

A1

Christianity Revealed

Seeking the Historical Jesus

Dr M D Magee

AskWhy! Publications
Frome UK

AskWhy! Publications

This pdf file may be freely copied and distributed.

Copyright © 2003 M D Magee and AskWhy! Publications.

The right of M D Magee to be identified as the author of this work
has been asserted by him in accordance with the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved

Content first published on the AskWhy! Publications Website

Copyright © AskWhy! Publications and M D Magee 1997

<http://www.askwhy.co.uk/>

<http://www.askwhy.co.uk/christianity/>

<http://www.askwhy.co.uk/judaism/>

<http://www.askwhy.co.uk/truth/>

Copyright can be transferred only in writing—Library of Congress: Copyright Basics. This file may be copied electronically or as printed sheets for private or educational use, and may be redistributed free of charge, but may not be sold or republished without permission. Provided that the author is properly cited, selections can be quoted in print for criticism or reference.

We make all our electronic publications freely available, but you can reward us by ensuring that Askwhy! Publications paperback books (“The Hidden Jesus”, “The Mystery of Barabbas”, “Who Lies Sleeping?”) are ordered by your local college or communal library. You might wish to buy them yourself.

- The Hidden Jesus ISBN-0-9521913-2-6 £12.99 + £1.50 p&p UK (\$30.00 inc shipping US). © Mike Magee. 1997.
- The Mystery of Barabbas? ISBN 0-9521913-1-8 £9.99 + £1.00 p&p UK (\$20.00 inc shipping US) © Mike Magee. 1995.
- Who Lies Sleeping? ISBN 0-9521913-0-X £7.99 + £1.00 p&p UK (\$20.00 inc shipping US). © Mike Magee. 1993.

This file was made using Jan's EasyPDF.exe. Jan Verhoeven makes small, dedicated programs using Delphi that are excellent and free. A websearch will yield his current websites from which the programs can be downloaded. This program lets you set up a page as XML and then converts it in one keypress to pdf. Not fancy but effective. Recommended.

Christianity Revealed

Seeking Jesus in History

Dr M D Magee

The history of Christianity is remarkable for many things, not least for the resilience of the faith despite vast historical changes, the “infinite variety” of the forms it can take and the changing ways in which, over the last 20 centuries men and women have seen Jesus, and worshipped him as “the Christ”.

The roots for this saga are the four gospels, our chief source of direct information about Jesus. These, however, are always tendentious, often contradictory and sometimes demonstrably wrong. According to medieval scholar and Christian, Jaroslav Pelikan (Jesus through the Ages, Yale University Press, 1985), the Jesus they yield “resembles a set of paintings more closely than a photograph”. Since people see in them what they want, a mirror might be a more accurate analogy. Believers always convince themselves that they—and usually they alone—have come face to face with the “true” Jesus.

The Slippery Christ

People have offered a bewildering variety of pictures of Jesus, including the cosmic Christ, creator of the universe; the Christ crucified of the medieval world; the mystic “bridegroom of the soul”; Christ as the prototype of the Renaissance “universal man” or the Enlightenment’s “teacher of reason” and the modern resurgence of Christ the liberator.

Even so, his story becomes rather thin in the modern era when the Jesus of history began to dethrone the Christs of faith. A liberal, western European Christian of today is likely to be chary of the Emperor Constantine, who made Christianity the official religion of the Empire, not because he was an awful tyrant who murdered his wife and was so hated by the population of Rome he had to move his capital to a different city, but because he obtained the throne with God’s supposed help in sending the miracle of a cross in the heavens saying “Conquer by this”.

Today’s Christian is certain that the essential message of Jesus was not to go around conquering in his name but that we should love one another. The biblical scholar, C H Dodd, was less sure. He pointed out that, in the gospels, Jesus is credited with few sayings about love for one’s fellow men, and what he does say would have been commonplace among first century Pharisaic Jews. The urgency of his message was elsewhere.

The Jesus that emerged from the historical work was a Jew of his time—a time when the Jews were in rebellion against the foreign oppressors, the Romans. Jesus was an Essene who expected from the signs of the times the literal coming of the Kingdom of God in the lifetime of those whom he addressed.

He called upon Jews to repent, and to make ready for this divine intervention in which, as the signs multiplied, he saw himself as playing the role of liberator or the earthly saviour of the Jews. If he did his part and the Jews repented, then God would respond by sending the angel Michael and his heavenly armies to defeat the Satanic Romans and join heaven and earth together as a home for the righteous.

But the events he prophesied did not come to pass. Instead, he endured the ignominy of the Roman crucifixion. Within the movement which sprang up after this death a process or metamorphosis took place by which the proclaimer became the proclaimed, the rebel was acclaimed as God, and the Christs of faith began to rise, like bad odours, from the corpse of the Jesus of history. In the quest for the historical Jesus there are more bad odours generated by Christian scholars than feasible pictures, but Christians do not mind, as long as the exasperated doubter gives up the quest and remains within the fold of the believing flock.

It is fashionable these days to speak of three “quests” for the historical Jesus, though, of course, there has only ever been one quest, and it will continue while the supernatural Jesus is claimed by Christians to be historical. Honest people, some of them Christians, consider research on the historical Jesus as demanded by historical inquiry and the need to reach an adequate theology. But usually Christians say they are concerned with a living Jesus not a historical one. One apologist argues:

“If the expression the real Jesus is used at all, it should not refer to a historically reconstructed Jesus. Such a Jesus is not ‘real’ in any sense, except as a product of scholarly imagination. The Christian’s claim to experience the ‘real Jesus’ in the present, on the basis of religious experience and conviction, can be challenged on a number of fronts (religious, theological, moral), but not historically.”

The quest for the historical Jesus is therefore valueless to evangelical Christians whose beliefs do not depend on historical facts. Interest in the historical Jesus signifies a failure of faith. For them, ignorance is bliss.

It always has been for most Christians because no priest or preacher wants to spill the gravy boat and no punter wants to lose the fantasy of their imaginary friend, Jesus. Belief in him is a form of MPD, and should be treated in the same way—by psychiatry. The reason is that the Christian Jesus is obviously not historical. It will be impossible ever to get a consensus on what the life of the historical Jesus was, because no Christian will accept history, so the quest will be an eternal merry-go-round.

Nevertheless, the quests have led to a good idea of who the historic Jesus was, for rational historically minded people, and broadly it was the very first Jesus offered by Reimarus, who is considered to have initiated the “first” quest, the second having been launched by Bultmann and those of his era, and the third or modern quest having been founded in the seventies with Jewish scholars and some skeptical Christians prominent, and heavily dependent on the hypothetical pre-Christian document called “Q”.

The primary sources are still the four gospels. The hypothesis that makes best sense of the relations among the gospels is that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark and another source Q. John is seen as essentially independent of the others, of little historical worth and that overlaid with mythology. No gospel writers witnessed the events they describe. The gospel of John is not narrative, it is only Christology. The biblical quest for the historical Jesus is confined to the three synoptic gospels. The narratives, in the three synoptic gospels, add up to only thirty-one days of Jesus’s life, and his ministry lasted about a year and a half. This is not much of a base for a history of Jesus.

Little external evidence supports the biblical evidence of the historicity of Jesus, but this is true of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. No archeological evidence has been unearthed for the Mount Sinai where Moses was said to have received the Ten Commandments; none for the flight from Egypt by the Israelites; none for a battle of Jericho where the walls could not have come tumbling down because the town had no walls at that time; none for the military conquest of Canaan, none for David, Solomon, and so on. The Christian scriptures are equally unreliable history.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, the Dead Sea Scrolls have revealed to anyone not besotted by the lies of Christian “revelation” the true source of the beliefs of Jesus. The scrolls not only revealed a diverse Judaism which freely employed dualism more familiar to us from the language of earlier Mazdaism and later gnosticism, but also they alerted us to diversities in understanding Torah. They have also stimulated new attention to the works of Josephus and Philo. Nevertheless, we still have lacunae to fill, and have to make judgements where there are gaps, and this is where the Christians are able to obfuscate.

An analogy is this. The Romans are on one bank of the Rhine. A little later, they are on the other bank. How did they get there? The true answer is, if that is all we know, we cannot say for sure how they got over the river. Nevertheless, if someone said the river parted and they were able to cross dryshod, we would say they were insane. Yet that would be the Christian answer. The historian would boringly say that the Romans built a bridge, or used boats, both feasible answers. That a miracle happened is not.

In the quest for the historical Jesus, the theologians come up with a mass of unfeasible answers just to leave the faithful saying: “I might as well believe what I’ve always believed, that the waters parted”. So we get Christian scholars coming up with theories:

- the Germans pretended to be Romans,
- the Romans walked under the river,
- they went via the Behring strait,
- they stood on the backs of whales,
- they tunnelled under,
- they did it by mirrors,
- they flew over,
- aliens took them over,
- they were not Romans but were Vikings, and so on.

Plenty of Jesuses can be imagined but few of them meet the criteria of feasible history and most can be discounted.

Some Questers

The first historical quest of a Jesus unadulterated by theological mud came out of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. It aimed to use the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of church dogma and power in setting belief and practice. The first to undertake a scientific investigation was the German orientalist Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) who wrote a 4,000 page manuscript titled *The Aims of Jesus and His Disciples*. Gotthold Lessing published it posthumously in 1774, Reimarus like Copernicus being worried by the consequences, but it received little attention until Strauss published his own famous work fifty years later.

Reimarus saw in Jesus of Nazareth a Jewish messianic revolutionary whose failure led his followers to steal his body and create a new story of Jesus based on aspects of Jewish messianism. The Christian religion did not grow out of the teaching of Jesus. It emerged new from these failed expectations.

His major points were:

- We should draw an absolute distinction between the writings of the later church and what Jesus might have said.
- Jesus spoke as a Jew—Christian readings cannot be attributed to him.
- Jesus performed no miracles.
- He was a man not a god.
- His notion of the Kingdom of God was the messianic expectation of Jews at the time.

Karl Friedrich Bahrdt (1741-1792) wrote a fictitious life of Jesus but one with clever insights. Jesus was reared by the Essenes and studied Plato and Aristotle under Greek teachers. He performed no miracles, and in later life became a senior brother of the Essenes. He learned that he must die, like Socrates, and Luke and Nicodemus plotted how to bring this about. They rescued Jesus from the tomb and Luke's medicine brought Jesus to health. After a few physical appearances, mentioned in scripture, Jesus retired to the Essene community where he died in old age.

In 1835, David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) published a two volume life of Jesus, revised in 1839, and again in 1864. Strauss argued that one needed to unravel the historical Jesus from the overlaid myths and miracle stories of the evangelists. He concluded that:

- None of the gospel writers was a witness of the events they discussed. Their accounts were second hand.
- Every story prior to Jesus's baptism is a fabrication.
- The story of Jesus calling twelve disciples is not historical.
- None of the miracles happened.
- The gospel of John is a complete fabrication.

Bruno Bauer (1809-1882) wrote a life of Jesus in which he concluded:

- Matthew and Luke copied from Mark and added nothing new to the story. Jesus's life rests on one person who was not a witness.
- The gospel of John contains no historical material at all.
- The birth stories are literary inventions.
- All the writings of Paul are fictitious.
- The Jews did not expect a Messiah and Jesus did not claim to be one.

The Frenchman, Joseph Ernest Renan (1823-1892), followed with his *Vie de Jésus* in 1860 in which he romanticised Jesus as a great moral teacher, but no more. His *Life of Jesus* emphasised the unhistorical gospel of John which prompted Albert Schweitzer to comment:

“There is scarcely any other work on the subject which so abounds in lapses of bad taste... It is Christian art in the worst sense of the term... There is insincerity in the book from beginning to end.”

Martin Kähler, in *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, 1896, concluded that a biography of Jesus was impossible. He argued that as the Jesus of history was inseparable from the Christ of faith and yet since the New Testament mainly concerns itself with the latter as does the church—and it is this Christ that has influenced history, scholars should only be interested in the Christ of faith. He concluded

“I regard the entire Life of Jesus movement as a blind alley.”

At the turn of the 20th century Heinrich Julius Holtzman developed the theory of Mark's priority as the first gospel of the synoptics and argued that we can know the historical Jesus by unravelling the connexions and borrowings between the gospels. He firmly denied that it was:

“...possible to describe the historical figure of the one from whom Christianity derives its very name and existence in such a way as to satisfy all just claims of scrupulous historical critical investigation.”

Albert Schweitzer published his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* in 1906. He reviewed and exposed the fallibility of the previous lives of Jesus and the problem of whether anything could be safely known about him. He found previous questors had fashioned Jesus according to their own worldview. The initial questors were rationalists trying to discredit traditional Christian teaching. Counter quests were Christian theologians hoping to fend off the criticism by building from theological bricks a “real Jesus”. The result of the latter was a Jesus whose message of a “spiritual kingdom” was that of nineteenth century German Protestantism.

This was a hugely important discovery for Christians who ever since have been able to say that any historical Jesus is merely a reflexion of its author's prejudices and can be discounted. It seems that any Christian version is not a product of prejudice and must be accepted. Schweitzer concluded:

- Jesus was an eschatological Jewish leader, convinced the world was in the End Time, who tried and failed in a mistaken mission to bring in the kingdom of God. No one had properly recognised this.
- The quests had been fruitless.
- There is no history of Jesus that can be discovered, and:

“In the last resort this book can only express the misgivings about the historical Jesus as depicted by modern theology. There is nothing more negative than the results of the critical study of the life of Jesus.”

Nineteenth century research into the so-called “Pseudepigrapha” of the Hebrew Bible, had revealed new insights into Palestinian Judaism—a prominent trend had been apocalyptic. The teachings and activity of Jesus could not be honestly examined without reference to Jewish eschatology. The recognition of Jesus's “thoroughgoing eschatology” is Schweitzer's unassailable contribution to scholarship. He upheld Johannes Weiss who had convincingly shown, in *The Preaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God*, that Jesus taught pure eschatology.

No modern Christian commentator likes to think about it, because it answers too much. Schweitzer himself hated the idea but, unlike modern Christian “scholars” he did not try to escape from his honest conclusions. Jesus was a first century Jewish leader intent on seeing in the cosmic victory of God over evil. This Jesus is foreign to Christians, as Schweitzer knew:

“The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma.”

Since Schweitzer recognised that Jesus was an eschatologist, and his words must only have been an interim ethic which had nothing to offer us, he abandoned devotion for practical Christianity, as a medical doctor in Africa.

Nineteenth century scholars concluded that a Jesus who would curse fig trees, claim to be the only begotten Son, and pretend to perform miracles, was psychologically sick. Albert Schweitzer wrote *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus* to refute these claims that Jesus was mentally unbalanced and that if he were alive today, he would be institutionalized.

Eschatology, involving ideas of the last judgment, resurrection, and supernatural deliverance of the elect from temporal earthly existence, though nominally Christian, has been lost in fairy tale ideas like that of “the Rapture” based upon Thessalonians. In the first century Jewish milieu, the concept was one of a cosmic battle.

Many features of the early church, whether reconstructed from the gospels or Paul, only make sense against the background of eschatological expectation: resurrection, the gift of the Spirit (meals, baptism), and the continuing anticipation of God's imminent intervention. The earliest community beliefs also could not be honestly disconnected entirely from the beliefs of Jesus and his disciples before Easter.

In his treatment of the historical Jesus, *Jesus and the Word*, in 1920, Rudolf Bultmann thought it a happy conclusion that:

“We can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary.”

What can be known by examining Jewish tradition of the time is Jesus's message, his “word”, the coming of the Kingdom of God, a “miraculous eschatological event”, but one that has to be interpreted existentially: “the Kingdom of God is a power which, although it is entirely future, wholly determines the present... because it now compels man to decision”. Bultmann concluded:

- The Christian proclamation (kerygma) will never be confirmed by historical investigation.
- Since the message is in the myth, the gospel of John is the preferred one.
- The historical quest is impossible, irrelevant, and illegitimate.

For Bultmann, a scholarly “quest of the historical Jesus” is impossible and theologically illegitimate because it substitutes worldly proof for faith. The simple fact of the Christ event—that God acted—sufficed. In *The New Testament and Mythology* he concludes:

“The Christian life does not consist in developing the individual personality, in the improvement of society, or in making the world a better place. The Christian life means turning away from the world.”

Is it surprising the world is a mess when it is run by people of this teeth grittingly irresponsible philosophy? Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *Christ the Center*, (1960) concluded that, if we did find an historical Jesus, it would show that Christian faith had been an illusion. The world thereby might be saved.

Karl Barth preferred not to participate in the quest for the historical Jesus. Barth with Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann and others accepted Kähler's conclusion that faith could not depend on the historical Christ, about whom nothing could be known. He agreed with Bonhoeffer that nothing in historical investigation could add anything to faith. At most, such analysis might tell us what others thought Jesus was like.

But Barth was an alien as far as the natural world was concerned. The natural world was irrelevant to him because only Christ was important and Christianity was the “end of all religion”. If that is so, it only is because it will be the end of humanity. We should take this as the severest warning to us, not the ultimate accolade that Christians suppose it to be.

Ernst Troeltsch saw the historical method of analysis as having three essential features: probability, analogy and correlation. Historians cannot deal in certainties. They discover events with a degree of probability attached to their likelihood. The probability of an event has to be judged by analogy with such a similar event occurring today, in times we know, are familiar with and have some estimatable degree of attestation. By analogy, it looks impossible that anything like 600,000 able-bodied men left Egypt in the Exodus.

Correlation is the principle that events influence each other. Nothing occurs in isolation and the likelihood of an event occurring has to be judged in the knowledge that it can be influenced by other events. The inhabitants of the hill country of Palestine had no knowledge of an Evil Spirit until after they had been colonised by the Persians who already had an Evil Spirit in their cosmogony. From the rule of correlation it is idle for Christian or Jewish theologians to claim that Jews invented the concept independently.

Troeltsch says it is invalid to place all emphasis on one event to the exclusion of others because all relevant events have to be judged equally by the same set of rules. Christianity cannot be judged only on its own claims about itself but in the wider context of human history. The dogmatic viewpoint of traditional Christianity violates all this, because it divorces a fixed set of events entirely from their realistic setting. Its pronouncements are absolute, being the Word of God and so they too are utterly divorced from any historical situation. Christian authority stems from its very falseness in historical terms—it is separated from history in practice despite the claimed historical setting of the mythical stories.

Its appeal is to the supernatural, the sphere of the human imagination, not history. Salvation history is supernatural history, and Troeltsch shows that it is therefore not history at all but romance based upon loyalty to a church or purely subjective inner experiences. Even Rudolf Bultmann said that it was impossible to believe in demons and spirits, while using electrical appliances and modern medicines, as Christians are expected to. History is like the fruit of a real tree but salvation history is like the fruit of a tree drawn on a piece of paper. The latter can be made to look wonderful but will not feed anyone. Troeltsch’s ideas help us to distinguish the two, should we have trouble.

“The only justification for the doctrinal basis of Christian tradition would seem to be miracle... for only such a belief can save it from being a contingent part of the ongoing fabric of history.” (John Bowden)

Critics of Troeltsch accuse him of not knowing what to do with a miracle if one happened because his method rules them out. The point about a miracle is not that it is unique—all events are unique, even the most trivial—but that it cannot happen in Nature without God's intervention. Spectacular single events, such as someone surviving a severe fire or fall are not miracles although they are called miracles in popular usage. A miracle simply cannot happen. It has zero probability of occurring. It is its impossibility that makes it a miracle.

A virgin birth would admittedly be pretty miraculous, though scientists might be able to think of a peculiar set of natural circumstances that could lead to one. Nevertheless, it is so miraculous that few scholars and many ordinary Christian believers do not think there ever was a virgin birth. A genuinely dead and already decaying man being resurrected would certainly be a miracle by any standards, and it therefore forms the basis of Christian faith, but it is such a poorly attested miracle that it is much more likely that the witnesses are deluded, mistaken or crooks than that the event happened. Only by eliminating the likely possibilities can the miracle be given credence. As it stands, it has none to anyone except those who will believe despite the evidence.

None of the “miracles” in the bible are well attested unless the miracle of the bible being the very word of God is true. If it is, then believers have to explain why everything that can be learnt by scholarship about the bible shows it to be the manufacture and composition of human beings, and is full of just the errors and contradictions that a human work copied by hand for many generations would contain. In brief, if God produced a miraculous book, why did he not ensure that it was miraculously distributed without errors? Christians believe the New Testament because they are Christians, not the other way around.

New Quests

In 1953, one of Bultmann's students, Ernst Käsemann, in a famous address to the annual gathering of the "old Marburgers" (the Bultmann school), declared the Lord of the Church could not have had no historical existence or he would have been completely mythological! Interest in the historical Jesus was theologically valid, after all, and he set in motion the "New Quest of the Historical Jesus", based on scholarly investigation, and recognising that the kerygma of the church emerged from an eschatological message.

Critical analysis such as form criticism would allow information about the historical Jesus to be found in the gospels, but criteria were needed to settle the authenticity of Jesus's sayings. Bultmann had already formulated one such criterion, dubbed by Norman Perrin, "the criterion of dissimilarity":

"The earliest form of a saying we can reach may be regarded as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church."

Or, "if we are to seek that which is most characteristic of Jesus", it will be found in the things wherein he differs from Judaism, such things as would be "new and startling to Jewish ears". The premise that the authentic Jesus was to be found not in his Jewish context but in whatever was different from it, became a typical Christian confusion of true inquiry. Plainly this criterion begs the question, because its underlying assumption—that Jesus was deliberately being different from contemporary Jews—is what Christians want to hear.

About 90 percent of Jesus's sayings are found in contemporary Jewish teaching, leaving just 10 percent for the real Jesus. Robert W Funk, founded the Jesus Seminar in 1985, calling scholars together to offer an alternative to the fundamentalist pictures of Jesus in American society. Around 200 people have participated to discuss, then vote with beads on historicity. Not much survives and even the Lord's Prayer goes. The Jesus Seminar agrees that:

"...way less than 25 percent of the words attributed to Jesus were his."

In fact, the scholars of the Jesus seminar concluded that 82 percent of the words ascribed to Jesus were not actually spoken by him:

1. The only words in the gospel of Mark were 12:17, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's".

2. The only words in Matthew were: 5:38-39 “Turn the other cheek”. 13:33 The parable of the leaven in the flour. 20:1-15 The parable of the workers in the vineyard. 22:21 “render unto Caesar...” “None of the Sermon on the Mount was accepted, the only part of the Lord’s Prayer were the words “Our Father”, and only three of the beatitudes: the hungry, poor and sad. Omitted were the references to the meek, merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers.
3. In Luke, the scholars accepted: 2:20 “Blessed are the poor, hungry, and sad” 6:27 “love your enemies” 6:29 “turn the other cheek”, “go the second mile” and “give your shirt”. 10:30 the story of the Good Samaritan 11:2 only the word “Father” in the Lord’s prayer. 13:20 the parable of the leaven 16:1 the parable of the shrewd manager.
4. Nothing in the gospel of John was accepted. But the scholars gave credence to the Gospel of Thomas and used it to confirm or deny Jesus’s words.

Donald A Wells explains that the following assumptions were made by the Jesus Seminar to begin its analysis. An assessment is appended to each:

1. The Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke are more reliable than John in separating the legendary and the mythical from the historical Jesus. Agreed.
2. The gospel of Mark is the oldest and Matthew and Luke copied from it. Agreed.
3. The most likely passages are those consistent with an oral rather than a written tradition. Meaningless. All of it is oral tradition.
4. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are assumed to be literary narratives and not history. Meaningless. All writing is literary. He means “fiction” which is too sweeping.
5. It was assumed that Jesus was not an eschatologist (he did not believe in the imminent end of the world). Total nonsense. He plainly was.
6. Since the oldest gospel manuscripts in our possession were written 175 years after the death of Jesus, and since every scholar who copied a manuscript added marginal notes which subsequent scholars commonly added to the body of the text, we ought not put much too emphasis on the particular words. Far too sweeping.
7. The Dead Sea Scrolls are of no help since they were written before the birth of Jesus. Nonsense. They might as well say the Jewish tradition is no help because it was founded before the birth of Jesus. Jesus plainly was an Essene and the Jesus Seminar wants to count the truth out at the start.
8. All the gospels were widely circulated for many years anonymously and were later given authorship names by persons unknown to make them more acceptable. The Church Father, Eusebius, had stated (300 AD) that Christians would not accept a writing as authentic unless it had been written by a famous person. Agreed.
9. Paul’s writings were in circulation long before the first gospel appeared, Paul never read the gospels. Since Paul had never met Jesus, his conjectures cannot be the basis for any facts about Jesus. Agreed.

