Ancient Textual and Modern Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Early Christianity

A Critical Bibliography

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Board of Trustees of Mt. San Antonio College for providing this opportunity to pursue my interest in early Christianity. I would also like to thank the Sabbatical and Leaves Committee for recommending approval of this project.

Sabbatical Application

of Michael Sullivan, English

CHANGES TO THE PRELIMINARY READING LIST AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE PROJECT WERE APPROVED BY COMMITTEE ON 5 MARCH 2003. THE FINAL REPORT REFLECTS THOSE CHANGES.

Project Title:

Ancient Textual and Modern Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Early Christianity

Background:

Since 1995 (following the retirement of Professor Larry Parker, who had taught the courses almost exclusively for many years), I have taught courses in the Bible as Literature: Old Testament (LIT 46) and New Testament (LIT 47). My qualifications to teach the courses consisted at first of only a Religion minor as an undergraduate at Hamilton College and, of course, the Ph.D. in English. Since that time, I've attempted to increase my knowledge in this very broad field, which incorporates elements of ancient history, sociology, archaeology, anthropology, psychology, theology, and mythology, as well as literature and language.

But the breadth of the field and the enormous advances that have characterized

scholarship in the past 125 years in the study of biblical texts, ancient peoples, and the "historical Jesus" have made it difficult to become as knowledgeable as I would like to be, given the other demands of teaching English at a community college. As an example, the discovery in 1945 of a hidden library of ancient texts of the early Christian era at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, has revolutionized our understanding of the diversity within the Jesus Movement (as it has come to be called) prior to the establishment of Christianity as a state religion in the early 4th century. These texts, alongside their more famous cousins, the Dead Sea Scrolls (discovered two years later in Palestine), have caused scholars to rethink established theories of 1st to 4th century Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, resulting in hundreds of publications representing numerous new theoretical frameworks.

Project Purpose and Scope:

I propose to study an eclectic collection of late Jewish (ca. 300 BCE-100 CE) deuterocanonical and extracanonical texts and early Christian (ca. 50-300 CE) extracanonical texts and to read recent theoretical scholarship regarding the Jesus Movement, 1st century CE Palestine, and the development of the christos myth. While I cannot hope to read all that has been published on these subjects, I have chosen primary and scholarly texts that should allow me to emerge much better informed about recent thought regarding the forces that contributed to early

Christianity.

I have attached a proposed reading list. The list is necessarily partial, as I expect that my reading will lead in directions unforeseen at this time. Nevertheless, the secondary sources include recent works by highly-regarded researchers and theoreticians in the field and should serve as a satisfactory basis for continuing study. In particular, I have listed several researchers whose work is characteristic of contemporary Jesus studies, including Crossan, Fredricksen, Mack, Pagels, and others.

Listed primary sources comprise most of the Gnostic and other extracanonical Christian texts from the Nag Hammadi discovery, as well as late deuterocanonical and extracanonical Hebrew texts from post-exilic Jewish writers and the Essenes (the producers of the Dead Sea Scrolls).

Project Outcome:

The published outcome of the study will be a critical bibliography that will certainly be useful to me in developing lecture material for the Bible as Literature courses (particularly LIT 47); in addition, I hope to make it available to students in those courses and to colleagues who have a teaching or other interest in the subject.

Project Schedule:

Much of the reading in primary sources will be done in the first semester of the leave, and the secondary sources will occupy the second semester; however, as I mentioned before, I anticipate that the reading may take me in unforeseen directions, and I would like some flexibility to accommodate that eventuality. It may prove helpful, for instance, to study Pagels in conjunction with the Gnostic texts. My intent is to have read all the items on the list by the end of the leave; the order in which they are read is inconsequential. The critical bibliography will be written continuously as the reading progresses.

A tentative schedule, then, follows:

August –October—Essene and other pre-Christian Jewish texts

November-January—Gnostic texts

February-May—secondary texts

Preliminary Reading List: Secondary Texts

Callaway, Joseph A., et al. Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple. Biblical Archaeology Society: Washington, 1999.

Crossan, John Dominic. The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus. HarperCollins: San Francisco, 1998.

-----. The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story. Polebridge: Sonoma, 1988.

----- Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography. HarperCollins: San Francisco, 1994.

Fredriksen, Paula. Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity. Knopf: 1999.

Horsley, Richard A. and John S. Hanson. Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus. Trinity: 1999.

Mack, Burton. The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy. Continuum: New York, 2001.

The Oxford History of the Biblical World (selected chapters). Michael D. Coogan, ed. Oxford: New York, 1998.

Pagels, Elaine. The Gnostic Gospels. Vintage: New York, 1979.

-----. The Origin of Satan. Vintage: New York, 1995.

Patterson, Stephen, Marcus Borg, and John Dominic Crossan. The Search for Jesus: Modern Scholarship Looks at the Gospels. Biblical Archaeology Society: Washington, 1994.

Rogerson, J. W. An Introduction to the Bible (selections). Penguin: 1999.

Shanks, Hershel. The Mystery and Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Randon: New York, 1998.

Stegemann, Ekkehard W. The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century. Fortress: 1999.

Preliminary Reading List: Deuterocanonical and Extracanonical Texts

1 Clement

Acts of Andrew

Acts of John

Acts of Paul

Acts of Peter

Acts of Peter and the Twelve

Acts of Thomas

Apocalypse of Peter

Book of Thomas the Contender

Daniel

Dialogue of the Savior

Didache

Ecclesiasticus

Enoch

Epistle of Barnabas

Ezra

Gospel of Mary

Gospel of Peter

Gospel of the Egyptians

Gospel of the Hebrews

Gospel of Thomas

Gospel of Truth

Haggai

Infancy Gospel of James

Infancy Gospel of Thomas

Maccabees

Nehemiah

Secret James

Secret Mark

Selected Essene Texts

Shepherd of Hermas

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

Purpose, Conclusions, and Value

This sabbatical report is the product of my intensive study of early (prior to 400 CE) Christian non-canonical literature; related Jewish texts, canonical and non-canonical; and selected contemporary scholars whose interest is the Jesus of history or the varieties of Jewish and Christian religious experience in ancient times. My goal was to achieve a better understanding of the Jesus movements that predated the codified state religion of the fourth century, through study of their literatures and of the cultural context of their Greco-Roman world.

I selected Jewish and non-canonical Christian texts based on their relevance to that goal. I selected contemporary scholars whose respected reputations are apparent in the frequency with which other writers cite them and whose research is not substantially apologetic. My selection of texts, then, reflects my own interests and biases. Similarly, what I have chosen to write about them by way of summary and analysis reflects what I found interesting, fresh, or disputable and constitutes the "conclusions" of my research. The intention of the project and this report is not to provide a primer on early Christianity but to augment my own and my students' understanding of the Christian phenomenon. That knowledge will enhance my teaching of the Bible as Literature courses and provide students with written information derived from this report and supplemental to classroom lectures. Chapters of the report have been made available to LIT 47 students through my web site, http://elearn.mtsac.edu/msullivan.

Abbreviations

Titles of Textual Sources

DSS The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English. Geza Vermes, ed. New York: Penguin, 1997.

ECW earlychristianwritings.com

NHL *The Nag Hammadi Library*. James M. Robinson, ed. Third Edition. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990.

NTA *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol.2. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, eds. and trans. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963. Reprinted in *The Other Bible*. Willis Barnstone, ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984.

OB *The Other Bible*. Willis Barnstone, ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984.

OSB *Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha*. New York: Oxford, 1992.

OTP *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol.1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*. The Anchor Bible Reference Library. James H. Charlesworth, ed. Doubleday: New York, 1883.

SV Scholars Version. *The Complete Gospels*. Robert J. Miller, ed. Third Edition. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994.

Other Abbreviations

BCE Before the Common Era (equivalent to B.C.)
c. century
CE Common Era (equivalent to A.D.)
Trans. Translated by ...

STUDIES OF THE "HISTORICAL" JESUS AND HIS TIME

Defining the "Historical" Jesus

For at least the past century, scholars and students of the Bible have recognized the inadequacy of the canonical gospels to reconstruct a Jesus of history as opposed to a Jesus of literary creation. Not originally intended as history, the gospels acquired a mystique over the years that implied factuality when they are actually highly imaginative versions of various communities' understanding of a revered figure from the past. Not unlike other hagiographic literature, the gospels create and develop stories intended to show how their central character was special, how he surpassed other men in remarkable ways.

When I consider the gospels in the context of similar literature from both ancient and modern times, I am reminded of Parson Weems' influential nineteenth century biography of George Washington. Weems, a minister of questionable credentials and opportunistic motives, invented the famous story of the young Washington's remarkable honesty and superior virtue in the case of the hewn cherry tree. Then, in describing Washington's death, Weems manages to involve much of the cosmos, including the seraphim and cherubim, in the event. He goes so far as to have Washington assumed into Heaven. In short, Weems is clear about his purpose—to beatify former President Washington—and uses whatever miracles he can to accomplish it.

The Jesus mythology was developed over a period of several centuries, in various culturally-distinct locations, by anonymous writers who knew their subject only through tradition and hearsay. The traditional attribution of authorship of the canonical gospels to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all presumed to be contemporaries of Jesus or students or associates of his first disciples, is a fiction that comes to us partly from Papias, an early second-century cleric who, like most churchmen of his era, believed that apostolic acquaintance with Jesus was required to establish a writer's authority. Papias' writing is no longer extant, but he is quoted in Eusebius' *Church History*. Curiously, although Eusebius reports Papias' opinions on the subject, he does so with some contempt, after writing that "he [Papias] was a man of very limited intelligence, as is clear from his books" (3.39; 129). In fact, the earliest gospel was written a good forty years after the execution of Jesus and after Jesus' closest associates were themselves dead. And linguistic and literary analysis of the gospels indicates that they were written outside Judea, where Peter and James established their church.

Reconstructing a Jesus of history is difficult for several reasons. Besides the unreliability of the received texts for documentary purposes, there is the problem of Jesus' social class. All stories about him stress his peasant background; assuming this detail is likely true, then, it is safe to say that Jesus, like every other peasant of

that or any time, went largely unnoticed. As a peasant, he certainly was not literate (if he could quote scripture, it was because every Jew could do so—religion permeated daily life, regardless of social class or education), nor would any record have been kept of his existence. Peasants collectively may be useful for feeding the upper class but peasants as individuals have no inherent personal value to an imperial government and are usually invisible to history.

Most scholars assume that Jesus did exist (a necessary point of departure where history is concerned). But outside the gospels and ecclesiastical literature, the evidence is not overwhelming. The evidence (perhaps too definite a term) comes in the form of references primarily to Christians, rather than to Jesus, and none of it is earlier than the late first century, there being no contemporary mention of Jesus at all. Whereas the identities of various characters in the gospel narratives can be established through outside references (Pilate, for instance, or Annas and Caiaphas, or Tiberias Caesar—basically anyone whom the Greco-Roman world would have thought of consequence), there are no such references to a Jesus of Nazareth.

Four sources are traditionally cited to place Jesus in history (quoted below from Crossan, *Birth*): Josephus (in the early 90s CE), Pliny the Younger (in 111), Tacitus (in 115), and Suetonius (after 122). The latter three refer to Christianity as a "depraved" or "pernicious" or "mischievous" superstition. Josephus is studiously neutral.

Pliny, legate to Bithynia-Pontus, writes to the emperor Trajan for direction regarding how he should deal with Christians, whose monotheism has upset the economy of his district. Trajan humanely suggests that no pogrom should be initiated but that if someone were accused of Christianity and failed to repent by performing the perfunctory obligation to the Roman gods required of all citizens he should be punished.

Tacitus, whose purpose in *Histories* is to trace the fall of the Flavian dynasty, says this in explanation of who Christians were (in the context of Nero's having blamed them for the burning of Rome in 64 CE): "Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition was checked for the moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue."

Suetonius mentions Christianity briefly in his biography of Nero. Josephus, in a discussion of Pontius Pilate in *Jewish Antiquities*, writes: "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man. for he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest

standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared." Of the four, Josephus' is the longest and most neutral, but its content is unreliable, as *Antiquities* was heavily redacted by later Christian writers (I've removed the most egregious redactions; Josephus, a Jew, would not have written "He was the Messiah."). Taken together, the four "contemporary," references to Jesus and Christians by non-Christian writers sixty and more years after the fact hardly give us much to go on, saying nothing specific about a Jesus and little more than that there were self-named "Christians" from Nero's time to Pliny's.

The seriousness of the problem struck me recently when I received the November/December 2002 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*. *BAR* was the first publication to announce the discovery of an ossuary, or "bone box," in Jerusalem with the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." (There is some controversy about the punctuation of the inscription, which is in Aramaic, an unpunctuated language. The placement of commas by the translators—or the non-use of them, which is another possibility—can alter the meaning of the inscription. See below.) Jewish burial practices from 1 BCE to 70 CE involved first placing the body "in a niche carved into the wall of a burial cave," then "about a year after this primary burial, when the corpse's flesh had decayed" transferring the

bones to an ossuary, which could contain the bones of more than one person. The apparent purpose of this short-lived practice of "ossilegium" was to make "room for additional primary burials inside the burial cave" (Lemaire 26-27).

All well and good. What I found disturbing, however, was that some two thousand years after Jesus of Nazareth is alleged to have lived, *BAR* exclaims triumphantly on its cover "Evidence of Jesus Written in Stone." A long wait for "evidence," however tenuous. And regrettably (to the historian), the ossuary is not evidence of Jesus at all, only of someone named James whose bones once inhabited it. That the names Joseph and Jesus appear in the inscription could be merely coincidental. All three names were very common in ancient times, so it is not unlikely that three kinsmen could be so named. Add to that the punctuational dilemma—does "brother of Jesus" modify James (as the editors of *BAR* assume) or does it modify Joseph, making the inscription irrelevant to the search for a historical Jesus?

My point is that the search for the "historical" (the quotation marks suggesting the tentativity of the enterprise) Jesus is only as credible as the sources it relies on. For Christian apologists, the gospels—as self- and mutually-contradictory as they are—will suffice. But serious historians require multiple attestation before declaring something a historical fact. Some of the more recent studies incorporate archaeology, sociology, and economic history into their search, using the biblical

literature as a guide to what various Christian communities believed rather than as an evidentiary source. In other words, they attempt to reconstruct Jesus in the context of his own time rather than from the point of view of later history, by which time the Christian myth had been fully elaborated. These works, some of which appear here, provide us with perhaps the most useful approaches to the Jesus of history.

Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity
Fredriksen, Paula. New York: Knopf, 2000.

In this study, Fredriksen departs from some elements of her earlier work in reconstructing a historical Jesus (*From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*), arguing that a reconstruction of the Jesus of history use as its point of departure two incontrovertible facts that constitute "a crucial anomaly": "Jesus was executed as a political insurrectionist [crucifixion having been a punishment "reserved particularly for political insurrectionists"], but his followers were not (9). The challenge of such a reconstruction is to overcome anachronisms, such as those imposed on the Jesus story by the evangelists, who impute to Jesus their own "post-Temple religious consciousness" and by modern scholars who imagine Jesus to have been concerned with the social justice questions of our time.

Various problems arise from the gospel writers' portraits of Jesus. For example, "the question of their communities' relations with Gentiles, with gentile culture, and with imperial government looms much larger for the evangelists than it could have for Jesus himself" (19). The gospels contradict one another frequently, reflecting the conflicting traditions of their authors. For example, nativity stories appear only in Matthew and Luke. According to Luke, Mary and Joseph travel from their home in Nazareth (in Galilee) to Bethlehem (in Judea, where the scriptures

say a messiah will emerge), presumably to enroll for tax purposes (an absurd claim, since tax censuses were performed in the places where people actually lived and worked, rather than, as Luke claims, in the towns of their birth; since the census alluded to occurred in 6 CE, years after Jesus' birth; and since that census involved Judea, not Galilee). After the birth, according to Luke, they return to Nazareth. Matthew, on the other hand, has Mary and Joseph already living in Bethlehem. According to Matthew, Herod has heard that a messiah is to be born and orders the slaying of all newborn boys, to escape which decree Mary and Joseph flee with Jesus to Egypt, returning after Herod's death (Herod died in 4 BCE!) to live in Nazareth.

Fredriksen points out, logically, that, even if credibility is assumed for either story, both versions cannot be true. Similarly, the passion narratives differ regarding Jesus' alleged appearance before the Jewish council. Mark and Matthew have Jesus appear before a large convocation of Jewish leaders twice, at night, following the Passover seder. In both versions, Jesus, under the heated questioning of the high priest, admits to being the christ and is accused of blasphemy. Luke, though, has no night trial. His morning conference contains no dialogue with the high priest, nor is there a charge of blasphemy. And John has no trial scene at all, just a simple interview, the night before the seder, alone with Annas and Caiphas. As with the conflicting birth stories, the trial traditions are mutually exclusive.

Fredriksen's point about anachronism takes into account the evangelists' liberal use of Jewish scriptures in the formation of their stories and whether "the existence of the scriptural image did not create the details or even the action of the story. Put differently: The source for a Gospel story about Jesus might lie not in some transmitted tradition going back to a contemporary eyewitness in the early first century, when Jesus lived, but in the religious authority of the distant biblical past. [As a consequence,] we learn little ... about Jesus of Nazareth himself" (27). She argues sensibly that the evangelists' anachronistic use of ancient scripture in their portraits of Jesus is understandable, considering the post-Temple context in which they wrote and their need to have the Jesus of the early first century speak the language of the post-Temple age, similar to the way later Christians have reinvented Jesus to make him relevant to their times. But anachronism is the enemy of the historian.

Fredriksen begins by identifying the single most significant difference between modern and ancient religion: blood sacrifice and purity regulations. Blood sacrifice and purity rules formed the common link among <u>all</u> ancient forms of worship. Consequently, it was quite normal for thousands of pagan gentiles, for whom multiple religious allegiances were the norm, to worship the Jewish god in the Jerusalem Temple; for that reason they had their own courtyard on the Temple Mount, "the largest one, which circumscribed the Temple area" (61).

The Temple existed primarily for the performance of continual sacrifice to the Jewish god. But strict rules (the purity regulations) governed one's suitability for worship. Various bodily functions and many common experiences, including menstruation, sexual relations, disease, or contact with the diseased or dead, were believed to make an individual impure and unsuitable to enter the Temple precincts. Fredriksen points out that "the remedy for impurity is purification and not (as some scholars, confusing impurity with sin, have argued) forgiveness" (67). Elaborate purification procedures governed one's restoration to purity (perhaps the most common of which was baptism or bathing).

Furthermore, "Jews viewed the Torah as the exclusive privilege and responsibility of Israel ... Its commandments, accordingly, were incumbent only upon Jews" (69). Thus, Gentiles were not subject to Jewish purity regulations (many cults had their own). The point is that Temple worship was ecumenical—no one was refused, and all were welcome. The mix of religions in worship at the Jerusalem Temple indicates a comfortable coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in Jesus' time.

Fredriksen discusses "Jewish apocalyptic expectation," which, although it typically did not involve a messiah, did anticipate "the Gentiles' turning to the God of Israel as one of the events of the End of Days," and also "featured Jerusalem as the center of the Kingdom" and the return of "the ten lost tribes of the Northern Kingdom

that had been swallowed up by Assyria after 722 BCE" (95). Jesus, Fredriksen maintains, believed that the arrival of the Kingdom was imminent, using as evidence Paul's insistence on an imminent Parousia as well as Mark's breathless expectation of the kingdom in his gospel. Of course, the kingdom didn't come, and as the first century proceeded without it, kingdom talk becomes much less frequent in the later gospels.

With regard to Torah observance, particularly of purity laws, "what Paul, midcentury, said to Gentiles makes no sense as a message that Jesus, some twenty years earlier, would have said to fellow Jews" (106). Fredriksen demonstrates, compellingly, that the Jesus of history was very much an observant Jew, keeping the sabbath, paying the temple tax, and observing purity regulations, although the impression given by the evangelists, anachronistically (the Temple having been destroyed and all worship-related regulations having come into question), suggests otherwise. Modern interpreters' "dichotomy of 'ethical' vs. 'ritual' is itself intrinsically anachronistic. It is a modern distinction, resting on the perceived externality (hence moral superficiality) of ritual in favor of (implicitly more authentic) ethics. But people in antiquity did not distinguish these behaviors in these terms" (109). Similarly, Paul's message to the Gentiles is in keeping with Jewish non-expectation of gentile observance of Jewish law, but it is certainly not what Jesus taught to an exclusively Jewish audience.

With regard to messiahship, Fredriksen points out that "the Judaism preceding and contemporary with ancient Christianity knew no tradition of a resurrected messiah, and thus nothing of a dying messiah" (126). In fact, messianic expectation was very limited in scope, a belief held by a relatively small number. By identifying Jesus as from Nazareth, rather than Bethlehem, Mark and John defeat the notion of a Davidic messiah. Yet Matthew and Luke appear to be at great pains to make Jesus just that.

Fredriksen also takes on two popular beliefs: that Galilee in Jesus' time was a hotbed of dissent and radicalism and that Rome routinely persecuted Christians and other religious groups. In fact, Galilee, unlike Judea, was remarkably tranquil under the "long, unbroken, and stable regime of Herod Antipas" (176). And as for religious persecution, in 41 CE, after the death of Caligula, Claudius restored religious tolerance and special rights of Jews throughout the empire, benefits that had been enjoyed during the lifetime of Jesus. With regard to Christians, "'Rome' as such had no policy of persecuting Christians up until the emperor Decius in 250 CE," and even then Jewish Christians were exempt from Roman cultic requirements imposed on all citizens (175-176).

She examines the gospel accounts of the famous "cleansing of the Temple" and asks,

reasonably, "cleansed of what?" The traditional view, that Jesus was concerned with "'cleansing' the holy site of commerce, makes little sense, as money-changing and the sale of pigeons and other animals for sacrifice was a necessary and expected element of a visit to the Temple. There was no common monetary system throughout the far-flung Roman Empire, so worshippers from outside Judea would have to engage in money exchange to make a cash offering; and it would be absurd to expect pilgrims from Syria or Egypt or even Galilee to bring live animals with them. Besides, this commerce occurred outside the Temple gates" (207-208). Moreover, Jews throughout the empire voluntarily "supported the Temple service" (209); there was no objection to sacrifice, and the half-shekel Temple tax was paid willingly even in the diaspora. Fredriksen concludes that Jesus' overturning tables "had nothing to do with any supposed 'cleansing,' criticism, or condemnation. In symbolizing apocalyptic destruction, it pointed ahead to eschatological renewal and rebuilding. Jesus' gesture was simply a dramatic performance of the chief message of his mission, that the Kingdom was, indeed, at hand" (210). Still, the story itself (in all its versions) presents problems. The synoptics present it as the signal event that brings Jesus to the attention of the Temple authorities (John, on the other hand, places it at the beginning of Jesus' travels). Yet the likelihood of a little table-upsetting being even noticed is slim. The colonnade where the money-changers were located would have been quite crowded with people (it was Passover time). The priests would have been nowhere in the area, as they would

have been up to their elbows in sacrificial blood in the Temple itself (Passover was their busiest time of year). So who would have noticed? And Paul, who writes long before the time of the gospel writers, makes no mention of it at all. The incident, and the Temple priests' involvement in it, is likely a literary fiction used to bring Jesus to the attention of the authorities.

Fredriksen looks elsewhere for an answer to her central questions (why was Jesus executed, and why were his followers not?). Turning to the "triumphal" entry into Jerusalem, as it is depicted by the synoptics, she maintains that "little in these Gospel traditions—though the evangelists would have liked it—points to Jesus' putting himself forward as messiah in any way. ...But if Jesus had taught many times in Jerusalem, and thus if Pilate already knew that Jesus in every practical way was harmless, then this scene's basic historicity—pilgrim crowds hailed Jesus as messiah as they all coursed into Jerusalem the week preceding this last Passover—can stand without whittling down its scale or significance. The crowds' action called forth no Roman response precisely because Pilate knew that the message of Jesus' movement posed no threat to Roman power" (242-243).

Jesus had taught throughout his ministry that the Kingdom of God was imminent. Fredriksen speculates that his teaching had pointed to this particular Passover as the time of the coming of the Kingdom. It was the crowds, rather than Jesus himself,

who linked the coming of the Kingdom with the coming of a Davidic messiah, a warrior-king, and, in their fervor at the outset of this Passover week, acclaimed Jesus that messiah, thus bringing him to the attention of Roman authority. That Pilate executed Jesus as an insurrectionist, using the form of capital punishment intended for that crime, despite knowing that Jesus himself had neither claimed to be a messiah nor was he an insurrectionist, is more a masterful method of crowd control on Pilate's part (crucifixion being an excellent, very public deterrent to insurrection) than an indictment of Jesus himself.

In her "Afterword," Fredriksen distinguishes Jesus from other contemporary preachers of the Kingdom: from John the Baptist, Theudas, the Egyptian, and the signs prophets. The difference was not the message, but the timetable, which Jesus had changed "from *soon* to *now*" (266). Perhaps having said or implied that the Kingdom's coming would be associated with this very Passover, "Jesus galvanized crowds gathered in Jerusalem who were not socialized to his mission—its pacifist tenor, its emphasis on divine rather than human action—and who in praising the approaching Kingdom proclaimed him Son of David and Messiah. It was this combustible mix of factors—the excited popular acclaim, in Jerusalem at its most densely populated pilgrim festival, when Pilate was in town specifically to keep his eye on the crowd—*not* his teaching as such, nor his arguments with other Jews on the meaning of Sabbath, Temple, purity or some other aspect of Torah, that led

directly to Jesus' execution as King of the Jews" (266).

In conclusion, Fredriksen distinguishes between the task of the theologian and that of the historian with regard to Jesus of Nazareth. "A theological construction of Jesus can appropriately strive to relate this foundational figure to the concerns and customs of the modern believing community," and many disparate theological interpretations will result (269). On the other hand, "a historical construction of Jesus looks for what Jesus meant to those who followed him in their own lifetimes, and his," placing Jesus not in a modern context but "as coherently and compellingly as possible, in his own" (270).

The strength of Frederiksen's book lies in its disinclination to use the gospels as historical sources. Her answers to two important questions in Jesus studies are logically-argued and well-supported.

The followers of Jesus, as she and others have pointed out, did not expect him to be executed. Their behavior following his death—the movement essentially falls apart for a time while the disciples regroup—is evidence of that. Their development of a resurrection mythology, utterly disconsonant with Jesus' actual teaching or with mainstream Jewish theology of the time, attests to their need to believe that the Kingdom was, indeed, imminent, as Jesus had taught. The myth of Jesus' return, or

Parousia, dominated the work of Paul and of later Christians who traced their lineage to the Jerusalem Church. Although the myth lost some of its luster as the years passed without the imagined return, it became a cornerstone of orthodox Christianity and persists among Christian groups to this day.

The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus

Crossan, John Dominic. HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

The Birth of Christianity is, in my opinion, Crossan's *chef d'oeuvre*. Like his other studies of the historical Jesus and early Christianity, it is written lucidly; but the complexity of the argument and the multiple threads of Crossan's discussion require the reader's constant attention. It is one of those books that should be read in one sitting, but its length (over 600 pages) is prohibitive. That said, *Birth* is a monumental accomplishment in its purpose, scope, and execution.

Crossan's central purpose is to achieve a reconstruction of the interaction between "the historical Jesus and his companions and the continuation of that relationship despite his execution" (xxi). Presupposing, and with good historical reason for doing so, that "[i]t is not enough to say that the vision of a dead man birthed Christianity, because that, at least in the first century and probably in every century since, is not special enough of itself to explain anything. Neither is it enough to say that the vision of a dead man was interpreted as the start of the general resurrection and that interpretation birthed Christianity" (xxi). As Crossan correctly points out in his Prologue, substantiating his point with examples from ancient texts and from modern psychiatry, visions of the dead returned to life were in ancient times (and

are today) *de rigeur*, quite ordinary elements of natural human grieving for the deceased. Thus, Christianity could not have had its start because, as is widely asserted, post-death appearances of Jesus were unique; in fact, human experience shows that such appearances were, and are, quite ordinary. What would be unique would be grief without such appearances. Visions of the dead Jesus aside, then, what was there in the relationship between Jesus and his associates that caused its continuation after his death?

Crossan's exploration of this question is limited in time to the period immediately after Jesus's execution. Paul, whose letters dating from the mid-50's are considered by many to be the earliest statements of Christian belief, is outside that period. Crossan includes Paul "not in the birth of Christianity but rather in its growth and development" (xxi) for four reasons: he does "not think Paul was as important theologically or historically in the first Christian century as he was in the sixteenth Christian century"; because we have no contemporary texts from the 20s or 30s CE, "we tend to move much too swiftly ... to the historical Paul in the 50s (where we do have contemporary texts)"; "If you begin with Paul, you will interpret Jesus incorrectly; if you begin with Jesus, you will interpret Paul differently"; and lastly, "the Platonic dualism that had influenced Philo, Paul, and Josephus had not so influenced John the Baptist, Jesus, and James, nor ... the Essenes and the Pharisees before the rabbis" (xxi, xxvii). It is necessary to remove Paul from a discussion of

Christian origins precisely because Christianity had to have already been born before Paul came along to notice, persecute, and convert to it.

Crossan concludes his Prologue with several definitions. First, by "Christian" or "Christianity" he means "a sect within Judaism," not a religion separate from Judaism, as it was later characterized. Second, by "birth" he means "the earliest continuation from before to after the execution of Jesus," as distinguished from "growth," which refers to the expansion of the Jesus movements (and their Hellenization) from Paul onward. Finally, he distinguishes between "two great inaugural traditions" that constitute the organization of the rest of the book: the Life Tradition, "with its emphasis on the sayings of Jesus and on living within the kingdom of God" and which "is centered on Galilee and goes out from Galilee" and the Death Tradition, "with its emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus and on lives lived in expectation of his return" and which "is centered in Jerusalem and goes out from Jerusalem." He identifies the common element between the two traditions as the "Common Meal Tradition" (xxxiii-xxxiv).

Crossan discusses what he calls a "war" among four gospel types: sayings gospels, such as *Q* and *Thomas*; biography gospels, the four canonical narratives; discourse gospels, such as the *Apocryphon of James*, which are set after the resurrection; and biography-discourse gospels, such as the second-century *Epistula Apostolorum* and

Acts of John, which combine features of biography and discourse (31-36). The warfare among these gospel types occurs over one faultline: the "monastic and sarcophilic sensibility where the human being is flesh-spirit conjunction" and the "dualistic and sarcophobic sensibility where the human being is flesh-spirit separation" (38). Biography gospels are "the programmatic gospels of sarcophilic Christianity," whereas discourse gospels are "the programmatic gospels of sarcophobic Christianity. Sayings gospels, the earliest of the four types, became incorporated into either of the two sensibilities, with *Q*, for example, being used in support of sarcophilia and *Thomas* used for sarcophobia. The biography-discourse gospels constitute a hybrid form that could be used by either side to undercut its opponents by using "their own theological weapons" (36-38). The biography gospels become canonized and "normative" precisely because they embody a "dialect of then and now"; that is, these narratives use the historical Jesus of the late 20s CE in his native place but have him speak to the authors' communities in the present time (39).

Crossan discusses at great length the questions of sources for and literary dependence among the gospels. In an especially effective section, he undermines the widespread idea that Jesus traditions were somehow transmitted orally, from memory, and later recorded in writing. He outlines three "presuppositions about the intracanonical gospels" on which his subsequent argument is based: Markan

priority (that is, that Mark's gospel was the earliest of the biography gospels); acceptance of the existence of the *Q Gospel* and its use by Matthew and Luke; and the dependence of John on the synoptic gospels "at least and especially" for the passion and resurrection narratives (109-114). And he adds three additional presuppositions related to extracanonical gospels: the independence of the Gospel of Thomas; the independence of the Didache; and the existence and independence of the Cross Gospel, Crossan's name for a section of the *Gospel of Peter* that contains "a passion-resurrection narrative quite different from that in Mark (119-120).

Crossan examines two peculiarities of first-century Christian publishing: the facts that, contrary to the practices of pagan and Jewish literary production, Christian publishers preferred the papyrus codex over the more widely-used scroll by a ratio of roughly eight to one (the same ratio applying to what would later become canonical and non-canonical texts); and that a significant change occurred in the printed use of the name or names of the divinity, from a single sacred name (YHWH) "that could be written normally but not pronounced normally" to a set of names "that could be pronounced normally but not written normally" (121-133). Crossan concludes that these changes, common to all early Christian literature, must have originated from a single source that had the authority to impose such consistency; he identifies that authority as the Jerusalem church.

He then turns to a discussion of the "anthropological template" that will determine his conclusions later in the book. This template involves three components: an "anthropology of class, of gender, and of resistance" (151). Class is "the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation of the "non-propertied" class by the "propertied" classes (152). Using Gerhard Lenski's typology of human societies and John Kautsky's identification of the Roman Empire as an agrarian society of the commercializing type, in which class inequities were inherent, Crossan argues that "Jesus is concerned primarily with systemic rather than individual evil," the very "exploitation and oppression" that characterized life in the Roman Empire (157). Furthermore, "the systemic dislocations created by commercialization both create an environment conducive to peasant resistance or rebellion and supply the dissenting retainers who will become its leaders" (167). "Retainers" are those whose role in society is to support the ruling class. Retainers would be military, religious, or scribal; and the continuation in power of the ruling class relied, to a great extent, on the cooperation of the retainer class.

Crossan notes that, despite a long history of foreign domination, Jewish Palestine was never more volatile than it was under Roman rule and suffered the consequences of three major revolts within two hundred years (177-178). The cause of this volatility, according to Crossan, is the structure of Roman society and "Jewish traditions about rural commercialization" (178). He points out several interesting

facts. The upper strata, consisting of members of the senatorial, equestrian, and decurional classes, accounted for one percent of Roman society (180). The average life expectancy was "38.8 years for a man and 34.2 for a woman," and fully two-thirds of live births were dead by the age of 16 (181). Life was especially hard on the 99 percent of the population that constituted the lower class. In this context, Crossan discusses Jewish concepts of righteousness, justice, and purity. Righteousness and divine justice have behind them a logic of radical egalitarianism, human equality written into law. This is the basis if Torah law, divine justice expressed as equalization: the mighty (Pharaoh in the Moses story, for instance) are humbled. Crossan also mentions the Jewish people's "tradition of relentless criticism" (198) of those in power, which is apparent throughout the Hebrew bible. Such criticism is, of course, not tolerated in a society structured according to the Roman model (like the United States under the Bush administration, for instance).

