In the wake of liberation theology and of the various revolutionary movements of our time, many Christians are advocating guerrilla warfare and armed resistance to imperialist powers. This option for violence is, in their opinion, consonant with the political Jesus we encounter in the Gospels — provided of course we are not hoodwinked by the pacifist veneer which overlays the authentic, seditious Jesus, who may yet be discovered if we are willing to reinterpret his sayings and actions along revolutionary lines. Other Christians dismiss these views outright and believe instead that Jesus was a nonresistant pacifist who advocated passive acceptance of the established order. Finally, a third group of Christians seek a middle ground between these two extreme stands.

This essay will attempt to examine in turn each of these three positions. Since my own sympathies lie with the third group, I will proceed by contesting the first two. For these latter groups I will first present briefly the proponents of each opinion, then I will survey the various Gospel passages with which they buttress their views on this issue. In each case I will summarize the interpretation proposed for these passages and then criticize it by way of various objections. Finally, in the third part of this study, I will submit a straightforward presentation of my own views.

PART I. JESUS THE POLITICAL ACTIVIST

A. PROONENTS

In modern times Samuel Reimarus¹ was the first biblical scholar to present Jesus as a political insurrectionist who hoped to over-

1. *Vom Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, Braunschweig, 1778. Already in 1779 J.S. Semler wrote a detailed refutation of this work.
throw Rome and its Jewish puppets within the Jewish nation. Reimarus' work appeared in 1778, two years after the American revolution. At the beginning of this century the German socialist Karl Kautsky published a book containing a chapter entitled "The Rebellion of Jesus"; he was supported partially by Julius Wellhausen. In 1929-1930 Robert Eisler followed suit with a massive and scholarly two-volume opus. His theses were afterwards popularized in 1962 by the American Joel Carmichael, who in turn inspired F. Pzillas' short study published in 1966. The following year S.G.F. Brandon issued a work of enormous erudition, which was to become a focus of controversy in recent exegesis and which inspired directly or indirectly such authors as Stephen Rose, Sebastian Moore, Willis Elliott, Colin Morris, Jean Cardonnel (1968), Richard Shaull (1968), Thomas Q. Melville (1968), Arthur Rich (1969), Josef Smolik (1969), Michel Dutheil, G. Puente Ojea, Pedro V. Salgado and many others. For the sake of convenience I will henceforth refer to these authors collectively with the term "revolutionists" since, despite many differences, they all share the common belief that Jesus was a political activist who sought to free his people from foreign occupation through violent means. They also base their thesis on a certain number of Gospel passages. Naturally, they do not all

2. "Vom Rebellentum Jesu", in Ursprung des Christentums, 1908. This opinion was criticized by H. Windisch, Der messianische Krieg und das Urchristentum, 1909; and also by P. Fiebig, War Jesus Rebell?, 1920.
3. Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien, 21911, p. 83. Wellhausen thought that Reimarus could "have been right up to a certain point."
7. Jesus and the Zealots, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967 (hereafter cited as Jesus); cf. also by the same author The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth, New York: Stein and Day, 1968. The latter is a popularized version of the earlier book.
13. Ideología e historia. La formación del cristianismo como fenómeno ideológico, Madrid, 1976. Basically, this is a propaganda work of a Cuban communist.
refer explicitly to the same passages, nor do they necessarily agree in all particulars as to the interpretation to be given to those passages. But, on the whole they tend to invoke these passages rather commonly and to interpret them along similar lines. We will now deal with these texts, following the order in which they appear in the Gospels.

8. TEXTS

1. The temptation story (Mt 4, 1-11 par.). It is indeed paradoxical that we should begin with this particular text because it is ordinarily used to prove exactly the opposite of what it is meant to prove here. Be that as it may, this first text need not detain us very long for, to my knowledge, it is used only by Brandon, and furthermore without much emphasis. Brandon believes that the evangelists included this episode in their Gospels, not in order to deny that Jesus was seeking world-domination, but that such a claim (which they held as quite legitimate) was not inspired by Satan.

Here Brandon assumes both that Jesus was seeking world-domination and that this claim was a directly political one. These two assumptions will be dealt with at considerable length in other parts of this essay, and so we may leave them for the moment. Suffice it to say at this stage, in the manner of a quite generic objection, that they are contradicted by so many passages of the Gospels (reservations of Jesus about the title of Messiah, rebuke to Peter at Caesarea Philippi because of Peter's triumphalistic views, sayings on humble service, identification of Jesus with the Suffering Servant, predictions of the Passion, etc.), that the whole Gospels would become unintelligible if they were true. In fact, only Brandon holds such an interpretation. 15

2. Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were an organized party of revolutionaries. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus mentions them in connection with the outbreak of the Jewish War in A.D.

66. The revolutionists claim that such a party existed at the time of Jesus and that the latter chose one of their members to become one of the twelve apostles. Simon is named in Mk 3, 18 (where he is characterized as a Kananaios), in Lk 6, 15 (where he is said to be "called Zelotēs") and in Acts 1, 13 (Zelotēs). This choice of a "Zealot", so runs the argument of the revolutionists, indicates that the profession of Zealot principles "was not incompatible with intimate participation in the mission of Jesus".16

Three objections can be levelled against this opinion. First, for all we know there were no Zealots (with a capital "Z") at the time of Jesus.17 There were bands of outlaws and brigands (some of whom were no doubt patriotic anarchists) practicing terrorism on a small scale. There was also assuredly much discontent and resentment stemming from the Roman occupation. But there was no organized political party working as a coherent entity, having a common ideology or strategy, and bearing the name Zealots. Beyond reasonable doubt it can be said that, according to all extant sources (and especially Josephus, who is our main source) the Zealot faction did not emerge until A.D. 66, that is until the outbreak of the Jewish War. This has been convincingly demonstrated by the recent studies of S. Zeitlin,18 G. Baumbach,19 M. Smith,20 M. Borg,21 P.W. Barnett,22 and others.23 If this is so,

17. I am aware of course that this statement flatly contradicts what was, until recently, accepted almost universally as an assured result of the best scholarship, especially after the ponderous monograph of Martin Hengel, Die Zeloten, Untersuchungen zur jüdischen Freiheitsbewegung in der Zeit vom Herode I bis 70 n. Chr., Leiden: Brill, 1961.
18. "Zealots and Sicarii", JBL 82 (1962) 395-398. This short article gave the initial impetus to a drastic criticism of Hengel.
20. "Zealots and Sicarii, their origins and relation", HTR 64 (1971) 1-19. The author, in an extremely competent presentation, corrects Klausner, Roth and Hengel on many crucial points. He also proves that the "Sicarii" were a party distinct from the Zealots and began their special brand of terrorism in the early 50s.
22. "Under Tiberius All Was Quiet", NTS 21 (1974-75) 564-571. Expanding on this quotation of Tacitus ("Sub Tiberio quies"), the author shows that, within the First Procuratorial Period (i.e. from A.D. 6 to A.D. 44), "by comparison with what happened later it was a quiet period", broken only by a few incidents. Surprisingly, most authors still describe the time of Jesus as a time of feverish agitation and unbroken upheaval. This is simply not true. For the 60 years going from the revolt of Judas of Galilee in A.D. 6 to the outbreak of the Jewish War in A.D. 66, historians can only cite half a dozen significant disturbances.
then what is the meaning of the qualifier "zealot" (small "z") in the name Simon the zealot?

If we examine the related words (zêlô, "to be jealous", "eager"; zêlos, "zeal", "enthusiasm", "jealousy") in the New Testament we find that the general sense of the word has to do with religious zeal or religious sectarian rivalry (e.g. Ac 5, 17; 7, 9; 13, 45; Rm 10, 2; 1 Cor 3, 3; Gal 1, 14; 4, 17-18). It has no political overtones and never refers to the Zealot party. An equivalent English term would be: zealous. Thus, a fervent Jew was "zealot" (or zealous) for God (as Paul asserts of himself in Ac 22, 3) or "zealot" for the Law (as were the Christian brethren in Jerusalem, according to Ac 21, 20). We know that, before his conversion, Paul was such an enthusiast for the Law (Ac 26, 5; Ph 3, 5-6), that is a converted Pharisee of the stricter sort. This kind of "zealot", like the qannaim (Heb. zealots) of old (e.g. Phinehas in Nb 25, 6-13 and 1 M 2, 54; the just in Ps 68, 9 and 119, 139; Elijah in 1 M 2, 58 and Si 48, 2), persecuted lax Jews.