The “Third Quest”, has been so named since perhaps the 70s. A distinguishing feature is the involvement of Jewish scholars trying to recover the historical Jesus. It claims that critical historical research can lead to who Jesus was by careful sifting of the sources.

It places Jesus squarely within the context of first century Palestine and Second Temple Judaism. Geza Vermes's book *Jesus the Jew* boldly declares this. S G F Brandon and Hyam Maccoby saw Jesus, like Reimarus, as a Jewish revolutionary, whilst Vermes saw him as a Galilean Hasid, apparently accepting that Jewish holy men could perform miracles.

Gerd Theissen applies sociological analysis to the "renewal movement within Judaism", Jesus founded. Jesus and some of his followers are depicted as "wandering charismatics", dependent on sympathizers in the local villages, analogous to wandering Cynic philosophers in the gentile world. They too led a vagabond existence, renouncing home, families and possessions.

Gerd Theissen's analogy depicting Jesus as a Cynic spawned an industry of pseudo-scholarship. F Gerald Downing found that Cynics must have been active in Galilee in Jesus's day because Jesus proves it! Jesus can equally be proved to have been an Epicurean, the view of Wolfgang Kirchbach (*Was lehrte Jesus? Zwei Urevangelien*,) according to Schweitzer, or anything else by being suitably selective.

Dominic John Crossan, one of the Jesus Seminar's chairmen, in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, written in 1994 and dedicated to the Jesus Seminar, takes up the cynical idea, denying Jesus was a teacher of Judaism but saying he was instead a wandering cynic preacher heavily influenced by Greek thought, a stoic Greek philosopher who gathered disciples around himself. For Crossan, the eschatological Jesus had been foisted on the tradition by the early church, and Jesus himself had rejected the eschatological message of John the Baptist to instead adopt wisdom teaching appropriate to a Jewish peasant.

Crossan concluded that Jesus was a peasant Jewish Cynic, a hippie deriding the yuppies. He bases his conclusions on a series of fantastic revisions of accepted chronology and a vivid imagination. For this "analysis", Crossan places the Gospels of Peter, Hebrews, Egyptians, Nazoreans, Ebionites, Secret Mark, various fragments, dialogue and apocryphon writings, alongside the four canonical writings and Thomas as having historical worth. That might be true, but it is a question of to what degree, and adequate identification of the historical bits. All gospels cannot count equally as sources. Few deny these are late works and later works are less reliable.

Crossan's attempt to make the passion narrative of the Gospel of Peter the source of the passion narratives in the canonical gospels has won little support. In short, no one believes a word of it, though it impresses publishers, and it reveals the author's cynicism, not Jesus's.

The new element in gospel research comes partly from continuing research on Q and from the Gospel of Thomas.

Burton Mack in *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, focuses on the lost gospel of Q, and increasingly scholars like H Koster see the Gospel of Thomas as containing some traditions earlier than the canonical gospels. Thomas and the collection thought to be Q are remarkably similar. If these are the most authentic traditions and others are secondary myths, a Jesus emerges who is only just Jewish and not focused on eschatological hope.

According to Kloppenborg, Q can be divided into three strata, the earliest of which consisted of a collection of wisdom sayings, expanded secondarily by material with a stronger eschatological flavour. Kloppenborg himself does not argue that the earlier layer existed in isolation from other traditions later introduced into Q, but this has been the conclusion of some scholars, notably Mack.

Mack, by selecting the earliest wisdom layer and supporting it with the Gospel of Thomas, discounts Mark as a fiction, a rationalisation by Mark of Christian failure. By identifying Jesus with the wisdom layer of Q and Thomas's gospel, Mack supports the idea of Jesus as a sage of the Cynics. He was not interested in eschatology or Jewish law and history but challenged the establishment, like Diogenes.

The Cynics were itinerant preachers of a philosophy of freedom from every constraint and a life lived with minimal requirements "according to nature". Flouting social convention, often in a way that shocked, they derived their name (kynikoi, "dog-like") from one of their founders, in the fourth century BC, "the Dog", Diogenes of Sinope, who went about Athens doing in public all that a dog did, while hurling insults on spectators and public figures alike. One time while behaving like a dog in the market place he said, according to Diogenes Laertius:

"Would that it were possible to relieve hunger simply by using the hand."

He was masturbating! The Jews were quite prudish and one of the complaints of the Maccabees against Greeks culture was its lack of prudishness. Jesus's and Paul's prudery have come to us in Christianity, so cannot have been absent in the earliest Christians. So, it is absurd to imagine that the first Christians were anything like as liberal as the Cynics.

Marcus Borg, also of the Jesus Seminar, made Jesus a Marxist in that he saw society rather than personal sin as the cause of evil. Borg's Jesus is more Jewish but is still the model of sage and spirit person that Borg likes to appeal to popular religious feelings of our day.

The weakness in Mack, Crossan, Borg and the Jesus Seminar is their dismissal of the eschatological Jesus though they instead make him into an anarchic and outrageous Greek dissonant. They accept that Jesus began with the eschatological John the Baptist and was followed by an eschatological Church, but tell us Jesus had no interest in eschatology!

Christians have always sought to deny Jesus's eschatological aims because they point too clearly to historical reality. The charge on the cross was not unjust—it was just and legal under Roman law!

One wonders whether these “scholars” are putting their ideas forward for serious consideration or for purely cynical reasons—to obfuscate the truth. Commentators can write off all of these “historical Jesuses” in favour of the twentieth century religious image Christians have, on the grounds that Jesus can indeed have been anything, an Essene, a recluse, a Greek philosopher, a married man with children, an Hillel Jew. Yet all of these proposals are not equal in evidential content. Jesus was a Jew and he was a particular kind of Jew. The evidence for these facts is overwhelming. It is scarcely less overwhelming to anyone except a Christian that Jesus was what he died as—a Jewish rebel. Everything else is a smokescreen.

Another major trend has been to emphasise Jesus's Jewishness. Jesus's Jewishness and Torah observance are central. Jesus did not stand outside his own religious tradition. He was not a Christian among Jews—he was a Jew. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary called Jesus a “Jewish preacher”, causing an outcry. A member of the General Synod of the Anglican Church said this was “a rather derogatory term”.

The Jewish scholar, Vermes, acclaimed Jesus's Jewishness, as a holy man, a hasid, like Honi the circle maker or Hanina ben Dosa. Vermes, was reprimanded by chaplains at an English University for saying Jesus was a Jew! The problem is that Vermes's rabbinic sources are late.

Sanders too has urged that Judaism should be re-assessed within New Testament scholarship. Torah as God's gift and the priority of God's grace seems clear in the early writings. Sanders has made a strong case for understanding Jesus in his Jewish context. Sanders emphasises Jesus's faithfulness to Torah and his espousal of restoration eschatology.

At his birth, Jesus's genealogy shows he was a Jew. He was circumcised the eighth day (Lk 2.21), bore a common Jewish name, Yeshua, “Yehouah saves” (Mt 1.21). Yeshua was the fifth most common Jewish name, four out of the 28 Jewish High-Priests in Jesus's time were called Yeshua. Joseph was the second most common male name and Mary the most common amongst women, this in itself is sufficient evidence to throw doubt on the recently found tomb of “Jesus, Mary and Joseph”.

Mark portrays a clever Jesus engaging in refutation, by wit and aphorism rather than by argument, against extreme legalist positions. Yet, he evidently observed the law, interpreted it defended it wittily, expounded its values all in a way acceptable to Judaism of the time because we find Jews defending him and his followers. He was conservative in sexuality even by Jewish standards and his dealings with gentiles reflect a conservative Jewish background.

Jesus never wished to see his fellow Jews change one iota of their traditional faith and remained within the range of acceptable Jewry to his last moment.

Where do we get the idea from that Jesus was a carpenter? Matthew 13:55 based on manuscripts of Mark only describes Jesus as “son of the carpenter” not as the “carpenter, son of Mary”. The early third century church writer Origen writes against Celsus’s assertion that Jesus was a mere carpenter, that “in none of the Gospels current in the churches is Jesus Himself ever described as being a carpenter!” Yet, the earlier church writer Justin cites it in his dialogue with Tryppho the Jew:

He was considered to be the son of Joseph the carpenter; and He appeared without comeliness, as the scriptures declared; and He was deemed a carpenter (for He was in the habit of working as a carpenter when among men, making ploughs and yokes; by which He taught the symbols of righteousness and an active life).

Jesus had brothers and sisters, according to Mark 6:3, James, Joseph, Juda, and Simeon and two sisters. One brother, James, was the head of the church in Jerusalem as testified in the book of Acts. The trouble with this is that if Jesus was a member of a brotherhood like the Essenes or the Therapeuts well then his brothers and sisters were not blood brothers and sisters but other members of the fellowship. It is fair to ask why particular ones should be picked out and called his brothers. The main reason is that the gentile church wanted to hide the fact that Jesus was a member of a brotherhood, and so pretended from the outset that references to brothers and sisters in this context meant real brothers and sisters. Naturally, this plan pre-dated the virgin birth and the idea that Mary was a perpetual virgin.

According to the gospel legends, by the age of 12 Jesus was found in the temple precincts “both listening and asking questions” (Lk 2:46). The Jews of Jesus’s era were imitators of the Greeks in comprehensive universal education. Most were taught to read and write. The philosopher Seneca remarked that the Jews were the only people who knew the reasons for their religious faith.

The study of Greek in Palestine in Jesus’s day was not encouraged by pious Jews, although it was a necessity of daily life in the diaspora lands outside of Palestine. Greek philosophy was equally deprecated by Jews who were not Hellenistic. Early church theologians were later to remark “what has Athens to do with Jerusalem” decrying Greek thinking.

Jesus said a blessing at meals (Mt 26:26 and Lk 24:30 which is post resurrection; cf. Didache 10:1). Jewish scholars used to hold that the object of the blessing was not the food but God (Dt 8:10;). When the New Testament inserts “it” or “the bread” in such verses it is not found in the Greek. A Jew would not bless the object rather than the creator. Many such mistakes are made based on the assumption that first century Judaism was Rabbinic. Jesus was an Essene and they treated meals as a messianic meal. The Scrolls (1QSa 2:10) tell us that the Priest blessed the “first fruits of the bread and wine”.

Sanders makes the point that much of Jesus's teaching makes the law strict. The Essenes had the stricter view of the law. Our Jewish sources also offer examples of the kind of emphasis on attitude in relation to sexual behaviour and anger which characterised Jesus's teaching.

The eschatological focus of much of the Jesus tradition makes good sense in the light of the diverse eschatological expectations of the day, which crystallised around would-be messiahs or prophets of hope.

Eschatology

Jesus's eschatology is expressed most often with his favorite term: "the kingdom of God"—the expectation that God would cleanse the land and rule it directly, restoring Israel to wholeness, liberating her from her oppressors, and bringing righteousness and peace. The hope was an expectation of changed reality, especially for the people of Israel—Jews not gentiles—for whom it was Good News. His vision implied a political or military solution, whether God's alone or one assisted by the Chosen People. His hope was an urgent one like that of John the Baptist. His own ministry indicated that the hope was beginning to be realised.

The imagery associated with this hope in the Jesus tradition reflects prophetic hope for Israel's restoration, the gathering of the lost and scattered sheep, the eschatological banquet, the renewal or rebuilding of the temple, the establishment of new leadership in Israel, healing and deliverance.

John Bowden, SCM Editor, warns New Testament readers to distinguish between symbolism and history. the darkness at the crucifixion cannot have been an eclipse as interpreters of the stories have often assumed but even some early commentators realised. The darkness comes from the prophecies of the cosmic events that would accompany the End Time (Joel). In the same way, the rising of the saints from their tombs, spoken of in Matthew, symbolises the general resurrection prophesied for the righteous dead (the saints) at the End Time. Bowden urges us to see all of this as sensible and reasonable in terms of Jewish beliefs at the time, but why then cannot the healing of the blind, the deaf and the maimed be seen as equally symbolic rather than as actual miracles? The driving out of devils might be metaphorical too. None of them need to be miracles but all relate to beliefs of the time, beliefs that provided for the Essenes a technical code language based on the Jewish scriptures.

Wright's work, *Jesus and the Victory of God* on the historical Jesus, takes Sanders's notion of restoration eschatology further but, he reassures Christians, Jewish apocalyptic did not imply the end of the world. Jesus was offering an alternative to the way of being Israel, which, if pursued, would lead the nation to disaster.

There is virtually no evidence that Jews were expecting the end of the space-time universe. There is abundant evidence that they... knew a good metaphor when they saw one, and used cosmic imagery to bring out the full theological significance of cataclysmic socio-political events.

It was only warning about Israel's immediate future. So, all that talk and imagery about a judgement day, resurrection, being at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the restored Israel, and so on simply mean that Jews should take care! How could there be such confusion of understanding of eschatology apparently shared by James, Jesus and John the Baptist, and that of the early church?

The truth is the Essenes saw the kingdom of God as a renovated world. Heaven and earth joined, destroying forever the old wicked world but creating a new one that differed only from the old in being perfect and uncorruptible. The old world ended for the wicked but the righteous were resurrected in uncorruptible and therefore immortal bodies into the purified world—the kingdom! If Wright is correct, the wicked world was not meant to end. People just had to start being good—just what modern Christians want to think.

Christians are preoccupied with titles of authority. They took it as given that Jesus was the messiah then looked for as many titles as possible that they could give him. References to Jesus as messiah are few and so ambiguous that, if Jesus saw himself as messiah, he left no indication of what he understood by it, other than the messiah of Jewish expectation—a leader of god’s armies. The general was soon made king—as they are—and replaced the kingdom of God as the centre of Christian preaching.

What of the expression, Son of Man? It is taken by Christians to mean the vision of Daniel 7. But in Palestine at the time, it was a polite self designation intended to avoid the conceit of using “I”. If this was a common use, then how was the special meaning given it by Jesus meant to be distinguished from the everyday use? Most people will have understood it as *derekh erez*—Jewish etiquette.

Dr Michael D Magee has stiffened the quest for the historical Jesus with a little realism in his 1997 book *The Hidden Jesus: The Secret Testament Revealed*. He sticks to the earliest tradition we have, as agreed by most biblical scholars, that of the gospel of Mark, and interprets it in the light of the discoveries in the Judean desert. John is too overlaid with legend to be anything other than secondary and Matthew and Luke are used only to enlarge upon the skimpier material in Mark.

Much of Q, the hypothetical document used by some Jesus seminar scholars to reject a revolutionary Jesus, is considered to be pre-Jesus, being a collection of Essene wisdom sayings many of which were doubtless used by Jesus but tell us nothing about his career except when they are linked to the narrative of Mark.

Ancient history, where important elements of a story have been lost or deliberately destroyed, is a matter of judging probabilities. Dr Magee accepts much of the tradition of Mark, but believes it is not presented at face value as Christians do. Some things are unlikely to be invented, like Jesus’s eschatology and his baptism by John the Baptist. What is embarrassing to Christianity is likely to be genuine because there is no other good reason for it being in the tradition at all. Other embarrassing elements have been purposely distorted, because tales were emerging that had to be explained away.

Though Mark is the earliest and best tradition, it has been deliberately distorted by the gentile bishops to make the gospels acceptable to the Romans and the basis of a universal religion. Dr Magee peels off the pious accretions and interpretative wrappings added by the earliest gentile bishops to the story of the exploits of Jesus.

The truth is peculiarly transparent, although two thousand years of conditioning and the invention of spurious translations of Greek words to suit Christian belief in the so-called New Testament Greek have succeeded in blinding even the most critical of scholars.

The gentile bishops of the embryonic religion were faced with travelers' tales from Palestine that Jesus was not what he seemed. This oral tradition was strong because Jews were already widespread in the Empire and after the defeat of their rebellion in the Jewish War and their dispersion in 70 AD many more arrived from Palestine.

Pericopes, individual stories about Jesus, kept coming to the bishops and when they did not match their preferred image of a saintly Son of God, had to be "corrected". The bishops had to say to their flocks:

Ho, Ho, Theophilus, how silly you are. It was not quite like that. No, this is what really happened.

Then they would change a few subjects and objects and retell the tale such that a core remained but the sense favoured the view they were propagating rather than the truth. It still happens today. There never was a gate in Jerusalem called "The Eye of a Needle" but it was invented by clerics to allow the rich to be saved when the plain sense of Jesus's aside was that he considered it impossible for the rich to be saved.

The resurrection and appearances that gave rise to Christianity are about the disciples' perceptions. In the minds of the disciples, Jesus had been vindicated through the disappearance of his body and this provided not only evidence of his exaltation to God's presence as the first fruits of the dead, the first of the Righteous to have been raised up by God in the general resurrection prophesied in Hosea, but also of the truth of his claim that the kingdom of God was at hand.

God's restoration of the world was a restoration of the sinless world before Adam! The Righteous were resurrected into the world but it was now joined to heaven and was therefore perfect and incorruptible. That Jesus had been resurrected into this higher order of reality proved, for them that history had ended.

For honest, reasoning people, though not those who are irrational or emotionally dependent on the traditional image of Jesus, gospel stories will never be the same again—they now make sense. Oddly, the message of many modern Christians is upheld—that God is not an external supernatural entity ready to interfere with the world at a whim or a prayer.

Jesus believed an external God was ready to intervene—he was forsaken or rather mistaken—but Christians have made the same mistake ever since, teaching people to blame devils instead of facing up to their own responsibility for their actions. Our gods and devils are within us and there we must seek and come to terms with them.

This picture of Christ is the most powerful and original one of our century, but it is negative in that Christianity is found to be based on a mistake, and that Jesus was not really the Son of God but merely had that title as a priest and prince. All this is hardly the basis of a religion.

It is because this undesirable but realistic and historic Christ is at the core of the Christian religion that such a profusion of fanciful alternatives have always been sought. Recent years have seen the promotion of a gay Christ, a feminist Christ, Christ as a druggie and Christ as an alien from outer space. The hope of the true believers is that the historic Jesus will turn out to be just another Christ of his times, no “truer” to the original than the cosmic Christ of the Byzantine world.

Then again, no! Many Christian theologians want to get the historic Christ out in the open so that the Christian churches can metamorphose themselves into the purely mystical concoction of mystery beliefs that it rapidly picked up from the religions of the times. For such Christians, the Christ of history was always likely eventually to be exposed by an Alexander who cared not for the conventions and respectabilities of his times and unceremoniously cut through the Gordian knot of lies that Christianity had to be to escape the unpalatable truth. When it happens, they can gulp, breathe a sigh of relief and then get on with it, declaring that nevertheless there is a saviour—it is simply that he is a heavenly one. For people ready to believe in Christ the alien, it will be a great advance.

Jesus Never Lived

From the time of Bruno Bauer to the end of the twentieth century, scholars argued that no historical evidence existed to prove that Jesus ever lived at all. Bauer thought scripture offered no sure evidence that he lived. Among the scholars that thought the life of Jesus was a complete fabrication were the following.

J M Robertson, an English theologian, who argued in *The Historical Jesus: A Survey of Positions* (1916) and *The Jesus problem: A Restatement of the Myth Theory* (1917) that all the elements of Christianity can be derived from the mystery religions. Christianity was built on the model of the mysteries because they were fashionable and to combine them with the Jewish scriptures that were also widely admired. Jesus is, thus, a Jewish Osiris, Mithras or Adonis created for gentile use.

Arthur Drew, a German Hegelian philosopher, in his books *Christ Myth* (1924) and *Legend of Peter* (1924), argued that first century Christianity was a social ethical movement which needed no founder to explain its rise. A long standing feature of the Semitic world was an annual sacrifice of a “Son of the Father”—Barabbas, originally called Jesus Barabbas. This may account for the myth that an historical person, Jesus, actually lived.

G A Wells, of Birkbeck college, London, in *Did Jesus Exist?* also concluded that Jesus never existed. If he had existed, we should have a more detailed description of him. The lack of many details of him that we could reasonably expect of a historical person leaves us with two options:

- He did exist but made no significant impact.
- He did not exist but was invented like Osiris to explain Pauline religion.

Latterly, Earl Doherty has presented similar arguments in “The Jesus Puzzle,” and on his excellent website. Former evangelical theologian, Robert M Price, thinks there is no convincing historical evidence that Jesus ever lived. Price is a former evangelist turned battling skeptic who declares Jesus Christ to be a fiction, in more ways than one. The worst way is that Jesus is really the fly used by evangelists, priests and other crooks whose real interest is to catch people to control them.

As Price puts it, Christ is shorthand for the institutions on whose behalf he is invoked. When an evangelist invites you to have faith “in Christ,” they are smuggling in other issues—Chalcedonian Christology, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Protestant idea of faith and grace, a particular theory of biblical inspiration and literalism or inerrancy, habits of church attendance, anti-Darwinism and other questions that theologians have debated for centuries and still have not agreed.

No evangelist ever invites people to accept Christ by faith and then to start examining all these other associated issues for themselves. They are non-negotiable, but yet are not taught by the godly chap the punter signed up for. To be saved they have to toe the party line. So the gullible or weak punter signs up for Christ and gets a mass of largely conservative political doctrine on someone else's say-so.

Christ is a fiction because he is not simply the god-sent saviour of souls but an umbrella for unquestioning acceptance of what some institution tells us to believe, usually ready made right-wing politics. This is what Christianity always was as Paul proves when he wants "the taking of every thought captive to Christ," and insists on the "obedience" of faith. Christ is a euphemism for the dogmatic party line of an institution.

Price also shows that Jesus as the personal saviour, with whom people have a "personal relationship" is fictional—a comfort blanket or Harvey the Rabbit for children and grown ups alike. If it proves a psychological help, the personal Jesus might be of value, but all the rest of the package has to be accepted too, as noted above, and that often ends up no longer purely personal.

It is hard for anyone of a reasonable nature to discredit all this but Price has other ways in which Jesus is fictional too, and one at least virtually implies that history is bunk! He says Christ might not be based on any historical individual, not only in the sense that the "Christ of faith" is an invention of theologians—a Christian lucky rabbit's foot with lashings of gravitas—but, no Jesus ever lived in first century Nazareth. There only ever was a Christ of faith and there was no Jesus of history.

The life of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels is that of the worldwide hero of mythology:

"The divine hero's birth is supernaturally predicted and conceived, the infant hero escapes attempts to kill him, demonstrates his precocious wisdom already as a child, receives a divine commission, defeats demons, wins acclaim, is hailed as king, then betrayed, losing popular favor, executed, often on a hilltop, and is vindicated and taken up to heaven."

If these features are found everywhere in heroic myths and epics, but never in real life, it is not safe to believe anyone who tells you that in one particular case it really happened. Yet that is what the born again punter does and that is what the scheming priests make children believe before they have developed any critical faculty. Some believers glibly accept these other myths but declare them false, to which one has to accuse them of special pleading. They do not know that this one rather than any other is the "true" myth.

If we do not use the standard of current real-life experience to assess history, we would find ourselves accepting every myth and outlandish fairy tale there ever was, and would finish up drowning in a morass of make-belief. And why would God or Nature do things that do not happen now? As Price says: "Isn't God supposed to be the same yesterday, today, and forever?"

So far so good, but here Price begins to get carried away because he says the whole of the Jesus saga is captured in the standard myth, “with nothing left over”. It is therefore...

“...arbitrary to assert that there must have been a historical figure lying back of the myth. There may have been, but it can no longer be considered particularly probable, and that’s all the historian can deal with: probabilities.”

He says he is more and more attracted to the theory that Jesus never existed and so is simply a fiction.

This is where we have to part company with Mr Price because a great deal of Mark’s gospel, considered by many to have been the earliest one written, has quite specific details of an extended and peculiar campaign in Galilee and a march on Jerusalem. The interesting thing about this is that it is set in a particular and known historical period and involves historical characters and historically verifiable institutions. It was a period of deep discontent and of prolonged revolution ending in a four year bloody war. Now, the mythical Jesus turns out to have been crucified as a rebel against Rome, a most likely happening if a rebel is what he was and a most unlikely choice of death if the designers of a new religion wanted to choose a hero.

Price goes on to say that the passion stories of the gospels are too similar to contemporary myths of dying and rising saviour gods including Osiris, Tammuz, Baal, Attis, Adonis, Hercules and Asclepius to be real. Like Jesus, these figures were believed to have once lived a life upon the earth, been killed, and risen shortly thereafter. Their deaths and resurrections were in most cases ritually celebrated each spring to herald the return of the life to vegetation. In many myths, the saviour’s body is anointed for burial, searched out by holy women and then reappears alive a few days later.

So this is where history and myth begin to merge. The popular hero in Palestine was caught and crucified. He was a holy man because those who fought for independence for Judaea in those days generally were holy men, the Jews being God’s Chosen People. Since they were expecting a miracle from God—though it never came—they persuaded themselves it had and began to merge history and myth. At a time when news passed by word of mouth, the rumour machine was probably highly efficient and many of the rebel’s followers might have had the myth not long after it was invented.

