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Rev Igbakua Iorjaah

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Charles O. Nnaji, Ph.D. is a lecturer in the Department of Religions and Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja, Abuja.

Kareem, Kayode Peter, A Lecturer in ECWA Theological Seminary Igbaja, Kwara State.

Email address: kayode_kareem@yahoo.com

Prof. Igbakua Iorjaah
Faculty of Arts • Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
Professor of New Testament

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Rev Igbakua Iorjaah

IDEOLOGICAL CLASH IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETAL PEACE

Igbakua Iorjaah, Ph.D.

Abstract

Matthew's Jesus announced the dawn of God's kingdom which by Jewish royal ideology was the Davidic Kingdom. The crowds followed him but Jewish authorities saw him as a power swindler, opposed him, and masterminded his execution for treason. Analogous royal ideology apparently explains the web of armed conflicts in much of today's world. This study ideologically analyses the dynamics undergirding the conflict between Jewish leaders and Jesus and draws implications for today's societies, with Nigeria in focus. It divulges crossing points among three constructs: politicization of religion, sacralisation of politics, and economic control, and advocates respect for human dignity, in place of religionism and veneration of ideologies, for peaceful coexistence.

Key Words: Nigeria; peaceful coexistence; politicisation of religion; veneration of ideologies.

General Background

Every society has dynamics that dictate its social process. For Palestinian Jews in first century AD, like Nigerians today, these were religious, political, and economic powers. Matthew presents Jesus as the son of David from the line of Judah, and so as *the* Jewish messiah (Mat 1-2). The story depicts the reception of Jesus' messiahship claims with mixed reactions. Among the populace, Jesus pulled large crowds of followers who clung to him because of his acts of compassion (Matt. 4:25 - 5:1). He brought succour to them in their hardships emanating from seizure of their lands by absentee landlords who made them perpetual day labourers (cf. Matt. 20:1-16). Among the Jewish Establishment, however, Jesus was a power swindler that had to be eliminated by all means (Matt. 12:9-14; cf. Jn

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11:45-48). The Jewish Establishment was the collective client of the Roman Emperor enjoying both the status of “the rulers of the people” (Matt. 20:25) and the benefits accruing to that position. They had sought and gotten permission to institute direct rule through the Sanhedrin¹ so that the Roman governor in Judea was only an overseer.² They therefore resented and worked against anything that threatened their position—what would disturb the “colonial peace”³ and dethrone them (cf. Jn 11:45-48). Matthew hints that this dual response was informed by opposing perspectives in Jewish royal ideology (cf. Matt. 12:22-24; 38-45; 21:15-16).

Royal ideology was an important construct in Ancient Near East (ANE) because it provided the dynamics of the entire social system.⁴ The Jewish establishment in Jesus’ time was immersed in the Roman patronage system, which was built on the framework of sovereignty, and understood politics as “being in with the right group” to maximize personal gain. This necessitated stepping on the heels of others in accord with the character of the honour-shame culture undergirding politics. The challenge-riposte culture set people against others and undermined potentials for peaceful coexistence. The numerous Jewish revolutionary movements in this period were ignited by the mean socioeconomic situation of the populace, driven by the exploitative machinery of patronage politics: class conflicts and heavy taxation among others.

¹ Alan Storkey, *Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 40.

² Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, CD-ROM. (Bible Works 6, LLC., 2003), *Ant.* 18.251-52.

³ Alan Storkey 40.

⁴ Jeong Bong Kim and J. D. Human. “Nagid: A Re-Examination in the Light of the Royal Ideology in the Ancient Near East.” *HTS* 64/3(2008), 1475-1497, 1477-78.

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Jesus conceived of politics in the framework of enemy-love with some connotation of ancient Greek's concept of the πολιτική,⁵ but with the twist of assembling people and influencing them to conform to God's will on interpersonal relationships through individuals' acts of compassion for the common good. For him, sovereignty was God's prerogative. Matthew's Jesus sought to correct the ills of his time through ideological reorientation by giving kingdom citizenship education in word and indeed to his followers on the essential nature of the government of God, the character of kingdom citizens, and life in the kingdom (Matt. 18-20). His royal theology therefore collided with Jewish royal ideology, especially its development with strands from Roman patronage ideology.

Today's Nigeria is caught up in a web of armed conflicts that have similar features with Israel's situation in Jesus' time. The *Boko Haram* menace in Northern Nigeria has been perpetrated by similar factors. Whatever others are saying about the movement, "*Boko Haram* is an Islamic sect that believes politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt, false Muslims. It wants to wage a war against them and the Federal Republic of Nigeria generally, to create a 'pure' Islamic state ruled by sharia law."⁶ The social banditry in the Niger Delta area and even the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which is now largely replaced by Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), led by Nnamdi Kanu among others, that are making demands on government, are all ideologically informed. Generally speaking, social banditry arises in agrarian societies where peasants are exploited by the government or ruling class – usually in times of economic crisis, famine, high

⁵ In this work, "politics" is used in light of Jesus' usage of "kingdom of God"; the kingship of God, or God's government on earth. God's kingdom is the assembly of people (ἐκκλησία) influenced to recognise the sovereignty of God and live by his standards of human relationships—among men and with God. 'Εκκλησία with which Matthew's Jesus describes his group was used in Greek πολιτική, (politics) of his day to indicate the civic duty of the assembly of the πολίτης (citizens) of a given city state (πόλις) to make democratic decisions for their common good.