This meaning of the term "zealot" is confirmed by the fact that twice (Lk 6, 15; Ac 1, 13) Luke calls Simon the apostle a "zealot". Now since (as it is commonly believed) Luke was writing an apologia for the upper Roman classes, it is impossible to think that he would have used the term "zealot" if that term meant a member of the revolutionary political party which had rebelled against Rome a few years earlier. For then, that would have amounted to telling the Romans that Jesus had been closely associated with one of their fiercest enemies. It seems more logical by far to think that Luke was merely describing Simon either as a converted Pharisee of the stricter sort, or simply as a man who was particularly fervent in respect to God and the Law.

However — and this is my second objection to the contention that Simon was a political Zealot — even supposing the existence of Zealots at the time of Jesus and that Simon had been a Zealot, it is not proved that Simon was still a Zealot at the time of his

23. In fact, we do not even know whether or not there were so-called "messianic pretenders" during that period — contrary to what many careless authors repeat uncritically. If there were such messianic pretenders, we do not know their names or anything else about them. On this score, see the decisive appraisal of A.E. Harvey, Jesus and the Constraints of History, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982, pp. 85 and 175.

discipleship. Why not simply think that Simon had been a Zealot, as Matthew had been a tax-collector?²⁵

Thirdly, even supposing the existence of Zealots and the fact that Simon was still one during his discipleship, this would not prove that Jesus was in sympathy with the Zealot nationalistic ideas, since he was also associated with tax-collectors (the enemies of the Zealots and the friends of the Romans) and with Samaritans (the non-Jews). No nationalist could have invented the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 30-35) or the Q saying (Mt 8, 11-12 = Lk 13, 28-29) about pagans entering the Kingdom while Jews were left outside.²⁶

3. No condemnation of the Zealots. The revolutionists suppose that Jesus was sympathetic to Zealot ideas since he is never recorded to have condemned the Zealots or their principles. If, they insist, such a condemnation could have been recorded, it would have been of the greatest value to the Christian cause, when it was known that the Zealots were responsible for the terrible war of A.D. 66-70.

The first objection that can be brought against this line of thinking is, of course, that arguments "ex silentio" are inherently weak. Such a type of argument amounts to an interpretation of a person's silence, and this is always a delicate matter. It is all too easy to project one's own ideas on a person's silence. In fact, this same argument from silence was used by some in the past²⁷ to make Jesus into an Essene (the only Jewish sect not mentioned in the Gospels)!

Secondly, Jesus' silence about the Zealots is best explained by the fact that, in his time, there was as yet no organized political party called the Zealots (as shown in the preceding discussion). How could he have spoken, whether approvingly or critically, of what did not yet exist?

Thirdly, even granting for the sake of argument the existence of a Zealot party at the time of Jesus (dato non concesso), the silence of Jesus could hardly amount to an implicit approval of

²⁶. See, among many others, M. Hengel, JSS 14 (1963) 236.
its ideals, since he held positions directly contradictory to these same ideals: 1° the ideal of the Suffering Servant, which Jesus meant to embody, was directly opposed to the belief in armed rebellion; 28 2° the foretelling of the destruction of the Temple, the very heart of Jewish religion, was unthinkable on the part of any sympathizer of the Zealot cause; 29 3° the avowed universalism of Jesus (e.g. the logion of Mt 8, 11-12 just quoted above, about the entrance of the pagans into the Kingdom) was hardly compatible with the narrowly nationalistic views of the Zealots.

Fourthly, Jesus’ polemic with the Pharisees was implicitly anti-Zealot. We must remember that historically the Zealot movement emerged as the far-left wing of the Pharisee sect. In all respects they were Pharisees, except that instead of resigning themselves to the presence of the Romans, they actively opposed it. And so it can be said that in a sense the opposition of Jesus to the Pharisees was implicitly an opposition to the Zealots. 30

4. The proclamation of the "Kingdom of God". As we know from the Gospels, Jesus proclaimed the imminent in-breaking of the "Kingdom of God" (Mk 1, 15 = Mt 4, 17). Whatever the precise meaning of this ideal state, it would necessarily have had to involve, according to the revolutionists, a complete change in the existing world-order, which meant of course the elimination of the Roman government in Judæa. 31

Here the revolutionists are certainly right in saying that the coming of the Kingdom of God would necessarily involve a complete transformation of the existing world-order. In that sense, it certainly would have tremendous repercussions on all spheres of human life, including politics. All the more so because, everywhere in Antiquity and especially in Palestine, "secularism" as we have come to know it in modern times was nonexistent. In other words, religion and politics were intermingled to such an

30. Here one can scarcely improve on the statement of M. Hengel: "Die antipharisische Polemik Jesu richtete sich wohl teilweise auch gegen die Zeleoten als die radikalisten Vertreter des linken pharisischen Flügels" (Die Zeleoten, p. 385).
31. See S.G.F. Brandon, Jesus, pp. 337, 344, etc. In this connection, Jesus "would have seen the leaders of his people, in particular the higher ranks of the hierarchy who controlled the Temple and the Sanhedrin, as constituting the major impediment to a reformed people, deserving of God's salvation" (Brandon, op. cit., p. 338).
extent that nothing could have been considered as only political or only religious. Therefore, to imagine that Jesus was ushering in a purely "spiritual" Kingdom of God, without any consequent transformation of the political realm is anachronistic. But, on the other hand, to suppose that Jesus meant to usher in the Kingdom by subverting the political structures of Palestine does violence to the Gospel data. What he had in mind was a revolution of a more far-reaching scope than a mere change in government. That is why the decision to address himself to the political structures as such would have short-circuited his over-all project. For the lever of change was not to be found in what we would call nowadays the purely political (understood as organizational politics: forms and systems of government, liberation movements, subversive activities, canvassing for a specific platform, etc.). The lever of change was to be found in what we might designate, for lack of a better term, as inspirational politics (the realm of motivations and attitudes inspiring political decisions: desire to serve versus desire to dominate and exploit, faithfulness to truth versus duplicity, detachment versus greed, love versus hate, etc.). This latter kind of "politics" is based on a new understanding of the relationships between God and man, as between man and man. Basically, such a revolution was in itself a moral-religious one, not a directly political one. Naturally it would also have prodigious repercussions on politics (if followed through consistently), but this would be a consequence of the coming of the Kingdom, not a condition of it. The cause of the Kingdom is always God alone, acting through the person of Jesus, and the condition is man’s opening up (by conversion) to this free gift of God.

I referred just now to the Gospel data. These show clearly that Jesus was not directly concerned with the purely political (organizational politics). Each of these data constitutes an objection to the claim of the revolutionists that Jesus was engaged in a political struggle against Rome and the Jewish leadership in an attempt to overthrow them — or, in other words, that he was involved in

32. In this respect the logion of Lk 17, 21 is often misunderstood. There Jesus is not saying, "The Kingdom of God is in you", i.e. as something indwelling in the heart of men, spiritual and invisible. This could hardly be the case, since Jesus is saying this to the Pharisees! Furthermore, it contradicts everything else Jesus ever said about the Kingdom. And so, with most exegesis today, we should understand the logion to say, "The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (RSV).
power-politics or structure-politics (understood in the restricted, modern sense of these terms).

First, Mark and Matthew tell us that the very first theme of Jesus' preaching concerned not only the Kingdom, but also repentance: "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent" (Mk 1, 15 = Mt 4, 17). For Jesus, evil is not found primarily in socio-political structures; it has its root-cause in man's heart (Mk 7, 15-23; Lk 6, 43-45).