Price adds that the details of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection accounts are similar to the events of several surviving popular novels from that period in which two lovers are separated when the woman, say, seems to have died and is unwittingly entombed alive. Grave robbers discover her reviving and kidnap her. Her lover finds the tomb empty, graveclothes still in place, and first concludes she has been raised up from death and taken to heaven.

Then, realizing what must have happened, he goes in search of her. During his adventures, he is sooner or later condemned to the cross or actually crucified, but manages to escape. When at length the couple is reunited, neither, having long imagined the other dead, can quite believe the lover is alive and not a ghost come to say farewell.

Apologists contend that all these myths are plagiarized from the gospels by pagan imitators, pointing out that some of the evidence is post-Christian. Nevertheless much is pre-Christian and the early Christian apologists prove it by arguing that these parallels to the gospels were counterfeits in advance, by Satan, who knew the real thing would be coming along later and wanted to throw people off the track! They could not have argued this way had the pagan myths of dead and resurrected gods been more recent than the Christian.

C S Lewis suggested that in Jesus's case "myth became fact," an argument that Price pooh-pooh's, Lewis being a soft-headed apologist for Christianity. The others were myths, but this one actually happened. But though Lewis meant this as an apology for his belief, it is likely to be true—not by accident but by design, so to speak. The very point the earliest gentile bishops would have been making to the Roman housewives and slaves they recruited was that this dying God had "actually happened" recently, and witnesses could confirm it.

This latter is both the reason why an absurd religion got a foothold at all, and the reason why the gospels seem unhistorical.

Pious Lies

There were witnesses and after 70 AD, there were even more, the Jews having been dispersed from their homeland. These witnesses confirmed that there had indeed been a Jesus who was crucified, but he was not a god but a rebel against the Romans. They confirmed the fundamental fact, and for the first gentile Christians as for born again converts today, it was sufficient—they wanted to believe.

What of the details though? The Jewish witnesses could quote particular cases and did. How were they to be refuted? The bishops could not say they were false, because that would undermine their case. They wanted to accept they were true, then their god was proved to have lived in detail. So, they simply told their followers pious lies, just as they have done ever since—the Jewish witnesses had got the story a bit confused. If it is for the glory of God and his son, Jesus Christ, then any lie is the truth, so they confused the truth with their distortions but still retained enough of it to keep the essence of the story of the witness. All of these lies are set down in remarkably unadulterated form in Mark's gospel and have been interpreted in *The Hidden Jesus*.

Despite the bishops' best efforts, besides gullible souls, there were plenty of skeptics then, just as there are gullible souls and skeptics today. Paul, the first evangelist to the gentiles, did not want to talk at all about the god except in mythical language. He never mentions Jesus performing healings because the healings were not physical healings at all but spiritual ones, persuading Jews to take courage and oppose the foreign rulers. Paul would not have wanted to mention this. Only twice does he speak of "words of the Lord". He never speaks of Jesus as a teacher because Jesus was not particularly known as a teacher, and what he did teach was rebellion.

Paul attributes the death of Jesus not to Roman or Jewish governments, but rather to the designs of evil "archons," angels who rule this fallen world, an obvious early attempt to put space between the historical Jesus who was murdered by the Romans he hoped to convert and the God Jesus, Paul set out to create.

Romans and 1 Peter both warn Christians to watch their step, reminding them that the Roman authorities never punish the righteous, but only the wicked. Price amazingly asks: "How could they have said this if they knew of the Pontius Pilate story?" The answer is that they were trying to deceive their flocks—who at that stage will not have known the story—as preachers have done ever since.

Two epistles, 1 Thessalonians and 2 Timothy, do blame Pilate or Jews for the death of Jesus, and can be shown on other grounds to be non-Pauline and later than the gospels. The story was by then out in the open, successfully smudged by the bishops as it has since remained, despite the attentions of hundreds of "scholars".

Price claims that Jesus was eventually “historicized,” redrawn as a human being, much as Abraham, Joseph, David, Solomon, Moses, Samson, Enoch, Jabal, Gad, Joshua the son of Nun, and other ancient Israelite gods had already been. Different attempts to locate Jesus in recent history were made by laying the blame for his death on well known tyrants including Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate and even Alexander Jannaeus in the first century BC! Now, if the death of Jesus were an actual historical event well known to eyewitnesses of it, Price says there is simply no way such a variety of versions, differing on so fundamental a point, could ever have arisen!

We must take, Price’s word for it that there were these other attempts beside the familiar gospel ones to ameliorate the story of Jesus, but that they should have been made is not in the least surprising. First century bishops did not have the internet. Different versions of excuses were made and some of them now appear in the New Testament even though they are contradictory. Some bishops might have tried to make out that Jesus was punished by a Jewish king not a Roman governor, for obvious reasons.

Price himself, answering the apologists’ claim that there was “too little time between the death of Jesus and the writing of the gospels for legends to develop, “ says 40 years is easily enough time for legends to arise. He also points out the apologists are not facing his argument that Jesus never existed for they presuppose a historical Jesus who died around 30 AD. The theory that Christ is mythical means there was no Jesus alive in Pontius Pilate’s time to give rise to a legend but instead that later Pilate’s time was selected as the time when Jesus lived. Just as somebody always knows somebody who had a miraculous experience, orally transmitted legends usually come from the generation before last.

Now, on the idea outlined in *The Hidden Jesus*, this is possible. The gospel clues suggest that Jesus began his campaign in 18 AD and died in 21 AD which precedes the governorship of Pilate. There is reason to believe that Christians, when they took state power in the fourth century, doctored the dates of Pilate in Josephus so that anyone who found or had kept a copy of the Roman archive pertaining to the crucifixion of Jesus could be discredited as a fraud. Only two easy alterations were needed to the letters which served as Greek numbers.

It just about remains possible that the dates of Pilate are correct and Jesus was crucified by an earlier governor. The legend that it happened in the reign of Pilate then arose because Mark and the first Christians, who had been waiting fifty years for the end of the world, decided that the bloody defeat and diaspora of the Jews and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD sufficed for it, and though they had forgotten exactly when the events had happened, simply extrapolated them back forty years—a Jewish generation, the maximum extent of the prophecy—from then into the reign of Pilate as Prefect of Judaea.

Price questions the historicity of the passion by asking why the earliest gospel crucifixion account in Mark spins out the terse narrative from quotes cribbed from Psalm 22? Well, the answer is plain. Whether Jesus in reality died a noble death or otherwise, the story had to be embellished. The legend of Jesus was now being made and the followers were not going to tell the truth about their god, so begin to take messianic references from the scriptures and apply them to Jesus—now Christ. He asks also why does 1 Peter have nothing more detailed than Isaiah 53 to flesh out his account of the sufferings of Jesus? The answer is the same. And the more recent gospels carry on mythologising, even finding a book of wisdom sayings and attributing them to Jesus.

Price also gets on dodgy ground when he disparages quests for the historical Jesus by turning to Albert Schweitzer, an admirable scholar but a Christian. He says the “historical Jesus” found by those bothered to look is “just” a reflexion of the individual who is looking. Price hints that Schweitzer was the “single” exception, but any exception invalidates the rule.

On the other hand, it is quite natural, and almost inescapable, that everyone is moulded by their own experiences and social situation. All investigators therefore paint themselves into their findings. The truth, inasmuch as it is possible to get it, is found by the continuation of this process until by trial and error and eliminating the excesses and the mistakes and bringing in new discoveries, eventually a reasonable approximation will be found.

Plainly once someone is dead and times have passed, the truth can never be resurrected. Even President Kennedy is now a myth, but we still have a reasonable picture of him. It is pure defeatism in history to say that the historian can never get the truth because he projects himself into his picture. Says Price:

“Today’s Politically Correct ‘historical Jesuses’ are no different, being mere clones of the scholars who design them.”

So there is no point in doing history at all? Nonsense!

Price now finds comfort from C S Lewis: “Each ‘historical Jesus’ is unhistorical. The documents say what they say and cannot be added to”. Lewis took it for granted, as all Christians do, that the gospel picture is sufficient—it is true. All the questors are doing is saying, “Not necessarily, mate! What about this? And what about this too?” By assessing the “probabilities” in all these pictures, an approximation to the truth will be found. Why does Price object to this? He explains that:

“Even if there was a historical Jesus lying back of the gospel Christ, he can never be recovered. If there ever was a historical Jesus, there isn’t one any more. All attempts to recover him turn out to be just modern remythologizings of Jesus. Every ‘historical Jesus’ is a Christ of faith, of somebody’s faith. So the ‘historical Jesus’ of modern scholarship is no less a fiction.”

The correct attitude is that they are all approximations to the truth. If all the facts about someone's life are available, it is still impossible to know the historical person. Facts have to be selected to present an accessible portrait. If many of the facts are missing or have been deliberately altered, as in the case of Jesus, then it becomes harder still because it becomes a matter, not of selection, but of interpretation and we have to look for clues in the events and circumstances. None of this makes the task not worth undertaking for otherwise history—and indeed many other fields of inquiry—is pointless.

It seems that Price is being distracted by the fashion for postmodernism—a denial of scholarship in favour of empty verbosity. It is a sort of extension of Christian pious lies into every field of scholarship, and unsurprisingly Christians are at the forefront of it. All you have to do is make up anything you like by association of ideas, negation, astrology and fantasy—any means as long as it does not involve reason or facts—to discredit, preferably, a conventional piece of learning generated by someone else's sincere efforts and that is scholarship. It's baloney, but typical of the insanity of the world.

Christianity Revealed

The Gospels

Dr M D Magee

Vitually none of the modern translations [of the New Testament] can be trusted to bear the weight that is put on them.

John Bowden, SCM

No single translation of the New Testament can be recommended as a completely clear and accurate reading.

Bruce Chilton

Belief or Examination

In the western world, most of us are brought up as Christians. Christianity distinguishes itself from other monotheistic religions in its devotion to a divine being who, it is claimed, appeared at a known time and place in history and whose life and teachings are accurately known because they were recorded by people alive at the time.

Christianity teaches that its founder, Jesus of Nazareth, fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament, the holy scriptures of the Jews, which narrate the unfolding of God's plan for his chosen people, originally the Jews but, from the advent of Jesus, the whole human race. Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the saviour promised by God, a divine being, one of the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. As the Son of God, he was incarnated on earth, was crucified to atone for the sins of humanity, was resurrected as proof of his divinity and ascended into heaven. Because humanity's sins have been forgiven by the sacrifice of the Son of God, salvation and eternal life await for those who believe it—those who have faith.

The principal form of Christian worship is the mass or holy communion in which worshippers achieve communion with God by consuming consecrated wine and bread which miraculously is the blood and body of the crucified god. The holy book of Christianity, the Bible, consists of a version of the scriptures of the Jewish religion added to which are four gospels describing the ministry of Jesus on earth, the Acts of the Apostles (mainly of Paul, the evangelist), letters of some of the apostles of Christ, again mainly Paul, and an apocalypse.

The gospels describe the human sacrifice of the incarnate God and include a core of teaching broadly expressed as love thy neighbour. Christianity has several holy days—the principal ones being the supposed anniversaries of Jesus's death, resurrection and birth—and has adopted Sunday as its sabbath.

These are the essentials of Christianity, a religion which today holds the hearts and minds of over a thousand million people—many in the most advanced countries of the world. Christians, even in these cultured societies, really believe that Jesus was the absolute god who came to earth as a man, and this is a fact of history. But is it?

Many other gods were thought by their devotees to have been historical people who wandered around doing good deeds—Orpheus and Hercules, for example—yet most people do not now believe they existed. Why do we consider worshippers of Hercules to be insane but worshippers of Jesus inspired? The clergy teach that all gods are myths other than their own but what makes the Christian god an exception to the rule? Who could believe a book published today that abounded in miracles? If the holy book of another religion had miracles comparable to those in the gospels, would a Christian believe it?

Why are events as remarkable as miracles recorded only in some gospels and not in others? If anyone today claimed to be a Son of God, we should consider them to be deluded or a charlatan, and our skepticism would be justified. Yet because we are brought up to it, we accept it without question of a man whose followers proclaimed him a god around 2000 years ago.

Even St Augustine admitted: I should not believe in the gospels if I had not the authority of the church for so doing. A saint he may be but his argument is circular, for he admits without this special authority, it would not be possible to believe the gospels, yet, if the gospel story is not to be believed, what special authority has the church? If the gospels were not the foundation of our own religion we would find them preposterous and would not comprehend how anyone could believe such nonsense. And, if our faith is greater than St Augustine's and we do not need the authority of the church to accept the gospels as God-given truth, how do we explain the many contradictions in them? Why is God so confusing—or confused?

Can we be sure the Son of God of the gospels is not an illusion or a fraud? Could we be gullible dupes whose ethical base is a confidence trick? For Christians such questions are impertinent. Christianity is genuine. It is the only genuine religion. All others are heathen. Pagan! Christians have sufficient proof—their belief! Celsus, an early critic of Christianity, said the Christians do not examine but believe. Is it credible that highly educated, worldly people today will not examine but simply believe? It is credible! They do—just believe!

These difficulties arise because Christian beliefs are built upon the fallible testimony of men, but they include the belief that the original testimonies, fallible as they are, are the infallible testimony of God. Some Christians seeking rationality, struggling with the knowledge that men wrote the accounts they revere, resolve their doubts by claiming they were inspired by God, or by an aspect of Him—the Holy Ghost. Though written by men they are still infallible. The Bible is the holy book. The gospels can be nothing other than true: they are the gospel truth—the word of God himself.

Those a little more skeptical might wonder why God leaves the reporting of his incarnation on earth to disciples who are terminally stupid and succeed in botching up the story, when he could have rendered it accurately himself during his sojourn here. Or, he could have sent an angel to reveal it inscribed on tablets of gold. Why didn't he do something obviously infallible and save a lot of trouble?

Evidently he chose not to, and a Christian would say we cannot be expected to understand. Yet, according to Genesis, God made us in his own image, endowing us with brains. It would be unreasonable to believe he does not expect us to use them. Quite the reverse. Having given us brains He must expect us to use them, and, if necessary, uncover false doctrine. The Christian scholar, Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, pleads that the basis of Christianity demands historical and critical study—its piety depends upon it.

If Christian faith rests upon a particular event in history, those who refuse to investigate it honestly must betray a lack of that faith, for they dare not risk discovering they are mistaken!

Perhaps the origins of Christianity are not what they seem. Perhaps cautionary tales that circulated among oppressed and ignorant people came to be believed. Could Roman slaves and housewives be expected to understand what motivated the Jewish nation in its plight?—that Jesus was not what the church is now compelled to teach, lest it should destroy its own foundation?

It is hard to be dispassionate about the Bible when we have been taught to revere it all our lives, and our systems of beliefs seem to depend upon it. The gospels have such authority in our society that most people, practising Christians or otherwise—like St Augustine—believe that they are absolutely or essentially true. Jews and Christians are indignant when anyone suggests that the authors of the scriptures were lying. “Can saints and prophets, guided by God through the Holy Spirit lie? Outrageous! Of course they do not lie!” They presume the biblical authors were upright and honest people because they believe. What they read of these authors—the bible—is why they believe! They refuse to examine the many problems especially of chronology in the biblical texts, and even if they are obliged to consider them, they will dismiss them as Satanic temptations.

Christian commentators have carefully steered away from accepting anything in the gospels as allegorical or metaphoric. Rudolf Bultmann spoke despidingly of “mere metaphors or ciphers.” He did not know how close he was. The gospels are indeed ciphers, rather crudely done, not very finely done as Barabara Thiering claims, yet with the same idea at root perhaps. The idea of the Essenes was that the scriptures were allegorical and properly deciphered contained God’s absolute truth, so the heirs of the Essenes, the gentile bishops, thought the gospels could be written as crude allegory to hide their real nature, and still be God’s truth.

Modern bishops fear that by accepting the gospels as allegorical, the historical Jesus will be immediately vaporized into myth. In fact, the myth is immediately condensed into history. The mind of the allegorist is flying on magic carpets, walking on water and seeing bodies rise from the dead, and what they write is not history. The allegorist has made real history symbolic, so reading the symbols as the real history is plainly wrong. The symbols must be interpreted properly. Allegory is the enemy of gospel exegesis based on the historical assumption. It is an assumption, because it has no corroborating evidence. That it was set in first century Jerusalem is not evidence that the allegory is history. The whole of the Christology of Jesus also depends on his historicity, but the wrong christology must emerge if the allegorical Jesus is taken to be the historical one.

E J Tinsley, a professor of theology at Leeds University says “biblical literature is a structure of myths, images and metaphors thrown up and conditioned by a particular series of historical events.” So, all biblical commentary is allegorical interpretation.

What we have in the gospels is a story about a movement against the puppet king of Galilee and then against the Roman Prefect of Judaea, but deliberately allegorized to disguise the underlying sedition, which would have been quite unacceptable to the Romans. In case no one noticed, Christianity was unacceptable to the Roman authorities anyway, and remained so for 300 years, but over that time, the allegory fooled enough ordinary people that it was a true history of an innocent and misunderstood man, that the religion eventually became institutionalized as the state religion. Thereafter, the allegory was institutionalized as history! Any counter evidence was carefully destroyed or suitably edited.

That the parables of Jesus require decoding is implied by the refrain: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

In the parable of the sower, the harvest is unnaturally large. Even the lowest, 30 fold is hugely optimistic. A typical yield would have been eight times. The harvest is therefore an allegorical benefit of unimaginable value. The details of the lost sowings are also allegorical. Yet C H Dodd in *Parables of the Kingdom* says Jesus "did not feel the need for making up artificial illustrations for the truths he wished to teach." Professor Matthew Black thought the parables were allegories and said of Dodd that he "managed to get the benefit of allegory while denying that it is allegory."

In the Unmerciful Servant (Mt 18:23-35), the servant owed 10,000 talents! Each talent is 10,000 denarii, the pay of a day labourer. A days pay today, for the poorest labourer would be at least £25. So this servant owed over two billion pounds or 4 billion dollars. He was a rich servant, by any standards. The debt is unimaginably huge! The tribute of Galilee and Peraea (Herod Antipas's kingdom) in 4 BC, according to Josephus was 200 talents. The parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, the Great Feast (Mt 22:1-13), The Ten Virgins (Mt 25:1-12) are all unnatural and unrealistic.

Professor E J Tinsley of Leeds University saw long ago that the "mission of Jesus had been allegorized" in the gospels, "to make it contemporary," he believed. "To make them acceptable," is the truth.

Jacob Neusner in *Rabbinic Literature and the New Testament. What We Cannot Show We Do Not Know*, criticises Christians for:

- failing carefully and critically to analyse the literary and historical traits of every pericope adduced as evidence;
- assuming that things happened exactly as the sources allege;
- using anachronistic or inappropriate analogies and the introduction of irrelevant issues.

In short, Christian belief boils down to:

"What you do not know,
You do not have to show.
Just say... and it is so."

It is obviously quite impossible to reason with such people although Jews, pace Neusner, are scarcely any different. “Belief” is irreconcilable with reason. Rational people must want to examine the origins of their beliefs and show that they are well founded. They must be sufficiently curious to wish to examine the relevant Christian texts to justify and confirm their views. They must be willing to look at the books of the New Testament in their human and historical context, accepting that, if God inspired their composition, it would shine through. Equally, if it does not, they must be willing to accept the Christian holy books are merely the work of men wilfully or misguidedly duping their fellows. Would God want us to believe it if it were not true?

Pilate said: What is truth? Whatever we accept as the truth of Christian origins, there is sure to be a deeper truth waiting to be discovered. Why should anyone fear it? My purpose here is to offer the Christian story from the viewpoint of a skeptic—to show that it is possible to interpret the facts offered to us by the early Christian writers in a non-mystical, non-supernatural way, and thereby recover from the Christian gospels the remnants of historical truth.

But the gospels themselves offer serious problems to any rational interpretation.

Christian “Scholars”

Modern Christian “scholars” apparently only want to tackle easy problems—in other words, anything that is not a problem. This is the meaning of “scholar” applied to a Christian student of the bible. They do not want to risk discovering something that might rock the holy boat. They want to be free to babble to their heart’s content secure in the knowledge that their scholarly peers will approve—so long as they do not actually try to discover any truths about biblical history or myth.

These “scholars” like to place tags of disapproval upon anyone who really tries to formulate serious, testable theses about the New Testament. The long accepted theory is the “Two Document” theory that the synoptic gospels were based on Mark’s gospel and another work, now lost, called “Q.” This theory superseded an earlier theory called the “Griesbach Hypothesis.”

Now, no one imagines that the synoptic gospel writers took their sources, whatever they were, wrote and handed to the general public the final version of their gospels—the ones we can read today. Christians might like to think that God inspired the writing of gospels, so the process was quite straightforward, but no objective scholar ever believed this. The gospels have obviously been changed frequently by deliberating editing or by copying errors since they were first written, and it is not even clear that the gospels of Mark and Luke even existed in an agreed form at first. There is good reason for thinking that both could have existed initially as a draft form (proto-Mrk and proto-Luke) and this was worked up by many hands into the books we now have. A similar scheme applies too to Matthew which was originally not at all like the gospel we now have but was a collection of sayings, perhaps a version of the document called “Q.” This was combined with Mark, to give a fuller, richer and more polished gospel and this was edited by many editors before it reached the modern form.

Plainly, at a time when books were not easily made, earlier drafts might have been kept in circulation even though they were strictly superseded by a later version. So, though the authors of Matthew and Luke drew on Mark and “Q,” neither Mark nor Q might have been the latest version. Not long afterwards, incomplete versions of all three synoptic gospels might have been around, and some editors might have transferred stories from one to the other for the sake of harmony.

None of this detracts from the basic thesis that the synoptics are composed of Mark and Q, but suggest the process was not simple. Yet, Christian “scholars” disparage the “Two Document” thesis as “simplistic,” a deliberate implication that those who accept it—unlike the sophisticated “scholars,” Christian ones—are simple.

Christian scholars are intent on doing what they have successfully but dishonestly done for millennia—muddying the waters as soon as proper scholars begin to clear them a little. These clever Christians tell the simpletons that the Two Document hypothesis cannot account for the complexities of the gospel texts. They are playing to the gallery of their own gullible followers who will guffaw at the slight on the critics—God 1 – the Devil 0. Christian mainliners preserve their fix against the nasty thought police who want to dissuade them from their addiction and, instead, hand out a little truth in pure, unsanctified needles. The truth is that those who paint the absurd picture of the Two Document hypothesis are its detractors, and, like all drug dealers, it is for their usual self-seeking and dishonest reasons.

The Two Document hypothesis successfully explains most of the perceived relations between the synoptic gospels, and more successfully than rival theories, but problems remain. The explanation will never be known because it lies long ago, but there are no problems that cannot be solved on the basis of the Two Document hypothesis followed by editorial attempts at harmonisation. The reason that Christians do not like the Two Document hypothesis is that it reduces the evidence of Jesus to Mark's gospel which lacks the dead Jesus walking around with holes in his hands, feet, head and side, showing them off to everyone he can find.

As rational people we might wish to discover what we can about the origin of Christianity from the evidence, but not much evidence remains other than the works long ago categorized by Christian bishops as canonical, which is to say those which they deemed acceptable for general consumption. Most evidence deemed unacceptable has been destroyed. Not simply lost, decayed or despoiled by the ravages of time but destroyed by the Christians themselves! Anything that has not been destroyed has been savaged by early Christian editors until it is difficult to know what was original and what has been interpolated or re-written.

Most Christians who are not theologians do not realize this. They do not realize that the gospels were not written as accurate records for the archives but purely to persuade people to believe. They were not written as historical documents but to recruit converts, just as modern holiday brochures are written to persuade people to spend their money. Like the exaggerated colours of the brochures, gospel stories could be mainly hype, and gentle Jesus simply a glossy picture to attract new punters!

Nor are the earliest Christian records those which appear first in the New Testament, the gospels, but some of Paul's epistles. The earliest of Paul's epistles may have been written only a few decades after the crucifixion, in about 52 AD. But Paul's letters tell us almost nothing about Jesus, the person. Indeed the absence of detail about the life of the founder of Christianity by his most important apostle seems astonishing.

Paul can say very little about Jesus:

- he was a Jew of the line of David—Paul knew of no divine impregnation—and was the first of many children;

- he started the tradition of the Eucharist;
- he was crucified;
- he rose from the dead on the third day;
- he appeared to various people after his resurrection, including a multitude;
- he had died before Paul was converted and Paul never met him.

Paul overcame the last impediment by claiming a superior way of knowing Jesus—supernaturally! Paul apparently was a medium. From time to time he would fall into a trance and have visions of the risen Jesus telling him where the chosen apostles were going wrong!