Crossan discusses the actual situation of Roman Galilee and Judaea as it has been reconstructed from archaeology, a discussion that can be read in numerous other studies of that time and place. It is a commonplace observation that the Roman economy was based not on supply and demand but on the supplying of urban areas by the labor of rural workers. He does pose one interesting question, though. If first-century Galilee was dominated by Sepphoris and Tiberias, the two large, new cities that controlled the livelihoods of most of the population, rural or urban, why

is Sepphoris never mentioned in the gospels and Tiberias mentioned only indirectly in John?

Perhaps a related question occurs later: "Why was it that the Jesus movement emerged in Lower Galilee during the reign of Herod Antipas, rather than at some other time and place? Why in Galilee rather than in Judaea, and why in Lower rather than in Upper Galilee?" And "[w]hy did <u>two</u> movements arise in the late 20s of that first common-era century in the <u>two</u> separated regions of Antipas's territory: John's baptism movement in Perea (east of the Jordan) and Jesus' kingdom-of-God movement in Galilee (to its northwest)? Crossan agrees with Christopher Seeman that "the Jesus faction" emerged in response to "Antipas's urbanization program for Lower Galilee," which "generated a new [more oppressive] social situation for the Galilean peasantry" (231). Crossan concludes this provocative section by suggesting that "Jesus' kingdom-of-God movement began as a movement of peasant resistance but broke out from localism and regionalism under scribal leadership" (235). In other words, the opposition movement that Jesus, an illiterate peasant from a peasant village, began spread as a result of the involvement of a disaffected scribal class responding "to the increasing exploitation of the countryside by the urban wealthy" (235).

His comparison of *Q* and *Thomas* begins by identifying the list as the earliest writing

genre, "the interface between the oral and the written" (241), calling on Goody, Ong, and Smith for support. Both gospels considered in this section are, essentially, lists. Crossan examines *Thomas* and *Q* to identify parallels. He relies on Kloppenberg's stratification analysis of *Q* and Arnal's analysis of *Thomas*. Agreeing with Patterson, he concludes that "the original Common Sayings Tradidion contained neither Gnosticism nor apocalypticism but required redactional adaptation toward either or both of those eschatologies." Under that redactional adaptation lies a "sapiential" layer that reflects an earlier tradition, one that predates the "theological paradigms better known from later Christian generations" (255).

He then turns to apocalypticism and eschatology. Crossan stipulates a definition of the term "eschatological" that involves three components: a "radical, counter-cultural, utopian, or world-negating" vision or program; a "divine, transcendental, supernatural" mandate for that program; and "modes of [living] the eschatological challenge" (260). *Thomas*, Crossan believes, advocates celibate asceticism as the appropriate mode of world-negation (269).

Crossan identifies three types of eschatology: apocalyptic, ascetical, and ethical. the first "negates this world by announcing that in the future, and usually the imminent future, God will act to restore justice in an unjust world" (283). Justice is brought about through "divine ethnic cleansing," by which God achieves revenge

against the unjust. Ascetical eschatology "negates this world by withdrawing from normal human life in terms of food, sex, speech, dress, or occupation" and can be personal or communal (283). Ethical eschatology "negates the world by actively protesting and nonviolently resisting a system judged to be evil, unjust, and violent" (284). Unlike apocalypticism, in which God is the initiating agent, ethicism presumes that "God is waiting for us to act" (284), nor is God violent or vengeful. "The courage [for ethical action] derives from union with transcendental nonviolence" (284). "Martyrdom ... the ultimate and public act of nonviolent resistance to violent authority ... is ... the final act of ethical eschatology" (289).

In a lengthy analysis of the Common Sayings Tradition as it relates to eschatology, Crossan detects, in the redaction of *Q* and *Thomas*, a movement away from apocalyptic eschatology and toward ethical eschatology. He identifies Jesus as a member of the artisan class, which is essentially unpropertied, itinerant, and poor. In other words, Jesus is a landless laborer, a source of apparent embarrassment to Matthew, Luke, and John, as Crossan points out.

Crossan then turns to the *Didache*, the title of which, he stresses, means "training," in this case "a Christian Jewish training program for Christian-pagan converts" (367). He maintains that the *Didache* is independent not only from Paul or John but also from the synoptic tradition and that it represents the "manifesto" of itinerant

prophets (392).

Part X considers "the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus" (478). Crossan makes generous use of the *Gospel of Peter*, as it represents the Death Tradition just as Thomas represents the Life Tradition. The canonical gospels are at their weakest just at that part of the story, resorting to "prophecy historicized" rather than "history remembered" (479). "First, the *Gospel of Peter* is a late and composite document—that is, a second-century composition that includes both intracanonical and extracanonical sources. Second, the *Gospel of Peter* contains a consecutive and canonically independent source that constitutes about half its content" (482). Crossan calls that independent source "the Cross Gospel" and dates it to the early 40s. the Cross Gospel "is the Jerusalem community's response to the crisis created by the combination of Agrippa as king, Matthias as high priest, and both as concerned the temple in Jerusalem" (510). The discussion of the Cross Gospel is fascinating, but the end result is confirmation of what Crossan mentions elsewhere: the gospel is updated good news, meaning that each iteration, each redaction updates the gospel stories to reflect current events, problems, communities (524). And he laments that something so obvious should have been recognized long ago, as it is "tragically late to be learning it" (525).

Finally, Crossan turns to a discussion of "exegesis, lament, and biography" (527), arguing backward in time from the Cross Gospel "into the Jerusalem community of

the 30s" and focusing "especially on gender roles within that community, on the interaction of exegesis and lament, and on the relationship between named females and named males in those earliest days after the execution of Jesus" (527). He explains types of crucifixion. The first is biblical crucifixion, "the traditional Jewish method," which was crucifixion after death, by which an executed criminal was hung on a cross as a public warning but removed before sunset. The second is Roman crucifixion, which was live crucifixion intended also as public warning. The body was generally left on the cross "as carrion for birds and dogs" (541). The condemned died an agonizing death, but the warning lay in non-burial of the corpse, a significant dishonor. The likelihood of a body being removed for burial before sunset (and before wild animals arrived) was negligible; in fact, despite the extensive use of crucifixion by the Romans, "only a single crucified skeleton has been found so far from that terrible first-century in the Jewish homeland" (543).

Crossan notes that the women who are at the grave and who are the first to see the resurrected Jesus in the canonical gospels are quite absent from the earliest versions of the story, raising the question of why they were introduced. Basic to Crossan's answer to this dilemma are two points: "first, Mark created both the women's discovery of the empty tomb and the burial story needed in preparation for it. Second, Matthew created the story of the apparition of Jesus to the women to change Mark's negative ending into a more positive one. John copied that vision from

Matthew. In both those cases, it was a message-vision (tell the disciples) and not a mandate-vision (change the world). There is, therefore, no anterior tradition, let alone historical information, in any of those three units" (552). So why the stories involving women?

Crossan concludes that Mark's story of Joseph of Arimathea is a fiction "improved" by Matthew and Luke. Mark is "severely and relentlessly critical of the Twelve in general, of Peter, James, and John in particular, and of Peter above all the others," so he can't very well end his story with Jesus appearing to them (557). But even the women fail Jesus. Having been told repeatedly that Jesus would be resurrected "after three days," the women show up at the tomb with burial spices to anoint the corpse! This is Mark's theme, that those closest to Jesus fail him repeatedly. Only one person, and that a woman, shows true faith in Mark's gospel: the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus with expensive ointment, over the objections of the disciples. "For Mark, that unnamed woman is the first Christian" (558).

For all four canonical gospels, seeing the risen Jesus does not confer authority or leadership. So what does? Crossan wonders.

A distinction between oral multiform—which refers to oral performance not based on a normative written text and details of which differ with each telling—and

scribal uniform—a written text that is, of course, permanent—leads to a discussion of textual dependency among the canonical gospels. Crossan concludes that all four gospels depend on an outside written source for the passion-resurrection story. Crossan sees a linear development from the *Cross Gospel*, through the canonical gospels, to their combination in the *Gospel of Peter*. But since exegesis preceded story, we are faced with another question: How did exegesis become story?

Crossan identifies four steps in the evolution of this story. First, the passion-resurrection story in *Cross* and *Mark* "is built from a tissue of biblical references" (569). Second, those biblical themes are sub-textual at first. Third, within the canonical gospels, those themes and references become explicit and "break through the surface of the story as divine validations" (569). Fourth, the process of searching the scriptures for divine validation "continued after the passion-resurrection schema became a story ... It continued in Christian texts composed after the canonical gospels" and " the argument from typology and proof from prophecy became more and more determinative ... as if all those psalm texts referred exclusively and prophetically to Jesus alone" (569). Thus, Crossan concludes, it was "not necessary and not inevitable" that exegesis became story. He cites the *Epistle of Barnabas* as an example of pure exegesis without story (569). "The group or process that created exegesis is not the same group or process that created story" (italics Crossan's 571). So who created the "passion-resurrection schema" as

story (571)?

The answer, according to Crossan, and where all the apparently disparate strands of this long study have led, is that "*ritual lament is what changed prophetic exegesis into biographical story*" (italics Crossan's 572). The Life Tradition, which "predominated among the hamlets and small towns of Galilee and Syria," and which is present in the Common Sayings Tradition, the *Q Gospel*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Didache*, and for which "the biblical pattern of persecution-vindication is fundamental" (573), "shows no evidence of knowing any passion-resurrection story" (572). The reason for "the absence of passion-resurrection narrative in the Life Tradition" is that "it [meaning the passion-resurrection narrative] was composed in Jerusalem, where the female and male companions of Jesus whose names we know stayed from the very beginning. That was where Jesus had been crucified and that was where God would act to vindicate Jesus. They stayed in Jerusalem because that was where they expected the imminent apocalyptic consummation to take place" (573). Within this Jerusalem community operated "two equiprimordial processes, exegesis and lament, engendered respectively by male and female members. In the absence of a body and a tomb, female ritual lament wove exegetical fragments into a sequential story" (italics Crossan's 573).

Thus, the passion-resurrection story is attributed to women within the Jerusalem

community whose "lament tradition turned the male exegetical tradition into a passion-resurrection story once and for all forever" (573). And the Cross Gospel is "the closest we can get to that story" (573).

This summary has been necessarily selective. Crossan manages so much more in *Birth* than a summary can convey. Although it requires familiarity with canonical and noncanonical scripture and some knowledge of form criticism and early Christian history, the book also provides a wealth of information beyond what its conclusion would suggest. The reader familiar with Crossan's work will find in it some of Crossan's old hobby-horses, and his arguments with other scholars, particularly the Christian apologists, are amusing (and damning). However strained Crossan's answer to his thesis question may seem (and, despite the careful organization of his argument, the conclusion does come as rather a disappointment, even on second reading), the reader must congratulate Crossan for having tackled perhaps the most difficult question in the study of early Christianity: what happened in the Jesus movement between the time of Jesus' execution and the time of Paul and other canonical writers?

The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century

Stegemann, Ekkehard W. and Wolfgang Stegemann. Translated by O. C. Dean, Jr.

Fortress: Minneapolis, 1999.

The organization of this book is noteworthy. The authors have arranged it as a reference book, not intended to be read at once. The book consists of four parts: Economy and Society in the Mediterranean World of the First Century; The Land of Israel, the Social History of Judaism, and the Followers of Jesus; and The Social History of Christ-Confessing Communities in the Cities of the Roman Empire.

Each part contains its own introduction, followed by numbered sections that discuss economic concerns and social development and stratification. Each part concludes with a section that links the main topic of that part in some way to the Jesus Movement of the first century.

As a social history, the book is concerned primarily with people: how they organize themselves (or can be organized by circumstances) into groups, how they relate to one another economically and socially, and how their interactions affect the group and the larger social environment. Consequently, the book takes a macroscopic as well as a microscopic view of first-century life in the Roman world and Palestine and draws on theoretical scholarship from the fields of sociology and economics, as

well as history. It should be noted that the book was first published in German in 1995 as *Urchristliche Sozialgeshichte: Die Anfänge im Judentum und die Christusgemeinden in der mediterranen Welt.*

I. The Mediterranean world in the 1st century

The Stegemanns describe a Roman world comprised of advanced agrarian societies, by which they mean societies in which farming is the dominant element of production but in which distribution is controlled by a small, urban elite. They further distinguish these societies as "posthorticultural" and "preindustrial," meaning that developments in technology (the use of the iron plow, for instance) were an advance over horticultural societies, which required greater human energy "to guarantee subsistence" (11), "The economy is characterized by increased division of labor and a chain of command, but not by supply and demand"; the divide between rural and urban becomes pronounced, the lower, illiterate, rural classes existing at subsistence and the upper, literate, urban classes (estimated to have constituted only five to ten percent of the population) owning most of the land and controlling the rest of the population. "Governmental institutions are the primary source of inequality, creating and enforcing "large differences among people in regard to the distribution of power, the enjoyment of privileges, and prominence in society" (12-14). Developments in military technology allowed the introduction of professional armies; agrarian societies "are also conqueror states" in which war is

"chronic" (11).

The idea of "economy" in ancient society differs from the modern definition. The authors point out that the very language of modern economics ("production, labor, capital, market") "had no equivalent in ancient languages" (15). "Economics" (Greek *oikonomia*) referred to the operation and management of the household and contained an ethical dimension absent from the modern use of the term. (The household model of economics is evident in the language Paul uses in reference to the organization of Christ-believing congregations.) This ethical dimension, however, shouldn't be interpreted as beneficence. It rather refers to distinctive attitudes toward work: for the lower class, work is "directed toward survival" (24); for the elite, who owned the land but did not work it themselves, physical labor is disparaged in favor of intellectual pursuits.

As property ownership shifted from the peasant-farmer to the moneyed elite, "the number of independent small farmers constantly decreased, while the number of unpropertied wage earners and tenants grew" (28). Increasingly, land was leased to independent farmers, whose rent was paid in the produce of the land. Typically, the cost to the lessee, as well as taxes (a substantial burden for the poor) and mandatory contributions to the support of the standing army, ensured that most of the peasantry barely subsisted, and many fell into debt when their agricultural output

failed to meet expenses. An artisan class of "carpenters, cobblers, and smiths" developed in the villages and "earned their livelihood in nearby cities" (28). Money, not centrally coined, "was used as a medium of exchange only in the cities of the empire" (39); elsewhere, barter or exchange predominated.

Ancient society lacked a middle class; society consisted of a small "upper stratum" elite (1-5 percent of the population) and a large "lower stratum" non-elite. The upper stratum consisted of the *ordines* (the imperial aristocracy (*domus Caesaris*), the senatorial nobility (*ordo senatoris*), and the equestrians (*ordo equester*)), all of whom enjoyed approximately equal power and privilege; the rich, a group that could include women as well as men, as well as freeborn or emancipated members, and who, because of their wealth, were able to influence the *ordines* without themselves holding political office; and the retainers, "free individuals, freed slaves, and slaves who assumed duties for their masters in prominent political positions or performed important administrative tasks in the private sphere" (69). The members of the lower stratum are more heterogeneous and therefore less easily categorized. What they shared in common was exclusion from participation in government. The Stegemanns use income and prestige as criteria to distinguish among members of this stratum. Thus, they divide the lower stratum into the "relatively poor" (*penetes*), who could provide "an adequate subsistence for themselves and their families"; and the absolutely poor (*ptochoi*), who lack the

means "to achieve subsistence" (71). The authors point out that Jesus's father, an artisan, likely earned barely enough to support his family of five boys and several girls.

II. Israel, Judaism, and the followers of Jesus

The Stegemanns characterize Israel of the Roman era in terms of class antagonism, and they attribute the rise in importance of the prophetic-eschatological and wisdom strain in Jewish thought; the social importance of new groups such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes; the Jesus movement; and various messianic communities after 70 CE to this class antagonism. When Herod wrested power from the Hasmoneans, he began a policy of appointing and deposing high priests, a practice "retained by Herod's successors and also by the Roman procurators" (130). Increasingly, the lower stratum lost confidence and respect for the ruling aristocracy, including their Temple retainers.

The authors maintain, as do other historians of the period, that "there was no clear boundary between religious and nonreligious areas of life" in postexilic Judaism (137). But Judaism was by no means monolithic. The Hellenization of Palestine and the city-building of the Romans brought "heterogeneity and socio-religious multiplicity" (137). Two constants, however, characterized Judaism: monotheism and "faith in the election of the people and the land of Israel" (137).

Much of what the Stegemanns discuss in this section is by now common knowledge. Of special interest, though, is their discussion of the origins of apocalypticism, which, quoting K. Müller, reflects "a completely changed idea of the salvation that is realized in *history*." "A crucial part of the teleological perspective is the collapse of confidence in a salvific development within history, as well as in the continuation and dependability of past salvation history. A turning point is expected only from an abrupt upheaval and the miraculous intervention of God at the end, which is preceded by terrible catastrophic events." Apocalyptic mysteries are present in biblical sources, according to the apocalyptic worldview, but must be uncovered "through extraordinary revelation" (144-145). The authors see apocalyptic thought originating not in the lower stratum, as did the John the Baptist and Jesus cults, but among Pharisees and scribes: "we distinguish apocalypticism as an elite literary dissidence phenomenon, as found in the apocalypses but also in other literary witnesses, from prophetic millenarian or chiliastic phenomena such as the repentance movement of John the Baptist and the followers of Jesus, which arose rather in the lower stratum and took shape around charismatic figures in regular movements" (147). Significantly, they argue that the gospel writers' association of apocalyptic motifs with the Baptist and Jesus is literary in character; that is, the evangelists anachronistically attribute apocalyptic motifs that reflect their post-Temple sensibility with historical figures whose Kingdom talk was decidedly

non-apocalyptic in comparison to such groups as the Essenes (148).

The Stegemanns draw helpful distinctions among the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. The Essenes (the Qumran community) questioned the legitimacy of the high priest and believed themselves to be "already living in the renewed creation and participating in the heavenly community through worship" (154). The Pharisees were characterized by strict observance of purity and food laws. "More a reformist than a conservative movement," they were open to new religious currents, "such as belief in the resurrection, judgment, and angels" (155). The Sadducees "are to be regarded above all as an anti-Pharisaic group ... developed from the upper stratum as an anti-Pharisaic countermovement" (156). They rejected apocalyptic belief in angels and resurrection and supported the legitimacy of the high priest in Jerusalem. The authors dispute Luke's claim that Paul was a Pharisee, as there is no evidence of Pharisees in the diaspora.

The authors discuss at some length other groups and influential individuals of the time, including the thaumaturgists (miracle workers), signs prophets, such as Theudas and the "Egyptian," John the Baptist, religio-political and socio-revolutionary resistance movements (which, corroborating other historians, they characterize as "pre-political" when they first emerge in the lower stratum but later involving upper stratum membership), social bandit and messiahs, and

anti-Roman insurrectionist groups, such as the Sicarii.

In discussing the followers of Jesus, the authors identify three groups: "the group connected with Jesus during his lifetime," which they refer to as the "Jesus movement"; the "Jerusalem early church, which arose after Jesus' death"; and the "messianic churches of the time after 70" (187). The Jerusalem church introduced several innovations on Jesus' original message, including references to its members as "saints" and to itself as "the church of God," in contrast to the use of the term "disciple" in the older Jesus tradition (188). The authors maintain that this nomenclature implies "an apocalyptic self-understanding" closer to that of the Essenes than to Jesus (188). The messianic churches, "shaped especially by the reformation of Judaism taking place" in the period following 70 CE, sought to distance itself from Judaism by emphasizing Jesus' messiahship. They point out, however, that in the earlier Jesus movement, "faith in a specific salvation-historical function of Jesus as Messiah seems not to have played any role"; Jesus considered himself a prophet, and others regarded him as one (206). And contrary to the picture painted in the gospels (and particularly John), no evidence supports the notion of "persistent conflict" between Christ-confessing Jews and Judaism. Archaeological evidence indicates that the two groups "lived side by side harmoniously into the seventh century" (240).

III. Social history of Christ-confessing communities outside Israel

The Stegemanns identify four social characteristics that distinguish Christ-confessing communities (i.e., Jesus' followers outside Israel) from messianic communities (those within Israel): they were composed of Jews and non-Jews, within the communities the two groups "realized an unrestricted ... social interaction," they were minority groups within the larger pagan culture, and they represented Judaism alongside the synagogues in the diaspora (251).

Christ-confessing communities adopted the Greek civil term *ekklesia*, which meant a public assembly. But their use of the term could also imply an assembly of believers. Thus, *ekklesia* is used in both senses in Paul and elsewhere. In some contexts, it can refer to individuals or a group, regardless of assembly.

These communities arose only in urban centers of the diaspora, subsequently extending to rural areas. They were characterized by unrestricted interaction between Jews and Gentiles within the *ekklesia*, a situation that provoked the first intramural conflict between the churches of the diaspora and the Jerusalem church, known as the Antiochene Conflict. It involved the eating of meals in common, Jew and Gentile, and the keeping of *kashrut*, purity laws related to food. The conflict resulted in a relaxation of *kashrut* in the context of common meals. The Stegemanns are careful to argue that this relaxation of food laws should not be

viewed as emancipation from or renunciation of the Torah, but a "'revaluation' that is typical of charismatic movements." If the Spirit can be given to Gentiles as well as Jews, then "a more flexible treatment of the traditional frame of reference" is justified (272).

The authors argue convincingly and at some length that the traditional understanding of the social composition of the Pauline communities—which holds that the communities represented a cross-section of Roman society, from the *ordines* to the *ptochoi*—is unsubstantiateed. They find no prosopographic evidence (corroborating evidence from outside the community) for upper stratum membership in the *ekklesiae*, nor do the destitute seem to be represented in any sizeable numbers. The early Christ-confessing communities, then, consisted primarily of upper-lower stratum members, including women, slaves, and artisans, and the authors maintain that this composition described the communities after 70 CE, as well.

In their discussion of Paul's social position, the writers discount the always-unreliable Luke and his hagiographic version of Paul's life in "Acts of the Apostles." In their view (corroborated in part by Paul himself), Paul is "a member of the lower stratum above minimum existence" (302). His Jewish and Greek education, not itself an indicator of stratum membership, seems to have made him

a powerful writer but, by his own admission, a man of "weak" bodily presence and "contemptible" speech (302).

The Stegemanns discuss the alleged persecution of Christ-believers at length. According to tradition, and supported by biblical texts (and only by Christian texts; there is no mention of relations with Christians in this period in Jewish literature), Christians suffered persecution not only from the Roman state but also from "the Jews." Thus we read, for example, the virulent anti-Jewish rhetoric of John's gospel or the allegations against "the Jews" in Acts. But the Stegemanns point out that persecution can only be executed when one party has power superior to another. "The aim [of persecution] is the extermination of deviant convictions. It is doubtful whether this aim can be attributed to Judaism in the diaspora, which, in any case, has never found itself in the powerful position necessary for such persecution. In the cities of the Roman empire, the Jewish communities, like the Christian, existed as minority groups that by no means had at their disposal the necessary means of power presupposed by the concept of persecution" (342-343).

The authors examine Luke's claim in Acts that Paul the Pharisee persecuted Christians before his own conversion and conclude that it is a fabrication. There is no independent evidence of the kind of police power Luke attributes to Paul. (Luke alleges that on the authority of the high priest in Jerusalem, Paul searches out

Christians door to door and imprisons them, then travels to Damascus to retrieve runaway Christians so that they can be returned to prison in Judea.) This implausible assignment from the high priest, whose authority neither involved police powers, nor extended outside of Jerusalem, together with the notion that the persecution is directed from Jerusalem (Paul implies in Galatians that he did not persecute anyone in Jerusalem; in fact, no one in Jerusalem knows him when he arrives to visit James and Peter.) are clearly literary extravagances. According to the authors, "In the special historical situation after 70, delations against believers in Christ are to be understood as Jewish measures of self-protection. Such accusations gave Judaism a chance to distance itself from a messianic movement that was suspected of being anti-Roman ... Likewise, we can also presume ... that Diaspora Judaism coexisted harmoniously with Christ-confessing communities and, indeed, was in the main officially hardly aware of its existence as such" (352-352).

IV. Social roles and situation of women in the Mediterranean world and early Christianity

"Ancient Mediterranean societies were characterized by a rather strict differentiation of the social roles and areas of competence assigned to the sexes" (361). This should come as no surprise, nor does the Stegemanns' discussion of women's social roles deviate from what we would expect.

More interesting is the social status of female characters in the gospel texts. Because women disciples are "not connected with traditional women's roles that would identify them as circumspect, industrious administrators of a household who were concerned about their virtue," they appear not to "agree with the conventional values of virtue" of that time (385, 384). To be clear, unmarried women who travel with men are assumed in ancient culture to be sexually available and promiscuous. This is the situation of Mary Magdalene, for example, or the anonymous woman who anoints Jesus' feet at dinner in the house of Simon the leper. This phenomenon deserves more thought than it has conventionally received. The idea that Jesus' relations with single women, publicans, and other undesirables is meant to suggest his iconoclastic view of Jewish convention just doesn't make sense. Jesus was a Torah-observant Jew and a product of his own culture, one very different from ours. The women's liberation argument is an absurd anachronism, given Jesus' first-century social context. Curiously, the gospel writers (who, as the tradition is refined after Mark, embarrassedly refine the women's roles) do not comment on the apparent fact that Jesus consorted with prostitutes.

In discussing women in leadership roles in the Jesus movement, the authors mention Junia, "the only woman who is explicitly designated with the title *apostle* in the New Testament" (Rom. 16:7). A Jew, "she was one of the earliest itinerant missionaries, even before Paul himself" (395), and, like Paul, had presumably seen

the risen Christ. Similarly, the first deacon is a woman named Phoebe. Generally, though, women were subordinate to men in the Pauline churches, performing relatively minor duties, not preaching or teaching.

Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography

Crossan, John Dominic. HarperCollins: San Francisco, 1994.

Crossan's method in this reconstruction of the historical Jesus "locates the historical Jesus where three independent vectors cross": cross-cultural anthropology, which characterizes a particular society based on "what is common across history to all those of the same ecological and technological type"; "Greco-Roman and especially Jewish history in the first quarter of Jesus' century"; and a "literary or textual" vector, focused "especially on the earliest stratum of the tradition, on materials [dated] to the period between 30 and 60 C.E.," and avoiding "anything that has only a single independent attestation" (xi-xiii).

He begins his reconstruction with a comparison of stories written about two "sons of God" (*divi filii)* who, in their respective stories, become gods: Octavius (later Augustus), adopted son and heir of Julius Caesar (who was deified by the Roman Senate two years after his assassination), whose "mythical genealogy," tracing his ancestry back to "Aeneas—son of a human father, Anchises, and a divine mother, Aphrodite," is related by Virgil in the *Aeneid*; and Jesus, son of a human mother and a divine father, whose mythical genealogy is related in the divergent birth narratives of Matthew and Luke (1-5). Crossan calls the gospel birth narratives "overtures, condensed intertwinings of the dominant themes in the respective

gospels to which they serve as introduction and summary" (5).

Crossan then examines the Lukan and Matthean birth narratives in detail. Luke's narrative emphasizes the mothers, one of whom is too old to conceive, the other a virgin, and begins with two birth stories, of John and Jesus, one looking backward, "assimilating the birth of John the Baptist into that of the ancient patriarchs, prophets, and heroes of the Hebrew Scriptures" and the other looking into the future, "asserting the primacy of Jesus' birth over that of the Baptist and thus over all those preceding figures with which the latter had been associated" (5). Crossan points out the "detailed parallelism" between the two stories, identifying "five parallel acts": the angelic announcements to Zechariah and Mary; the publicized birth of each child; the circumcision and naming of each; the public presentation and prophecy of destiny; and the description of the child's growth (6-9). Matthew "is equally interested in connecting Jesus' birth with the ancient traditions of his people's sacred writings." Using contemporary "expanded popular accounts" of Moses' infancy, and emphasizing the fathers' roles, Matthew draws three parallelisms between the births of Moses and Jesus: the ruler's plot, by which the ruler, acting on a prediction of the birth of a rival, orders the killing of all male newborns; the father's decision to *be* a father, which for both Amram (Moses' father) and Joseph involves, at first, uncertainty, followed by resolve (the pattern common to each is divorce, reassurance, remarriage); and the child's escape from the ruler's

plot. As with Luke's comparison of Jesus to John, Matthew's comparison of Jesus to Moses emphasizes that Jesus is greater than his model (5-15).

Crossan discusses both authors' insistence on a virginal birth, mentioning, of course, the widely-known linguistic misinterpretation of *almah/parthenos*, and the references, explicit (in Matthew) and implicit (in Luke) to Isaiah 7:14. "Clearly," Crossan concludes, "someone went seeking in the Old Testament for a text that could be interpreted as prophesying a virginal conception, even if such was never its original meaning. Somebody had already decided on the transcendental importance of the adult Jesus and sought to retroject that significance onto the conception and birth itself" (18).

Similarly, both authors go to great lengths to associate Jesus' birth with Bethlehem in Judea, the anticipated birthplace of a second David, "one who is to rule in Israel," according to Micah (5:2), a late 8th century BCE contemporary of Isaiah. But the generally-acknowledged problems with that effort are substantial. Matthew takes for granted that Mary and Joseph had always lived in Bethlehem and moved to Nazareth only after their return from Egyptian exile. Luke invents a census for the purpose of taxation, which requires Mary and Joseph to migrate from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Joseph's ancestral town, to enroll. Luke's story is "pure fiction," of course. "There was no such worldwide census under Octavius Augustus." Luke

has previously placed the birth dates of John and Jesus in the reign of Herod the Great (who died in 4 BCE), but the census to which Luke refers, under Quirinius, the imperial legate for Syria, occurred in 6 CE. Finally the practice throughout the empire in regard to taxation censuses was to register people where they lived and worked, "to get you registered where you could be taxed." Thus, Luke's census story and Matthew's story of exile in Egypt are simply ways for the writers to link Jesus' birth to the Mican prophecy. Both Mark and John presume that Jesus is a Galilean, not a Judean, by birth (18-20).

Crossan turns then to the question of social class in connection with divinity claims. Society in the Roman Empire consisted of two classes. If the gospels' claim is accurate, Jesus was a carpenter, an Artisan, a "group pushed into the dangerous space between Peasants and Degradeds or Expendables" (25). In the Roman world, a claim of divinity was not in itself suspect, but a claim of divinity for a member of the lower class was considered absurd. "The divine origins of Jesus are, to be sure, just as fictional or mythological as those of Octavius. But to claim them for Octavius surprised nobody in that first century. What was incredible was that anyone at all claimed them for Jesus" (26-27).

An interesting parallel to—and likely source for—Mark's account of the beheading of John the Baptist is the famous story of Flaminius, a Roman senator of the second

century BCE, who, to impress and entertain his mistress, beheads a prisoner at her request, during a dinner party. The story is attested in three sources available to Mark (36). Having dismissed Mark's account of the reason for John's execution by Antipas, Crossan postulates a more likely reason. John, like other apocalyptic prophets of the troubled early first century (and there were several notable ones besides him), used the Jordan River in symbolic recapitulation of the Israelites' crossing into Canaan, accompanied by their bellicose god. Operating in Perea, Antipas's domain east of the Jordan, John would baptize (i.e., purify) people in the river, then send them back "into the Promised Land." "What he was forming ... was a giant system of sanctified individuals, a huge web of ticking time bombs all over the Jewish homeland" (43). As for the relationship between John and Jesus, Crossan hypothesizes that Jesus was likely a follower of John who, after John's death, rejected John's apocalypticism, becoming convinced that God "did not and would not operate through imminent apocalyptic restoration" (48). Instead, "Jesus was not an apocalyptic prophet like John the Baptist, but he was an eschatological or world-negating figure" (53).

Regarding the numerous anti-family statements attributed to Jesus in the gospels, Crossan disputes "the usual explanation ... that families will become divided as some accept and others refuse faith in Jesus." Instead, he maintains that "the attack has nothing to do with faith but with power." Because "the family is society in

miniature," Jesus' statements against it are intended to condemn the abuse of power in his society (60).

Perhaps Crossan's most famous contribution to historical Jesus scholarship is his theory of open commensality. Commensality refers to "the act of tabling and eating as miniature models for the rules of association and socialization" (68). In Crossan's view, "Open commensality is the symbol and embodiment of radical egalitarianism" (71). Similarly, healing is a "social miniature that can support or challenge, affirm or negate a culture's behavioral rules or a society's customary codes. Indeed, *body to society as microcosm to macrocosm* undergirds ... my entire understanding of the historical Jesus" (77). Crossan understands Jesus' healing activities as subversive, not, as later redactions of the healing stories would have it, as indications of Jesus' observance of purity laws but as implicit rejections of them.

He also finds a connection between demonic possession (so frequent, particularly in Mark) and colonial oppression, and he understands exorcism as "individuated symbolic revolution" (91). Crossan even describes Jesus' itinerancy as a radical act. "For Jesus, the Kingdom of God is a community of radical or unbrokered equality in which individuals are in direct contact with one another and with God, unmediated by any established brokers or fixed locations" (101).

The ethos of Mediterranean society was "groupism based on kin and gender ... and its pivotal moral values were rooted in honor and shame as well as patronage and clientage. Crossan argues that Jesus' practice of open commensality "was a fundamental challenge to honor and shame," and his practice of healing challenged patronage and clientage (103). "The heart of the original Jesus movement," then, is "a shared egalitarianism of spiritual (healing) and material (eating) resources" (107). Here is Crossan's central point.

