celebrates the resurrection of esus as the high points of hristian belief and experience

t is important to note that all four ospels are considered inspired scripture but also that most hristian traditions recognize that each ospel was written within a specific historical context to illustrate a specific religious purpose. The ospels of atthew ark and uke give very similar accounts of these events primarily because all three ospels were written drawing upon similar sources. The ospel of ohn is quite different depicting another chronology of events much dissimilarity in the spoken words of esus and a conflicting account especially of the reactions of those who were present during and after esus' death

Il of the ospels were written well after esus died none of the ospels as we have them today were written by eyewitnesses to the events as they happened Therefore no assion play or film of the assion can be accepted as anything like a "documentary" of what happened to esus each is a religiously interpreted account of the *meaning* of his death and resurrection

W T S SS Y

assion play is a dramatic representation of the assion narrative assion plays are among the earliest dramas in the hristian Western world dating back to uring the iddle ges hristians began to feel a need to dramatize the events and emotions in the last days of esus' life especially of his assion t is thought that assion plays developed from lyrical compositions originally associated with the veneration of the cross on ood riday

assion plays became widely popular across urope especially during ent and oly Week Some were presented in congregations and some in more theatrical settings like the assion play of berammergau ermany which remains the most famous and continues to be performed today

assion plays remain as a dramatic source of inspiration for hristians a "living" way to reflect on the events most central to their faith to identify with them and to understand them at a deeper level s faith reenactments they are important in the spirituality of hristianity They bring to life the basic event of hristian commitment esus' death and resurrection meant to nurture the religious feeling of those who view them

They are not meant to be indictments of ews or to blame ews or persons of other faiths for the death of esus

W T ST T TW T S T S SS YS

n the ospel of atthew when ilate declares himself innocent of esus' death it is said "n all the people answered 'is blood be on us and on our children "th ver the course of time hristians began to accept this interpretation of the crucifixion to mean that the ewish people as a whole were responsible for killing esus coording to this interpretation both the ews present at esus' death and the ewish people collectively and for all time have committed the sin of deicide or od killing or years of hristian ewish

hristian communities of the first three centuries
The hristian ospels reflect only some of this diversity

This in part helps to explain why much of hristian Scriptures were written in a controversial style that often portrayed ews and esus—and therefore udaism and hristianity—as adversarial There are four different accounts of esus' death in the ospels and ews play different roles in each of them

t is understood by most hristian traditions that a strictly historical reconstruction of what happened during the last days of esus on earth is not possible. The motivating forces behind the gospels were theological and apologetic not historical accuracy. The gospel writers' accounts reflect the experiences of those who transmitted them part transmitted knowledge and part faith.

Succeeding generations of hristians construed the theological thrust of ohn's use of the term "loudaioi" which may refer to ews who did not follow esus to mean a negative judgment on all ews for all time This depiction of ews formed the basis of the image of the ew as the "hrist killer" n fact concerns by ewish authorities did contribute to esus' arrest owever Roman authorities sentenced and executed esus for sedition against the Roman mpire—a treasonable offense punishable by death

esus' conviction by the Romans carried with it the danger of persecution for all who followed him or identified with his teachings. We know that persecution of early hristians under Roman rule was brutal and widespread in their own defense and maintaining that esus was innocent of any crime against Rome these early hristians explained the crucifixion of esus under Roman authority as the result of a weak Roman governor who succumbed to ewish pressure

This resulted in the gradual vindication of Rome which made hristianity the official religion of the state in the th century and an equal exaggeration of ewish treachery. The Roman emperor onstantine removed fear of Roman persecution forever in the dict of ilan saying the hristians and it has pleased us to remove all conditions whatsoever which were in the prescripts formerly given to you officially concerning the hristians and now any one of these who wishes to observe hristian religion may do so freely and openly without molestation were however were not protected by these stated religious freedoms

RS S U TS

or reference and to illustrate that in many places it is clear that persons who are portrayed as abusing esus are not specifically referred to as ews below are citations of the assion and death of esus from his "agony" in the arden of ethsemane until just before he is taken from the cross followed by a comparison of verses from each ospel translations are from the Revised Standard Version

atthew hapters

owever there are those who have interpreted the ospels to refer to "all the ews" as meaning that the ews were in collusion with Rome to execute esus nowing that the Romans had absolute authority over all affairs of state negates this misinterpretation of history

n our own day ope ohn aul has stated that the anti Semitic theology that ews bear responsibility for the death of esus is an "unjust and erroneous interpretation" of hristian scriptures n accurate reading of the ospels history and current atholic theology all indicate that while some ews did oppose esus they were few in number and represented neither udaism nor the ewish people collectively

should aim to present ews and udaism in an honest and objective manner free from prejudice and without offenses "

The ishops' ommittee emphasizes that the atholic hurch and the ewish people are linked together at the very core of their identity and that an accurate sensitive and positive appreciation of ews and udaism "should not occupy an occasional or marginal place in hristian teaching" but should be considered "essential" to hristian proclamation

ccording to the ational ouncil of atholic ishops any presentation of the assion that explicitly or implicitly seeks to shift responsibility from human sin onto an historical group such as the ews can only be said to obscure a core gospel truth "orrectly viewed the disappearance of the charge of collective guilt of ews pertains as much to the purity of atholic faith as it does to the defense of udaism"

W USTS RT

earn more about the important theological issues raised by this film e prepared to engage in conversation from an informed perspective about the issues covered in this guide ontinue to educate yourself and others about theology art and our religious lives

ost importantly be prepared to challenge your own preconceived thoughts beliefs attitudes and ideas or many of us these assumptions may be deeply held and uncomfortable to bring into the open onsult with religious advisors

- " xcerpts from Roman atholic agisterial Teaching ocuments on the rucifixion" by hillip unningham <a href="http://https
- " ostra etate" eclaration of the Relationship of the hurch to on hristian Religions Second Vatican ouncil

On The Death of Jesus: Jewish and Christian Interpretations by r ugene isher ssociate irector Secretariat for cumenical and nterreligious ffairs United States onference on atholic ishops and Rabbi eon lenicki onsultant for nterfaith ffairs nti efamation eague

Passion Plays and Judaism, edited by Rabbi eon lenicki ublished by the nti efamation eague in cooperation with the ational ouncil of atholic ishops—Secretariat for cumenical and nterreligious ffairs and the ational ouncil of hurches—nterfaith Relations ommission

ordon R ork "Wicked ews' and 'Suffering hristians' in the berammergau assion lay" n Representations of Jews throughout the Ages

S S RS T <u>V W R'S U</u>

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