⁶ Andrew Walker, "What Is Boko Haram? Special Report 308 June 2012." The United States Institute of Peace. 12 Dec. 2012. < www.usip.org>.

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taxation and social disruption. These are the complaints that gave rise to the banditry in the Niger Delta and are the same issues that birthed MASSOB.⁷ Boko Haram's aim "is to cause fear, instability, job losses, family fragmentation, internally displaced refugees and Christian/Muslim enmity in order to force the government to negotiate."⁸

The following paragraphs try to make sense of Matthew's story of Jesus' Messianic mission from a political theological stance, based on Jesus' royal theology, in the face of competing royal ideologies. The development of Jewish messianism up to the time of their Roman occupation is explored, examining possible connections with Roman patronage system and the possible resultant influence on the Jews in the time of Jesus. Also focused is Jesus' specific concerns in his royal theology and how they influenced his contemporaries and the promise they hold for peace in Nigeria today.

Jewish Royal Ideology and the Messianic Kingdom in Matthew

By the time of Matthew in the first century AD, monarchy was the fundamental Jewish political system and kingship defined leadership. Jewish royal ideology was fundamentally messianic. The idea revolved around the kingship of God interfaced with the kingship of David; a two-tier concept of kingship in which the Davidic king is an under-king to King Yahweh.⁹ This idea saturates the Old Testament and the Intertestamental literature in so many strands that the "messianic hope" defies a neat taxonomy. The following survey of the subject in the OT through the intertestamental period is a mere attempt to make meaning of it.

⁷ cf. Bob Brown Chinda, *Will this House Fall?: The Plot to Break up Nigeria*. (Atlanta: Ivory, 2004), 5-7.

⁸ Maiwa'azi Dandaura Samu, "Boko Haram Conflict Research/Analysis & Management: Preventive Counterterrorism and Sustainable Peace building: Nigeria and Boko Haram Case Study," (Center for Justice and Peacebuilding Eastern Mennonite University, USA, 2012), p.15.

⁹ Robert D. Rowe, *God's Kingdom and God's Son: The Background to Mark's Christology from Concepts of Kingship in the Psalms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 61.

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Messianism in the OT and Intertestamental Period

On this subject we simply summarise Rowe's comprehensive work on it¹⁰ as a bridge to our discussion. Throughout the OT, Yahweh is characteristically presented as the eternal king (מֶלֶךְ) of Israel (Isa 37:16; 41:21; 43:15; 44:6), enthroned in Zion (Pss 9:7, 11; 10:16; 93:1; Isa 6:1-6); the shepherd/leader of Israel (Isa 40:11), who destroys his adversaries, Israel's national enemies (Ps 97:1, 3, 8; Ezk 34:14-25). Note worthily, Yahweh's kingship over Israel is especially connected with his saving acts on their behalf as is the case of the exodus from Egypt (43:16, 17; 51:10) and his specific designation as "Redeemer" (גֹּאֲלֵם) of Israel (Isaiah 41:14) "leading a 'new exodus' of his people, this time from Babylon (Isa 43:14-19)" (Rowe 66).

Yahweh's kingship so depicted is connected with the Davidic kingship. The Psalmist's prayer of restoration (Ps 80) sees King Yahweh, the Shepherd of Israel (vv 1, 8, 9) in similar light to that of the Davidic king, the "man of your right hand" (verse 17). In Ezekiel 34:22-24 David is Yahweh's shepherd over Israel. Characteristically, the Davidic king is Yahweh's anointed (Pss 2:2, 20:6; 89:38), chosen by God and specially made "the servant of Yahweh" (Pss 78:70; 89:3). Hence, the king is Yahweh's subordinate (2 Sam 7:13-16) and adopted son (Ps 2:7; 89:26-27). By his adoption, the king "is the one most entitled to represent the father's kingship" (Rowe 52).

This royal ideology has traces of ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian ideological framework of divine and sacral kingship, from where Jews probably borrowed many of the features of their royal ideology. Most of Mesopotamian political culture contained the view of the king as a son of the gods or god-incarnate, by which the king was a viceroy of the gods.¹¹ Divine kingship was an ideological

¹⁰ Robert D. Rowe, *God's Kingdom and God's Son: The Background to Mark's Christology from Concepts of Kingship in the Psalms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

¹¹ Piotr Michalowski, "The Mortal Kings of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, Ed. Nicole Brisch, (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 33-46, p. 35.

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construct “designed to bolster the notion of the king as god”¹² so as to maximise his stranglehold on and relish political and economic power.¹³ It was a deliberate politicisation of religion and sacralisation of politics by fusing “the crown into the social, cultural, and economic worlds of the temples.”¹⁴ Egypt had a similar political culture, but their king was not a viceroy, but *horus*, the Egyptian god whose primary duty was to uphold *ma’at* (justice),¹⁵ a social and cosmic responsibility of the king very central to Egyptian life.

It is worthy of note that the entire concept of a Davidic king was both existentialist and idealistic. Jewish messianism originated from Israel’s socio-political experiences in their life history, in the light of their religious beliefs. Israel’s idealisation of David’s kingship may be linked to Nathan’s oracle in which Yahweh is presented as covenanting with David to establish for him an everlasting dynasty (2 Sam 7:12-16). The psalms, e.g., Ps 2:2, 6; 89:20-35, 110 and the prophets frequently refer to this divine promise. The Davidic monarch, who nevertheless would be his vicegerent, was to come from the line of Judah (Gen 49:10), possibly at the *eschaton* (cf. Num 24:17).¹⁶ Israel’s first king was not from Judah and summarily failed to establish a dynasty. When David

¹² Jerrold S. Cooper, “Divine Kingship in Mesopotamia, A Fleeting Phenomenon.” *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, Ed. Nicole Brisch, (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 261-264, p. 263.

