

Religion and Politics

by Phillip W. Weiss

This weekend is known as Easter weekend. It commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a Jewish rabbi who announced himself as the Messiah. Jesus delivered a message of hope but with a condition that one could achieve salvation only by accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Well, a lot of people accepted that condition. They wanted salvation. Under the Jews, the possibility for salvation was restricted only to the Chosen People. Jesus opened that possibility to everyone, which meant to heathens. No wonder that the Jews persecuted Jesus. Jesus was offering to all that which was promised only to a few. From Jesus's ministry evolved the Christian religion. The Christian religion was the logical outgrowth of the Jewish faith with its belief in a messiah. Jesus packaged that belief into something that even the most intellectually limited person could understand and embrace. To accomplish this requires divine inspiration. Jesus was able to sell an abstract concept of God to people who thought only in concrete terms when it came to questions of religion. That was a tough sell, but Jesus sold it and the people bought into it. Thus, it is no surprise that the Roman authorities treated Jesus so harshly. He was delivering a message that posed a direct threat to the authority of the Caesar who was by law and custom considered a god who alone possessed the power and authority to offer and dispense salvation. Now, Jesus was teaching that the God of the Jews can dispense salvation to all, Jew and Gentile. That was a momentous development in history.

The world was never the same. From Jesus's message sprung the political message that all men are equal and need not bow to kings and others who claimed special dispensation to govern. The republican form of government has its roots in the teachings of Jesus. Hence, the Christian religion is one of the major pillars of power in modern Western society. Christianity invests government with the moral authority to govern. The relationship between religion and politics is so intertwined as to render them virtually inseparable. Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, with the promise to return without warning to deliver final judgement.