

JPJRS 8/2 ISSN 0972-3331, Jul 2005 143-162

Jesus' Vision of A New World Order and His Stand against Society and Religion of His Day

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Abstract

After accepting that we cannot expect Jesus to have given us a blueprint of the new society of God's dream, the author understands that it is legitimate to arrive at valid conclusions about his vision of a new society. There is ample evidence in the NT to show that Jesus was proclaiming a God for whom humans were more important than systems and structures, laws and regulations, temple and Sabbath. The God of Jesus wills that humans unfold themselves and become what they are called to become. In this article an attempt is made to show that Jesus' vision of a world order is not based on any ideology or pious fantasy but on his intimate, unique and personal relation with his Father as well as his revelation about what humans are and what humans can become. This is expressed by the symbol, *Kingdom of God*. In the first part of this article we shall see the context in which Jesus proclaimed his vision of the society. In the second part, how Jesus' relationship with his Father made him challenge the society and religion of his time which stood against all that he believed in and lived for. In the third part, what the main features of Jesus' vision are of a world where God's reign is lived out rather than sacralized and the consequences of his vision for those who are committed to him and his values.

Keywords

Kingdom of God, symbol, vision of Jesus, new world order.

At the outset it must be made clear that the title of this article may be misleading. When we discuss the new world order according to Jesus' own vision, we must admit that it would be an anachronism to suggest that Jesus understood the complex socio-political and economic systems and structures which constitute nations and their complex interrelationships that make up the world order as we understand it today. Jesus' life and mission was limited to a very small geographical area and his knowledge about the surrounding nations and the Roman Empire that kept the Palestine of his time under its control might have been very limited. However, we can draw valid conclusions about his vision of a new society and a new order of human relationships based on the NT witness about his dream of a new society where God's reign is recognized, acknowledged and celebrated for human well-being.

We cannot expect Jesus to have given us a blueprint of the new society of God's dream which he claimed to interpret authoritatively. Still it is legitimate to arrive at valid conclusions about his vision of a new society. He had clear ideas about how humans should order their lives in this world. This we can conclude from the demands he makes on his disciples whom he called to be 'the light of the world and the salt of the earth' (cfr. Mt 5:13-14). There is ample evidence in the NT to show that Jesus was proclaiming a God for whom humans were more important than systems and structures, laws and regulations, temple and Sabbath. His virulent attack on those who perpetuate the systems of oppression whether religious and social is indicative of this commitment to humans who are valued more than anything else in this world. The God of Jesus wills that humans unfold themselves and become what they are called to become. So the new order of the world must create ways and means to enhance the unfolding of humans and to prevent those forces that work against the flowering of the human person. Jesus' own attitude to humans and their situation reveals that this new order must be based on ontology, the law of Being and not on autonomy or self-determined law unto itself for which the Zealots fought, or

the heteronomy of a hierarchical structure where the higher becomes law for the lower, which the Sadducees and Pharisees wanted for their society.

In this article an attempt is made to show that Jesus' vision of a world order is not based on any ideology or pious fantasy but on his intimate, unique and personal relation with his Father as well as his revelation about what humans are and what humans can become. This is expressed by the symbol, *Kingdom of God*. In the first part of this article we shall see the context in which Jesus proclaimed his vision of the society. In the second part, how Jesus' relationship with his Father made him challenge the society and religion of his time which stood against all that he believed in and lived for. In the third part, what the main features of Jesus' vision of a world are where God's reign is lived out rather than sacralized and the consequences of his vision for those who are committed to him and his values.

I. The Context of Jesus' New Vision of a World Order

The context of Jesus' life was not very different from our own at least with regard to the human attitudes and tendencies in responding to their life situation and the options available to them. "The names might be different but the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Baptists, Scribes, Samaritans, Herodians, tax-collectors, the pious few, the agnostics, and practical atheists, the masses who live 'lives of quiet desperation' are still with us."¹ The NT gives us important insights into the attitude of Jesus with regard to the society and religion of his time and the position he took vis-à-vis the oppressive structures of both that society and religion. There was no separation between religion and society at the time of Jesus and the complex interconnectedness between them was such that anyone who stood against specific social issues would also would be standing against the structures of religion and *vice versa*. There was another major force in the society, the

Roman occupation which, to some extent, affected the world-view of the Jewish people.

