed by symbolic action and prophecy)." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 464, own translation)

The rituals of the Jewish Passover do not match the Gospel narratives.<sup>137</sup> From a certain moment on, joy gives way to melancholy: Jesus announces his death, speaks as if he were saying goodbye, and announces that one of those present will betray him. His greatest message was his gesture of washing the disciples' feet, showing that authority for him and his disciples

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<sup>135</sup> According to R. Peesch, Jesus, aware of the acute threat (from the Jewish authorities) made secret combinations with the owner of the house and ensured that its location would not be known. B. Borhäuser writes that Jesus instructed his disciples so that only two of them would know where the (Pesach) meal would take place, and controlled that the location be kept secret. (VERHOEVEN, 2011, p. 195)

<sup>136</sup> <sup>136</sup> "Using a different calendar theory, all four gospels agree on the date and nature of the Last Supper. [...] (I used astronomical knowledge to reconstruct ancient calendars. this was facilitated by the availability of computer power, which would have been unthinkable only a few years ago)." (HUMPHREYS, 2012, p. 247, own translation)

<sup>137</sup> For Enzo Bianchi, "Jesus celebrated the Passover according to the custom of the Essenes on Tuesday evening [...] he would have been arrested on the night from Tuesday to Wednesday. On Wednesday, the Sanhedrin process would have taken place, with the high priests. On Thursday he would have been delivered to Pilate [...] on Friday morning he would have been handed over to the soldiers for execution [...]". (BIANCHI, 2011, p. 47, own translation)

For Joachim Gnilka, "if it were assumed that Jesus had wanted to celebrate the passover already on Tuesday [according to the Qunram solar calendar] it would not have been possible for him to obtain a properly slaughtered lamb in the Temple. Now, this was an indispensable condition for celebrating the passover [...] the fourth Gospel in no way intends to give the impression that the supper Jesus ate with his disciples was an Passover supper." (GNILKA, 1999, p. 226, own translation).

For Geza Vermes, "According to the Jewish time-counting system, the day begins at twilight, when the first stars become visible in the sky. Thus, the last day of Jesus' life began at dusk on what we consider the previous day, with his last supper. [...] There is disagreement among the Gospels about the date of Jesus' last supper, arrest, and crucifixion. For the Synoptics (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) Jesus' last day begins with the supper at twilight on Thursday into Friday, the 15th of Nisan, the Jewish Passover day. John's Gospel suggests that this day would be 14 Nisan, the eve of Passover. Astronomical calculations indicate that in 30 A.D., the year of Jesus' death, the Passover celebrated at the full moon on 15 Nisan fell on a Saturday, April 8, and that consequently, Jesus, crucified on Passover eve (14 Nisan), died on Friday, April 7, 30 A.D." (VERMES, 2007, p. 38; 80; 112, own translation)

is, and must be, service. Two recommendations stand out. The first is a synthesis of his good news: love one another as I have loved you. Jesus did not command, he invited. The Gospels register only one imperative: "This I command you, that you love one another. By mutual love you will make yourselves known as disciples. The second is a gesture/recommendation, rich in itself of symbolic value. He shares bread and wine, common food, associating them with his death, with his permanent presence. In everyone's eyes the meal becomes enigmatic, or rather, paradigmatic and out of the ordinary; so rich in symbolism that it will become, in Christianity, a religious ceremony whose formality provokes strangeness today. The warmth of the meeting of disciples/friends, an expression of love capable of giving its life for others, the invitation to share bread and wine, the assurance of their presence whenever they so gather, all this has given way, throughout the history of Christianity, to a religious ceremony, rich in symbolism, but opaque to the youth of the contemporary world. But this is another story ...

On the same night, Wednesday, or the following night, Jesus, accompanied by some disciples, retires to the Mount of Olives to pray, and what takes place there is a poignant scene of Jesus' humanity. He groans and weeps under the weight of the foreshadowing of what will happen to him: betrayal, imprisonment, humiliation, abandonment, unbelief, torture, crucifixion, and death. His nature as a mortal being reacts viscerally against suffering.

A little more than two years announcing the kingdom of God, (WINTER, 1998, p. 271, own translation) living joyfully with the poorest people, who are filled with hope and understand who the Father is, and he, Jesus, sees death ahead of him. What will become of these people that he rescued to life? What will become of his disciples; will they be prepared to continue what he took as his mission?

"Father, take this cup away from me." He suffers intensely like any mortal: he does not want to lose his life, the life he so valued and wanted in abundance for all. He overcomes the mysterious will of the Father which he obeys with filial love. In one of the interruptions of his prayerful agony, he finds the disciples sleeping. Solitude upon solitude. He prays again and regains strength for whatever may come.

That same night he is arrested and betrayed with a kiss from a friend and disciple.<sup>138</sup> A failure of his? Mysteries of human freedom...

In the last of the Gospels, that of John, the public life of Jesus is extended to two or three years, as opposed to the six months, or even a year, of the synoptics (Mark, Matthew, and Luke),

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<sup>138</sup> "To be betrayed by one's own disciple - from whom one was expected to learn through imitation of the master - would be a cause for embarrassment and humiliation in that cultural system that revolved around honor and shame." (KEENER. 2017, p. 334, own translation)

which record Jesus' presence in a single Passover. There is no reason for the earlier witnesses to reduce the story so much. (VERMES, 2008, p. 175, own translation)

Accepting that Jesus used the pre-exilic calendar to celebrate his Last Supper as a Passover meal, Colin Humphreys presents in the following table the chronology of events, sources and time, from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion.

Da Última Ceia à crucificação		
Acontecimento	Evangelhos	Hora
Última Ceia	Todos	Quarta-feira à noite, terminando entre a meia-noite e as 2h00 de quinta-feira
Caminhada até Getsémani	Todos	Quinta-feira de manhã cedo
Orações em Getsémani	Sinóticos	Quinta-feira de manhã cedo
Prisão de Jesus	Todos	Quinta-feira de manhã cedo
Interrogatório de Anás	João	Quinta-feira, cerca das 3h00-4h30
Primeira negação de Pedro e canto do galo	Todos	Quinta-feira, cerca de 3h00
Terceira negação de Pedro e canto do galo	Todos	Quinta-feira, cerca de 4h30
Jesus conduzido a Caifás	Todos	Quinta-feira, cerca de 5h00
Julgamento principal pelo Sinédrio	Sinóticos	Quinta-feira após o nascer do Sol (às 5h46), durando provavelmente algumas horas
Sinédrio entrega Jesus aos guardas	Marcos	Quinta-feira, no final do julgamento pelo Sinédrio
Segundo e curto julgamento de confirmação pelo Sinédrio	Mateus, Marcos	Sexta-feira após o nascer do Sol (5h46)
Julgamento por Pilatos	Todos	Sexta-feira de manhã
Julgamento por Herodes	Lucas	Sexta-feira de manhã
Julgamento por Pilatos	Todos	Sexta-feira de manhã
Mulher de Pilatos informa do sonho	Mateus	Sexta-feira de manhã
Libertação de Barrabás	Todos	Sexta-feira de manhã
Jesus chicoteado	Mateus, Marcos e João	Sexta-feira de manhã
Soldados zombam de Jesus	Mateus, Marcos e João	Sexta-feira de manhã
Simão carrega a cruz	Sinóticos	Sexta-feira de manhã
Crucificação	Todos	Sexta-feira, cerca das 9h00
Jesus morre	Todos	Sexta-feira, cerca das 15h00

### Chronology - from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion

Source: HUMPHREYS. *The Mystery of the Last Supper - a historical journey into the last days of Jesus*, p. 243.



# XVI

## ARRESTED, TRIED AND CONVICTED

Jesus was the victim of a plot. There were Pharisees who didn't like him, but in general they were well-meaning, faithful followers of the Law. Jesus criticized them for their formalism and the burden of obligations imposed on others. They were annoyed, offended even by his words and attitudes - disrespecting the Sabbath, eating with publicans and sinners - but they did not want his death, and even warned Jesus of Herod's intentions. But there were people who, even out of a sense of duty, as representatives of the empire, wanted to kill him. Herod wanted to, but he was afraid to kill Jesus and create another martyr like John the Baptist.

It was not the "hypocritical Pharisees, whitewashed sepulchers" - expressions that, according to the exegetes, were not Jesus', but Matthew's - who set up the plot to kill Jesus. These were just adversaries who felt they were losing ground among the people, in the face of this strange prophet. Was he really a prophet? His manner did not correspond to what was expected. But what would Israel expect, if for more than 400 years there had been no prophet, and suddenly, for many, two had appeared, John and Jesus?

The plot took place at the highest levels of Israel, among the religious-civil elite, but especially among the priestly caste, the Sadducees, guarantors of order in the face of the imperial power of Rome. It was all a question of order, of good sense, of prudence: "it is better that one should die than all [...]". Part of those who exercised and enjoyed power and its benefits knew well what they had to lose.<sup>139</sup> The leaders of Israel, starting with the highest authority, the High Priest, were chosen by Rome. In recent times, at the time of Jesus, the empire had changed the High Priest several times.<sup>140</sup>

According to many experts, the primary factor in the decision to arrest and convict Jesus was the disturbance he caused in the temple, in addition to his popularity.<sup>141</sup> The whole structure set up around the temple for its operation and to receive the pilgrims who came daily, and especially three times a year, was vital to the economy of Israel and the Romans. For the

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<sup>139</sup> "Messianic claims threatened the stability of the temple hierarchy as much as the act of turning over tables (Mt. 27:11). Most of the Sadducee families were elite priests who exercised almost all control over the city and the temple; they did not generally long for a Messiah. Should they expect him, he would be someone who would challenge their power with military force or seek to make an alliance with them. From the aristocratic perspective, seeking followers among the weak was dishonorable and a foolish way to try to establish a kingdom." (KEENER, 2017, p. 107, own translation)

<sup>140</sup> "Sanhedrin - presided over by the High Priest - was made up of three groups: the high priests, elders and scribes (Mk. 15:1). The high priests formed the cultural aristocracy, the elders the patrimonial aristocracy, and the scribes the intellectual aristocracy. Between A.D. 6 and 66 there were 18 high priests, of whom only three ruled for more than two years: Annas (A.D. 6-15), Caiaphas (A.D. 18-36), and Ananias (A.D. 47-59)." (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 301; 302, own translation)

<sup>141</sup> "Most scholars believe that his action in the Temple was the main cause of his death. What he did was much more than a protest against the merchants and money changers. It was a symbolic action, a prophetic sign that the Temple itself was about to be destroyed." (RAUSCH, 2006, p. 179, own translation)

Romans, Palestine was strategic, since Galilee was a granary and the temple a great source of taxes. A large part of Israel's economy revolved around the temple. It is estimated that at that time there were 4 million Jews dispersed around the world, dreaming of knowing the splendor of the temple, where God dwelled in the Holy of Holies. It was the only place on earth where the God of Israel had his dwelling.

Two days before Passover, the High Priest Annas gathers his personal, informal council; there they discuss the convenience and urgency of arresting Jesus. They agree that it is dangerous to let Jesus loose, even more so in a Jerusalem, full of pilgrims. In a meeting with one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, who is willing to betray his master, they agree on when and how to arrest him.<sup>142</sup> Once the decision is made, the rest is easy and is conducted by the High Priest and his assistants, with the web of influence between the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the newly arrived pilgrims. On the evening of the next day, Thursday, with the support of the temple security forces, whose command was in the hands of the "head of the clergy", Jonathan, son of Annas and brother-in-law of Caiaphas, Jesus is arrested and taken to the High Priest's house.<sup>143</sup>

Caiaphas, the main articulator of the arrest and prosecution of Jesus before the Roman authority, was a clever politician. By marrying Annas' daughter, he became part of one of the richest and most powerful families in Palestine, the Ben Hanin.<sup>144</sup> He was confirmed as High Priest by Pilate, with whom he lived together until they were both deposed.

Mark's Gospel recounts a meeting of the Sanhedrin on the same night of Jesus' arrest, during which he is unanimously condemned. Both the theme and the expressions "Messiah" and "Son of God" reflect titles attributed to Jesus by the 60s A.D. There was, strictly speaking, no meeting of the Sanhedrin, which could not meet at night, but of a private, informal council whose participants were chosen by the High Priest Caiaphas, from among members of a religious and civil elite, to agree among themselves how to formulate a political charge against Jesus.

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<sup>142</sup> "The priestly aristocracy was, above all, guardian of the status quo: politically it would have to deal with the would-be messiahs in the most political way possible; they would not dare to arrest Jesus in public" (Mt. 26:55). (KEENER, 2017, p. 127, own translation).

<sup>143</sup> For Paul Winter, "the outlines of the original (model) text would go something like this: A detachment of Roman soldiers, accompanied by their commander and Jewish policemen, arrested Jesus, bound him, and took him to Annas, the High Priest. Jesus was interrogated by the High Priest about his followers and his teaching, and answered that he always openly declared everything he taught, and had no secrets. During the interrogation, a policeman (or an assistant to the High Priest) slapped Jesus. In the morning, Jesus was taken to the Governor's palace." (WINTER, 1998, p. 87, own translation)

<sup>144</sup> "Annas was High Priest from 6 to 15 A.D., when the Romans deposed him. According to Jewish law, it was the High Priest's prerogative to hold office until the end of his life. Some Jews, therefore, considered the deposition imposed by the Romans invalid, and Annas was still highly respected. He was Caiaphas' father-in-law, and all five of Annas' sons became high priests at some point in their lives; he, rich and powerful, wielded great influence until his death in 35 AD." (KEENER, 2017, p. 356, own translation)

"No formal arrangements had been made before the trial. No public notice was proclaimed in the Temple, a requirement in the rules of procedure in the Sanhedrin [...]. There was almost certainly not a single genuine member of the people present in the enclave; rather the space was filled with priests, Levites, and Temple peddlers, a handpicked audience." (THOMAS, 2007, p. 255, own translation)

There, before the authorities, the mistreatment and humiliation begin, the common treatment given to those arrested by the hated temple guard. Jesus could not be handed over to Roman authority for religious, theological issues; these the Jewish authorities had the power to resolve.<sup>145</sup> At that time, there was no clear orthodoxy, and religious divergences were expressed in groups - Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes - that lived together with a certain tolerance, if not harmony. According to Gerard SLOYAN, "Jesus' religious views clearly fit within the permissible limits of disputes in the Israel of his day." (SLOYAN, 2006, own translation)

Caiaphas and his advisors agree that Jesus is a false and dangerous prophet who dares to affront the order in the temple and preaches a kingdom of God that would already be happening.<sup>146</sup> They consider him to be a threat to public order. They decide to bring Jesus before Pilate, who administers justice in the morning in his palace. There is a hurry because nothing can disturb the Passover celebration.<sup>147</sup>

In the opinion of many Jewish authors today, the accusation against Jesus, in all probability, came from a corrupt faction of the Jerusalem priesthood, who handed Jesus over to Pilate for fear of the terrible reprisals that could ensue if news of the threat represented by the messianism formed around the person of Jesus of Nazareth reached the ears of the Roman procurator. (SCHLESINGER, 1979, p. 169, own translation)

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<sup>145</sup> According to Haim Cohn - former president of the Supreme Court of Israel - "The Sanhedrin was only authorized to judge offenses that were offenses under Jewish law, just as the Roman governor was only authorized to judge offenses that were offenses under Roman law. The initiative for Jesus' arrest - in which members of the temple guard participated - came precisely from the Roman authorities [...] first step in a legal process [...] the commander who arrested Jesus agreed to deliver him into custody to the temple guard until the next morning [...] and Pilate was ready to judge Jesus early the morning of the day after the arrest, which proves that the governor had prior knowledge of Jesus and his arrest." For Cohn the summoning of the members of the Sanhedrin to an emergency meeting on the night of the eve of Passover was an attempt by the High Priest to deliver Jesus from the hands of the Romans, who would surely condemn him to the cross. From the point of view of the Sanhedrin, the court of the Jews, Jesus was totally innocent. (COHN, 1990, p. 51; 82; 84; 87; 119; 250, own translation)

<sup>146</sup> "Proclaiming the kingdom of God with God's imminent rule is clearly a political statement in which religion is embedded, since it speaks of who is near or far from the kingdom, what that kingdom of God looks like, prayers to God for his kingdom to come, royal judgment and royal reward and punishment, all of which represents political language for a first century person. Jesus taught in public in the political arena, and he came to Jerusalem to proclaim his prophetic message in the very center of political religion, the temple." (MALINA, 2004, p. 99, own translation)

<sup>147</sup> "Rome depended on the local aristocracy in the provinces to arrest and convict rioters, although it was the Roman government itself that inflicted the death penalty (Jn. 18:31)." (KEENER, 2017, p. 355, own translation)

Jesus is brought before Pilate by Caiaphas. There is a good understanding between the two. Pilate, in a way, owed him a favor, for having had it easy for him to use temple resources to build the 30 mi aqueduct to bring water from the Bethlehem region to Jerusalem. Pilate does not sanction Caiaphas' judgment, nor does he decide immediately, as the Roman legislation of the empire allows him to do. He prefers to hear the accusation, interrogate the accused, assess guilt, and pass sentence, as is customary in Roman trials, albeit summary trials.

