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"DA GESÙ AL CRISTIANESIMO"

"De Jesus ao cristianismo"

PESCE, MAURO
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Pesce's work consists of two parts that exhibit respectively a reconstruction of the historical Jesus and the origin of Christianity based upon a critical dialogue with Käsemann, Dupont, Allison, among other European lines of interpretation (10). Pesce's book portrays a presentation (pp. 5−10), two parts with five chapters each, bibliography (pp. 227−257), index of names (pp. 259−263), and general index (pp. 265−267).

FIRST PART

Chapter I (pp.13−34) expounds the quest of the historical Jesus under four aspects: a) the important historical stages covered by the research as a background to the Italian scholarship: it is the *status quaestionis* from the XVI−XXI centuries (pp.13−21); b) the basis for the reconstruction of the historical Jesus incorrectly resides in the inaccuracy of the anachronistic

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approach that considers the NT as the only reliable source, neglecting other proto-Christian writings (pp. 21–25); c) faith is not essential to the argument and cannot determine the historical research (pp. 25–29); d) Pesce emphasizes the methodological use of five historical criteria: 1) continuity and discontinuity, 2) lack of reference to Jesus in the apostles' debate, 3) different conceptions between Jesus and his own environment, 4) Christological absence in the proto-Christian writings, and 5) anachronistic inapplicability of the Christology of the IV–V century to Jesus[1].

Chapter II (pp. 35–54) highlights five notions: 1) A summary of the research regarding the transmission of Jesus' words, without separating Jesus' *logia* of the NT from the extra-canonical writings and therefore criticizing Jeremias' methodology (pp. 36–38). 2) The oral transmission continues to thrive and multiply during the birth of the written *logia* (pp. 38–40). 3) The passage from the oral to the written tradition implies five phases: the oral transmission *per se*, the coexistence of the oral and written tradition, the predominance of the written forms, the prevalence of Gospels in regions, and the final preponderance of the NT (pp. 40–42). 4) Pesce presents eight modes of transmission of Jesus' words (pp. 42–45), analyzing the first one in particular, which refers to words of Jesus transmitted without an explicit declaration of their origin (pp. 45–54).

Chapter III analyzes the notions of the forgiveness of sins and Eschatology (55–84), pondering the notion of *afesis* (forgiveness/remission) without the implications of Christ's death and authority, namely, a direct forgiveness from God without mediation (pp. 56–61). According to Matthew (6:12.14;18:15–18.21.32–35) and Luke (4:16–19;7:41–42;17:4), God's remission of sins interrelates strictly with the reciprocal forgiveness between men, which functions as the condition to receive God's pardon. Subsequently, *afesis* acquired an eschatological dimension in the Jewish interpretation of the Jubilee year (Lev 25:8–55: Dan 9) that, being common in the socio-historical and religious setting of Qumran (1Q22 (Col

1 These criteria have been employed by the author in one of his previous works. See Destro, A. and Pesce, M. (2008) *L'uomo Gesù. Luoghi, giorni, incontri di una vita*. Milano: Mondadori. Pp. 12–28.40.

III,4−11), 4QMMT C31, 11QMelk 2.4.9), influenced Jesus' religious world (pp. 62−81). Pesce also correlates this conception to the amnesty granted by a king at the beginning of his kingdom (*prostagmata philantropa*: pp. 82−84), concluding that the proto-Christian idea of *afesis* can be attributed to the historical Jesus who used it to mark the beginning of God's kingdom.

Chapter IV explains the relationship between Jesus and the Judaic sacrifices (pp. 85−119). Distinguishing the involuntary sins from the voluntary, Pesce affirms that sacrifices purify the Temple from involuntary sins (ʿōlâ, qorban minḥa, ḥaṭṭā't, 'āšām, šĕlāmîm), not being prescribed any sacrifices for voluntary sins (Leviticus, Philo, and Josephus: pp. 99−101). The *Yom ha-kippurim*, rather than purifying the Temple through a sacrifice, implies the atonement/forgiveness of collective voluntary sins without a sacrifice (pp. 85−99). The baptism of John the Baptist exhibits a ceremonial remission of individual voluntary sins that contrasts with *Yom ha-kippurim's* practice (pp. 101−107). Alternatively, Jesus distances himself from John's conception by accepting the forgiveness of sins without a corporeal purification, not denying sacrifices, and presupposing a reciprocal human forgiveness (pp.107−119).

Chapter V (pp. 122−135) recapitulates the methodological criterion of Dupont (Jésus aux origines de la christologie: 1973), who corroborates Käsemann's position (1953) affirming that the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the faith simultaneously embodies a continuity and discontinuity. This position separates both, Dupont and Käsemann, from Bultmann's standpoint (pp. 122−131.133−135). Pesce criticizes both aforementioned authors for not specifying *which Christian faith* is derived directly (in continuity) from the historical Jesus (pp. 127−131).

SECOND PART

Chapter I expounds on the problem of how to study the birth of Christianity, avoiding the a-critical and anachronistic approaches that deny a distance between the studied object (historical Jesus) and cultural Christian categories (pp. 139−145). Pesce establishes a terminological clarification of "Jewish"

and "Gentile", both of which comprise ethnic, cultural, and religious connotations, in order to distinguish them from the exclusively religious notion of "Christian" that absorbs different ethnicities and cultures (pp. 145–151). He proves his position with examples from 2Macc 8:1; Gal 2:12–14; 3:28 (pp. 151–157) and concludes by criticizing Jossa's notion of absolute novelty, affirming the continuity and discontinuity regarding Jesus and Judaism (pp. 157–158).

