

Was Jesus a revolutionary?

Studies dispute Gospels' Holy Week accounts

By MARGARET MILLER

What happened when Jesus of Nazareth went on trial — an event of nearly 2,000 years ago — may have been quite unlike the traditional reenactments going on in countless churches during this Holy Week.

That is the view of Livonian John Stuart, who says many biblical students are beginning to question the account in four Gospel books of a pacifist and blameless Jesus betrayed by fellow Jews and crucified by the Romans somewhat against their will.

"There is ample evidence that Jesus, if not a revolutionary, was at least in sympathy with the Zealot, or revolutionary, cause," said Stuart. "It is my feeling that there was enough evidence as far as Pontius Pilate was concerned to convict Jesus for sedition against the Roman government. Pilate certainly had the power to protect an innocent man."

He further pointed out that crucifixion at that time was the punishment for sedition, and that conviction on a charge of blasphemy would have meant a lesser penalty — probably stoning.

STUART IS a social studies department head in a Detroit junior high school and for about 10 years has been studying the writings of British professor S.G.F. Brandon and historian Arnold Toynbee.

He has concluded that the four writers of New Testament gospels have for reasons largely political given a somewhat distorted account of many facts in Jesus' life, especially those concerning his arrest, trial and crucifixion.

Recently Stuart conducted a seminar at Newburg United Methodist Church

of Livonia, detailing his studies. The four gospel accounts, of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, were written for Gentile Christians or Jews who had a reason to dissociate themselves from the violence of the Zealots, Stuart explained.

He added that they were written after the ministry of the apostle Paul had begun and tend to push his view of a Messiah for all men and not just the Jews.

"But they have left a tragic legacy, one that put the blame for Jesus' betrayal on the Jews and have given

Christians in the Middle Ages and more recent times the excuse for all kinds of atrocities," Stuart said. "That blame remained right up to the time of Vatican II."

BY WAY OF EVIDENCE that Jesus was more nearly revolutionary than appeaser, Stuart offered first the fact that he lived and preached in Galilee, then a hotbed of revolutionary activity.

"The Zealots were a group that functioned in that area and were Judean nationalists undermining in every way possible the hated Roman oppressors," Stuart said. "We know that at least one of the disciples, Simon, was a Zealot, and Peter was known as Bar Jonah, which could be translated as revolutionist. Then there were James and John, described as 'sons of thunder', and Judas Iscariot, whose second name might be an anagram of Scurius, the daggerman of that day."

Stuart also pointed out that a famed saying of Jesus, "Take up my cross," has since been learned to be the motto of the Zealot group.

He mentioned too that a more recent understanding of Jesus' admonition to "render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar."

"It is my opinion that Jesus' point was taking the Zealot view that nothing should be paid to Caesar since nothing belonged to him in Israel," Stuart stated. "But Christians have always taken it to mean it's all right to pay taxes."

STUART EXPLAINED the historical scene in which the crucifixion and later events were played out, showing how this scene led to the gospel books being written as they were.

The Zealot cause inspired in fervor and gathered more adherents after

Jesus' death, he said, so much so that in 66 A.D. the Roman armies moved in and utterly crushed the Jewish capital Jerusalem, leveling the city and the Jews' sacred temple.

Most Zealots were wiped out then, he added, but a remnant under Menachem later were besieged at Masada and killed themselves rather than submit to capture by the Romans.

"Mark wrote the first gospel about 65 A.D., either during or right after the fall of Jerusalem," Stuart said. "He was with Gentile Christians in Rome, and his writings were aimed at explaining to Roman Christians why their government crucified Jesus."

"There was a lot of hostility toward the Jews because of the one fighting; and Mark also wanted to show that the leaders were largely blameless and to show Jesus loyal to Rome at the last and isolated from his Jewish disciples and family."

LATER GOSPELS continued in the effect of pulling Jesus away from his Jewish background especially during the time of the trial, said Stuart.

"Matthew was written about five or 10 years later," he said, "and for Jewish Christians living in Antiochia. The destruction of the temple was over now, and there was much fear of what happened to people of his name. Matthew seemed to be reminding Jews from the idea of violence."

It was Matthew, too, who put in the mob scene and the words: "His blood on us and on our children" and led to so much suffering on the part of Jews, said Stuart.

Luke, writing for Hellenic Christians, and John, the theologian and perhaps most anti-Semitic, continued the picture of a pacifist Christ who belonged not to the Jews but to all men, Stuart said.

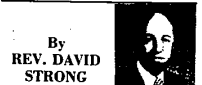
"This was essentially Paul's view," he added, "and that is the view upon which the Christian Church has been based."

"But theologians are now considering new findings, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, to see Jesus in a rather different light."

Moral perspectives

Scare tells us our garden has limits

The predecessors of Columbus were right. We can sail off the edge of the earth. The most ancient stories of creation are right. The garden has limits. There are limits to the production of nuclear power. The recent frightening events at the Three Mile Island reactor and a similar nuclear power plant accident described in the book, "The Day We Almost Lost Detroit," make this clear. The garden has limits. We have grown up in a time and in a part of the earth where we have acted as though the garden has no limits. We rip and tear and use the earth and its resources as though there were no limits. With all the warnings and rules concerning our use of oil and gas, we as a nation steadily consume more and more.



By REV. DAVID STRONG

preserving, maintaining and conserving the earth. Some blame the Jewish and Christian religions for teaching that God has given the earth to us to use. These teachings have made us the keepers of the garden and have encouraged us to make it fruitful and to multiply. We

have seized these teachings and used them to justify our getting and having more. We have failed to hear the teachings concerning the order and limits of creation. We have rejected limits and discipline as moralistic.

TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO the religious leader John Wesley proposed an ethic of sharing and of self limitation. He said, "Get all you can and give all you can." He recommended that a person not eat more than eight ounces of meat a day nor more than 12 ounces of vegetables. "Only one glass of wine," he suggested.

For years we have rejected such teachings as moralistic. Yet we now

see new reasons for eating less and limiting our total consumption.

We need a new ethic of material simplicity. We need to hear Thoreau's wisdom. "He is rich in proportion to what he can do without."

"We need to assess our lifestyles. We need to differentiate between what we want and what we need. We need to reconsider what it means to share with justice and compassion.

Our garden has limits. The sooner we realize this and live accordingly, the greater chance we will have for peace, justice, a healthy life style and even survival.

John Paul II Center issues first newsletter

The first issue of a newsletter published by and for friends of the Pope John Paul II Center is now available.

The publication is intended to document the life and work of the former Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, now Pope John Paul II.

The Pope John Paul II Center gathers, catalogs and prepares for distribution materials connected with the Pope.

Through its newsletter, the center also will maintain contacts with other

periodicals which regularly publish works dealing with the pope. The center may eventually publish a bibliography of items concerning the pope on a world-wide scale.

Subscription rates are \$3 a year, \$5 for two years, or \$10 or more a year for patrons. Patrons will receive two

copies of each issue. Their names will be listed in the newsletter which will be published five times a year.

To subscribe, write to The Pope John Paul II Center, Orchard Lake Schools, Orchard Lake and Commerce Roads, Orchard Lake, MI 48063.

AMERICANS HATE limits. We pretend that the frontier beyond which there are limitless resources still exists. Yet the Bible says we are limited. There is a boundary line to the garden.

Soon we must again realize that we are a part of the creation. We must identify with the sacredness, the care and keeping of natural places and resources. We must decrease the enormous pressures which work against

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