We do not have historically reliable accounts of how this trial of Jesus went, certainly one among many that Pilate held that morning. According to the accounts that circulated among the first Christian communities and that the Gospels record, Pilate hesitates, confesses not to find guilt, but passes sentence. He would have said to Jesus of Nazareth, in Latin, the official language of the empire: "Ibis ad crucem! - you will go to the cross!

"It is possible that, then, characters remembered by his countrymen from his childhood and youth in Galilee came to mind: Hezekiah (executed in 46 B.C.), Judas Galilean, protesting against the census and storming, in front of a crowd, the royal palace in Sepphoris (6 A.D.), proclaiming: 'no king but God'; Atronges (4 A. C- 6 A.D.), fighting for national liberation and restoration of the Davidic kingship." (SCARDELAI, 2021, p. 271, 278, 281, own translation)

Pilate condemns Jesus to crucifixion and gives a message to the authorities and the other natives of any colony of Rome: "here is the king of the Jews"; "what I have written is written".<sup>148</sup>

It is now widely accepted that responsibility for Jesus' death can be equally attributed to the Roman system, more specifically to the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. It was the Roman emperor who appointed him; it was Pilate who chose the High Priest Joseph Caiaphas, effectively making him a vassal of Rome.(THOMAS, 2007, p. 23, own translation)<sup>149</sup>

"If within the Sanhedrin Jesus was condemned for "blasphemy," or "heresy," in the Roman Praetorium he was found guilty of the crime of seduction and lesa majestatis (crimen laesae maiestatis) (PALMA, 2011, p. 98, own translation)

The condemnation of Jesus was not a mistake, or the fruit of unfavorable circumstances, but a rational, pragmatic, realistic decision to punish the prophet of the kingdom of God, for attacking the social order, accused by the Jerusalem elite, and decided by the Roman authority.

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<sup>148</sup> "Unlike most governors, Pilate belonged to a lower order of nobility and was politically vulnerable without the support of Sejanus, his patron with Emperor Tiberius. In the end, Pilate would give in to the demands of the Jewish aristocracy. The fact that he was slow to accept the recommendations of the chief priests may well be indicative of contempt for them and not a commitment to justice (Jn. 18:30-31). Philo and Josephus portray Pilate as someone extremely cruel." (KEENER, 2017, p. 359, own translation)

<sup>149</sup> "History admits no more than two appearances of Jesus: one before the Jewish authorities; another before the Roman power. Christian reflection, supported by Scripture (Ps. 2:12), very soon added a redundant digression, the sending of Jesus to Herod." (François Bovon in ALONSO, 2022, p. 291, own translation)

Jesus is generally seen as a religious reformer committed to purifying the Temple-centered Jewish religion. But the Temple, along with its high priesthood constituted the political-economic as well as the religious heart of Jewish society at large and was an essential institution in the imperial order until its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D. (HORSLEY, 2004, p. 35)

Jesus' death is a consequence of tensions between a charismatic coming from the countryside and an urban elite, between a Jewish renewal movement and Roman foreign sovereignty, between the herald of cosmic change who was also to transform the temple and the defenders of the status quo. Political and religious reasons cannot be separated. In "the reign of God, which would soon erupt [...] there was no room for the domination of the temple aristocracy and the Romans." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 493, own translation)

"What was so threatening about the teachings of a poor Galilean peasant to be executed on the Roman cross?...at least two exponential episodes: the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mk 11:1ff and parallels) and the other: the cleansing of the temple (Mk 15:15ff and parallels). Such actions certainly incriminated him before the priestly and Roman authorities." (SCARDELAI, 2021, p.343,367, own translation)

The Gospel accounts play up the colors by blaming the Jews and softening the blame on the Romans, not wanting to confront the empire, still very present and strong in the atmosphere of the Christian communities. The cries of "crucify him" by the crowd, recounted in the Gospel of Mark (Mk. 15:13-14), according to Pagola, constitute "a deplorable dramatization machined in the Christian communities against the Jews in the synagogues," which had terrible consequences for the Jewish people, accused of deicide and persecuted by Christians many times and in many places.



# XVII

## TORTURED, DEAD AND BURIED

The subjects of the Roman Empire were submitted to three punishments considered the most terrible and shameful, because of the enormous suffering: being handed over to the beasts, being burned alive, and the worst, crucifixion, because of the tortures that accompanied it and the slow and painful agony. Cicero calls it "the most cruel and terrible torture. The historian Flavius Josephus (37 to 100 A.D.), a fellow countryman and almost a contemporary of Jesus, considered crucifixion "the most miserable death of all". Roman citizens could not be punished with this penalty except when necessary to maintain military discipline.

Pragmatic, the Romans managed to establish a *modus vivendi* with Israel, which guaranteed power to the local elite and freedom of worship, but heavy taxes and rigid control of public order. The local elite, by the agreements established with the empire, was guarantor of the order. It was up to them to take care of the daily disputes and conflicts. If dissatisfaction erupted into disturbance and revolt, the Romans intervened with all their might and cruelty. They even set up logistics for the preparation and transport of the wood necessary for crucifixion, wherever it was needed. Vertical sticks (*stipes*), prepared to receive the horizontal crossbar (*patibulum*), were fixed at the entrance of the cities to make it clear that the Romans ruled there and could crucify any subject that dared to disturb the *pax romana*.

Flavius Josephus relates that Varus, governor of Syria, had about a thousand Jews crucified in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Jesus was about 10 years old when this happened. Any Jew of that time knew what it meant to be crucified.

The young Jesus of Nazareth, so hopeful in the "kingdom of God" that he had seen being born and growing, especially among the most needy, however prepared he was, must have heard the sentence, terrified: "You shall go to the cross" (*Ibis ad crucem*). The penalty of crucifixion brought together everything the worst executioner could wish for: torture, mockery, degradation and certain death, slowly distilled, drop by drop. (LÉVILLE in WINTER, 1998, p. 146)

He knew what awaited him. This was a common punishment that the Romans applied widely to the local population under their rule. The Roman citizen, when judged, had the right to a defense and could not be crucified. Once the sentence had been passed, the execution began immediately, by handing over the condemned man to the cruelty of the Roman soldiers. These were recruited from among the Samaritans, Syrians and Nabateans, who did not like the Jews. It was customary to amuse themselves at the expense of the condemned, humiliating them in the sight of all.

The ritual execution of the sentence usually began with the flogging, a public act conducted by soldiers in the courtyard of the palace.<sup>150</sup> The flogging served the function of weakening the condemned, nullifying his resistance as he was led through the streets and hastening his death on the cross.

Jesus is stripped naked, tied to a pillar (*infelix legnum* = miserable tree) and scourged with a short whip, with metal balls and sheep bones at the end. When the flogging was over, Jesus, like the others condemned to the same punishment, almost without strength, with his body all bruised, could hardly stand up. The flogging was so cruel that often the condemned died right there and then.

No time for rest, since at least three condemned men had to be crucified before sunset.<sup>151</sup> A small platoon of four Roman soldiers leads the condemned from the prefect's palace to Golgotha (place of the skull, or Calvary), a distance of about 550 yards. The condemned carry on their backs the *patibulum*, or horizontal crossbar (*infamous stipes* = wood of infamy weighing more than 20 kg.), where they will be nailed. Plautus (254 B.C.(?) - 184 B.C.), a Roman playwright, describes the following scene: "They will lead you through the streets, the gallows on the back of your neck, stabbing you.

Each one carried a small tablet hanging around his neck, on which, according to Roman custom, was written the cause of his condemnation. On Jesus' tablet was written, in Latin, Hebrew and Greek: "King of the Jews". An irony, a mockery, and an intimidation directed at the Jews of Jerusalem and the pilgrims, many of whom spoke Greek.

However unreasonable the arrest and cruel the condemnation, the earliest gospel has retained the motive for both: Jesus was arrested, indicted, condemned, and executed on charges of rebellion. (MARUCCHI in WINTER, 1998, p. 112-113)

The first three Gospels tell us that on the way to Golgotha, a passerby was asked to help Jesus, for the sole purpose of ensuring the execution of the sentence<sup>152</sup>. The place reserved for crucifixions, where several vertical sticks were already firmly fixed, ready to receive the horizontal crossbar, was an old quarry about 40ft high. Jesus, like the other condemned men,<sup>153</sup> was stripped naked to further degrade his dignity, and nailed by the wrists to the crossbar. This was then raised and fastened to the vertical pole, which was a little over 6.5ft high, so that the feet of the crucified one above the other on the pole were less than 20 inches off the ground.

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<sup>150</sup> "In Roman practice, flogging followed the verdict of mortal punishment. John may have reversed the order to give Pilate the opportunity to change the hearts of the Jews before pronouncing a condemnation." (BEUTLER, 2015, p. 427, own translation)

<sup>151</sup> "Mark (15:27) and Matthew (27:38) say that two bandits were crucified with Jesus, whom tradition has come to designate as thieves. According to Rodrigo Alvarez this is an 'unlikely accusation,' since the cross is reserved for slaves and major criminals, creators of disorder, rioters, revolutionaries, or anything else that dares to threaten the power of Rome, as the Jewish priests said Jesus had been doing." (ALVAREZ, 2018, p. 334, own translation)

<sup>152</sup> "The Roman soldiers had the authority to order anyone to carry objects for them. Simon - a Greek name widely used by Jews of the time (because it sounded similar to Simeon, the patriarch), was from Cyrene (located in North Africa, in present-day Libya) - was supposed to be arriving for the day's festivities in Jerusalem." (KEENER, 2017, p. 283, own translation)

<sup>153</sup> The Romans crucified their victims without clothing - the only difference was that women were nailed to the cross facing the tree and men on their backs (GIBSON; MCKINLEY, 2015, p. 212, own translation)



There was no footrest, only a wooden hook in the middle of the beam to support the body and prolong the ordeal. Christian art, over the centuries, often disguised the horror and cruelty of the scene.<sup>154</sup>

The proximity to the ground made it easier for the soldiers carrying out the sentence to work and for the wild dogs to graze when the condemned were dead. Although a busy road passed near Golgotha, onlookers were not allowed to approach the condemned.

The clothes of the condemned, as was customary, were divided among the four soldiers as spoils, making it clear that those no longer belonged to the world of the living.

The officer designated as *exactor mortis* had an envied function: for he had the right to be the first to choose the clothes and any other personal spoils of the condemned. (THOMAS, 2007, p. 315)

Jesus was nailed to the cross between nine in the morning and twelve o'clock.

The crucified were dying of asphyxiation, in increasing inability to breathe, which could take hours. Pagola describes the scene:

"The body is becoming deformed, the anguish of its progressive asphyxiation grows. Little by little it runs out of blood and strength. His eyes can hardly see anything anymore. From the outside, all that reaches him are the sneers and cries of despair and rage from those who agonize beside him. Soon convulsions will come over him. Then the final gasp".<sup>155</sup>

To hasten death the Romans used to break the legs of the condemned, which asphyxiated them even more (THEISSEN in CASTILLO, 2015, p. 167). It seems that this was not necessary in Jesus' case.

Each evangelist tells, in his own way and according to his source, the last moments of Jesus and his last words.<sup>156</sup> Since family members and friends were not allowed near the condemned, there are no reliable historical records of the facts. However, historians record one fact that draws attention for its unexpectedness: Jesus, just before he died, gives a cry, and the

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<sup>154</sup> From the bones of a young first-century crucified man found near Jerusalem, in Givat ha-Mivtar, "one can deduce the probable method of crucifixion: The victim, standing upright, was placed against the cross and nails were hammered through his forearms. The legs were then pushed up and the heels were nailed. The weight of the body was thus exerted on the arms. The nails that pierced the forearms tore through the flesh until they caught in the wrists. This kind of macabre simplicity is typically Roman. It required no skill on the part of the executioner." (CONNOLLY, 1998, p. 51, own translation)

<sup>155</sup> They applied to him a *coup de grâce*, called *crucifragium*. This consisted of a sharp blow to the legs that broke the tibia and killed the condemned by asphyxiation. (SILVA, 2014, p. 174, own translation)

<sup>156</sup> "A dying man could make an oral will even on the cross, as long as there were witnesses. Jesus had brothers, and it was up to the eldest to care for his widowed mother, and in his absence, to the others. However, Jesus expressly entrusts his mother to the care of a disciple, who will make provision for her after the master's death." (KEENER, 2017, p. 365, own translation) / Some authors consider that this disciple, in John's Gospel called the "beloved disciple," may have been Lazarus, from Bethany, the Greek form of Eleazar. (WITHERINGTON, 2015, p. 128-125)

words articulated then, in Aramaic, would be a quote from Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>157</sup> The unexpectedness of a "cry of despair and horror, from one who is almost out of breath, gives it more historical credibility. Something no one forgets. They are the only words mentioned by two evangelists (Mark and Matthew).

Jesus, dying, would have felt the limit of loneliness, the horror of abandonment by friends and God, and the emptiness of his proclamation of the kingdom of God.

