

The Influence of the Messianic and Apocalyptic Aspirations over the Today's Middle East Conflicts

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Abstract

It is highly thought that the messianic activism lies behind the political crashes in today's Middle East conflicts. Therefore, we need to survey whether the Abrahamic traditions have any influence over the everyday's political challenges. This paper is going to show that messianism at the two sides of conflicts is not the main factor. Both in Islam and in Judaism, messianic activism (or active messianism) is not permitted and the abuse or instrumentalization of this belief is hardly rejected. The appearance of such aspirations depends, conversely, on the political situations. Nearly any religion would be converted or transformed to a political movement, if its followers could not find their favorite world through secular human actions. The failure of international and regional organizations or conferences to solve the problems justly and impartially led to the appearance of a religious messianic approach to the Middle East conflicts.

Resumen

Generalmente se piensa que el activismo mesiánico se esconde detrás de los enfrentamientos en los actuales conflictos del Medio Oriente. Por lo tanto, tenemos que indagar si las tradiciones de Abraham tienen alguna

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influencia sobre los desafíos políticos cotidianos. Este artículo mostrará que el mesianismo en los dos lados de los conflictos no es el factor principal. Tanto en el Islam como en el Judaísmo, el activismo mesiánico (o mesianismo activo) no está permitido y el abuso o la instrumentalización de esta creencia es muy rechazada. La aparición de tales aspiraciones depende, por el contrario, de las situaciones políticas. Casi ninguna religión se convierte o transforma en un movimiento político si sus seguidores no han podido encontrar su mundo secular preferido a través de las acciones humanas. El fracaso de las organizaciones o conferencias internacionales y regionales para resolver los problemas con justicia e imparcialidad ha dado lugar a la aparición de un enfoque religioso mesiánico sobre los conflictos del Oriente Medio.

Introduction

MESSIANIC expectations root generally in human longing to achieve some kind of redemption or salvation, which is naturally inaccessible. Historical evidences show us that in many religious traditions, especially in the ancient Middle East, there have been several kinds of messianism.

The terms *messianic* and *messianism* come from Israeli and Jewish tradition, referring originally to the coming of a royal descendant of David. Mashih or messiah, literally an anointed one who was chosen by God, was expected to appear and make an end to the pains and afflictions of the Israelites, making this people to be above all and causing others to serve the people of God. The salvation, which was expected to come with appearing of the Messiah, seemed to be at the outset a this-worldly, national and political one. But in the course of Israeli history the term 'messiah' along with the meaning of Salvation underwent some development toward apocalyptic and then individual other-worldly saviour and salvation, which embodied typically in Christianity.

Today the terms *messianic*, *messianism* and other related terms are used widely to apply to some other kinds of salvific expectations. For example 'Islamic messianism' became seemingly a common word, which has been used by some leading scholars.² The term suggests Muslim expectation

² See for example in:

a) Sachedina Abdulaziz ABDULHUSSEIN, *Islamic Messianism*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1981.

b) Watt W. MONTGOMERY, "The Muslim Yearning for a saviour: Aspects of Early Abbasid Shi'ism", in S. G. F. BRANDON (ed.), *The Saviour God*, Greenwood Press Publishers, 1963.

of the appearance of a religious-political figure who is traditionally called Mahdi, literally the true guided one. Therefore it is allowable to take Islamic messianism equal to Mahdism. 'Secular messianism' and 'messianic democracy'³ are some other approximately common terms in today's politics. Such terms imply that the holders of related doctrines view themselves as self-appointed arbiters of good and evil, entirely above the laws of men. They try to enforce their wishes, which they equate according their worldview with human welfare.

Religious messianic activism

Generally we can divide messianism into activism and quietism, as well as into religious and secular. Religious messianism implies a request of change, a yearning towards transforming of dominant situations; it suggests that the advocates of such an idea are not satisfied with the current religious-moral and/or sociopolitical atmospheres, and they like changes in their spiritual-physical world. Usually the present situations are symbolized through and unified with the evil realm, so that Satan becomes the king of the present world and God that of the coming one⁴.

