

# Reaction Paper to Marvin Harris' Concept of Cultural Materialism

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## Introduction

Cultural materialism is a term that was coined by Marvin Harris in 1968 in his attempt to explain how people and societies live together amidst strikingly different and dynamic ideologies and symbols. In his book "Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches", Marvin pours water on the common belief that Jesus the Messiah, was truly the Word's most awaited prince of peace. This paper reacts to these views that have been considered quite provocative across the religious circles.

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## The Military Messianic tradition

Marvin Harris paints a picture to suggest that the life of Jesus was the precursor for political expedition of the infamous military messianic traditions. This is a misplaced observation considering that the contradictory nature of the gospel writings, from which he bases his arguments, does not exist. The non-peaceful events that were witnessed and attributed to Jesus during his mission work were not politically motivated but were sparked by the opposition met by the miracles that he performed. The religious teaching and ideologies that Jesus taught could

also at some point conflict with the Jewish traditions and the Mosaic laws but not necessarily with the political establishment, this in essence led to uproar among the Jews in most cases and not the Romans. Therefore the implication that Marvin Harris attributes to Jesus and John the Baptist alleging them as guerilla warlords is unfounded. The contents of the gospels is perfectly in balance and non ambiguous in their clear expression of Jesus as the prince of peace.

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## The Caesar's tax question

Marvin Harris wrongfully assumes that the gospel writers did not know about Judas of Galilee and the Galileans revolt in tax payment to the Roman Empire. When Jesus asked his critics to pay their due taxes to Caesar and give to God what deserved him, it was out of his reconciliatory effort, between the Jews and the Roman government and it reflected his unwavering respect for authorities. The teachings by Judas of Galilee that everything that existed belonged to their creator did not serve to mean that the tax also belonged to God, neither did Jesus in his statement try to contradict what belonged to Caesar from what belonged to God. So Jesus rightfully meant what he said that citizens were obliged to paying taxes, not to God, but to Caesar and his roman government, as a demonstration of this, he directed Peter to get money from the mouth of a fish and use it to pay tax to Caesar.

The connotation of Jesus as the king and messiah of the Jews did not mean that he was to overthrow the Roman Empire ruling at that time to

establish his kingdom in Jerusalem. Instead, as written in the prophetic books that Marvin Harris, quotes Jesus was to be opposed, killed, resurrect and ascend to heaven before coming back to establish the kingdom. So his title as a king was not in any way a threat to the government of the day and it still valid today for he is yet to come and establish his kingdom across the world.

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## Conclusion

Jesus is therefore as expressed by the gospel books, the prince of peace. Christianity was initially meant for his believers mostly the Jews though later extended to all, as propagated first by Paul. Romans embraced Christianity later and propagated its teaching far and wide especially after the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. However this does not ratify any doctrine and changes that they could have introduced about Jesus, which was not based on the general teachings of the gospels.