Jesus accepted the lowest function to which a society can subject someone: that of an offender executed for blasphemy and subversion. (PAGOLA, 2011, p. 475)

According to the evangelists, Jesus would have surrendered his spirit to God, trusting, but without understanding his Father's designs. He died, according to experts, probably "at a little over 35 years old, on Friday, April 7 of the year 30, 3,790\* of the Jewish calendar, 783\* of the foundation of the city of Rome." (GNILKA, 1999, p. 300, own translation)

The Romans generally left the corpses unburied and under guard, exposing the bodies to vultures and as "food for the crows", as described by Petronius (27-66 AD), which disgusted the Jews.<sup>158</sup> The Evangelists tell that a member of the Sanhedrin obtained permission from Pilate to remove Jesus' body and bury it quickly, without the usual obsequies, also because the Passover celebrations were approaching.

Joseph of Arimathea is a historical character. He was not a member of the Great Sanhedrin, nor a follower of Jesus. He belonged to a smaller Beth Din (there were three Jewish courts in Jerusalem), in charge of providing a dignified burial for the executed people even before nightfall. He did his job according to Jewish Law, and his pious attitude was not forgotten. Tradition made him a Christian. (WINTER, 1998, p. 129)

Paul Winter summarizes the result of his historical research "on the process of Jesus:"

"We can safely say that Jesus was arrested by Roman military personnel (Jn. 18:12) for political reasons (Mk. 14:48), then brought before a Jewish administrative official (Mk. 14:53a; Lk. 22:54; Jn. 18:13a) the same evening. The next morning, after a quick deliberation by the Jewish authorities (Mk. 15:1a; Lk. 22:66), Jesus was returned to the Romans for trial (Mk. 15:1b; Lk. 23:1; Jn. 18:28a). The governor sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion (Tacitus; Mk. 15, 15b. 26), and the sentence was carried out according to Roman penal procedures (Mk. 15, 15b. 24, 27)." (WINTER, 1998, p. 262, own translation)

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<sup>157</sup> The most likely interpretation of this phrase is that it was a popular Aramaic exclamation of religious incomprehension. (VERMES, 2006, p. 227)

<sup>158</sup> Jesus was born, grew up, and died a Jew. Sometimes over his hips [in Christian representations] hide Jesus' essential Jewishness, the mark on his flesh made by circumcision. (THOMAS, 2007, p. 12)

# XVIII

## WHO WAS JESUS OF NAZARETH?

Historians, exegetes, theologians and other experts make a distinction, which is fundamental, between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of faith.

Jesus of Nazareth (5/6 B.C. - 30 A.D.) is a historical personality. His existence is one of the best documented historical facts of his time and region. He is the best known Jew of his time. For this reason, he can be, and has been, the object of historical, anthropological, archaeological, linguistic research, etc., with all scientific rigor. There are hundreds of researchers from related disciplines studying, with the methodology proper to each discipline, the historical Jesus and his circumstances. Just one institution in the United States - the Jesus Seminar - brings together more than 150 researchers. Today, there are over 100,000 printed biographies of Jesus in English alone, and a much larger number of monographs. (JOHNSON, 2011, p. 9)

What we have done - with our limitations as non-specialists but trained researchers - is to consult the books and summarize what is most current and historically reliable about Jesus of Nazareth. What we are bringing to the attention of our readers is reliable information, probable, at the current stage of research, remembering that certainty is not the proper field of science.

About the Christ of faith, the one who came to us through the churches<sup>159</sup> and who is the object of faith of Christians, we will deal in an addendum, convinced that the knowledge of the Nazarene is important for believers and non-believers alike. We will try to show - with all the limitations of research in this field - how Jesus of Nazareth, who saw himself as a messenger of the Father, comes to be seen by his disciples as the Message itself - the expected and unexpected Messiah. What happened, after his death, that led to this profound change?

Jesus appears on the scene - the beginning of his public life - in the company of John the Baptist, of whom he becomes a disciple for a few months, around the year 27 to 28 of our time, when he was 32 to 34 years old. We know almost nothing about his previous life: he lived in Nazareth, Galilee, was a farmer and a craftsman; a carpenter/bricklayer/mason - a craftsman in the community, a handyman, a "jack-of-all-trades", as we would say today. He lived there anonymously for about 32 years.

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<sup>159</sup> There are thousands; according to José Comblin "there are 38,000 religions registered in the United States [...] there is no shortage of religions; they appear constantly." (BARROS, 2014, p. 180, own translation)

The first writings about him that have come down to us date from the year 50 A.D., 20 years after his death. Historical research, as can be seen from the previous chapters, tells us more about the environment in which Jesus lived than about himself. And who was he? <sup>160</sup>

I - What do his contemporaries say?

John the Baptist, when he was already in prison, sends some of his disciples to ask Jesus who he was, if he was the Messiah he and the people were waiting for. Jesus does not answer directly, but refers to what was happening and they could see, the kingdom of God in gestation: "the blind see, the lame walk, the Good News is proclaimed to the poor" [...] He leaves to John and his disciples the responsibility of seeing and interpreting.

Sometimes he is called "rabbi" or "rabboni" - master or simply lord - a treatment he politely accepts, without passing himself off as a master. There is no historical proof that he attended the Rabbinical School of Jerusalem, or the "monastery" of Qunram (John the Baptist probably did), much less that he wandered through India and China, as some would have us believe. He was essentially a learner in the school of life, like millions of people to this day.

He even asks his disciples, "who do you say I am?" The answers denote some archetypes of mysterious figures of the time and the doubts of those around him. By his lifestyle, by what he does and speaks, he looks like a prophet, someone like Elijah, Jeremiah, or, more closely, John the Baptizer, revived.

Peter's so-called confession, "You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God," in the form in which it came down to us (Mt. 16; 16, own translation), is of doubtful historical authenticity. It expresses and reflects the faith of the apostles, of Peter in a special way, and of the first Christian communities in the period after his death and resurrection. In any case, even if one admits that Peter said exactly this, Jesus of Nazareth did not confirm it, historians note. There is consensus among them that Jesus of Nazareth never declared himself to be the Messiah, leaving the definitive manifestation of the kingdom and of his person to the Father.

Jesus never really explained who he was. The disciples treated him with respect, sometimes with awe, never with adoration or religious sentiment (COMBLIN, 1971, p. 18; 20). According to Lohfink, "Did Jesus present himself in a certain way as the Messiah? The answer is clear: No! Jesus proclaims God's domain, which is now beginning, but not himself as Messiah." (LOHFINK, 2015, p. 407, own translation)

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<sup>160</sup> For Klausner, "Jesus was the most Jewish of all Jews; he was more Jewish than Hilel himself." (SCLESINGER, 1979, p. 272, own translation)

## 2 - Self-affirmations

Jesus of Nazareth did not define himself, did not say clearly who he was, nor did he give himself titles of excellence, or exclusives, like Messiah (Christ), Son of God in a unique and exclusive sense, or son of transcendent man, eschatological prophet, like Elijah or Moses. It is as if he only intends to reflect the image of God. God is for him the absolute protagonist. He is a herald of the kingdom of God, "the one to whom God has entrusted to announce his kingdom at the very moment of a decisive turning point in history, when it begins to happen."<sup>161</sup>

There are three forms through which Jesus of Nazareth reveals and conceals the mystery of his person: son of man, the son, I am - the three forms show a deep rootedness in the human species and in the mystery of God.<sup>162</sup> "Son of man" is the most frequent expression: it appears 69 times in the Synoptics, 13 times in John, and once in the rest of the New Testament (DUNN, 2009, p. 106). The expression did not exist as a title in Jesus' time. It could have been inspired by the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, in which case it would consciously express Jesus' human condition and the humanizing mission of the kingdom of God. There are data in the Gospels that make one think that Jesus was not fully and clearly aware of his own uniqueness.(CASTILLO, 2015, p. 212)

Other researchers recognize in the expression only an unusual way to refer to himself: "I", "myself", "this one before you", "my person", in the expression of some social groups in Brazil.<sup>163</sup>

Jesus uses a title that surprises us by its universal meaning of appearance and poetic flavor. It could suit any of us; it has, however, a sacred brilliance, not only because it appropriates it, but also because it dives into a fabulous vagueness. Jesus said: "the Son of Man". Remarkable in such a nickname is the solidarity of this man who was Jesus with the entire human race (BRUCKBERGER, 1969, p. 7). The phrase "the son of man is also lord of the Sabbath" meant at that time, both in Aramaic and Hebrew, "the man is lord of the Sabbath".

The expression "son of God" has its origin in the political theology of the ancient East. In both Egypt and Babylon, the king was given the title of son of God. From the king blessed by

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<sup>161</sup> "No exegete doubts that Jesus was aware that he was the eschatological prophet of the coming kingdom of God." (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 488, own translation)

<sup>162</sup> "The expression that the early Christians will translate as son of Man, comes from bar Enosh in the Aramaic spoken by Jesus, or ben-Adam in the Hebrew that is also common in his time. It means to be human, but can be translated literally as son of Enosh, son of Adam, or even son of Man, without in any of the three cases necessarily meaning a son of God." (ALVAREZ, 2018, p. 102, own translation)

<sup>163</sup> "In everyday Aramaic parlance, son of man means human being in a generic sense (or the human being himself), any person in an indefinite sense, or I as a person in a periphrastic sense." (THEISSEN, 2008, p. 63, own translation)

God, the title son of God transferred to the Jewish people, blessed by God, as a son. Jesus refers to himself not as the son of God, but as "the son," an expression that occurs once in Matthew's Gospel, once in Luke, and 18 times in John. The expression "the son" on Jesus' lips refers to a personal and intimate relationship with God, his Father. However, once again he does not make explicit a unique relationship, as if he wanted to share with everyone the same filial relationship. The distinction put on Jesus' lips between "my Father" and "your Father" is an early Christian one. It was not unusual, in Jesus' time, to say that someone was a son of God, but absurd and blasphemous for someone to proclaim himself "the Son of God". Jesus did not, according to historians. The early Christians did. Mark puts into the mouth of a Roman centurion what he could say only of the emperor: "Truly this was the Son of God."

The expression "I am" and "that I am" - "I am the light of the world, the bread of life, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth and the life, the true life, etc." - occurs more in John and less in the first three Gospels, called synoptic for their similar structure. From the point of view of historical research, none of these expressions, said by Jesus, reveals more than his total and deep relationship with the Father.

Everything indicates that the earthly Jesus never claimed the title Son of God for himself.. He is seen by his disciples as Son of God by virtue of the resurrection. (ZILLES, 1999, p. 91)

Jesus of Nazareth, object of scientific research, hides more than reveals himself; it is as if it was enough to reveal God, his Father and his kingdom, destined "to make men recover the full humanity that, in a thousand ways, they were losing", as Juan Jose Segundo said. (SEGUNDO, 1997, own translation)

### 3 - What historians and other researchers say

José Antônio Pagola, in his book *Jesus of Nazareth, a historical approach*, briefly presents some titles, or models, attributed to Jesus of Nazareth by different specialists:

- Marginal Jew;
- Social reformer;
- Itinerant cynic;
- Sapiential teacher;
- Pious Jew, Spirit-filled or pious charismatic;
- Eschatological prophet or Messiah.

Giuseppe Barbaglio, in his book *Jesus, Hebrew of Galilee: Historical Research*, briefly presents "a cast of diffuse readings, often vitiated by unilateralism". For the authors of these readings, Jesus would have been:

An eschatological prophet, prone to the reunification of the twelve tribes of Israel;

A charismatic of great fascination, capable of thaumaturgical gestures;

A master of life, subversive, or a revolutionary guru;

A Hebrew peasant, Mediterranean, with a cynical tendency;

A subversive sage, like the Cynics in Greek philosophy;

A rabbi;

A prophet and sage, among the sages of antiquity.

The two authors clearly spell out the scope of historical research: it is important, it helps to know the Nazarene, but it is unable to say "this is the real Jesus". Their studies, like those of many others, are historical approximations. The character remains a mystery, which has been challenging the understanding of believers and non-believers alike.

"After studying Paul's letters, the Q Gospel and the Gospel of Mark, we are in a position to say something reasoned about Jesus of Nazareth. [...] it is possible to draw a profile of him that contains the following characteristics: Jesus is 1) a natural leader, a man of action, 2) free, 3) affective, 4) quiet and secure, 5) religious, 6) a political opponent, 7) living in a climate of violence, 8) ethical, 9) a man of success, 10) crucified." (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 81, own translation)

The novelty - an important novelty - seen in the last fifty years of biblical studies has been precisely the recovery, the rediscovery of the Jewishness of Jesus [...] until we insert the words and actions of Jesus into the core of Judaism, it is impossible to understand who he really was. If we want to truly know him, it is necessary to remove the Christian glasses and look at him with Jewish eyes. (AUGIAS, 2011, p. 33; 36)

For Edward Schillebeeckx, "the way Jesus of Nazareth led his short earthly life makes us understand the meaning of Messiah, Son of God, Lord, although he never gave himself these titles." (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 145, own translation)

We end this chapter with some words from John Baptist Libanius:

"The greatest novelty of Jesus does not consist in gestures and behavior. Many people before and after him, without any reference to him, did similar acts and of the same ethical, spiritual level. Human history is full of heroic examples in all times.

The originality of Jesus is that he lived extreme actions of self-giving, of attention to people in situations of marginalization, of social and religious segregation. In all of them he showed enormous sovereignty and freedom of creation." (LIBÂNIO, 2013, p. 60-61, own translation)

"Poor he was born, poor he lived, poor he died, and with the poor he lived together in true revelation of God's favorite love for them, in which happiness fundamentally consists." (LIBÂNIO, 2012, p. 39, own translation)



# XIX

## TWO CONTEMPORARY READINGS ABOUT JESUS OF NAZARÉ

In this chapter, we intend to provide the reader with the opportunity to compare two recent (2016) approaches to Jesus of Nazareth by two authors who are renowned in their respective professional fields.

The first text is a novel by psychiatrist Augusto Cury, who uses his technical knowledge and proven fictional ability to portray the character Jesus of Nazareth and present a provocation to the academic world. In his view, the academic world has been very remiss in the scientific approach to the personality of Jesus.

The second text is by historian Eduardo Hoornaert, a specialist on the subject, who innovates with his literary analysis of the first writings about Jesus of Nazareth, among which is included the Letter to the Hebrews, disagreeing with other historians.

Since this is a synthesis focused on the person of Jesus of Nazareth, we have tried to stick to the text of the mentioned works.

1 - Augusto Cury. "The most intelligent man in history"

This is the title of the fiction book, published in 2016, by psychiatrist Augusto Cury.<sup>164</sup> The author, with more than 25 million books sold, presents in this work the result of his studies, summarized here, about the mind of the most famous character in history: Jesus of Nazareth.

The author, who is said to have been "more skeptical and critical than the great atheists of history" (p. 7, own translation), has already published five books about Jesus: *The Master of Masters*, *The Master of Sensibility*, *The Master of Life*, *The Master of Love*, and *The Unforgettable Master*.

In this novel, the author sets the stage for a major United Nations (UN) conference in Jerusalem on the causes of and solutions to violence in the modern age. The Secretary-General accepts the challenge posed by the central character, the physician and neuroscientist Marco Polo: to seek a new fundamental paradigm for education that will allow us to move beyond the information age, inaugurating what he calls "the age of the managing self of the human mind" (p. 11, own translation), that is, "to know how to manage our thoughts, protect our emotions, free our creativity, and become the protagonist of our own history" (p. 12, own translation). For

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<sup>164</sup> (CURY, 2016). The author announces the next books of the collection *The Sermon on the Mount and Love and Sacrifice: the greatest trial in history*.

him, the greatest example of a human being who managed to reach his potential in this area was Jesus of Nazareth.