Paul uses very little of the life or teaching of Jesus because he did not know it and thought it irrelevant anyway. Paul was preaching his own message. For Paul a belief in the risen Christ was all that was needed for salvation. Whatever Jesus thought while he lived simply did not matter to Paul, and Paul could not know what was attributed by the church to Christ later. These are the reasons why much of the teaching of Jesus seems mysterious, and even contradict Christianity as it has come to us via Paul. If you believe in the risen Christ, you are saved so what does it matter what Jesus taught?

Nor do Paul's epistles refer to written accounts of the life of Jesus. If they existed, it is inconceivable that Paul would never have quoted from them when it suited him. We can safely conclude that the gospels did not exist in documentary form when Paul wrote his letters. Paul's epistles were written around 50–60 AD whereas the earliest narrative gospels are from around 60–90 AD. Paul had no gospels but at some stage the gospel writers or editors discovered Paul. They could make use of Paul's teaching and also incorporate the theory and practice of the church as it had evolved in the years following the death of Jesus.

Why was it not until about 30 years after the traditional date of Jesus's death in 33 AD that the earliest written accounts of his mission appeared?

The Jewish disciples of Jesus, the Nazarenes, considered the second coming—in Greek, *parousia*—and the end of the world as imminent and regarded it as a pointless exercise to record the events of Jesus's life. For the same reason the apostles—preachers not writers—practised an oral tradition rather than any written one. Being Jewish, the apostle's teachings initially were transmitted orally in Aramaic, the Jewish vernacular of the time, a semitic language related to Hebrew and Arabic. The dominant themes of the early church were the passion, the resurrection and the impending return of the messiah. Whatever the apostles knew about these, they would have told. They would have been less interested in events preceding the week of the passion. Nor would they have been too concerned about any peripheral teaching of the fledgling god. The first Christians were not expecting to have to teach teachers.

Only as time passed and the second coming did not arrive did those who retained their faith decide to write down details of the passion, and then other details of Christ's life and thought. The original oral tradition of the Nazarenes became a written tradition.

Accounts in the form we now have them were years later still. By then the stories had been told many times, the tellers of the stories, missionaries, had dispersed to many lands, and the stories had become stylized and idealized.

The first Christian missionaries, the evangelists and those who preceded them—a church already existed at Rome when Paul arrived there—had founded many Christian churches in the Roman Empire. These different churches produced different holy books. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD no single church had any special seniority. Some, like the church of Alexandria in Egypt, consisted largely of Jewish Christians who felt better able to understand the teachings of a Jew than the essentially gentile congregations of other churches like that at Rome where the Jewish War had left a bad impression and local Christians were keen to play down the Jewish origins of their religion.

These different congregations saw Jesus in different ways. Jewish converts who did not revert to Judaism, were interested in the thought of Jesus, essentially Jesus the rabbi, and therefore keen on his sayings. The gentile churches including those set up by Paul were interested in the dying and resurrected god and had little interest in Jesus's life otherwise. Others saw parallels between Jesus and Orpheus or Adonis and it became expedient to write in appropriate stories and parables.

Some Christian historians think different followers of Jesus specialized in different aspects of Jesus's ministry. One collected parables, another miracles, another passion narratives, and so on. Evidence of this is taken to be the prologue of Luke in which he refers to a number of writers who have established the facts of the religion as handed down by the original eyewitnesses. Luke is admitting he had earlier sources—earlier gospels—but, because they were omitted from the canon, they have since been lost, though fragments are discovered from time to time. It seems likely, however, that if these were systematic collections of any sort then they preceded Jesus. They would have been collections of messianic scriptural prophecies and testimonia which the gospel writers indiscriminately applied to Jesus.

The results of the divers sources and interests of the writers were a number of variant accounts which at first circulated separately in particular communities. Among them were the four gospels or their prototypes which the church later defined as being authoritative but which were evidently not accepted by Christian writers until after 140 AD to judge by citations by early churchmen. The acceptance of the four gospels by the church does not mean they were the most original or the most accurate accounts. It means they were the ones that best suited the growth of the church in its Roman milieu.

For these reasons the four canonical gospels are not reliable. Unauthentic elements were incorporated into them. For example, the personal views of the evangelists were written into the gospels because the translator or scribe had no way of knowing whether something was true or the evangelist's opinion. They were heavily and clumsily edited by their authors and by later theologians who felt they could be improved in this or that small way.

Some gospels, like Luke, are not at all in their original form. They contain anachronisms—confusing Nazarene beliefs with what the church at a later date wanted converts to believe. Matthew 16:18–19, on the role of Peter when Jesus says: upon this rock I will build my church, notes a later concern of the church not a concern of Jesus, who believed the world was about to be renewed under the direct rule of God. But no single editor ever had the authority to rewrite all the holy texts to eliminate contradictions. That was to be a boon for the church, allowing it to do as it wished, always able to quote some bit of scripture in justification, but it is also a boon for the inquirer because ad hoc editing leaves inconsistencies that can be revealing.

What editing happened before 140 AD or so, is unknown but considerable. Even after 140 AD variations continued to be introduced because the fourth century codices, the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus, differ in important respects.

Why, you might ask, are we so fussy about the reliability of the New Testament books? Our oldest copies of Herodotus and Thucydides are only hundreds of years old yet we do not question the accuracy of their every word. And there are many more manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts of the gospels preserved from long ago than of any other book. Surely such fussiness is unwarranted.

The answer is that Herodotus and Thucydides are not the sacred books of millions of people who believe they are the true word of God. The copyists of Herodotus and Thucydides had little reason to alter them, whereas the copyists of the New Testament texts had every reason to alter the holy books to suit church politics and to match its changing dogmata. Deliberate alterations were made to the gospels within only a few years of their being written. Earlier drafts of the gospels are now lost and lost versions could explain some of the puzzles of the connections between the gospels. But even the completed versions were altered in parts by later editors and copyists.

Still, the gospels were written successively and the evolution of theology can be seen from gospel to gospel, Jesus growing, for example, from the modest son of man of Mark into the fully fledged god cast in the eastern saviour mould of John. Jesus's own message of a personal repentance from sin to join the elect of God and secure entry into the coming kingdom was replaced by Paul's innovations, redemption from original sin by irrational faith mediated by the power and ritual of the church. The paraphernalia and dogmas of the church were constructed in imitation of rival religions or through political necessity not from any prescriptions of Jesus. When christologically advanced concepts appear in the gospels they were probably inserted by a later editor.

The skeptic therefore takes the view that anything in the Christian scriptures which seems inappropriate or contradicts church doctrine is likely to be a remnant of the original tradition that has escaped editorial correction. An inquirer will examine the culture of first century Palestine and will believe the gospel account when it agrees with the culture of Palestine at that time. Otherwise he will doubt it just as he would doubt the authenticity of a Roman bicycle pump.

The Gospel of John

Christians might believe that in the gospels they have independent accounts of the ministry of Jesus. One observer, they might argue, could have been mistaken but could four? Regrettably examination of the texts tends to explode this argument. One expects different accounts of the same events to tell broadly the same story, but when the common material extends to the same word order, vocabulary and grammatical peculiarities one begins to suspect copying. The four gospel writers are not independent witnesses.

The one which does seem to be independent of the others in large measure is the last in the New Testament and the last one completed. The first three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because they tell essentially the same story—they have the same viewpoint. John is quite different from the other three, omitting—apparently deliberately—much of their content. The author seemed to feel another full account could serve no purpose but that there was scope for refinements—doctrinal clarifications and additional material to answer criticisms. The author of John was writing a work to complement the synoptics.

The high prestige of John for Christians partly comes from Paul's description of John in Galatians 2:9 as one of the pillar apostles, the others being Peter and James, but it is unlikely that John the apostle wrote it. Very little, if any, of the New Testament is written by people who knew the Son of God in person. Despite its own claims, the signs are that it was written late, so long after the events it records that the apostle John must certainly have been dead. John could have been written as early as 100 AD or some say, certainly mistakenly, as late as 160 AD. It is not mentioned by Papias or Marcion writing about 140 AD and Justin Martyr only quotes from it tentatively in 163–167 AD as if he knew his readers would not regard it as authoritative. Not until the third century did it become generally accepted.

John propagates a well developed theological outlook, its parts being linked together as a uniform whole to a much greater extent than the other gospels. It is more than the set of pericopes—units of oral tradition—that can be seen in the synoptic gospels. John is more didactic, philosophical and theological than the synoptics. It is mainly discourse rather than narrative, and depicts Jesus as giving lengthy disquisitions rather than the homely sayings and parables of the other gospels. These long connected discourses suggest the source was a programme of sermons, possibly derived from originals by the evangelist, which were worked up by authorities in one of the regional churches.

The history of the church is of doctrine becoming more and more elaborate not of it being simplified. Furthermore the evolution of Jesus from man to messiah to divinity to equality with the Almighty places John late in the timescale—advanced elements would not be lost once established so it could not have preceded the synoptics.

As it adds at a late date much that is not in the other gospels and is overlaid with later theology, it can only be used as a secondary source.

The material peculiar to John is the miracle at Cana, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, healing a cripple and a blind man in Jerusalem, raising Lazarus, washing the feet of the disciples, the farewell discourses, parts of the passion and the prologue. We must treat these additions with skepticism not least because Matthew and particularly Luke obviously made determined attempts to pull together every particular of tradition they could find, and yet never heard of such an astonishing event as the raising of Lazarus. In John this was so amazing a miracle it was the reason for Jesus being crucified, so it could hardly have been forgotten by those interviewed by Matthew and Luke.

Unlike the synoptics Jesus's messiahdom is recognized very early (Jn 1:14). Yet in John 6:15, when the multitude want to make Jesus king, he refuses to accept, taking measures to evade the crowd. The cleansing of the temple and the anointing are in a different setting and order from the other gospels and there is little verbal agreement with them. But John is very free with the rendering of his Old Testament quotations and it is possible that he was equally free with his rendering of the bits of the synoptic gospels he chose to use. The title Son of man is less used than in the synoptics—Son of God is favoured.

Besides these, John's chronology has been mixed up, either by him for doctrinal reasons or by editors, or perhaps by accident—some pages look as though they have been interchanged for no clear reason. In several places in John transpositions would improve the flow of the text. The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the immediate cause of Jesus's arrest not the cleansing of the temple, which occurs near the start of the gospel, but some scholars think John 2.13b–25 has been misplaced and should really be after the raising of Lazarus thus restoring the cleansing of the temple to its proper place. Possibly an editor attempted to answer the criticism that Jesus's behaviour in the temple was an act of banditry and redolent of rebellion by deliberately moving it earlier in the story.

The date of the last supper in the synoptics and John differ. In the synoptics it is a Passover meal but in John it is one day before. This difference might be due to the Nazarenes' use of a different calendar, the solar calendar of the Essenes prescribed in Jubilees not the lunar one of Jerusalem. Or perhaps the synoptics used the reckoning of Jews in the diaspora in which the Passover was fixed not varying according to the phase of the moon. But even this puzzle, which John creates, looks less like calendrical confusion than that John thought it suited God's purpose to depict Jesus as the paschal lamb—simply altering the chronology to have him crucified on the day when the lambs were being sacrificed in readiness for the Passover. Some scholars take all John's references to time to be symbolic.

John is the most hostile of the three to the Jews, but it has more in common with Jewish mysticism than with Rabbinism. The author of John also allegedly wrote the Revelation of St John the Divine between 69 and 93 AD, which, being an apocalypse, is in the style of the Essenes. It was always controversial, Marcion rejected it, Jerome as late as 420 AD rejected it, but Justin Martyr accepted it and gradually it became accepted universally. It is difficult for the modern mind to understand how such mumbo-jumbo continues to be included in the Christian canon but, since no one now has the authority to change God's Bible, it is easier to ignore it, or leave it to fundamentalists, who love it! Historically it is valuable, being largely Essene.

Since the discovery of the Qumran scrolls—dubbed the Dead Sea Scrolls from the proximity of the site to the Dead Sea—about fifty years ago in the Judaeen wilderness, we now realize the gospel of John also has Essene features and vocabulary. Concepts like light and truth, previously thought to be Hellenistic, are found in the scrolls as is the contrast of light against darkness. There are parallels with the *Hermetica* of Hermes Trimegistus in Egypt in the second and third centuries AD and some common imagery in the work of Philo of Alexandria such as the metaphors for God of light, fountain and shepherd. Philo also uses the concept of the Logos.

John might contain therefore some elements of genuine Nazarene tradition, treated from a different perspective from the other three gospels—but, being the last and the most highly developed in its thinking, John remains historically the least reliable of the gospels. John still has to be treated with the most caution, and especially where it reports remarkable incidents that no one else ever heard of.

The Synoptic Problem

Matthew, Mark and Luke are earlier than John but are not at all independent. Indeed in some respects they are so similar they create a problem of their own, called by scholars, the synoptic problem. The problem is to explain the following facts.

- These three gospels have much common material. Matthew covers 90% of Mark! These two have 250 verses in common, many containing the same words and phrases. Only seven short passages of Mark fail to appear in Matthew. Luke contains almost 50% of Mark but misses out the whole chunk of Mark 6:45 to 8:26. Only four passages of Mark, about 30 verses, are not covered in either Matthew or Luke.
- In about half of the material common to all three, the grammar and phraseology and even unusual vocabulary are often the same. Compare for example the following three passages from the synoptic gospels.

“...and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and they said unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? or who gave thee this authority to do these things? And Jesus said unto them, I will ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we should say, Of men; they feared the people: for all verily held John to be a prophet. And they answered Jesus and say, We know not. And Jesus saith unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”
(Mark 11:27–33)

“And when he was come into the temple, the chief Priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question, which if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the multitude; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We know not. And he also said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”
(Matthew 21:23–27)

“...as he was teaching the people in the temple, and preaching the gospel, there came upon him the Chief Priests and the scribes with the elders, and they spake, saying unto him, Tell us: By what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one question; and tell me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why did ye not believe

him? But if we shall say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they knew not whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.” (Luke 20:1–8)

- These passages are effectively identical. Not only are they from the same source they are copied almost unaltered.
- Matthew and Mark often agree when Luke differs and Luke and Mark sometimes agree when Matthew differs but in each case the order of the common material is nearly always the same. There is also a body of material in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark, mostly the teachings of Jesus with little narrative and no passion. Again the similarity often extends to wording but Matthew and Luke rarely agree when Mark differs.
- On the other hand there are parts where the same events in Matthew and Luke are given very different settings and quite different vocabulary is used, as in the healing of the centurion's servant (Mt 8:5ff; Lk 7:1ff).
- Matthew and Luke often include doublets, accounts of apparently the same event with slight differences. Each of these two gospels also have aspects peculiar to themselves: Luke's travel narrative is largely his own (9:51–18:14) whereas Matthew groups his material into five themes.

As long ago as 1778 G E Lessing attempted to solve the synoptic problem by proposing that the gospels were different translations of an original Aramaic gospel—the story of Jesus told by his companions and early Jewish followers. But the best explanation is that two of the gospel writers used the work of the other, and, where they used it, they copied it virtually word for word. Since Matthew and Luke between them contain almost the whole of Mark, we can deduce that Mark was the original gospel and the other gospel writers had sight of it before they completed their own versions. The reasons are as follows.

- We have seen that, in the sections common to all three synoptic gospels, passages are constructed too similarly to be independent.
- Mark's order is followed in both Matthew and Luke. The differences in Matthew are because Matthew has consciously grouped his material into five themes yet this order is not reflected in Luke or Mark. Since only seven short passages of Mark do not appear in Matthew, evidently Matthew had Mark to work from and incorporated nearly all of it into his own account. We saw that Luke covers almost half of Mark, usually retaining the same order.

- Matthew and Luke are more concise than Mark. Mark has six verses to describe how Jesus healed in crowds by driving out the unclean spirits (Mk 3:7–12). In Matthew only two verses are required and in Luke only three (Mt 12:15–16 and Lk 6:17–19). They also usually improve Mark's style by omitting unusual words and unwieldy grammatical constructions. These are signs that Mark has been edited in Matthew and Luke.
- Though Mark is more verbose he is often less precise, as when he calls Herod a king in Mk 6:14 although, as Matthew and Luke correctly state, he was only a tetrarch (Mt 14:1 Lk 9:7). Mark has been corrected in Matthew and Luke so must have come first.
- As the gospels became aimed at an increasingly gentile audience editors would be expected to eliminate Aramaic words. Mark has more Aramaic words in the sayings of Jesus than Matthew and Luke. Also Mark was not writing for Jews because he explains Jewish customs like handwashing (Mk 7:3–4) and defines the Aramaic words and phrases he uses—unless it is expedient not to.
- Mark is more honest in his accounts, showing Jesus with a full range of human emotions and even some foibles. Mark says Jesus could do no mighty work in Nazareth (Mk 6:5), Matthew says not many (Mt 13:58) and Luke omits it. In the stilling of the storm Mark is definite in his wording, Do you still have no faith? compared with Luke's, Where is your faith? and Matthew's, You of little faith (Mk 4:40 Mt 8:26 Lk 8:25). Humanity fades in later editions as the man receded and the god advanced.

Modern biblical analysts do not doubt that the similarities between the synoptic gospels must imply common sources, but was it a single one? Many scholars postulate two written sources for Matthew and Luke—Mark and a source labelled by scholars Q. Thus the doublets mentioned above can be explained as accounts from both Q and Mark that differed sufficiently for Matthew or Luke to want to include both.

Luke and Matthew were not named as the authors of their gospels until Irenaeus did so in 180 AD. Such late assignments cast doubt on their validity.

The Gospel of Matthew

Though sophisticated Christians today prefer John, Matthew was considered the most important of the gospels for almost the whole history of the church. It was placed first in the canon because of the regard in which it was held.

Matthew is the most Jewish of the gospels and probably reflects most strongly the ambience of the Jerusalem Church. Jewish customs and words are not explained as they are in Mark and, in that sense it seems to anticipate a Jewish readership. Some see this strong Jewish flavour as proof of its authenticity. Others dislike it as signs of the work of Judaizers, a mythical breed of early Jewish Christians who tried to deny the innovations introduced by the Son and revert to good old Mosaic Jewishness. Despite Judaizers and its Jewish tone, it propagates the Hellenized view of the Christ—that conditioned by Greek culture—rather than the Jewish view of the messiah. It does not use as many Aramaisms as does Mark and most of his quotations are from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the scriptures, both of which could point to the source of Matthew being a city like Alexandria or Antioch where Jewish communities had long been Hellenized. Jewish Christians were reverting to orthodox Judaism as time went by with no sign of the kingdom appearing. Attempts were made to stem the ebbing of the tide in vain. Even in these largely Jewish cities, the gentile theology of Paul began to dominate, and Jesus had to become divine—but in Matthew it was Jews who recognized it—the disciples not the Roman.

There are thematic indications that Matthew is Essenic in nature, and so it is not unreasonable to believe that Matthew did have its origin in one of these cities. Nazarenes, escaping the troubles in Palestine after the crucifixion, dispersed to various centres where their brothers the Essenes had strong communities. The author seems not to be defying or negating the Jewish religion but rather is showing here is a thoroughly Jewish faith of a firmly established church. Matthew is a polemic with the rabbis of the synagogues—a polemic which continues the polemic of the Essenes with the Pharisees. His purpose is exactly that of the sectarians of Qumran—he is stating categorically that only the elect, formerly the Essenes but now the Christians, will enter the kingdom of God.

Matthew is more carefully constructed than the other gospels. It has many similarities with the Damascus Rule of the scrolls. Though not being quite so obviously a manual of rules, there are rules in it—most notably in the sermon on the mount. And, like the Damascus Rule, it gives some history of the foundation of the movement and some exhortations or discourses—in Matthew they end with the formula, ...and it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings—each being devoted to a topic: the sermon on the mount, a missionary discourse, a parable discourse, a church discourse, and an eschatological discourse, thus serving as a vade mecum for members, as the Damascus Rule did.

Matthew is keen to show Jesus—who is a parallel figure to Moses—as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. His approach is akin to the peshar method of commentating on scripture favoured by the Qumran community whereby current events are interpreted as prophesied by the scriptures. Matthew has five scriptural references in the birth narrative to show that prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. Matthew's use of these quotations is rarely precise. He does just what the sectarians of Qumran did—change the quotation subtly to suit his purpose.

The original draft of Matthew might have been written in Alexandria where many of the survivors of the fall of Jerusalem settled because of its proximity and its large Jewish population—a third of its population of three million—or Antioch where an early church was established possibly based on an existing Essene community. Its strong emphasis on the leadership of Peter in the years immediately after the crucifixion (in Matthew, Peter is granted special authority) suggests it arose in a Jewish milieu where Peter was revered, Antioch being the place of choice. Matthew is the only gospel to mention a church (Mt 16:18; 18:17), certainly a late interpolation, though it might be based on the word used by the Essenes, often translated congregation. Matthew also shows late influences in the concluding passages (Mt 28:18–20).

It seems odd that Matthew, a Jewish composition, should lean so heavily upon Mark, a gentile composition, as it obviously does. The explanation can only be that Mark carried great authority, and that authority traditionally is that Mark is really the Gospel of Peter, Peter having related it to Mark. Matthew could forgive Mark his clumsy style, Latinisms and other foibles because he was passing on the words of the man who had been Jesus's minder.

An aim of Matthew seems to have been to answer criticisms and to do so he concocts unlikely explanations. The reluctance of John the Baptist to baptize Jesus and the guards at the tomb serve to explain respectively that John the Baptist recognized Jesus as superior and that the disciples could not have stolen the body. Similarly narratives of Peter walking on water, Judas bargaining for silver and Pilate washing his hands serve respectively to boost Peter, damn the Jews as money-grabbing traitors and absolve Romans of any responsibility for torturing a god.

The infancy narrative seems to answer charges of Jesus's illegitimacy. The flight to Egypt and subsequent return parallels Moses and the children of Israel's sojourn there in the scriptures, but Jesus's family return to Nazareth, instead of Bethlehem, providing an explanation for Jesus's title—the Nazarene. Some wiseacres in the Empire might have remembered that the Nazarenes were a group of Jewish revolutionaries so an innocent explanation of the title was needed. In like fashion, modern apologists, embarrassed by Jesus so plainly stating that to be rich is to be a sinner, have invented a narrow gate in the walls of Jerusalem called the Needle's Eye. There is no historical evidence for any such gate. Jesus's metaphor is paralleled several times in the Jewish Talmud which also has large animals attempting to do incredible things serving as visual images of the impossible.

Scholars have long recognized that Matthew had at hand a collection of citations written in Aramaic because he punctuates his narrative at various points with the formula, ...this happened in order to fulfil what was said by the prophet. This collection they called the Logia. Such collections existed in the Jewish world, for example in one of the Qumran testimonia documents in which three sections consist of quotations of messianic prophecies and the fourth is from the apocryphal Psalms of Jonah. Their use suggests the author was a member of a sect like the Essenes. According to the biblical scholar, Donald Guthrie, if Matthew belonged to a group which, like the men of Qumran were devoted to such exegesis, it is easy to see how many of the texts would spring naturally to his mind when he was writing the narrative. In Matthew the Logia is combined with Mark's account to create a richer synthesis than Mark alone. But since it was not completed until around 100 AD, the apostle Matthew cannot have had any part in the final editing. Additions continued to be made for another 100 years.

A church Father, Papias allegedly affirmed that Matthew collected oracles or sayings—the Logia—which were translated by others as best they could. He says the Logia was a collection of Jesus's sayings compiled by Matthew for the use of Christian teachers—it was indeed a manual. The version used by the gospel writers was probably a good Greek translation of the original Aramaic. Scholars consider it was assembled 25–30 years before the gospels and some clergymen believe it might actually have been collected in Jesus's lifetime. Much of it seems to have been in practical form, and, because its allusions are often rural, believers consider they give an insight into Jesus's character.

Now we can see that the Logia preceded Jesus, deriving from a collection of Essene liturgy, prayers, testimonia, maxims and orders, probably arranged in five parts to reflect the five books of the Pentateuch, inspiring Matthew's fivefold arrangement, and apparently an early catechism or manual of discipleship. Its rural character arose because the Essenes were farmers and herdsman. The source called Q is essentially the Logia but Luke evidently left out much of it as being too Jewish—emphasis on the fulfilment of the law, remarks about the lost sheep of the house of Israel, some sayings and testimonia, and perhaps some anti-Pharisaic material. Matthew's apocalypse is much longer than Mark's and eschatology also shows in the parables of the tares and the talents suggesting a pronounced Essene influence.

There is much in Matthew to value though it is not a Greek translation of the Aramaic Gospel of the Nazarenes. If Matthew belonged to a community of Nazarenes then even his collection of oracles will be of interest in understanding them although they might not help us greatly in settling the narrative sequence.

