

What Was Marx Inspired by

When the Messianic idea appears as a living force in the world of Judaism-especially in that of medieval Judaism, which seems so totally interwoven with the realm of the Halakhah- it always occurs in the closest connection with apocalypticism. In these instances the Messianic idea constitutes both a content of religious faith as such and also living, acute anticipation. Apocalypticism appears as the form necessarily created by acute Messianism.

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In contrast, apocalypticism produced the doctrine of the two aeons which follow one another and stand in antithetical relationship: this world and the world to come, the reign of darkness and the reign of light.

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Jewish Messianism is in its origins and by its nature - this cannot be sufficiently emphasized - a theory of catastrophe. This theory stresses the revolutionary, cataclysmic element in the transition from every historical present to the Messianic future.

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In this connection, the talmudic teachers were already faced with the question whether one may "press for the End," that is to say, force its coming by one's own activity.

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Traditionally, however, the Messianic idea in Judaism was not so cheerful; the coming of the Messiah was supposed to shake the foundations of the world. In the view of the prophets and Aggadists, redemption would only follow upon a universal revolutionary disturbance, unparalleled disasters in which history would be dislodged and destroyed.

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Classical Jewish tradition is fond of emphasizing the catastrophic strain in redemption.

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Conceiving the content of redemption as a public occurrence, which takes place at the end of history or even beyond it, affecting the collectivity and not the individual, Messianism could be, in the first place, the return to a primeval period, to a state of things which in the course of history, or perhaps even from the very beginning, became decadent and corrupt and which needs restoration, reconstitution, or reintegration.

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The Sabbatian "believers" felt that they were champions of a new world which was to be established by overthrowing the values of all positive religions.

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What remained was a wild revolt against all traditions, a movement that found a new, popular content in the biblical books and translated them into a totally untheological, even vulgar language.

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If the full truth be told, however, even after one has taken into account Frank's unscrupulous opportunism, his calculated deceits, and his personal ambitions, none of which really concerns us here, he remains a figure of tremendous if satanic power. True, neither the promises and pledges with which he allured his disciples, nor his visionary schemes for the future that was to follow the general cataclysm of the times seem particularly impressive today

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Concerning the redemptive powers of havoc and destruction Frank's imagination knew no limits.

"Wherever Adam trod a city was built, but wherever I set foot all will be destroyed, for I came into this world only to destroy and to annihilate. But what I build, will last forever." Mankind is engaged in a war without quarter with the "no-good" laws that are in power – "and I say to you, all who would be warriors must be without religion, which means that they must reach freedom under their own power and seize hold of the Tree of Life."

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All in all, while the idea of violating the Torah of beriah remained a cardinal principle of "the holy faith," its application was transferred to other areas, particularly to dreams of a general revolution that would sweep away the past in a single stroke so that the world might be rebuilt.

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Throughout this literature apocalyptic ideas mingle freely with the political theories of the Revolution which were also intended, after all, to lead to a "political and spiritual liberation"

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All this culminated in the remarkable case of "the Red Epistle," of 1799, a circular letter written in red ink and addressed by the Frankists in Offenbach, the last Mecca of the sect ... In sum, an entire mystical theory of revolution.

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