Discussing the missionaries of the Jesus movement, Crossan maintains that the "group of twelve" apostles is a convenient fiction, intended to suggest that the Jesus community is a reinvented Israel, with its twelve tribes and patriarchs. However, the tradition of the twelve is limited to Mark and is absent from the literature of most other early Christian communities. Crossan indicates that missionaries were not some "closed group" but rather "healed healers" who were empowered to heal others (108-109), and he believes that Jesus' injunction in Mark, *Q*, and *Didache* that missionaries should "take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics" is authentic. This injunction recalls Cynicism, a philosophical movement of the fourth century BCE. Cynics publicly negated "cultural values and civilized presuppositions" in their style of dress (shabby) and their public behavior (unconventional) (114-115). Their object was to question values and power,

particularly among the elite. Crossan sees Cynicism as a Greco-Roman form of eschatology or "world-negation" (117).

Crossan next discusses the passion and crucifixion. "Roman crucifixion was state terrorism ... its function was to deter resistance or revolt, especially among the lower classes; and ... the body was usually left on the cross to be consumed eventually by the wild beasts" (127). He claims (rightly) that the "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem is a fiction (cf. Fredriksen) used (like the Bethlehem connection) to link Jesus to earlier prophecy. With regard to a "last supper," he points out that although Paul seems to have been familiar with a tradition of a ritual meal involving Jesus's symbolic body and blood, other early witnesses seem to be unaware of it well into the second half of the first century; therefore, "it cannot be used as a historical event" (130). And he argues that "an *action* and *saying* involving the Temple's symbolic destruction (the "Temple cleansing") go back to the historical Jesus" (132).

Crossan proposes "that Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing whatsoever about the details of his crucifixion, death, or burial"; the biblical passion accounts are "not *history remembered* but *prophecy historicized*" (145). He distinguishes "three stages in the development of the passion stories": "the *historical passion*—what actually happened to Jesus, what anyone present would have seen"; the *prophetic passion*—the search by scribally learned followers from the Retainer rather than the

Peasant class to find basis or justification in the Hebrew Scriptures for such a shocking eventuality"; and the narrative passion—the placing of such prophetic fulfillments into a sequential narrative with its origins well hidden within a plausible historical framework" (145).

He recreates the likely trajectory of story development related to the burial of Jesus, a real problem, as his friends are alleged—and are likely—to have run away when the authorities seized him. Crossan points out that often there wasn't much left to bury, after the crows and beasts had had their fill of the crucified one. But if some body were left, it might be buried properly if the person's family had some money, otherwise it would occupy a shallow grave. And even so, to request the body might put family members in jeopardy. After all, mostly bandits and rebels were crucified. The challenge for those who wrote the crucifixion stories was to find some way around the ugliness of it all. If the state had control of the body, one would hope that they buried it. But to avoid that doubt, Mark invents Joseph of Arimathea, a man of some influence and a good Jew, to ask for and get the body. Matthew improves Mark's story by making Joseph a rich disciple of Jesus (and adds a "new" tomb). Luke makes Joseph a Jew again, a member of the council (as in Mark) who had disagreed with their decision to have Jesus executed; he also stresses that the tomb is fresh, no one having used it before. John makes Joseph a secret disciple and invents yet another character, Nicodemus, who anoints and wraps Jesus' body

before placing it in a new tomb (152-158). Crossan concludes: "With regard to the body of Jesus, by Easter Sunday morning, those who cared did not know where it was, and those who knew did not care" (158).

In a fascinating chapter called "How Many Years Was Easter Sunday?" Crossan demonstrates how the followers of Jesus, the people he'd healed, the missionaries he'd sent out with his revolutionary message, likely conducted themselves just as they had before his death; most probably didn't know about it. After all, names of the crucified were not announced on the evening news. So the stories of Jesus' resurrection seem unnecessary; they certainly wouldn't cause Jesus' followers to comport themselves differently. Then why resurrection? Crossan attributes the resurrection stream in early Christianity to Paul.

He also argues that the post-resurrection experiences related in the gospels are not the same kinds of trance that Paul experienced but are actually "quite deliberate political dramatizations of the priority of one *specific leader* over another, of this *leadership group* over that *general community*. Those stories, then, are primarily interested not in trance and apparition but in power and authority. They presume rather than create the Christian community; they are about how it will continue, not how it began" (169). Crossan also proposes that "other stories in the gospels, ones from before the execution of Jesus—the so-called nature miracles—serve the

same function. They are not about Jesus' physical power over the world but about the apostles' spiritual power over the community" (170).

"What is important [in the apparition stories] is to whom [Jesus] appears, not what he says" (170). In the final analysis, "there is a *specific leader*, Peter; there is an exclusively male *leadership group*, the Twelve Apostles; and there is everyone else, including the women" (174).

In "Epilogue: From Jesus to Christ," Crossan summarizes his findings as follows: "The historical Jesus was a *peasant Jewish cynic* ... [H]is work was among the houses and hamlets of Lower Galilee. His strategy ... was the combination of *free healing and common eating*, a religious and economic egalitarianism that negated alike and at once the hierarchical and patronal normalcies of Jewish religion and Roman power ... [H]e moved on constantly ... Miracle and parable, healing and eating were calculated to force individuals into unmediated physical and spiritual contact with one another. He announced, in other words, the unmediated or brokerless Kingdom of God" (198).

One senses in Crossan's work a sadness that comes from a simultaneous desire to believe and a recognition that the belief system to which Crossan belongs is fraudulent. The logic of his discoveries about the historical Jesus and the early

church leads him almost to apostasy, and one wishes he would take that final step out of honesty to his work and to himself. Instead, Crossan concludes *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* in much the way he concludes his other books: with a wistful regret that the religion of Christianity invented a Jesus unlike the one of history, set him up as a god, and set itself up as the mediator between the people and that god.

His final remarks have as their basis a "description of the imperial banquet celebrating the Council of Nicea's conclusion." That early council of the church had been called by the emperor Constantine to resolve certain doctrinal differences among Christian groups. The outcome of the council was a "creed" to which Christians were now expected to subscribe and a closed canon of holy scripture. That Jesus' self-proclaimed successors, the bishops, share this feast with the temporal ruler of much of the known world is, to say the least, ironic, in light of what we know of Jesus of Nazareth and what he professed. Crossan is moved by the irony "of peasant Jesus grasped now by imperial faith." And here is where the sadness comes in: "Still, as one ponders that progress from open commensality with Jesus to episcopal banquet with Constantine, is it unfair to regret a progress that happened so fast and moved so swiftly, that was accepted so readily and criticized so lightly? Is it time now, or is it already too late, to conduct, religiously and theologically, ethically and morally, some basic cost accounting with Constantine?" (201).

The book ends with that question.

Who Wrote the New Testament?: The Making of the Christian Myth

Burton L. Mack. SanFrancisco: HarperCollins, 1995.

Mack traces and explains the origins and development of the Christian mythology, describes its tenacity, largely through political good fortune and force, and argues, finally, that it is a mythology that has outlived its relevance or usefulness:

> The [Christian] epic is predicated on a set of ideals that runs counter to the direction the world is actually moving. The biblical epic is based on a worldview that is universalist in scope, monolinear in historical imagination, a singular system in organic conception, hierarchical in the location of power, dualistic in anthropology, and which has to have miracles, breakthroughs, and other dramatic or divine moments of rectification to imagine the adjustments that humans have to make when life and social circumstances change or get out of hand. These features of the worldview assumed and projected by the biblical epic are no longer helpful as ideals in our multicultural world. (306)

The Christian myth as it emerged "over the course of the second and third centuries" reflects the victory of "centrist" Christians, who

> were able to create the impression of a singular, monolinear history of the Christian church ... by carefully selecting, collecting, and arranging

> anonymous and pseudonymous writings assigned to figures at the beginning of the Christian time. As they imagined it, this history was foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament, inaugurated by Jesus and his sacrifice for the sins of the world, established by the apostles in their missions, and confirmed by the bishops in their loyalty to the teachings of that illustrious tradition. And because all the New Testament writings were now regarded as written by apostles and their associates, the differences among their views of Christian beginnings were effectively erased. In the centrist Christian imagination, the four gospels merged into an amalgam of the one gospel story, and the letters of Paul and the other apostles were read as "witnesses" to these dramatic events that inaugurated the Christian time. (7)

The idea of the New Testament "as a charter document for Christianity" is an invention of the fourth-century church, accomplished "by means of literary fictions." The New Testament is "neither an authentic account of Christian beginnings nor an accurate rehearsal of the history of the empire church. Historians of religion would call it myth" (7-8).

Mack's primary contribution in this study of New Testament origins lies not so much in his historical analysis of the emergence of the fourth-century centrist

church, the process and details of which have been, for the most part, proven sufficiently over a hundred years of historical Jesus studies. What distinguishes Mack's work from that of other scholars is the boldness with which he treats his subject. Where other scholars tread lightly around the issue out of deference to "believers," Mack forthrightly identifies Christianity as a mythology (which, according to any definition of the term, it certainly is). This forthrightness gives Mack's scholarship an honesty that others (Crossan comes to mind) lack.

> That early Christians engaged in mythmaking may be difficult for modern Christians to accept. The usual connotations of the term *myth* are almost entirely negative. And when it is used to describe the content of the New Testament gospels there is invariably a hue and cry. That is because, in distinction from most mythologies that begin with a "once upon a time," the Christian myth is set in historical time and place. It seems therefore to demand the belief that the events of the gospel story really happened. And that means the story cannot be "myth." It may help some to note (1) that mythmaking is a normal and necessary social activity, (2) that early Christian mythmaking was due more to borrowing and rearranging myths taken for granted in the cultures of context than to firsthand speculation, and (3) that the myths they came up with made eminent sense, not only for their times and circumstances, but also for the social experiments in which they were invested. (13)

Mack begins by discussing the sociopolitical context of the Greco-Roman age (second century BCE to second century CE), and three "model societies" that shaped the consciousness of the period: "the ancient Near Eastern temple-state," which dates back to the fourth century BCE, "the Greek city-state (*polis*), and the Roman Republic," all of which "came tumbling down in the aftermath of Alexander the Great's campaigns" (19).

The temple-state was characterized by hierarchical control of labor, justice, and commerce, a highly-stratified social organization with king and priests occupying the top of the hierarchy and in tension with one another. "An intellectual class of scribes filled the niche between power and purity and mediated between the interests of the king and the temple priests" (21). Their role was to develop codes of law, which were then attributed to "the will of the gods of the royal temple cult" (22). The goal of such legislation was primarily to underpin the notion of purity and its application to social stratification. The importance of the temple-state to Jewish Palestine is reflected in Hebrew scripture: Jewish mythology was based on the idea of the Jerusalem Temple as God's place and the locus of God's eternal kingdom. The Romans' destruction of the temple in the Roman-Jewish war (66-73 CE) brought to an end the practicality of a temple-state but not its idealization, for Jews or (later) Christians.

The city-state "was the major symbol and vehicle for the spread of Hellenizing institutions" as a result of Alexander's campaigns (24). Numerous Hellenistic cities were established throughout the Near East, bringing with them Greek institutions and language. But the high Athenian ideals on which the city-state had been based were not readily exportable (24). "Instead of enhancing the grand tradition of classical Greece, the Hellenistic city generated ideological confusion and cultural conflict" when it collided with the temple-state, particularly in Palestine.
Nor did the "patrician and senatorial traditions" of the Roman republic export well to the far-flung districts of the Roman empire of the second and first centuries BCE (25). Despite Roman successes in developing infrastructure and bring law and order to the empire during the *pax romana*, Rome "was respected, but it was not loved" (26), nor did it succeed (or even attempt, really) to develop a common culture in its subject territories.

Characteristic of this period of instability and breakdown of traditional forms of social organization was an increase in social critique, of religious experimentation and philosophical inquiry. Mystery cults, Stoicism, and Cynicism, among other movements, had their day, and Jewish scholars reinterpreted the "Books of Moses" for clues to understand the present confusion. Shrines were built to local deities, and monastic communities and splinter groups (notably the Essenes) arose.

According to Mack, "Galilee happened to be a perfect place to experiment with social critique and try out new ideas about a better way to live" (38). Geographically, historically, and culturally separated from Jerusalem and its temple cult, Hellenized by proximity to twelve new cities founded on the Greek model, its people considered themselves "Galileans, not Syrians, not Samaritans, not Jews. It was, as the later rabbis would say, the 'district of the gentiles'" (39). From Galilee came Jesus, of course, whom Mack characterizes as "something of an intellectual ... but not a constructive, systematic thinker of the kind who formulate philosophies or theologies. He did not create a social program for others to follow or a religion that invited others to see him as a god. He simply saw things more clearly than most, made sense when he talked about life in his world, and must have attracted others to join him in looking at the world a certain way ... Jesus' genius was to let the sparks fly between two different cultural sensibilities, the Greek and the Semitic" (39-40).

Jesus' sayings (Mack uses *Q* as his source) combine two themes: "a playful, edgy challenge to take up a countercultural lifestyle" and "an interest in a social concept called the 'kingdom of God[,]' which "referred to an ideal society imagined as an alternative to the way in which the world was working under the Romans" and "an alternative way of life that anyone could take at any time" (40). Mack emphasizes

that "[t]he kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus was not an apocalyptic or heavenly projection of an otherworldly desire," but an alternative way of life "in the present state of affairs" (40).

Mack traces three courses of development in the writings of the "Jesus people," those who were influenced by his talk of the kingdom. One line, traceable to the earliest Jesus movement, "through Matthew's gospel, to later communities that understood themselves as Jewish Christians ... found a way to bring the behavior of the Jesus movement in line with more traditional Jewish codes of ethics." Another, which "may have been the most attractive form of Christianity during the second to fourth centuries," begins with Sayings Gospel Q, "runs through the Gospel of Thomas .... and ends up in gnostic circles.. These people cultivated the invitation to personal virtue and thought of the kingdom of God as an otherworldly dimension of spiritual existence where true human being had its origin and end." The third, which referred to itself as the church, "had worked its way through northern Syria and Asia Minor where the Christ cult formed to justify the inclusion of both gentiles and Jews in the kingdom of God. It was this trajectory that converged on Rome, developed the notion of the universal church ..., and created the Bible as its charter" (41).

Mack identifies seven "streams within the Jesus movement" in its first forty years:

"a 'family of Jesus' group for which there are only a handful of clues ... the congregations of the Christ ... the community of Q who produced the Sayings Gospel *Q*; the Jesus School that produced the pre-Markan pronouncement stories; the True Disciples who produced the Gospel of Thomas, the Congregation of Israel who composed the pre-Markan set of miracle stories, and the Jerusalem Pillars about whom we have only an early report from Paul in his letter to the Galatians" (44-45). Each of the seven was "engaged in some kind of group formation," based on its own conception of the kingdom of God; and each group developed its own distinct version. As Mack says, "The road from Jesus to the Christian religion that finally emerged in the fourth century, with its myth of Jesus as the son of god solidly in place, is a very long and twisty path. Christianity was not born of an immaculate conception. It was the product of myriad moments of intellectual labor and negotiated social agreements by the people investing in the experiment" (45). To be sure, "[n]o early Jesus group thought of Jesus as the Christ or of itself as a Christian church" (45).

Mack proceeds with thorough analyses of the writings that emerged from these groups, beginning with the earliest, Q, and proceeding through Thomas; the miracle stories; references to the Jerusalem Pillars in Paul's letter to the Galatians; lengthy discussion of Paul and the Christ myth; gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke; John and the "cosmic lord"; the second through fourth century writings attributed

backward to the apostles; Luke's fanciful Acts of the Apostles; and letters of second through fourth century church fathers. The virtue of Mack's analysis lies in its comprehensiveness; the inclusion of the so-called "apostolic letters" and the writings of Marcion, Clement, Justin, Origen, and others lend substantive proof to Mack's thesis.

Q The Q people, "instead of meeting to worship a risen Christ, as in the Pauline congregations, or worrying about what it meant to be a follower of a martyr, as in the Markan community ... were fully preoccupied with questions about the kingdom of God in the present and the behavior required if one took it seriously" (48). Mack discusses the three "layers" of *Q*, each corresponding to a different stage in the history of the Q community. Q^1 provides the community with radical behavioral recommendations consistent with the kingdom of God: "voluntary poverty, severance of family ties, renunciation of needs, fearlessness in speaking out, [and] nonretaliation" (50). Q^2 reflects a less sanguine mood. Probably a response to the social conflicts of the 50s and 60s, Q^2 adopts "a decidedly judgmental stance toward the world" (51-52). Q^3, which was added after the Roman-Jewish war, "dulled the radical edge of the earlier material and made a kind of peace with more traditional ways of being the people of God while waiting for the kingdom. It was the book of *Q* at the Q^3 level that attracted the attention of other Jesus groups, was copied and read for another generation within the Jesus movements, and was

eventually incorporated into the gospels of Matthew and Luke" (53).

Pronouncement stories (*chreiai*) These stories follow a characteristic formula: "Jesus is depicted in a certain situation; someone questions what he is saying or doing; and Jesus gives a sharp response" (54). Pronouncement stories, found largely in the synoptic gospels, are based on Greek *chreiai*, "useful" anecdotes that "were capable of creating the impression of a teacher's character" (55) and which were used by biographers of Socrates, for instance, or the Cynic philosophers to illuminate their subjects. In every instance, Jesus has the last word (hence "pronouncements"). Several of these stories, which predate the gospels, were adapted by the Markan community in its apparently ongoing struggle against Pharisaic purity codes; thus, the Jesus of Mark's gospel "came to be imagined as the founder-teacher of a movement that had worked out its self-definition in debate with Pharisaic teachings" (59), unlike the methods by which other Jesus communities defined themselves.

Thomas "The Thomas people, like the Q people, were interested only in Jesus' teachings" and "thought of themselves as the True Disciples of Jesus" (61). Gnostic in nature, the Gospel of Thomas's characteristic theme involves the disciples of Jesus asking him questions (usually the wrong questions) and receiving his corrective responses, which are, more often than not, enigmatic, representing

"hidden" knowledge that only the most industrious seeker will attain.

The Jerusalem "Pillars" Having produced no documents of their own, and mentioned only in Paul's letter to the Galatians (c. 55 BCE), the exact nature of the small group that lived, until shortly before the Roman-Jewish war, in Jerusalem is somewhat of a mystery. No other Jesus group considered Jerusalem important to their movement. (Jesus himself seems to have had little to do with Jerusalem.) We know that the group consisted of Cephas (Peter), James (Jesus's brother), and John (the son of Zebedee) and that the group adhered to Jewish purity codes, unlike the other Jesus movements.

The Christ Cult The Christ cult, which began probably in Antioch in northern Syria and spread through Asia Minor into Greece, "differed from the Jesus movements in two major respects":

> One was a focus upon the significance of Jesus' death and destiny. Jesus' death was understood to have been an event that brought a new community into being. This focus on Jesus' death had the resuly of shifting attention away from the teachings of Jesus and away from a sense of belonging to his school. It engendered instead an elaborate preoccupation with notions of martyrdom, resurrection, and the transformation of Jesus into a divine, spiritual presence. The other major

> difference was the forming of a cult oriented to that spiritual presence. Hymns, prayers, acclamations, and doxologies were composed and performed when Christians met together in Jesus' name. Meals and other rituals of congregating celebrated both Jesus' memory and the presence of his spirit. (76)

Paul was converted to the Christ cult, characteristics of which can be derived from his letters. The central statement of the Christ myth, the kerygmatic tradition of the group that Paul had joined, is presented in 1 Cor. 15:1-3):

> That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
> and that he was buried;
> and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures;
> and that he appeared (to Cephas, then to the twelve ...). (79)

Two mythologies "provide the logic underlying the entire enterprise" [of the Christ cult]: the Greek myth of the noble death and the Jewish myth of the persecuted sage (80). According to the first, "martyrdom [represents] the ultimate test of virtue, and obedience unto death the ultimate display of one's strength of character" (80). The second involved "an unjust charge of disloyalty that put the sage 'into the hands of' a foreign despot who threatened to kill him ... The second episode was the revelation or discovery of the sage's piety and loyalty by the despot. This revelation

resulted in the rescue of the righteous man and his elevation to a position of honor" (81).

Two significant facts regarding the Christ myth: "its first conception had little to do with historical reminiscence and no interest at all in setting the event in any historical context"; and secondly, "there is no reference to Jesus' death as a crucifixion in the pre-Markan Jesus material." Although "Mark's story is dependent on the martyr myth in the *kerygma*," according to Mack, "the kerygma and the passion narrative of Mark's gospel are two different, incongruous myths" (87).

Finally, although various Jesus groups shared a common meal in their meetings, only the Christ cult developed a ritualistic tradition of reenactment (a tradition that predates Paul, but which he mentions in 1 Cor. 11:23-25), the "words of institution":

> That the Lord Jesus on the night he was handed over took bread,
> And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said,
> "This is my body which is for you.
> Do this in remembrance of me."
> In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying,
> "This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
> Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (88)

Thus the Christ cult created an identity myth in which "Jesus' death was a 'sacrifice' that sealed a 'covenant' that founded the Christian community, and the Christian community acknowledged that foundation by making of their common meal a memorial of that sacrifice" (90).

Mack asserts that "Paul's gospel was his very own construction" (123). He discusses Paul's attempts to shape the congregations of the Christ to which he preached and wrote. He changes the emphasis from the resurrection, which apparently caused too much happiness in the congregations (or spiritual ecstasy, at least), to the cross and the necessity of suffering.

Mack discusses the idea of the "cosmic lord" as that figure is described in "four fully developed systems of cosmic worldview, each governed by the concept of the cosmic Christ": the Gospel of John, the post-Pauline school tradition, documented in Colossians and Ephesians, the anonymous letter to the Hebrews, and the Revelation to John (175).

Luke's *Acts of the Apostles*, which Mack dates at 120 CE (about 35 years later than some scholars), "marks the shift in focus for second-century mythmaking, away from Jesus and toward the apostles. Mack analyzes the *Didache* (which provides rules for its community) and the letters of Clement and Ignatius. He traces the shift

from mythmaking to the construction of theologies (themselves myths) in the patristic age of the church, the central claim of which "was that Christians were the legitimate heirs of the epic of Israel, that the Jews had never understood the intentions of their God, and that the story of Israel, if one read it rightly, was 'really' about the coming of Christ" (252). Despite the strangeness of such claims (Mack calls them "far-fetched") they become "a Christian theology of centrist persuasion" that brought historical legitimacy to Christianity by appropriating the scriptures of a much older tradition (252).

Mack concludes, "The Bible is the Christian myth. The Christian myth is the Bible" (276). Tatian, around 170 CE, was the first to use the terms "old testament" and "new testament." But the Christian Bible wasn't created until the conversion and accession of Constantine in 324 CE and the rapid expansion and doctrinal standardization of the church as Christianity became a de facto state religion of the Roman Empire. Jerome's selection and Latin translation of biblical texts in the early 5th century gave the Roman church a Bible that would be used until the 16th century.

His final chapter assesses the Bible's usefulness in modern society. "It is no wonder that Christians think they hear the Bible talking to them. One can ask any question he or she wants of the Bible, turn the handle 'round and 'round, and get some kind of answer. If the first answer does not appear to be helpful, the handle can always be

cranked again until the right answer appears." He continues, "if that is all there were to it, the role of the Bible in our culture might be considered harmless. After all, every culture has had its basket of feathers, sticks, and stones, or other means for doing divination" (299). But "as a lens through which to view the world, the old-new formula in the composition of the Bible has resulted in a distinctively Christian mentality that views *all* non-Christians as pre-Christian. This mentality includes an implicit claim to know the truth about God, history, and the human situation that other people do not know. People outside the domain of Christian knowledge are invariably ranked lower and in need of enlightenment or transformation" (303). The Christian mythology, with its "universalist," "monolinear" orientation, so contrary to the world as it is today, is essentially a relic of the past, and Mack calls for the creation of a new mythology that more accurately reflects the worldview of our own time.

Mack is the most honest of all the scholars of early Christianity. This book confirms much of what I've read elsewhere but does so without the usual absurd apologies to those who might take offense at a new idea. He is quite conscious of the difficulty involved in discussing the Bible at all, having to overcome first the notion that the text is self-proving because it is "the word of God."

Bandits Prophets & Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus

Horsley, Richard A., with John S. Hanson. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999.

In this reprint of a 1985 edition, Horsley challenges the notion that Jesus and the movements that followed him can be studied without reference to their social contexts. He faults Jesus scholars for their overdependence on scribal literature for understanding the 1st century CE social milieu, arguing that scribes and Pharisees constituted a very small segment of the population. Horsley therefore studies the peasantry, the masses of the Judean and Galilean population, to describe the context from which Jesus emerged. "The dynamic force in the situation, religiously and politically ... appears to have been movements among the peasantry" (xxxiii). His purpose in so doing is to emphasize the significance of class conflict in an agrarian society in which "90 percent are peasants dominated by a small minority" (4). Furthermore, he challenges the prevalent notion that the Jews of Jesus's time were expectantly waiting for their messiah.

The problem with attempting to reconstruct the lives of peasants is that peasants, almost by definition, are illiterate; consequently, they leave no written record of their existence. The characteristics of the peasant class of ancient times must be reconstructed, therefore, in one of two ways: either by studying more modern peasant societies and applying the same assumptions to those of ancient times, or by

extracting from the written works of literate men clues about the underclass. Horsley is aware of this problem. Curiously, though, he relies on the scribal literature (biblical texts, contemporary histories) almost exclusively, after having faulted other scholars for their overreliance on such testimony. Perhaps aware of this self-contradictory method, Horsley compensates by "reading into" the scribal literature subtexts that, as he claims repeatedly, reveal what peasant attitudes "must have been." In fact, his most-used verb form is the modal ("must have," "could have," "would have"). This leaves the reader with the inescapable impression that Horsley's argument is entirely speculative. There is food for thought in some of his speculations, but in the end his argument does not cohere.

Bandits "Social banditry arises in traditional agrarian societies where peasants are exploited by governments and landowners, particularly in situations where many peasants are economically vulnerable and governments are administratively inefficient" (49). He cites Eric Hobsbawm's conclusion that social banditry is a form of "prepolitical rebellion" (48), and that "it is always a rural phenomenon" (49). Horsley describes the emergence of numerous bandit groups in Galilee. Bandits, it seems, were not common thieves, exactly (although they could be), but more like guerrillas or Robin Hoods, banes of the ruling class and heroes to the peasantry. He points out that, as scattered rebellions gave way to more organized political opposition, "brigand groups, finally, provided not only much of the fighting force in

the revolt of 66-70, but some of the key leadership as well" (83).

Messiahs Horsley identifies two messianic ideals of the time: the Qumran ideal, which imagined a messiah as a warrior of words; and the popular idea, which imagined the messiah as an armed leader, acclaimed king by the people (130).

Prophets Horsley identifies two types of prophet: oracular (prophesies impending judgment or redemption) and action (leads popular movement to usher in God's expected redemptive action) (135). He describes three important movements involving action prophets: the movement in Samaria in roughly 35 CE; Theudas (c. 45 CE), who was followed by a large group to the Jordan River (the traditional scene of the Israelites' entry into Canaan under Joshua); and "The Egyptian" (c. 56 CE), who led a group of thousands to the Mount of Olives, outside the walls of Jerusalem, in an intended reenactment of Joshua's successful verbal assault on the walls of Jericho. All three movements were brutally suppressed by the Roman authorities. Two oracular prophets, Jesus son of Hananiah and John the Baptist, were more a threat to Jewish ruling groups than to the Romans, according to Horsley.

Other Groups Horsley discusses the Fourth Philosophy and the Sicarii, who were neither prophetic nor messianic groups and were not peasant movements (190).

The Fourth Philosophy, operating very early in the century, organized a tax revolt. The Sicarii, urban terrorists, threatened the Jewish ruling elite, whom they saw as collaborators with the Romans. The Zealots also challenged temple authority, calling for a popularly-chosen high priest. They were later joined by a coalition of bandit groups during the Roman-Jewish war.

The Search for Jesus: Modern Scholarship Looks at the Gospels

Patterson, Stephen, Marcus Borg, and John Dominic Crossan. Ed. Hershel Shanks. Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1994.

This book is a panel discussion among three biblical scholars, the transcript of a symposium at the Smithsonian Institution held on September 11, 1993.

Patterson reviews the three historically important theories that have influenced gospel studies: Griesbach Hypothesis, Markan Priority, and Two-Source Theory, the last of which is believed by most critics today. He then describes the methods by which the historical reliability of a text is determined: multiple attestation (two or more sources agreeing on a particular datum), the kerygmatic criterion (distinguishing between "what early Christians said about Jesus" and "things Jesus might plausibly have said about himself"), the criterion of social formation (distinguishing between "processes of social formation that went on in the early church but not in the historical career of Jesus himself"), the criterion of coherence (conclusions must make sense), the environmental criterion (historical material is plausible "given what we know about the religious and cultural world of the Mediterranean basin in the first century") (23-25).

Patterson then traces the history of historical Jesus study, from the rationalist critics

of the 19th century, to the history of theology movement of the 1950s, to the varied methods of recent scholarship involving diverse fields of study in pursuit of the "historical" Jesus.

The remainder of the book records the symposium itself. The topics are the Palestinian background; the infancy and youth of the messiah; portraits of Jesus; and the Passion, crucifixion, and resurrection. Crossan mentions that Jesus, like 95 percent of the people of his time, was illiterate. he also reveals that the earliest extant complete gospel texts "date to the fourth century" (34). Borg mentions the "deeply Jewish" nature of first-century Palestine, meaning that "it was grounded in the Scriptures of ancient Israel" (42). The "central cultural dynamics" of that world were the result of several factors: it was a colonial society; it was a cosmopolitan society, well-Hellenized; it was a peasant society (Lenski's "pre-industrial agrarian society") with implicit class conflict; it was a "purity society," meaning that it was "organized around the great contrast or polarity between pure and impure" (50) and involved sharp social boundaries between the ritually pure and the ritually impure; and finally, it was a patriarchal society with an androcentric tradition (44-53).

Crossan deals with infancy issues. He points out that the purpose of Luke's infancy narrative is to show that "Jesus is parallel but superior to John the Baptist" (62). Matthew compares Jesus with Moses. Thus, Matthew's infancy story involves legal

traditions, while Luke's involves patriarchal and prophetic traditions (66). Crossan points out that, except for Matthew and Luke, no one who read Isaiah 7:14 understood it to prophesy the virginal birth of Jesus (68). He concludes, rightly, that Luke's Bethlehem trek is "pure fiction" (70). Both Matthew and Luke feel a need to have Jesus's birth confirm Micah 5:2, so they need to get Jesus born in Bethlehem by hook or by crook. Neither of the other evangelists think Jesus was born there. Furthermore, Luke's angels say to the shepherds precisely what was said "on marble stelae in the Asian temples dedicated to the Roman Empire and Augustus" dating to 9 CE (73). In other words, "Luke is taking on ... the myth of the divine emperor" (77).

Borg evaluates each of six "portraits of Jesus" constructed by scholars in the 20th century: the "restoration eschatology prophet" model of Sanders, which sees Jesus as the herald of an imminent eschaton that will restore Israel to biblical greatness; Mack's "hellenistic cynic sage" model, which sees Jesus as an itinerant teacher of "wisdom that mocked or subverted conventional beliefs" (92); Elisabeth Fiorenza's "egalitarian wisdom prophet" model, a feminist interpretation of Jesus's wisdom teaching (Wisdom is personified as a female in the Hebrew Bible); Horsley's "social prophet" model, by which Jesus is "an Elijah-style social prophet and community organizer" (95); Borg's "spirit person" model, by which Jesus is "a mediator or a funnel or a conduit for the power of the spirit to flow into this world" (96); and

Crossan's "peasant sage" model, by which Jesus is "a Jewish cynic peasant with an alternative social vision revealed through magic [healing] and meals ["open commensality"]" (99).

In the next section, Crossan discusses the Passion and resurrection, concluding that what we get in the canonical gospels is not "history remembered" but "prophecy historicized" (passim). The intensity with which each evangelist rewrites the burial scene is evidence that "with regard to the body of Jesus, by Easter Sunday morning, anyone who cared did not know where it was, and anyone who knew did not care" (120). Finally, the resurrection accounts "are not intended to be visions or hallucinations ... They are calm, serene statements of who is in charge in this community and who is in charge in that other community" (126).

The Changing Faces of Jesus

Vermes, Geza. New York: Viking Compass, 2000.

Geza Vermes, translator of *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (1997) and himself a Jew, explains in his prologue that he came to Jesus studies through his collaboration in the reediting and rewriting of Emil Schürer's *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (1973-87). Over the twenty-year period of 1973-93, he published a trilogy of works examining Jesus in his Jewish context. Indeed, this is the "particular slant," as he calls it (2) that he brings to historical Jesus studies—that he considers the New Testament within, rather than apart from, its Jewish context, without the "qualitative distinction" typically imposed on New Testament versus "nonbiblical Jewish writings" by "Christian churchmen" (2).

He begins with a linguistic dilemma overlooked by most scholars: Jesus himself was an Aramaic-speaking Jew, but the gospels and letters of the New Testament are written in Greek and based on a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. They are the product of the Hellenized, gentile Graeco-Roman world rather than of the Jewish world of the Galilee in which Jesus operated. Thus the New Testament version of Jesus is filtered through a language, culture, and sensibility unfamiliar to the actual Jesus. One significant example Vermes provides is the gentile Christians' literal interpretation of the Hebrew or Aramaic phrase "son of God," a phrase always

interpreted figuratively in its native culture (3).

In an attempt to break out of the Greek worldview of the New Testament and to "shed an invaluable light both on Jesus and on primitive Christianity" (4), Vermes refers in his study not only to the New Testament texts but also to the Apocrypha, the Jewish Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the writing of Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, and the vast rabbinic literature of the early centuries of the Christian era. And his method for uncovering the historical Jesus is to work from the latest canonical gospel (John) backward to the earliest (Mark). This unorthodox methodology reveals a highly plausible Jesus by peeling back the "faces" imposed on Jesus as Christianity invented itself.