The Gospel of Luke

The gospel of Luke also is not independent. Luke is thought to have been a doctor, the companion of Paul on his travels. So, he was neither an eyewitness of the events he describes nor the secretary of one, as was Mark—Paul only met Jesus in his imagination. If Luke was the companion of Paul, the two did not communicate a great deal because Luke does not seem to use Paul's epistles or understand Jesus in quite the Pauline way.

Luke evidently was an educated man whose Greek was good, though not classical (writers of literary Greek always copied the classical style) and who, by his own account, did some research before writing. The prologue to Luke's gospel says he used the works of a number of writers who had recorded the memories of the original disciples of Jesus. By the time he put it all together, Christians had long abandoned the idea of an early parousia. Luke was well versed in the Septuagint. He also wrote Acts, both his books being written for gentiles.

Luke arguably had knowledge of Antiquities of the Jews written in 93 AD by the Jewish historian, Josephus, and Acts is usually dated at about 100 AD, but some consider it could have been much earlier. Acts ends tantalizingly with Paul awaiting trial in Rome in around 64 AD suggesting to some theologians that the work was written about then. But Paul's fate might not have been what the early church wanted to record, and the narrative in Acts might have been left deliberately unfinished. Though the events of Acts follow those of Luke, Acts—or parts of it—was probably drafted first. Luke would have written down first what he was familiar with—the history of his companion, Paul, so parts of Acts might be quite early but the gospel much later. The Acts of the Apostles was probably written by Luke in part as early as 64 AD. Luke himself or editors then tampered with it considerably.

Luke has much to say about the conversion of gentiles and gentiles are often painted in a good light. He is evidently a gentile writing for gentiles, but he is one who seems quite well versed in Essene ways of thinking. He shows every indication of being either an Essene proselyte of Stephen's Hellenistic wing of the Nazarenes, or a godfearer who had stood for a long time at the edge of the Essene movement, longing to join but not having the courage to be circumcised and grateful for Stephen's revisions of the law allowing gentiles to be admitted into a form of Judaism. He shows his Nazarene influence in his desire that people should repent, repentance being a central theme of Luke, but—like Stephen—he extends repentance beyond the Jews to everyone, and thus helps to universalize the narrow sectarianism of the Essenes. So there are dangers in accepting Luke as a primary source but indications that he was familiar with pre-crucifixion Essenism. Providing that care is taken to resist Luke's universalistic desire, evidence about the Nazarene mission can be gleaned from his gospel.

Luke uses Mark, that is plain, but is much less deferential towards it than Matthew. He renders some of the passages in Mark much more freely, as indeed he seems to with all his material, and omits quite a lot. Other curiosities of Luke are that the travel narrative gives little indication of an itinerary and that it gives unusual prominence to the role of women. Luke refers to Jesus as the Lord on 14 occasions—Mark and Matthew never do (except in the fictional dialogue of demons or angels) indicating that in Luke the split from Nazarene teaching was essentially complete.

Luke was often much freer with his material than one would expect of an editor—he was more a re-writer. Parts of Luke seem to be taken from both Mark and Matthew. Some scholars think that Luke used Mark and Matthew but regarded Matthew as only a secondary source much of which he rewrote. However most scholars believe that the material common to Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark came from the source Q which Luke as well as Matthew had before him as he wrote.

Comparison of the three synoptic gospels allows the missing source Q to be crudely reconstructed. If it were a collection of sayings, it ought to contain no narrative yet it seems to include the healing of the centurion's servant which Guthrie considers mystifying. The two accounts of the centurion's servant differ considerably, which might be explained if there were yet more sources besides Mark and Q. Other parts of Luke are similar to accounts in other gospels but are also different enough to suggest another source (Lk 24:1–12). These additional sources are called M and L. The narrative material independent of Mark could have been common to M and L leaving Q a collection of pure sayings. The additional source for Luke, L, comprises parables, isolated sayings and narrative material.

It must be remembered that some of the Logia might not have been used in either Matthew or Luke and is lost altogether, and some might have been used by one gospel writer but not the other so that M and L both are partly Logia—like the strongly Jewish material of Matthew omitted by Luke. The few sayings of Jesus in Paul's epistles, which we have seen pre-date the gospels, stem from Q—roughly the version of Matthew—suggesting it was the earliest Christian text. There is evidence for Q also in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas.

Naturally the problem is enormously complicated by later editing when copyists tried to harmonize the gospels or improve them for the sake of doctrine, and indeed by the possibility of there having been earlier editions, now lost, but in circulation before the ultimately accepted versions. Vincent Taylor, a professor of New Testament language and literature, convinces us that Luke combined Q and L to give a proto-Luke which he later combined with Mark when he came across that gospel. He reasons thus.

- Luke omits half of Mark suggesting he had other material he preferred.
- Luke's passion narrative contains only 20% of Mark also suggesting Luke had another source. When Mark's material is subtracted a continuous narrative remains. Luke changes Mark's order unusually often (12 instances between 22:14 and 24:11).

- The same seems to apply to Luke 21 (the eschatological discourse) where verses 20–34 at least are non-Markan but with insertions from Mark.
- Q material is often combined with L material but never with material from Mark which appears in distinct blocks suggesting it was added afterwards.
- In the main narrative of the ministry there are blocks of material from Mark alternating with other material. When the material from Mark is extracted a reasonably continuous story remains.
- The proto-Luke text lacked Galilean material, miracles and kingdom parables. These were inserted from Mark.
- Different words are used in the Greek for those rigidly adhering to the law: grammateus in the parts from Mark but nomikos in the other parts.

The dating in Luke 3:1 was the start of proto-Luke. The birth narrative was added later. Possibly Luke originally wrote proto-Luke-Acts together as one book with no knowledge of Mark's gospel. Later he came across it and added into proto-Luke what he thought was useful. An editor at some stage split off Acts as a different book and subsequently it was blown hither and thither by the zephyrs and whirlwinds of early church politics.

It seems then that there were two primary gospel sources but the authors of Matthew and Luke had additional material. The source of the gospel narrative was Mark. The second source was an unknown book of gospel sayings, labelled Q, which was known as the Logia.

The Jerusalem Church must have had a gospel and written it down in Aramaic as the Gospel of the Nazarenes. We know from Jerome this was still used by the Nazarene sect of Arabia in the fourth century. The Quran speaks of the Gospel, in the singular, which must have been the gospel of the Nazarenes evidently still existing in Arabia at the time of Muhammed in the seventh century and revered by local Christians. It was written in Aramaic. Ibn Ishaq, the first biographer of Muhammed, tells us in the eighth century that the Abyssinians, who were Christians, followed the same gospel as the Christians of Arabia but were circumcised, revered what was claimed to be the Ark of the Covenant and kept the laws of the Torah including the food taboos.

Some critics believe that a Nazarene Gospel existed even before Jesus and that his followers applied it to him after Jesus's crucifixion—a distinct possibility if the Nazarenes were inspired by Essenes. Ancient scholars identified the Nazarene Gospel with a version of Matthew and, if this is true, it probably contained little narrative. Essentially it would have been Q, a collection of sayings and testimonia of the type found at Qumran. Paul, who probably had this among the books he carried with him, would have been content with it since he ignored any stories about Jesus's life as irrelevant to the spiritual person wearing the body.

In the post-War years Robert Graves and Joshua Podro tried, by combining classical and Jewish scholarship, to restore this Nazarene Gospel rather fancifully. They rashly accepted all of the gospels as equally true, each relating genuine Nazarene tradition, and, together with bits of other books whether canonical like Acts or non-canonical like the Recognitions of Clementine, tried to restore the original as a rearranged and reinterpreted combination of them all!

My objective also is to try to retrieve the true events of the gospel but I shall be less rash. I do not accept the gospels as equally valid. The fourth gospel, John, seems to stem from a different tradition from the other three especially in its account of the last week in Jerusalem but is too late to be of primary interest. Matthew, Mark and Luke are not independent. Matthew and Luke are mostly based on Mark and Q but Q, though earlier, seems to be a collection of wise sayings with little or no narrative so can add relatively little to the story I seek to uncover which is largely narrative.

What is left is Mark's gospel.

The Priority of Mark

The missionaries to the gentiles spread stories about Jesus by preaching the “kerygma”, “that which is proclaimed”, the main characteristic of a gospel. That is how the sayings and deeds of Jesus got to Rome where someone wrote a gospel, to be attributed to Mark, between 65-71 AD. Mark's gospel was anonymous until a second-century tradition linked a “Mark” mentioned in the epistle 1 Peter 5:13 with the gospel.

Mark's gospel is simple, clumsy and breathless—everything happening “immediately—the author joins “pericopes” with the Greek word “euthus” meaning “immediately”. It suggests Mark is not familiar with Greek, simply meaning “then”. No one has yet thought of a reason why such a crude and clumsy work could have been adopted by the church while elegant writers like Matthew and Luke had already published their own versions. Mark's gospel must have been retained because it was the first one.

Mark is, according to Eusebius (writing around the beginning of the third century but quoting Papias who wrote about 130 AD), the interpreter and companion of Peter in his later travels. Perhaps Mark translated lessons given in Aramaic by Peter for the Greek speakers in the audience. At any rate Papias says he recorded in no particular order the old man's memories of the acts and sayings of Jesus. Mark was therefore not first hand. He had not known Jesus, but from Peter's sermons and anecdotes he was able to write his gospel shortly after Peter's death in about 64 AD.

The passages in Mark related in the third person plural might have been Peter's own words. Some of the adjacent material seems so closely related to it that, sensibly, it too should be included with that thought to have been Peter's. The rest of the material in Mark seems to be in well arranged blocks or pericopes suggesting already collected pre-Markan material. Inasmuch as Peter must have followed the Nazarene tradition in his sermons and the other material, being very early, can hardly have lost much of its original content, Mark should be closest to the true story of the Nazarenes.

Difficulties with the testimony of Papias are that Peter has no special significance in Mark's book and Mark's theology is Hellenized like Paul's. Matthew, the singularly Jewish gospel, uses Mark lending some credence to the view that Mark must have been based on the testimony of an authoritative Jewish figure—Peter—and possibly Peter emulated Jesus in his modesty, feeling little need to play up his own role. When Paul's influence waxed the gospel would have been edited to suit his outlook. It seems to have assumed a shape close to the present one by about 90 AD.

Christian scholarship is a type of treadmill. Christians keep plodding round the same material until the return to the conclusions they had long ago discarded. For over a hundred years most scholars have been satisfied that the shortest and clumsiest gospel, Mark's, was the first one—the Priority of Mark.

The gospel of Mark is considered the first written gospel, it has “priority” over Luke and Matthew because they used Mark in composing their own gospels twenty or so years later. They were more complete works and written in better Greek, so the early Church preferred them and neglected Mark. Mark is theologically the most primitive of the gospels, though it is not the most Palestinian—that is Matthew.

The hypothesis of the priority of Mark is that Mark wrote, then first Matthew and then Luke each used Mark independently as a source for their own gospels. We have seen Matthew and Luke have a lot of common material not in Mark, mainly sayings of Jesus, but with narrative material too. Where did this common material come from if Matthew and Luke wrote independently? This generated the Two-Source hypothesis. Matthew and Luke both used Mark but each had another source, largely of the sayings of Jesus, which is now lost. The lost source was noncommittally called “Qwelle” (“Q”), simply German for “source”.

In the introduction to his gospel, Luke admits that he had sources, saying that “many” including eyewitnesses had declared that which Christians believed. This has been taken to be evidence for his use of Mark and “Q” as main sources and other lesser ones. Streeter in 1926 expounded the Two-Source theory fully in his study of the origins of the gospels. Indeed he went further because some material in both Matthew and Luke are exclusive to each gospel and so must have been the authors’ own work or taken from further sources of which we know nothing. For 60 years, Streeter’s exposition was accepted almost universally.

Significantly, since it is considered the earliest gospel, Mark's gospel has a false ending—the so-called Markan Appendix. The last twelve verses (Mk 16:9–16:20) are not original. These last verses cannot be the recollections of Peter. Peter's story ends with the message of a young man in a white robe (the garment of the fully initiated Essene) sitting in Jesus's tomb that Jesus is risen and gone ahead of them to Galilee. Whereupon the disciples fled in fear and said nothing to anyone. No appearances! No ascension! How many Christians realize that all these essential notions of their religion are absent from the earliest version of Jesus's life?

None of the variant endings were the work of the original writer. A later editor, a long time after the original composition, considering the ending inappropriate, added the last eight verses in which Jesus appeared all over the place and then rose into heaven to be received at the right hand of God:

- many manuscripts end at verse 8; many have just two sentences added to the end of verse 8; some have both the two sentences and the twelve verses; some have another addition to Mark 16:14, the Frear Logion;
- None of the early Church fathers, Clement and Origen, mention anything after verse 16:8 when they could have strengthened an argument by so doing. And even Eusebius and Jerome in the fourth century did not know of the added twelve verses;

- the style and vocabulary cannot possibly be first century.

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary notes that the longer ending differs in vocabulary and style from the rest of the gospel, is absent from the best and earliest manuscripts now available, and was absent from manuscripts in patristic times. It is most likely a second-century compendium of appearance stories based primarily on Luke 24, with some influence from John 20.

The fourth-century AD Codex Sinaiticus is the only ancient Greek manuscript that contains the entire New Testament. It does not however have the Markan Appendix. In *Secrets of Mount Sinai*, James Bentley made this observation:

“The scribe who brought Mark's Gospel to an end in Codex Sinaiticus had no doubt that it finished at chapter 16, verse 8. He underlined the text with a fine artistic squiggle, and wrote, ‘The Gospel according to Mark’. Immediately following begins the Gospel of Luke.”

James H Charlesworth has pointed out that Codex Syriacus (a fifth-century translation), Codex Vaticanus (mid-fourth century), and Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (fourth or fifth-century Latin) are all early manuscripts that exclude the Markan Appendix. About 100 early Armenian translations and the two oldest Georgian translations also omitted the appendix. Manuscripts written after Sinaiticus and Vaticanus have been found that contained the Markan Appendix but with scribal notes in the margins that said the verses were not in older copies. Others have dots or asterisks by the verses to mark them as different.

The shorter ending consists of the women's reports to Peter and Jesus's commissioning of the disciples to preach the gospel. The non-Markan language and the weak manuscript evidence indicate that this passage did not close the gospel. The addition at Mark 16:14 of the longer ending is a late gloss aimed at softening the condemnation of the disciples in this verse. All the endings attached to Mark in the manuscript tradition were added because scribes considered 16:1-8 inadequate as an ending.

Some say they replace an original ending which was lost. That is not true. They were added because there were no appearances in the earliest tradition. The earliest gospel is unable to testify to the appearances. It ends perfectly well in the middle of verse 8 before anyone knew of appearances, but, without the appearances, the resurrection has no basis, and so theologians have to claim that they are accidentally missing. Mark was written before Paul or some early editor of his epistles had invented them.

Christians never liked Mark being the first gospel because it lacks these features that they hold dear—Jesus's appearances and the birth narratives. If these did not appear in the first gospel, the implication is they were invented for later ones. Christians always wanted Mark to be an abbreviated version of Matthew and Luke as once had been thought. The treadmill having revolved a turn, today Christian polemicists like William R Farmer champion the idea again—in the Two Gospel or Griesbach Hypothesis.

Its supporters believe the gospels were written in the order Matthew, Luke and Mark. Luke made use of Matthew and Mark made use of Matthew and Luke thus dispensing with Marcan priority and the hypothesised source “Q”. If Luke did not use Matthew directly, then material common to Matthew and Luke not derived from Mark, must be from the hypothetical source, “Q”. But, if “Q” did not exist because Luke had Matthew to hand, Farmer asserts the reasons for Marcan priority are not valid. There are also other theories that dispense with “Q” and Marcan priority. Here they are summarised.

- The Griesbach hypothesis—Matthew was copied by Luke, and Mark conflated them both—can explain the alternating support in order of pericopes of Mark by Matthew and Luke without appeal to “lost sources.” Its failing is providing a comprehensible account of Mark’s composition, particularly explaining Mark’s major omissions from his sources Matthew and Luke.
- Austin Farrer’s and Goulder’s theory of Marcan priority—Mark without “Q”—explains the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark by accepting Luke’s direct use of Matthew, dispensing with any need for “Q”, but it cannot explain the order in Mark in relationship to Matthew and Luke as well as can the Griesbach theory. Goulder is not convincing that “Q” can be abandoned. However, that Matthew used Mark and Luke used Mark and Matthew is more convincing than the previous hypothesis—that Mark used Matthew and Luke.
- The Boismard Multiple Source theory affords an explanation for agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark but it fails Occam’s Test. It is too complicated to be validated and seems less likely than the Goulder and Austin Farrer theory. Boismard takes us into the realm of conjecture, where everything is possible whereas the scientist tries to keep to the simplest of hypotheses to meet Occam’s razor. Nevertheless, the real history of the gospels will have been complicated.

Farmer’s lengthy article in support of the Two-Gospel hypothesis and attacking the Two-Source hypothesis (Synoptic Problem Seminar at SNTS, Copenhagen, Denmark, 4-8 August 1998) is savage but not convincing. He adopts a high scientific posture but omits much of the context. He pleads that his opponents atomize the gospels in analysing them and says, since the Synoptic Problem is the problem of explaining the agreement and disagreement between the Synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—it is important to see these three gospels as synoptic, together in the same view. Yet, he ignores the background of the early Christians as if it was so irrelevant as to be a distraction.

It is hard to analyze something without pulling it to pieces. Surely, that is an aspect of science. Nowadays the term used is “backward engineering”. The enemy aircraft is taken to pieces to find out how it can be synthesised—put back together again! No one pretends that an aircraft in bits can fly, but only by taking it to bits can the engineer understand how it flies.

Science has to work in different ways according to the circumstances. Its bases of observation, hypothesis and deduction are constant but the ways of testing hypotheses have to change. In experimental science, an experiment, devised to distinguish between hypotheses, tests them. Unfortunately, in history, palaeontology and textual criticism amongst others, experiments cannot often be carried out and the evidence is fixed pending new physical discoveries. In these cases, scientific criteria cannot be so strict. Christian scholars speak of “proof”, the more fundamental they are, the more affirmatively. Their own personal convictions are proof enough—they are certain, 100 per cent. They often demand the same degree of proof from scientific investigations. It is always impossible. However many times an event is observed there is no certainty it will happen in the same way next time.

We might never know for certain which gospel was first. The evidence is conflicting. The churches always took it to be Matthew, and the only reason that was doubted was because it posed problems in conjunction with our reading of the other synoptic gospels. Unless we unearth an unequivocal statement that So-and-so’s gospel was the first, or an indisputable statue to So-and-so the author of the first gospel, we are unlikely to be able to certainly deduce which of them came first. We have to take the balance of the evidence, and the evidence will be unbalanced to different people to different degrees. Most scholars still use the Two-Source Hypothesis because the other ideas offer even greater problems.

Marcan Priority and “Q”

Since the point of Farmer’s article is to attack Marcan priority let us, briefly, recapitulate the arguments for it.

- Mark is the shortest gospel. If it is a synopsis of Matthew and Luke, why were much loved verses from both like the Good Samaritan and the Sermon on the Mount, not to mention either birth narrative, omitted while Jesus’s foibles are included? It is more feasible to believe it is both shortest and partial because other traditions had not yet been invented or collected.
- Mark is the least polished and most vivid suggesting its early date as the recollections of an eyewitness—traditionally, Peter.
- Mark’s text is altered in Matthew for good reasons. His Greek was poor, his knowledge of Palestine poor, he was critical of both Jesus and the disciples, and he was often unclear. Streeter argued for Marcan primacy from Matthew’s tendency to improve Mark’s style. Later evangelists expunge Mark’s frank descriptions. If Mark followed Matthew and Luke, it is nigh on impossible to imagine why the developing church would want to adopt such a poor gospel compared with the ones it already had. Sanders and Margaret Davies say that though no one can recover ancient intentions, there are strong objections to accepting Griesbach’s Mark as the third gospel, though they do not rule it out.
- Occasionally Matthew alters Mark then fails to make a necessary later change to match. In Matthew 14:5 Herod was only stopped from murdering John the Baptist because of the crowds who thought him a prophet. Incongruously, in verse 14:9 he was sorry he had to behead him. His sorrow matches Mark where Herod admired John as a good man and just—an Essene. Matthew altered Herod’s admiration to murderous distaste but forgot to alter his sorrow. He was copying Mark. Farmer would reverse this argument saying that Mark was trying to correct Matthew’s error, but Mark’s style is so bad, arguments this way round carry no weight.
- The order of Luke is essentially that of Mark and the order in Matthew is also that of Mark except where he has deliberately grouped items into general discourses by his hero. Once thought to have been a strong argument, critics point out that the order would largely have been followed whoever did the copying, so preservation of order in Mark is not a strong argument for it being original. In other words, the common general order of Matthew, Luke and Mark can be explained by turning Streeter’s argument round. Only someone writing after Matthew and Luke and deliberately combining them can keep the order Luke preserved from Matthew and yet, whenever Luke departed from Matthew, following the order of either one or the other. However, the argument has to be taken in context. If Luke used Matthew, he ignored his special groupings, a strange decision when Matthew was supposedly the first gospel and highly regarded.

So, we have to suppose that Luke ignored the special ordering of Matthew and then so did Mark who was copying from both Luke and Matthew. The argument from order is that the priority of Mark is simpler and more reasonable in the context of all three Synoptics—one of Farmer’s bleats!

- Some passages in Matthew and Luke are almost identical. If Mark is basing his choice of extracts from his two master texts on consistency, as the Griesbach hypothesis supporters believe, why has he missed out the most consistent parts?
- If Luke copied Matthew, he sometimes follows Matthew’s words closely but not his order of events and other times he does the reverse. Here also is a curious inconsistency.

A lost source surmised alongside the priority of Mark explains most of the problems of commonality between Matthew and Luke while allowing them such different approaches. Matthew has plainly arranged his material in a non-narrative way to give Jesus several major discourses, the most famous of which is the Sermon on the Mount. Sayings from these discourses appear all over the place in the other two gospels. It is hard to accept that later evangelists would be so cavalier with the work of the original one. Why also should Luke be so respectful of Matthew’s words when he plainly thought his order was wrong. If Luke and Matthew knew nothing of each other’s work but used common sources, such things are not problems.

Different instances in both Matthew and Luke seem to preserve the original story most closely. If Matthew had been the original gospel, it should have a clear predominance of original wordings. On the other hand, why should Mark, copying from the two miss out passages which are effectively identical in both and therefore apparently doubly reliable. The hypothesis of the source “Q” explains these puzzles because both evangelists took passages they admired almost verbatim from “Q”, but Mark had no access to it.

Hoping to be iconoclastic, a supporter of Farmer’s view, Christopher M. Tuckett, in the New Interpreters Bible, 1995, notes that nearly all of Mark is paralleled in Matthew or Luke or both, yet all this shows is that some literary relationship exists. It does not prove that the only possibility is that Mark’s gospel was the source of Matthew and Luke. The failure of Matthew and Luke hardly ever to agree against Mark in order and wording does not prove that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark as a source; it only shows that Mark is some kind of “middle term” between the other two in any pattern of relationships.

To Farmer’s glee, Tuckett declares in this “flagship publication” the “weak and inconclusive nature” of some of the arguments for the Two-Source Theory, adding that since Streeter’s arguments for Marcan priority are no longer reliable, work based upon Streeter has to be questioned—most of the work this century!

The situation seems serious. But is it? Is Streeter really demolished? Are the attacks on him well founded or just the perambulations of the Christian “scholars” round their cloistered universe in which the same texts are consumed and regurgitated in different patterns according to the current fashion? Why are the reasons for Marcan priority more “weak and inconclusive” than those of Farmer’s alternative hypothesis?

Are Matthew and Luke independent as the Two-Source hypothesis requires? Of all the counter arguments to the Two-Source hypothesis, the weightiest is the question of minor agreements between Matthew and Luke—they seem to be prime evidence for literary contact between the two. There are also about six pericopes of about 32 verses present in Mark but absent from Matthew and Luke. One such is the seed growing in secret in Mark 4:26-29. Proponents of the Two-Gospel hypothesis take these passages to be agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark, and should be added to that category of evidence against the Two-Source hypothesis, as if it is obligatory for editors to use all of the material at their disposal. Farmer argues that advocates of the Two-Source theory have never satisfactorily explained the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark.

Though there are arguably many examples of minor agreements, the attitude of Farmer, et al, is that any one of them serves to destroy the idea of the priority of Mark. He cites Goulder who has taken what Streeter designated as one of his “residual cases” where Jesus is being mocked and has shown that the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark cannot be explained except by requiring “Q” to expand to include a passion narrative. For Farmer, this reduces to an absurdity the chief tenet of the Two-Source theory, that it can most simply satisfy the synoptic data by offering Mark to explain narrative agreement of Matthew and Luke, and “Q” to explain their agreement in sayings of Jesus not in Mark.