Urged by other scientists and supported by the UN Secretary-General, Marco Polo, an atheist, accepted to "analyze the personality of Jesus of Nazareth", because of the special place he occupies in history and, especially, because of his intelligence, resilience and ability to transform human minds. It was agreed that the "analysis criteria" would be science and not faith or any kind of religious approach. It was also agreed that he would have three doctors as debaters - a Protestant theologian, a theologian from the Vatican, an atheist doctor -, and his assistant Sofia, a psychiatrist, whose parents were oncology doctors - a Catholic and a Protestant. This debate would take place "under the cloak of psychology, sociology, and psychopedagogy" (p. 60, own translation).

Marco Polo spells out his "theoretical framework": the "basic skills" he would look for in Jesus:

- Emotion management skills;
- Ability to filter stressful stimuli;
- Ability to overcome sources of tension and reinvent oneself in chaos;
- Ability to free your imagination and develop creativity;
- Resilience and the threshold to withstand frustration;
- Sustainable pleasure and ability to contemplate the beautiful;
- Ability to think before reacting and self-control;
- Ability to be empathetic and build interpersonal bridges;
- Ability to form thinkers and brilliant minds;
- Ability to be the author of one's own history and critical consciousness (p. 61, own translation).

Starting the discussions, which were open to the public, Marco Polo was convinced to take as his "main source of information" the "only biography of Jesus produced by a physician" (p. 59, own translation), the Gospel of Luke. Once the historical source was defined, the lecturer set about analyzing this author and his work:

The author, the physician Luke, "meets Paul around the year 38 and they become friends and inseparable for decades" (p. 68, own translation), which allows him to contact and talk with people who lived with Jesus. Being an excellent researcher, Luke was able to get very extensive information about several generations of Jesus' family, and more specifically about Jesus. This happened, probably, because of his great proximity to Mary, who would have revealed intimate

facts about her son. As a writer, Lucas excelled in rationality and lucidity when researching and organizing the data he collected (p. 81-84).

For the scientist Marco Polo, "Luke's book was addressed to one man...a solemn act of love" (p. 88, own translation).

At this stage in the narrative Augusto Cury's novel disqualifies the empirical basis of the scientist Marco Polo. For him, Luke's text was written around A.D. 55 and was probably preceded by the books of Matthew and Mark (p. 84). According to the historical data available today, the Gospel that is conventionally called Luke was written by an unknown author (not the aforementioned friend of Paul), outside Palestine, probably in Rome, between 80 and 90 A.D., for readers with Greek culture. Before him, two other Gospels had already been published: Mark's, around the year 71, and Matthew's, at the end of the 80's, and not in the order in which it is presented in the New Testament editions adopted by Augusto Cury. The Gospel of Luke and the first two (Mark's and Matthew's) are called synoptic, because of their similarity and because they partially used earlier sources, such as the so-called Q (Quelle, from the German source). According to Pagola, their roots are mainly the oral traditions of each community and each one speaks mainly to his respective community in order to nurture faith in the risen one and not to write about historical facts, in the sense we give that expression today.(PAGOLA, 2012, p. 13)

Before analyzing the mind of Jesus, the scientist Marco Polo observes what he did not expect: that Luke, "as Jesus' biographer", would trace some relevant characteristics of his educator: Mary (p. 85). He then discovers that the one he sees as "the most famous woman in history" presents, in the eyes of the Greek physician Luke, basic characteristics that she transmitted to her son. Among them are "extreme courage", followed by "a sophisticated capacity for reflection", "a surprising ability to reason in a synthetic way", an unusual self-esteem (p. 94) - "the most solid in history" (p. 125, own translation) - and, finally, a "keen political consciousness" that led her to idealize "a just society" (p. 130).

Marco Polo begins his analysis of Jesus' personality with some criticism, especially of the universities and the human sciences in general, which have not been interested in studying Jesus' biography in depth. Thus, "the most famous man in history has become a taboo" (p. 133, own translation),<sup>165</sup> with educational and research institutions even in Europe treating "the most famous mind in history with superficiality" (p. 157, own translation). Next, the scientist points out that although Jesus had no social privileges throughout his life, he stands out for "his

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<sup>165</sup> See, in the Introduction, the data from the bibliographical research done in public and private universities, including Christian ones.

psychological notoriety" (p. 158, own translation) and intelligence, demonstrated through the various tests he faced. Notable among these are the tests in the desert early in his public life, which Marco Polo classifies into several types.

First, the "physical stress test," in which "Jesus' body was pushed to the limit"; however, "instead of succumbing to instincts, he preserved his critical conscience" and "spoke of the greatest dream of mortals: eternity" (p. 167, own translation);

The second, the test of political power, concerns not only unbridled ambition for power, "but also when we exercise without management the power we already possess" (p. 169, own translation). Jesus' biographer points out that he had a great ability to seduce people, which could lead him to have political power; however, he resisted this temptation: his purpose was to "spread his message to the world" (p. 199, own translation) without pursuing fame and criticizing the cult of celebrity (p. 203). In Marco Polo's opinion, "never has anyone so great wished to make himself so small in order to make the little ones great" (p. 172, own translation).

The third test concerns religious power, which, like political power, causes most people to be "infected by it." Jesus refused this power; as Marco Polo notes, "only he who bows down before society in order to serve it is worthy of power [...] To the astonishment of the human sciences, the only man who was called son of God wanted to be human" (p. 171, own translation).

Finally, the fourth test, that of public humiliation: "the carpenter from Nazareth was booed in his own home" (p. 178, own translation). However, instead of suffering in advance or resenting losses and frustrations, "Jesus thought strategically about the future and prepared himself to endure the unbearable. Jesus was very sociable [...] he treated his opponents with flowers; whether they were critics or prostitutes, no one was off his agenda" (p. 181, own translation).

The scientist Marco Polo concludes by stating that the four tests show "a gifted mind, a genius without size," a person who patiently prepared himself for thirty years "to open his mouth to the world," in a demonstration of perfect self-control (p. 182, own translation). More, still:

"Jesus' intelligence is simply amazing. The stress tests he went through would take our sleep away. His emotional abilities and his self-confidence to form thinkers out of rough stones are astounding. We knew the son of God, not the son of humanity." (p. 248, own translation).

It is exactly the use of this intelligence and self-confidence "in his methodology to transform restless, insane minds into calm, intelligent minds (p. 213, own translation) that

makes Jesus of Nazareth "one of the very rare teachers who do not give up on any student," including his disciples, each with a different problem (p. 213, own translation). Two are his main techniques: "to give of himself without overcharging, to lower expectations of return, and not to demand of others what they cannot give" (p. 179, own translation).

For all this, the novel concludes that Jesus "was the master of masters of emotion management" (p. 263, own translation), treating everyone as equal and unique and teaching the way to happiness, which would be formulated especially in the Sermon on the Mount, "the greatest treatise on happiness and the prevention of emotional disorders in history" (p. 254, own translation).

## 2 - Eduardo Hoornaert. In search of Jesus of Nazareth: a literary analysis

Eduardo Hoornaert,<sup>166</sup> a graduate in Classical Languages and Ancient History, known for his three dozen books on the history of Christianity in Brazil and Latin America, published two important books in 2016: *In search of Jesus of Nazareth: a literary analysis* and *Origins of Christianity*. We would dare to say that there is nothing better, more current, in Portuguese on the themes of both books. Since our interest here is Jesus of Nazareth, we will stick mainly to Chapter VI - "A Brief (Provisional) Biography of Jesus of Nazareth" - from the first book,<sup>167</sup> complemented by Part Four - "A Profile of Jesus of Nazareth" - from the author's second book<sup>168</sup>.

Hoornaert's genius lies in giving us a key to reading the figure of Jesus as presented by the first texts that have come down to us: the four Letters of Paul (50-55), the Letter to the Hebrews (around 65), the Gospel of Mark, written by someone in Rome after the Roman troops razed Jerusalem in the year 70.

The core of the first book aims to show how, in the 50s, Paul presents Jesus as "the Anointed One"; how, in the 60s, the Letter to the Hebrews interprets Jesus from the biblical figure of Melchizedek and, finally, how, in the 70s, Mark takes all this up and memorializes Jesus in a new literary genre that gives rise to the Gospels".<sup>169</sup>

According to Hoornaert,

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<sup>166</sup> HOORNAERT. *In search of Jesus of Nazareth: a literary analysis*, 2016 (from now on, references to this work will be given by means of the acronym JN). HOORNAERT. *Origins of Christianity* (OR, from this point on).

<sup>167</sup> Hereafter, this book will be referred to by the acronym EBJN.

<sup>168</sup> Hereafter, this book will be referred to by its acronym OC.

<sup>169</sup> Marcelo Barros, biblical scholar, author of 46 books, in the presentation of the first book, p. 9, own translation.

"We have no direct knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth. No one, of those who lived with him, wrote about him, because they didn't use to communicate in writing. Jesus lived in a universe without letters, so that at the time, 97% of the population of Palestine was illiterate. Jesus was an unexpected event in that milieu, people were taken by surprise and only in time did they appreciate the importance of what had happened in their midst." (OC, p. 81, own translation).

The first to properly appreciate the universal dimension of the prophet from Galilee was Paul of Tarsus (an inhabitant of Asia Minor), a Pharisee, whose first writings that have come down to us date from the year 50, 20 years after Jesus' death (EBJN, p. 23).<sup>170</sup>

To "be able to say something justified about the life of the Galilean leader" (EBJN, p. 17, own translation), the author considers it essential to analyze the literary text and context of the "early writings of Paul, Hebrews, Mark and others" (EBJN, p. 21, own translation), which "militate within the synagogue structure" (EBJN, p. 23, own translation). All three clothe Jesus in the garb of Israel's history: anointed like David (Paul), priest like Melchizedek (Hebrews), and prophet like Elijah (Mark). The early writers are Jewish, follow Jewish traditions and have a Jewish mentality. It is an anachronism to speak of Christianity at this time; the Jesus movement "is then configured as a Jewish sect, or 'dissenting synagogue,' and the Christian consciousness distinct from the Jewish one is only consolidated over centuries" (EBJN, p. 24, own translation).<sup>171</sup>

This analysis leads Hoornaert to the following biographical features of Jesus:

- "he abandons John the Baptist and in this reveals himself to be a natural leader with a strong personality;
- he displays unsustainable freedom and lightness of being;
- is driven by affection;
- exhibits ethical behavior that astonishes and causes scandal;
- is condemned to death in the name of morality" (EBJN, p. 162, own translation).

For Hoornaert, Jesus is "a natural leader, a strong personality, whose greatest legacy is practicality" (OC, p. 83, own translation). "It was the everydayness of practices in the sense of dignity, freedom, solidarity, love, and openness to the weakest that guaranteed the Christian movement a place in history" (EBJN, p. 163, own translation); for the disciples "walked the paths opened by Jesus of Nazareth, the man of action" (OC, p. 83, own translation).

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<sup>170</sup> Buddha only enters the literary scene 500 years after his death; Confucius 400/600 years.

<sup>171</sup> With Irenaeus, around the year 170, the first signs of a specifically Christian consciousness are perceived (1, p. 22).

Free: "Wherever he goes, Jesus causes strangeness and at the same time fascination, the disciples oscillate between fascination and insecurity, enthusiasm and timidity, indecision and motivation. Few people in history, even among those most committed to public causes, have taken such a stand before their own family [...] Such astonishing freedom is felt as a threat by the powers that be, for it calls for a totally new mode of relationship between people and institutions" (EBJN, p. 164, own translation).

Affective: "In a society ruled by moralistic rigidity, Jesus likes to make puns, plays with words, sprinkles his answers with a good dose of irony, and communicates with ease" (EBJN, p. 165, own translation).

"It is in laughter,<sup>172</sup> delight, fine irony, and joy that Jesus' group is distinguished from the others who appear on the scene in Palestine at that time. The wanderings with Jesus are hard, but joyful and healthy; Jesus is a person of easy laughter." (EBJN, p. 165, own translation)

A laughter that reveals freedom, lack of inner censorship, of fear, of authoritarian interdicts, that expresses liberation from fear... especially laughter permeated with irony (which we find in Mark's Gospel) hurts the status of the authorities, as the villagers of Galilee well realize: "He speaks with authority" (Mk. 12:34) (EBJN, p. 166, own translation).

"What is really new in Jesus' religion consists in the fact that he replaces the severe God of the "fathers of the faith," with a Father God [...] a revolutionary thought, presented with simplicity, as if it were something normal." (EBJN, p. 167, own translation)

"He is outraged by the exploitation of the pilgrims who attend the Temple and find themselves having to exchange their hard-earned coins for devalued money minted by the Temple." (EBJN, p. 169, own translation).

"To study the figure of Jesus without paying attention to the affect factor is to miss the opportunity to grasp the essentials (OC, p. 84, own translation). I think that Jesus becomes a political opponent for social reasons, that is, out of affection for the people of the villages" (OC, p. 85, own translation).

Ethical: "It is Jesus' ethical stance that, today as yesterday, causes most strangeness and even scandal in many people. It is not difficult to find in the Gospels episodes in which Jesus manifests unconventional behavior. Already in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus

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<sup>172</sup> "As the movement gains prestige and power, beginning in the second century, Jesus becomes more 'serious'. He gains dignity, power, and authority, abandons laughter, and his face acquires serious features." (EBJN, p. 166, own translation). For Tatian (2nd century) and Clement of Alexandria (3rd century) laughter does not suit Jesus. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom is peremptory: "Christ never laughed" (EBJN, p. 156)

interrupts his speech in the synagogue of Capernaum to give attention to a leper, which was strictly forbidden by the Law" (OC, p. 90, own translation).

"The case that scandalizes most is that he takes his meal inside his own home with tax collectors. Not only does he invite tax collectors to his house, but he walks with them." (EBJN, p. 175, own translation).

"The impression one gets, when reading the episode of the tax collectors, is that, for Jesus, the person himself is more important than any commitment made, program to be spread, or task to be accomplished." (OC, p. 92, own translation).

Religious: "Jesus' religiosity bears the marks of the place and time. He shares with his countrymen the apocalyptic imagery, believes that the end of the world is near ('some of you will see the coming of the son of man and his kingdom before the hour of his death') (Mt. 16:28, own translation) and that the people of Israel are chosen by Yahweh to bring the knowledge of God to all peoples" (OC, p. 86, own translation).

The reading from Mark's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus feels a pressing need to communicate with God (who, on one topic, he calls "abba, father"). He gets up very early in the morning to "pray to God" (EBJN, p. 177).

"Whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, my mother"(Mk. 3:33-35, own translation). Jesus thus defines a new kind of family, where God is father, while men and women are brothers and sisters (EBJN, p. 179).

