

Was Jesus a contrarian?

By JIM RYAN
Herald Special

33rd Sunday in
Ordinary Time
Mark 13:24-32

Jesus is a contrarian. This is what Mark would say if he'd read Robert Pirsig's new book, *Lila: An Inquiry into Morals*.

What would Mark mean by the above statement?

Well, that Jesus attacks every static moral pattern that he can find.

He attacks every "static moral pattern" that he can find?

Yes. Let me explain. Pirsig writes, "Each culture has its own pattern of static good derived from fixed laws and the traditions and values that underlie them. This pattern of static good is the essential structure of the culture itself and defines it."

Why does he attack it?

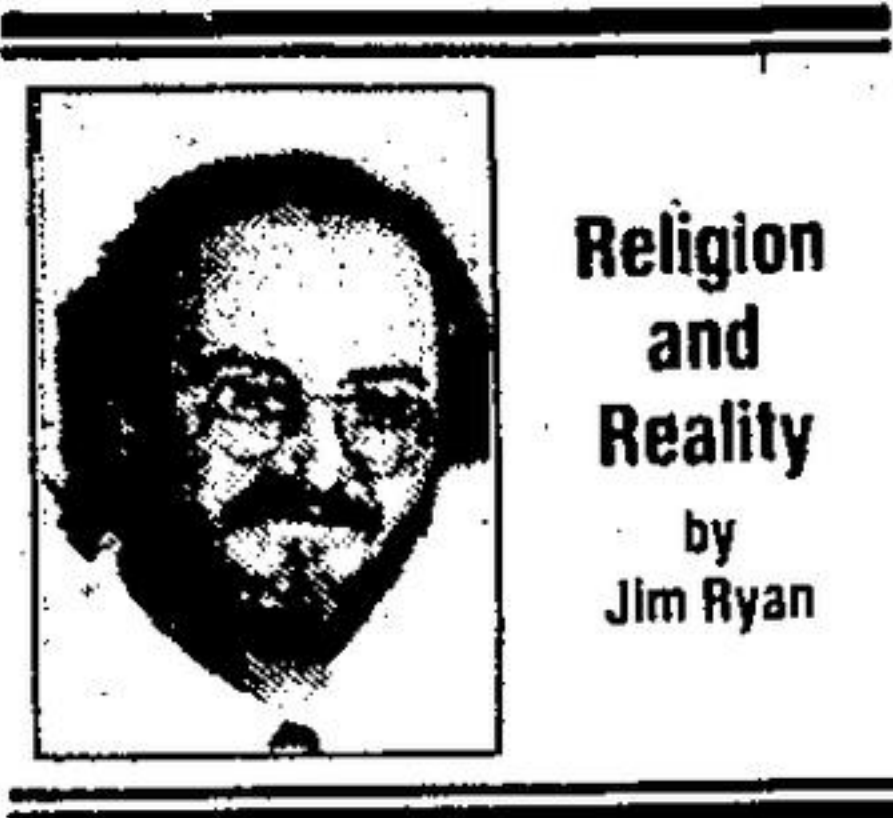
Because he finds that the static forms of the culture have become life denying rather than life-affirming.

Okay, but what distinguishes Jesus from any other person, take Lee Harvey Oswald for example, who happens to attack the law?

Well, according to Pirsig, Oswald fits into what he calls the negative contrarians.

Negative contrarians?

Yes, negative contrarians feel that a great wrong, a great injustice has been done to them and that they can resolve the injustice



Religion and Reality
by Jim Ryan

by attacking the static moral norms or patterns.

So he kills President Kennedy?

Right.

Are there any other examples of negative contrarians?

Yes. According to Pirsig, we're all negative contrarians from time to time. For example, no matter what we're supposed to do, well, that's the thing we least want to do. Do you know that feeling?

Yeah! How about every Monday morning.

Sometimes negative contrarians are into the ego thing. They think, "I'm too important to be doing all this dumb static stuff."

Yeah, that's true...

And sometimes negative contrarians become a static pattern of their own. They get on the negative contrarian roller coaster and they can't get off.

Okay, so what about Jesus?

Well, he's what Pirsig calls a positive contrarian.

That makes sense.

If Lee Harvey Oswald is degenerative or decadent, Jesus is Dynamic.

Are those Pirsig's terms?

Yes. Pirsig writes, "But sometimes it's Dynamic, where your whole being senses that the static situation is an enemy of life itself. That's what drives the really creative people - the artists, composers, revolutionaries and the like - the feeling that if they don't break out of this jailhouse somebody has built around them, they're going to die."

But they're not being contrary in a way that is just decadent. They're way too energetic and aggressive to be decadent. They're fighting for some kind of Dynamic freedom from the static patterns. But the Dynamic freedom is a kind of morality too. And it's a highly important part of the overall moral process. It's often confused with degeneracy but it's actually a form of moral regeneration. Without its continual refreshment static patterns would simply die of old age."

Hmm... Interesting.

Endnote: Robert Pirsig's book, *Lila: An Inquiry into Morals*, was published by Bantam in November of 1991. You might remember Pirsig's first book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.



Remembrance Day address

Rev. Mary Campbell of Norval Presbyterian Church addresses the crowds Sunday afternoon at the Georgetown Cenotaph during the annual Remembrance Day services. (Herald Photo)

It can be painful to remember

EDITOR'S NOTE: Due to time and space constraints, Rev. Ruggie's column with Remembrance Day as its theme, was not able to appear prior to Remembrance Day, observed Monday across Canada.

By RICHARDE E. RUGGLE
St. Paul's Church, Norval

A lot of us aren't old enough to remember two world wars. We've watched the TV coverage of the high-tech weaponry that was used in the Persian Gulf; but most of the victims were on the other side, and it all seems rather remote.

The annual observance of Remembrance Day reminds us that wars can command the energies of a nation, for years on end; and that its casualties can include your cousin, your son or your neighbour next door.

Wars are fraught with frustrations - their missed opportunities and their waste of life and their destructiveness can make them seem mere exercises in futility. Yet they often seem inescapable.

Armistice Day, as it has sometimes been known, recalls the cease-fire that ended the first world war, on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. During that war, some people thought about the God who shares human suffering. The German negotiator of the armistice, Mr.



Erzberger, said that his experience was like a Calvary (like the mountain where Jesus was crucified); his country was defeated, humiliated and left to the ravages of revolution, famine and disease.

A popular Canadian chaplain had similar thoughts. Though F.R. Scott was too old to serve, he managed to get overseas anyway. He compared Jesus' suffering to his own:

"For lonely graves along the country side,

Where sleep those brave hearts who for others died

Tell of life's union with the Crucified."

Along many European roads there are old wayside Calvaries, statues of Jesus on the cross. One wartime photograph is a wordless parable on the same theme. It shows one of these crosses, torn apart by machine-gun fire.

Many of the men in the trenches were not particularly religious. Only a handful attend-

ed services on the Easter Day just before the battle of Vimy Ridge, when Canadian soldiers achieved the breakthrough that had eluded the British for so long. But the men developed a sense of camaraderie, of looking out for one another. They were capable at times of heroic deeds, of putting others before themselves. And they often asked what it was all about.

After the armistice, the world faced new problems. An influenza epidemic took lives in Georgetown, and around the world caused more fatalities than the war itself. Depression and racial hatred created an atmosphere in which war erupted again.

It can be painful to remember the suffering that war has inflicted on people, on civilians as well as combatants. God is somehow there in the midst of our pain, as he was in the midst of theirs. And our memories, or the memories others share with us, remind us how our generation has been shaped, and call us to reflect on where we are headed.

Say: "I saw it in The Herald"

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