Hans-Herbert Stoldt has compiled 272 minor agreements, an apparently impressive number. Many however are merely grammatical agreements. If two editors don’t like split infinitives we can get “to boldly go” altered to relatively few alternatives. If both choose to alter it to “to go boldly” is that a minor agreement proving literary contact? Of course not, other than that both are using the same language and have the same idiosyncrasies of style. If Matthew and Luke independently used Mark but corrected him, almost every minor agreement can be explained in an innocent way.

Stoldt’s excessive list actually makes the argument of minor agreements ridiculous. The word “minor” disguises a few quite serious agreements that cannot have come from Mark or from “Q”. But, though hardly minor, do they necessitate the hypothesis that Luke used Matthew? If he did, the argument leads us back to questions like Luke’s blatant ignoring of Matthew’s arrangement of events. Some have suggested that Matthew or Luke got hold of the other at a late date in writing his own gospel and plagiarised a few stories he thought impressive. Who can say it is not true?

Here, of course, we meet another absurdity of the critics of the Two-Source hypothesis. It is treated as if it alone must be a complete solution to the Synoptic Problem. Yet, anyone knows that the evolution of the gospels took at least a century and probably as many editors. So, there was time for editors to take episodes from one gospel into another, if they thought it illuminating. Other contributions were elements of the oral tradition which emerged, perhaps quite late and became included in slightly different forms in both gospels then were perhaps harmonised to some degree by later editors, and deliberate or inadvertent harmonisation between the two gospels by copyists familiar with both.

Doubtless there will be an outcry: “All this speculation isn’t very scientific!” Perhaps not, but it is probably what happened, and there will never be any way of knowing precisely. The reasonable Two-Source theory is that Mark and “Q” were the original sources, Mark about 60 AD and “Q” possibly a pre-Christian book of wisdom sayings—Essene doubtless—but Christianised as the Logia about mid-century and conceivably even then associated with the name Matthew. Mark itself probably came in at least two versions—pre-Jewish War and post Jewish War—parts of which were eventually bound together probably in error, giving us the curious double image in the middle of Mark which a diligent editor tried to rationalise but which Matthew and Luke were unaware of. If Matthew and Luke copied parts of this earlier edition of Mark, parts of which were later omitted or changed, their agreements together against our present edition of Mark are explained.

Later, a learned editor improved the Logia “Gospel of Matthew” by incorporating Mark to give us essentially the modern Matthew. Later still, another compiler known now as Luke put Mark and “Q” together in a different style suitable for gentiles rather than Jews. It seems that Mark fell out of fashion and almost lost because the two newer gospels were preferred, but was eventually saved when the church put together its canonised books. “Q” was not so lucky perhaps because it was essentially a book of sayings with little or no narrative. It disappeared into history’s dustbin.

Before the gospels became well known and eventually canonised, copyists made piecemeal changes in pious attempts consciously or otherwise to harmonise them. One might ask why the editors did not go the whole hog and just harmonise the gospels instead of writing new ones. Well, Farmer is trying to say they did—the result was Mark, a gospel that was the bare consensus of the other two gospels. If so, the bishops picked a dunce to compile it. Later there was a complete harmonisation of the four gospels, which was popular for a long time. But some people and some churches preferred the originals. In short, nobody had the authority to replace earlier gospels with harmonised versions and eventually we finished up with four of them in the New Testament and many others lost or rejected.

The Two-Gospel hypothesis requires the author of Mark to rewrite Matthew and Luke omitting the miraculous birth of Jesus, the sermon on the mount, and the resurrection appearances, but adding the the young man fleeing naked, a difficult healing miracle for Jesus and the putative God supposed mad by his family. Farmer merely says that all this needs to be explained if Mark was the third gospel. Why adopt a hypothesis with such serious defects? But the least credible aspect of it is that the church would accept such a poor rendering of the gospels of Matthew and Luke as that of Mark.

Not only that but it then added to this simplistic piece of work the legend that it was the gospel spread by the church's greatest Saint, Peter. If the church really did this then it was the very first pious forgery!

Whatever Christians believe, there is no doubt that Jesus, if he lived at all, was a man. From a man he was transformed into a god. That change can be seen in the progression of the gospels. In almost thirty verses, Mark has a more human Jesus than Matthew. If Mark followed Matthew, the Church sanctioned a work in which Jesus was made less god-like than he was in the source gospel. Farmer, quite feebly tries to refute this by saying no one knows the direction of primitive Christology, arguing a high Son of God Christology was well entrenched in the church long before the gospels were written, to judge by Paul's letters. Paul's letters themselves have been jumbled up and multiply re-edited before they reached their present state. Furthermore, by Paul's own evidence, he and Peter were at loggerheads, so why should Paul's Christology have to be overwhelmingly present in a work that is, according to tradition, Peter's?

Semitic expressions are found in Mark but not in Matthew. Why should Mark writing for a gentile audience introduce foreign words into his supposed summary of Matthew and Luke? The only explanation again would be that Mark was a deliberate forgery, intended to be attributed to Peter, a simple Aramaic fisherman.

A similar problem is that the Greek text for Jesus's question from the cross,

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,"

conforms to Aramaic orthography in Mark 15:34 whereas Matthew's parallel Greek text (27:46) conforms to Hebrew orthography. Only Matthew's Hebrew "Eli, Eli" properly explains the bystander's observation. "This man is calling Elijah." Mark's Aramaic "Eloi, Eloi" seems unlikely to have been mistaken for the name of Elijah.

Farmer believes Mark made the change for some curious reason and so destroyed the credibility of the words of the onlookers. Really, this is an argument for Marcan priority. Mark was, according to tradition, Peter's interpreter and Peter was an Aramaic speaker. Jesus was well versed in the scriptures as he would necessarily have been as an Essene leader. In his agony, Jesus would have quoted the scripture in Hebrew, as he had learnt it, but Peter would have related the story in Aramaic.

Matthew, a Jewish scholar, would have realised Jesus must have quoted Hebrew not Aramaic and therefore restored the original when he corrected Mark. Even in the 60s of the first century, the church must have had some Aramaic speakers accessible to it, even if most Jewish Christians had by then abandoned Christianity. Why then would it have permitted Mark to make such a blunder in his harmony? “Eloi” in Mark favours the idea that the book records the memories of an Aramaean speaker.

Many of Mark’s readers did not understand Aramaic expressions because he generally translates them (Mark 3:17; 5:41). He translates the Aramaic word Corban (Mark 7:11) whereas, when Matthew uses a related word elsewhere in his gospel (Matt 27:6), he leaves it untranslated. Farmer believes this shows some of the Greek text of Matthew was first used in circles where Aramaic loan words in Greek were well understood. Possibly! Matthew wrote for Jews, but they would have been worldly Jews in the wider Empire and so would have understood both Greek and Aramaic. Otherwise, it shows that, when Matthew’s gospel was offered to gentile Christians, it did not need Corban editing out or translating because the gentile Christian audience knew what Corban was—Mark had explained it, Mark being the earlier work.

Farmer thinks that the use of Aramaic expressions in his gospel shows that Mark had an interest in including such expressions in his text for effect. He explains that the well established use of the Aramaic word Abba for Father, meaning God, in churches acquainted with Paul’s letters, including the Christian community in Rome, reminded Mark’s readers of Jesus’s origins. So, Mark deliberately wrote the text of his gospel in a bogus Aramaic style to make it seem authentically Nazarene. Farmer is telling us the author of Mark was not honest. Why not believe that Mark wrote what Peter had said and translated it for his Greek speaking audience, as the church always said? Otherwise, the Church is being accused of blatant forgery.

No critic would deny that the gospel of Matthew is more Jewish than Mark, and more Palestinian. Matthew evidently was a Palestinian Jew, though he would likely have been writing in Alexandria or Antioch. It seems odd that Matthew, a Jew, should have taken the clumsy work of the gentile, Mark, to write a Jewish gospel. This can be taken as an argument against Marcan priority, but it is fully understandable if Mark’s work was known as the reminiscences of Peter.

Overlaps between Mark and “Q”, Farmer’s school tells us, are not allowed in the Two-Source hypothesis. Nor is “Q” allowed to grow to explain the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark. The Two-source hypothesis must maintain the independence of Matthew and Luke. These restrictions are placed on the Two-Source hypothesis because if it didn’t have them it would undermine the ground for the Griesbach hypothesis. It is difficult to imagine that Mark and “Q” did not overlap. Why should the author of Mark not know any of Jesus’s sayings recorded in “Q”? Mark’s gospel is not rich in sayings but why should some of those which appear in Mark not have also appeared in “Q”? If “Q” contained elements of narrative, some of those too might have overlapped.

Moreover, Streeter postulated specific sources M and L for material peculiar to Matthew and Luke. Who is to say for certain that none of this M and L material was not part of “Q”? The source, “Q”, is not merely the material common to Matthew and Luke but a different book in its own right. Who knows that Matthew did not omit verses that Luke liked and vice-versa? Parts of M and L therefore originated in “Q”. “Q” is understood to be sayings with little or no narrative, but the gospel authors might have changed sayings into narrative. The physical dumbness of the priest Zachariah in Luke’s birth narratives was a metaphorical dumbness in a thanksgiving chant. So, what is to stop “Q” from expanding, if it explains things?

Once Boismard is followed and it is accepted that one or more gospels existed in more than one edition and that the gospels as we have them may have been dependent on more than one proto or intermediate gospel, the criticisms of the Two-Source hypothesis start to evaporate. Only when forced into its conventional straitjacket, does it fail to explain the agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark.

The basic Two-Source hypothesis adequately explains almost everything that needs explaining but there are a few rough edges that might never be fettled off. Common sense suggests the historic answer is more complicated than the basic Two-Source hypothesis, but the complete answer is unlikely ever to be certainly known. The Two-Source hypothesis at core is secure, but editorial changes, copyists errors and harmonisations, and later interpolations must have complicated the central idea. These relatively minor problems are being used by the Two-Gospel school to beat the advocates of the Two-Source hypothesis. The Two-Gospel advocates are on the thinner ice, though further discoveries might prove them correct. If so, the earliest bishops will be found guilty of forging a gospel of Peter!

The Gospel of Mark

Mark had been written down in no particular order but later was tampered with by editorial additions and rearrangements. In the version which we now have there is a broad chronology leading from Galilee to Jerusalem, and then to the events leading to the crucifixion, but individual episodes cannot be assumed to be in the correct order. It gives a description of the work and movements of the Nazarene band but its true meaning has been thinly disguised to anyone who cared to believe other than the Christian gloss.

New Testament Greek is called Koine, which might be considered as meaning common or colloquial. It was not classical or even refined Greek, and has given Christian translators a marvellous time in making up translations of abstruse words—perhaps vulgarities or profanities or just bad grammar and misunderstandings—as words that suit them. Mark writes in this colloquial Greek not the more refined classical Greek of an educated man. He includes Latinisms suggesting the influence of Rome (Marcus was a very common Roman name at that time). He seemed unfamiliar with the country of Palestine or common Jewish customs, scholars giving the following examples:

- Dalmanutha referred to in 8:10 does not exist by that name, though it seems to be the same as Magdala of Matthew 15:39 properly rendered Magadan;
- in Mark 5:1 the country of the Gerasenes extends to the Sea of Galilee but Gerasene is really some forty miles from the lake, behind the mountains in what is now Jordan and then was the country of the ten Greek cities called Decapolis;
- he describes the town of Bethsaida in 8:26 as a village;
- he invents Jewish proceedings;
- he confuses references to the Herodian family in 6:17;
- he thought the appearance of Jesus before the High Priest was a trial not the committal hearing that it was;
- he thought a wife could divorce a husband contrary to Jewish law in 10:12.

Though some of these anomalies can be explained, it seems Mark either was not a Jew or, if he was, was so thoroughly Hellenized he retained few traces of his Jewish roots. He could have been a gentile, judging from his name and his Latinisms, possibly a Roman Christian convert with no direct experience of Palestine, and writing in Rome for a gentile readership. Confirmation that Mark was a pagan convert comes in the Acts of Barnabas supposedly written by John Mark himself. He writes:

“I John, accompanying the holy apostles Barnabas and Paul, being formerly a servant of Cyrillus the high priest of Jupiter, but now having received the gift of the Holy Spirit through Paul and Barnabas and Silos, who were worthy of the calling, and who baptized me in Iconium. After I was baptized, then, I saw a certain man standing clothed in white raiment, and he said to me: Be of good courage, John, for assuredly thy name shall be changed to Mark, and thy glory shall be proclaimed in all the world. The darkness in thee has passed away from thee, and there has been given to thee understanding to know the mysteries of God.”

Note the symbols of Essenism, baptism, white garments and hidden mysteries of God. Jupiter is the Roman name of Zeus, and, in his gospel, Mark tries to flatter the Romans and denigrate the Jews it being composed when Jewish nationalism was a nuisance in the Empire and Christians had to be distanced from the Jews. The missionaries were trying to get converts among the gentiles of the Roman Empire so the Romans in the story had to be blameless. There are several signs of this.

- Paul and the authors of Matthew and Luke accept the descent of Jesus from David but Mark ignores it dissociating Jesus from any claims to the throne of Israel.
- He calls the disciple, Simon, a Cananaean to avoid the word Zealot.
- He relates the story of the tribute money such as to acknowledge Caesar's authority not reject it.
- He puts the responsibility of the death of Jesus on the Jews and relieves Pilate of it by inventing the custom of releasing a prisoner, a custom which is otherwise unknown and most unlikely.
- The divinity of Jesus is first recognized in Mark by a Roman.
- He inserts the passage attributed to Jesus that a prophet is not without honour except in his own country and among his own kin to indicate that Jesus acknowledged his rejection by his family and countrymen. But it rests uneasily with his brother James and thereafter his nephew succeeding him as the head of the Nazarenes.
- He runs down the apostles appointed by Jesus—they are stupid, weak, argumentative, vain, treacherous, cowardly—all part of the process of dissociating the Son of God from the Jews.

Writing a couple of decades later when Jewish nationalism had ceased to be an issue, Luke has no need to be as cautious. Roman distaste for the Jews had faded and Josephus had published his Jewish War as a warning to potential hotheads in Palestine. Jews were no longer a threat and poor and illiterate Christian converts would not have understood references to them.

Mark includes as part of chapter 13 what was originally an Essene explanation of the signs of the coming kingdom now garbled with a Christian prophecy of God's punishment of the Jews inserted after the fall of Jerusalem.

Mark was not a companion of Jesus, possibly not an inhabitant of Palestine and possibly not a Jew. His gospel includes garbled bits of Essene and later material, is confused in its geography and sociology and has a false ending. Nevertheless, if Mark's is the first gospel to be recorded, if it is considered accurate enough by two more gospel writers to be reproduced by them in large measure and, if Mark really wrote down what Peter said, as church tradition has it, then Mark should contain the essence of the Aramaic oral tradition, the story of the Nazarenes as perceived by Peter, supposedly Jesus's right hand man.

Mark's should be accepted as the most authoritative rather than the least of the gospels. It is this gospel that should be the central reference for anyone reconstructing the true events at the foundation of Christianity. The other two synoptics are obviously later but have much of the original tradition and can be used to supplement deductions from Mark. John is much too late to be anything but secondary. Nothing that occurs only in John can be trusted unless it can somehow be traced to Mark or to the Essene tradition.

In reconstructing the events leading to Jesus's death we follow the gospel of Mark. We want to build on the earliest tradition and the one most free of later Christian accretions. The other gospels are of less value the later they are but they can help when they clearly relate to episodes in Mark. Matthew and Luke and less so John can be used to flesh out the shorter but more original account of Mark. In accepting assistance from these other gospels we can feel more assured when there is a clear Essene reference, and less assured when the references are traceable to the gentile church.

Tradition is that Mark took Peter down in no particular order and yet the arrangement of Mark does seem to be ordered. An examination of Mark shows that there is a broad sequence of events which could hardly be altered. That broad sequence can be used and the individual items of the tradition, or pericopes as they are called, can then be themselves examined to find whether there is any better way of fitting them into the outline.

Without a general theory that is difficult but given a hypothesis along the right lines the pericopes can be fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle. Some pieces are missing and some have been bent but a reasonable picture emerges. Of course it must be true that some sayings Jesus used in his eschatological speeches were used more than once so there is no fixed context. Some of these can be perceived in the gospels dotted here and there. We must try to see more closely the relevance of such scattered sayings to the general argument and place them accordingly.

Many of the miracles are complete misunderstandings of the mystical language or code used by the Nazarenes. Others could have arisen as metaphors of sayings or titles of the messiah. The healing of a blind man was probably code but used as a metaphor of the light of the world. The withering of a fig tree is a metaphor of the destruction by God of the enemies of Israel but was taken to be a metaphor of the destruction by God of Israel implying that Christianity had superseded Judaism.

The four gospels are anti-Jewish. The gospels and Acts arose in an atmosphere of racism that New Testament scholars are aware of but say nothing about. They were written to disassociate Jesus from the Jewish cause at a time when Jews were looked upon unfavourably by most citizens of Rome. Yet since they were based on a Palestinian tradition elements of it still emerge from the deliberate obfuscation of the New Testament. They aim to disassociate Christianity from its Jewish origins and remove any hints that it was anti-Roman. Jesus and his followers are depicted as harmless healers and preachers. Since the gospels were completed and widely circulated only after the Jewish War, the purpose of the bowdlerizing was clear—Jewish nationalists were unpopular. The result is the bizarre story of the passion in which a monster like Pilate is an angel and respectable religious sects like the Pharisees are demonic. Furthermore, with the dispersion of the Jerusalem Nazarenes, the heresies of Paul had no one to oppose them and found new favour among the godfearers of the Empire. The Hellenists took over and were able to dictate policy. Mark wrote the first and most factual gospel with these two objectives in mind to provide a new authority after the destruction of the Jerusalem Church.

The first details of the new gentile religion that were put together were the details of Jesus's suffering or passion, to use the technical term. E Trocme believes that Mark was originally in two main sections. Chapters 1–13 told the mission story and it was added to the passion narrative of chapters 14 and 15, which was either from an older written source or from an oral source so often repeated that it had already become stylized. This idea does not contradict the tradition that Peter was the original prime source. Gentiles were mainly interested in the dead and resurrected god, and the passion must have formed the central part of missionary preaching in the first few decades. That is not to say that an apostle like Peter would not tell other parts of the story, but these would have been most often related to close associates in private company. Mark was apparently the first to combine the private recollections of Peter with the public ministry centred on the passion.

Vincent Taylor believes that Mark's passion narratives themselves stem from two sources: a narrative form from a gentile source, and a semitic collection of self contained narratives. The gentile source has to be treated with suspicion. It comprises: Mark 14:1–2; 10–11; 17–21; 26–31; 43–46; 55–64; 15:1; 3–5; 15; 21–24; 29–33; 34–37; 39; 16:9–20. One or two other doubtful passages have been given here the benefit of the doubt.

C H Turner thinks the passages in Mark related in the 3rd person plural were originally related by Peter - 1:21 29 5:1, 38 6:53-54 8:22 9:14 30 33 10:32 46 11:1 12 15 20 27 14:18 22 26 32. T W Manson added more material to Turners on the grounds that the adjacent material could not be detached from that thought to have been Peter's giving 1:16-39 2:1-14 3:13-19 4:35-5:43 6:7-13 50-56 8:14-9:48 10:32-52 11:1-33 13:3-4 32-37 14:17-50 53 54 66-72. The rest of the material seems to be well arranged blocks suggesting already collected pre-Markan material.

Abstract of the Thesis

To follow the arguments and judge whether they are valid, readers need to know my premise and some information missing from the gospels to persuade them that this premise has some foundation.

The premise is that Jesus Christ, the God of the Christians, was an Essene leader. The information missing from the gospels is who the Essenes were, how they related to the other Jewish sects which do appear in the gospels, why Jesus seemed not to be even an orthodox Essene and what it all had to do with the Roman occupying forces.

The synopsis which follows should give preliminary answers to these questions enabling the reader to see the point of the preparatory material and understand the subsequent commentary.

Jesus was an devout Jew—he stoutly defended the law of Moses as the gospels illogically admit. Most Jews yearned for their gentile enemies—especially the Romans who ruled them—to be overcome so that they could be ruled as a theocracy—a kingdom of God. They believed that God had promised them a messiah, a great king who would drive out the gentiles allowing the promised kingdom to begin, as an extension of heaven, on earth.

One sect of the Jews believed this so strongly that they had separated themselves from the ungodly to prepare the way for the messiah and begin to create the kingdom of heaven on earth—they were the Essenes. Their community they considered to be perfectly holy, and their members had to behave as perfectly holy people, to be a foundation of the heavenly kingdom. But they believed that the kingdom of God could not encompass the world until the men of perfect holiness detected the signs of the times which announced the acceptable day of the Lord—the day of vengeance of God—when God would avenge the wrongs done to His people.

When the time was right there would be a cosmic battle in which the forces of darkness and evil would be overcome by God's miraculous intervention. The duty of the Essenes was to watch for the signs and lead out the saints, those who were perfectly holy, against the forces of darkness—the Romans and their allies, sinful Jewish collaborators.

When the signs indicated that God was ready to create His kingdom on earth, most Jews, being children of Israel, the chosen people of God, would revert from sinfulness to godliness—they were the simple of Ephraim, Jews who had been misled by their pragmatic and collaborating leaders—the Pharisees.

But though Essenes had the secrets of discerning the signs of the times, it was not a perfect art because heaven had not yet arrived, and the Essenes had to send out leaders with the mission of converting the simple of Ephraim. The success of these missionaries would itself be an important sign of the coming kingdom.

The men sent on this essential mission were senior figures in the Essene hierarchy. Jesus was such a man and so was John the Baptist. They had to urge the simple of Ephraim to prepare for the coming kingdom. Jesus was the nasi, the prince of Israel, a leader in the Davidic mould who would convert sinful Jews and assert the authority of God's righteous.

Only the righteous could enter the kingdom so sinful Jews had to repent sincerely, ritually purify themselves through baptism and prepare for the coming battle. In his acts of conversion, the nasi was metaphorically casting out evil spirits, making the blind see and healing the sick. Those who were thus purified could enter the kingdom and were the soldiers in the messianic army. The nasi represented the messiah but could make no claim to be him, the appointment being God's alone at the end time.

If the nasi were successful then the kingdom was nigh, and if the sum of the signs were such that the acceptable day of the Lord was imminent then the forces of light would engage the forces of darkness, precipitating the cosmic battle for the kingdom. Then one like unto the Son of man, who the prophet Daniel told would come on a cloud from God—probably the archangel Michael with a heavenly host riding out of the Mount of Olives as it cleaved east and west—would arrive to institute the kingdom. Essenes felt that God only helped those who help themselves and the kingdom of God had to be won by the righteous taking on their enemies, then God would intervene with a miracle.

Jesus was appointed nasi by John the Baptist. After initial successes recruiting the simple, the authorities caught on and hounded them, the Nazarenes were seen as a liability, many followers asked Jesus and his generals to leave them alone and they had to flee from Antipas's soldiers to Phoenicia.

Jesus hid, then ventured back into Antipas's country. He was still certain the signs were correct but had come to believe that God wanted him to capture Jerusalem and the temple and that to inaugurate the kingdom of God he was required to play the role of the messiah, Melchizedek. Then God would intervene with a miracle. His disciples crowned him Melchizedek—he was transfigured!

His band proceeded to Jerusalem with Jews travelling for the coming Passover. No one could address him by any title that might draw attention to the spies of the authorities. Outside the city the Nazarenes overcame the inadequate Jerusalem garrison and Jesus purposely revealed himself by fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah—entering the city on a foal of an ass—and controlled the temple. The defeated Roman garrison in the Antonia barracks withdrew to await reinforcements from Caesarea.

Pilate's troops counter attacked after a few days, killed the Galilaeans in the temple, battered the Tower of Siloam where some were holding out and recaptured the city. Still there was no miracle. Jesus and his generals in hiding took a last supper together—an Essene messianic meal. Jesus, convinced that he had done all that God required and that a miracle was still in the offing, said he expected to be eating his next meal in the coming kingdom. His men remained armed.

The next day was the Passover, a likely occasion for a miracle. They went to the Mount of Olives where, according to prophecy, the miracle would take place and Jesus urged his men to keep watchful—not for the enemy but for God's intervention.

It did not occur. A body of the temple guard arrived instead. Jesus had been proven a false prophet and had to suffer the appropriate fate prescribed in Zechariah—he had to die as the worthless shepherd.