He is condemned to death in the name of morality:

The disturbing thing for those studying today the motives that led to Jesus' death is that he, in following with scandalous "faithfulness" the Law of Moses, is condemned in the name of the same Law. The priest interprets the Law in a moral way; Jesus in an ethical way (EBJN, p. 179). [A careful reading of Mark's Gospel allows us to say that the priests gathered in the Sanhedrin to decide on the fate of Jesus are not amoral, corrupt, perverse people. The opposite is true. They act in accordance with their responsibility, they set up a trial, they call witnesses and interrogate the accused. The point is that they let themselves be guided by morals and do not address at any time the ethical dimension of Jesus' actions and words. They do not see the good that Jesus did for the people of Galilee. For them, following the legal precepts and procedures is doing the right thing. The obedient priest, doing his duty, the Pharisee 'separated from sinners' and the scholarly man dedicated to meditating on God's words day and night can only find strange a disobedient Jesus, a transgressor, a friend of 'sinners' (EBJN, p. 181-182).

The people gathered around Caiaphas follow morality. Some are particularly 'honorable' and respected for their way of living. However, the ethical question itself does not arise in their



consciousness... and with this they become absolutely incapable of distinguishing between good and evil. They are not driven by hatred or fanaticism, they simply cannot see the criminality of their own behavior. They do evil thinking they are doing good (EBJN, p. 183).

In the second book mentioned, Eduardo Hoornaert draws a profile of Jesus of Nazareth and details each of the following characteristics: 1) a natural leader, a man of action; 2) free; 3) affective; 4) calm and secure; 5) religious; 6) political opponent; 7) living in a climate of violence; 8) ethical; 9) a man of success;<sup>173</sup> 10) crucified (OC, p. 82).

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<sup>173</sup> Atheist philosopher Alain Badiou writes: "Jesus is an event that explodes unexpectedly on the historical scene, transforms the coordinates of human reality, reshaping, from head to toe, men and women, who remain stubbornly faithful to him." (EBJN, p. 22, own translation)



# XX

## JESUS OF NAZARETH: THE BEST AMONG US

By way of conclusion: a dive into the humanity of Jesus.

The existence of Jesus of Nazareth is a historical fact proven by many sources. Therefore, he is one of us, a member of the human race. If our current scientific knowledge is correct, we and he are the fruit of a long process of evolution from one of the three million species already catalogued on Earth. This one, in turn, is one of the eight or nine satellites that revolve around the Sun, that dwarf star, one of 100 billion stars in the Milky Way, one of 200 billion galaxies in our universe that has been expanding for 13 billion years. If this were not enough, we may have to think in multiverses.

Like every human being, Jesus was born frail, dependent, and found his first delights in the breast of Mary (Miriam), his young mother of 15 or 16 years old.

Like all of us, in the poetic words of the evangelist Luke, "he grew and was strengthened, and God's favor followed him," and "those who heard him were astonished at his intelligence and his answers," and that "his mother treasured all this in her depths. Once again, like all of us, "Jesus grew in knowledge and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Lk. 2:40, own translation)

Since there was no school in Nazareth, his learning took place daily in the family group, on Saturdays in the synagogue - with the sacred texts of his people - and in daily life and work. He was trained, as they say, in the school of life. He learned to speak in Aramaic, to read and translate the sacred texts, written in Hebrew, in the synagogue. He may have learned more than a few words of the Greek and Latin spoken by some in Sepphoris, capital of Galilee, three miles from Nazareth. He seems to have greatly exercised his five senses in the perception of nature and human making. When he began to speak in public, he would show himself to be a keen observer and an excellent storyteller.

He was described as the greatest contemplative of humanity, for his ability to unveil with his eyes the smallest beauties of the earth and to rejoice in the wisdom of the simple and the little ones. To his contemporaries, he seemed to be a man endowed with a strong and balanced personality, exuding the most remarkable common sense in apparently complex and difficult things. (SCHLESINGER, 1979, p. 45)

He developed an extraordinary ability to transmit his messages through parables, especially about the kingdom of God, a language unheard of until then. <sup>174</sup> Forty of the parables told by Jesus

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<sup>174</sup> According to Joseph Klausner, Jesus was the greatest Jewish artist of parables, but not the inventor of this literary form, known as "marshal" in Hebrew. (VERMES, 2006, p. 143)

have come down to us. The first Christian communities did not succeed in giving continuity to this poetic language. Studies of Hebrew literature have compiled about 1,500 rabbinical parables, none earlier than 70 AD.

Before preaching, he learned to listen. When Jesus, after his apprenticeship with John the Baptist, returns to Nazareth at the age of 32/34 and speaks to the synagogue, everyone is amazed at his knowledge, knowing him to be the son of Joseph, a handyman. The surprise leads us to think that he was not given to speaking in the Nazareth community, although he could do so from the age of 13.

Jesus' prospects and dreams as a child in Nazareth were somewhere between being a skilled and competent craftsman like his father or a hard-working farmer like others in his large family. This is apparent from his delay in leaving home.

When, how and why did he start thinking about doing something else?

At some point - we don't know when - Jesus begins to think about doing something different. We can think that the break with routine began with a mixture of dissatisfaction and hope. These feelings are fed by an experience, or experimentation, with the compassion of Yahweh, who increasingly takes on the appearance and affection of a father for Jesus. His experience of prayer, meditation, and contemplation of God/Father overwhelms him, translated into compassion for the poor and abandoned people.

Jesus shared with his countrymen the dissatisfaction with the domination and exploitation of the Romans, and with the self-serving subordination of Israel's leaders; dissatisfaction with the poverty and indebtedness of many of his countrymen, landless, subject to search, each day, for uncertain work; with those accommodated to a repetitive, sterile and ritualistic religiosity that, with its rules of purity and impurity, sacrificed some and marginalized others; with the authoritarianism of the men who imposed a heavy yoke on women and only saw children as adult projects; with the dissatisfied who sought a way out in the armed struggle, or put their hope in a new envoy of Yahweh, who would come to turn the game around, dominating the dominator. For Jesus, this was not the world God wanted. His kingdom had to be different.

And hope as a feeling, conviction, and driving force for change - which will take the name kingdom of God - how did it come about? We will never know when and how it began. We can imagine, based on Jesus' humanity, that his spirituality was evolving on a continuum that led him to feel and know himself lost and found in God. "I and the Father are one." "Whoever sees me sees the Father". "I do what the Father has told me to do". It is impossible to penetrate this stupendous human experience of the personal encounter of the creature with the Creator.

Mystics of all religions - and they exist at least in all the great religions - recount this ineffable experience of losing oneself, finding oneself, and merging. Having lived this experience, they retire into silence or narrate it in poetry. Some of these are well known in Christianity: João da Cruz, Tereza de Ávila, Francis of Assis; and, in Islam, where the Sufi mystics knew how to articulate in an impressive way the sense of the overwhelming transcendence of God with His closeness to the human soul, as "He who is closer to you than the vein in your neck". (TEIXEIRA, 1995, p. 22, own translation)

"Mysticism and mystical experiences have been part of Judaism since its earliest days".<sup>175</sup>

We know nothing of the spiritual trajectory of this man, born of a poor family, in a poor and despised village, who joins in community with the poor and miserable of the neighborhoods, transmitting so much joy and hope to his contemporaries. Through his disciples, Jesus reached out to us and challenges us to look for the best in ourselves.

We have tried to stick as much as possible to the historical facts, presenting, in a synthetic way, the most current and reliable information about Jesus of Nazareth, according to the research that has been done and to our limitations as non-specialists on the subject. He put his life at the service of building this kingdom. He may have been wrong in his prediction that this kingdom was imminent, but he gave his life for it and left us the legacy of this utopia.<sup>176</sup>

Jesus' solicitude for human suffering reveals dramatically how the cause of God is the cause of humanity. The God of Jesus is a God intrinsically concerned with the totality of human beings. That God is all-encompassing and egalitarian is evident in Jesus' initiative to turn to those on the margins. In the same way, this God is the God of all. (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 106)

We conclude convinced that, regardless of any consideration of his transcendence of the human condition, Jesus of Nazareth is the best among us.

As ESTRADA observes, "what scandalizes in Jesus is his freedom and autonomy in relation to the religious and social code, to the laws and the sacred Scriptures, to the authorities and traditions. Discernment and personal reflection testify to his inner freedom. He strives for a new order of the spirit and resists the temptation to close himself in the desires of the self, to take refuge in social practices or in the security of the religious code. This is why he scandalizes,

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<sup>175</sup> "Kabbalah (Kabalah) is the mystical part of Judaism and its starting point is G-d - the beginning and end of all things. Authentic Jewish mysticism is an integral part of the Torah." Morasha Magazine, ed. 27, 5578; Dec. 1999. Available at: <[www.morasha.com.br/](http://www.morasha.com.br/) <http://www.morasha.com.br/misticismo/introducao-a-mistica-judaica.html>>. Accessed on: 10 Mar. 2018.

<sup>176</sup> "The admission of such ignorance, and even of error, on our Lord's part is entirely compatible with belief in the Incarnation." (HARMONDSWORTH in VERMES, 2006, p. 323, own translation)

because he is faithful to himself and to the mission for which he knows he has been sent.(ESTRADA, 2016, p. 75)

For the Iranian-American researcher "raised in a heterogeneous family of disinterested Muslims and exuberant atheists," Reza Aslan, author of the bestseller *Zealot: Jesus of Nazareth* is as attractive, charismatic, and praiseworthy as Jesus the Christ. He is, in short, someone worth believing in." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 233, own translation) - emphasis added

This is a value judgment and, as such, subjective. It is up to the reader to make his or her own judgment and assessment. We base our statement on what he was, what he did, and what he left us.

Theissen and Merz end their review of Jesus' life with the following observation:

"Jesus belonged historically and theologically to Judaism. Through the Jews who believed in him, he became at the same time the foundation of Christianity. In this way, he belongs today to two religions, which only separated after his death in the course of the 1st century. Their common theme is life in dialogue with the one God and ethical responsibility for the world and society." (THEISSEN; MERZ, 2015, p. 598, own translation)

# **ADDENDUM:**

## **From Jesus of Nazareth to the Christ of Faith**

Resurrection, empty tomb, appearances to the women,  
ascension - the events that determined the conviction  
that Jesus continues to be alive and active in the building  
of the kingdom, whose proclamation justified his life.





# METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

Much of the historical research on Jesus of Nazareth ends with his death. Research into the trial, condemnation, and execution of Jesus is innumerable. What follows after his death becomes the specialty of the theologians, since their object is no longer the man who was born in Nazareth and died in Jerusalem, but the Messiah (Christ), the object of faith.

Some historians disagree with this position and consider that there is one more step to be taken by them and other scientists in the research on Jesus of Nazareth. The object of this step would be exactly the empirical research of what happened after the death of the Nazarene, which transforms a handful of frightened and fearful disciples into brave men, convinced that Jesus, whom they knew and saw die, is alive.

Using the resources that science can offer, through multiple approaches - psychological, anthropological, linguistic sociological, etc. - it is possible, if not to reconstruct, at least to approach the empirical facts, individual or collective, that marked the transition - of rupture and continuity - of Jesus of Nazareth into the Messiah (Christ), so expected by Israel and so unexpected in the way he appeared. How is the conviction born and propagated by some people and some groups that God did not leave Jesus of Nazareth in the land of death?

How did the name Jesus, the Nazarene, get incorporated with a title - the Anointed One, in Hebrew Messiah, in Greek *Khristós* - that became almost a surname: Jesus Christ?

"The early community used more than 50 names, titles or qualifications to define who Jesus is: the title Christ is employed about 500 times;

Lord occurs 350 times; Son of Man 80 times; Son of God 75 times ; Son of David , 20 times and so on . In a time span of 30 years after His death, He attracted to Himself all the titles of human and divine honor and glory that existed and could be imagined within the Roman Empire. The titles and names, even the most divine, do not want to erase the man Jesus; rather they want to highlight him." (BOFF, 1972, p.153-154, own translation)

Researchers who venture into this field are, from a scientific point of view, even more careful because they are walking on a borderland between scientific probability and the certainty of faith (or is the certainty of faith, too, a plausible bet of high probability?).

Let's look at some of the latest and greatest about the afterlife of Jesus.

To understand what happens in the short period after Jesus' death - not necessarily three days - it is important to take a step back, contemplating his sudden, violent, tragic death. Jesus of Nazareth is arrested one day and crucified the next. All for the kingdom of God, his dream, his utopia, his reason for living; totally focused on increasing the kingdom of God that he believed was beginning. With the advent of this kingdom, everything would be different, because men would look at their

fellow men, everyone, especially the neediest, as brothers, with the compassionate gaze of God, the Father.

His dream, which he saw present, materialized in the coexistence of men and women, in the sharing of bread, in the healing of the sick, in the scaring away of evil spirits, seems to be coming to an end. Overnight, one of his disciples hands him over to the temple authorities. The others flee. In less than 24 hours he is arrested, tried, convicted, and executed. Executed barbarously like any criminal who dared to challenge the local Jewish-Roman power.

Abandoned and alone, absolutely alone. The cry of that loneliness, on the cross, seems to have remained in the memory of those who witnessed the scene from afar: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" His phrase in Aramaic has gone down in history. He did not say Father, but God.

"Jesus' cry on the cross would represent and reflect the cry that every victim and outcast of the system carries in his throat. Jesus' despair on the cross is the clearest expression of the despair of the helpless poor, and with such a cry the poor identify themselves." (SCARDELAI, 2021, p. 429, own translation)

Christian tradition puts on his lips other phrases that historians do not confirm.

Jesus of Nazareth felt abandoned. Dying, he knew he would go to sheol, and there, in "Abraham's bosom," he would remain until the resurrection on the last day, which, according to historians and exegetes, he expected soon. Jesus was a pious Jew, and his religious background bore the mark of the Pharisaic conception of the resurrection of the dead, denied by the Sadducees.

To ascribe to Jesus of Nazareth divine predicates - which he did not ascribe to himself - may strip him of his humanity. As Hoornaert states, "The divine nature is irrelevant except to the extent that it exalts human nature, and to the extent that it does not, it means nothing to us; to the extent that it does, we are faced with a human reality; there is a new way of 'being man' in him." (SHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 602, own translation)

In Rausch's words, "It is quite unlikely that Jesus openly claimed to be the Messiah from the very beginning of his preaching (Jn. 4:26), or proclaimed his divinity [...]. We know that the disciples had not perceived Jesus' divinity during his public ministry, and that the early Christian community did not proclaim Jesus from the outset as the eternal Son of God." (RAUSCH, 2006, p. 55, own translation)

It is important, even fundamental, for believers and non-believers, Christians and non-Christians, to see all the immense humanity of this man who believed, identified, lived and died for the most abandoned by the inhuman world we have created.

Jesus died. His disciples, prudent and frightened, dispersed. Is it all over, as it was for many other idealists who, before him, gave their lives for their neighbor? Is it all over? <sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Those who know theater know that the first rule of a true outcome, of perfect theatrical credibility, is to surprise the spectator with what he expects, with what we have made him expect. Here everything is in the

Something happened, something that radically changed many of those who knew Jesus of Nazareth.

There is a what, a when and a how to be researched. We are facing a social, collective phenomenon that deserves and has been much investigated, especially in the last twenty years. How a handful of pious peasants from Galilee, "God-fearing" Hellenists living in Jerusalem, like Stephen and Philip, zealous Pharisees, like Paul of Tarsus, quickly overcome and deny the statement of their Holy Scriptures - "he who hangs on a tree is accursed of God" (Deut. 21:23, own translation) - and come to see in Jesus of Nazareth, whom "God raised from the dead" (a formula coined in the years 35-40), the expected Messiah, in a completely unexpected way?