Unbiased readers of John have long recognized that, as Vermes says, the gospel "reflects not the authentic message of Jesus or even the thinking about him of his immediate followers but the highly evolved theology of a Christian writer who lived three generations after Jesus and completed his Gospel in the opening years of the second century A.D." (8). Further,

> It is obvious to anyone acquainted with the doctrinal tradition of the church that the theological understanding of Jesus—who he was and what he did—by historic Christianity ultimately depends on the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul. Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, is primarily responsible

> for the church's teaching on Christ, the Redeemer of mankind; faith in the divinity of the Son of God and the divorce between Christianity and Judaism, on the other hand, derive first and foremost from the influence of the Fourth Gospel ... the climax in the evolution of Christian dogma in the New Testament, its most polished and ultimate expression. (8-9)

John's gospel, for which "the oldest known manuscript fragments ... belong to sometime between A.D. 125 and 150" and for which "the oldest references ... in early Christian literature come from the mid-second century, was likely published "between the years 100 and 110" (11). It presented a rather serious problem to the early church in that it contradicts the synoptic gospels in so many matters related to Jesus as to undermine the validity of the first three gospels. At first, the church tried to overcome this embarrassment by creating a gospel harmony, the *Diatesseron*, that tried to blend the four gospels into one. But eventually it adopted the view that John simply "avoided repeating most of" the other gospels' stories, and instead attempted to supplement, enrich, and improve them (10). Of course, such a defense of contradiction, still popular today, is absurd. Either Jesus was crucified on the day before Passover (John) or on the day after (the synoptics); you can't have it both ways and claim to be dealing with "gospel truth." Either Jesus' travels brought him to Jerusalem three times (John) or only once (the others); it can't be both. Either Jesus cast out demons (the synoptics) or he didn't. Either the famous "cleansing of the

Temple" scene occurred at the beginning of Jesus' public career (John) or at the end (the others), if it happened at all, which is highly unlikely (see Crossan et al.). And either Jesus' most dramatic raising from the dead, the Lazarus story—which allegedly involved a person truly dead, not just "asleep" or freshly dead—happened (John) or didn't (the others). Either Jesus sought to be baptized by John (the synoptics) or he didn't (John). Either Jesus' mother is a part of Jesus' entourage (John, who never refers to her as "Mary") or Jesus is openly hostile to his family and is not accompanied by them in his travels (the others). Either Jesus preached the imminent approach of the "Kingdom of God" (synoptics) or he mentioned it only once, without emphasis, being more concerned with proving his own divinity (John). And either Jesus was victimized "profoundly and universally" (20) by "the Jews," who wanted him dead almost from the outset of his public life because he healed on the sabbath and "claimed that God was his Father" (20) (John) or no such antagonism would have occurred for such reasons. (All Jews were considered children of the Father, and there was no Jewish prohibition against curing illness on the sabbath.)

Regarding the "son of God" usage, Vermes points out that, although for Christians "'Son of God' is just another way of saying God," such was not the case "in the Old Testament and in intertestamental Judaism" (36); "No biblical or postbiblical Jewish writer ever depicted a human being literally as divine, nor did Jewish religious

culture agree to accommodate the Hellenistic notions of 'son of God' and 'divine man'" (37).

It strikes me as odd that Vermes seems to be the only scholar who recognizes the obvious derivation from Greek mythology of the idea of Jesus as offspring of a human mother and a divine father. The only similar reference in the Old Testament is in Genesis 6, where celestial beings (Sons of God) impregnate human women, creating a race of giants and bringing destruction to humanity. John's claim that the Jews found Jesus' claim to be the Son of God blasphemous is "baseless from the point of view of the Jewish traditional use of the idiom" (36).

Vermes argues that John's gentile audience, ignorant of Jewish literature and culture, needed to have some things spelled out for them. Thus the commandment in John to "love one another" is presented as if it is wholly new, when it actually comes from Leviticus.

John's greatest innovation was to personify the holy spirit, who was to carry on Jesus' redemptive work. In Vermes view, this was "a clever strategem" that obscured three generations of doctrinal development from the time of Jesus to the time of John, under the guise of "perfecting" the revelation of the son (54).

Vermes considers Paul to be "the odd man out among the apostles," obsessed with "the questionable nature of his status as an apostle" (68). Having had no contact with the actual Jesus, having never heard Jesus' teaching, Paul had to invent his own, unique, "nonhistorical approach to the Lord Jesus Christ which contained no obvious disadvantage for Paul himself" (71). With the exception of two traditions that Paul claims were transmitted to him (divorce and financial support of clergy), his theology is outside the development of Christian thought that led to the gospels; that is, it is unsupported in them or supported only partially.

The eucharist is one such Pauline innovation. The gospels are equivocal about whether Jesus' last meal was intended symbolically; John has no eucharistic "last supper" per se. For Paul, though, the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine, symbolic of Christ's body and blood and performed ritualistically with certain words in a setting of a communal dinner, was central to Christian ritual and belief, symbolic of the unity of Christians in one "body of Christ."

Paul claims that most of his insights come through visions rather than from traditions about Jesus. Ignorant of the Jesus of history, Paul "deliberately turned his back on the historical figure, the Jesus according to the flesh" (75). Paul's Jesus is almost entirely spirit. His mythology contains only three named apostles, no "holy family" of Jesus, no King Herod, no John the Baptist, no Pontius Pilate, no trial

scene. What is important to Paul is that Jesus' physical body died, and he became pure spirit, having risen from the dead. Indeed, that Jesus had been a physical person in an actual body seems to have embarrassed Paul, who avoids knowing "anything of Christ 'according to the flesh'" (79). The death of the physical body and the quest for full spirituality inform Paul's teaching about marriage, sex, Christian community, and the imminent eschaton, including his notion that Jesus would return in the end time. (Vermes mentions how in the early fifties CE the church at Thessalonica, having read one of Paul's letters a certain way, believed that Christ had already returned. Many of them stopped working, assuming that the Lord would manifest himself any day.)

Vermes provides substantial textual evidence to argue that Paul did not consider Christ to be divine and that for Paul Jesus becomes the Son of God only at the time of his resurrection (88). Faith in Jesus allows the Christian to partake in his resurrection, so that "in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith" (Gal. 3:26, 89).

But it is the cross, not the resurrection, that is Paul's focus. Vermes discusses at some length how Paul came to understand Jesus as a type of Isaac, the date of whose almost-sacrifice had been determined to be 15 Nisan, the day on which Passover is celebrated. It is "spiritual communion with the death of Jesus" that "allegorically

terminates sinful existence and opens the door to a new life" (95): "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom. 6:6, 95).

The outward symbol of Christian freedom is baptism, which for Paul has nothing in common with the baptism long practiced by Jews, who understood it as a restoration to purity. For Paul, the baptismal pool symbolizes "the tomb from which Jesus rose at Easter." Immersion in its water represents burial and a symbolic sharing in Christ's death; emergence from the water represents a mystical sharing in his resurrection (98).

Paul invents the doctrine of original, or transmitted, sin. Vermes points out that Jewish thinkers saw sin as a natural (and God-created) part of being human. Nowhere in Jewish theology do we find the notion of transmitted sin. Adam may have brought death into the world, but sin was preexistent. But Paul equates sin with death; for him, Adam represents death, and Christ, the new Adam, represents life, having overcome sin. Paul is ambivalent but generally negative about the law. In his view, law actually encourages sin because it spells out what sin is. Rather than view the law as moral guidance, Paul sees it as unable to make men live holy lives. For him, it is faith that brings righteousness, not works, an interpretation of the Abraham-Isaac story that years later became Luther's famous dictum: *sola fide*

(by faith alone).

What was worship like in Pauline churches? Because "the Jesus of Paul has no earthly identity," being "without human face or character ... Paul and his church members could seek only a spiritual-mystical encounter with the death and resurrection of a superterrestrial, meta-historical being" who is "the channel which carries the Christians' supplications or thank offerings to the Father" (106). The liturgy consisted of "a communal meal during which the participants recalled the death of Christ in the form of a symbolical reenactment of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him," the purpose of which was to "'proclaim the Lord's death until he comes'" (1 Cor. 11:23-26, 107). There is no reading of scripture, no sermons, no healings or miracles. Members might prophesy or (Paul found this embarrassing) make ecstatic noises.

Paul introduced a separation between the worshipper and God. Urging his congregations to "Be imitators of me" (1 Cor. 11:1), the worshipper was at two removes from the Father, separated from him by Paul and Jesus. "Thus began a trend, still conspicuous in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, to introduce models, mediators, and intercessors between the believer and God. Vermes points out how amusing it is that Paul, the hero of the Reformation, introduced what became the cult of saints and Mariolatry, bugaboos of the Protestants (110).

Trying to account for the rapid spread of Gentile Christianity, Vermes cites the spiritual liberation at the base of the Pauline myth, but he also credits Paul's "shadowy co-workers" (113), barely mentioned in the letters, who seem to have provided the churches with a hierarchical management structure consisting of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, whose qualifications for leadership roles included monogamy (not celibacy!), good temperament, and sobriety.

Vermes discusses the influence of other (non-Pauline) New Testament letters. Of those, the *Letter of James*, pseudonymously attributed to Jesus' brother and the leader of the Jerusalem church, has caused church theologians, Catholic and Protestant, great difficulty. The letter, which dates from the end of the first century CE, explicitly contradicts Paul regarding the value of works:

> *So faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead* ... Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed in God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. *You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.* (Jas. 2:14-24; italics Vermes')

Vermes notes that "the God of James is the God of Judaism" and that "Jesus stands very much in the background" in the letter (123). "Today many Christian biblical

scholars cannot stomach the idea of an open doctrinal conflict in Holy Scripture between two apostles of Christ. But we know from Paul that his conflict with the Judaizers, the "circumcision party," was all too genuine" (124).

Turning to Acts, Vermes states that "the author of the Acts intended to place Jesus lower than the Christ of Paul and John, but above the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels" (127). Vermes' most illuminating point in this section has to do with "*pesher*," a Hebrew word meaning "explanation," but "used to designate a kind of fulfillment interpretation." Vermes discusses how "between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, Bible interpretation was developed by Jews into a fine art," and that "by the middle of the second century B.C. Palestinian Jews possessed a collection, or canon, of holy scriptures" and a large body of "explanatory literature" (133). Exegesis of eschatological prophecy, particularly by the Essenes of Qumran, involved *pesher*: "The significance of a prophetic, or presumed to be prophetic, text is determined by identifying persons roughly contemporaneous with the commentators as individuals in whom the ancient prediction is thought to have been realized" (133-134). For instance, the seventh century BCE prophet Habakkuk, who prophesied regarding the Babylonians, Israel's enemies in his time, was reinterpreted to apply to the Romans, the Jew's enemies in the first century BCE when the prophet was reinterpreted (154).

The application of *pesher* to early Christianity should be obvious, as the church scoured Hebrew scripture for prophecies that could be assumed to point to Jesus. "The early Christian *pesher* like the Qumran *pesher*, was not primarily an interpretative exercise. Its aim was to furnish biblical sanction to disturbing details in the life of Jesus and of his associates. It also sought to demonstrate that these details fitted into, and were an integral part of, a chain of happenings arranged by God for the salvation of the Jews (and of mankind)" (135). Vermes uses the term "fulfillment interpretation" to describe this use of *pesher*. Fulfillment interpretation was intended to "serve as a 'rational' proof of the validity of faith.

To summarize Vermes' study of *Acts*, "Christianity began as a Jewish revivalist movement ... proclaimed only to 'Hebrews and Hellenists'" before the rise of Paul (151). The persistence of Peter, James, and others in maintaining their Jewish identity indicates that the anti-Jewish strain in Christian writing and the idea that Jesus' purpose was to establish a new religion outside Judaism are features of Christian thought unrelated to Jesus himself. And the testimony in *Acts* of people who are alleged to have known Jesus "may be summarized in a blunt statement: the Acts of the Apostles contains nothing that could possibly be interpreted as pointing to a divine Jesus. It contains no prefiguration, not even a shadowy foretaste of Paul's Christ/Son of God, let alone John's eternal *Logos*" (156).

Vermes' discussion of the synoptic gospels takes no prisoners. He begins by noting that Jesus' unmarried status is curious, as "by the age of thirty practically all male Jews, apart from the celibate Essenes, had been married for years" (163). His bachelor status is even more remarkable in that he seems in the synoptics to be surrounded by female friends (163). With regard to Jesus' family, which according to Matthew and Mark consisted of four brothers and several unnamed sisters, Vermes points out that

> nothing in the New Testament itself would suggest that these men and women were not Jesus' full brothers and sisters. Mary is nowhere called a virgin except in the 'infancy' stories which were later added to the main Gospel tradition. In fact, only with the development of the belief in the perpetual virginity of the mother of Jesus did the need arise to find an innocuous explanation for the embarrassing presence of brothers and sisters in the Gospels ... [I]t is hardly necessary to point out that in any context other than the New Testament it would occur to no one to query the ordinary plain meaning of the words. (163)

With regard to the numerous instances in Mark and Matthew in which Jesus makes it plain that his mission is only to the Jews, a tradition that "flatly contradict[s] other sayings attributed to Jesus" about a universal mission, Vermes believes that "in order to legitimize the growing presence of non-Jews in the church, fictitious

sayings were inserted into the Synoptics in which Jesus himself orders the promulgation of the gospel far beyond the confines of the Jewish world" (167-168).

As teacher, Jesus' recurring theme was the Kingdom of God; as a healer, his primary occupation was exorcism. Vermes cites the exorcism at Gerasa or Gadara (the actual place-name is uncertain), in which Jesus sends exorcised demons into a herd of swine, who then jump into the lake and drown. He adds that neither place is near water, however, and "if the swine had taken off from either of those places they would have been required to fly rather than jump if they were to land in the Sea of Galilee" (177). Jesus seems to have had quite a following in Galilee, but that warm welcome dissipates as he ventures out of his home district (176).

Vermes takes issue with the synoptics' depiction of Jesus' hostility toward Pharisees and the trial of Jesus before the high priests. He attributes the former not to actual events in Jesus' life but to late first-century controversy between the Jerusalem church and the Pharisees; in fact, there was minimal Pharisaic presence in Galilee at the time of Jesus. Of the latter, Vermes declares that "Practically every detail of the Synoptic [trial] account conflicts both procedurally and substantively with any known Jewish law." A court hearing at night would have been illegal, especially at Passover, and Jesus' words do not amount to blasphemy (180-181).

Problems surround the resurrection stories, too. Vermes points out that despite Jesus' having predicted his own death and resurrection on the third day, none of his disciples seems to have bought it, as they all flee, and the women go to the tomb expecting to anoint the body. Vermes argues, reasonably, "[O]ne is inclined to conclude that the announcements concerning the resurrection of Jesus are later editorial interpolations" (184). With regard to the stealing the body tradition, Vermes asks "if no one expected him (or the Messiah) to rise from the dead, why should anyone feign a resurrection?" (186). Vermes concludes:

> [N]o one can trace exactly the first stages of the spiritual conviction that led from despair followed by a belief mixed with doubt to the established doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus. In my opinion, the implicit evidence of the Acts of the Apostles may be of help. According to that chronicle the apostles attributed the continued efficacy of their charismatic healing and exorcistic activity to the power of the name of Jesus risen from the dead and enthroned in heaven. Put differently and looked at from an existential stance, the genuine Easter miracle can be seen in the metamorphosis of the apostles. (187)

With regard to messiahship, Vermes notes that Jesus' "response to being publicly proclaimed the Messiah oscillated between the unenthusiastic and the negative" (194). The term "Lord" in the synoptics is never "associated with anything to do

with divinity," nor is it ever linked "to the messianic function of Jesus" (201).

So how did Jesus see himself? Jesus "saw a link between his charismatic deeds and those of Elijah and Elisha"; he "perceived himself explicitly as a miracle-working prophet" (206). Jesus was "thoroughly Jewish in his roles of teacher, exorcist, and preacher, prophet and son of God" (208). "The eyes of Jesus were resolutely focused on the present, on the duty of the moment, and closed to anything pertaining to the more distant future ... Such a perspective has no room for the idea of an organized society, a church, destined to last until heaven and earth pass away in a far distant age to come" (219). "Unshakable faith and trust in God ... was the hallmark, the ideal of Jesus ... We may reasonably believe that it continued to his last day ... and even on his way to the cross. But there came the moment of realization that his Father would not intervene, which provoked the cry of anguish ... 'My god, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" (220).

> "The Jesus of the Synoptics, like that of the Acts of the Apostles, is not an otherworldly figure, but one that is firmly planted in our universe of man. His apotheosis was not sudden; it was reached step-by-step ... Formal deification ... was not achieved until the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. But let it be forcefully underlined once more, and finally, that in the minds of first-century Palestinian Jews no human being, not even one celebrated as

'son of God,' could conceivably share the nature of the Almighty." (221)

Jesus was "an itinerant Galilean preacher, healer, and exorcist" recognized "wherever he went ... as the spokesman of God by the simple folk of Galilee" (221). But "from an early stage of his public career, but it would seem without any encouragement on his part, the name of Jesus began to be linked to that of the Messiah ... [yet] he eschewed any association with the traditional political figure of the royal son of David" (222).

In a fascinating discussion of Mark vis á vis Matthew and Luke, Vermes concludes that "Mark's gospel brings us nearer the Jesus of history than any other New Testament writing ... Mark is the only evangelist who enables us to hear today an occasional and faint echo of what may have been ... Jesus' own words in his own language" (234).

Vermes concludes with a kind of lament for the lost Jesus. "[T]he emigration of the Jesus movement from its Jewish home territory to the primarily Greek-speaking pagan Mediterranean world of classical cultural background occurred at too early a stage ... As a result the new church, by then mostly Gentile, soon lost its awareness of being Jewish; indeed, it became progressively anti-Jewish" (282).

"Jesus, the religious man with an irresistible charismatic charm, was metamorphosed into Jesus the Christ, the transcendent object of the Christian religion" (282). The Greek-trained minds of the second-century church invented "a program steeped in metaphysical speculation on the incarnate Christ's person and nature, and his relation to the eternal Son of God, and on the mutual tie between the divine persons of the Trinity. The Scriptures, including the Old Testament, were searched for apparently suitable quotations and interpreted allegorically to prove the conclusions reached by philosophical reasoning. This procedure was made all the easier for these great Hellenistic thinkers since their Bible of both Testaments was in the Greek language. and they could do so freely since by that time there was no longer any Jewish voice in Christendom to sound the alarm" (282).

I find it difficult to assess Vermes' book objectively, as I agree with nearly all his observations and conclusions and would like to avoid cheerleading. The only regrettable flaw in his study is attributing Jesus' execution to the ill-considered "cleansing" of the Temple at Passover time (280), an event that is surely, in my judgment, fictional. But his purpose in this book has nothing to do with determining the cause of the execution, so that unfortunate conclusion is irrelevant to his purpose anyway. Vermes has brought a fresh perspective to the debates over the historical Jesus.

STUDIES OF EARLY CHRISTIAN EXEGESIS

The Origin of Satan

Pagels, Elaine. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Pagels writes what she calls "the social history of Satan; that is, I show how the events told in the gospels about Jesus, his advocates, and his enemies correlate with the supernatural drama the writers use to interpret that story—the struggle between God's spirit and Satan" (xxii-xxiii). She begins by analyzing angels ("messengers") in the Hebrew Bible, noting, as have most biblical scholars, that "Satan, along with other fallen angels or demonic beings, is virtually absent" (xvi). She traces the development of the idea of Satan (Beelzebub, Belial, Belior, or Mastema) as a personified character metaphorically representing the "evil" associated first with foreign nations but increasingly with "enemies within," beginning with pseudepigraphic and extracanonical works from the Persian period through the 1st century CE and achieving its full literary flowering in the works of the Essenes (a radical Jewish sect), of Mark and the other Synoptics, and of the so-called Church Fathers, Justin, Origen, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. This increasingly dualistic worldview, distinguishing the legitimate "people of God" from enemies of the faith and reflecting a cosmic "struggle between God's spirit and the demons, who belong, apparently, to Satan's 'kingdom'" (xvii), informs the subsequent social history of Christianity, in that "such [demonic] visions have been incorporated into Christian tradition and have served, among other things, to confirm for Christians their own

identification with God and to demonize their opponents—first other Jews, then pagans, and later dissident Christians called heretics" (xvii).

The worldview of most cultures is based on a we/they, human/not human, dichotomous understanding of one culture's relationship to others. The Israelites were no exception to this anthropological truism. The Torah, for example, is concerned primarily with cultural identification and distinction. But in the Hebrew Bible cultural self-identification is generally not accomplished by demonizing other groups, nor is the Satan figure, mentioned by name only in Numbers and Job (written c. 550 BCE), the particularized character that he becomes in later literature. Satan is depicted as an obedient servant of God, an angel sent by God for the specific purpose of blocking or obstructing human activity. He is defined best as "the adversary," and "unexplained obstacles" in human life or "reversals of fortune" are attributed to his divinely-sanctioned agency. Thus, Satan is God's instrument as a corrective to change the course of certain human events. Foreign nations are identified not with Satan but with mythological creatures, such as Leviathan, who are unfortunate elements in God's creation.

But beginning in the 6th century BCE, following the return from exile, writers of prophetic books, including parts of Isaiah, Zechariah, Daniel, Amos, and others begin to use mythological imagery, previously used against foreign nations, against

other Israelites whose religious views are deemed by the (generally very conservative) writers to be unorthodox. At the same time, the literary role of the Satan begins to change; he becomes God's opponent, leading fellow-countrymen into error.

The successful Maccabean revolt (168 BCE) against the Hellenizing influence of the Seleucid ruler of Palestine Antiochus Epiphanes and the subsequent rise to power of the Hasmonean dynasty (which, as its long time in office progressed, became quite Hellenistic itself) gave rise to dissident groups such as the Pharisees, who denounced the Hasmonean "priestly family and its allies" (47). Later radical groups, such as the Essenes and the early followers of Jesus of Nazareth shared the Pharisaic "opposition to the high priest and to the Temple" (47). These conservative extremist groups "began increasingly to invoke the *satan* to characterize their Jewish opponents" (47). They also produce written "histories" of Satan, personified now as an insubordinate angel in opposition to his master. He becomes, in this new mythology, "not the distant enemy but the intimate enemy—one's trusted colleague, close associate, brother" (49).

One such work is *Book of the Watchers*, written during the Maccabean war and incorporated into the apocryphal 1 Enoch. Basing part of its story on a curious passage in Genesis, it relates how "watcher" angels mated with human women,

creating a race of bastards—nephilim (meaning "fallen ones"—who "brought violence upon earth" (50). Two other writers represented in 1 Enoch, one of whom wrote in Jesus' time, elaborate on the watchers stories, more explicitly associating the personified Satan with enemies within Israel. This theme is continued in Jubilees (also c. 160 BCE). The writer revises the stories of Abraham and Isaac and of Moses, introducing a personified evil spirit or spirits (who presumably against God's will convinced Abraham to attempt the sacrifice of his son).

In the Christian gospel tradition (which begins with Mark, following the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE), the central theme becomes the cosmic struggle between God (represented by Jesus) and Satan, whom Mark repeatedly associates with the Pharisees, the powerful chief opponents of Mark's extremist Jewish sect. Matthew, Luke, and John are even more bitter toward their perceived antagonists, extending condemnation to the entire Jewish majority.

By 100 CE, gentile converts dominated the Christian movement, and they turned satanic scrutiny not on Jews but on other gentiles whose understanding and practice of the relatively new religion deviated from that of what was becoming an institutional church based on priestly authority and (later) organized into dioceses with bishops as overseers (a model adapted from the Roman army); in the 2nd century CE, the idea of "apostolic succession" is invented to lend legitimacy to a new

order, intolerant of dissent. Justin, his student Tatian, and the Egyptian Christian Origen continue in their writings the demonization of dissidents within the church.

The late 2nd century CE church fathers Irenaeus and Tertullian define deviance from church leadership as heretical. Tertullian urges leaders not to allow people to ask questions, which often lead to heresy: "The true Christian ... simply determines to 'know nothing ... at variance with the truth of faith'" (164). Irenaeus, writing in *Against Heresies*, identifies gnostic Christians as "agents of Satan" (178). Apparently the early "fathers" considered gnosticism to be the greatest threat to the incipient church, as it called for unmediated communion of the individual with the divinity within himself, a system in which priests and bishops are superfluous. And interestingly, the gnostic writers do not engage in demonization of others.

The demonizing of Jesus's opponents in the canonical gospels does not reflect the earliest known traditions about Jesus but are later reconstructions of earlier events from the anachronistic perspective of the writers' present situations. And many Christians, from that time to this, "have believed that they stood on God's side without demonizing their opponents" (184). "For the most part, however," Pagels concludes, "Christians have taught—and acted upon—the belief that their enemies are evil and beyond redemption" (184).

Pagels is a thorough scholar and a clear writer. Although her topic is more circumscribed that the book's title may imply (depending on one's definition of "origin," a more appropriate word might be "demonizing"—certainly poor Satan undergoes a dramatic and unfortunate change of character in the imaginations of late Jewish and early Christian writers), one is impressed by Pagels' discussion of the development of the Satan mythology in support of an increasingly authoritarian and intolerant institutional religion. Particularly disturbing are the many parallels in the modern response by some Christians (recent Republican presidents among them) to "others" perceived as enemies perceived as demons. Pagels wisely avoids contemporary social criticism, however, leaving that to the reader.

Adam, Eve, and the Serpent

Pagels, Elaine. New York: Vintage, 1988.

In this intellectual history, Pagels' purpose is "to show ... how ... ideas concerning sexuality, moral freedom, and human value ... took their definitive form during the first four centuries [of the Common Era] as interpretations of the Genesis creation stories, and how they have continued to affect our culture and everyone in it, Christian or not, ever since" (xxviii).

Pagels discusses how Jesus' teaching 'reverses traditional [Jewish] priorities" regarding family, marriage, and procreation by dismissing one's obligations to "parents, siblings, spouse, and children" and "by subordinating the obligation to procreate, rejecting divorce, and implicitly sanctioning monogamous relationships"; perhaps more importantly, "Jesus endorses—and exemplifies—a new possibility and one he says is even better: rejecting both marriage and procreation in favor of voluntary celibacy, for the sake of following him into the new age" (16). (It should be mentioned that the later gospel writers, particularly Matthew, bowdlerize Jesus' comments on marriage and celibacy, effectively neutralizing them, to invent a more conventional Jesus.) Similarly, the authentic teaching of Paul (later "corrected" in the conservative deutero-Pauline letters of 1 Timothy, Ephesians, and Hebrews) recommends celibacy, including celibacy <u>within</u> marriage, as the proper

social arrangement for those anticipating the coming kingdom. Indeed, for Paul, marriage is a necessity only for those who otherwise would be unable to restrain their sexual passions.

Pagels points out that for centuries Jewish interpreters mined the Genesis creation myths for rules regarding marriage and sexuality, using the text to argue that concepts considered fundamental to the culture, such as the idea that procreation be the sole end of marriage, originated in natural law. Early Christian exegesis of Genesis 1-3 reveals that "for the first four hundred years of our era, Christians regarded *freedom* as [the text's] primary message, " but that in the late fourth century "with Augustine ... this message changed"(xxv). It is the pivotal role of Augustine in the history of western ideas about sexuality that constitutes the most compelling part of Pagels' argument.

Apparently from the beginning of the Christian movement, considerable intellectual effort was devoted to sex, procreation, and the relative merits and roles of the genders. Paul's letter to the Corinthians indicates that early members of the Christ cult, at least, had taken Jesus' teaching about sex, family, and commitment quite literally, celebrating celibacy not only for the unmarried but also for married couples. Pagels provides examples of two women, Thecla (a disciple of Paul) and Mygdonia (a disciple of Thomas), who reject sexual relations both without (Thecla)

and within (Mygdonia) marriage, at great personal cost. Paul, himself apparently celibate, encouraged celibacy enthusiastically among his congregations.

As distance from the time of Jesus grew, however, Christian discussion of sexual morality became increasingly conservative, with commentators relying not on the unexpurgated teaching of Jesus but on Genesis, with (predictably) divergent interpretations.

In the second century, Justin, a convert to Christianity, uses Genesis 6 as evidence that the patron gods of Rome are actually the demonic offspring of fallen angels who have attempted to enslave humanity. Justin's literal-mindedness missed the point about so-called pagan gods, however; they were not worshiped as—or believed to be—actual beings (in the way Christians worshiped Jesus) but were understood to be representations of natural forces. A more significant difference from prevailing Roman ideology was that shared by Justin, Perpetua, and other converts regarding individual freedom. The Roman understanding of freedom was that people were most free when they were under the rule of a "good emperor," one approved by the patrician Senate. Early Christian thinkers, though, found in Genesis 2-3 an argument for personal liberty derived from "the intrinsic value of every human being" (56). This argument was an element in the joyful martyrdom of some Christians, as martyrdom was a course one chose freely.

The gnostics objected to the literalism of orthodox Christians. Instead of reading Genesis as "history with a moral," they read it as "myth with meaning," and their exegesis, rather than interpreting scripture as guide to moral living, searched for hidden meaning within the myth in their quest for enlightenment (62-64). The gnostics interpreted Genesis radically differently from orthodox (i.e., church) Christians. For example, Ptolemy, a follower of Valentinus, wrote that "the story of Adam and Eve shows that humanity 'fell' into ordinary consciousness and lost contact with its divine origin" (65). Another Valentinian, the author of the *Gospel of Philip*, "says that human beings fell into the error of projecting divinity onto beings external to themselves, and so created religion." Accordingly to that gospel, "In the beginning, God created humanity. But now humanity creates God. This is the way it is in the world—human beings invent gods and worship their creation. It would be more fitting for the gods to worship human beings" (65-66).

Gnostics differed from the orthodox in their understanding of Eve and of the God character of Genesis. Orthodox belief held that Eve was the mother of sin, that her curiosity, her desire for knowledge, was fittingly punished. Gnostics, on the other hand, saw Eve as the source of spiritual awakening and as Adam's superior. Gnostics developed a complex mythology of their own, using Genesis 2-3 as its basis. Yahweh, the creator-god of Genesis, is a lesser god, rather a blunderer, and his creation shows his ineptitude. He is jealous of his own creation, obviously lacks

foreknowledge, and stands in the way of true spiritual enlightenment. Yahweh's flawed universe contained suffering and death as part of the natural order before the alleged "fall" of Eve and Adam. Where the orthodox blame humanity for the sorry state of creation, then, the gnostics blame Yahweh. Where the orthodox attribute suffering and death to the misuse of free will, the gnostics argue that free will is severely limited by the circumstances of the natural order of Yahweh's creation.

The orthodox church, proclaimed by Irenaeus late in the second century to be "universal," "stood unanimously against the gnostics on the question of freedom" (76), believing it to be the central message of the Genesis story. Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, and Origen argued for the essential freedom of the individual to choose good or evil. Ironically, the church considered those who exercised freedom from orthodox dogma to be "dangerous to the movement" (77).

The third and fourth centuries had many champions of asceticism and celibacy. Jerome, active among married women of the upper class, encouraged women to marry themselves to Christ and to avoid sexual intercourse with their husbands. Other ascetics disagreed with Jerome over the advisability of celibacy within marriage. Both sides of the issue could cite Paul (or so they thought), as Paul clearly recommends against marriage and for celibacy in preparation for the eschaton but recommends as clearly for marriage and procreation in the deutero-Pauline letters

which many took to have been written by Paul.

The greatest determiner of the matter was the fourth century theologian Augustine, who in his youth was a self-described libertine, but who later gave up marriage into a wealthy, influential family. He argued that "all humankind was fallen," that even the ascetic could not escape the snares of sensuality. Pagels points out that Augustine's extreme view of human nature as utterly degraded (which came to dominate Christian teaching even to our time) coincided with "the evolution of the Christian movement from a persecuted sect to the religion of the emperor himself" (97).

The contorted reasoning that led Augustine to defend ever more violently his theory of Original Sin obviated earlier Christian thinking about free will. According to Augustine, we are born contaminated with sin, indeed "from the moment of conception"; the sin is in the semen itself, which comes from Adam. The only human to have escaped the curse is Jesus, who, according to the legend, was conceived without semen (109). Augustine argues that desire and shame are inextricably entangled, proof of which is that we cover the genital area and copulate in private (112).

Because of our degraded state, humans—even the best of us—are incapable of self-

government. For that reason, Augustine argues, political governments exist. In his view, it is better to be ruled by a tyrant than to be left to man's own devices. Similarly, he argues, mankind is in need of strong church government. "Later in his life Augustine came to endorse, for the church as well as the state, the whole arsenal of secular government that Chrysostom had repudiated—commands, threats, coercion, penalties, and even physical force." In his view, the bishop is God's surrogate and church leaders are physicians charged with healing sick mankind (or performing surgery, if necessary) (117). As bishop of Hippo, "a provincial North African city," Augustine used political coercion and physical force against the Donatists, Christians who "denounced the 'unholy alliance' between Catholic Christians and the Roman state" (124). And later, in suppressing the Pelagians, who insisted on free will, through an unholy alliance with the bishop of Rome and his imperial supporters, "Augustine and his associates ... offered to the bishop of Rome and to his imperial patrons a clear demonstration of the political efficacy of Augustine's doctrine of the fall. By insisting that humanity, ravaged by sin, now lies helplessly in need of outside intervention, Augustine's theory could not only validate secular power but justify as well the imposition of church authority—by force, if necessary—as essential for human salvation" (125).

Augustine's doctrine became and remains Catholic dogma, but not everyone found his argument convincing, or particularly logical. Pagels cites the case of Julian of

Elanum, a bishop himself, who argues in very modern fashion—Pagels refers to his ideas as "a Copernican revolution in religious perspective" (144)—that there is a distinction between "what is *natural* and what is *voluntary*. Which conditions belong to the structure of nature, and so to 'acts of God' beyond our power, and which depend upon human choice? What is natural, and therefore beyond our will, and what is voluntary?" (132). Universal mortality is part of the natural order; all species die. Thus, death cannot be the consequence of one man's behavior. What kind of god would condemn all living things to death for one man's sin? Similarly, labor pains are not unique to humans and "have nothing to do with sin," Julian argues (136).