¹³ Reinhard Bernbeck, “Royal Deification: An Ambiguation Mechanism for the Creation of Courtier Subjectivities.” *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*. Ed. Nicole Brisch, (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 157-170, 149; Jeong Bong Kim and J. D. Human, “Nagid: A Re-Examination in the Light of the Royal Ideology in the Ancient Near East,” *HTS 64/3* (2008), 1475-1497, p. 1478.

¹⁴ Michalowski p. 36.

¹⁵ John Bright, *A History of Israel*. 4th Edition, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), p. 38.

¹⁶ The Testament of Levi 24:1-4 and the The Testament of Judah 24:1-6 utilise the Old Testament messianic prophecy of “the ideal king” (Gen 49:9-10) to paint a grand portrait of this Messiah: A star shall arise from Jacob (TJud 24:1a, as in Num 24:17; TLev 18:3); a branch or shoot (TJud 24:4, see also Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12) of God, Most High (24:4, = Gen 16:22; Dan 7:27) arising from the root of Judah (24:6, = Isa 11:1,10; cf. Rev 22:16).

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redeemed/saved Israel from the hands of their enemies and established an empire, Israelites saw his reign as the ideal (2 Kings 14:3; 22:2).

Existentially, through hindsight view, the picture of Israelite messianism painted above developed in response to changing unfavourable social and political circumstances of the Hebrew race. After their exodus from Egypt, Yahweh covenanted with the Israelites at Horeb to be their sole God (Ex 19: 5-6). Thenceforth they were no longer subjects of the Pharaohs of Egypt, but of Yahweh and their system of government was no more monarchy, but theocracy. Theocracy in traditional Israelite two-tier kingship conception meant that sovereignty is God's prerogative (1 Chron. 29:25; cf. Psalm 103:19; 4QFlor 1, 3; 1QH 10, 8; 1QM 14, 16). He administers Israel through vice-gerents who are directly responsible to Him (Deut. 17:14-20; cf. Gen. 1:26-28; 17:6, 16; 35:11; 49:10). Monarchy was thus, rebellion against the theocratic lordship of Yahweh.¹⁷ That is why Gideon turned down a request for him to establish a dynasty (Jdg 8: 23) and Hosea similarly had this tendency (Hos 3: 4; 7: 3; 13: 19-11).

The tradition in 1 Samuel 8-12, however, conveys a seismic shift from theocracy that Israel was known for, to monarchy. It presents two political fronts; two opposing ideologies: the one pro- and the other, anti-kingship. The former saw and expressed the need for the Israelites to adopt the monarchy that was in vogue in the Fertile Crescent so as to be modern (1 Sam 8:5). Continued assaults by surrounding hostile neighbours (1 Sam 12:12; 13:19-22) made them dissatisfied with their theocratic confederacy ruled by an abstract God-king and its makeshift leadership that arose only in times of emergency (1 Sam 8:7). The pro-monarchy party was also probably enticed to kingship by the attractions of the palace, the insignia of royalty, and the whole gamut of benefits accruing to the king and his subjects. In those times kingship was very attractive; the

¹⁷ Bertold Klappert, "King, Kingdom," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 2. Ed. Collins Brown, (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1976), 372-389, p. 374; cf. Jdg 8:23; 1 Sam 8:7; 12:12, 19.

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king held sway on all the functions of modern government—the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary. Moreover, the king had unlimited wealth because he had power to exact taxes from his subjects (cf. 1 Sam 8: 11-18).

Though apparently the majority party, their request met strong resistance from a small but influential minority party of predominantly the covenant regulators—the prophetic cycle (1 Sam 9:1-10:16) led by Samuel and later, Nathan. Samuel pointed out that monarchy would bereave the independence-loving Israelites of freedoms and possessions that the people presently enjoyed (1 Sam 8:11-17). Moreover, it violated the character of Yahweh, Israel's sovereign, as the God of justice.

By the time of David, however, the monarchy was legitimized in Israel because now the establishment of kingship in Israel was seen as a sacred occasion. By the depiction of 2 Samuel 7:11; 23: 5 and Psalm 132 Yahweh elected David, covenanted with him and established Israel's monarchy through him (2 Sam 7). Consequently, King David became the servant of King *Yahweh* (Ps 132) enthroned on Mount Zion, the dwelling place of *Yahweh* and his earthly seat of power. The Davidic king sits at God's right hand; he proclaims and implements God's sovereignty in addition to mediating God's salvation to the world (cf. Pss 2; 21; 110).

But then, something went wrong; the reigns of the kings on David's throne were characterised by misrule and apostasy. Jeremiah 5:30-31 sums it up: "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their *own* authority; and my people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?" Ezekiel 34:2-24 paints the same sorry picture, but with broader brush strokes. In these conditions of the pre-exilic period, Israelite prophets announced Israelite/Judahite exile, but they also expressed hope for the restoration of a Davidic kingship in some future time as in Hosea's "later days" (Hos 3:4-5). Micah 5:2 specifically traces such Davidic king to Bethlehem. Isaiah presents the reign of this "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" as an everlasting reign, a time of peace, upheld by justice and righteousness (Isa 9:1-7).