"It seems undeniable that a resignification of the concept of messiah has taken place on the part of Jesus' disciples...the resurrection is not of the victorious and powerful, but of someone politically and religiously defeated, weak and poor ... God's solidarity with the poor is stronger than death... the nourishing and uniting element of those who believed in Jesus and were united in order to persevere in the face of persecution. (SCARDELAI, 2021, p. 416, 422, 427, own translation)

If he died, was his body buried or left to the wild animals and vultures, as was the custom among the Romans? If buried, where, how? Empty tomb, resurrection, apparitions, ascension; what does it all mean?

Research has advanced greatly and is able to present us with new insights into facts and narratives that go back almost two thousand years. There comes a point where scientific research cannot penetrate. There are facts, perceptions, and feelings - the most obvious of which is love, faith - that science cannot reach, and this does not testify either against it or against them.

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manner, in the style of the outcome: a manner that is impossible to predict, the stroke of genius that fills with wonder once it is realized. For Christians, the redemptive incarnation, the God of Sinai, incarnate and dying on the cross in a great shout, such is the outcome of the entire Old Testament. (BRUCKBERGER, 1969, p. 18)



# OF THE DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION

The penalty of crucifixion for the Romans was a complete ritual of humiliation, suffering and defamation of the condemned.<sup>178</sup> It was not a private rite, but a social one, of exemplary punishment and intimidation. Opinions differ:

"For Christians, Jesus' tribulation is a unique phenomenon. For the Jews of the first century, it was a tragic, everyday spectacle, but in the eyes of the Romans it was insignificant, an inevitable, terrible necessity. Characterized, and justified, by Cicero as "the most cruel and abominable of forms of execution." (VERMES, 2007, p. 30, own translation)

Usually the naked body of the crucified, with broken legs, was left on the spot to serve as food for wild beasts and birds of prey. Today we have more difficulty in understanding the humiliation and family dishonor of not being buried. We can imagine, however present, the pain of the relatives of the unburied dead who were victims of dictatorial regimes.

Christian tradition says that the body of Jesus - out of personal piety, or community duty, we don't really know - was handed over by Roman authority to an element of Israel's elite, Joseph of Arimathea, who buried it in haste, without a vigil and without the usual lamentations by the women.<sup>179</sup> Despite the thousands of Jews crucified in the first century around Jerusalem, the bones of only one man have been found to this day, which reinforces the thesis of the unusualness of the Christian tradition. The burial of Jesus would have been an exception.

We must imagine that most of Jesus' disciples, who fled at the time of his arrest, were still imagining - or not wanting to imagine - Jesus' body exposed to public execration and the voracity of wild animals, while all the people of Israel were beginning to prepare to celebrate his liberation, the Passover.

Jesus died on the cross, according to experts, a few hours before the beginning of the Passover celebration. His body would have been placed in a typical tomb of the time, of someone of resource: "a hole carved in limestone rock, with an antechamber, which opened into a room containing several deep niches, in which the body was placed at right angles to the room," as described by John Dominic Crossan. (CROSSAN, 2004, p. 576, own translation)

The tomb of Jesus was to be veiled for three days, the time necessary for, according to the conception of the time, the dead to be considered surely dead. Jesus would need to be dead

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<sup>178</sup> "Early Christians continued for a long time to consider the cross a demeaning symbol [...] the cross became a glorious symbol from the second half of the second century." (AUGIAS, 2011, p. 201, own translation)

<sup>179</sup> "That a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea, took on the task of burying Jesus with all honor according to Jewish custom, this fact is hard to think of as historical; it may be a legend invented by pious Christians, who could not imagine a dishonorable burial for Jesus." (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 345, own translation)

in order to enter sheol (emptiness, hell) and then, according to early Christian narratives, "destroy forever the power of death".

The first mention of Jesus' death and resurrection is from the apostle Paul. In it he says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried, he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures. He appeared to Cephas (Peter) and then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once: most of them are still living [...]." It is interesting to note that Paul speaks of a good news that he had already transmitted and denotes formulas of proclamation (kerygma) and profession of faith already consolidated.

Paul, converted in 35, or two or three years earlier - two to five years after Jesus' death - takes to Corinth, in his first stay in the city, around the year 50, all that he had learned and experienced in the communities of Jerusalem and Antioch.<sup>180</sup> These are the oldest recorded accounts of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. Paul says: "the gospel which I preached to you [...] I handed on to you [...] what I myself received [...]" (1 Cor. 15:3-6, own translation). Paul does not seem interested in the historical facts, but in their meaning, read through the Scriptures: Jesus is the "suffering servant" referred to by the Prophet Isaiah, and resurrected is among us (Is. 53, 3-6).

Any of us who have ever lost someone very dear, after a while forget dates and facts and keep what the person meant and means in the present, besides some phrases said by him or her in some circumstance. In Paul's perspective, and therefore that of the first Christian communities - the name Christian arose in the community of Antioch - the resurrection of Jesus is not a unique and personal privilege, nor is it a past fact: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised [...] for if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either." (1 Cor. 15:13-16, own translation)

Philosopher Alain Badiou (\*1937), who attributes to Paul the foundation of universalism, wrote:

"The resurrection is not, in Paul's own opinion, of the order of fact, falsifiable or demonstrable. It is pure event, the beginning of an epoch, a change in the relations between the possible and the impossible, for the interest in the resurrection of Christ is not in itself, as would be the case with a particular fact, or a miracle. Its true meaning is that it reveals the possible victory over death, death that Paul considers not as factibility but as subjective disposition. This

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<sup>180</sup> In 39 or 40, according to Justin Taylor, Barnabas' disciples became involved in a disturbance that the Romans characterized as subversive activities and attributed to Messianists, in Latin "Christiani", from where the term Christians came from, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. St. Paul does not use the expression. (TAYLOR, 2010, p. 109)

is because we must constantly link the resurrection to our resurrection, to go from singularity to universality and vice versa: "If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is in vain." (1 Cor. 15:16, own translation) Unlike the fact, the event is measurable only according to the universal multiplicity of which it prescribes the possibility. It is in this sense that it is grace and not history." (BADIOU, 2009, p. 56, own translation)

As the Romanian historian Mircea Eliade (1907-1985), a specialist in the history of religions, put it:

"There is no doubt that Jesus' preaching, and perhaps even his name, would have been lost in oblivion without a singular and incomprehensible episode, external to faith: the resurrection of the supplicated [...]. Faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ transformed the fray of demoralized fugitives into a group of men determined and certain that they were invincible. It can be said that the apostles too knew the trial of hopelessness and spiritual death before they were reborn to new life and became the first missionaries of the Gospel." (ELIADE, 2011, p. 295, own translation)

There is consensus among experts that what has come down to us about the passion and resurrection are detailed narratives from biblical patterns rather than historical recollections.<sup>181</sup>

For Lohfink,

The disciples' paschal experiences, from a theological point of view, can be considered really and truly as appearances of the Risen One, in which God revealed his son with power and in all his glory (Gal. 1:16) - from a psychological point of view, however, they can be seen at the same time as visions in which the disciples' imaginative power constituted their contemplation of the Risen One. One does not exclude the other.(LOHFINK, 2015, p. 385)

Each of the Gospels was written (all after Paul's death) from within a community and addressed primarily to it. They are interested not in past facts, but in the significance of Jesus alive and present among the members of the community.

It is the modern interest in history that leads researchers to search, in the texts and in all available sources, for historical facts. Since the subject - the death of Jesus of Nazareth and the life of Jesus Christ - is complex, we have chosen to present, briefly, in the following chapters, the point of view, reading and/or interpretation, of three contemporary specialists: Pagola,

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<sup>181</sup> "It is important to distinguish historical from true. Jesus' resurrection is true, though not historical in the exact sense that is given to the term today." SECOND. The lost history of Jesus of Nazareth: from the Synoptics to Paul, own translation.

Queiruga and Lenaers. We will end this Addendum with an analysis by Libanio of philosophical frameworks compatible with the resurrection.

Rather an observation/warning from the theologian Joseph Ratzinger, found in the book *Jesus of Nazareth, from the entrance in Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, which he published already as Pope Benedict XVI: "Whoever approaches the resurrection narratives with the idea of knowing what resurrection of the dead is, cannot but misinterpret them, and then dismiss them as foolish". (RATZINGER, 2007, p. 219, own translation).

About the nature of Jesus' resurrection, theologian Roger Haight summarizes: "It is the assumption of Jesus of Nazareth into the life of God. It is Jesus exalted and glorified in the reality of God. This occurred at the very moment of his death so that there was no time at all between his death and his resurrection and exaltation (emphasis added). It is a transcendent reality that can only be appreciated by faith-hope." (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 139, own translation)



# RESURRECTION, EMPTY TOMB, APPARITIONS, ASCENSION: AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS

There are, among Christians, some (or many?) who take literally what is found in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. However, there are not those among the recognized specialists in the academic world who admit that such a position is rational.

Below, we register some agreements and disagreements on the theme of this chapter, from the point of view of the authors presented here:

## 1 - Buried

There is no disagreement that Jesus died crucified.<sup>182</sup> Was he buried? It was the custom of the Romans to leave the bodies of the crucified on crosses to be eaten by wild animals and then throw what was left into a mass grave and cover with lime. Archaeological research around Jerusalem records only one occurrence of the remains of a crucified man, from the 1st century,<sup>183</sup> when it is known that the Romans crucified thousands of Jews at the time. Jews at the time, out of piety - using political influence, or bribery - sometimes removed the bodies and buried them. The description of Jesus' burial found in the Gospels may be historical fact: it is plausible. However, Luke's description, with the intervention of Nicodemus or an influential member of the Sanhedrin, according to Matthew, is an apologetic construction. For many Christian theologians, the absence of burial does not contradict the reality of the resurrection, as faith in the living and active Jesus.

## 2 - Empty tomb

Jesus is said to have been buried and left the tomb empty; for some this is an important and plausible fact. For other theologians, this is irrelevant, since it does not affect what happened and the message of the resurrection. The burial and the empty tomb are not historically verifiable facts.

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<sup>182</sup> Modern authors and novelists from *The Passover plot* (1965) by Hugh J. Shonfield and *Jesus the man* (1992) by Barbara Thiering to *The da Vinci code* (2003) by Dan Brown... in the absence of real ancient evidence, these modern reflections need not hold our attention. (VERMES, 2013, p. 169). Also the hypothesis in the book *The Jesus Conspiracy* by Holger Ketsten and Gruber (1994) that Jesus did not die on the cross, but was taken off alive, which would be proved by the holy shroud of Milan, is not accepted in the academic environment.

<sup>183</sup> In 1968 the bones of a crucified man were found in Givát ha-Mivtar, north of Jerusalem. The man would have been about 26 years old and 5'4 ft. tall. The bones of the heel (calcaneus) were still attached to each other by a nail. The bones of the lower legs were broken. There was the sign of a nail in one of the bones of the right forearm (radius). (CONNOLLY, 1988, p. 51)

### 3 - The accounts of post-mortem events

The first mention of Jesus' resurrection is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, written around 54/55. In the letter, he refers to what he had already taught them personally around 51, when he first visited Corinth. His statement concerning the resurrection of Jesus and ours is in the form of a "profession of faith" which he says he received from the Christian community of Antioch (where the name "Christian" first appears), which in turn owes its origin to the Jerusalem community. This "profession of faith" in the resurrection goes back, therefore, to the first ten years after Jesus' death. "It is a very ancient formula, which can be traced back to the early 40s A.D. [...] the belief in the resurrection of Jesus [...] one of the first attestations of faith of the community." (ASLAN, 2013, p. 193, own translation)

The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and some apocryphal writings narrate, in more or less detail, the post-death events of Jesus of Nazareth. There is agreement among experts that these are not descriptions of historical facts, but narratives drawn from the traditions of each of the communities to which the authors write. Mark, the author of the first Gospel (70s-71s), used at least two earlier sources: the Q Gospel (unanimity), which has been lost, and the Gospel of the Cross (no unanimity), which may date back to the 30s and 40s.

The narratives should be read not literally, but as one reads Jesus' parables. In most cases, the narratives are inspired by the Jewish holy books and are intended to be catechetical (for conversion), when not apologetic (to refute contrary arguments). What may seem contradictory, exaggerated, absurd, to logical reasoning, may make perfect sense to poetic reasoning.

The theologian Leonardo BOFF, back in 1972, said:

"On apparitions "the older formulas in 1 Cor 15:3b-5 and in Acts 2-5 clearly let us glimpse, by their rigid formulation and without any "pathos," that these apparitions are not subjective visions, the product of the faith of the primitive community, but really trans-subjective apparitions, testimony to an impact that was imposed on them from without. On this all exegetes today, Protestant and Catholic, even the most radical, agree." (BOFF, 1972, p. 139, own translation)

### 4 - Apparitions to women (we highlight this item because it is peculiar and even curious)

Most of the authors studied prefer the concept of revealing Himself: Jesus reveals Himself and does not simply appear, even because His recognition is not immediate, as if it depended on faith.

Some authors argue that Jesus' first revelation was not to Peter, but to Magdalene. The special disciple who had always accompanied Jesus would have been the first to recognize him alive. For Schillebeeckx, "Historically it was certainly the women who spread the first news that Jesus was alive, risen." (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 344, own translation)

Opinions regarding the appearance to the women generally differ widely. Some believe that Matthew's narrative places the women as unbelievers, since they go out to look for Jesus in the tomb, which is empty. Other authors consider that the protagonism of women in the apparitions reflects the growing role of women in the early Christian communities. Leaving the synagogue and the temple (especially after its destruction in the year 70), the place of prayer is the home, where the Eucharist is celebrated and where women have a more relevant role.<sup>184</sup>

For Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx:

"The original account of the women's visit to Jesus' tomb on Passover morning is a cultic, etiological legend, that is, this account clarifies the Jerusalem community's visit to Jesus' tomb every year (at least) in order to celebrate the Risen One and listen to the narration of the pre-Markan tradition, which we can still recognize in Mk. 16; 1-8." (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2017, p. 334, own translation)

## 5 - Resurrection

This is not the vivification of a corpse, but a new way of being: the glorified body of Jesus is independent of time and space. It is not a manifestation of God that relates exclusively to Jesus, but a sign and guarantee of our resurrection. God has manifested in Jesus our future, our final destination: the survival of our self, under a new mode of being.

The resurrection is not a historical fact, but a metahistorical one, which brings us back to the crucial question: are our dreams and efforts to transform or revolutionize our world meaningful? Does everything really and definitively end - good and evil - or does all good resurface in the mystery of God, the source of life and existence?

"Resurrection, for Christians, is not just a metaphor. It is real enough, but not in the sense that it would be possible to photograph it, if one happened to be in the vicinity of Jesus' tomb armed with a camera.

Meanings and values are also real, but equally impossible to photograph." (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 111, own translation)

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<sup>184</sup> "Christianity's decisive word to the world is specifically a message of women. Only they are able and worthy to see and make visible the victory of life over death." DREWERMANN in REIMER. Mary, Jesus and Paul with Women, p. 71, own translation.

## 6 - Ascension

There is a consensus in this regard: the description of the ascension, according to Pagola, "is a literary composition imagined by Luke with a very clear theological intention", expressed in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:9-11).

