

The Millenary Messianism of the Brazilian Sertões. A Historical and Eidetic Approach - summary

Research project objectives/ Research hypothesis

At the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries in many parts of the Brazilian backlands (*sertões*) were formed the millenarian and messianic Christian religious communities. The ideological foundation of that movements was the conviction that the world is sinful and unjust, present life runs in times of cosmic and social crisis. These visions were accompanied by eschatological hope for the possibility of salvation. The eschatological dimension of expectation was linked with hope of the establishing a new social order in the future. The new order was established under the leadership of the charismatic persons, perceived by these communities as the incarnations of saints (they were called *beatos*, blessed) and biblical personages. Religious and political authorities of Brazil perceived these forms of religiousness as a threatening social and religious order, therefore they combated them by the means available in their domains - their leaders were excommunicated, they were subjected to the police repression; the military expeditions were also directed against them, sometimes bringing thousands of victims. Although this kind of religious and social liveliness expired at the end of the 1930s, its presence is also manifested in less intense forms manifests also in the culture of present-day Brazil.

The research hypothesis of the project presupposes the existence of an ideological and pragmatic matrix, a spiritual eidos, common for the investigated movements. It is also assumed that this matrix was the product of the process of “cultural translation and symbolic negotiation”, which has taken place between the millenarian and messianic beliefs of indigenous people of Brazil and similar visions of the Christian missionaries and evangelizers.

Research project methodology

The adopted methodology is inspired by Hans Jonas's assumptions and research on relation to the gnostic doctrines of the late Hellenistic epoch, presented in his excellent work “The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity” (Beacon Press, Boston 1958). The researches of Jonas were based on the following assumptions: 1. “The Greek monopoly of all forms of intellectual expression had for the oriental spirit simultaneously the aspects of suppression and of liberation: suppression because this monopoly deprived it of its native medium (...); liberation because the Greek conceptual form offered to the oriental mind an entirely new possibility of bringing to light the meaning of its own heritage” (Jonas, 2001: 21-22). 2. “All these phenomena, different as they are, are in a broad sense interrelated” (Jonas: 25). 3. “Yet this system has to be elicited as such from the mass of disparate materials” (Jonas: 24).

Adoption of this method of study is justified by similarity of the situations of Eastern culture of the Hellenistic period and the indigenous cultures of the Brazilian people after their conquest and Christianization. One of the consequences of these relationships in both cases was the “theocracy”, “confusion of the gods”. As Jonas pointed out, although the Gnostic systems were manifold in their forms, they all repeated the same patterns of expression, images and formulations and ultimately constituted the same cultural, religious and ideological system. This system (eidos of the Gnosticism) was extracted by Jonas from a lot of examined materials and reconstructed in his work. Similar study, which seeks to grasp and to present the eidos of Brazilian messianism and millennialism, is the key objective of the researches assumed by this project.

Expected impact of the research project on the development of science

In the literature dedicated to these phenomena, we may find their description and numerous answers to the question of the causes of the religious revival in the Brazilian backlands, but there is no such, which can be called the “eidetic synthesis”, describing and explaining them in the source (essential) aspect, and what could lead to their fuller understanding. Brazilian millenarianism and messianism have not been so far investigated by the proposed method, which, as may be supposed, can to reveal the unknown essential substance of these phenomena.

The millenarian-messianic movements and groups have repeatedly appeared in the history and their ideas are still present in the ideologies of religious, social and political movements in various parts of the world. They appear to be the lasting components of the human thought, so learning these ideas and phenomena is significant also for the recognition of the important motives of the assuming of certain attitudes and principles of the action, in the past, today and, we might think, as well in the future.