To seek the historical Jesus, we adopt the procedure of trawling through Mark's gospel noting each event and assessing its authenticity and place in the story, checking where appropriate the parallel accounts in other gospels, and considering the possibilities of obfuscation by pious lying. First, though, what of non-biblical sources, and the manipulation of them by the Christians when they had the authority to do it?

Christianity Revealed

Manipulating the Good News

Dr M D Magee

Christian Censorship in Josephus

Christians are fond of quoting authorities to their bemused converts. It stems from the absolute authority they give the bible as the supposed infallible word of God, but they extend it to any written word that an evangelist chooses—under the influence of the Holy Ghost—to quote. Usually the authorities quoted are simply other fundamentalist believers, but they expect their flock to take them on trust and being sheep, they do!

“What, then, does the historian know about Jesus Christ? He knows, first and foremost, that the New Testament documents can be relied upon to give an accurate portrait of Him. And he knows that this portrait cannot be rationalized away by wishful thinking, philosophical presupposition, or literary maneuvering.”

(John Warwick Montgomer, *History and Christianity*)

This quotation is untrue in every particular, but being a Christian, it can be written without a blush. It is even only possible to write this rubbish because many of the historical records of Jesus have disappeared.

Lost!

Who lost them? The Christians!

Flavius Josephus was the Roman name of Joseph ben Matthias. Josephus during the second half of the first century AD, produced two long and detailed histories of the Jews and the events leading to the Roman victory in the Jewish Wars, *History of the Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*, but has almost nothing to say about Jesus and even that is probably added by Christians to fill a prominent gap left by the censors.

Josephus was born in Jerusalem only a few years after the crucifixion. He shows an interest in the Jewish religious groups of the time. He tells us about the Jewish religious parties, about John the Baptist who Christians say was the herald of the Messiah and about Jesus's brother, James, whose death he says was a reason for the start of the War in 66 AD. But he tells us nothing about the crucifixion or how it occurred. A man almost contemporaneous with Jesus and whose reputation was built on detailed histories of the Jewish people fails to mention him except in two brief passages, if they are genuine.

The precocious Josephus had studied all the Jewish religious sects before the age of 19 when he decided to become a Pharisee. He became a clerk to the Sanhedrin and at 26 went as an envoy to Rome to plead for some priests sent to Nero by Procurator Felix for trial. With the help of Poppaea, the Empress, who was possibly a Jewish proselyte or at least a godfearer, he succeeded. He was thus in Rome at much the same time as Paul, the Apostle to the gentiles.

Back in Jerusalem in 64 AD, revolt was simmering. Josephus was patriotic enough but had seen the power and extent of the Empire and knew that rebellion was futile. When the war broke out Josephus was made a general by the Sanhedrin and fought in Galilee with John of Gischala, the Zealot leader of the Galilaeans. Vespasian captured him after the town of Jotapata had been sieged for 47 days and decided to use him as an interpreter. Josephus got on well with Vespasian, predicting that he would become Emperor, which he did. Vespasian asked Josephus to write an account of the Jewish War for his campaign Triumph, a Roman victory parade. It was to be a warning to the people of the East not to try to defy Roman might.

Josephus wrote a draft in his native Aramaic which he called *On the Capture of Jerusalem*. This he polished into his book, the *Jewish War*. To gather his material, as the appointed historian of the Emperor, he was granted access to official archives, to the Reports of Roman Governors, the campaign diaries of Vespasian and Titus, the Emperor's commentaries and he also corresponded with Agrippa I, for a short while King of Judaea before the war. His work had the ultimate stamp of approval—that of the Emperors themselves.

When Josephus uses official sources it is usually evident. He often tells us who filed the report from which he is quoting and transcribes it verbatim with little effort to paraphrase. Thus even non-signalled passages from official sources can be identified by their style. When writing from experience he is more informal, sounds less official and is less impersonal in the information he imparts.

Our present versions of the *Jewish War* mention none of Jesus, John the Baptist or Menehem, who revolted in 66 AD, but they do tell us of Judas of Galilee and Theudas, both messianic nationalist leaders. He records that the Jews merely protested when the Romans erected a statue of Caligula in the Temple, an act grossly contemptuous of the Jewish religion. This is a curiously subdued response for the fanatically religious Jews. In their outrage, history suggests they must surely have rioted, if not revolted.

Also strange is the omission of the fire in Rome in 64 AD which Nero attributed to the Christians. Such passages smack of censorship because Josephus usually fastidiously records the smallest detail of events relevant to his subject. It looks as though a whole chapter might have been erased by Christian censors because it depicted Jesus and his followers as fomenters of rebellion. Some manuscripts of the *Jewish War* contain a passage on Jesus extracted from Josephus's companion volume, the *Antiquities of the Jews*, proving that someone has tampered with the original text, presumably in an attempt to fill the obvious gap left by the initial excision.

The inserted passage is favourable towards Jesus even though he was viewed, rightly or wrongly, by the Roman hierarchy as a terrorist. Josephus would have been taking an unlikely risk by making such an assessment. Remember he was a captive who had been adopted by Vespasian and given certain privileges in return for certain duties—privileges which could easily have been withdrawn. Domitian, who was Emperor when the *Antiquities of the Jews* was published, could have been no lover of

Jesus or his followers. He even ordered all descendants of King David to be rounded up for questioning in an attempt to detect potential rebels and he banished two members of his own family for wanting to be Christians.

In versions of the *Antiquities of the Jews* by Josephus, edited by Christians, are two passages describing Jesus. Neither is in the Jewish version of the Josephus's *Antiquities*. The longer passage, the so called *Testimonium Flavianum* (18:3:3), is cited by Christians as independent confirmation of Jesus' existence and resurrection. It reads:

“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a 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. He was the Messiah. 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. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”

“At that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be called a man; for he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among us, had condemned him to the cross, they who before had conceived an affection for him did not cease to adhere to him. For on the third day he appeared to them alive again, the divine prophets having foretold these and many other wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of christians, so called from him, subsists to this time.”

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:3:3 (Lardner's translation)

A thorough examination of the validity of this paragraph in Josephus was made by Nathaniel Lardner in 1838 according to Gordon Stein (1982), but John Seed writes that Nathaniel Lardner, a Christian but a liberal religious dissenter and even something of an early Unitarian, was not writing in 1838 but in the 1730s and 40s (*Credibility of the Gospel History*). His Works were published in 11 volumes in London in 1788 and there were later editions. Lardner's work was merely the first and many other scholars have written about it since, so no Christian apologist can plead ignorance of their findings. The truth is, it is a forgery. Why should we accuse it of being a forgery?

- The church fathers liked to quote passages that supported Christianity, yet not one of them quoted this passage in defence of Christianity until Eusebius did in the fourth century, about 330 AD, though the works of Josephus were famous. Christian writers make no reference to Josephus's commendation of Jesus even when it would have suited them, as they must surely have done had it existed. Origen, for example, writing long before Eusebius, quotes other parts of Josephus but not this passage. Indeed Origen, writing in about 250 AD, puzzled:

“Though he [Josephus] did not admit our Jesus to be the Christ he none the less gave witness to so much righteousness in James.”

Elsewhere Origen adds:

“...although [Josephus] disbelieved in Jesus as Christ.”

Plainly Origen’s version of Josephus’s works did not have the passage to which we are referring, but by 330 AD the version used by Eusebius did. Jerome’s Latin version has the insertion but it is less assertive, rendering “He was the Messiah” by “He was believed to be the Messiah”. It shows that the text of Josephus has been altered. Who would or could have altered it?—only Christians.

- The passage is amid stories about calamities that have befallen the Jews. This is not a calamity as it stands, but has been inserted instead of the original piece which will have described Jesus’s failed rebellion—certainly a calamity.
- Josephus says this man performed “wonderful works” yet fails to describe any one of them though he quotes the miracles of others.
- The passage is too pro-Christian. Josephus says that Jesus was the Christ, an unlikely statement for him to have made, not only because he was a Pharisaic Jew but also because he was critical of messianic movements. Josephus, a Jew in the pay of the Roman Emperor and at his mercy as a captive, could not possibly praise a man killed—as far as the Romans knew—as a rebel and a threat to Rome. Only a Christian could write this. So, what do we find? Not that the passage was forged but, Christians declare Josephus to be a secret Christian!
- For the same reasons Josephus would not have said the Christian religion was the “truth”. Josephus was effectively a prisoner of the Romans, given a privileged position because he flattered the Roman general, Vespasian, who later became emperor, and because Vespasian found him useful. He would have been courting personal disaster to say that the followers of a crucified rebel told the “truth” about him when he was under the guardianship of the general who put down the massive Jewish rebellion in 68 AD.
- Stating that the sect of Christians “...subsists to this time”, implies it was written a considerable time after the events he was describing. Conceivably, such a point could have been made when Josephus wrote about 60 years later, but it would have matched the time when Eusebius wrote better.

The passage sounds very much like Josephus in style. If it is a bald insertion it has been written in a style compatible with Josephus’s, but it could be a skilful redaction of a genuine passage. Phrases such as “tribe of Christians” and “wise man” which are typical of Josephus are possibly relics of the original. Christian editors who Christianised the text might have cleverly retained these phrases to keep the flavour of Josephus.

However, because the passage was evidently totally absent in early editions since otherwise it would have been quoted even in an attenuated form, we can conclude that originally Jesus was not mentioned, or, more likely, the reference was too defamatory for Christian bishops to quote. Josephus's work will have referred to Jesus but unfavourably. Christian redactors found unsuitable references to Jesus or none at all and interpolated brief but suitable references based purely on Christian belief.

Because the passage sounds like the work of a Christian, it must have been added to *Antiquities* some time between Origen and Eusebius, when Christians got the power to edit books. After the Christians became supreme in the reign of Constantine they evidently planted evidence on Josephus, turning the leading Jewish historian of his day into a witness for Jesus as Christ. Eusebius is one of the few Christians to admit that lying for the advancement of the church was acceptable (though Paul started it all). He most likely interpolated this passage into Josephus.

Some Christians admit that Josephus's quotation about Jesus is "contested", but do not say what they mean, and otherwise treat the quotation as authentic. Contested means that the majority of scholars since the early 1800s have rejected the entire *Testimonium Flavianum* as a Christian insertion, but Christian clergy and preachers, disdainful of honesty, still say it is genuine. Even though Christians of all denominations are aware that the passage is suspected, by the best experts, of being a forgery, they still quote it in support of their Jesus. This is not only dishonest, it is exploiting the Christian's self-styled virtue of being truthful to spread lies. They follow their masters Paul and Eusebius in using lies to propagate their own "truth". The people fooled by this are mainly ignorant. The intelligent will cringe at the dishonesty involved and disregard Christian "evidence".

Antiquities, does mention both John the Baptist and James, the brother of Jesus. Josephus also, in passing, mentions Jesus later in *Antiquities* (20.9.1):

"So he [Ananus, son of Ananus the high priest] assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before him the brother of Jesus, he who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others (or some of his companions) and when he had formed an accusation against them, he delivered them to be stoned."

Many scholars think this too is forged. If not it confirms that a previous mention had been made of Jesus. An unfavourable reference to Jesus in the original version must have been excised to render it publishable but Christian copyists, finding that their crudely censored versions contained no reference to Jesus felt obliged to insert one. So what Origen could not see, Eusebius could.

More space is devoted to John the Baptist in our editions of the *Antiquities* than to the master whose coming the gospels assure us he was proclaiming. A section covering the career of Jesus in considerably more detail than the short passage we now have must have been deleted.

The passage giving testimony to Jesus in Antiquities comes during a catalogue of calamities that the Jews experienced at the time of Pilate taking office. Josephus seems here to be drawing upon official sources and lists Pilate's raising of the standards in Jerusalem and his taking Temple funds to finance the construction of an aqueduct into the city. Then he mentions Jesus and concludes with two incidents in Rome that occurred, according to Tacitus, in 19 AD. This chronology implies that Pilate was governor earlier, and Jesus was active much earlier, than Christians today believe.

The next section of Antiquities has skipped almost two decades to a revolt led by "The Egyptian" (the one that Paul was mistaken for in Acts) in Samaria in 35 AD. So two tumults in Jerusalem and two incidents in Rome bracket a short paragraph praising Jesus, then there is a jump forward of 15 years to the next strand of the story. Something looks amiss.

Following the testimonial to Jesus, the first of the two incidents in Rome is introduced by:

"About the same time also another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder..."

but there follows a description of a woman tricked into intercourse with a man pretending to be a god in the Temple of Isis in Rome, a passage eight times longer than that allocated to Jesus and of no apparent relevance to the Jews, despite its introduction. Logic requires this introduction to be that of a passage about the tumult accompanying the arrest of Jesus and described in the gospels. This section was deleted in some copies of Josephus and strongly edited and put forward in others so that the ministry of Jesus would not be described as a calamity.

The only relevance to the story of Jesus was that the conniving Priests of Isis were crucified by Tiberius, although it might have been included as a satirical commentary on the myth, new at the time, that Jesus was born of a virgin.

Acta Pilati

Provincial governors had to dispatch, to the Emperor, “acta”, official reports of all that occurred under their jurisdiction. Important trials such as those requiring the death penalty had to be filed, particularly if the trial concerned an attempt at insurrection against Imperial rule. On the evidence of the gospels Pilate must have filed an account of the trial of Jesus, and one must have existed in the Roman archives.

We know that Tiberius had an almost obsessive reverence for the legal and civic reforms introduced by his predecessor, Augustus, and paid meticulous attention to the governance of the provinces. Officials had to take care not to step outside of their powers and particularly not to oppress their inferiors. Taxation was light and the policy in frontier regions was to avoid conflict. It is inconceivable that Tiberius should not have been informed of the trial of a man charged with riotous assembly and treason.

Josephus had access to the Acts of the Governors and he would have needed it to get an accurate view of events between 6 AD when his earlier source, the books of Nicholas of Damascus, court historian to Herod the Great, ended and about 55 AD when his direct experience as a scribe to the Sanhedrin would have become relevant. So for the period of about 50 years, which covered the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, Josephus’s main source would have been Roman and Herodian archives.

Justin Martyr was certain that Pilate would have sent a report of the crucifixion to Tiberius at Rome. He knew what the duty of a Roman governor was, and it involved being a dutiful bureaucrat. He had to despatch his reports, but Justin cannot have had access to the records and could not have verified there definitely was such a report. Christians take refuge behind this uncertainty, but Justin himself has no doubt and writes (1 Apol 48,53) “And that He did those things, you can learn from the Acts of Pontius Pilate,” and “And that these things did happen, you can ascertain from the Acts of Pontius Pilate”.

Justin was also confident that the Roman records of the census of Cyrenius would reveal the birth details of Jesus and his family.

“Now there is a village in the land of the Jews, thirty-five stadia from Jerusalem, in which Jesus Christ was born, as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing made under Cyrenius, your first procurator in Judaea.” (Justin Martyr, 1 Apol 34)

The point about these assertions is that no such evidence has ever been adduced by Christians, whether the Acts of Pontius Pilate or the census of Cyrenius. When the Christians took control, they obviously had access to these records, but they have never produced them and they are not part of the New Testament as they ought to be. It shows that they did not support the Christian case.

If Jesus did live, it seems incredible that there was no reports like these, because Romans were usually meticulous officials. Of course, the *Acta* might have said nothing more than what the gospels accept—that Jesus was crucified as a rebel against Roman authority, a man claiming to be the king of the Jews, at a time when the proper king of the Jews was the Roman Emperor. Such a report would prove Jesus was a criminal in Roman law, not that he was a god. Christians might have wanted to preserve such a report nevertheless, but did not. It must therefore have given detail of the acts that led to Jesus being crucified—that he led a rebellion and captured Jerusalem. Christians would not have wanted to keep such incriminating evidence and there is little doubt that they therefore destroyed it and presented forgeries to the world when they took power under Constantine.

In the fifth century, someone forged a report that Christian theologians know is a forgery but nevertheless quote as if it were genuine.

In his *History of the Church* in 325 AD, Eusebius informs us that the *Acta Pilati*, were published in 311 AD by the Emperor Maximinus Daia precisely to prove that the claims of the Christians were false and the verdict of Pilate was correct. Oddly these documents date Jesus's trial and crucifixion to 21 AD, apparently at odds with Josephus who says Pilate did not take up office until 26 AD. Eusebius concludes the *Acta Pilati* were forgeries. But it is stretching credulity to suggest that the Roman administration were so incompetent as to unnecessarily change the date when they were altering the record to discredit the Christians.

What reason could they possibly have to want to alter the date especially with Josephus so well known? It is more likely that the triumphant Christians only a few years later decided to alter Josephus to put Pilate's rule outside of the period when the *Acta* were dated. The Christians had control of the copying of books after the time of Constantine but their opponents could have hidden copies of the Roman records. By altering Josephus, any copy of the true record that emerged could be shown by reference to Josephus to have been a forgery. And altering the dates in Josephus needed only two simple numeric changes—to the Greek number for the length of Pilate's Prefecture (from 18 to 10 years) and the Greek number for the length of the Prefecture of Gratus, his predecessor (3 to 11 years).

Gratus had appointed four High Priests according to Josephus. Now John's gospel (11:49) describes Caiaphas as "High priest that year", implying that it was usual for High Priests to be changed each year. That is just what Gratus had been doing, confirming that three years was his term of office. Gratus had appointed a new High Priest for each year he was governor and had appointed the fourth one, Joseph Caiaphas, for the next year, but Gratus was then recalled.

Pilate arrived, found Caiaphas High Priest and kept him in place for his full term of office. When Pilate was recalled, Vitellius, Legate of Syria, Pilate's boss, sacked Caiaphas also. So there is good reason to believe that Pilate and Caiaphas ruled Judaea in tandem for eighteen years from 18 to 36 AD. The policy of Tiberius was not to

change governors believing that, like blowflies, they left the body alone when they were sated. Pilate's long period of office is testimony to the policy if not the theory,

To return to the Acts of Pilate: we are faced with the following chain of logic.

- Either the Acta Pilati existed or they did not.
- If they did not exist Pilate must have neglected his duty in not submitting them but Pilate was a conscientious bureaucrat and would not neglect such matters. It is difficult to believe that none were written or submitted.
- If they existed either they were favourable to the Christian story and so would be part of the Christian canon or they were unfavourable to the Christian story and so would have been destroyed or altered. They are not part of the canon and so they were unfavourable to the Christian cause. They were either destroyed or altered.
- If they once existed but had been destroyed someone must have known and therefore claims that they once existed would have been made. Claims that the Acta once existed have been made.
- If they once existed but had been altered someone must have known and therefore claims that they had been forged would have been made. Claims that the Acta have been forged have been made.

It looks very much as though the Acta Pilati once existed as would have been expected but have been destroyed by the Christians. The only reason they would have destroyed them is that they did not match the story the Church wanted to be believed.

There is a Slavonic text of Josephus's Jewish War which seems to be an early version. It is not free of Christian alterations but tells a different story from the usual. Jesus is not named as such but is called the "Wonder Worker" and led a band of 150 disciples into Jerusalem in a pathetic attempt at revolution. He was crucified around 21 AD. Christians tell us this is a mediaeval forgery!

Other Early Sources

The apparent allusions to Christians in *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius (120 AD), one in the section on Claudius and one in the section on Nero, are ambiguous. The short mention of “Chrestus” in Suetonius shows that the Roman author was not sure of his subject by spelling Christ’s name wrongly, if that is who he meant. Suetonius wrote of a Jewish revolt at Rome in the reign of the Emperor Claudius apparently instigated by “Chrestus”:

“As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.”

Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* (Claudius 25:4)

The passage implies that there was an actual person named “Chrestus” in Rome at the time instigating trouble. Jesus was not in Rome instigating the Jews in 45 AD, so Suetonius must have meant another person. By 41 to 54 AD when Claudius was Emperor scholars doubt that Jesus’s supporters could have spread to Rome in sufficient strength to cause a revolt.

“Chrestus” is not another spelling of “Christus”, as some Christians pretend. Chrestus is the Latin form of a Greek name Chrestos. It means “Excellent One” in Greek. Christus means Messiah, so “Chrestus” would have to be a misspelling of “Christus”, meaning Christ to imply a Christian presence in Rome at the time.

Chrestus as a proper name is so common that it occurs over 80 times on Roman inscriptions. Chrestus was a common name in Rome because it was given to hard working slaves, many of whom earned their freedom over the years. Suetonius might have been simply giving the name of a Roman rabble-rouser. He possibly read “Christus” and, assuming the common name was intended, corrected it to “Chrestus”. So he perhaps should have written “Christus”, meaning a messiah, but not specifically Jesus. The disturbance would have been caused by messianic Jews possibly responding to the messianic claims of a contemporary. If Chrestus indeed meant Jesus, the riots were by orthodox Jews incensed by early Christian missionaries on Stephen’s wing.

So, in summary, plausible explanations of this passage in Suetonius are:

- Chrestus was a freed Jewish slave fomenting zealous Jews into believing the messiah was soon to come.
- Chrestus is an error by Suetonius who took his source to mean that, Chrestus being the name with which Suetonius was familiar, but the riots were by messianic Jews rioting with each other about whether the messiah had come or not, possibly in reference to the claims of Jesus’s followers.

The linking of a word so close to Christus and “Jews” in the same context, favours the second explanation, so Suetonius can be taken as a rather weak witness to the fact that Jews even in Rome were in a turmoil over messianism at the time, possibly as a result of Christian claims. At a stretch, it shows that some people—presumed to be Christians—might have been claiming that the messiah had come.

Even if Suetonius is referring to Christians in Rome, this only confirms the existence of Christians, not the earlier existence of Jesus. There were Christians in Rome during the first century AD but this does not imply that Jesus was himself historic.

The testimony of the Pagan historian, Thallus, is also worthless but is often quoted by the liars of Christendom. Eusebius says Thallus wrote, in Greek, in three volumes the history of the world from the fall of Troy down to the 167th Olympiad in 52 AD. None of Thallus’s work exists any more except a reference to the crucifixion in the remaining writings of a third century Christian, Julius Africanus. Africanus’s own work survives only in fragments, but refers to the lost history of Thallus as describing Jesus’s death being accompanied by an earthquake and darkness. Africanus says Thallus in the period before 221 AD, wrote in the third book of his history, that the darkness which supposedly covered the earth at the time of the crucifixion was an eclipse:

“Thallus calls this darkness an eclipse of the sun—wrongly in my opinion.”

Plainly this has little value since the passage could easily have been inserted into Julius Africanus and we have no way of checking whatever Thallus said. The earthquake and darkness are confirmed nowhere. They are peculiar to the New Testament. Yet, from this, Christian apologists have argued that a non-Christian contemporary of Jesus testified to the midday darkness. Thallus might be saying what the Christians believed, but the explanation is impossible because Jesus was crucified at the new moon. Solar eclipses cannot occur at Passover when the moon is full. The moon, in its monthly track round the earth, is in the diametrically wrong place. Even Africanus realized this.

The fragment is damaged. It speaks of “...allus”. Is this Thallus? Thallus was a popular name common on Roman inscriptions. Josephus (*Antiquities*, 18:6:4) refers to a Thallus:

“Now there was one Thallus, a freed-man of Caesar’s, of whom he borrowed a million of dracmae, and thence repaid Antonia the debt he owed her.”

Thallus was born about 50 AD, so must have been writing about 80 AD or later, after the first gospel written, Mark’s. If he had used Mark’s gospel as a source, the observation is not independent, and Thallus would have probably have been a Christian himself, to have been reading it at such an early date after it was written.

The Talmud contains virtually no mention of Jesus. There was much persecution of the Jews by Christians during the Middle Ages, and many Jews were afraid that the presence of unfavorable references to Jesus in the Talmud of the time would bring

down greater revenge by the Christians. References were eliminated by Jewish copyists so that Christians would have no excuse for burning their books and synagogues, as they were wont to do. Scholars have collected the references from ancient copies of the Talmud and published them, but they remain disputed.

Jesus in the Talmud was a bastard and a magician who learned magic spells in Egypt or else stole the secret name of God from the temple and used it to work magic or miracles. The father of Jesus was a soldier named Pantera. Talmudic stories were set down in the period from 200 to 500 AD, and, even if reflecting the earlier situation, were coloured by Jewish attempts to deal with Christianity. The Talmud therefore is not historically accurate and is only marginal use in assessing Jesus as an historical person.

Another fragment, quoting the letter of Mara Bar Serapion, also has not been accurately dated. It says that the Jews killed their “wise King”. Christians will say this is Jesus, but this fragment is, again, worthless for this purpose.

Lucian’s sarcastic comment, written in the second century, is evidence that the Christians of the time thought that a man had been crucified in Palestine as the basis of their sect. It also shows that they were a brotherhood, confirming that the use of brother in the bible acknowledges membership of the common order not blood relationship, and the gullibility of the gentile Christians is also lampooned.

