

## **THE TRAGEDY OF JESUS**

Few people understand the tragedy of Jesus and the reason for which the Jews refused to recognize Him as the Messiah: He refused to restore a Jewish Kingdom because the Kingdom of God "is not of this world" (John 18,36). Thus, a Jewish State is condemned by God as much as a Christian or an Islamic one, because God belongs to all the believers, whereas the States belong exclusively to their respective citizens, believers and unbelievers.

### **Zionism against Judaism**

The tragedy of Jesus is Zionism, the politicization of Judaism. This is the heart of the problem!

Judaism is essentially spiritual: a belief in God. This faith started with Abraham to whom God revealed Himself in order to get to be known by all men. The divine intention was not to set up a Jewish political movement but to spread the knowledge of the unique God.

During the centuries, Zionism crushed Judaism to the point of reducing it to a Jewish nationalism. The Hebrews thought that they should create a national State out of their faith. Is Judaism a faith or a State? From God's point of view the two are incompatible. This is the tragedy!

### **History of the politicization of Judaism**

Judaism turned to politics since the XIth century B.C, after the Hebrews came into Palestine after leaving Egypt. Since then, the Jewish community wanted to become a kingdom and asked Gideon to rule them as their first king: "The men of Israel said to Gideon: 'Rule over us, you, your son and your grandson...'. But Gideon replied: 'I will not rule over you, and neither will my son, because God is your Ruler' " (Judges 8,22-23). Gideon perceived the danger of such a political dynasty and rejected the project of a political Jewish kingdom, as Jesus did centuries later, because God is the One and only King.

A second attempt took place one century later with Samuel. This time a Jewish Kingdom was effectively established with Saul as first king, but that was against the explicit will of God and of the prophet Samuel. Indeed, God declared to Samuel that, by doing so, "...It is not you they have rejected, but Me, not wanting Me to reign over them anymore" (1 Samuel 8,7).

After Saul's enthronement, Samuel asked the Israeli community to repent and to admit to having done wrong by asking a man to be their king: "Clearly understand what a very wicked thing you have done, in God's eyes, by asking for a king" (1 Samuel 12,17). The Jews, in fact, confessed: "To all our sins we have added this wrong of asking for a king." (1 Sam 12,19). The politicization of Judaism was therefore condemned, since the beginning, by those who founded it.

Centuries later, the prophets reminded the Jews of their deviation towards politics. God said through the prophet Hosea:

"They (the Jews) have set up kings but without my consent, and appointed princes but without my knowledge... (Hos 8,4)... Israel, you have destroyed yourself, though in Me lies your help. Your king, where is he now to save you, and your governors of whom you once said: 'Give me a king and princes'. I gave you a king in my anger and took him away in my wrath (Hos 13,9-11)".

Effectively, the kingdom was taken away from Israel after the Babylonian invasion under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. The Temple of Solomon was destroyed, the Jews were deported to Babylonia and the kingdom, the dynasty of David, ceased to exist since then (2 Kings 25,8-12 / 2 Chr 36,17-21).

Ever since, the Israelis felt a deep nostalgia for this kingdom of David, totally forgetting that the One and only King is God. During the centuries that followed the Babylonian invasion, they often tried, in vain, to restore this kingdom in Israel. They thought that the Messiah was the only person capable of restoring this kingdom of David. This earthly kingdom had become their obsession. Like the old Simeon and Anna, they eagerly expected this "consolation of Israel", this "redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2,25-38).

In the first century B.C, the Romans helped the Jews in establishing a Jewish kingdom under their control. The first king was Herod the Great who ruled without the people's consent because he was not from David's descendants, but from the Maccabees (tribe of Levi). Moreover, Herod was just a puppet at the service of the Romans; they crowned him king with the sole purpose of calming the Jews eager to have a kingdom.

But the Jews wanted an autonomous kingdom from David's dynasty. Their aim was to provoke a rebellion against Herod and the Romans to restore this kingdom. They believed that the Messiah's mission was to re-establish this kingdom by mobilizing the Jews against the Romans. This increasing nostalgia for an Israeli kingdom totally eclipsed the spiritual dimension of Judaism. The Messiah was expected only to "save" Israel by military means in view of restoring a vast Jewish empire, "The Great Israel" which existed under Solomon.