One question here is whether the messianic idea causes sociopolitical problems, trying to force the end or, conversely, it is political problems like injustice, which make quietist messianism transform into messianic activism. The historical evidence shows that religious messianism takes always place when believers are not satisfied with the religious-political situations. This phenomenon, despite its activist character, is usually a reaction of believers to some politically unbearable predicaments. According to some researches, the rise of so-called fundamentalist groups in Arab and Jewish communities depends on the disability of governors to meet social and political needs like justice, security, peace, etc.⁵

Therefore, dualism is a permanent component of messianism: there are two realms of existence, one is the domain of the good, the righteous, light and God Himself, and the other is the domain of the evil, the wicked, darkness and Satan. The present world is under the dominance of satanic powers and

³ See: TALMON, JACOB, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, fredrick A. Prager Publishers, New York (1951).

⁴ See New Testament, Eph, 6:12; 2Thess 2:9.

⁵ About Zoroastrian mythological messianism see: Bundahish, translated from Pah. to Persian by Mehrdad Bahar, Tus, Tehran, 1378 AH. And for its English translation see: HORNE, Charles F. (ed.) *The Bundahish: The Zoroastrian Account of Creatich-Pamphlet*, Kessinger Publishing, 2006.

it is to be defeated one day by the good powers. Maybe we can find the most original kind of messianic dualism in mythology and soteriology of Zoroastrianism. There, the present world is a mixture of two orders, which is dominated under the evil one, headed by *Angara.mainu* or *Ahriman*. This Evil, according to Zoroastrian tradition, intervened in the process of creation and made malevolently a parallel order of creatures in order to damage the Mazda-created world. Not only every member of humankind, but also the whole creatures participate in the battle between the two origins of the good and the evil. The most significant dimension of each creature lies upon its role in this history-long struggle; the more the being or its action contribute the good to defeat the ahrimanized order, the more it enjoys religious virtue and salvation. Although the scene of this battle lasts throughout the history, the most important stage is to come at the end of the time, in which some descendant of Zarathustra will renew not only the religion but also the whole existence. He, analogous to his forefather, Zarathustra, together with his two forerunner brothers complete the process of mythological, universal and religious salvation with the miraculous intervention of divine powers at the End. Ultimately and eschatologically the good powers conquest the evil and bring the world back to its ideal heavenly state, of course with some new features which make actually an unprecedented utopia.⁶

There is a wide view among the scholars that Jewish-Christian messianology was under influence of Zoroastrian kind during the Babylonian exile of the Israelites. But the strong monotheism in Israeli religion remains always in the background of its messianism, so that we may speak about a monotheistic messianism. The unique creator is God, and the whole creation is his own action, without intervention of any others. Therefore the act of salvation is referred to God himself. But the satanic powers, which are frequently the creatures of the unique Creator, appear here to explain the natural and moral deficiencies and evils. Satan, Belial, Antichrist, al-Dadgdgal and such figures in Abrahamic religions are comparative with Ahriman and his fellow daevas, with the difference that the dualism in Zoroastrianism is not reduced to a subordinate to monotheism. Conversely, dualism in semitic religions is not an essential cosmological dualism between two orders of existence, but a historical moral deviation from the unique good-created order.

⁶ About the influence and comparative points of Zoroastrian messianism in Jewish history see:

a) DUCHENSNE-GUILLEMIN, J., *The Western Response to Zoroaster*, Oxford University Press, 1958.

b) OTTO, Rudolf, *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn*, C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, München, 1934.

The meaning of salvation, depended on the kind of dualism and degeneracy of the world and humanity, differs from religion to other. Religions like Zoroastrianism, which originate in cosmology and mythology, have mainly a cosmological-mythological salvation, although through their historical development they have gotten other dimensions of salvation. But in religions like Judaism, it is mainly historical salvation, embracing moral-religious and sociopolitical dimensions, because their soteriology (their doctrine of salvation) got form in a world which suffered from social and political pains and consequently led to such a doctrine of salvation. Here also we can see developments towards cosmological-mythological soteriology under the influence of other traditions. The situations in which a doctrine of salvation takes shape can be considered as a criterion to understand how much a soteriology through its history absorbed foreign features or developed itself to a sophisticated stage.