Secondly, Jesus never connects the advent of the Kingdom with political subversion. The Kingdom comes from God with an irresistible life of its own, as in the parable of the seed that grows by itself, unaided by human agency (Mk 4, 28): "The ground produces a crop by itself (automatê)". The signs of the Kingdom do not reside in the spread of a revolutionary popular uprising, but in Jesus' preaching, in his healings and in his exorcisms: "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then know that the Kingdom of God has already reached you" (Lk 11, 20).33

Thirdly, as we read the Gospels one thing strikes the attention: by far the most frequent and the fiercest controversies of Jesus were with the Pharisees and the scribes — and these had no real political power! Not only were they politically insignificant, but they always adopted a strategy of non-involvement in politics, which explains why, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, they were allowed to re-settle peacefully in Jamnia.

Fourthly, when Jesus attacked the only politically influential party of his time, the Sadducees (on the three occasions mentioned in the Gospels), it was not on political but on religious matters. On one occasion he challenged their unbelief in the resurrection of the dead (Mk 12, 18-27 par.). On another occasion, he refused to show them a sign from heaven (Mt 16, 1-4). On the third and last occasion, he issued a general warning to his disciples against their doctrine (Mt 16, 5-12).

Fifthly, in regard to the chief priests and the sacerdotal aristocracy, on one occasion Jesus merely refused their demand that he justify his actions (Mt 21, 23-27) and, on another occasion he uttered against them the parables of the Two Sons and of the Wicked Tenants (Mt 21, 28-45). Aside from predicting his death at

their hands, that is all he had to say about them.

_Sixthly_, we do not find on Jesus' lips any explicit criticism of the Roman government or its occupation forces in Palestine. On the contrary, we see him curing a centurion's servant (Mt 8, 5-13 par.) and socializing freely with tax-collectors, who were the Romans' agents among the population.

5. "I have not come to bring peace but a sword" (Mt 10, 34). This saying of Jesus is often interpreted by the revolutionists as expressing Jesus' approval of violence.

One can make two objections to this interpretation. **First**, the "sword" spoken of here is probably only a metaphor for "divisions". This is suggested by the verse following immediately (v. 35), which reads: "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law". A similar connection is found in the parallel of Lk 12, 51-53 (where, however, no sword is mentioned): "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division (diamerismos); for henceforth in one house there will be five divided . . . son against father . . . daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law". In both these versions the basic thought is the same: Jesus' call to decision compels one to take a stand which will eventually produce tensions and sharp divisions even within the family. This in Luke is formulated in a straightforward way by the term division, whereas in Matthew it is expressed with the help of a metaphor, that of the sword (probably in closer kinship to the original utterance of Jesus). 35

**Secondly**, even if the "sword" were to be taken literally, it could have a passive meaning (= suffering from the sword) instead of an active one (= using the sword on others). Historically, the passive meaning is the one which better describes both the destiny of Jesus and that of his first followers. 36

34. For example S.G.F. Brandon, Jesus, p. 20, n. 4.

35. Cf. G.R. Edwards, Politics, p. 12; M. Hengel, Violence, pp. 34-35; K. Schubert, Jésus à la lumière du judaïsme du premier siècle, Lectio divina 84, Paris: Cerf, 1974, pp. 114-116 (hereafter cited as Judaism). Schubert produces interesting parallels borrowed from the apocalyptic and rabbinic literatures (Hen 100, 1-2; Sanh. 97a), where it is said that family divisions will form part of the trials immediately preceding the Messianic era.

6. The tribute to Caesar. The revolutionists\textsuperscript{37} claim that Jesus' answer to the question concerning the payment of the tribute to Caesar (Mk 12, 13-17 par.) could not have meant, in its historical context: pay the tribute. For that would have meant giving to Caesar what belonged to God, namely the Holy Land of Israel and its resources. Precisely because of this, it is argued, the answer of Jesus meant: do not pay the tribute. Any other answer would render inexplicable the fact that he was popularly regarded as possibly being the Messiah. It is by giving the episode an inauthentic setting in v. 13 that Mark succeeds in suggesting the opposite meaning. We have a confirmation of this in the fact that Luke reports, concerning the charges made by the Jewish leaders to Pilate, precisely this one: "We have found this man ... forbidding us to pay tribute to Caesar" (Lk 23, 2).

This thesis of the revolutionists contains three distinct assumptions: 1\textdegree Mark distorted the meaning of the logion by tampering with its original context; 2\textdegree the original logion in itself had the opposite meaning to the one Mark gave it; 3\textdegree Jesus could not have been popularly regarded as the Messiah if he had advocated payment of the tribute. For the sake of clarity, I will treat each one of these assumptions separately.

First assumption: Mark distorted the logion's meaning by inserting it in the artificial context he created for it in v. 13. This is highly improbable for three reasons:

a) Ten years at least before Mark wrote his Gospel, Paul taught the moral obligation of paying the tribute (Rm 13, 7). And so, if the teaching of Jesus was allegedly distorted, this would not have originated with Mark, but would have occurred at a much earlier date.

b) The context of the logion is alleged to have been composed by Mark, who would have thus provided it with a setting distorting its meaning. Now this context comprises not only v. 13 but vv. 13 to 16 as a whole. Yet, according to the most radical Form Critics, only v. 13 would be a redaction of Mark himself. This means that vv. 14 to 16, the rest of the context, are not at all from Mark; actually they belong to the oldest Palestinian tradition and form the authentic historical setting of the logion. This being

the case, it follows that the question of Jesus, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" would become absurd if, afterwards, he meant to conclude that the denarius, which bears the image and inscription of Caesar, was not to be given back to him.

c) This teaching of Jesus fits very well with the whole of his preaching: absence of nationalism in the presentation of the Kingdom, care to avoid political overtones in the titles of Messiah and Son of David, forecast of the destruction of the Temple, refusal to be drawn into anti-Roman attitudes (Lk 13, 1-5), etc. All this tallies with Jesus' favorable stand on the question of the tribute as described by Mark, but on the other hand it jars with the opposite accusation of the Sanhedrin before Pilate (Lk 23, 2b). Of the two statements, surely that of Mark is to be preferred.

Second assumption: The original logion taken in itself had the opposite meaning of the one Mark gave it. This is most unlikely for the following reasons:

a) Mk 12, 17 is built on two strictly parallel clauses. The second clause ("give back to God what belongs to God") surely has a real content in the mind of Jesus. Now if, as the revolutionists say, this content means: give back to God the land of Israel and all its resources including the tribute money, then the first parallel clause would become void of content. For in such a case "give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar" would refer to exactly the content of the second clause. Thus the parallelism would become meaningless.

b) Jesus' reference to the image and inscription stamped on the denarius is a way of preparing and reinforcing his subsequent statement "render to Caesar". Thus he begins by directing attention to the owner of the coin: Caesar. For indeed, in Antiquity, it was held that a currency belonged ultimately to whoever had minted it. This means that paying the tribute was only giving


39. As A. Richardson points out: "In current opinion coins were the personal property of the ruler whose image they bore" (Political, p. 47). But also, as we learn from rabbinic texts, the area within which the coins of a ruler were used as currency was recognized as representing the territory over which that ruler's jurisdiction extended: "According to rabbinic teaching, the rule of a king was regarded as being coextensive with the region in which money of his coinage was accepted as a medium of exchange (cf. Sanhedrin 2, 20b, 17 where Abigail in 1 Sam 25, 23 refuses to accept David's jurisdiction because Saul's mintage was still accepted as legal tender; cf. also Meg. 14b in Strack and Billerbeck, I, 884). When, therefore, these Jewish leaders produced the
back to Caesar what was his own. This is confirmed by the fact that the Greek text uses the verb *apodidòmi* which, in the unanimous opinion of scholars, is to be understood in this context as: give back, render, return, restitute, etc. And so, by referring to the image and inscription stamped on the denarius, Jesus' subsequent saying ("Render to Caesar") could not possibly have meant: do not pay the tribute.

