

Catholics For Renewal

The Jesus Movement

Summaries and/or direct links to
A Set of 8 Papers
2015

David Timbs

1. The Jesus Movement Part I: The early social and religious context.

The Peasant Farmer: Debt, Taxes and Bread for the day.

2. The Jesus Movement Part II

- *Jesus in conflict with the Teachers of the Law*
- *The Jesus Movement and its conflict with the Synagogue*

3. The Jesus Movement Part III

The Split

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Paul, His Gospel and Mission

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Paul and his Opponents

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The end of the Apostolic Era.

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1. The Jesus Movement Part I: The early social and religious context.

Jesus was keenly aware of the crushing hardships experienced by the Jewish people in Palestine. Their daily lot was to endure grinding poverty and to be subjected to constant, acute anxiety about their very survival. The peasant farmers of first century Galilee were the victims of an almost crippling dual taxation system imposed by the racially and religiously suspect Herodians or the Roman occupiers. Most of the bread winners in Jesus' Galilee worked the family plot or sharecropped and, in order to make ends meet they took on any other available work. Jesus is called a tekton, which is a generic term for any kind of worker or labourer who was prepared to do any manual tasks. He and Joseph probably worked a small plot of land in order to produce food for the family and picked up any paid labour they could find. People had to do things like this in order to lessen the impact of the debt burden.

Zero Sum or Limited Good economics prevailed throughout the Ancient world. With the exception of the few who were born into wealth, riches were usually not accumulated by just or honest means. People who enjoyed political power or patronage were often in a position to exploit people who were socio-economically vulnerable, especially peasants who might need money to pay a debt. Often the terms of the financial transaction ensured that the debtor would have little or no chance of clearing the debt. In the process, they alienated their land title in exchange for cash or loans. Their birthright was the little collateral they might have. People were literally gambling on their identity, their future and that of their families. This unjust system of economic coercion and exploitation was the principal focus of the prophetic outrage and protest of Amos, Elijah and Isaiah. Jesus saw himself as part of that tradition.

Tithes and debts constituted a constant burden on the rural poor in the time of Jesus. Temple scribes estimated debt levels, Levites collected the Temple tax, the tithes of first fruits for distribution to the priestly caste. These tithes were recurrent so peasant farmers had to make provision for yearly surpluses. This burden in turn generated a vast sub-current of popular rage and protest.

Catholics for Renewal - The Jesus Movement (2015)

Unfavourable economic times put added pressure on those peasant farmers who still owned their own land. Drought and civil strife periodically disrupted agriculture so people were unable to pay their taxes. To make up for this, they would go deeper into debt, and in extreme cases would be thrown into slavery or debtors' prisons. The three main options for peasants who did not own their own land were to work as tenants paying a fixed rent to their landlords or to pay a predetermined portion of their produce to their owner or to join on with one of the great latifundia (large privately owned estates). This meant that the peasant farmer became equivalent to a slave.

It must have sounded like a huge ironic joke for his audience to hear Jesus say.....(cont.)

Read / download Part 1 [HERE](#) , including the following further Sections:

The Mission of Jesus: The permanent year of Liberation.

The message of Jesus understood and lived in the Church after the Apostles.

*David Timbs is a member of Catholics for Renewal, April, 2015

2. The Jesus Movement Part 2

- Jesus in conflict with the Teachers of the Law
- The Jesus Movement and its conflict with the Synagogue

Click [HERE](#)

3. The Jesus Movement Part III - The Split

[HERE](#)

4. The Jesus Movement Part IV - Paul. His Gospel and Mission

[HERE](#)

Further highlighting substantial changes of thinking in the early Church David Timbs in this continuation of his series of papers on the Jesus Movement, David Timbs recounts the basis of Paul's conviction that the Jesus Movement would only achieve credibility, attract and hold outsiders if its members validated the Gospel message by the quality and congruence of their community life. For Paul, this meant that Christians needed to establish a revolutionary alternative community in which people would be welcomed, given a place of belonging, treated as human beings and embraced as sisters and brothers.

Read this Part IV paper [Here](#)

5. The Jesus Movement Part V - Paul and his opponents

Extract from Paper by David Timbs, 21 August 2015 In this final New Testament article in the Mutations series "The Jesus Movement Part V: Paul and his opponents" highlighting significant challenges in the earliest days of the Church, David Timbs examines some of the most intense conflicts between Paul and his opponents in the Jesus Movement. All of them in some way bear uncanny resemblance to the dynamics of current passionate arguments, conversations and disputes involving dysfunction and disunity in the modern Catholic Church. Paper [HERE](#)

6. The Jesus Movement Part VI - the end of the Apostolic Era.

Extract from Paper by David Timbs, 20 September 2015

The previous article in the Mutations series explored key aspects of Paul's understanding of the centrality of Christ and how his message quickly precipitated a profound theological rift not only between himself and Pharisaic Judaism but also between him and his fellow Judeo-Christian missionaries. The disputes were largely about the conditions on which Gentiles would be accepted and integrated by the Jesus Movement. Paul steadfastly refused to accept the principle that conversion required not only Baptism but also observance of Jewish dietary law. For Paul, the issue reduced to the absolute and exclusive centrality of Christ and that authentic humanity together with its inalienable freedoms is realisable in him alone.