One common character of different messianisms is usually their eschatological and apocalyptic characteristic. The history terminates ultimately to its completion, to a stage in which every side of the good and the evil exhibit their highest power to win the final battle. In this battlefield the good side is to overpower the evil and thereby the history comes to the end. Traditionally, both in Zoroastrian and in Semitic religions, the fall of moral-religious and social values and the appearance of unbearable torments have been seen as important signs of the imminence of the messianic salvation. These discomforts were interpreted as the pain of birth, and were expected to end to renovation of the world, a world without defects and oppressions. Such a belief encouraged many people to expect redemption, to think hopefully and messianic-minded and, more important, to suppose that the history of humanity reached its climax and imminently comes the messianic era.

But all those beliefs and expectations are not enough to cause someone act redemptive or messianic. To do so, it is required to believe in the responsibility of believers or humankind to cooperate with God and divine powers to bring the salvation. The meaning of messianic expectation changes from a neutral position of believer towards history and humanity to a more activist messianism. According to this approach, men are not to expect merely a new world; they should contribute to renew the world. This idea, as we have already seen, originated in such religions, in which god is not considered as an omnipotent, but a benevolent being, who needs the contribution of his creatures against the evil.

Apart from the question of human as cooperator of God and that of where this idea originate from, it seems that we can make more a division between two different kind of religious activism. Expecting longingly of the appearance of salvation and believing in the responsibility of believers for that do

not necessarily lead to a messianic political activism. The contribution of believers to the redemption of the world and humanity can also take place through religious rituals, prayers and other nonpolitical activities. The main streams of orthodoxies in both Zoroastrianism and Abrahamic religions have emphasized highly on a pious religious life in order to receive messianic salvation. The Israeli prophets declared always that the precondition of redemption of the people was their repentance and keeping on the Mosaic Law. According to some Shiite traditions, the main act of the believer during the disappearance of the Mahdi is to pray for his appearance.

Usually such a spiritual activism in messianic idea is called by scholars as 'quietism', but it should be considered that this term includes trends which remain inactive or even denying messianic expectations. The merely spiritual activism, although may seem something paradoxical, hints to a nonpolitical, forceless and religious system of ideas and activities, which tries to provide the situations for the messianic era. I don't insist on giving such a spiritually activistic Messianism a new name, but I like to mention that the term 'quietism' may not hint exactly this meaning, and we should notice that this term implies a wider meaning.

Quietism, embracing the abovementioned trend, unlike politically messianic activism, abandons the ultimate complete salvation to God the Saviour. Monotheism is a firm ground for such an approach; it is only the Creator who can save His creatures. The human saviour like Messiah or Mahdi, remain here merely as an agent of God and a symbol of His embodied action on the earth. But salvation is the act of God and remains for him forever. Adding to spiritual activities, the main messianic act of believer is expectation for coming of the messianic salvation. This doctrine, opposite to prevalent view, can coexist with democracy as a human urgent treatment in the lack of messianic theocracy. But in these pages we can not peruse this question.

The religious-politically activistic messianism, in its precise meaning, sees the messianic idea as a practical manifest of political operation. The merely messianic expectation looks to them like a passive submission to the current authorities. It may be called revolutionary messianism too, because it advocates revolutions against *tyrannical* governors or orders, at national, regional or international levels. Here we don't survey whether the messianic idea in religions rose due to social problems or not, but the rise of revolutionary messianism in different traditions has been highly under influence of sociological dissatisfaction. When men encounter problems and try to resolve them, they search ideas, to ground on them their action, to legitimize their activity and to theorize it. The messianic-minded people in such predicaments like injustice or foreign imperialism naturally grasp the nearest

and most applicable ideas, namely the idea of the battle between the righteous and the wicked at the end of the history under commandments of the good, from one side, and the evil from others.