**Third assumption:** Jesus' stand on the payment of the tribute is irreconcilable with his great popularity among the people. This assumption rests on a more basic one, namely that Jesus could choose between only two courses of action: 1° collaboration with the Romans — the course followed by the Sadducees, the Herodians and some Pharisees; and 2° violent resistance — the course adopted by the various guerrilla movements. But this is a gross oversimplification of the real situation. For indeed Jesus could choose and actually did choose a widely shared third alternative, which could be labelled "critical loyalty" to the Roman Imperium. This third option was shared by most of the rabbis, by the Essenes, by the majority of the Pharisees, and finally by the am-haaretz or uneducated poor people of the land. As M. de Jonge concludes: "It is a mistake to say or at least to imply that a devout Jew was of necessity a supporter of the Zealot cause." Because of this, it was entirely possible for Jesus to recommend payment of the tribute while retaining his popularity with the mass of the people.

7. **Entry into Jerusalem.** Some revolutionists interpret this incident as the first step in Jesus' grand design for taking control of the Roman denarius out of their midst, they were proving in effect that they had accepted Caesar's rule over their nation" (Henry A. Fast, *Jesus and Human Conflict*, Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1959, p. 79 — hereafter cited as *Conflict*).


43. Cf. W. Wink, *Reflections*, p. 41. Brandon himself is forced to recognize that there were among the Pharisees a "section of the party which pursued a policy of abstention from political affairs and issues" (*Jesus*, p. 314). Actually in A.D. 66 the Pharisee leaders protested against the interruption of the Temple sacrifices offered in the name of Caesar (cf. Josephus, *Jewish War*, II, 17, 3)! 


first of Jerusalem and then of Palestine. They see him as one fully aware of the Messianic role which popular enthusiasm expected him to play. Jesus, according to them, decided that the time had come to signify publicly his acceptance of this kingly role by means of a carefully staged triumphant entrance into the country’s capital as its king. This was to be immediately followed by a takeover of the Temple (also sedulously organized — cf. the revealing notation of Mk 11, 11), which in turn was to be the signal for a popular insurrection. With this in view, Jesus chose to manifest his acceptance of a political Messiahship by acting out the prophecy of Zech 9, 9, which announced the coming of a Messianic king riding into Jerusalem on an ass. That Jesus proceeded to do just this shows conclusively that, contrary to what is often suggested, he never repudiated the role of a triumphant Messiah. The attempt to lessen the significance of the incident by emphasizing that an ass is too humble a mount for a Messianic demonstration of this nature is beside the point: the prophecy of Zech 9, 9 required an ass, if it was to be acted out at all. By riding on an ass, Jesus was merely making possible the fulfillment of the prophecy, whose main stress was to foretell the coming of the Messianic king. So runs the argument of the revolutionists.46

It is true that, as the revolutionists say, the provision of the ass was necessary, if the fulfillment of Zech 9, 9 was to be realistically acted out. But what is significant is that in the only public demonstration of his Messiahship (which Jesus staged at the very end of his career as an ultimate attempt to win over the leaders of Israel), he chose precisely that prophecy, and no other one, to illustrate his claim. For indeed, this meant unequivocally that he repudiated the specific Messianic role which popular enthusiasm attributed to him. His choice of Zech 9, 9 indicated clearly what kind of Messiahship he claimed for himself: it was not the popular, triumphalistic one, it was the humble and nonviolent one of Zechariah, who states explicitly that the Messiah, though “triumphant and victorious” is nevertheless “humble and riding on an ass” — a detail which completely transforms the character of this manifestation. In this respect, the choice of the ass does not lessen the significance of the incident, on the contrary it heightens it, for it enables Jesus to point to the particular kingship which is his — not

46. Cf. for example in S.G.F. Brandon, Jesus, pp. 349, 353 and passim.
a mere political one, based on human power, but a kingship founded only on the power of God. And so the entry into Jerusalem as *staged by Jesus* (i.e. intentionally patterned after Zech 9, 9, with its shocking mention of an ass) succeeds in combining two notions which seemed contradictory to the Jerusalemites: it was a genuine public demonstration of Jesus’ Messiahship, and at the same time it was a public repudiation of the popular, political one.

8. *Cleansing of the Temple.* In the opinion of the revolutionists, the “so-called” cleansing of the Temple (Mk 11, 15-18 par.) was actually an overt attack on the authority of the sacerdotal aristocracy. It was “a most radical challenge”, “a truly revolutionary act, for the high priest held his office and authority from the Romans, and was thus an essential factor of the Roman government in Judaea. To challenge the rule of the high priest was thus, in effect, to challenge the Roman rule”.

The evangelists depict Jesus as making this attack alone, but this could not have been true in the concrete circumstances (number and quality of persons involved, presence of the Temple police). “It is likely that (Jesus’ action) was achieved by the aid of an excited crowd of his supporters and was attended by violence and pillage”.

Several objections can be raised against this reconstruction of the events. *First,* if the cleansing of the Temple degenerated into the kind of mass action imagined by the revolutionists, why was it not brutally checked by the Temple police or the Roman cohort (some 500 to 600 troops) constantly keeping watch over the Temple courts from the walls of the Antonia tower or even, during great feasts, from the roofs of the outer colonnades overlooking the courts? This non-intervention conclusively proves that whatever happened on this occasion in no way could have had the scope attributed to it by the revolutionists.

*Secondly,* the silence of Josephus on this incident confirms this. An author who was, as he was, intent on highlighting the dangers

50. Cf. Josephus, *Ant. XX*, 106-107; *War II*, 224-225. Even Brandon wonders at this. He supposes that the Temple police “either dared not intervene or were swept aside” (*Jesus*, p. 334). But then, he still has to explain the non-intervention of the Romans. And here he has to confess: “It is curious, too, that the Roman troops in the Antonia, who must have observed the fracas, did not intervene to restore order, as they did when Paul was being lynched in the Temple courts (*Acts 21, 31ff.*)” (*ibid.*).
of rebellion and violence, would never have omitted to mention a military attack on the Temple. ⁵²

Thirdly, if the cleansing of the Temple had been a major disturbance, it would have provided a clear legal pretext for taking action against Jesus. But, when the Sanhedrin held a first hearing to determine on what grounds it could accuse him, it found none—which means that this particular incident had nothing illegal about it. It was not even brought up at the time, according to the accounts of the four Gospels. ⁵³

Fourthly, these same Gospel accounts all agree that Jesus’ gesture was not political in nature, but rather prophetic. In fact, even though the evangelists vary greatly in their interpretation of the precise meaning of the event, ⁵⁴ they all comment on it indirectly by means of scriptural quotations which confer on Jesus’ action the dimension of a prophetic gesture. Now a gesture of this sort needs only be striking and challenging; its aim is to arouse attention to the message it is meant to convey. By its very nature, it is symbolic, it does not physically change things. For example, when Jeremiah went about carrying a yoke on his neck (Jr 27), he was not physically producing the submission of Israel to Babylon, but rather symbolically expressing a message from God to this effect. Likewise, Jesus’ gesture probably amounted to no more than a light disruption in the routine of the bankers and merchants: a few tables overturned, a few animals shooed away, one or two loud utterances. But this was enough for him to make his point. Any other reconstruction of the incident raises great historical difficulties: how could he have cleared the huge open space of the court of the Gentiles singlehandedly and how could he have prevented the traders from seeking the intervention of the Temple police? But, if the disturbance was a minor one, of a symbolic-prophetic nature, then these difficulties disappear. And, on the other hand, we understand at the same time why it was not used

against Jesus during the latter’s trial, and also why it was never mentioned by Josephus.

Fifthly, far from being a mass action “attended by violence and pillage” (Brandon), the cleansing of the Temple was, strictly speaking, a nonviolent action — in the sense that it was not a physical attack on persons, but only on animals and things. This might come as a surprise to many, since this action of Jesus, at least as it is described in Jn 2, 13-22, involved the use of a whip (v. 15) and has traditionally been understood as the only instance in the life of Jesus when he resorted to violence. But is this truly the case?

In order to understand clearly in what manner Jesus used a whip, we must guard ourselves against the distorted account projected by older versions such as the Vulgate and the Authorized Version. The latter translates the critical v. 15 in this way: “... he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen...” This translation implies that “them all” refers to the money-changers and the vendors of animals. Yet, such an interpretation has long ago been excluded by Greek Church Fathers such as Theodore of Mopsuestia in the Fourth Century. Many commentators (McGregor, Temple, Plummer, Strachan) and recent Bibles rightly translate v. 15 in this way: “... drove all the animals out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle” (Good News Bible), or “drove sheep and oxen alike out of the temple area” (New American Bible) or “drove all from the Temple area, both sheep and cattle” (New International Version).