### **John the Baptist**

When the nationalist Jews saw John the Baptist attacking Herod, they thought that he was the Messiah and crowds followed him, but he used to tell them that another One, more powerful and more important than himself was to appear (Mat 3,11/ John 1,26-37). Yet, for John the Baptist, this Messiah due to come after him to liberate Israel, could only be a warrior. Even John did not understand the behaviour of Jesus, therefore "when John had heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask Him: 'Are you the One who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?' (Mat 11,2-3). He expected to hear that Jesus was gathering the people and preparing them to revolt, instead, He was doing the opposite; his doings were those of a merciful man who forgives and a healer of wounds, not of a revolutionary Jew. These spiritual actions could not satisfy the nationalist Jews, one of whom was John himself.

Therefore, without doubting that Jesus was a messenger of God, John sent some of his disciples to ask Him if He was the expected Messiah "or are we to expect someone else" as Messiah to lead the revolt. He had not yet understood the spiritual dimension of the Liberation. This is why Jesus said that "the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John the Baptist" because of his materialistic idea of God's Kingdom (Mat 11,2-11).

Even today, all those who do not understand the spiritual inner dimension of Christ's Kingdom still await this "other Messiah" to restore the political kingdom of Israel.

### **Jesus**

When Jesus came the Jews had already lost the spiritual notion of salvation. The best among them un-derstood this fact politically. They thought that the Messiah was to come from some notorious clerical or high ranked family of Jerusalem, able to mobilize the people. Paradoxically, Jesus came from a humble and modest family in the remote village of Nazareth: "From Nazareth, can anything good come from there?" (John 1,46).

A poor Carpenter did not convince the proud expectations of the Israelis. His main mission was to restore Judaism in its spiritual genuineness, liberating it from politics: "My Kingdom is not of this world", said Jesus (John 18,36). By Jesus, God re-conquered his Throne in the hearts of the believers. This Kingdom is accessible to all men of good will, all over the world, and is not restricted to the Jews as they thought.

Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God (not of Israel) . The Jews believed in Him when they saw Him performing miracles, but they understood that He was the political and military saviour they expected. Instead of responding to his invitation to repent, their reaction towards his miracles was inspired by politics. They wanted to force Him to become the political king of Israel, to restore David's kingdom since He was from David's descendants. In fact, John reveals in his Gospel that the Jews, after the miracle of the multiplication of the bread, believed in Jesus since they said: "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world". Yet their reaction after the miracle was not a spiritual one since John concludes: "Jesus, as He realised that they were coming to take Him by force and make Him king, fled away to the mountain alone" (John 6,14-15).

We must pay attention to this fact which often passes unnoticed: "They were coming to take Him by force and make Him king but He fled away". The Jews were not coming to propose the kingdom but to impose it on Jesus. He had no other choice: to flee from what betrayed his Mission. Had He not refused such empire from the devil? (Mat 4,8-10).

The tragedy of Jesus appears in these verses because, after Jesus's persistent refusal to restore the kingdom, the Jews refused to recognize Him as the Messiah.

Seeing that Jesus had not put his miraculous power at the service of the nation and of the throne, the nationalists accused Him of not being a patriot and that He was "leading the people astray" (John 7,12). The Jews had hoped that He would end up by performing a national restoration: "We had hoped that He would be the one to liberate Israel", said two of his disciples after his death (Luke 24,21). Seeing that Jesus did not respond to their national expectations, the Jewish leaders concluded that his miracles were made by the power of Satan (John 10,20/ Mat 12,24-28). They finally succeeded in crucifying Him because he was attracting the crowds and became an obstacle to the realization of their political and nationalist goals (John /,37-52/ 12,10-11).

Yet, Jesus was not the first Jew who had refused to establish an Israeli kingdom because this was against God's Will. Gedeon, Samuel and God Himself had declared to be against such a kingdom because "God is the One and only King".

