

Editorial

Religion - A Sophisticated Strategy to Gain Control Over the Masses

Gurevitz M*

*Corresponding author: Michael Gurevitz,
Department of Plant Molecular Biology and Ecology,
George S. Wise Faculty of Life Sciences, Tel Aviv
University Ramat Aviv 69978, Tel Aviv, Israel

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Among matters that occupy the mind of people since early history are fears of the unknown and death that have most likely triggered the need for a patronizing superpower, namely, God.

Limited understanding of surrounding wonders, hard survival, and refusal to comply with our relatively short life span have probably prompted this need, which intensified with growing hostility among tribes and rising civilizations fighting over territory, resources and leadership. Although physical power has always been a dominating factor in these human struggles (as is among animals), the developed brain and verbal communication provided an additional powerful tool used by smart individuals and minorities to gain control over ignorant, frightened masses. In convincing the audience about their ability to convey prayers and requests to the 'heavenly patron', God, these people (e.g., Shamans, Prophets, Priests, Monks, Rabies, Islamic preachers) have actually constituted a new status, 'sanctified mediators', from which the road to establishment of a new religious movement, based on an unusual individual, was paved. To ratify their sacred status, these people cleverly attributed the creation of the world (still an unsolved issue) to God, and formed a virtual reality accompanied by rituals that attracted the masses. They exploited the need of people for a patronizing superpower to constitute a religion that provided 'answers' to the rising curiosity, limited scientific knowledge, and spiritual requirements of the masses, but also to gain superiority as well as advance their own abundance and wealth. Not only that people now had a God to lean on, the sanctified mediators further strengthened their status by composing social and religious rules with an entire set of orders (do and don't do) and worships that included prayers and ceremonies, aiming to please God and obtain his mercy and support. In administrating the worships these mediators utilized the amazing obedience consent of people to satisfy their spiritual needs, and so they took control over the masses.

An obvious question is why had people agreed to be under the control of these mediators without any physical proof for the existence of God? The answer must have involved human psychology and brain permissiveness to accept an illusory conviction that increased their feelings of security and sanctity, while getting answers to bothering issues like 'have humans originated in an evolutionary process (Darwinian) or creation (by God)', or why was our species 'selected' to dominate Earth. The people established a built-in imaginary misconception that strengthened them physically and spiritually,

and during countless generations of religious services perpetuated into fascinating ceremonies that luckily have also become a rich and beloved cultural enjoyment. The spiritual satisfaction provided by the religious cultural life and daily rules may also underlie the recent mode of religious conversion, for example black superstars converting to Islam (e.g., Muhammad Ali, Karim Abdul Jabbar), or others adopting orthodox Judaism (e.g., Madonna). The success of these mediators to assemble large groups of enthusiastic followers was based most likely on their unambiguous trust and admiration of the remarkable founder, his generous and merciful behavior to the poor, openness toward humanity, verbal convincing abilities, and promises for improved future. As time passed and after the death of the founder, the sanctified mediators found themselves in a leading advantageous position over the masses. To attest their holy eminence, they had substantiated the new movement by composing a sophisticated 'mythos' with fabulous proofs to the supernatural abilities of God and his messenger (e.g., Moses, Jesus, Muhammad), and also provided detailed instructions for worships (prayers, ceremonies, rituals) and apt rules for daily life (e.g., the 'Ten Commandments'; various TABUs). Generations of devoted followers and legendary tales stabilized the new religion and consolidated the sacred hierarchy of the mediators, a minority that unveiled cleverly a way to control the masses.

