Menachem and Elisheva Korn sent their letter about Rabbi Jesus at just the right time. As I have been working through their searching questions, week by week, an article has appeared in Time Magazine that cites Rabbi Jesus as developing one of “10 Ideas That Are Changing the World.” That is the title of the cover article, click here to read David Van Biema’s fine essay, Re-Judaizing Jesus.

In the first of my responses to Menachem and Elisheva Korn’s letter, I referred to my identification of Jesus as a mamzer as provoking controversy at first, only then to be widely accepted. But another idea in the book is more revolutionary: understanding that Jesus was a Jewish mystic, a prophetic practitioner of the vision of God such as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Zechariah, and John the Baptist, permits us to appreciate the visionary passages in the New Testament on a critical basis for the first time.

The Korns pick up on this theme in relation to the baptism of Jesus:

Your discussion on pp. 55-58 of the Divine Chariot and Jesus seeing the Spirit descending upon him as a dove, rather than as a frightful beast, is beautiful! Have you considered the significance that when Jesus gave the sign of the Jonah (the dove) as his final sign alluding to his death and resurrection, he was thereby bracketing his entire ministry with the dove?! (I am concerned with the apocalyptic visions and "holy violence" endorsed by many American Zionist Christian pastors, such as John Hagee, that they have all but obliterated the symbolism of Jesus' dove and returned to the violent and frightening imagery of earlier apocalypses.)

As we in the Institute saw this spring in the series, “Prophecy, Social Justice, and the Vision of God,” the way a prophet envisions God translates into the mode of action in the world he or she advocates. Jesus’ initial vision indeed anticipates both his teaching on resisting violence and his hope of resurrection. His insistence that love is the standard of ethics is directly related to his mysticism, because he taught that loving God and loving your neighbor are directly coordinated to one another.

When televangelists such as John Hagee use the language of apocalypse to speak of God’s judgment against Jews and Muslims, that is obviously a cause for concern (see
http://www.lewrockwell.com/barnwell/barnwell73.html). After all, Hagee has identified himself as teacher of the Gospels and as a responsible supporter of Senator John McCain. Both claims deserve to be questioned.

A related question the Korns pose is whether “the frightening imagery of Revelation contradicts the image of the dove portrayed by Jesus in the Gospels.” In response, I would point out that not all of Jesus’ visions were peaceful. The issue in any prophetic insight is the balance between disruption and restoration, and how the force of divine revelation leads to its appointed end. Because the Revelation of John is governed by the image of the lamb, in my reading it represents an authentic, prophetic continuation of Jesus’ visionary method.

The lamb imagery is grounded, in John the Baptist’s identification of Jesus as the divine lamb, an indication that John also was a visionary prophet. As I mention in Rabbi Jesus, John also engaged in a ministry of immersing people that was grounded in the prophecy of Ezekiel, the preeminent prophet of Jewish mysticism. This indicates that John introduced Jesus to the mystical practice that changed his life, and goes on changing the world.

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