

THE PURSUIT OF HISTORICAL OBJECTIVITY IN THE CLAIM THAT THE JEWS KILLED JESUS CHRIST

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Abstract. Tales about Jesus Christ are infinite because of the mixture between myth and reality in the examination of historical Jesus. However, there is a need to re-examine the sequence of events that led to the killing of Jesus Christ. Available evidence as demonstrated in this paper entirely exonerates the Jews in the annihilation of Jesus Christ. Most importantly, the context of historical objectivity points to the direction that Jesus Christ was a victim of the mob who can either be or not the Sadducees, Pharisees, Romans, or the Jews. The Jewish involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was adumbrated and doctored by the synoptic gospel crusaders of Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John in their defense of certain status quo not built on historical realities.

Keywords: objectivity, Jews, Jesus, historical scrutiny, Crucifixion, Resurrection

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1. Introduction

The search and pursuit of the historical Jesus are continuing. This is because every era must be capable of interpreting its history. The idea behind historical Jesus began with the eighteenth-century liberal protestants who wanted to separate the earthly Jesus from the Christ of faith (Harrington 2009:14). Historical objectivity is the heartbeat of the historian's craft. The historian must pursue the truth, unearth it and present it in the light of new evidence even if it undermines the historian's personality or ideology. Harrington (2009:15) noted that "historical methods can help us to see the basic reliability of the tradition about Jesus and to encounter Jesus as the strong personality behind the Gospels and the traditions and truths contained in them." In this study, Jesus's personality, public ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection are subjected to serious scrutiny in a way to differentiate between faith and historical reality of what actually transpired.

The synoptic gospel writers, namely Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John reported the same events about Jesus Christ differently. Harrington (2009) reveals that: "Synoptic Gospels viewed issues with one eye or vision." Ezeogu, for example, notes that Matthew knew that Jesus was from Egypt, born in Israel but grew up in Galilee (Ezeogu 2009:83). The book of Luke recorded that Jesus grew up in Nazareth (Ezeogu, 83). However, Matthew wanted to invent Jesus as the son of David to satisfy his fellow Jews that Jesus was their own (Ezeogu,83). The same did not apply in the book of Mark as he saw and referred to Jesus as the son of Virgin Mary (Ezeogu, 66). Referring to Jesus as the son of David in the words of Ezeogu was an exercise of faith, but not a fact of history (Ezeogu,68). The need to investigate Jesus's personality cannot be overemphasized. This is because each new inquiry about Jesus provides new evidence. Scholars and historians have examined the spoken words of Jesus (Akin-Olugbade and Ogbeidi 2012), but the politics of crucifixion need to be explored further. Justices Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas declared that the case and trial of Jesus Christ were not judicable. Yet, highly placed bourgeoisie and temple priests organized mobs against Jesus. Oded Heilbrunner has studied anti-Semitism employed by the Roman Catholic Church even up to the era of Nazism in Germany which took over six million lives. According to him: "the Catholic Church, by contrast, rejected radical and *völkisch* anti-Semitism, but on the one hand, priests continued to employ anti-Semitic images and express prejudices in their sermons and festive rituals and services" (Heilbrunner 2019). The history of Jewish dispersal is clear in that by 58 B.C. they had already settled in Rome under the reign of Pompey (Lazare 1894:50). At the height of the Roman civilization, efforts were put in place to "relegate the Jews on the accusation that they have driven Christ away, and therefore they are capable of evil only" (Lohfink 2011:50). In line with the blueprint established by Fredrick Engels, that all history must be studied anew, there is a need to borrow a leaf from the expression of Gerhard Lohfink as follows:

Historical criticism is indispensable to research on Jesus. It illuminates the world in which Jesus lived, and still more, it works out the relationships among the sources of the gospels, illuminates the various layers of tradition, and thus sharpens our perception of what the evangelists wanted to say about Jesus in their "final text." Historical criticism inquires persistently about what happened, and thus it demonstrates that Christianity is about real history and not about myths or ideologies (Lohfink 2011:xi).