What the Genesis story does reveal, according to Julian, is "the subjective experience of one who sins." The person who sees the world as accursed "'expresses the viewpoint of a person who is spiritually dying,' the emptiness of one who, having 'failed to cultivate his own possibilities,' projects onto the world his own sense of loss. Such a person foolishly sees the earth itself—indeed, all of nature—as cursed and afflicted ... [T]his lie cannot injure nature, nor the earth, in this curse, but only his own person, and his own will" (138).

Pagels' point about Julian is that his reasoning seems to us (well, unless you share Augustine's dim view of the world) so common-sensical. "That we suffer and die

shows only that we are, by nature (and indeed, Julian would add, by divine intent), mortal beings, simply one living species among others. Arguing against the penal interpretation of death, Julian says, 'If you say it is a matter of *will*, it does not belong to *nature*; if it is a matter of nature, it has nothing to do with *guilt*" (144). But what is revolutionary about Julian's logic? It "threatens to dislodge humanity, psychologically and spiritually, from the center of the universe, reducing it to one natural species among others" (144).

The mystery of the durability of Augustine's worldview—how it could persist even into an age enlightened by science and, presumably, beyond the influence of feathers on a stick—Pagels explains as need fulfillment. Mentioning similar counterrational beliefs in Judaism and American Indian religions, among others, she concludes that "people often would rather feel guilty than helpless" in a world in which events "occur at random" and do not "follow specific laws of causation" (146-147). The comfort in Augustine's answer to the question "Why me?" is his assurance that "you personally are not to blame for what has come upon you; the blame goes back to our father, Adam, and our mother, Eve" (147).

EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS

1 Clement

Source/Trans.: ECY (Lightfoot)

Date: disputed, probably 90s CE

Author: Pope Clement I, fourth Bishop of Rome

This letter to the congregation at Corinth is Clement's response to an apparent intramural challenge to existing authority. Although the reason or cause of the challenge is not specified (Clement, in the style of the time, being a master of circumlocution), nor are the challengers named, the offense seems to be that younger members have "displaced" the elder leaders of their church, and the implied effect has been disruptive to the order (Clement likes the word "seemliness") of the church. The dominant theme of the letter, then, is church discipline, which is accomplished, in Clement's view, through divinely-ordained apostolic succession and submission of church members to the authority of the bishops.

Clement provides substantial biblical and extrabiblical support for his position, going as far back as Noah for examples of divinely-appointed leadership and the people's submission to it. The moral Clement derives from his examples is also the challenge (it might better be termed a threat) of his letter to the Corinthians: "We ought to do all things in order ... For unto the high-priest his proper services have

been assigned, and to the priests their proper office is appointed, and upon the levites [sic] their proper ministrations are laid. The layman is bound by the layman's ordinances ... Let each of you, brethren, in his own order give thanks unto God, maintaining a good conscience, and not transgressing the appointed rule of his service, but acting with all seemliness. (40-41).

Clement's understanding of apostolic succession is expressed as follows:

> The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order. Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe. And this they did in no new fashion; for indeed it had been written concerning bishops and deacons from very ancient times; for thus saith the scripture in a certain place, *I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.*

> And our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office. For this cause therefore, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons, and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministration. Those therefore who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the whole Church, and have ministered unblameably to the flock of Christ in lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for long time have borne a good report with all—these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministration. For it will be no light sin for us, if we thrust out those who have offered the gifts of the bishop's office unblameably and holily. Blessed are those presbyters who have gone before, seeing that their departure was fruitful and ripe: for they have no fear lest any one should remove them from their appointed place. For we see that ye have displaced certain persons, though they were living honourably, from the ministration which they had respected blamelessly. (42, 44)

Clement proposes as a solution not discussion, negotiation, or compromise, but a confession of wrongdoing, repentance, and "forbearance and humility" by the perpetrators: "Let us therefore entreat and ask of His mercy, that we may be found blameless in love" (56, 50). And if they are unwilling so to reform themselves,

Clement reminds them of the consequence of disobedience (reinterpreted from its original reference to Temple sacrifices to failure to obey the church's presbyters): "They ... who do any thing contrary to the seemly ordinance of His will receive death as the penalty" (41). "Let us therefore be obedient unto His most holy and glorious name, thereby escaping the threatenings which were spoken of old by the mouth of Wisdom against them which disobey ..." (58). Those who "laid the foundation of the sedition" are advised to "submit yourselves unto the presbyters, and receive chastisement unto repentance, bending the knees of your heart" and "laying aside the arrogant and proud stubbornness of your tongue" (57).

In this letter, then, Clement expresses what becomes administrative policy for the universal church from that day to this. The church is not a democracy. Its leaders, successors to the apostles, are divinely appointed and are therefore not to be disobeyed or challenged. Apparently, the Corinthians do not yet have a bishop (the letter refers only to plural "presbyters," who seem, nevertheless, to have, in Clement's opinion, the authority of a bishop), which may explain, partially, why Clement becomes involved in this dispute.

Didache

Source: ECW (Roberts-Donaldson)

Date: disputed. Probably c. 100 CE

Language: various

Author: unknown

The *Didache* (also known imaginatively as the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles") is a guide to community conduct. It deals primarily with the community's treatment of traveling "apostles" or prophets, but it also provides rubrics for baptism (a section probably added later in the *Didache*'s evolution), Eucharist, fasting and prayer, and selection of bishops and deacons. Crossan and others locate the *Didache* in predominantly rural Christian communities of the diaspora, largely because of its emphasis on traveling prophets, who, like Paul (who was exclusively an "urban" apostle), traveled from place to place carrying the gospel. Rural Christians, we know from other witnesses, seem to have been susceptible to false prophets, of which there were likely many. The *Didache* presents a common sense method for determining a prophet's probity and rules regarding the community's reception of itinerant apostles. The popularity of the *Didache* is apparent in references to it by important church fathers of later centuries and the incorporation of its precepts in various church documents.

The *Didache* is quite straightforward in its likely original form (later redactors made it "more Christian" by interpolating sayings of Jesus). What is not obvious, however, is where it fits in the chronology of developing Christianity. If the redactions are removed, the *Didache* reflects a distinctly non-Pauline, non-Christological, untraditional understanding of what we now consider Christian "basics." In its Eucharistic formula, for instance, the bread and wine do not symbolize anything beyond bread and wine; for Paul, on the other hand, they represented Christ's body and blood, and the wording of his formula (used in Christian churches today) summarized the christos myth—a reenactment of Jesus's death and resurrection. The *Didache* presents the Eucharist more as a thanksgiving ritual, thanksgiving for what God provides. Also, the *Didache* ends with an eschatology that lacks the self-satisfied element of revenge that we see in Revelation, for instance.

With regard to itinerant prophets, the *Didache* acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing the legitimate from the illegitimate. One practical sign of illegitimacy, though, is requests for money. The community is advised to welcome all prophets and to judge no one, but to send a prophet on his way after two days, unless he has a trade by which he can support himself. This applies to both true and suspected false prophets. Prophets, bishops, and deacons are to be awarded the people's trust only insofar as they demonstrate humility and charity, the virtues that

the community in general should display.

Finally, the *Didache* distinguishes between two "ways": the Way of Life and the Way of Death. The Way of Life is essentially the Golden Rule. Treat others as you want to be treated; it is better to give than to receive. The Way of Death consists of a catalog of conventional sins (with murder and adultery at the top of the list); but it also advises against hypocrisy and snobbery. Two sentences, nicely written, summarize the sections on life and death:

> You shall not hate any man; but some you shall reprove, and concerning some you shall pray, and some you shall love more than your own life" (2). "You shall not exalt yourself, nor give over-confidence to your soul. Your soul shall not be joined with lofty ones, but with just and lowly ones shall it have its intercourse. Accept whatever happens to you as good, knowing that apart from God nothing comes to pass. (3)

In sum, the *Didache* is a guidebook full of common sense and reassurance. It discourages "the service of dead gods." It advises against a high opinion of oneself or of one's religiosity. It encourages alms-giving, within reason. And it recognizes that humans are not perfect, even if they be prophets of God: "For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able to do this, do what you are able" (5).

Acts of John

Source/Trans.: ECY (M. R. James)

Date: uncertain, probably late 2nd century CE

Author: traditionally ascribed to Leucius Charinus, a companion of John

[Because this book was condemned by the church, it exists only in fragmentary form in Greek and Latin, with redactions spanning about fourteen centuries.]

Like the other *acta*, *Acts of John*, narrated mostly by one of John's traveling companions, relates the adventures of its hero. M. R. James begins with John's being invited to Ephesus by Lycomedes, the praetor of the Ephesians and a wealthy man, whose wife suffers from palsy. John cures the palsy, but in the process Lycomedes drops dead. Seven days later, John revives him. Lycomedes has a painter create a portrait of John, who now sees his image for the first time. Subsequently, John (with the help of his god) destroys half of the temple of Artemis in Ephesus; seeing the power of his god, the Ephesians destroy the other half and convert. A young man whose brother has been a priest of Artemis brings his dead brother's body to an assembly of new Christians. John, giving the boy the words to say, allows the boy to raise the priest from death. The priest then, of course, converts.

In another adventure, a young man sleeps with a married woman and kills his own

father. John raises the father, and the young man, repentant of his sins, cuts off his own penis, which, John informs him after the fact, is unnecessary. Then there is the legend of John and the bedbugs, which infest the beds of John and his fellow travelers. John kindly asks the bugs to leave the room while the men sleep, which they do, waiting outside the door until John beckons them back in the following morning.

The most complicated story involves a man who, under the influence of Satan, pursues Drusiana, the virginal sister of Andronicus. Drusiana dies, brokenhearted that the man did not know God. But the man's lust is only stimulated by her death; with the help of Andronicus' servant, he visits Drusiana's sepulchre at night and strips her corpse with the intent of violating it, when a serpent enters, kills the servant, and holds the man hostage. Three days after Drusiana's death, John and Andronicus visit the tomb, expecting to eat lunch there, and discover a handsome youth who vanishes into heaven. They also find the dead servant, Fortunatus, and the lustful man, Callimachus, also dead. John tells the serpent to leave, then raises Callimachus from death. Callimachus recounts the entire story to John and then becomes a Christian convert. At Andronicus' request, John then raises Drusiana, and at Drusiana's request (but against the wishes of Callimachus), John allows her to raise Fortunatus. However, it turns out that Fortunatus wants to be dead, and, now alive, runs from the room. Later, he has his wish. John, sensing that Fortunatus is

about to be given over to Satan, discovers Fortunatus, dead, with a blackening disease that has reached his heart.

Following a few incidents involving John, Peter, James (these two are jealous of John's closer relationship with Jesus), and the resurrected Jesus (who leaves no footprints!), the narrator becomes John himself, telling of the day of Jesus' crucifixion. This is a docetic Jesus, who consoles the grieving John while his physical body hangs on the cross.

John dies a natural death, but not before overseeing the digging of his grave and delivering a lengthy summary of his calling and career, addressed to God. The day following his death and burial (in one version he is not buried, just covered with a linen cloth), his followers dig up the grave to discover that the body has (presumably) been assumed into heaven.

Although the *Acts of John* is typical of the genre in its melodramatic episodes and its insistence on its hero's celibacy and piety, the section about Jesus and the apostles, which has a clearly docetic, gnostic orientation, would have disqualified it from orthodox reading lists. It is intriguing, though, that the Jesus of these *Acts* is not that inconsistent with the Jesus of John's gospel, which itself can be read gnostically, and which was the last gospel to be canonized, perhaps for that reason.

Acts of Andrew

Source/Trans.: ECW (M. R. James)

Date: ca. 150 CE

Author: unknown

The *Acts of Andrew* follows the apostle from Jesus' Ascension to Andrew's martyrdom, which he actively desires. It consists of scores of legends about Andrew, various healings, drivings out of demons, raisings from the dead, and rightings of injustices. The pace of Andrew's activities is astonishing and his powers apparently unlimited. An example of his abilities:

> A Christian lad named Sostratus came to Andrew privately and told him: 'My mother cherishes a guilty passion for me: I have repulsed her, and she has gone to the proconsul to throw the guilt on me. I would rather die than expose her.' The officers came to fetch the boy, and Andrew prayed and went with him. The mother accused him. The proconsul bade him defend himself. He was silent, and so continued, until the proconsul retired to take counsel. The mother began to weep. Andrew said: 'Unhappy woman, that dost not fear to cast thine own guilt on thy son.' She said to the proconsul: 'Ever since my son entertained his wicked wish he has been in constant company with this man.' The proconsul was enraged, ordered the lad to be sewn into the leather bag of parricides and drowned in the river, and

> Andrew to be imprisoned till his punishment should be devised. Andrew prayed, there was an earthquake, the proconsul fell from his seat, every one was prostrated, and the mother withered up and died. The proconsul fell at Andrew's feet praying for mercy. The earthquake and thunder ceased, and he healed those who had been hurt. The proconsul and his house were baptized.

In his travels, Andrew covers a large area in the eastern Aegean that we associate with Paul. And like the Paul of legend, Andrew is a chick magnet; wherever he goes, wives of powerful men and daughters of wealthy fathers follow Andrew and cease all relations with men, eagerly absorbing Andrew's teaching about chastity. This, as we know from Paul's case, is unpopular with husbands and suitors, one of whom, the proconsul Aegates, condemns Andrew to death by crucifixion (without having his hands and feet nailed, so wild dogs could eat him at night while he still lived) after Andrew converts the woman he wants to marry, Maximilla. A young protegé of Andrew and Aegetes' brother, Stratocles, attempts to intervene, but Andrew is dead set, so to speak, on being crucified. He addresses the cross in an extended apostrophe, then hangs on the cross (placed by the sea), addressing a crowd that grows to two thousand, for a day and a night and converting them to Jesus. The crowd threatens Aegetes, who attempts to loosen and free Andrew, but Andrew prays to die, and does. Maximilla tends to the body, Aegetes hurls himself from a cliff, and Stratocles devotes the rest of his life to Christ.

The melodramatic character of this and other stories about the apostles' adventures reminds one of a daytime soap opera. A central element in the stories is the tension between sex and chastity; in each case, a world of other offenses springs from sexual desire. No one is shown to be immune to desire or even able to overcome it. Fear of human sexuality seems to have outranked all the other phobias for the early church fathers who wrote literature of this genre. The only solutions to the problem of human sexuality are the cloister or the martyr's cross. And of the two, the cross is preferable; the writers need very badly (and unimaginatively) to have their heroes imitate Jesus's method of dying. Yet, for all their melodrama, these stories lack suspense, certainly (the hero dies), but, more importantly, they lack the terror that any Greek dramatist would know is necessary to tragedy on a heroic scale. If the protagonist wants to die (and in the most gruesome way possible), the story becomes a masturbatory exercise, ghoulishly repeated time after time with the same predictable effect. Even Jesus' passion, particularly as it is rendered by John, is ultimately uninteresting.

Acts of Paul

Translation: NTA

Dating: 185-195 CE, according to Tertullian

Authorship: anonymous presbyter in Asia Minor

The *Acts of Paul,* like much of the "acts" literature, is primarily concerned with celibacy and virginity as guarantors of salvation. The narrative relates traditions about Thecla, a saintly virgin who is introduced to Paul's chastity theology when she overhears him addressing the household of Onesiphorus and sees "many women and virgins" going in to him. Without having seen him, Thecla becomes "captive" to Paul's words, much to the chagrin of her mother, Theocleia, and her fiancé, Thamyris. Paul's traveling companions, Demas and Hermogenes, betray him to Thamyris, who has Paul arrested. Thecla, undeterred, visits Paul by night in prison, where she kisses his fetters. Thecla herself is then brought to judgment, refuses to marry Thamyris, and, at the suggestion of her mother, is condemned to be burned. But god sends rain and hail to extinguish the flames, and Thecla follows Paul to Antioch. There she is pursued by a new suitor, refuses him, and is condemned to die by lions. She survives that death and baptizes herself in a pool filled with deadly seals, who die as she enters. Thecla is released from her sentence and seeks Paul, who charges her to teach god's word, which she does until "a noble sleep" overcomes her. Thecla is interesting because she is living proof of the power of

chastity but also because she is the only woman to perform a baptism.

In other adventures, Paul baptizes a lion, who then runs off "to the country rejoicing ... A lioness met him, and he did not yield himself to her but ran off." And Paul is executed by Nero, whose men are becoming Christian in growing numbers. As a sign of Paul's chosenness, milk spurts from his neck at his beheading.

The message of *Acts of Paul* is best expressed in Paul's homily to the household of Onesiphorus. Consisting of fourteen beatitudes, the homily converts the young Thecla, as it is meant to convert the reader:

> "Blessed are they who have kept the flesh pure ...
>
> Blessed are the continent ...
>
> Blessed are they who have wives as if they had them not ...
>
> Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well pleasing to god, and shall not lose the reward of their purity.
>
> For the word of the father shall be for them a work of salvation ...."

Gospel of Peter

Source (Trans.): CG (Scholars, Dewey)

Date: mid-1st c. CE

Author: unknown; Syrian Petrine tradition

The Gospel of Peter is an early passion narrative—perhaps the earliest—that is independent of the canonical gospels. It exists in three fragments, all in Greek, dating from the second to ninth centuries. Scholars disagree on whether Mark and Matthew may have relied on *GPet* for the outline of their passion stories or whether the author of *GPet*, like Mark and Matthew, referred to some other source. Although *GPet* has some elements in common with Mark and Matthew, it differs strikingly in its assessment of Pilate, its docetic orientation, its description of the elaborate plans for guarding the tomb, the unique story-within-a-story that Crossan refers to as the "Cross Gospel," and the reason provided for the women's visit to the tomb on the fourth day.

The community from which *GPet* originated completely exonerates Pilate from any culpability in the execution of Jesus, instead locating the full blame in Herod, the chief priests, and the scribes. Pilate is merely an unwilling participant, as he hands Jesus off to Herod, who imposes the death sentence. Rome in general is exonerated, as the people, not the Roman soldiers, mock Jesus on the way to the cross. This is a

docetic Jesus, however. Hung between two criminals (one of whom defends Jesus' innocence), "he himself remained silent, as if in no pain" (4). Jesus' last words ("My power, (my) power, you have abandoned me") are uttered just before he is "taken up," indicating that his spirit is separated from his body at that moment and assumed into heaven (5). The writer avoids any literal reference to death.
The body is given to Joseph, who washes it and places it in his own tomb, while the apostles, including Peter (who ostensibly narrates the passion), hide for fear of the people. But the people, themselves fearful of the various natural signs that occur, relent of their impetuousness. The elders request of Pilate that a special contingent of soldiers, led by Petronius the centurion (one of only a few names mentioned in the gospel), be assigned to the tomb for three days. The elders and scribes look on as the soldiers roll a "great stone" before the door to the tomb and seal it seven times. Crowds come the next day to see how it has been sealed.

But the night before, odd things happen as the soldiers stand guard:

> ... a loud noise came from the sky, and they [the soldiers] saw the skies open up, and two men come down from there in a burst of light and approach the tomb. The stone that had been pushed against the entrance began to roll by itself and moved away to one side; then the tomb opened up and both young men went inside. [As the soldiers report these events to the centurion] again they see three men leaving the tomb, two supporting the third, and a cross

was following them. The heads of the two reached up to the sky, while the head of the third, whom they led by the hand, reached beyond the skies. And they heard a voice from the skies that said, "Have you preached to those that sleep?" And an answer was heard from the cross, "Yes!" (9-10)

As the soldiers debate what to do, "again the skies appeared to open, and some sort of human being came down and entered the tomb" (11). The soldiers rush to Pilate, convinced (as is Pilate) that this "was a son of God." At the request of the elders, who argue that "it is better for us to be guilty of the greatest sin before God than to fall into the hands of the Judean people and be stoned" (11), the soldiers are instructed to say nothing about what they have seen.

This sequence of events constitutes Crossan's "Cross Gospel," a tombside account quite at variance with the canonical gospels. Although Mark places a young man in the tomb to announce the resurrection, and Matthew places an angel there, and Luke—not to be outdone—two angels, *GPet* involves God the Father (the heavenly voice), a total of three young men (or two young men and an anthropoid being), a speaking cross, and Jesus himself in the tomb action. The implication of the speaking cross, the symbol of death, and its affirmative reply to God's question regarding preaching to the dead ("those that sleep") is that between the time of his physical death and his retrieval from the tomb, Jesus has brought life to those in sheol, the faithful of generations past. That becomes a church tradition, included in

the Nicene Creed ("He descended into Hell").

On the sabbath morning, Mary of Magdala, having failed to "perform at the tomb of the Lord what women are accustomed to do for their loved ones who die" (12) because she (like the apostles) fears the rage of the Judeans, takes her friends to the tomb. It is clear from the text that "what women are accustomed to do" in this situation is to keen, or to engage in ritual lament over the corpse, not to anoint the body, as later gospels would have it: "Although on the day he was crucified we could not weep and beat our breasts, we should now perform these rites at his tomb" (12). But what they find in the tomb is a handsome young man (apparently the human-like being), dressed in "a splendid robe," who informs them—and a bit mystified that they haven't figured it out for themselves—that "the one who was crucified ... is risen and gone" (13). The women flee "in fear" (13), just as they do in the *Gospel of Mark*. The gospel fragment concludes with the beginning of what was probably a resurrection appearance story involving Peter, his brother Andrew, and Levi.

Besides these indications of a passion story in the very earliest stage of its elaboration, *GPet* also exemplifies what became the primary method of Christian gospel-writing: the use of Jewish scripture, particularly the psalms and the prophetic books, to frame (one might say invent) a narrative. As the editors of *The*

Complete Gospels point out, "almost every sentence of the passion narrative of Peter appears to be composed out of references and allusions to the psalms and the prophets," constituting a kind of "scriptural memory" (400). Christian writers adopted the method of "scriptural memory" as a way to establish authority and lend credence to their narratives. None of them having been eyewitnesses to the crucifixion (indeed, the canonical gospels testify that even the apostles are absent out of fear, and the writers are from another generation altogether), they construct a story out of authoritative elements from their own literary and cultural past, a story that would resonate with the cultural memories of its readers, regardless of historical accuracy.

Secret Mark

Source (Trans.): ECW (Morton Smith)

Date: see below

Author: unknown (see below)

I am indebted to Shawn Eyer, whose essay "The Strange Case of the Secret Gospel according to Mark: How Morton Smith's Discovery of a Lost Letter by Clement of Alexandria Scandalized Biblical Scholarship" (1995) provides an excellent survey of the history of and critical reaction to this text.

Secret Mark, discovered by Morton Smith in 1958 and published and analyzed by Smith has been perhaps the most vilified extracanonical discovery in recent times. A graduate student at Columbia University, Smith discovered Secret Mark while cataloging manuscript holdings in the Mar Saba monastery, located just south of Jerusalem. Eyer writes:

> What Smith then began photographing was a three-page handwritten addition penned into the endpapers of a printed book, Isaac Voss' 1646 edition of the Epistolae genuinae S. Ignatii Martyris. It identified itself as a letter by Clement of the Stromateis, i.e., Clement of Alexandria, the second-century church father well-known for his neo-platonic applications of Christian belief. Clement writes "to Theodore," congratulating him for success in his disputes with the Carpocratians, an heterodoxical sect about which little is known. Apparently in

their conflict with Theodore, the Carpocratians appealed to Mark's gospel.

Clement responds by recounting a new story about the Gospel. After Peter's death, Mark brought his original gospel to Alexandria and wrote a "more spiritual gospel for the use of those who were being perfected." Clement says this text is kept by the Alexandrian church for use only in the initiation into "the great mysteries."

However, Carpocrates the heretic, by means of magical stealth, obtained a copy and adapted it to his own ends. Because this version of the "secret" or "mystery" gospel had been polluted with "shameless lies," Clement urges Theodore to deny its Markan authorship even under oath. "Not all true things are to be said to all men," he advises.

Clement then "transcribes two sections [of the special gospel] which he claims to have been distorted by the heretics" (Eyer):

> The first fragment of the Secret Gospel of Mark, meant to be inserted between Mark 10.34 and 35, reads:
>
> **They came to Bethany. There was one woman there whose brother had died. She came and prostrated herself before Jesus and spoke to him. "Son of David, pity me!" But the disciples rebuked her. Jesus was angry and went with her into the garden where the tomb was. Immediately a great cry was heard from**

the tomb. And going up to it, Jesus rolled the stone away from the door of the tomb, and immediately went in where the young man was. Stretching out his hand, he lifted him up, taking hold his hand. And the youth, looking intently at him, loved him and started begging him to let him remain with him. And going out of the tomb, they went into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus gave him an order and, at evening, the young man came to him wearing nothing but a linen cloth. And he stayed with him for the night, because Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God. And then when he left he went back to the other side of the Jordan.

Then a second fragment of Secret Mark is given, this time to be inserted into Mark 10.46. This has long been recognized as a narrative snag in Mark's Gospel, as it awkwardly reads, "Then they come to Jericho. As he was leaving Jericho with his disciples...." This strange construction is not present in Secret Mark, which reads:

Then he came into Jericho. And the sister of the young man whom Jesus loved was there with his mother and Salome, but Jesus would not receive them. Just as Clement prepares to reveal the "real interpretation" of these verses to Theodore, the copyist discontinues and Smith's discovery is, sadly, complete. (Eyer)

In his publication of his discovery, Smith posited a revolutionary new

understanding of Jesus that, for the first time in modern criticism, took the miracle stories seriously. Innocuous enough, but Smith maintains that Jesus, through a mystery-laden baptismal ritual, was literally able to provide for the initiate an experience of the kingdom of God. But what really ticked off the conservative crowd was that Smith noticed in *Secret Mark* the subtle (or obvious, depending on your orientation) sexual element in the initiation of the young man into the kingdom. I refer the reader to Eyer's essay for a summary of the reaction to this suggestion. Suffice it to say that it is perfectly acceptable to claim that Jesus was an excellent athlete (no kidding) but utterly unacceptable to suggest that Jesus may have been sexual, and particularly homosexual. Yet the text of Secret Mark certainly permits the entertaining of that possibility.

In the letter, Clement is writing to answer questions about the Carpocratians' use of a secret gospel. The Carpocratians were a gnostic sect named for their founder, Carpocrates. Little is known avout them except from references in the anti-heretical literature of the second through fourth centuries. Apparently, the Carpocratians believed, like all Gnostics, in the worthlessness of this world. They differed from other Gnostics, however, in the way they showed contempt for the world. Their belief was that to achieve gnosis one had to first experience the world completely. One form of experience being sex, the Carpocratians developed a reputation for sexual experimentation. Clement's suggestion that the heretics have distorted the

secret gospel is probably linked to the Carpocratians' use of the gospel to support that experimentation.

But whatever the involvement of the Carpocratians, it is interesting that Clement does nothing to mitigate the sexual implications of this story of Jesus and the "young man [*neaniskos*] whom Jesus loved."

Marvin Meyer, in his essay "The Youth in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*," suggests that the *neaniskos* story "communicates *Secret Mark*'s vision of the life and challenge of discipleship, as that is exemplified in the career of the *neaniskos*. Meyer explains that *neaniskos* "is used to denote a young person or at times a servant" (120) and that it generally refers to a young man in his twenties. Meyer substantiates his thesis by examining five Markan pericopae in which a *neaniskos* is present to demonstrate a likely connection among the five, linguistically and thematically. In another essay, "The Youth in *Secret Mark* and the Beloved Disciple in John," Meyer proposes convincingly that the enigmatic "beloved disciple" of the Johannine gospel is derived from the *neaniskos* of Mark and is both that young man and the Lazarus of John's own story.

In any event, the young man is partially redacted from the canonical Markan gospel. That redaction raises for me the question "Why?" What was there in this

mysterious young man that the redactors found embarrassing?

Epistle of Barnabas

Source (Trans.): ECW (Kirsopp Lake)

Date: between 70 and 132 CE

Author: unknown

This letter is addressed only to "sons and daughters"; its provenance is undetermined, although "the Greek speaking E[astern] Mediterranean appears most probable." The writer makes no reference to other New Testament writings, leading some scholars to think that it is based on early oral traditions.

The primary purpose of the letter is didactic, "in order that your knowledge may be perfected along with your faith" (1:5). The writer attempts to demonstrate that the Jewish scriptures prophesied Jesus; thus, his method is exegetical. His often strained reading of the Hebrew Bible to confirm that Christians have superseded Jews as God's chosen people suggests that the author is an orthodox apologist, similar to others active in that time period.

The author refers to the evil of his time, claiming that "the worker of evil himself is in power," which is good cause to "seek out the ordinances of the Lord" (2:1). In his discussion of those ordinances, he argues that the Israelites misinterpreted Torah law, apparently taking it too literally. Thus, when expected to present sacrifices or to

fast, they failed to understand that "sacrifice for the Lord is a broken heart" (2:10) rather than a burnt offering and that fasting involved not abstaining from food but avoidance of injustice toward others (3:3). The writer urges his generation to "pay heed in the last days" to "resist ... against the offences which are to come, that the Black One may have no opportunity of entry," lest God abandon them as he has the Jews (4:9, 14).

Beginning from a premise that Jesus was present with God from the beginning, the writer assumes, then that it was Jesus who spoke through the prophets. Much of the letter consists of "prooftexts" to demonstrate how Christians were prophesied from the beginning. Most of the prooftexts are a strain, to say the least. And the writer seems to think that simply stating the prooftext makes its Christian interpretation obvious. For example: "How is [Jesus] like to the goat?" (referring to the sacrificial goat in Temple ritual). "For this reason: 'the goats shall be alike, beautiful, and a pair,' in order that when they see him come at that time they may be astonished at the likeness of the goat. See then the type of Jesus destined to suffer" (7:10). The writer's loose reasoning could, of course, be used to liken any suffering individual to a sacrificial goat, but rules of logic do not apply in this argument. Another example: Chapter 8 bases its argument on the commandment that the sins of the people can be expiated by heifer holocaust. According to that ritual, the heifer is slain and burned, then boys put the ashes into vessels, bind scarlet wool on sticks,

and sprinkle the people with hyssop. The writer proceeds: "Observe how plainly he speaks to you. The calf is Jesus; the sinful men offering it are those who brought him to be slain ... The boys who sprinkle are they who preached to us the forgiveness of sins [the apostles]" (8:1-3). Amazing that the Jews did not understand this in ancient days! "And for this reason the things which were thus done are plain to us, but obscure to them, because they did not hear the Lord's voice" (8:7).

The characteristic Christian mining of the Old Testament for "predictions" of Jesus does serious damage to the Jewish Bible. Abraham, for example, is said to have circumcised his household "looking forward in the spirit to Jesus" (9:7). The writer even engages in cryptography in reference to Abraham. Using the text "And Abraham circumcised from his household eighteen men and three hundred. What then was the knowledge that was given to him? Notice that he first mentions the eighteen, and after a pause the three hundred. The eighteen is I and H—you have Jesus—and because the cross was destined to have grace in the T he says 'and three hundred.' So he indicates Jesus in the two letters and the cross in the other" (9:8). In Hebrew, numbers are written as letters; 18 would be written IH and three hundred T, making TIH for 318. IH are the first two letters of Jesus's name in Greek. The writer concludes that Abraham, by circumcising 318 men, knowingly predicted Jesus' passion, with the name and the cross (T).

Everything is interpreted metaphorically, even the food laws. The injunction against eating eagles and hawks actually is a warning against associating with men who do not "gain their food by their labor and sweat, but plunder other peoples property in their iniquity" (10:4). Eating eels is forbidden because eels represent men who are "utterly ungodly" because the eel lives "on the ground at the bottom of the sea" (10:5). Perhaps the craziest notion, though, is that Moses names Joshua Joshua to prophesy Jesus (Jesus in Hebrew is Joshua). Even the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE is reinterpreted; God did not want a temple in the first place, the writer maintains, but the foolish Jews misunderstood, so the Lord saw to it that the Temple was destroyed. There is no arguing with such logic. It cannot be refuted because it is alogical to begin with. The writer is determined to show that God's covenant was intended for the Christians, not the Jews, and he simply rewrites the Jewish scriptures to prove it.

The epistle concludes with a lesson regarding the "two ways," similar to what appears in the *Didache*. The Way of Light involves loving the maker, remaining meek and quiet, avoiding fornication, and disciplining children with corporal punishment to "teach them the fear of God from their youth up" (18:5). The Way of Darkness consists of a long list of conventional evils. In the epistolary style of the time, an exhortation brings the letter to a close.

Gospel of the Hebrews

Source (Trans.): OB (Cameron)

Date: mid-1st c. CE

Author: unknown, Egyptian (?)

This may be among the earliest Jewish-Christian gospels and was perhaps a precursor to the Gospel of Matthew. According to a list of books drawn up by the Patriarch of Constantinople in the ninth century, the *Gospel of the Hebrews* originally contained only 300 fewer lines than Matthew. The language of its original composition remains in doubt but was likely Greek; contrary to Jerome's claim, it was not written in Hebrew. It represents an early statement of belief of the Jerusalem congregation led by James, Jesus' brother; indeed, according to this gospel, the resurrected Lord appears first to James in a private revelation. James, not among the original followers of Jesus, comes to belief after Jesus' execution, when, having sworn not to eat bread "until he should see [the Lord] risen from among them that sleep," he is visited by the resurrected Jesus and invited to partake of bread, "for the Son of man is risen from among them that sleep." As the first witness to the resurrection, then, James is given particular authority in this gospel.

The gospel "is the Jewish-Christian gospel most frequently mentioned by name in the early church; it is also the only one whose original title has been transmitted

from antiquity" (333). Yet it exists only in references to and quotations from it by church fathers of the second to fourth centuries, including Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Origen, and Clement. Besides the appearance to James, the gospel reflects an early understanding of Jesus' special calling, maintaining that he receives special powers only at his baptism (not at birth). It also contains parallels to the *Gospel of Thomas*, another early gospel, and the wisdom tradition, particularly as it relates to seeking and resting: "He that seeks will not rest until he finds; and he that has found shall marvel; and he that has marveled shall reign; and he that has reigned shall rest." Also Jesus' mother is given special status, as she is in John, but here his mother is the female Holy Spirit rather than Mary, an idea that the later, orthodox church probably found heretical.