## 7 - The prevalent readings of the specialists today

Something extraordinary, unfathomable happened that converted a group of simple, frightened and fearful men into heralds of an unusual message: God resurrected the one who was crucified, Jesus, and he is alive and active. It is not about believing that Jesus is risen (a past fact, more and more distant), but believing in Jesus who is alive, active, transforming: the great driver of love for our neighbor.

The enigma of the Resurrection can perhaps be summarized in two points:

1. The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith; without it, Jesus of Nazareth, the best of us, of the significant human species, would not be the Christ, object of the faith of billions of people, in all corners of the Earth, throughout twenty centuries;
2. The resurrection is the guarantee of the re-signification of man's existence as an individual and as a collectivity; human history has meaning, goodness overcomes evil; it is not about a predetermined meaning, but about a future to be built.

How are these two meanings intertwined? Is resurrection a fact of the past, or eternally present? In what way does Jesus make God present in the life of each one of us and in history as a process of spiritualization of the human species? The knowledge that has been accumulating, with contributions from the human and social sciences, has given us new insights into this theme, the spinal cord of the meaning of our species.

The most important lines of all Christology can be summarized thus: a) it is about a concrete man; b) the history of hope of all mankind; c) the history of God with men and the history of salvation. (ZILLES, 1999), p. 36)

Philosopher and literary critic Terry EAGLETON (\*1943) pondered:

"As Walter Benjamin recognizes, the kingdom of God is summed up those scattered, almost always ill-fated struggles on behalf of the oppressed, seen, in effect, from the standpoint of eternity, as gathered together at a nunc stans, or single point, where they come together in order to be fulfilled and redeemed, as a coherent narrative...only a redeemed humanity receives in fullness its past." (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 88, own translation)

For the Marxist Garaudy:

"Each of the liberating and creating acts implies the postulate of resurrection [...]. How can one propose that other existences sacrifice themselves so that this new reality is born, if one does not believe that this new reality contains all the others and prolongs them, that is, that they live and resurrect in it [...]. Everything happens as if action (liberating or creative) is founded on faith in the resurrection of the dead." (See GARAUDY in SECOND, 1997, own translation)

The sentence was pronounced and he was taken away. Crucified, dead and buried, he nevertheless rose in the hearts of his disciples, who loved him and felt his closeness. Judged by the world, condemned by authority, buried by the churches that profess his name, he rises again, today and forever, in the hearts of men who love him and feel his proximity. (WINTER, 1998, Epilogue)



## PAGOLA: RESURRECTED BY GOD<sup>185</sup>

Jesus' arrest and death, so unjust and humiliating, leaves his friends, his disciples, with a question that questions the meaning of each one's life: Why did God abandon Jesus, who did only good and lived for others, building the kingdom of God? Without an answer, frightened and humiliated, they return to their homeland, Galilee. Five of them - Matthew, also called Levi of Alphaeus and the brothers Simon and Andrew, James and John - traveled together, or met in Capernaum. Some time later - it is not known when - they come together again in Jerusalem, in the name of the same Jesus, whose arrest and death there had driven them away.

What happened that caused them to revive, individually and collectively? There is no historical record of what happened; there are diverse, different, discontinuous accounts.

There is only one conviction, one certainty, which fills everyone with hope and the desire to announce the news: "God raised Jesus from the dead" (Acts 2:24). The idea of resurrection expresses it with two terms: "awakening" and "raising". God awakened Jesus, the crucified one, from the sleep of death and "raised him to life."

The first written mention of the resurrection is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthian community, dated 55/56. In it, he reinforces the good news he had brought them on his visit around the year 50. This good news - the resurrection of Jesus on the third day (read "on the right, decisive day") - is not something new to Paul, but the testimony of what he saw and heard in the communities of Jerusalem and Antioch, probably in the 40s. The announcement of Jesus' resurrection, in Paul's words, is associated with our resurrection, the "firstfruits" of a universal resurrection, the inauguration of the last times.

But in what does Jesus' resurrection consist?

In the disciples' conviction it is something real, that happened to Jesus, by the action of God. It is not the resuscitation of a corpse.<sup>186</sup> It is much more. Jesus does not return to this life, but enters, definitively, into the Life of God. A life freed from the power of death. As Paul said, "We know that Christ, once raised from the dead, does not die again, and his living is a living for God." (Rom. 6:9, own translation)

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<sup>185</sup> Summary of the chapter with this title from the book by José Antonio Pagola: *Jesus: a historical approach*, from 2011. We use, in order to better illustrate the text, excerpts from the author himself.

<sup>186</sup> One can agree with Kepler: "A videocamera installed in the sepulcher would have recorded nothing." (BARBAGLIO, 2011, own translation)

Jesus is alive, he is someone real and concrete, with a "glorious body," who reveals himself, who makes himself known, not always immediately.

The first accounts of what happened after Jesus' death were composed between the 70s and the 90s. They speak of God's mysterious intervention, giving life to Jesus, as a real fact that actually happened. There is, however, no account of the resurrection itself. We cannot say that it was a "historical fact", describable in its empirical characteristics. But for the disciples of Jesus and all others who came to believe in Christ, "the resurrection is the most real, important and decisive fact that has occurred in human history, because it constitutes its foundation and its true hope. For the early Christians, Jesus was the first to be born into the definitive life of God. He anticipated enjoying a fullness that awaits us as well. He is the guarantee of humanity's resurrection, that is, that human beings are destined to share in God's infinite happiness.

It is a personal, powerful, decisive and pacifying experience, lived in community: Jesus is alive and is with us!

How, then, can we understand the events narrated in the Gospels, which have all the appearance of historical facts: an empty tomb, individual and collective appearances, ascension into heaven?

The Gospels do not narrate historical facts, in the current sense of the term, nor are they concerned with reconciling different and even contradictory narratives. They reproduce narratives present in various Christian communities, which had been transmitted orally for some 35 to 40 years, that is, from the death of Jesus (year 30) to the writing of the first of the Gospels, that of Mark, around the years 65 to 70.<sup>187</sup>

When Paul, in the first letter to the Corinthians, talks about the resurrection, he says that most of the people to whom Jesus revealed himself were still living. When the Gospels speak of Magdalene, the disciples of Emmaus, and others, these had probably already died. There remained in the Christian communities stories transmitted orally in catechesis and celebrations.

What matters in the stories is the meaning, the content, the certainty that Jesus, already then the Christ (the Messiah, the Lord),<sup>188</sup> is alive, present in the communities, in the life of each new Christian. The Messiah, so long awaited by Israel, came in an unexpected way. Jesus of Nazareth was killed and God revived him, as he will revive each one. "Among the Christians of the second and third generation it was remembered that it was the encounter with the living

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<sup>187</sup> Most experts today think that Mark's Gospel would have been published in 70-71, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

<sup>188</sup> "In the first preserved Christian document, written in 50-51, Paul writes to the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. 'To you, grace and peace' (1 Thess. 1:1). Jesus, in this letter, is designated 18 times Kyrios (Lord) specific title of the Emperor." (ROSSI, 2017, p. 38, own translation)



Jesus, after his death, that had triggered the contagious announcement of the Good News of Jesus".

Two Gospel narratives are mistakenly taken by many Christians as historical facts: the ascension and the empty tomb.

Regarding the ascension, there is total agreement among researchers: it is a literary composition, imagined by Luke - the only evangelist to narrate it - with a very clear theological intention: it is the solemn culmination of Jesus' time. He is going to God's unfathomable world, but he promises, as Matthew says, "I will be with you all days, until the end of the world." (Mt. 28:20, own translation)

The empty tomb has already sparked much debate among experts. It is a late account, not in the early confessions (read proclamation of faith) and liturgical hymns that speak of Jesus' resurrection, nor is it mentioned by Paul. The empty tomb is not mentioned until the 70', i.e. about 40 years after Jesus' death, and the account does not seem written to present Jesus' empty tomb as proof of his resurrection.

"We don't know if Jesus ended up in a mass grave, like so many crucified people, or if Joseph of Arimathea was able to do something to bury him in some nearby sepulcher. All possibilities find advocates among contemporary researchers. There is also no consensus as to whether women found Jesus' tomb empty. It is difficult, therefore, to reach an irrefutable historical conclusion."

However, the meaning of the accounts is clear and on it there is consensus:

"[...] it is a mistake to look for the crucified one in an empty tomb; he is not there; he does not belong to the world of the dead. He is alive and continues to encourage and guide his followers. It is necessary to live by healing those who suffer, welcoming the excluded, forgiving sinners, defending women and blessing children; it is necessary to have meals open to everyone and to enter homes announcing peace; it is necessary to tell parables about the goodness of God and denounce every religion that goes against people's happiness; it is necessary to keep announcing that the kingdom of God is near. With Jesus a different, kinder, more dignified and just world is possible."

Around the year 40 or 42, while Christians were searching for an answer or an explanation for Jesus' death, a formula was coined that has been generating much misunderstanding: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures",<sup>189</sup> But if God were

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<sup>189</sup> "This unfortunate interpretation of Jesus' life and death - caudatory of the Jewish symbolism of animal sacrifice, including the 'scapegoat' - endures to this day, as can be seen in the commentary by Israeli writer Yuval Noah

someone who demands the blood of an innocent person in advance to save humanity, the image Jesus gave of the Father would have been totally misrepresented. "What gives redemptive value to the ordeal of the cross is love, not suffering. By itself suffering is bad, it has no redemptive force."

Jesus was consistent, faithful to the kingdom of God, announced and lived with the excluded, for whom he gave his life. The suffering imposed on him was an evil, neither desired by him nor by God. His crucifixion was a crime, like so many others against innocent victims.

The first Christians were amazed to confess: "God so loved the world that he gave his Son".

As a historian, Pagola concludes:

"It is possible to verify historically that between the years 35 and 40, the Christians of the first generation confessed with various formulas a conviction shared by all and which quickly spread throughout the empire: "God raised Jesus from the dead."

As a popular educator, Carlos Mesters, biblical scholar, doctor in exegesis, writes, for the humble, suffering and anonymous people who ask him about the meaning of life:

"The resurrection of Jesus is the confirmation that, for God, the last word is not death. Jesus, who always defended life (Acts 3:15), was killed by the powers of this world, but God raised him up! Faith is believing that God is able to bring life out of death itself (Heb. 11:19). It is to believe that the same power, used by God to bring Jesus out of death, also works in us and in our communities through faith. This is the central message of the Gospel around which the communities arose" (MESTERS, 1995, p. 126, own translation)

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Harari: "God incarnated a human body and was crucified to redeem our sins." (HARARI, 2015, p. 36, own translation)

## QUEIRUGA: RISEN FOR OUR SALVATION<sup>190</sup>

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke begin with Jesus' childhood. The Gospels of Mark (the first) and John (the last) begin at the beginning of his preaching. In reality, all four are written from the end, starting with the resurrection; they are the life of the risen one. The resurrection illuminated and gave new meaning to the life, actions and words of Jesus of Nazareth.

If Jesus of Nazareth had not risen he would have been reduced to just one more of the many characters - tragic or sublime, great or wretched - who are willingly shattered against the cold wall of history. But no: Jesus rose, and everything became unique and different in him.

The Gospel narratives are not interested in the resurrection as if it were an "objective" phenomenon, interesting for what is unusual and extraordinary about it. The resurrection is interesting because it is for us, as Paul said, "risen for our salvation" (Rom. 4:25). By salvation we mean the full realization of the human being. Salvation is total and the horizon of the human being appears liberated from all limits and stumbling blocks, because even the insurmountable "last enemy, death" has been conquered forever. (1 Cor. 15, 26)

How can we conceive of the Risen One in relation to Christ Himself?

Because it is beyond our capacity to understand - outside our temporal frame of reference - we call the resurrection a mystery. This does not exempt us from trying to understand it.

There is nothing more mistaken - though frequent - than to conceive of resurrection as "reanimation of a corpse": a dead person coming back to life. Paul resorts to a paradoxical appellation: the risen Christ is a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44). Body, to indicate that he remains the same as always, one of us, Jesus of Nazareth: in biblical anthropology, that is, in Paul's understanding, body is not the opposite of soul, but the totality of the human being. Spiritual, because the body of Jesus is totally pierced by divinity, it is pure spiritual transparency, absolute freedom, unlimited presence.

Paul, in his letters, insists on making us feel that Christ is no longer something in front of us, outside of ourselves, but someone who penetrates each of us, merging us all into community: we are "in Christ", according to the constantly repeated formula.

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<sup>190</sup> Summary of the chapter under this title in the book by Andrés T. Queiruga - Recovering salvation: for a liberating interpretation of Christian experience, 1999. Text supplemented with quotes from other chapters of the same book.

The risen Christ is a living, original individuality, liberated from every limit, who penetrates everything and can identify with everything. He is an unrepeatable you, whom we can speak to and love; but he is also a you who comes to meet us in any other you, in any other reality. It is a full presence, an intimacy that integrates, multiplies, and strengthens when it is given to someone, it creates openness and communion with others, with everyone.

The Gospel narratives, in their most symbolic and imaginative way, had already said the same thing: the Risen One "appears," "lets himself be seen," "lets himself be touched," "causes strangeness," is not subject to time and space.

How can we conceive of the Risen One with regard to his meaning for us?

In the resurrection, after all, the most concrete and ambitious aspirations of the human being are realized, from the dreamed-of perfection of the first-born myths to the most elaborate projects of social philosophy.

Christ as "realized utopia" is the synthesis and recapitulation of everything, the communion without obstacles or frontiers, the universally realizable love, the life that once and for all conquers death [...]. That is why it is utopia: on the one hand it is the realization of the highest perfection that is sensed; on the other hand, it is not located anywhere, nor in time.

He is the "life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45), that is, full communion, "flesh forgotten of itself", according to the magnificent expression of St. Irenaeus (130-202 AD); total generosity, source of life and grace, overflowing surrender (Rom. 5:9, 10, 15, 17).

He is the new man, or the "generic man" - of which J.I. González Faus speaks - in whom self-fulfillment ceases to be private, possessive, individualistic, to become social, shared, universal. He is the "essential man" not corrupted by any of the tremendous alienations of existence, but fully reconciled with himself, with other human beings, with the world, and with God. He is, in Paul's expression, the "second Adam," the first new man, fully identified with God.

What God really wants for the human being: his salvation, his full realization, his total happiness.

As Karl Barth said "the resurrected Christ is future to himself". This means that, in his fullest reality, Christ is nevertheless a constitutive and essential expectation: an expectation that what took place in him will be realized in all of us.

Salvation is - after all - the breaking down of the limit, the "infinitezation" of the creature, the end of the most frontal and terrible sadness: that of finitude.

In a concise way, Paul expresses the "divinization" of the human being: "God is all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). Then there will no longer be any doubt about what today constitutes our veil and our torment: If God created the human being, it was solely and exclusively for this: to transform him with His glory, to fill him with His happiness, to submerge him in the bottomless sea of His joy and of His love.



# **LENAERS: BELIEVE THAT JESUS HAS RISEN? OR BELIEVE IN HIM WHO LIVES?<sup>191</sup>**

Belief is a rational process without existential depth. Believing in someone is a dynamic process that emerges from our depths, supposes involvement, and includes commitment, surrender, and adherence. When we next speak of faith in God, or in Jesus Christ, the living, we will always have this attitude in mind.