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In the exilic period, those days of unfavourable circumstances caused by the failure of the Davidic kings, too the Jews recollected Yahweh's saving acts and began to look forward to the return of such good old days when *Yahweh* would re-enthroned his ideal king over Israel. Such an ideal king took various faces. Isaiah depicts him as the "Servant of Yahweh" (Isa 40-55), which sometimes refers to Israel as a nation (Isa 42:19; 43:10; 44:26) and at other times to an anointed individual (Isa 61:1-3). Ezekiel presents him as David, the shepherd of God's people (Ezk 34:23-25). Daniel depicts him as the Son of Man who will receive dominion over the world from the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:13-28) – and is interpreted as Israel (vv 18, 22, 27) and as Israel's representative (v 27).

During the Second Temple, the Psalms of Solomon presents the Messiah as a human prince from the line of David (Ps Sol 17: 21, 32). But in more visionary-prophetic literature, the Messiah (1 En 52:2) seems to be portrayed as a celestial being, "one like a son of man" (Dan 7: 13), or "the Son of Man" to be revealed only at the end of time when he will establish a heavenly kingdom and judge the nations (1 En 62:5-7; cf. 48:2.6). In 4 Ezra 12:32; 13:26, he is even a military Messiah.

In all these portraits, the messiah is intrinsically linked with Israelite salvation; the Jews were looking forward to a political Messiah who would rescue them from their pagan overlords, having been under foreign rule for over seven hundred years by the time of Matthew's Jesus. Luke presents Zechariah as prophesying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant ... Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us" (Lk. 1:68-75). For the prophets therefore, Yahweh's enthronement as king through his vicegerent becomes good tidings to be announced on Zion to his people (Isa 52:7-10; 61:1-3). His kingship over Israel is good news because it brings peace through divine salvation (Isa 52: 7, 10) and restoration of Israel's nationhood (Isa 52: 8) to the nation that was hitherto suffocating in the pangs of exile in Babylon. There is special emphasis on the proclamation of freedom, the release of captives, and

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recovery of sight to the blind (Isa 61:1) in the context of the jubilee year (Isa 61:2) looking back to Leviticus 25:10. The wellbeing of individual citizens of the kingdom couched in covenant terms thus becomes the prerequisite for peace (Ezk. 34: 3-4, 30). It is an announcement of times of refreshing to a restless people.

Herein lays the background to Jesus' messianic manifesto. Using the enquiry of John the Baptizer to confirm his Messiahship, Matthew depicts the Messianic King, pointing him to his healings and exorcisms as the outworking of the Messianic manifesto, started in Matt. 11:5: "*the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them*" (NAU, cf. 12:18-22; Lk 4:18-22). But, these very activities pitched him against Jewish leadership as clients in the Roman patronage politics. Jewish leadership particularly took offence whenever Jesus was solicited for assistance or hailed as "Son of David" (Matt. 9:27-34; 21:14-16) and they apparently influenced some segment of the crowds to doubt Jesus' Davidic sonship (Matt. 12:22-24). In that regard Matthew tries to explain the continuing controversy between Jesus and the Jewish leadership from the perspective of Jesus' bid to reinstitute God's government on earth, which ran contrary to patronage politics in Roman Palestine.

Roman Patronage System in First Century AD

The social control system of the Roman Empire by the New Testament time was patron-clientelist. The Greeks, and later the Romans, ran a patronage system of social control wherein a privileged few (the wise and *elite*), the great men, clustered together and ascribed to themselves a status high above the rest of society over which they domineered. Patronage was the gift that those benefactors, the great men, graciously bestowed on their loyalists. In that political setup, the controlled populace had no rights. As Bruce Malina explains, what they sought from their rulers was favour or patronage, which was graciously granted them by the lords, but only

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in return for service they rendered.¹⁸ The royal ideology of patronage was therefore, the modern expression of ANE ruler-dominated religio-cultural system of social control.

Under the Emperor was a complex of interlocking patron-broker-client relationships. The Roman Empire was "a household" [*oikoumene*] which saw discreet social entities consisting of ethnic groups, though located in their land of birth, not as nations, but as clusters of family groups under lords, "elites." These lords, the various patrons of the kin groups, were controlled by local kings, the emperor's in-group—those who facilitated access to him (brokers or intermediaries), who were in turn, controlled by the Emperor, the supreme patron.¹⁹ The primary qualification for being a broker was kinship bond "essentially 'kin-ifies' relations—simulating kinship or creating fictive kinship—between the controlled and those in control."²⁰ Patronage operated on its central principle which also dictates much of Nigerian political culture today: "It is not what you know, but whom you know that counts."²¹

The patronage system or clientelism, as it really was, was built on Greco-Roman's social values of prestige, shame, and kinship.²² The premier concern of this value system was to promote one's personality at the expense of others.²³ By honour/shame value is meant a culture that valued honour and sought to avoid shame at all costs.²⁴ Attainment of positions of honour in that system was often through subterfuge and even bloody competitions. This too was consonant with that culture's social game of challenge and riposte

¹⁸ Bruce J. Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in Mediterranean Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress), p. 75.

¹⁹ Bruce J. Malina p. 82.

²⁰ Malina p. 75.

²¹ John C. Hutchison, "Servanthood: Jesus' Countercultural Call to Christian Leaders," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (January–March 2009), 53–69, <www.dts.edu/utility/file.aspx?FileID=479> p. 61.