What is interesting about the *Gospel of the Hebrews* is that it is independent of other Jewish-Christian gospels, including the canonical Matthew, and apparently was respected by church clerics of several centuries. Early Christian understandings of Jesus were diverse, and there can be no question that the Jewish-Christian groups led by James and Peter held views quite different from those of the gentile churches of, say, Paul. What remains of this gospel suggests that its traditions and concerns were characteristically Jewish, and the myths on which it was based were Greco-Roman. Among its most significant precepts, one derived from Judaism, is the idea of brotherly love; the most serious offense one can commit is to "grieve the

spirit" of one's brother.

Infancy Gospel of James

Source: SV

Dating: probably mid-2nd c. CE

Authorship: Unknown, but certainly not James, who died in 62 CE

What do we know of Jesus' parentage or the circumstances of his birth or his childhood? Nothing, of course; peasant births were not recorded in ancient times. Naturally, as traditions about Jesus developed, interest turned to his birth and childhood, and writers invented highly imaginative stories to explain his origins. Not surprisingly, no two sources agree on any detail except his mother's name. Other matters, such as the relationship of Joseph (a murky figure about whom writers seem to have known nothing) to Mary, where and when Jesus was born, the size of his family and his siblings' names, and what he was like as a child, are depicted in fanciful narratives. In fact, the infancy narratives of Matthew, Luke, Thomas, and James, because of their authors' flights of fancy, make some of the most pleasurable reading in early Christian literature.

The focus of *Infancy James* is Mary, not Jesus. Perhaps because nothing was known about her relationship to Joseph, and because there seem to have been allusions to the illegitimacy of Jesus' birth, writers of the infancy narratives go to fantastic lengths to emphasize Mary's purity. Whatever her relationship to Joseph (ward?

wife? "companion"?), Mary herself is always portrayed as innocent, even stupid. Mary reminds one of Lena Grove in Faulkner's *Light in August*: dumb, but either lucky or shrewd in her ability to survive; not remarkably beautiful, but fertile; pathetic but not pitiable; ignorant of biology but ripe with it. Like Lena, Mary has no female friends, and she seems to attract two male types (both of which are represented in the various versions of Joseph): the lecher and the protector.

The gospel begins with a birth story of Mary. Her wealthy parents, Joachim and Anna, are childless and ashamed. Both pray to the Lord, though, and Anna is made pregnant (by the Lord, presumably, as Joachim is away tending his flocks at the time). Out of gratitude to the Lord, Anna and Joachim leave Mary in the care of the Temple priests when she reaches the age of three. Mary is attended by virgins and fed by a heavenly messenger until she reaches twelve years, at which time, to avoid pollution of the Temple when she begins to menstruate, the high priest, Zechariah, summons all the widowers of Israel to the Temple to find her a husband. Joseph is chosen to be her husband when a dove comes out of his staff and perches on his head, a sign from the Lord. But, by his own admission, he is old, already has sons, and is afraid he'll "become the butt of jokes among the people of Israel" (9:8). Nevertheless, out of fear of divine retribution, he takes her "into his care and protection" (no mention of actual marriage) then goes off "to build houses," leaving her in the Lord's protection (9:11-12). While working on a little spinning project for

the high priest, Mary is informed by a heavenly messenger that she will conceive a son "by means of [the Lord's] word" (11:5). Shortly thereafter, though, during a visit to her relative Elizabeth, Mary (age 16), having forgotten the messenger's words, becomes fearful as her womb swells, returns home, and goes into hiding from other people. When Joseph returns from his business trip and discovers Mary's largeness, he becomes frantic and accuses her of corruption. She protests her innocence, that "I haven't had sex with any man." To Joseph's question "Then where did the child you're carrying come from?" Mary replies, "As the Lord my God lives, I don't know where it came from" (13:8-10). Joseph plans to divorce her (the author having forgotten that they're not married), but a messenger of the Lord visits Joseph in a dream to dissuade him. Still, Mary's condition comes to the attention of the high priest, who, disbelieving her protestations of innocence, administers a "drink test," by which Mary and Joseph are exonerated.

Mary's time comes on the way to Bethlehem. Joseph puts her in a cave with his sons as guards and goes in search of a Hebrew midwife. As he searchess, suddenly everything around him is in suspended animation at the moment of Jesus' birth. He encounters a midwife, who affirms that Mary was indeed a virgin. But another visitor, Salome, is incredulous. So Mary submits to Salome's digital examination, which confirms the virgin birth.

The story concludes with the family of John the Baptist (Elizabeth and Zechariah). The author addresses a problem inherent in the canonical nativity stories, the question of why, if Herod has decreed that all male infants be killed, John the Baptist (who is only a few months older than Jesus) managed to escape. The author has John's mother take him to a mountain, which opens up a cave in which they hide. Meanwhile, John's father is slain at the Temple by Herod's men.

Infancy James is derived in large part from the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke. Its unique spin on the story, though, is its special interest in Mary's purity, which is maintained from her birth through the birth of her son. Mary is rather a dim bulb in this story, but she gets the job done for the Lord. Joseph is never around when you need him. He is a very reluctant guardian, sensitive to public opinion. In his defense, though, he's already raised one family and surely deserves some rest.

Infancy Gospel of Thomas

Translation: SV

Dating: by late 2nd c. CE

Authorship: Unknown

Infancy Thomas depicts Jesus the boy at ages five, six, eight, and twelve in a series of interactions with other children and adults in Nazareth. Pseudonymously identifying himself as "Thomas, the Israelite," the author addresses his text to "all my non-Jewish brothers and sisters, to make known the extraordinary childhood deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). The author is oddly unaware of the cruelty in little Jesus' words and actions and assumes that they are normal or expected behaviors in a god-boy. This authorial naivete has, for the modern reader, an untended effect: the reader sees the writer as a fool and his Jesus character as a despicable, self-indulgent child.

In the opening scene, Jesus is playing in a stream on the sabbath, purifying the water and making clay sparrows. A Jew reports this activity to Joseph, who asks Jesus why he's doing what is not permitted on the sabbath. Jesus claps his hands and the clay birds fly away. Meanwhile, the scholar's son breaks a little dam Jesus has made. Jesus damns him and causes him to die on the spot. Not long after, as Jesus is walking through the village, a boy runs by and accidentally bumps Jesus' shoulder.

Jesus, angry, causes another death.

The village parents complain to Joseph that they're losing children at an alarming rate. Joseph questions Jesus, who strikes his accusers blind. Joseph, attempting some discipline, pulls Jesus' ear; Jesus, infuriated, replies, "Don't you know that I don't really belong to you? Don't make me upset" (5:6).

A teacher, Zacchaeus, volunteers to teach Jesus the alphabet. Jesus refuses to cooperate, so the teacher strikes him on the head. Then Jesus begins a dissertation on the letter alpha. The teacher, overwhelmed, returns him to Joseph. In another incident, a playmate of Jesus falls off a roof and dies. Jesus (still five!) raises the dead child. The boy's parents worship him. Then Jesus heals the foot of a young man who had been injured by an axe.

At the ages of six and eight, Jesus performs various minor miracles. Then Joseph takes him to another teacher. Again, the frustrated teacher strikes Jesus on the head, only this time Jesus strikes him unconscious. When Jesus returns home, Joseph cautions Mary, "Don't let him go outside, because those who annoy him end up dead" (14:5). Yet a third teacher volunteers to work with Jesus, but when he finds that Jesus already knows everything, he sends Jesus home. Jesus, pleased, revives Teacher #2.

In the remainder of the narrative, Jesus heals a deadly snakebite and restores a dead child and a construction worker (who falls from a roof) to life. The last adventure, borrowed from the Synoptics, has Jesus teaching in the Jerusalem Temple at age twelve.

Although *Infancy Thomas* is crudely written, in combination with other stories of Jesus' birth and childhood (including those invented by the authors of Matthew and Luke), it provides an indication of the flights of fancy in which early Christians engaged as they imagined a past for their hero.

Shepherd of Hermas

Source (Trans.): ECW (Roberts-Donaldson)

Date: mid-2nd c. CE

Author: unknown

A very popular book in the second-fourth century church (and quoted long after the establishment of the canon), the *Shepherd* was considered by some church fathers to be inspired scripture. A morality tale encompassing five visions, twelve mandates, and ten similitudes (parables), it is non-doctrinal and even, depending how you interpret certain obscure passages, unorthodox in its understanding of the relationship among God, the Spirit, and Jesus. Its central figure is Hermas, apparently a slave or servant as he is "sold" at the outset to one Rhoda, who subsequently frees him and toward whom he develops an attraction that borders on lust. As a freeman, he has earned, by not always honest means, a fortune, which he has subsequently lost. He describes himself, accurately, as "patient and good-tempered, and always smiling," "full of simplicity and of great guilelessness" (Vision 1.2). He is a simple man, not especially bright but very curious and open to instruction; he seems to represent the ideal church member.

In the most interesting narrative sections, Hermas is guided by an old woman, who represents the church, and a man dressed as a shepherd. He is questioned about his

intentions toward Rhoda and informed that lust, even when it is not acted upon, is still a sin. His management of his sons is criticized (he has been too lenient), as they rejected the church during a recent persecution of Christians. He endures the criticisms well and is open to improvement. The old woman gives him a book, which he is instructed to copy: "Therefore shall you write two little books and send one to Clement and one to Grapte. Clement shall then send it to the cities abroad, because that is his duty; and Grapte shall instruct the widows and the orphans. But you shall read it in this city along with the presbyters who are in charge of the Church" (Vis. 2, 3,.4). The dominant theme of the visions is repentance, which is open to all baptized Christians. The moral behavior expected of church members is reasonable (the author seems to have a charitable understanding of human failings), and the ability to repent and reform is assumed. The Similitudes, because of their allegorical form, resemble the parables of 1Enoch more than those of the gospels. After each is told to Hermas, he requests and gets an interpretation. Those who follow this moral instruction are blessed.

The following summary of *Shepherd of Hermas* (much more succinct than I could make it) is taken from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

> The book consists of five visions, twelve mandates, or commandments, and ten similitudes, or parables. It commences abruptly in the first person: "He who brought me up sold me to a certain Rhoda, who was at Rome. After many

years I met her again, and began to love her as a sister." As Hermas was on the road to Cumae, he had a vision of Rhoda, who was presumably dead. She told him that she was his accuser in heaven, on account of an unchaste thought he had once had concerning her, though only in passing; he was to pray for forgiveness for himself and all his house. He is consoled by a vision of the Church in the form of an aged woman, weak and helpless from the sins of the faithful, who tells him to do penance and to correct the sins of his children.

Subsequently he sees her made younger through penance, yet wrinkled and with white hair; then again, as quite young but still with white hair—this is the Church of the forgiven. Lastly, she shows herself all glorious as a Bride—this is the Church of the end of the days. In the second vision she gives Hermas a book, which she afterwards takes back in order to add to it. He is to give this writing to the presbyters, who will read it to the people; another copy is for "Grapte", [sic] who will communicate it to the widows; and a third is to be sent by Clement to the foreign Churches, "for this is his office". [sic] We see here the constitution of the Roman Church: the presbyters set over different parishes; Grapte (no doubt a deaconess) who is connected with the widows; Clement, the pope, who is the organ of communication between Rome and the rest of the Church in the second century is well known to us from other sources.

The fifth vision, which is represented as taking place twenty days after the fourth, introduces "the Angel of repentance" in the guise of a shepherd, from whom the whole work takes its name. He delivers to Hermas a series of precepts (*mandata, entolai*) as to the belief in one God, simplicity, truthfulness, chastity, long-suffering, faith, fear, continence, confidence, cheerfulness, humility, good desires. These form an interesting development of early Christian ethics. The only point which needs special mention is the assertion of a husband's obligation to take back an adulterous wife on her repentance. The eleventh mandate, on humility, is concerned with false prophets who desire to occupy the first seats (that is to say, among the presbyters). It is possible that we have here a reference to Marcion, who came to Rome about 142-4 and desired to be admitted among the priests (or possibly even to become pope). After the mandata come ten similitudes (*parabolai*) in the form of visions, which are explained by the angel. The longest of these (ix) is an elaboration of the parable of the building of a tower, which had formed the matter of the third vision. The tower is the Church, and the stones of which it is built are the faithful. But in Vis. iii it looked as though only the holy are a part of the Church; in Sim. ix it is clearly pointed out that all the baptized are included, though they may be cast out for grave sins, and can be readmitted only after penance. (Knight)

Gospel of the Egyptians

Source (Trans.): ECW (James)

Date: late 1st c. CE

Author: unknown

Two ancient Christian texts share the title "Gospel of the Egyptians." One is a gnostic salvation history in which Seth, the father of the gnostic race, is the central figure. We're dealing here, though, with the other text, one that must be reconstructed from various patristic commentaries in which it is mentioned, by Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Epiphanius, and Theodotus.

According to Ron Cameron, "the theology of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* is clear: each fragment endorses sexual asceticism as the means of breaking the lethal cycle of birth and of overcoming the alleged sinful differences between male and female, enabling all persons to return to what was understood to be their primordial and androgynous state." Similar ideas can be found in the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Mary*, and *Dialogue of the Savior*, gnostic texts of the mid-2nd century that likely borrowed from *Egyptians*. In *Egyptians*, the return to the primordial state is symbolized by baptism. Perhaps more important than its theology, though, is the central role of Salome, a very minor character in Mark, in dialogue with the Savior, suggesting the important role of women in the community that produced this

gospel.

Acts of Peter

Trans.: NTA

Dating: 2nd c. CE

Authorship: Unknown

The *Acts of Peter* is a fascinating collection of traditions about Peter as miracle worker. Together, the collected tales constitute an aretology, a treatise on virtue and the means of attaining it. The dominant theme is sexual abstinence, an encratite message characteristic of orthodox and some gnostic Christian groups of the second century. This theme is worked out through a series of healings and miracles involving women, including Peter's own daughter. For example, a crowd urges Peter to cure his own paralyzed daughter, which he does. But following the cure, he wills her paralysis to return, as a safeguard against seduction. In the story of the gardener's daughter, Peter prays that the Lord "bestow upon her what was expedient for her soul." The girl drops dead. The father begs Peter to revive her, which he does, but shortly thereafter a traveler comes the old man's house and seduces her. The message, of course, is "death before sex," at least where young girls are concerned.

But the *Acts* contain, as well, a suspenseful contest for the trust of the people between Peter and Simon Magus, a Christian Gnostic whom we know from other

texts as Peter's nemesis, a powerful magician himself to whom many people were attracted in Judea and, later (after Simon Magus flees Judea to escape the consequences of robbing a wealthy woman), in Rome. This contest between Peter and Simon reminds us of that between Moses and Pharaoh's court magicians in its one-upsmanship. It involves talking dogs, raisings from the dead, a smoked fish that is brought back to life, and in its very dramatic conclusion a flying Simon Magus, who is brought down only by Peter's prayer to Jesus that Simon fall from the Roman sky, breaking his leg in three places. Simon's final demise comes with his stoning by the people of Rome and his death at the hands of the angel of the Devil.

In the end, though, Peter himself is a martyr to his cause. Having brought his message of celibacy to the women of Rome, who are eager to convert, Peter incurs the wrath of Roman husbands. They complain to Agrippa, who orders Peter's execution. Peter disguises himself to escape from Rome, but on the way out of the gate he encounters Jesus on his way in. When asked "Where are you going? (Quo vadis?)," Jesus replies, "I am coming to Rome to be crucified." Peter reenters Rome and is crucified—upside down, at his own request. (An unintentionally humorous element of the crucifixion scene is Peter's lengthy explanation of the upside-down cross symbolism, delivered as he hangs upside down with his lips nailed shut!)

Although the writer intends that Peter's acts be considered noble, he is apparently

unaware of a subtext that undermines their altruism. For one, Peter's disposition of money and property that come to him in his ministry is equivocal. The writer relates a story of Ptolemaeus, a wealthy man who, having seen Peter's (twelve-year-old) daughter bathing, wants her for his wife. His servants abduct her, but the Lord paralyzes one side of her body, making her less attractive. Ptolemaeus is converted to Christ by this miracle, and at his death he leaves land to Peter's daughter, which, according to the law of the time, goes to Peter. Peter protests—twice in one sentence!—that he sold the land and gave the money to the poor. In another episode, a wealthy woman named Chryse ("the Golden"), who is notorious in Rome as a slut (even "going in" to her own houseboys!), gives Peter ten thousand pieces of gold after having been instructed to do so by God in a dream. Over the protests of his "brethren," Peter accepts the gold as Christ's gift to his servants. Although there is some mention that with the gift "the afflicted" could now be "relieved," the next section, in which Peter cures many diseased people, makes no mention of the gift being used for that purpose. Indeed, except for the healings, Peter seems to move mostly in privileged society, among senators and their wives. (Indeed, the splitting of senatorial marriages is the direct cause of his execution.)

Peter's contest with Simon Magus is also questionable. In every instance, Simon matches Peter's magic or outdoes it. Flying over Rome is Simon's coup de grâce.

Peter's method of winning, by humiliating his opponent, implies a meanness in Peter. Peter's greatest triumph, after the humiliation of Simon, is that he brings many Romans to Christ. But at what cost? The encratite ethic that the author attributes to Peter splits families down the middle by using female chastity as a means of social, as well as sexual, control. Peter's victory over the Roman establishment is achieved through Roman women, whom he empowers to emasculate their husbands. Thus, just as he humiliates Simon Magus in the end, Peter humiliates the Roman power structure. He even controls the method of his own execution. Peter conquers Rome in this collection of stories, preparing it, as the text indicates, for "the coming of Paul."

Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles

Source (Trans.): ECW (Parrott and Wilson)

Date: late 2nd c. CE

Author: unknown

This is an artfully-written story of, as the title suggests, Peter and the eleven (not twelve! the action is post-resurrection) apostles and a post-resurrection encounter with the Savior. Using the devices of metaphor, mystery, and suspense, the author imagines the eleven setting out as a group "to fulfill the ministry to which the Lord appointed us." They hitch a ride aboard a ship and end up at a city that, according to a stranger on the dock, is called "Habitation," so named, we later learn, "because by everyone who endures his trials, cities are inhabited, and a precious kingdom comes from them, because they endure in the midst of the apostasies and the difficulties of the storms."

Peter finds the stranger exceptionally beautiful, although all that Peter can see are the soles of the man's feet, the palms of his hands, part of his chest, and his face. The man behaves oddly, crying out "Pearls! Pearls!" he draws a crowd of poor people, the rich having looked out their windows then turned away. The poor want to see the pearls, but the stranger tells them they'll have to come to his city, where he'll give them pearls for free. The man introduces himself to Peter as Lithargoel,

which means "light, gazelle-like stone" (whatever that might be).

Peter and the rest travel to the stranger's city, Nine Gates. They encounter various difficulties on the way, but when they arrive they are greeted by a physician who agrees to take them to Lithargoel's house. Before you know it, the physician is revealed to be the Savior and the stranger from Habitation. He sends Peter back to Habitation to see to the needs of the poor, giving him a bag of medicine with which he is to heal the sick. Peter, afraid to continue conversing with the Savior, tells John to talk. John asks how they, not being doctors, will heal the sick. The Savior really wants them to "heal the heart." Finally, the Savior warns them to avoid the wealthy men of Habitation, "lest their partiality influence you. For many in the churches have shown partiality to the rich, because they also are sinful."

This is the moral of this *Acts*: the proper role of the apostles, the leaders of Jesus's church, is to feed and heal the poor of heart. The rich, on the other hand, "who reveled in their wealth and pride," are left to shift for themselves. An interesting unsigned essay about *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* is on the ECW web site.

STUDIES OF GNOSTIC CHRISTIANITY

The Gnostic Gospels

Pagels, Elaine. New York: Vintage, 1979.

In this study of Gnostic Christian texts discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945, Pagels' purpose is "to show how Gnostic forms of Christianity interact with orthodoxy—and what this tells us about the origins of Christianity itself"(xxxiv). These texts, which express Christian beliefs contrary to those adopted from the second century onward by the "universal" church, were systematically disparaged and suppressed as heresy early in the church's development. She is interested primarily in investigating "how politics and religion coincide in the development of Christianity" (xxxvi). So this book studies not only the Gnostic gospels but, more significantly, the historical-political process by which the institutional church (later the Roman Catholic church) established its authority over Christian dogma and belief, authority that continues to this day, by whatever name the Christian church is called.

It is easy to imagine how the various beliefs that we refer to collectively as "Gnostic" would have disturbed the church fathers. Among the orthodox principles that are challenged by the Gnostic writers are the idea that human sin "marred an originally perfect creation," that God is strictly masculine, and that the resurrection of Christ is

actual rather than symbolic (xxxv).

That the Nag Hammadi texts are called "Gnostic" belies the incredible variety among them, a characteristic that distinguishes them from the monolithic dogma we refer to as "orthodoxy" or "institutional Christianity" and that challenges us to develop an all-inclusive definition of Gnosticism. Pagels is sensitive to this variety, recognizing that the texts reflect several sometimes competing views of God, creation, and Jesus, and that the proponents of these beliefs probably did not refer to themselves as gnostics. Nevertheless, she defines *gnosis*, a Greek word meaning intuitive (as opposed to rational) knowledge, as a process of self-discovery that uncovers otherwise "secret" or hidden truths about ultimate reality (xix). The "Gnostic" is engaged in this process of discovery; the "agnostic" is not. The objective of Gnosticism, then, is the achievement of perfection through the discovery of the essential divinity of man. Pagels quotes the Gnostic teacher Monoimus (from Hippolytus' *Refutationis Omnium Haeresium*): "Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says, 'My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.' Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate ... If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself" (xix-xx).

Pagels begins her discussion with a question that goes to the heart of orthodox teaching: Was the resurrection of Jesus historical or symbolic? Central to orthodox belief is the physicality of resurrection: the resurrection of Jesus and by extension believers' is corporal—the body, not just the spirit, is "raised." Tertullian, admitting the implausibility of corporal resurrection in *De Carne Christi* but condemning belief to the contrary heretical, writes "it must be believed, because it is absurd!" (5). Pagels points out that canonical New Testament texts are ambivalent about this issue, here arguing that the resurrection of Jesus was physical, there arguing that it was spiritual. Paul, who alleges to have encountered the risen Jesus, writes "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50) and concludes that resurrection is a mysterious "transformation from physical to spiritual existence" (6). Pagels questions why, if the canonical texts themselves express both possibilities, the church fathers or the second century insisted on only one; she concludes that "the doctrine of bodily resurrection also serves an essential *political* function: it legitimizes the authority of certain men who claim to exercise exclusive leadership over the churches as the successors of the apostle Peter"; in other words, it served to validate the apostolic succession of bishops, the basis of papal authority to this day" (6-7).

How did the orthodox insistence on the authority of apostolic succession come about? Although the New Testament mentions how the resurrected Jesus appeared

to "many others besides Peter" (in one instance, "to five hundred people simultaneously," according to Paul), church fathers isolated statements in Matthew and Luke that suggested a distinction between resurrection appearances to the *hoi polloi* and appearances to "the eleven" (later twelve, after Judas had been replaced), who were considered the *official* witnesses. Also, according to Luke, after forty days of appearances to the eleven/twelve, Jesus rose, to reappear only in visions and trances but never again "in the flesh," as he had to the apostles,. Thus, "all authority derives from certain apostles' experience of the resurrected Christ, an experience now closed forever," suggesting that "only the apostles had the right to ordain future leaders as their successors. Christians in the second century used Luke's account to set the groundwork for all future generations of Christians" (9-10).

Gnostic Christians, however, insisted that resurrection "was not a unique event in the past" but a *symbol* of "how Christ's presence could be experienced in the present," as a result of spiritual, rather than literal, seeing (11). What interests me about this interpretation of resurrection is its orientation to present time, reminiscent of Mark's frequent use of present tense verbs in the earliest of the canonical gospels; where orthodoxy looks to the past for its Jesus, gnostics can experience his resurrection in the present. Indeed, as Pagels points out, quoting the *Gospel of Philip*, "'Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error.' Instead, they must 'receive the resurrection while they live'" (12).

Pagels demonstrates the Gnostic rejection of apostolic authority by reference to the *Gospel of Mary*, one of my favorite Gnostic texts. The gospel's *mise en scène* is a gathering of the apostles (plus Mary Magdalene, the Mary of the title) after Jesus' death. The males are sorrowful and frightened for their own safety, but Mary attempts to reassure them by relating a vision she has had of the resurrected savior, in which he shared with her secret (and consoling) knowledge. Peter and Andrew (who represent orthodoxy) ridicule Mary, disbelieving both the "strange ideas" she has attributed to Jesus and that she has had such a vision at all. Mary responds emotionally to Peter's skepticism (Gnostic visions always provoke intense emotion), is defended by Levi, who rebukes Peter for his disbelief, and finally "joins the other apostles as they go out to preach" (13). The symbolism is apparent: teaching authority is not limited to the apostles and their successors, nor is it limited to men, nor is the experience of the risen Christ "closed forever."

An essential difference between orthodoxy and Gnosticism has to do with the nature of Jesus' teaching. Orthodoxy maintains that his teaching was public and revealed to "the many"; Gnosticism maintains that it is private, or "secret" and revealed only to the few. The gospels and Paul seem to support the Gnostic view. The "messianic secret," Mark's insistence that Jesus reserved his most significant teaching for his closest disciples, and Matthew's parabolic Jesus, whose public

teaching is deliberately obfuscatory, emphasize secrecy. Paul, describing in 2 Corinthians an ecstatic trance in which he is "caught up to the third heaven," claims to have heard "things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" and elsewhere alleges to have knowledge of "hidden mysteries" and "secret wisdom" that he can share "only with those Christians he considers 'mature'" (15).

One way in which Gnostic texts differ from the canonical ones is that the canonical gospels are interested primarily in the *life* of Jesus, whereas Gnostic gospels are more concerned with Jesus *after* his crucifixion. Another is that Gnostic texts, in general, do not rely primarily on narrative to convey their message; some use poetry, and others use narrative only to provide a putative setting for a dialogue. Like the canonical texts, though, Gnostic texts are often attributed (preposterously) to Jesus' disciples.

Pagels' second chapter deals with a concept at the very heart of orthodox belief—monotheism, the notion that there is only one God—and the orthodox response to the "dualists," as their detractors referred to them: Marcion (mid-second century) and the Gnostics who shared Marcion's belief in two gods: a creator-god or "demiurge," the bungling, self-absorbed character in Genesis and throughout the Hebrew Bible, and a wiser, usually female, god who represents wisdom and goodness and with whom the creator-god engages in constant hubristic competition.

Marcion had a point. How does one reconcile the legalistic, judgmental, punishing god of the Hebrew Bible with the loving father of forgiveness and love whom Jesus describes in the gospels? Marcion—who was not a Gnostic—reconciled the problem by arguing that the Hebrew Bible be abandoned, as its god had been replaced by the god of the newer testament. Some Gnostics, rather than abandon the offensive parts of the Hebrew Bible, namely the second creation myth and the stories of the patriarchs, both in Genesis, simply reinterpreted and reinvented the stories.

Thus the authors of *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World* name the creator-god Samael, which means "god of the blind." (The god of Genesis is oddly unwilling to reveal his name in that book, until he irritably tells Moses, who wants to inform his people which god they'll be worshipping from then on, some gibberish that is usually translated "I am.") The *Secret Book of John* reasons that if the creator-god claims himself to be "jealous" of another god, obviously another god must exist, "for if there were no other one, of whom would he be jealous?" (an insight that seems self-evident, except to the orthodox monotheists). In various Gnostic reinterpretations of the Eden creation myth (I am distinguishing here between the two very different creation stories of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3, the second of which contains the named humans Adam and Eve and, of course, the serpent), God's prohibition against eating from the Tree of Knowledge (lest the humans become "like one of us") is viewed as a silly command from a god who

envies his own creation. Eve's leadership in disobeying that command is viewed as a first, welcome step toward liberation from Eden's wacky creator; thus, she is called a life-giver or a light-bringer. The Serpent, far from being despised, is depicted as a valued tutor who leads Eve and Adam to the light of knowledge.

But Pagels points out that not all Gnostics were dualists. Valentinian Gnostics (after Valentinus, their influential spokesman) believed in a monadic god, just like mainstream Jews and Christians; they distinguished, though, between the god of people's imaginations and "what that image represented—God understood as the ultimate source of all being," which Valentinus called "the depth" (32). Yet, despite their shared beliefs (and the fact that most Christians seem to have thought the Valentinians harmless), Irenaeus, Clement, and other early church fathers vehemently condemned the Valentinians as heretics. Pagels asserts that the reason for their invective was that any modification of the idea of *one* God was understood as an attack on the spiritual authority of the *one* church. Clement, Bishop of Rome at the end of the first century, argues (speciously) that the one God delegates his authority on earth to bishops, priests, and deacons, and "whoever refuses to 'bow the neck'" to their authority "is guilty of insubordination against the divine master himself" (34). Clement is the first church member to officially divide Christians into two groups: the clergy and the laity (34), superiors and subordinates.

What frightened Clement, Irenaeus, and Ignatius most was the challenge to their authority implicit in Gnostic belief. If the individual believer could, through initiation into the secret wisdom which Valentinus claimed to have received directly from Theudas, a disciple of Paul, achieve gnosis—a recognition of "the true source of divine power"("the depth"), a simultaneous discovery of his own spiritual origin, full knowledge of his true Father and Mother, and *apolytrosis* ("release" or redemption)—, that individual would have become independent of the bishops' presumed authority over this world (36-38). To make matters worse for the bishops, followers of Valentinus rejected hierarchical authority on principle; their assemblies assigned authority within the group by drawing lots, which would be drawn in each meeting for the "offices" of priest, bishop, and prophet (41).

Some Gnostics attributed both feminine and masculine characteristics to God. Pagels identifies three characterizations of a "divine Mother." Valentinus imagined a "Mother of the all, " who is characterized by desirable silence, in contrast to the masculine principle, "the depth." From the union of the two, "she brings forth all the emanations of divine being, ranged in harmonious pairs of masculine and feminine energies" (50). Another characterization "describes her as Holy Spirit" (51), the divine mother of Jesus. A third characterization of the divine Mother refers to her as "Wisdom."

Once again, the bishops declared these beliefs heretical. The likely reason can be guessed easily: from Paul onward, mainstream Christian literature is misogynistic. "By the year 100, the majority of Christian communities endorsed as canonical the pseudo-Pauline letter of Timothy, which stresses (and exaggerates) the anti-feminist element in Paul's view." "By the end of the second century, women's participation in worship was explicitly condemned" (63). Apparently, the question of the role of women caused a pitched battle between Gnostics and orthodox Christians. Both sides claimed apostolic authority for their views. Only one important late second century church leader, Clement of Alexandria, urges women to participate in their communities. But Pagels points out that most churches followed the advice of "Clement's severe and provincial contemporary," Tertullian, who wrote: "It is not permitted for a woman to speak in the church, nor is it permitted for her to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer [the eucharist], nor to claim for herself a share in any masculine function—least of all, in priestly office" (68-69).

Yet another source of disagreement between Gnostics and orthodox Christians is the suffering and death (or "Passion") of Jesus; to wit: did Jesus suffer? The orthodox view, that Jesus was fully god and fully human, required that he suffer on the cross. One gnostic view argued that "insofar as Jesus was the 'Son of Man,' being human, he suffered and died like the rest of humanity. But since he was also 'Son of God,' the divine spirit within him could not die: in that sense, he transcended suffering

and death. A more extreme belief, docetism, held that Jesus, being pure spirit in the illusion of a human body, suffered nothing at all; he was able to look on his own crucifixion as he left that body on the cross.

Pagels explains this controversy in terms of the alleged persecution of Christians. From early in its history, the church championed martyrdom. Particularly in the second century, when there was some actual persecution under Rome, the rhetoric of martyrdom permeates orthodox Christian writing. "The opponents of heresy in the second century—Ignatiius, Polycarp, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus—are unanimous both in proclaiming Christ's passion and death and in affirming martyrdom. Also, they accuse the heretics of false teaching about Christ's suffering and of 'opposing martyrdom'" (89). But Gnostics objected to the church's teaching about martyrdom on several grounds: first, that martyrdom offered forgiveness of sins; second, that the rhetoric of martyrdom implies that God desires human sacrifice; and third, that martyrdom is presumed to ensure resurrection (92). One Gnostic writer, Heracleon, essentially condemns the martyrs as hypocrites who, rather than live Christian lives, announce to the world their Christianity so they can be martyred. Heracleon considers this the easier course of action (96).

The orthodox church survived because it established a highly-effective hierarchy, rules of affiliation, and dogma. Gnostic churches ceased to exist after a few hundred

years largely because they lacked organization, disagreed on conditions of membership (was the member required to have achieved gnosis prior to entry?), and rejected the idea of dogma. Of course, the demise of Gnosticism was hastened by the assiduous efforts of orthodox clergy to brand it heretical, to expurgate Gnostic thought from Christian belief, and to actively suppress Gnostic literature.

Much of what the Christians we lump together as "Gnostics" wrote is thought-provoking. Much of it makes perfect sense. Most of it is iconoclastic, offering fresh perspective on ancient texts and religious ideas. And much of it is more relevant to a modern understanding of humanity and divinity than orthodox Christianity, in its monolithic inflexibility, has proven to be. "Gnostics came to the conviction that the only way out of suffering was to realize the truth about humanity's place and destiny in the universe. Convinced that the only answers were to be found within, the gnostic engaged on an intensely private interior journey... In the process, gnostics celebrated—their opponents said they overwhelmingly exaggerated—the greatness of human nature" (144). In the words of the *Gospel of Philip*:

> ... God created humanity; [but now human beings] create God. That is the way it is in the world—human beings make gods, and worship their creation. It would be appropriate for the gods to worship human beings. (cited in Pagels

122)

The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters

Pagels, Elaine. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1975.