The three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (in order of their historical appearance) are considered the most advanced among all that have preceded. Still, despite the initial holiness and compassionate intentions, shortly after the death of the founders, as the followers came to power, they went through outrageous bloody periods. The Hebrew people arrived from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and later led by Joshua conquered Canaan (Israel) and destroyed most of its inhabitants. Jesus led a movement with spiritual and gracious objectives and lived a sacred life, yet, several generations later, as his followers, the actual founders of Christianity, got to power, they harassed millions of non-Christians (e.g., Crusade journeys; the dark period of the Catholic Inquisition). Muhammad, the founder of Islam, united the Arabic tribes around Mecca and Medina, but only later, his followers composed the Qur'an (Koran) 'mythos' claiming it was given to Mohammad by the angel Gabriel. The Qur'an is loaded with aggression calling repeatedly for Jihad, a term that also refers to inner contemplation and self-improvement, but is used mainly as an aggressive call to destroy non-Muslim believers. The emergence of these religions and horrible acts performed by the successors of the founders clearly demonstrate how a new movement with initial holy positive intentions can be twisted to achieve control over the masses and fulfil non-ethical ambitions and desires of the sanctified mediators. Interestingly, the principles of another movement, Buddhism, established in India, are quite different from those of the monotheistic religions. This movement is actually not a religion per se (although considered as such in the Western world), and although

practiced in impressive ceremonies and rituals by millions, it lacks worships to God. Instead it focuses on inner contemplation and a continuous attempt to reach spiritual enlightenment while following the holistic way of Buddha's life. Although not quite a religion, those of Buddha's followers recognized as sanctified mediators, have gained control over the masses, destroyed their opponents as soon as they came to power, and established a sacred status that enabled an honorable living supported by the public.

How to rationalize the aggression and bloodshed that ensued the holiness and compassionate intentions of the founders of these religious movements, while ignoring the most precious value of civilized people - human life. Throughout the history of mankind, the 'Do not kill' commandment was continuously neglected not only in the struggle over territory, leadership and wealth (e.g., the extermination of the Indians in America by European inhabitants), but often in seemingly non-profitable outbreaks of cruelty (e.g., the massacre of the Armenians, Gypsies and Jews). It seems that despite the advances in civilized manners and ethical consensual values, humans did not get rid of basic animal urges as is evident daily worldwide in murderous acts by individuals and never-ending wars. Extreme examples that validate this conclusion are the 'Shaheed' phenomenon in Muslim terrorism, where brain-washed people, often motivated by silly reasoning's, which to others seem to be on the border of insanity, sacrifice their life in acts of terror while carrying Allah's (God) name on their lips. Another example is those Nazis that prior to their bloody acts were 'normal' citizens that "just obeyed to orders" and lost their humanistic restrictions. The overall conclusion of this situation is that the development of civilized manners is a fragile cover that easily vanishes under pressure or struggle over territory, power and leadership allowing evil urges to outweigh. It seems that although religions helped people spiritually, relieved fears, and organized their life while claiming that everything is in the hands of God, they also enabled minorities to get control over the masses and have created a reality where cruelty, greed, and brutality have often prevailed.

On this background one may ask whether the negative consequences of religious establishments were unique or have they also emerged upon constitution of other large-scale movements? As provocative as it may sound, the long-run consequences of the establishment of a religious movement resembles to some extent those encountered following the constitution of new world-wide political movements or revolutions (e.g., Bolshevism succeeded by Stalinism; the 'Arab Spring'). In both cases the original positive intentions were altered by the successors to gain political power and control. This transformation was ensued by bloody acts and often destruction of those associated with the original founders. Hence, the establishment of new social, political or religious movements aiming to satisfy economic, spiritual and political needs was often exploited thereafter by the successors to satisfy their self-indulgence and desire for power and control over the masses.

Amazingly, the large variety of religious worships is not limited to distant uncivilized tribes, and so despite the enormous expansion in scientific lore and better understanding of our place in the Universe, the religious worships and rituals have not dissipated. They have actually been ratified by the sanctified mediators, and are still practiced worldwide. Thus, not only have these rituals been engraved in large portions of human populations, most people won't give up their religious conviction and traditional habits. Can fears of the unknown and death still be the main reasons that underlie the fierce grip of religion over human life, as it was in the days of scientific ignorance and deep phobia, or could spiritual deficit or weakness and need of fulcrum with daily reinforcements explain it all? No doubt, ignoring the accumulated knowledge of the way our Universe was created as well as the evolutionary development of *homo sapiens*, while attributing everything to creation by God, may seem as kind of escape from reality, while gaining spiritual tranquility and purported protection against our fears.