²² David Arthur deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000), 23–25; Hutchison p. 64.

²³ deSilva p. 29.

²⁴ Hutchison p. 62.

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which is essentially, a vehicle for augmenting one's honour and status at someone else's expense.²⁵ It is still observable in modern Mediterranean world and to a large extent in Nigeria.

Jesus' royal theology of the kingdom of heaven ruling on earth, however, starkly contrasts with the patronage royal ideology described above. All through his teaching on the messianic kingdom, Jesus emphasised subordination to the rule of God and deconstructed the ruler-god ideology of the state represented in Israel by the Herodians and Jewish authorities.²⁶

Jesus' Royal Theology in Matthew's Gospel

In Matthew, John the Baptizer introduced Jesus to Israel as bringing a new prophetic order; he revived the royal theology of the OT Prophetic Party. He is the chief New Testament prophet whose views characterise that royal theology of the Old Testament's prophets who opposed Israelite's adoption of monarchy. Matthew's Jesus was in the line of God's vicegerents like Gideon (Judg 8: 23), Samuel (1 Sam 8:19-20; 12:12), and Nathan (2 Sam 12).

At issue in the story Matthew narrates is Jesus' controversial messiahship/kingship in Israel. The Gospel is plotted on the dual motif of Jesus' messianic mission and its opposition by the Jewish Establishment. By the summary of the genealogical table (Matt. 1:17), Matthew presents Jesus, whom he often calls "King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:6, 20, 21; 15:31) as the Davidic Messiah who culminated the royal line of Judah.²⁷ Jesus comes to establish God's government on earth: "Let your kingdom come, [that means] let your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). He is the "King of Israel" (Matt. 27:42) who, along with his twelve apostles (commissioners) sitting on the twelve thrones of Israel, shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel at the "restoration" (Matt. 19:28).

²⁵ deSilva p. 29; Hutchison p. 68.

²⁶ Storkey explains this well on pages 123-30.

²⁷ R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*. (Grand Rapids. Academie, 1989), p. 168; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*. Trans. Robert R. Barr, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 6.

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On his part, throughout his public ministry Jesus proclaimed a multiracial and multicultural messianic kingdom: he invited people from east and west into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 4:17; 8:11-12). "Kingdom" and "kingship" are political terms. Jesus was justifiably so understood by those in power, the existing political organisations—Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, etc. He was born in the royal line of David and accorded the title, "King of the Jews" which irritated Herod the Great, the sitting "King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2-3). At the outset of his mission, Jesus recruited a twelve-man team to recruit followers (Matt. 4:19). The appointment of these twelve marked the formal founding of a visible socio-political intervention,²⁸ which was understood as the usual political process of gathering popular support.²⁹ Moreover, Jesus' mission succeeded that of John the Baptizer, which had a "pronounced political character."³⁰ The crowds the Baptizer pulled around him by his kingdom-proclamation threatened Herod's political equilibrium—he suspected a possible insurrection—this became the real cause of John's execution³¹ as Josephus also witnesses (*Ant.* 18.5.2). This is why the political groups joined forces to put him down (Mat 12:14)—and thenceforth it was intrigues all the way until Jesus was executed for trumped-up treason charges.

For Matthew, controversy arose because the Jewish leadership misunderstood Jesus' mission. The global messianic kingdom Jesus announced was not a political entity in the sense of power politics for the control of geopolitical territories, but of a sphere of God's reign, a relational concept which outlines how people relate under the government of God (Matt. 13:3-23). It is a countercultural revolutionary concept which gradually, but effectually reorients human thought faculty and behaviour toward the dignity of the human person and the common good (13:31-33; 36-43). It is an alternative society, a new people of God, a new creation community

²⁸ (Yoder 32)

²⁹ Storkey p. 30.

³⁰ (Yoder 23)

³¹ (Storkey 61-64)

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or counterculture as a community of people who recognise the sovereignty of God and do his will (Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 1:21; 2:6; 21:43; cf. Stanton 124-131. As France puts it, "where the will of God is done, there is the kingdom of God."³² It is this new community that Matthew identified as "the Kingdom of Heaven" (32 times); "the Kingdom of God" (five times); "the Kingdom" (11 times); and ultimately as *theékklhσία* (Matt. 16:18; 18:17) with the nuance of "those called out".

Matthew's Jesus exclusively referred to himself by the title, Son of Man (Aramaic: *bar nasha*) twenty-nine times in the Gospel. This is likely an allusion to the "one like a son of man" in Daniel 7:13, seen in Jewish circles as a celestial messianic being (1 En 52:2) and as a military messiah in 4 Ezra 12:32; 13:26. When Matthew's Jesus calls himself the Son of Man in this manner, he is echoing the salvific role of that figure as his compassionate works of healing and feeding the needy indicate (Matt. 8-9). This is the import of his answer to John the Baptizer's question whether Jesus was the Messiah he was heralding (Matt. 11: 2 -19; Lk. 7:18-23). The one like a son of man in Daniel 7, as a representative of the people of God, smashed the kingdoms oppressing God's people and established an everlasting kingdom for them. For Marshall in Jesus' day, the Jews were hoping for a messianic prophet like Moses to restore the paradise conditions of the wilderness period (Deut. 18:15-22).³³ Matthew's Jesus claimed that these messianic prophecies were fulfilled in him (Matt. 11:16-30; cf. Lk 4: 18-22). Yet, he several times turned down the people's moves to crown him king (cf. Jn 6:14-15) and naturally invited trouble.