The faith that saves and liberates is just that dynamic faith that radiates and changes life.

Resurrection is not a descriptive language, but only a figurative one. It is a mistake to make the biological bodily resurrection of Jesus, coming out of the sepulcher on Sunday morning, the password of orthodoxy. Rejecting the resurrection formula in no way means denying the good news embedded in it.

In order to express in the 21st century with an eye of faith, and therefore with meaning, the fact that occurred to Jesus of Nazareth in his death, the believer of modernity needs a new language, because that of the past, including the expression resurrection, is the summary of a vision of man and the world distinct from ours.

Israel did not know cremation; the custom was to bury the dead. The certainty that the good man buried there would live again raised the image that he would be asleep. Hence the word "cemetery", which means "dormitory". The term resurrection also has its origin in the semantic field of sleeping and waking, lying down and rising up.

The word resurrection is a culturally conditioned concept, which depended on the historically casual way in which the Jews cared for their dead. This means that the concept has no absolute content with regard to what actually happened to Jesus. In an incineration culture, this process would have received a completely different name.

The good news about Jesus cannot consist of him dying (or sleeping) on a Friday afternoon and waking up before sunrise on Sunday to say goodbye to the sepulcher.

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<sup>191</sup> Summary of the chapter under this title by Belgian theologian and philologist Roger Lenaers: *Another Christianity is Possible: Faith in Modern Language*, 2010. We believe an explanation is convenient: the author is a Jesuit priest, philosopher, theologian, and specialist in classical philology. Convinced that modern Western culture represents a true human mutation and that it breaks the shell of a pre-scientific, and therefore mythological, vision of the world, he proposes in this courageous book to introduce the reader to what would be the great challenge for Christianity today: to review all the language in which the Christian faith has been expressed in order to make it intelligible and acceptable to modern man.

The accounts of Jesus' appearances are not reports, but interpretations, as Paul is the first to point out. The earliest allusion to the resurrection, in 1 Cor. 15, employs as a confession of faith the formula: "he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." With this formula, Paul certainly refers to the Old (or First) Testament, for the New did not even exist in design. This "third day" is not a calendar day, but rather a symbol that God acted in a decisive and saving way in Jesus' death without perspective.

The representation of the bodily resurrection of Jesus after staying for about 36 hours in the sepulcher, for those living in modern times, is a narrative that belongs to the realm of fable. The same is true for the modern believer, for whom it is difficult to imagine such an occurrence. Fortunately, his resistance is supported by the non-historical character of the apparition accounts, precisely the accounts that are usually used to affirm the corporeality of Jesus' resurrection. This is important, because if these accounts told historical facts, we would have no choice but to accept them.

It is easy to see that "the accounts are not precisely minutes of historical events. The Gospel of Mark, the oldest of the four, does not mention any apparitions; it speaks only of the empty tomb. About ten years later, Matthew mentions two apparitions, one at the sepulcher, the other in Galilee. Luke tells of three apparitions, all in Jerusalem. In the Acts of the Apostles, written several years later, the apparitions last for forty days. The Gospel of John, written at the end of the first century, speaks of four apparitions. It is not surprising that historical criticism gives little value to these accounts.

The accounts appear to be a collection of oral traditions, narratives, unverified by the evangelists. Even entering into many contradictions, the Evangelists agree on what is truly important: he was "seen".

What will have been the existential experience of Jesus' followers after his death? We have to look for the reality hidden behind the words - from the Jewish and Hellenistic culture of the first century - to translate it into the language of modernity.

The image of "ascending into heaven" is only a symbolic expression of what occurred to Jesus at his death: he "went to the Father." "Ascending into heaven," or "sitting at the right hand of God" are equivalent to "rising from the grave"; they are not indications of successive events. If ascension is no longer understood literally, neither is it necessary to continue understanding resurrection literally. We can understand it today, calmly, as a symbolism. In the eyes of orthodoxy this may seem, perhaps, an abomination.

How, then, to explain the apparitions?



Jesus' disciples first experienced a terrible night of disappointment, senselessness and fear, right after the arrest and execution of their master. After a while, however - perhaps not exactly "on the third day" of the calendar - they had a very special experience. The inexplicable certainty that Jesus, whom they revered, despite his pitiful end, was nevertheless not a loser, but was alive and with even more intensity and fullness than ever before.

This is such an intense inner experience of Jesus' fullness of life that it was projected outwardly. The figure of that Jesus, who meant everything to them, took on visible and audible form. The experience of one of them psychologically smoothed the way for a similar experience to be shared by others. We are not isolated spirits, but communicating vessels, but the psychic endowment is not the same in all; in this case, the figure that determined their common experience was also different. Here is a possible explanation for some of the contradictions pointed out.

Next, the disciples wanted to share their joyful experience with others. If Jesus, the righteous one, "lived" - and they themselves were witnesses that he lived, for they had "seen" him - this meant, from the perspective of Jewish anthropology, that he had been awakened from the sleep of death and had risen, that is, that he had risen bodily. From then on the message of his resurrection began to grow progressively in the oral tradition.

For the modern believer the real good news of Jesus of Nazareth is that from him, even after his death, a life force surpasses the limits of time and space, just as before death. This force produces an improvement in the quality of life of all those who turn to him and follow him, and is therefore a source of salvation for them.

The Bible treats Jesus as a whole. He is the one who dies, but whom his followers continue to experience as the one who lives. This is all. Therefore, the experience of the living Jesus must be the starting point of an essay that expresses in an autonomous language (of modern culture) the same content called for by the language of the resurrection myth.

We speak with Holy Scripture of the "living God". In this case, living means a reality that surpasses any biochemistry.<sup>192</sup> If this mystery is love, as the believer confesses, the human being who loves becomes one being with him, in the measure of his love, and participates in

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<sup>192</sup> "Without biochemistry there is no life, and without a brain there is no consciousness. And death is the irrevocable termination of all biochemical processes. [...] Modernity is certainly right when it states that biochemically determined consciousness ends with biochemical death. However, it does not follow from this that it is meaningless to speak of peace, light, consolation, bliss beyond this boundary. [...] To believe in eternal life is the same as believing in God, which is an attitude of praise and love, a dynamic process of surrender... the more the love grows, the greater the union with God and the greater the participation in his eternity, despite biological death. Here our ability to describe reality more accurately ceases... trusting in love and letting our biological being be determined and confiscated by it is good - it is the only good." LENAERS. Another Christianity is Possible, p. 158; 163; 164, own translation.

the same reality in its richness of creative life. This is the foundation of the modern concept of resurrection. In his death, Jesus became the loving human being, no more.

In it, he carried to the end the surrender of himself. The essence of love consists precisely in the going out of oneself. With this, we try to reach the limit of what words can express about the "risen one". There all representation ends, as always happens when we talk about God.

We are a spark of the way God expresses himself, that is, God belongs to the definition of our being and that we must look at each other from God. We exist only according to the measure of his presence in our depth; therefore, according to the measure of our love.

# **LIBANIUS: PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS COMPATIBLE AND INCOMPATIBLE WITH RESURRECTION<sup>193</sup>**

What is the core of faith in the resurrection? That is the question St. Paul answered in 1 Cor. 15. "Jesus was buried and rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve." And he goes on to talk about the apparitions. Or, if we like, St. Peter, in the sermon of the Acts, expounds: "Jesus, the Nazarene, [...] you delivered him up and suppressed him, making him crucified at the hands of the wicked, but God raised him up." (Acts 2:22-24, own translation)

This core biblical datum, which was embodied in the creeds prayed in Sunday and holiday celebrations, challenged theology as a faith that seeks intelligence. In essence, intelligence here means philosophy. Philosophies stand before faith in the resurrection in two forms. Some prevent and lead to the denial of the resurrection. Their conception of being, of transcendence, of the human being, of the world, is consolidated in such a way that the mystery of the resurrection has no place in them. They offer unacceptable philosophical frameworks for a Christian who believes in the resurrection. Others propose elements that allow us to understand this theological reality.

## **Philosophical framework incompatible with the resurrection**

All materialistic philosophy hinders the understanding of the mystery of resurrection. In the beginning there is matter and everything returns to matter. The spirit is but a mere and temporary occurrence of matter by force of an evolutionary process governed by the internal laws of matter itself. How can we think that Jesus Christ in the totality of his being overcame the limiting, temporary conditions of matter for a life beyond death? Evidently every materialist rejects any mention of resurrection as mere fantasy, as pure wishes of the human being who cannot bear his own fate of being lost in the material cosmos without any personal existence.

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<sup>193</sup> Synthesis of text by the theologian João Batista Libânio, S.J., under the same title, which is available at <[www.jbllibanio/artigos](http://www.jbllibanio/artigos)>.

After death, the personal nothingness, the existential nothingness, the nothingness of everything we were as a free and conscious history.

Nor does it save materialism to admit that we continue to exist in history by those and what we mark during existence with the relationships we cultivate. We will be in others, in the things touched by us. The poets in poetry, the painters in paintings, the writers in writings, all in the loves they have lived. But the self definitely disappears. How to understand the resurrection of Jesus in this picture? Impossible. Jesus would have left his message and would have continued forever as a master acting only by the internal force of his teachings. Such a philosophical framework does not capture the least bit of the mystery of the resurrection.

The opposite philosophy, spiritualist, rejects the definitiveness of the human flesh. It clothes the spirit for as long as it lives here in history. At death, the soul is totally freed from any bond with the flesh, as an expression of the corporeal visibility of the human being. This spiritualism has circulated in philosophy from the purest Platonism in which the human being is pure soul, spiritual, immortal and divine, to popular forms of contempt for the body. The model of death is Socrates, as described to us by Plato in the dialogue Phaedon. Jesus' death on the cross, giving himself up to the Father, and being resurrected by him, does not fit at all into this philosophy. This is why, when Paul spoke of the resurrection at the Areopagus in Athens, the listeners ironically remarked, "We will hear you about this on another occasion." (Acts 17:32)

More widespread among us is the philosophy of reincarnation. In essence, it participates in a certain spiritualism, although it clearly speaks of reincarnation. Reincarnation means that the spirit gets rid of one body and can return to another. The ultimate consistency of the person is the spirit. It carries, so to speak, the personal nucleus wherever it goes, without any definite attachment to the first body. On the contrary, it successively frees itself from the bodies to go on purifying itself. In essence, it reduces the human being to a spiritual entity that wanders through different bodies. Reincarnation is in direct opposition to the mystery of resurrection, at least understood in this crude way.

With the New Age, such doctrine has come strongly to the fore. The Brazilian people carry a deep and long reincarnationist tradition. It has penetrated their mentality and emerges, here and there, under various forms. The crucial point that is incompatible with the resurrection of Jesus consists in denying the personal unity between body and soul and the indestructibility of the human individual. Death can be thought of neither as a loss in history (Marxism), nor in the cosmos (materialism), nor in a vague anonymous being, nirvana (Hinduism), nor also as possible returns of the individual to history in other forms.

Any Manichean framework, which despises matter, which sees the body as degradation, does not allow us to understand a glorious body. This implies admitting that matter has the possibility of being sanctified and glorified by God, which the Manichean does not support.

#### Philosophical framework compatible with faith in the resurrection

Any theological explanation of the resurrection must take into account an indispensable dogmatic core:

- a. Jesus Christ, in corporeality and spirituality, came to fullness in the resurrection, without rejecting either of these two dimensions. He continues to exist in the unity of his person - body and soul, spirit and matter. The totality of Jesus' person has risen;
- b. Between the Palestinian Jesus and the glorious Christ remains the identity of person. The same Jesus, who became incarnate, was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, dead and buried, is the same risen one. There is no break in personal identity, but only in the way of life;
- c. The resurrection of Christ, although signifying the absolute fullness of the fulfillment of a personal human existence, is still incomplete in the ecclesial body, as St. Paul clearly teaches. If something is missing to be completed in Christ's passion, it is also missing in the resurrection (Col. 1:24). This is the social aspect of the resurrection. It is not an isolated act of Christ. It implies the resurrection of all the dead. St. Paul, elsewhere, makes this point explicit: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised" (1 Cor. 15:13, own translation). It could not be clearer. The resurrection of Christ is closely related to the resurrection of the dead, and vice versa. In other words, the resurrection of Christ and of each of us will only reach its fullness at the end of time, as we find in the symbol of faith: "I believe in the resurrection of the dead on the last day." The resurrection of Jesus is therefore the first of our resurrection and the glorification of the cosmos. All creation participates in it even now, it has in it the germ of eternity, and it will be fully manifested at the end of time. The resurrection does not belong to any immanent force of the human being, so that he would continue to exist beyond death by his own nature. It is a gift from God the Father. The verb resurrect is direct transitive and the subject can only be God. God resurrected Jesus Christ, as Peter (Acts 2:24; 32) and as the use of the verb resurrect in the passive voice, whose efficient cause subject is God, (Mk. 16:6) show.
- d. Jesus' resurrection already took place right after his death. Scripture uses the symbolic expression "on the third day" to say that he did not remain in the world of the dead. Christian theology has to take all these points into consideration to be plausible.

Currently, two theological frameworks aim to account for this task:

#### Traditional framework

Based on an almost literal reading of Scripture and on a pre-modern philosophical horizon, an explanation has been elaborated that is even today more common and easier to understand. Because it is very well known, I will mention it briefly. At death, Jesus' soul was

separated from his body. The body remained in the sepulcher for three days, waiting to be reunited with the soul. Then the resurrection took place by God's action, who transformed Jesus' dead body into a glorious body. In those three days, he would have descended into the mansion of the dead, as we pray in the Creed.

#### Picture of the inseparable radical unity between body and soul

The change came through the influence of the natural sciences and modern philosophy. The evolutionist conception and the advance of microbiology have lowered the threshold between matter and spirit, between body and soul, both in the evolutionary process and in the reality of each being. Unity is so thought of that it is not understood how soul and body can be separated at death, since soul is the matter that has become conscious of itself, and matter is the "frozen" soul. One dies all. Either one returns to nothingness, or God immediately resurrects the whole.

In the traditional position, resurrection was understood as the union of the soul to the body, giving it new glorious form at the moment it is united with it. In Jesus' case, this happened on the third day. Mary, on the other hand, at the very hour of her death, was assumed into heaven. And we, however, will rise at the end of time.

In this new anthropological reading, the resurrection happens for everyone - Christ, Mary and us - in the same way in terms of the instant, and not in the same way in the historical-salvific sense. The difference is not in the temporal priority of Christ and Mary, but in the priority of both in God's salvific project. In Christ, Mary was resurrected. In Christ and in intimate communion with Mary, Christ's faithful follower, we all rise at the moment of death, as followers of Christ and with Mary as our model.

The great turning point comes in overcoming the temporal and spatial schema, to understand the resurrection of Christ, the assumption of Mary, and our resurrection in terms of relationship. Through the resurrection a relationship is established that surpasses all time and space. It is another mode of existence of the same self, in its totality. Resurrected body and soul acquire another meaning. They are not substantial constitutive parts of the human being that unite (conception) and separate (death) respectively. They are an expression of the historical unity and bodily spirit of the human person and therefore remain beyond death in another way of existence, of relationship.

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