Sometime in 2013, a Kenyan lawyer Dola Indidis sued Israel, Italy, King Herod, Pontius Pilate, various Jewish Wise Men and the Roman Emperor Tiberius for illegal trial which violated “Jesus’s human rights” (Kenyan Lawyer 2013:70). When the Kenyan High Court declared lack of jurisdiction for the trial, he went to the International Court at Hague. Dola insists that Jesus of Nazareth was accused of blasphemy against the Jewish religion and sedition, according to the Roman law. He was tried on the first court by Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest while the second court was heard by Pontius Pilate when Judea was an autonomous region within the Roman Empire (Kenyan Lawyer, 70).

Unfortunately, the existing scholarship before Diola’s hypothesis did not see any reason to include the role of the Roman Empire, Sadducees, and Pharisees in the annihilation of Jesus Christ. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI Joseph Ratzinger’s interesting book titled *Jesus of Nazareth* attempted to challenge the Jewish role in the verdict passed on Jesus Christ. His work like the present article points to the direction of the role of non-Jews in what took the life of Jesus Christ.

The continuous blame of the crucifixion of Jesus on the Jews was designed to promote anti-Semitism that showed Jews in a bad light. As far back as 1965, the Vatican issued a document known as *Nostra Aetate* where the collective Jewish guilt is denied (“Pope Exonerated Jews for Death of Jesus” (2016)). This paper insists that the mob was the only valid group who had a hand in the killing of Jesus Christ and not the Jews. Sub-theme to be examined include:

- Historical insensitivity in the Jewish role in crucifying Jesus
- The politics of the mob in Jewish role in crucifying Jesus
- The enigmatic Jesus Christ and his ministry and;
- Gender dimension of Jesus’s public ministry

At the end of this paper, the claim that the Jews killed Jesus Christ would have been addressed in the light of new and genuine scholarship.

2. Historical insensitivity in the Jewish role in crucifying Jesus

The earlier Biblical scholars’ account about the death of Jesus was anti-Jewish in their reportage. As a result, many Jews until date are not Christian-friendly because of the way the Bible records presented their involvement in the killing of Jesus Christ. Kelvin J. Fernlund (2008:228) captured the development as follows:

The money-grasping Jew, who has no use for the Christ of Calvary, does all in his power to bring discredit on Christianity, and would be pleased to see the whole structure broken down, and in this way get rid of his responsibility for crucifying the Christ on Calvary and bringing curse

on his race, which they have had to suffer
since the beginning of the Christian era.

The whole gamut of anti-Semitism about branding the Jews the killer of Christ Jesus began with the early Christian groups. To start with, the cross was not a Jewish model for punishing an offender, but rather it belongs to the Romans. Available records show that crucifixion probably first began among the Persians. Furthermore, it is recalled that it was “Alexander the Great who introduced the practice to Egypt and Carthage, and the Romans appear to have learned of it from the Carthaginians and perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering through the most disgraceful and cruel methods of execution, and usually was reserved only for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries, and the vilest of criminals as Roman law usually protected Roman citizens from crucifixion” (Edwards 1986:1458). Jesus was crucified because he was a black Jew. Had he been a Roman citizen, he would have been only jailed. The trial of Jesus was instigated by temple aristocrats who felt that the teaching of Jesus would soon render them ineffective. It was not clear to them why the temple, which took many years to erect, should be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. The need to defend the temple’s status quo became an urgent need. Jesus knew who his killers were and when he would be killed. He submits that the son of man will be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, handed over to the Gentiles and be killed, but will rise on the third day (See Luke 9:22-26, Luke 21:37). How does this assertion translate to be a Jewish affair?