Jesus' kind of messiah became a contradiction in terms for the large crowds of Jews following him, who were looking forward to a Davidic king that would save them from their enemies; "those who hate us" (Lk. 1:75). The Jewish leaders particularly feared that by

³² R. T. France, *Jesus the Radical: A Portrait of the Man they Crucified*, (Leicester: Inter Varsity, 1989), p. 147.

³³ cf. I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology*. Updated Edition. (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), p. 53.

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this mixture of Jesus' attitude of cowardice and his growing popularity, he was endangering their clientele position. Yet, they feared he might nonetheless take over their political leadership of the people from them if he were allowed to continue unchecked (Jhn 11:45-48). To some extent, the Jewish leadership had good cause for such fears. Jesus not only called himself "the Son of Man"—a highly messianic title—but also accepted the designation "Messiah" as his official title (Matt. 16:13-18), for which even his disciples construed him on the categories of political leadership of a geo-political area (Matt. 18:1-5; 19:27-30; 20:20-21; cf. Lk. 24:21; Acts 1:6). Coming from Galilee that was known for insurrections, such claims invited the Romans' wrath.

Matthew shows the ideological conflict between Jewish leaders and Jesus' movement deepening in the passages on healing and exorcisms; each time Jesus was identified particularly as the "Son of David," the Jewish leaders took offence (Mat 9:34; 10:25; 12:24-27). For Matthew, these healings were Jesus' demonstration of his messianic power and concern for the wellbeing of citizens of the messianic kingdom (Matt. 8-9). But, the Jewish leaders rejected this portrait of Jesus. They consigned the so-called miracles to Jesus' demonstration of his ability to manipulate satanic power (Matt. 9:34). Stanton understood the Jews well: Jesus was a magician; hence, Matthew was not interested in reporting the miracles as such, but in the confrontation or developing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees that they produced.³⁴

From all fronts therefore, Matthew shows himself concerned with projecting an ideological conflict between two parties over the leadership of the people of God. Matthew's Jesus saw his contemporary Jews "distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd (9:36)," felt compassion for them, and embarked on the mission of their salvation. He went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the good news of the dawn of the government of God and validating his claims through his acts of compassion, which positively affected

³⁴ Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, (Westminster: John Knox, 1992), p. 174.

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the people's life, and won their confidence in him (Matt. 4:23). He taught in their synagogues to reorient their thought to accord with the essential nature of the kingdom and the way of life in it. Thus, he emerged the masses' leader; "Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him" (4:25), the true "ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (Matt. 2:6). For this reason Jesus became a "messianic threat."³⁵

While the leaders of the Jews [Pharisees, Scribes, Chief Priests, elders of the people, Sadducees, and Herodians] (Matt. 16:1; 22:16, 23) opposed his increasing popular authority, Jesus saw them as "blind guides of the blind" (Matt. 15:14). He used the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:33-46) to condemn the Jewish leadership (Matt. 21:23, 45) for their misrule of the Jews as a people (the vineyard). They are the group ["*ethnos*" group or community rather than nation] from whom the kingdom will be taken away and given to another group [*ethnos*] of leaders which can lead Israel well. That group is God's new creation community, the followers of Jesus who are described as salt and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). This royal ideology of theocracy has shades in the armed conflicts in today's Nigeria, as the next section shows.

Royal Ideology and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

Royal ideology is the dynamic perpetrating the *Boko Haram* insurgency in Northern Nigeria, the kidnappings of the Niger Delta bandits, and the Fulani mercenary attacks on various ethnic groups, among others. But, for ease of understanding, this study focuses on examining the spate of conflicts in Northern Nigeria, particularly *Boko Haram* insurgency and the Fulani aggression. *Boko Haram* [Arabic – *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* – "the Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad"] "is an Islamic sect that believes that politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt, false Muslims. It wants to wage a war against them, and against the Federal Republic of Nigeria

³⁵ Storkey p. 84.

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generally, to create a 'pure' Islamic state ruled by sharia law."³⁶ The sect is an off-shoot of "The Nigeria Taliban," an Islamic group that appeared in Borno State around 2002 professing dislike for all western influences. The Nigeria Taliban was dispersed in 2004 by the Borno state police command, but one of its members, Muhamed Yusuf, continued with its ideology and formed a new group under the name "Ecomog." This ironically bred political thugs for political leaders in Bauchi, Yobe and Maiduguri.³⁷ Ecomog was a group of unemployed young people in Borno State, many of them university graduates. They became frustrated with life under their unemployed condition, destroyed their educational certificates in protest against the bad leadership that made them social misfits with higher degrees, and withdrew from society into the mountains of Yobe State.³⁸

Boko Haram's religio-political violence in Nigeria has ideological roots in Usman dan Fodio's jihad of 1804 - 1808. Like dan Fodio, *Boko Haram* believes that the Federal Republic of Nigeria has to be a pure Islamic state under Islamic Law [*shari'a*]. The phenomenon depicts a political economy that is concerned with identity and purity, based on religious fundamentalists' ideology of theocracy, which is dubbed "ideal State" in Islam. Underlying the struggle for power using religion is the understanding that a good grasp of political power is invariably a hold on economic power of the given society. But, since human beings are innately predisposed to religion, it is held that these two social dynamics are more easily grasped by manipulating religious power. This is the spirit in which Ahmed Sani Yerima, a former Governor of Zamfara State, led others to introduce Islamic Law [*shari'a*] in 12 of the 19 States of Northern Nigeria, invariably declaring Islamic States within the Nigerian State.