Though first century Palestine was considered by many historians a turbulent period, Josephus, the Jewish historian, attests that there were no conspiracies in Palestine between 6-44 CE. Jesus spent his life in Palestine during this time. But the Gospels give us sufficient indications to show that it was a turbulent period as Jesus invites his hearers to make a decision for letting God's reign happen in their lives and their society. They must be open to receive his kingdom. They must pray for its coming, "Thy Kingdom come!" (Lk 11:3).

In some of the parables there is an urgency to take a decision with regard to letting God's reign happen. A.M. Hunter comments on the parable of 'the Way to Court' which is the last of the five parables in Luke in which Jesus speaks of the impending crisis and calls his countrymen to read the signs of the times and make right decisions (the Waiting servants, the Sleeping Householder, the Man in Charge and the Weather Signs). In the parable of the Way to the Court, the insolent debtor is Israel which is on the way to court. The parable of 'the Way to Court' is Jesus' way of describing the impending peril in the nation's history and God's judgment on the nation. Israel has to choose between her way of nationalism, which is no more than an exclusive tribalism expressed by fighting a losing battle against Rome or follow God's purpose for humans embodied in Jesus. A.M. Hunter further observes, " Consider the historical situation as Jesus saw it in the light of God's purpose for the world. God has chosen Israel to be his servant—to be the bearer to the world of a 'light to enlighten the Gentiles' that they too might come to knowledge of his saving truth. But Israel, by rejecting God's kingdom and Messiah, was repudiating her part in God's great plan."²

Israel could not take that decision to let God's reign happen in the lives of humans and the ordering of human society according to God's own purposes as the society was influenced by strong socio-religious and political movements like that of the Zealots,

Sadducees, Pharisees and others. Here again, we do not want to show the higher stature of Jesus as opposed to the caricatures of these movements like calling the Pharisees narrow-minded legalists, the Sadducees sophisticated skeptics, the Zealots fanatical nationalists or the Essenes esoteric sectarians and a large majority of people devoid of any religious sensitivities ('am-harez).³ Our concern is to show how the well-intentioned approach of a group of people to determine the destiny of their nation , however religiously justified their assumptions may be, can go against God's purposes for humans and their world. The origin of Jesus' vision is different. It breaks the boundaries of all types of exclusivism and triumphalism and goes to the very root of human nature to enhance authentic communion.

a. The Zealots' Struggle for Autonomy

The term 'zealot' was used during the OT times and intra-testamental times for all those who were zealous for the establishment of God's law. There is no unanimity among scholars about the identity and ideology of the Zealots. The commonly accepted view about the Zealots is that it was a monolithic resistance movement against the Roman rule in general which began with the uprising of Judas, the Galilean in CE 6 against the census ordered by the colonial power Rome and ended in CE 74 with the suicide of those who tried to defend Masada. This monolithic movement seemed to have a dynastic leadership, a specific ideology, and a well-structured organization with a commitment to secure their plans and purposes through violence. Some scholars question this commonly held view on account of the lack of evidence to arrive at such conclusions. They claim that there was no specific group which could be called ' the Zealots' until CE 66-70 , the second year of the great Jewish revolt.

In fact, there were individual leaders who gave a certain identity to the resistant groups which held violence as a means to liberate the Jews from Roman rule. Josephus, the Jewish historian names five of these resistant groups which revolted against Roman

rule. The first among them was called the *Scicarii* (*sica* in Latin means dagger people). Their origin is not clear but probably they were influenced by the “Fourth Philosophy”⁴ of Judas, the Galilean. They began their terrorist activity in the 50’s of the first century and ended at the fall of Masada. The second group, the Zealots who occupied the temple led by the priest Eleazer. The third group was that of the followers of the Galilean John Gischala who in collaboration with the Zealots terrorized Jerusalem. The fourth group were the followers of Simon bar Giora who had under his control the whole of Southern Judea and fought against the Zealots. The fifth group was Idumaeans who supported for sometime the Zealots and then the movement of John Gischala and finally joined the group of Simon bar Giora.⁵