Surely, appearance of such movements in societies makes sociopolitical problems more complex and their solution more difficult. However, generally we can conclude that the religious messianic movements with activist attitude rise in result of political dissatisfactions, although the rise of them complicates the situations. The expansion of messianic ideas in relation to their prevalence and aims depends on the expansion and dimensions of the problems, which leads believers to such positions, and also on the religious ideals of the tradition, which such movements rise from.

One question here is whether the messianic idea causes sociopolitical problems, trying to force the end or, conversely, it is political problems which make quietist messianism transform into messianic activism. The historical evidence shows that religious messianism takes always place when believers are not satisfied with the religious-political situations. This phenomenon, despite its activist character, is usually a reaction of believers to some politically unbearable predicaments. According to some researches, the rise of so-called fundamentalist groups in Arab and Jewish communities depends on the disability of governors to meet social and political needs like justice, security, peace, etc.⁷

Successfulness of religious messianic movements to establish new political-religious orders can be followed by rising of other new messianic movements on the one hand, and/or secularizing of old faith on the other hand. When the subsequences of established movement, which becomes in turn a new tradition or government, can not satisfy messianic aspirations of some believes due to its insufficiency or allegedly total wrongness, the appearance of some more activist messianism is most likely. On the other hand, the so-called realized activist messianism, the new tradition, tries to revise and modify its radical principles. It may go far ahead to demessianize itself.

The modification of religious messianic activism by a realized political tradition results in an especial kind of secularization; the old heavenly apocalyptical ideals change to this-worldly ordinary political or even religious institutes. By this kind of secularization I don't mean the separation of the state and the church and similar ideas, but I mean that extraordinary

⁷ See BERMAN ELI, *Hamas, Taliban and the Jewish Underground: An Economist's View of Radical Religious Militias*, UC San Diego National Bureau of Economic Research, September 2003.

high-standing religious ideals descend to everyday ordinary practical issues. The famous meaning of secularization, the separation of state and church, is somehow the result of abovementioned kind of secularization. Secular messianism, which is a modern phenomenon and we assess it in following pages, appears along the successive process of (quietist) messianism, messianic activism, taking shape of a new tradition from the last messianic movement, self-demessianization of the movement and secularization of it.

Before going on to assess secular messianism, it is high worthy to mention that the orthodoxies in Abrahamic religions usually have denied activistic messianism. During the messianic rebellion of Bar-Kochba, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE) and more disappointment of Jews, although Rabbi Akiba along with many people protected the movement⁸, the main stream of the Jewish orthodoxy denied it and criticized Akiba.⁹ The messianic claims of Shabbatai Tsevi (d. 1676), though were welcomed by Jewish communities, but many religious authorities objected the movement.¹⁰ Zionism, both its religious and secular modes, was confronted especially at the beginning, by objection of Jewish orthodoxy.¹¹ In Christianity, particularly from fourth century, under authorities like Augustine (354-430), the literal understanding of the second coming of Jesus and millenarianism was strongly criticized.¹² In Islam, in Shiite tradition, the high religious authorities, the Imams, rejected the request of some of their followers to take a messianic role¹³, and emphasized definitely on eschatological miraculous characters of Mahdi's movement, so that any banner of rebellion before his was introduced as heterodoxy. In Sunnite history, the rejection of activistic messianism was not less than that of the Shiite. One of the latest instances was the hard reaction of Sunnite authorities to al-Mahdiyya movement in Sudan headed by Muhammad al-Mahdi (1844-81).

⁸ KLAUSNER, Joseph, *Die Messianischen Vorstellungen des jüdischen Volks im Zeitalter der Tannaiten*, Krakau, 1903, p. 5.

⁹ See in *Everyman's Talmud*, by A. Cohen, translation to Persian: Amir.Freidoun Gorgani, p. 354.

¹⁰ See: COHN-SHERBOK, DAN, *The Jewish Messiah*, T&T, Clark, Edinburg 1997, p. 147

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹² See: MCGINN, B. "Forms of Catholic Millenarianism: A Brief Overview" in KOTTMAN, Karl A (ed.), *Catholic Millenarianism: From Savonarola to The Abb Gregoire*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Boston, 2001, p. 3.

