

BORN TO BE A REBEL

*"Blessed are you poor...you that hunger...you that weep."
~JESUS OF NAZARETH*

The claim is that a baby was born two millennia ago without benefit of sexual intercourse, which must have severely tried the faith of the father and perhaps greatly surprised the mother. No one is absolutely certain when the infant appeared in a stable among farm animals, his temporarily homeless parents and, old testaments say, angels and other celestials. The baby was proclaimed the Son of God by three travelers from the East known ever afterward as Wise Men (Magi), although in his lifetime none of the world's religions recognized him as blood or spiritual kin to any of their deities. He had no brothers or sisters who are known about (this is disputed), and he seems to have been encouraged in his own omnipotence as only children often are.

Not much is known about the child's early life until he reached 30. Like his father (or the earth-person who seems to have resignedly accepted his paternal role), he became a carpenter. Only one incident of his childhood is chronicled: he is said to have ejected a few avaricious money-changers from a temple, which betrays an early example of his essential naiveté.

He emerged from obscurity when he was 30, and until his death three years later he roamed around preaching radicalism, sedition and revolution. He was unusually popular among the impoverished and discontented, attracting followers of homeless and unemployed, mentally unstable and physically disabled, sexually and politically deviant, and other assorted pariahs. He eventually came to the attention of authorities who were greatly concerned about his disruptive effect upon the lower classes. A paid informer from his inner circle (called Apostles) betrayed him and he was executed after an inconclusive trial.

His place in history and myth is principally as a religious figure. However, a significant number of scholars challenge that he was the son of any but a humble carpenter. They claim he was a political activist, specifically a labor organizer in an era when workers had absolutely no political or personal rights or liberties. These revisionists refute that he was executed for religious preaching — as even contemporary times show, religious radicals and cult founders can be tolerated within a society while labor agitators are frequently imprisoned or murdered.

His execution is often cited as evidence of this theory. He was crucified on a cross, which was the normal method for dispatching criminals and enemies of the state, replaced in later periods by the gibbet and electric chair. However, nails were driven into his hands and feet instead of suspending him by the usual rope bindings. The specific use of nails is proof enough, the revisionists insist, that he was arrested and executed for his attempts to organize carpenters and others of the working class in what would later be known as a labor union, and that he had no intention of founding a religion.

Some of his later followers, though adherents of him as Son of God, have acknowledged that he antagonized the law and order establishment of his day. They admit, in the words of a few, that he attacked "the very roots of his society," and that "he was a problem to his mother and to his entire generation." "He was the most radical leader who ever lived," a 20th century disciple has written.

Although the revolutionary nature of his preaching caused his execution, his later proselytes adapted the *status quo* to their creed, which ultimately became its most effective instrument of perpetuation. By structuring a theology on the claim that he was the Son of God, his successors enjoyed an advantage most temporal systems lack (and religions enjoy): they did not have to deliver on their promises. Indeed, for three millennia they have kept their flocks docile with extravagant suggestions of everlasting life beyond the grave of the flesh, which surpasses anything secular organizations can offer — and the sweetest part is they don't have to prove any of it.

The first generations of his disciples eagerly martyred themselves (incidentally providing immensely popular spectacle for mass audiences while supplying abundant food for circus animals). The farther west succeeding generations moved the center of their expanding religion the increasingly lighter his skin and hair in evocations of his image, and his radical ardor was softened to a benign, implicitly feminine expression.

He is called the Prince of Peace, yet in his name his followers have warred incessantly against peoples of differing beliefs and against each other as sects rise and claim themselves his only true disciples. In his name genocide was waged against the original inhabitants of the Americas, and Europe was made a cemetery in the name of Reformation 1700 years after his death. In the most grotesque excess of theology, a bizarre, vengeful sect that confused him with grim ancient gods he displaced, almost succeeded in exterminating the religion of his parents which had refused to accept him as a long awaited messiah 2000 years before.



B. KADRIE, 'NATIVITY' (1968)

His presence might be useful again, but not in the scenario of Armageddon some of his more fervent disciples yearn for; nor would it help if he (or she) posed as a messiah, buddha or guru. Humanity, as it has so often before, could use a few good prophets — revolutionaries armed with visions instead of weapons and hatreds. Unfortunately, false prophets emerge in unsettled periods who create great mischief and misery, whose violent and vengeful ambitions obscure quantum visions of universal suffrage and prosperity.

Perhaps it is time to reexamine his real message to humanity. Instead of a Son of God predestined to die to defer human responsibility for its sins of greed, rapacity and butchery, we have an ordinary carpenter who, for reasons that have been lost due to his deification, felt compelled to fight the slavery and injustices of his era and attempted to raise up the poor and disenfranchised into a powerful force of revolution. If that is what he was, then he did not die to save our souls: he lived to make us free and was put to death for that heresy.

~MICHAEL MCCUSKER (1989)

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