Jesus had a great difficulty in explaining his spiritual Kingdom even to his closest friends. He often pre-pared his apostles to his crucifixion, not to fight against Herod and the Romans. The Kingdom He spoke to them about never had a political aspect and his speeches were never that of a nationalist. He never spoke about David's kingdom but about the Kingdom of Heaven. They expected Him to say, for example: "People of Israel, you the free descendants of Jacob, follow me, don't hesitate to take your arms and liberate the land of your ancestors...etc". His speeches were of the opposite kind: "Blessed are the poor in spirit (humble), for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs,...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are the merciful...(Mat 5,1-12)...The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field...(Mat 13)...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...(Mat 5,43-45)".

To the Pharisees who came to ask Him "when the Kingdom of God was to come" (according to them this meant the Kingdom of David), Jesus answered: "The coming of the Kingdom of God will not be observed and no one will say: 'Look, it is here! Look it is there!' for the Kingdom of

God is within you" (Luke 17,20-21). Since this Kingdom is within men, nobody should expect another one outside. Nobody in Israel expected such a kingdom nor such a messianism. The nationalist spirit had seduced all the Jews, including the apostles.

In order to establish the Divine Kingdom, the image of the political messiah had to be destroyed. Jesus knew that this could only be achieved at the price of his condemnation. He prepared his apostles for this tragical outcome : "The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men and they will put Him to death". Hearing this "a great sadness came over them" (Mat 17,22-23), because they thought that He was the invincible nationalist Messiah and could not imagine that Jesus could be defeated, put to death, without restoring David's throne and dynasty.

The apostles did not easily understand the spiritual dimension of the Kingdom in spite of the fact that Jesus had remained with them for three years. After his Resurrection He had shown Himself to them and, for forty days, he had continued to appear to them and speak to them about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1,3). They still went on believing that this kingdom is political and asked Him, just before ascending to Heaven: "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1,6). They only began to understand the Master's intention after having received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1,7-8/ 11,15-18/ 15,7-11).

Jesus wanted to replace in his apostles' minds the idea of a zionist messiah by that of the spiritual and universal Messiah. This was a delicate and subtle exorcism He had to operate. He waited two years before starting this difficult task. First of all, He wanted to make sure that they believed that He was the Messiah. Therefore, He manifested his power through the miracles He did and thus got them to trust in Him (John 2,11/ 6,14). Only then He asked them: "You, who do you say I am?" Peter, he alone, had the courage to answer: "You are the Christ!" Jesus praised him for this answer and told him that this had been revealed to him by God Himself (Mat 16,15-17). The first step was thus obtained: the apostles believed that He was the Messiah. Nevertheless, for Peter and the rest of the apostles, Jesus was the nationalist messiah, the saviour of the israeli nation; He is the messiah, yes, but the warrior messiah!...Peter still carried his sword when Jesus was arrested! (John 18,10-11).

The second and most difficult step was to reveal his spiritual messianism, a fact that the apostles could not even imagine. Jesus, after having secured for the first time their belief in Him as the Messiah, went further and revealed his true face: the spiritual, non nationalist, Messiah. He did so by declaring to them, for the first time, that he would shortly be put to death. He only revealed this tragical outcome the day they recognized Him as the Messiah, not before: "From then onwards Jesus began to make it clear to them that He must suffer and be put to death" (Mat 16,21). This meant: Yes, I am the Messiah! But I shall not restore the political kingdom. In order that you may understand it, I shall be put to death.

The spontaneous reaction of Peter was to reject this unexpected declaration: "Taking Jesus aside, Peter started to rebuke Him: 'Heaven preserve You, Lord, this must not happen to you!'. But Jesus severely reprimanded Peter: "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me! Your thoughts are not those of God but those of men" (Mat 16,21-23). Peter's reaction is understandable: the disciples could not conceive the fact that the Messiah, the future king of Israel and the saviour of the nation, should end up on a cross like a vulgar criminal, when they already imagined Him on Israel's throne, inaugurating the new dynasty of David. The Messiah, the King of Israel, dying on a cross?! Never! He who will dethrone Herod and expel the Romans! The apostles, therefore, "did not understand what Jesus said; it was hidden from them so that they could not understand the meaning of his words" (Luke 9,44-45).