These latter translations reflect a more careful analysis of the Greek text of Jn 2, 15, which reads: “... pantas exebalen ek tou hierou, ta TE probata KAI tous boas...” Now the double conjunction te ... kai normally initiates a series. Here it can hardly continue a series beginning with “them all” — which would be the case if “them all” referred to the merchants. This means that “them all” must refer to the following “sheep and oxen”. An awkward but literal translation would be: “he drove them all, namely the sheep and the oxen, out of the temple”. This analysis of te ... kai results from a survey conducted by J. Lasserre on

56. Moffatt, Goods speed, the Zurich Bible, etc.
all the 104 usages of this conjunction in the New Testament. In 86 cases a rendering comparable to “as well as the sheep and the oxen” would be impossible.

As a last remark on this topic, let it be specified that the verb “exebalen” does not of itself imply violence; in other usages in the New Testament (e.g. Mk 5, 40; Mt 9, 38; etc.) it simply means “to send away”.

9. Swords and armed disciples. The revolutionists make much of what we read in Lk 22, 35-38: “And he (= Jesus) said to them (= disciples): ‘When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?’ They said, ‘Nothing.’ He said to them, ‘But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, “And he was reckoned with transgressors”; for what is written about me has its fulfillment.’ And they said, ‘Look, Lord, here are two swords.’ And he said to them, ‘It is enough.’”

On the basis of this text the revolutionists point out that some of the disciples of Jesus were accustomed to go about with concealed weapons, after the manner of the Sicarii and the Zealots. These weapons, they say, were concealed in the disciples’ garments, since Jesus had to make sure that they were armed. Thus, we see that “Jesus ordered his disciples to arm themselves before going to Gethsemane”.

There are two points in this argument: 1° the logion of Jesus about buying swords, and 2° the fact that the disciples had weapons on them. Each of these points will be dealt with separately, for the sake of clarity.

1° The logion on swords. Here the interpretation of the revolutionists is open to two objections. First, it seems very likely that Jesus is not alluding to real swords, but is rather using the term metaphorically. He is contrasting two phases in the apostles’ career: the peaceful one of the past and the stormy one of the future. This he does by mentioning the concrete objects symbol-

59. I will prescind here from the moot questions of the homogeneity of these verses and of their original connection with their present context. Since what is at issue is their meaning as they stand now in Lk, I will limit myself to a discussion of this last point.
60. Notice that in Mt 10, 34-36 we have another saying of Jesus in which the sword is taken metaphorically.
izing each of these two phases: no purse or bag suggests open hospitality, acceptance, peace (no need for personal resources), while the sword suggests hostility on the part of the world. Faced with such hostility, the disciples will have to "steel themselves" (to use an English equivalent of Jesus' metaphor). This interpretation is confirmed by the reference to Is 53, 12. By indicating beforehand that this prophecy will shortly be fulfilled in him, Jesus endeavors to prepare his disciples for those times of trial which will begin precisely with his arrest.

Secondly, if by these words "Jesus ordered his disciples to arm themselves before going to Gethsemane" (Brandon), this would have been presumably so that they could use their weapons in case of attack. But this is most unlikely since, when he was arrested, Jesus rebuked the only disciple who actually did make use of a sword (Lk 22, 49-51). Besides, if Jesus had had any intention of resisting arrest, he would have made sure that the twelve had more than two swords between them, for two swords would hardly have been adequate against well-armed troops.

Thirdly, Jesus' comment on the disciples' action of showing him two swords ("It is enough" — v. 38) confirms that they have misunderstood his previous statement on the future need of swords. As we have seen, Jesus was speaking metaphorically, but the disciples take his words literally and react by showing him two swords. At this point Jesus brings the exchange to an end by the words "It is enough" and departs with them for the Mount of Olives. If Jesus had previously been speaking of real swords, then the words "It is enough" would mean: two swords are sufficient. Yet, surely two swords for twelve men would not agree with the instruction that everyone must buy a sword even at the cost of selling his matle. If, on the other hand, Jesus had been speaking metaphorically, then the words "It is enough" would not refer to the number of swords shown to him, but would have another meaning. In Greek the expression used by Jesus, "hikanon estin",

can also mean: enough of this. We find it (but under a verbalized form) in a parallel situation in Dt 3, 26, when Yahweh tells Moses to change the subject of their conversation: "But the Lord was angry with me on your account, and would not hearken to me; and the Lord said to me, 'Let it suffice you (hikanousthō soi); speak no more to me of this matter'". This interpretation of hikanon estin as "enough of this" fits the present situation perfectly: Jesus sees that his previous words about the swords have been misunderstood and, in frustration, breaks off the conversation at this point. This latter interpretation is widely accepted by commentators.

2° Armed disciples. This second point need not retain us for long. Contrary to the revolutionists' contention, the disciples could very well have carried a few weapons between themselves without having particularly bellicose intentions. After all, they were itinerant men, who just a few days before had been traveling the dangerous road from Jericho to Jerusalem. Now the short sword or the dagger was part of the traveller's standard equipment against robbers and wild beasts. Josephus (War II, 125) tells us that even the pacifist Essenes (on their pacifism, see War II, 135 and 140; 1QS 9, 21ff.) brought nothing on a trip "except weapons on account of the brigands". On the other hand, some rabbis justified the carrying of weapons even on the sabbath, since arms were also considered a man's ornament (Shab., 6, 4). And so, the fact that the disciples bore arms is easily explained by either of these two reasons. Arm-carrying was simply a widespread custom among Jews at the time of Jesus:

10. Armed resistance in Gethsemane. All four Gospels record that armed resistance was offered in Gethsemane to the arrest of Jesus (Mk 14, 47; Mt 26, 51; Lk 22, 49-50; Jn 18, 10-11). This armed resistance, in the opinion of the revolutionists, was "a serious affair".

63. The NEB translates: "'Enough!' he answered. 'Say no more of this.'" The same Bible translates Lk 22, 38 by: "Enough, enough!"


There are three difficulties to this view. First, it is patently untrue that the resistance put up to Jesus' arrest was "a serious affair". According to the four Gospels, there was a single sword thrust, nothing more.

Secondly, far from allowing this action to become the signal of a general scuffle, Jesus immediately intervened and pronounced a strong reproof against any form of violence: "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt 26, 52). Furthermore, Luke reports that Jesus repaired the damage done by the untimely sword thrust: he healed the cut ear of the wounded man, a slave of the high priest (Lk 22, 51).

Thirdly, after the arrest the disciples escaped easily, without further pursuit or subsequent prosecution. This would not have been possible if they had offered any significant resistance to Jesus' arrest. The same holds true for the trial of Jesus: it concerned only him. Had the disciples rioted during the arrest and aggravated this into "a serious affair", no doubt they themselves would have been arrested on the spot.67

11. Pilate was convinced that Jesus was a dangerous activist. We know from reliable sources that Jesus was crucified by the Romans.68 On the basis of this fact, the revolutionists conclude that Pilate "was convinced that Jesus was guilty of conduct subversive to the maintenance of Roman rule in Judaea".69 Such a conviction, it is argued, stemmed from the charges made by the Jewish leaders against Jesus to the effect that he was stirring the people to revolt against Rome (Lk 23, 2.5) and from some recent actions of his: the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple. These charges and these actions clearly had enough substance to justify the titulus placed on the cross: "The King of the Jews".70

This opinion of the revolutionists runs counter to all the evidence. First, our four chief authorities on the matter (Mark, Matthew, Luke and John) all state that Pilate did not believe the allegations made by the Jewish leaders and that, on the contrary,

68. Apart from the unanimous testimony of the Gospels to this effect, we also have that of Tacitus, Annals XX, 44.
70. Cf. S.G.F. Brandon, Jesus, pp. 348-349.
he tried to save Jesus and in the end gave an unfavorable verdict only when the Jews threatened to report him to the emperor Tiberius. 71

Secondly, here the revolutionists ignore the fact that those who initiated judiciary action against Jesus were the Jewish authorities, not the Romans. The Roman trial took place only because those authorities deferred Jesus to Pilate. Furthermore, during the Jewish preliminary hearing which preceded the transfer of Jesus to the Roman tribunal, the charge against Jesus was not that of political activism but that of blasphemy. Of course this does not mean that the charge of blasphemy had no political relevance. For, as we have already seen, inasmuch as Jesus in his activities and his teaching appeared to subvert the religious order of things in Israel (especially the Law, the customs and the Temple), he was by the same token seen as indirectly subverting the political order as well, since the Sanhedrin was responsible to the Roman administration for the “peace and order” situation. Anyone who questioned the religious status quo was automatically, if only indirectly, questioning its political status quo. In this connection the revolutionists are quite right in viewing the death of Jesus as having political causes. But they overstate their case when they claim that these causes were the main ones and that Pilate saw Jesus as politically dangerous. We must keep in mind that, if the actions and words of Jesus inevitably had political repercussions, they were not directly addressing the political order — at least not at the organizational level.