It is not easy to point out exactly which group can really be called the Zealots. Sean P Kealy is right in affirming that whatever be the terminology and problems involved in identifying the group, ‘the option for Zealotry or armed resistance was a real option at the time of Jesus and indeed a tendency in the human situation in every age.’⁶ However, the Zealots were not mere freedom fighters but also exhibited zeal for the establishment of God’s Law. According to Martin Hengel, Judas the Galilean and Menahem were not just leaders of armed groups of resistance but also preachers of repentance like the prophets of old. However they were oscillating between a mythical past and an eschatological future without a clear idea of what kind of state they would like to establish.⁷ The ideology of all Zealots is the same, to establish a theocratic state. And often their armed struggle to establish a utopian theocratic state ends up with their own destruction as in the case of the Jewish revolt of 66-74 CE and 132-135 CE against Rome.

The Zealots’ ideology for a society or a nation and the methodology they employed in realizing it followed the principle of autonomy. Belief in theocracy as an ideology may be based on the principles of heteronomy, but the Zealot’s interpretation of theocracy and the violence they used as means to achieve it made their approach a perverted use of autonomy. All Zealot groups,

though they followed heteronomy in their organizational set up, executed their plans according to the principle of autonomy or by being a law unto themselves independent of every other group or the rest of the world. This was evident from the factional feuds among them. Richard M. Cassidy while explaining the main characteristics of the Zealot movement says:

“Perhaps the most important was the vicious factionalism that developed among the various leaders and groups who later took part in the struggle. The three rebel factions that were ensconced in the different sections of Jerusalem constantly pillaged and killed themselves, and it was not until the very end that they were able to mount a unified effort against the forces of Titus.”⁸

The dissension among the various Zealot groups indicates that the Zealots grand plans for the society of their dreams were founded on each groups’ particular interests and not based on God’s law which they claimed to defend. According to the report of Josephus, when the Zealots took control of Jerusalem they set fire to the Archive building to destroy the bonds of the money lenders in order to gain the sympathy of the poor sections of the society and to show that they were against the rich.

A new society cannot be built by manipulation of the sentiments of the populace or by setting one group against the other. It must be based on principles of recognizing the sovereignty of God, justice, equality and inter-personal relationship. A positive and right understanding of autonomy leads one to the unfolding of humans in right relationships with others. But a perverted understanding of it can only lead to the destruction of society through violence and disruption of human development by creating an atmosphere of debilitating fear and suspicion among humans that destroy communion. The Zealot groups were radically committed to the creation of a new society but only on their own terms, not based on God’s terms. So they were doomed to failure.

b. The Sadducees' and the Pharisees' Vision of a New Society founded on Heteronomy

Sadducees, a name probably derived from Zadok who was appointed chief priest by Solomon (I Kings 2:26ff, 35),⁹ were the priestly and aristocratic party in Judaism. They appear in the history of Judaism after the Maccabean rebellion and supported the Hasmonean development of the Jewish state. Their interest centred around the Temple and the power it implied. After the unsuccessful attempt to re-establish the monarchy under Zerubabel, the leadership in Judaism was centred around the priesthood and the Sadducees evolved into a party that consisted of high priests and aristocrats.

What characterized the Sadducees was their uncritical support of Hellenization which began with Antiochus IV Epiphanes and continued in the Roman rule. Being a pragmatic high-priestly and aristocratic group with their own political interest, they lived in splendid isolation from the ordinary populace, 'slow to shed their inheritance from provincial surroundings, maintained the violence and crudity of the rustic; loud and crude manners maintained aristocratic authority over subordinates.'¹⁰ The Sadducees concern was to preserve Judaism as a state with its own politico-secular interests. It is also suggested that the Sadducees represented the interests of the temple and its priesthood. Therefore they were considered to be the defenders of priestly prerogatives of the performance of temple services and the priestly interpretation of the law. Perhaps the most important was their political interest in viewing Israel as a theocratic state properly organized under the leadership of the high priest.¹¹ For them the colonial rule of Rome, more than a political issue, was a threat to the high priest's rule and the uninterrupted temple service. For the Sadducees *the temple* seemed to have represented the political power concentrated in the high priest, hierarchically shared with the priestly and aristocratic group. It represented the economic power concentrated in those who were closely associated with the administration of

the temple and the cultic power to control cult and to interpret Divine law.