¹³ See: An-No'mani Mohammad Ibrahim, *Kitab al-Ghibah*, Tehran, without date, p. 167.

Secular messianism

It is too difficult to make or realize an accurate distinctness between religious and nonreligious activist messianism, because firstly, there is not an exact and common definition of religion. Some components like “ultimate concern” make such a definition include Marxism, and some other concepts like “believing in God” exclude Buddhism. Secondly, some religious characters transfer to secular systems of thought without consciousness of its founders or advocates; teleological and semi-apocalyptic inspirations of Marxism are something like Jewish-Christian messianism, although Marx and Engels had antireligious thoughts. But we may make a practical difference between religious and secular messianism by pointing on the different grounds and ideals. The religious messianism, even in its political activist form, aims some religious values like priority and dominion of a particular religious community or revival of its ancient glory. Objectives like justice and peace are also understood religiously, corresponding to ideals of the related tradition. The unique source of religious messianism is the word of God, though with a different interpretation from that of orthodoxies; messianic movements emphasize always on the true understanding of scriptures and consider the orthodox understanding a deviation from the text.

But secular messianism or secular messianic trend has some allegedly human goals in sociopolitical fields, which are not based on religious grounds and aimed not at such ends. The main sources of this kind of messianism are the human reason and will, but there is a great tendency to instrumentalize religious values, so that in some cases we confront with a fused form of religious-secular messianism. However, as Talmon said “The point of reference of modern Messianism is man’s reason and will, and its aim happiness on earth, achieved by a social transformation. The point of reference is temporal, but the claims are absolute”.¹⁴ These absolute claims about equality, classless society, liberty, democracy etc. exhibit some ideologies, which proclaim universal and global function, and feel mission for themselves to save humanity, so that Talmon divided two different democracies and says: “The coexistence of liberal democracy and revolutionary Messianism in modern times could legitimately be compared to the relationship between the official Church and the eschatological revolutionary current in Christianity during the ages of faith”.¹⁵ A ‘totalitarian’ or ‘messianic democracy’ is an ideological democracy beside a merely methodical democracy.

¹⁴ See TALMON, JACOB, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, Fredrick A. Prager Publishers, New York (1951), p. 10.

¹⁵ TALMON, JACOB, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, p. 9.

The secular kind of messianism, as mentioned above, is a modern product of the Judeo-Christian west, which underwent secularization and modernity. But the religious messianism had some direct and indirectly important influences over the taking shape of the secular messianism. One of the most important forms of such messianism is Marxism. Marx (1818-1883) himself had Judeo-Christian training; his Jewish family converted to Christianity and he was baptized in 1824. His Marxism “shared in and interacted with the Judeo-Christian heritage in two fundamental ways: (1) Marxism continually confronted, and drew on, the heritage of radical Christianity, and (2) Marxism was a result of a process, rooted in the Enlightenment and developed by G. W. Hegel and the left-wing Hegelians, that transposed the structure of Christian faith and hope into a humanist key. ... Communism for Marx, like the kingdom of God for Christians, is genuinely eschatological. Hope in its coming is not dimmed by its delayed arrival. It is always at hand. It will bring a transformation of human nature by new social conditions that, Marx believed, will be prepared in the struggle itself and in transitional socialist”.¹⁶ To understand Marx psychologically, one should use the following dictionary:

Yahweh = Dialectical Materialism

The Messiah = Marx

The Electe = The Proletariat

The Church = The Communist Party

The Second Coming = The Revolution

Hell = Punishment of the Capitalists

The Millennium = The Communist Commonwealth

The terms on the left give the emotional content of the terms on the right, and is this emotional content, familiar to those who have had a Christian or a Jewish upbringing, that makes Marx’s eschatology credible.¹⁷ When Bruno Bauer criticized Jews because of their Jewish struggle for freedom and wrote: “if they like to be delivered, they should not convert to Christianity, but to dissolve Christianity”¹⁸, Marx answered: “it concerns still

¹⁶ West, Charles C., Marxism in Encyclopedia of Religion vol. 9, pp. 240-244.