Thirdly, if Pilate had been convinced that Jesus was a political subversive (again, at the organizational level), surely he would have arrested his followers — as was done in A.D. 6 when 2,000 Jews were crucified with Judas of Galilee. 72 This fact is all the more remarkable in that, during the subsequent 40 years, the followers of Jesus settled openly in Jerusalem and their community was never bothered by the Roman authorities. If in the eyes of these authorities Jesus had appeared as the leader of an insurrection, they would never have allowed in Jerusalem a community which claimed him as its founder. 73

Fourthly, even if Jesus had been deemed a subversive on the part of Pilate, this in itself would not prove that he was. Then as nowadays, any genuine witness of the Gospel was liable to be labelled a subversive by the defenders of the Establishment, simply because he denounced oppression and injustice.  

12. The Barabbas amnesty. According to Mark’s account of the Roman trial (Mk 15, 6-15), which the other two Synoptics accept with few modifications (Mt 27, 15-26; Lk 23, 17-25), Pilate condemns to death a man he knows to be innocent and instead releases Barabbas, a dangerous insurrectionist — all this because the Jewish religious leaders demand Jesus’ death on the one hand and, on the other hand require Barabbas’ release in connection with an alleged custom of annual amnesty at the time of the Passover. The revolutionists hold Mark’s report to be unreliable on several counts: 1° the amnesty story has no historical support whatever; 2° Pilate’s conduct is not only illogical, but it is also utterly inconsistent with what Josephus and Philo tell us of Pilate’s character; 3° Pilate could never have been able to justify his conduct in his report to the emperor Tiberius.  

This whole episode, they conclude, only betrays Mark’s pro-Roman, anti-Jewish bias.

It is true that outside the Gospels we find no clear witness that there was such a custom as the Passover amnesty. We do find, however, an analogous case recorded in an Egyptian papyrus from the year A.D. 85. Also, there seem to be traces of such a custom in the Talmud (Pesahim VII, 6a). Finally, there is some evidence that here John’s testimony (Jn 18, 39) does not depend on Mark and represents a distinctive strand of early Palestinian tradition.  

All this is not conclusive evidence, far from it. But there is enough evidence for many historians to accept the amnesty custom as probable. At any rate, the statement made by the revolutionists that it is “historically unsupportable”, is certainly unwarranted.

Secondly, it must be granted that the Gospel tradition has had the tendency to whitewash Pilate and to underscore the Jewish leaders' guilt concerning the death of Jesus. But this was done without serious historical distortion, as far as we can judge. In the case at hand, for example, Pilate appears a bit too eager to free Jesus for justice's sake (in Lk he proclaims Jesus' innocence no less than 3 times). We need not think that this was his strongest motive — and here we can detect the whitewashing process at work. However, it is still possible that Pilate was acting quite logically when he was seeking to free Jesus. For example, as A. Bajsić has suggested in a thought-provoking article, it might well be that Pilate had no particular concern about Jesus, whom he considered innocuous, or even less about justice. A reasonable reconstruction of what took place historically would run along the following lines. Pilate is preparing to pass sentence on Barabbas, a dangerous insurgent. He learns that Barabbas' supporters are planning to demand his release on the occasion of the Passover amnesty. He decides to thwart this attempt by offering Jesus' release instead, hoping that Jesus' sympathizers will clamor their agreement, and also that the Jewish leaders (who, as men having vested interests in keeping law and order, abhor insurgents) will equally support Jesus' cause. Thus pilate hoped that, using Jesus as a pawn, he could avoid having to release Barabbas, the real object of his political concern. Nothing in this scenario contradicts the Gospel data (except for the question of Pilate's real motives, which are somewhat glossed over in the accounts) or what we know from other sources about Pilate's character.

Of course, once Pilate had decided not to release Jesus (as he would have done normally) but instead to balance him against an acknowledged criminal, he had no choice but to condemn him to the same penalty he would have inflicted on Barabbas if he had had his way. At this point perhaps a more upright character would have resisted the pressure of the crowd, but Pilate's character was not of that metal. Besides, the pressure was very great: after all, Pilate was being practically blackmailed. Had a denunciation been made against him in Rome, his career might well have been ruined — something which happened in fact, a few years later (in A.D. 35) when, upon a denunciation made by the Samaritans to Vitellius

the legate of Syria, he was recalled to Rome so as to give an account to Tiberius, and thereafter was heard of no more.

Not only did Pilate act logically in all this (if we take into consideration all the circumstances of the case), but his actions were not out of character from what we know of him. In fact, in his *Legatio ad Gaium* Philo describes Pilate as acting, although in an altogether different set of circumstances, exactly in the way in which he acted in the episode of Barabbas.  

_Thirdly_, in his report to the emperor, Pilate could easily have justified his conduct in a variety of ways. He could have exposed his plan to forestall the release of Barabbas along the lines just described. Although that plan eventually miscarried, it was the only one that seemed promising at the time. Or, he could have pretended that he had been convinced by the evidence produced by the Jewish leaders to the effect that Jesus was indeed dangerous and that Barabbas was not. Or again he could have said that, given the ugly mood of the crowds, he had preferred sacrificing the life of an innocent man rather than have to squelch an insurrection in a blood bath. Again, the behavior of Pilate as described in the Gospels appears neither implausible nor irrational.

13. *Pacifist fabrications in the Gospels and in Paul*. Many logia or actions of Jesus having a "pacifist" character (such as Mt 5, 3.5.9.41.43-44; 26, 52-54; Lk 2, 14; 9, 52-56; 13, 3; 19, 38b. 41-42; 23, 34; Jn 18, 36-37) are, in the opinion of the revolutionists, interpolations invented by the evangelists for apologetic purposes, namely so that Christianity would not be seen as politically dangerous or so that Christians would resist the temptation to join the Zealot movement. However, the persons chiefly responsible for the suppression of the portrait of the pro-Zealot Jesus in favor of the pacific Christ were Paul and Mark. Paul taught a radically different Gospel from Peter's: Peter preached the pro-Zealot Messiah of Israel who would shortly return to drive out the Romans and restore sovereignty to Israel, and Paul preached Christ, the Son of God, the spiritual Savior of all mankind. And Mark, a disciple of Paul, followed the lead of Paul and fabricated a wholly pacific Christ for his own apologetical purposes.  

This reconstruction of the Gospel redaction encounters four objections. First, if the evangelists were intent on portraying a "pacifist" Christ of their own invention, why did they preserve in their Gospels declarations or actions of Jesus which seem to point in another direction — for example a logion like "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt 10, 34), the nicknames of James and John as "sons of thunder" (Mk 3, 17), the fact that two of Jesus' disciples had concealed swords (Lk 22, 38), the forceful cleansing of the Temple, etc.?