In this early study of the Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi, then becoming available to scholars for the first time, Pagels documents "extraordinary new evidence for *gnostic* Pauline tradition" (2). Noting that modern Pauline scholarship is unduly influenced by the writings and viewpoints of second century heresiologists, Pagels argues that "two antithetical traditions of Pauline exegesis have emerged from the late first century through the second," one of which "reads Paul *antignostically* [the Paul 'familiar from church tradition'], the other *gnostically* [Paul as 'teacher of wisdom to gnostic initiates']" (5). The orthodox (antignostic) tradition, expressed by Irenaeus and Tertullian, bases its assumptions on the Pastoral Letters, which depict Paul as "antignostic polemicist" and which they assume (incorrectly—the Pastorals are pseudonymous) to have been written by Paul; the Gnostic tradition, represented primarily by the Valentinian school in Pagels' study, ignores or rejects the Pastoral Letters and bases its exegesis on Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and Hebrews, "a list that corresponds exactly to the earliest known Pauline collection attested from Alexandria" (5). The gnostic exegetes claim Paul as their special "apostle of the resurrection" who, according to Theodotus, "taught in two ways at once": to the "psychics" (literalists) of a fleshly savior (the kerygmatic gospel of the crucified Christ) and to the elect, the

"pneumatics," a symbolic gospel of the spiritual Christ. The Gnostics claimed that Paul was himself one of the elect, by virtue of his special revelation, and that his "secret" teaching had been communicated to Valentinus and his disciples through Theudas, Paul's disciple (5).

The dispute between the Gnostics and the heresiologists of the orthodox church, from the Gnostic point of view, is mainly over two *methods* of scriptural exegesis and how those methods result in divergent conceptions of the Pauline message. On one hand, the traditionalists "make the mistake of reading the scriptures only literally" (psychically), while Gnostics read them symbolically (pneumatically) "as ... Paul intended." Only this symbolic reading "yields 'the truth' instead of its mere outward 'image'" (6). The Valentinian exegetes discern in Paul certain common metaphors and parables for the distinction between "the *called* and the *elect*, between psychic and pneumatic Christians" (7), among those metaphors the distinction between the Jews (who represent the psychic Christians and, by extension, the orthodox church derived from the Jerusalem church of Peter and James) and the Gentiles (who represent pneumatic Christians, the church of the elect, Paul's church). According to the Valentinians, Paul recognized his "dual responsibility" to "both the Greeks and to the barbarians" (Rom 1:11), that is, "both to the wise (the pneumatics) and to the foolish (the psychics)" (Rom 1:14); therefore, Paul writes, as he preaches, according to Theodotus, "in two ways at once" (7). The

"outward, obvious" message of the letters is directed toward to psychics "in terms they can grasp"; but his "deeper communication," the truth behind the images, is directed toward the pneumatics (7).

Pagels' purpose in this book, then, is to identify the hermeneutical methods by which Valentinian exegetes "derive such exegesis from Paul's letters" (7). Her method involves first "collecting evidence of Valentinian exegesis for each passage of the writings cited in second-century sources as 'Pauline,' including fragments of writings of Valentinus, Ptolemy, Heracleon, and Theodotus; passages of Valentinian exegesis cited in the accounts of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian," Clement of Alexandria, and Origen; and from "citations and allusions to 'Pauline' texts available in the Nag Hammadi writings generally considered Valentinian" (8). She then collates the collected textual evidence into "analysis of each of the letters cited" and organizes her discussion "according to the letters which (according to extant evidence) the Valentinians considered Pauline" (as listed above) (8).

Valentinian exegesis of Paul involves an unlocking of Paul's hidden message to the elect, moving past the literal message intended for the psychics to the wisdom imparted to the pneumatics. The keys to the message are various terms, phrases, and metaphors that Paul uses consistently, across the letters, to allude to his hidden message. Among the terms Paul uses are "Lord," a reference to Yahweh, the Jewish

god of the psychics, the "demiurge," the creator of a flawed universe and himself a creation, and "God," a reference to the Father, the god of the pneumatics, the Gnostics' übergod. This distinction is essential because in the Valentinian view psychic Christians worship the demiurge, "created to serve as an image and instrument of diving revelation" but now "mistaken as a substitute for God and ... worshiped as a god himself!" (17). A division between these Yahweh-worshipers and the elect is suggested in Romans 1:26-27, a passage that, on a literal level, expresses a moral warning against homosexual behavior but that on a symbolic level expresses this unnatural separation between psychics and pneumatics, who were originally "part of the same being" but who now associate only with their own kind, "instead of uniting with each other in loving relationship" (17). [Gnostics generally did not share the negative orthodox perspective on sex, believing that "in Christ 'all things are permitted'" (17). Consequently, for them, the "unnatural" relationship that is the concern of Paul in Romans 1:26-27 is not sexual but theological; division of any sort is contrary to the primordial unity intended by the Father.]

Because the psychics (Jewish Christians) esteem the demiurge, they are subject to his laws, including those related to circumcision and food. Pneumatics (Gentile Christians), on the other hand, have transcended these literal laws to become circumcised of heart. Thus the controversy between Paul and the Jerusalem church

over observance of Mosaic law is resolved by Paul in a liberalization of the regulations defended by Peter and James.

So with the idea of resurrection from death. The orthodox interpret resurrection literally; for them, it is a *physical* resurrection, both for Christ and for his followers. But the Gnostics read Paul differently. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," Paul writes (1 Corinthians 15:50-52). "Nothing that comes from the demiurge can enter into the kingdom of God the Father" (86). Pneumatics have already been resurrected; psychics must put off the physical form (and all it symbolizes—psychic literality, for example) so that death can be "swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:55; 86).

Perhaps the most significant difference between orthodox and gnostic exegesis of Paul has to do with the idea of redemption (*apolytrosis*) and salvation, a concern of Paul's in Ephesians. [Note, though, that Ephesians is not authentically Pauline, though both the gnostics and the orthodox considered it to be.] For the elect, the pneumatics, Christ's death served as an indication of their redemption *in this life* rather than as a promise of future potential. For the psychics, on the other hand, his death represents their *potential* to be saved. It is incumbent on the elect to lead the psychics toward gnosis of God the Father; it is the psychics' responsibility to achieve such knowledge as they can, according to their (limited) lights.

Pagels points out that the energy devoted to refuting the gnostic appropriation of Paul is testimony to its "power and appeal" (157). The plausibility of gnostic exegesis of Paul, the "allure" of introduction to "hidden mysteries," and the attractive exclusivity of gnosis seem to have posed a challenge to the traditionalists. Furthermore, the libertarian element of Pauline gnosticism, the freedom of those who "have gnosis" from restrictions on their conduct (like Paul's freedom from the authority of Peter's Jerusalem church), challenged the authority of the bishops to discipline church members (158-160). Pagels notes that the church fathers seem to have considered Paul a bit of an embarrassment and engaged in very little discussion of the authentic letters. Irenaeus and other orthodox writers, responding to the gnostics's interpretation of Paul, instead used the Pastoral Letters, because of their antignostic flavor, to refute the notion that Paul was gnostic.

Pagels concludes by saying that traditions concerning Paul, like those concerning Jesus, were various. Both the "gnostic Paul" and the "antignostic Paul" are constructions of the second century, long after Paul's death c. 60 CE, and neither should be considered historical. Nevertheless, the conflict between those traditions was substantial enough to cause one of the major rifts in early Christianity.

GNOSTIC CHRISTIAN TEXTS

Gospel of Thomas (Gnostic Christian)

Source (Trans.): CG (Patterson)

Date: mid-late 1st c. CE, contemporary with canonical gospels

Author: unknown; textually attributed to Didymos Judas Thomas, legendary patron apostle for Syria

The *Gospel of Thomas* is a sayings gospel, consisting of 114 sayings and containing practically no narrative. As such, it is concerned not with Jesus' life but with what he said. Although fragments of a sayings gospel in Greek (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus) had been discovered in the late nineteenth century, it was not until the discovery of the library at Nag Hammadi in 1945, including a full-text *Thomas* in Coptic translation, that scholars were able to identify the earlier fragments as *Thomas*. The original language of the gospel is assumed to have been Greek.

Similar to the books of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible and to other *logoi sophon*, collections of sayings of the wise) from antiquity, *Thomas* purports to record the insightful words of a wise man, Jesus. Unlike the Jewish wisdom tradition, however, which tends to be conservative, *Thomas* "subverts dominant cultural values," upsetting popular notions of family, piety, and "respect for community leaders" (303). Its theological orientation is early gnostic: Jesus "has come from God to remind the 'children of humanity' of whence

they have come and to where they shall ultimately return" (303). It is a world-negating theology: the cosmos is evil, a mistaken creation, in which humanity is trapped unwittingly, having forgotten its divine origin. Jesus' function is to provide the gnosis (knowledge) necessary to transcend this false world and achieve immortality. According to Saying 1, "And he [Jesus] said, 'Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death."

Many of the sayings in *Thomas* appear also in the Synoptic Sayings Source, or *Q*, which is the putative source of Jesus sayings used by the writers of Matthew and Luke. But other sayings in *Thomas* are older than those in *Q*, "paralleled in the Gospel of John, in Mark 4:21-25, and even in 1 Corinthians" (Koester, *NHL* 125). And the cosmic, eschatological orientation of *Q*, the expectation of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God, is missing from the oldest level of Thomas; instead, the orientation of Thomas is personal rather than cosmic: it stresses "the finding of wisdom, or of the "Kingdom of the Father," in the knowledge (gnosis) of oneself ... guided by the sayings of Jesus" (Koester, *NHL* 125). The *Gospel of Thomas*, then, is a very important discovery, revealing as it does a direction in early Christian thought that is related to yet different from that of the synoptic gospels, a direction that influenced the writer of the *Gospel of John* and that came to full fruition in the various Gnostic schools of the second century.

Thomas presents some challenges. Some sayings seem purposely obscure. And Jesus' responses to some questions seem utterly unrelated to the questions. For example, when the disciples ask whether they should fast or give to charity, Jesus responds, "Don't lie, and don't do what you hate" (6). Or this inscrutable saying: "Lucky is the lion that the human will eat, so that the lion becomes human. And foul is the human that the lion will eat, and the lion will still become human" (7).

But other sayings are quite plain. "If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the (Father's) imperial rule is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the (Father's) imperial rule is inside you and outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty" (3). Or this subversive statement, "Perhaps people think that I have come to cast peace upon the world. They do not know that I have come to cast conflicts upon the earth: fire, sword, war" (16).

The disciples ask (18) how their end will come, and Jesus' reply is anti-eschatological: "Have you found the beginning, then, that you are looking for the end? You see, the end will be where the beginning is. Congratulations to the one who stands at the beginning: that one will know the end and will not taste

death." That beginning is the androgynous state of man before the creation of woman, the primal unity, as this exchange suggests:

> Jesus saw some babies nursing. He said to his disciples, "These nursing babies are like those who enter the (Father's) domain." They said to him, "Then shall we enter the (Father's) domain as babies?" Jesus said to them, "When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female ... then you will enter [the (Father's) domain]." (22)

The desirable, and original, state of all creation is oneness. The idea of gender is anathema to that oneness. The world born of woman is intrinsically corrupt because it was engendered out of division rather than unity (not, as some would infer, because the female gender is corrupt but because the very principle of gender is a corruption of the primal unity). The gospel includes women's voices, Mary's and Salome's, as well as men's. All are seeking to know. The only suggestion of misogyny comes from Simon Peter (who is often represented in the gospels as bone-headed): "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus corrects him: "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of Heaven" (114).

Jesus' disciples, he tells them, "have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself ... If they ask you 'What is the evidence of your Father in you?' say to them, 'It is motion and rest'" (50). The gospel uses light and darkness as metaphors for gnosis and ignorance. The world is the locus of ignorance, a place of death, from which the elect must escape: "Whoever has come to know the world has discovered a carcass, and whoever has discovered a carcass, of that person the world is not worthy" (56). And "I am the one who comes from what is whole ... For this reason I say, if one is (whole), one will be filled with light, but if one is divided, one will be filled with darkness" (61).

Unlike the Pauline or the Markan communities, this community is not eagerly awaiting the eschaton, debating whether it will come today or tomorrow. Instead, *Thomas* assumes a realized eschatology; the keys to the Kingdom have already been provided. Only vision is needed to see them. The Father's imperial rule, Jesus claims, "will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!' Rather, the Father's imperial rule is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it" (113).

The sayings of the *Gospel of Thomas* present Jesus in a very different character from that of the canonical epistles and gospels, neither the spirit-being of Paul nor the surly, eager victim of Mark nor the god of John but a cerebral Jesus with a

comforting message of redemption. There is no mention of sin or damnation in this gospel, no promise of Armageddon. No need to relish a scene of final revenge, because the world is already dead. It is easy to see how the Gnostic faith in the power within, discoverable through the guidance of a realized soul, Jesus, would have become the greatest threat to mainstream, ecclesiastical Christianity for the next several hundred years.

Gospel of Mary (Gnostic Christian)

Source (Trans.): NHL (MacRae and Wilson)

Date: 2nd c. CE

Author: unknown

The *Gospel of Mary* consists of two parts that were likely joined from separate documents by a redactor. The first part consists of a dialogue between the resurrected Savior and the disciples. In his dialogue, the Savior defines sin as "the improper mixing of the material and the spiritual" (523). This part ends with the departure of the Savior, the grief and doubt of the disciples, and Mary's reassurance. The second part consists of Mary's consoling the disciples with a special revelation given to her in a vision by the Savior. In that revelation, Mary is permitted to see the progress of the soul toward its ultimate goal, eternal rest. This section concludes with Peter's and Andrew's skepticism first of the reliability of private revelation and second of the likelihood of the Savior's giving such knowledge to a woman. Levi comes to Mary's defense, saying that the Savior loved her more than the others.

The problem in analyzing the *Gospel of Mary* is that the two extant texts are highly fragmented, neither providing a full version. Nevertheless, from the available texts we can deduce the gospel's solution to two problems that must have plagued early communities: whether visions and other forms of personal revelation could be

believed and whether women's testimony could be valid. Clearly, the authors of the gospel believed both questions should be answered affirmatively. Furthermore, Peter's misogyny and Andrew's reluctance to believe imply a distancing of the author's community from the one represented by those two disciples or at least a divide between the orthodox community and the one represented by Mary and Levi.

Gospel of Truth (Gnostic Christian)

Translation: Attridge and MacRae (NHL)

Dating: 140-180 CE

Authorship: possibly Valentinus

The *Gospel of Truth* is a homily similar to the Letter to the Hebrews in construction and written in high style Greek. Although it is a gospel in the sense that it proclaims "good news," its structure is non-narrative. Written in high Greek style, it may have been intended as an introduction to Valentinian gnostic principles.

The gospel is organized into three expository blocks separated by two "formally distinct" units. Each expository block contains three "thematically distinct" sections. The first block contains a description of how Error came into the world, not through the Father; Jesus' work as "revealer and teacher"; and Jesus' death as an act that "reveals the essence of the Father and the origin and destiny of the human self in Him," insight which overcomes "the powers of Error." This is the "gospel of truth." The second block "describes the effects of the revelation" of the gospel: unity with the Father, "authentic human existence" ("wakefulness), and "ultimate return to the Father." The third block "focuses on the process of reintegration to the primordial source": the attraction of "an alluring perfume" (incorruptibility), forgiveness, and finally "rest in the Father."

The gospel is written from the perspective of one who "has come into the resting-place," speaking to the children of the Father, "those upon whom the love of the Father is poured out and in whose midst there is no lack of him. "The gospel of truth is joy for those who have received from the Father of truth the grace of knowing him, through the power of the Word that came forth from the pleroma, the one who is in the thought and the mind of the Father, that is, the one who is addressed as the Savior...." So begins this exuberant and confident gospel. It explains how error—oblivion—came into the world not from the Father but from ignorance of him. Jesus, "the Christ," came and "enlightened those who were in darkness through oblivion," showing them "a way," which is truth. Error, angry at Jesus, nailed him to a tree. But Jesus, "having stripped himself of the perishable rags ... put on imperishability," having brought to mankind the Father's "living book," in which are inscribed the names of "those who are to receive teaching." Those will be called, they will respond and ascend, and they will receive rest in unity with the Father. Unity is the goal; doubt and division are its antitheses. Jesus has brought the knowledge that provides a way back to the Father.

Particularly interesting in this gospel is the way the Father-god is rendered and how humans are not blamed for their imperfect world (as they are in the Yahweh stories). This god is a sympathetic character who sees division and only seems to want wholeness restored. He gives his own name and teaching authority to Jesus so

that humankind, his children, can be led back to him. It is no wonder that gnostic Christianity gave ecclesiastical Christianity cause for worry, providing as it does self-actuated, unmediated access to the divinity and the assurance that the divinity is not a judge.

Apocryphon of James (Gnostic Christian)

Translation: Williams (NHL)

Dating: likely pre-150 CE; definitely pre-314 CE

Authorship: unknown, pseudonymous

This apocryphon purports to be a letter from "James" (Jesus' brother) to a recipient whose name is illegible in the MS, possibly Cerinthus, an early Christian heterodox teacher. The letter frames a narrative that relates a secret teaching of Jesus to Peter and James (so secret, apparently, that "James" claims to be writing in Hebrew, which hardly anyone would be able to read), delivered upon Jesus' return 550 days after the resurrection, when the twelve disciples are sitting together, each writing his own book of the savior's sayings. Jesus takes Peter and James aside to "fill" them. He predicts persecution and martyrdom and encourages the latter: "for the kingdom (of God) belongs to those who put themselves to death." Jesus repeatedly urges Peter and James to exceed him in knowledge so that they can "receive the kingdom of heaven." But his primary concern seems to be those who did not know him directly, whose search for gnosis will be mostly up to their own faith. Eager to return to the Father, Jesus departs, but Peter and James manage to follow him by sending "our heart(s) upwards to heaven." They manage to follow almost to "the Majesty" himself (having crossed through two outer regions), but they are recalled to earth by the other disciples, who want to know what Jesus told them and where

he went. Peter and James inform them that he has ascended; then they impart the secret knowledge. The disciples won't be saved simply because they're disciples; instead, a new generation of children not yet born will seek their love and, in return, offer them salvation. The disciples are (understandably) miffed at this, so James and Peter send them away, and James goes on to Jerusalem, expecting to there encounter "the beloved, who will be made manifest."

The text concludes with the letter frame, in which James prays that "the beginning may come from you, for thus I shall be capable of salvation." He does not mean, however, that his correspondent is one of the mysterious children to come but rather he urges the correspondent to put this secret revelation to good use and "make yourself like them and pray that you may obtain a portion with them."

Acts of Thomas (Gnostic Christian)

Source (Trans.): OB (Hennecke and Schneemelcher)

Date: probably early 3rd c. CE

Author: unknown

Acts of Thomas belongs to the Hellenistic-Oriental romance tradition. Its novelistic style employs a narrator (in this case, an unidentified apostle) who describes the journey of the hero, Judas Thomas, also called Didymus and brother to James, to a foreign land (in Thomas's case, against his will). There the hero works various prodigious feats, and the narrative features erotic scenes. Thomas, however, remains celibate and preaches virginity. According to Gunther Bornkamm, the Thomas story was used by Mani to shape the doctrine of the Manichaeans (464).

The story begins similarly to stories of the prophets, with a call from the Lord; but in this case all the apostles get the call, instructing them to go to their respective regions to proselytize, and Thomas, like Jonah, refuses, not wanting to preach to "Indians." To have his way, Jesus sells Thomas to Abban, a merchant, who takes him to the royal city of Andrapolis. When they arrive, a feast celebrating the engagement of the king's daughter is in progress, and Abban and Thomas attend. There, a Hebrew flute girl becomes smitten with Thomas when he sings a song. A cupbearer slaps Thomas, Thomas predicts he'll be mauled by dogs, and he is, as he

goes to the well. When the flute girl explains this to the king, the king requests that Thomas pray for the young couple. After Thomas blesses them, Jesus appears to them and convinces them to "abandon this filthy intercourse" so they can "become holy temples." To dissuade them from reproducing, Jesus comments that "the majority of children become unprofitable, possessed by demons ... they become either lunatic or half-withered, consumptive or crippled or deaf or dumb or paralytic or stupid." The couple immediately convert. The king, at first angry, is himself converted through the influence of the flute girl.

Arrived in India, Thomas is introduced to King Gundaphorus, who hires him to build a palace and gives him substantial money to do so. But Thomas gives the money to the poor instead. The king becomes understandably angry. His brother, Gad, urges the king to kill Thomas, then dies. The angels take him to heaven and show him the palace that Thomas has built there for the king with his alms. The angels return Gad to life, he informs the king, and Thomas is exonerated. The king and Gad join Thomas in his ministry to the poor.

In another adventure, the Lord directs Thomas to the scene of a recent death, where a snake confesses that he has killed the "comely youth" because the youth has had intercourse with a girl the snake loved. Thomas convinces the snake to suck its venom out of the youth, and the youth revives. Yet another youth murders a

young woman when she refuses to become his "consort in chastity and pure conduct," following the teaching of Thomas. Thomas blesses the youth and raises the slain woman, who has had a vision of adulterers' hell.

Under King Misdaeus, Judas Thomas's fortunes turn. He and his followers are imprisoned for performing sorcery and converting the king's wife and son. Miraculously, the cell doors are opened, but Thomas begs the Lord to close them again. Misdaeus questions Thomas in much the same way Pilate questions Jesus in the passion accounts. Misdaeus has the soldiers take Thomas to the mountain to slay him with spears. After a prayer, Thomas asks to be slain. Later that night, the resurrected Thomas appears to two of his followers. Later, the son of Misdaeus is possessed by a demon. Misdaeus decides to use one of the apostle's bones to cure him, but the bones have been removed by Thomas's followers and taken "to the regions of the west." Nevertheless, Misdaeus applies some dust from the place where the bones had lain to his son, the son is cured, and Misdaeus becomes a Christian.

The theme of *Acts of Thomas* is life. Redemption through Jesus bring life, and redemption is available to those who forsake carnal pleasure. No one remains permanently dead in this story except Thomas himself.

Book of Thomas the Contender (Gnostic Christian)

Source (Trans.): NHL (John D. Turner)

Date: first half of 3rd c. CE

Author: unknown

A revelation dialogue, the *Book of Thomas the Contender* consists partly of questions and answers between Judas Thomas, Jesus's twin brother, and the resurrected Savior, recorded by "Matthaias," who is a third party to their conversation, and partly of a long monologue of the Savior, for which neither Thomas nor Matthaias is present. The dramatic shift from dialogue to monologue suggests, according to the translator, that a redactor compiled the text from two separate works: a dialogue between Thomas and Jesus and a sayings collection. Its orientation, like that of other revelation dialogues in the Nag Hammadi collection, is decidedly Gnostic, "with its emphasis on seeking, finding, resting on, and ruling by the truth, and thus escaping the troubles of life" (201) and in its characteristic depiction of the resurrected Savior instructing or "filling" selected disciples.

The dialogue begins with the subject of visibility and the difficulty of seeing beyond the visible encountered by those who "have not yet received the height of perfection." The light of the sun is temporarily provided to the elect so that they can see who they are, abandon "the lust that scorches the spirits of men," and make

"wings to flee every visible spirit." The desirability of asceticism over imprisonment within "an illusion of truth" is emphasized. Thomas is concerned about the fate of those who find that illusory truth attractive, and with good reason. The Savior tells him that those who "fulfill the lust of their fathers" are "servants of death" and will be "deprived [of the kingdom]" and consigned to inescapable fire.

The remainder of the text consists of the Savior predicting "woe" (the word begins each apostrophic sentence) for those who do not listen to the elect and who "dwell in error" and "love intimacy with womankind and polluted intercourse with them." The text ends with a much shorter section in which the Savior blesses and reassures those "who have prior knowledge of the stumbling blocks and who flee alien things" and who "are oppressed by those without hope." Having "left behind the suffering and the disgrace" of this life, they "will receive rest."

Dialogue of the Savior (Gnostic Christian)

Source (Trans.): NHL (Emmel)

Date: unknown, not attested in any other ancient source; probably early 2nd c. CE

Author: unknown, title provided by a redactor

This highly fragmentary MS, which shows the influence of the deutero-Pauline epistles and the Gospel of John, according to Helmut Koester and Elaine Pagels, is an "attempt to reinterpret the sayings of Jesus in the horizon of gnostic thought" (246). The text is a redactional compilation involving dialogue, a creation myth, a wisdom list and an apocalyptic vision. Koester and Pagels speculate that the document's purpose is related to baptism, as it implies a realized eschatology similar to that expressed in Ephesians and Colossians, by which "those who are baptized have already passed through death into true life" (245). And once again the Savior holds Mary in high regard, privileging her as one of the boys. In answer to Judas's question, "When we pray, how should we pray? (90), the Lord replies, "Pray in the place where there is no woman" (91). Mary, apparently, has overcome her gender limitation.

Apocalypse of Peter (Gnostic Christian)

Source/Trans.: NHL (Brashler and Bullard)

Date: 3rd c. CE

Author: unknown

In this Gnostic text, Peter (the narrator) has three visions that are interpreted for him by Jesus the Savior. This is a docetic Jesus, meaning that, by his own testimony, the Jesus hung on the cross was not the real Jesus but a "substitute," a physical shell. The "living Jesus," Jesus' spiritual nature, looked on the crucifixion "glad and laughing." This "living Jesus" is the savior of the chosen, the Gnostics; the dead Jesus is worshiped by the blind priests and people. Thus the apocalypse (revelation) is meant to reassure Peter and the gnostic faithful.

The first vision depicts "hostile priests and people about to kill Jesus," the second "describes Peter's vision of the crucifixion of Jesus," and the third is a Gnostic interpretation of the resurrection, in which "the spiritual body of Jesus" is reunited with "the intellectual light of the heavenly pleroma" (James Brashler 372). "The immortal souls (the Gnostics) outwardly resemble the mortal souls (non-Gnostics)" but are differentiated by their "immortal essence" (372). The text seems to come from a community that considers Peter its founder and that sees itself in tension with both the orthodox church and other Gnostic groups.

The apocalypse reassures the community of its chosenness and of its ultimate vindication. "[D]eaf and blind ones [the other groups] join only with their own kind," Jesus tells Peter, and immortality will be reserved for Peter and his group. Those orthodox Christians who "bend themselves under the judgment" of those who "name themselves bishops and also deacons, as if they have received their authority from God" are "dry canals," Jesus says. A day of judgment will arrive for them, Peter is told, but meanwhile, Jesus suggests, "let us go on with the completion of the will of the incorruptible Father ... I shall be with you in order that none of your enemies may prevail over you."

POST-EXILIC JEWISH TEXTS

INCLUDING APOCALYPTICS, LATE PROPHETICS, APOCRYPHA AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

4^{TH} C. BCE TO 2^{ND} C. CE

Daniel (Canonical)

Source (Trans.): OSB (REB)

Date: 2nd c. BCE

Author: unknown

Daniel is unique among canonical Old Testament books because it contains a sophisticated, highly-developed apocalypse, which accounts for half the length of the text.

The first half, chapters 1-6, modeled on the story of Joseph in Genesis 41, features the young Daniel, an Israelite in exile in Babylon at the beginning of the Captivity. Along with three other handsome, educated young Israelite men, Daniel has been selected to undergo a three-year period of instruction in Babylonian language and culture, at the end of which time he is to enter Nebuchadnezzar's service. Daniel's special gift (like Joseph's) is the interpretation of dreams. He rises rapidly in the king's esteem through his ability to interpret dreams that stump Nebuchadnezzar's court magicians, and he is given "authority over the whole province of Babylon" (2:48). Naturally, the promotions of Daniel and his three compatriots (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) causes ill feelings among native Babylonians who have been displaced by the talented young men. In a particularly dramatic scene, following Nebuchadnezzar's construction of an enormous golden idol, Daniel's

three friends are accused of failing to prostrate themselves before the image according to the king's command. They are cast into a blazing furnace, where, to the wonder of the Babylonians, they walk around unharmed by the flames, in the company of a fourth man who "looks like a god" (3:25). Nebuchadnezzar is so impressed with the power of the boys' god that he makes it a capital crime to blaspheme Yahweh and gives the boys great wealth.

The book plays very loosely with actual Babylonian history, confusing the kings and misnaming them. Nevertheless, Daniel's further adventures involve the ill-fated Nebuchadnezzar, who loses his kingdom to his son (according to the book, but not actual history); the son, Belshazzar, who fails to read the writing on the wall (literally); and Darius the Mede, who conquers and divides Belshazzar's kingdom. Daniel's god torments the Babylonian rulers, by the way, because they stole the temple vessels in the destruction of Jerusalem. Darius takes an immediate liking to Daniel; not so Darius' ministers, who arrange to have Daniel sealed in a pit with a lion. Darius is overjoyed when Daniel emerges the following day, unscathed, and orders that his ministers, their wives, and their children be thrown to the lion; and he orders that all in his domain fear Daniel's god.

The mood changes abruptly in chapter 7. Daniel begins to have complicated visions predicting the ultimate vindication of the Lord's people. Chapters 7-12 serve as the

model for Christian apocalypses of the first and second centuries CE. Typically, the apocalypse begins with a vision involving various beasts, some recognizable and some with unusual features, like a lion with wings. The beasts in all cases are intended to represent kingdoms that threaten the writer's people in the writer's time, although the visions are set in distant places and times to make them seem like predictions. The beasts engage in battle or devour one another. There is also frequent mention of "horns," not the musical instruments but horns on the beasts' heads. The horns typically represent particular present-day kings (in the case of Daniel, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, successor to Alexander the Great and oppressor of the Jews from 175 to 163 BCE).

Daniel has a series of very troubling visions, delivered to him by an angel suspended above the Tigris River. One little horn, in particular (Antiochus), is able to "cast true religion to the ground," succeeding in all it attempts (8:12). But the victory of the little horn will not last forever (two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings, to be precise), and eventually "the Holy Place will be restored" (8:14). They give the illusion of exactness, but without necessary details (like actual names and dates); thus they are open to interpretation. Daniel's vision of the end time in Chapters 11 and 12, for instance, refers to a "king of the north" and a "king of the south" rather than to the Seleucids and the Egyptians, respectively. Chapter 11 concludes with the king of the north routing every army in

his way for a time but then dying alone.

Chapter 12 continues the vision to "the end of history," at which time "there will be a period of anguish" (always) followed by the deliverance of the writer's people. The only reference to resurrection in the Old Testament occurs at 12:2: "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake,/some to everlasting life/and some to the reproach of eternal abhorrence."

The angel cautions Daniel to "keep the words secret and seal the book until the time of the end" (12:4). Then Daniel sees two other beings, one on each riverbank. Daniel asks the angel, "How long will it be before the end of these portents?" And the angel replies, with typical apocalyptic inexactness, "It shall be for a time and times and half a time. When the power of the holy people is no longer being shattered, all these things will cease" (12:7). Daniel, understandably confused by the angel's gibberish, asks for clarification, to which the angel replies (only somewhat more helpfully), "From the time when the regular offering is abolished and 'the abomination of desolation' is set up, one thousand two hundred and ninety days will elapse. Happy are those who wait and live to see the completion of one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days!" (12:11-12).

Apocalypses purport to answer our time-worn questions about "the end of history."

We assume, rather egotistically, that since we as individuals must die, human society itself must eventually cease, as well. Apocalypses console us by promising that the people who "oppress" us or are uncomfortably different from us in this life will be suitably punished when history ends, and we—even if we've predeceased the final day—will be rewarded for our patience. The appeal of apocalypses is incontrovertibly psychopathological.

Haggai and *Zechariah* (Canonical)

Source (Trans.): OSB (Revised English Bible)

Date: uncertain; possibly 2nd c. BCE

Author: unknown

These prophetic books have as their central problem the controversy over rebuilding the Temple following the return from Babylonian captivity. Having been permitted to return to Judah and Jerusalem, the leaders of the people had made little progress toward reestablishing pre-captivity religiosity. About 520 BCE, both Haggai and Zechariah pressure the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel (grandson of the exiled king Jehoiachin), and the high priest, Joshua, to devote their resources to rebuilding the Temple of the Lord. Haggai, speaking for the Lord, asks, "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your well-roofed houses, while this house [the Temple] lies in ruins?" (Haggai 1:4). Haggai is so persuasive that Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people are "filled with fear" of the Lord and immediately "went and set to work on the house of the Lord of Hosts their God" (Haggai 1:12, 14). Within four years, the Temple is completed.

What is interesting about *Haggai* from a 1st-century CE perspective, besides the rebuilding of the Temple, is his fourth prophecy, which implies that Zerubbabel is considered to be anointed by the Lord, in the messianic tradition of King David.

Thus, the rebuilding of the Temple and the reestablishment of Davidic kingship are achieved simultaneously.

Haggai is straightforward; *Zechariah*, on the other hand, is oblique and enigmatic. The first eight chapters share the prophet Haggai's interest in reviving Judah's religiosity, here through the purification of the priesthood in Joshua and the accession to kingship of Zerubbabel. The theme of these chapters is rendered through eight visions of Zechariah and their interpretation.

Chapters 9-14, though, are less direct. It lacks a narrative thread and involves reminders of past prophecy as it related to events in Israel's past. It concludes (12-14) with an oracular section that seems to have influenced the gospel writers, with its obscure allusions to the speaker (that is, the Lord) as "him whom they have pierced" (12:10) and to a day of mourning that will coincide with the purification of "the line of David" and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" that will also bring to an end the age of prophecy: "I shall expel the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness from the land" (13:1-2). All nations who have traditionally warred against Jerusalem will be struck with a plague, and Jerusalem will become the center of pilgrimage for all the earth. This prediction of the vindication of Jerusalem is, of course, nothing new in prophetic scriptures. But the method of its telling, and its odd attachment to Zechariah 1-8, seem to indicate a later redaction by editors who apparently are living

in a time of considerable turmoil, perhaps the Maccabean War, which concluded about 160 BCE. The style of 9-14 is also similar to apocalyptic Jewish and Christian books of the period 200 BCE-100 CE.