Chapter II elucidates the origin of Christian theology, summarizing the positions of Käsemann and Allison. Pesce agrees with Käsemann's three basic statements: a) Jesus was not a theologian, b) Christian theology began after the resurrection experience, and c) the "mother" of the first Christian theology had a Judaic eschatological standpoint (pp. 159–163). Pesce agrees with Allison in the acceptance of a multiplicity of Christian theologies, criticizing Allison's favoritism for the "apocalyptic eschatology" and the apocalyptic terminology employed by Käsemann and Allison (pp. 164–168). Then Pesce describes Jesus' practice of life in three dimensions: a) complete material detachment, b) Jewish religious practice, and c) thaumaturgic practice, considering these three dimensions as the primary sources for the diverse Christian theologies (pp. 168–172).

Chapter III offers the Judaic phases of "Johannism" (giovannismo)[2] in John's Gospel, indicating how Jesus' followers separated themselves progressively from Judaism by becoming a Hellenized Judaism. "Johannic" Judaism practiced the Jewish feasts (Pesach, Chanukkah, Sukkot) and proclaimed Jesus' superior dignity above the common Jewish conception of Messiah, but there were frictions between the Jewish-Christians and other Jews in matters of a) the purification or katharismos, now acquired by Jesus' word, b) an identity crisis originated by the experience of the rebirth in the Spirit, c) the cult in the Temple being substituted by the baptized person, and d) the Shabbat as a practice not followed by the Johannine communities which became an essential disconnection from Judaism.

2 Pesce creates his own term *giovannismo* (Johannism) to talk about this kind of Christianity reflected in John's Gospel (p.174). Pesce also avoids dealing with John's uniqueness in the Gospel genre and its connection with Greco-Roman religion.

Pesce in chapter IV affirms that the expression "Judeo-Christianity" is an equivocal concept (pp. 189–194), since it presupposes Christianity as a non-Judaic religion distinct and separated from Judaism (as religion, culture, and ethnicity), which views the Jewish-Christians as secondary when the situation in reality was the opposite. Pesce concludes that it is erroneous to use the expression for the first two centuries, because there were numerous Christianities (Valentinians, Marcionites, Carpocratians, Modalists, etc) that fluctuated between the dimensions of culture, religion, and ethnicity (pp.194–197).

Chapter V explicates the loss-of-Judaism (degiudizzazione) in Jesus' message, using Justin as an illustrative example. The Dialogue with Trypho 47 describes six categories of believers in Judaism and Christianity, among which Justin only called *christianoi* the non-Jews in regard to culture, religion, and ethnicity, a tendency that will be progressively ratified in time (pp.199–205). These non-Jews adopted typical Jewish notions, making them their own and uprooting them from Judaism, like the concept of God conceived as a Trinity (pp. 205–207). Other examples indicated by Pesce are the term Messiah interpreted according to the notion of chrêston: "excellent", emptying it from its Jewish political, religious, and ethnic notions (p. 207), and the allegorical reading of Scripture in order to find its universal message (pp. 207–208).

Pesce concludes that Jesus did not found any religion or ekklêsia. His intention was to proclaim God's kingdom to all Israel, which would end the non-Jewish dominion (pp. 209–213), but this idea was only developed by later Christian currents (in Johannine and Pauline communities) as a way to understand the event of Jesus' resurrection. Therefore Christianity marginalizes Jesus' waiting and preaching of Gods' kingdom, promoting instead salvation through Christ (pp. 217–221). The historical Jesus did not talk about conversion of non-Jewish peoples, the non-fulfillment of God's kingdom, and ecclesiastical organizations (pp. 222–225). These conceptions are displayed in three main Christian groups: Judeo-Christians, Pauline communites, and the *christianoi* (according to Justin's Trypho) who de-Judaized Jesus to confront the new historical situations, making decisions that differentiated them from the historical Jesus (pp. 213–217).

This being said, there are three main critiques regarding this work:

1) Pesce never utilizes the NT and extra-biblical material in order to examine the problem of how Jesus interpreted his own death: as a continuation of Jewish tradition or something radically different from it. Important platform to establish the radical substitution of the motive of God's kingdom for the resurrection of the Messiah as appears in Paul's letters and later Christianity. This conception serves as one of the stepping stones for establishing the separation of Christianity from the historical Jesus, but it is avoided in the book.

2) Other weak point is that Pesce affirms the establishment of Christianity as a religion completely distinct from Judaism at the end of the second century, using Justin's Trypho as his major argumentative point and affirming that many different "Christianities" emerged after Jesus' death. But these he hardly deals with them, e.g. Pesce does not examine the Christians groups reflected in the Pauline letters, the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, General (Catholic) Letters in order to indicate which are the predominant stances behind them. He dedicated one chapter (pp. 173−187) to the Johannine currents, concluding that among these different positions there existed the notion of a religion different from Judaism, but he does not indicate if this particular group (or another) prevails as the predominant form of Christianity.

3) During his elucidations Pesce also mentions some of the many different Christianities existing in the first two centuries (Valentinians, Marcionites, Carpocratians, Modalists, etc), but he does not evaluate them in order to answer the query proposed at the beginning of his book: which Christianity predominated and became the basic branch that rules Christian thought after the second century (pp. 8−10)? he leaves the question unanswered.

Regardless of these comments, Pesce offers a good academic work. His bibliography thoroughly covers the relevant recent and classical scholarship. Despite the complexity of the theme, Pesce proposes a serious methodological framework that is useful for future improvement and dialogue regarding the historical approach of Jesus and Christianity.