According to NT and Josephus the Sadducees rejected the doctrine of resurrection, spirits and angels and future punishments and rewards as they did not believe in the immortality of the soul. Hence their concern was for this worldly life which must be organized according to their principles of a theocratic state controlled by the high priest..

The origin of the name Pharisee is obscure. The common explanation is that it comes from the Hebrew word *parash* which means 'one who is separate' but separated from whom or what, is not clear. It is suggested that they were lay interpreters of the law who separated themselves from the priestly interpreters of the law in the post-exilic times. According to Josephus, Pharisees were known for their legalism and legalistic rigorism. They were noted for their strict accuracy in their interpretation of the law¹² which led to the development of an elaborate system of rules and regulations which were handed down orally and which could be adjusted to the new situations of the society. The Pharisees were accused of building a wall around the Torah preventing non-Pharisees from benefiting from the Torah. Though the large majority of the Pharisees were from the ranks of the laity, ordinary lay people could not follow their meticulous observance of ritual purity. The Pharisees too insulated themselves from ritual contamination by any association with the ordinary people. They formed themselves into a caste. They were supporters of the synagogues and the services in the synagogue and they took care that everything was done according to the demands of the law. Many of the scribes belonged to the party of the Pharisees.

Like the Sadducees, the Pharisees too were struggling to have political power. If not by fully aligning themselves with the foreign power, at least by not opposing, it they retained their position or enhanced it. In the writings of Josephus, the Pharisees emerge as a religious-political party in the Jewish-theocratic state, partisans of authoritative system of law based on tradition.¹³ But

their main interest seemed to have been the development of Jewish religion. They believed that history was controlled by God and was governed by God leading it to its fulfillment as God had already planned. The Pharisees like the Sadducees believed in a theocratic state where religion determined the secular, the spiritual concerns were superior to material ones, cultic purity more important than moral purity, the Sabbath more than human beings.

What we discover in the vision of the Sadducees and Pharisees is their insistence on the rule of the state by a hierarchically ordered socio-political and religious structure. In this theocratic state divine law is interpreted to justify the hierarchical structure, the religious one is not only superior to the political one but also gives rules to the latter, the political superior gives rules to the subordinates and the rich to the poor. This is what we mean by a world order based heteronomy. "It is the hierarchical conception of the world. Not only cesaropapism and theocracy, but also caste system and state communism could be adduced as examples of cancerous heteronomy."¹⁴ The doctrines and characteristics of the Pharisees were different from that of the Sadducees but in the final analysis their vision of the world was based on heteronomy.

Any world-order based on autonomy or heteronomy has already the seeds of violence in its very structure waiting to erupt at any opportune moment. It is based on the preservation, expansion and consolidation of power in the hands of a few, condemning the vast majority to a life of oppression and dehumanization. Religious traditions can be manipulated by any group to justify their unjust and discriminatory ideology, to further their selfish interests at the cost of human dignity and true glory of God.

II. Jesus' Vision of a New World Order: Its Source

Jesus has not given us clear principles and methods of procedure to evolve a world-order or how human society can be organized taking into consideration the complex nature of the

elements involved in the making of a nation. However, his life, mission and his teaching clearly indicate what types of human societies should be established so that humans can unfold and become what they are called to become. He has given us a vision to be realized.

The very purpose of God-becoming human is primarily to reveal what humans are and what they can become. Whatever be the type of world-order it is for humans, and humans cannot be sacrificed of the sake of this world order. Whatever structures or systems whether religious or secular, that prevent humans from unfolding and becoming what they are called to become are challenged and prophetically denounced by Jesus. Whatever promotes the flowering of the human is proclaimed and promoted by Jesus.