3. The politics of the mob in Jewish role in crucifixion of Jesus

In his book titled *The Six Illegal Trials of Jesus*, Anthony Ekendu Onyeocha highlighted those behind the death of Jesus to include the Jews, Pontius Pilate, Satan and Sins of the world. In what he called the ultimate cause, he argued that it was God and Christ’s love for humanity that killed Jesus Christ (Onyeocha 2011:55-61). This author, although erudite in his own right omitted to investigate the nature and dimension of the Roman-Jewish politics of that era. However, he acknowledged that “the Judges, elders, and scribes had beaten the Messiah throughout the trial, mocked him, and later followed him to the crucifixion, mocked him more, made a crown of thorns” (Onyeocha, 83). All the aforementioned groups do not necessarily include the Jews. Jesus was a victim of temple conspiracy with the mob as we pointed out earlier. The mob does not represent people of any ethnic stock or nation. According to Webster’s Dictionary, the mob is a movable crowd, disorderly and lawless crowd who can attack, jostle and annoy (Guralnik 1978:481). The trial of Jesus was not a Jewish affair, for Jesus of Nazareth underwent Jewish and Roman trials, was flogged and was sentenced to death by crucifixion. The death of Jesus points to the legal politics of the era dominated by Roman authorities. These two groups acted as one in defense of the temple, which Jesus has promised to destroy and rebuild in three

days. For example, a Jewish jurist Caiaphas suggested that “it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (See John 18 verse 14; John 11 verse 50).

Soon after midnight, Jesus was arrested at Gethsemane by the temple officials and was taken first to Annas and then to Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest for that year. Jesus was not given adequate fair hearing because before daybreak, Jesus was tried before Caiaphas and the political Sanhedrin and was found guilty of blasphemy. William D. Edwards et al noted thus:

Since permission for an execution had to come from the governing Romans, Jesus was taken early in the morning by the temple officials to the Praetorium of the Fortress of Antonia, the residence and governmental seat of Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea. However, Jesus was presented to Pilate not as a blasphemer but rather as a self-appointed king who would undermine the Roman authority (Edwards, 1456).

Ratzinger (2011:183) captured the prominence of the Roman power over death verdict as follow:

Jesus interrogation before the Sanhedrin had concluded in the way Caiaphas had expected: Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy, for which the penalty was death. But since only the Romans could carry out the death sentence, the case now had to be brought before Pilate and the political dimension of the guilty verdict had to be emphasized. Jesus had declared himself to be messiah.

Since only the Romans possessed such legal power, it is clear that Jesus’s death was not a Jewish factor. If all this represents the sequence of events that took place, then we must re-assess some of the historical pitfalls that surround the killing of Jesus Christ. Available records on those who mocked Jesus have been categorized into three by Ratzinger as the mockers who reminded Jesus of destroying and rebuilding the temple. The second group was the Sanhedrin group, which include the priests, scribes and elders. The third group includes the robbers who were crucified alongside Jesus (Ratzinger, 208-211). There was one group who yearned for the

killing of Jesus Christ, and that was the multitude, crowd or mob. How does that translate to be the Jews? The death of Jesus was only a temporal relief to the Jewish temple aristocrats. John, a disciple of Jesus and of Jewish nationality in John 11 Vs 48 warned the Jews about a future when the Jews will suffer as the scapegoats of global politics. This warning came from the Council of State meeting where chief priests and Pharisees planned to kill Jesus because of his rising popularity. They claimed that the Romans would come and take away their place and nation if they do not stop Jesus who was performing signs and miracles. Unfortunately, the Romans capitalized on the ignorance of the Jews and took over the headquarters of the first church, which ordinarily should have been headed by the Jews. Giles Fraser (2019) captured the mood as follow:

It is a horrible irony, then, that Christianity bears primary responsibility for historic anti-Semitism. Few ideas can have been as poisonous as, and inspired more murderousness than, the idea that Jews were the Christ-Killers. Of course, only the Romans had the legal authority to crucify someone: it was their signature way of dealing with troublemakers. But this fact became historically inconvenient for a religion that was eventually to place its global headquarters within Rome itself.