The apostles had to be submitted by the Master to a real "brainwash", a "baptism". This could only be achieved by the Master on the cross. The One they believed to be the Messiah had to be put to death without restoring David's throne. Then their faith in Him as the Messiah - the spiritual and universal One, not the nationalist one they used to believe in - would go on living within them. This is the concept they admitted later, after the crucifixion of Jesus.

Therefore, the death of Jesus killed the Zionist idol. By his death, Jesus triumphed over the deadly nation-ism: "I have overcome the world", said Jesus on the eve of his crucifixion (John 16,33).

Effectively, after Jesus's death, the apostles went on believing that He was the Messiah. They thus discovered the spiritual and universal dimension of salvation. God was no longer a monopoly of the Jews, but He belonged, since then, to the whole world: "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also!" (Romans 3,29). But for the stubborn nationalists, Jesus was "a cause of falling" (Mat 11,6) and a "stumbling-stone" (Rom 9,30-33): they were shocked by his "lack of patriotism" and rejected Him.

One must differentiate between a religious nationalism created in the name of faith &ndash; which is explicitly condemned by God &ndash; and a legal patriotism not depending on faith.

### **Judas**

Judas never followed Jesus from spiritual conviction, but because of material interest. This fact clearly appears in John's opinion about him: "He was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself from what was put therein" (John 12,6). Judas joined the apostles because he thought that Jesus was the nationalist Messiah. His only ambition was the restoration of the kingdom of David by Jesus through which he aimed to obtain a prestigious position (minister of finance for example). He was totally indifferent to the miracles and speeches. He only perceived them as a means to reestablish the political kingdom and for him to realize his own materialistic ambitions. His hidden indifference towards the words and deeds of Jesus appears in the Master's judgment on Judas after the miracle of the multiplication of the bread and his speech on the Bread of Life:

"There are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who did not believe and who was to betray Him...After this, many of his disciples went away and accompanied Him no more. Then Jesus said to the Twelve: 'Do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Message of Eternal Life...'. Jesus answered: 'Did I not choose the Twelve of you? Yet one of you is a devil'. He meant Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he was the man, one of the Twelve, who was to betray Him" (John 6,64-70).

It would have been better for Judas to leave with the unbelievers like himself. The reason he remained in the group of the Twelve is, again, his hope to realize his materialistic ambition. When he finally realized that Jesus did not intend to establish a political kingdom, and that he, therefore, had no hope of getting some benefit out of following Jesus, he decided to betray Him (John 13,2). For Judas, material interest mattered more than any other consideration. This is clear in his desire to deliver Jesus by getting at least some financial profit. In fact, "he went to the chief priests (who wanted to catch Jesus by subtility) and asked them: 'What will you give me and I will deliver Him unto you?' And they agreed with him for thirty pieces of silver" (Mat 26,14-15).

Judas represents the tragedy of Jesus.

## **The apostles after the Cross**

Two of Jesus's disciples were on their way to Emmaus after his crucifixion. They were disappointed after his death and looked sad: "We hoped that He would be the one to liberate Israel" (Luke 24,21). They still expected a political liberation.

Just before ascending to Heaven, the Eleven apostles "when they saw Him, they knelt before Him, though some doubted" (Mat 28,17). What were they doubting? They were doubting that Jesus was the Messiah because He had not established the kingdom in Israel. At this moment they asked Him again: "Will you, at this time, restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1,6).

Today, the tragedy of Jesus is repeated with the reappearance of the Jewish nationalism incarnated in the State of Israel. This State has misled many Christians who blindly support it in spite of Jesus's warnings: "Take care that no one deceives you...When you see the abomination of desolation stand in the Holy Place (Holy Land, Jerusalem)...Take care not to be deceived, do not follow them..." (Mat 24,24,4-15/ Luke 21,7-8). Yet, they followed them!!