The early Church recognized that the source of Jesus' authority to proclaim the presence of a new and hitherto unknown way of ordering human life and society originated from his intimate relationship with his Father whom he addressed in a such a familiar and unconventional way as *Abba*. It may have been the habitual way of expressing Jesus' intimate and unique relationship with his Father that made the evangelists articulate such a relationship in terms of theophanies where the Father addresses him as his beloved Son (Mk 1:11) John in particular expresses it very succinctly in a *Mahavakya* "I and the Father are oneness" (Jn 10:30). John emphasizes the point that Jesus' authority is derived from his relation with his Father (Jn 5:30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). What we want to highlight here, is that his authoritative interpretation of the presence of God's reign springs from his deep relationship with his Father and, therefore, from his interiority. His words, deeds and life-style were the signs of a new way of human relationship where everyone finds adequate space for unfolding his or her life in a right relationship with God, other humans and the world. Indeed the right relationship with others becomes the criterion to judge the authenticity of one's relationship with God. Therefore, with courage and

conviction he confronts and overcomes the forces that would try to hinder the establishment of God's reign.

For the Jewish religious establishment Jesus was nonconformist and a non-orthodox in his interpretation of the law because he seemed to have relativized the demands of the law. His opposition to the religious authorities, the Scribes and the Pharisees was that they manipulate God through various mechanisms they had invented for their own ends. Their concept of God does not liberate humans. Their God stands for temple, Sabbath and the status quo. Finally he was condemned for blasphemy. Jesus' notion of God is different from that of the Jewish religion because Jesus' God stands for humans. For him moral purity is more important than ritual purity, humans more important than Sabbath (Mk 2.:23-28) communion with God and other humans based on love more important than the temple and all that it represents.¹⁵

By his table-fellowship or commensality he transgressed the boundaries of a social system based on discrimination and marginalization of those whom the society considers economically poor, socially outcast and ritually impure. By his association with such people he challenged the existing structures of social and religious hierarchies and unjust and inhuman mechanisms of discrimination. The cleansing of the temple could be considered as the climax of his stance against the nexus of socio-economic and religious structures organized to oppress the poor and the disadvantaged.

The method Jesus employed in confronting the structures of religion and society is a subject of serious debate among the scholars. The range of opinions regarding Jesus' response to the oppression and injustice perpetrated by religion and society moves from violence, non-violence, non-resistance and accommodation to complete indifference to worldly affairs.

Concluding from Jesus' way of teaching and acting aggressively and assertively against the agents of oppression and injustice some scholars hold the view that Jesus sanctions violence

against the structures of oppression. They base their arguments on certain passages like, 'I came not to bring peace but a sword' (Matt 10:34) and the 'arming' of the disciples (Lk 25: 35-38). There had been various attempts in the past to explain Jesus' life and mission as that of a Zealot, indeed a failed one like any of the leaders of the Zealots' groups or a political revolutionary. H.S. Reimarus (1694 – 1768) portrayed Jesus as a failed political revolutionary whose intention was to become the King of the Jews but the disciples covered up the whole story after he failed to achieve this by making him a spiritual Messiah. For Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) Jesus was not only a teacher but also an agitator who did not hesitate to use violence in the cleansing of the temple with an intention to liberate people from hierocracy and nomocracy. For W.Weitling (1801 - 1871) Jesus was like Pythagoras trying to bring about a radical revolution to transform society and abolish private property. For Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) Jesus was a social and political reformer who set in motion the eschatological development of history. There are also other proponents of such theories linking Jesus to the Zealot movement. S.G.F. Brandon in his book *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester, 1967) argued that though Jesus was not a Zealot or belonged to any Zealot groups, he and his disciples sympathized with the ideals and aims of Zealot group.¹⁶ He too bases his argument on selected texts but misses the irony in Jesus' words in the selected texts. The debate goes on.