This essay will cover key developments in the community life, worship, leadership and the redirection of its evangelical outreach as the Jesus Movement was gradually transformed into 'Church' during the century after the Apostles and Evangelists. Paper [HERE](#)

7. The Jesus Movement Part VII - The Third Century

"We appeared only yesterday, but now we fill your cities, your homes, your squares, your municipalities, the councils, the tribunes, the decuries (senatorial electorates), the palace, the Senate, and the Forum. We have left you nothing but your temples. Should we secede from you, you would be terrified by your own loneliness." - Tertullian (160-220 CE), Apology 37.

In this article some of the key elements in the history of the Jesus Movement in the third century will be examined. They include the success of its early mission to the Gentiles, its infiltration of the Greco-Roman host culture; its largely unobtrusive inculturation and gradual consolidation as an increasingly respected member of society as its collective wealth and influence grew to such an extent that the Jesus Movement was in a position to provide spiritual and social outreach to people regardless of race, social position or gender. A number of other elements specific to the history of Christianity in the third century will be covered briefly, notably the effects of Roman persecution on the Jesus Movement and the development of its internal community life and worship.

Changing the Eschatological Clock

It takes only a very short time before a good idea attracts a board of directors and a book of rules – With apologies to Jesus Christ (6 BCE – 33 CE) on what seemed like a good idea at the time.

Within a few decades of the first Christian Pentecost, the followers of the Jesus Movement were forced to do a radical reappraisal of themselves, their mission and their collective future. In its early years Christianity was gripped by a mood of intense expectation that its first generation would witness the return of the Lord. (1) As time went by and Christ had not reappeared, it became clearer that the Jesus Movement had to maintain its commitment to the mandate of Christ just prior to the Ascension to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28: 19-20)

Paper [Here](#)

Read full Paper [HERE](#)

8. The Jesus Movement Part VIII - Towards Nicaea

Introduction:

During over two hundred and fifty years leading up to the end of the third century CE, Christianity had largely migrated from rural Palestine and had taken root in the great cosmopolitan centres of the Empire where it had grown and flourish. The Jesus Movement had successfully adjusted to its new existence and had become an honest and respected citizen in the social and economic world of its host culture. Christians had become so successful that they had become essential in the effective functioning of almost all areas of Roman society. They not only benefited from the Pax Romana, they were instrumental in validating, promoting and guaranteeing its continuation.

When Constantine became the sole Emperor he enacted the Edict of Milan in 213 CE which not only put a stop to the State persecution of Christians but actually offered the Jesus Movement protected status. It was in the interests of Constantine and his Empire that unity within Christianity was an absolute necessity for guaranteeing stability and cohesion within the Empire. A major factor in guaranteeing this was the resolution to the issues of Christology (theology of Christ) which threatened the existence of the Christian Movement.

One of the greatest challenges in the history of the Church was to arrive at a theological point of convergence where finite language, imagination and analogy were brought together in order to define and profess the mysteries of the Trinity and the subsistence of the Eternal Word in the humanity of Jesus Christ.

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Catholics For Renewal

We welcome all Catholics who are committed to their faith and want a Church which is Christlike in all it does, providing leadership in the world based on the teachings of Christ. We are of the view that the institutional Church needs renewal in accordance with those teachings.

We call for an outward-facing Church whose leaders are accountable, transparent and inclusive, and which advocates unequivocally for the rights of the oppressed and disadvantaged while tending practically to their needs. Encouraged by a history of church renewal Church reform over the centuries has been continual, but has required great patience, too much patience.

Whilst daunted by the challenge ahead we are also encouraged by hopeful new signs of change, and some things that have already been achieved in recent times or are starting to happen. These include initiatives by Pope Francis, and global collaboration between a growing number of active national and international Church Reform and Renewal groups, thanks to unprecedented networking opportunities now readily available through new technology. Also see Church Mutation. Commitment We are not content with seeking renewal of the Church. We believe that we all have responsibilities to commit to a better world. This website refers to a variety of social concerns and also identifies particular issues in which Catholics for Renewal is active, including the important area of clerical child sexual abuse.