¹⁷ RUSSELL, B., *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 383.

¹⁸ BAUER, Bruno, “*Die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden*” in Einundzwanzig Bogen, p. 56-71, quoted in Marx: Zur Judenfrage, S. 49. Digitale Bibliothek Band 11: Marx/Engels, S. 475 vgl. MEW Bd. 1, S. 371.

with a *conversion* of Jews, not merely to Christianity, but to the dissolved Christianity”.¹⁹ He did not find Bauer’s solution secular enough and liked to offer a totally secular humanized salvation, but unconsciously he took some religious features to his philosophy and made a semi religion with its doctrine of salvation, which was messianic but secular.

Zionism was nearer to Bauer than to Marx. Under influence of western nationalism and humanism, some secular leading Jews, along with some religious persons, translated the long-lasting messianic expectation in an activist dwelling in Palestine and establishing of a state as preparing for messianic era (religious messianism) or the very expected salvation (secular messianism). Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), the founder of modern Zionism, although was supported by some rabbis, was a secular and westernized person. Nevertheless, he was greeted by many eastern European Jews as a messianic figure. “The attitude toward religion among the early secular Zionist thinkers was frequently quite hostile. Traditional Judaism was viewed as the religion of the exile and the Zionists saw themselves as a movement to ‘negate the exile’”.²⁰ Some other secular Zionists like Ahad ha-‘Am (Asher Ginsberg, 1856-1927), tried to develop a secular Judaism based on certain principles from the Jewish heritages; the Jewish religion was one expression of a wider Jewish national culture. Yet there was a religious messianism, which saw Zionism as a preparation for the messianic era. Avraham Yitshaq Kook (d. 1935) and his son, Tsevi Yehudah Kook (d. 1982) developed the idea that when Zionism succeeded, messianic times would come and the Zionist movement would itself return to its unconscious religious roots. However, Zionism was a deviation from the Jewish tradition, and because of that it was rejected at outset by most orthodox rabbis. This rejection and the later acceptance of Zionism are comparative to the similar story of the institute of kingship in ancient Israel. Both modern Zionism and ancient kingdom were accepted after the Israelite/Jewish people had undergone the hesitation in their function, with the difference that the ancient kingship was absorbed in Israeli religion, but Zionism secularized some religious ideals and instrumentalized them for political goals.

In protestant Christianity, unlike Catholic, the more literal understanding of millenarianism and messianic expectation continued to survive in modern age. Both Luther and Calvin viewed the papacy as Antichrist. Although the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Encyclopedia of Religion, *Zionism*, Vol. 15, p. 4.

more religious messianism transformed usually into new sects, the secular messianism provides American politicians with a power to justify their unusual desires, to facilitate American hegemony, and to proclaim the end of the history by the dominance of 'totalitarian democracy'. The secular messianism, and here the messianic democracy, is a deviation from both traditional messianism and 'liberal democracy'; it is an illegitimate fusion of two different realms.

Here, like in the case of Zionism, some right-wing Evangelists contribute American secular messianism with their millenarian feelings. They come also sometimes together with the Zionist messianism to defend the Jewish emigration to Israel and the building of settlements in Palestine as a contribution for hastening the coming of the millennium. Near to the dawn of the third Christian millennium, millions of enthusiastic millenarian-minded people went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the Israeli officials spoke about 'Jerusalem syndrome'. Such emotions pave the way for the politicians, who may not have the same feelings, but theorize and instrumentalize them for their messianic globalization or democratization of the world.