Jesus' approach to those who use violence against the poor and the marginalized and the very use of violence itself for bringing about a social order based on autonomy is considered as non-resistance and/or non-violence. These two categories are to be clarified to understand Jesus' approach to the oppressive structures of his time. Those who follow non-resistance refrain from not only doing physical harm to others but also from directly confronting those responsible for the existing systems of oppression and injustice. They suffer with those who suffer injustice and they hope that their suffering would convert those who use violence against them. But those who follow non-

violence as a means to confront the oppressors believe that they have to challenge and confront those responsible for socio-economic and political evils holding on to the principles of truth and love and by avoiding any violence to the persons concerned. This they believe would eventually lead to dialogue and a change of the situation for the better. ¹⁷ The adherents of both non-resistance and non-violence would bring the power of love in their confrontations with the situation of oppression but would shun physical violence as they consider it an obstacle to build a just society. According to Richard J Cassidy, who made a study on Luke's presentation of Jesus in the context of politics and society, Jesus' approach was non-violent and sometimes bordering on non-resistance. Jesus was aware of the oppressive political situation created by Herod Antipas (Lk 13:31) and Pilot (Lk 13:31). Several of his parables suggest that he was aware of the oppression and injustice perpetrated by those who wielded power and he uses fiery words confronting them. In my view, the NT as a whole presents him as one who lived and advocated both non-violence and non-resistance (Lk 6: 27-31, 11:4)

Human society must be transformed into God's Kingdom where humans can truly become humans by recognizing God's sovereign leadership. In Jesus' vision it is in such a Kingdom that the leadership of every human emerges. In this vision everyone will have the authority that comes from within even if they are powerless.

The new society is to be built on the foundation of *ontonomy*, the law of Being, which is nothing but a radical inter-relationship of everything that exists. In this order no one is excluded or included but all are related to one another radically and existentially. There is no exclusion or inclusion (as any exclusion or inclusion makes the presence of a higher power), no 'we' and 'they', no outsiders and insiders, no citizens and foreigners, no Jews and Gentiles, Christians and Non-Christians, believers and non-believers but all are fellow citizens and friends, children of God. Discovering the law of *ontonomy* is an in-sight, a re-velation. Jesus' *Abba* experience is the source of this discovery and his

proclamation of the Kingdom is the expression of this ontonomic relationship.

Therefore, Jesus proclaims an ordered human life based on the principle of love, equality, justice, reverence and respect for one another. This world order is based not on autonomy or heteronomy, which begets violence, disorder and dehumanization but on ontonomy, which expresses authentic communion of humans among themselves and with God, in right relationship with the entire creation.

a. Jesus' Stand Against the Structures of Society and Religion

The counter culture which originated from Jesus' preaching and teaching was a radically new culture based on his ontonomic vision of the kingdom-community. In this community there cannot be any discrimination and division based on the logic of haves and have-nots, male and female, Jew and Gentile, old or young, so-called just and so-called sinners. Any division or discrimination based on any ideology negates the very foundation of the Kingdom community. "The discipleship community is defined as a 'contrast society,' i.e., as a community that is fundamentally different from all other social organizations based on autonomy or heteronomy. This community's life, as well as the life of the individuals, is not defined by 'above' and 'below,' but by helping one another."¹⁸ This kingdom has no boundaries. Nobody is excluded. It is not an organization. It is not an institution. Its foundation is the God of unconditional love. Its law is love. Its territory is the inner space of human beings that embraces everything and everyone as God does. Jesus praxis reveals the logic of this kingdom. It is the praxis he wanted his disciples to continue. Hugo Echegaray says, "Jesus did not set up a rigid model for action but, rather, inspired his disciples to prolong the logic of his own action in a creative way amid the new and different historical circumstances in which the community would have to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in word and deed".¹⁹ According to him Jesus' praxis in view of his commitment to the vision of the kingdom found

expression at three levels: first at the level of economics, second at the level of politics and the third at the level of ethico-social behaviour.