It is important we re-examine the position of Pontius Pilate in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Pontius Pilate realized the mystery of Christ and planned how to undermine the Jews in a post-resurrection era that would be dominated by the Romans. For example, the Roman authorities expressed shock that Jesus died and quickly gave out the body to Joseph for burial. Before this period, the Roman authorities led by Pontius Pilate as expressed in John ch. 19 vs. 19 in three languages namely Latin, Hebrew and Greek, wrote boldly JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This was done without the consent of the Jews. Pontius Pilate downgraded the Jews and painted them black with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Ratzinger (2011:200) wrote thus:

As Prefect, Pilate represented Roman law, on which the Pax Romana rested – the peace of the empire that spanned the world. This peace was secured, on the

one hand, through Rome's military might.
But military force alone does not generate
peace. Peace depends on justice.

Furthermore, thus noted Ratzinger(200-201):

Pilate – let us repeat knew the truth of this case, and hence he knew what justice demanded of him. Yet ultimately it was the pragmatic concept of law that won the day with him: more important than the truth of this case, he probably reasoned, is the peace building role of law, and in this way he doubtless justified his action to himself. Releasing the innocent man could not only cause him personal damage – and such fear was certainly a decisive factor behind his action – it could also give rise to further disturbances and unrest, which had to be avoided at all costs, especially at the time of Passover.

The Roman script of the entire episode was to take over what ordinarily belongs to the black Jews, which is Christ Jesus. Why is it that the records of flogging and humiliating Jesus points more to the Romans soldiers (Math 27 vs. 27; Mark 15 vs. 16)? The temple aristocrats, i.e. the chief priests and the scribes as Ratzinger noted, were out to destroy Jesus at all cost (Ratzinger,185; see also Math 27 vs. 1; Luke 22 vs. 2). These aristocrats instigated the mob (not the Jews) to ensure that the Judgment against Jesus by Pontius Pilate would be in their favor (Luke 23 vs. 1; math 27 vs. 20).

4. The enigmatic Jesus Christ and his ministry

Jesus Christ's personality is enigmatic to many Christians and Bible scholars as well. This is because he arrogated so many powers to himself and could not define himself most times, as he referred to himself, as I am that I am. He referred to himself as the way, the truth and life and did not expose properly that he was King of the Jews. By this statement, he made himself the only monopoly of approaching God. Furthermore, his riding on a donkey to Jerusalem reserved only for kings further exacerbated many problems about the sovereignty of the Jewish government over him.

Jesus was not a quiet person in the ordinary sense. He flogged people buying and selling in his father's house in Jerusalem (Matthew 21 Vs. 12). The Bible records present Jesus with too many human qualities that raise too many doubts about his messianic nature. For example, at various times, he was thirsty, slept, hungry, angry, etc. As a result of this development, a renowned African philosopher Joseph Omeregbe (1993:45) raised fundamental questions as follow:

But is God in reality an anthropomorphic being? If God were really to possess these human traits that religions attributes to him, he would be imperfect and limited, for imperfection and limitation are implied in these attribute. He would hardly be better or greater than men. To conceive God both as an anthropomorphic deity and as perfect and infinite being is to involve oneself in self-contradiction and this is precisely what religions do. The God of religion is, as we have said earlier, an embodiment of contradictory and mutually exclusive attributes.

Furthermore, Omeregbe (46-47) ask:

Can we talk of God as being angry, having compassion, being jealous, loving or hating. All these apply only to corporeal beings, with emotions. But since God is not a physical, corporeal being, it cannot have these emotions. If then God is an immaterial, spiritual being, without a body, without bodily organs like eyes, ears, mouth, etc, how then can we speak of it as seeing, hearing, speaking etc?