“It was then that he [Perigrinus] learned the wondrous lore of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And—how else could it be? He made them all look like children; for he was prophet, cult-leader, head of the synagogue, and everything, all by himself. He interpreted and explained some of their books and even composed many, and they revered him as a god, made use of him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector, next after that other, to be sure, whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world...”

“The poor wretches have convinced themselves first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another, after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods, and by worshipping that crucified sophist him-self and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property—receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan or tricksters able to profit from them, comes along and gets among them he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.” (Lucian, Perigrinus)

The “evidence” quoted from Pliny Secundus, Pliny the Younger, is also of dubious

value. He had to punish the Christians in Asia Minor as a subversive group. In a letter to the Emperor Trajan of about 112 AD, some eighty years after the presumed date of the crucifixion, Pliny wrote that he had found Christians to be harmless people who sang hymns at daybreak (just like the Essenes) to their Christ as to a god, and asked the Emperor whether therefore he had to take action against them. This correspondence proves that there were Christians living in Asia Minor in 112 AD, which is hardly surprising as it was one of the first places proselytised by Paul. But the fact that Roman officials found Christians practising their “superstition”, as Romans called, it tells us nothing about Christianity’s origins. Singing hymns to a god called Christ says nothing about the historical Jesus. Christians could have invented their myth of Jesus Christ to explain why they were worshipping a god called Christ.

Tacitus

Another major ancient historian who supposedly mentions Jesus is Tacitus. Cornelius Tacitus (55-120 AD) wrote his *Annals* at least 70 years after Jesus's crucifixion. Jesus is not mentioned by name anywhere in the extant works of Tacitus. In his *Annals*, Tacitus says that the Christians were accused by Nero of setting fire to Rome in 64 AD. He accuses the Christians of hating the human race.

He says that members of this mischievous sect were horribly tortured and their confessions led to many others being convicted, and, in Book 15:44, he mentions Christus:

“Nero looked around for a scapegoat, and inflicted the most fiendish tortures on a group of persons already hated by the people for their crimes. This was the sect known as Christians. Their founder, one Christus, had been put to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. This checked the abominable superstition for a while, but it broke out again and spread, not merely through Judaea, where it originated, but even to Rome itself, the great reservoir and collecting ground for every kind of depravity and filth. Those who confessed to being Christians were at once arrested, but on their testimony a great crowd of people were convicted, not so much on the charge of arson, but of hatred of the entire human race.”

(Tacitus, *Annals*, D R Dudley's translation)

Even if this is genuine, what does this tell us about Jesus? From the way in which this is written, Tacitus did not claim firsthand knowledge of the origins of Christianity. By 120 AD the Christian tradition that Christ had died under Pilate had been established. Tacitus was not recording a historical event but the Christians' own explanation of their origins. And Tacitus would have thought an action like this typical of Pilate. He is repeating a story which was then commonly believed, namely that the founder of Christianity, one Christus, had been put to death under Tiberius.

In any case, scholars maintain there could not have been many Christians in Rome even by 64 AD and that Tacitus, writing 60 years later, is confusing the Christians of his day with those instigated by Chrestos in Suetonius, messianic Jews. This would better explain the accusation of “hating the human race”, in conventional terms a curious accusation to make of Christians but one which could apply to Jews, especially orthodox Essenes, who considered themselves as God's Elect, thought gentiles were inferior and hated the Romans.

If Tacitus had been using the Roman imperial records, to which he had access, the report would grow in importance. Had he? Note that he calls Pilate the “Procurator”. This shows he was not using official records because Pilate was the “Prefect” of Judaea. The lesser title of Procurator only came into use later. He also calls Jesus by the religious title “Christos”. Roman records would not have referred to Jesus by a

Christian title, but by his given name. Tacitus is telling us nothing historical but only contemporary knowledge.

Gibbon points out that, if Nero persecuted Christians, it was the only example of Roman intolerance up to the Jewish War. Even Origen, the early Christian apologist could declare that “the number of martyrs was very inconsiderable”. The Christian fathers, Acts, Justin and Origen all say little or nothing about the Christian persecutions of Nero, because the victims were predominantly Jews. The only other reason for the silence would be if the passage in Tacitus was interpolated. Notice that Acts concludes by saying that Paul was not forbidden to teach in Rome, he did it with all boldness—and the year was around 64 AD.

In truth, these are serious difficulties that prevent this passage from being taken as genuine, and suggest it is a Christian interpolation. In summary:

- No other report that Nero persecuted the Christians has ever emerged.
- Multitudes of Christians cannot have been in Rome in 60 AD, unless Christian is being used more widely than it is today—to mean messianic Jews rather than believers that the messiah had come in Jesus.
- The term Christian was not in common use in the first century.
- Nero was indifferent to the religions in his city, and did not need any group to be his scapegoat because the rumour that he started the fire was an early slander of an unpopular man.

Damning to the authenticity of this passage is that it is cited, among obvious fairy tales, almost word-for-word in the Chronicle of Sulpicius Severus (d 403 AD). Again, no one before had mentioned this part of Tacitus, and nor do contemporaries. It was probably not in the manuscripts of Tacitus at that time, but copyists in the Dark Ages might well have copied the passage from the Chronicle into the manuscript of Tacitus they were reproducing.

Missing Records

Christians explain the lack of official records of the events of Jesus's life by claiming that they were totally unimportant at the time. For a vast empire, insignificant events occurred in a distant country of which Romans knew nothing and cared less. To children in Sunday school this sounds quite convincing. But it is not true and should not be repeated by honest adults.

Palestine was not a minor country of little importance to the Romans. The Jews were already widespread as merchants and artisans in the Empire and Judaea was strategically important astride the trade routes to Persia, Arabia and India, and the military corridor by land from Africa to Asia. The countries to the east had been serious rivals to Rome not long before and were still strong and independent. They remained a threat at the time of Barabbas though later the Romans briefly annexed them.

Romans mistrusted Jewish links with these countries. Many Jews still lived in Parthia preferring to remain even though Cyrus the Persian had allowed them to return from Babylonian exile. And the Jews, though inhabiting only a tiny country, had a record of militancy that, combined with their strategic position, meant they could not be ignored. Thus events in Judaea were watched keenly by Roman observers at diplomatic and military levels if not by the *hoi polloi*, and statesmen demanded regular and accurate dispatches.

Jesus was proclaimed a king as even the gospels admit and as such he was a rival to Caesar and a threat to the Empire. That was no trivial crime and required detailed reports from the Roman governor to the Emperor. If, though, as Christians maintain, it was not worth recording and indeed was not recorded, it seems curious that early opponents and critics of Christianity failed to question the absence of independent evidence of Jesus's existence. The Christian apologists did not attempt to answer any such questions, so apparently they were not put. Only in modern times have critics argued that Jesus never existed at all.

In the early days of Christianity, its critics' main argument was a different one—Jesus was a bandit and a magician and, remarkably, that the records of the time proved it! A Jewish source says Jesus was crucified at Lydda as a false teacher and a beguiler. Celsus and Lucian early in the second century and Sossianus Hierocles late in the third tell us that Jesus was a sorcerer and a fomenter of rebellion who committed highway robbery at the head of a band of men. These documents existed because later scholars refer to them. But where are they now? Gone! Nothing of this remains now because Christians, when they came to power under Constantine, began to destroy anything contrary to their own view.

The death penalty was prescribed for anyone owning or trying to preserve any books describing Jesus as a magician or an agitator!

The writings of Arius and Porphyry were ordered to be burnt. De Judaeis by Antonius Julianus completely disappeared. We only know it existed because Josephus mentions it. Another book, vital because it was written at the end of the first century by Justus of Tiberias, who organised the revolt in Galilee, has also gone. But Photius, Bishop of Tyre in 448 AD, commenting on Justus's book which still existed then, expressed surprise that it made no mention of Jesus. Justus knew the events of that period from direct experience and could hardly have avoided mentioning the execution of a claimant to the Jewish throne. But the Christian censor had been at work for a century. Thus Photius tells us that when the writings of Eunapius, a critic of Christianity, were republished after the death of Julius the Apostate, all anti-Christian references had been expunged.

Passages were removed from Lucian. The works of Celsus and Sossianus Hierocles were suppressed and we now only have quotations made from them by Christian polemicists. Many old manuscripts in museums and archives are testimony to the Christian censors blotting out sentences or sometimes obscuring whole pages by spilt ink.

Besides official censorship, Christian editors and copyists, altered passages as they saw fit. Even Josephus which has managed to survive has been "improved". The paragraph in Antiquities of the Jews bearing witness to Jesus was not in its present form in 250 AD and is thought by many to be a Christian forgery.

The missing books of Tacitus possibly owe their disappearance to their having references to Jesus. The books of Tacitus come to a halt at the siege of Jerusalem. The Romans considered both Christians and orthodox Jews to have participated in the Jewish War, and Sulpicius Severus, a Christian writer, does not demure. He asserts, in his Chronicle written in the fifth century, that the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem Temple to stop it from being an inspiration to the Jews and to the Christians. (These Christians could only be those of the Jerusalem Church, the Nazarenes or Ebionim.)

However this is not confirmed by the works of Josephus as they stand today and it is an amazing statement to be made by a Christian especially at such a late date. Because it is quite contrary to anything the Church would want to maintain, it could not be an invention of the time. Yet, if it is based on a contemporary source, it must have been a prestigious one to carry weight against Josephus. The only source with such prestige is Tacitus. Since it is just at this point that the works of Tacitus are lost, there is again a strong hint of Christian suppression.

Jews also had to alter their records if the Christian censor was not to burn them. Explicit references to Jesus were replaced by references to "a certain one". The version of the Old Testament written in Greek, the Septuagint, was also tampered with by the Christians who then accused the Jews of altering their own version. In the pogroms of the Middle Ages, Jewish Scriptures were burnt by the cartload. In 1263 AD King Jayme I of Aragon in Spain ordered that all Jewish books should be destroyed.

The greatest act of Christian vandalism of all was the destruction in the fifth century of libraries like that of Alexandria and the Pagan schools that had propagated Greek scholarship. This wholesale destruction of accumulated wisdom in the name of God precipitated the dark ages from which we did not recover until the Renaissance. Are the churches are different now? The Catholic, John P Meier, with the approval of the Imprimatur, advised in *A Marginal Jew*, in 1991 AD that Secret Mark, the Gospels of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter, the Egerton Gospel and all other non-canonical texts about Jesus were worthless and might be thrown “back into the sea”. We can be certain that if Christians had anything to do with it many modern discoveries would never see the light of day. They would be incinerated.

The lack of evidence makes it impossible to prove that Jesus ever existed.

- There are no proven, legitimate references to the existence of Jesus in any contemporary source outside of the New Testament. Even the New Testament is really not a contemporary source, as it was written from 30 to 120 years after Jesus died.
- There is no evidence that the town of Nazareth ever existed at the time.
- The earliest New Testament accounts do not refer to any details of the life of Jesus. The authentic Pauline epistles imply only that he was a god.
- The existence of Jesus is not necessary to explain the origin or growth of Christianity (see Earl Doherty’s detailed arguments).

The most convincing evidence that Jesus lived is the fact that he died as an opponent of the Roman state. No myth, to explain the worship in the Roman empire of a celestial or cosmic god called Christ, would have been invented with the immense disadvantage that the god died opposing the state. It was this embarrassing fact that the early church desperately tried to ignore that led to the lack of citations by Paul and other early Christians to the life on earth of the god. It shows that Jesus was historical, but was not the person that Christians think he was!

Christianity Revealed

AskWhy! Publications

- The Mystery of Barabbas? ISBN 0-9521913-1-8 £9.99 + £1.00 p&p UK (\$20.00 inc shipping US) © Mike Magee. 1995.
- The Hidden Jesus ISBN-0-9521913-2-6 £12.99 + £1.50 p&p UK (\$30.00 inc shipping US). © Mike Magee. 1997.
- Who Lies Sleeping? ISBN 0-9521913-0-X £7.99 + £1.00 p&p UK (\$20.00 inc shipping US). © Mike Magee. 1993.

The Mystery of Barabbas

From time to time we read of churchmen scaring us with accounts of the spread of paganism, by which they usually mean worshipping Satan. Pagan religions were really the religions which preceded Christianity in the lives of the citizens of the Roman empire. When Christianity became the state religion all Pagan religions were banned and Pagans were persecuted. So it has been ever since, only in the last few hundred years has Christianity adopted a mask of liberality.

The author decided to explore the origins of Christianity, an exploration that eventually took him into the book, *The Hidden Jesus*, and he found that there is little that can be identified in Christianity that did not have its origin elsewhere. Christianity is itself Pagan insomuch that it has adapted its ceremonies and liturgies from the Pagan precursors that it professes to decry as the work of the Devil. *The Mystery of Barabbas* can be thought of as a companion volume to *The Hidden Jesus*.

“Dr Magee's claims are pure rubbish.” (Mary Whitehouse)

The Gospel According To Barabbas

“...the God of Israel has called out the sword against all the nations, and He will do mighty deeds by the saints of His people.” (The War Scroll)

Jesus Barabbas had no intention of changing Jewish laws—only expectations. He was a fanatically dedicated Jew of an apocalyptic order, the Nazarenes, who believed that God had begun to create his kingdom on earth. He stoutly defended the Law of Moses as the gospels illogically admit. The Jewish people were fed up and hoping for their enemies to be overcome. Jesus Barabbas was one of many men who thought he could lead his people into the kingdom of God. He could only do this if he believed that he was God sent. He did and accepted the crown of David.

He began by urging people that they should prepare for the coming kingdom just as John the Baptist did. Only the Righteous could enter the kingdom so he invited Jews to sincerely repent and symbolically purify themselves through baptism and prepare themselves for the coming battle. In doing this he was metaphorically casting out evil spirits, making the blind see and healing the sick. Those who were thus purified could enter the kingdom and were the soldiers in the messianic army. He made no claim to be the Messiah.

Jesus believed that God helps those who help themselves. So the kingdom of Heaven has to be won by the Righteous showing that they were ready to take on their enemies, then God would intervene with a miracle. He knew it would not be easy for it was prophesied that those called to the messianic kingdom would have to face the might of the heathen. They had to sustain these tribulations to prove themselves faithful.

Jesus gathered together an army in the desert. He knew that by alerting the faithful and gathering an army he would be also alerting the authorities. He was the Nasi, the Prince, a leader of the Davidic mould who would assert the authority of God's Righteous, and that consequently one “like unto the Son of Man”, who the prophet Daniel told would come on a cloud from God, would arrive to institute the kingdom. After some remarkable successes the uprising was a failure, no “Son of Man” appeared, people asked them to leave them alone and Jesus and the disciples had to flee from Antipas's soldiers to Phoenicia.

Jesus hid, then ventured back into Antipas's country. He had come to believe that his mistakes were that God has ordained him the Messiah, the Melchizedek, and that the kingdom of God required him to capture Jerusalem and the Temple. Then God would intervene with a miracle. He became transfigured—crowned as Melchizedek. His band proceeded to Jerusalem disguised as Pilgrims. No one could address him by any title that might draw attention to the spies of the authorities.

However at the entry into the city he purposely revealed himself by fulfilling the prophesy of Zechariah, captured the city and controlled the Temple. The Roman garrison in the Antonia barracks probably withdrew to await reinforcements from Caesarea.

Pilate's troops counter attack after a few days, kill the Galilaeans in the Temple and batter the Tower of Siloam where some were holding out. The Romans had recaptured the city and still there was no miracle. Jesus and his generals in hiding take a last supper together—a messianic meal of the Essene type. Jesus, convinced that he had done all that God required and that a miracle was still in the offing, says he expects to be eating his next meal in the coming kingdom. He tells his men that they must remain armed. The next day was the Sabbath and also the Passover, a likely occasion for a miracle. They went to the Mount of Olives where, according to prophesy, the miracle would take place and Jesus urged his men to keep watchful—not for the enemy but for signs of God's intervention. It did not occur. A body of the Temple Guard arrived instead and arrested Jesus.

Jesus, the God, and Barabbas, the bandit, were both tried and crucified. Jesus, the God, knew his role in God's plan and as he expired whispered (Jn 19:30):

“It is finished.”

But Barabbas, the bandit, still believed that God would intervene—until, despairing, he called out with his last breath (Mk 15:34):

“My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?”

Available at good bookshops at £9.99—add £1.00 p&p UK and Europe—or \$20 inc shipping and dollar conversion (US). Or by mail order (order form online, payment with order): AskWhy! Publications Selwyn 41 The Butts Frome Somerset BA11 4AB.

e-mail: staff@askwhy.co.uk

The Hidden Jesus

- Was Jesus an Essene? Christians deny it. There are some similarities, they say, but too many differences. This book shows Jesus was indeed an Essene, and one of their leaders, and explains why there were differences from the Essenes described by Josephus, the Roman historian.
- What is the meaning of the word, Nazarene? Does it really refer to a previously unknown hamlet, as Christians believe, or was this an invention to hide its real meaning?
- Did Jesus really try to tell every Jew in Palestine at the time to love their Roman oppressors? Why then do even the gospels contradict this? Was his message intended only for Jews and meant to be a rallying cry against gentiles? The Christian universal faith depends on this being untrue.
- Why do demons get driven out of opponents of Jesus when he and his henchmen arrive on the scene? Why are these people torn and left for dead? Was it because the disciples were doing the tearing and beating to silence the opposition?
- Why are Jesus's main apostles given such thuggish nicknames? Could it be that they really were thugs, or zealots as they came to be known? Christians pretend they were pacifists but is that because the early church had to paint such a picture to disguise the opposite, and has done so ever since?
- What did Jesus consider to be God's when he, according to Christians, agreed to pay the tribute money, saying, "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's"? Aren't the only characteristic possessions claimed by God, His Children and the land he promised them? Jesus was refusing to pay tribute when he uttered this famous sentence.
- What was the unbindable, savage demon that Jesus rendered impotent when it revealed itself to be really 2000 Gadarene swine and to have the name Legion? Is Gadarene, an inland town the correct name for these swine?
- What was the Field of Akeldama where guts were spilled, gentiles were supposed to have lain asleep and had the nickname the field of blood? Who were the Galilaeans whose blood was spilt in the temple?
- Why did Jesus curse an innocent fig tree? Could it have had anything to do with the fig tree being a symbol of Rome?

Why have these questions not been adequately answered? Forget the obfuscations of the Jesus Seminar. All these and many more questions are convincingly and controversially answered in "The Hidden Jesus" which can be ordered from good booksellers and libraries (ISBN 0-9521913-2-6).

In this remarkable book Dr Michael D Magee peels off the pious accretions and interpretative wrappings added by the earliest gentile bishops to the story of the exploits of Jesus to make the gospels acceptable to the Romans and the basis of a universal religion. The truth is peculiarly transparent in the bible, although two thousand years of conditioning and the invention of spurious translations of Greek words to suit Christian belief in the so-called New Testament Greek have succeeded in blinding even the most critical of scholars.

The gentile bishops of the embryonic religion were faced with travelers' tales from Palestine that Jesus was not what he seemed. This oral tradition was strong because Jews were already widespread in the Empire and after the defeat of their rebellion in the Jewish War and their dispersion in 70 AD many more arrived from Palestine. Pericopes, individual stories about Jesus, kept coming to the bishops and when they did not match their preferred image of a saintly Son of God, had to be "corrected". The bishops had to say to their flocks, "Ho, Ho, Theophilus, how silly you are. It was not quite like that. No, this is what really happened". Then they would change a few subjects and objects and retell the tale such that a core remained but the sense favoured the view they were propagating rather than the truth.

It still happens today. There never was a gate in Jerusalem called The Eye of a Needle but it was invented by clerics to allow the rich to be saved when the plain sense of Jesus's aside was that it was impossible for the rich to be saved. Dr Magee explains parables and the healing miracles, and such difficulties as the cursing of the fig tree, the meaning of Nazarene, the cleansing of the temple, the release of Barabbas, Peter's triple denial, the tribute money and the Gadarene swine.

This book is a tour de force. For honest reasoning people, though not those who are irrational or emotionally dependent on the traditional image of Jesus, gospel stories will never be the same again-they now make sense. Oddly, the message of many modern Christians is upheld-that God is not an external supernatural entity ready to interfere with the world at a whim or a prayer. Jesus believed an external God was ready to intervene-he was forsaken or rather mistaken-but Christians have made the same mistake ever since, teaching people to blame devils instead of facing up to their own responsibility for their actions. Our gods and devils are within us and there we must seek and come to terms with them.

Available at good bookshops at £14.49 inc p&p (UK) or \$30 inc shipping and dollar conversion (US). Or by mail order (order form online, payment with order): AskWhy! Publications Selwyn 41 The Butts Frome Somerset BA11 4AB.

e-mail: staff@askwhy.co.uk

Who Lies Sleeping?

The Dinosaur Heritage and the Extinction of Man

Mankind seems to suffer from an inability to recognize and understand what it is doing to its own environment. In this book Dr Magee considers the extinction of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago and shows that its symptoms were just the symptoms of the mass extinction which is occurring at present. Is it possible that the dinosaurs developed intelligence and destroyed themselves just as present day humans seem to be doing? The author examines the evidence in detail and shows that the dinosaurs gave every indication of being ready to become intelligent. Some species of dinosaur somewhere had all the attributes considered necessary for intelligence in the intelligent mammal. The latter has used its gift to begin the destruction of the world within 200 years of inventing technology. If the intelligent dinosaur had done the same, all that would remain of it in the fossil record would be an oily smear, polluted with heavy metals and exotic compounds. That is just what we find when the dinosaurs died.

“A book to savour... Deserves all the hype it can get.” UFO Magazine

“Stretches my imagination.” Nick Owen, BBC Good Morning

“Valid and credible theories... An intriguing and compelling read.” Alien Encounters

“More Sensational than Jurassic Park.” Daily Star

“A terrific writer... Compelling as any first rate thriller.” Bath Evening Chronicle.

Summary And Contents

This book is about the mass extinction of species. One technologically superior species of mammal reached domination over the planet at the end of the 20th century: one species of dinosaur achieved human-like intelligence at the end of the Cretaceous Period. In only a moment in geological time, each destroyed the majority of co-existing higher life forms.

From early days, experts of various persuasions have demonstrated their prejudices and incompetence. A non-expert should not feel obliged to accept an expert's opinion, nor feel inhibited about trespassing on the experts' demesne. Our future might depend upon confronting the experts.

We examine details of the lifestyles and physiology of dinosaurs. Our hypothesis depends on the dinosaurs not being the ponderous, cold-blooded lizards of common belief. The dinosaurs were physiologically sophisticated. Otherwise the suggestion that “reptiles” could achieve intelligence would be rightly laughable.

The growth of intelligence in the mammals, culminating in mankind, highlights features necessary for intelligence to develop in animals.

We seek in dinosaurs the features of the intelligent animal. Dinosaurs often had the necessary features and indeed owed their superiority over the mammals for millions of years to having evolved them.

Similar answers to evolutionary problems arise repeatedly. Convergence suggests that the solution of the problem of the evolution of intelligence in mammals and dinosaurs would yield similar features in both.

By making deductions from convergence we can reveal otherwise unsuspected possibilities. Humans have many characteristics of aquatic animals, pointing to an extended period of partial submergence which could explain a gap of four million years in our fossil record.

Evolution can occur astonishingly quickly. Intelligent dinosaurs could evolve, as *Homo sapiens* did, in a geologically short time. Because evolution and extinction were rapid they left few traces.

We ponder briefly on the possible appearance and nature of the intelligent dinosaurs (called *Anthroposaurus sapiens* to emphasise their similarity to the intelligent mammal).

Puzzles in old rocks could be remains of the dinosaurian civilization. Though this should be the most important evidence, it is poorly documented, having been glossed over or ignored by the experts. But even without it the circumstantial case remains strong.

We review the welter of theories concerning the end of the dinosaurs and from them identify underlying causes.

The destruction of the dinosaurs compares with that going on in the present world. We show how today's extinctions have the same underlying causes and warn of experts who ridicule public fears and distract attention from genuine concerns.

Perhaps we are doomed to self extinction like the anthroposaurs because we have inherited some self destructive traits from them. We attempt an initial diagnosis of the dinosaur heritage in human psychology.

Why are we constantly interested in monsters like dinosaurs? Are the squamous anthropoids that preceded us lying sleeping, awaiting their opportunity to retrieve the world they lost? A subliminal awareness of this might explain our obsession with monsters.

Available at good bookshops at £7.99 inc p&p (UK) or \$20 inc shipping and dollar conversion (US). Or by mail order (order form online, payment with order): AskWhy! Publications Selwyn 41 The Butts Frome Somerset BA11 4AB.

e-mail: staff@askwhy.co.uk