At the first level, the logic of the Kingdom does not allow the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few condemning the majority to abject poverty. At the same time it does not propose a utopian equality. It stands against the unjust accumulation of wealth, which not only creates division of humans into classes and categories but also prevents true communion among humans as brothers and sisters. It creates a class of people who are always in debt and who can be manipulated by the economically powerful for furthering their own selfish interests. Religion further makes the plight of the poor still more miserable by considering them as sinners and excludes them from the so called 'holy' people and even canonizes the accumulation of wealth as a sign of blessing from God. Jesus subverts this wrong understanding of wealth and the dehumanizing attitude that follows from this understanding. For him wealth is for sharing with the needy. Wealth accumulated is bad if it prevents communion and discriminates among human beings on the basis of what they possess or what they do not possess. Jesus enters into table-fellowship with those who are discriminated in this way. "The practice of Jesus would thus leave to the community the responsibility of building itself up without at the same time yielding to the system of accumulation of goods and wealth that was the characteristic of the empire."²⁰

At the second level, the political power exercised by rulers is in contrast to the praxis of Jesus, which reveals the logic of the Kingdom in exercising power. In the Kingdom the exercise of power is based on justice and the equality of humans because they are the children of the same loving Father. It excludes all forms of domination, manipulation, cover-ups, lies and abuse of power by those who wield power. In the Kingdom community there is no other justification for the use of power except for service.²¹ Leadership, in Jesuan praxis, is the empowerment of others to be leaders in self-emptying service (Lk 22: 24-27; Mt 20: 20-25; Mk 10:45).

At the third level the Jesuan praxis reveals that the Kingdom community must promote ethico-social behaviour based on the logic of freedom and love. There is no triumphalism or arrogance that contradicts and hinders right relationship among humans. In fact, the practice of right relationship might involve more hardships and suffering as it may subvert the type of relationship promoted by the systems and structures opposed to the kingdom-community. In this context one can understand the warning Jesus gave to his disciples, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt 10:16). Echegaray, commenting on the praxis of Jesus at the level of ethico-social behaviour says, “The disciple must overcome a spirit of diffidence; collaboration in the kingdom calls for decisiveness, tenacity, and fruitfulness (cf. the parable of the talents). The disciple must work as the Lord worked and not be afraid of the kingdoms of this world.”²² It is God’s dream that the whole human race becomes the kingdom-community where all can experience the unconditional love of God through the self-emptying love of humans for one another. It is in such a community one experiences true freedom to become authentically human.

To build up such a kingdom community Jesus appoints a small community of leaders whom he called apostles. He gives them a vision. He educates them to take up leadership of the communities in which all are leaders in decision-making, though decision-taking may be left to the one appointed by the community with the utmost docility to the Spirit of God.

b. Implications of Jesus’ Vision of a World Order

The iconolaters have never for a moment conceived Jesus a real person, who meant what he said, as a fact, as a force like electricity, only needing the invention of suitable political machinery to be applied to the affairs of mankind with revolutionary effect. Thus it is not disbelief that is dangerous to our society; it is belief. The moment it strikes you (as it may any day) that Jesus is not a lifeless, harmless image he has hitherto

been to you, but a rallying centre for revolutionary influence, which all established States and Churches fight, you must look into yourselves, for you have brought the image to life, and the mob may not be able to stand that horror.²³

This was George Bernard Shaw's observation about the impact Jesus would make on society if Jesus and his teachings were to be taken seriously. This too was the belief of Sun Yat-sen, who organized armed resistance against the colonial powers in East Asia and welcomed the Bolshevik revolution. He says: I do not belong to the Christianity of the churches but to the Christianity of the Jesus who was a revolutionary."²⁴ .

It is clear that individuals and groups will interpret the life and mission of Jesus according to the needs of the context and according to their psychological and ideological perspectives. However, no one can deny that Jesus' stance against religion and society was founded on his vision of the unfolding of human life in this world and it has much to do with the socio-political situation of the people. It is true that the early church understood that his kingdom was not of this world but it was not other-worldly either. It must unfold and grow here in this world journeying towards its finality beyond this world. This demands from the Church not to create two cities and preside over only the affairs of the city of God. The two cities are distinct but not separate. The city of humans is the city of God. Therefore the evil tendencies of humans to manipulate religion, to create systems and structures whether social or political or economic must be prophetically denounced and confronted with authority and courage. .