Today's American conservative governors, supported by such theories, made themselves commitment to fulfill abovementioned aspirations forcedly. The gestalt of president Gorge W. Bush and his certainty of being supported by God made his messianic politics more complex. "Bush is playing to a base activist constituency; many of these people believe that they're living in biblically inspired End Times."²¹ Michael Klare, professor of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College, believes what motivates Bush is "a combination of the empire and the messianic. He grasps the practical need to control oil, for which the Administration is willing to go to any lengths, and he fuses it with messianic fervor."²²

Religious-secular messianic battle in the Middle East

Condoleezza Rice, Bush's Secretary of State, during the war between Israel and Hizbollah, interpreted this bloody affliction biblically as the "birth pangs" of the new Middle East. Traditionally, in the Abrahamic religions the messianic redemption was expected to be preceded by natural, cultural

²¹ CLARKSON, Frederick, *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy*, Common Courage Press, 1997, p. 128.

²² It was quoted in an article named "Bush's Messiah Complex" at the website 'progressive.org'

and even cosmological disorders. These were only some signs to declare the immanence of messianic era, but they had no causal role in taking place of the salvation. As we have seen, to give human struggle apocalyptic and messianic redemptive meaning is at the same time deviation from both monotheistic messianism and human secularism.

People in the Middle East seek justice, peace, welfare, autonomy, partly democracy, etc. When national or international institutes fail to meet these needs peacefully, there rises inward or outward messianic longings, occasionally against native or foreign dominant powers. However, inward messianic trends in Sunnite Arab world, unlike in Jewish atmosphere, appear seldom. Some mystic messianic movements or trends in North Africa (like al-Mahdyyah, 1881-5) or in India (like Ahmadyyah, 1891-1908) are not to be seen in the Middle East. Here, when such aspirations appear, they aim usually against foreign imperialism and hostility. Historically, Sunnite messianism was developed during the wars between Umayyad and then Abbasid caliphate from one side and Byzantine Empire from other side. It had therefore in its activist form an anti-crusade nature, and understands sometimes the current events in the shadow of this historical background. For example during the first Persian Gulf War, in some circles Saddam Hussein was understood as an expected messianic figure, who was, according to a tradition spread at that time, ‘as strong as rock’.²³

Islamic messianism, unlike Jewish and Christian ones, has not experienced secularization; therefore, it is nearer to its original religious characteristics. Its eschatological and miraculous occurrence is expected to be fulfilled divinely at the end of the world, and because of that, to make messianic claims is too difficult. The today’s occasionally atavistic messianism in the Middle East is comparable partly with the liberative theology in Latin America; at the time of danger, they both try to use the best accessible theoretical and practical possibilities, and the messianic idea is one of these.

The most dangerous treatment with religions is to renovate them revolutionary and to make an ideologically modern manifest from them; it can destroy the long-lasting harmony. To change religious faith into secular religion is like to change the genes of a cell, which may be killer. I can not agree with Rabbi Marx, an American liberal Jew, when he says: “Messianism is not about waiting for tomorrow so we can embrace eternity; it’s about transforming now into an eternity. It’s about courageously redeeming the oppressed of today ...today is the Day of Judgment. And the message of this day is “*Don’t wait . . . Create.*”²⁶ But what is to be created? When the

²³ See: SACHADINA, A. A., Messianism in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islamic*

other side decides to do the same, don't the creations stand against each other, and doesn't it lead to destruction?

Such an understanding of ancient messianism in a modern way is enough enthusiastic and exciting to cause the audience to think about the achievement of human modern possibilities, like democracy, in a messianic way. There will be a messianism without messiah, or better to say, a messianism with too many messiahs. To preach and achieve democracy with messianic vehicles, don't lead to a messianic democracy, which will be much exclusivist that contradicts democracy itself? It seems that the eschatological apocalyptic messianism must be left totally to its ancient doer, to God. If men try to substitute for God, it results in totalitarianism. Men need to stay human beings in order to make democratic societies and a democratic world democratically. Today's Middle East conflicts are not directly the consequences of religious ideas; they rose partly from an attempt of allegedly self-defense, which leads to instrumentalizing of religious beliefs, like messianism, and partly from an imperialistic trend, which secularize and, in turn, instrumentalize the messianic idea in order to make a monopole favourite world.



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²⁶ His speech on Yom Kippur Sept. 98, quoted in *Congregation Beth Organization* (at its website: www.bethor.org).

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