When Jesus Christ resurrected, a few conflicting developments took place. First was the prevention of Mary Magdalene who first saw him on resurrection from touching him (John 20 vs. 17). For the present writer that was correct because he was in spirit, but eating fish and bread with his disciples further raises questions about his human nature after the resurrection (Luke 24 vs. 42; John 21 Vs. 12-13).

5. Gender dimension of Jesus's public ministry

The reflection of gender in the public ministry of Jesus Christ is important at this point. Jesus's choice of leadership was patriarchal. His commitment to patriarchy was exemplified in his choice of male disciples of twelve, which excluded women. Although he had few female friends, such as Martha, but this did not transform his belief in women's leadership. Generally, women were committed to his ministry and demonstrated bravery by being the only group that followed him when others absconded especially to Golgotha.

Women were the only group who were not afraid in their pursuit that no harm should befall Jesus. As a devoted member of Jesus's ministry, Peter denied him three times before the cock's crow and most annoying was to deny Jesus before a maiden girl of low social status. If a coward like Peter was given another opportunity after the resurrection of Jesus to take care of his sheep, then there are too many things wrong with women not placed in Jesus discipleship. The only consolation women got from following Jesus was the encounter where Jesus exclaimed Mother behold thy son, thus requesting the disciples to accept his mother as their own.

A quick reflection of the genealogy of Jesus Christ reveals why too many women followed him. Joseph, his stepfather, was a Jewish carpenter but Mary, mother of Jesus, is also known as Virgin Mary, but she was not a Jew. Many false accounts trace Mary to Jewish ancestry. In the life and times of Jesus Christ, there are too many Marys. They are Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary the mother of James, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. These Marys were Egyptian black women who migrated from Egypt and settled in Galilee and its vicinity. It was the close ties between these Marys as aunts of Jesus, which made them follow him to the end. The story of Jesus's closeness to Mary and Martha made him travel to Bethany over the death of Lazarus his cousin (John 8 vs. 28-37). Of few places, Jesus was recorded to have wept in the Bible, his affection over Mary, Martha, and Lazarus indicated they were his maternal relations.

The Bible records of Mathew 2 Vs 12-15 indicate that when King Herod was after the life of the infant Jesus, the mother of Mary and Joseph ran to Egypt, the maternal home of Mary the mother of Jesus Christ. In recent times, the name Mary or Maria has been subjected to derogatory meaning, but using wrong ethno-historical parameters. Among the Hebrew, Mary means bitterness or disobedience, but the Egyptian meaning of that name is beloved (Ezeogu,71). This ethno-linguistic inquiry is important in clarifying Mary's ancestry.

Infant Jesus, Mary, and Joseph did not travel to an unknown destination. Egypt was domiciled by blacks before Arabization. According to Akinsanya (2010:6):

Arab conquest of Egypt in the 7th century did not lead to complete Islamisation and Arabisation. The Egyptian Copts, who welcomed the Arabs as a relief

from persecution by Roman officials and tax collectors were recruited into the new Muslim regime as physicians, administrators, translators and craftsmen. The Coptic Church and the Mosque co-existed although the end of a proselytizing Christianity and the new immigrants from Arabia gave Egypt its dominant Muslim character at a very early stage.

The denial of Egypt as Mary's ancestry is one key area the African contribution to world civilization has been relegated. Louis Farrahkham (2019) noted thus:

Jesus and Mary were blacks of African descent. Jesus whether you want to believe it or not was a man of color'

Jesus must have carried his mother's traits and was a black man. Since Mary conceived Jesus without any touch from Joseph, he must have been black. The account of Mathew 1:18-25 is clear that Jesus was not the son of David in actual sense, but was inculcated into the genealogy of David by virtue of Joseph's marriage to Mary. It was because of this color prejudice that Jews refused to accept Jesus. After all, in Math. 2 vs. 23 he was given the background of a Nazarene even when they knew he was not.