Nehemiah/Ezra (Canonical)

Source (Trans.): OSB (Revised English Bible)

Date: 4th c. BCE

Author: unknown

Nehemiah and *Ezra* comprise a continuation of *1 and 2 Chronicles*. Together, the four books trace the (idealized) liturgical history of the Jerusalem Temple from its inception under David, who is the central figure in *1 and 2 Chronicles*, through its loss under later kings of Judah, to its restoration by Nehemiah and Ezra after the Babylonian Exile. The books of *Nehemiah* and *Ezra* are particularly concerned with the reestablishment of temple worship and a renewal of fidelity to the Law of Moses following the return from exile in the sixth to fifth centuries BCE.

The books' arrangement in the Bible, Ezra coming before Nehemiah, implies, in the context of the four-book chronicle of the Jerusalem Temple, that Ezra preceded Nehemiah chronologically; however, textual clues and the general confusion of details within the stories of the two prophets suggest that a reverse order is more likely. Confusion within the books involves mostly the story of Ezra, which occupies chapters 7-10 in *Ezra* and chapters 8-9 in *Nehemiah*. The first six chapters of *Ezra* deal not with Ezra but with Sheshbazzar, who led the return from exile, and Zerubbabel, who oversaw the Temple's reconstruction. Additionally, the prophets

Haggai and Zechariah make an appearance to convince Zerubbabel to recommence construction, thereby disobeying a royal order from the Persian ruler of the district to desist. Scholars refer to that three-fifths of *Ezra*, from which Ezra is absent, as "The Book of Zerubbabel."

Those problems notwithstanding, each of the prophets—Nehemiah and Ezra—serves a distinct function in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Nehemiah, who served as governor of Judah for twelve years, initiates and leads the reconstruction of the city's wall and gates, which had been destroyed by fire in Nebuchadnezzar's siege of the city. He also engages in social causes to ameliorate the suffering of the lower class, whose property and, in some cases, their children have been mortgaged to Jerusalem's nobles and magistrates. Nehemiah shames the upper class into returning the land that has been appropriated from the poor and forgiving their debts. Finally, he establishes rules of conduct (derived from Mosaic law) regarding tithing, support of Levites and singers, and observance of sabbath regulations.

Ezra's contribution is religious rather than economic or social. Ezra, a scribe and priest descended from Aaron, leads a public reading of "the book of the law of Moses" (Nehemiah 8:1), with all the people, the Levites, the holy men and magistrates, and Nehemiah, the governor, in attendance. The people are moved to tears when they hear the law read, and in an extraordinary recommitment to the

God of Israel and their shared history they reinstitute the pilgrim feast of Booths (established by Moses but not practiced since the time of Joshua), repent of their backsliding, fast, and engage in public and written renewal of their covenant with God.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah chastise their people for having intermarried with non-Jews during and after the Exile, although their methods differ. Nehemiah, outraged that "some Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab" and that "half their children spoke the language of Ashdod or of one of the other peoples but could not speak the language of the Jews," argues with the Jewish husbands, reviles them, even "beat[s] some of them and [tears] out their hair" until they agree not to marry their daughters to non-Jews or take the daughters of non-Jews as wives (Nehemiah 13:23-25). Ezra uses moral suasion rather than corporal punishment. Learning from the leaders of Jerusalem that "the people of Israel, including even priests and Levites, have not kept themselves apart from the alien population and from the abominable practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites" and have "taken women of these nations as wives for themselves and their sons," Ezra tears his robe, pulls hair out of his beard and scalp, and publicly kneels in prayer, expressing his personal humiliation for his people's sins (Ezra 9:1-6). A crowd gathers as Ezra addresses God; moved to repentance by Ezra's prayer, they authorize

Ezra to do whatever he thinks necessary to restore them to God's favor. Ezra establishes a commission to investigate the seriousness of the problem, the outcome of which is a long list of men (listed by name!) who forthwith dismiss their foreign wives, "together with their children" (Ezra 10:44).

1 Enoch (*Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch*) (Jewish Pseudepigrapha)

Source (Trans.): OTP (E. Isaac)

Date: composite text, 200 BCE-100 CE

Author: multiple

> Wisdom could not find a place in which she could dwell;
> but a place was found (for her) in the heavens.
> Then Wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people,
> but she found no dwelling place.
> (So) Wisdom returned to her place
> and she settled permanently among the angels.
> Then Iniquity went out of her rooms,
> and found whom she did not expect.
> And she dwelt with them,
> like rain in a desert,
> like dew on a thirsty land. (1 Enoch 42:1-3)

Ethiopic Enoch is one of three pseudepigrapha that use his name. Enoch was the seventh descendant of Adam and Eve. Genesis says little about him except that he "walked with God. Then he vanished because God took him" (Gen. 5:24). So Enoch, like Elijah long after him, is one of only two Old Testament characters to be

assumed into heaven. The mysterious Enoch inspired so many stories that a mythology of Enoch developed extracanonically.

1 Enoch is of interest to students of early Christianity because it seems to have been well known to many Jews, particularly the Essenes, and early Christians. Its influence is seen in varying degrees in the gospels, Revelation, and particularly in the letter of Jude. Several extracanonical Christian authors make reference to it, notably in the Epistle of Barnabas and the Apocalypse of Peter, as do several authors of Jewish apocryphal books and pseudepigrapha, including Jubilees, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Assumption of Moses, 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra. Finally, several early fathers of the church, including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, found inspiration in it. After the book lost favor in the Western church, it remained influential in Ethiopia even to our time (8).

1 Enoch contains several innovative theological developments. Its god is "the righteous and just God of the Old Testament; he is the Creator of the world, the holy lawgiver, the dispenser of history, and the ultimate judge of all" (9). 1 Enoch opens with an announcement of a final judgment, at which the wicked will be destroyed and the righteous will be rewarded. Judgment and the end of history are the dominant themes of the book. The apocalyptic is enhanced by the introduction of a heavenly Messiah, called the Righteous One and the Son of Man, who has existed

from before the Creation and who will sit in judgment of both mortals and spiritual beings. Sinners are depicted in economic and political terms, as exploiters and oppressors. Indeed, the familiar catalog of sex-related sins is nowhere in 1 Enoch, which is—to draw an anachronistic comparison—almost Marxist in its worldview.

Besides the theological innovations, 1 Enoch is built around a darn good story derived from one paragraph in Genesis (6:1-4) about how in ancient times the sons of God had intercourse with human women, creating a race of giants. In 1 Enoch the sons of God are instead fallen angels, whose offspring with human women corrupt the people by introducing them to arms-making, the use of cosmetics, and precious stones and metals used in jewelry-making. The giant offspring eat all the people have, then start eating the people. A thoroughly bad lot, they even drink blood and copulate with "birds, wild beasts, reptiles, and fish" (1 Enoch 7:5). Enoch enters the picture in an attempt to intercede with God on behalf of the fallen (but now fearful and contrite) angels. He is unsuccessful in that mission, but he is given a guided tour of God's universe, not unlike Dante's tour of Hell, only happier.

Besides a number of new interpretations of old ideas, 1 Enoch takes a cosmic view of the world of the Jewish God. Enoch is permitted to see things others are not because he is a righteous man. And the desirability of righteousness, that is, being faithful and obedient to God, is an important theme. The angels' disobedience and infidelity

result in severe punishment, despite their plea for clemency. This is a God who is in control and who doesn't alter his course.

Humans, though, are given a chance to reform. There are demons in God's creation (symbolized by the fallen angels) who can easily lead people astray. God reserves his wrath for these and for humans who willfully exploit the weakness of their fellows. 1 Enoch influenced Christian doctrines "concerning the nature of the Messiah, the Son of Man, the messianic kingdom, demonology, the future, resurrection, final judgment, the whole eschatological theater, and symbolism" (10). It provides reassurance to a people that perceives itself as oppressed.

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (Jewish Pseudepigrapha)

Source (Trans.): OTP (H.C. Kee)

Date: c. 150 BCE; later Johannine Christian interpolations c. 100 CE

Author: unknown Hellenized Jew

The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is a good example of the "testamental" genre based on the deathbed monologue of Jacob (Israel) in Genesis 49, in which Jacob's twelve sons are gathered around the patriarch's deathbed to hear his final testament and to receive a final blessing or, in some cases, curse from their father. "*T12P*," as the title is abbreviated, consists of the final testaments of Jacob's sons. Each testament follows roughly the same pattern: the patriarch reviews for his sons his life history, identifying particularly the youthful deed or misdeed that defined his adult character and urging his sons to emulate that deed or avoid that misdeed in their own conduct. Each patriarch concludes with predictions about the destiny of Israel (including prediction of its captivity) and its future "restoration to glory in the eschatological future" (Kee 775).

T12P was apparently a favorite text of both Jews and early Christians, evidence of which is the geographical and linguistic diversity of extant texts. Manuscripts or fragments in Greek, Armenian, Slavonic, and Aramaic from Western Europe, Egypt, and Syria, and twelve Christian interpolations suggest "a broad and free

tradition," according to Kee (777); he argues, though, for Greek as the original language because of the obvious reliance of the author on the Septuagint and the Hellenistic ethical concepts it employs.

The fictional setting for the testaments is Egypt between the times of Jacob's death and the rise of Moses. The patriarchs, like their father, ask to be buried in Canaan, but the sons return to Egypt following the interments.

There are several common themes in the twelve testaments. First is a dualistic understanding of the cosmos, by which two types of spirits—of truth and of error—have competed for man's allegiance since before the Flood, and departure from God's will is understood as contributing to "disorder" in God's otherwise orderly universe. Second is an eschatological element that predicts the Temple's destruction (the First Temple, that is) as a judgment on Israel and its ultimate restoration and redemption of the people through the influence of Levi and Judah. A third element is messianism of a distinctly dyarchic nature: the restoration of Israel will be accomplished through both Levi and Judah, through priest and king. Fourth is an emphasis on sexual promiscuity and the inherent impurity of women, who entice men to sin. The fifth theme involves temperance and asceticism: the patriarchs urge their sons to avoid the temptations of the flesh (which have been the downfall of most of the patriarchs) and to moderate their emotions, particularly

anger. On that note, the general pattern involves the father recommending that his sons not repeat the sins of the father's own youth. Yet there is an implied inevitability that the sons will fail; otherwise, the predictions of the Temple's destruction (an historical reality for which the writer needs some justification) as punishment for Israel's disobedience would be silly.

Literarily, *T12P* is a quality work. The structural symmetry achieved by the author among the testaments is consistent and effective. Each patriarch is individuated from his brothers, according to his particular passions. Each story has its unique tone and outlook. And each patriarch, even those who play only minor roles in Genesis, is given his due. Take Zebulon, for instance, who is barely mentioned in Genesis. The author imagines Zebulon empathizing to the point of physical weakness when Joseph is tormented and left for dead by the other brothers. And this ability to empathize becomes Zebulon's defining characteristic. As a fisherman (and the inventor of seagoing boats!), Zebulon feeds not only his father's family but also "every stranger. If anyone were a traveler, or sick, or aged, I cooked the fish, prepared it well, and offered to each person according to his need, being either convivial or consoling" (6:1-6). And the author creates for Zebulon perhaps the most moving of the advisory monologues:

> Now I will tell you what I did. I saw a man suffering from nakedness in the wintertime and I had compassion on him. I stole a garment secretly from my

own household and gave it to the man in difficulty. You, therefore, my children, on the basis of God's caring for you, without discrimination be compassionate and merciful to all. Provide for every person with a kind heart. If at any time you do not have anything to give to the one who is in need, be compassionate and merciful in your inner self. For when my hand could not find the means for contributing to a needy person, I walked with him for seven stades, weeping; my inner being was in torment with sympathy for him. You also, my children, have compassion toward every person with mercy, in order that the Lord may be compassionate and merciful to you. In the last days, God will send his compassion on the earth, and whenever he finds compassionate mercy, in that person he will dwell. (7:1-8:2)

4 Ezra (entitled *2 Esdras* in the Apocrypha) (Jewish Pseudepigrapha)

Source (Trans.): OTP (Metzger)

Date: ca. 100 CE

Author: unknown, prob. Palestinian

The visions of Ezra are purported in this book to take place in Babylon, during the Captivity following Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE; however, analysis of the text indicates that the setting, referred to in the text as "in the thirtieth year after the destruction of our city" (3:1), actually follows the Roman's destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Several Latin versions of the text dating from the ninth to eleventh centuries were probably translated from a lost Greek version, which may itself have been translated from an original Hebrew text. The Latin texts, however, contain four chapters, two at the beginning and two at the end, added by Christians in the third century.

The main (Jewish) part of the book describes seven visions granted to Salathiel, who is also called Ezra. In the first vision, Ezra's guide, Uriel, assures him that the end of the current corrupt age (which stretches back even to Adam) is at hand. In the second, Ezra is assured that those who die before the coming of the new age will have the same benefits as those who are alive. The third vision describes the last judgment and its consequences for the righteous and the wicked. Ezra struggles to

understand how a merciful God can fail to forgive even the wicked and intercedes for them unsuccessfully. The fourth vision depicts a woman in mourning who is "suddenly transformed into a glorious city, identified as heavenly Zion in the day of salvation" (517). The fifth is an allegory of the Roman Empire's (depicted as an eagle) rise, persecution of God's people, and subsequent punishment (and destruction)by the Messiah. The Messiah, by the way, is of the Davidic (not the Christian) type. The sixth vision describes God's "son," as "a man coming up from the sea," who has been concealed by God until the endtime. At that time, he will defeat Israel's oppressors; and the Northern Tribes, missing since they were taken captive by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE, will be reunited with the Jews of Palestine. In the seventh and last vision, Ezra asks the Lord how those who are born after Ezra's death will be instructed in God's law, since the Torah was destroyed along with the destruction of Solomon's Temple. The Lord instructs Ezra and five other men a to go into seclusion for forty days, during which time Ezra is filled with understanding, wisdom, and memory, and he dictates to the five men, who become able to write "what was dictated, in characters which they did not know" (14:42).

The outcome of their labor is ninety-four books; God instructs Ezra to "make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first ... but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people" (14:45-47). Thus, Ezra and his men write the twenty-four canonical books of the Hebrew Bible*, as well as

seventy apocryphal books. It will be remembered that in *2 Kings*, during the reign of the reformist King Josiah, the Law of Moses, long ago lost and forgotten by the people, "appears" in the Temple. Ezra, then, is its putative "author."

According to B.M. Metzger (523), *4 Ezra* influenced John Milton, John Ruskin, and Christopher Columbus. Columbus quoted from a section of *4 Ezra* that claims that during the Creation God intentionally made the earth one-seventh ocean (6:42), to persuade Ferdinand to fund him. (Of course, the proportion is closer to one-seventh land, but the story is interesting nonetheless.)

Even more interesting is the case of William Whiston, an 18th century Cambridge mathematician, who "proved" that the end of the age had arrived, using *4 Ezra* to do so. Whiston saw omens of the end everywhere (as apocalypticists are wont to do). One such omen was the widely-circulated rumor in 1726 that an illiterate farm woman of Surrey, named Mary Toft, had given birth to a litter of rabbits. To the torrent of pamphlets and editorials written for and against the truth of the story, Whiston added his impassioned defense—for he was convinced that here was a signal fulfillment of Ezra's prophecy that at the end of the age "women shall bring forth monsters." (4 Ezra 5:8; 523)

4 Ezra succeeds mostly because of its narrator, Ezra himself, who, unlike some of the

more radical prophets, seems like a rather nice guy, concerned for his fellow man, willing to ask God some hard questions (which, of course, the author—and therefore God—is unable to answer), and not gloating about his own chosenness. If we ignore the smug Christian additions to the book, which serve generally to justify God's condemnation of faithless Israel and its replacement with the gentiles, God's new chosen people, 4 Ezra is actually a pleasant book to read.

*Five books of the Law (the "Pentateuch"), eight books of the Prophets (the former prophets, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel (as one book), 1 and 2 Kings (as one book), the latter prophets (counted as one book), and eleven books of Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (as one book), and 1 and 2 Chronicles (as one book).

Damascus Document (Dead Sea Scrolls; Essene Jewish)

Source (Trans.): DSS (Vermes)

Date: 100-75 BCE

Author: unknown

The *Damascus Document*, so named by translator Geza Vermes, is a manual of community order for the Qumran community. Damascus is mentioned several times in the text, but it is not clear whether it refers to the Syrian city or is a metaphor for something else. The text consists of two genres: exhortations and statutes. The exhortations, comparable in style to *Hebrews*, are addressed to community members, the chosen ones whom god has "called by name." The text posits an omnipotent, omniscient God who knows from the outset who will be rejected in the end (one of the weirdnesses of this god, that he intentionally creates beings whom he hates). The elect are the "sons of Zadok," a priest, and their role is to wait and watch as Belial "let[s] loose in Israel," bringing fornication, wealth, and pollution of the sanctuary. This period of time is referred to as "the period of wickedness." At the end of this undisclosed period, God will visit and mete justice to those who have rejected the commandments. the commandments are largely drawn from the *Book of Jubilees*, a Jewish pseudepigraphal text composed around 168 BCE. Besides the commandments, the text includes a list of regulations that govern the community. The list is written entirely in the negative, with the word

"not" appearing in nearly every entry. The regulations largely have to do with purity concerns and make reference several times to a "Messiah of Aaron and Israel" who will "arise" at some future time. Other regulations deal with interpersonal relations within the community, particularly accusations of misconduct by one member against another. Yet another section is concerned with new initiates, who are to be enrolled with "the oath of the covenant which Moses made with Israel."

The War Scroll (Dead Sea Scrolls; Essene Jewish)

Source (Trans.): DSS (Vermes)

Date: 50 BCE-50 CE

Author: unknown

This text describes an apocalyptic battle between the forces of light (God and the people of Israel—specifically, the members of the Qumran community) and those of darkness. The military strategy imitates that of the Roman legion, with the addition of a priest among the soldiers, encouraging them forward by blowing a ram's horn. The war in which the forces are engaged will last forty years; it will begin with the return of exiled "sons of light" to Jerusalem to reclaim the homeland from those who have failed to keep the Law of Moses.

The composition and behavior of the army is very specific. The soldiers must be between forth and fifty years old, as must the officers; older men will set up camp. Younger men will "strip the slain" and take the booty (no pun intended). But no children, women, blind, lame, or skin-diseased men are permitted in camp, nor will any soldier who has had a nocturnal emission the night before battle be allowed to participate. Priests of Aaron, dressed in white with linen "designer" (no kidding) belts of "blue and purple and scarlet thread," lead the men into battle (VII).

Tobit (Old Testament Apocrypha)

Source (Trans.): OSB (Revised English Bible)

Date: 250-175 BCE

Author: unknown

Tobit is an inspirational romance of the same genre as Ruth. Grouped with *Judith* and *Esther* in the Apocrypha, it can be described also as a domestic romance and a quest story. Its canonical status is varied; the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches consider it canonical, the Anglican Communion places it among the Apocrypha, and most Protestant sects consider it non-canonical, as it is not part of the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, it seems to have been a favorite among early Christian and Midrashic writers, and novels have been written about *Tobit* in more recent times.

Tobit is set in the eighth century. The title character is a pious older Jew, originally of the Northern Kingdom tribe of Naphtali but living now in Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, with his wife, Anna, and his son, Tobias, having been deported there following the fall of the North to the Assyrians. Tobias, contrary to what one might expect of a citizen of the Northern Kingdom, which seceded in 922 BCE from the tribal confederacy established by David and focused on Jerusalem, is scrupulous in his observance of Torah law, including performing routine pilgrimages to the

Temple. Moreover, he is highly solicitous of his fellow Jews, alive or dead, and gets into trouble with the Assyrian authorities for burying murdered Israelites.

The story contains two interwoven plots, one involving Tobit and his family and the other concerning an unfortunate virgin named Sarah. In the first plot, Tobit loses his eyesight, then, considering that he may not live many more years, sends his son on a journey to retrieve some money Tobit long ago deposited with a friend in Media. The second plot concerns an unfortunate young woman, Sarah, daughter of Raguel, who has been married seven times but whose husbands have all died on their wedding nights, leaving Sarah a virgin and causing her father (and herself) much embarrassment.

The plots are joined through the influence of Azarias (who, unknown to anyone, is actually the angel Raphael), a stranger whom Tobias hires to accompany and guide him on his journey to Media. En route, Raphael teaches Tobias a bit of folk medicine: a fish's heart and liver can be used to ward off a demon or evil spirit, and its gall can be used to cure blindness. Raphael also urges Tobias to marry Sarah, whom they are scheduled to meet when Raphael and Tobias spend the night with Tobit's kinsman, Raguel, Sarah's father. Tobias discourages that idea, having heard of the deadly fortune of Sarah's previous husbands, but Raphael assures him that the fish parts can be used to defeat the demon, Asmodaeus. Having sent Azarias on

to Media to collect Tobit's money, Tobias does ask Raguel for permission to marry Sarah, Raguel assents (but not without secretly expecting Tobias to turn up dead the next morning), Tobias uses the fish liver and heart to make a foul incense that drives Asmodaeus away to Northern Egypt (biblical demons, in both Old and New Testaments, have very sensitive olfactory capabilities), and he and Sarah spend a loving and otherwise uneventful first night together.

After spending another two weeks with Raguel and Edna (Raguel's wife), Tobias, Sarah, and Azarias return to Tobit in Nineveh. As Tobit rushes out to greet them, Tobias applies the fish gall to his father's eyes, curing his blindness. Tobit, overjoyed at his son's safe return (with the money, by the way), at his ability to see again, and at his new daughter-in-law, throws a week-long celebration. At the end of that time, he instructs Tobias to pay Azarias half the amount he'd collected in Media, as thanks for Azarias' loyal and helpful service. Azarias then reveals to all that he is actually Raphael and that God has sent him to answer the prayers of two very deserving Israelites, Tobit and Sarah. Raphael reminds them all that he has eaten no food, explaining that he is merely an apparition; he then ascends to heaven, and Tobit writes a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

Tobit prospers throughout the remainder of his life (we are reminded of Job's catastrophe and compensatory reward), continues his acts of charity, and dies

peacefully at the age of 112. But before he goes, he instructs Tobias to escape to Media before the prophet Nahum's prediction of Nineveh's destruction comes to pass. He also predicts the future destruction of Judah and the Temple, the resulting exile, the subsequent rebuilding of Jerusalem, and a long-off day when "all the nations in the whole world will be converted to the true worship of God" (14:6). Tobit and, shortly thereafter, Anna die; Tobias buries them then moves with his wife and children back to Sarah's home in Media, where, following the death of Raguel, he inherits Raguel's estate. He lives to the age of 117, having "lived long enough to hear of the destruction of Nineveh" (14:15).

Tobit is a well-written story. The writer is conscious of his details (even if he is rather ignorant of geography). The book is notable for its novelistic form. But what sets *Tobit* apart from every other biblical story is that it contains the only positive biblical reference to a dog. Since dogs are more ancient than Yahweh, and since the Israelites, like all ancient peoples, certainly kept dogs, it is odd that they appear so infrequently (and with such bad reputations) in the Bible. The exception is *Tobit*. The reference isn't much, and the dog is not given a name, but he is present, nonetheless, and in the company of an important angel: "The youth and the angel left the house together; the dog followed Tobias out and accompanied them" (6:1).

[Partial reference: Matkin.]

GENERAL COMMENTARY AND REFERENCE

The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story

Crossan, John Dominic. Sonoma, California: Eagle, 1988.

The Dark Interval is a study of parable and its contribution to "the experience of transcendence," by which Crossan means the experience of "the edge of language and the limit of story" (30). Crossan considers parable as a type of story and locates it on a spectrum of five story types: myth, which "establishes world"; apologue, which "defends world"; action, which "investigates world"; satire, which "attacks world"; and parable, which "subverts world" (42). Myth and parable are in constant tension. Parable "is a story deliberately calculated to show the limitation of myth, to shatter world so its relativity becomes apparent" (42). "Parable keeps us humble by reminding us of limit. Like satire, it is intrinsically negative. It is in fact the dark night of story, but precisely therein and thereby can it prepare us for the experience of transcendence" (43).

As his point of departure, Crossan discusses the idea of limit as it relates to language, indeed, the limit that <u>is</u> language: "Our intentions, our theories, our visions are always confined within both language and story. A theology of limit seeks above all to explore this limitation which is posed by the inevitability of life within story, of existence in this story or that but always in some story" (2). In connection with limit is the idea of game, "that process in which one individual or team competes against

the limitations of possibility imposed by the rules themselves" (4). "Game is a very serious practice session for life and death, or more precisely, for life towards death. It is a cautious experience of the necessity of limit and the inevitability of death. It is an experiment in disciplined failure" (5).

From this introduction, he proceeds to dispute what he calls "three master claims to objective reality," claims which "deny the limitation of story and which hold ... that we are capable of getting outside story to an objective reality" (5-6). These "master claims" are: the claim that a distinction can be drawn between "*art* (or faith, or imagination) and *science* (or fact, or reason)"; the claim of evolutionary progress, the notion that we are getting "better and better"; and, finally, "that there is an external reality *out there* ... and that we are gaining objective knowledge and disciplined control over this extramental reality" (6). Crossan argues that these claims, themselves stories, are not true because "they are no longer interesting" (7). "I propose, then, to consider as most interesting the story that art and science ... are not two simultaneous and separate ways of knowing but two successive and connected moments of all human knowledge; that there is continual evolutionary change but no overall evolutionary progress; and that 'reality' is the world we create in and by our language and our story ..." (24-25).

"A parable is a story which is the polar, or binary, opposite of myth." Parable,

Crossan points out, lies within story (because to be outside of story is to be "outside humanity"), but it is "story at the point where it shows awareness of its own inevitability and also its own relativity" (38). Citing Frank Kermode's statement that "Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change," Crossan concludes that "parables are fictions, not myths; they are meant to change, not reassure us" (39). Parable makes us uncomfortable because it points out the fact that we invented the myth.

Crossan identifies the parabolic form through structuralist analysis of the books of Ruth and Jonah. In each example, the story contains a Giver, an Object, and a Receiver, a pattern characteristic of folktales. What differentiates parable from folktale, however, is that the structure of "speaker expression" (meaning the direction the story actually takes) is the exact opposite of the structure of "hearer expectation" (the direction in which the audience expects the story to go). He concludes that "the question posed by the books of Ruth and Jonah is this: What if God does not play the game by our rules?" (60). He then applies the same analysis to stories by Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges before discussing "Jesus as Parabler."

The difficulty in using the canonical gospels, of course, is that they reflect a heavily-edited version of what Jesus may have said, telling us more about the myth of the early church than about Jesus himself. However, Crossan attempts to get

behind the text to determine what Jesus's audience is likely to have heard. Crossan analyzes the parables of the mustard seed, the lost sheep and the lost coin, the Pharisee and the publican, the good Samaritan, and the great feast. His purpose is to show "that Jesus' stories are parables as parables have been defined here, not historical allegories and moral example-stories [both forms of apologue, not parable], which is how the traditional interpretation has presented them" (45).

Crossan considers the connection between Jesus's parabolic stories and his frequent references to the "kingdom of God" and suggests that the connection is that "Parables give God room." "They are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the relativity of story itself. They remove our defenses and make us vulnerable to God. It is only in such experiences that God can touch us, and only in such moments does the kingdom of God arrive." Crossan calls this relationship "transcendence" (99-100).

In his final chapter, Crossan postulates that the early church, in turning Jesus's parables into allegories and moral-example stories, made Jesus himself the parable, by announcing Jesus as "the Christ, the Parable of God" (102). Together with his cross, Jesus became the parable, the way to transcendence.

If we ignore this unfortunate conclusion, which bears no relation to the rest of

Crossan's argument except, perhaps, as an apologue for the myth of the early "fathers," *The Dark Interval* is a provocative work that makes us rethink not only the idea of parable but the ideas of language and reality, as well. Crossan is an impressive thinker and a polished writer, but here, as in his other works, he subverts the logic of his own argument in the end by remaining (however dishonestly) within the mythology of the Christian church. I greatly enjoy reading Crossan but am repeatedly disappointed by his disingenuousness.

"Roman Domination: The Jewish Revolt and the Destruction of the Second Temple"

Cohen, Shaye J. D. In *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. Hershel Shanks, ed. Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999.

Ancient Israel, a collection of essays by various scholars thaat traces the history of Israel, as its title promises, from Abraham to the fall of Masada in the 70s CE contains some helpful maps and illustrations and serves as a good basic introduction to Jewish history of the period. Of particular relevance to this study is the essay by Shaye J. D. Cohen, revised by Michael Satlow, entitled "Roman Domination: The Jewish Revolt and the Destruction of the Second Temple."

Beginning with the entry of Rome into Judaean politics in the resolution of the Hasmonean problem, the essay concerns itself primarily with the Roman influence on Jewish politics through its series of local rulers and prefects, beginning with Herod the Great. Of particular interest for students of early Christianity (which was a sect or cult within Judaism) is Cohen's discussion of the "variegated Judaism" (278) of the time, which, according to Cohen, had become a "book religion" different from that of the pre-exilic Israelites. Two collections of sacred texts, the Prophets and the Writings, had recently been added to the Jewish Tanakh, or Bible, and as a

result a new brand of religious practice involving "regular prayer and scripture study" arose, a more individualistic piety, and its locus became the synagogue. By the first century CE, synagogues could be found throughout the diaspora as well as throughout the land of Israel (278). Cohen also describes the rise of Pharisaism and Christianity during this period.

Cohen admits the difficulty of reconstructing this tumultuous period with certainty, as the primary histories of the period were written by one man, Flavius Josephus, whose credibility in numerous instances is questionable. Cohen wisely uses Josephus as little as possible, relegating him mostly to the discussion of the First Revolt, which resulted in the destruction of the Temple, and about which Josephus wrote fairly authoritatively. Cohen's essay is a fine, but not unusual, introduction to the period of Roman domination of Israel.

The Mystery and Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Shanks, Hershel. New York: Random, 1998.

In this book, Shanks, the venerable editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, provides a history of the discovery, transmission, translation, and analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls, probably (the date is in dispute) discovered in 1947, and the archaeology of Qumran, the likely original source of the scrolls, an Essene monastery on the Dead Sea near the caves where the scrolls were found. The checkered history of the scrolls in modern time is related. Because the stories and controversies surrounding the scrolls have been amply publicized, and because the scrolls' history is outside the topic of this project, this summary will skip the details and indicate only Shanks' particular contribution. His discussion of some of the individual scrolls and the scholarship related to them is an excellent contribution to the popular literature about the scrolls, and his archaeological discussion of Qumran allows Shanks to pursue what he knows best. But his recognition that the scrolls that have come to light since the initial discovery may be just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, of documents still in the possession of "collectors, investors, and dealers" (201) is intriguing. This is Shanks' "mystery" (the rest of the book is more factual than mysterious): whether the many area caves in which scrolls have not yet been found because of rockfalls caused by ancient earthquake activity will someday yield even greater treasures. Readers interested in the history of the scrolls

will find this book a helpful introduction.

"Churches in Context: The Jesus Movement in the Roman World"

Schowalter, Daniel N. *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, Michael D Coogan, ed. Oxford: New York, 1998.

This reference work is a collection of historical essays by biblical scholars and scholars of the history of Israel. Of particular relevance to the present study is this essay by Daniel N. Schowalter. Schowalter considers "the religious, political, and social realities of the Roman world of the first century CE" to answer the question "How did the Jesus movement develop from an obscure Jewish sectarian group into an independent religion with a wide spectrum of followers and adversaries?" (389).

He begins with a discussion of Augustus Caesar to illustrate the Son of God phenomenon in Roman culture, then turns to Augustus's reluctant successor, Tiberius, who appoints Pontius Pilate governor of Judea. Tiberius considered Pilate to be the best choice to maintain order in this fractious province, and Pilate was known for his no-nonsense dealings with rebels. But no predecessor matched Julius Gaius Caesar, called "Caligula," for cruelty. Descended from the gods, according to Roman popular belief, Caligula "raged" against anyone who refused to offer him "divine honors" (397), and he installed a statue of himself in the Jerusalem Temple, outraging the Jews.

Following Gaius's assassination in 41 CE, Claudius became emperor. A statement by Suetonius regarding a disturbance in Rome "caused by Chrestus" may, if Chrestus refers to Jesus, indicate the presence of Christian Jews in Rome in the mid-40s, although how the Christ cult may have reached Rome by this early date is unclear (399).

Claudius's successor Nero, perhaps responsible for the burning of Rome, blames (according to Tacitus) "a group of people, 'known for their shameful deeds, whom the public refers to as Christians'" (402), and begins a period of repression of Christianity, according to Tacitus. However, there is doubt whether Nero's "persecution" of Christians was so severe or whether it actually took place. Other than Tacitus, there is no contemporary evidence of widespread trials of Christians (403). In 68 CE, at any rate, Nero committed suicide. Interestingly, some predicted that Nero would return from death. As Schowalter points out, "This expectation of a return of the deceased emperor developed at about the same time as an increase in hopes for the imminent return of Jesus, a belief that was not shared by all Jesus communities, however (404-405).

The era of Vespasian and his son Titus, although devastating for Jerusalem in 70 CE, was marked by greater integrity than Rome had known in some time. Vespasian apparently had a sense of humor, too. According to Suetonius, shortly before his

death Vespasian remarked "Woe, I think I'm becoming a god" (407). Under Titus, the Mediterranean world suffered "one of the most famous natural disasters of ancient times," the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE (408), to which Titus responded with paternal compassion to those who survived.

Similarly benign and stable was the reign of Trajan (98-117 CE). Although no "systematic oppression of Christianity" seems to have occurred under Trajan (414), by that time "the name Christian had developed a negative connotation" in "society as a whole" (414).

Finally, by the reign of Trajan's successor Hadrian, Christianity had become a large enough cult to become the subject of prejudice and often accused of eating children and engaging in other unspeakable acts (417). But "internal conflict was also becoming an increasing problem for the churches" (418). As the churches began "to create the ecclesiastical structure and common doctrine" that would allow it "to dominate the Empire" in later years, they came into conflict with their own members over various interpretations of the church and dogma (418).

Schowalter's essay provides helpful background information, particularly regarding the succession of Roman emperors in this crucial period.

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