Secondly, most of the "pacifist" material attributed by the revolutionists to Mark or to the other evangelists is actually found in the Q source, which predates Mark by more or less 20 years. And so, if there ever was a falsification of the historical Jesus from a political insurgent into a "pacifist" Christ, it was done in the very first years of the primitive Church, before the redaction of our earliest Palestinian source. 83

Thirdly, there is no basic difference between the Soteriology of the Jerusalem Church and that of Paul: both are inspired by an understanding of the death of Jesus as the atoning death of the Suffering Servant. Far from being invented by Paul, the atonement theology was received by him from the Jerusalem Church, as he himself states clearly: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15, 3). As shown by L. Cerfau, 84 the formula "died for our sins" betrays an Aramaic background and can be ascribed directly to the Jerusalem Church.

Fourthly, we find in Gal 2, 1-9 that Paul submitted his "gospel" to the leaders of the Jerusalem Church, who approved it unreservedly. It is therefore inconceivable that Paul's teaching on Jesus could have been radically different from that of Peter.

14. Armed resistance of the Jerusalem Church. We have finally come to the last of the revolutionists' theses examined in this essay. (There are others, but those treated here are the most significant.) In this particular thesis the revolutionists claim that the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem sided with the Zealots in the great revolt of the years A.D. 66-70 by armed resistance against Rome. 85

This is proved by the fact that after A.D. 70 the Church of Jerusalem disappeared completely. (Their flight to Pella before the Jewish War is a tradition going back only to the Fourth Century, and it involves insuperable historical difficulties.) The beliefs and actions of these original disciples of Jesus must surely reflect the attitude of Jesus to his nation’s cause against Rome. The later presentation of Jesus in the Gospels as politically non-involved must be treated as suspect — a watering down for apologetic reasons.

This argument rests on a triple assumption: 1° the Jewish Christians did not flee to Pella before the siege of Jerusalem; 2° they sided with the Zealots and perished during the siege; 3° this explains their disappearance as a Church after A.D. 70. Each one of these assumptions will be considered in turn.

*First assumption:* the Jewish Christians did not flee to Pella before the siege of Jerusalem. This is countered by three objections.

a) In his *Ecclesiastical History* (III, 5, 3) Eusebius states clearly that the people of the Church of Jerusalem fled to Pella before the war: "Moreover, the people of the Church of Jerusalem, in accordance with a certain oracle given out by way of revelation to approved men there, had been commanded to depart from the city before the war, and to inhabit a certain city of Perea. They called it Pella." This crucial text is thus translated by Brandon: "... an oracle, given by revelation to men approved before the war, to depart from the city..." This rendering of Eusebius' text is patently tendentious. The words "before the war" (pro tou polemou) immediately precede the word "to depart" (metanastenai), and the meaning is obviously: to depart before the war. But Brandon makes "before the war" modify "approved" instead of "to depart", thus connecting *pro tou polemou* with a word ("approved" — dokimos) which does not have the same degree of closeness as the verb "to depart". Anyone can see that the resulting translation of Brandon "men approved before the war" is grammatically forced and does not make much sense.\(^{86}\)

b) In spite of their rejection of the Pella tradition the revolutionists themselves have to admit that at some stage "some Jewish Christians did settle at Pella".\(^{87}\)


c) Even after the war began, Christians could have escaped from Jerusalem, for Josephus tells us that, after the defeat of the Syrian legate Cestius Gallus in the first decisive engagement of the war, "many (polloi) distinguished Jews abandoned the city".  

Second assumption: the Jewish Christians sided with the Zealots and perished during the siege. One can oppose three considerations to this view.

a) There is not a shred of evidence to support the contention that the Jerusalem community took arms against Rome.

b) The revolutionists state that the Jerusalem Christians believed that Jesus would shortly return with supernatural power to annihilate the Romans and restore the kingdom of Israel. If this had been the case and if these Christians had stayed in Jerusalem during the siege, even then surely they would not have undertaken any military action before the actual return of Jesus, otherwise they would have gone against their own presumed Christology.

c) The Book of Revelation stages a great battle between Jesus and his heavenly troops of angels on the one hand, and on the other hand the Beast, Babylon (= Rome) and their supporters (ch. 17-19). At no point in the whole book do the Christians themselves participate in this battle. Neither before nor after the return of Christ do they take up arms.

Third assumption: the Church of Jerusalem is no longer heard of after A.D. 70 because it had been annihilated during its fight against the Romans during the siege of Jerusalem. This assumption contains an element of truth, for undoubtedly at some time during the First Century the Church of Jerusalem ceased to be a Church of any significance among the various centers of Christianity. But this bare fact can be explained along lines very different from those followed by the revolutionists. In this connection one can put forward four considerations which discredit the revolutionists' thesis.

a) It is not true that the Church of Jerusalem disappeared completely after A.D. 70 for the reason that it has been annihi-
lated during the siege of Jerusalem. Actually, as we have seen, it migrated to Pella, at least in part, and this took place before the war. As far as we can see, when it settled in Pella it simply melted into the local Church, not having any leaders of its own to help it preserve its identity. This would explain why, on the other hand, the Church in Pella became such a strong Church — strong enough for Eusebius to remark on it. 93 And so, we should not be speaking of a disappearance, but rather of a decline of the Jerusalem Church.

b) The main reason for this decline was probably the absence of leaders. We know from Acts that Stephen was stoned to death (Ac 7), and that later on James, the brother of John, was executed by Herod Agrippa I (Ac 12, 2). In the years immediately preceding the war “James, the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, and certain others” according to Josephus 94 were also executed by order of the Sanhedrin. By this time both Peter and Paul had been imprisoned or executed in Rome. This means that within a few years before the revolt, the leadership of the Jerusalem Church had been decimated.

c) Notwithstanding this lack of leaders, the Church of Jerusalem did continue a kind of shadowy existence after the rebuilding and resettlement of Jerusalem. According to Eusebius 95 there was some semblance of episcopal continuity through Simeon, “a cousin of the Savior”.

d) Other causes explain the decline of the Jerusalem Church, such as its great poverty, 96 and its geographical isolation from the main centers of Christianity. 97

C. GENERAL OBJECTIONS

As we conclude this first part of our study, perhaps we have reached the point where we do not see the forest anymore because of the trees. We have taken one after the other a series of Gospel episodes as well as isolated sayings of Jesus, and we have seen that a revolutionist interpretation of these was not at all compelling.

93. This is according to the testimony of Eusebius, Demonstr. Ev., III, 5, 108.
94. Ant., XX, 197-200.
96. Cf. W. Wink, Reflections, p. 44.
97. Cf. Marcel Simon’s study in The Modern Churchman 42 (1952) 52, quoted in W. Wink, ibid.
However, this examination has led us to focus our attention on so
many details, that in the process we may have lost sight of bigger,
more fundamental issues. Thus, after having raised many objections
to a number of misinterpretations concerning specific texts, per-
haps it is now time to formulate a few objections of a more general
nature concerning the entire approach of the revolutionists.

1. The first of these basic objections would address itself to one
of the pet theories of the revolutionists. According to them, Jesus
endorsed violent resistance to Rome and to the Jewish leadership,
but his militancy was subsequently transformed into pacifism by
the evangelists. Unfortunately for the revolutionists, this thesis is
based on two premises which are both rather difficult to accept.

An initial premise is that there was in the primitive Church a
central control of documents, a sort of authoritative "publishing
directorate" which could arbitrarily enforce on all Christians a
common "public relations" policy (in this case: portraying Jesus
as a pacifist, although the first generation of Christians, namely
the Palestinian Church, supposedly knew he was not), a policy
which could extend its hold on preachers and writers from Jeru-
salem to Rome, and from Alexandria to Galatia. But, as all our
evidence suggests, when the Gospels were written there was no
such central authority which could blanket out disquieting facts
and compel authors to tow a common party line.