The State [*ummah*] is held in Islam as the universal community of believers who recognize neither authority nor guidance—that is law—except that which comes from Allah and the prophet of Islam as what constitutes the supreme law to which every Muslim must

³⁶ Walker, p. 2.

³⁷ Samu p.10.

³⁸ Samu pp. 11-12.

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completely submit (*Qur'an* 4:5; 24:47-48; 33:36). All other laws are on this category, man-made systems devoid of divine guidance. They therefore, only lead to chaos and crookedness (*Qur'an* 20:24). The assumption underlying the *shari'a* on this thinking is basically that men are incapable of discriminating between right and wrong by their unaided powers. This is also why the government of the State must be theocracy. In this association with the concept of the state, *shari'a* assumes political dimensions, and therefore, new dynamism. It becomes synonymous with "Islamic government, "a system based on the application of *shari'a* and headed by a religious leadership."³⁹

Both *Boko Haram* and the Fulani have the same ideological agenda of a theocratic state for Nigeria and need to be studied synoptically. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* makes it clear, the Fulani are a Saharan pastoralist race that is known in history for Islamic state-building invasions. They are particularly receptive to the doctrine of *jihad*. The Fulani strategy is to exploit the weak points of a people, occupy them, and take over their political power and impose on them their own religious culture. It is also their strategy to ally themselves with "disgruntled groups of locals and mobile pastoral kinsmen to make *jihad* a military reality".⁴⁰

A good example is the 17th and 18th century exploits that imposed Fulani rule over Zamfara and Kebi. The breakup of the Songhai Empire had led to a power vacuum there, which had been an encouragement to Fulani settlement. Usman was an opportunist. As an employee (an Islamic cleric) at the court of the Hausa king of Gobir for 20 years, he saw the weakness of the king and then "used the influence he had gained to develop a Muslim community of his own, some miles away from the capital, governed according to the strict principles of law preached by the Qādirīyah".⁴¹ When the kings of Gobir decided not to allow a kingdom within their kingdom, in

³⁹ Muhammad Said Ashmawy, *Islam and the Political Order*, (Washington: Council for Research in Values, 1994), p. 62.

⁴⁰ "Fulani empire." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014.

⁴¹ Britannica 2014

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1804 Usman (his popular name) declared a full-fledged *jihad* against them.

The ideology behind the *jihad* was that it is easier to rule a people with one religion. In 1804 Usman recruited, mostly slaves and the oppressed pastoral Fulani, whom he indoctrinated with his hard line Islamic ideals, tagged them lovers of true Islam and admonished them to rise up for a revolt and overthrow the unjust rulers. He “withdrew his followers to Gudu, where they formally proclaimed him “commander of the faithful” [*amīr al-mu'minīn*], pledged their loyalty, and prepared for war. Within three years almost all the Hausa kings had been replaced by Fulani emirs who acknowledged the supreme authority of Usman. In this way Usman created a caliphate, with its seat at the newly established town of Sokoto. Each emirate enjoyed autonomy but pledged loyalty to the “*amīr al-mu'minīn*” and made contributions for the upkeep of Sokoto. The caliphate was built on the framework of patron-clientelism which underlies the Nigerian problem to this day. The present Fulani aggression is a revival of the Dan Fodio *jihad*.

The Problem with Nigeria

The fundamental problem of contemporary Nigeria is elitism—the dynamic for politicisation of religion and sacralisation of politics that dictates interrelationships in Nigeria. It best explains and is explained by the union between liberal democracy and sovereignty in the conception of power. Liberal democracy is oriented on the framework of kingship with its sacral connotation of sovereignty and the notion of agency-extended social formation, with some elements of kinship bonds. This is the institutionalisation of patron-client relations, which are characterised by the exploitative and domination-control tendencies of sovereignty as a mode of political control.

Elitist segregation in Nigeria is dictated by greed and involves creating hegemonies by suppressing peoples and then showing them in bad light as socially unfit to share in available resources. It means “ascribing different scales of values and different sets of rights to

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people”⁴² so that they are frozen into underdevelopment and their identity socially redefined to deny them the right to share in the resources available.

Elitism has held sway for most of Nigeria’s independent political life, even tracing itself back to pre-amalgamation times. It informed Usman Dan Fodio’s conception of the Sokoto Caliphate. The Caliphate, in Dan Fodio’s conception, has the exclusive divine right to rule and can only co-opt anyone from among the “the ruled” [talakawa] into this Fulani hegemony and grant him an “acquired status [Shigege]”.⁴³ The dividing line between the ruling classes and the ruled is sharp and is test summed up in the Hausa proverb: “the descendants of the king can never become commoners” [*Zuriyar sarki ba talakawa ba ne*]. This class ideology is built on the concepts of power in Hausa society in which the ruler [sarki] has to be “surrounded with pomp and pageantry so as to instil fear and respect. The resources of the land should be centred on him and these could be disbursed to maintain the loyalty of subordinates.”⁴⁴

In our digital world, such politics of sovereignty ultimately convulses the system. There is an intrinsic link between Nigeria’s political and social instability and the factor of its leadership. Nigerian leadership, especially the Babangida and Abacha regimes, building on the logic of divide and rule, constructed an ethnic state access map through which they distributed social goods and scarce resources and created polarization and division amongst ethnic groups. This prompted cries of social injustice, marginalization, neglect, deprivation and seeming insecurity for the people, thus, providing background for the emergence of ethnic militia groups. As

⁴² Swami Agnivesh, “Religious Conscience and the Global Economy: An Eastern Perspective on Socio-spiritual Activism,” *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy*. Eds. Paul Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar, (New York: Orbis, 2002), p. 43.