Egypt was not in a constant state of stability and was opened to foreign rule at one time or other. For example, in 30 B.C. Egypt was under the control of the Romans, but when Jesus was born, King Herod's tyranny in Bethlehem could not get to Egypt. Egypt like the one we pointed out earlier was not the home of any other group except the blacks. Basil Davidson (1974:36-37) has expressed similar concern as follows:

Egyptians were of continental African stock, and even of central West Saharan origins, there is likewise serious dispute among the authorities even as to whether the 'hypothetical dynasty race' associated with the foundation of Pharaonic Egypt had come from outside Africa. These early population undoubtedly included the descendants of incoming migrants from the Niger East. But to argue from this that the vast majority of the inhabitants of old Egypt, not being 'Negro' were therefore not

African is as little tenable as to argue the same about the Berbers and the Ethiopians, whom nobody has yet proposed to erase from the list of African peoples.

In his 1992, Ahiajoku lecture, Professor Gabriel M. Umezuruike wrote that Egyptians were called Hoi Aigupoti meaning black people in Greek, and the name Egyptian was derived from the Greek word Aiguptos that means black. He maintains that people in ancient Egypt in the period of the mother of Jesus we are discussing were not the same people as the Egyptians of Arab stock who came in the seventh century A.D. (Umezuruike, 1992:56). If that is the case, then world civilizations such as Heliography, mummification of the dead, Shadof and other human ingenuity were black-oriented. Still, on this development, Joseph E. Harris (1972:40) noted that Egypt served as a great magnet attracting people from Asia and Europe to join blacks in the drama of history. According to him, by 3200 B.C., Egypt was already in existence and had a commercial relationship with Greeks who referred to them as Aethiopes, meaning that areas of South of Egypt were home of people with dark or black faces. In his submission, Ezeogu (2009:37) maintained that the earlier inhabitants of Israel and Egypt were black and drew his analysis from the Bible account when Joseph was sold into slavery from Israel to Egypt, his brothers from black Egypt could not recognize him as a minister in charge of food affairs. This development is self-explanatory because there was no color difference between Israelites and Egyptians in that epoch since both of them were black. It appears that creative applied artists from Africa did not embrace art history in time. Otherwise, nothing could be historically more misleading than painting pictures of Satan and evil as black, while Jesus and Mary who ordinarily are black Africans based on historical search are painted white. Humanities in Africa have tried for a long time now, but are docile in many critical areas of the global quest to restore man's dignity.

6. Conclusion

Jesus is no myth but historical reality. The trial of Jesus and his death has been discussed anew in this paper. Against the earlier claim that the Jews killed Jesus Christ, the trend is that the mob in the legal and ordinary sense cannot identify a people, their religion or ethnic group. Anti-Semitic ideologies promoted this idea from the arrival of early Christianity, and have sustained it over the years.

Jesus, his life and time have continued to be discussed in various dimensions. His claim as the monopoly Son of God has assumed different theoretical interpretations. More specific to this study is that the Jews were not responsible for the death of Jesus, but instead the temple bourgeoisie who were afraid of to lose their hard-earned status. The same who allowed people to buy and sell in the temple could not find it pleasant to hear that their temple, which is their source of livelihood and power, would be destroyed and rebuilt in three days.

Jesus's ministry was an all-inclusive male affair, but a critical search about his person reveals that he was strongly supported by women, especially his mother and aunts such as Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Cleophas and Mary the mother of James, who were black Egyptian women from Africa who settled in Bethlehem. The aforementioned women followed Jesus because they were related and not necessarily because of his signs and miracles. The persistent denial of his mother's ancestry of black Egypt reveals the denial of the contribution of Africa to global civilization. Elsewhere, Acholonu (2009:19) has analyzed that between 500,000 BC to 1,600,000 in Nigeria, human beings older than Homo Erectus and the Biblical Adam lived in Ugwu Ele, Uturu, southeastern Nigeria.

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