The second premise is that Jesus was violent, but was followed
by nonviolent disciples. This is of course intrinsically possible,
but it is rather unlikely. That a conspiracy of silence could have
surrounded the alleged militancy of Jesus, letting only traces of
it escape in a few ambiguous statements in the Gospels, is some-
thing hard to imagine. Such a gap between Jesus and the second
generation of Christians would leave unexplained too many things.
As Walter Wink\(^{98}\) aptly puts it: if the revolutionists' interpretation
of Jesus is correct, then "we have the curious paradox of a reli-
gion whose founder uttered little besides political rhetoric and
revolutionary commonplaces . . . and who was succeeded by a
group of dissident disciples. These disciples . . . created . . . a
truly unique and utterly remarkable religion of suffering love . . ."
Such a development is not unthinkable, but very nearly so. For
after all, it supposes that a personality as unique as that of Jesus

98. W. Wink, Reflections, pp. 55-56.
(such as described in the Gospels) could have been invented by a group of disciples scattered in time and space. In other words, if the historical Jesus was a revolutionary, then Christianity as a religious phenomenon remains an enigma as to the adequate cause of its emergence, since the personality who is believed to have created it is not consonant with it. This is what the revolutionists ask us to accept. But is it not far more reasonable to think that a pacifist Christianity can have as its adequate cause nothing other than a great pacifist personality such as the one presented in the Gospels? Any other explanation would leave Christianity floating in mid-air.

2. Another basic objection to the revolutionist interpretation is that it is too selective in its choice of Gospel passages, accepting as authentic those which conform to its theses, and holding as tendentiously invented by the evangelists those which are contrary to its theses. No scientific criterion is given to justify this choice, only an imaginative reconstruction of what Jesus "must have been". Now the question which arises at this point is of course this one: were the evangelists tendentious?

If, as the revolutionists believe, it could be proven that the evangelists in their presentation of Jesus' activity have tendentiously expurgated the political character of this activity, then we would have to conclude that we have no accurate knowledge of the genuine teaching of Jesus — for, after all, the Gospels are our only source in this respect, and if they are unreliable, then how could we get behind them and reach the "real" Jesus? This conclusion was quite logically drawn by Brandon, who blandly states: "We have no certain record of Jesus' teaching". 99

However, such a conclusion is hardly acceptable on scientific grounds because, if it is true that we rarely know the ipsissima verba of Jesus, we do know his ipsissima vox, to use an expression coined by J. Jeremias. One needs only read the latter's New Testament Theology to realize how far we have progressed since the skeptic days of Bultmann. To take only one example of many, the parables as a whole constitute an historically inexpugnable body of teaching which even the most radical critics attribute to Jesus. The personality of Jesus is already indirectly revealed in that bedrock of the Gospel traditions, unmistakable and unique. No

anonymous group can invent such a literature. This is also true of his quite original teaching on the Kingdom or on the Law, of his enigmatic sayings, of his personal style of speech (preference for the divine passive, initial Amen, address to God as Abba, etc.). To say then that “we have no certain record of Jesus’ teaching” amounts to ignoring the considerable progress done in scholarly research during the past fifty years. For indeed we do have a hard core of teachings of Jesus which even the most critical historian will recognize as having a high degree of historicity. Yet, when we look into the content of these teachings, we do not find the Zealot sympathizer depicted by Eisler, Brandon, Carmichael and others. This does not mean of course that everything we find in the Gospels is historically reliable. But it does mean that, while many details can be questioned in this respect, we do have a prima facie case of reliability. Even Bultmann concedes this.  

This is entirely in harmony with what we learn of the evangelists as we study their way of writing in general. They are usually candid, and sometimes brutally frank, Mark especially. Here examples are too numerous to mention. We need only think of how the evangelists depict the apostles, their petty ambitions, their constant misunderstanding of Jesus, their ignominious flight at the moment of his arrest, the denial of Peter, the betrayal of Judas, etc. If the evangelists were so ingenuous in their presentation of the apostles, why would they suddenly become tendentious and unreliable in their presentation of Jesus? Of course we are not dealing here with mathematical certainty, but only with historical probability. However, insofar as we are restricting ourselves to probabilities, it seems much more probable that the evangelists are reliable than that they are tendentious. Whatever one might think of the Gospels as literature, it is undeniable that they ring true when they report on the public ministry of Jesus. And this, even more so when they report on the circumstances of his death because, despite several unresolved historical problems in the Passion account, we must not forget that this account was the earliest continuous narrative derived from oral tradition.

100. Thus he writes: “Though one may admit the fact that for no single word of Jesus it is possible to produce positive evidence of its authenticity, still one may point out to a whole series of words found in the oldest stratum of tradition which do give us a consistent representation of the historical message of Jesus” (“The Study of the Synoptic Gospels”, in Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research by R. Bultmann and K. Kundsins, trans. F.C. Grant, New York: Harper, 1934, p. 61).
3. After the foregoing considerations, another type of critique might be addressed to the revolutionists, but of a more subtle and indirect character. This pertains to psychology rather than exegesis, but it may not be entirely irrelevant, for after all exegesis is produced by exegetes, and these have psyches and psychological hang-ups like anybody else.

In this connection, to construe Jesus as a political activist against such contrary evidence as that found in the relevant historical sources supposes an almost pathological need for make-believe—of the kind which inspires war novels or a suicidally romantic "charge of the Light Brigade". Perhaps only incurable warmongers can imagine Jesus leading an insurgency operation against the Romans. In this respect, the long stint of Brandon as a military chaplain (1939-1951) might have some bearing on his vision of Jesus. To one who has imbibed during such a long time the peculiar atmosphere of army camps, it may seem logical after a while to see the army (or even any kind of organized violence) as a means to political ends. It may well be that many who advocate violence in the name of Jesus are really indulging their unhealthy taste for the smell of gunpowder or their "fascination with the glory of battlefield heroism" (Wink). One also wonders if they are not nursing the secret death-wish explored by Freud. For example, we find side by side in the same paragraph these two statements of Brandon:

The resistance of the Zealots, particularly those of the lower orders of the priesthood, was instinctively sound... Their struggle against this menace (= their double yoke of servitude to Rome and to the sacerdotal aristocracy), in the knowledge that Rome was concentrating its forces for revenge, was indeed suicidal.

For a revolutionist like Brandon, perhaps there is no contradiction between an "instinctively sound" resistance which is however "suicidal", but not everyone will agree with him.

4. One final remark before concluding this section. Some revolutionists speak readily of "prophetic" violence, thus placing violence under the patronage of the great prophets of the Old Testament, who were known for their fierce and uncompromising stand at the service of Yahweh, as well as their ferocious attacks on idolatry, social injustice, and the like. Thus, Brandon states: "The

Zealots stood in true succession to the Yahwist prophets of old."  

If this could be said, with some reservations, about Elijah and Elisha, it is quite untrue for most of the prophets who, from the standpoint of nationalist interest, were considered as traitors by many of their contemporaries. In this respect, the image of the prophet used by the revolutionists is quite unsuitable when applied to the realm of politics. For in politics the prophets were utterly free of nationalism. One could say they were anything but revolutionaries!

This is not surprising upon reflection. Israel sees its whole history as unfolding according to God’s purpose. Its monotheism brings it to see in the triumphs of the pagan kings over it the designs of God punishing Israel by imposing foreign masters on it (1 K 19, 15.17; 2 K 8, 9-13; Am 3, 9-12; 4, 1-3; 6, 1-14; Hos 9, 1-6; 10, 9-10; Is 5, 26-30; 8, 5-8; etc.). When Amos, Hosea or Isaiah announce divine punishment, they are thinking of the invasion of Assyria, which of course they accept as the expression of God’s will. In Is 10, 5-6 Yahweh explicitly calls the conqueror “rod of my wrath, club of my furor”. Jeremiah is the first to develop this thought to its ultimate conclusion: he invites Judah and the neighboring kingdoms to submit to Nebuchadnezzar (Jr 27, 4-8; 28, 14), whom Yahweh calls “my servant” (Jr 25, 9; 27, 6; 43, 10). He even invites the exiled Judeans to pray for Babylon, where they have been deported (Jr 29, 7-10). Similar positions are taken by Daniel and Baruch regarding the Persian Empire.  

These prophets all see their foreign oppressors as instruments of God to whom Israel must submit — a far cry from what the revolutionists say of them.

We will now leave the revolutionists for the time being. The least that can be said of them is that they have not proved their case.

(Part II of the present article, “Jesus the Nonresistant”, will appear in the next issue.)