⁴³ Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1993), p. 5.

⁴⁴ Sa’ad Abubakar, “The Established Caliphate: Sokoto, the Emirates and Their Neighbours,” *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ed. Obaro Ikime, (Ibadan: Heinemann, 2006. 303-326), p. 326.

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Chinua Achebe argued, lack of social justice prompts people to scramble for social goods, which include position and status.⁴⁵ This is the undergirding force of agitations for resource control that has become the greatest destabilising force for contemporary Nigeria. Uchenna Nwankwo made it clear that social goods are something more than economic wealth; they entail the entire idea of social stratification in class, status, and power, which undermine the highly-valued commodity of egalitarianism. While social stratification is natural, the real cause of social unrest, especially violent conflicts in Nigeria is “the proper nature of that gradation”⁴⁶ which has to do with proper distribution of the social goods.

As seen in their respective cases above, this is the cry of Boko Haram, the Niger Delta militia groups, and MASSOB. Because the hegemony of rulers have sacralised their power positions by manipulating religion to grab and surround themselves with the nation's social and economic wealth and give to others only as patronage, each of these associations feels ideology can only be matched with ideology. Fundamentalism that underlies all of them is a political economy that is concerned with identity and purity of the group, which may be a religious group in the sacral sense of religion, or of a tribalist group like Ohaneze. As it is argued elsewhere,⁴⁷ religion is not limited to groups expressing some form of sacred/profane dichotomy, the limited sense of religion; it also describes social groups with strong self-definition—community-based organizations which may be called “identity groups,” or the “politics of recognition.” On these conceptual categories each of these groups has therefore been religionised to meet the sacralised political ideology of hegemony. Each of their armed conflicts is a

⁴⁵ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1983), pp. 28-29.

⁴⁶ Uchenna Nwankwo, *Strategy for Political Stability*, (Apapa: Oliver Ibekwe and Pathway, 1988), p. 56.

⁴⁷ This is the subject of my paper, “Covenants and Religious Pluralism: An Analysis of Expressions of Fundamentalism in Nigeria” in *Swem Journal of Religion and Philosophy*, 2, 1, (August 2008). 31-43.

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reaction to the Fulani hegemonic ideology. The cry of Uwazuruike of the MASSOB is typical of them all:

Since 1970 till now, no Igbo man has been president of Nigeria, civilian or military. No Igbo ward has been Chief of Staff or Police IG. Are you not surprised there is no International Airport in the south East? Nationwide, we have the worst road network. The least of everything is allotted to us to wit: only five out of 36 states of the federation. Just 95 out of 774 Local Governments and 15 out of 109 senators. This is pure marginalisation and yet we are not allowed to stand on our own – we want to go.⁴⁸

Conclusion

As the foregoing has made it clear, the continuing controversy between the Jewish leadership and Jesus was informed by ideological differences concerning the kingdom of God. Whereas the Jewish Establishment understood that kingdom as the Davidic World Empire promised the Jews by Yahweh through his prophets, Jesus saw it as man's submission to God's sovereignty. The gap between the two was especially widened by Jewish leadership's subscription to Roman patron-clientele politics that worked for the good of the ruling class and those in the corridors of power to the exclusion of the common good. This created the web of Jewish rebellions that led to several massacre raids on them by Roman authorities culminating in the interim in the AD 66-70 siege and destruction of Jerusalem. It was this scenario that motivated Prophet Jesus to initiate the campaign for the return to the true theocratic rule of the Jewish people which excited the arms conflict against him by the Jewish leadership of his day. This scenario mirrors the situation in today's Nigeria. *Boko Haram* and the many other identity groups are simply ideologically reacting to the Fulani hegemonic ideology which has arrogated to itself the exclusive divine right to rule Nigeria. Just as the Middle Belt discovered this ideology and worked against it in the First Republic, so is the present "politics of recognition."

⁴⁸ qtd. in Chinda p. 7.

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In view of the above analysis, the question immediately pops itself up, what is the way forward for Nigeria? This article answers that to have peace, first, Nigerians must choose a compromise position—one that must be acceptable to majority of members of the society—between concentration of economic power in few hands and absolute lack of it since both extremes are adversely defective. In addition, Nigerians must avoid veneration of ideologies to support their identity games; instead they should respect the dignity of human life.

Thirdly, Nigeria has to dig up the roots of the complex of violent conflicts to properly understand them. To this end one need to first of all unearth the history of each of these armed groups, which should identify those sponsoring and controlling them and each group's relation to the others. Possibility of some relation among the groups, say between MASSOB and the Niger-Delta militia groups, and between *Boko Haram* and Fulani herders is quite high. Today, the violent activities of some of these groups have been largely reduced, but their tactics continue to increase in sophistication. There is also a pressing need to closely study the factors impeding efforts at curbing their havoc. The Dasuki saga, for instance, calls to mind the possibility of and the need to examine the relation of these groups to the Nigerian statecraft, certain business interests, the neighbouring countries, and even the armed forces who are supposedly the agents of peace.