The tendency to be indifferent to the world and its affairs seemed to have overcome the social teachings of the Church. When Pope Paul VI wrote *Populorum Progressio*, some of the Latin American Governments did not want it to reach people because the Pope wrote: "The earth's goods must be divided fairly and this right of everyone to a just share comes first. Even the right to private property, and the right to free enterprise, must yield to justice."²⁵ But sometimes the Church fails to take a definite

and clear stand against systems and powers that blatantly violate human rights and dignity. There are those who having been known to be indifferent to the socio-political situation then experienced conversion by entering into the actual life of politically and socially oppressed people. Oscar Romero, the murdered Archbishop of San Salvador wrote after such a conversion, “It is practically illegal to be an authentic Christian in our environment...precisely because the world which surrounds us is founded on an established disorder before which the mere proclamation of the Gospel is subversive.”²⁶ Paul’s exhortation to obey the authorities of the state (Rom 13:1; Tit 3:1; I Pet 2:13) does not mean an uncritical and unquestioning obedience (Mk 12: 17, Lk 13:32, Acts 5:29, 16:35 etc).

Conclusion

The Church has to make clear choices as Jesus did. It cannot silently watch the creation of a world order that does not promote justice and does not care for the least and the voiceless. Even to be a mute witness to the disorder created by anti-kingdom forces is involvement in politics. It is a choice. But a choice that fails Jesus and his cause. The Church must take a stance against systems and structures in a non-violent way and sometimes also non-resistant way, discerning God’s purposes for humans and by a radical commitment to Gospel values. Then it can truly become a catalyst for a world order based on the radical inter-relationship of everything that exists.

Notes

1. Sean P. Kealy, *Jesus and Politics* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Publ., Michael Glazier Book, 1990), p.28.
2. A.M. Hunter, *The Parables Then and Now* (London: SCM Press, 1971), pp.90-91, cfr. Sean P. Kealy, *Jesus and Politics*, pp.23-24.
3. E.P.Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1984) , p. 360.
4. Josephus, the historian, informs that Judas with a Pharisee called Zadok is the founder of the fourth philosophy which accepts the doctrines of

the Pharisees besides holding on to their invincible love of liberty and accepting only God as their only Lord and Master. This philosophy would not accept any man as master. *Antiquities* XVIII.23-25. Josephus does not identify the fourth philosophy with Zealots' ideology. According to J.P.M. Sweet, "The term 'Zealot' certainly has connotations of violence in defence of the Law, but not specifically of armed resistance to Rome and its collaborators." J.P.M. Sweet, "The Zealots and Jesus," in *Jesus and the Politics of the Day*, E.Bammel and C.F.D.Moule, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1984), p. 5

5. Josephus, War, IV. 5.3; IV. 9.11; IV.4.1
6. Sean P Kealy, *Jesus and Politics*, p.36
7. M.Hengel, *Nachfolge und Charisma: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie zu Mt 8.21f. und Jesu Ruf in die Nachfolge* (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelman, 1968); *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, trans. James Greig (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 23f.
8. R.M.Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (New York: Orbis Books, 1978), p.123
9. Some Fathers of the Church thought that the name Sadducees is derived from the adjective zadik meaning 'righteous' (Epiphanius, Heresies, 1.14; Jerome, Commentary on Matthew 22.13). See Interpreter's Dictionary of Bible, Vol. IV, "Sadducees," pp.160-162
10. *Interpreters' Dictionary Bible*, Vol IV, p.162
11. Ibid., p.162
12. *Antiquities*, XVII, 2.4
13. Ibid., XII, 5,9; 10, 5-7
14. R.Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, p. 31
15. J. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1978), pp. 205-209
16. J.P.M.Sweet, "The Zealots and Jesus," in E.Bammel and C.F.D.Moule, p. 1
17. Richard J.Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel*, p. 41.
18. J.Roloff, "Church leadership according to the NT," *Theology Digest* 44:2 (1997), p. 140.
19. H.Echegarary, *The Practice of Jesus* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 94.
20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p. 95.
22. Ibid.
23. George Bernard Shaw's preface to *Androcles and the Lion*, cited in Sean. P. Kealy, *Jesus and Politics* , pp. 17-18.
24. J.P.M.Sweet, p. 2
25. *Populorum Progressio*, No.22
26. *Tablet* 24/31 December, 1983, p. 1251

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ISSN 972-33315

